



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

The Actuary

April 1993 – Volume 27, No. 4

A professional recruiter's view

What are companies looking for in today's actuary?

by Terri Michalewicz

Conceptualize... negotiate... communicate... manage... adapt to change... business sense... influence... bottom line orientation... market sensitivity... technical strength... people skills... continuing education... leadership... listening skills... industry involvement... social mobility...

As recently as three to five years ago, the demand for actuaries exceeded supply across the board and at all levels. Companies were much less selective in the recruiting process. A math, statistics, or actuarial science degree, combined with reasonable exam progress and some experience in a desired specialty, was a virtual assurance of employment and job security. Exam and credential status, rather than performance, determined progression up the ladder, both in title and compensation. Advancement opportunities were primarily within the actuarial hierarchy, and a career path was relatively clear cut.

Today, companies are looking for and, in some cases, demanding a breadth of skills above and beyond technical competence. This is because management now requires that more be done with less. We've all seen a contraction in the industry through reorganizations, consolidations, and downsizing; controlling and reducing expenses is vital in today's marketplace. While some may consider these occurrences as negatives, it increases opportunities for the actuary with both technical and leadership skills. Demand is high for actuaries who are poised to help solve today's complex business problems. The focus is on hiring for long-term potential and mobility, rather than a short-term immediate need. Individual contribution is more closely scrutinized and measured.

What skills are paramount for increasing an actuary's value to the organization and improving marketability? All the points listed at the beginning

of the article are important. Hiring authorities, however, request the following five attributes most frequently.

1) Ability to be an effective communicator

An effective communicator has both verbal and written skills. Often companies ask for a candidate to provide a writing sample. Presentation skills are more important than ever. Both actuaries and non-actuaries could be in an audience, so a presenter needs to know how to tailor approach and subject matter accordingly. Training in presentations is available from universities, extension courses, seminars, and reading material. Many companies are willing to pay for this added training.

2) Ability to influence people and to negotiate when necessary

Teams formed to solve problems and involving people with different responsibilities are becoming more prevalent in companies. Usually most of the team members have no direct reporting relationship to the team leader. The leader can help the team achieve goals only through influence and negotiation and "management by persuasion."

3) Management/leadership skills

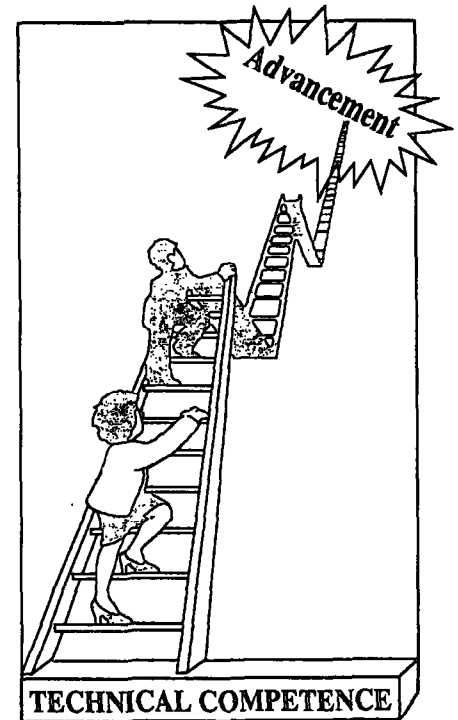
This includes both project and people management. The ability to facilitate, delegate, and motivate are recognized assets.

4) Understanding general business principles

This includes an ability to demonstrate "big picture" thinking while remaining sensitive to detail.

5) Technical and analytical strength

Sound actuarial competence remains the cornerstone. Companies now seek actuaries with expanded skills, yet



these skills are sought "in addition to" not "instead of" sound technical competence.

The insurance industry is changing, and actuaries are being asked to change with it. The actuary who successfully blends technical, managerial, and leadership capabilities will find increasing, not diminishing, opportunities in today's marketplace.

Terri Michalewicz, not a member of the Society, is principal at LCM Associates, Newnan, Georgia.

Math Awareness Week

The Joint Policy Board for Mathematics has designated April 25-May 1, 1993, as Mathematics Awareness Week. The theme for this year's activities is "Mathematics and Manufacturing." Related to this, the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM) has published a report on "Mathematics and Manufacturing: The Mathematical and Computational Sciences in Emerging Manufacturing Technologies and Management Practices." The Society of Actuaries library has a three-page abstract of this report on file. The complete report is available from SIAM, 3600 University Science Center, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2688, 215/382-9800.