

There are many reasons to participate in a local association, not only as a member but active in leadership of the organization.

Why participate in a Professional Association in the first place?

For professionals who are interested in furthering their career, joining a professional association is a good start. There are associations for nearly every profession or area of interest and many have national, state and regional chapters available to join. An association is a synergistic group, meaning that the effect of a collection of people is greater than just one person. So, how exactly can becoming part of this synergistic group help further a member's career goal? Here are some benefits of joining an association.

Enhance their professional network:

For most people, creating professional relationships is important, and joining a group allows members to have a sense of security and trust. From this, they are able to support and help one another in reaching their professional goals. Many associations sponsor numerous events throughout the year that allow members to connect with their peers. They can share ideas, ask for advice, volunteer to be a speaker or become a member of a committee. Since most associations have national or local conferences, members can participate and have the opportunity to learn about breaking news in their career, learn "best practices" or new ideas, hear about key achievers in their field and also meet and brainstorm with others who are also looking to share and learn new information.

Additionally, by expanding your network you may find a mentor to help you with your professional needs or you may be in a position to become a mentor to someone else. Giving back can be the greatest reward and benefit. Participating in forums, chat groups or discussion boards sponsored by the association is also a great way to grow their network. This allows them to use their peers as sounding boards and often make some great friends with the same interests.

Take charge of your career:

Another important reason to consider membership to a professional organization is to take advantage of career resources. Associations often have job listings online or in print available only to their members. This is a great way to find targeted job postings for a member's area of interest. Additionally, many associations have career resources available such as tips on effective resumes or cover letters, job searching strategies and negotiating techniques. Some associations even have panels of experts that members can contact for specific questions on career issues. Other benefits include information about seminars, training or certification classes that may be ideally suited for their career. Often these classes can be done through web- or podcasts so members don't even travel. And don't forget, listing association membership on a resume is impressive to current or future employers as it shows dedication to staying connected to the profession.

Broader knowledge:

Most associations provide an enormous amount of access to resource information such as: case studies, articles, white papers and books written by experts in specific field or areas of interest. Also, major journal, magazine and newsletter access is provided as a part of your membership privileges. Additionally, associations provide a source for scholarship information, links to publications, and awards for persons achieving excellence in their field. No matter what your field is, staying on top of all of these issues is important.

So, whether a member is looking to learn about job postings in their field, network in their professional community, gain access to current events in their career area, or just have some fun while meeting new people, joining a professional association is a step in the right direction!

Depending on the type of organization (local, regional or national) membership often includes participation in one or more chapters across North America where members are able to connect, exchange information and ideas about what's happening in their industry. It's an invaluable tool for knowledge building, leadership opportunities and networking alike.

Also, getting involved in a local chapter is a great way to:

- Integrate and network with other local professionals
- Attend a variety of local events and conferences on the hottest topics in the market
- Connect with local business resources and solutions
- Expand management, leadership and public speaking skills by volunteering for the chapter executive board or committees

Demonstrates commitment to the industry

Joining and participating in the management of an industry association shows you are committed to the industry and willing to go above and beyond just your 9-5 effort to improve yourself and your profession. It demonstrates to your boss, your coworkers and your direct reports that you are serious about your industry, that you believe in professional development and that you are willing and able to participate meaningfully in promoting your industry and profession.

Exactly what are associations?

Industry associations represent a collection of professionals who work towards the common goal of promoting and improving the profession they are associated with. These organizations champion their members by providing resources, information and opportunities they might have not had otherwise.

Members are bonded together as they advocate for their peers and share their challenges and triumphs among one another. Joining an association provides members with a competitive advantage because they become active, informed members within their industry. Many association members who lead busy professional lives depend on their association to brief them on important industry trends, new legislative rulings and advances in technology.

The top reasons to join an association.

1. Networking: Associations provide unparalleled networking opportunities, allowing individuals to connect with their peers, mentors, and other industry leaders. As a member, you are in the unique position to attend conventions, seminars, award dinners and other related events with like-minded professionals in the field. These events are attended by the brightest minds and are a hotbed of ideas and collaborative efforts.

An association's annual meeting represents an incredible opportunity for you to meet and network with the largest gathering of your peers during the year. Networking with professionals outside your place of employment can give you a broader perspective on the market and industry in general. Listening to the experiences of others may even leave you feeling energized and refreshed with the feeling you are not alone in the fight.

2. Education: The atmosphere of most industries is always in a state of change. Industry professionals can keep up with the newest developments and scientific breakthroughs through their associations': seminars, journals, specifically in the healthcare field CME courses and other education opportunities provided to them. Additionally, many associations conveniently offer all of the certification courses you will need throughout your entire career. Your professional organization also provides access to mentors,

giving you an opportunity to participate in mentoring others as well. Having a mentor in any field will help your career grow and thrive. As an association member, you are in the unique position to gain a competitive edge by utilizing of all the educational resources available to you.

3. Intrinsic Value: Associations are always in need of new blood to help organize their annual meetings, workshops, continuing education courses and legislative committees. Helping your organization work to improve your profession as well as to help improve the overall state of healthcare can be a very rewarding opportunity. To fully receive the benefits of membership, you need to be engaged with the association. With any membership, however, you get what you put into it. Get involved as often as possible and you will reap the benefits offered to you as a member.

4. Jobs: Industry associations are great places to find the latest jobs in your field.

5. Broaden your knowledge: Professional organizations sometimes offer courses, seminars and/or lectures to keep themselves and their members up to date on the latest industry innovations, research and trends. Staying informed on your industry's trends will only help you in the long run and will put you one step ahead of the competition!

6. Take charge of your career: Take advantage of career resources. Associations often have job listings online or in print available only to their members. This is a great way to find targeted job postings for your area of interest.

7. Build a better resume: Many organizations have career resources available such as tips on effective resumes or cover letter writing. Listing your association membership on your resume is impressive to current or future employers as it shows that you are dedicated to staying connected in your profession.

8. Enhance your network: We all know that networking is key for the movers and shakers of the community! Making connections is critical, and joining associations give countless opportunities to connect on a local and sometimes even global level. For most people, creating professional relationships is important, and joining a group allows you to have a sense of security and trust. From this, you are able to support and help one another in reaching your professional goals.

9. Be a Leader: Professional associations give you an opportunity to develop your skills as a leader, and this is important not only for your personal growth, but for your growth in your firm.

10. Become a mentor: Giving back can be the greatest reward and benefit. Participating in forums, chat groups or discussion boards sponsored by an association is also a great way to grow your network. This allows you to use your peers as sounding boards and often make some great friends with the same interests as you.

11. Make a new friend: Once we graduate from school, we all know how hard it is to get out and meet new people and make a new friend! Use professional networking groups as an opportunity to escape the norm and meet new people that may give you a reason to come out of your shell a bit more and have fun.

12. Give back to the community: There are plenty of organizations that coordinate socially conscious initiatives to support community efforts. Whether it is a nearby animal shelter or a food drive for a local charity, there are sure to be plenty of options for you to choose for if you are looking to give back.

13. Strength in Numbers: We live in a day and age where establishing a presence in any given career field often demands working long hours in the office and bringing work home when the doors close. At

the end of the day, you may have ideas for cultivating partnerships, yet not feel up to shouldering all the responsibility to organize them. In a community organization, you have access to an established support system of experienced people who are motivated to get things done. The battle is half-won!

14. Stay Inspired and Stay Motivated: Learn to love what you do! You may not even know that you love something, but it's important to be proactive about things you discover on the journey. Join a professional organization and discover something new TODAY!