MANAGEMENT AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SECTION

"A KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY FOR THE SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES"

July 2008

Issue No. 31

Published in Schaumburg, Ill.

by the Society of Actuaries

The Stepping Stone

contents

Actuaries
Risk is Opportunity.®

Chairperson's Corner

by Scott D. Haglund

"Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me." — Carol Burnett

As actuaries, part of our responsibility is to examine the world around us and interpret what it means to others. In order to do this, we must continue to learn and stay connected to what is around us. Being isolated from what impacts the products and people around us only leads to false conclusions and misguided perceptions.

In this issue's Chairpersons Corner, I hope some thought presented here will lead you to become more engaged in learning and growth as you pursue your actuarial career. Growth is important, and it is up to you to take the steps needed to reach your objectives.

"Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people." — William Butler Yeats

One of any actuary's primary goals should be communication. However, this communication needs to be understood by those who need the information. Having enormous amounts of data or great studies is of very limited use if only you or people like you can understand the information. To be of value, the information must be compiled and presented in a manner that is clear and actionable, not overwhelming.

The exam process and continuing education opportunities have provided you with the opportunity to study a wide variety of topics. Your goal now should be to take the information you've read and used and explain how it applies to the everyday work of those around you. Being plugged into the people and processes of your company will allow you to learn more about what you are doing, but will also provide you the opportunity to share what you already know.

"The great aim of education is not knowledge but action."— Herbert Spencer

In order to make what you've learned a part of your everyday life, you will need to experience and apply the information you've gained. As mentioned in the previous issue, there are a number of books and articles on effective communication, but to truly learn to communicate, you need to do it. To improve your verbal and written skills, you need to speak and write. Look for opportunities to use new skills and new ways of reaching your audience.

"How use doth breed a habit in a man!"
— William Shakespeare

Don't give up as you make attempts to change. To become effective in what you do as an actuary, continuous learning is critical. Although changes in how you communicate with others may seem awkward at first, over time, the new behavior will become how you always do things. Use your skills, don't just read about them.

"The wisest mind has something yet to learn."
— George Santayana

Your training as an actuary is not finished just because you have earned a credential. The exam process was (and is) just the beginning of your career. Look for opportunities to learn and improve as you continue your actuarial career. Practice and hone your communication skills so what you know can be used by those around you. ❒

Scott D. Haglund, FSA, MAAA, is AVP STD and Service Pricing at Unum. He can be reached at shaglund@unum.com.

Orchestrating Attitude—Part 3

Orchestrating your Words

by Lee J. Colan, PhD

Editor's Note: Catch up on Parts 1 and 2 of "Orchestrating Attitude" in the January and April 2008 issues of The Stepping Stone, *and watch for the conclusion of this series, "Orchestrating Your Actions," in the October 2008 issue.*

Remember the old saying, "Choose your words carefully?" This phrase is used to warn the speaker of the impact of her words on others. In reality, the greater impact is on the speaker, not the receiver. Once you have spoken or heard the words, they become programmed into your mind. **It's not what you say, but what you *repeatedly* say.** The words you repeat are gradually convincing your mind that these statements are true; therefore, precluding your mind's eye from seeing any possibility to prove your words wrong.

Our mind hears our words, good or bad, and then programs our brain accordingly.

Words reflect our commitments to act. **Our words tell the truth**. Whether we have a long conversation with a friend or simply place an order at a restaurant, every word makes a difference. The results of our interactions are rarely neutral; they are almost always positive or negative. Ask yourself, "Do my words reflect a commitment to being joyful, helping others, creating win-wins, keeping things in perspective, seizing the moment, continuously learning, embracing change?"

Words are the seeds of commitment. We plant the seeds with each movement of our lips. Once they are spoken, our words either grow in the form of an immediate response or they take time to germinate. Whether the result becomes apparent sooner or later, we cannot speak words of failure and defeat and expect a life of success and victory.

Here are three instruments for orchestrating your words:

1. Talk yourself up!
2. Speak with strength.
3. Ask the right questions.

Talk Yourself Up!

Did you know that you talk more to yourself than to anyone else in the world? In the face of challenging situations (and we all have our share), the words you choose for that conversation with yourself will directly impact how long you will find yourself in those situations. **Use your words to *change* your situation, not to describe it.** The moment you speak something—good or bad—you give birth to it as an idea, an expectation, a desire. You have planted the seed that will, sooner or later, grow into the results you will reap.

When you're feeling somewhat down-spirited, don't tell people how you feel, tell them how you *want* to feel. By controlling what you say and how you say it—using positive words with enthusiasm—you help to change your physical and mental state.

I remember the year I started my own business. I jokingly refer to it as "the year I told a million lies" because I spent a lot of time talking myself up. Let me explain. Like most start-up businesses, I had my share of challenges, disappointments and adjustments. I recall many well-intended friends asking me, "Hey, Lee, how's your business coming along?" I could have described my situation by saying, "Gee, it's been a tough year. I have had to really dig into my savings to keep things going and it's been a lot harder than I thought it would be to convert my existing business relationships into paying customers. To boot, it's a lot more work than I thought it would be."

(continued on page 4)

Lee J. Colan, PhD, is a leadership expert, author and speaker. Learn more and contact him at *www.theLgroup.com.*

Orchestrating Attitude—Part 3 ... • from page 3

That type of response would not only drag my friends down—and no one wants to hang around a downer for too long—it would have planted the seeds of doom for my business. Instead, I chose to use my words to change my situation. I wasn't telling a lie, I was simply "choosing my view" in response to my friends' inquiries. So, I said something like, "I feel good about my prospects and am confident that I am doing the right things that will pay off long-term. Most importantly, I am passionate about my work and that's a victory in itself." My words planted the seeds of the success that was to come.

Most people enjoy working and living with people who live and work with a positive, upbeat attitude. **Tell people how you *want* to feel and it won't be long before you do**. So, the next time you are feeling gloomy and a friend asks you how you are doing, talk yourself up!

Speak With Strength

The words we use are more powerful than we can imagine. There is power in the words that we use, the things that we say, and the things that we do. Most people greet each other with words that have no power or energy. Think of the last time you heard someone else (or even yourself) respond to a greeting of "How are you?" with "Oh, I am doing so-so," "Hanging in there," "I'm surviving" or "Not too bad." It probably wasn't much past yesterday.

Now, try this experiment. The next time anyone asks, *"How are you?,"* whether it's someone at work or a cashier at the store, respond with strength. Give them an energetic, enthusiastic, "Great!" or "Terrific!" It will be hard to do without a smile on your face, and you are likely to get one back. Second, you will likely feel a physical response of increased energy. Third, your words will send a message to your mind that will be consistent with feeling Great! or Terrific! To see the results, you have to do this often and with sincere enthusiasm (not robotically). When you do, your subconscious mind will begin to act on what you are saying and begin to design your reality to be consistent with your thoughts and words.

Speaking with strength also creates a sense of accountability and commitment to get the best from yourself and others. Your challenge is to consciously avoid using words that are strength killers. These words sap energy and commitment from your interactions, and ultimately, your actions. **Eliminate these words** from your vocabulary:

- I can't
- If
- Doubt
- Try
- I don't think
- I don't have the time
- Maybe
- I'm afraid of
- I don't believe
- It's impossible.

But omitting these negative words is not enough. A sports team needs more than just a good defense to win; it also needs a strong offense. So, you must also mobilize your own offensive assault with the words you choose. **Build positive mental connections, personal strength and commitment by using these strength builders:**

- I can
- I will
- Expect the best
- Commit
- I know
- I will make the time
- Positively
- I am confident
- I do believe
- All things are possible.

The power of your actions is preceded by the power of your words. Choose to speak with strength and watch the power of your words bring out the best in yourself and others!

Ask the Right Questions

The fastest way to change the answers you receive—from yourself and others—is to change the questions you ask. Consider the possible responses to questions like these:

- What happens if I fail at this?
- How will I deal with this problem employee?
- How can I get through this situation?
- How will I ever afford the car I want?

On the other hand, think about the responses that positive, more empowering questions will yield:

- What's the best way for me to be successful at this?
- How can I support the success of this employee?
- How can I make the most of this situation?
- What are the options I need to consider in order to buy the car I want?

In the last question about affording the car you want, asking the right question opens one's thinking to alternatives like: looking at a used model, no-money-down financing, increasing my savings for next six months to afford the down payment or looking at leases.

Asking the right question gets you better answers whether you are asking it of yourself or of others. **The questions you ask will either limit or expand the possible responses you get.** Additionally, your choice of words will also dictate how involved, receptive and motivated the recipient will feel.

For example, in the heat of a month-end deadline, a sales manager might ask his lead representative, "Why are we falling short of this month's sales goal?" The representative naturally feels defensive, put on the spot and unable to respond to the supervisor's satisfaction, regardless of the reason. An alternative question could be, "What do you think we can do to ensure we meet our sales goal?" Now, the representative feels involved in the solution (versus being accused of the problem), receptive to brainstorming alternatives and supported by the supervisor. In short, he feels motivated to meet the goal.

The power of the answers you receive is directly proportionate to the power of the questions you ask. Consider how the questions you ask, both at work and at home, elicit certain responses. Ask yourself, "How can I ask questions to get the best from myself and others?"

Next time, we will discuss how to orchestrate your actions.

But you don't have to wait to take a FREE *Attitude Tune-up!* A five minute investment will help you practice these instruments and more effectively orchestrate your attitude! Visit *www.theLgroup.com.* ❐

Vu Ja De: The Opposite of Déjà vu

by Bela Patel-Fernandez

In today's project–filled, deadline-driven work environment, having to do more with less is a painful reality. One way to deliver more with fewer resources is to promote a culture of continuous innovation.

Innovation has many forms. On a basic level, innovation involves going to a previously uncharted realm, where something earth shattering revolutionizes the way things have been done. On a more subtle level, innovation can also be seen as doing something new in the commonplace. It is the ability to do something for the hundredth time as if it were the very first time that defines this type of innovation. This *vu ja de* mentality generates a questioning of commonly held assumptions that could redefine a process for the better through incremental innovation.

Tips for creating, promoting and sustaining this *vu ja de* innovation is explored in Robert Sutton's book, *Weird Ideas that Work.* Some of his 11-½ ideas are controversial and counterintuitive. However, they are guaranteed to do one thing: *shake things up!*

Hire Slow Learners (of the Organizational Code)

This does not mean that you should hire poor performers. This step encourages managers to hire individuals that are slow to learn about a company's organizational code. The usual norms of politics and "doing things the way we have always done them" will not affect these slow learners. These slow folks have a certain stubbornness about them that allows them to think individually and creatively. They are driven by high internal standards of excellence and will drive an organization to the best solution, even if the solution is controversial.

Hire People Who Make You Uncomfortable

Folks who think differently from you may have different strengths than you, and will bring new perspectives and insights to a project. It may be difficult to hire this type of person, so this perspective can be watered down to hiring people who will make other people uncomfortable. This type of hiring strategy will be sure to end homogeneous group thinking, which could allow inefficiencies to thrive unquestioned.

Hire People You (Probably) Don't Need

The key behind this concept is to hire people with interesting backgrounds that may not be directly related to the job. This background should demonstrate an ease with learning new things and a resilient attitude in changing times. This broad background will bring a fresh perspective to projects.

Encourage People to Ignore and Defy Supervisors and Peers

Once you have hired these slow learners with weird backgrounds who make people uncomfortable, do not teach them company procedures or norms. Instead, teach them to observe, question what is accepted as fact, and give them the authority to solve problems that may not have hit your radar screen. Encourage them to believe in a flat organizational structure, where one can freely talk to peers, directors, VPs, and C-levels.

Find Some Happy People and Get Them to Fight

The right type of fighting is centered around ideas. When a good team argues about conflicting ideas, the solution will probably combine

Folks who think differently from you may have different strengths than you, and will bring new perspectives and insights to a project.

the best elements of all the ideas. The key is to make sure that these folks are happy. There should be a level of respect, humor, fun and free food interjected in these discussions so disagreements can be resolved without hurt feelings.

Reward Success and Failure, Punish Inaction

Actuaries are in the business of quantifying risk. In order to be successful, a certain level of risk-taking must be encouraged. Instill in the team the belief that wacky ideas should have their tires kicked. The most valuable skill here is courage. Give your team the freedom to try new problem-solving approaches. They may take more time than planned, and may not even succeed, but the new mental agility could spur new epiphanies.

A controversial take on this is to try something that will probably fail, but convince yourself and others that success is inevitable. It seems dishonest, but being honest in this situation will ensure the project's failure. Optimism could provide the spark that is needed to find that one-in-a-million solution. Setbacks and failures will come, but if they are perceived as temporary, the team can ricochet off them and get back on the path to success.

The only true failure is inaction. When nothing is attempted, one cannot succeed or learn from mistakes. Rewards should be given for success and failure. However, failures should be monitored, analyzed and not repeated.

Don't Learn from People Who Say They Have Solved the Problems That You Face

Sometimes, having too much knowledge can be blinding. Ignorance is not bliss, but a *tabula rasa* with a healthy dose of curiosity will come up with surprising solutions.

Forget the Past, Especially Past Successes

This is the spice of life. Mix work groups around. Put curious people in positions that they do not currently know how to do. Encourage questioning of past successes, and encourage changes needed for future success.

At the end of the day, the goal of any organization is to hire teams that are passionate about solving problems. This passion, if carefully nurtured, can yield surprising results, and eventually the impossible becomes possible. ❒

Bela Patel-Fernandez, FSA, MAAA, is an actuarial director at Health Net of Arizona. She can be reached at *bela.h.patel-fernandez@healthnet.com.*

Make the Most of Your Promotion

by Kevin Leavey

Congratulations! You've just been promoted to manager, now what do you do?

The occasion of being promoted to manager is always a pride-filled moment. You've earned this recognition by achieving a professional milestone or the confidence of senior management that you're the right person for the job. As you bask in the warmth of this good feeling, a bit of trepidation usually starts to seep in. Part of you is thinking, "I've only had to worry about myself in the past … now what do I do?"

I have been managing people for over a decade. Over this time I have learned a great deal about how to bring a team together to meet company goals. A consistent source of pride for me is the feedback I've received that I am a good manager; people like working for me, and my teams have been well respected. I offer the following tips to help you start pulling together your own team.

1. Learn the basics.

There are certain administrative items you'll be expected to know as a manager. Familiarize yourself with company policies regarding: scheduling, recording and approving vacation and work time; how to submit salary increases for exams, merit, and promotions; when to complete and deliver formal performance management; who to contact for systems concerns; and how to complete and submit expense reimbursement. These processes may seem mundane, but they are crucial to a smooth-running organization. Your staff expects you to be able to do these things, and to do them right. Introduce yourself to your department/division HR specialist; they'll be an invaluable resource to you.

2. Be an advocate for your people and your company.

One of the best pieces of advice I received as a new manager was to remove any barriers that prevented my employees from completing their assigned tasks. Make sure they have all the tools needed to complete the job. Let them know they have your support, in words and deeds. Also, bring their thoughts and concerns to senior management. Knowing you "have their back" allows your team to focus on doing their job.

3. Be an advocate for your company.

You are now the first link in the chain to senior management; take this responsibility seriously. Know the company's strategy and how your group fits within the strategy. Articulate and reinforce this throughout the year.

4. Maintain the proper perspective.

You will need to transition your outlook from individual to supervisor. You are no longer just an individual contributor. You will need to learn to delegate. Do not assume this will be easy, and be patient. No one will do a task exactly the same way you would, and their first attempt will not go as well as you could do it now. Let them learn—your first attempt probably didn't win any awards either!

5. Maintain the appropriate relationships.

You are the boss. Everyone wants to be liked, and you should maintain a cordial and professional relationship with your staff. However, you are not expected to be their best friend. You will be put in a position where you need to push your people at times for them to reach their highest potential. Do not let your desire

Kevin Leavey, FSA, CFA, MAAA, is AVP, Annuities Product Development at Sun Life of Canada (U.S.). He can be reached at *kevin.leavey@sunlife.com.*

to be liked influence your ability to push your team when needed.

6. Always strive to improve.

Take advantage of available resources. Many companies provide manager training. Companies are striving to make the training easier by offering webcasts and other online media to deliver the training. You can also look to management books and *The Stepping Stone* for assistance. Encourage your team to let you know how you're doing. Let them know that their feedback is important to you, and you will take their comments seriously. That does not mean you have to automatically correct all critiques, but that you will listen carefully, evaluate their input, and endeavor to improve in the future.

7. Finally, don't assume you're ever truly "done".

This point was driven home for me a few years back in a rather unexpected way. I had begun a class to become a certified soccer referee. When the instructor asked the participants why they were there, most said *"I want to be a referee".* He actually laughed. Then he said, *"Okay folks, listen up. When you complete this course and pass the test, I will give you a patch to wear that allows you to go out onto the field and potentially embarrass yourself. You will not be a referee. Come back to me after you've done 100 games and then I'll call you a referee."* Ignoring the fact that he needs some help in motivating people, his point was well-taken. Learning the skills and tips I laid out above will not make you a good manager. Applying them over time and developing the ability to adapt your methods and style to the people who work for you is what will make you a good manager, maybe even a great one.

So learn the basics, be an advocate for your people and your company, maintain the proper perspective and relationships, and always strive to improve.

Congratulations, you've earned your promotion! ❒

You will be put in a position where you need to push your people at times for them to reach their highest potential. Do not let your desire to be liked influence your ability to push your team when needed.

Like Death and Taxes—Meetings!

by Paula Hodges

Paula Hodges, FSA, MAAA, FLMI, PMP, is a senior manager at Allstate Financial, specializing in management of in-force products. She can be reached at Paula.Hodges@allstate.com.

The workday is consumed with meetings for many of us. Like death and taxes, they are a part of our lives. Even so, we spend a disproportionately small amount of time exploring ways to make this time more productive. Depending on your role in any particular meeting, you can certainly influence the tone, substance, and engagement of the attendees when you are a key participant. This is especially true when you have the role of moderator at the meeting.

If you've never considered yourself a "moderator", answer the following questions:

- Have you scheduled a meeting with several subject matter experts?
- Have you been in a situation where a decision had to be made, and you brought together the decision makers to come to the right conclusion?
- Were you ever in charge of bringing in external consultants to review a business process, design a product feature or analyze a business strategy?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you've been a meeting moderator. As a moderator, there are four key areas for which you are accountable. Depending on the meeting's focus, visibility and corporate impact, you should adjust how you allocate the effort put into each of these items. You will be responsible for Planning the Meeting, Setting the Stage, Facilitating the Meeting and assuming the role of Timekeeper.

Planning the Meeting

This is the most time-consuming, but most crucial element of your moderator role. It includes all the pre-work for the meeting—from the basic elements, like reserving the appropriate-sized conference room; to the complex task of coordinating the roles of key meeting participants. The details of what might be included in the planning process are numerous, but here are a few key components.

The Agenda

The first rule about the agenda is to *have one*! Write down the purpose of the meeting, the topics that will be discussed and the expected outcome of the meeting. As part of this exercise, you will probably discuss the agenda with key attendees, which brings us to the second rule on agendas—you need to pre-meet with those attendees who will be influential in the meeting, either as supporters or detractors, or simply due to their status in the corporation.

The pre-meet can be informal in a one-on-one setting. The purpose of the pre-meet is to ensure that those key individuals are also prepared. They may have suggestions for your agenda, so be sure to review the draft that you have prepared. When you walk away from each pre-meet, you should understand their position on the subject matter, and they should walk away with a clear understanding of their role in the meeting and how much they should prepare. This will give you an opportunity to ensure your agenda topics are covered completely, without redundancy and it could expose some differing opinions.

The Format

The meeting format may be decided before or after you have some of your pre-meets. Some examples of meeting formats:

- Informational meeting—One or more subject matter experts are scheduled to talk through material that is new to most attendees. The Question/Answer period will fall mostly at the end of the presentation.
- Debate—Different valid viewpoints exist on a topic. The meeting won't necessarily resolve the issue, but details need to be brought forward and discussed.
- Workshop—Progress needs to be made on some focused area of work. The workshop participants are actively identifying issues and moving forward during the meeting to resolve them.

Room Logistics

The format of the meeting will prescribe how your room should be set up. The room layout and equipment will be the focus. You may want to have a checklist of the things to consider in setting up your room:

- Room layout—workshop setting, round tables for breakout discussions, one round conference room table
- Flip charts
- Whiteboard
- Overhead projector
- Conference phone
- Internet connection for Web access

The details of acquiring these items can be delegated to an administrative assistant, but the decisions regarding the needs lie with you.

Practicing

Ensure that the key presenters of the meeting know the amount of time they will have for any prepared remarks. This does not apply for some meeting formats, but is vital for others. If the meeting consists of mostly prepared remarks, you may want to do a practice run with the presenters, to ensure that they understand the time constraints and can meet your requirements.

Your role as moderator will involve opening remarks and wrapping up the meeting. In addition to encouraging your presenters to practice, you should practice your own speaking role.

Setting the Stage

Arrive to the meeting early. If possible, check the room logistics early in the day, to make sure the room is set up as you requested it and with all the items that you ordered. By checking early in the day, there is more time to make last minute corrections, if necessary.

As people arrive at the meeting, make them feel welcome. Casual conversation as they enter the room will put them in a collaborative mood and create a friendly atmosphere. It is especially intimidating for junior-level attendees to walk into a meeting room with more senior people who are all silently waiting for the meeting to start. If people are expected to participate in the meeting, you can influence that the moment they walk in the door by greeting them with a smile and some light small talk.

As moderator, it is your job to officially start the meeting. In your opening remarks, it is very helpful to restate the purpose of the meeting. By stating it verbally, it sets the stage. Then, if the discussion later veers off course, the initial agreement of the group to the meeting's purpose gives you permission to bring the discussion back on track.

The meeting format should be reviewed for the benefit of the group. Briefly discuss who will be talking, and whether questions will be entertained throughout. If there is more than one person in a formal presentation role, take the floor between the speakers to provide a smooth and natural transition from one presenter to the next. Try to provide a logical segue from the speaker who just finished to the speaker who is about to present.

Facilitating the Meeting

The success of the meeting may be dependent on your skills as facilitator. In this role, you will keep the discussion on topic and, near the end of the ses-

(continued on page 12)

If people are expected to participate in the meeting, you can influence that the moment they walk in the door by greeting them with a smile and some light small talk.

Like Death and Taxes—Meetings! ... • from page 11

sion, ensure that the Q&A is incorporated effectively.

Business meetings can often stray off-topic. When the off-topic conversation seems to be taking over your meeting, it is your job to bring it back. One approach to bringing the topic back into focus is to call it out to the group, stating that the agreed-upon purpose of this meeting is "x" and that the discussion on "y" may need a different group of people. Request that "y" be addressed at another time, with the better group to discuss that issue.

Another example of how the discussion can move off the stated agenda is an off-topic question asked by a well-intended audience member. If an off-topic question comes up, the answer should be brief. If follow-up questions move further off-course, suggest that the topic can be addressed offline.

If Q&A is part of the meeting, be ready to ask the first question. The first question often breaks the ice, and others soon follow. When they do, be sure that the entire group is able to hear the question. Repeat the question if necessary.

Another part of facilitation is to bring attention to action items. As follow-up items are identified, the facilitator should clarify who will be responsible for the action item, request a target date, and the means by which the owner will report back to the group. The notetaker (ideally someone other than the moderator) will thank you for making these points clear during the meeting.

Timekeeper

Be sure to have a watch, cell phone, or wall clock in view during the meeting, so that you can get people out of the room on time. During the planning of the meeting, you should get an idea of how much time should be allocated to various agenda items. Each agenda item should be well thought out, and the last agenda items are not necessarily the least important. Often those items get squeezed in or omitted completely. For these reasons, the agenda should rule, and the timekeeper should make sure that transitions between agenda items are kept on time. Adjusting the agenda during the meeting can be challenging.

If the first agenda item is taking much longer than planned, you may discover that your planning did not give appropriate time to the topic. At this point you might want to get group consensus on whether to continue with the current topic, at the expense of later topics, or whether to move on. You may need to get the group's permission to call an additional meeting. Be sure you have their commitment to attend this additional meeting if this is the approach you take.

Conclusion

Meetings certainly have their role in corporate business. And, like death and taxes, there's no way to avoid them. The good news, however, is that while ineffective meetings can sap time out of your day and everyone else's, meetings that are run effectively can be extremely valuable and informative and, actually, be the way that work gets done. When you take on the role of moderator, you have the opportunity to influence whether you're wasting your time in your meetings or getting the best out of your colleague's participation and your own. So plan ahead, set the stage, facilitate effectively and manage the time. And, unlike death and taxes, people may actually look forward to your meetings! ❐

10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job (Part 3)

by John West Hadley

Editor's Note: Catch up on Parts 1-2 of "10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job" in the January and April 2008 issues of The Stepping Stone, *and watch for the conclusion in the October 2008 issue.*

6. Use E-mails and Letters as Marketing Weapons

The term **Cover Letter** sounds like something superfluous, a wrapper to be torn off to get at what's inside. And if you approach cover letters that way, then they are a waste of time!

On the other hand, if you approach a cover letter as a **Marketing Letter**, it can be a powerful weapon in your arsenal. **Sure, not everyone will bother to read a cover letter, but I can guarantee they notice whether or not there is one included with your résumé!** And since the cover letter will become a part of your application file, often shared with all of the people you will meet during your interview, a powerfully written letter will have much more of an impact than it might appear on the surface.

Think of the marketing pieces you've received in the mail. What's your opinion of a brochure that arrives with no letter, just stuck in an envelope by itself? Doesn't it look like a mass mailing on which the sender has expended no effort? Unless the cover of the brochure jumps out and gets my attention, it's going straight into the circular file.

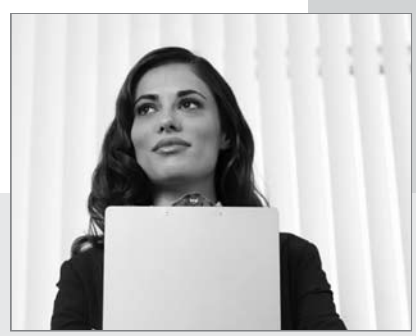
What about a brochure that arrives with a very generic or poorly written cover letter? That's almost worse, isn't it? Now even if the brochure is well-done, I'm likely to conclude that it was prepared professionally, and the letter is the true example of the quality of the sender's work. Now I'm wondering if he/she is capable of the level of quality service I seek.

Now what is your reaction if the brochure is accompanied by a compelling, persuasive, personalized letter? Aren't you much more likely to be interested in the sender's services? Aren't you starting to draw the conclusion that the sender is a true professional, who really cares about doing business with you? Someone who actually put some effort into this mailing?

One final scenario: What if all that is in the envelope is that compelling, persuasive, personalized letter, and no brochure at all? When you open the envelope and see a brochure, you immediately think the purpose is to sell you something. Without the brochure, aren't you that much more likely to at least scan the letter? If I'm a hiring manager, and a letter arrives with a résumé attached, it's very likely that I (or my administrative assistant, who has instructions to screen out résumés), will just mark it "Human Resources" and forward it on.

Obviously, if you are writing to apply for a specific job, you have no choice but to include your résumé to be considered. In other situations, I believe that a powerful letter **with no résumé attached** is the strongest possible approach.

So, from now on **don't send cover letters, send marketing letters!** Approach each cover letter, thank-you letter or e-mail, and networking follow-up note as a marketing presentation of why the reader should be excited about talking with you.



7. Build Your Network

Make sure everyone knows that you are in a career search, what you seek and why you would be an outstanding candidate.

(continued on page 14)

John West Hadley is a career counselor who works with job seekers frustrated with their search, and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence at work. He can be reached at *John@JHACareers.com* or 908.725.2437. His free *Career Tips* newsletter and other career resources are available at *www.JHACareers.com*.

10 Secrets to Landing Your Dream Job (Part 3) • from page 13

However, never do this by sending a blast e-mail to everyone about your search, or by handing out your résumé to everyone you know or meet.

Be particularly careful NOT to come across as asking for help in finding a job. If you do, you will lose most of what makes the contacts helpful, because:

- You are asking for a big favor that often turns contacts off, and makes them hesitant to refer you to others, as they presume you will impose on them in the same way.

- You are putting them on the spot, so that even if they sincerely want to help you, pretty soon they may start to feel awkward and may even become hesitant to return your phone calls.

- It puts blinders on what they seek to provide you, focusing their brainstorming squarely on contacts who they believe can help you further your search in very specific ways, mostly those who they believe have openings. You miss out on all of the other potentially influential contacts who can help you build a powerful spider web of connections that starts catching interesting opportunities for you.

When networking with your friends, the temptation is to assume they know what you bring to the table, and this can be a fatal mistake. Often friends or past co-workers have a mental image they've built up based on your past history with them, and you need to make sure that image is what will be most helpful to you. Start from the context in which they know you and acknowledge that, but then draw them a clear picture of the rest of the package you bring to the table.

Don't let people get off the hook by offering to send your résumé to HR or the hiring manager. Thank them for the offer, but then try to get them to actually introduce you to someone else you can talk to. **Focus on building that spider web of connections, instead of having your résumé handed off, often into a black hole.**

8. Network the Right Way

Many people confuse being open to networking opportunities with always being 'on stage.' They are constantly in a 'selling' mode, trying hard to shake as many hands as possible, and actually turn off many people in the process. I remember one recruiter who wandered around an SOA conference in a dumpy suit carrying a shopping bag, and sticking pens in everyone's hands. While I kept the pen, his name on it only served as a continual reminder of one headhunter with whom I would never work. This is similar to the person who runs around networking events handing everyone in sight their business card. That is NOT networking. That's giving out a lot of cards that are mostly going to wind up in the trash. **Networking is about building relationships**, and that takes time and effort.

I've met many people who try to go to a wide variety of networking events, constantly meeting lots of new people. However, simply attending the events doesn't accomplish all that much. It's the meetings, e-mails and phone calls in between events that build and ripen the relationships into meaningful opportunities. And if you spend too much time going to networking events, you don't have time to do the follow up that bears the real fruit! As a result, I've severely limited my memberships in networking groups. Last year I was invited to a new networking group that met biweekly, and enjoyed the people in it and the 'feel' of the group. Afterward, I considered joining.

On reflection, I concluded that I could only participate meaningfully in that group if I was prepared to drop out of at least one other group I was in.

Do a lot of networking, but be selective about it. Think about which networking events are most likely to help you develop the relationships you are seeking, or to provide you the long-term visibility your search requires. **Then make sure you are allocating the time and energy to build on those events instead of just attending them.**

And never ask about openings. If you have a compelling marketing message that describes your package and gets me excited about it, I will volunteer those. Focus on getting referrals to other people you can talk to in similar jobs to what you seek, in your target companies, or who might be able to advise or help you in different ways. ❐

Do a lot of networking, but be selective about it.

This Seems Like a Job Interview

by Steve Gaspar

Steve Gaspar, FSA, MAAA, is vice president and chief actuarial officer at The Regence Group in Portland, Oregon. He may be reached at *steven.gaspar@ regence.com.*

Years ago I had a conversation with another actuary about how her team approached their work. I was very curious about their performance because my area was directly affected by their work product. Following the end of a meeting I asked her some questions. After about 10 minutes of 'Help me understand why you do it that way', and 'What would you do in this situation?' she remarked "Hey, this seems like a job interview."

Pausing, I considered her statement. Similar to a job interview I was asking her questions and forming an impression. I needed to understand her capabilities and to what degree I could count on her to deliver. In the course of the discussion she disclosed challenges and limitations that affected her group. The entire time I was drawing conclusions about her competence in a variety of areas. Eventually I responded, "I suppose this does seem like a job interview. But then it's all a job interview, isn't it?" By this statement I meant that everything we do is observed by others, and this continuous demonstration-observation loop is very much like an ongoing interview.

Whether an independent consultant or an employee in a heavily matrixed organization, we all depend on others to get our job done. This interdependency causes a need for understanding each other's capabilities. We consciously and subconsciously form impressions of others all the time. This competency surveillance can influence one's career trajectory.

Direct observation is one way we form impressions of others. Our appearance plays a role in how we are perceived. Image consultant Maureen Costello often writes in *The Stepping Stone* about the importance of one's appearance (see the October 2007 and January 2008 issues). People draw conclusions from how we look, what we wear, how we stand and how much we smile. They infer from our appearance what we must be like. In the same way, people draw conclusions from every interaction they have with us. So in a sense it is all just one big job interview.

Consider this issue from a *personal brand* perspective. One's personal brand may be defined as the thoughts and images that consistently arise when others think of us. Personal brand is the residual image that exists when our name surfaces and we are not around. As such, we affect our brand every day by our words and our actions.

Personal brand is shaped by both "the what" and "the how". What we get done is always important—was it done on time, was it accurate, was it on budget, were all the angles considered? How we interact with others—what we say, how we say it, what expressions and emotions we use when we speak—can also be a powerful influence on one's personal brand. If we complete the task accurately and on time (the what), but alienate everyone in the process (the how) our brand suffers. If this sounds similar to Emotional Intelligence, it should (see "EI not IQ", July 2007 issue of *The Stepping Stone*).

Much stronger than a reputation, a personal brand can influence how tasks and resources are allocated in a company. For example, if your personal brand conveys "rock solid analysis, clever insight and strategic thinker" you are more likely than others to be given opportunities that require those skills. Or suppose your personal brand is "TCOB", i.e., Takes Care of Business. People with this reputation are trusted to get the job done when it counts. They are the business equivalent of a clutch-throw quarterback. The next time your boss needs someone to TCOB, guess who gets the chance? Think of the value of developing this kind of personal brand. Not only will such people get the opportunities that matter most, they will also be provided with resources to accomplish the task because of a proven track record.

What does your personal brand say to others? If you don't know, ask some trusted colleagues. Better yet, write down on paper what you think they will say to this question, "What skills do you think of when you think of me?" Then ask them that very question. Make sure you tell them that you want it straight—you truly want to know the good and the bad. Writing down your guesses at what they will say beforehand is important because it will show you something about your own self-awareness.

If you accurately predict their responses your self-awareness is relatively high. High self-awareness will be useful as you manage your personal brand. Conversely, if you guess incorrectly your self-awareness is not as high as it might be. Though not favorable news per se, such knowledge is useful in three ways. First, simply knowing that your self-awareness is not as high as you thought it was can be valuable. Such insight will make you pay closer attention to how you interact with others. Second, learning specifically how you are perceived by others can help you leverage hidden strengths. For example, you may find out that skills you took for granted are talents that others respect and value. And third, learning of weaknesses or things you should change is quite a gift. Just knowing isn't a cure, but you can't fix something until you know it is broken.

Once you have a better awareness of your personal brand you have two more questions to ask yourself: (1) what are the personal brands of those who are successful in the roles to which I aspire, and (2) will my personal brand carry me to my career goals? The first question seeks to identify what it takes to succeed. The second question involves sizing yourself up to see whether you have what it takes or that you need to make some changes. If the answer to the second question is "no, it won't get me there" then you know you have to do a better job managing your brand.

Personal brand management is a discipline. One needs to have the discipline to take on every task, every encounter, every day with the same mantra in mind, "my actions are going to support my brand." This is a critical point because as we have seen, people form opinions about each other all the time. They do so based on the only information they can get—looking at you, listening to you, asking others about you, and watching how you do things. Understanding what you are going to do and how you are going to do it—every day—is critical to brand development and maintenance. Disciplined brand management will help you nail that big ongoing job interview every day. ❐

What does your personal brand say to others? If you don't know, ask some trusted colleagues.

Business for Diplomatic Action

by Maureen Wild

This month I would like to pass along the name of a Web site that can be of invaluable use to business travelers. It is not meant to offer you discounts on your airfare or bump you into first-class hotel suites. Actually, if the truth be told, I believe it may even trump those perks. I am referring to ***www.businessfordiplomaticaction.com***, the brainchild of Keith Reinhard who founded this nonprofit to work to improve America's image abroad.

Intensive research by Business for Diplomatic Action reveals that "the alarming rise in anti-American sentiment represents a looming crisis not only for U.S. businesses and brands marketed abroad but for future generations of Americans as well. Even though much resentment of our country currently centers on our foreign policy, ***much does not.*** Other root causes include the perception that we are arrogant and insensitive as a people, that our culture has become all-pervasive, and that the global business expansion on the part of U.S. companies has been exploitive." The mission of the folks at BDA is "*to enlist the U.S. business community in actions to improve the standing of Americans in the world with the goal of once again seeing America as admired as global leader and respected as a courier of progress and prosperity for all people.*"

Reinhard asserts that Americans are disliked partly because of our collective personality which survey respondents around the world described as "arrogant, loud, ignorant and totally self-absorbed." Business for Diplomatic Action has published a short pamphlet with 16 tips on relating better to colleagues overseas. More than 600 companies have already ordered the information and have distributed it to their employees.

Some of "our" worst faux pas? It will hardly surprise you to discover that Americans are not good listeners. Not only do we seem to strike foreigners as "know it alls," we tend to pontificate at the top of our lungs. There is a serious problem with American volume control.

Another pet peeve of our international colleagues is our lack of propriety and respect for common courtesy. While foul language and crass behavior may be tolerated, or even extolled in American films and television, it certainly doesn't resonate in other cultures. This disconnect affects the bottom line. *Forbes* magazine reported that, "… when teens in 13 countries were recently surveyed on which brands they most recognized, not a single American brand finished in the top three. No CEO is willing to admit that anti-Americanism has directly affected the bottom line. But, we know in marketing that when the affinity drops and the brand rankings drop—as they are doing around the world—buying behavior will surely follow."

This is an alarming trend, but it is a trend that CAN be reversed. A little common sense, diplomacy and civility go a long way in repairing strained relationships. American business people, particularly those who do a lot of international travel, would do well to click onto Reinhard's site.

Maureen Wild is a certified etiquette and ethics trainer with credentials from The Protocol School of Washington and The Josephson Institute of Ethics. She has led seminars for many Fortune 500 companies and prominent colleges and universities. Wild has also been active in Meeting Professionals International and is a member of the National Speakers Association. She has been quoted in The New York Times Sunday business section "O," the Oprah magazine, Self magazine and American Baby magazine. She is certified by the State of New Jersey to mentor small business owners. Maureen has been interviewed on matters of ethics and etiquette for national television and radio programs. ❒

Maureen Wild is a certified etiquette and ethics trainer.
She can be reached at *Maureen@highroadsolutions.com or 908-625-8563*

Which Way to Go? Let Aptitudes Guide You

by Mary Pat Campbell

During the years of exam-taking, one looks toward the end of a seemingly endless series of tests. Newly minted FSAs are rarely interested in subjecting themselves to another battery of tests. And yet, a few months after I attended the FAC, I walked into the Manhattan office of the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation (JOCRF) to undergo some six hours of tests. But instead of the familiar feeling of the intellectual marathon that are FSA exams, the experience was varied and interesting. Best of all, you don't need to study for these tests.

The JOCRF tests for aptitudes, which they define as *"natural talents, special abilities for doing, or learning to do, certain kinds of things easily and quickly"*. Johnson O'Connor himself started down the road of aptitude testing when he worked for General Electric in the 1920s, and was trying to determine how to best fit employees there with particular jobs.

The first of what are now a couple dozen tests was picking up small metal pins and inserting them in a pegboard in order to test manual dexterity. Johnson O'Connor and his fellow researchers had found that performance on this test, as well as the others they administer, remains stable in a relative sense, when compared to a peer group based on age ranges. For example, on the manual dexterity test, people will peak in speed and accuracy at a certain age, but within their own age group they will stay in a certain percentile of performance. Scores above 70th percentile on a particular test are categorized as high in that aptitude; likewise, scoring below 30th percentile is considered low in that aptitude.

So why go through this testing? In my case, it was to help get a better feel for which of the various actuarial career paths would best suit me.

You see, in addition to keeping stats on the relative performance of people, the JOCRF also researches which aptitude patterns suit which careers best, in order to give advice to people in help picking an appropriate college and major (teens as young as 14 can be tested), a profession, or a particular path within a profession. For many professions studied by JOCRF, you need to possess particular aptitudes in order to be able to compete well—for example, if you have difficulty in seeing patterns in numbers (tested by asking the client to complete number sequences), you're most likely going to make a really dismal actuary.

But it's not just a matter of which aptitudes you posses a high score in—for some professions, scoring low or average in particular aptitudes is equally important:

- An aptitude may distract a person from getting a job done; if your mind is buzzing with ideas all the time, it may be difficult to concentrate on a single idea enough to take it all the way through execution.
- Particular aptitudes need to be used if you score high in them to avoid frustration—structural visualization is one of these.

For example, accountants tend to score low or average in structural visualization (tested with a mental paper-folding test and hands-on assembly of a 3D jigsaw puzzle). A person scoring high in structural visualization working as a corporate lawyer, for example, may find his job infuriating as he does not have an outlet for this ability. On the other hand, if such a person were to go into patent law, he could find ways of using it.

In the case of the actuarial profession, the JOCRF researchers have found that actuaries sat-

(continued on page 20)

Mary Pat Campbell is a senior actuarial associate for TIAA-CREF in New York, N.Y. She can be contacted at marypat.campbell@gmail.com

Which Way to Go? Let Aptitudes Guide You • from page 19

isfied in their careers score in the high range in structural visualization, number series and analytical reasoning, which involves taking something and putting its component parts in a logical relationship. If you have gotten through the exams and some years of actuarial work, chances are good you possess these aptitudes. But there's more to actuarial work than that, and there are many varied paths one can travel in one's actuarial career: product development, valuation, research in modeling, programming actuarial software, regulatory work, marketing, management, consulting, academia ... for such a small profession, there are many niches a person can fill.

So here are where some of the other aptitudes come into play, along with two other tests the JOCRF administers that aren't aptitude tests, but a personality test and a general knowledge test.

For example, there's ideaphoria, which is an ease in generating a lot of ideas quickly. Mind you, they don't test if any of your ideas are actually good, just whether you can generate a lot of them quickly. This is one of those aptitudes where having a high score is not necessarily good for certain positions. For example, business executives, except those in marketing, tend to be lower in ideaphoria; they need to be able to focus on ideas one at a time and consider other people's ideas more rather than necessarily generating their own. A person scoring high in ideaphoria can channel that manic flow into teaching, consulting, writing, marketing, product development, and any other pursuit where cranking out a high volume of ideas in a short period of time is a plus. People with high scores in ideaphoria would likely better avoid the type of actuarial work where you're doing the same thing year in and year out.

Another aptitude that may be relevant to an actuarial career is inductive reasoning, an aptitude associated with troubleshooting. A person scoring high in this aptitude might best work on systems or debugging other people's work. The medical profession is a career in which high inductive reasoning is a *sine qua non*—it's related to diagnosis.

Finally, another relevant aptitude is foresight, which relates to the ability to plan for the long term. This can be helpful in many areas of actuarial work, especially if you want to consider the life cycle of a new insurance product being developed. A high score in foresight is also handy if you are in management and need to consider business growth over the long term, and what kinds of talent development you would need in your company.

In addition to these aptitudes, there is the consideration of personality, which the JOCRF categorizes into two groups: objective and subjective. The objective personality works well with and through other people, and is suited for general management positions and more teamwork-oriented environments. The subjective personality, on the other hand, is very personally tied to their work, and better suited to work on their own piece of a project—they do well as an expert or a guru in their chosen field.

A subjective person in a management position can cause lots of grief, ending up as the classic micromanager, even sometimes redoing the work of their subordinates. This is not to say that subjective people are introverted and objective people extroverted; you can be a gregarious subjective person or a diffident objective person. This test has to do with how you relate to your work. To paraphrase a description by a JOCRF staff member: *work to an objective person is like a hard-boiled egg, the separation between work and self, like the separation between yolk and white, is well-defined. To the subjective person, life is an omelet, with work and self thoroughly mixed together.*

Finally, there is the one test you can actually study for: a vocabulary test. Again, this test is referenced against a peer group, and results are in terms of percentiles. Here, you can increase your percentile over time through focused study, and the JOCRF has found that a high vocabulary pays off in career success in all fields: the group with the highest vocabulary scores are not college professors, as you might think, but top business executives.

This test does track somewhat with general knowledge: as you get older, you know more, and the same progression is seen with vocabulary. The larger your vocabulary, the more sources you can read and understand. But also, the "hardest" words in the test are generally very precise and obscure terms, which may be related to being able to make fine distinctions in meaning and be related to communications skills. Executives have to communicate with a wide range of people and make their meaning clear. As the late William F. Buckley, Jr. wrote, *"I am lapidary but not eristic when I use big words."* Well put.

So if you are trying to choose between possible paths, or would like to be able to find the path that best fits you, contact the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation *http://jocrf.org*, which has offices in 11 cities across the United States. It's given me much food for thought, and if nothing else, has helped me to follow the Socratean oath: *"Know Thyself."* ❒

The Stepping Stone
Issue Number 31 • July 2008
Published quarterly by the Management
& Personal Development Section
of the Society of Actuaries

475 N. Martingale Road, Suite 600
Schaumburg, IL 60173
ph: 847.706.3500
f: 847.706.3599

World Wide Web: *www.soa.org*

This newsletter is free to section members.

SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

475 N. Martingale Road, Suite 600
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173
Web: www.soa.org