

THE

VOLUME 15 ISSUE 1

Actuary

FEB
18
MAR

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LET'S TALK

14 SIMPLIFYING THE COMPLEX

Tailor your message to nontechnical audiences

18 SECURE TRUST

How to build trust to improve both your personal and professional life

38 STOP WASTING TIME

Tips on how to make the most of meetings

46 BODY TALK

Improving communication by being aware of body language

52 IMPROVING INTERACTIONS

Exploring the roles of introverts and extroverts in group dynamics



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THE Actuary

VOLUME 15 ISSUE 1

FEB
18
MAR



14

18

24

34

38

52

FEATURES

14 **SIMPLIFYING THE COMPLEX**
How to speak to nontechnical audiences
By Raymond E. DiDonna

18 **SECURE TRUST**
How to build trust to improve both your personal and professional life
By Darcy Eikenberg

24 **INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE**
How to communicate your value during a job interview
By Marianne Westphal and Julie Garwood

30 **STRAIGHT TALK**
Jason Alleyne, Stephen Camilli, Terri Michalewicz and Milanthi Sarukkali sound off on communication fundamentals

34 **THE ELEVATOR PITCH**
How to leave a lasting impression and take your networking game to the next level
By John West Hadley

38 **STOP WASTING TIME**
How to make the most of meetings
By Katie Wright

44 **OVERCOMING THE CYBERSPACE CHALLENGE**
The impact of social media on the actuarial profession
By Debbie Fine and Hillary Steele

46 **BODY TALK**
Improving communication by being aware of body language
By Kelly Hennigan

52 **IMPROVING INTERACTIONS**
Exploring the roles of introverts and extroverts in group dynamics
By Mitchell Stephenson

56 **TURNING POINTS**
Q&A with senior technical director David Moore

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56

64

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DEPARTMENTS

- 6 **EDITORIAL** *Communication Breakdown*
- 8 **FROM THE PRESIDENT** *Fostering Innovation and Growing Skills*
- 10 **AROUND THE GLOBE** *SOA Outreach in Asia: A roundup of news from the global community*
- 12 **NEW & NOTEWORTHY** *Issues in Public Health: Your source for industry briefings and SOA news*
- 60 **TOOLBOX** *Communicate Better: Useful tools and resources for actuaries*
- 62 **INNOVATE** *Predictive Analytics Pilot: The story behind the SOA's predictive analytics certificate program*
- 64 **RESEARCH** *The Impact of SOA Research: Q&A with R. Dale Hall, SOA managing director of Research*
- 66 **TAKE CHARGE** *Information on Professional Development Opportunities*

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According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”

—Jerry Seinfeld, American comedian, actor, writer, producer and director

The most humorous jokes are oftentimes inspired by real life events, which is exactly the case with this quip by Jerry Seinfeld. A 1973 survey conducted by R.H. Buskin asked 2,500 people to list their greatest fears. Forty-one percent ranked speaking in front of a group at the top of the list, while only 19 percent said they feared death. It turns out Seinfeld wasn’t joking!¹ Fortunately, many actuaries have overcome their fear of public speaking, as was proven by the quality of the speakers and sessions at the 2017 Society of Actuaries (SOA) Annual Meeting & Exhibit in Boston.

The 2017 SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit also confirmed the continued interest actuaries have in developing

their softer skills, such as communication and social skills—and for good reason. One hundred years ago, Charles Riborg Mann released results from an extensive study that indicated 85 percent of job success came from having well-developed soft skills, while only 15 percent was driven by technical skills. Although this study is now a century old, the importance of soft skills has grown in recent years.

For example, TalentSmart, an organization that has studied emotional intelligence (EQ) in thousands of professionals over the last few decades, finds that emotional intelligence is responsible for 58 percent of job performance. They also found that 90 percent of top

performers have high EQ. EQ, unlike IQ, can change over time. It also deals with skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management, all of which can be considered soft skills.²

The Annual Meeting Program Committee bestows Outstanding Session Awards to the top five sessions of the conference based on multiple criteria including, but not limited to, topic importance and relevance, evaluation ratings, and comments and attendance. Two of the five sessions that received these awards at the 2017 SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit were sponsored by the SOA Leadership & Development Section and focused on softer skills: “From Technical Professional to Leader” and “Communication Breakdown.” I had the opportunity to moderate the latter. Within this issue of *The Actuary*, we include articles from several of the presenters involved with the 2017 outstanding sessions.

“Communication Breakdown” is a song by Led Zeppelin from its 1969 eponymous debut album. In its time, the song was an anthem for frustrated youth and was frequently played either to open the group’s shows or as an encore. Analogous to how actuaries often think about communication skills as being secondary to our analytical skills, the song was released on the B-side of the band’s first single in the United States, “Good Times Bad Times.”

For those of you unfamiliar with vinyl, records had an A-side and a B-side. The A-side featured the song music producers positioned to receive the most radio airplay and become a hit record. Meanwhile, less thought was typically put into the song selected for the record’s B-side, or “flipside”—this ensured the focus remained on the A-side, or the more commercial of the two tracks. Akin to the actuarial profession, frequently more emphasis is placed on our “A-side” of technical skills rather than on our “B-side” of softer skills, such as communication. This is especially true during the exam-taking process, when we invest hundreds of hours into learning highly technical and complex concepts. However, research has shown that over the long term, we need to focus more on our softer skills to have the biggest impact on our career success.

When the actuarial career was ranked as the nation’s best overall job in 2015, Tonya Manning, one of the past presidents of the SOA, stated, “Being strong in math is a given, but having soft skills, such as the ability to communicate well and work in a team, can be just as important.” Each summer, the SOA brings together the contributing editors of *The Actuary* magazine at its offices in Schaumburg, Illinois, for a brainstorming session. During this session, SOA staff and actuaries—who span a wide variety of

practice areas—gather in a meeting room for a full day and contemplate potential future themes, topics, articles and authors for the upcoming year’s issues. During the course of the July 2017 meeting discussion, we realized that a recurring nontechnical theme was threaded throughout many of our collective brainstormed suggestions. It was then officially decided that an issue dedicated to communication would be in *The Actuary*’s lineup for 2018.

Within this issue, we are excited to provide our readers with a guidebook to communication. This magazine includes a variety of articles, resources and tools on various aspects of communication—relevant not just to actuaries, but to all professionals. In reading this issue, you will find pieces related to speaking to a nontechnical audience, building trust, managing effective meetings and a Q&A communication “panel”—just to name a few.

Thank you to those who contributed in the development of this issue—the collaborators, authors, proofreaders, contributing editors—you know who you are! I truly enjoyed bringing this issue together in conjunction with SOA Magazine Staff Editor Jacque Kirkwood.

George Bernard Shaw said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Across the many articles in this publication, you will find ways to develop your soft skills to avoid that illusion. We hope that you are able to refer back to this timeless issue as a communication reference in the coming months and years. ■

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¹ “What Percentage of People Are Afraid of Public Speaking.” 2014. Public Speaking Power. January 16. <http://publicspeakingpower.com/percentage-of-people-afraid-of-public-speaking/>.

² “About Emotional Intelligence.” 2018. TalentSmart. Accessed January 5. <http://www.talentsmart.com/about/emotional-intelligence.php>.

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Outstanding Sessions Award recipients
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Fostering innovation and growing skills

BY MIKE LOMBARDI

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As members of the Society of Actuaries (SOA), each of us has regular opportunities for professional development, be it in-person events, webcasts or via resources from professional interest sections. We are constantly learning from and adapting to the world around us. We innovate by moving forward, staying curious and enhancing our skills.

This topic reminds me of an article I wrote a few years ago about sharpening our skills. In that article, I compared the skills and qualities of both Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock from the original *Star Trek* television series. Mr. Spock served as an example of high intelligence and the ability to solve complex problems—qualities we see and value in actuaries. However, technical competence is not enough. Much like Captain Kirk, to be effective as leaders, actuaries also need to be passionate, decisive, innovative and visionary. The best

actuaries are able to combine both technical competence and soft skills in appropriate measure.

Here are some of the skills and approaches to consider in being the best you can be as an actuary.

- Build upon both your writing and speaking skills, as they help round out overall technical abilities. We know the data well and therefore have an opportunity to communicate it clearly, both in presentations and on paper.
- Keep up with emerging trends to remain knowledgeable and relevant. We are expected to know our key audiences within society and how they interact and are affected by the changing world. For example, younger generations have evolving perspectives and needs in terms of insurance based on their habits, technology advancements and more.
- Get the most out of your time when traveling, such as while you're at the airport or in the air. Read or

purchase books or online resources so you can brush up on your business skills, learn about new approaches, gain thought leadership insights and much more. If you like going for walks, consider listening to recorded seminars or podcasts to broaden your perspectives.

- Innovate through experiencing, exploring and interacting with others. Technological advances are constantly challenging and shaping our world. Think about how advances such as self-driving cars, smartphones, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain technology, cyber risk and the Internet of Things (IoT) may affect your practice and what risks and opportunities may emerge.
- Enhance your potential by gaining or building upon your communication and presentation abilities. Be able to explain in layperson's terms not only what you do as an actuary, but also the relevancy and impact of your work. Actuaries need to be



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The best actuaries are able to combine both technical competence and soft skills in appropriate measure.”

seen not just as problem solvers, but also as effective communicators. Small changes, such as reviewing an email from the perspective of the recipient, can highlight areas where clarity of communication needs to be improved.

- Increase your skills and your level of engagement with the SOA. You can improve your professional development, tap into available research, connect with your peers, join sections, mentor colleagues at work, speak at meetings and more. Increasing your level of engagement advances your skills, gains new experiences and improves your leadership qualities.

As actuaries, we need to continue looking to the future to help ourselves and those we serve. Let's sharpen our actuarial skills and at the same time enhance our business acumen and communication skills. Let's prove the relevance of our credentials and make a difference. ■

action

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ➔ The website Apps for Actuaries provides a variety of mobile applications, from actuarial focused to others focused on business, travel and more. Visit appsforactuaries.org.
- ➔ The Tools for Actuaries website serves as a broad resource for tools and books, including on communication, strategy, leadership and other subject matter. Visit toolsforactuaries.org.
- ➔ Take the opportunity to join (or renew) membership with one or more professional interest sections. Tap into the technical knowledge and insights from section events, newsletters and other resources available. Visit SOA.org/sections/join-section.
- ➔ There are always new opportunities available for volunteering with the SOA. Search by type, time commitment and/or qualification level. Visit SOA.org/volunteer.

SOA outreach in Asia

A ROUNDUP OF NEWS FROM THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

Whether you travel the world or never leave your home country, you are affected by global organizations, international requirements and the increasingly international nature of the actuarial profession itself. Here is some news from around the world.



SOA staff and students at a recent university visit.

GENERAL INSURANCE OUTREACH IN ASIA

The Society of Actuaries (SOA) organized a General Insurance

Outreach Presentation program that took place in November 2017 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Jakarta, Indonesia, and Bangkok, Thailand. This program provided a high-quality professional development experience in an interactive and informational format. A variety of stakeholders attended the events, including junior to mid-level actuaries from major actuarial employers and senior management executives from these companies.

The SOA received valuable support from SOA Greater Asia Committee members to develop and present the programs, and also from local leaders of key organizations in the region, including the Actuarial Society of Malaysia; Asosiasi Asuransi Umum Indonesia; the Risk Management, Economic Sustainability and Actuarial Sciences Development in Indonesia (READI); the Society of Actuaries of Thailand, and Viriyah Insurance Public Co. Ltd.

SOA staff fellows Anthony Cappelletti, FSA, FCAS, FCIA, and Scott Lennox, FSA, FCAS, FCIA, delivered an overview of the SOA General Insurance track education, and several industry experts and SOA members gave presentations on technical topics that included analyzing underwriting and general insurance claims data through predictive modeling, IFRS 17 update (for long-term general insurance), pricing techniques for general insurance products, and the basic functions and value of actuarial

work in general insurance. Presenters included Xiang Shi, CEO assistant and chief actuary for Huahai Property & Casualty Insurance; George Kau, former senior VP/head of Actuarial Services of Takaful Ikhlas Berhad; Nurul Syuhada Nurazmi, partner, Actuarial Partners; Tatcha Ayana, VP/head of actuarial at Allianz General Insurance Thailand, and Chayana Siripirom, CFO of AXA Insurance.

THE SOA VISITS UIBE

On Nov. 14, 2017, Shu-yen Liu, FSA, CERA, MAAA, retired partner of PwC and chair of the SOA 2017 China Committee, and Jessie Li, SOA lead China representative, visited the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE) in Beijing.

During the event, UIBE professor Yuantao Xie indicated the university is working to strengthen the relationship with the industry to promote more collaboration among students and employers.

Close to 80 undergraduate students majoring in statistics and actuarial science attended the student presentation sessions. UIBE offers majors in actuarial science, risk management and social security programs.

SOA staff and SOA China Committee members visited six universities in China in 2017 and met with more than 450 students. ■

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ISSUES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Here's your source for industry briefings and SOA news. Important headline information, section highlights and current stories—in short, news to note.



WHY ACTUARIES SHOULD CARE ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH

BY JIM MANGE AND SARA C. TEPPEMA

For many, public health conjures up images of scientists racing against the clock to prevent the spread of infectious disease or manufacture critical supplies of vaccines. But at its core, public health is simply the people and infrastructure that work to keep us and our communities safe and healthy. So why should actuaries not simply take public health as a given? A task force of both public health professionals and actuaries has been

exploring this question over the past 18 months.

A short answer, as Lisa Macon Harrison, MPH, a community health expert and member of the Society of Actuaries (SOA) public health task force, states, is that “fiscal instability threatens critical public health infrastructure in many places,”¹ an issue that cries out for actuarial solutions. In her article, “Saving Money and Improving Health”² Harrison offers

background on her field and calls for actuaries to engage in public health. She also discusses the meaning of “margin versus mission” in her work.

Actuarial work tends to focus more on margin and less on mission. But the task force finds that understanding public health enhances actuarial practice and offers actuaries the opportunity to make a positive difference in society. This spirit of uniting margin and mission prompted task force

members to comment on the Healthy People 2030 initiative,³ suggesting that its framework explicitly references the importance of cost/benefit evaluations when seeking funding for clinical and public health programs.

The task force also:

- ➔ Published several articles in *Health Watch* (the Health Section's newsletter)
- ➔ Participated in updates to the Health Track's Basic Education curriculum to include public health
- ➔ Presented at the 2016 and 2017 SOA Health Meetings
- ➔ Formed a public health subgroup that began meeting in January

The task force's work culminated in a web-exclusive series online in conjunction with *The Actuary*,⁴ featuring several articles that tie actuarial practice and public health together. The web-exclusive articles take us through the evolution of public health and bring an actuarial perspective to several current and critical topics, including:

- ➔ Creating a culture of health in the United States (Marjorie Rosenberg, FSA, Ph.D.)
- ➔ Opioids and the national opioid crisis (Rebecca Owen, FSA, FCA, MAAA)
- ➔ Suicide (Jason McKinley, FSA)
- ➔ Dental care (Shereen Sayre, ASA, MAAA)
- ➔ Climate change and health (Mona Sarfaty, M.D., MPH, FAAFP, with a comment by the SOA's climate committee chair, Jeff Beckley, FSA, MAAA)
- ➔ Vaccinations (Geoffrey Sandler, FSA, MAAA)

- ➔ Family planning (Kari Berglund, MSc, and Sara C. Teppema, FSA, MAAA)
- ➔ Public health systems and services (Lisa Macon Harrison, MPH)
- ➔ Community care organizations (Sudha Shenoy, FSA, CERA, MAAA, and Michelle Mickey Rork, MPA, MPP)

We encourage all actuaries to explore the web-exclusive articles and think about how public health connects to your area of practice. If you are interested in joining the subgroup and sharing ideas through monthly calls and other media, please sign up at SOA.org/News-and-Publications/Listservs/list-public-listservs.aspx.

We would like to thank the members of the task force for their efforts and passion over the past 18 months, as well as the Health Section for its support. Task force members are: Sara Teppema, FSA, MAAA, chair; Julia Lerche, FSA, MAAA, MSPH, vice-chair; Jim Mange, FSA, MAAA, publications lead; Arlene Ash, Ph.D.; Lisa Macon Harrison, MPH; Bethany McAleer, FSA, MAAA; Rebecca Owen, FSA, FCA, MAAA; Marjorie Rosenberg, FSA, Ph.D.; Geoffrey Sandler, FSA, MAAA; Shereen Sayre, ASA, MAAA; Laura Seeff, M.D.; Norm Storwick, FSA, MAAA, and Jim Toole, FSA, CERA, FCA, MAAA. Health Section council liaisons are: Greg Fann, FSA, FCA, MAAA; Jackie Lee, FSA, MAAA, and Geof Hileman, FSA, MAAA. Finally, thank you to SOA staff support: Joe Wurzburger, FSA, MAAA, and Dee Berger. ■

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¹Harrison, Lisa Macon. 2018. "Saving Money and Improving Health." *The Actuary*. Society of Actuaries. <http://www.theactuarymagazine.org/saving-money-improving-health>.

²Supra note 1.

³<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People>

⁴<http://www.theactuarymagazine.org/category/web-exclusives/public-health>

WEB EXCLUSIVE!

For the full complement of articles in the public health collection, visit *The Actuary* online at theactuarymagazine.org/category/web-exclusives/public-health.

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SIMPLIFYING

HOW TO SPEAK TO NONTECHNICAL AUDIENCES

BY RAYMOND E. DiDONNA



THE COMPLEX

A natural part of anyone's business career, the further you advance, the broader your audience becomes. And that applies to both formal and informal settings.

As an actuarial student, your primary audience is your boss (an actuary), his or her peers (other actuaries) and your peers (actuarial students). For the most part, this group is homogenous and very similar to you. Thus, it's not too difficult to prepare to present information to them. You just need to focus on how you want to present the information since, generally speaking, the way you want to present it is the way they want to receive it. Said differently, early in your career you already know your audience well. This is not true, however, as your career advances and your audience gets more diverse.

Once your career progresses from actuarial student to practicing actuary, you will have the opportunity to present information to audiences that include professionals outside of the actuarial realm—whether they are inside or outside of your company. These professionals may be from other insurance disciplines such as underwriting, sales, marketing, claims or operations. They also may be from support disciplines such as information technology, legal, finance or human resources. Whatever the case, you will find many (or most) of these professionals to be much less technically-oriented than what you are used to. In addition, unlike years and decades ago, today's audiences

have shorter attention spans due to all the technology available and all of the information at our disposal. Patience is an important quality in business-people that seems to be vanishing quickly—I don't believe that's a good thing, but it is our reality.

For actuaries to advance to high levels within insurance organizations, they must learn to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences, especially those that are nontechnical. To do this, actuaries need to focus on three key facets of good communication. Actuaries must:

- ❶ | Know their audience.
- ❷ | Simplify their message.
- ❸ | Sell their point of view.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The first key to making sure your presentation to nontechnical audiences is impactful is to “know your audience.” You first must understand your audience and, in particular, how they like to receive information, before you can properly craft your presentation. In terms of receiving information, there are generally three types of people: those who like to see lots of details and data (such as actuaries), those who like to consider several different options and not just rely on the data to tell them what the answer is, and those who want to quickly get to the bottom line (they want to know the answer first, before understanding why that's the answer).

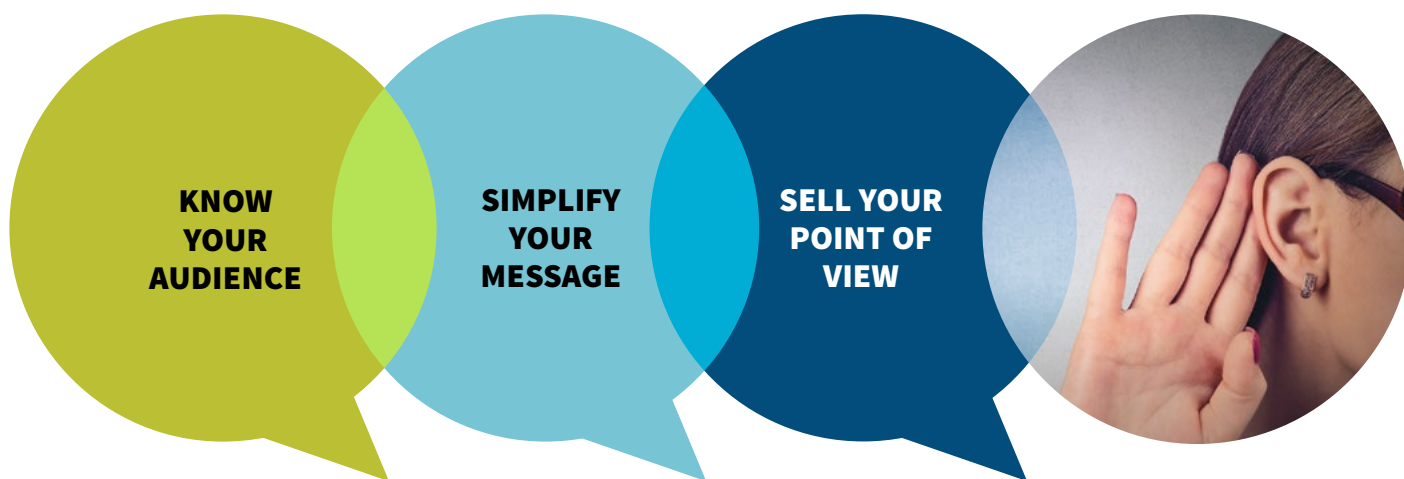
So, first things first—know your audience. But, how do you do that? And, importantly, how can you be

sure an audience fits a particular category?

Those are not easy questions, but a quick answer is to prepare. A lot of the time, preparation for a speaking engagement means figuring out what to say. However, before doing that, you must make sure you have a good grasp on the type of audience you will be facing and gauge how they might want to receive information. No matter how you want to deliver your message, focus on what the audience is looking for if you want to be effective. As a quick example, most actuarial audiences will appreciate seeing all the details you can provide, as well as the analysis you performed to draw your conclusions. This is not the case, however, with an audience of sales or marketing professionals. In general, they would likely be interested in your conclusions first, with a moderate level of detail to follow. If you bog them down with details at the beginning, you may lose their interest for the rest of the presentation. The end result is an ineffective presentation that will be forgotten almost immediately.

So, pay close attention to who will be in your audience (what types of professionals). In most settings, you should know well in advance to whom you will be presenting. If the presentation is within your company, you will likely know many of the participants personally, so you will be able to make some clear judgments on how to best craft your information so it will be received well. If you don't know those in your audience, reach out to colleagues who do and get some feedback on the audience as part of your early preparation.

THREE KEY FACETS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION



Another way to get to know your audience is to ask them questions, either prior to your presentation or even during it. If you know some of the people in your audience, don't be afraid to reach out in advance and probe them on what they will be looking for in your presentation. A more challenging approach (that is not a substitute for upfront preparation) is to ask your audience on the fly, during the presentation, what they are looking for. The obvious challenge is you will need to quickly adapt to their responses and present your information exactly the way they want it. Experienced presenters are much more likely to use this technique. For example, they may start the presentation with this question: "Do you want to hear my whole story from the beginning or have me get right to my conclusions?" The presenter then needs to be ready to direct the presentation either way. Again, this is not an easy task, but one that certainly lets you get to know your audience.

SIMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGE

We've all heard of the KISS principle: "Keep It Simple, Stupid." Well, for presenting to nontechnical audiences

(or to technical audiences for that matter), I prefer a different phrase. In his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, leadership guru John Maxwell makes this pronouncement: "Communicators make the complex simple."¹ If you remember nothing else from this article, remember this quote. These five "simple" words are the key to delivering the right information to the right audience. If you want to be a great communicator, focus on taking complex information and making it easy for *everyone* to understand. If you've done your job, everyone should walk away saying, "I get it."

One more well-known phrase for you is: "Time is money." Well, these days, with all the technology we have at our fingertips and all the information that floats by us in the form of emails, tweets, posts, blogs and so on, your audience is prone to distraction. People have gotten increasingly impatient, so they need you to get to your point quickly. In this case, quickly also means simply. You need to make absolutely sure the message you are trying to convey is clear—so everyone "gets it" clearly and immediately.

One of the things actuaries need to pay close attention to with nontechnical

audiences is avoiding going into excruciating detail, which is typically our comfort zone but, unfortunately, perpetuates the perception that actuaries are poor communicators. Thus, you must pay close attention to the level of detail you are providing and make sure you are simplifying the complex. Focus a lot of attention here, and your audience will benefit. It's perfectly fine to provide more details if questions come up that require going a little deeper, but you need to let the audience ask you to go there. As part of your preparation, look at everything you are presenting (your words, your slides, your data, your charts and graphs) and ask yourself:

- ➔ Is this simple?
- ➔ Will my audience get it right away?
- ➔ What may be confusing?

Be honest with yourself, and you will be on the path to creating a presentation that hits the mark for your audience.

As a final thought on keeping it simple, when presenting any topic, I focus on these three "Cs" of communicating: make sure you are *clear*, *concise* and *candid*. Make sure your informa-

tion is clear—ask yourself the three questions I posed. Make sure you are being concise—in this case, more is not better. Brevity is another key to understanding. Finally, be candid with your audience, whose understanding of your information will be improved if you show your genuine self. Audiences can see through presenters who are not being candid, and they will quickly zone out. Be yourself, and be genuine, in a clear, concise way.

SELL YOUR POINT OF VIEW

You need to keep in mind that anytime you are speaking to a group, whether they are technical or nontechnical, you are essentially “selling” a point of view. As you advance in your business career, less and less is black-and-white, and more of what you deal with is in a gray area—there is often no one, true, right answer. You must recognize that more than one point of view can be “right,” and everyone has a different lens through which he or she draws opinions. Thus, start with the premise that you must sell your point of view to any audience.

Before I provide a few suggestions on how to best sell your point of view, let me make a related point. While you want to make every presentation interesting, and to some degree entertaining, style should *never* trump substance. Style is not unimportant, but it can never take the place of actually making a strong case. You need to know your topic cold, and you need to be very confident that your point of view has merit. So, start there. Make sure you have a strong point, backed up by credible information. That should be the outline to making your case. Then utilize the suggestions about knowing your audience and keeping your information simple.

Now that we are clear on substance trumping style, let’s discuss some opportunities to add style to your pre-

sentation to improve the likelihood of making your case. First, I don’t believe you will have much luck convincing your audience of your point of view unless you display some passion—quite a bit of passion, in fact. How can you expect your audience to buy in if they don’t necessarily believe you, yourself, have bought in? You need to show them your passion to persuade them to be on your side—to really “move” them. I know a lot of actuaries are low-key introverts, and that’s fine. But, if you really want to persuade someone, he or she needs to see your passion come through.

Alongside passion, you need to bring high energy to your presentation. People want to hear from interesting, dynamic speakers. They want to be interested and energized while you convince them your point of view has merit. The more they see your energy, the more easily you will draw them to your side. So, make sure you are well prepared to present your information to your audience—if you are well prepared, then you can focus on bringing passion and having energy throughout your talk.

If I haven’t yet convinced you how important showing passion and energy are, consider this: How does it feel to be in the audience of a two-hour presentation in which the presenter shows no passion for his or her topic and has very little energy? Perhaps his or her voice is monotone as well. How quickly does your mind wander? When do you begin checking emails? How long before you regret sitting too close to the front of the room where there is no escape? We’ve all been there before, so I implore you to not be the speaker who elicits these mental questions from your audience.

Finally, while earlier I stressed keeping your points simple, I believe the judicious use of PowerPoint slides (or

other graphics) can be helpful in making your case. Bear in mind, however, that your slides need to supplement what you are saying, not replace what you are saying. Slides should not be overcrowded with narrative. Rather, they should have plenty of white space, and they should be loaded with eye-catching, easy-to-read charts and graphs (not to be studied but to help your points resonate with the audience). Never overdo it, but always allow a tool like PowerPoint to help you drive home your key messages so your audience walks away remembering what you want them to remember. You know the old adage, “a picture is worth a thousand words”? Well, it’s true.

CONCLUSION

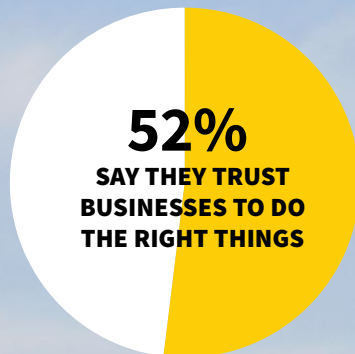
To wrap it all up, I strongly believe actuaries, based on the vast knowledge they build through the exam process and company rotations, have a tremendous opportunity to ascend to very high levels within insurance companies and consulting organizations. However, a key to success on the professional ladder is being able to communicate effectively with all different audiences, especially nontechnical ones, which you encounter more and more as you rise within the ranks. Because this doesn’t come naturally to most actuaries, we must be well prepared when the opportunities arise. To have the maximum impact, make sure you know your audience, keep it simple and sell your point of view. ■

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Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer

SECURE TRUST

**HOW TO BUILD TRUST
TO IMPROVE BOTH
YOUR PERSONAL
AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

BY DARCY EIKENBERG

Imagine it's the day of your annual performance review. You're sitting down with your leader to talk about what's happened, and what's next.

Your technical skills are awesome. Of course they are—you focus on excellence every single day. But your communication skills—the long-misabeled “soft skills”—you're told they could use some work.

Honestly, you knew this, right? You just hoped that because of your technical prowess, no one would notice—or care. Not anymore.

So where do you start? After all, there are a thousand different strategies, courses and tools to choose from to develop better communication skills. But the uncomfortable truth is that none of those interventions work if you don't start first by building trust.

WHY FOCUS ON TRUST?

For the past 20 years, global marketing firm Edelman has researched levels of trust around the world through its extensive Trust Barometer study.¹ In 2017, its findings were summarized as “Trust in Crisis.”

That's no surprise to all of us living in a world of fake news, data breaches and ethical breakdowns. But it's a

shock when we realize that the gap in trust applies to us. In fact, in the Edelman research, only 52 percent of respondents said they trust businesses to do the right things, and only 37 percent believed CEOs—once key voices of authority—were credible.

On the flip side, CEOs aren't blind to this struggle. In PricewaterhouseCoopers' (PwC's) 2017 survey of more than 1,300 executives, 69 percent of CEOs said it's harder for businesses to sustain trust in the digital age when errors are amplified immediately, and cynicism is the default standard of judgment for internal and external stakeholders.²

This is the water you're swimming in as you work to improve your communication and improve your performance. In some companies, it's the ocean they're drowning in without a lifeguard in sight. But don't dismay. Because the world's collective levels of trust are in the dumpster, the opportunity for you to build it is huge.

As human beings, it's in our DNA that we want to trust somebody. Why shouldn't it be you? If you're ready to build more trust, we're ready for you. But first, you need to face the four uncomfortable truths about this important and scarce trait.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH #1

ASKING FOR TRUST DOESN'T GAIN TRUST

Let's go back to that annual performance review. Perhaps you want to know what's next—how to gain the promotion, bigger project or manager post. And instead of outlining a specific step-by-step plan, your manager says something like: "It'll happen. Just trust me." Would you?

In fact, when anyone today tells you "just trust me," do you? When I ask this question in large rooms of people, about a third say they'd trust the person, but reluctantly. But two-thirds say no. No matter who is asking, trust is not a gift to be easily given. And yet, we get frustrated when we find that others don't trust us, or need constant reassurance about our intentions, direction and thoughts.

What You Can Do: Don't Ask, Just Give

The best way to combat this uncomfortable truth is not to ask for trust at all. Instead, you can choose to be a role model for giving trust, openly and often.

How do you do this? It doesn't need to be a grand gesture, where you hand over the responsibility of your biggest client to the rookie on the team. That's not trust—that might be a fiscal nightmare. Instead, you can give trust in little steps, every single day.

Research from University of Houston professor and bestselling author Brené Brown uncovered that trust is built in very small moments, such as remembering a name or following up with genuine interest on a personal situation. ("How's your mom doing after her fall?")³

In my work with leaders and high-performing professionals, we often focus on creating more of these moments by adding trust-oriented comments into everyday conversations to make communication stronger.

For example:

- "You don't need to report back to me on that meeting unless there's something where you need some help. I know you've got it."
- "I'm evaluating which direction to take on XYZ project. Could I have your opinion?"
- "I see you at the ABC meetings, but I don't know much else about you and your work. I'd like to change that. Could we meet for lunch sometime?"

What those leaders find is that by consciously using trust-building messages, they plant seeds that communicate their decision to give trust unconditionally.

Do they get let down? Sometimes. But do they begin to earn trust back? Always.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH #2

FAILING IS ESSENTIAL

When someone in your circle makes a mistake, are they allowed to own it, apologize for it and move on? Or are they consistently reminded of the error, living in fear of when the hammer will fall all over again, whether it be in their next performance review or behind closed doors when they're passed over for the next opportunity?

And how often do *you* openly acknowledge your own mistakes, shortcomings and failures? Gulp. Knowing we're safe to fail is an essential boundary of trust. But our cultures of fear and avoidance can make fail a bad four-letter word.

What You Can Do: Show Your Work—Especially Your Mistakes

In school, we often got extra credit for showing our work—making it clear what path we took to get to the answer, even if the answer was wrong.

It works the same today. The people around you need to see your work. How did you get to where you are? Where did you trip and fall? How did you pick yourself back up again?

Don't discount telling personal stories as a waste of time. They often deepen the connection and quality of communication between you and your clients and team, especially when they clarify how you think, what assumptions you make, and how you've changed those assumptions or actions over time to get to better outcomes.

For example:

- "This reminds me of the time I ..."
- "I don't talk about this a lot, but there was a situation like this where I ..."
- "Have I told you about the time I screwed up on something similar to this? My big mistake was ..."

If you're struggling to connect with a colleague or client, a conversation about your biggest failure is a great way to open up new insights and pathways that lead to trust.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH #3

WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL, GET OVER IT

In the movie *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone explains why shooting a

corrupt cop will be OK. He says, “It’s not personal—it’s just business.” Maybe you’ve used that line, too. And maybe you believe it. But if you’d like to build trust, please stop.

What You Can Do: Stay Human

Neuroscientist Paul J. Zak has spent a decade researching the question, “Why do people trust each other in the first place?” His work involves sampling one thing all humans have in common: blood.

Specifically, Zak’s team measures levels of oxytocin, what some call the “happy hormone.” He’s sampled people inside companies as well as indigenous tribes in Papua New Guinea, and he found that no matter what the surroundings, the relationship between oxytocin and trust is universal.⁴

According to Zak’s research, when someone shows you trust, a feel-good jolt of oxytocin surges through your brain and triggers you to offer trust back. This simple mechanism creates a perpetual trust-building cycle, which, Zak says, is the key to changing stubborn workplace patterns.

So our efforts to build relationships aren’t a fluffy waste of time: They’re chemically proven to make a difference.

What’s the easiest way to start? I asked my clients for their suggestions:

- ➔ Take time for lunch (and extra points if you invite someone to join you).
- ➔ Share what’s going well and invite others to share their “brag” stories.
- ➔ Create a click-free zone when you’re limiting use of your digital devices.⁵
- ➔ When you ask, “How are you?” pay attention to the answer and really respond.

Sounds simple, right? But how often are you doing it?

FOUR STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN YOUR TRUST-WORTHY COMMUNICATION

KNOW YOUR VALUES

Your values are the elements you believe are most important in the way you live and work. But if your values are just words on a wall, they’re worthless.

When asked, can you state your values out loud? When I ask this question of clients who are starting a leadership development program with me, about 90 percent of them aren’t sure. Once your personal values are clear, you can evaluate how often your actions and decisions support those values. When the choices we make are out of sync with our values, we immediately lose trust.

TELL YOUR FAILURE STORIES

You know you’re not perfect. We know you’re not perfect. Bridge the gap and don’t pretend.

A good failure story can change the direction of a business. Facebook famously had an intern named Ben who accidentally took down the site for 30 minutes while testing for bugs. He got hired, and Facebook still celebrates “BenTesting.”

Take a page from Silicon Valley and fail often and in public. The message that it’s safe to be imperfect accelerates trust.

BE VISIBLE

Don’t hide behind your computer or smartphone. As more of our work is handled by remote teams, it’s easier than ever to default to over-efficient emails, texts and instant messages.

The truth is that visibility equals viability. Person-to-person contact is still the gold standard for building trust, and voice-to-voice is a close second. Show up, be seen and heard, and start two-way conversations that feel human and real.

BE REPETITIOUS

Too often we abandon our core messages because we get tired of hearing the same thing over and over. We assume others are bored because we’re bored of ourselves.

But to your customers, clients and colleagues, repetition creates a feeling of “ah, yes, I’ve heard this before, and so I can trust it.” When we switch messages constantly—such as changing our priorities or talking differently about our goals—we generate more uncertainty and demolish trust in our words.

Do the work to get clear on what you’re all about as a professional, leader and colleague. Don’t get tempted by the latest cool idea, whim or fear. When you are consistently you, trust will always be yours.

As technology has allowed us to get further and further from each other, we need to intentionally work to stay closer to ensure we're communicating effectively. As Brown says in her 2017 book, *Braving the Wilderness*, "People are hard to hate close up."⁶

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH #4

THE PERSON YOU MUST LEARN TO TRUST AGAIN IS YOURSELF

Even the most confident person harbors a few cells of impostor syndrome inside. Impostor syndrome is the feeling that you're a fraud, a fake or a phony—that you're not as great as everyone thinks you are.

Of course, we know this is true. *Wait—what?* Yes. You will always know more about your lumps and bumps than anyone in the outside world ever will. But you should never let it hold you back. Because how can we trust you when you don't trust yourself?

What You Can Do: Be Clear About You

PwC global chairman Bob Moritz said, "*How* we lead needs to be reassessed as much as *what* we lead." So, how do *you* lead—even if the word "leader" isn't part of your role? Are you clear about who you are and what you want, right now?

To help you create clarity, ask yourself:

- Do I understand my strengths and know how to use them in the best ways possible?
- Do I always do what I say I'll do? If I don't, what's getting in the way?
- Does my schedule reflect my values and priorities? Do I know what they are—and am I honest with myself about what's really a priority for me and what's just someone else's fire drill?

When you take a step back and get clear about who you are and who you want to be, it's easier to start trusting your own ideas, actions and big decisions you need to make in your work and life.

WHAT NOW?

If you need to build your communication skills—whether based on formal feedback from your manager during your annual review, informal feedback during a conversation or just your own assessment when you evaluate your results—don't immediately dive into programs and tools.

First, do the work to build trust by strengthening your communication—one person at a time, one day at a time. Your work will have a ripple effect in your organization. As proof, neuroscientist Zak found that compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report:⁷

- 74 percent less stress
- 106 percent more energy at work
- 50 percent higher productivity
- 13 percent fewer sick days
- 76 percent more engagement
- 40 percent less burnout

What difference would those results make in your company, community and career? It's time to go find out. ■



BUILD TRUST BY STRENGTHENING YOUR COMMUNICATION—ONE PERSON AT A TIME, ONE DAY AT A TIME. YOUR WORK WILL HAVE A RIPPLE EFFECT IN YOUR ORGANIZATION.

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INTERVIEW ETI



BY MARIANNE WESTPHAL AND JULIE GARWOOD

HOW TO COMMUNICATE YOUR VALUE DURING A JOB INTERVIEW

Interviewing can be a challenging communication endeavor for even the most seasoned candidates, and it can be helpful to review some basic etiquette in order to make the most of the process.

Employers use a variety of interview methods to assess technical skills, personality traits and overall fit of a candidate. These include on the phone, in-person, during a meal and virtually, and can be held one-on-one or in a group setting.

Throughout the interview process, you may encounter one or several of these methods. Bear in mind, the interview process is meant to be beneficial for both parties:

- ❑ It is the prospective employer's chance to evaluate appropriate candidates for a particular hiring need and consider their fit with the overall company culture.
- ❑ It is a prospective employee's opportunity to assess the company and position, as well as the fit for one's background and career goals.
- ❑ It can be an educational exercise for each party involved.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

The phone interview is typically the first opportunity you have to demonstrate your skills and ask questions, and you want to make the best impression possible. Employers look for candidates who can express ideas and come across as polished and professional, in addition to having appropriate experience.

The first phone interview may be with human resources (HR) or a hiring manager. Consider the following:



- HR conversations tend to be a high-level overview of your resume and may address any gaps in employment, exam progress and reasons for moves. Be sure you are able to speak about skills you have picked up in each role that relate to the position, and find a positive reason for each move you've made throughout your career.
- Hiring manager calls will be more technical and position specific. Review the job description bullet by bullet, and draw parallels and give examples of your experience in those areas.
- In group calls, expect questions from any party on the call, and don't be overly concerned if you can't identify who asked a specific question, as you will want to be thorough and demonstrate your interest regardless. Of course, if it's important to you or puts you at ease to know to whom to direct a specific answer, you are welcome to ask.

Be prepared to answer questions about why the company and role are of interest to you. This means you need to have done your research ahead of time.

Since you are on the phone, take advantage of having the position description, company details, prepared questions/examples and your resume in front of you to reference. Take notes, as you will want to refer to them later.

Though you aren't in front of the interviewer, there are specific things you can do to project confidence and interest. Be enthusiastic, ask questions, and speak clearly and enunciate. Smile! This translates over the phone. Occasionally, enthusiasm leads candidates to start speaking before interviewers finish their sentences; avoid this, as it comes across as impolite.

A few other tips include:

- Frame experiences in the past in a positive light, and don't speak negatively about former employers or colleagues. If you discuss a past conflict, detail how you were able to address it and move forward. If asked for a shortcoming, try to put a positive spin on it. For example, if you are leaving due to changes in leadership, you can say you seek a more stable environment rather than pointing out perceived negatives of the current leadership in your company.
- Write out questions prior to the interview.
- Do not ask about compensation and other benefits in your initial call. This is a valid inquiry, but it can give the impression that your focus is on your interests rather than the opportunity. It is more appropriate to ask these questions later in the interview process.

- Find a private, quiet place to take a call. Prior to the interview, check that your location has adequate reception. If you need to cancel a call, give as much notice as possible and offer alternative availability. If the call is interrupted or ends before it should, follow up by expressing interest in continuing the discussion and, again, offer alternative times.
- No matter how well you connect with the interviewer, avoid being overly casual. They are assessing how you interact in a professional situation.
- Reiterate your interest in the opportunity and your appreciation for their time.

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

In-person interviews usually take place at the company's office, but they can also be held off-site at a restaurant or other neutral meeting place. These meetings can range anywhere from one hour to a full day of interviews.



Typical in-person interviews allow the candidate to meet the hiring manager(s), potential co-workers and peers, members of other departments, and HR.

From the moment you step into the building, you are interviewing. Arrive with a prepared and confident demeanor, and remember to conduct yourself professionally throughout your entire visit on-site.

In addition to the information from the phone interview, there are several ways you can set yourself up for success before, during and after your in-person interview.

Prepare in advance. Here are some tips:

- 1 | Research the company, position and the interviewers.
 - Review the company's website and search for recent press releases.
 - Use LinkedIn to research interviewers you will meet.
- 2 | Dress for success.
 - Dress business formal even if the company has a casual or business casual dress code.
 - Both men and women should wear business suits; choose a conservative style and color.
- 3 | Bring multiple copies of your resume printed on resume paper. Carry these in a leather-bound portfolio with pen and paper for note-taking.
- 4 | Arrive approximately 10 minutes early.

Be mindful of body language and overall behavior throughout the entire interview process. Here's how:

- 1 | Keep your energy level and enthusiasm up and consistent throughout the entire interview.

- 2 | Smile, make eye contact and offer a firm handshake at introductions.
- 3 | Engage the interviewers and make them feel comfortable speaking with you, but don't let your guard down.
- 4 | Ask questions, both prepared and unprepared, to show your intellectual curiosity and listening skills.
 - Do not dominate the conversation; do not give one-word answers, either.
- 5 | Turn your cell phone off (not on vibrate) so you have no distractions and can focus completely on the interview.

Be prepared to navigate questions about compensation (see the “Findings” sidebar on page 28).

After the in-person interview, take a few minutes to write a thank-you note to the interviewers. It can be brief and sent via email directly to them or by your recruiter. The note should explain your appreciation for their time interviewing you, a reflection on a topic you discussed and an expression of continued interest in the role and/or company.

Prior to sending the note, always ask someone else to review it. A second set of eyes may catch an error or be able to provide critiques. This may be the only time a company has the ability to assess a candidate's writing skills, so consider this another stage of the interview process.

MEAL INTERVIEWS

Meal interviews are another means of evaluating a candidate. This type of interview can happen at any stage of the process and can be with HR, hiring managers and others.



Two important factors to keep in mind when preparing for a meal interview:

- Act professionally, just as you would in an office setting.
- Remember your table manners.

The meal is secondary to the interview. It is a good time to build rapport with potential new peers and other colleagues, and get to know people on a more informal basis. Though it is more informal, remember that you are still interviewing. During a meal interview, the conversation does not need to stay on the topic of the job itself. You may discuss other subjects such as company culture, hobbies or interests.

The goal of a meal interview is to demonstrate that you are able to interact well with others and engage in conversation in a less formal setting.

Consider the following dos and don'ts regarding table manners:

- **Do.** Wait for your host to suggest the seating arrangement, place your napkin on your lap as soon as you are seated, chew and swallow before you speak, be polite to wait staff and thank your host for the meal.
- **Don't.** Be indecisive in ordering, begin eating until everyone is served, order food that is difficult to eat or requires eating with your hands, drink alcohol even if the host does, criticize the meal or the restaurant.

VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

Virtual interviewing is more common than ever. The ability to use video technology for interviews has allowed employers to meet interviewees face-to-face earlier in the interview stage than in the past. In fact, sometimes it takes the place of an on-site interview. This type of interview allows companies to reach a diverse applicant pool and can save the employer time and money on travel.



There are a variety of different mediums to conduct virtual interviews, such as Skype, FaceTime and web-based conferencing services. Because the virtual interview is face-to-face, it is important to treat it like an on-site interview.

When preparing for a virtual interview:

- Set up and test the equipment you will use to conduct the interview. Make sure the internet connection is strong.
- Make sure the area you are in is clean and quiet, with a background free of any distractions or personal items.
- Dress professionally, as you would for an on-site interview.
- Monitor behavior like shuffling papers or looking away from the camera, and be mindful of your posture.
- When speaking, look into the camera and not at the image of yourself on your computer screen.

Technical difficulties are always a possibility in virtual interviews. If the internet connection is causing video/camera quality to cut in and out, turn off the video piece so you are not distracted. Keep your cell phone nearby (but out of sight) so if there are technical issues, you can continue the interview over the phone.

INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEW TIPS

Of course, customs differ from country to country, but some etiquette holds true for any international interview. A few additional points:



- Show that you have done your research, not only on the company and the role, but also on the country

findings

and its customs, and what it would be like to live there. Demonstrating that you've researched housing, education options if applicable, work style and so on will give the company confidence that you are serious about and committed to making a move.

- If you've worked internationally, highlight and expand on that experience, even if it was in a different country than the one you are considering. If you have not worked overseas but have experience with or exposure to international teams, be able to speak in detail about this. If you have not done either, consider situations you have been in where you had little guidance or information but were able to successfully take initiative and adapt.
- Research whether the company does business in the native language or other languages. Discuss experience, exposure and coursework in those languages. Be prepared to answer questions in a language if you say you are fluent.
- Interview follow-up is always important, but it's something that can be of particular significance in other countries and, in any case, will reiterate your interest. It also allows you to highlight your written language skills if you are interviewing with a company that requires knowledge of a particular language.

CONCLUSION

Interviewing can be both a challenging and an exciting time. It's vital to be well-prepared, to present yourself in the best possible light and be able to gain the information needed to make an educated decision. There are countless situations that could come up in an interview setting, but this article provides some tangible approaches to use as a foundation. ■

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THE SALARY QUESTION

Discussions around salary can be difficult to navigate. Sometimes companies want to know what a candidate needs and expects before making a career move, and vice-versa. This can be challenging, given the interview process is designed to educate both sides about the role and potential fit, and salary expectations may develop or change over the course of discussions.

Interestingly enough, in recent months there have been several cities and states that have or will be making salary history questions illegal. In most cases, companies may still ask for expectations, but not about previous pay. Judging by the current trend, we expect to see more and more companies unable to ask for salary history.

If asked to provide current compensation, include short- and long-term bonus information, as well as any other considerations you have, such as a bonus you have earned but won't receive, or anything you may need to repay to your current employer. You don't necessarily need to go into detail about other benefits, as that is something that can be addressed nearing the offer stage. There is a balance between providing an accurate overview of considerations and getting too far into the details, where you might give the impression that your focus is on other issues rather than the opportunity. Keep this in mind in these discussions.

Whether you can or cannot provide current compensation, it's fair if asked for expectations to say you are looking to be compensated at market value, or that your focus is on the opportunity. It's also fair for you to ask for a better understanding of what is meant by compensation, as we see growing value placed on things like benefits, vacation, long-term planning, educational support, flexibility and other incentives. Prior to an interview, research the various salary surveys available, which can help you understand your value. Also, spend some time thinking about a range that would make sense for you.

Julie Garwood joined DW Simpson in February 2006. As a senior manager and lead recruiter, Julie enjoys the interpersonal aspects of keeping in touch with individuals throughout the evolution of their careers.


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STRAIGHT TALK

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION FUNDAMENTALS

Communication plays a fundamental role in all facets of our lives. It's essential to focus on developing and fostering communication, as good communication is key to building and maintaining relationships and team spirit in the workplace. *The Actuary* asked a panel of four individuals to address various aspects of communication—including areas for improvement, the importance of communication, how we can grow as communicators and other related topics. Participants are Jason Alleyne, FSA, FCIA, FIA, FRM; Stephen Camilli, FSA; Terri Michalewicz; and Milanthi Sarukkali, FSA, Ph.D.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION STYLES

Sarukkali: Self-awareness and introspection are key to improving your communication skills. Analyzing your communication style and techniques after each important meeting, presentation or even email exchanges, and considering what influences your communication style had on the eventual outcome, positive or negative, can help you understand what needs to be improved. Directly asking for feedback from others who were a part of that communication can also help identify strengths and weaknesses. There are plenty of videos and podcasts that one can use on-the-go that can help improve communication skills.



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“Self-awareness and introspection are key to improving your communication skills.”

REFINING WRITTEN AND VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Michalewicz: I've seen areas where we all can improve our communication—not just actuaries. Everyone should keep things simple and concise, particularly in business. Whether communication is verbal or written, a clean and effective style follows these steps:

- 1 | Set the situation.
- 2 | State the idea.
- 3 | Describe how it works.
- 4 | Highlight the benefits.
- 5 | Close the circle.

We all can be guilty of getting lost in the details, but an actuary is more likely to give an overabundance of detail that can complicate the message. This may cause listeners to become confused and frustrated. Keep the end result in mind and don't get caught up in explaining methodology unless it's relevant. Resist using actuarial jargon, and simplify the message using analogies and examples as much as possible. Streamline information so it always leads to the end result. When creating presentations, keep slides clean, simple and uncluttered so they're easy to read and follow. When writing reports or articles, open strongly with a summary of what will be conveyed. If the report is segmented, separate sections with meaningful titles and use bullet points

when appropriate. Conclude with a recommendation, thought-provoking question or strong summation of what the audience should take away.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

Camilli: In our time of practicality and results-oriented conversations, we often lose sight of the human element and the importance of emotional and personal connections with our coworkers.

There was an excellent article in the *Harvard Business Review* written by the former surgeon general, Vivek H. Murthy, about the changing face of work and our country's loneliness epidemic. Based on this article, our company implemented a new agenda item for our staff meetings called the "Inside Scoop," where a staff member shares a 5- to 10-minute story through photos on a topic of their choice. I went first and told a story about my deep passion for ultimate frisbee, and in our next meeting, I was followed by a colleague who shared about his hobby of tabletop and online gaming. I find that when we take the time to make ourselves a bit more vulnerable and create deeper personal relationships in the workplace, not only does it make our overall life better, but it also improves our ability to put out an excellent work product. You can read Murthy's article, "Work and the Loneliness Epidemic," at bit.ly/MurthyHBR.

Michalewicz: In this age of digital convenience, relying solely on emails and texts is all too easy. They're quick and right at our fingertips. But face-to-face communication is still king. A large portion of communication is nonverbal. Actual human interaction fosters collaboration, trust and



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“Everyone should keep things simple and concise, particularly in business.”

expansion of ideas. Being an active listener allows you to get at the root of what a person is trying to convey by asking clarifying questions, which also builds a stronger relationship. If you are part of a virtual team, or if you're required to put something in writing, always follow up by phone to determine if there is a need for further clarification. Use FaceTime or GoTo Meeting, when practical, to minimize the impersonal feel.

IMPROVING THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

Alleyne: The key learning skill to effective communication is self-awareness and humility. Our profession has long been the king of the hill in our traditional practice spheres. We are not well-practiced in collaborating, taking advice and new learning, because in many of our core practice areas we are the lead professional. To truly be a super-influencer, we as a profession need to rely less on our regulatory-granted position of power and more on the unique insights we can discern from the vast oceans of data available in any field.

Our best professionals are those who learn to collaborate through their humility, continual learning and willingness to accept criticism. The only education I know for that is to be agile and to embrace design thinking and lean innovation. There are various avenues to learn these. But the student of such matters can only be successful if there is a willingness to try, and he or she must be able to accept failure. Communication in this regard is about expressing the insights and lessons learned from a project that has "failed." This requires professionalism, honesty and integrity. We practice this every day in our InsurTech company.

And I can tell you it is much harder to do than to write about (or to study in a classroom).

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Sarukkali: Communication between managers and subordinates may not always be open. This is more prominent in Asia, where cultural influences make subordinates reluctant to question or provide feedback to managers directly and openly. Managers also may be providing only one-sided feedback—for example, always focusing on negative feedback.

I have seen some core teams within organizations feeling unappreciated and lost because the company objectives have not been communicated to them properly. Open dialogue between management and employees can alleviate such problems. However, again due to cultural influences, employees tend to believe that they are expected to follow orders, not contribute toward a common goal.

Promoting open dialogue vertically and laterally is key to overcoming such barriers. In our company, we have weekly one-on-one meetings between managers and their direct reports, in which the manager is expected to dedicate that time to provide guidance and feedback, and understand issues faced by his or her subordinates. This is not common in the market we practice in, and it is something I found very helpful in the early days of my career in the United States.

KEEP PRESENTATIONS INTERESTING

Camilli: I find that in communication, as the old saying goes in baseball, “It’s all about the fundamentals.” When planning a presentation, begin with



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“Great flexibility in communication can lead to a lack of depth if we are not intentional about how and when we communicate.”

the end, and ask yourself: “What do I want to communicate with this presentation? What do I want people to know at the end?”

Respect your audience, and spend some time putting yourself in their shoes. What kind of presentation would you like to hear? Would you want the slides read to you?

Don’t bury the lead. Start with your main point, and don’t give a rundown of everything you want to accomplish during the presentation.

Have fun! If you sound bored, your audience is going to be bored, too. Have a story or an example to go with each theoretical point. Many studies show that people remember stories and narrative better than facts, so have a story, anecdote or example to illustrate key points. This drives a theoretical point deeper, can illustrate key areas that may be confusing and gives your audience an emotional connection to the topic and to you.

COMMUNICATION AND CAREER GROWTH

Alleyne: The way we work is very different from just 10 years ago. The knowledge and skill sets required to be successful are constantly changing. The pace of the pace of change is positive and increasing. So in my company, we use a project-based approach to our recruitment. We’d rather see how a new candidate can assimilate new knowledge to produce a meaningful result by giving the candidate a small project. This in turn allows the candidate to demonstrate his or her communication skills in delivering the key insights from the project. The work environment is now more likely to be one of myriad projects, and we need our people to take ownership

and get results, and then share insights effectively. This has proven to be an effective approach to recruitment both for us and the candidates.

FOSTERING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Michalewicz: Two-way communication actually has four components: a sender, a receiver, a message and a response. If any component fails, communication breaks down. Whether reading or hearing it, the receiver must correctly interpret the message as it was intended. To complete the communication, an appropriate response should be returned to the sender. It sounds so simple, but the reality can be far more complex.

Many of us are quite good at executing the nuts and bolts of our jobs, but we may struggle with two-way communication. This can be particularly true when we need to interact with people outside of our area of expertise, let alone outside of our industry. One thing that really helps is to be an active and engaged listener. Don't jump ahead in your mind to what you want to say next. Make it clear that you care about and hear what the other person is saying. Ask clarifying questions. It can be helpful to respond, "What I heard you say was ..." and then rephrase their words in order to be sure the message was received correctly. Asking someone to "show me" what the issue is can be powerful as well. Another potential pitfall comes from having difficulty in the area of emotional intelligence, which is simply reading cues from others and adapting your response appropriately. The good news is that we can become aware of communication deficiencies, which puts us on the path to improvement.



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“
The key learning skill to effective communication is self-awareness and humility.”

CHANGES IN COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Camilli: Technology advances have made it incredibly easy to communicate with actuaries across the country and the globe at little or no cost. It has also enabled us to work from multiple locations with ease, thus building remote teams. I now communicate with many more people than in the past. Nevertheless, upon self-reflection, I realize I now sometimes give less prior thought to my communication than I did when it cost a significant amount of money, such as making an international phone call, or when I had to take the time to put something down in writing and print it out. I also am dedicating less time, due to simple math, to each individual with whom I communicate, and to each relationship.

So, great flexibility in communication can lead to a lack of depth if we are not intentional about how and when we communicate. Ease of communication should not lead us to value our communication less, or put less thought into how we communicate.

Cal Newport wrote a great book titled *Deep Work* about strategies to do more focused work and the possible detrimental effects of technology. I think a great companion to that book that we all should read (once somebody writes it) would be titled *Deep Relationships*.

Because we can communicate so easily on a global level, we tend to communicate less with those who are closest to us physically, which can have a real, negative effect on our workplace culture, the richness of our relationships and, ultimately, our lives. ■

THE ELEVATOR



**HOW TO LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION
AND TAKE YOUR NETWORKING GAME
TO THE NEXT LEVEL**

BY JOHN WEST HADLEY

PITCH

Many find it challenging to develop an effective elevator pitch. In fact, when I've asked experienced business professionals at networking events what percentage of the pitches they just heard were particularly engaging and effective, the answer I typically get is 10 percent.

Why is this? The biggest reason is that most people think their pitch should be about providing information. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The real goal of your elevator pitch should be very simple: to leave listeners wanting to know more. I know I've reached my goal when people ask me questions afterward. That means they are engaged and want to know more.

The more information you include in your pitch, the less room there is for people to ask questions. When you tell them exactly what you do, they simply file your pitch away for future use—"I know what that person does, and if I ever need that, I'll reach out." But the odds that they actually reach out are low because you haven't left a memorable impression.

Now, you may get lucky and someone really wants an expert in your specific area right now, so that sparks a conversation. But that doesn't mean your pitch was effective. You would have achieved the same result if you had an interesting and engaging pitch, and you might have had many others interested in talking with you as well.

Now let's break it down further.

CRAFTING THE CONTENT OF YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

Suppose I'm at the networking reception at a Society of Actuaries (SOA) conference, and someone asks me what I do. I say, "I'm an actuary with (insert company name)."

That is what I would call a "title" format. But a title is just that—it's information that lets someone slot me into a role in their mind. It tells what I do, but not the value I provide in that role. Unless the other person is very interested in actuaries, it doesn't do much to advance a conversation.

What if instead I responded with, "Most recently, I created an actuarial experience system that allows us to dig deeply into our results and to secure rate actions we previously could not have hoped to get approved." Now I've provided an interesting response that suggests value I bring to the table.



The person interested in actuaries will still know I do actuarial-related work, and may even be more interested in talking to me because of the result I produced. And others may be interested because they work with experience analysis, rate actions or state filings, or simply want to know what else I may be capable of doing. The bottom line is that I've said something more interesting!

Notice that I didn't include a title in this second answer. I didn't even say that I'm an actuary.

That's purposeful. The title tends to dilute the effect of the results-based statement. If I modified the statement with, "I'm an actuary with ... and most recently ..." it wouldn't be as strong. As soon as listeners heard the title, they would mentally "slot" me in their files, and they wouldn't listen as carefully to the rest of the statement. And whatever mental baggage (good or bad) they associate with the title actuary would have just been assigned to me.

On the other hand, if they are first engaged by an example of the value I can bring to the table, and then later in the conversation ask about my job, there is a different reaction. Now they are asking because they are truly interested in what I do, and when I tell them I'm an actuary, instead of just assigning that baggage, their mental reaction may be, "He's not like other actuaries I've met!"

Now, obviously that simple one-line response to “What do you do?” does not fill up the 20–30 seconds that make up the average elevator pitch. Think of it as a building block to start you on your way. Now you can flesh it out further to make up your full pitch.

Here’s one way I might expand on this example to create a more complete elevator pitch: *Our company was struggling to keep its disability line profitable, so I put together a small task force to gather data from thousands of paper applications, built a data repository and designed an actuarial experience system that allows us to dig deeply into our results. We’re now able to secure rate actions that we previously could not have hoped to get approved, and have even secured funding from our parent to expand the system. I’m John Hadley, and I make actuarial operations more efficient.*

Whether I would include my name at the start or the end of the pitch depends on how the group approaches me. If I’m introduced with my name, then I’ll save it for the end (as shown in the example). If not, I’ll start with my name. But either way, best practice is to always end with your name—if you’ve engaged people with your pitch, that’s the time they will focus and potentially remember it!

Of course, there are other elements to consider beyond the words themselves. Here are what I call the five Cs of an effective elevator pitch:

- ① | Content
- ② | Context
- ③ | Confidence
- ④ | Casual
- ⑤ | Conversational

We’ve already talked about the content; now let’s take a look at the other four Cs.

CONTEXT

Don’t forget where and how you are making your pitch:

- A venue where everyone is expected to get up in turn to give an elevator pitch is very different from a one-on-one conversation.
- The same pitch that is very effective in response to a question like “What do you do?” may sound stilted or “salesy” as an introduction. You may be more effective breaking it down into shorter segments, and then using those as responses to various questions.
- A pitch to a roomful of actuaries can be more technical than a pitch to a more general audience.
- In almost every context, shorter is better.

THE FIVE CS OF AN EFFECTIVE ELEVATOR PITCH



I once invited a job seeker to a business networking group where everyone got a chance to stand up and give a 30-second pitch to the group. She used only 15 seconds, and then turned to me disappointed in herself. I told her that her pitch actually stood out because what she said in just 15 seconds was interesting. In fact, after the formal part of the meeting ended, two people came up to her with job leads.

CONFIDENCE

If you don’t feel and act confident in your message, why should I give it any credibility? Whatever you are going to say, you must deliver it comfortably, confidently and smiling like you really mean it.

If you need to pause to remember details, feel nervous or find yourself stumbling, cut it down to just one line, followed by your name. Only after you get really good at delivering that short message with panache should you consider adding a second or third line.

Remember that a new message or delivery style may feel uncomfortable, so practice it until you can deliver it with confidence. And if you never achieve that level of confidence, think about starting over with a different message that works for you.

CASUAL

The best pitch sounds natural.

- Avoid technical jargon and long words that are difficult to understand. Just because you are in front of an audience that may understand the jargon doesn't mean you will be more effective using it.
- Keep it simple, casual and something you could actually say in a friendly conversation.
- Practice your pitch so that you can call it up naturally in every situation, then throw away the script. It's more effective if it comes out a little different each time.
- Change it up. Switch the order. Use different "marketing headlines." This will help keep it natural and not sound "memorized."

CONVERSATIONAL

I invited a friend whom I considered to be a good networker to join me for a business networking event. I introduced him to someone, and he immediately launched into his 30-second

pitch. While the content was sterling, the impression created was that he was trying to sell something.

Don't work to push your message on others—deliver it conversationally. In a natural conversation, there is give and take. You don't suddenly jump up on a soapbox and deliver a pitch. Think in terms of communicating the elements of your pitch line by line in response to appropriate questions.

CONCLUSION

Start with powerful content, and then focus on all of the five Cs. You will be dramatically more effective with your marketing message! ■

John West Hadley is a career counselor working with job seekers frustrated by their search and professionals struggling to increase their visibility and influence.

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STOP WASTING TIME

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF MEETINGS

BY KATIE WRIGHT



Meetings. In business it seems most communication takes place via emails or meetings. A meeting that is well planned and well facilitated can be highly productive—and meetings that aren't can be incredibly painful. In the words of Dave Barry, "If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings.'" My view of meetings isn't quite as dire as Barry's; however, there are planning, facilitation and participation techniques that help make meetings more productive.

LEADING THE MEETING: PLANNING

The first step to an effective meeting is to have a clear purpose. A great way to find the purpose of your meeting is

to finish this sentence: "This meeting will be successful if ..." Think about the purpose of the meeting in terms of what you want to walk away from the meeting with. Is it a decision? Is it approval? Is it a clear list of action steps toward a task or goal? If the purpose is to provide information, consider if there is another approach you can take to sharing information. Information often can be shared in writing in advance of a meeting, and then the meeting time can be used to discuss the information provided.

Once you're clear on the purpose of the meeting, think through what is needed in order to accomplish that purpose:

- Who needs to be there?
- What type or size of room do you need?

- What equipment is needed?
- What information do participants need in order to make the most of your meeting time?

See **FIGURE 1** for more considerations based on the type of meeting.

Common pitfalls when planning meetings include the "shotgun" approach to meeting participants—where the meeting organizer invites everyone who they think might have an interest in the topic in hopes of having the right people there. Or maybe the organizer invites all five people from one particular team, hoping that at least one of them will attend. A better approach is to ask if the person can't attend that they ask someone from their team to attend in their place.

Another common pitfall is not inviting the key decision-makers or inviting

FIGURE 1 MEETING CONSIDERATIONS VARY BASED ON THE TYPE OF MEETING

In Person	Phone	Video
Is a projector needed?	Does the room have a polycom?	Best with a small number of participants, or if participants can gather in a few rooms. Otherwise there are too many little video boxes to really see faces.
Is a flip chart stand and paper needed?	Does the polycom work?	Make sure everyone has the appropriate bandwidth for video; test it prior to the meeting.
Is a whiteboard needed?	Have you distributed materials electronically prior to the meeting?	If anyone is participating from outside of your company's network, you may not be able to share content. Check with IT or test it prior to the meeting.
Do you have the appropriate markers? (Please don't write on the whiteboard with permanent marker!)	Be sure materials have page numbers that you can easily reference to make sure everyone is looking at the right page.	Provide a conference number as a backup in case of a bad connection or low-quality video.
Will you bring handouts with you?	Do you want to use screen-sharing software like Skype?	Check for glare and adequate lighting.

the key decision-maker and then still holding the meeting if the decision-maker declines the invitation. Be thoughtful about who really needs to be in attendance at the meeting, and hold the meeting at a time when the key people can attend. If a key decision-maker isn't in attendance, decide as a group if you can make enough progress so that it's worthwhile to have the meeting. More often than not, it's best to reschedule the meeting for a time when key decision-makers can be present.

All meetings should have an agenda and materials (if applicable) sent prior to the meeting. Materials should be sent at least 24 hours prior to the meeting, and in many cases, 48 hours is preferred. Stakeholders are more likely to attend the meeting if they know the purpose and agenda.

Also consider if it would be beneficial to assign someone other than you to take notes during the meeting. Often it's difficult to both facilitate a discussion and take notes. Asking someone to take notes for you involves another person in the meeting in addition to freeing yourself up to focus on facilitating the discussion.

FACILITATION

As the facilitator, you set the stage and tone of the meeting, so kick it off with a positive tone. Welcome everyone, share what you hope to achieve, how you plan to achieve it and express

confidence in the group's ability to achieve the purpose.

Cover the most important information first. What happens when you cover the easy stuff first? There is a risk of not getting to the core purpose of the discussion. Ideally, you cover the entire agenda, but if by chance you can't, at least you covered the important items.

One of the most challenging aspects of leading a meeting is handling off-topic conversations. Let the purpose and agenda drive your meeting. If the conversation goes off-track, you can say: "That's good discussion. Let's talk about that at the end of the meeting if we have time." Write down the topic so you don't forget to return to it.

If you notice you are running out of time and won't get through the agenda, consider giving the group a choice. Ask: "We can focus on X or Y in our remaining time. Which would you prefer?" This allows you, as a team, to step back and make a conscious decision about how and where to spend your time.

Another common pitfall of meetings is that a handful of people dominate the conversation. As the facilitator, you want to engage everyone. Here are some engagement techniques to try:

- Facilitate a round-robin during the meeting. Go around the room and give everyone a chance to voice an opinion.

- Ask meeting participants to write their thoughts on a sticky note and place the sticky note on a flip chart or whiteboard at the front of the room that the facilitator then reads to the group.

- Write options on a flip chart or whiteboard and ask participants to come to the board and cast a vote by placing a checkmark next to the option they prefer.

- Invite contrary opinions by asking, "Does anyone think differently?" Or, "Does anyone have a different opinion?"

After the meeting, send an email summarizing the meeting discussion and outcomes. Clearly note who is responsible for each action item and a date by which the action item is due. The last step is to follow-up on the action items as they become due.

PARTICIPATING IN THE MEETING

One of the most common reasons to hold a meeting is to make a decision. When people are brought together to make a decision, different opinions come to light. This diversity of thought is a good thing! So how do we voice our opinion professionally, and in some cases, disagree, without being disagreeable? One of the most effective techniques to use when driving toward a decision comes from

FIGURE 2 HIGH-QUALITY ADVOCACY: EXPRESSING A VIEW OR MAKING A STATEMENT ABOUT YOUR CONCLUSIONS

Make Your Thinking Process Explicit

WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY
State your assumptions and describe leading data.	→ "Here's what I think and how I got there ..."
Explain your assumptions.	→ "I assumed that ..."
Make your reasoning explicit.	→ "I came to this conclusion because ..."
Give examples of what you propose.	→ "To get a clear picture, imagine you're the customer ..."



BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT WHO REALLY NEEDS TO BE IN ATTENDANCE AT THE MEETING, AND HOLD THE MEETING AT A TIME WHEN KEY PEOPLE CAN ATTEND.

Peter Senge, a lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management. He says leadership requires a balance of advocacy and inquiry.¹

Those who are most skillful in bringing a group to a decision balance both advocacy and inquiry. A common misnomer is that “telling is selling,” when in actuality the most effective way to get your point across is to balance telling (advocacy) and asking questions (inquiry).

Let’s look at advocacy first. Advocacy is expressing your view or making a statement about your conclusion. It can be stating your opinion, sharing what assumptions or data led you to that conclusion, sharing your reasoning or rationale, and giving examples of what you propose. **FIGURE 2** provides examples of what to say when using high-quality advocacy.

Inquiry is asking others to make their thinking explicit. It’s asking

questions to learn what data led them to their conclusion, what assumptions they are making, what previous experience leads them to their conclusion and asking for examples to make sure you have an accurate understanding of what the other person is proposing. **FIGURE 3** provides examples of what to say when using high-quality inquiry.

Let’s look at advocacy and inquiry in practice. Two hypothetical scenarios

FIGURE 3 HIGH-QUALITY INQUIRY: EXPLORING THROUGH QUESTIONS

Ask Others to Make Their Thinking Process Explicit

WHAT TO DO

WHAT TO SAY

- Find out what data others are operating from. —————> “What leads to your conclusion?”
- Avoid using aggressive language. —————> “Help me understand your reasoning.”
- Draw out their reasoning. —————> “What is the significance of that?”
- Explain your reasons for inquiring. —————> “I’m asking about your assumptions here because ...”

depict a business meeting where leaders are discussing what system enhancements will be included in the next release. The first scenario uses low-quality advocacy and inquiry, and the second uses high-quality advocacy and inquiry.



functionality can have a huge impact.”
Leader 1: “Let’s go back and revisit the list of enhancements scheduled for the Dec. 1 release and see if it’s feasible for the auto-enroll enhancement to go in and still meet the Dec. 1 deadline.”

You can see that using advocacy and inquiry led to a much more productive conversation and ultimately a better outcome for the company. Advocacy and inquiry are also good techniques to remember when conversations get heated.

Scenario 1

Leader 1: “The enhancement needs to be implemented by Dec. 1.”
IT: “OK, here are the changes to the system scheduled to go in by then.”

Leader 2: “We need to have the auto-enroll functionality in by that date, too. It’s not on the list.”

IT: “We can’t do it by then.”

Leader 2: “We need it to go in by the end of the year.”

IT: “We can’t do all of the current system enhancements and the auto-enroll enhancement by Dec. 1. It’s just not possible.”

Leader 1: “It’s more important for the currently scheduled enhancements to go in by Dec. 1 than to add this auto-enroll enhancement and possibly delay the launch.”

Leader 2: “I disagree.”

IT: “I don’t think this is going to work. You’re asking for a miracle.”

Scenario 2

Leader 1: “We really need to meet the Dec. 1 deadline for these enhancements.”

IT: “Help me understand what’s driving the importance of meeting this deadline, from your perspective.”

Leader 1: “Senior leadership is watching this project closely, and it’s important to be able to report that we met our project deadline.”

IT: “OK, that makes sense. Let me show you the list of enhancements that are scheduled to be implemented by Dec. 1.”

Leader 2: “How did you decide what functionality would go in by Dec. 1? What was your rationale?”

IT: “We prioritized the enhancements by both ease and impact. We started with those that were both easy to implement and had the most impact, and then decided to look at those enhancements that would have the most impact on the business.”

Leader 2: “I’d like to discuss what it would take for the auto-enroll functionality to also be included in the Dec. 1 release. Let me explain why it’s important. There’s a new client coming online in January. If this functionality is in place, it will make issuing policies much faster, therefore allowing us to meet our service-level agreements without mandatory overtime. As you know, mandatory overtime costs the company a huge amount of money. When you look at impact to the company, I think this

CONCLUSION

Meetings can carry an extremely high price tag for an organization. According to *Inc.com*, more than \$37 billion per year is spent on unproductive meetings. There are 25 million meetings each day, and executives consider 67 percent of them to be unproductive. With all the time spent in meetings, it’s worth the investment in improving meeting effectiveness. Proper planning, effective facilitation, engaging participants and practicing high-quality advocacy and inquiry can make meetings a worthwhile use of time. ■

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OVERCOMING THE CYBERSPACE CHALLENGE



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE ACTUARIAL PROFESSION

BY DEBBIE FINE AND HILLARY STEELE

Technological advances have dramatically affected the actuarial profession. When the internet and social media forums did not exist, professional networking was key. In the 1970s, candidates submitted resumes to companies via snail mail and/or by fax, or companies and potential actuarial candidates contacted actuarial recruiting firms for help filling and finding jobs.

Today, resumes are submitted electronically by emailing the human resources (HR) manager directly or via an online portal system. This current process has eliminated much of the direct communication between applicant and prospective employer. As a result, candidates may get no response from the company and find that their resume has ended up in “cyberspace.”

A survey conducted by HR provider firm Drake Beam Morin found that 61

percent of their clients who received outplacement services after being laid off found a job through networking, compared to only 6 percent who used the internet.¹ Without someone to advocate and communicate personally a candidate’s strengths and why he or she is a good fit for a position, strong candidates are often ignored. Having an advocate, an internal touchpoint at the company or a recruiter who can aid in personally communicating a candidate’s strengths often proves to be invaluable to overcome this “cyberspace” challenge.

While there has always been a strong demand for the actuarial skill set, the actuarial profession has grown significantly over the last decade. In 2016, the Society of Actuaries (SOA) had 27,770 credentialed members across the world—up from 18,186 in 2005.² As a result, communication, networking and having a social media

presence have become even more important for both employees and employers.

CONNECT ON LINKEDIN

The ability to communicate why you stand out from other applicants or why your company stands out from other companies is instrumental. LinkedIn is a valuable means of online communication for the actuarial community in the 21st century. It can be used to communicate with fellow actuaries, stay up-to-date on industry trends and position how you want to be perceived by those within and outside of your network. According to a CareerBuilder survey, 70 percent of financial services recruiters use social media to find and vet potential candidates.³ Another CareerBuilder survey from 2015 found that 35 percent of the more than 2,000 employers surveyed said they are less likely to interview

candidates if they are not able to find information about them online.⁴

Your LinkedIn presence is often the first impression a potential employer or recruiter has about you—especially since the site has more than 467 million users, with 71.5 percent of them located outside of the United States.⁵ Also keep in mind that your social media presence can result in conference speaking engagements, mentoring opportunities and other industry opportunities aside from getting a job. Be sure to keep your profile up-to-date and complete, include a profile picture, ensure there are no grammatical/spelling errors or inappropriate content, and make sure your profile complies with your current employer's social media policy. For instance, if there is inappropriate content posted, you likely will not get a response for an interview, and you also could put your current employment at risk. In one instance, a woman who worked at National Suisse in Switzerland told her employer she needed to work in a darkened room at home one day due to having a migraine. However, her employer noticed her social media activity that day while at home, and she was promptly fired.⁶

EMPLOYERS UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA

Due to the various social media channels, there is also more competition for companies seeking qualified candidates. It's become more difficult for companies to find the right candidates, and they can no longer expect that the right candidates will find them. Employers must learn to communicate and market their best "sales pitch" to a prospective applicant and have an online and social media presence. Twitter was cited as having more job listings than any other platform, and 174 of the companies

on the Fortune 500 have a dedicated Twitter account for recruitment.⁷

Review your corporate career site, as well as your organization's social media profile to confirm that it aligns with your branding and the types of employees you desire. Communicating brand to prospective applicants is an integral part of the search process and enables top candidates to see why the company is the right match for them. According to a *Corporate Responsibility Magazine* survey, 69 percent of job seekers won't take a job with a company that has a bad reputation—even if they're unemployed. In addition, according to Betterteam, organizations with a positive employment brand receive twice the number of applicants than companies with a negative employment brand.⁸

CONCLUSION

Historically, actuaries were expected to have strong technical abilities, but not much attention was paid to the "soft" skills—including communication! Having strong communication skills has had a dramatic rise in importance in the actuarial world, as most employers now seek "well-rounded actuaries" who have the expertise to do the technical piece as well as the ability to communicate with various levels of senior management and with clients. Illustrating your communication skills in an interview setting, as well as highlighting these softer skills on your social media profiles, are critical in complementing your technical background. For example, one of our insurance company clients is currently seeking an FSA to help implement principle-based reserves (PBR), where strong communication is a key attribute of the role and specifically requested by the employer, as the candidate will need to work with all areas of the company to discuss implementation.

An actuary's ability to expand his or her professional network has changed dramatically since the 1970s. Today's actuary relies on integrating social media and communication, in its various forms, to further advance his or her career. It's important in today's society that employee and employer alike have an internet presence and an advocate on their side! ■

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BODY TALK

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION BY BEING AWARE OF BODY LANGUAGE

BY KELLY HENNIGAN

Body language is the means by which people convey information through physical behaviors rather than words. Body language may involve conscious or subconscious body movements such as facial expressions, gestures or body postures. Communication style is highly reliant upon body language, because even when we aren't saying a word, we are communicating. By being mindful of our own body language signals, we can improve the effectiveness of our personal communication. Similarly, interpreting the body language cues of others will enable us to identify potential elements of inconsistent messaging when others are communicating.

THE HISTORY OF BODY LANGUAGE

"I speak two languages, Body and English."

—Mae West, American actress, singer, playwright, screenwriter and comedian

The scientific term for body motion communication is kinesics, which Ray Birdwhistell, an anthropologist who studied how people communicate through posture, gesture, stance and movement, first introduced in 1952. Ironically, Birdwhistell did not like—nor did he use—the term “body language,” as what is conveyed via body communication does not meet a linguist’s definition of language.

Birdwhistell believed all movements of the body have meaning and that nonverbal behaviors can be broken down similarly to spoken language.¹ He estimated that only 30–35 percent of the meaning of any conversation is based upon the spoken words.² This statistic was later reduced to a mere 7 percent in 1967 by Dr. Albert Mehrabian, UCLA Professor Emeritus of Psychology and author of the book *Silent Messages*.³ The book contains a detailed discussion of Dr. Mehrabian’s finding on messaging of feelings and attitudes, as well as the relative importance of words versus nonverbal cues. When communication across nonverbal

“
The most important thing
in communication is
hearing what isn’t said.”

—Peter F. Drucker, management consultant,
educator and author



and verbal elements is incongruous, the interpretation of messaging is based upon 55 percent nonverbal elements (i.e., body language such as facial expressions, gestures, posture), 38 percent vocal elements (e.g., tone of voice) and 7 percent spoken words. Apparently when the Blues Travelers crooned, “It doesn’t matter what I say ... So long as I sing with inflection ...”⁴ they were 38 percent right!

The 7 percent/38 percent/55 percent rule has been widely misinterpreted, as these metrics were derived as a

result of Dr. Mehrabian combining two different studies. (Think about it: Can you watch someone speaking in a foreign language and actually understand 93 percent of their messaging?) As with most experiments, Dr. Mehrabian’s studies were conducted under very specific conditions; therefore, interpretations based on the studies’ findings are limited. The studies Dr. Mehrabian performed in the late 1960s were based on experiments that dealt with artificial context (a single tape of recorded words), focused on the



“
The human
body is the best
picture of the
human soul.”

—Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Austrian-British philosopher

communication of feelings or attitudes such as likes or dislikes, involved a sample population of females only (men did not participate in the study) and did not include other types of nonverbal communication (e.g., body posture).⁵ Dr. Mehrabian's website (kaaj.com/psych/) addresses these misinterpretations.

BODY LANGUAGE AND THE ART OF NEGOTIATION


"What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, American essayist, lecturer and poet

In order to be fully effective, all three aspects of communication (words, tone of voice, body language) must be congruent for the recipient to trust the speaker's messaging. This is particularly important advice for those leading teams, working groups or involved in negotiations.

Changing your body language enables you to affect your emotional state. Here is some body language guidance to consider throughout a negotiation session or even a team meeting:

- Before joining an important meeting, practice a "power pose." For example, stand up and put both hands on your hips for two to three minutes—mimicking Wonder Woman. This pose may be empowering and could lead to increased testosterone and decreased cortisol (stress hormone) levels.⁶ Social psychologist and 2017 Society of Actuaries (SOA) Health Meeting keynote speaker Amy Cuddy suggests this stance during her 2012 TED Talk. Subsequent research has questioned the true effect of this pose on hormone levels, as additional studies have not consistently been able to reproduce Cuddy's findings.⁷
- Upon entering into the discussions, walk into the room with a sense of purpose. Physically align with the individual with whom you are negotiating or in discussions (i.e., sit or stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the same direction). This positioning reduces tension, defuses potential strong verbal arguments and aids in the ability to agree on solutions more quickly. Be sure to avoid turning yourself away from others, as that signifies you are uninterested and uncomfortable with the conversation.
- Upon concluding the conversation, leave with a positive impression by shaking hands, making eye contact, saying thank you and giving the indication that your counterpart(s) should look forward to dealing with you in the future. Note that averting eye contact makes it look like you have something to hide, while exaggerated eye contact gives off an overly intense and aggressive vibe.



IN ORDER TO BE FULLY EFFECTIVE, ALL THREE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION (WORDS, TONE OF VOICE, BODY LANGUAGE) MUST BE CONGRUENT FOR THE RECIPIENT TO TRUST THE SPEAKER'S MESSAGING.

Gerard Nierenberg, an expert in negotiation and communication strategies and founder of The Negotiation Institute, recognized the link among the spoken word, body language and effective negotiations. Nierenberg wrote *The Art of Negotiating* in 1968 and had the perspective that negotiation is an acquired skill rather than an innate talent. As such, each of us is able to—and should strive to—advance our powers of persuasion. As Nierenberg said, "In a successful negotiation, everybody wins."⁸

PHYSICAL PRESENCE

"The human body is the best picture of the human soul."

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Austrian-British philosopher

Body language can serve several different purposes. It can be a replacement for our words. For example, we silently nod in agreement rather than speak the word "yes." It can be used to emphasize what we are saying.



Unlike negotiation, which is an acquired skill, body language is a natural, instinctive behavior. Across different cultures, people display gestures of pride and shame similarly. In a 2008 study, Dr. Jessica Tracy, professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia, compared the nonverbal expressions of sighted, blind and congenitally blind judo competitors representing more than 30 countries. Winning athletes tended to raise their arms up in a “V” position to celebrate their success and also puffed out their chests. Those who were defeated dropped their heads down and pulled their chests inward to make themselves appear smaller. These gestures occurred for both sighted and blind athletes, regardless of culture. Other research has shown that blind children will cover their eyes when they hear bad news.⁹ As people who are born without sight exhibit the same body language expressions as people born with sight, these behaviors indicate that body language is innate—unlike our spoken language.

WATCH YOUR (BODY) LANGUAGE!

“And don’t underestimate the importance of body language ...”

—Ursula in the 1989 animated film *The Little Mermaid*,
by Walt Disney Pictures

Our bodies reflect our emotions before we even consciously know what we are feeling. Research shows that our feelings first appear in our body, and then only nanoseconds later enter into our minds.

Here are 10 interesting body language facts:

For instance, in a heated argument, we may shout accusations and point a finger to place the blame. And, it also can be a tell-tale indicator of our mood. We might slouch in our seats around the conference table when we are bored or tired, for example.

Individuals should focus on the power of nonverbal behavior and ways to affect their own behaviors by actively auditing their body and paying attention to physical presence. One way to check yourself to ensure you are exhibiting positive body language is to remember the mnemonic device SOFTEN.

- S → Smile
- O → Open posture
- F → Forward lean
- T → Touch
- E → Eye contact
- N → Nod

- ❶ | Scientists believe there are six universal facial expressions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise. Some argue that looks of contempt and embarrassment are also universal expressions.¹⁰
- ❷ | Women typically are better than men at reading body language (and similarly are better at decoding what is happening in a silent movie).¹¹
- ❸ | There are 18 different smiles, but only one—coined the “Duchenne” smile—reflects true happiness.¹² The Duchenne smile involves two muscles: the zygomatic major muscle, which raises the corners of the mouth, and the orbicularis oculi muscle, which raises the cheeks to form crow’s feet around the eyes.
- ❹ | One of the best ways to establish rapport with someone is to touch him or her on the arm somewhere between the elbow and shoulder.¹³ The elbow is considered a “public space.” The gesture will give you three times the chance of getting what you want,¹⁴ and it makes a more memorable first impression.

- 5 | People are perceived as more attractive when they tilt their heads.¹⁵ This likely harkens back to the difference in male and female height, where women who tilt their faces forward are seen as more attractive and men are considered better looking when they tilt their head backward.
- 6 | When in a comfortable social interaction, our feet and legs will mirror those of the person with whom we are talking (also known as isopraxism, where we adopt the mannerisms of those we admire).¹⁶
- 7 | A normal, relaxed blinking rate is six to eight blinks per minute. People under pressure (e.g., when lying) typically dramatically increase their blinking rate.¹⁷ (Women also tend to move around busily when lying.)
- 8 | When feeling discomfort, men typically touch their faces. Women typically touch their necks, clothing, jewelry, arms and hair.¹⁸
- 9 | People under stress or feeling vulnerable will often “ventilate” their necks. For instance, a man will put his fingers between his shirt collar and neck to pull away the fabric, while a woman will toss her hair to allow air to circulate around her neck.¹⁹
- 10 | When people cross both legs and arms, they have emotionally withdrawn from the conversation.²⁰ To prompt them to engage, offer them a beverage, as they will be more inclined to adjust their arm positioning.

Author Janet Lane once commented, “Of all the things you wear, your expression is the most important.” This statement particularly rings true upon meeting someone for the first time. Research shows that most people make an initial judgment about whether or not they like you within the first seven seconds of meeting you—based on your body language, presence and posture. While the first impression may be appropriate in the moment, it does not give us an indication of the person’s behavior across a longer time span and when exposed to different situations. To engage effectively with others over the longer term, put into practice some of the tips outlined in this article. This will improve your body language, your overall ability to communicate and your relationships with others.

In the words of Cuddy, “Our bodies change our minds, our minds change our behavior and our behavior changes our outcomes.” Communicate and connect through body language. Speak to others without saying a word. Listen to the unspoken. ■



**WHEN A PERSON
CROSSES BOTH LEGS
AND ARMS, THEY
HAVE EMOTIONALLY
WITHDRAWN FROM
THE CONVERSATION.**

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IMPROVING IN



TERACTIONS



Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it."

—Robert Frost

EXPLORING THE ROLES OF INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS IN GROUP DYNAMICS

BY MITCHELL STEPHENSON

We usually think about communication in the context of ourselves and the person with whom we're speaking. When it comes to one-on-one interactions, there are all kinds of things to pay attention to. You should be aware of your body language, your tone of voice and the actual words you are using. When it comes to communicating within a group setting, it gets even more complicated.

One of the areas in a group setting that actuaries should pay special attention to is the dynamics between introverts and extroverts. Introverts are individuals who tend to generate energy—or recharge—by spending time alone. Extroverts generate energy by being around and interacting with other people. One of the ways that personality tests determine whether you are more introverted or extroverted is by posing a hypothetical scenario. The scenario often asks about whether you feel energized after spending time in a group setting. For example, if you attend a three-hour party, do you feel so exhausted when it's over that you want to go home and rest? Or do you feel more energized and want to stay for another three hours? If you answer that you want to stay, you're probably more extroverted. If not, it's likely that you are an introvert.

ACTUARIES AS INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS

The website *Introvert Retreat* lists the percentage of introverts in the general population to be between 25 and 50 percent.¹ While we don't have statistics specifically on the actuarial profession, the public perception is that we are largely an introverted group. One of the primary reasons for this is the way in which we achieve our credentials. The actuarial exam process requires a significant amount of self-study time. This activity attracts many individuals who generate energy by spending quiet time alone—in other words, introverts.

The work of actuaries can require intensive calculations and models that may take a long time to develop, build and review. This process is appealing to individuals who thrive in an environment where they work alone. In fact, the actuarial profession frequently appears on job lists as one of the best professions for introverts. In her article, "The 20 Best Jobs for Introverts," author Melissa Stusinski explains why: "Introverts can earn a great living by working with numbers rather than people." An actuarial job "doesn't require a lot of interaction with others because it is more about calculating numbers than customer service."²

While this may be true in some cases, an actuary must be able to communicate and interact effectively with others to be successful, no matter how introverted he or she may be. For those of us who are introverts, we need to identify the best ways to communicate with others so that we are heard. We need to ensure that our views are considered. Conversely, extroverted actuaries need to identify the best ways to take into account the viewpoints of others, especially those of more introverted individuals. Doing this helps us to consider all of the various inputs from the members of our group.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING OTHERS

Scott E. Page is the Leonid Hurwicz Collegiate Professor of Complex Systems, Political Science and Economics at the University of Michigan. He is also a researcher who studies the role of diversity in complex systems. In his keynote address during the 2017 Society of Actuaries (SOA) Annual Meeting & Exhibit, Page explained that diverse groups typically outperform individuals. This is due to something he calls the diversity bonus. Page demonstrated this by looking at several examples where models have been combined to generate more accurate results than those achieved by any one of the individual models. He argued that this concept applies to people as well as to mathematical models.³ The more diverse viewpoints you have in a room, the better the overall result is likely to be.

AN ACTUARY MUST BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE AND INTERACT EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHERS TO BE SUCCESSFUL.



Without hearing from everyone, specifically those introverted individuals who may be less comfortable interacting in a group setting, it's not possible to achieve a full sampling of diverse viewpoints. Therefore, we may not be achieving our best outcome as a group when we limit the full participation of both introverted and extroverted employees.

Susan Cain, author of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, has written extensively about the subject of dynamics among introverts and extroverts in the workplace. She was a keynote speaker at the 2012 SOA Annual Meeting & Exhibit. Cain argues that the workplace environment is moving more and more toward one that favors extroverts and their strengths over those of introverts. Some examples of this include group collaboration activities and open architecture floor spaces, where physical boundaries like cubicle walls are removed. While there are many benefits to these changes, introverts, who generate their best energy in their own space while being alone, can struggle with them.

Cain also points out that brainstorming is particularly challenging for introverts. The idea of brainstorming is to encourage a free-flowing exchange of ideas among the members of the group. Typically, the more extroverted employees who feel more comfortable speaking early and often in a group setting will set the tone of the meeting. The rest of the group then may begin "mirroring" the tone or mood set by those who speak the earliest and loudest. This may result in the group arriving at a decision that has nothing to do with the best possible answer.⁴ This outcome is obviously something we want to avoid.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS

The good news is that there are specific steps we can take as individual contributors, or as managers, to encourage the best communication dynamics among introverted and extroverted team members in a group setting. Here are a few specific actions we can take.

Prepare for, or Ask Others to Prepare for, Brainstorming Sessions

Have you attended a meeting recently with a somewhat cryptic topic, no agenda and no additional information

available to the meeting invitees? That can make it very difficult for anyone to come in prepared to discuss what you want them to discuss, even if they are the subject-matter experts. If the purpose of the meeting is to discuss a topic, make sure the attendees know what they will be expected to discuss ahead of time. This will provide everyone a chance to thoroughly think through and prepare to discuss the topics at hand. Some may choose to do this on the spot in the meeting, while others may need to prepare ahead of time. If you don't send out the agenda first, you'll never give those that need to prepare the chance to do so. If you will be attending a brainstorming session, ask what you're going to need to talk about or request an agenda prior to the meeting. The meeting organizer will almost certainly comply. This will then provide you with a chance to prepare to participate as fully as possible in the discussion.

Make Sure to Hear From Everyone

If you've called a meeting of six people and four have dominated the discussion, make sure to ask the other two for their viewpoints. Why else did you invite them? You may receive some valuable information or insight just by calling on those who have been quiet during the discussion. Jonathon Ive, Apple's chief design officer, said that a manager's most important role is to "give the quiet ones a voice."⁵ To do that, you must listen to all attendees. If you are more introverted and find it difficult to get a word in edgewise during group discussions, offer your ideas early in the meeting. It may help to set the tone of the discussion when you provide your opinion up front.

Don't be Afraid to be a Contrarian

In their book, *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*, authors Ori and Rom Brafman describe a study in which research participants were placed in rooms with a group of actors. One participant was placed among the actors in each room. The participants were not aware that the other people in the room were actors—they thought they were all there to participate in the study. A researcher then came in and asked the group a series of questions. When the actors all gave the same wrong answer to the questions, the research participants gave the same wrong answer about 75 percent of the time. They did this even when it was obviously the wrong answer. However, if only one of the actors gave a different answer than the rest of the group, even if it was not the right answer, then it encouraged the research participants to say what they really felt was correct.⁶ The point is, presenting a viewpoint contrary to the rest of the group, or being the devil's

advocate, may be an effective strategy in drawing out what others really think. This is like a strategy Apple co-founder Steve Jobs sometimes employed. Jobs would state a strong point of view to a group, maybe even something controversial, and then demand a response.⁷ By advancing an idea with which he knew others may disagree, he reasoned that it would get them to discuss what they really felt the most strongly about.

CONCLUSION

Working in a group setting can be difficult. There is a lot to think about in terms of how you present yourself to others and what effect you can have on the group dynamics. To "give the quiet ones a voice," whether you are introverted, extroverted, an individual contributor or a manager, keep these tips in mind as they can help you to improve the dynamics of your team.

When speaking about group dynamics and being challenged by his employees, Jobs said: "I don't mind being wrong. And I'll admit that I'm wrong a lot. It doesn't really matter to me too much. What matters to me is that we do the right thing."⁸

Keep in mind that the goal of working in a group is to do the right thing, tap into its diversity and, ultimately, to arrive at the best possible answer. The faster and more efficiently you get there, the better your team will perform. ■

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FEATURE
EXPERT ADVICE



Q&A

TURNING POINTS

Q&A WITH SENIOR TECHNICAL DIRECTOR DAVID MOORE

Q: How are you using predictive analytics in your job?

A: I lead the Life Insurance Analytics and Predictive Modeling team at Nationwide Financial, which is charged with using predictive analytics to enhance our life insurance business processes. Currently, our focus is using predictive models for life insurance underwriting and accelerating the new business process. However, as we have gone down this path we have realized there is much more to value in predictive analytics than just making a faster underwriting decision. Analytics can help throughout the life cycle, from identifying the customers to whom you want to market, to understanding what drives customers to buy, to finding inefficiencies in your existing business process, to the way you engage with inforce policyholders to encourage them to live a healthy, low-risk lifestyle. Since our accelerated underwriting models went online in 2015, we have been continually trying to enhance them by looking at new data that can provide us with some valuable insight. In turn, we use the data and analytical capabilities to enhance the customer experience.

David Moore, FSA, MAAA, is a senior technical director at Nationwide Financial in Columbus, Ohio.

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Q: How did you learn the tools and techniques of modeling?

A: First, predictive modeling is a growing and evolving application, so everyone working in data science today needs to be continually learning. The technology and the tools available to apply to data keep improving, and this requires you to continually evaluate what you are doing and how you are doing it.

I was lucky to get involved in predictive modeling projects from the business side first rather than actually building the models myself. I helped define the business case, put together the cost benefit analysis, analyzed model output and tested predictive models built by data scientists. With an actuarial background, it was easy to catch on to the fundamentals of those models—which at that time were generalized linear models—and see the potential in using predictive analytics in many other applications across insurance companies as well.

Once you get started in predictive modeling, you discover there are tons of resources available to help you learn. There are free data science courses available online at websites such as Coursera. Many data scientists are using R or Python, which are open source languages. This makes it very easy to get started, and allows you to quickly search for help online or post questions to user groups.

Now that the Society of Actuaries (SOA) has increased its predictive modeling content, any actuary who is interested should look through the website and explore the podcasts, newsletters and slides from the recent Predictive Analytics Symposium to explore the topic as it applies to the actuarial profession. Actuaries have the right background in math and statistics and already have experience with a self-driven education model from completing the SOA exams, so it should be an easy step for someone looking to get involved in predictive modeling.

Q: What are the main skills actuaries need for work in predictive analytics?

A: The baseline skills for a role in predictive analytics are part of every actuary's education, as the basis for everything that we are doing is in statistics. However, the tools that one needs to use for analytics—to handle data, develop models and analyze results—are rapidly changing as more data becomes available and the software to handle the data get better and better.

There are a couple of areas where actuaries may be challenged while developing their skills. First, the massive amounts of data and the increasing complexity of tools often require projects to be collaborative in nature. Actuaries often will want to take over all aspects of a problem when building a model or solution; however, there is considerable value to be gained by problem-solving using a team approach. In the past, it was more typical for one or two people to set the strategy for how to accomplish something, and that model would get built. Now, especially in predictive analytics applications, we can allow more people to try something innovative to see what approaches work best. A decentralized approach to problem solving can be brought together by using ensembles of predictive models, in which models developed separately are combined to produce a solution that works better than any individual model does alone.

I often hear that we are looking for unicorns (i.e., something that doesn't exist) to build predictive models in actuarial departments, but I think that is a bad analogy. As long as you can build a team with the right skill sets in aggregate, you can accomplish the task. So, if your actuaries are still learning predictive analytics but know the business, you can add a data scientist or a data engineer to bring those skills to the team.

Q: What are some of your best professional experiences as an actuary?

A: I met my wife, Jen, at the Fellowship Admission Course, so that has to top the list. It also means I can't forget the date we met since it is on our Fellowship certificates.

One of the more unique experiences was being mentioned in a cover story in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2010 about the use of predictive analytics in life insurance. In the story—based on some of the sessions at the SOA Life & Annuity Symposium—I was simply referred to as “another consultant” as it detailed a presentation I gave on third-party data sources available for predictive modeling. We have come a long way from the initial predictive models, and it's been a great experience being a part of something new and innovative in the industry.

In my current role, getting out the first model in production was a great experience, as it was the result of countless hours of work for the many team members across the organization who contributed. It also is a building block for future success, confirming that we can apply innovative solutions to life insurance.



Q: What skills positioned you for work in predictive analytics?

A: I somewhat came upon my first project by chance. I had worked in a life insurance inforce management role at my first employer and had experience developing mortality tables and working with the underwriting department. I moved to a consulting firm after completing my FSA and was working with Alice Kroll and Chris Stehno, who were looking to leverage the predictive modeling work that was being done in property and casualty underwriting but for life insurance. They needed a subject-matter expert to work with the data scientists to tie the models together with the risk selection and mortality aspect of what they were trying to build. I was fortunate to be able to work closely with the team and learn from them. Looking back, the data available to companies for model development in 2008 is nowhere near what is available today, but Alice and Chris had the foresight to see the potential before it grew to where it is now.

Q: What is the most challenging aspect of your work?

A: Even though the underlying models are technically very complex, the most challenging aspect of applying analytics in the life insurance business is often change management. Life insurance has a well-earned reputation of being an old, slow-moving industry, but at the same time we are also under threat of disruption from outside the industry. There is currently an incredible opportunity to improve how our industry operates, but now there is also a sense of urgency about it. I think the best approach is to try and find the common ground and look at the problem from the eyes of those impacted by the change. The insurance customer's expectations are changing rapidly because of technology, as is the data the customer can provide us.

We need to meet those expectations for a faster, easier and more personalized experience. To do this, we need to make significant changes to the way our organizations operate. This is a challenge, but it's also very exciting to be working on something that will be a turning point in the life insurance industry.

Q: Can you tell our readership audience some things they may not know about predictive analytics?

A: The prevalence of predictive analytics in everyday life is incredible. In almost every action or interaction we make during the course of the day, past observations are used to push and pull us in ways so subtle we are often not consciously aware. The marketing you are subjected to and the level of customer service you receive are all determined by algorithms. Even job offers in some industries can be determined by a model, if it has deemed you are more likely to succeed.

Because of this growth of using data-based decisions, especially in insurance, it is important to emphasize ethical use of predictive models to ensure transparency from data to decision. We also need to be diligent when testing and implementing models to review the output, and make sure that the output follows as expected from the model.

Q: If you could turn back the clock, knowing all that you know now, would you choose the actuarial profession again? If yes, why?

A: I chose to pursue an actuarial career because I thought it was the best way to combine a love of math and interest in business, and I would not change that route. In fact, the insurance field is more exciting than ever as a result of the new technology and the disruption being caused by InsurTech. However, if I were starting now, rather than turning back the clock, I would question whether the exams are the best way to prepare someone for the current environment. As the pace of technological change accelerates, it puts increased strain on the SOA to keep the syllabus up-to-date. It also challenges actuaries to be able to continually stay on top of the tools used for managing risk in the age of big data. Fortunately, the SOA is making investments with updates to the actuarial education system, as well sponsoring events like the Predictive Analytics Symposium, to bring practitioners together and help us learn from each other. ■

COMMUNICATE BETTER

Looking to be a leader in your workplace or in your profession? Here are some resources that can help you in that quest.

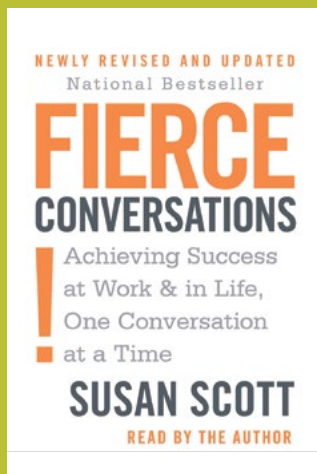


BOOK

FIERCE CONVERSATIONS

In *Fierce Conversations*, author Susan Scott provides insightful direction on how to responsibly and effectively have “hard” conversations. She talks about the importance of transparency and being present by prompting us to consider that “the conversation is the relationship.”

While the fierce approach to conversations may be tough initially, problems and issues will exist whether or not we talk about them, so we should not avoid these discussions. And lest we forget that each person owns his or her own “truth” about reality, we must fully understand all sides of a situation before choosing the course of action. A common theme throughout her narrative is the potential impact of any one conversation. Put simply, “While no single conversation is guaranteed to transform a company, a relationship or a life, any single conversation can.”



E-COURSE

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- ➔ Work more effectively with others.

bit.ly/SOA-Decision



TED TALK—10 WAYS TO HAVE A BETTER CONVERSATION

Celeste Headlee, host of the Georgia Public Broadcasting program “On Second Thought,” shares 10 useful rules for having better conversations. “Go out, talk to people, listen to people,” she says. “And, most important, be prepared to be amazed.”

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COMMUNICATION TRENDS

Read the *Forbes* article, “How Shifting Communication Trends Are Impacting Digital Transformation.” The author contends that “communication remains one of the most fascinating elements of digital transformation.”

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PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS PILOT

THE STORY BEHIND THE SOA'S PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

BY STUART KLUGMAN AND MARTHA SIKARAS

Big data is a daily news topic. Actuaries, with their deep understanding of statistics and models designed to assess risk, are primed to be leaders in the application of predictive analytics techniques. Market research and stakeholder discussions reveal predictive analytics is a topic of major interest for post-qualification actuarial education.

As part of a broad set of analytics initiatives, in March 2016 the Society of Actuaries (SOA) began the process of developing a rigorous and specialized pilot certificate program for actuaries in predictive analytics. The pilot

program targeted SOA members (FSAs) with some experience in the field. A curriculum mapping process produced a set of learning objectives. The delivery format was set as an online interactive experience with a rigorous project-based assessment. To construct the program in a timely manner, two vendors were selected as the result of a comprehensive request for proposal (RFP) process. Willis Towers Watson provided the subject-matter expert team that created the education content to address each of the learning objectives. Wise Wire, a learning experience design company, transformed that content into an online education experience.

With content development well underway, a call for pilot program participants was issued on Jan. 31, 2017. The SOA received nearly 100 applications. To better manage evaluation feedback and ensure participant interaction, the pilot program was limited to 30 participants. With oversight from a volunteer advisory group, 30 applicants were selected from a variety of employers and practice areas.

CURRICULUM

The online portion of the course was made up of six modules and was launched on April 10, 2017. The module topics were:

- ➔ Module 1: Predictive Analytics Tools
- ➔ Module 2: Effective Problem Definition and Project Management
- ➔ Module 3: Data Design, Transformation and Visualization
- ➔ Module 4: Data Exploration
- ➔ Module 5: Feature Generation and Selection
- ➔ Module 6: Model Development and Validation

Within each module, there were knowledge checks, exercises, end-of-module tests and opportunities to interact with other participants via a private discussion forum. At times, the module instructions would ask for specific interactions. At any time, participants were free to use the forum to make comments or ask for help.

The participants worked on a variety of data sets, using RStudio to perform the analyses. Sometimes full code was supplied, sometimes partial code needed to be filled in or altered, and other times code needed to be written from scratch.

The concluding learning experience was a two-day seminar. Day One included a recap of the module content, small breakout groups for additional discussion and practice, and numerous Q&A opportunities with the facilitators. The assessment on Day Two was a six-hour project involving the solution of a business problem using a subset of a larger data set familiar to the participants from their module work. A large component of each participant's final score was based on demonstrating the ability to explain concepts, methods and results.

Grading followed usual SOA processes. Papers near the pass mark were graded by a second person, with the two graders reconciling differences. Results were presented as pass/fail. Those who participated in the seminar and were unsuccessful will have the opportunity to try again at a 2018 program.

FEEDBACK

Our pilot group participants and their employers committed to providing detailed feedback on each module and

the program as a whole. Feedback was obtained through a variety of survey tools. Viewpoints were obtained not only on specific content items, but also on whether the pilot group and their designated managerial contacts supported formal implementation and, if implemented, what changes to make for the next version.

All of the feedback was compiled and shared with the SOA's Professional Development Committee (PDC). The PDC was satisfied that the positive feedback combined with the demonstrated interest in a certificate program, and it formally recommended continuation to the SOA Board. At its October meeting, the Board approved making the certificate program permanent, with at least two offerings in 2018. In addition, the PDC is to research topics for a second certificate program.

For 2018, the program will retain the primary feature of a group of participants progressing synchronously through the e-Learning component and culminating in a two-day seminar that will include a formal assessment. Each program will be designed to host 50 participants. Program registration will be open to all credentialed actuaries. Announcements on program dates and other details will be posted to the certificate program webpage.

The certificate program is a key development in the full suite of offerings in predictive analytics. The SOA is committed to ensuring that actuaries are well-positioned to take a leading role in using these tools in insurance and other risk management applications. ■

RELATED LINKS

Learning Objectives

theactuarmagazine.org/asa-reimagined

Predictive Analytics Certificate Program

bit.ly/SOA-PA-Cert

Predictive Analytics

bit.ly/SOA-PA

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THE IMPACT OF SOA RESEARCH

Q&A WITH R. DALE HALL, SOA MANAGING DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH

During the past year, Society of Actuaries (SOA) research and thought leadership has been featured in a variety of communications, from papers, reports, podcasts, videos and articles published by the SOA to social media references, blog posts and a broad array of coverage among business, industry and consumer media.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE RECENT SOA RESEARCH REPORTS AND STUDIES THAT STAND OUT MOST TO YOU?

A: We've released a wealth of research during the past 18 months. Some of the key projects that stand out include a variety of mortality experience studies, and growing our presence

and reports on mortality for both the United States and the worldwide population. We continued our work on aging and retirement issues with new research on retirement considerations and insights for those age 85 and older. Our collaborative work with other organizations includes the Actuaries Climate Index with the American Academy of Actuaries (the Academy), Casualty Actuarial Society (CAS) and the Canadian Institute of Actuaries (CIA).

Q: WHAT ACTUARIAL RESEARCH HAS THE MEDIA COVERED RECENTLY?

A: The SOA and its members' work continues to get increasingly referenced by the media, and it brings to light the importance of the actuarial profession. The SOA reports and

studies include the MP-2017 mortality improvement scale and emerging U.S. population mortality. SOA members, including myself, appeared in an episode of National Geographic's TV series "Breakthrough" on the topics of predicting longevity and mortality. The media has also written about the different sports and entertainment associations' multiemployer pension plan fund findings from the SOA. This list of findings includes the National Football League, the National Basketball Association and the Screen Actors Guild. Additionally, there have been several interviews with health actuaries discussing the future of the United States' Affordable Care Act.

I also recommend checking out the SOA's collection of podcasts called SOA Research Insights, which we

started in 2017. This podcast series helps highlight technical and general-interest research, such as recaps of research featured at major SOA meetings. The series also includes actuaries discussing the findings of research involving principle-based reserves, health care and more.

Q: WHAT IS NEXT IN STORE WITH RESEARCH FROM THE SOA?

A: We certainly look forward to the many new research projects for this year, such as on retirement risks, pension plan funding, understanding rising health care costs, severe weather impact as part of the Actuaries Climate Risk Index, applying predictive models, emerging risk survey findings and more.

We will also share more information about the SOA's Strategic Research Programs, a new and ongoing series of actuarial research that reflects a different way of organizing and developing critical research on behalf of the profession.

By the way, we have reorganized how SOA research is listed on *SOA.org*, so that the various types of research are categorized by topic area, with papers, essays, monographs, studies and research tools.

Q: HOW CAN OTHERS HELP OR PARTICIPATE WITH SOA RESEARCH EFFORTS?

A: For those of you interested in conducting rigorous research and studies, the SOA lists requests for proposals for the different available research projects, along with calls for essays and a call for papers on the Living to 100 Symposium taking place in 2020. We also offer a variety of volunteer opportunities to serve on research committees, or be reviewers or members of the Project Oversight Groups. It's a great opportunity for members to provide their insights and connect on emerging topics in their practice area.

Visit *SOA.org* and click on the "Participate" tab to find and apply for specific volunteer opportunities. If you have questions, contact our researchers at research@soa.org. Aside from volunteering, you can also help by letting your colleagues, peers, employers and others in the industry know about the available research findings and resources. Also, consider sharing the research findings and resulting media articles on SOA research through your various social media channels, such as on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. ■

R. Dale Hall, FSA, CERA, MAAA, is managing director of Research at the Society of Actuaries.

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RELATED LINKS

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GOOD RESEARCH READS

UNDERSTANDING RETIREMENT RISKS

The Society of Actuaries (SOA) Committee on Post-Retirement Needs and Risks released its Risks and Process of Retirement Survey, which explores how Americans understand, prepare for and manage retirement risks. Access this ninth biennial report.

bit.ly/SOA-Risks-Process

CHANGES WITH POPULATION MORTALITY

This SOA analysis looks at the latest emerging trends in U.S. population mortality. Observations are based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recent release of 2016 mortality experience, along with prior mortality experience data from 1999 through 2015.

bit.ly/SOA-Pop-Mort

ANALYZING SEVERE WEATHER

The Actuaries Climate Index provides an analysis of severe weather in Canada and the United States through spring 2017. Learn more about this index, which was developed jointly from several actuarial organizations, including the SOA.

bit.ly/ACI-Spring2017

TAKE CHARGE

Continue the cycle of improvement and identify new experiences to pursue. Attend a meeting or seminar. Tune in to a podcast. Take an e-course. These are great ways to take charge of professional development and can help you:

- 1 | Develop leadership skills.
- 2 | Stay up-to-date with current business trends.
- 3 | Expand your network base.
- 4 | Make meaningful contributions to your company, your team and the profession.

MEETINGS

2018 Life Insurance Conference

April 9–11, Chicago

Network with peers and leading industry experts at this event jointly hosted by LIMRA, LOMA, the Society of Actuaries (SOA) and the American Council of Life Insurers (ACLI). Gain insight into the latest in product innovation, distribution, markets, administration, regulation and technology. Register now.

bit.ly/SOA2018LIC

2018 Retirement Industry Conference

April 11–13, Chicago

Jointly hosted by the SOA and the LIMRA LOMA Secure Retirement Institute, this important conference covers the latest strategic, sales, product, operations and administration, marketing and distribution trends, as well as regulatory issues that affect the retirement industry. Sign up while space is available.

bit.ly/SOARetireConf

2018 ERM Symposium

April 19–20, Miami

This popular symposium provides thought leadership, best practices and networking opportunities to professionals working in the many aspects of enterprise risk management. The symposium supports the SOA and Casualty Actuarial Society's development of professionalism within the actuarial discipline. Plan to attend.

bit.ly/SOA2018ERM

PODCASTS

Leadership and Business Skills

Lori Weyuker, ASA, MAAA, innovator and actuary, began her career in a traditional actuarial role. Listen in as she shares how she explored other business areas and branched out in various roles that may be considered outside the box.

bit.ly/SOALeadPodcasts

Meet the Uber Actuary, Frank Chang, FCAS, Ph.D.

The first actuarial hire for both Google and Uber shares details about his fascinating career path. Check out other podcasts in this series highlighting individuals who have chosen unusual or innovative professional career paths.

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