

Are Chapters Important? | by Kim R. Wallin, CMA, CFM, CPA

Are chapters irrelevant? Are they obsolete? Some people in IMA think so. But I feel our local chapters have a lot to offer and are still an important part of our organization.

They offer us three unique opportunities that we can't get elsewhere in IMA: networking, education, and leadership development.

Networking. Local chapters can help you develop your own personal network. In today's age of electronic job boards, some of you may wonder if networking is still important when you are searching for a job. But according to a Forrester Research Study, 62% of employers found their employees through word of mouth. That means who you know is a lot more important than posting your resume on a dot-com. Many of my friends and associates have been hired because of the contacts they have made in IMA. Yet networking is *not* just about getting a job. It's also about friendships, knowledge, and advice. Interacting with other IMA members will result in lifelong friendships and in exchanges of important knowledge that can be worth its weight in gold.

Education. Each time you attend a chapter meeting, you are presented with an educational opportunity. The programs are designed to keep you abreast of current issues. Remember, there is always something to learn. Web-based and other education sources might be more convenient, but you don't have the two-way exchange of ideas you get from a live presentation with a question-and-answer period. The answer to your question or somebody else's question might be the missing part of

that puzzle you have been trying to solve.

Leadership. Leadership training is very important, especially for young professionals. Your employer expects you to have or develop leadership skills in order to advance in your career. Although colleges and universities attempt to teach it, leadership usually develops over time through practice. Volunteer to be on your chapter board. Participating there will allow you to practice your leadership skills in a nonthreatening and friendly environment. You won't be fired if you make a mistake, and your fellow board members will be there to help you succeed.

Another important part of being a leader is having good communication skills. By serving on a chapter board, you will develop your public speaking ability and learn to communicate your ideas in a clear and concise manner. You will also learn to keep an open mind and listen to the ideas of others. A good leader also needs to be a motivator. When you serve at the volunteer level, you learn to motivate people even without monetary rewards. This is a great skill to bring into your work environment.

These are just a few of the reasons to participate in chapter activities. If you don't belong to a local chapter yet, you can go to the IMA website at www.imanet.org and find the chapters in your area.

As always, keep in touch and let me know what you are thinking. I can be reached at kwallin@imanet.org. ■



KIM R. WALLIN