

Value of Mentoring

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by Stacie L. Buck, RHIA, CCS-P, LHRM, RCC, CIC; Dwayne M. Lewis, RHIT, CCS; and Rita K. Bowen, MA-HIMT, RHIA, CHPS

Mentoring is a vital way that professionals give back to the profession. Here, three distinguished AHIMA mentors explain their commitment to advancing the profession one person at a time.

Linda Kloss , RHIA, CAE, FAHIMA
AHIMA CEO

I have long had a special interest in mentors and mentoring and am deeply grateful to those who guided me, formally and informally, throughout my career. Research shows that mentoring does aid in career advancement—getting ahead in one's job, developing one's professional identity and sense of self-worth and confidence.

Mentoring takes on different significance at different career stages. Early career professionals are exploring possible career paths, acquiring knowledge and skills to prepare for advancement and gaining the requisite confidence and contacts for advancement. Mentors can help get careers off to a strong start.

For many new professionals today, however, it is more difficult to find a mentor, particularly an HIM mentor. The nature of the work has changed, as have the resources in our organizations. For the lone HIM professional in an organization, there may be no one there to help and guide. AHIMA introduced a mentoring program to address these very changes.

We celebrate the members of AHIMA who care deeply about helping new professionals and who take the time to serve as mentors. We hear from three of them here—Stacie Buck, Dwayne Lewis, and Rita Bowen. All three are committed to the health information management profession, and each has been recognized by their peers with the FORE Triumph Award in mentoring.

Whether we are just starting out in HIM or are mid-career professionals assessing and reappraising our careers against expectations, mentors are an important part of our professional life. Engaging with one's professional association is an important first step in building the network of critical professional relationships—and perhaps, finding your mentor.

Stacie L. Buck , RHIA, CCS-P, LHRM, RCC, CIC
Vice President, Southeast Radiology Management
Triumph Mentor Award, 2007

Over the years my volunteer roles have been many, but perhaps one of the most rewarding has been that of serving as a mentor to several aspiring HIM professionals. Recently I heard a quote that succinctly summarizes why I have chosen to serve as a mentor to those in the HIM profession:

Success is not counted by how high you have climbed but by how many you have brought with you.
—Will Rose

As we work towards building our resume, I believe it is as equally important for us to work towards building our legacy. Mentoring is perhaps the single most important activity that we can engage in that ensures that we have a lasting impact on our profession.

Many new graduates are filled with excitement and enthusiasm as they set out on their HIM journey, but too often many become disheartened during the initial job search. I have heard stories of some leaving the profession before getting their first HIM position because they are continually told that they lack experience. In some cases they could not even get an interview.

As HIM professionals I believe we have a duty to ensure that this does not happen. At a time when our industry desperately needs to add qualified HIM professionals to the work force, we must choose to embrace and nurture new graduates.

The biggest reward that I have received as a result of serving as a mentor is knowing that I have been instrumental in encouraging individuals to keep pressing on towards their goals and, as a result, see them achieve those goals. I have also developed close friendships with some I have mentored over the years, and I can honestly say that I have learned just as much from my “mentees” as they have learned from me.

Dwayne M. Lewis , RHIT, CCS

DML Consulting, Inc.,

Triumph Mentor Award, 2006

Mentoring has always been a valuable part of my life. It is the one thing that I can say that has formed me into the man I am today. As a young child I was mentored by my grandmother, uncle, older schoolmates, and a lot of teachers. I guess that experience provided me with the passion and endurance to be the best mentor possible to other individuals.

Growing up, I was taught that if I wanted to learn anything in life, it was a good idea to read and understand as much history as I could. But the ultimate education came from the teachings of our elders who had come before us. What better way to learn something new than from someone who had already experienced the exact circumstance or a similar situation?

As a young man, I rebelled, like many young people do today, because I thought that I knew it all and that if I needed to learn, then “let me learn by experiencing the situation myself.” This was a common statement that had many of us wanting to kick ourselves later in life and wishing that we would have listened to those who were trying to teach us life lessons.

As a mentor, I make it a point to consider all individuals that I am mentoring a protégé. With this particular distinction, it gives the individual a sense of respect and admiration that they are viewed as up-and-coming professionals who just need a little guidance to clarify their career path. My ultimate goal is to elevate their thought process from being a follower of today to being a future leader of tomorrow!

As a member of AHIMA and a former recipient of the Triumph Mentor Award, I make it my duty to speak with current students, graduates, and fellow colleagues about the opportunities that exist in our profession and the impact they can make to our organization by just getting involved.

For anyone who receives a blessing of having a mentor now or in the future, I say to you, “Think Big!” AHIMA has conquered a lot of hurdles over the years of its existence, but there are still a lot of barriers to overcome. In order to achieve this, you should consider becoming a mentor to a potential protégé and assist them with their learning pursuits.

Rita K. Bowen , MA-HIMT, RHIA, CHPS

Enterprise Director HIM, Erlanger Health System

Triumph Mentor Award, 2005

As a recipient of the benefits of many mentors, I find it only natural to in turn want to help another person do a job more effectively and progress in their career.

A good mentor engenders trust and will share their own struggles and frustrations and how they overcame them. We all win through collaboration, and often the discussions with someone who has “been there, done that” not only helps the person seeking the assistance but often brings to light new ways of thinking about an old problem for the seasoned professional as well.

A mentor communicates hope and optimism and offers encouragement. There are a variety of approaches to mentoring—coaching, training, counseling—but mentoring is mostly discussion. When I was a new graduate, I was as green as they come, and it was through discussions with other professionals that helped me firm my position.

Today, with the AHIMA Communities of Practice, mentoring and discussion is happening every day. Having the ability to share new knowledge and perplexing questions in a collegial manner is the heart of mentoring.

Yet there continues to be a need for that face-to-face time in mentoring, which requires open and honest feedback to an individual to allow them to grow and expand both professionally and personally. Yes, mentoring can be a challenging endeavor requiring an investment in time and energy, but the reward of knowing that you have made a positive and enduring impact on someone in turn enriches your own personal and professional life.

When it comes to mentoring activities, persistence is the key—to continue coaching when another person might want to give up or simply doesn't want to be challenged to take the next step required in their professional journey.

I believe in order to be a good mentor one must capitalize on opportunities to affirm the potential of the mentee in private conversations and open recognition in public settings. I find enjoyment in enthusiastically showing interest in others and helping another person become more confident and improve the way they present themselves to others.

I recently read *The Janitor* by T. Hopkins and R. Hilbert, which is a testimony to the “gift of giving that keeps on giving.” The book illuminates a need for each one of us to consider a greater sense of mission. Mentoring allows us to “pass it on,” to make a difference in someone's life. Isn't that what we are supposed to do as we continue our journey of life?

AHIMA Mentoring Resources

AHIMA offers two mentor programs, one dedicated to student members and one for all members. It recognizes exemplary mentors with the FORE Triumph Awards.

AHIMA Mentor Program

Student members may consult with more than 30 professionals in the field by visiting the Student Community of Practice, available through the myAHIMA log in at www.ahima.org.

ACE Program

All members can benefit from the expertise of the Action Community for e-HIM Excellence. ACE members volunteer to mentor in their select areas of expertise. A directory is available at www.ahima.org/ace/directory [web page no longer available].

The FORE Triumph Awards

AHIMA's Foundation of Research and Education Triumph Awards recognize individuals who have made a difference in the HIM profession. Triumph Awards are presented in multiple categories, including mentoring. The 2008 awards will be presented in October at AHIMA's convention in Seattle. Information is available at www.ahima.org/fore/professional/awards.asp [web page no longer available].

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