Internal Auditor, Advocate for Thyself: 
Professional Advocacy Recommendations for Internal Auditing

Submitted by:
Amanda G. Carlson
Bentley University
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Topic:
One of The IIA’s strategic initiatives is Advocacy of the profession. Advocacy means promoting the profession of internal auditing by “instilling pride in the profession, encouraging change, and building relationships with organizations and key stakeholders that impact the profession globally.” To become better advocates for the profession, we need a clear understanding of how advocacy efforts impact constituents of the profession, how to represent the profession to constituents, and how best to convey the message in the most clear and expeditious manner. In particular, we need to consider the following specific questions:

- What does Advocacy mean to students, practitioners, and other stakeholders?
- Which regulating bodies and listing organizations across the world have requirements for the presence of internal auditing and recognize a requirement to follow The IIA’s Standards?
- What methods are used to effectively advocate for a profession and how can these methods best be used for the internal audit profession?
- How should advocacy initiatives be prioritized by The IIA to provide the greatest impact?

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About the Author

Amanda Gates Carlson, CPA, MBA, is an honors student in the Masters of Science in Accountancy program at Bentley University, where she completed her coursework in Internal Auditing in the fall of 2014. She earned her Masters of Business Administration degree with highest honors from Bentley, a Certificate of Accounting from the University of Southern California, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in American History and Literature, magna cum laude, from Harvard College. Ms. Carlson was an Assurance Manager at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and is currently the Controller of New England Conservatory of Music. She lives with her husband and two-year-old daughter, plus another daughter on the way this spring, in Belmont, Massachusetts.
Executive Summary

The Institute of Internal Auditors (The IIA) currently pursues numerous advocacy initiatives, including lobbying lawmakers concerning the value of internal auditing and supporting universities in developing curricula for internal audit programs. While these initiatives are invaluable, The IIA could enhance its advocacy of internal auditing by implementing additional initiatives modeled on successful advocacy endeavors that have been undertaken within other major professions. This paper examines advocacy efforts within the medical, nursing and engineering professions and notes those professions’ successes in the areas of focused lobbying, support for their members, early promotion of advocacy among students and young professionals, and grassroots efforts to educate the general public. It is especially critical that The IIA focus its lobbying efforts on increasing internal audit regulatory requirements in a broader range of organizations worldwide in order to promote growth for the profession. The paper concludes with the prioritization of advocacy ideas, in order to most effectively promote and improve public awareness regarding the internal audit profession.

Introduction

My father worked in internal auditing for 26 years, leading the internal audit functions of three Fortune 500 companies before his retirement. I had the impression while growing up that my father was like a private detective, traveling all over the world to apprehend “bad guys” who had been stealing from their companies. It was only upon entering the business world myself and interacting with other internal auditors that I gained a better understanding of my father’s work. If it was difficult for a top chief audit executive’s own daughter to comprehend his field, how much more difficult must it be for the general public to understand what internal auditors do and how critical their work is to business organizations? How can the internal audit profession better advocate for itself to help the general public understand what auditors do? How can the profession attract more students and professionals to the field of internal
auditing, and support practitioners working in the field? This paper will address these questions and recommend various forms of advocacy for the internal audit profession.

Fundamentally, what is professional advocacy? The literature on the topic suggests that advocacy involves working on behalf of oneself and/or others to bring attention to a concern and advance potential solutions. Advocacy often necessitates operating through established decision-making entities, such as business organizations, political bodies, or other entities working on policy in a particular field, in order to achieve the desired results (Tomajan). Professional advocacy for internal auditing could therefore consist of advancing issues of concern through established channels within business organizations, political bodies, and/or other policy-setting entities such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) or stock exchanges. Advocacy might promote relevant policy issues such as job creation, additional mandates for internal audit functions in various types of organizations, and improved workplace conditions for internal audit professionals.

Why is advocacy important for internal auditing? An internal audit function is required for companies traded on the New York Stock Exchange (Harrington) and exists in many other private and smaller publicly traded companies, leading to an ongoing need for new internal audit professionals. Internationally, a handful of countries such as South Africa, Italy, and the United Kingdom require internal audit functions within publicly listed companies and/or governmental entities (Marais, Burnaby and Abdolmohammadi). Attracting students and other professionals to the field of internal auditing is critical to meet this increasing demand and thereby ensure the profession’s ongoing success. In addition, internal auditing serves as an important part of any organization’s operations because of its focus on assessing the effectiveness of internal controls established by management and recommending operational improvements. Investors and other stakeholders should therefore ask whether companies have internal audit functions and push for their establishment if they do not exist. The more the general public understands about the role of internal auditing, the better informed they will be as investors in the stock market and as participants in the worldwide economy.
The upcoming sections will discuss professional advocacy success stories from other fields and how those may be applied in the internal auditing profession, as well as how requirements for the presence of an internal auditing function have greatly increased the demand for internal auditors and thereby encouraged growth in the profession. Lastly, the paper will address how The IIA can best prioritize its advocacy initiatives to produce the greatest impact.

**Successful Professional Advocacy Efforts**

An annual Harris Poll asks respondents to rate a variety of occupations according to prestige. Doctors led the poll in 2014, with 88% of participants rating the medical profession as prestigious, followed by military officers (78%), firefighters (76%), scientists (76%), nurses (70%), engineers (69%), and police officers (66%). Accountants fell into the bottom half, with only 40% of respondents rating the profession as prestigious. The poll also inquired as to whether respondents would encourage a child to pursue each occupation. The results were similar, at 91% for doctors, 65% for military officers, 77% for firefighters, 91% for scientists, 90% for nurses, 93% for engineers, and 60% for police officers. Accountants were considerably higher in this second part of the poll, with 78% of respondents indicating that they would encourage a child to pursue an accounting career — notably higher than any of the public safety careers (Harris Poll).

What is it about accounting — the professional category into which internal auditing would also likely fall — that leads the general public to view it as worth pursuing professionally yet not prestigious? Is it the perception that accountants make a lot of money but are mere “bean counters”? Does the general public not really understand what accountants or internal auditors do? How would internal auditors rank if their occupation were listed separately within the poll? Also, what is it about the health care, scientific, engineering, and public safety professions that lead respondents to view them as more prestigious and/or more desirable as careers?

Before addressing what these other professions do well in the area of advocacy that contributes to their strong public opinion, it may be helpful to define “profession.” According to Merriam-Webster, a
profession is, “a type of job that requires special education, training, or skill” or “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” (Merriam-Webster). BusinessDictionary.com takes this definition one step further, calling a profession an “[o]ccupation, practice, or vocation requiring mastery of a complex set of knowledge and skills through formal education and/or practical experience. Every organized profession (accounting, law, medicine, etc.) is governed by its respective professional body” (BusinessDictionary.com). Combining these two definitions, a profession could be said to a) be a job or occupation; b) require extensive and often specialized knowledge gained through education or experience; and c) if an organized profession, have a governing professional body.

While the Harris Poll described above covered a broad range of careers, the definition of a profession narrows the field of possible occupations to compare against internal auditing. Military officers, firefighters, and police officers receive a great deal of training for their public safety occupations, but formal education or commensurate practical experience is not a requirement. In contrast, becoming a doctor, nurse, or engineer, or entering the fields of accounting and internal auditing, requires a great deal of schooling in addition to practical experience. The medical, nursing, and engineering professions also happen to have governing professional bodies, similar to those of accountants and internal auditors. These professions are therefore the ones on which this paper will focus in examining successful professional advocacy efforts.

The IIA has already undertaken a number of advocacy efforts on behalf of the internal audit profession. With over 180,000 members worldwide, The IIA’s mission includes, “advocating and promoting the value internal audit professionals add to their organizations,” as well as, “researching, disseminating, and promoting knowledge concerning internal auditing and its appropriate role in control, risk management, and governance to practitioners and stakeholders.” The IIA establishes standards, provides training and certification, publishes journals and newsletters, and funds research activities, all in support of the internal audit profession (“About The IIA”). The IIA lobbies in Washington, D.C., with a focus on conveying to lawmakers the critical role that internal auditing holds in corporate governance.
The IIA also partners with universities on their internal audit curricula and helps other institutions of higher education establish internal audit programs. With $52 million of revenues and net assets of $36 million in 2013, The IIA has substantial resources with which it can undertake its advocacy activities (The IIA 2013 Annual Report).

While The IIA’s advocacy work on behalf of the internal audit profession is significant, much can be learned from other professions’ advocacy efforts. The coming sections will examine professional advocacy within the medical, nursing, and engineering fields.

**The Medical Profession**

With 228,000 members, the American Medical Association (AMA) is the fifth largest professional organization in the U.S. in terms of size of membership, behind the National Association of Realtors, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), the American Institute for Certified Public Accountants, and the American Bar Association (American Medical Association 2013 Annual Report, Encyclopedia of Business). With $280 million in annual revenues and $454 million in net assets, the AMA is second only to the IEEE in terms of annual revenues and is by far the richest professional organization in terms of net assets (Guidestar.org, IEEE 2013 Annual Report). The AMA publishes the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), which is frequently quoted in periodicals and widely viewed as an authoritative reference for medical research and guidance (AMA 2013 Annual Report). The AMA also establishes standards for the medical profession, promotes ethical standards throughout the medical community, lobbies and advocates on behalf of the profession, sells medical malpractice insurance, and assists doctors with fighting legal claims (Hoovers). More than one-quarter of all doctors are members of the AMA (Young).

Beyond this work in advocating for the medical profession and for individual doctors themselves, the AMA includes professional advocacy in its Declaration of Professional Responsibility, directing doctors to commit themselves to “[a]dvocate for social, economic, educational, and political changes that ameliorate suffering and contribute to human well-being” (AMA). Doctors are therefore encouraged to
take time away from their busy patient schedules to advocate on behalf of the medical profession and its “public agenda.” Such advocacy might take the form of working to improve access to medical care for a community or using lobbying or grassroots efforts to change the financing system for healthcare. Not least in importance is the practice of talking with friends and family to raise public awareness about particular medical or health issues, such as childhood asthma or diabetes. Groups of doctors working together on behalf of particular issues or initiatives have been particularly successful in their advocacy efforts (Gruen). While the AMA’s financial resources enable it to undertake significant lobbying efforts at the organizational level, the directive for all doctors to advocate on behalf of their profession, health issues, and their patients is also powerful.

It has been proposed, additionally, that medical schools and other education programs should include professional advocacy within their curricula, and accreditation bodies should outline competencies in the area of advocacy against which students could be measured (Earnest). That said, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, the accrediting body for most U.S. medical schools, does not currently include professional advocacy as one of its curriculum standards (Liaison Committee on Medical Education).

The Nursing Profession

After medicine, the second profession rated as both prestigious and desirable per the Harris Poll is the field of nursing. The American Nurses Association (ANA) is the eighth largest U.S. professional association with over 200,000 members (Encyclopedia of Business). The ANA represents the interests of approximately 3.1 million registered nurses in the U.S. by promoting high standards for the profession, supporting the rights of nursing professionals in the workplace, and undertaking political advocacy for health issues relevant to nurses and the general public. Political lobbying is the primary focus for the ANA’s advocacy efforts, but the ANA’s Scope and Standards of Practice also indicate that advocacy for safe and effective work environments is a responsibility of individual nursing professionals (ANA,
Tomajan). The ANA, with $37 million of income and $6 million of net assets in 2012, undertakes its activities with substantially lower financial resources than the AMA and the IEEE (Guidestar.org).

Advocacy for the nursing profession is a popular topic in the research literature, including personal advocacy in the workplace, support for colleagues, and promotion of issues at the organizational or health system levels. Advocacy is intended to improve the professional image of nursing, which all nurses are called to do (Tomajan). The notion of further improving the professional image of the nursing field through grassroots efforts is a unique aspect of nursing-related advocacy.

Nurses often work in the shadow of medical doctors, but they do not merely follow doctors’ orders. They have professional standards that require them to personally assess and take action on health care issues that arise in their work. Nursing educators are also called to model advocacy behavior for their students in the classroom and in nursing practice settings, so that their students can develop professional identities as advocates as well (Tomajan). Like doctors, nurses are called to advocate for themselves, for health issues, and for their patients.

**The Engineering Profession**

The third profession identified by the Harris Poll as both prestigious and desirable is engineering. Electrical engineers constitute the largest segment of engineers in the U.S., and the IEEE is the second largest U.S. professional association, with 430,000 worldwide members. The IEEE has considerable resources, namely $413 million of income and $329 million of net assets in 2013 (Encyclopedia of Business, IEEE 2013 Annual Report). While the IEEE’s mission statement does not specifically mention advocating for the electrical engineering profession, it has the lofty goal of fostering “technological innovation and excellence for the benefit of humanity,” doing so through a combination of “highly cited publications, conferences, technology standards, and professional and educational activities” (“IEEE Mission & Vision” and “About IEEE”).

A separate arm of IEEE called IEEE-USA focuses on advancing the engineering profession and standing of its members through lobbying and advocacy in Washington, D.C. IEEE-USA lobbies for job
creation for engineers during economic downturns, intellectual property issues, technical policy, pension legislation, and immigration reform. Important recent efforts have focused on federal funding and public relations for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) pre-college education, aimed at providing the profession with its next generation of engineers. IEEE-USA has also focused on recruiting young engineering graduates and professionals to join in their advocacy efforts and learn hands-on about the importance of professional advocacy (Meredith). While the literature on professional advocacy for engineering does not mention grassroots efforts such as those performed by doctors and nurses, IEEE-USA’s lobbying endeavors directly support the engineering profession and interests of its members. These advocacy efforts, along with those of the medical and nursing professions, carry many lessons for the field of internal auditing.

**Professional Advocacy Lessons for Internal Auditing**

There are four particularly successful areas of advocacy demonstrated by the AMA, ANA, and IEEE from which The IIA can learn and benefit: focused lobbying efforts, support for members, early promotion of advocacy among students and young professionals, and grassroots efforts to educate the general public.

The lobbying that the AMA, IEEE, and ANA undertake on behalf of their professions’ funding and job creation is notable. One particular type of lobbying that would fit into this area would be lobbying the government to require an internal audit function in every publicly traded company and in governmental entities and nonprofit organizations over a certain size. As discussed in the next section of this paper, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) requirement for an internal audit function in every NYSE-traded company greatly increased internal audit staffing requirements and thus supported job creation for the field.

Support for the individual practitioner’s work experience is another important area of advocacy. For the AMA and ANA, enhancing their members’ work experience means ensuring safe and effective health care environments for providing patient care. The support that the AMA offers doctors facing
lawsuits speaks volumes about the strength of the AMA as a professional organization and the backing that it provides for its professionals. In the case of the IEEE, advocacy for the individual work experience has focused on pension reform, to ensure that engineers have retirement assets; immigration reform, to help their professionals obtain and retain jobs; and technology standards, to establish safe workplaces for engineers. Like the other professional organizations, The IIA could advocate for effective work environments and pension reform, among other issues.

The next area of successful advocacy from the other professions is the early promotion of advocacy efforts among students and young professionals. The AMA and ANA have advocated through their flagship publications for a greater focus on professional advocacy in medical and nursing education, both formally in the classroom and informally through mentorship and role-modeling in practice environments. The earlier that students understand that there is an expectation for them to advocate for themselves, for health care issues, and for their professions, the more likely it is that they will undertake professional advocacy during their busy careers. Similarly, IEEE-USA is actively recruiting young engineers to join their professional advocacy efforts, allowing them to participate in dynamic lobbying efforts for job creation and the value of technology in society. Likewise, The IIA should consider developing an expectation through internal audit education that advocacy is part of being an internal audit professional, with professors and guest lecturers conveying this message both in the classroom and as role models for students in practice. This advocacy should focus on the importance of internal audit functions in strong corporate governance and the value that they bring to their organizations and the global economy.

Lastly, grassroots efforts are critical to educate the general public about current issues that are of concern to the profession and about the work of the professionals themselves. Who better to advocate for health care issues than doctors or nurses, either individually or collectively, given how close they are to health care practice and their patients’ concerns? Further, while many people may think that they know what doctors or nurses do, the nature of those professionals’ work may actually be somewhat opaque, given that it is based on many years of schooling and experience. The health care professions’
encouragement of members’ grassroots efforts to educate friends and family about their work is a powerful way to inform the general public about their professions and also potentially recruit new professionals to their ranks. Similarly, the IEEE aims to educate the general public about the importance of technology in society and recruit the next generation of engineers through its STEM educational and public relations efforts, both formally and through grassroots efforts.

Educational and grassroots advocacy efforts are of particular importance to internal auditing, since the general public often does not know what internal auditors do or why the internal audit profession is important. Promoting early business education that includes the basics of accounting and internal auditing is one area where The IIA could undertake both formal and grassroots efforts. This education would ideally begin in elementary or middle school and continue through high school, as students’ understanding of business evolves. Continuing The IIA’s efforts to develop and advise on internal audit curricula in universities and business schools is also crucial, but these efforts should include a professional advocacy component, advising internal audit students that advocating for their profession is expected and encouraged. Finally, The IIA must appeal to its membership and internal audit professionals worldwide to educate the general public — friends and families — about their work and current issues facing the internal audit profession. This three-pronged approach toward a) supporting early business education, b) incorporating professional advocacy into internal audit curricula at the higher education level, and c) encouraging grassroots efforts among internal audit professionals will help the general public better understand internal auditing and the critical role that it provides to organizations.

U.S. and International Internal Audit Requirements

Nothing has advanced job creation for the internal audit profession so much as the legislative changes of the last decade. While the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 (SOX) did not require internal audit functions for public companies, many organizations nonetheless added such functions in order to help them comply with Section 404 and the new requirement for Chief Executive and Financial Officers’ certifications regarding effective internal controls (Harrington). Following SOX, the NYSE introduced a
rule mandating the presence of an internal audit function in all NYSE-traded companies within a year of their listing (New York Stock Exchange Listed Company Manual). This new requirement greatly increased the need for internal audit professionals. While 80 percent of Fortune 1000 companies had internal audit functions prior to the NYSE rule’s effective date of October 2004, approximately half of the NYSE-traded companies modified their internal audit function and/or added staff to comply with the requirement (Harrington). NASDAQ-traded companies have not been subject to this same rule, but the NASDAQ identifies having an internal audit function as a best practice and proposed adding the same requirement in March 2013 before withdrawing the plan several months later (Harrington, Mont).

Internationally, the Common Body of Knowledge (CBOK) study was conducted in 2006 with the assistance of over 9,300 internal audit professionals working in 91 different countries (Burnaby and Hass). Several papers resulting from this study discussed the internal audit requirements in the largest of these 91 countries. In the United Kingdom, the Local Government Finance Act of 1982 instituted a requirement for an effective internal audit of each local government’s finances. Italy’s Corporate Governance Code of 2006 required organizations that issue stock to establish internal audit functions. While the UK, Belgium, and the Netherlands do not require internal auditing for public issuers of stock, they do recommend it (Burnaby and Abdolmohammadi). In the Asia-Pacific region, the five countries that were examined saw increases in the number of internal audit functions present in their organizations in recent years, although none of them specifically required internal auditing (Leung). In South Africa, the King Committee on Corporate Governance of 2002 put in place a requirement for all South African publicly listed companies to have internal audit functions in place. Enactment of the Public Finance Management Act of 1999 expanded this requirement to cover all public organizations. As a result, The IIA’s South African membership almost doubled from 2,516 in June 2003 to 4,874 in September 2006 (Marais).

While only a handful of countries were found to mandate internal audit functions for publicly listed and/or governmental organizations, and required adherence to The IIA’s International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (Standards) by extension, on average 82 percent of
respondents reported following The IIA *Standards* and Practice Advisories to some extent if not completely. All but one had adopted the Code of Ethics, with the one exception using its own local ethical code. The survey observed greater adoption of the *Standards* in countries such as the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, where internal audit functions have existed for a longer period than most of the other countries included in the survey (Burnaby and Hass). Interestingly, South African internal audit functions reported a higher level of adoption of The IIA *Standards* (94%), despite the internal audit profession only having been mandated in South Africa for four years at the time of the study. The *Standards* were heralded for providing “structure and support” to the new South African internal audit functions and professionals (Marais).

Based on the significant increases in internal audit professionals noted in the U.S. subsequent to the NYSE rule and in South Africa following that country’s legislation, regulations that require the presence of internal auditing in organizations appear to be effective in stimulating job creation and growth for the internal audit profession. Advocacy for political mandates in this area is thus all the more critical to ensure future growth of the profession.

**Prioritizing Advocacy Initiatives**

While all of the advocacy ideas noted are important, lobbying, grassroots efforts, and education appear to be the most critical, in that order. Given that internal auditing helps to improve controls and operations, more organizations should have their own internal audit functions. Lobbying political bodies and policy-making entities will help lead to additional mandates for internal audit functions and thereby support growth for the profession.

Next, grassroots efforts enlisting internal auditors to help others understand their work and why it is important are critical to improving the prestige of the profession, which will help attract additional internal audit professionals as well. These grassroots efforts would best be supported by a public relations campaign and scholarly literature encouraging internal auditors’ personal promotion of the profession in
their communities. Discussing the importance of advocacy in internal audit curricula would also help to enlist the newest members in promoting the profession.

Thirdly, expanding pre-college business education will help the general public to better understand how business organizations operate and how internal auditing supports the economy. This goal might be accomplished by partnering with other organizations such as the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) in order to develop and promote curricula for every level of schooling. Additional lobbying could be undertaken to potentially incorporate these new topics into the standard educational framework and pedagogy. With so many adults working in business and every individual impacted by the organizations that comprise the economy, key elements of business education should not be limited to institutions of higher education or to those students who elect to pursue coursework in business.

Reflecting back on my father’s career and on my interactions with other internal audit professionals, it seems that there are other aspects of the internal audit profession and work experience that could also be highlighted in The IIA’s and internal auditors’ advocacy efforts. For example, internal auditors’ work is much more consultative than the general public may realize. Internal audit professionals add value by assisting internal clients and the organization as a whole to improve their operations and controls. The most successful internal auditors excel at developing strong relationships across their organizations, which enables them to learn more that might help the organization and to be viewed as trusted advisors by their colleagues. Further, in contrast with external auditors, internal auditors write their own audit programs and can utilize both creativity and professional judgment in determining both what and how they audit. Returning to my childhood impression of my father’s work, the fact that internal auditors sometimes actually do identify individuals who are stealing from the organization or are otherwise not behaving ethically may lend a James Bond-like excitement and mystique to the role. For auditors within larger companies, a great deal of travel domestically and internationally is often part of the job as well, further adding to its appeal, particularly for students and younger professionals. The IIA
and internal auditors should consider advertising these additional selling points in order to attract more students and other workers to the field and also help the general public to better understand its work.

**Conclusion**

The IIA’s professional advocacy efforts to date have been admirable in their focus on educating lawmakers and policymakers about the value that internal auditing brings to organizations and the economy. The profession could further expand its efforts to promote mandates for internal audit functions in more organizations globally, to expand upon existing educational efforts and promote advocacy through existing internal audit curricula, and to educate the general public about its work via grassroots efforts. Much can be learned from other professions’ successful advocacy endeavors in all of these areas. It will be exciting to observe The IIA’s future advocacy efforts and the impact that they will have in heralding the importance of the internal audit profession to business organizations and to the worldwide economy.
References


“Encyclopedia of Business, 2nd Ed.,” http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Per-Pro/Professional-and-Trade-Organizations.html, accessed 13 Dec. 2014. (Note that rankings and figures presented in this paper were updated if more recent data was available.)


