

# Mining Diamonds in the Rough: How to Hire New Graduates

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*by Susan Parker, MEd, RHIA*

As a busy manager, you know exactly what you want when you post a job ad or inform your human resources department of a vacancy. You do not have time to sift through piles of resumes to find the person you need. But after weeks of searching, you may begin to wonder—is there anybody out there who can do this job?

As an HIM recruiter, I hear variations on this theme frequently. It's a valid complaint. But have you considered that the best candidates may be standing right in front of you, but their resumes aren't written in a manner that expresses their skills?

Your candidate could be a new graduate with little professional experience but a lot of knowledge. This article explains how to read through resumes and conduct an interview with a new graduate to find the best employee to fill your organization's open position.

## **New Graduates, Hidden Gems**

The new graduate's resume will not show up on your radar screen using traditional parameters, because most often a new graduate will not have very much professional experience in the field.

New graduates have an objective, which is usually to become employed. This is an honest goal. They have directed their time, energy, and financial resources toward this objective. The trouble is, however, that they cannot point to years of experience, a traditional benchmark for success. That's why it's essential that we assess potential in a new light.

## **Experience from Education**

Today's HIM graduates are some of the best-trained professionals we've ever had, yet their resumes are understandably light on paid work experience. New graduates in both the RHIT and RHIA programs have spent much more focused time on problem solving and team projects than most of us who graduated a decade or more ago. We all took difficult, rigorous courses and mastered the skills to pass the credentialing exam, but today's curriculum involves more practical applications.

These graduates have taken courses in hospital reimbursement involving CFOs and budgeting at a level that we weren't exposed to until we did our first budgets as managers. Their actual, hands-on experience with information technology and software applications may far exceed that of an RHIT or RHIA who has been working in a facility without the latest technology. Their professional practice experience is usually highly structured with specific assignments and practical approaches to learning.

## **What to Ask**

How can you determine if the new graduate has received an education from an HIM program that turns out the best graduates? The key is knowing how to read the resume and which questions to ask. New graduates are not experts at writing resumes. We should look for substance, not flash and polish. Consider these aspects as you review resumes and conduct interviews:

Look at skills not titles. How does the candidate's background meet my needs? Look at projects and classes where the student would have had not only exposure, but actual experience as well.

Examine life experience versus employment. Did the candidate work while going to school? If the candidate did work during college, notice course load versus work time. For some, a job might not have been an option if they were attending full time or if their course load was heavy with clinical visits or labs. Students may also have added pressure to maintain grade point averages required by scholarships or their HIM program.

If the resume indicates a job, look at it in terms of relevancy to your need, not job title. If the student put himself through school working in a health information related area, the correlation is obvious. Even non-HIM related work might indicate a level of responsibility and commitment. How much responsibility was the applicant given in that previous job? Have applicants provided examples of how well they worked with other employees? This may indicate team skills.

What kind of volunteer activities has the applicant participated in? Sure, if the president of the student government association at a major university applies for a position, you will see the leadership potential, but don't overlook the learning experiences gained from service projects and activities. How could these skills transfer to your available position? Does this indicate the person has priorities beyond baseline expectations? Does it mean the person gained skills at group projects and met self-imposed deadlines? Dig a little—ask what frustrations he or she encountered and how the candidate dealt with them. This may indicate maturity and security issues.

Some courses can be considered work experience. Ask the applicant where he or she did clinical practices. Notice if the facility is similar in size to yours. Inquire about department similarities. Look for clues that indicate experience in the area you need.

Ask to see school projects, especially if they are listed on the resume. Ask the candidate to bring them to the interview as a portfolio. This can show you the quality of work and depth of a candidate's education and understanding.

## A Fresh Perspective

Above all, remember that new graduates bring fresh insights combined with academic training. This new graduate might have come through a distance educational program, might have changed careers many times, or might be from the most traditional curriculum available.

But the common thread in all of them is not always proof, but promise. In this case, your experience in knowing what to look for is more important than their inexperience in the work force.

**Susan Parker** ([seagatejobs@bellsouth.net](mailto:seagatejobs@bellsouth.net)) is president of Seagate Consultants and a member of AHIMA's Board of Directors.

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