

If Your Ship Has Not Come In...

Save to myBoK

by Margaret Stewart, RRA

As I write my last message, it seems hard to believe that my year as president will soon be over. It has been a great experience—one that I would highly recommend to anyone. I have enjoyed every minute of it, and I have the wonderful Board of Directors, the great AHIMA staff, and each of you to thank for making it a truly meaningful experience.

During this year, I read many books on motivation, management, and leadership to inspire me as I prepare my messages and presentations. I have absorbed a number of useful ideas that will be with me throughout my lifetime. I would like to offer you some of my favorite quotes—some well known and some that I have gleaned in my reading this year—as well as my thoughts on how they apply to our professional lives.

"...by chance you will say, but chance only favors the mind which is prepared."—Louis Pasteur (1822-1895), French chemist

How many times have we wondered why "some people have all the luck"? You can only be prepared for opportunities to succeed or excel if you have done your homework and are ready for the challenge. Today there is plenty of information to help us be "contenders" in healthcare. Find and use the resources that best suit your needs. Remember that no one can be expected to read everything that is available—you must be expertly selective and persistent in the choices you make. Establish a ritual for what you read, what you download from the Internet, and so on. Keeping abreast can be a full-time job in itself. Make it a craft that you finely tune and improve on all the time.

"To climb steep hills requires slow pace at first."—William Shakespeare (1564-1616), English dramatist and poet

This may sound as if I am recommending that we put the brakes on our energies and enthusiasm. Not at all. This quote reminds me how significant and overwhelming change can be for individuals as well as organizations. We all need to remember that change is a process. Think about a major computer system conversion or compliance effort. It takes time and energy to work through every detail and for each department to follow all the requirements. To succeed, stay focused on what you are going to achieve. Keep the underlying goal in mind. Efforts that seem small or tedious are necessary to accomplish the end goal.

"Consumers are statistics. Customers are people." —Stanley Marcus, chairman emeritus, Neiman-Marcus

HIM professionals who seldom have hands-on contact with patients may forget that each record represents a human life. But we should never get so wrapped up in statistics and data that we forget the business we are in—healthcare. HIM professionals are as responsible as anyone for quality care. We have the "whole picture" available to us, and we can present facts and figures that no one else can access. As managed care and federal regulations take greater hold, patients need to count on quality care more than ever. Let's help guarantee that they receive it.

"There is a profound difference between information and meaning."—Warren Bennis, university professor, University of Southern California

This distinction is critical for us, as information managers, to understand. I often ask HIM professionals why they collect certain data elements from the record. Often the answer is, "Because we have always done it that way." We should constantly revisit our information processes and alter these as needed. And we must realize that unless we can access information on a timely basis and make it meaningful, it is of little value to anyone. In the information age, we can make healthcare information valuable for a variety of uses. Let's work toward this end.

"Good humor makes all things possible."—Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), American clergyman

We could all use more fun in our lives. I love to laugh, and it does make me feel better. This does not mean work is all fun and games—it isn't. But you can lighten up even tense situations by bringing a smile to someone's face. Keep in mind that the cruelest laughter of all is at someone else's expense. We all want to laugh among ourselves, not at each other.

"If your ship has not come in, swim out to it."—Chinese proverb

If you sit around waiting for things to happen or for someone to tell you what to do, you will be left behind. We all should make a point of trying something new or daring at least once a week. It does not have to be something major. Prepare a report for the boss before he or she asks for it. Go above and beyond the call of duty and see what happens.

"I cannot predict the wind but I can have my sail ready." —E.E. Schumacher, "I Cannot Predict"

This quote evokes the vigilance we all need. No one can tell us what healthcare will be like in five or 10 years. But we can be prepared and—I would like to think—better equipped than most. This endeavor will take great determination and foresight. I can't think of 38,000 individuals I would trust at the helm more than our members.

Thank you for letting me serve as your president. I will remember and treasure this year, thanks to your efforts and thoughtfulness.

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