The value of an IT background
an interview with Trish Manna
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See page 16

22
Patient payment transactions: A confluence of security and compliance considerations
Ken Briggs

29
Medicare appeals process: CMS publishes final rule revising regulations
Andrew B. Wachler and Jessica C. Forster

38
Reducing the risk of False Claims Act qui tam actions
Joan W. Feldman

43
The secret to effective compliance training is engagement
Gary N. Jones
HCCA’s customer service

United Airlines has met with a little resistance with regard to their customer service. I wasn’t going to jump on the “dump on United” bandwagon, but it did get me thinking about how different our customer service approach is. Companies don’t have one culture, they have many cultures, and one culture is wrapped around how you treat customers. You have to care to your core about your customer service culture. Before I get started, I need to tell you we are proud of our approach in our organization, but by no means does it work all the time. We occasionally have people who go away mad.

We at HCCA/SCCE tell our frontline employees to start giving people stuff if we mess something up, even if we are not sure we caused the problem. We have to treat everyone equally, so we do have to have policies. If the dispute is over a policy that the caller doesn’t like, we will listen to new ideas. However, we do not feel our policies are something we need to apologize for very often. If a customer feels we made a customer service mistake and they are sincere, we are going with their perspective. Our staff is told to start giving them stuff to compensate for the mistake until they cry uncle (become happy). The staff is not told to get approval. They don’t put people on hold “to see what they can do about the problem,” or say, “We will get back to you later.” They deal with it immediately themselves in most cases, and they are given the latitude to make these decisions. Our staff are told that if they can’t get the person to cry uncle after giving them stuff (the caller is still mad), they can have the caller talk to their supervisor or to me (the CEO).

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I have had a few of these calls in my day. It really doesn’t take that much time and, more importantly, I learn about what is going on first hand. I stay in touch. If there is the perception of a mistake, I will give the caller more stuff than what the staff thought of. However, most people simply want us to acknowledge the issue and remedy it to the best of our ability. Most people don’t really want more stuff. They just want to know that someone in management is listening, cares, and wants to do the right thing.