

Taking Charge of Your Career Through Self Exploration

Save to myBoK

by Hal Patterson, MPA, and Beth Hjort, RHIA

Very few professionals have considered a current career plan. In fact, some have probably spent more time planning parties and vacations than planning their careers, which is a sobering thought in a world of rapid change. Yet, to succeed in today's healthcare environment, HIM professionals must take an active role in managing their careers.

Why is career planning important? Because mergers, acquisitions, integrations, and affiliations are common occurrences. They affect your organization and they affect you. But these events should not be the driving force behind our careers. Further, you can no longer depend on your organization to provide long-term career development and growth. We must empower ourselves to take control of our own career path. Frequently, two obstacles stop us. They are:

- a lack of information about ourselves
- a lack of planning and personal goal setting

It's Never Too Late

Without realizing it, you may have accepted our society's traditional view of the work world: the work you're doing now is the work you'll do for the rest of your life. Instead, consider doing what author Richard J. Leider calls career reassessment: unpacking and repacking your bags. Unpacking your bags means taking a long look at your past and the assumptions you've made about work and jobs. Are any of your assumptions holding you back? Repacking refers to evaluating, identifying, and reinventing yourself, changing priorities, and discovering new directions—essentially, planning your career. It's a process that we are urged to repeat to keep growing and developing with a sense of purpose.

Learn About Yourself

An old pattern for managing a career has been to do nothing until the company makes a staffing decision that affects you. Then, if you don't like the decision, you put together a resume, talk with one or two head hunters, and finally, send out resumes. This method entails relying on a dubious assurance that efforts will result in several offers from which a "best" choice can be made.

To take charge of your career, try a very different approach. Make job-related decisions based on knowledge about yourself and your career goals. To meet your ultimate career goal and make positive career-related decisions in the future, do what only two percent of health professionals do: take time to think about and develop your career plan. Ask yourself three questions:

Who am I? To answer this question, investigate and identify the values, interests, likes, dislikes, and skills that energize and motivate you. Discover your preferred culture and work environment and the type of colleagues you want to work with. Assessing yourself allows you to create a database of information that you can use to pursue and evaluate future career opportunities.

Where am I going? This question relates to your career plan or the direction you want to take in starting or finishing your career. Answering it entails considering the information uncovered about yourself and prompts educated decisions about your future. Initially you may uncover multiple options. You may identify a practical career goal that is reachable within your current organization or profession or an ideal career goal that will stretch you for the long-term. Ideal goals may not be "doable" now, but with a little planning, creativity, and professional development, they can be.

How do I get to where I want to go? Answering this question leads you into action by committing to planning and taking that important first step to change your career and life forever, rather than waiting or choosing not to make a decision.

How to Market Yourself

When marketing yourself, it's useful to think of five Vs:

- **Value** means demonstrating your worth to the organization, defining your contributions to the bottom line, and meeting organizational strategic goals.
- **Volition** refers to a willingness to make decisions. It's your energy, creativity, enthusiasm, and motivation. It's the way you communicate your comfort with change.
- **Versatility** refers to your flexibility and adaptability. It demonstrates that you can change easily and willingly from one task to another, take on different projects, or work with different groups and people. It means you're comfortable thinking creatively and embracing change.
- **Visibility** means creating opportunities for yourself. Maintain a high profile within your profession. Get more involved in the HIM profession. Are you known in your community as an HIM professional? Are you using your network contacts wisely and effectively? Are your contacts and resources thinking of you when opportunities arise?
- **Vision** means asking yourself if you have made a purposeful choice about where to live. Are you surrounded by those who you love and respect? Do you find work fulfillment through meaningful contributions?

The critical element in career planning should not be the fact that healthcare is changing nor the speed at which it is changing. Nor should it be the need to shed past impressions or a negative professional reputation. Instead, the critical elements are the answers to the questions who are you? and what are your personal skills, qualities, and interests that demonstrate your uniqueness? Once you have those answers, the roadway opens. You can choose to turn the corner in your career, or when you see a fork in the road, you'll know which way to go to best market yourself and the HIM profession. u

Reference

Leider, Richard J. and David A. Shapiro. *Repacking Your Bags*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996.

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