

The Case for NAPBS Accreditation

“Come on. Big village. Be Quick. Bring packs.”

George Armstrong Custer message dictated to Captain Cook for Captain Benteen.

“Hurrah boys, we’ve got them.”

George Armstrong Custer. Last thing John Martin (real name Giuseppe Martino) heard from Custer as he departed with the above message. He sent this message to Captain Benteen just before “the last stand.”

Man, some things seem like a really good idea, a really good strategy—until they aren’t. The case for *not* getting NAPBS accreditation is evident from the first reading of any clause in the accreditation criteria: difficulty, time and commitment. You look through the standard and tasks like making cold calls to prospects, having that disciplinary meeting or paying your bills seem suddenly more pressing and pleasant.

But there is a case to be made for accreditation, and when you throw all the reasons together and boil them down, you’re left with a distillate—profit. How does the accreditation process make companies more profitable? In speaking with accredited firms (and those in the process of getting accredited for that matter) several things come up repeatedly.

- *“We have adopted policies and implemented procedures that make us more efficient but also, we feel a lot more secure in our legal and regulatory compliance.”*

Efficiency is great. For our industry, compliance may be more valuable. And when you get in a court of law, documentation matters. The following quote comes up from non-accredited firms quite a bit:

- *“I think we probably meet all the requirements, but we just don’t have it in writing.”*

This could well be true. But I’ll tell you, it’s a sickly feeling to be in the box in the wood paneled court room when the plaintiff attorney says, to take an example, “you say your people were trained to respect the confidentiality of information, but did you have any, anything, in writing that prohibited that conduct or outlined consequences for disobedience?” The evening before trial, you’re in a ritzy big-city restaurant and the pressing issue is which fork to use. The next day, you’re in court swimming with plaintiff sharks and there’s viscera floating in the tide.

Those of us long in the industry have our war stories dealing with problem vendors, consumers and clients. They’re fun to relate and laugh together at NAPBS meetings over a drink at the end of a busy day. They are considerably less fun or funny during the happening or when the attorney bill comes in. Accreditation reduces CRA liability.

- *“We received a lot of good, local publicity.”*

This may be more true for smaller or mid-size agencies, but getting accredited has proved to be an excellent non-paid publicity tool in local and state newspapers. Firms specializing in a market niche or industry vertical have also had some success targeting their niche or industry vertical publications.

- *“It’s a competitive advantage.”*

Sales people (and savvy business owners) love differentiators that aren’t “price” and more objective than “service.” Accreditation is an objective, non-price differentiator. Accreditation is not just a plaque on your office wall, a seal on your website or a great answer on an RFP. Firms are internalizing accreditation and communicating to prospects that it’s not a feather in the CRA’s cap—the accreditation means the CRA has implemented policies, procedures, contractual stipulations with vendors, training of employees, etc that directly affect and protect *clients*. The message is not “we’ve received this accolade”. The message is “our entire operation, from tech to training, from education to vendor screening, policy and procedures has been reviewed, we have paid for an independent, comprehensive audit and we have been accredited as a firm that does it right for our *clients*.”

- *“Accreditation is a double-edged sword, but I wanted to do it on my terms.”*

The competitive advantage edge is one side of the blade. The other side is avoidance of disadvantage. Becoming accredited will be an advantage until the exact point at which non-accreditation is a disadvantage. If you *are* going to get accredited, I would recommend doing it on your terms to reap the advantage instead of waiting in line while you are disadvantaged.

This has thus far appealed to your selfish motives, but there is a collective motive that again, if you boil it down, will distill to...profit.

There are federal lawmakers and EEOC policymakers who will look you right in the eye and say criminal records should *never* be used by the general population as a factor in establishing eligibility for employment. And when challenged, they often point out that few private employee screening firms are accredited/audited/pro-actively committed to following best practice standards. (Those of you who attended the Orlando meeting and listened to the EEOC speaker are probably still scared).

The better we, as an industry, can demonstrate that we are a professional, balanced, accredited industry, the better will be our ability to forestall misguided regulatory initiatives, thrive and help employers. In today’s climate, there are some issues in which like it or not, we are going to have to hang together or hang separately from the yardarm of shortsighted political feel-goodism.

In summary, accreditation is a big task, but it's a profitable task for your agency and our industry.

Derek Hinton is President of CRAzoom (www.crazoom.com) a company providing complete accreditation assistance to CRAs. Involved with CRAs since 1984, Derek is also the author of "The Criminal Records Manual," currently in its Third Edition.