

Become an Active Member of Your Profession . . .

You Can't Just be a Nine-to-Fiver Anymore

Tim Keenan, CBET—manager of the biomedical engineering department at Denver's St. Anthony Central Hospital—took over as president of the Colorado Association of Biomedical Equipment Technicians (CABMET) in the early 1990s, and since that time has helped revitalize the organization. In this edition of Tech World, Keenan discusses the need for biomed to find ways to become active, engaged participants in their profession beyond the "nine-to-five" world.

Consider the days of simply punching the clock and collecting your paycheck over.

In today's healthcare environment, as a BMET or other healthcare technology manager, you need to do more. If your employer doesn't feel that you are providing real value as an employee, they could outsource your job or find other ways to get your work done.

Chances are, you can do a lot more than you realize. How do I know this?

I'll start with my story.

Back in the early 90s, my state biomedical society—CABMET—was struggling to attract and maintain members, and was on the brink of closing its doors. I wanted to do something to help keep the society afloat, and someone suggested I become president. But I had no experience running an organization or leading people, so I didn't think I could do it. But when a colleague offered to support me by serving as my vice president, I thought, "what the heck."

I wasn't happy with my job situation at the time, but I was a pretty gung-ho guy. So I figured becoming president would at least give me a chance to network with others and show potential employers what value I could bring to them.

There was so little interest in the society at that time that I ran uncontested for president. The challenge was renewing our members' interest and reaching out to new members.

As president, I heard all the complaints about what was wrong with the organization: the meeting schedule was haphazard and not well-announced; the content of the meetings wasn't helpful; and even the food—pizza—was the same every time.

So we took some simple but effective steps. Meetings would be held on the third Wednesday of every month, so there was no guesswork about when the next meeting would be. We encouraged the vendors who spoke at our meetings to provide technical, educational information rather than just sales pitches. We even started including educational material in our newsletter. And we began serving something—anything—other than pizza.

As people began learning useful information that they could bring back to their workplace, our membership began to grow. A "one-man band" at the time, I recruited a few volunteers to help me with administrative duties. Better yet, we had legitimate dues money coming in.

This helped us ratchet up enthusiasm for the society, as we printed CABMET mugs and distributed one to



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Tim Keenan, CBET

every biomed in Colorado—whether they were a member or not.

Within about three years, we consistently had 50 or more people coming to each meeting.

And vendors were lining up

to speak to our group. Participation was so strong that we started exploring an annual symposium, a golf tournament, and other events.

Our members talked to nonmembers about what we were doing, vendors talked to other vendors, and these events just took off.

Eventually, my vice president—Dave Scott—kicked off a certification study group, which added yet more value to what we were doing. In fact,

hospitals took notice of our efforts and offered to host our certification study group sessions, which were held separately from our regular society meetings.

Today, CABMET is one of the most active local societies in the country. So what's the point of all of this?

The point is to show you just how much you can do beyond simply punching the clock and collecting a check. Look at me—when I became president of CABMET, I was just an inexperienced guy who wanted to do a little something extra.

Our involvement with CABMET has brought a lot of value to biomedes across the state. But most of all, it's given us a chance to show our value as

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biomedes. I can't tell you how many times I've run into an obstacle at work, and I've been able to pick up the phone and ask a peer, "hey, do you have any ideas on how I can fix this?"

Sometimes I'll end up fixing a problem and look like the hero, simply because I talked to the right person.

So take the time to get involved in your local society. If you don't have one, organize a group in your area. It could be as simple as hosting a "lead tech luncheon," where you invite the lead technicians of your local hospitals to discuss work-related issues. Let's learn from each other, because when you give back to your profession, it comes back to you in spades.

—Tim Keenan

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