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Health Reform and Your Career

No better time than now to assess skills and determine a career strategy.

There is no doubt that we in the healthcare field are in the midst of big changes. In light of recent health reform legislation, organizations are beginning to position themselves for what they believe is coming. Restructuring and consolidations will increase. Physician alignment will become increasingly important, as more physicians will likely be employed in healthcare organizations. And there are tremendous pressures—more than usual—to control costs, implement process improvements and meet quality standards.

All of these changes, combined with a still-struggling economy, may make some healthcare professionals want to stay put in their current position until things “blow over.” But the current climate will take a long time to settle down, and many of the changes mentioned above—and more—will continue. Despite all of this external turmoil, there’s no better time than the present to focus on your career. The following are tips for managing your career in a dynamic healthcare environment and a challenging job marketplace.

Become a Student Again

Staying on top of what’s going on in the field is something healthcare leaders should continually do. This is

underscored even more in the current climate where change is truly the only constant. It is a good career maintenance practice to frequently assess the industry to help you determine what leadership skills you have to offer your current or future employer and those skills that you need to acquire to keep up with the industry and advance in your career.

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The graphic on the opposite page provides a framework through which you can think about your contributions to your organization and how they relate to health reform, reform’s effect on your organization’s customers (patients), your organization’s response to customers’ needs and your department’s role in that response.

As you think about how your role within your organization relates to the rest of it and the industry at large, consider what the needs of your customers (patients) and others within your organization are. Next, identify what skills and other

contributions you bring to your role to help meet your organization’s needs. These skills and other contributions are your “offer.”

Ask yourself: Is my offer aligned with the needs of my organization and the individuals it serves? Identify areas of alignment and also any gaps between your offer and the organization’s needs. Determining areas of alignment can help you identify the strength of your offer and leverage this within your current organization or prepare you for your next career move whether it is in the immediate or more distant future. Identifying gaps will clarify and prioritize your developmental needs both in your present role and beyond.

Competencies for a New Era

As the changes brought about by health reform become reality, many healthcare leaders will need to develop new skills or improve on skills they already possess. Because the specifics of many of the changes that will occur remain to be seen, healthcare leaders are going to have to be especially adept at change management. They will also need to be more future-focused and agile (able to change directions quickly as organizational priorities shift at a rapid pace).

Communication skills, always a key leadership competency, will be more important than ever. Physicians and other employees will have concerns

about their roles and the security of their livelihoods as it relates to health reform, and healthcare leaders will need to be able to articulately address those concerns. Good communication skills are also necessary for the increased involvement in public policy and board relations that will be necessary for all healthcare professionals going forward.

After assessing your leadership skills and areas for development, determine a plan of action to move forward. This may include obtaining formal training and education within those areas. Professional associations such as ACHE offer a variety of career assessment tools to help you identify your leadership strengths and weaknesses. (For more information visit ache.org/Careers.)

Know the Value You Bring

In a similar vein as reflecting on your strengths is reflecting on the *value* you bring to your organization. Because of the increased restructuring and

consolidation of many healthcare organizations that we will see going forward, organizations will have a heightened focus on identifying their high-value employees.

It's not in most individuals' nature to toot their own horns, so to speak, but it is important to make others in your organization aware of your successes. Communicate up: Articulate to your boss the value you bring and share examples of the impact you make.

Networking, Networking, Networking

This isn't news, but I cannot emphasize enough the importance of networking. Often the tendency is for individuals to think of networking as an activity that you do only during a job search. Do not wait for a career crisis or transition to begin networking—constantly make and maintain connections with people who can help you manage and advance your career.

Networking isn't just an extracurricular activity—it's an integral part of what you as a healthcare executive need to do to grow professionally. In fact, a good network is a marketable asset that can be of value not only to you in managing your career but to your organization as well. Knowing who to reach out to for advice on a complex project or getting a recommendation for hiring a consultant could help you make the right decision on the job. Change the mind-set that networking is something that you only do outside your working hours—make time for it.

Don't underestimate the effectiveness of today's modern networking tools, which make it easier than ever to integrate networking into your everyday routine. Fully embrace social media sites such as LinkedIn and others as a way to learn from, network with and get connected to others in the field.

With the changes brought about by health reform and other external factors affecting the current job marketplace, these can be complicated and uncertain times for healthcare professionals seeking a new job or advancement within their current organizations. By making it a point to constantly assess your career progress, including following the advice above, you will be poised for determining a career strategy that meets your needs, your organization's needs and the needs of the healthcare industry of the future. ▲

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What Do You Offer: A Framework



Source: BPI Group