

Global ambition | getting a seat at the table

“We have more work to do in this area, and much of this must be done by individual internal auditors.”

Richard Chambers, president and CEO of IIA Global

Whenever I travel, I meet internal auditors with a similar vision. The words vary, but the message is clear: “How can internal auditors get a seat at the table? What is IIA Global doing to help internal auditors become recognised and accepted as a part of senior management?”

We have more work to do in this area, and most of this must be done by individual internal auditors who are not yet seen as part of their organisation’s senior management team. The problem is that many of these people are unaware of all the steps necessary to achieve their vision.

Having a seat at the table is an admirable goal, but first it’s important to examine why you want to be there. Too often, internal auditors treat getting to the table merely as a sign of success. This is a mistake. We must be there for the right reasons, not because we hope that being with senior executives will make others view us as senior executives. A seat at the table is a means not an end and if you don’t prepare for it you may damage, rather than enhance, your career.

It’s also a mistake to view a seat at the table as a source of audit leads. If you leave your first management meeting with plans for an immediate audit of the operating unit discussed at the meeting, you may not be invited to the next one. You need to add value, not prevent others from talking freely.

And I mean add value – management will benefit from our being at the table only if we are prepared to share, not just to listen. It is similar to being guests at a dinner party: we want our hosts to invite us back. It helps if we bring something fresh, interesting and important to the discussion. Focus on how to

make operations better in the future, not on mistakes made in the past, and so provide not just hindsight, but also insight.

The table is not a training ground. We need to be able to discuss critical strategies and business risks facing our organisations. It is vital that we understand our organisation’s core business and are aware of both internal risks and external factors affecting our industry. If we don’t bring our own perspectives, we won’t add value. And we must be able to defend our views by ensuring we fully understand the discussion.

Most internal auditors can offer such valuable insights long before they are invited

“The table is not a training ground. We need to be able to discuss critical strategies.”

to the table, because getting there usually comes about through the relationships they’ve built. It’s not what we write in audit reports that gets us to the table – it’s what we do and how we interact with management every day. Senior executives will want us there if they respect us and see us as knowledgeable, trusted advisers. Cultivating



strong working relationships involves being aware of the issues keeping management awake at night. By the time most internal auditors are at the table, they no longer see management meetings primarily as sources of leads for audits because they are already fully informed on subjects likely to be discussed. Adding value at the table requires a different perspective from the one we use as internal control advisers. Most internal auditors can discuss internal controls for a new

strategic initiative, but when management discusses the feasibility of such an initiative controls may be just one facet of this. To act as senior management we must also add value to other parts of the discussion.

An important part of IIA Global’s strategic plan is to support internal auditors across the world in their quest to obtain a place at the table. We can advocate internal auditors and promote the value of internal auditing, but decisions over the scope of the role are made by organisations. Each internal auditor must therefore demonstrate the insight and capabilities to participate in their senior management team. Knowing what we want to accomplish and preparing diligently greatly increases our chances of getting there.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
 Richard Chambers writes a blog at www.theiia.org/blogs/chambers and tweets at [www.twitter.com/IIACEO](https://twitter.com/IIACEO).