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Fiction and Football

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How much time do you spend thinking about your personal development plan? Some years, when you are starting a new role, it can be pretty clear what you need to focus on. In other years, you may need to stretch yourself more.

A few years ago, I was in that comfortable place of knowing my job and being a local expert on various things, but I still wanted to challenge myself in my development plan. I decided to increase my awareness of how I felt about different situations in order to determine how I needed to improve. In the process, I came up with two areas that I found myself trying to avoid.

The first area was writing. Sitting down in front of a blank Word document left me paralyzed. I always managed to procrastinate when it came to writing reports or even long emails. I didn't struggle with the right grammar or structure, but putting my thoughts on paper was hard. I decided that the best way to attack my fear of writing was to write. But write about what? I needed topics and deadlines or I would just procrastinate.

I signed up for online writing classes at Gotham Writers' Workshop (www.writingclasses.com). I took Creative Writing 101 followed by Mystery Writing I. Because they limit class size, I was able to interact with my instructors and fellow classmates just like a live class. These classes gave me the opportunity to face my fears and just do it. Inspired by Denise Tiller, I even wrote a mystery story with an actuary as hero. Denise is one of the authors of the reinsurance text that we've all studied from over the years, but my inspiration came from a novel she wrote called *Calculated Risk* about an actuary caught up in a murder-mystery.

The next area in which I needed more confidence was sports. That doesn't sound like a normal actuarial skill, and it probably wouldn't even occur to those of you who are fluent in sports, but for me it was an issue. I worked for a reinsurer and I often had the opportunity to interact with clients. I was perfectly comfortable chatting with them until the topic turned to sports—I often struggled to

determine which sport they were even talking about. My family has no interest in sports, so I had very little background to work with. I decided to start with football. Just sitting down to watch football did little to keep my attention, so when the opportunity arose to join a fantasy football league, I nervously joined in. The competitive nature of the fantasy game gave me a reason to be interested. Slowly, I started understanding the game. I'm no expert, but I can at least enjoy watching a game now, and add something small to a sports conversation. I even decided last summer that the Giants would be "my team"—mostly because I had a lot of them on my fantasy team and I could always see their games on TV here in Connecticut. That worked out well for me. We had a great time inviting over our Patriots-fan friends for a Super Bowl party!

So, what about you? Which areas make you squirm? Be honest with yourself. None of these need to go into your official personal development plan. (I never put "watch football" on my official plans.) How do you want to improve yourself beyond your technical skills? Jump in there and do it. Force yourself do that whatever it is you are avoiding until you realize it's not so bad. You never know, you just might gain some new interests. I'm writing this article (starting from a blank Word document) while eagerly awaiting the start of football season. How are you going to grow this year? ●