

“Promoting You!” - SCF Section sponsors successful workshops at Spring Meetings
by John W. Hadley, FSA, MAAA

“I don’t like to boast!”

This was one of the first comments made at the opening of our first session (“Promoting You: Becoming a Self-Marketing Machine”) in Anaheim, which was attended by about 100 actuaries. This is a frequent refrain we hear when conducting workshops on how to promote yourself EFFECTIVELY. In fact, one FSA told us that “most actuaries instinctively abhor the whole idea of promotion because we believe that everything, including our own professional worth, should be evaluated on its merits....we need to understand why this [self-promotion] is necessary...”

In this two-part interactive workshop we presented not only why its vital to market yourself, but also demonstrated practical techniques for going about it in a way that doesn’t make you come across like a used-car salesman! We covered the soup-to-nuts techniques for being an extraordinary influencer by covering three key areas: Psychology, Strategy and Skills.

We began by asking “What is the biggest reason people fail to achieve their goals?” It boils down to them getting in their own way via their limiting beliefs. With the help of film clips from “The Matrix” the group identified the characteristics of an influencer with a resourceful psychology. What one thinks (or believes) will directly impact how they feel, which in turn impacts the actions they take (or don’t take). Psychology is 80% of the battle when it comes to success, the other 20% is mechanics. We ended up this section by taking the group through an exercise where they identified their limiting beliefs and replaced them with empowering ones.

Next we turned to networking techniques, working through what to do (and what not to do) to be truly effective at expanding and using your network, whether for business development, career growth or a job search. Most business owners and consultants intuitively recognize the value of the “30 second elevator pitch.” Our experience is that these are frequently executed very poorly, at least in part because they are too long. We worked with the participants to create their own Marketing Headline: a 10 to 15 second powerful marketing message designed to generate attention, interest and a curiosity to know more about what the influencer does.

We opened the second workshop (Promoting You: Clinching The Deal) with a discussion of the dos and don’ts of selling yourself in writing. We demonstrated this visually with specific examples, including a particularly lackluster Engagement Bio used by a principal at a major actuarial consulting firm (the names and details were changed to protect the innocent...or guilty!). One of the keys is to always focus on accomplishments instead of duties, and to relate them to the value produced for your client.

The final portion of our workshop revealed the secrets to hitting a home run at every influencing opportunity. It has been said that “all buying decisions are based on emotion, but justified by logic.” Those who are the most influential appeal to both logic and emotion. This is where we often find resistance in the audience – as actuaries, we are conditioned to operate like Mr. Spock

from Star Trek and ignore the emotion. Our final exercise – ‘the rule of three’ – let participants practice a very simple technique for getting down to that emotional level where they can create the rapport and understanding that significantly increases their influence.

The pair of back-to-back workshops seemed to deliver the intended message as shown by these comments from one of the many actuaries who stayed for both:

“The session was very informative and thought-provoking. The interactive exercises were excellent...This was a great session to help actuaries promote themselves. It serves the purpose of expanding actuaries into non-traditional roles.”

Editor’s note: John West Hadley, FSA, MAAA provides professional career counseling for actuaries in Somerville, NJ. You can reach him at JWH@johnhadleyassociates.com. He and Dave Miller, another professional coach, led the successful workshops: “Promoting You!” at both of the Spring meetings. For those SCF Section members who are interested in more of John and Dave’s advice, the SCF section is looking to sponsor web-casts based on the workshop later in the 2004.