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Leadership Inspiration: Always Have That Minute

By Joanne Ryan

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

My defining moment that changed how I show up as a leader was after I hired my coach, Karen Sullivan. I hired her for personal reasons, but like all coaching, it eventually touched on all aspects of my life. In one session I was telling her about the stress I was feeling at work trying to get a project done, when someone who reported to me popped into my office and said, "Do you have a minute?"

I told Karen at that moment my stress level had elevated even more, and I also felt a bit irritated and frustrated, which I regretted afterward. We talked about how I wanted to show up as a leader for quite a while during that session, and my biggest takeaway was when she said, "The people who work for you are your biggest asset. Think about the courage he had to come into your office and ask you for some time, so always have that minute." I loved that phrase so much that I actually wrote "Always Have That Minute" on a sticky note and stuck it on my computer monitor so I would see it every time somebody walked into my office.

Karen is not only an incredible coach but also a leadership fanatic, and she really helped me rethink my views on leadership. She helped me realize there is no secret formula for being a great leader, because we are all unique and have to find the leadership style that works for us. Being an exceptional leader requires our leadership approach to change with each and every person, since the people we lead are all unique as well and will respond differently to different styles.

She also helped me see being a leader requires a flip in attitude and perspective from how we had been approaching our careers. As we start our careers as actuaries, the focus is on "me" and what I can do to be the best actuary, to do the best job on a project, to be most effective in my position, etc. This makes sense in the early stages of our careers because we're developing the knowledge and skills to become successful actuaries. As we move into leadership roles, the focus flips from me to them:

- How do I inspire, motivate and develop them?
- How do I stretch them and give them opportunities to grow?
- What can I do to make the greatest impact on their careers and lives?

Basically, I now look at my role as a leader as not what they can do for me, but rather in what ways I can support them. Helping those on my team and around me become more knowledgeable and more skilled actuaries and leaders has a much greater impact than doing it myself, so Always Have That Minute! ■



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