

The Stepping Stone

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**SOCIETY OF
ACTUARIES**

**LEADERSHIP &
DEVELOPMENT
SECTION**

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To join the section, SOA members and
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Publication Month: November
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CHAIRPERSON'S CORNER

Face to Face

By Kelly Hennigan

Welcome to the August 2016 issue of *The Stepping Stone*! As always, you will find insightful articles on leadership, personal and career development, people and business management, and our popular “What Would You Do?” series. In this issue we include articles on such diverse topics as emotional intelligence, career growth, influence, leadership, and the psychology needed to foster success, and also kick off our Diversity Spotlight addition to the newsletter.

Peter Gruber, the chairman and CEO of Mandalay Entertainment, once said, “Nothing replaces being in the same room, face-to-face, breathing the same air and reading and feeling each other’s micro-expressions.” Our Leadership & Development (L&D) Section Council leaders can attest to this, as we all (finally!) had the opportunity to meet face to face in April.

Due to the nature of the resources provided by the L&D Section, this section is unique—our membership is comprised of individuals across many different practices areas. As such, our nine elected section council leaders rarely find more than two to three of us attending a given Society of Actuaries (SOA) meeting where we could gather to brainstorm on section-related topics. While we do hold a monthly conference call, and may talk more frequently based on ongoing initiatives, we felt strongly that a face-to-face gathering would be beneficial to us, as well as ultimately provide value to our members.

So, we decided to make it happen! Our section council leaders worked with our SOA Board partner (John Robinson) and SOA staff partners (Beth Bernardi and Jane Lesch) to schedule a one-day face-to-face meeting with a jam-packed agenda. I want to share with you the outcome of our meeting discussion.

Over the course of the next year and beyond, the L&D Section Council will focus on three key initiatives: *The Stepping Stone*, meeting speakers and networking opportunities. These are relevant to both our mission statement (found at www.SOA.org/ld) and important to members, based on feedback received through our March 2016 L&D membership survey.



INITIATIVE #1: THE STEPPING STONE

We will continue to deliver quality content via a variety of authors and perspectives, via The Stepping Stone quarterly newsletter.

Over the coming months our readers may see some updates and additions to the publication, such as the recent addition of the Diversity Spotlight. We will also begin to include some shorter “blog-style” articles alongside of the typical-length articles that our membership is accustomed to reading. To supplement our quarterly contact with our membership, L&D will begin piloting an e-news communication to keep our members informed of current events and resources. Of the many L&D Section resources offered, *The Stepping Stone* is the one resource that our membership uses most regularly and finds a great deal of value in doing so.

To those readers who are interested in submitting an article, or who know someone who may be interested in doing so, always feel free to share your articles with our editor, John West Hadley (at SteppingStone@JHACareers.com), for consideration in a future edition of *The Stepping Stone*.

INITIATIVE #2: MEETING SPEAKERS

We will continue to engage quality speakers at SOA meetings and symposiums.

While we continue to hear positive feedback on the actuarial-related leadership panel sessions at SOA meetings, we have

branched out to offer non-actuarial speaker sessions where the presenters have ranged from executive coaches to career consultants to social media experts. Second to *The Stepping Stone* resource, many of you provided feedback that our meeting speakers are well-received and very much appreciated to counterbalance the more technical topics offered at SOA meetings.

Also, when possible, we will leverage meeting speakers to further engage them in offerings for our section—such as through participation in webinars/webcasts or by recording podcasts.

INITIATIVE #3: NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

We will continue to facilitate and offer a variety of networking opportunities for actuaries.

At the SOA Life & Annuity Symposium this year, these networking opportunities came in various forms—one of which was L&D as a co-sponsor of the “Actuaries in the C-Suite” panel that I moderated. This panel featured three actuaries—a CEO of a life insurance company’s division; a CEO and co-founder of a pet insurance company; and the COO of a P2P risk sharing company. Needless to say, it was an extremely interesting panel to learn from due to the diversity of experience.

In October at the SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit, one of our sessions is titled “Breakfast with Senior Leaders,” where each

breakfast table will be hosted by an experienced actuary who has been in a senior leadership, senior management or C-suite role. We hope you will join us in Las Vegas for this meeting!

In this day and age of texting, instant messaging and email communication, the L&D Section Council leaders created the opportunity to get us into the same (conference) room, face to face, breathing the same (conference) room air, so that we could have the ability to read and feel each other’s micro-expressions. We found it extremely worthwhile for both us and our members to have the opportunity to further refine our three key initiatives: *The Stepping Stone*, meeting speakers and networking opportunities.

Thank you for your continued interest in *The Stepping Stone* and the L&D Section. Please do not hesitate to reach out to any of our section members with any suggestions you might have for future issues, or contact *The Stepping Stone* directly at SteppingStone@JHACareers.com. ■



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LEADERSHIP INSPIRATION: *The Effective Executive*

By Timothy Paris

Editor's Note: In the Leadership & Development Section's Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be better actuarial leaders. Here is the winning entry from the "Book/Song" category.

I find leadership inspiration in many places—books and movies, fiction and nonfiction, old and new, widely popular and niche. But I tend to revert to the classics. And from a leadership standpoint, I think that *The Effective Executive* by Peter Drucker is superb. It is written from a general business standpoint, which I think increases its value to actuaries and others with technical backgrounds in leadership roles.

While the concept of the "executive" role has changed dramatically along with business and cultural mores in the nearly 50 years since its publication, the key points in this book still provide a vital compass to effective leadership, which I summarize as:

1. Know where your time goes. Prune the waste and preserve time to learn and think deeply.
2. Focus on the externally oriented results that are required, then reverse engineer to optimize delivery.
3. Build on the strengths in yourself and your organization.
4. Prioritize, then concentrate your organization's resources for maximum impact on the most important areas. Aim high. Some things are not worth doing.
5. Most important, executives make effective decisions. These are typically few and strategic in nature, often subject to dissenting opinion rather than consensus, and are carried out in practice. Decisions with poor follow-through are often indicative of ineffective executives.



This book has massively influenced generations of business leaders and its echoes are still heard in 21st century best-selling business books such as two of my favorites—*The 4-Hour Workweek*, by Timothy Ferriss, and *Zero to One*, by Peter Thiel. As an actuary and head of a consulting firm, I like to think that my efforts to make effective decisions will ultimately lead to the objectives encapsulated in both of these book titles, but I have a ways to go yet. ■



Timothy Paris, FSA, MAAA, is CEO of Ruark Consulting in Simsbury, Connecticut. He can be reached at timothyparis@ruark.co.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? Stay or Go?

By John West Hadley

Here is our next entry in the “*What Would You Do?*” series.¹ Write to me at SteppingStone@JHACareers.com to tell me what you would do. In the November 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.

STAY OR GO?

Hardy had recently taken over as the product line actuary, a new role in the wake of the merger of his company into its parent. He was located at his company’s remote office, where he had been responsible for the actuarial work for several lines, including that one, for some time. Now it was receiving new scrutiny as the line reported up through a different operation within the parent.

It was quarter-end, and Hardy had arranged (and been approved) to take a few days’ vacation to attend his 20th college reunion on the West Coast, back to back with a three-day trip to the parent for its annual leadership conference. On the final day of the conference, his new boss came to him with questions about the third quarter financial results of his line, which were worse than expected. Hardy called back to the company and did his best to answer them, but would need to do substantial analysis, far beyond what he could accomplish prior to his trip, to fully satisfy his boss.

Hardy had been looking forward to this trip for some time, and had actually done a lot of organizational work for the reunion, so that people were counting on him to be there. His wife was also looking forward to the trip, and was flying out to meet him there. He would miss only two more days of work.



On the other hand, this role was a new one, both for him and for the parent, and he was one of few people being retained in the wake of the merger. The parent company gave quarterly financial result variations much greater scrutiny than his company had, and he was worried that he might not be seen as a team player if he waited until his return to dig into the issue.

What would you do? ■



John Hadley is a career counselor working with job seekers frustrated by their search and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence. He can be reached at John@JHACareers.com or 908-725-2437. Find his free *Career Tips* newsletter and other resources at www.JHACareers.com.

ENDNOTE

¹ 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, how to build connections with the home office, and career decisions. To catch up on the entire series, which started in May 2013, check out back issues of *The Stepping Stone* on the Leadership & Development Section website at www.SOA.org/ld.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT



DIVERSE CONTENT



LATEST SOLUTIONS



EXPERT KNOWLEDGE



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Comprised of nearly 200 sessions and networking events, the 2016 SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit is poised to be one of the largest in history. Packed full of expert speakers, leading actuaries and world-renowned keynotes, this year's meeting will showcase the best the industry has to offer.

For more information visit SOA.org/AnnualMeeting.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Responses to “To Consult or Not to Consult”

By John West Hadley

In the May issue of *The Stepping Stone*, I posed the question “*What would you do?*” to the following career situation. Here are selected responses and excerpts, edited for space and clarity, followed by the real-life conclusion. Send your own ideas for situations to pose in upcoming issues to SteppingStone@JHACareers.com.

TO CONSULT OR NOT TO CONSULT

West headed up an actuarial operation, but realized that his heart was no longer in it. His company went through a merger, and this was his chance to try something new. He had always loved the many large systems projects with which he had been involved or led, so he took his severance package and decided to strike out in a new career direction.

West had always seen himself as a corporate guy, very comfortable working in teams and enjoying the security of an “employer.” He briefly considered starting a consulting practice, but found the idea of needing to market himself to survive intimidating.

After searching for a number of months, a large insurer offered West a financially lucrative consulting assignment doing exactly the sort of systems work he loved to do. The chief actuary offered him a guaranteed two-month assignment, and told him there was possibility of a six-month renewal after that.

Three weeks into the assignment, an old friend offered him a corporate role at a large reinsurer. Financially, it was equivalent to the consulting assignment, after taking benefits, etc., into account. The role was still systems-oriented, but more “traditional” and less interesting to West than the consulting work. And to his surprise, he found that:

- In the consulting role, he felt like a weight had lifted from his shoulders that he never realized had been there, and
- His mindset around self-marketing had taken a 180-degree turn and no longer seemed like something to fear.

Still, he had kids who would be going to college in a few years, and the corporate role did offer stability ...

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Many thanks to the 14 respondents to this issue’s case study! The vast majority felt that West should follow his gut and stick with consulting. I always find it instructive to look at what the outliers have to say, so here’s one response that took the contrarian role:

Things are too uncertain today, and the only way I would give up the security of a job is not with a contract that *may* be renewed.

Another who leaned against, but with these caveats:

Self-fulfillment versus security for family is a no brainer—family first. There is an additional dilemma though—he accepted a two-month assignment. Can he finish this before he takes the corporate role? Backing out halfway into the job seems like a bad idea.

However:

1. “Family first” doesn’t mean he has to accept a boring corporate job. He should be able to hold out for a more interesting job. He is obviously marketable and more so than ever, since he stopped being afraid of marketing himself. Jumping at the first job that comes along is not necessary when you are marketable.
2. He might be more comfortable in the corporate job than before, now that he’s comfortable with marketing himself. He might well find that the real burden wasn’t the boring job, but the lack of self-confidence.

So he should:

- Turn down the job if he can’t finish the commitment he already made.
- Consider the job if he can finish the commitment he already made.
- Turn down the job unless he thinks he will be happy there.

A long-time consultant gave this summary of how West should approach this decision:

Running your own business as an independent consultant and working for a large organization as an employee are two very different things. There are three key issues:

1. Will West be happiest working for himself consulting on a variety of assignments but with no direct ownership over the long-term success of any client, or as part of a corporate team that drives ahead to long-term success of the organization that employs him?
2. Starting your own business can be stressful in the early years when you don’t know where you will get your next assign-

ment, and then in later years as you try to balance workload and staffing. This is different from the stress of deadlines and quality that comes in a salaried role where your income and workload are closer to guaranteed. What stress can West tolerate and for which type of stress is he best suited?

3. I have yet to see someone start a consulting practice and ramp up immediately to full income and “normal” hours. Long, unpaid hours are the norm in the early years as you build your network, your pipeline of prospective clients, and your systems and templates. These are investments that must be made to build any business and can be paid for by investors who will own future profits, or by the principal through “sweat equity.” Can West ride out the uncertain and uneven income he can expect in the early years?

There is a middle ground: Is there a small consulting firm that West could consider joining as a partner? Somewhere he can take on a partial role in building a business but where risks and responsibilities are shared?

And another who made this transition himself in recent years gave this risk-reward analysis:

Being an employee of a big corporation versus a sole proprietor can be gauged via a risk-reward approach, akin to traditional portfolio analysis. Each actuary will doubtless have his or her own risk-remuneration sweet-spot. No need to rehash the optimizing trade-offs here except to note something that most good actuaries know, but sometimes forget: Risk never truly disappears. It may be transformed or displaced or hidden, but it always finds a resting place in somebody’s pockets. No question that there is significant risk setting out in a small skin-covered vessel on dark northern seas. Yet, there also is significant risk toiling away in the sweaty boiler room of the Titanic. Risk can be much more difficult to measure and assess than simply comparing paychecks.

A couple of additional thoughts:

- Why is it that West’s “heart is not in it”? Is he heart-sick or somehow afflicted with actuarial ennui? Clearly, he hasn’t found a new love. Without heartfelt passion—the belief that the service one renders to one’s clients is worthy—there’s the risk (that word again!) that West will be just going through the motions, despite the material advantages of the several options open to him.
- The grounding of economic efficiency in the division of labor can be traced back to Adam Smith. Specialization accounts for the relative narrowness of some actuarial roles and the existence of much-decried “silo walls” that are more prevalent in larger organizations. One of the key advantages of being an itinerant consulting actuary is the opportunity to keep one’s



diverse skills sharp—and acquire new and complementary skills too.

The question of passion was echoed in several concise responses:

Over the years, I’ve come to realize that the most important aspect of a job is happiness. Stability is nice, but there’s never a guarantee that it will be there for the long run.

West, stick with consulting. It sounds like you have found your “True North” and are moving in the right direction, so don’t stop now! There is always comfort in going back to the familiar, but now that you have tried consulting and appear to be more engaged, energized and progressing nicely in your new career, you should continue to market and grow your business.

Although job security is definitely nice, working on something that I am passionate about means so much more to me. I am actually enjoying going to work again. Having had some experience now in creating a name for myself and marketing myself successfully, I am confident I can find another assignment or job fairly quickly if it ends up only being a short-term assignment; and besides, who knows where this experience will take me next?

I don’t think choosing stability or the safe route when your heart is not in the work is the right move. When people are energized by their work, they will work harder, be more productive, and ultimately more successful. While it is easy to fear the unknown of future consulting assignments, when someone is hard-working, solution-oriented and successful in past assignments, more than enough work opportunities will always be available.

We must always strive to work on what we enjoy and what we have passion for. When you settle, your career may simply become a job, and it will be difficult to stay motivated. We all spend a lot of time at work during our lifetime. Doing something you love makes all the sacrifices worth it.

And one respondent addressed an oft-overlooked aspect of the family issue:

West has two kids whom he is concerned about providing for, which is a good concern to have. However, as a father, his role goes far beyond providing. When you are in a job that you don't

Seeking clients is as demanding and excruciating as searching for a job.

like, that can permeate your attitude at home and your relationships with your family. Also, by not being afraid to try something new, he is teaching his kids to pursue their passions, take risks and not settle.

Finally, a thoughtful response from one of my personal mentors:

It's important for West to listen to his own feelings: “he felt like a weight had lifted from his shoulders that he never realized had been there.” That's a common reaction that many actuaries and others feel after leaving the corporate world of structured hierarchy. But, it's important for an actuary contemplating independent consulting to know her or his abilities as well.

An employed person in a professional role acts as an analytical and advisory resource for a boss and, ultimately, for the corporate employer. Analysis and advice are what a consulting actuary offers as well. The primary difference is that the employed actuary has but a single client. A consulting actuary may work on a project and never be employed again by that client. That can create insecurity. There is an implication of permanence in employment.

Before taking the plunge, West should have some notion of the quality of his work and the pace of his analyses. Quality, pace, presentation and price are central to independent practice. Clients retaining consulting actuaries expect a top-quality product completed in a timely manner for a fair price. Seeking clients is as demanding and excruciating as searching for a job. That means that West must be personable with many friends since his network of contacts will be central to his consulting work.

If West is personable, produces quality work and works efficiently, then the independence of consulting may well be his best

choice. It's worth giving it a fair chance to succeed. Of course, West is unlikely to ever get the handsome financial rewards that top officers of major corporations receive. And he'll be responsible for arranging his own benefits package. But the freedom to think for himself without the constraint of a boss can liberate him to achieve more than he might otherwise have thought possible. That can be very fulfilling.

Moreover, once West has attracted a cadre of loyal clients, he will enjoy a level of job security that is impossible in the corporate world. In a corporation, hard times can bring layoffs. It can be devastating to go from a paycheck one day to nothing the next. The same dynamic affects the consulting world as well but the loss of a single client from a portfolio of eight or 10 is far less devastating than the loss of job. Beyond that, it's easier to look for a replacement client while you still have a solid client base to keep you busy and earning, than it is to look for a new job while sitting at home with nothing else to do.

West seems like a well-qualified, highly employable actuary who enjoys the freedom and visibility of independence. He won't miss the seeming security and stability of corporate life once he has built his consulting practice. Who knows, he may even discover new modes of practice beyond narrowly actuarial work, and that innovative activity may bring him more satisfaction than what he might have enjoyed as a workaday actuary buried deep in the hierarchical anonymity of a large corporation.

On the other hand, if you love the life of lunch in the cafeteria and half days before Christmas, by all means stay with the corporate option. It's all a matter of personal preference.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

West went to his client and explained that he had a dilemma. He really enjoyed the assignment, and felt he had been adding a lot of value. However, while he had every intention of completing the two-month assignment, he had been offered a job and would need to decide whether to continue beyond that. West said that if they would guarantee his assignment for another six months, he would turn the other job offer down.

They did, and he did. By the end of the six months, they had found his contributions indispensable, and offered him the second of a long series of contract extensions. West continued to thoroughly enjoy his new career direction, and never returned to a corporate role. ■



John Hadley is a career counselor working with job seekers frustrated by their search and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence. He can be reached at John@JHACareers.com or 908-725-2437. Find his free *Career Tips* newsletter and other resources at www.JHACareers.com.

Diversity Spotlight

By Mitchell Stephenson

Welcome to the August 2016 Diversity Spotlight! The May 2016 issue of *The Stepping Stone* included an article on diversity by SOA Board member John Robinson titled “Diversity and the SOA.”¹ Going forward, *The Stepping Stone* will include a Diversity Spotlight. For this inaugural spotlight, there are two items to highlight.

The December 2015/January 2016 edition of *The Actuary* featured an article called “Building an Inclusive Work Environment,”² written by Linda Shepherd, FCAS, MAAA, and Kwame Davis, FCAS, MAAA. It highlights the reasons why increasing diversity and building an inclusive work environment are crucial to the future of the actuarial profession. It also lists several ways to get involved with organizations focused on increasing diversity amongst actuaries.

Also, the SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit in October 2016 is expected to include a variety of sessions related to diversity—“Diversity in the Workplace,” “Inclusion and Diversity Committee Roundtable,” and “Women’s Leadership Forum and Luncheon” with presenter Sara Jordan-Block, the director of Leadership and

Research Programs at Stanford University’s Clayman Institute. For additional details on each of these sessions, visit: <https://www.SOA.org/Professional-Development/Event-Calendar/2016-SOA-Annual-Meeting---Exhibit.aspx>. We hope you can join us in Las Vegas for these sessions!

Earlier in 2016, the Society of Actuaries formed the Inclusion and Diversity Committee as a result of the SOA Actuarial Diversity Task Force’s recommendation to establish an oversight committee. The committee reports to the SOA Board of Directors and determines investments and programs to achieve the greatest impact on inclusion and diversity in the actuarial profession. For more information on the SOA diversity initiative, go to <https://SOA.org> and search for “diversity.”

If you or your organization have any actuarial diversity efforts or events to feature within our Diversity Spotlight going forward, please do not hesitate to contact *The Stepping Stone* directly at SteppingStone@JHACareers.com. ■



Mitchell Stephenson, FSA, MAAA, is a Friend of the Leadership & Development Section Council.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Available online at www.SOA.org/ld.
- ² <http://theactuarymagazine.org/building-an-inclusive-work-environment/>.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

How Great Leaders Share Leadership

By Marcel Schwantes

Editor's Note: In the November 2015, February 2016 and May 2016 issues of The Stepping Stone,¹ executive coach Marcel Schwantes outlined how great leaders display authenticity, value and develop people—three of the foundations of effective servant leadership. Now Schwantes returns for Part 4 of a six-part series, discussing one of the most counterintuitive best practices of servant leaders—allowing others to share leadership. Here, he describes the four basics for creating leader-leader rather than leader-follower cultures.

I hear a lot of language about how leaders “drive performance.” Driving, as you know, is a popular word in business. It’s a hard management skill. Yet over the years I have learned that leadership culture has changed. Driving no longer holds a favorable place in servant-led cultures. If you think about it, we drive cattle, cars and trucks; they have no say because “we’re in charge.” We push them through and steer them where we want them to go, but that’s the opposite of what a great leader does or is.

A leader inspires and encourages excellent performance, and followers attribute authority to those they trust. The truth here is that people want to be inspired into action, not driven like cattle.

Now I’m going to tell you to consider doing something powerful and counterintuitive as an employee engagement strategy.

First, an illustration.

To this day, Bruce is my favorite executive boss. That relationship goes back 15 years, well before I founded my company. I was a director reporting to Bruce at a large hospital in California. Bruce taught me so many leadership lessons. He didn’t get caught up in his personal power; he inspired me by making me feel like an equal. Since humility was a natural strength of his, he never took advantage of his title or positional power. He was the most approachable boss I ever had. And while we played different roles in business, we shared in the decision-making.

There were so many instances where he could have pulled rank, like the time when I was tasked for the first time ever to write a portion of a federal grant and needed the support of key community stakeholders. Instead of leveraging his name to sell the project and get buy-in from potential partners, he put me in the

distinct role of community organizer. Bruce made sure I had a seat at the table in all the important coalitions and provided me with all the resources I needed to get signed Letters of Authorization and Memoranda of Understanding. When I was stuck, instead of spoon-feeding me answers, he offered coaching questions like, “What do you think would be the best option in this situation?”

He would often mentor me in areas where he wanted me to take ownership and then put me in places I least expected—like the time he made me chair of an executive council, which is usually a spot reserved for him or another peer executive. While I was still accountable to him, and he was still “the boss,” it stretched me to learn new skills and rise up to meet my own leadership challenges. And I remember how much more satisfied and engaged I was than at any other role in my corporate life to that point—because he shared leadership.

If that resonates with you, you may want to ask yourselves at some point: How can I help my workers succeed by sharing and delegating my power? How can I help them get it?

For the rest of this article, we will focus on four areas that have been proven over time to develop a culture of trust and loyalty in workers.

GREAT LEADERS FACILITATE A SHARED VISION

Barry Posner and Jim Kouzes, authors of the best-selling book *The Leadership Challenge*, have surveyed tens of thousands of employees about what they look for and admire in a leader. Seventy-two percent want leaders who are forward-looking. Among respondents in more senior roles, the percentage shot up to 88 percent.²

But even more important than a visionary is a leader who reflects the visions and aspirations of his or her constituents. This leader learns to communicate an image of the future that draws the tribe in—that speaks to what people see and feel.

As most MBA programs teach, great visions will answer these three questions:

- **Destination.** Where are we going?
- **Purpose.** Why do we exist? What greater good do we serve?
- **Values.** What principles guide our decisions and actions on our journey?

When a vision addresses all three of these questions for team members, a tremendous amount of energy is unleashed. There is going to be a higher level of commitment because they are able to see the relationship between the direction of the organization and what they personally believe in and care deeply about. After all, they signed up for this. As their leader, you learn to communicate an image of the future that speaks to what they see and

feel, why they are doing the work, and how their work contributes to the bigger picture.

But the vision isn't being driven forcefully. Great leaders encourage their tribes to contribute their ideas, insights and realities.

GREAT LEADERS SHARE POWER AND RELEASE CONTROL

The leaders in this relationship economy have a penchant to serve the needs of others first. What makes them stand out is an intrinsic motivation to share power and release control. As a servant leader, the power and the control come from the whole. It's the enthusiasm and commitment the whole team has to something—to specific projects and tasks that drive organizational objectives.

If you want to foster high trust, high risk-taking, high creativity and open communication, and you're still riding on your autocratic high-horse, consider getting off for the higher road of sharing power and releasing control. Because when you do, you actually gain real power by pumping fear out of the room; your team will have your back, unleash discretionary effort and do amazing work.

GREAT LEADERS SHARE STATUS AND PROMOTE OTHERS

Great leaders enable their people by sharing status. Since humility is a natural strength of theirs, instead of leveraging their positional power for personal gain, self-promotion or demands for special privileges, they put their people in positions of leadership to stretch their growth and develop new strengths. The return on sharing status is a culture of leaders, not followers, who will make others better as well.

GREAT LEADERS PUSH AUTHORITY DOWN

Everybody is familiar with the leader-follower structure in a top-down culture, right? It's still the prevalent way most companies operate. What's appealing about this is that it takes responsibility away from followers to think on their own. So a leader at the top may be rewarded for being indispensable. When the leader leaves the company, and his or her department's performance goes down the tubes, it's taken as a sign that he or she was a good leader.

The reality is that, most often, the leader was not very effective in equipping, training and developing people properly.

The problem here is that employees are released from any responsibility of the hard work of thinking, making decisions and being accountable because they're just cogs in a wheel (so they think). Their attitude may be, "Hey, I was only doing what I was told by my boss."

People get comfortable with the idea of being a follower, doing what they're told to do and nothing else.

While a leader-follower culture is still effective, there's a cost to this model over time. People who are treated as followers, you will find, will treat others as followers when it's their turn to lead. In turn, a vast untapped human potential is lost.

In highly effective organizations, there are leaders at every level, not just at the top. The solution is always to push authority down so you're creating a leader-leader culture.

Retired U.S. Navy Capt. David Marquet once commanded the USS Santa Fe, a nuclear-powered submarine. Marquet wrote a brilliant leadership book a few years ago called *Turn the Ship Around*, a true story and case study of how he transformed a ship in a culture of followers by challenging the U.S. Navy's traditional leader-follower approach and pushing for leadership at every level. As a result, the Santa Fe skyrocketed from worst to first in the whole fleet because of his choice to give up control. The crew became fully engaged, contributing their intellectual capacity every day, and the Santa Fe started winning awards left and right and promoting a huge number of officers to submarine command.

The lessons from this case study transfer to any business or position, and the payoff is huge: a happy team where every member is taking responsibility for his or her actions, and where each is a leader. Pay close attention to the do's and don'ts as you assess where you are with your team or work culture.

Question for reflection: Do you have a leader-follower or leader-leader tribe? ■



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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Available online at www.SOA.org/ld.
- ² "To Lead, Create a Shared Vision," by Posner and Kouzes, *Harvard Business Review*, January 2009.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Leadership Inspiration: Candace Wheeler— Bringing Beauty and Work to Women

By Mary Pat Campbell

Editor's Note: In the Leadership & Development Section's Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be better actuarial leaders. Here is an entry from the "Admirable Leader/Personal Mentor" category.

In November 2001, I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, looking for peace and beauty. I was well-rewarded by a special exhibit on Candace Wheeler. I have found inspiration in her designs as well as her life story.

Candace Wheeler started her career as a professional decorator and designer when she was nearly 50 years old. She was partnered with Louis Comfort Tiffany, helping invent the idea of professional interior decorators. Wheeler designed and made gorgeous silk draperies and door hangings. But she quit the company because they were restricted to a very rich clientele, and she wanted to bring beauty to the masses.

She founded a women's decorative arts collective in 1877, the Society of Decorative Artists, to promote the designs of American women and to make available "the beautiful home" to the average middle-class homemaker. In addition, she founded the New York Exchange for Women's Work in 1878, which was the Etsy¹ of its day. She was trying to help women as both consumers and producers.

A huge issue was the poor economic outlook for widows of Union soldiers from the U.S. Civil War and widows in general. It was difficult for women to earn money at that time, and while some got by on widows' pensions, the 1870s were particularly tough. In 1873, a worldwide financial crisis hit, which led to a depression that lasted until 1879. The need for rewarding work for women, in both an economic and artistic sense, was deep.

While Wheeler was helping create work for others, she made her own in designing and producing textiles and wallpaper. Wheeler came up with interesting weaving techniques to make shimmering illusions on the cheap—a woman might not be able to afford silk hangings for her home, but she could afford a cloth



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Boudinot Keith, 1928.
www.metmuseum.org.

cross-woven with black and red thread, which produced silk-like optical effects.

Wheeler made patterns that were seemingly varied and organic, though of course they repeated in a very predictable way. Later on, Wheeler wrote books, such as *Household Art* (1893) and *Principles of Home Decoration with Practical Examples* (1903), teaching design principles women could apply in their own homes, and showing how it could even be done on the cheap.

Wheeler was a creator, a business-builder, a network-weaver—someone who spread beauty and knowledge that gave others the ability to create for themselves. I see her inspiration as a person whose influence was felt on multiple levels in different roles; one can lead by creating art and then showing others how to create for themselves. I always think of her when I am writing about beautiful spreadsheets.

A final note: Wheeler actively worked until the age of 80, but she still was producing books after that, with her final one, *The Development of Embroidery in America* (1921), published two years before she died at the age of 96. Now *that* is an inspiration. ■



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ENDNOTE

¹ Etsy is a peer-to-peer e-commerce website focused on handmade or vintage items and supplies, as well as unique factory-manufactured items, that had 54 million registered members by the end of 2014.

SOA Explorer Tool

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The Simple, Shocking Tool You're Forgetting to Use When Making Career Decisions

By Darcy Eikenberg

We make good decisions all the time.

- We park in the middle of the lot to squeeze in a few more steps.
- We set the alarm and get out of bed when it rings—even a few minutes before.
- We resist criticizing our spouse, kids or co-workers when they act like jerks. (Okay, maybe they get an eye roll, but we keep our mouths shut.)

In fact, we make good decisions many times during the day. Of course, we have our share of stinky decisions from time to time (“sure, I’ll take a third slice of pizza”), but that just makes us human.

So, with all of the decision-making experience we have, why do we get so stuck when we’re making career decisions? Why do we get overwhelmed, frustrated and even angry at ourselves trying to figure out what’s next for us? Why do we stay unhappy, or, even worse, feel bored and wasted in our lives at work?

Why is this so hard?!!

HERE’S WHY MAKING CAREER DECISIONS IS HARD

I’ve been doing an extensive amount of research about decision-making. Each day, I hear **what** the clients and students who I work with get stuck on, but I wanted to understand more about **why** they get stuck in the first place.

And the data is eye-opening. Surprising. Shocking, even. Because while each of us has struggled (or has known someone who’s struggled) with making a career decision, we all have the same magic tool available to us.

And it’s free.

IT’S NOT THE PRO/CON LIST

Did you know that the world’s most common decision-making tool—the pro/con list—was actually invented by Benjamin Frank-



lin? According to Chip and Dan Heath in their book, *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work*, a friend asked Franklin how to decide between two options. Franklin suggested taking a piece of paper and drawing a line down the center, marking one side “pro” and the other “con.”

The Heaths point out this surprising fact: that somehow, this process has remained our default decision-making tool to this day. (Take a minute to swallow that. With all the innovation and technology in our hands, we **still** go back to something started in 1772. Yow.) But they point out that the pro/con list, while ubiquitous and accessible, is inherently flawed.

You probably already know this from your own experience. You’ve probably sat down and written up a pro/con list. Maybe you have one right now. And, looking at it, you clearly see that one list is significantly longer than the other. But you still can’t decide.

OK, SO WHAT’S THE MAGIC TOOL?

The pro/con list doesn’t work because it doesn’t take into account the one magic tool you’re overlooking: your emotion. (Cut to you: scrunched-up sour face, like you ate bad turkey.) Oh yes, I see you. This makes you uncomfortable.

Good. Because discomfort is where growth is. You’re uncomfortable because you were taught that there’s no room for emotion in today’s world of work.

You were told, “It’s not personal; it’s just business.” Right? Me too. Well, we’ve been taught wrong. Work is **always** personal. And that makes decisions around our work extremely personal.

(According to the Heaths, Franklin had a basic understanding of the emotional value of each element while using his pro/con

list. He called it “moral algebra,” giving different items different weights. Somehow, that complexity has gotten lost since 1772.)

TO MAKE CAREER DECISIONS, STOP AVOIDING YOUR EMOTIONS

Most of us want to resist believing that our best career decisions will come from paying attention to our emotions. We often don't value them, trust them, and, sometimes, we're not really sure what they are. We say things like, “Oh, maybe I'm just tired,” or “Maybe it'll get better tomorrow.”

But when we pay honest, respectful attention to our true emotions, we know whether those statements are true or not. Or we know if we're just kidding ourselves.

IT'S ONLY HUMAN

Unlike machines, plants or animals, human beings are uniquely equipped with emotions. Even Siri doesn't really feel anything.

Any human-like reactions were programmed in its chip-based head by a fellow human.

Emotions are what make us messy—and marvelous. Understanding and knowing how to interpret and use emotion effectively is one of the secret strategies for a successful career today. And it's the surprising tool you're likely overlooking on your path to making the right career decision for you.

Use it wisely, use it well, use it often—and you'll make the career decisions that are right for you. ■



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CAREER DEVELOPMENT

If Not Now, When?

Time to Spark Your Career Growth!

By Anne M. Katcher

We've all heard the expression, "If not now, when?" Perhaps it was a parent reminding you as a teenager to clean up your room, or a friend encouraging you to take a risk. My educator mother used to say it all the time, encouraging her students, her children and even herself to explore new challenges. The expression was her generation's version of "just do it!" Lately, we've seen Oprah using it as a rallying cry on commercials for Weight Watchers. No matter what the impetus, it is a good question to ask yourself periodically, especially when your growth seems to have stalled or slowed down.

As the warmer weather brings new growth all around us, it is the perfect time to ask yourself (and answer honestly):

Are you bored, frustrated, dissatisfied with your current career progress, or are you exactly where you want to be?

Do you drag yourself to work every morning and do just what is required to get by, or do you look forward to each day's challenges?

If your answer is the first part of either question, **now** is a great time to **get started**, one step at a time.

Here's how you can take a hard look at your career advancement and develop strategies to move ahead in three simple steps:

1. Before you can take action, you first need to understand **why** you feel this way and to identify the **root cause** of your dissatisfaction.
2. Knowledge is power! **What** are you going to do with this new self-awareness?
3. Now that you have developed further insights as to the direction in which you want to go, **how** do you proceed?

In this article, we will help you to uncover the "why," so that you can move forward in the right direction in Steps 2 and 3.

Let's take a look at Step 1. Before you can take action, you first need to understand **why** you feel this way and to identify the **root cause** of your dissatisfaction. Ask yourself these questions,

along with others that pop into your consciousness as you go through this exploratory phase:

- Is it the job? The boss? The company? The profession?
- How long have you been feeling this way? Is it recent or has it been ongoing for too long?
- Is the work too easy (e.g., you have become "the expert," with no room for growth)?
- Is the work extremely stressful, with too many hours and/or too long a commute?
- Are you afraid of change and uncertainty?
- Does your style and your boss's clash on a daily basis?
- Do your company's culture and strategy strongly differ from your own values?
- Do you have negative feelings about being passed over for an opportunity you thought you deserved?

Find a place away from distractions to focus on these questions and document your thoughts in a way most convenient to you—recording or writing notes on your mobile device or simple pen and paper. Even if you spend only 10 minutes a day, after a week or two, a pattern will emerge. Now step back and look at the big picture—what do you see? Better yet, ask someone you trust to take a look and tell you what they see.

Do you now have a better understanding of your **why**?

Once you do, you're ready to move on to Step 2: **What** are you going to do with this new self-awareness to better navigate your career in the right direction?

"None of us will ever accomplish anything excellent or commanding except when he listens to this whisper which is heard by him alone."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

If not now, when?

Editor's Note: Now that you've completed Step 1, join the conversation on the SOA Leadership & Development LinkedIn group forum at <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4397530>, where Anne continues the dialogue with entries on Steps 2 and 3. ■



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CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The Secret Ingredient—GRIT!

By Jamie Shallow

“I lost the fight, thus I am a terrible athlete, thus I failed at the only thing I care about in life, thus I should die.”¹

That’s some pretty interesting logic, isn’t it? This was a statement from an article online about how Ronda Rousey felt when she lost her first UFC fight. How many actuaries feel this way after failing an exam—or at least the first one they fail? For people who are driven, and successful early on, that first big loss feels pretty painful—even when it’s not the kind that requires stitches and a trip to the hospital.

I wonder what Rousey will do if she loses the next fight ... and the next one ... and the next one? What do actuaries do when they fail exam after exam? How many failures does it take before we quit? How many failures does it take before we *should* quit? What is logical? What about other areas of life?

On the one hand, it is good to be persistent; on the other, it’s not so good to be foolishly persistent. It reminds me of some of the contestants on *American Idol*—you know, the ones who perform very confidently in front of the judges but sing way off-key. Then, as they are walking out of the building they are hurling insults at the judges’ lack of judgment because their mother told them they sing great!

Maybe, when it comes to a career path, there is a point where people should be honest with themselves and the data and adjust their path accordingly. When it comes to life in general, however, there may actually be a place for being foolishly persistent.

We’re all familiar with the paradigm of seeing the glass half full or half empty, right? But, don’t we also know folks who have a glass that by objective observation would be about 90 percent full, and yet like Ronda Rousey after her loss, they’re unhappy and depressed? Then we also know others whose glass is only about 10 percent full and they are like those *American Idol* contestants who seem oblivious to reality and walk around like everything is great!



Maybe happiness is somewhat like Santa Claus—seeing is not believing, but rather believing is seeing. We may have to use less of our left brain sometimes to find happiness, and find it in the 10 percent that is full in our lives, if we happen to be in that leftmost tail of life’s distribution curve.

We all fall somewhere on the continuum between a glass pretty empty and a glass pretty full. Many things we do not choose, and where we lie also varies throughout our lives. To become successful in life and as a leader, many will need to traverse through the hills and valleys and find a way to persist with vision, purpose and happiness. There are a couple of valuable traits that tend to develop in those who follow this path—grit and compassion.

THE SECRET INGREDIENT—GRIT

In 1991 a young quarterback was selected with the 33rd pick in the NFL draft by the Atlanta Falcons. He was designated as the third string quarterback on the roster, behind Chris Miller and Billy Joe Tolliver. His 1991 stats read 0 completions out of 4 attempts, with two interceptions.² Who knew he would become a three-time MVP, and arguably one of the best quarterbacks of all time? Not Jerry Glanville, that’s for sure! It took Ron Wolf and Mike Holmgren to recognize what was in Brett Favre and then nurture it to excellence.

Just what was in Favre? Well, I had the privilege to learn the two key traits to Favre’s success when I heard him speak at a “Get

Motivated” seminar a number of years ago. He told the crowd that the secret to his great success was that he was coachable, and had a passion to win. Makes me wonder how many people fail to reach their potential and remain third-stringers in life because they never found someone to believe in them.

Now, there’s definitely a lesson in being coachable, but let’s focus here on the passion to win. I think this really translates into grit. When you think back to Favre’s career, he definitely exemplified grit! Just think of his almost 300 consecutive starts—that’s phenomenal for an NFL quarterback. I would conjecture that he was likely just born with some of this grit, but I also bet that some of it came from walking through valleys in life and developing the ability to push on with hope.

Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, “Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.” I would call this grit. One of my favorite examples of this is in the story of Abraham Lincoln’s life. In the chapter titled “Never Give Up,” the book *Pushing Up People* illustrates how Lincoln grew up poor and is said to have suffered a number of failures in life:³

- 1831 Failed in business.
- 1832 Defeated for legislature.
- 1833 Second failure in business.
- 1836 Suffered nervous breakdown.
- 1840 Defeated for elector.
- 1843 Defeated for Congress.
- 1848 Defeated for Congress.
- 1855 Defeated for Senate.
- 1858 Defeated for vice president.
- 1858 Defeated for Senate.
- 1860 ELECTED PRESIDENT.

I know that some of this is disputed, but I’m sure there are a good number of people who have walked this planet who have had even worse track records in life before finally reaching that moment of fulfillment. So, maybe if you’re struggling with life’s challenges, you’re really being prepared for something great—don’t lose hope! Take it from Rocky Balboa:

Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain’t all sunshine and rainbows. It’s a very mean and nasty place and, I don’t care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain’t about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That’s how winning is done!⁴

POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH!

So grit keeps us moving forward when things get challenging, but in what state do we move forward? In reading Shawn

Achor’s book, *The Happiness Advantage*, he discusses three possible states—the state you currently are in, one further negative, and the path up, which results in you being stronger and more capable than before getting knocked down. This third path has been referred to as “Post-Traumatic Growth.”⁵

We’ve all heard that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger (I can just hear Kelly Clarkson). That’s Post-Traumatic Growth! However, for some, it’s more like what doesn’t kill you right away still slowly kills you bit by bit over time. What makes the difference?

It turns out that the event is not even so much about what happens to us, but about our perception of the event. In Achor’s book, he refers to an experiment where people are questioned about a hypothetical situation: There are 50 people in a bank. A robber walks in and fires one shot, and you are hit in the right arm. Some see the situation as negative, and some see the situation as positive; but in both cases the views come from comparing the event to a “counterfact” that each person invents, which is also completely hypothetical.⁶

Someone might have answered it was an unfortunate event by comparing it to the counterfact of not being shot at all. Someone else might have thought it was a fortunate event by comparing it the counterfact of 50 rounds being fired and multiple people being shot. The interesting take-away is that the counterfact is hypothetical, and that means we have the power to choose it and consequently have the power to see the event as positive as opposed to negative.

In the end, I guess it actually is true ... **seeing is not believing, but rather believing is seeing!** ■



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CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Leadership Inspiration: “Nothing to Prove, Only to Share”

By Stephanie Calandro

Editor’s Note: In the Leadership & Development Section’s Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be better actuarial leaders. Here is an entry from the “Leadership Quote” category.

The outlook that we have “nothing to prove, only to share,” inspires me to be a better actuarial leader. Though this idea is attributed to American choreographer Alvin Alley, it is broadly applicable outside of both the choreographic and actuarial realms.

One of the aspects I enjoy most about being an actuary is working collaboratively on teams, both with colleagues and clients. It is commonly known that a well-functioning team is stronger and more effective than the sum of its components, and also that impactful leaders guide others to self-recognition of their own strengths and attributes.

These two truths, considered within the framework that everyone offers something to share with one another, drive me to be a better leader. I approach personal interactions with the mindset that I will learn something from each new acquaintance; however, it would be selfish to expect this without my willingness to give myself generously to every individual I encounter.

Establishing excellent rapport is a first step toward eliminating the barrier of feeling that one must “prove” himself or herself. This enables open communication whereby ideas are freely shared, which, in turn, begins building trust and buy-in within a team. The point at which this trust has been built is when a team becomes stronger than the sum of its components.

Collaborative brainstorming encourages new ideas to build off those presently at hand, with each proposal being considered, the associated pros and cons being identified and discussed, and it being accepted, reworked or discarded. Each team member’s individual perspective informs this process and allows a course of action to take shape.

Once a clear plan has been identified, the phase of determining its execution encourages team members to reflect on their own strengths and areas for opportunity, as well as those of their



teammates. Within the team’s solid foundation of trust and communications, participants willingly offer promotion, encouragement and support of fellow team members. By this stage, relationships have formed that cause participants to have a vested interest in each other’s individual success as well as the greater common objective of effectively executing the team’s plan.

As projects and processes change courses, the collaborative brainstorming and execution phases may be revisited, revised and/or recreated. However, maintaining the perspective that both my collaborators and I have something to share with each other—for both the individual and greater good—fosters an environment of open ears and minds that can collectively surmount any challenge we encounter. ■



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PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Trust Me, Do Nothing!

By Kelly Hennigan

This is the second article in a three-part series¹ focused on the “Do Nothing” leadership approach presented by Professor J. Keith Murnighan, the Harold H. Hines Jr. Distinguished Professor of Risk Management at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University. Murnighan is the author of the book *Do Nothing! How to Stop Overmanaging and Become a Great Leader*, and he promotes a synonymous leadership approach.²

Murnighan’s book opens with a dream: **You have just returned to the office after a three-week vacation during which you did not take your cellphone and did not check emails.**

In order to make this dream a reality, Murnighan suggests that we need to have trust. BUT, trust entails taking risks. And, as actuaries, we are naturally risk-averse beings, making it difficult for our occupation to fully trust others. (Particularly the author, for what may appear to be overly simplistic advice!?) The book recommends putting trust in our work colleagues in order to exemplify the “Do Nothing” approach to leadership.

A MATTER OF TRUST

“If (you) can trust anonymous strangers on eBay, how much should you trust the people you work with?”

—J. Keith Murnighan

In considering the general traits of an actuary, many of us are highly technical, detail-oriented, and have a sense of ownership about our work. This combination of characteristics, plus an introverted personality type, makes it challenging for us to relinquish control and trust others in the workplace. Oftentimes, we prefer to work independently and handle the details ourselves, rather than delegate to others. However, Murnighan encourages us to take the risk of trusting people.

Murnighan shares with the reader some of his eBay experiences and comments that despite his 1,200+ eBay interactions, only eight of these have been negative. He asks how one is able to put faith in complete strangers on eBay—who could be located across the country or even somewhere else in the world—to package up items to ship in a timely fashion. If it is possible to

place your trust in the eBay system, then why not place your trust in your co-workers?

In relationships, both professionally and personally, we tend to trust people (or perhaps distrust people) the more we get to know them. The author logically comments, “Fear that comes with trust should dissipate quickly with familiarity or with evidence.” We naturally have the instinct to reciprocate trust and be in mutually beneficial relationships (i.e., we trust people when we know them well and, in turn, they trust us).

Trust leads to other benefits as well. When team members trust each other and feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to speak up in meetings as well as interact with others across the organization—because they are motivated and comfortable with their environment. When leaders trust their teams, and the teams exhibit trust across their co-workers, it better positions those in management to follow the “Do Nothing!” approach to leadership. Murnighan states, “Leaders can naturally and easily think about their financial risks by weighing the upsides and the downsides. It’s far less natural for them to think that their interactions with people have similar upsides and downsides.”

However, individuals can be hesitant to put their trust in others due to fear of being hurt, as trust can be violated. When this occurs, it can disproportionately increase fears that it could be violated again in the future. Negative experiences (related to trust or even other off-putting behaviors) stand out in our minds more so than positive ones and therefore have a greater influence over our behavior and decision-making in the future.

TRUST YOURSELF

“There’s no bigger burden than that of having great potential.”

—Linus from “Peanuts”

If we follow Murnighan’s guidance, and trust our co-workers, what else remains in order for us to achieve this “Do Nothing” leadership ideology? Simply to trust in ourselves. This may appear in various situations and in different forms:

1. **Maintain structural control.** Trust in yourself to take on a sense of authority when leading or speaking at meetings. When leading, have an agenda set in advance with a goal in mind. Encourage people to share their perspectives, but herd any stray cats to ensure that the agenda is adhered to. Similarly, when speaking at a meeting, weave in your perspectives at the appropriate times on the agenda in order to impact any decision-making. Upon conclusion of a project, lead or participate in the post-mortem to learn what was done well/poorly. Were there any surprises? What could be done better next time?



2. **Work faster.** We can actually do many things quicker than we think. Oftentimes, we get sidetracked with other priorities. Or perhaps we just do not have the emotional willingness to tackle a cyclical reporting task. Or maybe the brand new project seems insurmountable to get off the ground. In these cases, we need to push ourselves or even have other forces (e.g., our managers or the senior leadership team) give us a push in the right direction. Getting that extra “oomph” may encourage us to believe in ourselves, thus resulting in that confidence boost we need to quickly accomplish the task at hand in a timely fashion.
3. **Persevere, rather than perform.** Achieving greatness as a leader requires passion, determination and making a conscientious effort to grow through continuous learnings. Rather than always focusing on performance targets, or fixed metrics of achievement, it is preferable to focus on learning goals that you can take with you in the longer term. In 2002, after the Philadelphia 76ers lost in the first round of the NBA playoffs to the Boston Celtics, Allen Iverson retorted, “How the hell can I make my teammates better by practicing?” This remark is in direct contrast to Murnighan’s mantra to persevere and focus on lifelong learnings, rather than the numbers on the scoreboard in the shorter term.
4. **Position yourself.** At work, illustrate to others that you are a talented employee by creating value. Individuals need to trust in their unique abilities, as everyone has something different to bring to the table. We ideally want to surround ourselves

with mutually beneficial relationships with others who know our abilities and appreciate them, and vice versa. However, do not be naïve to the fact that the world is always changing. Leaders and their teams need to consider how to adapt their skill sets over time to fit the needs of the future. That may require refocusing on other strengths, or perhaps even picking up a new skill set in order to keep relevant.

To conclude this portion of the series, Murnighan’s approach to living the dream is essentially just a matter of trust—contingent upon trusting others and also on trusting yourself. The final installment³ will focus on some unnatural leaders, as well as other learnings from Murnighan’s “hands-off” leadership perspective. ■



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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Part 1 in the series was published in the May 2016 issue of *The Stepping Stone*, available online at www.SOA.org/ld.
- ² Murnighan, J. Keith. (2012). *Do Nothing! How to Stop Overmanaging and Become a Great Leader*, New York: Portfolio/Penguin.
- ³ Planned for the November 2016 issue of *The Stepping Stone*.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

The Five Key Principles of Influence¹—Part 4

By David C. Miller

No matter what you do, you are in sales in some way. The word “sales” or “selling” brings up negative connotations for many people. It may be helpful to think of it as “influence.” Whether you’re a sales professional, coach, consultant or executive—there are key stakeholders in your world you need to influence.

To persuade successfully and non-manipulatively, it’s important to understand **five key principles of influence**. We covered the first four principles in the November 2015, February 2016 and May 2016 issues of *The Stepping Stone*.²

Let’s look at the fifth and final principle now.

PRINCIPLE #5

PEOPLE WILL MORE LIKELY BE INFLUENCED IF YOU HELP THEM GET TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Persuasion is the process of getting your client (or your boss, direct report, spouse, child, etc.) to clearly associate their most desired feelings to your product, service or idea. To do this we first need to know how to elicit these desired emotions from the person in conversation.

How do we do this? By using a skill called “chaining,” with which you link a series of questions together in order to get to underlying motivations or beliefs. For any given topic, it usually takes at least three or four levels of questions to move from superficial, factual answers to more revealing and meaningful ones.

For example, in a business conversation, your first question may elicit an answer involving a *fact or technical issue*. The next question may uncover *underlying business issues*. Further questions will take you to the level of uncovering *consequences and implications of actions and decisions*. Ultimately, if you stay with it, your conversation will get to a level that reveals *personal beliefs, feelings, convictions and motivations*. Now you know what is really driving this person and what their needs are. Only now are you in the position to truly meet their needs.

EXAMPLE OF CHAINING

I was demonstrating this concept in one of my seminars recently. I asked a person to identify something he really wanted to have or



change. He said he wanted to bring his golf score to the low 90s or better. Sounds like a pretty clear goal, doesn’t it? And it would have been very easy for me to assume why he wanted this: Obviously he loves golf and wants to excel in it. If I had made this assumption, I would have missed out on some very important knowledge about this individual and subsequently focused our conversation around golf (which would have been the wrong issue).

Let me lay out the trail of his responses as I continued to probe deeper into his motivations using the skill of chaining:

- **Level One.** “I’d like to shoot in the low 90s in golf.”
- **Level Two.** “I’d then be able to play with a whole new group of people at my club. At my current ability I wouldn’t feel comfortable playing with these people because they are really good golfers.”
- **Level Three.** “This would allow me to network with a whole new group of people. Many of these golfers are business professionals who hold a high ranking in their respective organizations. It would benefit me professionally to expand my network this way.”
- **Level Four.** “This would dramatically increase my career options and connections in case my current job does not work out.”
- **Level Five.** “I would feel like I have a great deal more job security. This would give me a true sense of freedom.”

So this conversation was not about golf—it was about job security and feeling a sense of freedom! I could have totally missed this if I had stopped short and not really understood his true motivations. By the way, I elicited these responses by asking one question over and over again: “*What would having this allow you to do or be (and eventually feel)?*” Asking questions in this way also will help the client understand their true motivations. How valuable is that—helping someone clarify what they want and who they are?

The concept of chaining is very simple but not necessarily easy to apply. Most often we stop short, not because the other person is uncomfortable, but because we are. We ask questions on the periphery because that is where we feel safe. Even when we penetrate a couple of layers, we often stop just one question short of breaking through to deep and meaningful responses.

My advice to you is **don’t bail out!** If you truly want to impact your “clients” and create more value in their lives or business, it’s better to ask a few questions that penetrate to the core rather than

many questions that stay on superficial levels. Don’t stop at the first level—that is, unless you don’t care about the results!

If you want to learn more about strategies, skills and models actuaries can utilize to become more influential, you may want to read *The Influential Actuary*. ■



David C. Miller, FSA, M.S., PCC, is president of Leadership Growth Strategies (www.leadershipgrowthstrategies.com), helping executives become influential leaders and consultants generate higher revenues. See his website for free weekly leadership tips.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Excerpts in this article are taken from *The Influential Actuary*, copyright © 2010 by ACTEX Publications Inc. Reproduced with permission.
- ² Available online at www.SOA.org/ld.

Knowledge On-the-Go

SOA Podcasts

The SOA releases free podcasts each month, designed to help busy professionals find the time to gain insight and hear different perspectives. Recent podcasts explored topics ranging from how nonqualified annuities are taxed to how to be an ethical leader.

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PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Leadership Inspiration: Do Your Best Work

By Fraser Smart

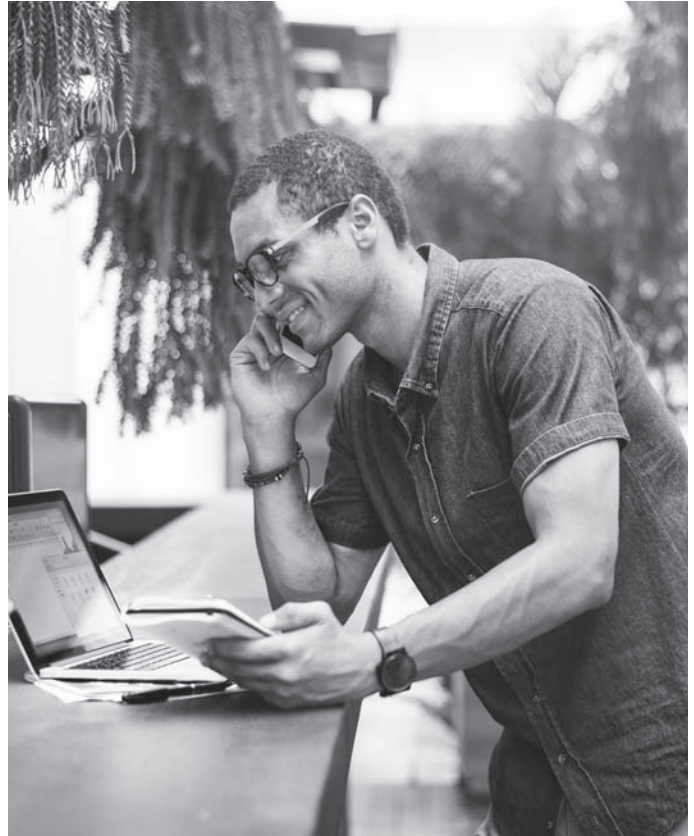
Editor's Note: In the Leadership & Development Section's Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be better actuarial leaders. Here is an entry from the "Defining Moment/Event" category.

Early in my consulting career, I had an opportunity to serve as an interim manager at a utility company in the United Kingdom looking after its pension plan and members. Through my work as the actuary to the plan, I was aware of the value that employers and the pension plan trustees placed on the advice of actuaries to provide precise calculations to help ensure the soundness of their retirement programs. However, I was unfamiliar with the impact on employees and plan members. It was a revelation to discover, through my interactions with plan members who came to me with questions about their pensions, just how much trust they placed in our work. The absolute trust they placed in the information I shared about their retirement and expected future income was humbling.

I saw that the clarity of our communications, more than the accuracy of our calculations, was absolutely paramount, because our work had a profound impact on the future of each plan member. The end result of our work was more than math, more than a well-informed client—we were responsible for providing security for millions of employees in their retirement. This defining moment in my career is still a driving force after my 20-plus years in the field, as I progressed from direct involvement in actuarial work into increasingly responsible positions.

Having become the head of an HR consultancy, I continue to believe that a retirement program must meet the needs of both the organization and its people, and that actuaries have a responsibility not only to our clients but also to their employees. And now I have the ability to ensure that our actuaries, and all our staff, keep an intense focus on quality and accuracy.

I spearheaded rigorous quality initiatives internally at Buck Consultants, as well as risk management offerings that help clients mitigate risk in their retirement plans. My top priority has always been to ensure that actuaries and other members of the team do their very best work for clients and also for their employees. I always keep the individual top of mind, because I



learned early on that the future of each employee is partially in our hands.

Today, with people relying largely or solely on their defined-contribution plan savings, our responsibility to the individual employee is greater than ever. The average worker doesn't have nearly the same financial savvy as the employers and trustees whom we serve. We have a huge opportunity to help our clients equip their plan members with the knowledge and tools they need to understand their financial position, save for the future, and prepare for retirement.

I know from my conversations with many consultants that our profession truly cares about making a difference in people's lives. It's become the foundation for my goal to support an individual toward achieving "financial wellness." As I was all those years ago, I'm humbled by this caring and compassion, and proud to be in a position to influence our profession's progress in this direction. ■



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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Emotional Intelligence: Why You Need It, and How You Can Increase It

By Lauren Scalzo

“In a high-IQ job pool, soft skills like discipline, drive and empathy mark those who emerge as outstanding.”

—Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*

Actuaries are highly intelligent people. We all know this to be true. Beyond simply possessing an impressive IQ, however, emotional intelligence (EI or EQ) is also essential to success and harmony in the workplace.

Often thought of very generally as “people skills,” EQ can be more precisely defined as one’s ability to be aware of, regulate, and express his/her emotions while also displaying empathy and social skills. Unlike IQ, which remains relatively stable over the course of one’s life, EQ—thankfully—can improve and evolve over time if we have the interest and intent. Given the fact that 90 percent of high performers at the workplace possess high EQ while 80 percent of low performers have low EQ (according to Talent Smart), we can all stand to push ourselves a bit in order to impel this growth.

HOW TO INCREASE EQ

Learn to Manage Your Negative Emotions

We can likely all recall particularly “bad days” in our own lives, and the domino effect that can begin with one unfortunate event feeding into others as we become overwhelmed with negative thoughts and resulting clouded judgment. Luckily, we have the power to change how we feel about a situation by changing our perception of it.

There are several ways in which we can teach ourselves to reduce these negative feelings:

- **Decrease fear of rejection.** Rather than view things as being simply black and white, you can instead push yourself to consider multiple options and alternatives for each scenario. In doing so, you give yourself not just a Plan A, but also Plans B and C (and maybe even D) and therefore a higher chance of a positive outcome.

For example: Say you are looking for a new job. Rather than simply believing “If I don’t get my first choice, I must not be

a valuable candidate,” take a step back and approach the situation with the mentality that you are applying for a handful of interesting positions, any of which you would be excited to fill. If one does not work out, you still have other viable options.

- **Decrease negative personalization.** This technique largely involves taking a breath and stopping yourself from immediately assuming the worst. When you have a negative reaction to someone’s behavior, try to consider the situation from alternative perspectives, just as in the earlier example. Instead of assuming your boss is being short with you because he is angry with or does not like you, entertain the possibility that he is having a bad day, or that his boss just reprimanded him for something completely unrelated. By allowing alternative explanations rather than personalizing others’ behavior, we simultaneously reduce misunderstandings and practice empathy.

Remain Calm Under Pressure

Imagine you are about to head into an interview, or give a presentation to company stakeholders or a very picky client. Are you sweating yet? (I am!) Luckily, there are a few tricks you can use to help decrease your anxiety (and blood pressure) and put yourself in a position to be collected and capable rather than reactive and on-edge.

- **Cognitive approach.** Instead of fixating on your nervousness and trying to deny it or cast it off, conceptualize your fear as excitement: “I’m not nervous; I am just excited.” While this may sound like touchy-feely fluff, it’s actually science! Harvard Business School psychologist Alison Wood Brooks discovered through a series of experiments that when people shift from a “threat mindset” to an “opportunity mindset,” this in turn shifts their anxiety to excitement and their performance improves.
- **Physical approach.** You can also simply move your body in order to calm your mind. Take a short walk; do some breathing exercises; do a few jumping jacks (in private, please). Some simple movement can help to channel your

- 90 percent of top performers have high EQ.
- EQ is responsible for 58 percent of your job performance.
- People with high EQ make \$29,000 more annually than their low-EQ counterparts.

Source: www.talentsmart.com



energy into a more positive direction, and you can literally work out your nerves.

Speak Openly and Confidently

Having EQ and empathy does not mean you must allow yourself to be a doormat. We all have the right—and at times, the need—to respectfully disagree with others, and to set appropriate boundaries. It is okay to be assertive and to practice self-preservation. Situations that require us to express difficult emotions can naturally evoke tension, but approaching them constructively can help immensely.

For example, rather than making a you-focused statement, it is more helpful and better received to make an I-focused statement in the format of “I feel (blank) when you (blank) because (blank).”

Consider: “You need to complete your work on time” versus “I feel stressed when you hand in your work late because we may not meet the deadline.”

You-focused language can often be construed as blaming or judgmental, which puts the listener on the defensive and, therefore, less receptive to your message. However, I-focused statements are expressing how you feel in response to an action, with which it is much more difficult to take issue or disagree with.

Reduce Reactivity

No matter how hard we try, there will always be that “one person” in your life whom you find to be difficult. Whatever the

reason, challenge yourself not to let your “person” affect you negatively and ruin your day.

Here are two methods to counteract aversion and remain positive:

- **Think before you speak.** Reacting in anger almost never ends well. When you are upset with someone, simply try to stop yourself. Take a breath, and give yourself a moment (or several) to calm down enough to approach the person with a clear head and the hope to defuse, rather than exacerbate, the situation.
- **Consider this person’s situation.** Again, this requires flexing your empathy a bit but will almost always help you to be a little calmer and kinder.

“Yes, I find interactions with Jim challenging but it must be difficult for him to _____” (i.e., have such a demanding schedule; deal with his mother’s illness; cope with his partner’s job loss).

By considering the person’s situation, rather than what you assume is his inherent character, you force yourself to remember that this person is human—just like you. Recognize that this person’s behavior is about his own issues. (“It’s not me; it’s you.”) In doing so, you are able to view the situation more objectively and can more easily devise solutions to the problem.

Grow From Adversity

Work is tough sometimes, and life can be tougher. Instead of wallowing in despair and cursing our lot in life, we can choose to find the lessons in our challenges and use them as fuel for personal growth. With every difficult situation you encounter, ask: “What am I able to learn from this? How can I avoid this in the future? How can I use this to redefine my priorities? What else can I do, and how can I do it better?” The right questions yield the best answers, and by asking yourself constructive questions—tough as they may be—you are setting yourself up to better deal with the situation while also facilitating self-improvement.

Connect Positively With Others

Humans do not exist in a vacuum. Part of life and work is creating relationships with and placing trust in others. While often overlooked or taken for granted, simple acts can contribute greatly to the strength and quality of your relationships. These acts can take the form of verbal expressions (such as asking a colleague how his day is going, expressing gratitude for a kind gesture, or even offering an apology), body language (nodding, shaking hands, warm eye contact, hugging, smiling) and behavior (giving a gift or card, doing a favor, offering a drink). By engaging in these positive behaviors, you are communicating that you care about the other person and that you value her presence in your life.

WHY DOES EQ MATTER?

When you think about a colleague or boss you have admired as well as with whom you have good rapport, you may also associate some of the traits we have discussed here: respectful assertiveness, reasonableness, calmness under pressure, and a generally positive demeanor. If you possess well-developed EQ you are more likely to not only be a happier person but also a better employee. When we have supportive relationships with our colleagues, we tend to be more satisfied on the job and, therefore, produce better quality work. Essentially, when you feel better you do better, and position yourself for greater success.

In work and in life, a high level of emotional intelligence has myriad benefits: improved physical health, mental well-being and conflict resolution skills, as well as success and leadership. If you find these advantages as appealing as I do, try to incorporate some of the tips mentioned here. Just remember: Much like foreign language fluency (or six-pack abs), EQ is something we need to keep working at in order to maintain. It's worth it, though! ■



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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Zen Actuary

Installment 9: “The Patience of Healing”

By Rich Lauria

*Author’s Note: This is the continuation of a series¹ adapted from the book *Awake at Work* by Michael Carroll, covering the application of Buddhist teachings to situations encountered in a modern corporate workplace setting. This series addresses challenges frequently encountered by practicing actuaries.*

This installment takes a 180-degree turn from the prior one, which discussed my adventurous foray into learning to stand on my head. Much of that experience encompassed dealing with the physical and mental challenges of taking on a physically demanding yoga posture. There are many barriers one must “push through” to achieve the final destination.

This article looks at testing one’s ability to “pull back” and slow down when circumstances call for doing so. As with headstand, attempting to heal from injuries involves setting goals and having

You need another set of eyes to help diagnose the problem and prescribe potential solutions to remedy the project.

a final destination. However, also like standing on one’s head, it’s the journey to recovery and examining the various states of mind along the way that is where the real work of self-discovery and personal growth occurs. Don’t worry, we’ll get back to *Awake at Work* in the next installment!

“Oww! That really hurt bad! I think I really messed up my arm this time!”

I was in the gym when this occurred and I did not say this out loud, but they were my exact thoughts as pain went searing through my right arm. I was in the middle of doing pull-ups, attempting to build some additional upper body strength that I felt I needed for some more physically demanding yoga poses I

had been working on. Hey, I made it into a headstand, so I figured the sky’s the limit. I thought to myself, “Rich, you live once. Go for it. You ain’t getting any younger!” The burning sensation going through my arm made the last part of that thought feel compellingly real.

I knew I was in trouble, but I did not want to face it. I told myself to take a day or two off and it would get better, and I could go back to working on levitation and defying other laws of physics. But it did not get better. It hurt like heck. Yet I still attempted to practice all of the advanced postures I had been working on: headstand, crow, side-crow, handstand, forearm balance. What a lunatic!

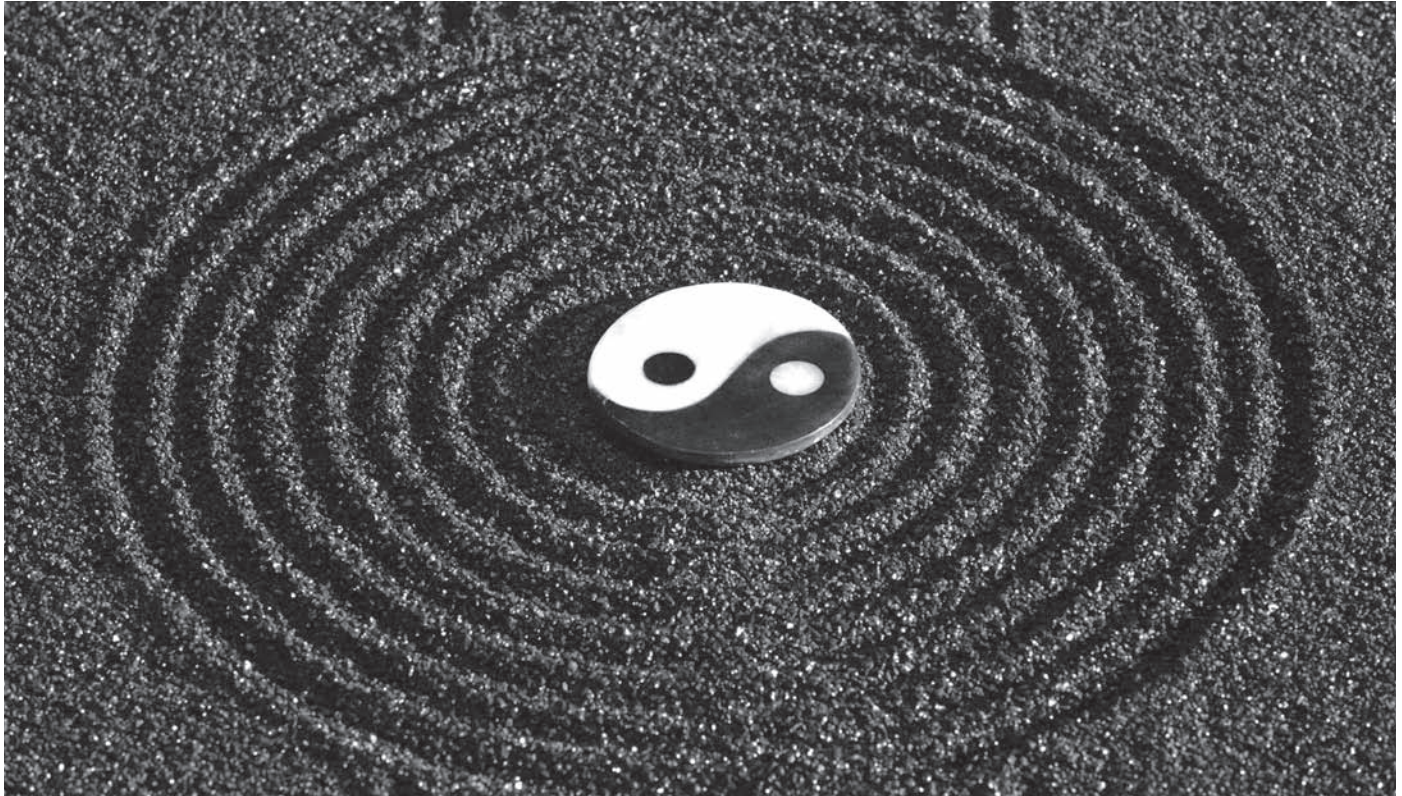
The rational, reality-facing part of me began researching and analyzing what was going on. I diagnosed myself as having elbow tendonitis—golfer’s elbow, not tennis elbow (there is a difference). I began to do some of the recommended exercises, but I was still trying to justify maintaining my asana practice at the same physical level. I refused to let go.

The recognition of this refusal was a crucial turning point—the first of several. I had become attached to my physical yoga practice. In some ways, it had become a means to an end—just another workout. I had lost the true meaning of the practice. The first step back was the recognition that I needed help—and fast. I made an appointment with an orthopedist, who confirmed my nonprofessional diagnosis, and prescribed physical therapy for the elbow.

This is not unlike what an actuary may experience in executing a challenging assignment. For example, you may be working on a complex model and at a crucial juncture of testing may begin to get unexpected results. You know something is not right and have a feel for where the problem likely is occurring, yet cannot shake the thinking and logic that created the flawed model. You are too close to it, too connected to what makes it go. You need another set of eyes to help diagnose the problem and prescribe potential solutions to remedy the project.

Similarly, a line of business that has long been producing acceptable returns begins to produce subpar results including some occasional red ink. The actuaries managing the line have the data to diagnose the issues, but may be too vested in the product psychologically to examine the data critically. Sometimes it takes either an external review by a consultant or even an actuarial management shake-up to implement real and efficacious change.

The physical therapist I started with gave some tough love for my elbow, but not in the way the phrase is normally perceived. He told me I had to really dial it back. No pressing or grabbing with the injured arm, or it would not get better. He suggested I avoid using it as much as possible, although he acknowledged that completely eliminating all use was virtually impossible.



This led to a new examination of all of my living habits, going beyond what I did in the gym or on the yoga mat. Even my hygiene practices needed to be re-evaluated. It was painful to utilize a toothbrush with my right arm, so I attempted brushing with my left hand. The first week or so of doing this was a mechanical mess, with many spots not getting the brushing they needed, despite my best efforts. While frustrating and mentally irritating, the experience was mild by comparison to shaving holding the razor in my left hand. Let's just say that antibacterial ointments and Band-Aids were in regular usage during the first two weeks of that experience.

Other switches to my nondominant left hand were not as difficult but still required breaking some long-standing habits. Despite all the meditation and yoga I had been ritually following over several years, I discovered that I was still going through much of my day like an automaton, mechanically moving from one thing to the next. My right arm dependency was astonishing. I always knew it was dominant, but my desire to use it in spite of the intense pain that doing so would cause was alarming. My natural habit to reach for a door knob or handle with my right hand frequently set back my recovery. To combat it, I began incorporating into meditation the mantra, "I am left-handed. Everything I do must be carried out with my left hand." Carrying

this thinking out of meditation into the rest of my life helped me gradually adjust to doing more with my left hand.

While it is stressful to do this when one has to recover from injury, I recommend experimenting when you are not injured. Watch and observe how your dominant hand becomes like big brother, wanting to come in and do things it normally does because it is far more efficient and effective. Even in tasks that require two hands, switch the role of each hand in the task and observe what goes on in your mind.

At first, pay attention to how the ego reacts to "beginner's mind." Struggling to do routine tasks that have become non-events (how many times do you even remember brushing your teeth?) can be quite humbling at first. One has to actually contemplate what one is doing. One of my greatest challenges was spreading butter on bread holding the knife in my left hand. I had to mentally tell my hand what to do and watch whether it was doing it. I experienced this activity fully in real time, perhaps for the first time in decades! How amusing! All these years I've been trying to improve my mindfulness through all these yoga and meditation classes and retreats, and there was a built-in simple way to do it under my nose that was far more cost-effective!

How many tasks do we perform in carrying out our actuarial responsibilities that we have not truly examined in years? For ex-

ample, I recently hired an external consulting firm to perform a model validation on my company's enterprise risk management model suite. The original purpose was to demonstrate that the model was working appropriately and breed further confidence in its integrity with senior management and the board. As expected, the model calculations and overall structure passed with flying colors.

However, the validation included a review of both key model inputs such as scenario construction, and how the reports generated were being used by key stakeholders. The exercise resulted in several key unexpected insights in these areas, including the need for better governance around scenario development, and for an expansion of modeling capability to address usage needs not met by the current set of models. The models have been in place for years and to some degree I had my team just unwittingly continuing to press the button each quarter.

In all aspects of life, there are times when things get even worse before they get better. For some time, I had been feeling pain in my right hip and lower back. Several weeks into my elbow physical therapy, I noticed this had extended to the groin and I diagnosed this as being some type of groin strain or pull. I dutifully did my internet research and added new exercises to address the problem. It was not getting better. I bit the bullet and once again saw an orthopedist. This time, I discovered my diagnosis was quite off, meaning I will not be attending medical school anytime soon. The orthopedist informed me that I had an inguinal hernia on the right side, and the only way to fix it would be through surgery. I had the surgery in early April, and am recovering reasonably well as of the date of this writing.

There have been setbacks with both injuries over the last two months, and what I've learned is that these are often part of the process. They help me better define what I can and cannot do. It has been a great lesson in impermanence, as I need to continually monitor my body as it progresses. It really is about paying attention.

Similarly, navigating our actuarial work requires that same dedication for us to be most effective. We've all experienced setbacks. Suddenly, that client we've had for 20 years calls to inform us that they are putting out a Request for Proposals. Or that version of actuarial software we've become dependent on is suddenly no longer supported by the vendor; all of those enhancements in our project plan are now at risk.

A larger example involves actuaries working on pricing individual major medical policies. They continue to grapple with how to adjust to the actuarial havoc wreaked by the underwriting and pricing sea changes ushered in by the Affordable Care Act in 2014. How to heal the market is under contemplation by many in industry, academia and government. Some participants have

decided that the market is permanently broken and have either exited or are planning to do so.

In applying the lessons of my healing process to my actuarial practice, I have found the following to be helpful:

1. **Be open to what is happening in the marketplace.** In other words, do not resist or go into denial about the continual changes. This includes monitoring trends in demographics, living habits and regulation, as well as policy experience and financial markets.
2. **Trust intuition and gut feelings, but validate them with real data where possible.** Working in this profession results in a tremendous wealth of experience for each of us to draw from; we just need to be careful not to jump the gun in diagnosing problems and drawing up solutions until we have all of the relevant information.
3. **Call upon a rich and varied network of external perspectives** to fill in the pieces of the puzzle where intuition and data are not providing answers. Talk to non-actuaries at other companies where possible.
4. **Maintain patience and restraint when implementing changes.** Moving too quickly and without thinking things through may result in a cure that is worse than the disease.
5. **Keep a sense of humor.** No one is perfect, and we are all in the process of continual learning. Remember that actuaries are well compensated because of their willingness to ask and attempt to answer the most difficult questions. Enjoy the process and be willing to smile at the opportunities to grow.

Injuries and ailments are never fun, whether to our bodies, minds, or the work that we depend on for our livelihood and self-esteem. But they often are our best teachers, calling for patience, compassion and self-awareness in the journey to healing. When faced with openness and humility, they bring about professional and personal growth that we may not be able to experience otherwise. ■



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ENDNOTE

¹ The first eight installments in the "Zen Actuary" series were published in *The Stepping Stone* from November 2013–May 2016, and are available online at www.SOA.org/ld.

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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Leadership Inspiration: “Make the Unconscious Conscious”

By Juan Arroyo

Editor’s Note: In the Leadership & Development Section’s Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be better actuarial leaders. Here is an entry from the “Leadership Quote” category.

How and what I think is what makes the difference.

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will rule your life and you will call it fate.”

—Carl Jung

Recently, I had the privilege to have a conversation with my gremlin. A gremlin is someone I know very well. It’s my inner critic. It’s the voice that likes me to be comfortable. It’s the persona that stops me from doing something because it wants to “protect” me.

Up until a couple of weeks ago, what I said, did and believed weren’t in alignment. I found myself thinking I could change the culture around me, but then I proceeded to sabotage my stories, my writing, my feedback and my suggestions. All disguised with beliefs like, “I don’t want to be in the spotlight” or “I don’t want to offend someone.” Hence, what I said was trumped by what I believed.

Today, it’s a different story. I became aware of this gremlin (unconscious), and I can now choose and decide how I’m going to react against it. In other words, I have control over what I choose to do and don’t do instead of my gremlin dictating my actions unconsciously.

Carl Jung was right.

I now laugh about the years I spent stopping short of taking action on my dreams because of the fear of challenging someone’s perspective of the world, or thinking I was not good enough for my dreams.

The fact is that once we become aware of what’s holding us back, we can never go back. We might like to say ignorance is bliss; but I can now say awareness is more powerful, meaningful and fulfilling. ■



Juan Arroyo, ASA, MAAA, wakes up every day looking for the question that allows an individual to break through a self-limiting belief and become a better version of oneself. He can be reached at juanri31@gmail.com.

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