

Power of Networking

Save to myBoK

by Margaret Stewart, RRA

As I look at my year as president of AHIMA, and all that I want to accomplish, my feeling is that I do not want to waste one day as I fulfill my commitments. One of my driving passions and goals is to enhance the position, respect, and perceived value of the HIM professional in the marketplace. I do not want to miss one opportunity to further that cause.

How can we best do that? One thing that I have learned through the years is that my opportunities are created by me. In other words, doors will not open unless I have found them and knocked on them. Opportunities must be grabbed at the right time, expertly executed, and thoroughly cultivated to be effective.

Make Your Own Luck

Networking seems to have become a "90s" term, but the concept itself is extremely valuable. It is the thing that can make or break your personal and professional relationships. When you think about it, our lives are a series of networks. Your friends, neighbors, family, and coworkers are all a part of your personal network. For example, friendships require effort to nurture, such as remembering a friend's birthday each year. Though it may not seem like it, these instances are personal networking experiences--responsibilities that you accept because the results are personally satisfying for both parties. Your professional networking should take on the same priority in your life, and the results can certainly be as rewarding.

Too often, we may have insecurities or fears about our professional networking. We might assume that people feel we are using them, or that if we ask for help, we will appear ignorant. That is simply not true. I recently read a book entitled *Power Net-working—55 Secrets of Personal Success*, by Donna Fisher and Sandy Vilas. I would recommend this book to anyone--it puts networking in the proper perspective and provides some excellent tips.

Frequently, we might hear someone discuss a peer who has achieved success by saying "how lucky she is." It may even appear that some people have all the luck, which allows them to be successful. Though luck may play a part in winning the lottery, in the professional world, it is created. As Anthony Robbins notes in *Power Networking*, "The meeting of preparation with opportunity generates that offspring we call luck."

Meeting the Challenge

I love this quote because it hits upon two points that are imperative to the networking process: preparation and opportunity. Let's look at both of those points in relation to our profession. If we are going to advance our profession and ourselves, we need to be prepared for the responsibilities. Are we?

For instance, think about whether we promote ourselves as health information champions in the managed care marketplace. That means we must feel confident that we:

- Understand the implications of capitation on data/coding requirements
- Can interpret the health information needs of managed care players
- Are able to explain to providers what the changes in information requirements will mean to their day-to-day practice
- Understand the accrediting bodies that are dominant in the market (e.g., NCQA) and can evaluate the health information needs of each

These are just some examples of the responsibilities that must be accepted. Once those are understood and met, opportunities must be created. What a widespread impact we could have on healthcare if we simply let everyone know how knowledgeable and competent we are. We can do that by:

- Getting the communications ball rolling. Think about all the companies, institutions, and individuals who simply have not heard of the term "HIM professional." How can they seek our input if they do not know we exist? It would be great if each of our members sent a letter, completely out of the blue, to an individual or group that could benefit from our Association and our members. This could include elected state or federal government representatives, a managed care company, or a third-party payer. This list is endless. I would love for each of you to accept this challenge. Do it and let me hear about your success stories.
- Discovering whom the players are. In other words, do your homework and make those networking efforts pay off. Identify individuals or institutions that could mutually benefit from communication with AHIMA and its members.
- Offering assistance in a given area. Perhaps you have read or heard that a practice was concerned about retention of records, for example. What a great time to step in and put that organization in touch with those who can help sort through and understand the issue.
- Looking within. Your fellow AHIMA members are some of the best sources of positive networking experiences. With the many talented, bright individuals we have in our profession, you should never feel shy about tapping into our network.

Put It In Writing

One last important point: Never undervalue how meaningful a personal note or letter is. For instance, if you enjoyed a speaker at a meeting or were impressed with a coworker's initiative, take the time to write a note or letter. These acknowledgments mean as much to me as any award or evaluation I've ever gotten. People will always remember you if you write to them, and it will make them feel much better about their job performance as well.

Once you feel thoroughly prepared and have identified your contacts, be assertive in your conquest. Remember that no one can do your networking for you. Let's use networking to our advantage in 1998 and beyond.

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Driving the Power of Knowledge

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