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Chairperson's Corner: On Volunteering, Learning, and a Sense of Community

By Ricky Trachtman

A few years ago, I started on a path of volunteering to try to give back to an organization that had given much to me. By "much," I am not talking about the anxiety, sleepless nights, stress, heartburn, and coffee addiction that are the oh-so-common side effects of the exam process. Nor do I mean the joy that all those confused faces bring me after mentioning in a conversation that I am an actuary, which is then followed by, "You're a what?" by "much," I mean, all the knowledge, perseverance, and self-learning skills that I have acquired through the SOA, and most of all how it has given me my profession. This path of volunteering eventually brought me to Ben Wolzenski, who asked me to put my name down to become part of the Forecasting and Futurism Council. I had always been interested in forecasting techniques, so I agreed. Soon after, I was elected as a council member and became the secretary/treasurer. I did not know exactly what to expect of the council and the section as a whole, but I can tell you that what I have experienced during the last couple of years being part of the council, is something I never expected. I was completely surprised.

What I found is a group of very involved individuals who care deeply about learning and innovating. They are passionate about predictive analytics and the technology that surrounds it. These are people who have created an environment that welcomed questions, focused on sharing their knowledge, and inspired others to do the same. This is a group of people who are willing to provide their time, effort, and knowledge to the rest of us. While I knew that we had more than a council and more than a section, I did not know how to describe us. So I did what any reasonable member of the predictive analytics and futurism (PAF) section would do, I used technology to find the answer. I opened my browser and started to type words into a google search, words such as group, innovation, members, learning, teaching, welcoming of questions, and volunteering. Eventually, a common word keep coming up and that word was "community."

I then typed "community" into my google search and the first thing google brought back was references to the sitcom, "Community," which is a funny show, but not what I was looking for. Isn't Google supposed to know what I want to know all the time? I continued scrolling down the result page some more until I found definitions of the word community that confirmed my suspicions. The PAF is more than just a section. It is a community that supports and nurtures knowledge.

As such I want to thank the members of the council, the friends of the council, the section volunteers, our section specialist Jessica Boyke, our SOA staff partner Andy Peterson, and our board partner Joan Barrett, for making this community what it currently is. While being part of the council I have had the privilege to work with two great chairs, Doug Norris and Brian Holland. Thank you both for all your great work and encouragement.

This sense of community has made volunteering a rewarding activity from which I have received more than I can possibly give back. I have made friends, learned many things and gained experience in leadership that I can bring back to my day-to-day work. I hope this short note inspires and encourages you to volunteer and continue to help our section be the great success that it already is.

I would like to give a special thanks to our great newsletter editors, Dave Snell and Kevin Jones, for all the hard work they do so we can all enjoy this publication. ■

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