

### “A Game of Inches” Hits a Home Run!

The Stepping Stone published an article called “A Game of Inches” by Michael Braunstein in October 2008. Coach Braunstein wrote that, in business like in the game of baseball, often the tiniest of margins make the big difference in career success. To help actuaries understand the “small but significant” things in our work or relationships that make a big difference, the Management and Personal Development Section held two different interactive sessions—(1) at the SOA Health Meeting in June 2009 and (2) at the SOA Life and Annuity Meeting in May 2010.

Facilitated discussions at each session helped us to learn what makes the difference in success at work—those subtle, seemingly unremarkable, not so obvious little things that separate those who get the job, the promotion, the next cool project, etc. To help gain insights, we split into 3 groups by management level,

- First Level Manager
- Middle Manager
- Senior Manager.

We then asked attendees to identify those tiny extras that can make a difference when dealing with others from different levels in their organizations. We asked each group three questions.

1. What are the 3 small things that you try to pay attention to when dealing with managers from other levels? Why? (Small things that I try to pay attention to....)
2. What are the 3 small things that you appreciate from managers from these other levels? Why are they helpful? (Small things I appreciate....)
3. What are the 3 small things that managers from other levels should avoid when dealing with you? What problems do they cause? (Small things that managers should avoid.....)

So, what did we learn? Each group offered candid responses to the questions. Also, each session offered some similar as well as different insights from health actuaries and the life/annuity actuaries. By cross-referencing the comments, we learned

- what FIRST LEVEL MANAGERS pay attention to when dealing with MIDDLE MANAGERS, then
- what MIDDLE MANAGERS appreciate from FIRST LEVEL MANAGERS as well as
- what FIRST LEVEL MANAGERS should avoid when dealing with MIDDLE MANAGERS.

Using our cross-reference, we are also able to glean perspectives for Middle Managers and Senior Managers.

To view the cross-reference and gain insights for all responses, please refer to the SOA Management and Personal Development Section web page at [www.soa.org/mpd](http://www.soa.org/mpd), under Publications heading “Game of Inches”.

Following are examples of the insights we learned from the participants in the three interactive groups at the respective sessions of health and life/annuity actuarial leaders.

**Relationship: First Level Managers ↔ Middle Managers**

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|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ✓ FLMs pay attention to what MMs want and when.           | ✓ MMs appreciate FLMs to clarify questions and be concise.                                  |
| ✓ FLMs appreciate MMs positive and constructive feedback. | ✓ MMs pay attention to giving FLMs ongoing feedback, staying in touch, and being available. |
| ✓ FLMs want MMs to avoid micro-managing.                  | ✓ MMs want FLMs to avoid surprises.                                                         |

**Relationship: First Level Managers ↔ Senior Managers**

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ✓ FLMs pay attention to communication with SMs by asking questions.                   | ✓ SMs appreciate FLMs to communicate back on conflicts rather than whining.  |
| ✓ FLMs appreciate SMs approachability and recognition of who you are and what you do. | ✓ SMs pay attention to FLMs by taking time to chat and getting to know them. |
| ✓ FLMs want SMs to avoid overuse of Blackberry and not respecting others time.        | ✓ SMs want FLMs to avoid not asking themselves the questions first.          |

**Relationship: Middle Managers ↔ Senior Managers**

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| ✓ MMs pay attention to information keeping SMs in the loop.                                | ✓ SMs appreciate no surprises from MMs and early warning of problems.                                                               |
| ✓ MMs appreciate the political influence of SMs and a clear understanding of their agenda. | ✓ SMs pay attention to MMs understanding the problem—explaining issues, possibly making suggestions, and seeing them figure it out. |
| ✓ MMs want SMs to avoid jumping to solutions.                                              | ✓ SMs want MMs to avoid lobbying an issue in the hallway.                                                                           |

Please note that the above insights are representative examples from the volunteer attendees in our interactive sessions. A more complete study may offer different or additional perspectives.

We appreciate the leaders who joined our interactive sessions and the facilitators who helped encourage excellent participation. As we start another baseball season, we are reminded that business, like baseball, is truly “a game of inches”.

**Relationship: First Level Managers and Middle Managers**

<b>First Level Manager Responses</b>		<b>Middle Manager Responses:</b>	
<b>When communicating with Middle Managers, I pay attention to:</b>		<b>I appreciate from First Level Managers</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Anticipating their needs</li> <li>· Summarizing and having documentation – know your audience</li> <li>· Cross checking work</li> <li>· Not asking for guidance without pursuing on my own first</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Anticipate what they want – what questions might they have</li> <li>· Clear communication – inclusive</li> <li>· Double check your own work – no errors</li> <li>· Understand what they want – timeframe and deadlines</li> <li>· Speak up – don't be shy – aware of audience</li> <li>· Not spinning your wheels too much</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Enthusiasm</li> <li>· Honesty</li> <li>· Constructive feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Good communication</li> <li>· Willing to speak their minds</li> <li>· Clarify questions/make sure they're concise</li> <li>· Initiative; willingness to take ownership</li> <li>· Open communication – esp. are deadlines at risk?</li> </ul>
<b>I appreciate from Middle Managers:</b>		<b>When communicating with First Level Managers, I pay attention to:</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Support. Having my back.</li> <li>· Availability</li> <li>· Open Communication</li> <li>· Balancing work complexity with skill set, credit</li> <li>· Positive or constructive feedback</li> <li>· Coaching</li> <li>· Giving credit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Protect staff-go to bat – defend</li> <li>· Availability</li> <li>· Independence on work</li> <li>· No micromanaging</li> <li>· Constructive feedback</li> <li>· Timely feedback in the proper environment</li> <li>· Giving credit, when due, to senior management</li> <li>· Provide context, big picture</li> <li>· Provide clear expectations</li> <li>· Provide mentoring</li> <li>· Respect/trust the position</li> <li>· Show courtesy, engage in small talk, stay connected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Giving ongoing feedback</li> <li>· Clarifying roles in the project (yours vs. theirs)</li> <li>· Long term goals and development plans</li> <li>· Giving them autonomy and/or decision making ability</li> <li>· Giving them tools &amp; information.</li> <li>· Understanding what they need to succeed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Keep aware of feelings and morale</li> <li>· Stay in touch, preferably in person/be available</li> <li>· Directions, goals – clarify for them</li> <li>· ID right people for each job</li> <li>· Be sure you provide enough resources</li> </ul>
<b>I would like Middle Managers to avoid:</b>		<b>I would like First Level Managers to avoid:</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Micro managing.</li> <li>· Last second assignments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Micromanaging</li> <li>· Absorbing credit and deflecting blame</li> <li>· Unavailability</li> <li>· Unethical business practices</li> <li>· Different messages for different management levels</li> <li>· Not sharing information</li> <li>· Time mismanagement</li> <li>· Not leading by example</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Surprises</li> <li>· Delegating up</li> <li>· Emotions</li> <li>Output: lazy formatting, misspellings, print ranges not set, Heads up if being bypassed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Surprises</li> <li>· Problems brought in without offering a solution</li> <li>· Bringing in 1st drafts/unedited work for review</li> </ul>

**Relationship: First Level Managers and Senior Managers**

<b>First Level Manager Responses</b>		<b>Senior Manager Responses:</b>	
<b>When communicating with Senior Managers, I pay attention to:</b>		<b>I appreciate from First Level Managers</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Same stuff they listed for Middle managers, just x2</li> <li>· Sr mgmt are people, too</li> <li>· Get the big picture</li> <li>· Office politics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Preparation</li> <li>· Be able to defend your point of view</li> <li>· Communication – ask questions</li> <li>· Anticipate needs</li> <li>· Show confidence</li> <li>· Keep middle manager in the loop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Bring everyone coffee</li> <li>· Say hello to me – be outgoing</li> <li>· Be on time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Communicate back on conflicts rather than whining</li> <li>· Get to point</li> <li>· Come with solutions or at least an idea</li> <li>· Have opinions</li> </ul>
<b>I appreciate from Senior Managers:</b>		<b>When communicating with First Level Managers, I pay attention to:</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Approachability</li> <li>· Confidence in their decision</li> <li>· Boost morale</li> <li>· Open communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Role model</li> <li>· Non-business interaction</li> <li>· Recognition – who you are and what you do</li> <li>· Forward thinking</li> <li>· Solicit feedback for future of office</li> <li>· Having credibility</li> <li>· Seeing talent</li> <li>· Demonstrate work/life balance</li> <li>· Sharing personal stories/breaking down invisible wall</li> <li>· Showing they are “regular” persons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Start with Big Picture</li> <li>· Make sure everyone has a business card</li> <li>· Take time to chat - get to know them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· How to deal with errors</li> <li>· Exam progress – reinforce importance</li> <li>· Talk to each other, not just e-mails</li> <li>· Are they comfortable coming to you directly</li> <li>· Help with weaknesses</li> <li>· How do they communicate the best?</li> </ul>
<b>I would like Senior Managers to avoid:</b>		<b>I would like First Level Managers to avoid:</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Poor character issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· All of the above (list from Middle Managers) and...</li> <li>· Overuse of Blackberry</li> <li>· Intimidation</li> <li>· Not respecting others’ time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· CC everyone on email</li> <li>· Lobby an issue outside of chain of command</li> <li>· Missing page numbers, references, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Not asking yourself the questions first</li> <li>· Droning on</li> <li>· Not having things checked out (peer review)</li> <li>· Granular details</li> <li>· Being on the phone/internet all day</li> <li>· Not trying to resolve with middle manager first</li> <li>· Not figuring out how to explain something before talking about it</li> <li>· Not having milestones</li> </ul>

**Relationship: Middle Managers and Senior Managers**

<b>Middle Manager Responses</b>		<b>Senior Manager Responses:</b>	
<b>When communicating with Senior Managers, I pay attention to:</b>		<b>I appreciate from Middle Managers</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· My appearance</li> <li>· The sr mgmt's style..do they like exec summary or all the detail</li> <li>· Understanding the sr mgmt and appreciating them personally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Do they understand?</li> <li>· Keep them apprised of critical issues/problems</li> <li>· Try to think like your manager/"manage up"</li> <li>· What level of detail, what content do they want or expect?</li> <li>· Information/keep you in loop</li> <li>· Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Polished presentations that can go to the CEO</li> <li>· Link to files rather than out on network somewhere</li> <li>· Acknowledge that they own it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· No surprises – early warning of problems</li> <li>· Think outside box - new ideas</li> <li>· Perspective on issues</li> <li>· Good completion rate</li> <li>· Enthusiasm</li> <li>· Busiest often best</li> <li>· Help with priorities</li> <li>· Know names of spouses and kids – personal info shows caring</li> </ul>
<b>I appreciate from Senior Managers:</b>		<b>When communicating with Middle Managers, I pay attention to:</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Political influence (presence of) ..a clear understanding of their agenda</li> <li>· Decisions and rationale for them</li> <li>· Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Room to operate</li> <li>· Feedback</li> <li>· Accepting bad news with a good attitude</li> <li>· Ownership of project</li> <li>· Welcome feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Big picture context</li> <li>· Check workload – are they delegating, engaging on priorities</li> <li>· Proactively give an update – things on your desk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Understanding the problem. (Expect them to understand). Explain issues, possibly make suggestions, see them figure it out.</li> <li>· Make sure it is done right and is complete, have checklist, instill importance</li> <li>· Read as client – accurate &amp; complete. Make it simple so understandable</li> <li>· Be understanding of conflicts</li> <li>· Be available</li> </ul>
<b>I would like Senior Managers to avoid:</b>		<b>I would like Middle Managers to avoid:</b>	
<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>	<b>Health Meeting - June 2009</b>	<b>Life &amp; Annuity Meeting - May 2010</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Lack of respect</li> <li>· Micromanaging</li> <li>· Public correction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Surprises</li> <li>· Not listening</li> <li>· Jumping to solutions</li> <li>· Dictating a decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Lobby an issue in the hallway</li> <li>· Blaming their direct reports or others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Don't go to someone else</li> <li>· Bring errors to forefront</li> <li>· Not having a solution</li> </ul>