

Learning by Teaching: Security Manager Finds Teaching Good Fit

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by Anne Zender, MA, director of communications

As an information security manager, Karen Czirr, MS, RHIA, CHP, learns by doing. She also learns by teaching.

Czirr, who works at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA, welcomes the chance to improve her knowledge, and she says teaching others is a great way to learn new things. Between frequent in-services about privacy and security at work and her role as an adjunct faculty member at several local colleges, she gets plenty of opportunities.

A Long-term Look at HIPAA

Czirr's duties include responsibility for enterprise-wide functions such as release of information and audit trail reviews. And, with implementation of the HIPAA security rule approaching, she is busy developing and performing training for staff on privacy and security-related topics.

The HIPAA work is the culmination of the hospital's several years of preparation. "We didn't focus on just one area but took a system-wide approach," Czirr says. The facility created 13 work groups, each one addressing a different piece of HIPAA. As coleader of the security work group, Czirr studied the security regulation and used a project management tool to identify and propose an implementation schedule for the organization.

'I Was Using the Same Skills'

Czirr has also been an adjunct faculty member at Temple University, Gwynedd Mercy College, and the Community College of Philadelphia, teaching courses including basic computing, management, and law.

The study and preparation involved in teaching a course help her learn, she says. Czirr has not had formal training in teaching, but the facilities usually provide her with opportunities to prepare, such as workshops and resources.

She's come a long way since her graduation from Temple. At the start of her career, Czirr spent 13 years working as a director of HIM in various hospitals.

In the early 1990s, she served as state association president. "When you volunteer, it sometimes brings a little recognition, and it seemed like employment opportunities were all over the place," she recalls. During that time, a fledgling document management company was looking for an HIM professional to help it get off the ground. She answered the call.

"I took the risk and left the hospital environment," she says. "But I was using the same skills."

Raising the Profile

Five years later, Czirr learned that The Children's Hospital had created a security manager position. "It sounded new and challenging, and I applied," she says.

She got the job, but it wasn't easy at first. "I hated it in the beginning," Czirr says. Part of that discomfort was a lack of familiarity with computers, she says. "I knew how to send e-mail, but I didn't know what made [computers] run," she says. One helpful tool was a dictionary of computer and Internet terms—she's now on her second copy. Czirr also took a Computers 101 course and when asked she agreed to teach a basic computer class. She taught herself so she could teach her students. "Students challenge you to stay on your toes," she says.

As she became more confident, she raised her own profile in the organization. Today, Czirr enjoys interacting with the hospital's large work force (the hospital employs more than 6,000 people). "I can't say I know them all, but I love to get out and about doing [privacy and information security] in-service education," she says.

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