As in many other advanced health-care professions, the journey to becoming a practicing audiologist is a fairly lengthy process involving classroom instruction, clinical experience, and licensure. You have certainly worked hard to earn your place among your peers, so be confident and let your overall experience, skills, and knowledge help you find your place.

Although my area of expertise is not in the practice of audiology, I do know about the practice of human resources (HR) and staffing management, which involves finding qualified employees, attracting them, employing them, and retaining them. That makes me qualified to speak to one specific professional challenge audiologists are experiencing in today’s employment arena—barriers to professional growth and/or employment entry. To gain a better perspective of the issue at hand, let us first take a look at how the profession has evolved.
Audiology Credentialing

Until 1999, a national certificate had been predominantly designed, described, and managed by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Employers frequently required the organization’s Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A) credential when employing an audiologist.

Today, there are two primary credentials available to audiologists. The American Board of Audiology offers the Board Certified in Audiology credential (ABA), and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) offers the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A).

Although licensure is the standard requirement that defines minimum standards for the practice of audiology, some private employers may require audiologists to meet a higher standard, usually characterized through attaining a professional credential. While many employers will accept either ABA Board Certified in Audiology credential or the CCC-A to satisfy this requirement, some have held firmly to the belief that CCC-A certificate is a standard and specifically require the CCC-A certified when employing audiologists.

Audiologists holding ABA certification have exceeded standards of licensure; the ABA certification actually requires more hours of professional practice and continuing education than does the CCC-A. Furthermore, audiologists with an ABA specialty certification in cochlear implants or pediatrics, have earned recognition for a high level of knowledge in their specialty area by passing a rigorous exam. With ABA the only credential that exceeds the criteria to obtain and maintain licensure in all 50 states, why would an employer choose to require ASHA over ABA credentialing, rather than recognizing and accepting either or both?

The Road to Change

Some of the reasoning behind this could be due to the fact that busy HR professionals often tend to rely on existing job descriptions as the basis for job requirements and often use these very job descriptions for staffing purposes. The problem with this approach is that most companies are not very proactive when it comes to updating job descriptions within the workplace. Often, they fail to comprehend that most job descriptions are only an established consideration of what was needed in the past, and not an accurate reflection of what is needed in the here and now.

Another possible reason simply could be a lack of knowledge, insufficient information, or inaccurate perceptions and opinions regarding ABA certification. Whatever the reason, the result is considered by some as a barrier to professional growth and employment opportunities—a source of frustration for employees and applicants alike.

All is not lost, however. While it may not necessarily be an easy task to accomplish, it is not entirely impossible
to beat an employer’s outdated, nonessential job requirements. A number of strategies can be employed to assist employees, as well as applicants, to overcome barriers regarding credentialing requirements.

Before effectively attempting to influence change, it is important to first understand the underlying factors behind the concept. To affect change, one must begin by changing perception. At the most basic level, perception leads to decision making and action taking—and the decision is simply to act or not to act. Of course, it does take time and effort to reverse a perception that has been firmly rooted. Essentially, two factors are involved in changing perceptions—education and persuasion. While education seeks to change the way someone perceives something, persuasion seeks to change how the individual interprets perceived facts.

The Role of the HR Department

As a Human Resources professional, it is hard to ignore the level of animosity and mistrust the average individual holds toward the HR department. This is in large part due to many stories portraying HR in a less-than-flattering light, implying that HR contact should be avoided whenever possible. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, the HR departments at the companies you decide to target will play a key role in affecting change or determining whether an applicant is hired.

Contrary to the many misconceptions surrounding HR, today’s HR department is considered a strategic business partner, a champion for change and an advocate for the company and its employees. In this role, HR can play a dual part in changing management—by initiating and leading the change and by serving as a facilitator for change.

The HR department usually performs a variety of functions associated with the communication, implementation, and tracking of change. Most HR professionals assist employees with organizational changes, by serving as a point of contact for questions and concerns and by providing feedback and support. By championing change, HR can help increase buy-in, comfort, and support for change, thereby increasing the success of change initiatives.

HR also is primarily responsible for an organization’s staffing management, dealing with the strategies, tactics, and processes for identifying, recruiting, and retaining the human capital needed to support organizational strategies in the present and the future. This includes developing, implementing, and evaluating programs—for sourcing, recruiting, hiring, orienting, and retaining employees, as well as for workforce planning. Also included are matters that focus on careers and communications, as well as effective staffing management practices and staffing management issues.

Because talent retention and employee loyalty have a significant impact on organizational success, selecting and retaining top talent has become a primary focus for many HR professionals. In short, human resources managers are required to produce an environment characterized by growing levels of skilled and trained employees through working with management to offer advice regarding the changes or staff that may be necessary to make the organization run more efficiently. While

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management will have its own specific criteria for who should fill the position. Skilful human resources professionals are able to provide advice and guidance regarding employee retention and selection matters.

Because HR plays such a significant role in influencing change, partnering with, and obtaining the support of, the HR department can be extremely beneficial. Rather than approach the thought of contacting HR with dread or fear, it is best to focus on how you can work with HR to overcome specific concerns.

Most HR professionals are not only quite approachable, they can be an employee or applicant’s best advocate. But reaching out to HR requires being very resourceful and stepping out of your comfort zone. It is best to approach HR people as if they are just like any other contacts in your organization or professional networking list (if you are an applicant). They are simply human beings, after all.

**Change in the Workplace**

Audiology professionals currently employed in organizations that may still require the CCC-A certificate are in the best position to advocate for change within their respective workplaces. Current employees know who their HR people are and have much better access to their HR departments than job applicants, which gives them a significant advantage over prospective employees in this regard.

Current employees should reach out and partner with their HR departments on any concerns regarding existing credentialing requirements, particularly if those requirements do not reflect the current professional standards for practice. Employees have the right to request a copy of their job description from the HR department and to suggest changes. HR professionals should encourage growth that benefits the company, as well as its employees. HR professionals want to hire and retain the best and brightest for their organization. If you approach the matter with confidence, respect, and are well prepared with a legitimate business justification for your request, HR will listen and most likely will act.

As an applicant, reaching out to the HR department in an effort to overcome outdated job requirements is a bit more challenging, made all the more difficult when HR has dozens of other applicants to consider. An applicant must proceed with a bit more caution and resourcefulness than an employee of a targeted organization. The first step is to identify the internal HR professional responsible for filling the job you want. This means getting the name of the HR associate within the organization of interest. Your chances of making initial contact and receiving a response are much greater if you pinpoint and reach out to the appropriate person within the HR department.

Several options are available to applicants. The first course of business when it comes to reaching out to a prospective employer’s HR department includes the following:

**Common Connections**

Once you have the name of the appropriate contact in the HR department, the next step is to look that individual up on social networking sites. To help simplify your outreach efforts, it is certainly worth the extra time to determine if you have common connections, either online or through a friend or acquaintance employed at the company. If you find you have common connections, decide which of your shared connections, if any, you can contact to help with an introduction. The benefit of reaching out to a shared connection provides an opportunity to get a sense of how the organization’s HR department works. E-mail may be preferred in place of a LinkedIn request or some other form of communication. Gather as much information as possible to help you plan a strategic approach for contacting the HR department.

**Affiliations and Common Interests**

If you do not have common connections, do some research to see if you share any common interests or affiliations. For example, is the HR manager in a group you belong to on LinkedIn, or does that manager participate in a membership organization you are affiliated with offline? This may serve as an icebreaker that will help you introduce yourself in the same way a shared contact can.

**E-mail HR Directly**

When you have nothing in common—no shared contacts or affiliations—try e-mailing HR directly. This may be daunting, but it is also effective when done correctly. With an e-mail or LinkedIn message, you should be careful not to come on too strong or to sound desperate. Remember, there is a fine line between confidence and arrogance. Make sure your approach is highly tailored; use job description keywords throughout your communications with HR. In your e-mail communication, briefly express your interest in the position and your desire to connect.
Following Up
You might not be able to reach the appropriate person in the HR department on the first attempt, or the manager you are contacting might not respond to your first communication. If that happens, it is perfectly acceptable to follow up on your initial communication, if you don’t go overboard and do it too often. Once you have the individual HR recruiter’s name, you are much more likely to reach that person in a follow-up call or e-mail message. It is recommended that you wait at least a week before following up. In addition, if you are able to e-mail your resume directly to the appropriate HR associate, you stand a much greater chance of having that individual respond to you personally.

Build a Strong Case
To effectively change perceptions through education and persuasion, you must build a strong case. A strong case helps facilitate communication by providing your target audience with all the necessary facts, information, and detail to allow them to make an informed decision. Simply put, the case is intended to convince key decision-makers of the merits of a particular course of action. A good case will explain the problem and identify possible solutions to effectively allow decision-makers to decide which course of action will be best for the organization.

Being well informed and prepared shows you are well trained and knowledgeable about your profession, and that your judgment and opinion can be trusted. Both of these are extremely important factors in being taken seriously and obtaining support. As an employee, when building a case:

Request the Full Job Description
You have to know the exact requirements of the job to make the case for change. Once you have a copy of your existing job description, review it and make notes regarding any items contained in the job description that are no longer an accurate reflection of what is relevant in current standards or practice. Gather factual information from reliable sources to help you build a strong case supporting a request for changes to job requirements.

Prepare
Arm yourself with as much information as possible to help you proceed with confidence. Provide concrete information that demonstrates that holding ABA certification means an individual has worked to meet or exceed the...
The Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

same high standards in audiology or in a specialty area of audiology as those required for the CCC-A certificate. The American Board of Audiology (www.boardofaudiology.org, aba@audiology.org) is a great source of information to help you get started.

**Project Confidence**
If you possess all the required skills and overall competencies required to effectively perform the job, and you can provide concrete examples of proven success or how you handled specific situations from your previous jobs, then you have value to contribute regardless of which certification you currently hold. Focus confidently on the value you have, rather than worry about what you may be missing.

When building a case as a job applicant, in addition to the above, you should also:

**Tailor Your Resume**
Ensure your resume is as tailored to the position as possible. If your resume isn’t tailored for the position, it sends the message that you didn’t care enough to put the time in to focus the information. Make sure your resume is relevant for the job you want and know the extra effort will benefit you later.

**Make Your Cover Letter Personal**
The more you can make your cover letter stand out, the better. Don’t use the usual generic spiel and buzzwords—aim to think outside the box while remaining professional.

**Prioritize information.** Your resume can only be one or two pages, so the details you include need to be maximally relevant and advantageous.

**Request the full job description, if you don’t already have it.** As an applicant, you do not have the right to suggest or request changes to the job description or job requirements, but you do need to know the requirements of the job to make the case that you can do it.

**Define your unique skills/strengths.** Review your background and identify what separates you from candidates that have the required certification. Use your qualifications summary to promote your value. Remember, as an applicant you need to impress the HR manager with the skills and knowledge you possess that are relevant to the job. This is your opportunity to prove that you are a more promising candidate than other applicants, regardless of whether you possess an alternative certification.

**Highlight education, professional development, and training.** Place experience before education if you have five or more years of experience related to your goal. The HR manager is more interested in your job accomplishments than in your education. Place education before experience if you are a recent graduate or have fewer than five years of work experience. If you are changing careers and have continued your education to support your new goal, education should come first. Academic and scientific professionals typically place education before experience on their resumes.

**Understand the Organization**
Every organization has a unique style, culture, and approach to achieving strategic objectives. When employees contact the HR department with concerns, they should expect to be treated with equal parts respect, sensitivity, and honesty. It should be reassuring to know, if given a choice, most HR professionals encourage and welcome employee suggestions and feedback, and will treat employees and applicants with the utmost respect and courtesy.

It is important to be realistic and to manage expectations carefully. Although human resources professionals can provide advice to management about the skills necessary for a particular position and facilitate the hiring process, the ultimate decision about any changes or who to hire generally will be left up to management.

Keep in mind that, while the strategies presented here can go a long way in changing perceptions regarding credentialing requirements, they may not always result in the desired change. There will be times you may encounter managers who will stubbornly hold steadfast to perceptions and opinions that make it difficult to make any real change within their organizations. While HR does not have to address every issue that comes its way, it is still worth the effort to bring a matter to the department’s attention. After all, there is everything to be gained and little to be lost in doing so.

**Make Some Ripples**
As in many other advanced health-care professions, the journey to becoming a practicing audiologist is not one for
the faint of heart. It is a fairly lengthy process involving a rigorous combination of classroom instruction, clinical experience, and licensure. You have certainly worked hard to earn your place among your peers, so be confident and let your overall experience, skills, and knowledge help you find your place.

If your effort does not immediately produce the desired result, do not take it personally or give up the fight. Keep in mind that having the professional courage to approach and partner with HR may still have longer-term benefits, even if the immediate outcome was not what was hoped for.

Go ahead, cast those stones and make some ripples. You are, after all, more than just the sum parts of your credentials!

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