

Take Advantage of Local Chapter Education

by Bob Bell, CMA, CPA

The IMA has more than 275 active chapters that meet four to 12 times a year, which gives members over 2,500 opportunities per year to obtain education in their local area. The system is in place. Now we need to make it more relevant to current and prospective members.

Chapter attendance tends to be made up of Boomers, with a scattering of Generation Xers. One way to draw more Xers is to have meetings during work hours. Late afternoon sessions finishing at 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. are attractive to members who have young children at home or involved in school activities.

It also is time to start forming new chapters. We need only 20 members who are committed to the idea to start one. There are several ways to do this. The local chapter can become a company chapter. By that I mean meeting within a company. The chapter can decide if it wants to commit its members to a specific company or be open to local members. Company chapters could become powerful tools for promoting certification and specific industry education.

Also, student chapters could become college or university chapters that serve students and regular members as well. We have over 70 active student chapters, which need to be counted and reported like all other chapters. Otherwise, we lose sight of them. Remember, "out of sight, out of mind."

It is time to "up the ante" and improve our local programs. We can do so by having joint meetings with the FEI, CPA Societies, APICS, local Chambers of Commerce, and local two-year and four-year educational institutions. We also must focus our education on business topics that use accounting, finance, or information technology in their solutions. As an example, the information technology arena is changing so rapidly that few of us can stay current. It offers a great opportunity for local education.

Soft topics are great once a year, but we need hard answers to solve our business problems. It is very important that we have substantive technical programs that attract our members. Top speakers also will attract members. But we have to be careful of the "chicken and egg" problem in that we can't have top speakers and strong programs and have few members show up. Once we create these programs, we must communicate with our members and make sure that our speakers feel their efforts and time are well spent.



BOB BELL

Education is composed of two parts: The first level is obtaining enough knowledge for problem identification. The second is learning how to solve a particular problem. Many of us need the former because we will use consultants or out-source the solutions. We need enough competence to understand what our alternatives are. If

we have leading or local experts as speakers at our chapter meetings, we will gain the competence we need.

In a time when many say local education is dead, I say local education is just beginning. With Web casts and teleconferencing, local educational programs will be the best yet. And never forget that excellent education will create a desire for certification. Our education and certification will set us apart within the business community.

Don't let your area be a "laggard." Step forward with strong leadership, and create a local educational environment that everyone in the community will want to participate in! ■

Bob Bell can be contacted by e-mail at Bob@griffinshine.com.