

## **“Why I Need an HIM Mentor”**

### ***AHIMA student essay contest winning submission***

**Student: Rebecca Teleszky, RHIA, University of Illinois at Chicago**

**Mentor: Maria Caban Alizondo, MAOL, RHIT, FAHIMA, Director of Enterprise Information Management at UCLA Health System**

In 2012 I had been out of undergrad for a few years and was wandering aimlessly, trying to find myself. I was living in Chicago, where I was born and raised, and had just begun my modeling career. Even though I thoroughly enjoyed modeling, I knew it was not a secure occupation. During this timeframe, I also discovered the Health Information Management (HIM) field and thus began my Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA) post-baccalaureate certificate program online at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). I ended up moving to Los Angeles in 2013 for modeling purposes while I also continued to work on my HIM certificate. I did not have a plan for post-graduation and, honestly, I was convinced that I was going to hold off on starting my professional life until modeling came to an end. I was excited that I was striving towards becoming an RHIA, but I was in no urgent rush to start my career. I was insecure, unconfident, and felt I did not belong in the professional realm or was not intelligent enough to be a full-time career woman.

The spring of 2015 was when my path changed drastically. It was also when I met my mentor, Maria Alizondo. I had started my last semester at UIC and concurrently started my practicum at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Maria was the Director of the Health Information Management Department at the hospital. The day I met her, I instantly recognized how enjoyable, approachable, intelligent, fun and extremely efficient she was. I felt an instant connection; in all honesty, she reminded me of myself.

Since I did not have much professional experience, Maria and I initially set up a shadowing routine where I worked alongside her on projects, calls and meetings. This then bridged into her becoming my mentor. We had many meaningful conversations; we talked about the field, my future, about anything and everything that I needed. She helped me form an amazing

resume, practice my interview skills and prepare myself mentally for the beginning of my career. Maria helped to change my perspective on professional life, the working environment, and myself and my abilities. After collaborating with her, I finally realized how much I belonged in this field and, for the first time, I felt inspired and eager to begin my career. I finally could visualize myself as a successful professional woman, who loved her job and had fun too!

I now work as a Regulatory Audit Coordinator (RAC) at UCLA. Knowing how immensely Maria helped me during my practicum, I recently asked her if she could continue to mentor me and she agreed. Already, she has presented opportunities for growth, and has helped me strive for goals that I did not think were attainable. She has also helped me remain focused on my future, gain substantial confidence and, overall, has motivated me to put myself out there as much as possible. The progress I have made in a few months of working is more than I ever imagined for myself.

Having a mentor truly has changed my mind set, my path and my life. I would wholeheartedly recommend working with a mentor. Not just to my classmates, but to anyone, in any walk of life. They help you define goals, see the big picture, and encourage you to become the best version of yourself. They are a role model for all areas of your life and are truly motivational and inspirational.

In the future, I see myself as a director of a large hospital system. I also see myself teaching, researching and presenting. I already plan on becoming a mentor as my career progresses, as I have already volunteered to work with our current practicum students at UCLA. I hope to help guide others when they are not sure what to do next. I want to show them that anything is possible. I want to inspire and bring out qualities that they may not know they possess. Overall, I want to help shape our field for the better, by helping to build a strong, confident and effective workforce. Most of all, I want to give others the same opportunities and experiences that I had, once I met my mentor.

I used to think that I was meant to move to Los Angeles for my modeling career. I now realize that I was meant to live here so that UCLA could be a part of my life. I am tremendously thankful to be where I am in my career and to have had the opportunities that I have been given. Beyond all else, I am forever grateful that I met Maria.