

## Following a Passion

By Noel C. Fairbanks, CMA



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**W**hen I was young, my parents instilled in me a passion for lifelong learning. Whether it was at school, on the practice field, in the community, or on the job, I have always enjoyed developing skills, broadening my education, and teaching others.

Besides the love of numbers, my ability to continually learn attracted me to the managerial accounting profession. Depending on what functional area you support, the business partners you interact with, or the industry you work in, you're constantly learning something new, and the more you learn, the better leader you become.

I joined Johnson & Johnson in 2002 through their Finance Leadership Development Program (FLDP) after graduating from Hartwick College with a B.S. in accounting, a B.A. in business management, and a minor in finance. The Rotational Leadership Program was a wonderful way to be introduced to the accounting and finance disciplines and afforded me many opportunities to continue learning.

J&J introduced me to IMA® (Institute of Management Accountants) and the CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) certification. J&J strongly encourages certification among its financial associates, ensuring an organization with broad experience and solid credentials. Hence, I became a member of IMA in 2002 and earned my CMA in 2006.

Since I've taken the CMA exam, the structure has changed, but the requirements have remained the same: broad experience in financial planning, analysis, control, deci-

sion support, and professional ethics. These skills were invaluable to develop early in my career, and I continue to use them as I progress through cross-functional roles of increasing responsibility in the J&J family.

I've been fortunate to have been involved in all sectors of the company, supporting various disciplines and working in different functional areas. Whether I was doing cost accounting in a manufacturing plant, consolidating financial reporting, developing investment analyses, or creating the annual business plan, I was able to apply the knowledge I learned from the CMA exam to my career.

Even as I completed my MBA at Cornell University in 2010 and as I currently serve on community boards, I find myself using the essential skills I developed while studying for the CMA. And the learning hasn't stopped there: I continually benefit from the Continuing Professional Education (CPE) sessions that I participate in each year, my interactions with colleagues, and the materials that are available.

At IMA's Annual Student Leadership Conference, someone asked me, "What advice would you give to those starting in your profession?" I replied, "The same thing I tell others I mentor: love what you do, work hard to make a difference, become a subject matter expert in your field, surround yourself with supportive family and friends, and maintain a passion for lifelong learning." I hope I can pay it forward to instill this same passion in others in my company, community, and personal life. **SF**