



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Critical Influencing Skills for Advancing Professionals (Part 2)

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Beyond technical skills, actuaries must be outstanding communicators and influencers in order to maintain the critical roles they play within insurance organizations. Part 1¹ of this series discussed how to influence your team. Now let's move on to influencing your peers.

INFLUENCING YOUR PEERS

No matter how good you are, you can never do it alone. Last time we discussed influencing a team to achieve a vision, but another constituent to focus on is your peer group: the other team leaders in your group, colleagues who you work with on committees, and others with whom you interact informally every day. If you don't need help from a peer today, you will tomorrow. And when you need that help, there's nothing worse than not getting it. So now we're going to focus on influencing your peers to provide you the help you need, when you need it.

Influencing your peers is all about developing strong personal relationships and building up "good will." Make no mistake about it, people help and support people they like. Read that sentence again—*people help and support people they like*.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you are at your desk and the phone rings. You can see on the display that the person calling is someone with whom you don't get along. What's your first reaction? Probably something like "...oh, what does *he* want?" Your first thought is that this is not going to be a good interaction, you would just as soon not be speaking to this person, and you hope he doesn't want anything from you.

Now, put yourself on the caller's end of the phone—you are the one who needs something (for example, you need to influence your peer to help you finish a project or to be an advocate for your position at an upcoming meeting). You need to make sure no one on the receiving end is ever thinking that they don't want to help you. How do you do that? Read on....

First and foremost, ***always be personable***, even when your peer is not. Never give someone an excuse to not help you because you didn't try to maintain a good relationship with him or her in the first place. In fact, ***make*** them like you—be positive and personable in all your interactions. By the way, that's good advice for almost all situations. The key is remembering it; especially when dealing with more difficult colleagues. One day you may need their help or their vote or whatever, and you want to make sure you've done everything possible in advance for it to be easy to be on your side. That does not mean a peer is always going to agree with you no matter what, but the point is to give yourself the best chance possible of winning them over.

Second, ***always say yes to helping out a peer***. Yes, always—well, as much as humanly possible. Why? Because when you need someone's support, it's much easier to get it if they are indebted to you. Hopefully you won't have to remind them of that, but, generally speaking, most people appreciate being helped and that usually translates into helping out when the time comes. By the way, I understand that it's not always easy to help out while your own workload is probably high as well. But, you must think of this as an investment in your future influence. Providing help today allows you to influence others more successfully tomorrow.

Third, ***make it easy for a peer to help you***. What I mean here is that you need to be very clear, concise and limited in the help you are looking for. If you are, it will be easier to secure the support you need. Think about starting your request like this: "All I need from you is" Don't ask for the world when you don't need it.

Fourth and finally, ***meet your peers in person as much as possible ... avoid emailing like the plague!!*** This is my favorite one to discuss because those who have worked with me in the past know I have a pet peeve about getting too



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



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many email messages. Don't get me wrong—there are a lot of great uses for email, but developing personal relationships is not one of them.

In these days of heavy electronic communication (emailing, texting, tweeting, blogging, etc.), I worry that we are losing important interpersonal skills and this negatively affects our ability to influence others. Remember, you can't look someone in the eye in an email, and it's too easy for him or her to say "no" in a quick response back. I've seen too many professionals show a lot

of bravery when typing an email only to crumble later when facing a difficult situation in person. So here's my advice ... get up from your desk, walk over to the person you need to influence (call if you are not in the same location), talk to them directly, and develop your relationship with them. You'll have a much better chance of getting the outcome you are looking for.

Editor's Note: Watch for the concluding Part 3 of this series, *Influencing Management*, in the February 2014 issue of *The Stepping Stone*. ●

ENDNOTE

¹ Published in the August 2013 issue of *The Stepping Stone*.