

Leadership Profile: *Sheldon I. Dorenfest*



Sheldon I.
Dorenfest

“Well, I put my pants on one leg at a time, I sometimes get angry at cab drivers in New York, and I sometimes spell ‘valuable’ with an ‘e.’” This is what Sheldon I.

Dorenfest thinks people should know about him. But there’s more...there’s much more.

Sheldon I. Dorenfest is the president of Sheldon I. Dorenfest & Associates, Ltd., which he started in 1976. When he entered the industry in 1969, most IT was in the acute care setting and in business applications. Clinical process was all manual and it took many steps to get each piece of information to all the right people and charts.

So, he fueled a vision for computerizing the patient record. By the late 70s the industry’s implementation of clinical IT was not going very well. And he feels that the industry is in even worse shape today because poor implementation of IT over the last two decades has convoluted, tangled, and made even more redundant the industry’s order execution and fulfillment processes.

“The latest technology is only valuable,” he says, “if it does something useful for you. Changing a large healthcare organization’s technology every few years has been a major problem for the industry, and what we really need to do is go back to the basics and remember that IT is a support tool, not an ‘end-all.’” He has been frustrated in the last few years by the industry not doing what he feels is the right thing with their IT investment decisions.

“But now I am excited,” says Dorenfest, “because I see a window opening to bring logic back to the industry and the decision-making process about how to use IT. I personally flourish when I can

influence my clients to understand what to do next that will produce business benefit for them.”

His renewed enthusiasm will keep Sheldon in the industry for awhile although he’s not sure for how long. “I frankly would have thought that by now, I would have moved on to other productive endeavors and would not have been focusing as much of my energy on my company and on the industry as I am right now, and in the near term, it looks like I will be increasing my focus and energy on the industry.”

In the long term, he has many things he’d like to do including writing books and traveling. “I know, at the same time,” says Dorenfest, “that the world is changing, and I am changing, so positioning one changing object against another changing object is a tough act of physics. So, I guess I am saying your guess is as good as mine, and we’ll just see what happens.”

He enjoys meditating, exercising vigorously, long walks, reading books, and solitude for reflection. “Solitude seems like a necessary ingredient to recharge my battery,” says Dorenfest, “for the reflection and activity required to do my job.” He also spends a lot of time on metaphysical subjects, alternative health care, spiritual beliefs, and ancient cultures.

He has a strong desire to help people grow. “Too often,” he says, “people limit themselves, and that frustrates me, and that probably is a major motivator for my wanting to help the industry the way I have over the years.”

He enjoys spending time with friends. “Although this past year,” he says, “has been a year that has been more

focused on my business and personal growth, so some of my friends may be wondering where I have been this past year, but I am coming back. You can let them know that.”

Sheldon shared a story that sums up his view of the state of the industry and his solution. “A friend of mine was visiting Chicago and had driven in one night quite late.

“He was up with all of us, and he went to bed about two in the morning, and he got a phone call from a friend in Denver, and he needed to see

this friend right away.

“He got up with only an hour’s sleep, and started driving. After driving for several hours, he saw a road sign that said ‘50 miles to Cleveland.’

“My friend was not very clear about geography, so he kept driving. A few hours later, he saw a road sign that said, ‘20 miles to Pittsburgh.’ Still not thinking enough, he kept driving until he saw a sign that said, ‘Philadelphia – 20 miles.’

“At that stage, he began to think that he should be in Denver already, and he pulled over to the side of the road and looked at his road map. He was able to make a correction by turning around and starting to drive in the right direction.”

“The healthcare industry is heading the wrong way,” warns Sheldon, “and if we do not turn around quick, we will create permanent damage to this industry, and we will have to rebuild from scratch or rebuild things side by side, both of which are too expensive and too damaging to the population.”

“The industry is at a crossroads and if it wants to get to Denver, it is going to need to turn around right now. Where it will be tomorrow depends on what road map we use today.” ★

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