

Student Academy Focuses on Getting That First Job

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A panel of five employers got right to the point during the Annual Convention's Student Academy. They gave inside insights into job search techniques, including how to decide what you want to do with your new HIM skills, and practical search tips for getting that first job.

Perry Ellie, MA, RHIA, FAHIMA, says charting a career path can begin right here at the national convention. Ellie, founder of HIM Recruiters, noted that school programs have limited time to explore alternate career paths, but at the convention you can sample a large variety of HIM sub-specialties by sitting in on presentations with target topics such as long term care, public health, behavioral health, and clinical terminology mapping. Students may have little or no exposure to these and other emerging specialties in the course of their regular studies.

Ellie also encouraged students to visit the exhibit hall. There they will come into contact with more than 200 vendors that provide products and services in support of the HIM profession. Perhaps a career as a vendor representative is just what the student is looking for.

Ellie has provided insight into using recruiters in a job search, outlining the rules of engagement and how a recruiter can become a life long asset to your HIM career.

Carol Clinedinst, PHR, MBA, of SoftMed Systems, focused on the resume and interview aspects of the job search. Make sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors in your resume, Clinedinst urged. An employer typically only has 15 or 30 seconds to review a resume, and those submitted with errors are deposited in the no pile.

She also reminded attendees that homework shouldn't stop once you get your degree. If invited for an interview, you should learn as much as you can about the company. Clinedinst likes to ask interviewees, "What do you know about our company?"

David McCann, CCS, explained the HP3 hiring strategy: Attitude, Aptitude, and Skills. He explained them as follows:

- Attitude-is the applicant confident, energetic, and trustworthy?
- Aptitude-do they have the ability to learn new things? HIM is a dynamic profession, and employees must be able to constantly adapt.
- Skills-what skills does the applicant bring to the job?

McCann also advised job applicants be PPOFF: positive, proactive, organized, focused, and flexible. These are the skills that all employers seek, he said.

Barbara Black, MBA, SPHR, of Care Communications, discussed the importance of a well-crafted cover letter-an essential for every resume. A good cover letter is tailored specifically to the job, Black said, and it clearly explains how the applicant's skills and experience make him or her the best candidate for the job.

Black also stressed the value of the thank-you letter. After the interview, it is important to close the communication circle by sending a note to the interviewer, usually within 24 hours of the interview. During the interview, ask when the company expects to make a decision on the position and then follow up with an e-mail or phone call, usually one to two weeks later, to ask the status. Black stressed that all your communications should be professional-avoid sending e-mail from an account with a cutesy user name.

Gwen Hughes, RHIA, CHP, offered tips for tailoring the job search. Hughes, of Care Communications, suggested to attendees that as students they visit with the school program's advisory board. Board members are interested in the program and in the student graduates, Hughes noted, so see if you can volunteer for additional clinical hours in order to gain skills in areas that you may not have had exposure to during the standard PPE.

Hughes also urged attendees to stay in touch with their instructors following graduation. Instructors often are among the first to know about upcoming job openings, and a recommendation from them can go a long way. Also ask clinical sites if they will serve as positive references for you. Finally, Hughes suggested that students volunteer at the local and state chapters, because many alliances are formed by working together on committees. She pointed to several jobs she had found as a direct result of networking through volunteer activities.

After the panel presentations, students were invited to participate in a mock interview, where the panelists threw out questions to the group. Together the group discussed answers that can help students put their best foot forward during the interviewing process.

Students unable to attend the national conference can review the handout materials by visiting the Student CoP at www.ahima.org under Community Resources.

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