



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Stepping Stone

May 2011 – Issue 42

"A Game of Inches" Hits a Home Run!

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The *Stepping Stone* published an article called "A Game of Inches" by Michael Braunstein in October 2008. Coach Braunstein wrote that, in business like in the game of baseball, often the tiniest of margins make the big difference in career success. To help actuaries understand the "small but significant" things in our work or relationships that make a big difference, the Management and Personal Development Section held two different interactive sessions—(1) at the SOA Health Meeting in June 2009 and (2) at the SOA Life and Annuity Meeting in May 2010.

Facilitated discussions at each session helped us to learn what makes the difference in success at work—those subtle, seemingly unremarkable, not so obvious little things that separate those who get the job, the promotion, the next cool project, etc. To help gain insights, we split into three groups by management level,

- First Level Manager
- Middle Manager
- Senior Manager.

We then asked attendees to identify those tiny extras that can make a difference when dealing with others from different levels in their organizations. We asked each group three questions.

1. What are the three small things that you try to pay attention to when dealing with managers from other levels? Why? (Small things that I try to pay attention to....)
2. What are the three small things that you appreciate from managers from these other levels? Why are they helpful? (Small things I appreciate....)
3. What are the three small things that managers from other levels should avoid when dealing with you? What problems do they cause? (Small things that managers should avoid.....)

So, what did we learn? Each group offered candid responses to the questions. Also, each session offered some similar as well as different insights from health actuaries and the life/annuity actuaries. By cross-referencing the comments, we learned

1. what *FIRST LEVEL MANAGERS* pay attention to when dealing with *MIDDLE MANAGERS*, then
2. what *MIDDLE MANAGERS* appreciate from *FIRST LEVEL MANAGERS* as well as
3. what *FIRST LEVEL MANAGERS* should avoid when dealing with *MIDDLE MANAGERS*.

Using our cross-reference, we are also able to glean perspectives for Middle Managers and Senior Managers.

To view the cross-reference and gain insights for all responses, please refer to the SOA Management and Personal Development Section web page at www.soa.org/mpd, under Publications heading "Game of Inches".



Following are examples of the insights we learned from the participants in the three interactive groups at the respective sessions of health and life/annuity actuarial leaders.

Relationship:	First Level Managers ←	→	Middle Managers
✓	FLMs pay attention to what MMs want and when.	✓	MMs appreciate FLMs to clarify questions and be concise.
✓	FLMs appreciate MMs positive and constructive feedback.	✓	MMs pay attention to giving FLMs ongoing feedback, staying in touch, and being available.
✓	FLMs want MMs to avoid micro-managing.	✓	MMs want FLMs to avoid surprises.

Relationship:	First Level Managers ←	→	Senior Managers
✓	FLMs pay attention to communication with SMs by asking questions.	✓	SMs appreciate FLMs to communicate back on conflicts rather than whining.
✓	FLMs appreciate SMs approachability and recognition of who you are and what you do.	✓	SMs pay attention to FLMs by taking time to chat and getting to know them.
✓	FLMs want SMs to avoid overuse of Blackberry and not respecting others time.	✓	SMs want FLMs to avoid not asking themselves the questions first.

Relationship:	Middle Level Managers ←	→	Senior Managers
✓	MMs pay attention to information keeping SMs in the loop.	✓	SMs appreciate no surprises from MMs and early warning of problems.
✓	MMs appreciate the political influence of SMs and a clear understanding of their agenda.	✓	SMs pay attention to MMs understanding the problem—explaining issues, possibly making suggestions, and seeing them figure it out.
✓	MMs want SMs to avoid jumping to solutions.	✓	SMs want MMs to avoid lobbying an issue in the hallway.

Please note that the above insights are representative examples from the volunteer attendees in our interactive sessions. A more complete study may offer different or additional perspectives.

We appreciate the leaders who joined our interactive sessions and the facilitators who helped encourage excellent participation. As we start another baseball season, we are reminded that business, like baseball, is truly “a game of inches.” ●