How your name affects your life

Do you have the right attitude for career success?

Boost your brand in 5 steps

LEADING THE WAY

Carlos Ramirez, MSN '09
Executive Director of AccentCare Home Health
El Centro, California

University of Phoenix® Alumni Association
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Letter from the president

The University continues to make great strides in being recognized as the most trusted provider of career-relevant higher education for working adults. Our faculty and staff strive to help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their professional goals and improve the performance of their organizations.

But you, our alumni, are real testaments to the character and leadership made possible through discipline, hard work and resilience. What you do here at the University and after graduation fulfills our mission and makes real our vision.

Congratulations on all of the positive changes you continue to bring to your families and future generations.

I urge you to make your voices heard, to engage with the University of Phoenix Alumni Association through your local chapter. I recently visited with the Phoenix chapter, and was thrilled to hear of the accomplishments of our impressive alumni—some of whom you will read about in the following pages.

Your local alumni chapter offers real opportunities to give back. You may choose to mentor existing students, or attend events that offer networking and career enhancement opportunities. Either way, I hope you’ll not only participate, but contribute with the same purpose, determination and character that you applied to your academic studies.

The University recently ranked in the top 10 percent of Best Online Bachelor’s Programs in U.S. News and World Report. Our School of Business is listed among the best in the U.S. in LinkedIn’s “Best Schools for Marketers.” Recently, we announced the creation of academic programs with major employers in career-relevant disciplines, including Hilton Worldwide for hospitality programs and EMC for IT data storage.

I could go on, but the truth is that I want to hear how you all are applying what you learned in order to provide leadership, to enhance your careers, to improve yourselves and those around you; and, most importantly, to contribute to a culture of service in your communities.

I am honored to stay engaged with a high performing community of University alumni, students, leaders and faculty. I am committed to amplifying your stories of success and those of the University.

You can reach me anytime at president@phoenix.edu. I am excited to hear your success stories, and I am proud to lead your alma mater.

Sincerely,

Timothy P. Slottow
President
University of Phoenix

Connect with Tim on Twitter @TimSlottow.
Shakespeare’s Juliet may have answered that question best: “That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.” Romeo and Juliet aside, have you ever wondered how your name could affect your life?

**WHAT’S IN A NAME?**

By Lori K. Baker

If you were named Usain Bolt, would you be destined to become a world-class sprinter? Is it pure coincidence that Carla Dove works as a program manager for the Division of Birds at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History? Are people like Amy Freeze (WABC-TV in New York City) and Larry Sprinkle (WCNC in Charlotte, North Carolina) natural-born meteorologists?

Questions like these date back to ancient Rome, when the Romans coined the term nomenet omen (“prophetic names”). Today, the term “ominative determinism” describes the popular theory explaining why some people seem to have picked occupations that perfectly suit their names. But some researchers, such as David N. Figlio, director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, remain skeptical about the theory. “Studies I’ve seen don’t give me any evidence that it’s true,” Figlio says.

Still, numerous recent studies do prove people make snap judgments about us everyday, purely on the basis of our names. And these perceptions can impact our educations, careers and relationships. As President Barack Hussein Obama once joked, “I got my middle name from somebody who obviously didn’t think that I’d ever run for president.”

**Through the looking glass**

Psychologists use the term the “looking-glass self” to describe how our identity is shaped by how other people treat us throughout our lives. Turns out, recent studies show that people may treat us differently if our names evoke gender, racial or socioeconomic stereotypes.

For example, Figlio studied 1,000 pairs of sisters in the U.S. Using a linguistic test to assign popular names a “femininity rating,” he discovered girls with feminine names such as Anna, Emma or Elizabeth are less likely to enroll in advanced math and physics classes than their sisters with more androgynous names such as—according to Figlio’s “femininity rating”—Abigail, Lauren or Ashley. In fact, parents could unwittingly send their daughters named Alex and Isabella (two names on opposite ends of the femininity scale) off on different career paths because a girl named Alex was twice as likely as her sister Isabella to take higher-level math or science courses. The reason? Girls with feminine names are often typecast, meaning that a girl named Isabella is less likely to study math or science because people don’t expect her to, Figlio concludes.
“Children whose names reflect a lower socioeconomic status are treated differently in schools. It seems to be a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

David N. Figlio, director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University

In another study published in 2005 by the National Bureau of Economic Research, Figlio found that children with a presumed linguistically lower-status name—often spelled in an unusual way or including punctuation—received on average 3 to 5 percent lower test scores than their siblings with more traditional names, and were less likely to be recommended for gifted programs. “Children whose names reflect a lower socioeconomic status are treated differently in schools,” Figlio says. “It seems to be a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

On a first-name basis

There is also striking evidence that names trigger different outcomes during job searches. In a study titled “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?,” researchers Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan sent nearly 5,000 resumes in response to job ads in Chicago and Boston newspapers. While the resumes were identical, half were given fake first names most commonly associated with African-Americans, such as Lakisha and Jamal. The other half were given fake first names that sounded like they belonged to white people, such as Emily and Greg. The study results concluded that the call-back rate from employers was 50 percent higher for the “white-sounding” names than for the “African-American-sounding” names. Even resumes with “African-American-sounding” names, such as Lakisha and Jamal, were less likely to be recommended for gifted programs. “Children whose names reflect a lower socioeconomic status are treated differently in schools,” Figlio says. “It seems to be a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

A distinct advantage

In the past, uncommon first names were seen as a hindrance. A 2005 study published in the Journal of Applied Psychology revealed that children with a presumed unusual name—often spelled in an unusual way or including punctuation—received on average 3 to 5 percent lower test scores than their siblings with more traditional names, and were less likely to be recommended for gifted programs. “Children whose names reflect a lower socioeconomic status are treated differently in schools,” Figlio says. “It seems to be a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Having a distinctive name helps you stand out in a crowd, says Dalton Conley, a New York University professor and author of Parentology: Everything You Wanted to Know about the Science of Raising Children but Were Too Exhausted to Ask. As the father of a 17-year-old daughter named E and a 15-year-old son named Yo, Conley says his teens enjoy notoriety at school, where they’re widely known by teachers, classmates and parents alike.

You name it

Once you know how your name can influence people’s perception of you, you can take charge of your personal brand. And if the name given to you by your parents doesn’t fit your brand, you can always change it, as did Peter Gene Hernandez (musician Bruno Mars), Demetria Guynes (actress Demi Moore) and Eleanor Gow (designer Elle MacPherson). But having a powerful personal brand (read our feature story, “Brand yourself in 5 steps,” on page 14) can be as simple as having a strong resume and knowing how to present yourself—and your accomplishments—in the best possible light.

The weird science of product names

Mark Skoultchi is what is known in the world of corporate branding as a namer. He’s a partner of the Oakland, California-based naming agency Catchword, which has done naming strategy work for McDonald’s, BlackBerry, FritoLay, Conagra, Cisco, Levi Strauss and others. In naming a new line of BlackBerry phones, Catchword drew upon compelling research presented in the book, The Hero and the Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands Through the Power of Archetypes by Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson. The book reveals how the most successful brands tap into one of the 12 major archetypes (Creator, Caregiver, Ruler, Jester, Regular Guy/Gal, Lover, Hero, Outlaw, Magician, Innocent, Explorer and Sage).

“Not every brand uses the archetypal strategy, but when they do, a name will have to fit with the overall brand personality,” Skoultchi says. Because BlackBerry’s target demographic is businesspeople seeking control and stability when working on the go, a brand tapping into the Ruler archetype was chosen. Catchword relied on other research that suggests three to four characters are the limit of what most consumers can easily remember. The end result? Q10 for a phone with a keyboard. “Q” hinted subtly at Qwerty, the letter layout on a keyboard, and because Q is an uncommon, and therefore more memorable, letter, Skoultchi says. Z10 was chosen for a phone with a touch screen. Why the letter “Z”? “We wanted to evoke the image of speed,” Skoultchi adds. Just think zip, zap, zoom.

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What’s your true grit?

Take our quiz to find out.

As an explanation for his success as a scientist, Albert Einstein once said, “It’s not that I’m so smart; it’s just that I stay with problems longer.”

Someone who has the ability to stick with something and persevere with determination, despite tremendous obstacles, is known as having “grit.” And the consensus today among educators is that having a lot of grit is an indication of a person’s ability to succeed in life.

“It’s very important that we know what we want and we continuously go after it with passion, with energy and with excitement,” says Cindra Kamphoff, director for the Center of Sport and Performance Psychology at Minnesota State University. She’s a performance coach who uses the concept of grit to train her athletes to achieve higher results.

A person’s grit absolutely affects the outcome of success, Kamphoff explains. “Many people expect success to be a straight line, where if you work hard, you’ll get where you need to go. But when you look at the journey of success, you’re going to experience setbacks. For an athlete that might be an injury, and for a business executive, it might be getting fired.” And whether you succeed is often due to your ability to bounce back with the same level of enthusiasm and commitment.
Do you have enough grit to succeed? Take our quiz to discover—when push comes to shove—just how gritty you really are:

1. You’re close to finishing an important project you’ve been working on for weeks, when your computer crashes and your work disappears. Sure it’s upsetting, but ultimately ... 
   - C. You'll redo the project and learn something important from the experience. In the end, you'll believe this mishap was a blessing in disguise because you improved your first draft.
   - M. You’ll give up on the project entirely, deciding that this accident was an act of fate. You weren’t meant to do this kind of work in the first place.
   - I. You’ll eventually return to the project, but when you do, you won’t regain the same enthusiasm.

2. You’re at a lively dinner party; when someone asks about your future career plans, you generally respond with ... 
   - I. Dread. You have a hard time setting goals and don’t like being put on the spot about them.
   - C. Enthusiasm. You’ve spent long hours thinking about where you’re heading and where you’d like to be a few years from now.
   - M. Hesitation. You have some ambitions but aren’t so certain you will achieve them. How can you predict the future or claim to know where you’re headed?

3. If you stayed late at work every night this week and went out of your way to be a bit of a perfectionist, it’s likely because you’re ... 
   - M. Trying to make a good impression with your boss and the higher-ups in the organization.
   - I. Uh, you’re describing someone else. You don’t behave this way ever.
   - C. Exceptionally passionate about what you’re doing, giving your absolute best effort in order to learn more and get the most out of your time.

4. When someone you respect gives you negative feedback in front of others, you’re likely to ... 
   - I. Go home and bury your face in a pillow. You’ll likely make harsh decisions about yourself and your ability to succeed based on the experience.
   - C. Take the feedback. You determine to work harder the next time and use the criticism to help you learn new ways to tackle the situation.
   - M. Let it affect you for a while. Although you’ll likely get over it, you may wind up avoiding this person in the future.

5. You order a piece of furniture online that you have long admired, but when it arrives you realize that not only will you have to assemble it, there are 456 small parts and cryptic instructions. You ... 
   - M. Get frustrated. You’ll work on it but in the end, you may wind up hiring someone to finish it.
   - I. Send it back.
   - C. Set aside some time to figure it out. You’ll complete the project, no matter how long it takes.

6. You finally figured out a career you’re really passionate about pursuing, but many people tell you the odds of success are slim because it’s super competitive. How likely is it that you’ll stick to this goal? 
   - C. 85-100% 
   - M. 30-70% 
   - I. 0-15%

7. It’s your day off and you’re suddenly in a traffic jam, when you realize it’s due to a car collision. You can see that paramedics haven’t arrived on the scene yet. Although there are other cars around, no one is jumping out to assist the victims. How likely is it that you’ll pull over to help? 
   - C. Definitely. I usually give 100%, even in a potentially hazardous situation.
   - M. It really depends. If no one comes forward, I might do it, but I’m not sure.
   - I. This is definitely not me. I’m not likely to get involved in a situation that is so stressful.

8. You’re excited about creating a vegetable garden. You go out and buy the soil, seeds, fertilizer and equipment but you wind up getting really sick for a week, delaying the project. How likely is it that several months later you will have a thriving garden? 
   - C. 100%. I always finish what I start. 
   - M. 50-60%. It depends. I’m not sure if I will start it again when I recover. 
   - I. 5-15%. I have good intentions but often get sidetracked, especially when I hit a bump.

Tally your true grit results 
Conver your answers in terms of C, M or I selections. Give yourself 10 points for each C answer; 5 for each M answer; and 0 for each I answer.

65–80: CEO of grit 
Congratulations! You’re a very determined and passionate person who doesn’t give up easily on ambitions. You recognize that setbacks are part of the process and you’re able to keep your eye on the ball, even when circumstances are tough. Stay on track and you’re likely to reach your loftiest goals.

40–60: Middle-management grit 
Nice! You’ve definitely got some passion and determination, but perhaps you aren’t as ambitious about achieving higher levels of success as others. You may be more comfortable right where you are. Kamphoff often has her athletes do exercises in which they practice writing down their goals in order to strengthen their commitment and desire.

0–35: Grit intern 
Sigh. Your grit factor is in need of training. The good news is that grit can be taught. “It’s really difficult to be passionate about something if you don’t know why you’re working to reach that goal,” shares Kamphoff. So in order to build grit, we have to begin by figuring out what our goals are and why we want to achieve them.

Cindra Kamphoff, Director for the Center of Sport and Performance Psychology University of Minnesota

Jenny Jedeikin lives in Northern California, and her writing has appeared in The San Francisco Chronicle, Rolling Stone and In Style, among other publications.
Brand yourself in 5 steps

Be the true you—in all ways—to win at work.

By Julie Wilson

What do people remember about you when you leave a room? The answer to that question—the intangible impression that lingers long after you’re gone—is what amounts to your personal brand.

“We all have a personal brand, whether we know it or not,” explains Susan Chritton, executive career coach, personal branding strategist and author of Personal Branding for Dummies, 2nd Edition. By actively managing your brand rather than leaving it to chance, you take control of who you are and what you stand for—and you open yourself up to opportunities that are aligned with your talents and values.

“The benefit for people is that they start to become recognized for what they want to be recognized for,” notes Chritton. “What I find is that people are actually happier—because they can be true to themselves.”

Here’s how to take charge of your own personal brand.

1. Pause and reflect
As you begin the process of managing your personal brand, it’s important to take the time to reflect on your skills, passions, interests and values. You need to get to know yourself on these terms before you can expect anyone else to.

“Personal branding is all about understanding who you are and what makes you special, and educating the world about your value and potential,” says Karen Kang, branding expert and author of Branding Pays: The Five-Step System to Reinvent Your Personal Brand. “Find your niche, something that you can do that you can lay claim to and defend.”

Chritton adds, “Once you have clarity of vision, values, passions, purpose and goals, you will be more likely to demonstrate your authenticity, knowing you are coming from a place of strength rather than adapting your behavior to be like others.”

2. Craft your message
The next step is to learn to articulate your brand in an efficient and effective way that resonates with people. “Be clear about your narrative, and back up your claims,” says Kang.

This means crafting a distinct, concise and competent pitch that will serve you as well during job interviews as it does while you’re chatting with a stranger in line at the supermarket. Having a clear message also helps other people tell your unique story when your name comes up in conversation, making it easier for your contacts to share your strengths with others when the opportunity arises.

The University of Phoenix Career Guidance System™—available to all alumni—offers tools to help you define your brand and to project a professional image to match so you can communicate the right message to those around you.
3. Connect the dots

You know what makes you tick, and you’re able to express that to other people. Now it’s time to put together the package in a holistic way.

“I talk about 360-degree branding,” says Kang. “In thought, word, deed and image, are you consistent? If you’re not consistent in any one of those areas, your brand is not so authentic.”

With social media removing degrees of separation between our personal and professional lives, everything you do speaks to your brand. “We no longer can live compartmentalized lives,” Chritton asserts. “The lines are too blurred, so you had better be paying attention.”

Details count, so everything from your wardrobe and LinkedIn headshot to your office décor and where you take clients to lunch should ring true to your personal brand, whatever it is. “How are you a congruent being in all parts of your life?” asks Chritton.

4. Cultivate your ecosystem

Your ecosystem is what Kang calls “spheres of influence that have great sway over your career.” She says, “So much of your brand is what others say about you. You’ve got to manage your brand ecosystem.”

This means connecting with the right influencers, those who are respected members of your department, company, industry or field, and educating them about your skill set, expertise, talents and point of view. For example, if you’re looking for a job, Kang suggests identifying the top 5 percent of people in that realm and reaching out to them. This may mean asking for a recommendation on LinkedIn or an introduction to a colleague while being mindful to communicate your personal brand during your interaction with anyone in your network.

Cultivating your ecosystem also means supporting others. For instance, you might Retweet™ someone’s post, comment on an article they wrote or send a quick congratulatory email if they receive a promotion. “The social media phenomenon is all about giving back,” Kang says.

When your connections know that your relationship is give and take, they’re more likely to help you when you reach out to them—and to think well of you in the process.

5. Create an action plan

With the stage set for your personal brand, it’s time to write your action plan. Actually, Kang suggests creating two: the first for communicating your personal brand and the second for improving it. “Once you have a strategy, message and idea of what you want to convey, you have to communicate it—verbally, nonverbally and visually,” she stresses.

Take the time to plan how you will implement your personal brand in your written communications such as your resume, emails and blog posts, your online presence on sites like LinkedIn and in person.

“Ask yourself, ‘How am I going to tell my story in all these different media?’” recommends Chritton.

Along the way, make sure you’re remaining true to your brand or adjusting it if you’re finding it isn’t quite hitting the mark. “The most authentic brands really do radiate from the inside out,” insists Kang, so make sure yours is the real deal.

In the end, putting your time and energy into personal branding empowers you to stay true to yourself while paving the way for success. Says Chritton, “It’s about taking control of your career so you feel like you own it.”

Got 5 minutes?
Boost your brand.

There’s no excuse not to take an active part in managing your brand. In just a few minutes a day, you can create the impression you want with the world around you. Here are some easy tasks that take almost no time at all:

- Retweet a contact’s Twitter® post
- Post a relevant article on LinkedIn®
- Share your expertise by commenting on other’s LinkedIn posts
- Email a colleague you hope to see at an upcoming conference
- Pop in to your boss’s office to offer your assistance with a new project

Hey, graduates!

Do you have your University of Phoenix degree listed in your LinkedIn profile?

Update your profile and get noticed.

linkd.in/uopxalumni
As it turns out, your mother, father, teacher, coach and scout leader were right. Having a good attitude can get you far in life. In fact, attitude is so important that it impacts every element of your existence, from your social circle to your career.

Attitude might be described, in part, as the lens through which you see things. If you’re focusing on the negative, that’s all you notice. On the flip side, if you’ve got your rose-colored glasses on, the good around you is highlighted. “One of the biggest things is that what you put out there is reflected back at you,” explains Curt Rosengren, career expert and author of 101 Ways to Get Wild About Work.

A positive attitude attracts even more positive opportunities—and significantly boosts your chances of on-the-job success—so it’s well worth taking the time and effort to convey one.

Defining moments
Attitude, according to Carl L. Harshman, Ph.D., founder and CEO of the Institute for Work Attitude & Motivation, “is a human characteristic we put labels on that we can’t see or touch.”

Rather, we can feel it, and we know a good one when we meet it. “Is it about me or we, about openness or closed-mindedness?” ponders Rosengren. “If I have a good attitude, I’m working hard, looking for ways to help, collaborating,” he explains.

Despite its intangible nature, attitude has a measurable impact on performance. Notably, a study by leadership training and management consulting firm Leadership IQ found that a whopping 46 percent of new hires will fail within 18 months. The reason? Many of them can’t accept feedback, don’t have a handle on their emotions, lack ambition or simply aren’t well-suited for the job.

Aptitude or attitude?
The same study indicates that 11 percent of new hires fail because they lack the necessary technical skills to succeed. This suggests that the attitude you bring to the job may factor more heavily into your performance than the skill set you possess.

Why does this matter? If you’re up against a job candidate with education and experience on his or her side, you can stay in the game by wowing the hiring manager with your adaptability to change, facility for learning and openness to growth.
“If you can demonstrate a can-do attitude and have the stories to back it up, it has the potential to shift the balance in your favor,” insists Rosengren. “Attitude is what you have the most control over, and it can be one of your biggest gifts.”

Adds Harshman, “Skill probably isn’t necessarily a sufficient condition to succeed. The other piece of the puzzle that plays heavily is attitude and motivation.”

How you show up

The Leadership IQ study showed, particularly, that an employee’s openness to coaching, emotional intelligence, drive and general nature are indicative of his or her likelihood to succeed or fail within the first couple of years on the job.

This plays out in the day to day at work, and everyone is watching. When faced with a challenging project, do you approach it with an eye on solutions and the best possible outcome, rallying your team to excel? Or do you see fault in every proposed measure, what Harshman calls “problem orientation,” forever looking for what is wrong and operating as if you’re already doomed to failure, bringing down the rest of your team in the process?

Reaping what you sow

The payoff is pretty simple. First, attitude has an internal impact on how you feel and on your capacity for developing yourself further. Negativity is draining and limiting by nature, while positive attributes tend to be energizing and enable growth.

“In many ways, I think attitude is a determinant of bandwidth,” says Rosengren. “Does it create openness or constriction? The more you have a positive attitude, the bigger the pipeline is for skills and knowledge to come through and shine.”

Externally, your attitude leaves a strong impression on others that can drive their behavior around you. “There’s the idea that people want to work with people they know, like and trust,” explains Rosengren.

If you’re generally regarded as the office downer, “supervisors are less likely to see you as someone who has the qualifications to advance and perhaps will be less inclined to support your growth,” he says.

Conversely, if you’re tackling your work with a smile and a desire to do your best, people take notice. “[Supervisors] are going to be more likely to help you get a leg up versus someone who is a walking, talking source of cortisol,” he adds.

In short, attitude matters. Bring your “A” game, and you’ll find yourself with greater opportunity for success—and that’s something to feel optimistic about.

Attitude rehab

Could your attitude use an overhaul? If so, there’s reason to be optimistic. “One of the beautiful things about your attitude is it is an internal phenomenon, and you have the ability to sculpt and shape what it looks like,” says Curt Rosengren, career coach, U.S. News and World Report career blogger and author.

Here are three questions to ask yourself if you’re trying to see the sunny side of things:

What was good about today?

“Make it the rule of the game that you have to find the good stuff,” says Rosengren. “Having consistent reinforcement means your brain has to continually notice what’s good.”

What can I be grateful for?

“Gratitude is the well-being wonder drug,” says Rosengren. Take time to reflect and appreciate what is positive, whether it’s the guidance of a mentor, the support of a boss or a really great cup of coffee during your break.

How can I make a difference?

Focusing on something other than yourself can do wonders for your attitude. “Feeling like you’re making a difference can shift how you feel about your experience,” notes Rosengren, which in turn can have a lasting impact on how you approach the world around you. So go ahead and help your colleague with that last-minute request. It’ll make you feel better.
LEADING THE WAY

By Jackie Dishner
Photographs by Frank Rogozienski

As a teenage boy, Carlos Ramirez left a large city in Mexico and found his calling in a small rural California town.

It’s one thing to be called a natural-born leader. It’s quite another to live it.

Just ask Carlos Ramirez, who as a young man, left Mexicali, Mexico, and crossed into the United States with his parents and three siblings looking for a “better life.” They wound up living in a one-bedroom apartment where he and his siblings slept on the floor while his parents claimed the only bed. It seemed less than ideal to the 15-year-old who had left a big city where his parents worked in the medical field.
“The degrees I received have helped me immensely in my professional career as a nurse leader, manager, director and as a nursing instructor.”

Carlos Ramirez, MSN ’09

“I was very excited to come to live in California ... but it was frustrating because I wanted to have a big house like other friends did,” he says of his early days in the U.S.

Even as a teenager, Ramirez understood the sacrifices his parents made to bring their family just 20 minutes across the border. They left their careers behind—his father a physician, his mother a social worker—for their children.

“I knew I had to study hard to improve my life and help my family,” he says.

His family came to live in a small rural town in California’s hot Imperial Valley desert, where his parents picked and packed produce for a living.

Welcome to America, land of opportunity

As it turned out, Ramirez found his opportunity with help from University of Phoenix®—prepared him for where he is today. As executive director of AccentCare Home Health, Ramirez manages a multi-million dollar home health care agency in El Centro, California. He also serves as an adjunct faculty clinical instructor for Imperial Valley College, working with nursing students.

Success didn’t come because of location, though. Ramirez, now a naturalized citizen, says it was due to education.

“The degrees I received have helped me immensely in my professional career as a nurse leader, manager, director and as a nursing instructor,” says Ramirez.

The early years

Remembering high school, Ramirez says he was assigned to attend English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and felt held back. He had grown up listening to music on English radio stations, and had taken English classes in Mexico, so knew he could do better.

“I wasn’t learning enough,” he says.

Refusing to settle, as other kids in those classes did, he asked his guidance counselor to transfer him to regular classes. By senior year, he was making good grades, scoring points on the school’s soccer team and playing guitar in a rock-and-roll band. He was also wondering what might come next.

The next step

Within two years of finishing high school, Ramirez had signed up for the nursing program at Imperial Valley College and was hired at El Centro Regional Medical Center as an emergency department aide while finishing his nursing degree.

“One of the professors saw how much I loved caring for the patients and recommended me,” he says. He explains that he was encouraged by their positive feedback. “It made me feel very good.”

Ambitious, called a “natural-born leader” by friends and family, Ramirez migrated toward hard work, including picking grapes in Coachella, California, and taking a second job grilling and serving burgers during his early college years.

“Customer service. That’s where it started,” he quips.

After earning his registered nurse (RN) license, he was soon promoted to his first leadership position as the in-charge nurse during his shift at the medical center.

“I knew the band wasn’t going anywhere,” he says, chuckling at the thought.

Attending a career fair at school proved to be a pivotal moment for Ramirez. During the fair, he listened to a panel of nurses discussing their work. They talked about college, and he realized that taking classes at the community college in town seemed the most accessible to him.

“In a rural setting, there are not a lot of nurses. You get promoted quickly—maybe too quickly. I was thrown in without having management experience. But I was lucky. I’d already had that strong clinical experience and natural leadership ability,” Ramirez says.

Throughout his career, he’s seen many nurses put into leadership positions before they were ready. “They’d last less than a year on the job,” he says.

“From my own experience, I’ve discovered you need education. You need a higher level of knowledge and communication skills to be successful in nurse management,” he says. “Many people can be great nurses, but can they speak to other people, implement new policies and procedures? Can they lead?”

Preparing future nurses

Ramirez explains that University of Phoenix made higher education accessible to him. He was able to work full time and earn his degrees through the online program.

“In my rural community, there was a lack of bachelor’s or master’s degree nurses and leaders. I wanted to make a difference, and become well-educated and experienced in order to advance in my career and to help my colleagues and my community,” he says.

Committed to continuing to teach and train, Ramirez now shadows nursing students twice weekly at the local hospital. He hopes to inspire and motivate them to continue with higher education.

“We need more nurse leaders in our small rural community representing nurses in the inpatient and outpatient settings,” he says.

The natural-born leader is showing them how to succeed.
As a budding journalist, Diane Senffner learned a valuable lesson years ago: Education matters.

When bright-eyed Diane Senffner was a young woman breaking into broadcast journalism, her enthusiasm was soon dampened by the uncomfortable realities of the job. “Horrible things happen, like children dying in a fire. Then they expect you to stick a microphone in the face of grieving parents,” she says of an example that soured her on the business. “It didn’t seem true to me. It didn’t seem like something I would want to do long-term.”
Today, instead of earning her living doing something that wasn’t aligned with her values, Senffner’s made it her business to do something that embodies them. As owner of Cine Learning Productions, she’s helping others harness the power of education to make a positive impact on their organizations, which is an endeavor that is true to her heart.

Dead end
Her own road to an education wasn’t as smooth as the one she provides for her clients. In fact, at her journalism job, she was encouraged to forgo school. “My news anchor at the time told me if you don’t know what you want to do, why don’t you leave school for a while? You can always come back,” she recalls. “I kind of curse him for that,” she admits.

For a while, her lack of a degree wasn’t an obstacle for her. She began working in hospitality positions, eventually landing a job as a meeting planner. Then she was offered a position with a top technology company, but when she met with the human resources representatives in person, she found herself at a dead end. They said, “Oh, you don’t have a degree. That’s a prerequisite,” she remembers. “I lost a plum position.”

Onward and upward
That’s when Senffner made the decision to return to school and pursue her education. At first, she enrolled in a human resources certificate program at University of Phoenix®. Right away, she was impressed by the quality of her courses and decided to continue with the Bachelor of Science in Business Management program.

“All the instructors were at the top of their fields, and I learned lots of great practical information that I could use right on the job the same day,” explains Senffner, who earned her bachelor’s degree in 2002 and immediately began the Master of Arts in Adult Education/Distance Learning degree program at University of Phoenix, earning her degree in 2004.

Senffner applied her newly learned skills in her role as director of training and development at Merv Griffin Hotels and later at Research International, where she served as the global organizational development manager, working in London and the U.S. on the professional development of employees in 25 countries.

In 2006, then-Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano appointed Senffner to oversee virtual office training and e-learning for the state’s Medicaid program. “It was specifically geared toward public health education,” she explains.

For three years, Senffner worked on the grant-funded program. “My group won a number of awards in public health for the programs we created,” she says. When the grant ended, Senffner worked for the Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS) for two more years. “I ran their multimedia education department,” she notes.

Getting down to her own business
Though her career had been exciting and fulfilling up to this point, Senffner was inspired to start her own business, a goal that had been percolating in the back of her mind for a while. “I had seen the popularity of the kinds of programs we had produced, and I knew there was a market for it,” she says. “It was terrifying, but at the same time, I had enough experience and education to know I could do it. The confidence was there.”

Senffner and some colleagues from DHS left the agency to found Cine Learning Productions, an interactive education company. “We help companies transform their learning organizations from something strictly classroom-based to a more 21st-century model with multiple learning modalities,” she says.

“All the instructors were at the top of their fields, and I learned lots of great practical information that I could use right on the job the same day.”

Diane Senffner, MAED/AEDL ’04

She and her core team of 12—along with dozens of consultants—develop content and curricula for e-learning, virtual instructor-led training, video and other media platforms to provide clients with relevant and dynamic education tools for leadership, soft skills, new hire orientations, customer service, sales, job skills and compliance training. Clients run the gamut from public health agencies to corporations in a range of industries.

“We put together curriculum and content, we have people who develop the programs, we have filmmakers who film our videos,” says Senffner about her team, which is known for its story-based approach. “People learn best through storytelling. When it becomes more relevant, they remember more and are more engaged.”

The mentee becomes the mentor
With a successful career that continues to flourish, Senffner finds herself mentoring others. Over the years, it has nagged her that her own mentor steered her away from higher education, something she considers faulty counsel. When she finds herself in the position to dispense advice, she tells people, “You may not love your field of study, but just get your degree.”

Despite the long road to her own education, she has no regrets about how her life has played out so far. “I don’t feel like any of my time was wasted,” she says. “Everything in life has given me perspective and experience that has brought me to the point where I am today.” And that’s right where she wants to be. ☝️
After surviving Hurricane Katrina, Ginger Grant-Del Valle decided that if you want to do something, the best time is now.

By Cynthia Ramnarace
Photographs by Matthew Gilson

Seizing her moment

After surviving Hurricane Katrina, Ginger Grant-Del Valle decided that if you want to do something, the best time is now.

When Hurricane Katrina bore down on Ginger Grant-Del Valle’s native New Orleans in 2005, the ensuing months of disaster and upheaval left her sure of only one thing: Life is unpredictable. So if you want something, don’t procrastinate.
She and her mother evacuated their New Orleans East home in advance of the storm, eventually winding up in Fort Worth, Texas. But her father, a registered nurse, stayed behind to help those in need. Unable to reach him by phone for days, she didn’t know whether he had lived or died in the flood waters. It was only after a news crew found him stranded at his home that she knew her entire family was safe.

“Hurricane Katrina made me realize how fragile life is,” says Grant-Del Valle, now 41 and a career educator. “One minute everything is fine, and then you can’t go back to your school because your school is demolished and your neighborhood is in shambles. The experience made me say, ‘Don’t drag your feet. If you’re going to do something, do it now.’”

**Post-Katrina**

But it took nearly two years for Grant-Del Valle’s life to settle down enough post-Katrina for her to make plans for her future. Immediately after the storm, the Louisiana Department of Education sent her to Shreveport to work in schools inundated with evacuees from New Orleans. Her home in New Orleans East, which flooded during the storm, had to be rebuilt.

In 2007, Grant-Del Valle began studying for her doctorate in education through University of Phoenix®. It was the culmination of a dream that began when she was 10 years old and set her mind on becoming a teacher. The dream continued as she worked as a distinguished educator in elementary schools in some of New Orleans’ most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. She was sent into schools slated for closure due to low academic performance and worked to turn them around.

**Learning to lead**

As her doctoral studies dovetailed with her professional life, Grant-Del Valle saw that what she was learning through her degree program was helping her on the job. Her leadership skills improved, as did the success of the schools she was tasked with turning around. Of the eight schools she worked with during her tenure as a distinguished educator, seven improved enough to be removed from the closure list. One school received “Recognized Academic Growth” status from the Louisiana Department of Education.

“Through my coursework and collaboration with my instructors and peers, I began to delve deeper into educational leadership,” Grant-Del Valle says. “The knowledge I gained made all the difference.”

The doctoral program didn’t just teach her to become a leader, but helped her pinpoint exactly what type of leader she could be. Through intensive coursework, Grant-Del Valle discovered her strengths lie in transformational leadership.

“We learned how we can identify the changes that are needed in an organization, and get people on board and execute the changes,” she says. “This helped me help the principals in the schools I was working in.”

**On to Chicago**

After receiving her doctorate, Grant-Del Valle continued to work as a distinguished educator until she got married and moved to Chicago. Now she works as a master teacher for the Octavio Paz Charter School in Chicago, one of the schools in the United Charter Schools Network. Just as in Louisiana, her school had been slated for closure due to low performance. She works in a high-crime, high-poverty area where the challenges are many but the opportunities are even more plentiful.

“We started asking, ‘What is going well? What’s not going well? What are our goals, and what do we need to do to get there?’” she says. “We had to execute changes, and my degree helped me frame that.”

Grant-Del Valle helped the school put a greater emphasis on teacher development. She coached teachers to become leaders in the classroom. “One thing that I’ve learned from my coursework is that the leader is often in the rear pushing people along so that they, too, can be leaders,” she says.

In the future, Grant-Del Valle hopes to teach at the college level so she can give prospective teachers the skills and leadership training they need to give children the education they deserve. She also hopes to write children’s books. Her toddler son, Grant, is her inspiration.

“Through my coursework and collaboration with my professors and peers, I began to delve deeper into educational leadership. The knowledge I gained made all the difference.”

Ginger Grant-Del Valle, Ed.D, ‘10
Q: What is the best way to find a job?

A: There are many means to searching for and obtaining a job, so it is difficult to know which method will land a position. Job search methods can be defined as either passive or active. It’s essential to cast a wide net and employ different strategies with a focus on more active approaches.

Passive job searching includes posting resumes online, sending resumes to job postings and making general inquiries via social media about opportunities. Any of these means can be made more effective through active engagement.

Applying for jobs is a necessary part of the process, but simply posting a resume online, or sending the same resume to each job listing, may not be effective. Writing a targeted cover letter and tailoring your resume to each opportunity will demonstrate to an employer that you took the time to read and understand the responsibilities of the position. This activity will also help you determine the most suitable jobs to apply for; quality is more important than quantity when it comes to sending out resumes.

In addition, plan to follow up on any jobs to which you have applied, to keep you engaged and on top of the process. Each time you apply for a job, make a note to follow up, with a phone call if possible, to inquire about the status of your application. This can be done one to two weeks after your initial application and will help you create a connection with the employer, as well as determine if it is an opportunity you want to pursue.

Networking is often considered the best way to find a job, but simply posting on social media that you are looking for a job may not be effective, especially if it is not directed toward a specific person and/or is too vague to elicit responses. Targeted networking through professional organizations, informational interviews and introductions is a much more dynamic way to learn about career paths and opportunities.

Using a variety of active search methods, as well as making passive efforts more impactful, will ultimately help you create a winning job-search strategy.

Q: I keep hearing that I need to network, but I don’t know anyone in my field.

A: The biggest misconception about networking is that it requires a job seeker to know high-level personnel or human resources officers who work for employers of interest. Networking is much more simple, and is just talking to people you know, as well as creating connections with people you want to know.

Although social media has made it easy to connect with people, racking up LinkedIn® or Facebook® contacts does not constitute active networking. Targeted networking through professional organizations, informational interviews and introductions is a much more dynamic way to learn about career paths and opportunities.

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Health care: An industry in transition

By Julie Wilson

Health care has come a long way from the days when barbers performed operations between shaves, when a minor infection could be life-threatening because there were no antibiotics. Over the centuries, the field of medicine has advanced beyond our ancestors’ wildest imaginations, thanks to amazing discoveries and innovations.

Today, the evolution continues, and like just about every other industry, health care is changing with the times. Here’s a look at some of the top challenges and trends influencing the industry, as well as how those changes may affect health care professionals.

Keeping costs in check

Advances in health care have been epic, and so have its rising costs. In 2013, U.S. health care spending reached $2.9 trillion, which amounts to $9,255 per person, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Projections show that costs will continue to increase.

Despite this large investment, the U.S. doesn’t achieve better health outcomes than the other 11 countries included in a 2014 report by The Commonwealth Fund. Additionally, a 2015 Deloitte study indicates that consumers are paying a greater share of their health plan premiums and shelling out higher out-of-pocket costs for medical services.

The 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) has produced further changes with its expansion of Medicaid and the health insurance mandate. While experts disagree on whether this effort will control health care spending, they generally acknowledge that soaring costs are one of the biggest challenges facing the industry today.

Innovations abound

Perhaps one way to create more efficient and effective health care is to embrace innovation and technology. The digital age has permeated every area of our lives, and health care is no exception.

Innovations have moved beyond electronic records management, which has become mainstream. Telemedicine—phone or online consultations with health care providers for routine, minor illnesses—is on the rise. Medical market research firm Kalorama Information reports that the global telemedicine market grew from $4.2 billion in 2007 to more than $10 billion in 2012.

Wearable devices are hot, too. According to a 2014 national survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers, one in five American adults owns one. The same survey showed digital health startups had raised $2.3 billion during the first half of 2014, with $200 million of that going toward digital medical devices—including wearables. This market looks like it’s set to boom.

With surgical robots already in the operating room and 3-D printing of transplantable human organs on the horizon, soon a trip to the hospital may resemble a scene from a science fiction movie.

Opportunity knocks

Another challenge will be fixing the shortage of health care professionals necessary to meet the needs of an aging baby-boomer population, as well as those newly insured through the ACA. Many experts believe that the demand for health care will exceed the industry’s ability to supply it.

A study by the Association of American Medical Colleges forecasts a shortfall of up to 90,000 physicians by 2025. Experts also predict registered nurses will be in short supply in the decade to come. The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) Employment Projections for 2012-2022 indicates the need for registered nurses will outpace the pool of qualified candidates. In fact, the BLS predicts there will be more than 1 million vacant nursing positions by 2022.

This predicament is compounded by the fact that there also is a shortage of qualified nursing faculty. A report by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing revealed that in 2013, nursing schools in the U.S. turned away more than 78,000 qualified applicants from undergraduate and graduate nursing programs because they didn’t have enough faculty members and facilities to accommodate them. For those who find a way to cultivate knowledge and expertise in health care, the prognosis looks promising.

“The health care industry is rapidly changing, which is great news for those who are ready to meet the challenges and are qualified to embrace the opportunities that will arise.”

Tamara Rozhon, Ed.D.
Executive Dean
College of Health Professions
University of Phoenix

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Hot jobs in health care

Groundbreaking innovations, projected shortages of health care professionals and the need for strong leaders all add up to one thing for those looking to work in the health care industry: opportunity.

“The career outlook is excellent for health care professionals,” asserts Margaret Morris, Ph.D., RN, dean of faculty for the University of Phoenix School of Nursing.

Here are three areas where qualified employees are projected to be in demand:

Technology
It’s no surprise that IT-related health care jobs are hot, so much so that a subset of this field has its own name: health informatics. Those working in health informatics jobs leverage the power of technology to deliver quality care in an efficient, effective manner. A study by Burning Glass Technologies reveals that the demand for these specialized workers will likely grow at twice the rate of overall employment.

While software developers, systems engineers, database managers and other IT professionals are working behind the scenes in health care, these new, specially trained health informatics employees will work as medical coders, clinical analysts, health information managers and in other technology-related functions.

The popularity of remote monitoring devices and other high-tech tools, such as those that keep tabs on the blood sugar levels of diabetic patients and send reports directly to doctors’ offices is increasing. In light of this change, it becomes obvious that even patient-facing health care workers will need at least a baseline skill set in technology in order to thrive.

Health care providers
The demand for health care providers is set to increase as previously uninsured individuals and families gain health care coverage. Additionally, seniors are living longer, often while managing chronic illnesses, meaning the demand for registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, medical assistants and other frontline caregivers will continue to increase.

U.S. News and World Report’s list of “100 Best Jobs of 2015” confirms this trend. The list’s top 10 includes nurse practitioners, registered nurses and physician assistants—a worthy indicator, considering the list includes jobs across a wide range of industries.

Health care administration
The need for leaders to navigate regulatory, legal and technological changes also is great. Health care administrators oversee medical and health services for organizations, be it for a small medical practice or a large-scale hospital system or government agency—and everywhere in between.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that health care administration jobs will grow at a much faster rate than the average for all other occupations—a whopping 23 percent from 2012 to 2022.

“There are health care shortages across the country,” explains Morris. If you’re in the market for a new career, all signs point to a healthy future in the business of caring.

Be ready for opportunity
Health care jobs abound. So what does it take to land one and build a successful career in health care? In short, the right skills and education.

“There are unlimited opportunities for those who are willing to prepare themselves,” says Mark Johannsson, DHSc, MPH, FRSC, academic dean for the School of Health Services Administration. “Retrofitting your knowledge and skill set through academic preparation will position you to fully engage in health care career opportunities,” Johannsson says.

Mark Madden, senior vice president of executive search at health care leadership consulting firm B. E. Smith, shares his take on the skills that are necessary in health care. “Besides a level of intelligence to work within a highly complex industry, [prospective health care professionals] have got to have the interpersonal ability to build relationships internally and externally,” he says. “They have to have the intensity and drive to move at a faster pace.”

Madden says they also need flexibility, adaptability and the capacity for innovative thinking.

The health care industry is going to demand a higher skill set,” adds Johannsson. “Our standards are changing. The health care industry’s expectations of its workers are continuously evolving, so keeping your knowledge base relevant in real time has never been more important.”

This means more practical nurses will obtain bachelor’s degrees, and more BSN degree nurses and other health care professionals will pursue graduate degrees so they are poised to grow with the burgeoning industry.

University of Phoenix offers a variety of degree and certificate programs for students preparing for a health care career. For more information, visit phoenix.edu/colleges_divisions/health-sciences-nursing.html.

Industry spotlight

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<th>Healthcare by the Numbers</th>
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<td><strong>$2.9 trillion</strong></td>
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<td>Amount of U.S. health care spending in 2013</td>
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<td><strong>90,000</strong></td>
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<td>Projected shortage of U.S. physicians in the year 2025</td>
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<td><strong>1 in 5</strong></td>
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<td>Number of Americans who use a wearable device</td>
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<td>Projected number of vacant nursing positions in 2022</td>
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<td>Number of qualified applicants turned away from graduate and undergraduate nursing programs in 2013 for lack of qualified faculty and facilities</td>
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<td><strong>36</strong></td>
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<td>Number of degree and certificate programs offered by the University of Phoenix College of Health Professions in 2015</td>
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University news

University of Phoenix® School of Business students
won the undergraduate Case Competition at the recent
Society for Human Resource Management® (SHRM)
Student Case Competition and Career Summit – West
Division, in Ontario, California. Congratulations
to human resource students Michelle Rhoads, BSB,
Katrina Ballard, BSB and Leslie Oakley, BSB. The
students competed against 21 other groups to take the
top position. Long time UOPX faculty member
Rosalie Lopez, DM, led the team to this exciting victory.

During the competition, SHRM presented each
team with a different complex situation that HR
professionals deal with regularly. Teams had to
determine a solution, write a paper on the project and
create an oral presentation. Each team presented its
projects in person to a panel of SHRM member judges.

“The School of Business is proud of our distinguished
graduates who demonstrated both the human
resources knowledge and critical-thinking skills that
are vital to organization success,” said Ruth Veloria,
executive dean of the University of Phoenix School
of Business. “The competition provides a realistic
preview of workplace issues that students may
encounter in the HR profession, and we are honored
to have the achievements of our team members
recognized by SHRM.”

The winning team received a $2,500 prize and free
registrations to SHRM’s Annual Conference and
Exposition in Las Vegas in June.

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