



the stepping .stone

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Strategy for Leadership Effectiveness

by David Wolfskehl

Leaders know that having a long-term strategy is what makes them successful. However, since long-term strategic issues take the longest to impact the organization measurably, they are often the hardest to move forward.

Meetings that deal with day-to-day client opportunities or the immediate pressures of the month's or quarter's numbers, all make it very easy to ignore spending time on long-term strategic projects. So often other people put priorities on the leader's plate, leaving very little time for the things that will make the organization successful in the long term.

I have never spoken to a leader who does not understand that working on long-term strategic issues is what will keep them successful. These same leaders will then ignore those issues in order to address the more immediate fires that occur in their organization. It is a vicious circle of not taking care of the long-term strategic issues, which causes more fires to occur, which then prevents the leader from spending time on those long-term priorities. Leaders who are experiencing this understand the consequences of this cycle, but still have a hard time of getting out of it.

I have developed a simple, three-step process in order to break the cycle.

1. Identify & Quantify. Identify the three most important long-term issues you are facing. Quantify

what these opportunities are worth and the consequences of not moving forward with them. This step helps you understand why it is important to address these issues, even if it means making them a higher priority than the current fire.

2. Schedule. Most executives rarely schedule any strategic time other than an end-of-year strategy session. You must schedule time to work on strategic issues on a regular basis. At the very least it should be bi-weekly; usually 90 minutes is enough to have a huge impact over time. Often times the next step to move a project forward can be as simple as an e-mail or phone call, but the entire project will be at a standstill until that is done.

3. Create Accountability. As a coach, it is my role to make sure that the leaders are spending their time on the most important or impactful projects. Make sure that someone in or outside of your organization is holding you accountable.

Today's fires are caused by yesterday's decisions. To be a true strategic leader, make sure you are spending the time necessary today to make your organization move in a positive direction for tomorrow.

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Dig into Challenges for Career and Business Growth

by John West Hadley

In the October issue of *The Stepping Stone*, I talked about using self-appraisals to raise your visibility and accelerate your career growth. Today I'd like to talk about another way to put your career or consulting business on the fast track: digging into challenges.

When was the last time you had a serious discussion with your boss about the challenges he or she faces? Do you really understand what keeps your manager up at night, and exactly why that is? If so, you are poised to become a powerful ally in whatever matters most to him or her.

My experience is that few of us think to do that. Or if we do, we don't dig very deeply.

It's not enough to understand that your superior is worried about revenue growth. That doesn't give you much to work with, nor does it really tell you what's going on. You want to understand what's behind that. For example:

- Why is revenue growth the biggest concern?
- What type of revenue growth is of most concern—new or established markets, new or old products or product lines, large or small customers, certain target sectors, etc.?
- How is the problem showing up? Is it that sales are showing signs of slowing overall? Is it the impact of the general economy? Are the most profitable target markets showing the greatest sluggishness? Is it a concern about the future that hasn't yet materialized in current numbers?
- What symptoms and factors are behind the problem?
- What is the problem costing the company? The department? Your boss personally?

The further down you dig, the deeper the perspective you get, and the more your boss sees you as both very interested in his or her issues, as well as someone who asks insightful, penetrating questions. This will also position you in the best possible way

to contribute to the solutions, and to shape your own work priorities to better align with what matters most to your superiors.

There's also an interesting phenomenon that occurs. Often just asking these deeper questions gives the person you are asking new insights into the problems. Even if you don't have a lot to contribute to inform the discussion, you often help lead them down productive avenues, and you will get some credit in their eyes just from that.

Don't let this process stop with your boss. Get into the habit of digging into challenges deeply with colleagues, people of influence in other departments, networking contacts, and potential buyers of your products or services. The more you do it, the more natural it will become, and the more people will see you as someone truly interested in helping them with their own issues.

You will be surprised at how much you can raise your personal stock—and truly help people in the bargain—if you just get into the habit of digging deeply into challenges! ●



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The Danger (and Opportunity) of the Economic Crisis

by Paula Hodges



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The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis'. One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger—but recognize the opportunity.

- John F. Kennedy

In my inaugural Chairperson's Corner, I can't avoid the "elephant in the room"—the economic crisis. Every individual, every organization, every section in the SOA is touched in some way by the changes in the financial world today. The Management and Personal Development Section is not immune. With the uncertain times ahead, it is a combination of our knowledge, our expertise and our ability to effectively manage change that will bring us through the crisis.

In translation:

$p_x = f(\text{Education, Experience, Execution})$

Although it is subject to endless debate, many feel that the crisis was brought about due to lack of planning for risk. As such, it seems that actuaries are in a key position to facilitate solutions to the crisis. The SOA exam process provided you with Education; your work history provides the Experience; and your ability to Execute is dependent on your management and personal skill level. The development of these skills is the very focus of the mission of the Management and Personal Development Section. Our mission is "to plan, implement and actively promote management and business skill development for members"*.

If you're currently managing staff, whether they are professional actuarial staff, administrative support or other people in your organization; If you have influence over other people and the type of work they do; If you are dependent on other organizations as your clients—Then you've certainly noticed that your job today is not 'business as usual'. Your people are worried about their jobs; they're worried about their friends' jobs; some of them are worried about their ability to secure financing for their home.

Staying on top of the latest developments in business and technical methods will be important in solving problems, but it will not be enough. You may be finding that a large part of your day is devoted to listening, reassuring and coaching the people around you. It's quite likely that you don't have all the answers. Even so, your people need coaching to help them manage their careers—whether that means improving in a current role, or ensuring that they are prepared to find a new role in this crazy new world.

Even if you're not managing staff, it is always wise to nurture your own personal skills. You need to know how to manage change; how to build a network that you can utilize both in good times and when you're in crisis; how to solve technical problems and then clearly communicate the issue and resolution to management. If you nurture these soft skills, you'll find it much easier to land on your feet if you become displaced in the current shuffle.

How does the Management and Personal Development Section help? We work to provide you with your personal development toolkit. One part of this toolkit is this newsletter.

- You can also access historical issues of *The Stepping Stone* on our Web site.
- We host several sessions at the SOA Spring Meetings and the SOA Annual Meeting, providing training on various management topics.
- We're in the process of building an informational portal on our Web site, directing you to recent executive books and book reviews.
- We have an exciting new offering, starting in May 2009. We're going to bring you, in partnership with the Financial Reporting and Product Development Sections, a Business School for Actuaries, a seminar that will follow the Life Spring Meeting next May in Denver. The primary topics will be change management

and conflict resolution. More information is on page 19 of this newsletter.

In short, our section is stepping up to help you meet the challenges of today. If you have suggestions on how we can work harder for you, please contact

any member of the Management and Personal Development Council. We want to arm you to be ready to face both the danger and the opportunity that the economic crisis presents! ●

* The mission statement for the Management and Personal Development Section is posted on the SOA Web site under *Professional Interests: Sections*.

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Managerially Speaking: The Power of Empowerment

by Marcel Gingras



Marcel Gingras is an actuary who retired in 2008 after a career as an executive in the insurance and benefits consulting industries. He is the author of the book *Managerially Speaking—A Common Sense Approach to Business Leadership*. He can be reached at marcel.gingras@cogercoco.ca

Although it may sound phonetically funny, one of the most powerful tools at the disposal of managers is the power of empowerment. It is one of the ways that managers can really add value to the organization—enlisting large numbers of people to behave as if they owned the company rather than blindly following orders. Yet, many leaders and managers do not understand the true meaning of empowerment or don't know how to really empower people. This article is an attempt to discuss the concept and practical ways to apply it.

WHAT IS EMPOWERMENT?

The dictionary defines the word 'empower' to mean 'to give power or authority to; authorize'. In simple words, it is to transfer the authority to act to somebody else. In a work environment, empowerment is a transfer of authority to subordinates to make decisions and take initiative in order to conduct the business more effectively. It is much deeper than simply authorizing people to sign checks or authorize clearly defined transactions. It has to do with sharing a meaningful portion of the action with other people in the organization. A lot of managers are not comfortable with this latter part, as it is not very well defined.

HOW DO YOU EMPOWER PEOPLE?

Empowering people requires quite a bit more than just telling people that they should feel empowered. Empowering people in a meaningful way requires a lot of hard work and it does not happen overnight. It has to become a way of life in a disciplined environment where all the players understand their roles and the boundaries of empowerment. In my view, to create an empowered environment, the following elements are needed:

1. A shared vision and mindset, so people are not left guessing the leader's expectations.
2. A shared mindset that is not the sole creation of its leader but rather the sum total of everything that is good within the organization.

3. Ongoing communications so people understand what is an acceptable range within a continuum of reasonable solutions.
4. A focus on results, not just actions. People must be made to feel like owners and entrepreneurs despite the fact that large organizations need structure to operate effectively.
5. Multiple solutions. For most leaders, empowering people means being prepared to widen the tolerance zone of what is acceptable. Forcing people to land on a single solution representing THE solution favored by the leader is not conducive to empowerment.
6. Tolerance for some mistakes, especially mistakes made because people are trying hard. It does not mean that tolerance should extend to sloppiness. However, mistakes need to be used as coaching opportunities to enhance a shared mindset.
7. A funnel perspective. Empowerment should be looked at as a funnel. Initially, it has to be wider as it is difficult for people to guess what is within the tolerance zone. As people get more accustomed to working together, the tolerance zone will narrow.
8. Reinforcement. When people act in an empowered way, they need to be told that the leader is happy with the way they are acting. This can be a very strong message.
9. An incentive compensation plan that is aligned to support the vision of empowerment, so people are rewarded for running a piece of the business as opposed to following instructions.

THE ULTIMATE TEST—OR, WHEN THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD

Most managers I have dealt with are generally supportive of empowering their people and they genuinely try to do so. However, the real test is when people who have been empowered do not deliver in a manner deemed acceptable or when actions being taken do not conform entirely to the



views of the leaders. This is typically when you see who can talk about empowerment and who really means it. I want to share a few ideas and provide a real-life example.

1. Empowering people can be a trial-and-error process. Initially, people lack the exposure to determine precisely what is going to be acceptable. So, it may not work all the time and it may require some adjustment.
2. In my view, expecting people to come up with the only solution acceptable to the manager is not empowerment; it is called politics and it is counterproductive. I see solutions as being a range of potential courses of action as opposed to a discrete point. Leaders who don't see it that way are generally not very successful at empowering their people.
3. It is important not to confuse empowerment and anarchy. Empowerment is not a license to act outside generally accepted boundaries and it is not the authority to disregard what is happening outside the person's primary area of responsibility.
4. Empowering people does not remove the responsibility to have controls in place; however, controls need to be on results as opposed to day-to-day actions. Needless to say, results are more than just bottom-line results. They must include meeting compliance, internal audit reviews and other internal controls.

When I speak about empowerment, I always remember the time one of our senior people had discussed the possibility of closing down an area in our office that had been set aside as a lunchroom with outside catering. It went from a potential course of action discussed at a management meeting to an e-mail announcement to all employees with no prior communication to the senior team, including myself. I had a friendly chat with the person to determine what had happened and his reaction was that we needed to clarify his area of authority as he felt empowered to do what he did. I was able to retrieve

a note where I had specifically requested that any such initiative should follow its own due diligence process and should have a proper implementation plan; hence this was a short discussion, as this had nothing to do with empowerment. We ended up with a major problem with our employees and luckily we were eventually able to extricate ourselves from the problem. Extricating ourselves was the easy part; the difficult part was to do it in a manner that would save face for the executive and would not send the signal that people around me were not really empowered.

SOME ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Before concluding, I would like to share the following observations, presented in no specific order of importance:

1. It almost goes without saying that you need the right people around you to feel comfortable empowering people; hence, selecting the right people comes before empowerment.
2. If you inherit an operation where people were not empowered to act under previous leadership, there may be a reshuffling of the deck; i.e., some very good people will emerge from the group and some others who had done well will struggle.
3. Some people can't be empowered. They might say they want to, however they may have grown comfortable operating under tight guidelines and will be unable to cope with this new freedom to act.
4. If you inherit an organization that has not been operating at a satisfactory level, you may need to postpone full empowerment for a while; people selection and cohesive mindset creation should come first as initially people may be incapable of guessing the right direction and an acceptable range of solutions.
5. Sometimes leaders may have to allow actions that they may not feel entirely comfortable with in order to send the right message around. A group reporting to me had decided to change

... expecting people to come up with the only solution acceptable to the manager is not empowerment; it is called politics and it is counterproductive.

Empowering people is one of the most powerful ways to obtain performance; however, it requires a lot of work before it is effective.

their titles to reflect more closely what they did and how they wished to portray themselves in the marketplace. Titles became things like ‘Chief Imagination Officer’ for the VP of Marketing and Chief Excitement Officer for the head of the division, etc. I can’t say that I was entirely thrilled with the idea at first; however, the market loved the creative titles. More importantly, I wanted to send the message that it was OK for people to be somewhat unconventional in an otherwise very conventional environment as long as we all understood that meeting business objectives was critical. Titles were just an instrument to get there. In the end, I did not care what titles were, as long as we performed.

6. Although there may be an impression that empowerment operates at the individual level, it is probably even more important at the team level.
7. Empowerment works better in non-political environments. In political environments, people are too concerned with watching their backs and avoiding mistakes; reducing politics is almost a must before empowering people will produce optimal results.
8. Moving into an empowered type of environment will make some managers feel uncomfortable; good leaders will likely love it as it will allow them to leverage their team, but weak leaders may well feel that they are losing control. This issue should be addressed with these managers.
9. Finally, empowerment should be looked at as a key ingredient in creating pride. People will feel more pride in results if they feel they own a piece of the action as opposed to simply executing somebody else’s master plan.

CONCLUSION

Managing and leading is a multi-faceted undertaking. There are many tools available to leaders to influence how they can optimize the performance of people under their responsibility. There is no single element that can work in isolation of the rest. Empowering people is one of the most powerful ways to obtain performance; however, it requires a lot of work before it is effective. It requires the right environment, the right people with the right attitude, a cohesive mindset, good communications and a group of leaders willing to share a piece of the action. Finally, it requires patience, as this is not something that will always produce the right results right away. However, there is high payback for those who use it effectively. ●

Nobody Works for Free: How to Reward Outstanding Performance

by Liz Bywater, PhD

Let's be honest. Nobody works for nothing. We all work because there's something in it for us, be it financial remuneration, prestige, recognition, pride or a sense of doing the right thing. The preferred rewards for a job well done vary from person to person. But the need to get something for one's hard work is universal.

Great leaders know all about this. They realize that they cannot simply expect their employees to do their best work, day after day, year after year, without some sort of meaningful acknowledgement. They understand that to get the most from their people, they've got to recognize their accomplishments in ways that have an impact, that serve to reinforce hard work and encourage continued creativity and innovation.

Here are some effective ways to reward employee excellence:

- **Show them the money.** That is, remunerate your high achievers in accordance to their worth. What value does an employee bring to the company? How do his efforts impact the performance of his team or department? What's the impact on the bottom line? Think about output, not input. Compensation (such as bonuses) based upon results achieved, rather than tasks performed, is both a powerful motivator and an effective reinforcement.
- **Offer sincere thanks.** A well-deserved pat on the back, a written letter of commendation, or some private (or public) words of appreciation and recognition can be extremely effective. Don't make the mistake of assuming that your employees already know how you feel. Tell them. \
- **Provide meaningful perks.** Offer some extra flexibility to work from home where feasible. Give your high achievers the afternoon off from time to time. Send them on a golf outing or to a show. Take them out to lunch at the restaurant of their choosing. The possibilities here are nearly endless. Be creative.

- **Help them keep up the momentum.** A motivated employee will relish the opportunity to work on a challenging new project. Success breeds further success. Give your outstanding employees a say in where their talents will be used next. Encourage them to keep on growing, learning and raising the bar.

- **Develop them.** Mentoring, coaching and advanced training need not be viewed merely as a means of addressing poor or deteriorating performance. Invest your developmental time and dollars in your top performers. That's the way to raise the bar, accelerate the growth of your strongest performers, and drive your organization to even greater levels of success.

There are innumerable ways to recognize the efforts and accomplishments of your employees. If you're not sure what approach to take with a given employee, remember this: You can always ask. What better way to engage him in the process, demonstrate your respect and provide him with a meaningful, high-impact reward for outstanding performance?

Dr. Bywater helps her clients dramatically improve individual, team and organizational performance, resulting in heightened job satisfaction, maximized productivity and increased profitability for the organization. To learn more or to sign up for your complementary e-newsletter, visit Bywater Consulting Group at <http://www.BywaterConsultingGroup.com>. ●



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Fire Your Boss—A Book Review

by Mary Pat Campbell



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Fire Your Boss by Stephen M. Pollan and Mark Levine, HarperCollins, 2004.

When I was lazily thumbing through the bargain bin in a Pigeon Forge outlet book store, the title *Fire Your Boss* jumped out at me. I thought it would be about leaving the cubi-sphere for brighter pastures of self-employment, but I could not have been more wrong. While some have labeled this book “mercenary” and “cynical”, I agree with those who say the book helped them “put things into perspective”. It is ultimately uplifting; it tells people to get a grip and quit looking for self-fulfillment in all the wrong places.

The core message of *Fire Your Boss* is really “Kill Your Career.” (I’m going to guess they thought that title would not sell as many books.) The problem, the authors write, is that many people fixed on the idea of a career are trying to achieve so many things at a job, that they ultimately fail in all their goals—of satisfaction, happiness, even making money.

One of the authors, Stephen Pollan, is a career counselor as well as financial advisor, and he lists some reasons his clients have said they work:

1. For power
2. For respect
3. For security
4. To travel
5. To serve
6. To meet people
7. To express yourself
8. For money

Pollan’s point is that all of the goals except money can be met more satisfactorily outside of work. For example, it’s better to make plenty of money through your job (in a reasonable amount of time) to pay for the travel you desire, than seek travel through your job. I have many friends who travel extensively as part of their jobs—but they never get to enjoy the destinations because when they get there, they have to work. Plus, you’re not likely to have much control over where you travel to as part of work.

To take this to an extreme, once upon a time I wanted to be an astronaut because I wanted to go into outer space—but that’s a lot of hard work, and I don’t have many of the required aptitudes. Once I heard of Virgin Galactic, I realized that my new goal was to make enough money to pay for a vacation in space.

But back on track—many actuaries have already made the calculation to work for the money; salary surveys are a perennial favorite in the actuarial world. The actuarial profession is chock full of ex-academics and ex-teachers, people who really wanted to serve the community, but realized they weren’t getting paid much to do it. For many of us, it is more helpful to the world at large if we work at our jobs and donate our money to educational charities or volunteer our time to tutor kids in math. Most of the fulfillment people look for at work is easier to find at home, with friends or in hobbies.

Another way to kill one’s career is opening one’s mind to having multiple job possibilities, rather than getting stuck in predefined paths or depending on other people to determine a career arc. Given the well-defined exam process, this seems to be the more likely trap for actuaries. While going through exams, the path to advancement and the jobs available along the way are pretty well-defined. Even beyond FSA, people look to well-worn paths to actuarial management positions, chief actuary, CFO or CRO. We can end up with blinders on, seeing our possibilities only by what has gone before us.

This is where the “Fire Your Boss” concept comes in—instead of sitting around waiting for someone else to tell you how to develop your skills and knowledge, and which jobs and industries you should pursue, you need to take charge. As Pollan and Levine caution, this does not mean staging a coup d’état against your current bosses, but to take mental control of your development. They propose a four-step process (paraphrased from pages 36-43):



1. WRITE YOUR OWN JOB DESCRIPTION

Survey your actual activities and distill them to as general a statement as possible. An example from the book took a woman's statement from "I work for Acme Computer as a technical writer preparing software manuals" to "I gather, analyze and digest complex information and then translate and present it in a form that meets the needs of a particular audience."

2. GIVE YOURSELF A PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Using the above job description, research salary and benefits earned by people doing similar things, not necessarily in the same industry, looking for which skills and activities are most highly valued in the market. An example from the book is a news photographer who found that corporate and wedding photographers were paid best in his field, and that skills in posed, studio photography, as opposed to his own specialty of outdoor and candid photography, were most valued by the market.

3. DEFINE ALTERNATE COURSES

Using the results of the first two steps, brainstorm possible jobs as well as skills to develop that will make you more saleable in the job market. The technical writer mentioned in Step 1 determined she could work as a political speechwriter, a CIA analyst, and any number of report- and article-writing jobs for specialty groups and publications. This step keeps you from feeling trapped in a dead-end career, or a career arc with no branches.

4. PUT YOUR PLAN IN WRITING

Make a map of how to deal with your current situation and future possibilities. Determine how to be more valuable in your current job, as well as how to develop new skills relevant to your alternate paths and how to find jobs in those areas. The photographer mentioned in Step 2

decided to take graduate coursework in technical photography as well as specific studio work, such as portraiture. Having further credentials makes him more marketable in a variety of jobs, including teaching photography courses.

So far, everything sounds like good, solid advice. So why have some readers had negative reactions? Some object to the concept that one cannot achieve fulfillment at work. The authors don't deny that you can—but by searching for fulfillment at work, often you will not achieve your stated goals. More importantly, you'll find employers taking advantage of this attitude to get you to stay longer on the job and to pay you less than you could command if you went for the "mercenary" path.

Mostly, though, it's some of the follow-up chapters that make people recoil:

Chapter 4: There's No I in Job

Many reviewers react negatively to this chapter, seeing it as brown-nosing. The concept is that job success is dependent on pleasing your boss, so find out your boss's pain points and relieve them. This chapter can come across as very cynical, but I prefer to look at it as win-win. You make your boss happy, thus you are successful at your job, and you have more time and money to spend in your personal life.

To turn this around, if you have your own business, you need customers willing to pay for your goods or services. You want to be successful in the bottom line, and you do this by providing pleasure or relieving pain through solving a problem of theirs. If your customers aren't happy with what you provide, and if you do not fulfill their needs, then ultimately you will have no customers and no income.

If you think of your boss as a customer of your business, why wouldn't you want to do these things? Your sense of justice may bristle at letting a glory-seeking boss take credit for a problem solved when it was your work that solved it—but what do

If your customers aren't happy with what you provide, and if you do not fulfill their needs, then ultimately you will have no customers and no income.

Who would say that IBM was mercenary when it changed its core business from hardware manufacturing and design to IT business consulting? Likewise, if you decide to use your skills in pension valuation to jump over to wealth management, why should this be any worse?

you care? It's just a job—the purpose of a job is to make money, and you're not going to do well by making your boss look bad.

Chapter 5: Go Fish

This chapter does not cause many objections—it's about how to keep one's job search wide and varied, how to set up the “bait”, and how not to narrow choices too early in the process.

Chapter 6: No One Hires a Stranger

This is another chapter that gets a negative response—using social connections to land a job. Given the social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, I think it's somewhat disingenuous to think that trying to find jobs through social contacts is cynical. It's a time-honored method of finding jobs and, as the authors write, people prefer to hire someone they know over a complete stranger they know only through a resume and interview. While the authors pooh-poo networking groups, I think it depends on the focus and the actual network involved. Finally, they're not saying to do something you wouldn't want to do normally, but to become publicly active in your interests, whether it's getting involved in local civic groups, special interest clubs, professional organizations (e.g., actuarial meetings), and even church activities.

Chapter 7: It's the Money

Ah, the Jerry Maguire-ism “Show Me the Money” that makes people say “What a mercenary book!” But why not go for a job that gives you the most money possible, for a reasonable workload? They are not saying that people should try to become investment bankers (especially not in this economic climate), but that one should ignore things such as amenities, opportunities for advancement, inflated title or status, as many of these are just ways for employers to pay less for you. As Paul Graham, a noted programming expert, wrote on prestigious jobs:

“If it didn't suck, they wouldn't have had to make it prestigious.”

I don't think this idea is that new or objectionable to actuaries. However, we do seem to be tied in to looking at only insurance-related industries, where we may be able to net higher salaries and benefits (for using the same skills and having the same workload) in other industries, such as hedge funds or financial advice. The authors are not telling you to ignore your skill set, but to maximize your income given your skills and experience (as well as keep an eye on the types of experience valued by the market).

It is similar to the advice given to companies to leverage their strengths to maximize revenue. Who would say that IBM was mercenary when it changed its core business from hardware manufacturing and design to IT business consulting? Likewise, if you decide to use your skills in pension valuation to jump over to wealth management, why should this be any worse?

Chapter 8: Hello, I Must Be Going

The idea here is that one has a foot out the door the moment you enter a job. People like to slap “mercenary” and “cynical” on this reasoning, but given how fast business changes and how little company loyalty there is to employees, this is the only way to have any level of economic security in your own life.

Going back to the analogy of business, when a company enters a certain line of business, they should also have an exit plan. Likewise, one doesn't want to be boxed in to any particular path, as it limits your freedom to maneuver and exposes you to the risk of job insecurity.

Though I've pretty much given the game away here, I still recommend you get the book, especially since as of this writing there are six copies of the hardcover selling at Amazon selling for a penny each (it's all about the money—in this case, saving it). In the book itself, Pollan relates the stories of many of his clients, so you can see how these ideas work out in real life. In addition, there are extra chapters relating to how to implement these ideas

if you're unemployed, looking for your first job out of school, or trying to change jobs between industries.

Companies and managers are told all the time to keep an eye on the bottom line, and as a worker, it would serve you well in your own job. The kind of advice found in this book is extremely practical, borne of the experience of decades and providing a perspective that one doesn't get from normal management and career development training (as it undermines many of those messages). Firing your boss, mentally, will help you take control of your working life so you have more time and money to spend on what you truly love. ●



Standing Out: Your First Impression as a Presenter

by Maureen Costello



Maureen Costello is principal of Image Launch, a corporate image management practice. She can be reached at www.imagelaunch.com

As children we learn to “never judge a book by its cover.” As adults working in the business world, however, it’s difficult to put this old adage into practice. Although we don’t like to think that appearances matter, often the first thing we notice about a person is what he or she is wearing.

Whether we like it or not, the minute we step in front of an audience, they begin to make numerous judgments about us without our permission. Thoughts like: “she has a commanding presence,” “that suit doesn’t fit him very well,” or “I wonder where that accent is from” all play a role in how people perceive not only us, but also our abilities as presenters.

As an independent corporate speaker and trainer, I have taught hundreds of business people in countless facilities both here and abroad. Though each audience and presentation is unique, one constant for me is the need to feel comfortable while looking professional at the same time.

Here are some tips and techniques that I have found most helpful in preparing for a successful presentation.

DRESSING PROFESSIONALLY

Appearing professional is crucial in any job, especially in the role of the presenter. Because clothes are a nonverbal code of communication, it’s important that the visual signals we put out there, based on our appearance, speak of our professionalism. To form this professional image, I have created a wardrobe that connects and complements my hair, skin, eye tones and body scale.

Because of my dark auburn hair, pale skin and green eyes, I often choose rich teal blues and emerald greens. Someone with olive-toned skin and brown eyes, on the other hand, would look best in French blue, lavender, and spice tones of nutmeg, paprika and cinnamon.

While choosing a wardrobe is specific to each individual’s distinct physical characteristics and coloring, there are some constants for dressing professionally. Proper grooming is a key part of the equation: trimmed, clean nails; styled, neat-looking hair; pressed clean clothes. Attention to detail is the next step, as it can take any wardrobe to the next level. Polished shoes. Properly tailored suits, jackets, pants and dresses. Updated eyeglasses. Fresh-looking jewelry and handbags. Neat-looking facial hair on men and well-applied makeup on women. These little things make an enormous impact in establishing a personal, signature look that is still professional.

CREATING AN AUTHORITATIVE LOOK

Creating and maintaining a professional image is important in any employment capacity. In addition to this, trainers should also strive to project an image of authority, as participants are looking to us to be experts in our presentation material.

The strongest way to do this is to dress in three pieces. Adding another garment to the look aids in finishing the style you pulled together. As an example, if you are wearing a blouse and pants, you may wish to drape yourself in a scarf or a pashmina



wrap, or tie a lightweight sweater around your shoulders to complete the image. In the summer when it may be too warm, consider accessorizing your outfit, especially near the face, e.g. earrings or a necklace. For men, a jacket, lightweight wool slacks, and an open-necked, pressed shirt with french cuffs are a great option to a full suit and tie. For women I recommend either a jacket or a dressy sweater set and tailored pants.

To complete a more authoritative look, make sure to fully accessorize. Shoes should be nicely polished. If you have salt stains on your shoes, apply vinegar before you polish. Women should wear a low but professional-looking heel, especially since the feet are the foundation of our body weight. There are many comfortable and fashionable options out in the market for men and women today. Sources such as zappos.com and shoe-buy.com Web sites provide many good options. Women should also wear natural fibers for maximum comfort with a little spandex for ease, and have nails polished in a neutral tone.

HAVING VISUAL APPEAL AS A PRESENTER

It's important to remember that as a presenter, I will be a strong focal point for my audience during much of the training. I want my audience to focus on the content of my presentation, not to be distracted by my attire. When selecting my wardrobe, I avoid flashy designs and distracting patterns.

Color choice is also important. Red, for example, is too bright to wear as a presenter because the human eye tires of looking at it over time. Audience members will have to periodically look away in order to give their eyes a break from the strong red. Instead of bright and metallic colors, I wear shades that are visually harmonious with my hair, skin and eye color because this creates and communicates credibility. When the audience looks at you, your eye should follow from your innate color tones and back down to the garments closest to the face. This is called visual harmony, when the clothes closest to the face complement your innate color tones.

COMFORT AND FIT OF CLOTHES

While choosing professional, authoritative and visually appealing clothes is crucial to impressing my audience, comfort is another important consideration. As a presenter, I want to feel at ease moving around the room and comfortable on my feet. Wearing natural fibers is always a good choice. Depending on the season, these materials include: cotton, linen blends, wools (both lightweight and heavy) and silk. Clothing made from such fibers not only fall over the body naturally, they also allow for maximum cooling because they don't cling as much. Of these fibers, I usually choose a knit top for under my jacket because this wrinkles less than a blouse and provides more give. I feel less constrained as I present, and when my presentation includes interactive exercises, I am more comfortable while moving about the room.

SIMPLE SET-UP TIPS

Choosing professional-looking and comfortable outfits as a presenter helps me feel sharp, self-confident and prepared. Here are some additional preparation strategies that also contribute to feeling confident and ready to go.

The first step is to simply be organized and prepared. Pack materials and clothes the night before. One essential presenter tool is a personal kit that can include: toothpaste and toothbrush, mouthwash, make-up, mirror, hairbrush, liquid Band-Aid (good for stockings or skin), a sewing kit, extra socks/stockings, mints, pen and writing pad, and a few healthy snacks.

The morning of the presentation, I eat a high-protein breakfast to give me energy and drink lots of water so I stay hydrated. I also carry Yogi tea called "Throat Comfort," which keeps my throat moist so I don't sound scratchy while presenting.

I always arrive at my destination early to allow time for navigating in a new facility and finding help in setting up the room if needed. I use roller luggage to easily transport my presentation materials. Once

I want my audience to focus on the content of my presentation, not to be distracted by my attire.

onsite I like to meet the key people who are hosting me. I wear comfortable shoes and take off my jacket while setting up and breaking down the training room. To ensure a smooth training session, I always double check the equipment: microphone, PowerPoint projector and handouts.

Because I've planned plenty of time, I use the last 15 minutes before presenting to mentally prepare. I take one more look in the mirror for a watery eye or lopsided jewelry to ensure I feel fresh. Then I take 10 minutes to quiet my mind before I am introduced so my thoughts are centered and my energy is high and ready to go.

SUCCESS

As a presenter, there is much to juggle when preparing for a presentation. I have followed these simple steps for the last 15 years and know that they have helped me in my success as a corporate trainer and speaker. Knowing I look my best as a professional gives me confidence and poise. Being

organized and prepared ensures I have a smooth presentation. With all of these details taken care of, I look and feel sharp as I work with my audience. What a great way to begin a session!

Maureen Costello is principal of Image Launch, one of the top corporate image management consulting practices in Chicago. Ms. Costello works locally and internationally with organizations on developing positive visual appearance strategies for high potentials and existing leaders in the areas of professional presence and business etiquette. www.imagelaunch.com. ●

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Rev up Your Career in 2009

by Mary Kilkenny



Mary Kilkenny is a Jacobson Associates actuarial consultant specializing in the life, health and pension arena for the professional recruiting division of the Jacobson Group in Chicago. She can be reached at mkilkenny@jacobsononline.com.

As you plan your New Year's resolutions for 2009, don't neglect career management! Now is the ideal time to reflect on your professional life and set a few challenging, yet attainable, goals to rev up your career. Even if last year's resolution to "lose 10 pounds" or to "go to the gym every day" didn't last a week into the New Year, you can create an effective career plan and achieve your goals in 2009.

How do you turn the goals you jot down on paper into an action plan? When it comes to career satisfaction and success, remember that you are in the driver's seat. Take the time to think through your goals and create an annual plan. An annual plan gives context and purpose to your daily tasks. Instead of just going through the motions, you are working toward attaining your goals. Follow the steps outlined below to create and utilize an annual plan that sets the stage for your success throughout the year.

Put your annual plan in writing. You are more likely to commit to your plan if it is in writing. Additionally, this will allow you to share your goals with your family, friends, mentors and co-workers. They may be able to help you achieve your goals, but only if they know what they are.

Break down major goals into smaller, more achievable tasks. Make your goals reasonable; don't set yourself up for failure. Of course we would all love to tackle the "things to accomplish in a lifetime" laundry list this year; but no matter how hard you work, it is unlikely you'll attain all those goals at once. If you plan to tackle one large goal this year, be sure to break it up into smaller, more manageable goals. "By the end of 2009, complete four courses toward earning a master's" is a much more achievable goal than "start and complete a master's degree this year."

Ensure that your annual plan is in sync with that of the organization. Does your company have an annual plan? Did they announce corporate goals

for the year? If so, review your annual plan to make sure it is parallel with the direction of the organization as a whole. Demonstrate that you are a team player; make sure that completion of your goals will directly or indirectly aid the organization in the achievement of its goals.

Discuss your annual plan with your supervisor. Set up a meeting with the sole purpose of discussing your annual plan. Your boss will be able to add insight into ways you can realize your goals, as well as the feasibility of your goals based on the organizational or departmental direction. This is also an excellent opportunity to find out what he/she expects from you and any goals he/she would like to see you accomplish in the coming year.

Focus on what is important. Set daily priorities to move closer to achieving your goals. Annual goals should be broken down into monthly goals; monthly goals should be broken down into weekly ones; and weekly into daily tasks. Smaller pieces of a larger project are easier to bite off and accomplish successfully.

Stay on task. If you have blocked out time to work on a specific item, make sure you are dedicating all of your energy to that one task. This does not mean you must sit down with the intent of starting and finishing a five-hour project. Instead, commit yourself to that project for a predetermined, uninterrupted amount of time before moving on to another task. When you are working on a project, work on it. Shut your door, turn off your instant messenger and silence your phone. If someone does drop in, don't feel guilty saying that you are busy at the moment!

Set aside time to realign your goals on a monthly basis.

- Have you accomplished any goals since last month? If so, check them off your list and add new goals in their places.
- Have any of your goals changed due to new requirements or developments in your field?

- Has anything happened at work or in your personal life that may cause you to rethink your career direction?

Do a full-fledged personal and professional assessment on an annual basis.

- Did you accomplish your goals? Did they lead into new goals for 2010?

- Realign your career goals as appropriate.

As you transfer birthdays, anniversaries and other dates to your calendar, mark off one night per month for career management. Dedicating specific time slots to your goals will ensure that you travel along your career path quicker and to more fulfilling destinations in 2009. ●

ENTERPRISE RISK MANAGEMENT

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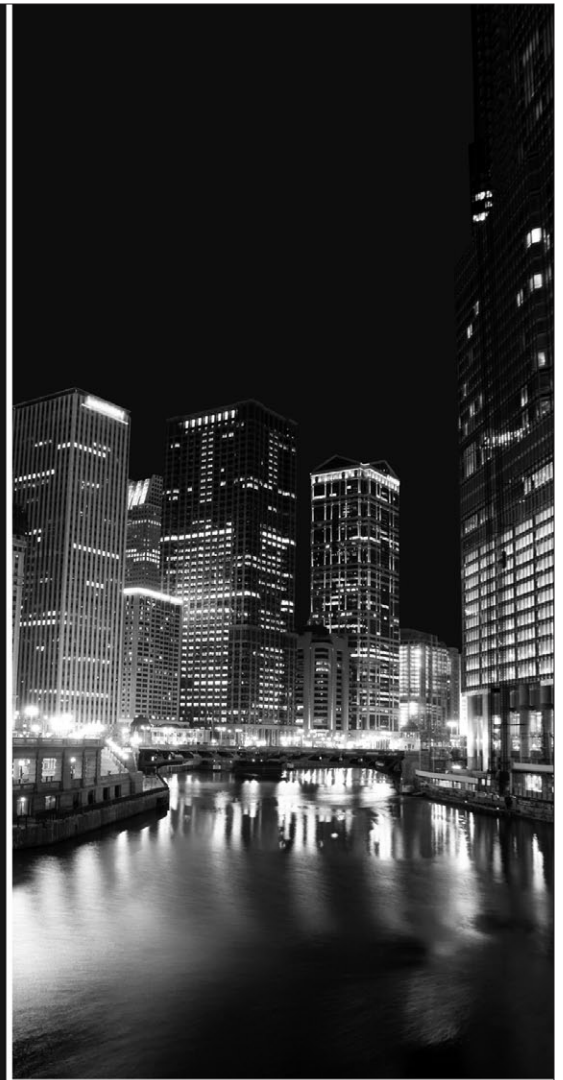
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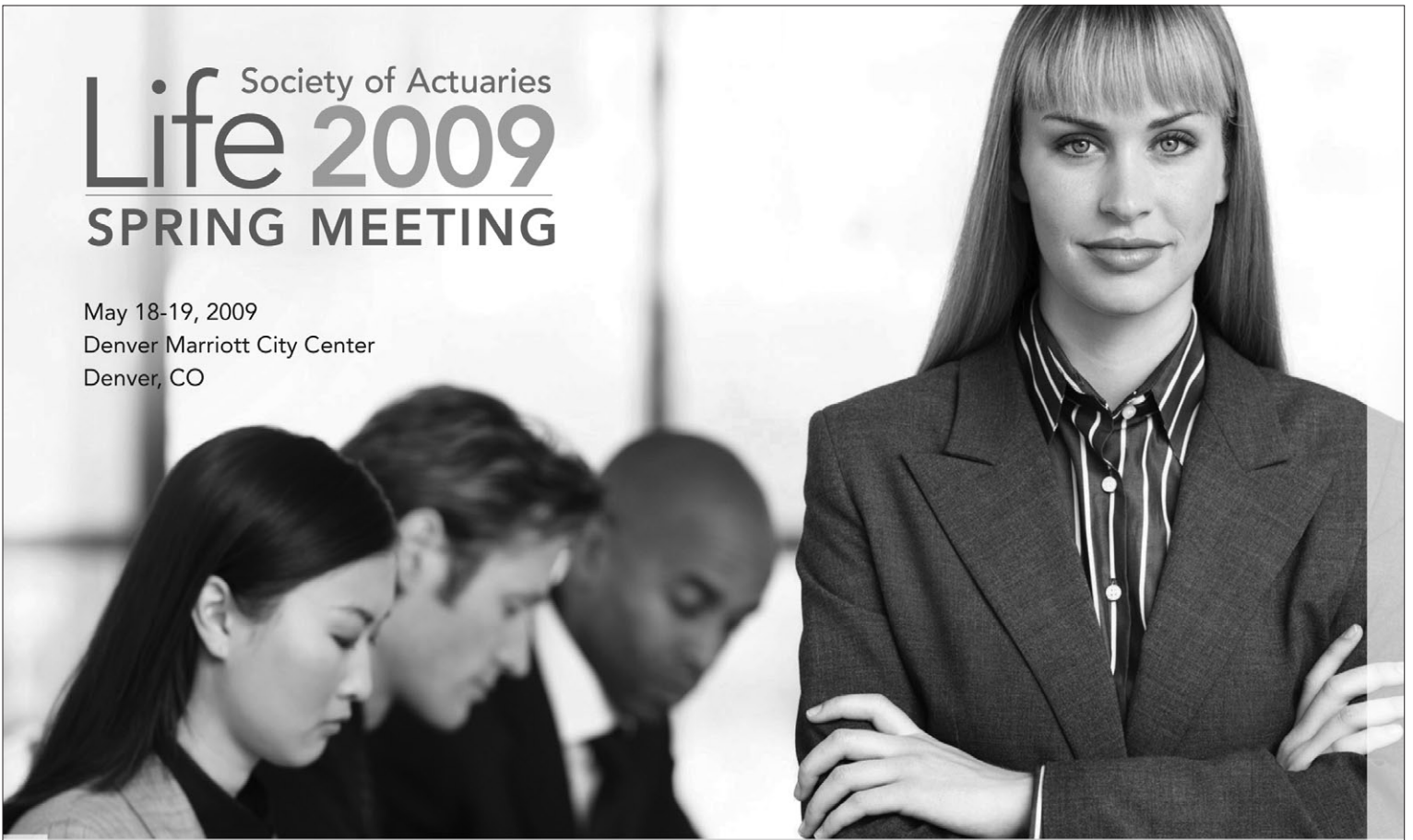
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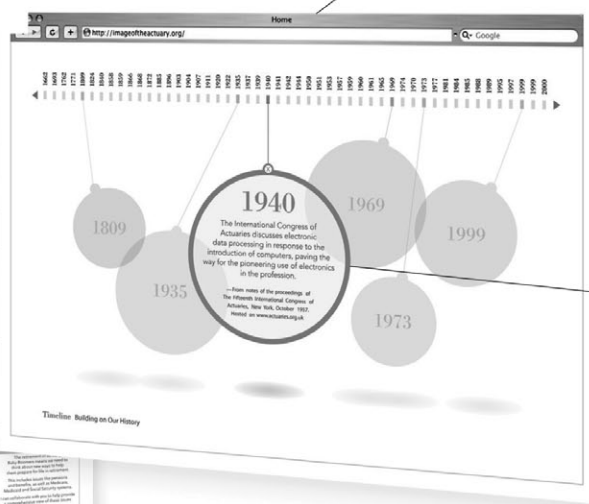
Learn more at <http://LifeSpringMeeting.soa.org>

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Explore the profession as a whole or as it pertains to specific areas.

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See how one event in actuarial history affects another.

SCENARIO PLANNING

Scenario Planning

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Have you ever wished you had a quick, effective response to frequent questions about your role as an actuary? The following cheat lists some common situations you may encounter, and provides guidelines for responses that highlight your skills, your position and your profession. Feel free to adjust the answers to make them your own - just remember that the most important thing is to be prepared.

Scenario #1	Encounter with a Client Member	Scenario #2	Planning Meeting with a Senior Manager
Scenario #3 <td>Encounter with a Peer Actuary</td> <td>Scenario #4 <td>Encounter with a Public Policy Maker</td> </td>	Encounter with a Peer Actuary	Scenario #4 <td>Encounter with a Public Policy Maker</td>	Encounter with a Public Policy Maker
Scenario #5 <td>Encounter with a Business Executive</td> <td></td> <td></td>	Encounter with a Business Executive		

Tips for quick, effective responses highlighting your position and your profession.

Common situations you may encounter.

Covers the phases of your career and opportunities to advance.

Provides actions you can take to help you advance the profession and enhance your visibility.

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS

Phase 2: The Mid-Career Actuary
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- SEEK NEW LEADERSHIP ROLES.** Your experience and training has prepared you to take on new challenges, so you're ready to look for new roles with increased responsibility and visibility.
- ELEVATE YOUR PROFILE IN YOUR COMMUNITY.** Help educate your community members about the role of actuaries by exploring opportunities to speak at local clubs and business meetings.
- CHOOSE YOUR PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS.** You've acquired the skills, knowledge and a particular area. Choosing an interest area that you feel passionately about will make your career more rewarding in the long run.
- TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION'S SPECIAL INTEREST COMMITTEES.** You can further your knowledge of your interest areas by actively participating in the many special interest committees available through actuarial professional organizations.
- POLISH YOUR NETWORKING SKILLS.** Networking opportunities are all around you. Take advantage of these opportunities by connecting with your peers and colleagues at conferences and professional meetings.
- CONTINUE WORKING WITH A MENTOR.** You're an experienced professional now — but there's always someone with more experience. Spend time with a mentor and develop a relationship where you can safely explore challenging situations, seek coaching and advance your professional abilities.
- FOLLOW THE TRENDS AFFECTING THE INDUSTRIES IN WHICH YOU OPERATE.** In order and clients, it's important to know where they fit of needing relevant industry trade magazines and journals to keep up on important business issues.
- BUILD YOUR NEGOTIATION SKILLS.** Whether you're setting a contract for consulting services or to know how to effectively negotiate.
- THINK ABOUT HOW YOU'RE COMMUNICATING YOUR WORK.** Make sure you're communicating the value of your work in a way that is simple, straightforward and meaningful to others.

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