



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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To Better Communication

by Vincent G. Mace, Jr.

Communication skills are important for actuaries. This message appears frequently in articles in our publications and in various sessions at our meetings. Not only do we tell ourselves that communication skills are important, our customers tell us this as well. The following comments were found in job descriptions on the Job Link section of the Society's Web site:

- Must have strong verbal and written communication skills.
- Proven success in analyzing medical claims data, recognizing improvement opportunities, developing potential solutions and communicating to internal and external customers.
- Excellent oral, written and communication skills and the ability to present technical information to nontechnical audiences is highly desired.
- Demonstrated outstanding communication skills and a successful track record of individual and team performance are required.
- Strong oral and written communication skills.
- Strong human relations and communications skills are needed.
- Excellent oral communication skills.

Are the following hackneyed actuarial jokes based on unfounded stereotypes?

In Canada, there is a group of people who refuse to speak English. They're called separatists and tend to live in Quebec. In the United States, they're called actuaries.

Actuaries are people who skipped the first six grades of school when all the other kids were learning short words.

Question: How do you recognize an extroverted actuary?

Answer: When speaking to you he looks at your shoes and not his own.

Do you maintain eye contact with your audience? Do you use short words, avoid jargon and keep your sentences concise? Do you tailor your presentations to the audience?

The following is from Toastmasters International's Web site (www.toastmasters.org):

"Toastmasters International is a nonprofit organization that has been around for nearly 80 years and offers a way to practice and hone the communication and leadership skills of its members. A Toastmasters club is a 'learn-by-doing' workshop in which men and women hone their skills in a comfortable, friendly atmosphere. A typical club has 20 to 40 members and meets for about one hour weekly or bi-weekly to learn and practice public speaking techniques. Membership fees are minimal; total annual fees are usually less than \$75.

There is no instructor in a Toastmasters club. Instead, members evaluate one another's oral presentations. This evaluation process is an integral component of the program. Besides taking turns delivering prepared speeches and evaluating those of other members, Toastmasters give impromptu talks on assigned topics. They also develop listening skills, conduct meetings, serve as officers in various leadership roles and learn parliamentary procedure.

Instruction is provided by a series of manuals giving speaking assignments designed to develop specific speaking skills. The basic manual, provided in the new member



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(continued on next page)

To Better Communication • continued from prior page

kit, uses a series of 10 speaking assignments to instill a basic foundation in public speaking. When finished with the first speech manual, members can select from among 15 advanced manuals to develop speaking skills that are geared to specific interests. They are: Public Relations, Specialty Speeches, The Entertaining Speaker, Speaking to Inform, The Discussion Leader, Speeches by Management, The Professional Speaker, Persuasive Speaking, Technical Presentations, Communicating on Television, Storytelling, Interpretive Reading, Interpersonal Communication, Special Occasion Speeches and Humorously Speaking.”

This may seem like an overly slow process when there are short seminars on public speaking and various college courses designed to teach the necessary techniques. There is no shortage of books and articles on the topic and online instruction is also available.

What is the advantage of Toastmasters?

The club environment provides a social support system to practice the skills necessary for effective communication in a structured format. There is the added benefit of having the opportunity to receive immediate, valuable feedback on delivery and other criteria as well as learning to evaluate and critique the presentations of others. To achieve their best performance, athletes work with coaches, and so should speakers.

To find an appropriate Toastmasters club, the first step is to go to <http://www.toastmasters.org>. The site provides a search function where you can find clubs near you. Most clubs are open to all and welcome visitors. Some have a special interest or are limited to members of a specific organization, but the Web site listings will tell you if that is the case. Different clubs have different styles, so sample a few until you find one that meets your communication goals and help stamp out the image of the incomprehensible actuary. □

PIMA Announces New Award

The Professional Insurance Marketing Association (PIMA) has established a new award called the Product and Process Innovative Marketing Award—or P2IMA. PIMA’s Product and Process Innovative Marketing Award competition, which is co-sponsored by the SOA’s Nontraditional Marketing Section, is open to all PIMA and SOA Nontraditional Marketing Section members. Entries will be judged equally on three critical elements: originality, salability and profitability. The product must have been introduced on or after January 1, 2001, and have involved a member of PIMA or the SOA in its development. Both insurance products and processes that facilitate insurance sales are eligible.

The entry fee is \$95. Entrants must be either PIMA members or SOA Nontraditional Marketing Section members. Members of the SOA who are not Nontraditional Marketing Section members may join the section by completing the application form that can be found on the SOA Web site at <http://www.soa.org/ccm/content/?categoryID=305005>. Click on the “Join a Section” link.

Membership in the Nontraditional Marketing Section costs \$20. The winner will receive an invitation to the PIMA conference in February 2005, a trophy and publicity within both PIMA and the SOA.

More information is available at the Nontraditional Marketing page of the SOA Web site at <http://www.soa.org/ccm/content/?categoryID=340001> or by calling PIMA at 817-569-PIMA. □