

Bridging the Gap from Student to Young Professional

Being prepared for the workplace may make starting a new job an enjoyable adventure and relieve anxiety on that first day. IMA® can be a big help in this area.

You finally approach it. It's staring right at you. You have prepared for this day your entire life. You put one foot in front of the other and tell yourself to just breathe. Palms sweating, you close your eyes and take a deep breath. You tiptoe onto the first plank and grab tightly to the rail. A gust strikes your face, creating a chilling sensation. You feel the goose bumps crawling on your skin and your heart thumping. Then you open your eyes...

How will you describe *your* first day on the job? Many people experience these dreadful nerves every day. How can an individual overcome these feelings?

Your career path is an adventure, but it doesn't have to be a nightmare. For many students, transitioning from student to young professional can be particularly scary. Don't worry! No matter what your background or interests, IMA is available to you and can serve as the bridge to a successful career path.

I have spoken with many colleagues about their experiences in becoming a young professional,

and they have said that the most challenging aspect about becoming a professional is giving up the luxuries of college, such as student organizations and activities outside school. They felt that student organizations allowed them to interact with other students and to become involved in activities away from their studies. How is this any different from students in high school?

As in high school, organizations fill the void in a person's life not already consumed by jobs, relationships, sports, or other extracurricular activities. Basically, while you've been preparing for your first day in the "real world," you've been using organizations as the fulcrum of school/life balance. But once in the real world, why should a professional remove organizational involvement from a work/life balance? What fills the void of professional organizations once you begin a career?

Speaking from personal experience, IMA has served as a bridge in my development from student to young professional. Having been involved in IMA as a student and now as a professional, I have taken advantage of many of the opportunities available to all IMA members. Let's look at some examples of what opportunities

are available to IMA members and how these opportunities have shaped my career path.

Student Organization Involvement

Participating in student organizations is a great way to build the leadership skills a student will need as a young professional. While completing my undergraduate and graduate studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, I was involved in Accounting Society, the campus student chapter of IMA. I went from being a member, to serving as a College of Business Student Council representative, to the president of the organization. I assisted in growing this organization's membership and in getting the members more involved in activities outside school. As a result, Accounting Society received IMA's Gold Award of Excellence and Outstanding Chapter under my presidency. This experience showed me how powerful the world of IMA can truly be for students.

Scholarships

Many students don't apply for scholarships because they think it's extremely improbable to be selected. After the initiatives I led at Southern Illinois University Car-



bondale, I applied for and received two scholarships from IMA. When I received the first scholarship, I instantly knew that I had found an organization that truly believed in me. This scholarship gave me the confidence and financial stability I needed to complete my undergraduate degree. It also taught me that no matter where you come from nor how big or small your university, you have just as much of a chance to receive the scholarship as any other applicant.

While I was completing my master's degree, I received the Stuart Cameron McLeod Society (SCMS) scholarship. SCMS, also known as the Society for Continuing Member Service, is a prestigious group within IMA that provides an opportunity for continued friendship, fellowship, and service to those who have served IMA. This scholarship provided me with the financing to sit for the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam before becoming a young professional. Additionally, this scholarship increased my awareness of what IMA has to offer its members. From this experience, I formed a new goal of becoming a member of SCMS and giving back to IMA, student members, and SCMS as its donors did for me.

IMA Conferences

When I was a student member, I attended several of IMA's Student Leadership Conferences. They add value to a person's professional development via accounting topics and soft skills such as networking and communication. In fact, my first Student Conference in Louisville, Ky., truly sparked my passion into getting further

involved in IMA.

It wasn't until I received the SCMS scholarship that I attended my first IMA Annual Conference & Exposition in Denver, Colo. As part of the scholarship, I received an all-expenses-paid trip to one IMA Annual Conference & Exposition and one IMA Student Leadership Conference. When I attended my first Annual Conference & Exposition, I was exposed to a completely different environment of many professionals from a vari-

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ety of backgrounds. The Conference gave me the opportunity to network with many professionals and build my confidence and communication skills. This exposure to professionals was exactly what I needed to prepare me for becoming a young professional.

Chapter and Committee Involvement

While I was completing my master's degree, I became involved in IMA's St. Louis Chapter, which is also Accounting Society's IMA parent chapter. This experience let me provide the young professional voice on the parent chapter level. It also allowed me to gain more exposure to professionals from a variety of backgrounds. I now serve on the board of directors for the St. Louis Chapter, helping provide support to the student chapters.

After my most recent IMA

Annual Conference & Exposition, in Baltimore, Md., I learned about IMA's Young Professionals Advisory Committee, a committee formed on the global level to carry out various initiatives and serve as the young professional voice to IMA. By serving on this Committee, I have been fortunate enough to compose several blog entries and to help select speakers for the upcoming IMA Annual Conference & Exposition in Orlando, Fla. This involvement, as well as the monthly teleconference calls, has improved my communication skills immensely.

In addition to the student chapter, parent chapter, or committee levels, all members have the opportunity to become involved on the regional council and global board levels. These leadership opportunities are ideal for building the bridge from student to young professional.

Internships

I strongly believe that my involvement in IMA helped me obtain an internship at the Deloitte & Touche LLP ("Deloitte & Touche") St. Louis office. This resulted in landing a full-time position with Deloitte & Touche. While serving as Accounting Society president, I had the opportunity of networking with two professionals in the St. Louis office who have served as mentors for my professional development. As a young professional with Deloitte & Touche, I feel my career skill set has been enhanced as a direct result of my involvement within IMA.

Guest-Speaking Opportunity

I was given the opportunity to

speak in front of students, professors, and professionals at the Student Leadership Conference this past November in Anaheim, Calif. I felt I had completed the circle; as I looked out at the audience, I couldn't help but remember being in their place just a year ago. As you can imagine, this opportunity enabled me to improve my presentation and public speaking skills.

CMA® (Certified Management Accountant)

Although I'm already a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), I have chosen to begin sitting for the CMA exam, which is supported by IMA. According to IMA's website, the CMA is the advanced professional certification specifically designed to measure the accounting and financial management skills that drive business performance. Additionally, in order to sit for the exam and maintain the CMA certification, you must be a member of IMA. I view the CMA as a certification on the internal business process and the CPA as a certification on the external business process. As an Audit & Enterprise Risk Services Advisory consultant for Deloitte & Touche LLP, I hope to use the CMA certification to complement my CPA and provide better client service.

Be Involved

Being prepared for the workplace can make starting a new job an enjoyable adventure and relieve anxiety on that first day. As you can see, just because you are, or will soon become, a young professional, you don't have to stop being involved in organizational activities. No matter where you are

on your career path, IMA can provide you with tremendous networking opportunities while expanding your accounting knowledge and building your soft skills. Jumping into a new job can be a terrifying situation, but IMA can provide a bridge to make that transition less of a challenge. **SF**

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