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CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Actuaries and Jungian Archetypes

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While compiling material for one of our Leadership & Development (L&D) sessions at the 2016 Society of Actuaries (SOA) Annual Meeting & Exhibit, I became interested in the various stages of development of the actuary—from the time that a candidate has passed either the MLC or C exam,¹ which I consider to be the examinations that jumpstart the actuarial mentality, to the pre-retirement years, where actuaries often hold C-suite corporate positions, own a consulting practice, or have made it to senior partner at a large firm. In my quest, I came across Carl Gustav Jung.

Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, founded the discipline of analytical psychology. His work also spans several fields such as philosophy, anthropology, literature and religious studies. A notable contribution to the field of psychology was his set of archetype figures, loosely defined as characters that usually have a significant influence in one's life, such as *mother*, *father*, *child*, *god*, *wise old man* and so on.

In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*,² Jung provided critical insight into the development stages of adulthood, and suggested that an awareness of a higher self is a developmental task of the adult. As we progress in our careers, we also go through these phases of adulthood. So, I drew parallel archetypes with the career progression of an actuary.

In the earliest years, actuaries focus on applying the actuarial knowledge, skills and judgment required to provide value-added services. As one's career progresses, the emphasis becomes anticipating trends and strategically aligning actuarial practice with broader organizational business goals.³ These activities may provide a framework for archetypes, such as *the student* and *the boss*.

When actuaries write exams, they are usually identified with their performance and achievements. The first few exams are rigorous, but they are seen only as challenges to overcome. The exam experience is a humbling one; we know that we must be disciplined and put in the necessary study hours to succeed. The achievement of having passed an exam is gratifying, but the skill to do so sometimes becomes the identifier with the self. Many actuaries outgrow this stage and make

other considerations more significant. Some actuaries move in and out of this stage, and a few stay there for the rest of their lives.

By the time a credential is earned, some actuaries have their ego dominating their lives and feel compelled to conquer the corporate world to demonstrate their superiority. Not only was I in that boat when I achieved my FSA, but I was also the captain. My objective was to defeat others in a race for the No. 1 spot. Status and position became my obsessions. The archetype may be defined as *the young, restless person* or *the athlete*.

Luckily, we make mistakes in life. We find some lessons need to be learned. And when that happens, we enter the stage of life when the ego is tamed and the awareness shifted. In that stage, my inner drive became my family: I didn't care about the size of the office, or whether my business card appropriately displayed the "FSA" designation after my name. I wanted to serve others. I considered the many volunteer opportunities available at the SOA, and at other organizations. Since then, I have served the SOA in various roles, and plan to keep contributing for the years to come. I have also had the chance to act as a mentor for younger actuaries, an activity that I find rewarding. This archetype may be defined as *the coach* or *the statesperson*.

Adult development encompasses the changes that occur in biological, psychological and interpersonal domains of human life from the end of adolescence until the end of one's life. These changes may be gradual or rapid, and can reflect positive, negative or no change from previous levels of functioning. Stage theories typically focus on age-appropriate developmental tasks to be achieved at each stage. Jung proposed stage theories of human development that encompass the entire life span, and emphasized the potential for positive change very late in life. A crucial component is made of one's vocation, and the actuarial career can be a continuous path that leads to the goal of any profession: to serve society at large.

What is my next step? Frankly, I haven't found out yet. But in the meantime, I keep running. I have become an advocate for meliorism.⁴ I do not believe in big transformational change; I believe in the slow, steady, concrete march to make each day slightly better than the last. I am focusing on character development, and have convinced myself that daily effort is crucial for that. ■



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ENDNOTES

- 1 These exams will be replaced on July 1, 2018, with the Long-Term Actuarial Mathematics and the Short-Term Actuarial Mathematics exams, respectively.
- 2 C.G. Jung. (2014). *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Routledge Classics.
- 3 Competency Framework Self-Assessment Tool, Society of Actuaries, 2016.
- 4 The belief that the world can be made better by human effort.