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## Connecting the Dots to a Brighter Future

By Jennie McGinnis

On Sept. 16, 2009, the Younger Actuaries Network (YAN) hosted its second annual webcast. “Connecting the Dots to a Brighter Future” provided attendees with tools to recognize and effectively use mentoring and networking opportunities toward their personal and professional growth. The large majority of participants found the session to be relevant and indicated that they would likely participate in sessions on similar topics in the future while heralding the presenters for their strong subject knowledge. The session was led by John Lowell, vice president at JPMorgan Compensation and Benefits Strategy, and Tom Herget, the former executive vice president and principal owner of PolySystems, with Ashwini Vaidya serving as moderator.

### MAKING THE MOST OF A MENTOR/PROTÉGÉ RELATIONSHIP

A mentor is “someone whose hindsight can become your foresight,” as quoted by Tom. The process of finding a mentor often happens quite naturally, as individuals seeking a mentor tend to be drawn to those they would like to emulate (which, John noted, is nothing to be afraid of, as imitation is the sincerest form of flattery). Characteristics of a successful relationship include respect for each other, strong communication, active listening and a willingness to learn. The fact that these aspects apply to both mentor and protégé offer the protégé a training ground to become an effective mentor themselves.

In a good mentor/protégé relationship, both individuals will find themselves benefiting from the time spent together. While the protégé can pick the mentor’s brain for advice on their career journey, the mentor also benefits through opportunities to hone their manage-

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ment skills, identify talent and grow themselves (since teaching is a learning experience, as pointed out by Tom). Given that there is so much to learn, and no one can ever know it all, mentorships provide a key tool toward growing as an actuary and as an individual.



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#### **NETWORKING TOWARD THE NEXT STEP**

The importance of networking cannot be underestimated, particularly after you have completed your actuarial exams. As Tom described, it's all about who you know and who knows you. Opportunities to network are everywhere and, given current technology, can happen at any time. Any networking relationship starts with a first impression, making how you look and present yourself essential. Your network will grow if you are willing to introduce your contacts to each other, increasing the likelihood that they will do the same.

Effective networking requires skill. For some, the ability to break past a preference for introversion is a big step. Perhaps comforting to these individuals is that it's okay to be part of a group when networking—the key is to keep growing that group. For others, it is finding the best way to expand their current network. Opportunities to get

your name out there exist beyond attending meetings and include writing an article, presenting at a session or webcast, or volunteering on a committee or project.

When interacting with others it is essential to be, as John described, a sponge. More important than remembering basic contact information is to learn something specific about each person—the more detail, the better. Being able to recall this information upon later interactions will go far toward strengthening the relationship. Those with concerns regarding their ability to memorize such information are encouraged to think back on how much information they were able to recall when studying for their actuarial exams!

The YAN thanks the presenters and attendees for their participation in the “Connecting the Dots to a Brighter Future” webcast and looks forward to bringing you another great webcast this fall! ☆