



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

Actuary of the Future

Nov. 2012 – Issue 33

It's a Challenging Job Market – How to Go the Extra Mile

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There's just not enough time! – That seems to be the consensus of college students trying to balance the pressures of a normal academic workload and extracurricular activities while having time to enjoy the college experience. When senior year rolls around there is the added pressure of finding a job, and not just any job but a job that will allow you to progress and satisfy your professional goals. Having gone to many career fairs, I learned early on that employers look for three main things on a resume: proof of academic aptitude, extracurricular involvement and leadership, and finally work experience. For the actuarial student there's the added pressure of having to pass one or two actuarial exams, but for the most part this is a standard checklist for employers. With so much economic uncertainty and student loans, students find themselves scrambling to get any job to pay the bills. Many students get so caught up in “beefing up” their resume they place little attention, if any, on one of the most important aspects of the job

search—networking. There is a common misconception by students that networking is solely a means to an end, the end being getting that desired job. However, networking is a life habit; it's the act of connecting yourself with a support system to help guide you, and when used efficiently, can go a long way in helping you to accomplish your life goals.

Networking provides a great deal of exposure to the different jobs out there and the opportunity to meet a wide range of people. With networking it's not just about a name, it's about getting to know someone on a personal level and learning more about what drives them to do what they do. In the process you start to learn about more about the things that interest you and the platforms available to you. As an actuarial student at a university where engineering predominates, there were limited opportunities to meet working actuaries, as most of the companies on campus were recruiting engineers.

Networking, therefore, became a useful tool for me to get as much information on the actuarial field and the type of problems that actuaries deal with.

One thing I learned very quickly is that if you ask someone who's gone ahead for help, more than likely they'll be willing to offer advice as best they can. I remember going to an alumni panel comprised of engineers and thinking "I doubt there will be any relevant information for actuarial students," but I went anyway. Surprisingly, when I mentioned in passing that my major was actuarial science, one of the alumni said a close friend of his was an actuary and would be more than willing to talk to me. Often your contacts, even if they can't help you themselves, can connect you with someone who can.

I find alumni in particular are very helpful because they are rooting for you to do well and will try their best to assist because they've been in the same position. In my junior year I had a hard time finding an internship. With one exam and one internship completed, I thought I was a viable candidate. As luck would have it, another student told me about an opening at his company and asked me to submit my resume. Because of this connection, I was able to get an internship and ended up returning to the company full time. With the economy as it is, many companies have cut down on the number of interns that they take making it more competitive for students seeking internships. Sometimes it's not a matter of having all the right qualifications but rather knowing the right people and taking advantage of your connections. Having a set of people who understand your skill set and what you bring to the table goes a long way in helping you get ahead in the job market.

With that, I'd like to share three simple tips that I think will give students an edge in the job hunting process.

Be Proactive – Seek out opportunities to network, and more often than not, there are many available. In college the easiest way is through alumni. Most career centers have a list of alumni in your field that you can connect

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with. Another good way to connect with other alumni is through involvement in certain clubs on campus. Professors are also a good resource and have a wealth of information about specific fields and taking the right career path. These days social media is another avenue. You can connect with people on LinkedIn (don't just add people to your friends list). I encourage you to actually talk to them and learn more about what they do. Just going the extra mile and asking a question can lead you to discover career possibilities that you may not have thought of. Don't expect opportunities to come knocking on your door if you aren't willing to spend time to seek them out.

Be Honest – Understanding what you want in a career can go a long way in finding the right people who can help you get to that place. What do you value most in a career? Does it need to be fast-paced and challenging? Do you want to travel often? Do you prefer a large corporation or a smaller startup? Too often I find that people don't take the time to think about what they would enjoy doing professionally. I think there's a tendency to view working as a way to pay bills rather than a meaningful engagement. It's important to spend time thinking about your ideal job and recognizing the positives as well as the negatives that come along with that. For example, traveling often may be a great way to meet people, but it can also be exhausting after a while. Spending some time thinking honestly about the ideal job can help you decide what career path is right for you and prevent you from taking jobs that may limit your progression.

Keep Track – Keep a list of contacts that you've met and how you met them. Maintain the relationship and send a message to check in from time to time. Remember these are people you want to develop a relationship with and feel comfortable asking for advice. Don't wait to contact

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someone in your network when you have an immediate need. It is important to touch base with them periodically to let them know what's going on in your life and vice versa. This way you develop a diverse base of contacts that will be able to provide different perspectives and advice.

It's never too late to start developing and strengthening relationships with people who are vested in your success. Understanding the importance of networking is the first step toward achieving a fulfilling and rewarding professional career and personal life. ☆



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