

# Sharpening Your Soft Skills

The IMA® Leadership Academy offers many courses for sharpening your soft skills. You can view webinars, attend workshops, or participate in a mentorship to build communication skills, counseling skills, and more.

I hope most of you are familiar with the IMA Leadership Academy. If not, here's a quick refresher. The Leadership Academy provides soft-skills training to management personnel through course delivery, course development, and leadership articles in IMA publications. The skills addressed include communication, counseling, utilizing resources, setting an example, planning, control, and evaluation. The Leadership Academy has obtained a multitude of courses created by the Education Foundation for Women in Accounting (EFWA) that address these skills. In addition, IMA volunteers have created several of our in-house courses or have revamped the original ones from EFWA to the current products used today. More than 24 courses are available to our members, and we continue to develop more each year. All of our courses are NASBA approved for offering CPE (Continuing Professional Education) credit to attendees in all areas of the United States.

## Building the Skill Sets

Soft skills are especially relevant as you grow into management roles and lead others in the day-to-day operations and decisions of your company. One such soft skill is communication, and our related course topics are interpersonal skills, facilitation skills, male/female communications, presentation skills, and our newest release about the impact of social media.



The listening skills course is currently in development. Leaders also need counseling skills, and our topics address motivation, workplace bias, work/life balance, and managing and navigating conflict. How to utilize resources of a team is addressed in the three areas of team building: “Essential Team Skills,” “Team Approach to Problem Solving,” and “Advanced Team Skills.” Our courses, “Coaching,” “Mentoring,” “Servant Leadership,” “Essential Leadership,” and “Transformational Leadership,” along

with our new course, “Better You, Better Leader,” deal with setting an example and representing your group. You can better manage how to plan, control, and evaluate for you and your team by knowing about change, delegation, problem solving, conflict management and negotiation, and goal setting. Several of the topics involve the various skill sets so members can obtain knowledge in several areas.

While these topics have been developed with guidelines for presentation, they aren't perfect. Nor do they cover all skills. Your input regarding how to make the courses more relevant and other topics that interest you is very important to us. Please take advantage of connecting with me or another member of the Leadership Academy about topics of interest or submitting comments, either positive or negative, when you have the opportunity to observe or even present one of the courses.

## Delivering the Topics

How do we get this material to our members? We do this in multiple ways. One of the most familiar is through our online monthly webinars. Our library of 24 course topics is rotated over a two-year period, but mentoring is covered

annually. The webinars are usually presented by IMA members who relate their own personal experiences to the topic. At least once a year a renowned guest speaker discusses his or her experiences with leadership, such as Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. To meet CPE requirements, we use polling questions and evaluation forms for each topic presented.

Another way we deliver material to members is via in-person workshops. This is a great way to provide knowledge to our local members in a cost-effective way. When a person presents a workshop, he or she receives the necessary tools via a *Leader's Guide*, and attendees can access workshop materials via LinkUp IMA afterward. These tools are the minimum we provide. If a presenter needs additional assistance, we can provide more information about presenting and suggest listening to previous presentations to learn how they have been done in the past. The in-person workshops can be managed for a one-hour or 1.5-hour CPE presentation. For the workshops, attendees are asked to fill out and submit an evaluation form to the IMA chapter or council that hosted the event.

For some, the best way to obtain soft skills is to actually see the message. Our monthly Leadership column in *Strategic Finance* provides this option and is written by experienced accounting professionals who bring their personal experiences to life. Personally, I can better understand and relate to a topic more closely when it's presented as a true-to-life experience. This past year, we've covered

teaching and leading as a management accountant. There have been several articles acknowledging and interpreting *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, including win-win, goal setting, prioritizing, and effective communication. Other articles have been about harnessing and utilizing your team's talents, leading people through change, managing a remote team effectively and being aware of the remote dynamics, effecting change and impacting end results, and discussing the military's training for future leaders via temporary role changes and obtaining a new perspective from your subordinates when lead change occurs. These articles are provided by IMA members. You can have your experience come to life by connecting with Esteban Quiros at [quiros.e@pg.com](mailto:quiros.e@pg.com).

### Mentoring Relationships

Another area of specialty for the Leadership Academy is mentoring. IMA members can become a mentor of other members and/or a mentee. To become a mentor, members must first complete our

The IMA® Leadership Academy provides leadership opportunities for all members. From leadership assessment to leadership courses offered in person as well as through WebEx to participation opportunities in mentoring, be it reverse or traditional, the IMA Leadership Academy can help you meet your leadership goals and improve your leadership skills. For more information, please visit the Leadership Academy website at [www.imanet.org/programs\\_events/leadership\\_academy.aspx](http://www.imanet.org/programs_events/leadership_academy.aspx).

mentoring course. Then they can fill out their mentoring profile and list their areas of experience. Once their profile is published in our database, a potential mentee can search by name, industry, location, and more to find a match suitable to their needs. My personal mentoring experiences have ranged from a one-time session to several months. The mentoring process is a true test of managing outcomes remotely as most participants usually don't live close enough for in-person meetings. It also is an opportunity to connect globally and expand your own skills.

The Leadership Academy continues to develop one new course per year and revitalize one of our existent courses each year. We have begun quarterly training sessions for those interested in learning more about presenting. Take a look at our courses, and see which ones you can relate to with your life story or situation. Consider presenting your soft management skills either by writing an article or presenting one of our topics to your fellow IMA members, and include members of your and their business team. We want to serve our members in the best way possible with the most effective and efficient tools available. I hope you will take advantage of what we have to offer. Meeting and exceeding your expectations is what we strive to accomplish. **SF**

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