



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Job Search

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Disclaimer: This is a work of “faction”. While this article is derived from actual events, details and events may have been modified for privacy reasons.

It’s not about you.

This is the opposite of what I had been taught. Of course it was all about me. It was about my GPA, SAT scores, the college I went to, the job that I got, and the money that I made.

And at some point, I started to realize that people were keeping score.

If you had parents - and if you had parents with friends - you probably became aware of this in an unpleasant way. There is always going to be someone who is smarter, someone who gets better grades, someone who has a better job, someone who makes more money. And accepting your limitations and trying your best in your own endeavors never seems to be enough.

If you live to satisfy the critics, it’ll always end up in disappointment - for you and the critic alike.

If there is one lesson I’ve learned, it’s that the critics will never be satisfied. They’re always bloodthirsty, always there to shoot you down. It doesn’t matter how skilled you are, how hard you try, or how much integrity, gentleness, and respect you have for others. You will never satisfy your critics. You must find another standard, another set of goals.

So what is the answer?

You can’t control how you are perceived, but you can control who you are.

Well, kind of true, but not quite. It is true that we can make better choices and conduct better lives. And I made several steps in that direction during my job search. I started getting up early in the morning, exercised on a daily basis and changed my diet. I studied for the actuarial exams nonstop. I continued to pursue my main hobbies and interests, which were church activities and

the violin - but otherwise, I really trimmed the fat from my daily routine.

And it didn’t end there. The job search started in earnest, as I pored over job openings on the internet. I contacted as many actuaries in the area as I could. I emailed several actuarial societies and clubs in the area, and finally found one I could join - the actuary club at UCLA. And through emails, telephone conversations, and actuary club meetings, I started to learn more and more about the profession.

One could say that I pursued the actuarial career religiously.

You’re not the one in control.

It’s foolish to think that you can do everything through your own power. Are you hard-working and disciplined? Yet, there are times when motivation disappears and your energy dissipates. Are you a social person? Yet people will let you down, and your social standing can turn on a dime. Are you kind and generous? Some stressful situation will come up that will test even your strongest traits. At some point you have to realize that there are things beyond your control.

Such was my fate when I started my internship, which finally came after a one-year job search, three exams passed, and constant efforts at networking. It’s always easy to point fingers after the fact and see all the things you could’ve done better - but I can honestly say that I made my very best effort in my internship. I was consistent in my effort, my production, and improvement. From an objective perspective, I had a higher level of production, while doing more demanding work than the vast majority of interns and new hires - which I gathered through several conversations and objective data I was given access to. I made my best efforts to communicate with my co-workers in a professional manner, and did so both within and outside the office. There is little more I could’ve done - I was already at the limits of my capability, given my inexperience.



The end did come, however, and it was not pleasant. It was especially unpleasant because I had been hired after an interview process for a full-time position - I was told that this position would be an internship after the fact, and even then, it would be considered a “trial period”. The review process came days before the final date of the internship - and on the final day of the internship, I was given one last exit interview and was summarily dismissed. I even put in several hours of work on the final day before the exit interview, finally being told to return the company equipment, pack up my desk and go home.

It's always good to know the truth - but it doesn't always help.

Yes, it's kind of contradictory. While unpleasant, it hardly came as a surprise. I had seen the signs. I had read a number of testimonies and comments on the web. I noticed that a number of interns and first-year associates had “left the company”. Some were poor performers, some were good performers, others were superb performers. All of them worked very hard and there is little doubt that most of them were bright people. There was a consistent pattern to this, though - it always came down to workload, billable hours and profit margins. If someone had to be let go, a poor performance review could be manufactured at any time to justify the layoff.

THE TRUTH WAS THAT I NEEDED THE INTERNSHIP VERY BADLY, AND I WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO WORK FOR FIVE MONTHS AND LOOK FOR A FULL-TIME POSITION ELSEWHERE.

Yet, even had I known this from the beginning, what would this change?

Nothing.

The truth was that I needed the internship very badly, and I would have been happy to work for five months and look for a full-time position elsewhere. And in principle, my responsibilities didn't change. You see, there are some things one should do simply because it is the right thing to do. In my case, I was given a temporary position, was being paid well for it, and the company deserved nothing less than my best effort and performance. They got it.

Be quick to give credit to others, but take responsibility for your own actions.

I'm sure that under different circumstances, I could have been a greater asset to my first employer. But the circumstances were what they were; and even at the end of my internship I was simply not capable of keeping up with more experienced associates and managers. In the end, I must be held responsible. The company set a standard that I was not able to meet, and that is that.

With that said, the internship helped me tremendously. I was treated like an experienced employee almost from the outset, and was given the same responsibilities, guidance and expectations on performance. I was given no illusions at all as to what it would be like to work for the company on a full-time basis - no one wore a special mask reserved strictly for interns, one designed to attract the intern to the company, as opposed to what it was like to really work for the company. It was an extremely important lesson that could only be learned through experience, and I was given that. Alas, I had to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

learn this the hard way, but that was the only way it could be learned - better to learn it early, while the stakes were still low.

You are not alone.

It only seems like you are. After all, you're the one who had to face the inevitable termination. But you're not alone, and your worth is not based on a few parting shots received during your exit interview. There is more, much more. There are the people you have spoken to, made connections with. People who have helped you, and people you have helped. And after a while, the pieces begin to fit. It's not about you; it's never been about you. It's about others. It's always been about others. It's about communicating, understanding and helping others. Making sure to listen and take down notes so you'll remember things later. Being unafraid to ask questions when necessary. Appreciating and respecting others' skills, and finding a way to facilitate, helping

them make the most of their talents. Taking a genuine interest in their lives, yet respecting their need to lead their own lives - instead of compelling them, or being compelled, to do things just to "fit in". Recognizing that differences exist, and learning to work together despite the differences - or because of the differences.

I've learned a lot of important lessons during my quest for a full-time job, which has finally come to an end. And I would like to thank all the people who have helped, supported and prayed for me throughout my ordeals during my job search - which had even greater trials than the ones I chose to reveal here. My only hope is to do for others what others have done for me - since there are so many people looking for the right guidance and advice - bright, talented, and motivated people looking to break into the profession.

I will do my best to be there for them. ☆