



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Hit The Ground Running In Your New Position

by John West Hadley, FSA

(This article is part two of a three-part series. Part one was published in the April 2004 issue of The Stepping Stone, and covered practical tips for hitting a home run in interviews. Part three will focus on navigating the roadblocks to achieving your career potential.)

OK, you've successfully navigated the interview process and secured the job offer or promotion you sought. Now you can put aside all those interview skills and forget about selling your achievements for a few years, and just relax and simply enjoy the fruits of your labor, right?

Definitely not! It takes most people a year or more to fully integrate into a new job or company, and to become fully effective in that new environment. But you want to do it much sooner, and really knock the socks off your new employer or boss! To do that requires that you use many of the skills you mastered during the search process, but to apply them in a different way.

For example, most people assume that when they accept a job offer, the interview process is over. However, during a job interview, a prospective employer is trying to both assess and impress you so he or she can fill the opening with the best person. Sharing fully the potential pitfalls of the new job and the company culture might work against that. Now that you're part of the team, everyone will be much more willing, in some cases even anxious, to share the negatives more fully. It's critical that you embark on your own series of mini-interviews to uncover and avoid the potholes that have tripped up past employees so that you can truly excel in your new role. This is what I call "getting the full story."

In "getting the full story," a key area to explore is how your predecessor operated. Ask

your boss why that person left, what things he or she was particularly good at, and areas that could have been improved upon. Get your boss brainstorming on anything that he or she would change about how the job is done, priorities, emphasis, etc. And make sure to explore exactly how the boss likes the relationship to work—for example, weekly status reports to brief him or her on everything in detail, or just occasional meetings to cover the essentials. Your new manager may never think to tell you some of the little things that he liked about how your predecessor operated, so getting clear on what works and what doesn't work for the boss is critical to making that very strong initial impression.

Of course, there is much more to do, but this will start the process of cementing your relationship with your new boss. Setting clear expectations in both directions is critical; being on a different page than your manager is the most effective way to sabotage a new relationship, and it can be very difficult to recover from that!

Don't forget to also interview your peers and especially those you will be supporting in other departments. Make sure you find out exactly what they felt worked well and what could be improved on in the way your predecessor operated and how he supported them. Explore their needs, the relationship they had with your predecessor and your unit, and what they would like to see from the "new guy."

Your goal in the first few months of your new position should be to maximize your connections with everyone: your boss, your boss's superiors, your peers, your subordinates, etc. You will be making a long series of first impressions, and you want to make the most of them. It's much easier to get a relationship off



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on the right foot than to try to do damage control on what went wrong!

Finally, you want to start to position yourself for promotion from day one. How can that make sense? After all, didn't I just start my new job? Isn't it way too early to start worrying about my next move?

No! Earning a promotion isn't something that happens in a day. It requires a proven track record, so that what you do starting on the first day in a new job will impact your future career progress and how quickly you

achieve it. And remember, if you don't have a goal, any path will get you there!

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If you are the most brilliant technical actuary and cannot explain the results to your audience in a language that they understand, then you have failed. The assignment is incomplete and your work is irrelevant if you have no audience.

When you have finished a piece of your work and communicate the results, do not ever consider it a "reporting job"; rather, it is always a leadership opportunity.

In fact, everything that you do is a leadership opportunity. Leaders and those seeking relevance have many things in common, including:

- Passion and energy
- Constant and continual learning
- Courage to step out and do something new, and to add unique value
- Development and practice of soft skills—social interaction, management, communication and presentation skills in particular
- Ability to inspire those around you
- Discipline to execute flawlessly
- A higher personal standard for yourself than one that could be set by others

How important is relevance, leadership and personal development to you? Are your skill sets consistent with needs of the past, or are your skills relevant for tomorrow?

The Management & Personal Development Section of the Society of Actuaries is here to help you, and our objectives are to:

- Provide tools to facilitate personal career development
- Provide results-oriented skills and knowledge for current and developing managers
- Build a bridge from technical knowledge to decision making and its implementation
- Develop educational opportunities and provide resources for all actuaries who strive to become more effective managing members within their business organizations
- Offer opportunities to network, enhance management practices and experience professional feedback.

Get involved and learn to lead—RELEVANCE will be certain to follow! □

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