

A woman with blonde hair pulled back, wearing a white collared shirt and a dark pinstriped blazer, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is looking upwards and to the left with a slight smile. The background is a soft-focus, glowing pattern of white circuit lines on a light purple and blue gradient. The overall mood is professional and forward-looking.

## Tangible Qualities for MT Success

BY CELESTE HARJEHAUSEN,  
CAREER STEP

# Professionalism

Have you ever walked into an ice cream store that advertises homemade ice cream and walked out with an ice cream cone but not enjoyed the experience? The clerk was rude or the tables were dirty. There were no napkins or you were overcharged. You walked away eating your favorite flavor of ice cream, so the need was filled (that place inside us all that just requires ice cream) but the experience was lacking.

The ice cream store had the right basic elements – ice cream, cones, scoops, bananas, change, recipes and the equipment and knowledge to make a tasty cone — so what was lacking?

Professionalism.

Have you ever hired, been hired by, had a peer relationship with or managed a medical transcriptionist who had all of the basic elements – medical language skills, English language skills, referencing, technology, etc. – but you felt at the end of the shift, pay period, or term of employment, that even if the reports were returned to the client, the experience was lacking?

Merriam-Webster defines professionalism as “the qualities, aim, or conduct that mark a professional person.” Professionalism is clearly more than just having specialized knowledge of the “profession.” It is about setting professional goals, developing professional qualities, engaging in professional conduct, and having high standards in applying professional knowledge.

Over the years, I have compiled my own list of the professional characteristics and standards that I feel are invaluable to the medical transcriptionist – I work to apply them to myself and value them in others. These are a:

- Personal standard of quality
- Balanced approach
- Pursuit of continuing education
- Willingness to seek clarification
- Broad network of professional connections
- Professional conduct that is appropriate in all situations
- High level of tolerance

I suppose, using my analogy, personal standard of quality would correlate to bananas. Just as a banana underlies a banana split, professionalism begins with setting a personal standard of excellence that is rigorous and requires personal accountability. A professional feels responsible for everything under his/her stewardship. The goal is to generate output that is as perfect as possible given experience, time, and resources. A professional's standard is the same whether someone is checking or not.

The balanced approach is the ice cream (feel free to pick your flavor). A professional does not target one area for excellence and neglect the rest. A medical transcriptionist who focuses on productivity (for example) – Lines per hour! Lines per hour!

Lines per hour! – but neglects to read account updates or review feedback is not as valuable to the employer as an MT who produces less but manages all of the elements of the job – quality, timeliness, flexibility, accuracy, networking, teamwork, etc.

The next two qualities of professionalism - pursuit of continuing education and willingness to seek clarification – go hand in hand. Butterscotch and chocolate. Strawberries and fudge. Marshmallow and caramel. (Sorry, I digress). A professional learns continuously and embraces the learning process. The modern world is in an ongoing learning curve. Those who become entrenched in their way of doing things or ignore new technologies, regulations, and tools soon find their skills outdated and their options limited.

I've sat in many interviews with applicants for MT positions who did not know what type of operating system was on their computer, how to search on the Internet, or what was meant by HIPAA compliant. I've never met a professional who felt that time invested keeping current in the industry, with employer requirements, and the tools of the trade was wasted time.

The next two toppings go together as well – broad networking and professional, appropriate conduct. There are so many ways to connect to people, employment, resources, answers, mentoring (as mentor or mentee) that it amazes me how many people sit in a little office in their homes never connecting with anyone. The time to create opportunities for your next job is today. The relationships built through participation in such things as AAMT, chat groups, forums, classes or mentoring will likely pay dividends in myriad ways such as finding employment, filling in blanks, and managing stress.

Professional conduct in networking is absolutely essential. It's the whipped cream! Remember the purpose of networking is personal and professional growth. Growth comes from solutions, support, nurturing, positive communications, and pursuit of common goals. I am stunned by the unprofessional behavior exhibited by some under the guise of anonymity. A professional does not engage in behavior publicly or privately, openly or anonymously, which undermines, attacks, discourages, or criticizes.

Finally, the nuts on top! Tolerance. Tolerance of diversity is a hallmark of the professional. When discussions and policies consider different viewpoints, learning styles, and experience levels, solutions can be implemented which reach more people and solve more problems. Be tolerant on a personal level, company level, and industry level. After all, we are mostly interested in one common goal – delivery of quality patient care records.

Well – I'm feeling quite hungry. I think it's time for an afternoon snack. Ice cream anyone? **P**