



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Actuaries Awake!

by Daniel L. Shinnick

Imagine what would have happened, if when Paul Revere and his companions rode through the countryside shouting "The British are coming, the British are coming!" that the minutemen said "don't bother me, I'm a farmer"—and then rolled over and went back to sleep ... we'd be playing cricket and eating Bangers and Mash.

Over the last decade I have heard SOA president after SOA president sound the clarion call that we must change to maintain/recapture our relevance in the marketplace. In the technical world, we are in danger of being replaced by financial engineers. In senior management, MBAs, lawyers and marketers are replacing us. But the rank-in-file actuary seems reluctant to change. We seem to be happy in our little cubicles—just like the frog in the pot of water that is slowly being heated to a boil. If we do not wake up to the changes we need to make and individually take action, our profession will become much less relevant and our job security will continue to disappear.

In 2003, the Society of Actuaries conducted a survey of our members and employers in the financial services industry. The research gave great insight to what others think of us, areas where we are seen as strong and areas where we need to improve.

Employers (and actuaries) think we are very strong at:

- Being ethical
- Quantitative skills
- Solving complex problems
- Financial assessment and reporting

Employers (and actuaries) think we are weak at:

- Communicating
- Focusing on the big picture
- Being proactive
- Being bold, taking informed risks
- Business acumen

We certainly should continue building on our strengths through our examination program, job experiences and continuing education. In my opinion, the SOA and its members have done a good job building technical skills and maintaining ethical standards.

However, as a profession and as individuals we need to recognize that our current strengths are only table stakes. To thrive, we must bring more than ethics and technical skills to the table. We must learn to communicate effectively and participate in running our organizations.

To help actuaries develop these skills, the Management and Personal Development Section over the last five years has offered actuaries over fifty sessions on communication, people management, general business management, interpersonal skills and career management.

In 2004, we will offer sessions on self-marketing, building a winning culture, business savvy, thinking like a CEO and a disciplined approach to product development. We will also be working with other sections to offer tailored development sessions at their seminars.

As actuaries, we need to be proactive and improve our non-technical skills. It is critical that each of us takes ownership of our own development and we commit to developing the skills required for success. At your next SOA meeting, seriously consider attending at least one Management and Personal Development session.

Actuaries Awake! Take action. The financial engineers are coming! The CPAs are coming! The MBAs are coming! ☐



Chairperson

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