

Life as New Graduate: 8 Things to Know

Save to myBoK

By Elena Miller, MPH, RHIA, CCS

When I first emerged from school into my life as a new graduate, I had no idea that there was still so much I had to learn. There are eight things in particular that I wish I had known then:

1. Experience is often preferred, not required.

Companies can only hire people that apply for the positions. The job posting may say that five years of experience is required or *it may say preferred*. Pay attention to the wording! If the experience is *preferred*, the company may want a candidate with the experience but would not discount a less experienced candidate if a more experienced candidate never applies for the position. Go ahead and apply! But remember to be realistic and honest with yourself. Brand new graduates shouldn't be setting their sights exclusively on applying for director-level roles.

2. Your health IT/health information management degree gives you A ticket, not THE ticket.

Somehow I graduated with the impression that the hospitals of America were just waiting on us to graduate and come in and run the department of our choosing. Then... I found out that the other departments knew nothing about the health information management (HIM) and health IT curriculum and were unaware that we may be an asset to have on their team. While times have changed since then, there are still many in the healthcare industry that do not know what HIM/health IT students learn in school. I am not saying that you can't find a position outside of HIM, I am saying that it may not be easy. You will need to be very strategic and open to entry level positions.

3. Take the interview even if you aren't sure you want the job.

Early in the job search, you may take whatever comes your way. After you get a little experience under your belt, you may think that you have it all figured out and start to decline potential opportunities. One of my favorite positions resulted from an interview that I took in order to practice for an upcoming interview for a position I wanted more. After completing both interviews, it turned out that I preferred the position that I didn't think I wanted. Which leads me to my next point...

4. Pay attention to the atmosphere and go with your instincts when looking for a position.

Mean Girls is not just the name of a movie; toxic work environments do exist. Be sure to ask questions during the interview. Why is the position vacant? What is the department climate like? If it is a peer interview, pay attention to the vibe between coworkers. If it doesn't feel right and you can afford to wait on another position, then wait. There is nothing worse than taking a job and instantly regretting it.

5. Be Humble.

You are sharp, you are educated, and you want the world to know. Guess what? There will be plenty of time for that. Experience is the best teacher. The coder that has been coding for 20 years and doesn't have a degree can teach you a thing or two; in fact, they will probably be the one training you. Be open to learning! You don't have to know it all, people appreciate individuals that recognize there is still much to learn. Your input is appreciated, but know your subject matter first. Learn about the department operations before making changes. Sometimes processes seem inefficient but there is a reason that things are done that way and there will be a major impact if things are changed on a whim.

6. Climb—but slowly and strategically.

When I graduated, I was all about the money. Which path should I take to make the most money? I decided that the path for me was coding. Thank goodness, I started my career as an emergency department coder and worked my way up. Many new grads are looking for leadership roles. It will serve you well to get some experience in operations before taking on leadership roles.

7. Establish and, most importantly, maintain relationships.

Networking is crucial in the HIM profession. From transitioning to new positions to benchmarking operations it is very important to have peers with whom you can share ideas.

8. “Live to work” or “Work to live”? You decide.

There will come a point in your career when you must decide if you will continue climbing or if you are fine where you are. Some of the high-level leadership roles require that you “live to work” and don’t afford very much work life balance. The circumstances will be different for everyone, but everyone must make this decision at some point in their career.

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Original source:

Miller, Elena. "Life as New Graduate: 8 Things to Know" ([Journal of AHIMA website](#)), September 13, 2017.

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