



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

Actuary of the Future

May 2011 – Issue 30

How Volunteering Helped an Actuarial Student

By Kate Lishego

While I was in school, I was one of those people who always signed up for everything. I needed to frequently connect with different types of people. Getting involved in various organizations was the logical way to do this. College was no different since there was an endless supply of organizations to join on campus. Any interest that one could possibly have would also have a corresponding club to join. Graduating college and moving to a city that I had never even been to was a bit of a culture shock. Now time was filled with just working, studying and hanging out with friends on the weekend.

Eventually I realized that something was missing. I did not see myself moving toward becoming the “Actuary of the Future” that I knew I wanted to be. Sure, I was passing exams, but that wasn’t enough. I decided to look to a few different places for new opportunities: my company’s volunteer program, Toastmasters International and the Actuary of the Future (AOF) Section. All three organizations provided experiences that helped with the soft skills that every actuary needs: communication, networking, teamwork and leadership.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is undoubtedly one of the most important skills an actuary can have. Anything that one completes for work will need to be communicated to someone else. Since Toastmasters International is a club for improving one’s public-speaking skills, it was an obvious organization for me to sign up for. While working toward completing the first 10 speeches, you become better at presenting with each one. You become more confident and learn ways to more effectively communicate. These skills will help me in my career as I need to explain results to actuarial and non-actuarial colleagues.

NETWORKING

Networking is another key skill that people may tend to forget about. While networking with other actuaries is



necessary, networking within and outside your company are equally important. By signing up for events through my company’s volunteer program, I was able to meet people from other areas throughout the company. Examples of events include serving dinner at a shelter and working at a holiday party for the local senior center, as well as preparing meals for people with family members in the hospital. Through all of these events I was able to meet other people and get to know them while we were volunteering together. Through networking I have been able to build relationships with people within and external to my company. Such relationships help me create contacts when I need help, whether it be explaining a function of my company that I don’t know (such as the claims department) or helping me see a situation from another person’s perspective.



Kate Lishego is an actuarial analyst at Independence Blue Cross in Philadelphia, Pa. She can be reached at KateLishego@yahoo.com.

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TEAMWORK

Many actuaries work in teams on a daily basis—working with their managers, other actuaries or people from other departments. Being able to work effectively in a team will help an actuary in any role. Through my company I signed up to run a relay race where each of the four team members had to run 8.6 miles. While the other three members on my team had run marathons in the past year, I had not participated in a race since high school. As a result, I had to train for a few months beforehand, and it paid off because our team finished the race with a bronze medal. Teamwork creates a sense of responsibility of not letting team members down and that it requires everyone to make an effort.

LEADERSHIP

Since many actuaries eventually manage other actuaries, developing leadership skills is necessary. After signing up as part of the AOF Section, I was able to get involved with organizing a speed networking event for actuaries. Creating an event of this type involved many different parties such as the local actuaries club, the AOF Section as well as the Entrepreneurial Actuaries Section. Starting planning early was important to allow time for input from all parties involved. This event has put my above-mentioned skills to use to make this event a possibility.

Events of this type held in other cities have been successful, and so was this one. It gave local actuaries an opportunity to meet actuaries from other companies and earn CPD credit at the same time. The event helped actuaries improve their networking skills and expand their business relationships.

Getting involved in organizations either within your company or outside of it can help with moving toward becoming an “Actuary of the Future.” There are a number of available opportunities such as volunteering, signing up for Toastmasters International or getting involved with the AOF Section. No matter what you sign up for, you are bound to improve the soft skills that every actuary needs: communication, networking, teamwork and leadership.

NOTE: The speed networking event Kate organized was held on March 7, 2011 in Philadelphia, PA. John Hadley and Pauline Reimer hosted the event and provided the 23 attendees with tips and pointers for effective networking. After the networking session, people were able to mingle with all participants and were encouraged to continue networking after the event.

If you are interested in volunteering in future events, contact us at aof@soa.org. ☆