



Remembering the Value of Credentials

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You know a lot of things. You know your organization owns one or more credentials. You know those credentials are your organization's life blood. You know you must protect the credentials. You know you must promote the credentials. You know the credentials benefit the credential holders and the public. You know a lot, but do you remember why?

In the beginning, your organization probably was founded because its mission was (and most likely remains) related to the creation, promotion and ascension of a credential that signified a higher standard of achievement in a designated profession. From the outset, your organization wanted to show that obtaining the credential translated to professional and better services and/or products. This would result in the public's awareness about the difference between those in a profession practicing with your organization's credential as compared to those practicing without the credential. Employers would recognize the value of the credential. This would lead to better and more jobs for those holding the credential. At the same time, the public - those receiving the direct benefit of the organization's credential holders' elevated standards of accomplishment and care - would gain both comfort and benefit from using the services and/or products of your organization's credential holder. The mission is laudable. The purpose is excellent. The formula is simple. Once the value of the credential is established, it's cruise control. It's easy, right? Wrong!!!

Over time, many changes can occur, each of which requires consideration and reevaluation. For example, the organization's mission may have changed. The mission may have stayed the same as documented in the Bylaws but become different in actual practice. The profession may have changed. Demands on credential holders may have changed. Demands by credential holders may have changed. When any of these happen, the purpose of the credential can shift. This can happen without leadership fully realizing it. If your leadership is doing its job, it should analyze whether and when it is time to step back and evaluate. The organization may have to reassess its mission, as stated and as practiced. The organization may have to ask itself what is the reason for promoting and maintaining the credential. Common questions should include: (i) has the organization changed to something more like a membership organization?, (ii) is it too hard or too easy to become and/or remain credentialed?, (iii) does the credential

have the same meaning in the field?, (iv) is the credential an enhanced standard of professional and excellent care or is it more entry level?, (v) is the point of the credential to raise revenue for the organization or is to elevate the standard of care and products?, (vi) is there a need for your organization to have more than one credential?, and (vii) are there other credentials in the same profession and, if so, how does your organization's credential compare?

Answers to these questions may surprise you and your leadership team. The organization may find that it is heading down the right path and that no major changes are needed. Reaffirmation is healthy, important and calming. Alternatively, the answers may cause the organization to conclude that philosophical, structural and/or business model alterations are needed to adapt to a changing environment. There is nothing wrong with that conclusion, in fact, it happens quite often. Being able to understand a changing climate and adapt to those changes are critical to ensuring the healthy continuation of the credential and the organization itself.

Every once in awhile, it is important for the organization, and its leadership, to stop what they are doing and to take inventory on what they are supposed to be doing. Hard questions must be asked. Shake up may be necessary. But, in the end, what's most important is that the organization and its leadership remember why the credential was created in the first place. Indeed, they must remember why the organization was created in the first place.