

Connections

By Christopher Mishler, CMA, CIA, CISA



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The value of the CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) credential is tough for me to quantify, but I can say it has been a doorway to a job, raises, and a wealth of knowledge, colleagues, and connections. I didn't plan to start out in business. At age 19, I took a career placement "test" that told me I might be a good bricklayer, nurse, or mortician, but I must avoid the accounting profession (the only negative score) at all costs. So I became an accountant.

After opting out of my post-baccalaureate doctoral program in speech and language science—my original career track—I worked in a photo product distributor's warehouse. Since I had a college degree, I was called up to the office to see if I could help out there. "Can you do accounting?" the president asked me. "Sure," I said, not knowing about the competency part of the *IMA® Statement of Ethical Professional Practice*.

Having overpromised already, I went back to school at Eastern Michigan University in the MSA program and met a couple of IMA stalwarts, Drs. Zafar Khan and Bob Okopny. They became my management accounting and internal audit mentors and urged me to get involved in the IMA student chapter. Eventually I became its president and also joined the Ann Arbor Chapter, which sponsors the student chapter. There I met Sue Bos, a fellow IMA Global Director who pushes me to do my best, and a host of other top-notch members of the Chapter's board. After several positions on

that board, including the presidency, I accepted roles in the award-winning Michigan Regional Council, again including the presidency. Then I became a member of the IMA Global Board of Directors, a natural move enabled by my connections in and to IMA. Along the way, my academic advisors had encouraged me to take the CMA exam, so I prepared heavily at the end of my studies and passed it the first time (in 1996). Because of this, my next raise was double that of others given at my firm. When it was time to move on, a fellow Board member introduced me to my current employer, Experis Finance.

IMA membership is no one-way street, as those serving on boards can attest, and I relish giving back to the profession and our members in those roles. A trait I have developed, "Connectedness," roughly defined by *Strength Based Leadership* as seeing how people and topics are or could be tied together, has helped me find common goals in my circles of influence, including my employer and IMA. I believe that all parties have benefitted through this interaction.

The CMA draws me to high-caliber individuals too numerous to name. IMA also gives me opportunities to speak to students as well as accounting and finance professionals, usually on my favorite topic of Excel risks and controls. In the end, giving back to others, from students to the Global Board, brings me full circle and keeps me connected to the people who make it all worthwhile—our IMA members. **SF**