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Editorial: The Diversity of Diversity

By Ronald Poon-Affat

In a company as well as an organization, a goal of managing for diversity is to ensure all employees feel valued. As The Society of Actuaries' Past President, Craig Reynolds FSA, puts it, "diversity means respect for and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, education and religion. Ensuring a culture of acceptance of and respect for these differences often enables companies to achieve greater productivity, higher profits, and improved company morale by improving communication and respect and reducing harassment and conflict."

To maximize its future, the actuarial profession would do well to seek out and attract the best and brightest from all segments of the population and from a variety of educational backgrounds, cultures and experiences. The SOA's 2017–2021 Strategic Plan has within it a commitment to cultivate a more diverse membership as well as foster greater diversity and inclusion in the profession. To do so, a standing SOA Inclusion and Diversity Committee has been established, charged with determining which investments and programs might have the greatest impact on inclusion and diversity in the actuarial profession.

DIVERSITY MAY BE MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

An additional dimension of diversity within a workforce consists of human behavior.

Let's consider the following everyday situation: Four people are inside an elevator, and its doors are about to close. A fifth person is running to get on. One of the people in the elevator is in a hurry—fuming, totally impatient, and does not want to wait for anyone. A second passenger, a bubbly, energetic person, holds the door for the newcomer and chats with him when he arrives. A third passenger, happy either way, smiles while waiting patiently for the newcomer to board. The fourth passenger, meanwhile, is calculating the approximate weight of the four passengers to see if the elevator can handle a fifth one. If the weight appears to exceed the recommended limit, she plans to point it out to the newcomer and ask him or her to take the next elevator.

Seems like a completely diverse bunch of people, right? Maybe. They might all be reinsurance actuaries from the same city and

college, and might even cheer for the same football team. Still, they are reacting to a situation in four entirely different ways, and their reactions point to intrinsic personality traits that give today's workforces a fascinating amount of diversity.

LIVING COLORS

I recently took part in a course that used a system based on Carl Jung's typology as a framework to evaluate personality types. The main two divisions of human behavior, according to Jung, are: extraversion vs. introversion; and task-oriented vs. people oriented.

The course results used four primary colors to classify individual personalities. The classifications are:

- **Fiery Red:** People with Fiery Red energy are extraverted. They are high-energy, action-oriented and are always in motion. They approach others in a direct, authoritative manner, and radiate a desire for power and control.
- **Sunshine Yellow:** These individuals are also strongly extraverted. They are usually positive and friendly, and are concerned with good human relations. They approach others in a persuasive, democratic manner, and radiate a desire for sociability.
- **Cool Blue:** Introverted Cool Blue energy people wish to know and understand the world around them. They prefer written communication in order to maintain clarity and precision, and radiate a desire for analysis.
- **Earth Green:** These individuals, also introverted, focus on values and depth in relationships. They want others to feel they can be relied upon, prefer democratic relations that value the individual and are personal in style, and radiate a desire for understanding.

The use of four primary colors is extremely intuitive, memorable and far simpler than systems employed by many other typographies. (It reminded me of the colors on recycling bins, which nudge you into acquiring the habit of recycling.)

Back to the elevator example above: the impatient guy (me) was a Fiery Red; the meeter-and-greeter holding the door was a Sunshine Yellow; the patient colleague was an Earth Green; and Ms. Calculator was a Cool Blue. The system does not classify everyone with just one color: there are more and less dominant colors, which reflect a rainbow of diversity.

Actuaries, it turns out, are typically (but not always) Cool Blues—oriented toward numbers, analytics, and lots of detail.

CONCLUSION

When people think of diversity, they may think first of ethnicity and race, and then of gender and age. However, diversity can be much broader than that, especially if behavioral and personality traits are incorporated into the mix. Understanding how best to relate to and work with each personality type can substantially ease the process of gelling as a group and working together effectively.

Next time you are in the elevator, see how your colleagues respond to a just-in-time entrant. If you believe you have determined your colleagues' dominant color or colors, the following recommendations are suggested to improve your one-on-one interactions with them:

- **Fiery Reds:** Focus your attention on the task at hand. Never, ever be late for a meeting or a deadline. Their motto: "be brief, be bright, be gone."
- **Sunshine Yellows:** Smile! Ask open-ended questions. Stay open to new ideas. Their motto: "Involve me."
- **Cool Blues:** Present your ideas clearly and with structure. Their motto: "Give me details."
- **Earth Greens:** Practice active listening. Give full attention to their need and concerns. Their motto: "Show me you care."



Increased diversity in the workplace also means that we have to consider adapting our communication styles and the manner in which we engage with others. As Dr. Robert Rohm author of *Positive Personality Profiles*, says "If I understand you, and you understand me, doesn't it make sense that we can work more effectively together?" ■



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2017 Life and Annuity Reinsurance Seminar

By Timothy Paris

Following the success of last year's Advanced Reinsurance Seminar, and previous Introduction to Reinsurance Boot Camps, we are planning our 2017 Life and Annuity Reinsurance Seminar for August 14–15 in New York.

Attendees can expect an in-depth view of the important topics and fundamentals of life and annuity reinsurance, from

the perspective of a U.S. insurance company. Industry experts will present on the various types of reinsurance, treaty issues, financial implications and other considerations, and we expect ample time for attendees' Q&A and discussion. This seminar will also provide a great opportunity to network with peers and experts across the industry. Attendees will leave this seminar with a stronger understanding of current topics in life and annuity reinsurance.

For now, save the date! Agenda and speakers will be finalized soon. ■



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