



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

Actuary of the Future

November 2009 – Issue 27



Actuary

ISSUE 27 | NOVEMBER 2009

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A World of Possibilities for the Young at Heart and Open of Mind: The Younger Actuaries Network Mentoring Program

By Ashwini Vaidya

It all began in Sao Paolo, Brazil. Marina Adelsky, jet-setter extraordinaire, a 25-year actuary with the heart and energy of a 25-year-old, met Gisele Immig, a spunky Brazilian actuary, one of the few working toward SOA fellowship. Starting from their taxi ride through Sao Paolo mid-day traffic, to lunch near Gisele's office, through discussions of travel in Brazil and actuarial aspirations, to their recent lunch at the Bridgewater Commons mall in New Jersey, close to where they both now live, the two have enjoyed and benefited from their time together. Marina has learned that she is an (over)ambitious vacationer, and Gisele has learned of and acted on opportunities here in the United States. What they have in common—vivaciousness, enthusiasm and determination—informs their experience as our first mentor-protégé pair.

Gisele enjoyed her experience so much, she told her friend Bruno Lima, an actuarial student at one of the universities in Brazil, about the program. In a recent e-mail thread, Bruno and his mentor, Tom Herget, discussed topics ranging from travel updates and soccer to the recent merger of Watson Wyatt and Towers Perrin and the impact on the actuarial student positions available to foreign candidates due to TARP guidelines. Tom encouraged Bruno not to worry, lauding him on working so hard at finishing his actuarial coursework and his work on his exams, and lauding himself for retiring thus making room for new actuarial candidates ...

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“For it’s hard, you will find, to be narrow of mind; If you’re young at heart” — Frank Sinatra

What our mentors and protégés have in common is curiosity, enthusiasm and a can-do attitude. True to the Younger Actuaries Network philosophy, they are all young at heart and open of mind. Our volunteer mentors and protégés are a diverse, determined and dedicated group of people. Between our volunteer mentors and their proactive protégés, we span the globe, covering four continents and between five and eight countries—depending on where in the world the many travelers among us are at the moment. We have mentors who live in China, the United States and Canada. Most travel extensively for work and pleasure. Many have lived or worked elsewhere in the world. Our current protégés are Chinese, Korean, Brazilian and American. Some are students studying actuarial science in a graduate program, some have been actuaries for a bit, others have decided to become actuaries after working elsewhere. Thus the program participants have an ever-widening range of perspectives and experiences to share with one another which enriches the lives—personal and professional—of both the mentors and protégés.

“Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction” — John C. Crosby, politician

So do you have it in you to be a mentor? You probably have already mentored someone and not even known it. All that it takes is a willingness to share your experiences and your ability to be an enthusiastic listener. A mentor will also encourage and develop their protégé to find his or her own way in the actuarial world through inquiry, lively discussion around his or her perspectives, and a willingness to provide guidance. Mentors find that they learn to be a better leader and manager. They might even discover a new perspective on topics that they’ve come to consider areas of expertise. They typically find that they learn something new about themselves as well, actuarial or otherwise. From senior actuaries with busy travel and work schedules, to new ASAs and FSAs, our mentors are

eager to share what they have learned and to learn from their protégés, whether it be management skills or the best restaurants to eat at in their hometowns, and have enjoyed the experience immensely. We’re sure that our future mentors (that means you!) will agree.

“Mentor: Someone whose hindsight can become your foresight” — Anonymous

Our protégés are eager to broaden their horizons, have an advisor in whom they can confide and seek opportunities to learn from their advisor’s experiences. They are eager to share themselves, ask good questions, have a personal cheerleader and reach out to someone who has ‘been there, done that’ in order to ease their journey through the unfamiliar. Perhaps an obvious benefit of being a protégé is that one has access to a more senior actuary—someone they might never have met on their own or may have been intimidated to talk to otherwise—in a comfortable and casual environment. They have the opportunity to learn from their mentor’s experience, and have someone to share their ideas with in order to receive good, informed feedback. This is a great privilege and with it comes great responsibility:

- to learn as much as possible by being available and arranging opportunities to make contact with the mentor
- to show interest by asking thoughtful questions, being curious and sharing their own views
- to take initiative by reading up on current issues or topics of interest so that they can be discussed with the mentor, and having goals that the mentor can help the protégé clarify and plan a means of achieving.

A mentor is not only a friend, but serves as an experienced, thoughtful and accessible guide.

For more information on the Younger Actuaries Network mentoring program, including program information for both protégés and mentors, as well as a form asking for basic introductory information, visit: <http://www.soa.org/professional-interests/actuary-of-the-future/aof-mentor-prgm.aspx>. We hope that you will join us.



Ashwini Vaidya runs the Younger Actuaries Network mentoring program. She encourages you to contact her at ashwini_a_vaidya@yahoo.com with any questions you have or to participate in the program.