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PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

What Actuarial Exams Teach You

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Anyone that's part of or knows about the actuarial profession understands that actuarial certifications and exams are a big deal. Colleges focus their courses on preparing actuaries to pass exams with the hope of great job opportunities. Aside from passing grades and job applications, what do actuarial exams teach those who decide to finish them?

It's well known that we only retain a small amount of the information we memorize for a test. Ask me about time series and I won't be able to tell you much about it. That said, there are three lessons I got from going through the actuarial exam process.

1. **Perseverance and discipline.** Yes ... there are some who were so smart they barely studied and put in little effort to pass exams. But for most of us, discipline and perseverance were needed to achieve success. With 30 to 40 percent passing rates, most actuaries end up taking at least one exam twice; some even take them three or more times. The possibility of experiencing failure several times requires the individual to be resilient in the quest. There's no better way to keep moving forward than to create discipline in our study habits and endless search for improvement.

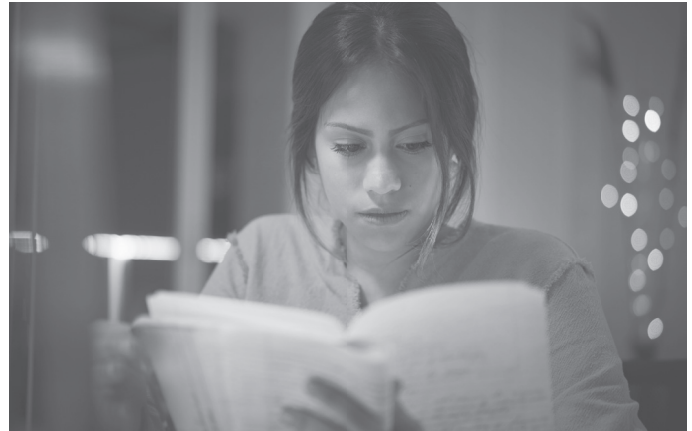
Like John Maxwell states¹ in his Law of Consistency, "Motivation gets you going but discipline keeps you growing." *Greatness is the result of ordinary things done daily.*

2. **Priorities and sacrifice.** The exam process takes time. For most it takes at least seven years. Throughout the journey, there are plenty of social events left behind in exchange for a chance to pass an exam.

Actuarial exams force us to choose what matters most and sacrifice instant gratification for long-term success. The family gathering, the Friday night movie, a trip to Vegas and your favorite TV show are examples of sacrifices. One thing is certain: For the ones who finish, the sacrifices are all worth it.

"He who would accomplish little must sacrifice little; he who would achieve much must sacrifice much; he who would attain highly must sacrifice greatly"

—James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh*



3. **Quick thinking and problem-solving.** Given the limited time to finish an exam, actuaries get conditioned to be quick to figure out how to tackle and solve a problem. In the ever-changing business environment this can be a very useful skill. The time constraint also simulates the sense of working under pressure.

Actuaries are always under the gun to provide guidance with quick turnaround. Actuarial exams give actuaries the opportunity to learn about their style under stress and their ability to handle the pressure and rapidly come up with sensible solutions to the problems at hand.

So how do perseverance, discipline, priorities, sacrifice, quick thinking and problem solving relate to the business world?

As actuaries, we strive to be innovators. In our quest to "deliver more than just numbers" we are always looking for ways to change the way the game is played. This approach leads to constant change, many failures and plenty of hard work. This requires us to be able to adapt quickly, think on our feet, be creative, prioritize and persevere.

Change is not an enemy. Change is opportunity. And taking advantage of opportunities requires the lessons actuarial exams can give.

What life lessons have you gotten from taking exams? ■



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.

ENDNOTE

1 From *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth: Live Them and Reach Your Potential* by John C. Maxwell.