



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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The title of my final article as chair illustrates the difference between communication and understanding. The “obvious” title for this article is, “Communication Is Difficult; Why Make It Harder?” (moving your hands one letter to the right on the keyboard).

Although it is hard to communicate effectively, it is easy to do it better. Focusing on a few aspects of your soft skills that need to be improved will allow you to become a more effective communicator in all aspects of your life.

According to BusinessDictionary.com, soft skills are defined as “Communicating, conflict management, human relations, making presentations, negotiating, team building, and other such ability, defined in terms of expected outcomes and not as a specific method or technique such as statistical analysis.”

The complete actuary would have the mix of “hard skills” (technical ability, analysis) as well as “soft skills” (everything else). During your exam career, you have been prepared for the technical aspects of your role, but now is your opportunity to develop the other areas of your life.

As I view the definition above, the main ideas that stand out to me are:

- Soft skill development is an active, not passive, process. You are doing, not reading or thinking. You need to communicate, present, negotiate and build as you improve your skills. Just as you needed to learn to apply your technical skills to the risk opportunities you encounter, you also need to learn to apply your soft skills to effectively deal with that risk.
- Although soft skills are not measurable, you can work toward a specific outcome. As you view your current level of soft skills, don't think about them in terms of a grade or a score; find something you do well and something you can improve. Take pride in what you do well and develop a plan for working on what needs improvement.

The goal of soft skill development is to get someone else to understand what you know. Perhaps a good place to start is to stop thinking of these skills as ‘soft skills’ and start thinking of them as ‘business skills’. True communication is not just talking or writing; true communication occurs when understanding takes place. ●

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