

# Make the Most of Professional Mentoring

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*by Barbara Siegel, MS, RHIT*

In classical mythology, the image of a mentor is based on the vision of Odysseus, who entrusted the care of his son to his friend. Mentor was a wise and faithful friend, a counselor, and advisor.

The attributes associated with mentorship come from this classical vision. Today, more formalized mentoring in HIM is strongly recommended by both new professional focus groups and national and state leader meetings.

## Mentor = Role Model

Mentors are those who help shape professional identity, model appropriate professional behaviors, render guidance and support, teach the intricacies of the work environment, and facilitate entry into organizational and professional networks.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout our lives we seek out role models who are willing to share what they know in a noncompetitive way. Mentors also benefit from this relationship by creating a legacy that inspires new ideas for the next generation and contributes to continued success of the organization and its leadership.

I found my professional mentors at the 1984 New York state meeting. They facilitated the House of Delegates, encouraged discussion, introduced new ideas, and spoke to an audience of more than 200 HIM professionals. I was amazed at their ability to be so confident in front of a large group of peers. My first reaction was, “I could never do that.”

As I look back on more than 20 years of increasingly challenging work environments and volunteer roles, I know my mentors gave me focus, the opportunity to learn, and the confidence to speak to large groups.

## Get Connected

In today’s work environment, mentoring is becoming more valuable and also more difficult to facilitate. As members of AHIMA, we have formal opportunities for personal contact—face-to-face and virtually, with national, state, and local leaders and more than 45,000 members. Explore the Mentor Program in the Student Community of Practice (CoP) or make a date to connect with your mentor at the National Convention.

The CoP presents an opportunity for virtual mentoring. Aspiring volunteers may be more comfortable in an informal mentoring relationship or gain greater benefits via a student-to-student, member-to-member, or leader-to-leader relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Look beyond new HIM professionals when seeking someone to mentor. Economic downsizing is creating a group of second careerists who need a new direction. You can provide emotional support, friendship, feedback, and career advice for someone making a transition to HIM.

## Mentor Today for HIM’s Future

According to a policy statement from the American College of Healthcare Executives, “The future of healthcare management rests in large measure with those entering the field as well as with mid-careerists who aspire to new and greater opportunities . . . the value of mentoring these individuals cannot be overstated.”<sup>3</sup>

Take the challenge—mentor an aspiring HIM professional and shape the future of the Association and the profession.

## Notes

1. Walsh, Anne M. et al. "Mentoring in Health Administration: The Critical Link in Executive Development." *Journal of Healthcare Management* 44, no. 4 (1999): 269-290.
2. *Ibid.*
3. American College of Healthcare Executives. "Professional Policy Statement on Responsibility for Mentoring." November 1999 (revised). Available online at [www.ache.org/policy/mentor.cfm](http://www.ache.org/policy/mentor.cfm).

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