



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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From a public service perspective

Leadership and management skills

by A. Haeworth Robertson

In 1973, I asked C.L. Trowbridge, then incumbent chief actuary of the Social Security Administration, what characteristics a person should have to be effective in that job. (This was during the early stages of assessing my own suitability for the position.) He said that one needed to be "feisty" and "confrontational," that is, full of nervous energy and eager to engage in the clash of forces and ideas. He thought that an experienced, successful consultant might be right for the job. Of course, he took it for granted that one had the necessary technical background and intrapersonal skills to harness and direct the energy of a group of actuaries — not always an easy task.

Trowbridge did not consider himself feisty. His call for feistiness was because of the difficulties dealing with the myriad of competing interests outside the Office of the Actuary, as distinguished from managing a discrete group of actuaries.

The problems and pressures of actuaries in public service may not be unique, but their challenges are sometimes more diverse and magnified than in private employment. Suffice it to say that not every player in the game really wants to have actuaries produce and publicize their best estimate of the future financial consequences of decisions made today.

To further assess my suitability as a public service actuary, I talked at length in 1974 with Robert J. Myers, Social Security's chief actuary from 1947-1970, on this same question of desirable leadership and management skills. My initial reaction was that Myers and I were so different from each other that since he had been a good chief actuary, I couldn't also be one. Upon further analysis, I decided it is reasonable for a particular job to be filled from time to time by individuals with different skills and personalities. Also, though a job description may remain unaltered, changing

conditions may require the incumbent to emphasize different "standard" leadership and management skills to remain effective.

The point in relating these anecdotes is that textbook leadership and management skills are not enough. The individual and his or her skills must be suitable to the exigencies of the job. The individual must be comfortable and natural in having and exercising those skills if he or she is to maintain equilibrium.

In his review of Jimmy Carter's new book, *Turning Point*, Richard J. Tofel (*The Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 1993) states:

Here is a man reserved and high-minded but with a passion for decency. The paradox of Jimmy Carter as president, of course, was that his greatest strengths — his essential modesty, quiet integrity, unwillingness to compromise on principle — were also his most glaring weaknesses. What *Turning Point* vividly illustrates is that this dichotomy was present from the earliest days of his political life.

Planning and executing your own life-journey is a challenging and dynamic process. You must continually learn about yourself, the nature of the various opportunities that are available to you, make as good a match as possible, and then not hesitate to change yourself or your job when the match is inappropriate. My suggestion is to be daring and take a few risks. I've always liked what Henry David Thoreau wrote in his conclusion to *Walden*:

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. ...I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now. I learned

Why should I vote?

by Daphne D. Bartlett

It's time for Fellows to vote to elect the Society's next President-Elect, three Vice-Presidents, and six members of the Board of Governors. First ballots for the 1993 elections were mailed on March 23, and the deadline for them to be returned is April 23. Results of the first ballot assist the Committee on Elections in determining who will appear on the second ballot, which will be mailed on July 20.

You may ask, "Why should I vote? I don't know any of the candidates."

The elections booklets attempt to provide you with some information about the candidates, including statements by candidates for President-Elect (both ballots) and Vice-President (second ballots). Some of you may not find this to be enough. In that case, I strongly urge you to discuss the candidates with someone whose opinion you respect.

The percentage of Fellows voting in 1992 on the second ballot increased to 42.1% from 40.0% in 1992. This is an improvement that I hope can be continued in 1993. Let's try to get the percentage over 50% for the first time since 1984.

Voting is a right you have earned as a Fellow of the Society of Actuaries. It is your duty to select those leaders you think can best guide our profession into the 21st century.

Please invest a few minutes of your time in the Society's future and vote!

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this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

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