

# Softer Skills Key to Leadership Position

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*by Madonna M. LeBlanc, MA, RHIA*

You landed the job. Your first day is a week away and you've left yourself enough time to recharge your batteries before jumping into a new adventure. To best position yourself for success as a new manager, think back to the human resources and personnel management courses you've taken and focus on developing your softer skills; your hard skills have already won you the job.

## Put Your Best Foot Forward

Dress for success. It's an old expression but wise advice, nonetheless. There are numerous books available on appropriate business dress and plenty of Web sites devoted to guiding the wardrobes of executives-to-be. Some suggestions include solid-color, conservative suits with a coordinating shirt and tie or blouse; limited jewelry; minimal makeup and perfume or cologne; a neat, professional hairstyle and groomed fingernails; and a portfolio or briefcase to carry work materials.

Your wardrobe need not be extensive or costly. Having at least one "power suit" in the closet that makes you feel confident and decisive will serve you well on days when you're signing the contract for a new product, delivering discipline or a termination notice, or meeting new business peers for the first time in meetings or committees.

## Develop Your Network

There are several ways to nurture your professional network:

- Meet with department heads: One of the best ways to become acclimated to new surroundings is to network, and the most expedient way to do this is through a round of introductory meetings. Ask for a list of department managers and directors and start calling. Introduce yourself and make an appointment to visit them in their department. This will give you a chance to familiarize yourself with the layout of your new facility
- Foster dialogue: When you meet with department leaders, ask about their current perception of your department and how you might better serve them. This shows measurable initiative and makes for an impressive introduction. Listen carefully to what they say and what they don't say. Capitalize on things you can address immediately and assure them you'll be exploring ways to address the rest of their concerns in the near future. Most importantly, follow up on their comments. Tenacity is a proven sign of a successful manager
- Use professional connections: There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Connect with your classmates, clinical site supervisors, and professors for answers to questions that arise while learning the ropes. It is perfectly acceptable to say "I don't have that information at my fingertips but I do know where I can find it." Contact your peers with questions outside your realm of expertise and keep notes on your contacts' specialties

## Keep a High Profile

One of the best ways to maintain a high profile in your organization is by increasing and sharing your knowledge.

- Know your resources: Maintain membership in AHIMA and access the Communities of Practice and the FORE Library: HIM Body of Knowledge at [www.ahima.org](http://www.ahima.org) on a regular basis. Answers and solutions are just a click away. Further, know your regulatory and accreditation resources and keep them readily accessible, whether by electronic bookmark or sticky notes that take you right where you need to be in a large body of information
- Be a resource: Lead and facilitate educational opportunities in your facility. Be willing to take the lead in areas of your expertise. For example, you might offer to add a presentation on confidentiality to new employee orientation or write an article for clinicians about the correlation between excellence in documentation and reimbursement. Or propose to teach

an elementary medical terminology course for clerical staff or facilitate a senior management brown bag lunch that includes information on patient rights regarding health information. Be visible and be heard

- Collaborate: Team up with another manager on a subject you're both passionate about. For example, approach the pharmacist about creating a collaborative presentation on dangerous abbreviations. Or work with the director of nursing regarding presenting documentation and the dangers of illegibility. Build professional credibility and relationships through collaboration on topics that you, too, have shared expertise

## Stay Fresh

Once you leave school, it can be tough to stay current on the latest trends in HIM and continue learning, so you'll need to make a concerted effort.

- Review and evaluate current policies and procedures: Get acquainted with your department and facility policies and procedures by reviewing them as soon as possible with regulatory and accreditation standards in mind. Note the last time they were reviewed or updated and make time to do so on an annual basis
- Be a host clinical site for a student: A good way to keep fresh in your professional career is to be a host clinician for a student. It is a prime opportunity for you to give back to the profession as well as objectively look at your own work habits as you guide a student through his or her directed practice experience
- Find a mentor and become a mentor: Initiate a professional relationship with a peer who has been in your field for a number of years. Take time to nurture that relationship by meeting routinely to discuss your questions, concerns, and hopes for the future. Then, as you enjoy success in your own career, take a less-experienced peer under your wing. These relationships make for a rich exchange of tested and emerging ideas and practices. You won't regret your investment
- Develop a lifelong learning plan: Once your learning curve levels off a bit, direct your energies to professional education. Learning is a lifelong commitment and successful executives are kept abreast of rapidly evolving trends in their industry by taking time to learn more. You have to plan for continuing education; it will not happen accidentally. AHIMA provides a wealth of continuing education opportunities as well as certification programs that will prepare and qualify you for advancing your career

Being the new kid on the block can be a great adventure all by itself. If you take time to strategically plan your entrance into the world of management, you will be equipped with useful tools to make it an enjoyable debut.

## Reference

"Job Searching." Available at <http://jobsearch.about.com/library/weekly/>.

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