



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

# The Stepping Stone

February 2014 – Issue 53

# Highlights of the 2013 SOA Annual Meeting

By Jennifer Fleck

Here's an overview of the exciting activities in which your Management and Personal Development (MPD) Section participated at the 2013 SOA Annual Meeting held in San Diego, Calif.

## NETWORKING EVENT: THE GREAT SAN DIEGO ADVENTURE RALLY

We kicked off the meeting with a Sunday afternoon networking event. Split into small teams, we worked together to complete The Great San Diego Adventure Rally. We explored the historic Gaslamp district and had a great time working together as teams. While my team didn't come anywhere near winning, I think we had the most fun.

## THE BACK OF THE NAPKIN

The Opening General Session on Monday wasn't organized by the MPD Section, but it was full of great information that supports our goals. Dan Roam, author of *The Back of the Napkin*, spoke to us about the power of pictures. He explained that drawing the issue you are facing makes it much easier to define and ultimately solve. It also helps you explain complex technical issues to non-technical audiences and allows you to gain their trust. Even those of us who are not artistically inclined can draw simple stick figures and flow charts. That's all it usually takes. This is one book that I've put on my Christmas wish-list.

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FORUM AND LUNCHEON

The Women's Leadership Forum that we co-sponsor with SCOR had an amazing panel of women talking about their careers. Joanne Collins moderated the session with Sue Ann Collins, Sharon Giffen and Tonya Manning. These successful women shared personal stories of struggles and triumphs over the years. We talked about mentors, choices, networking, volunteering and a host of other topics. See the article on page 30 for some deeper insights on this very popular session.



## EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING VIRTUAL TEAMS: LEADING WITHOUT SEEING

Paula Hodges and Van Beach, both seasoned virtual team managers, shared their experiences and insights. Paula kicked off the session with a bold demonstration of the discomfort associated with interacting with people you can't see, when she turned her back to the audience and proceeded with a segment of her presentation. With the attendees engaged, she then described the process of team building, while highlighting specific challenges when team members are virtual. Van candidly reflected upon his experiences managing a large team where the core was co-located, but also included virtual individual contributors and a virtual manager—himself. Insights included the extensive use of video conferencing, the importance of establishing communication patterns and rhythms, and emphasis on leadership. Attendees left with a better understanding of team formation, the challenges specific to a virtual team, ideas on overcoming these challenges, and practical tips and considerations for remote employees.



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Once the team knows what they are working toward, it is easier to manage the team with metrics.

## LEADERSHIP BOOK REVIEW BREAKFAST

We kicked off Tuesday morning with our annual Leadership Book Review Breakfast and section updates. Frank Chechel, Jeff Stock and Mary Wagnon discussed some of the best leadership books they had read over the past year. *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* by Sheryl Sandberg; *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* by Charles Duhigg; *Drive* by Daniel Pink; and *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership-Powered Company* by Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel are all books that you might want to add to your holiday wish-list this year.

## NEW MANAGER'S TOOLKIT

In this session, Ray DiDonna spoke to a group of young actuarial leaders. During this interactive session, we learned about how actuaries advance in the beginning of their careers by being technical experts; but eventually to continue to progress,

actuaries need to learn to grow others and multiply their impact. First, Ray spoke about creating a vision that the team can see. Once the team knows what they are working toward, it is easier to manage the team with metrics. He spoke about the importance of providing timely, clear and candid feedback. The conversation got more heated when the topic turned toward compensation and recognition. Ray suggested that a team can be managed to a distribution and ranked. Then bonuses should be distributed with that ranking in mind. This session left future managers with a lot to think about as they continue to advance their careers.

Overall, the annual meeting was a huge success. It was the second largest attended meeting ever. We are already starting to plan for the 2014 Annual Meeting in Orlando! I hope you can join us there. Drop me a line if you have any suggestions for meeting topics or if you would like to volunteer to help us put together a session. ●



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