



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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10 timely tips for the time-crunched office

by Dean L. Taylor

Most of us have read about time management techniques for individuals: creating filing systems, making priority lists, uncluttering work areas, and handling each piece of paper only once. This article is about how your office can become more efficient using 10 collective time management ideas we have instituted in the actuarial division of Trigon Blue Cross Blue Shield. These practical, time-tested programs have boosted our collective productivity immensely. In addition, these ideas facilitate communication among employees, which in turn helps them be more effective managers of people and projects.

Tip #1: Publication facilitators

Have you struggled to keep up with all the publications and internal reports that routinely cross your desk — sometimes weeks after the publication dates?

We first made a list of the publications our division receives, and then asked everyone to facilitate one publication. The facilitator's role is to quickly review the publication when it arrives, summarize pertinent articles in one or two sentences, and attach the summary to the cover with the routing slip. We also asked everyone to decide which publications they wished to see.

A publication that once took months to complete its journey now takes only a week or two. For several publications, summaries of articles are disseminated by e-mail, eliminating the need for a routing slip. *The Wall Street Journal* has five facilitators — one per business day — who send summaries of insurance, health, and technology articles over e-mail.

Tip #2: Mail slots for everyone

In our division of 41 people, time often was lost on failed attempts to distribute items to others. Now we use individual mail slots placed at the

entrance of our division. Employees drop off and retrieve mail several times a day. If an employee is out of the office for more than a day, a note is posted at the mail slot so routed publications are forwarded.

Tip #3: Computerized calendars

A computerized calendar system is an excellent way to save time. You can view everyone's schedule with the click of a button. These calendars are extremely helpful to our secretaries for scheduling meetings and to individuals for assigning blocks of time to their own projects. Also, we recently created a calendar that displays the dates individuals are out of the office for at least half a day.

Tip #4: Voice mail

Voice mail, when used properly, is a great way to communicate with others when a short verbal response is appropriate.

Voice mail is encouraged because it eliminates some of the secretary's distractions.

Tip #5: Divisional handbook

Several years ago, we learned that new employees in the actuarial section received very little information about it. So, one employee spearheaded an effort that resulted in a division handbook. Sections include each

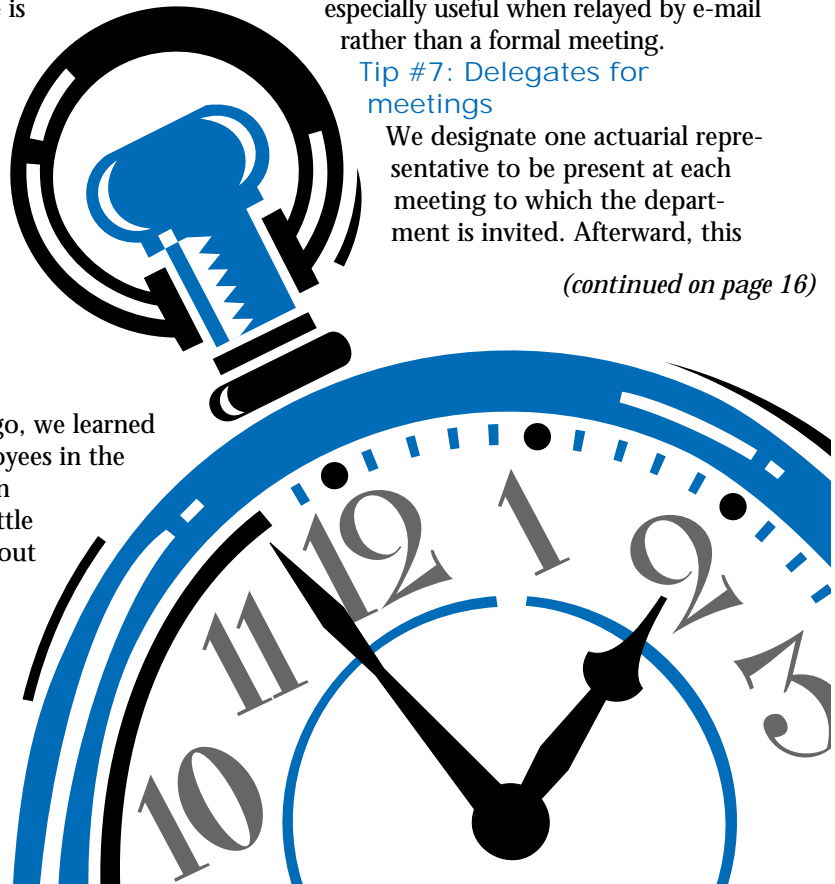
area's responsibilities, aids to help a new hire acclimate, a list of actuarial data bases, and contact persons for various topics. The handbook is updated as necessary. A consistent level of knowledge is provided to each new hire, and we have found that this eases them more quickly into their new positions.

Tip #6: Electronic mail

Every employee in our office is connected by e-mail, and we find it very useful in soliciting short and concise information from each other. One of the advantages of e-mail is the ability to set up distribution lists of names. For instance, the six employees in the individual pricing area often communicate informally to each other during the work day via an e-mail list. Summaries of phone conversations or meetings are especially useful when relayed by e-mail rather than a formal meeting.

Tip #7: Delegates for meetings

We designate one actuarial representative to be present at each meeting to which the department is invited. Afterward, this

(continued on page 16)

10 timely tips (continued from page 15)

individual sends a brief summary of pertinent actuarial issues to the appropriate persons within the division. This allows everyone to make more productive use of their time while remaining in the loop.

Tip #8: Staff meeting reports

Our division's chief actuary used to hold a weekly meeting with his direct reports, who would then conduct follow-up meetings with their employees. This caused delays of up to a week. Our new approach is to designate one person at the chief actuary's meeting to send a summary of the minutes by

e-mail to all division employees. This saves time formerly spent on meetings and shortens the time gap.

Tip #9: "Do Not Disturb" sign

When employees really need uninterrupted time, they place a sign stating that fact outside their office or cubicle. Also recommended is the use of the "do not disturb" button on the telephone.

Tip #10: Birthday celebrations

In prior years, our division celebrated each individual's birthday. To save valuable time, we now hold only one birthday celebration each month.

A few employees are responsible for

organizing the monthly celebration.

Time management is critical for both busy professionals and entire departments. By adopting these time management ideas, your department can reduce disruptions and increase its productivity, yielding collective dividends all around.

Dean Taylor is a senior actuarial associate for Trigon Blue Cross Blue Shield in Richmond, Va., and a member of the Committee on Management and Personal Development.



November results

The November exam grades have been mailed. The total number of candidates was 13,459, with 9,254 writing Series 100 and 4,205 writing Series 200 and higher.

As a result of November exams, six earned Associateship and 155 Fellowship candidates completed exams and are now eligible to attend the Fellowship Admission Course.

The exam process could not run smoothly without the aid of dedicated volunteers. The Education Services Department would like to thank the 900 supervisors, proctors, and examination committee members for another successful exam session. Risk Theory seminar changes considered

The 152 Risk Theory Intensive Seminar is currently under review. We anticipate implementing a few changes to make the week spent in this seminar more productive. One change being discussed is distributing the seminar notebook in advance so

candidates can become familiar with the material before the week begins. Pension track consolidations Several consolidations will be taking place in the Pension track in 1997:

- *Consolidation of P-560, P-561C, and P-562U*: A new pension course, P-567, "Retirement Income Security — A Worldwide Perspective," will be offered for the first time in fall 1997. It will replace courses P-560, which will be offered for the last time in spring 1997, and P-561C and P-562U, which were offered for the last time in fall 1996.
- *Consolidation of P-566U and P-362U*: Beginning this fall, P-362U will contain material from P-566U, and the number of credits will increase to 20.
- *Consolidation of P-565C and P-361C*: As of fall 1997, P-361C will contain material from P-565C, and the number of credits will increase to 25.

Supervisors needed for research paper option

The Research Paper Committee is compiling a list of qualified supervisors to assist candidates interested in the research paper option.

Under the Education and Examination Research Paper Option, candidates can earn 30 examination

credits through the successful submission and acceptance of a research paper. Before submitting an outline, a candidate must select a supervisor to guide him or her through the process. The list being compiled will aid students in selecting a supervisor.

Qualifications for supervisors are:

- Either FSA or ASA status
 - Have experience conducting research or have had at least one paper published in a professional journal
 - Have expertise on the paper's subject matter
- Duties include:
- Writing progress reports at the end of each three-month period
 - Guiding the candidate's efforts in producing a quality paper on an actuarial topic
 - Helping develop the candidate's research skills

Since the Research Paper Option began in 1988, 55 candidates have submitted proposals, and 11 papers have been accepted for credit.

To enroll as a prospective supervisor or to obtain more information, contact Bob Conover, education actuary, at the Society office (phone: 847/706-3597; fax: 847/706-3599; e-mail: rconover@soa.org).