

## My Convoluted Career Path

By Doreen Remmen, CMA



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**H**ow I envy young people who know exactly what they want to do with their lives! Those who enter the accounting profession are especially fortunate because there is a well-defined traditional path. I followed a very different path, and I continue to explore.

After working for several years and obtaining a liberal arts degree, I finally decided to study accounting while moving all over the U.S. and Canada as half of a two-career marriage. A decade later, with a well-rounded accounting education from five different universities, public accounting experience, and several years of controllership, I found myself searching for a new position when the company I worked for was sold. It was clear that I needed professional certification to obtain a desirable CFO role in an increasingly competitive job market.

I turned to the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA®) for the Certified Management Accountant (CMA®) designation. For six months I rose at 5:00 every morning, made a pot of coffee, and studied for two hours before getting my three children off to school and heading to work.

Studying for the CMA exam provided unexpected benefits. Concepts that had seemed remote and obscure to me as a student snapped into focus when synthesized with knowledge from the workplace. Surprisingly, functions I had learned on the job began to make more sense—or nonsense. I started to imagine how things could be

done very differently.

Armed with my CMA certificate, I found the job that was meant for me at a privately owned distribution company in the midst of a business turnaround. I turned to IMA for literature on best practices that helped me streamline the finance department. When I was asked to implement ethics training, IMA provided resources. Challenged to improve profitability by customer, I went to an IMA seminar on activity-based costing. Needing to understand problems with the flow of materials, I emerged from IMA headquarters in Montvale with an armload of books on the theory of constraints.

I designed and implemented a company-wide variable pay incentive program that rewarded cross-functional teams, reinforced radical company-wide change, and focused every staff member on our most important customers. Once again, IMA was a tremendous support, publishing my article on gain-sharing in the March 2003 issue of *Strategic Finance*. This certainly enhanced my own personal brand, and it also enhanced my company's image and credibility.

As the new CFO of IMA, I feel that everything I have done along my journey has brought me to this place where I have responsibility for strategic planning, information technology, and finance. The important role the association has had in my own career inspires me to do my best.

Have you considered how you can make better use of your association to enhance your personal brand and your career? **SF**