



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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## What Would You Do? Does Substance Trump Style?

By John West Hadley

Welcome to our ninth entry in the "What Would You Do?" series.<sup>1</sup> Write to me at [SteppingStone@JHACareers.com](mailto:SteppingStone@JHACareers.com) to tell me what you would do. In the August issue, I'll compile the responses received (preserving your anonymity, of course), along with what actually happened in the real-life situation.

Help me craft future case studies. Write to me about your own challenging, surprising or nightmarish situations involving business, leadership, management, or any of the topic areas covered by *The Stepping Stone*, and what lessons you learned from them. I'll collaborate with you on turning your situation into a simple case study, being careful to ensure no one is identifiable. And share your own thoughts (pro and con) on the series as a whole at [SteppingStone@JHACareers.com](mailto:SteppingStone@JHACareers.com).

### DOES SUBSTANCE TRUMP STYLE?

Joan is an actuary who finds any new assignment extremely stressful. She's terrified of missing

deadlines, and the uncertainty makes her very grumpy. As a result, even though she generally does a terrific job, people complain about working with her. In fact, in the five years she has been at Bingham Life, they have on three separate occasions begun the paperwork that would lead to firing her. Each time she has agreed to a corrective action plan, followed through, and has been reinstated.

Bill is the nicest actuary, who everyone loves to work with, but is incompetent. He never asks questions, and simply proceeds with his work in whatever way he has interpreted the assignment in the first place, often making mistakes and rarely meeting deadlines.

Bingham goes through a reorganization, and both Bill and Joan are moved to new units. The head of the operation warns their new managers of their shortcomings. One month later, both managers come to see him:

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Does Substance Trump Style? | FROM PAGE 1

- Joan's new manager tells the head that he needs to fire Joan because no one in his area can work with her.
- Bill's new manager tells the head she can't believe he gave Bill up, because he is so good and everyone loves him.

What would you do as either the operation head or the new managers? ●

**ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Past issues in the series have considered whether to demote or fire a difficult employee, performance reviews and their aftermath, interview challenges from both sides of the desk, evaluating job offers, a difficult product decision, and how to build connections with the home office. To catch up on the entire series, which started in May 2013, check out back issues of *The Stepping Stone* on the Management and Personal Development (M&PD) website at [www.soa.org/mpd](http://www.soa.org/mpd).



**John Hadley** is a career counselor who works with job seekers frustrated with their search, and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence. He can be reached at [John@JHACareers.com](mailto:John@JHACareers.com) or 908.725.2437. Find his free *Career Tips* newsletter and other resources at [www.JHACareers.com](http://www.JHACareers.com).

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