

# Leadership Lessons Take Flight

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by Barbara Odom-Wesley, PhD, RHIA

After deciding to write about leadership this month, I searched the works of several noted authors and reviewed the many principles of leadership. I decided to borrow an idea from “Lessons from Geese,” a leadership development article of unknown origin that has circulated on the Internet. Many writers have applied these lessons to their industries, and I believe they apply to HIM as well.

We can learn a lot from a flock of geese. These migratory birds, greeted as harbingers of the changing seasons, demonstrate a **sense of community**, the need for input from every member of the flock, and the importance of shared responsibility. Each of these principles are as important in the AHIMA community as they are in nature.

## Supportive Formation

Building a team with a sense of community is an important leadership principle. Powerful high fliers, geese travel in the characteristic “V” formation, which gives them added flight range. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an updraft for the bird immediately following. Moving forward, therefore, is a **collective effort**. This same sense of community is vital to everyone’s progress at AHIMA. As president I am grateful for the many talented professionals who keep AHIMA moving forward with their updraft.

The geese also take turns in the lead position. When the lead goose gets tired, it drops back in the formation to take advantage of the updraft of the bird in front of it. Every member of the flock has an opportunity to serve as leader during the long flight south. This affords each bird the opportunity to contribute to the forward progress, yet does not wear out any one goose to the point of exhaustion.

As leaders, we can learn that helping hands abound and are available to contribute if only given the opportunity.

## In-flight Support

When a goose gets sick or is wounded and falls out of formation, two other geese follow it to lend help and protection. They stay with the wounded bird until it can fly or it dies. Only then do they launch out on their own in an attempt to join another formation or to catch up with their original group.

Demonstrating **compassion and a strong sense of ethics** is a valuable leadership quality. It has been said it is more important to select leaders because of who they are than because of their education or experience.

## Safe Landing

As they fly overhead, we hear a great deal of honking from the traveling geese. Each goose seems to be encouraging those in the front to keep going. This is a profound lesson for us. As members of the flock, we should ask ourselves what we do more of—complaining to or encouraging our leaders? It can be easy to criticize the efforts of others, but **supporting words of encouragement** would be more effective in keeping us all moving forward.

The geese demonstrate that leadership is a **shared responsibility**. The leader has the responsibility of creating a participative environment while demonstrating courage to move forward using ethical means. The followers should provide input and assistance as well as encouragement.

With the arrival of spring, you might see a flock of geese returning north. Take a moment to observe these leadership principles in action. By following the geese’s instincts, we can reach our goals while supporting each other along the way. u

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