

A Juggling Actuary

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I started juggling when I was about 10 years old. Most people associate juggling with the circus or street performers. To me, juggling is so much more than a stage trick. It is great exercise, it is an art form, and perhaps most importantly it is a way to challenge and stimulate the brain. Research has shown that people who learn to juggle and who practice regularly increase the grey matter in areas of the brain associated with processing complex visual motion (Draganski, et al., 2004).

I started my path to becoming an actuary when I was about 22 years old. Most people associate actuaries with death or with Ben Stiller in *Along Came Polly*. To me, actuarial science is so much more than calculating mortality. It is a fascinating field of study with opportunities to work with brilliant people from all over the world who have the highest professional standards. It is a career that provides financial security to me and my family. I, in turn, get to help assure financial security of my clients. Finally, it is a profession that challenges me every day and is highly stimulating for my brain.

There is no end to the number of juggling tricks and patterns I can learn. Learning a new trick is incredibly hard, but immensely rewarding. I have to be willing to fail time and time again. My back gets sore from repeatedly bending over to pick up my instruments. After many hours of practice, it starts coming together and when I finally execute the trick perfectly it is a rush of excitement!

There is no end to the amount of knowledge and expertise I can gain as an actuary. It all starts with the actuarial exams which are extraordinarily difficult, but exceedingly rewarding. I have to be willing to fail. My hands get sore from writing. I must be resilient and know how to pick myself up over and over again. After hundreds of hours of study and practice when I finally get that 6, the feeling of joy is indescribable.

Juggling is a sport that allows the free expression of creativity. I can invent new tricks by using different parts of my body, by throwing different types of objects, or by using props. I can even create juggling patterns using a math notation called Siteswap, without throwing anything in the air.

As an actuary I get to freely express my creativity at work. When I tackle a project I always think, "how can I do this smarter, faster, or less error-prone than before?" My favorite part of my job is inventing new ways to do things that nobody has thought of before. There will always be opportunities to take advantage of new technology to improve some aspect of my job. I stretch myself by learning new programming languages such as VBA, Python, SQL, and DAX to create elegant solutions to problems.

I have a hobby and a career that are interesting, stimulating, and gratifying. Both my hobby and my career have given me opportunities to learn and experience failure. Failure has made me a better person as I've learned to pick myself back up. I get to express creativity while working and playing. I am a juggling actuary.

Bibliography

Draganski, B., Gaser, C., Busch, V., Schuierer, G., Bogdahn, U., & May, A. (2004). Changes in grey matter induced by training. *Nature*, 427(6972), 311-312. doi:10.1038/427311a