

Becoming a Lifelong Learner

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by Melanie Brodnik, PhD, RHIA

As I reflect on what AHIMA has accomplished over the last 10 years and where the HIM profession is currently headed, I realize that we have a very eventful future ahead of us, a future that requires transitioning from one knowledge and skill level to another. The challenge is to remain literate in an evolving work environment.

Our literacy requirement differs from the basic literacy of reading and writing. As futurist Alvin Toffler stated, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”¹ The literate of this century must adapt their knowledge and skills repeatedly to address the rapid changes in technology, globalization, and consumerism.

Learner-centered Learning

Lifelong learning is perhaps the most important element in moving to an e-HIMTM world. The philosophy of lifelong learning is that “individuals must engage in learning throughout their lifetime as a means of coping with an ever-changing employment and social world.”²

Our professional continuing education responsibility reflects the notion of lifelong learning and has helped establish a duty on the part of HIM professionals to seek educational opportunities on a regular basis. With new challenges ahead it is even more important for us to find new ways to quickly transition our knowledge and skills.

Learner-centered learning (LCL) is a means to accelerate your development. LCL is a “process in which an individual takes the initiative with or without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources, and evaluating learning outcomes.”³

LCL is supported by the use of learning agreements or contracts. A learning agreement is a formal agreement with yourself to learn what you feel is most important to you. Adult education expert Malcolm Knowles suggests that the learning agreement consist of the following elements:

- **Objectives**—what specifically you are going to learn
- **Resources and Strategies**—how to accomplish your objectives
- **Target Date**—date you wish to complete the education
- **Evidence**—how you know you have acquired the new knowledge or skill desired
- **Verification**—concrete evidence to show others you have accomplished your objective⁴

As a lifelong learner, your goal should be to understand yourself, identify your changing educational needs and goals, and find the methods that best connect you to optimal learning experiences. Whether you chose AHIMA, CSA, other organizations’ educational opportunities, or formal education in a college, what is important is identifying a plan that leads to your success as a change leader in an e-HIM environment.

Notes

1. Toffler, Alvin. *Future Shock*. New York: Random House, 1970.
2. Irving, B. “The Role of Initial Teacher Training in the Promotion of a Lifelong Learning Culture: A Conflict of Ideals?” *Education and Training* 41, no. 9 (1999): 416–24.
3. Knowles, Malcolm. *Using Learning Contracts*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.
4. Ibid.

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