

HOW TO CONVINCe YOUR BOSS TO PAY YOUR WAY (OR AT LEAST PART OF YOUR WAY) TO THE 9th ANNUAL FOCUS CONFERENCE

by *Bob Miglino RRT, MPS*

In this era of very tight budgets, how can you encourage your employer to pay for, or at least *partially* subsidize, your trip to the FOCUS conference this coming May 14-16, 2009? Here are some tips that can help you gain your employer's approval — and funds — to attend.

First and most importantly, provide a written plan to your boss to demonstrate (most impressively) what you will accomplish by attending the conference. This plan should include, amongst other things: meeting other professionals who may share expertise and resources, hearing about solutions that other organizations have instituted to solve a problem your department may be experiencing, learning about new clinical modalities, learning about new medications and/or new treatment options that might improve patient care outcomes or save money, (or both), learning about new equipment that might improve patient care or save money, gaining continuing education credits for recertification and, of course, learning things that you are then willing to come back with and *share* with your colleagues, (something that will also impress your boss, greatly).

Request to attend a conference early during the budget process but don't consider it too late if you did not. Explain the practical uses of the courses offered and how those uses apply to your job. Show how **you've** worked to minimize costs, for example, by sharing a hotel room, by doing your homework as far as airfares or by sharing travel expenses with colleagues (Focus actually runs a roommate bulletin board on its website foocus.com) Show your boss **all** that the FOCUS conference *includes* and how what FOCUS includes actually saves the institution money over the cost of sending you to another conference that doesn't include as much. (In reality, one of the biggest comments *about* the FOCUS conference from past attendees is indeed, what an extraordinary **value** the conference provides to its attendees.) Tell him or her that because of this value, this is the conference you've been "waiting to ask for".

If you think you'll be interviewing for a new job over the next few months, negotiate for conference funding - or at least *ask* about funding - before you accept a new position. Try hard to make annual conference funding a *part* of your compensation package in taking a job. Plant the seed with your employer early, that going to an annual conference to stay up to date is very

important to you and good for the institution.

Record details on the sessions you attended. Prepare a written synopsis of those lectures to give to your boss upon your return. Record information such as the speaker and lecture title, issues discussed and how you plan to use the information in your job when you return home from the conference.

Share what you learn with others. While at the conference, be on the lookout for ideas that you can pass along to your colleagues later. Tell your boss that you will be happy to present a synopsis of the conference or even a full-fledged in-service lecture to your co-workers upon your return. (a major "convincer" for most department heads/institutions). Invite *him or her* to that presentation and maybe spring for some refreshments to make it a special evening. Take lots of pictures while at the conference so as

to assemble a fun and interesting in-service upon your return.

Scour the handouts connected to or offered at, the conference. Pick up new books, pamphlets and calls for proposals for next year's conference. These tips will not only maximize conference knowledge but could also reinforce the importance of conferences to your boss. Bring these materials home to your boss after the conference, and of course, tell your boss **before** the conference that you will bring home materials to him/her. Emphasize the networking opportunities that can be gained by attending, i.e., with exhibitors, presenters and professionals in other organizations with similar services. Remind your boss that manufacturers exhibiting at the conference often have "show discounts" that can single-handedly make paying for your trip, worthwhile. For example, let's say your department is going to be buying a new blood gas machine or perhaps new ventilators. Often, the savings realized at the conference can more than pay for your going. You should also tap your present suppliers for help in attending. Department heads, for example can ask reps for a registration for either themselves or a therapist in the department. FOCUS offers reduced registration certificates to equipment reps and their companies exactly for this purpose, so, if your department just spent, or is about to spend, a lot of money with a company, don't be shy about inquiring about a gratis registration or two, to the FOCUS conference thru your sales rep. Decision makers such as managers espe-



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cially have the ability to “wrangle” a paid registration from a sales rep that they’ve done a lot of business with! Not only do those sales-reps get reduced-fee registrations, not only is the price of a reduced registration “small potatoes” in the context of the major sale they just made to you, but for them, the price of the reduced registration they purchased for you is totally deductible as a business expense!

Get your medical director involved. Ask him/her to write a letter/memo to your boss that urges him/her to send you to the conference from a “medical perspective” (difficult for an administrator to deny). Department Directors can also point to the Joint Commission requirement that states that at least the department’s manager should have relevant outside training opportunities provided to them, such as conferences.

And remember...in the very final analysis, your entire travel, lodging, food and registration fees involved in going to a professional conference directly related to your field, such as the FOCUS conference, are completely tax deductible. Thus, it may well be worth the investment in your own career to make the **personal** expenditure to attend, even if you cannot obtain financial help from your employer. As hard as it may be to do, we recommend that people put aside \$20 a week until the conference so that you’ll be half way there as regards having the funds necessary to attend. If you can then get at least **some** of the money from your employer, say, just the registration fee, with you picking up the rest of the expenses, you’ll be in good shape and able to attend. While on that note, also remember not to give up the ship just because they won’t pay your **entire** way. Ask them to pay at least **some** of the way if not all of it; perhaps just the registration fee or maybe just the travel expense with you picking up the rest (later deducting it on your tax returns.). Don’t be afraid to diplomatically point out that the institution has rarely or maybe even *never* sent you to a conference before (if that be the case) and so, your request is not excessive by any means.

Utilizing the above tips, will greatly increase your chance of getting at least **some** of the money needed to attend if not **all**. Remember, also, that in these tough times, our having the conference at Disney World in Orlando actually presents you with an **opportunity** to still have a family vacation that you might otherwise have to forgo in these tough times. Although still an expense, you and your family would probably not be able to “do” Disney as affordably as thru the FOCUS conference (Florida residents not included). We negotiated rooms at Disney for only \$129 per night and we negotiated up to *quad* occupancy for that same \$129 a night, rate. Staying at a Disney property also includes roundtrip transportation of you, your family and your luggage to and from the airport at no charge and free transportation to all of the parks including reduced pricing at those parks. All that Disney provides, combined with all that FOCUS will provide, does, really make for an extraordinary value! Follow these tips to the letter, be optimistic and provide a professional presentation of why you would like to go and you will greatly increase your chances of getting all or some of the funding necessary to attend. One you’re here you will love the conference and you will leave saying what 99.9% of previous attendees have said about the FOCUS conference, that is, that’s it’s a great conference and an extraordinary value. Good Luck in your efforts!

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In closing, it is important to mention one new pneumonia on the scene: severe acute respiratory syndrome. We know this one better by the name SARS, which first appeared in Asia in 2003. That year, the disease spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe and Asia before the global outbreak was contained. According to the World Health Organization, a total of 8,089 people became sick with SARS worldwide, and 774 died. Only eight confirmed SARS cases occurred in the U.S. during the epidemic.

SARS is caused by a coronavirus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). The primary mode of transmission appears to be through close person-to-person contact, most likely through respiratory droplets that are produced when a person coughs or sneezes. The virus also can spread through contact with contaminated objects or surfaces followed by touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.

Patients present with viral pneumonia symptoms. The common laboratory tests that appear to be abnormal in this disease are lymphopenia with a normal or low white blood cell count, elevated liver enzymes, elevated creatine kinase, elevated lactate dehydrogenase and prolonged activated partial thromboplastin time. Definitive diagnosis requires laboratory confirmation of the virus from respiratory specimens, blood and stool. Current treatment is supportive in nature.

Pneumonia is a disease that has been around for decades, but it still has the ability to present a challenge to the health care practitioner.

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