the stepping stone

Leadership Books: The Classics, Part 2

By Mary Pat Campbell

In the August 2012 issue of *The Stepping Stone*, I laid out a case for how some of the great classics still speak to business issues we face today. Here are some additional works that bear review, and why.

HISTORY: THUCYDIDES' *HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR*

While Plutarch lived well after the people he profiled, many by centuries (and some, such as Romulus or Theseus, may never have existed), Thucydides lived through the events he detailed in his history of the Peloponnesian War. This war, which occurred off-and-on over a few decades, was between Sparta and Athens. Thucydides made a detailed chronological account, and had a hand in some events himself. Interestingly, while he had been an Athenian general at one point, he also had a period of exile due to failure and spent time talking with the other side of the war as well.

There are several famous incidents and people covered by Thucydides in his accounts, but I will concentrate on one specific incident, the Sicilian Invasion, which signaled the beginning of the end for Athens.

After the Athenian victory against the Persians as noted in the prior article, they consolidated and expanded their power among various smaller, weaker Greek city-states. Sparta did likewise, but Sparta was less expansionist than Athens. In Thucydides' telling, war between Sparta and Athens was inevitable.

While Thucydides does detail military action, he spends most of his time relating arguments between various sides in public assemblies, and not only in Athens. A theme comes up frequently, stated by particular representatives of Athens:

> We're powerful, and we're going to use that power to benefit ourselves. All entities operate in their self-interest. Do not talk to us of justice. Might doesn't make right, but it does make for results.

Returning to the Sicilian Invasion, this seems a side excursion for the Athenians. This occurred during a negotiated peace with Sparta, so it wasn't officially a part of the war with Sparta. However, the great city of Syracuse on Sicily was an ally of Sparta, and when Athens invaded, Sparta responded.

Two particular leaders are profiled with respect to this excursion: Alcibiades and Nicias. Both of them were Athenian generals… at least at first. Alcibiades argued for invasion. Nicias argued against, and kept

Actuaries
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Issue Number 48 • November 2012

Published quarterly by the Management and Personal Development Section of the Society of Actuaries

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Phone: 847.706.3500 Fax: 847.706.3599
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This newsletter is free to section members.

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The Stepping Stone
Publication Schedule

Publication Month:
February
Articles Due:
November 19

BOOK REVIEW

Necessary Endings by Dr. Henry Cloud

By Brian E. Pauley

We put a lot of thought and energy into the things we need or want to be doing. In fact, we often take on more than we have the time to realistically handle. Here is something to think about: Have you considered what you should stop doing? In other words, are there endings that you need make in order to achieve what you want in life and business?

• Are there relationships that are not adding value to you anymore?
• Are there products in your company's portfolio that are average, but not performing well enough to keep around?
• Do you have an employee that isn't meeting your expectations and yet, you somehow believe that if you try one more trick, he'll "get it"?

Endings are a necessary part of life, but we often avoid them or mess them up. That's what this book is all about.

In this review, I want to highlight two of the models presented in this book.

PRUNING

Great landscapers know that rose bushes produce many flower buds. Left untouched, the bush will produce a few great flowers, a lot of mediocre ones, and even end up with some dead branches.

Landscapers perform what is called pruning - removing buds, flowers and branches in order for the plant to flourish. Our businesses and personal lives are no different. In order to get the results we want, we have to strategically prune – remove whatever it is in our business or life whose reach is unwanted or superfluous.

In order for you and your resources to reach their full potential, you should prune:

1. Things that are taking resources away from something with more promise.
2. Things that are "sick" and are not getting better.
3. Things that are "dying".

The book illustrates the practices of GE under Jack Welch's leadership as good examples of pruning the above in business.

I believe that the concept of pruning is a good model for actuaries to think about and practice. This fits nicely into the "Strategic Insights and Integration" competency of the SOA Competency Framework, which calls for actuaries to "anticipate trends and strategically align actuarial practice with broader organizational business goals." If actuaries are to do this effectively, pruning will be necessary.

THE WISE, FOOLISH AND THE EVIL

This section of the book discusses the difficult subject of how to deal with people. Do you engage with people, assuming they are just like you? Do you engage with people exactly the same way? As this model explains, not everyone is like you and you cannot deal with all people the same way.

• **Wise People** – They take feedback well and learn from their experience, using it to make adjustments and improve. They take responsibility for their performance, avoiding excuses and the blaming of others. The great thing about wise people is that talking to them helps, allowing you to justifiably invest your time to help them improve.

• **Foolish People** – They don't take feedback well. They adjust the truth so that they don't have to adjust. It does not make sense to keep trying to change this type of person's behavior. You must set clear expectations and hold them accountable to change.

• **Evil People** – You may have a situation in which someone is out to hurt you. They are not reasonable, and you should avoid them.

I believe this is a useful framework for dealing with people. Actuaries have a reputation for not being great at dealing with people. But to succeed in our jobs, particularly if you are in management, you need to develop your skills here. If actuaries are going to compete with other risk management professions, we must show leadership. And since leadership is influence, actuaries need to be able to demonstrate to senior management that they are capable of making the right and tough calls in more than just analytical matters.

I recommend this book to actuaries interested in growing their leadership skills. The book presents sound, easy-to-understand models that can be applied to both business and personal situations. ●

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shooting himself in the foot with regards to the invasion. After arguing that such an invasion would be pointless, and that they had defense issues at home, Nicias pointed out that they would need to send lots and lots of men and ships, and spend lots and lots of money to be successful.

"Great!" Said the Athenian citizenry. "Here's some money! Let's go!"

The expedition was launched, with Nicias and Alcibiades sharing command. Read Thucydides for the complicated story of why Alcibiades had to defect to the Spartan side soon after launch. The result: the man who hated the expedition had to lead it, and the one who wanted it went to the other side, and started giving advice—extremely effective advice.

Alcibiades is notorious for lots of reasons, some of which were detailed in Thucydides and some in Plutarch. None denied that he gave excellent military advice, and those who did not listen to him did so to their detriment. Sure, don't trust the guy with your wife, but he knew what he was talking about in winning battles.

Alcibiades had a very simple piece of advice to the Spartans with respect to backing the Syracusans against the Athenians: send a Spartan general. They did. And the Syracusans (and that general) prevailed. Nicias ended up being executed for his failure, as the Athenians were completely routed.

Thucydides, ominously, did not finish his work. It cuts off mid-sentence. But the upshot is the Athenians ultimately lost the war.

Throughout the work, the Athenians argued realpolitik and used their massive power to that end, crushing all who stood in their way. They killed all the men, and sold the women and children into slavery in the cities they defeated. They were very lucky the Spartans did not behave the same when they themselves were subjugated. The Spartans would not destroy those who protected the Greeks against the Persians… but they also would not allow them to be militarily powerful any longer.

Thucydides talks about the uses of power, and the effectiveness of power surgically applied, as with the solitary Spartan general sent to Syracuse. While he doesn't reach a conclusion, knowing the ultimate result, we see the limits of the use of power, as with the leaders paired in Plutarch[1].

Similar work: *The Histories* by Herodotus. Thucydides makes veiled barbs at Herodotus in his own work, for some of the shortcomings that led later people to label Herodotus "The Father of Lies" (as opposed to his other, well-known sobriquet: "The Father of History"). While Thucydides focused on the Peloponnesian War that ended the 5th century BC, Herodotus mainly focuses on the Persian Wars that began it. Famous ancient leaders, not only Greek, are profiled. Herodotus takes the view that what comes up must come down – particularly in the fortunes of men.

EPIC: THE ILIAD BY HOMER

While the prior categories of work at least purport to be historical (though rough edges may have been smoothed and a lot of stories "improved"), in the category of epic, the literal truth is not the point. The Iliad, one of the most renown of epics of history, and the vade mecum of Alexander the Great, has long been seen as commentary on the glory, or lack thereof, of war.

Though in the very first line we hear the poem is to be centered on the wrath of Achilles, there are two very different visions of leadership presented to us. No, Achilles is not one of these leaders. Indeed, for most of the epic, Achilles eschews his duties and when he does finally spring into action, it's as a singular war machine. We do not see Achilles leading men. He is almost always acting on his own behalf.

Rather, the leadership I speak of is of the opposing generals: Agamemnon and Hector. Agamemnon is

shown as a poor leader, originally alienating his best fighter, Achilles, in an attempt to regain face after a direct rebuke by the gods. The action of the epic starts because Agamemnon has offended Apollo by not returning the daughter of one of the gods' priests. Achilles argues the girl must be returned, and when a god-sent plague forces Agamemnon's hand, he decides he will put Achilles in his place by taking away Achilles' own "war prize": the woman Briseis.

Keep in mind that Agamemnon is not Achilles' king. Indeed, the "heroes" of the Iliad are all leaders of their own cities, and Agamemnon is merely first amongst equals. Egotism abounds among the Greek warriors, and Agamemnon's rank-pulling nearly ruins the Greeks' efforts at Troy. Achilles has a goddess as a mother, and thus can exact concrete revenge for his wounded pride. The result is that things go very badly indeed for the Greeks, as their best warrior had been unnecessarily insulted.

How often do we see similar actions within corporations, when various executives, who need to cooperate to be effective, decide to play status games of this sort? The particular situation that comes to mind is the Eisner/Katzenberg fight at Disney, which ended with cash for Katzenberg as well his own barbs shot at Disney when he co-founded Dreamworks. Such incidents aren't isolated.

Even beyond the initial event, we see Agamemnon relenting, sending three emissaries to Achilles to try to convince him to re-enter the fray. He uses Odysseus to bribe Achilles with material goods, and Odysseus uses additional cynicism to encourage Achilles to show up the rest of the force. There is Ajax, the second-greatest warrior (who, past the events of the Iliad, has ego problems of his own), to tempt Achilles with visions of war glory. Finally, there is Phoenix, an old man and foster father to Achilles, to try to persuade via sentimentality. All three fail in persuasion.

When Achilles returns to battle, Agamemnon has no hand in it. It is entirely due to the slaying of Achilles' bosom pal Patroclus by Hector, the Trojan Prince. Throughout the Iliad, Agamemnon is seen mainly as an ineffective leader of men.

In contrast, Hector, the crown prince of Troy and main war commander of Trojan troops, is shown as very effective in leading the Trojans. Hector is never

Egotism abounds among the Greek warriors, and Agamemnon's rank-pulling nearly ruins the Greeks' efforts at Troy.

shown to be whining (as Agamemnon does in the funeral games of Patroclus). Hector verbally slaps his brother, Paris, upside the head for not defending the city. Before Achilles re-enters on the Greek side and ultimately kills him, Hector is shown rallying troops to push to the Greek ships to destroy them. The only reason Hector fails, ultimately, is because the judgment of Zeus is against Troy.

So in this final profile of leadership, we see that good leaders can fail and poor leaders prevail, simply due to good fortune. The Greeks were never much for happy endings.

Similar Work: *The Aeneid* by Virgil. Best-remembered of the Roman epic is the affair of Aeneas and Dido, the Queen of Carthage. But she kills herself a third of the way into the work – Aeneas's adventures in Italy comprise most of the work. One sees Aeneas's careful decisions as a leader, in judging fairly amongst funeral games (a role Achilles played in the Iliad at Patroclus's funeral) as well as being effective in gathering allies once on Italian soil. Ultimately, too, Aeneas prevails due to the support of fate. Not quite the uplifting tale one might hope for.

EXCELLENT TALES, ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

As I mentioned in Part 1, close reading of these works are likely to be both edifying and entertaining. All are available, for free, in e-book format (via Amazon's Kindle store, the Gutenberg project, and MIT's Internet Classics Archive, to name a few free sources). There are also free audio book editions at sites such as www.librivox.org.

If you're going to spend some of your precious time reading, why not spend it on some of the best? ●

END NOTES

[1] Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans;* see the August 2012 issue of *The Stepping Stone* for more information.

Do You Present a Professional Image?

By John West Hadley

Elsewhere in this issue of *The Stepping Stone,* you will find a useful checklist of dos and don'ts for email. I'm sure one could easily come up with a similar list for the now-ubiquitous text messages.

We often think, *"I'm just dashing off a quick message, so everyone will understand if there's a minor error in it."*
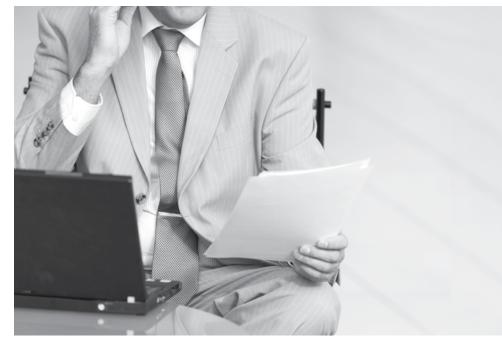
Maybe, maybe not.

What signal does it send if you send an important contact something with an error in it? If it was truly a situation where time was of the essence, then that contact is likely to be forgiving. On the other hand, if the message wasn't time-sensitive, and you just didn't bother to re-read it before hitting send, that's going to send a very different signal.

I don't claim to be perfect in that regard, either. Typos and bad auto-spell corrections are a reality of life, and I have made my share of them. At one point, my daughter's phone seemed to be linked to a medical dictionary, so that when she wasn't careful, texts went out with references to body parts. You can imagine how mortifying she found that.

However, arguably the most important contributor to career growth is the professional image you project. The reports you draft, presentations you make, emails you write, posts you put up and texts you send all contribute to that image. If you consistently take great care with those, then when you do make the occasional mistake, people will be forgiving.

If, on the other hand, you make little effort, many will interpret that you just don't care, and you will find yourself missing out on opportunities. And you likely won't even know about it, because rarely do we tell someone about the opportunity for which they aren't being considered.

Hopefully we all give a lot of attention to professional documents. However, we naturally tend to let down our guard when we're writing to friends and relatives, and this often spills over into emails to business and networking contacts and groups. But what impression are you making when a potential contact receives emails from you with typos, spelling errors or poor grammar?

One business contact used to send emails that were all bold, mixed capitalization, laid out all over the page with seemingly random indentation, with doubled exclamation points and question marks. The immediate impression was of someone who lacked written communication skills, and was clueless as to the impact of their messaging. Would you risk forwarding something like that to someone else you respect? Or even introduce that person with any form of positive recommendation that might backfire on your own reputation?

You might think that it's OK to post 'casual' notes to actuarial or other networking groups, to take short cuts in how you communicate, whether you bother to run spell check, etc. After all, we're all in the group to help each other, aren't we?

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... consider what happens when a potential hiring manager or powerful networking contact "Googles" your name.

But what signals are you sending to the 200, 800, 1500 people in that networking group when you do that? Haven't you just told them that they aren't important enough for you to take the time to make your message professional and error-free? And won't potential contacts assume that what you communicate in those 'unguarded' emails reflect your TRUE feelings? What does this do to your professional image, when these are the very contacts you are hoping will help you further your career or search?

Even if you aren't making THOSE mistakes, what about other signals you send? For example, would you be excited about reaching out to help the person who posted this note?

"Hello, I'm currently living in DC and looking for an actuary job. Anyone have any connections? Thanks."

Do you have any clue what sort of actuarial job he might be interested in or suited for? Plus, he doesn't understand that 'actuary' isn't an adjective. Or this one:

"I just recently moved to the Atlanta, GA area this week. I am searching for actuarial employment and if anyone know of any organization that is hiring, please feel free to share my attached résumé."

He expects everyone reading his note to do the work to read his résumé and figure out what he might be seeking or qualified for - how many do you think will even bother to open the attachment? (And he apparently didn't take the time to proofread such a short email, as it includes a typo.)

Attitude is critical. We are counseled to never badmouth past employers in interviews, and to avoid being negative about past situations. But what about in messages posted in blogs and networking forums? What conclusions might you draw about the person posting this message?

"The main problems with applying for jobs that one is overqualified for are: (1) they believe you are going to quit when something better comes along, and (2) they feel they have more power hiring someone who is more entry level. They don't want a knowledgeable person second guessing their decisions, even if the employee isn't going to say anything or try to grab power."

The first point is quite reasonable, but the second starts to reveal an attitude that many hiring managers would find objectionable. After reading this, wouldn't you be hesitant to introduce this person to influential people you might know?

Also consider what happens when a potential hiring manager or powerful networking contact "Googles" your name. Are some of those poorly crafted, error-prone or attitude-revealing postings going to show up in the search? If so, what damage have you just done to the professional image you are trying to present?

So make sure that everything you write (and do, wear, or say) sends a consistent, professional image. All it takes is one disconnect for networking contacts to have second thoughts about you! ●

Are You Wasting Your Life?

By Nicholas Jacobi

When I was a young man I hoped to grow up to become a doctor and an architect. I would build a hospital, and then work in it for a few years while designing other hospitals, and then repeat ad nauseam—it was perfect.

Then everything I didn't plan for happened. We've all been there, or will be someday. You make a plan to be overseeing a vast empire of some kind in five or 10 years. Instead you experience various traumatic life events and general failure to achieve your goals.

You didn't invent this cycle, it happens regularly to almost everyone. You can, if you wish, divide your life into three general phases if you like.

1. Years spent building up fantastic hopes and dreams
2. The day you realize you cannot achieve those dreams
3. All the days after that

Face it. This is life stage three—you are, in fact, a failure. How much money do you have in the bank? What car do you drive? What is the size of your house? What's your title at work? How many people report to you now? These questions, whether spoken out loud or not, inevitably mark your shortcomings, both personal and professional.

But note that these are all questions that other people use to determine how successful you are. Other people try to figure out if you earn more than them. Other people stare at your car and guess how much you've spent. Other people come to your house and laugh at your furniture. Other people look down on you since you don't have a fancy title or lead an army at work.

But what about you? What questions do you ask yourself? If you know you're failing now, if you're headed toward, or are at rock bottom, or if you just want to learn more about yourself then I'd invite YOU to ask to start asking the questions and not let the world tell you what is so great.

HAVE YOU EVER REFUSED TO QUIT?

You've been working on a project all week, all month, for years—and it's still not done. There are 10 dozen hoops your company wants you to jump through and you've only jumped through nine dozen so far. Do you give up? Have you ever pushed through a difficult assignment when you had no reason to continue and every inclination to stop? How many tangible symbols of success is that worth?

HAVE YOU BEEN CALM WHEN TAKING CRITICISM?

We've all sat in that chair—someone isn't happy with you, with your work, your behavior, something. It's natural to feel angry, to get defensive, hostile, to shut down, and to lie as a way of escape. All humans lie, and the first person you always lie to is yourself. The good news is that we can choose not to deceive ourselves or others, and we can choose to rise above our feelings and simply listen.

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R.H. Macy went bankrupt seven times before founding a good store,Jack London's first story was rejected 600 times, Michael Jordan didn't make the cut for his high school basketball team, and Einstein was thought to be mentally handicapped in his youth.

HAVE YOU EVER DONE SOMETHING IMPOSSIBLE?

It couldn't be done, but you did it anyway. Maybe it wasn't a big deal and just required someone to put in some elbow grease. Maybe it was a huge project at work that had been deemed impractical until you came along. Have you ever done more than just punch the clock at work? What's the value of that success to you? We all start out in our jobs by doing what is necessary to keep them, and eventually we move on to doing what is possible to improve them, and over time many of us can do what is impossible and go beyond the description of our nine-to-five lives.

HAVE YOU STARTED OVER?

Maybe you've seen more than your share of failure; many of us at some point experience total failure in our lives and end up losing everything. But if you've had to start over you're not in bad company. R.H. Macy went bankrupt seven times before founding a good store, Jack London's first story was rejected 600 times, Michael Jordan didn't make the cut for his high school basketball team, and Einstein was thought to be mentally handicapped in his youth.

78.2 years is the average length of mankind's life in America. Taking an even measure of 360 days for the year this gives you 28,152 days. Adding inter-calendar days of five per year adds an additional 391 days and the further addition of calendar corrections adds another 18.95 days. This brings the grand count of days you can expect to live up to 28,562— only one of which will be materially different from all the others. You have failed at life, but that is our shared destiny—our lives are short, our careers are pathetic, but we (within ourselves) can be amazing. We can choose to accept our setbacks or challenge ourselves to push through them. ●

Twelve Questions that Will Change
the Way You Email

By Malory Fischer

As a professional, you're comfortable with the everyday etiquette expected at your office. You greet your colleagues amiably, you respond to phone calls promptly, you respect other people's time constraints, and you wouldn't dream of making a sloppy appearance.

But what about your email? How well do you mind your manners when you communicate electronically?

In the current business environment, where email is the go-to method of communication, your written messages are an important extension of your professional persona. So what kind of impression does your email make?

Here's a test of your email etiquette that will help you polish your professional image.

Mark each item as True or False.

1. _____ Because email is intended to be a quick, informal way of communicating, the traditional rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation don't apply.

2. _____ Subject headings are optional.

3. _____ When email threads become lengthy, don't delete them, but do periodically summarize them in a few lines before providing additional input. Label the summary section of the email with a subheading such as Summary.

4. _____ Generally limit your To list to the person(s) from whom you expect a response.

5. _____ Double-check the name(s) in the To list; make sure your message is going to the intended recipient(s).

6. _____ There's no such thing as too much information. Include the widest possible circle of recipients on your Cc lists, including all possible stakeholders.

7. _____ When an email is distributed to a number of colleagues, your reply should always be sent as a Reply to All.

8. _____ Use Bcc to confidentially keep the recipient's manager (or your own manager) abreast of a sensitive situation.

9. _____ Language and culture differences are of little concern when composing business email.

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10. _____ Using the high priority notation assures you of a quick response.

11. _____ Your signature file should contain contact information as well as personal touches such as a favorite quote or symbol.

12. _____ Email communication is suitable for all business situations.

CHECK YOUR ANSWERS

1. FALSE. Although email should be quick and informal, it should not be poorly written. Ignoring the conventions of grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization is sloppy and reflects poorly on you and your organization. Informality in email means short sentences (no longer than two typed lines), short paragraphs, and frequent bullet lists. You can use "I" and contractions, but never use all capitals (because it looks as if you're yelling) or all lowercase letters (because you don't have poetic license).

2. FALSE. The subject heading should clearly predict the content of the message. For the reader, a descriptive subject heading is useful for prioritizing and filing. For the writer, the subject heading is an opportunity to bottom-line the message: state the topic and key information about the topic. For example, use Sales Meeting Postponed instead of Sales Meeting. If your email asks for information or warrants a quick response, include a subject line such as Request Updated ABC Data or Consumer Complaint: Pls Respond.

3. TRUE. Especially if you're asking for input from someone on your Cc list, make it easy to respond by including a succinct summary of the discussion. Also, if the conversation moves to a new topic, start a new chain with an adjusted subject heading.

4. TRUE. Use your To list to clarify who the active players are.

5. TRUE. Whether by human error or automatic insertion, your email can end up in the inbox of unintended recipients. This mistake may not irrevocably damage your career because we know better than to send highly sensitive, private, or embarrassing messages through the business email system. (We should all have learned from publicized horror stories about career-killing emails containing improprieties or worse.) However, if a time-sensitive email doesn't reach your intended recipient, that could derail your timeline or otherwise negatively impact outcomes.

6. FALSE. Include on your Cc list the smallest number of stakeholders that makes sense. Writers sometimes make the mistake of including parties who lack sufficient interest in the topic or who should not be involved in the discussion at this particular stage. If you're using email to resolve issues or make decisions within a small team, generally exclude outside stakeholders until you have something definite to report.

7. FALSE. Use Reply to All only when it's important for people other than the sender to know your

answer. For a meeting announcement, a simple Reply will usually do. A concluding "thank you" or a nicety such as "my pleasure" doesn't require a Cc to your boss or others.

8. FALSE. Generally, using Bcc can be risky since secrecy can sometimes backfire. However, this might be a useful option for broadcast messages where all 500 employees are receiving the same notice.

9. FALSE. Always write with audience awareness. When writing for a global audience, redouble your efforts to write clearly; use simple sentence constructions, bullet lists and a minimum of idioms. Keep in mind, too, that a greeting like "Good morning" may be inappropriate because of time differences. Also, recipients from some cultures will expect email to include formalities such as a friendly salutation (Dear, Hi, or Hello), a title (Mr., Ms., Dr., or equivalent), and a closing (Regards, Best regards, Sincerely). Do your homework and find out what's polite wherever you do business.

10. FALSE. The high priority flag may alert your recipient to your desire for a quick reply, but it doesn't guarantee compliance. Remember that email allows for rapid delivery of your message, but not necessarily a rapid reply. If you use the high priority signal, do so sparingly; you don't want a reputation for "crying wolf." Within your message, you can ask politely for a quick answer, but sometimes a phone call is just a smarter choice. In terms of your own email responses, aim to reply by end-of-business or at least within 24 hours. If you can't provide a full answer within that time frame, send a quick note that you'll get back within a couple of days.

11. FALSE. Leave out the quirky personal touches. That goes for brightly colored print and distinctive fonts, too. Use emoticons and texting abbreviations only when you know your readers well and you're sure they'll understand the meaning. Even then, use such informal tools sparingly. Save them for your personal email because they're … personal.

FALSE. Since email is more permanent and more apt to be misunderstood than spoken communication, some situations warrant a phone call, a meeting or an informal conversation. Don't write when you're feeling angry or emotional. Don't continue writing when you've already tried twice (unsuccessfully) to clear up some confusion through email. In fact, try not to over-rely on email; it's always convenient but it's not always the best method for achieving your ends or for building strong business relationships. ●

> **Use emoticons and texting abbreviations _sparingly_ and only when you know your readers well and you're sure they'll understand the meaning.**

The Almighty Elevator Pitch - Part 1: A Competitive Advantage

By Eugenia Kaneshige

Eugenia Kaneshige has a passion for helping professionals find jobs that feed not just their wallets, but also their souls. If you're ready for the next step up in your career, contact her at 704.966.1082 or *EKaneshige@norwood-advisors.com*.

• Do you have an elevator pitch that rolls off the tip of your tongue whenever you need it?
• One that you're confident is taking you to the penthouse, as opposed to leaving you in the basement or on the third floor?
• Do you have more than one pitch, for different occasions?

If your answer to any of these questions is "No," or "I'm not sure," I encourage you to do something about this horrible situation before you come to regret it. A great elevator pitch is a powerful driver in your career; a poor one can leave you sitting in the competition's rearview mirror.

So what exactly is an elevator pitch, why do you need one, and is yours taking you where you want to go? These are the questions I'll answer in Part 1 of this three-part series. Part 2 will cover the design and presentation of the networking/branding elevator pitch, and Part 3 will focus on the sales pitch—differences in purpose, tone and other nuances.

DEFINITION OF AN ELEVATOR PITCH

There are many different types of elevator pitches, ranging in length from 15 seconds to over an hour. The phrase is said to have been coined by venture capitalists who gave prospects scant time to pitch their ideas—about as much time as an elevator ride. Here's a definition of the most frequently used type—the one-minute workhorse of the genre that I'll be focusing on in this article:

> *An elevator pitch is a short summary used to quickly and simply define a product, service or organization and its value proposition.*

WHY YOU NEED AN ELEVATOR PITCH

Unless you live or work in a city with a lot of high-rise buildings, you may not have much opportunity to ride in an elevator, but that doesn't mean you can afford to be without an elevator pitch.

Mary Civiello, a communications coach and author, says:

> *Polishing your pitch is the cheapest and most effective way to get or keep a good job [or client] in a tough market. [Material in brackets added.]*

In a nutshell, we're always selling ourselves and our companies—consciously or unconsciously. Whether you work for yourself or for a large organization, a superior elevator pitch is essential to a strategic career plan. That's true whether you are a partner in your own firm, or you are an employee open to new challenges or outside opportunities. If only one in 10 people has a good elevator pitch, yours can be a tremendous competitive advantage—particularly in a slow-growth environment.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A PITCH THAT NEEDS POLISH

As career coaches and small business consultants, my partner and I do quite a bit of networking, and unfortunately, what we hear is a plethora of pitches that simply don't do justice to the speakers or their organizations. Take this pitch—please:

> *My name is David Wong. I'm the Senior Actuarial Controls Manager for NumbersRUs. We were founded in prehistoric times. I have an FCAS, an FSA, an MBA and an MSU. I've been an actuary for a bazillion years.*
>
> *My company is the biggest insurance company in the free world. We have offices in Canada, the U.K., South America, and the North Pole. We offer one-stop shopping. Our comprehensive services include life, disability, P & C, workmen's comp, and E & O insurance.*
>
> *If you know anyone between the ages of 0 and 100 or an organization that could use our services, please tell them to give me a call. Actuarially, my company can probably help them. Here's my card.*

One actuary commented in an online chat that when he tells people that he's a math nerd, they nod knowingly.

If this is your answer to the all-too-common question "So, what do you do?" then you may have noticed that people's eyes glaze over before you even reach the bad joke at the end. Let's analyze some of the pratfalls.

First of all, starting off with your name is sometimes unavoidable, but often, it's better not to, because nobody cares—until you give them a reason to care. And if they don't care, they won't remember. How many people know what an MSU (Makes Stuff Up) is, or what the rest of the alphabet soup after your name means? "If you have it, flaunt it" only works with those who already respect what it is you're flaunting. These days, the certification game has devalued even the oldest and most prestigious degrees and professional designations.

When you start with a title, it may be unique to your own company, and people may not have the vaguest idea what you do. This makes them fearful that they will look stupid. Following the old military policy, they "won't ask, won't tell" you that they've just mentally checked out from the rest of your speech.

If you start with a profession that most people don't really understand, like actuary, they may have an incorrect idea of what it is that you do, or they may decide that they have no need for your services, so they don't care. One actuary commented in an online chat that when he tells people that he's a math nerd, they nod knowingly. I suspect they are simultaneously looking around furtively for someone who holds the promise of a more interesting conversation.

When you tell someone in the first few seconds of your elevator pitch that you work for an insurance company, many people will jump to the conclusion that you are going to try to sell them insurance. Common thoughts are: "I already have an insurance agent" or "I'm not in the market for insurance." In other words, people are raising invisible psychological barriers to you and probably planning avoidance tactics for the next time you meet.

Several large financial companies have been bailed out since the recession began, and 'too big to fail' is an issue that is high on people's minds. Next to pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies top the list of industries people love to hate, so "biggest" is not always best.

As for offices at the North Pole, unless my name is Rudolph and I have a shiny nose, the first thing that comes to my mind is big overhead and high heating bills. When you talk about comprehensive services, you tell me that you're a generalist with a bottomless bucket of services to sell me.

The problem with this pitch is that it talks about features—which always come with pros and cons. Like a bad résumé, it exhibits the same problems that plague any résumé that tries to offer something for everyone, without explicitly talking about benefits:

> It speaks directly to no one;
>
> It's not memorable; and
>
> It puts people to sleep. Zzzz z z

Worst of all, it fails the "So what?" test, because it's all about the speaker. The listener is left thinking WIIFM ("What's in it for me?").

A great elevator pitch is an indispensable competitive advantage that will accelerate your career progress. A poor one can leave you toiling in anonymity. At the company level, it can skyrocket your company's sales, or leave it an industry laggard.

In Part 2 , I'll address the challenges of the networking elevator pitch and how to overcome the problems highlighted above. Until then, see if you can bring some creativity and pizzazz to your own elevator pitch. Can you engage your conversational partner enough to induce her to say, "That's interesting; tell me more"?

How to Handle Communication
Mishaps in the Workplace

By David C. Miller

THE CANCER THAT EATS AWAY AT RELATIONSHIPS

How much of your leadership success depends on your ability to skillfully relate to others? Whether it's with clients, senior management, staff or co-workers, your ability to effectively communicate and master key relationships could be the most important component of your success and fulfillment.

Assuming this is true, there's a "cancer" of relationships that we all need to be aware of. I'm not sure what to call it, but let me give you some of the symptoms that often follow this progression:

1. Misunderstandings and communication mishaps - For example, someone says something at a meeting and you're not sure what they mean. It could mean something negative or it may mean something else—you just don't know.

2. Assumption of motive - Based on what someone says (or doesn't say) or what they do (or don't do), you interpret some kind of negative intent (e.g., they don't care, they don't like me, they're unhappy with my performance, they're out to get me, etc.). It's called "mind reading." An example is if a prospect or client is not returning your phone calls and you come up with a negative interpretation of what this means.

3. Relational tension - A misunderstanding, followed by an assumption of bad intent will often result in some sort of relational tension, or even conflict. In our professional culture, conflict isn't usually expressed as outright war, but is often more subtle - ranging from avoidance behaviors to more passive-aggressive ones. More times than not, this relational tension is only experienced by one person in the relationship. The other is often unaware there is a problem!

Take this test: For one day notice how many incidences of misunderstandings, assumption of motives, communication gaps and relational tension occur around you. The results will astound you.

In my observation, relationship problems (small and large) are prevalent in the business world and, tragically, most of these problems are the result of two people "missing each other" rather than the existence of a significant relational issue.

The result is unnecessary relational pain, sleepless nights, major distraction, high stress, and dysfunctional, or even worse, broken relationships. This dynamic also costs businesses dearly in decreased productivity, employee morale and ultimately, revenue.

SO WHAT'S THE REMEDY?

There are certain "truths" we incorporate over time based on our life experience. One such truth I have is: *the quality of a relationship is directly proportional to the amount of effective communication that exists (or is lacking) in that relationship.* In other words, the less you communicate with someone where there is a potential misunderstanding, the greater chance that the relationship will suffer.

At the risk of making a gross overstatement, I believe there is a tool that will eliminate a significant percentage of the relational pain from our lives: **the clarifying conversation.**

What is a clarifying conversation? It is a conversation designed to clarify the intent behind the words and behaviors (or lack thereof) that have either caused or have the potential of causing tension in a relationship. It's all about killing the monster while it's small. Before our minds make a mountain out of a molehill, let's verify if there really is an issue. And if there is, let's catch it before it becomes something significant.

In my experience, I've found, almost without fail, that everything gets better after a clarifying con-

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versation. If there actually is a misunderstanding, it can be cleared up in five minutes. If there really is an issue, I can work through it with the person and we're better off. Even if it's an especially difficult issue, at least now it's exposed and we're dealing with it. That's better than having an "elephant in the room" in our relationship.

However, in coaching hundreds of professionals and observing people in my life (including myself), it seems we have a natural resistance to pursuing clarifying conversations. It's probably because we have this crazy need for self-protection, and this kind of conversation can feel risky. It falls into the "it's simple, but not easy" category.

Part of overcoming this resistance is understanding how to have a clarifying conversation.

STEPS TO MASTERING THE CLARIFYING CONVERSATION

Step One: Get Clear on Your Intent
The first thing you want to do is check your own motives. For the clarifying conversation to be successful, you need to detach yourself from the conclusions you may have already formed in your mind. Remember, the purpose is to learn the other person's perspective, so you need to be objective. Be curious to find out the other's intent by being open to any possibility.

Step Two: Practice Your Articulation
Many struggle to have these conversations because they don't know what to say, especially at the beginning of the exchange. We don't want a confrontation and we also don't want to overreact. An approach like "We need to talk," is better than nothing, but can put the other person on the defensive from the get-go.

While there is no single best approach, I've found the following to be effective:

Example #1: "John, I need your help on something ... when you said, '(fill in the statement)'

it sounded like you might have been dissatisfied with the way I handled (name the situation). Is there something we need to discuss around this?"

Example #2: "Judy, I need your help on something ... I've called you several times to follow up on our last phone conversation and I haven't heard back from you. I know you're not the type to just ignore phone calls. Can you help me understand what's going on here?"

The key components are to **1) ask for help** - people are usually glad to help if you ask, and **2) extend to them the benefit of the doubt** - it's one thing to question someone's behavior; it's another thing to question their motives. The latter can severely damage a relationship.

Step Three: Make Sure the Environment Is Right
This conversation is very important. Therefore, make sure that the setting is private, free from interruptions and distraction, and that there is adequate time to engage in the dialogue. For example, if you approach the person to have this conversation and they have another meeting in five minutes, schedule another time with them rather than trying to squeeze the discussion in.

Warning: It can be easy to use this step as an excuse to put off these conversations. Don't succumb to the temptation to bail out. If it's not a good time to have the conversation, make sure you still take action to schedule it!

Step Four: Focus on Understanding
Remember to stay objective and curious during the conversation. Your job, once you've kicked off the conversation, is to LISTEN and SEEK UNDERSTANDING. Doing this well takes strong self-management skills. Make sure you really hear them out. Ask clarifying questions that confirm you've heard them right. The goal is not to prove a

point or defend yourself; it's all about clearly understanding their perspective and intent.

Step Five: Change Perceptions or Procedures
Next, you need to assess whether you need to change your perceptions or procedures. You may find out that you perceived the whole situation the wrong way, so now you can begin to look at it differently.

Perhaps when Mary ignored you in the hallway, it wasn't because she thinks you are a poor performer, but rather she had a difficult meeting to prepare for that was weighing on her mind.

Alternatively, we might change our procedures. For example, you may have felt uncomfortable that your boss went to Ben, one of your direct reports, for some information. You stewed about it for weeks and then you saw it happen again. You begin thinking that your boss doesn't view you as competent or doesn't respect your position.

You have a clarifying conversation and find out that your boss had a special project that required some quick answers from your direct report. He knew you were already involved in meeting some high-pressure deadlines, so he went directly to Ben so as not to distract you.

You feel better once you've heard the explanation. Now you and your boss work out a communication procedure to eliminate this misunderstanding in the future. From now on, he'll mention the context to you before he approaches your staff.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE TODAY

If you want more success, fulfillment and satisfying business relationships, begin utilizing clarifying conversations as a regular practice. It's easy for communication mishaps to occur. It takes leaders with courage and intentionality to clean these situations up as they occur.

I encourage you to try this for the next 30 days and then take inventory of the impact it has on the quality of your professional and personal life. How much has the quality of your professional life improved on a scale of 1 to 10?

Remember, one key conversation can make a lifetime of difference. ●

Perhaps when Mary ignored you in the hallway, it wasn't because she thinks you are a poor performer, but rather she had a difficult meeting to prepare for that was weighing on her mind.

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Ethical Decision-Making for Actuaries:
Part 2

By Frank Grossman

Veteran actuaries know there's a world of difference between what works in theory and what succeeds in practice. Part 1 of "Ethical Decision-Making for Actuaries"[1] approached its subject in somewhat abstract terms by referring to the pervasive gray of the ethical plane, the Trolley Problem thought experiment, and the pitfall of strict utilitarianism. This second article focuses on practical issues confronting ethical decision makers and offers some possible solutions.

1. CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES

Corporate ethics training often relies on a step-wise approach to ethical decision-making. Here's a typical four-stage example:

1. Seek greater awareness – The decision maker is encouraged to obtain more "facts" about the situation faced. Admittedly, the situation may be ambiguous or complex, without clear or good options, at the outset.

2. Try to understand the situation better by asking questions – Could one's actions violate the law or corporate policies? It's important to recognize that the minimum requirements of relevant laws and regulations may present a very low standard, and that reputational risk may exist even when staying on the right side of the law. Might one's actions create a situation where others feel they are owed something, or that they are obligated to the decision maker somehow? Hence, could one's actions appear to be improper?

3. Review possible options – This includes reaching out to others if possible, and evaluating trade-offs.

4. Make an ethical decision

While this framework isn't much better or worse than most, its efficacy should not be taken for granted. A basic concern is not how corporate ethical training *seems* to be working but, rather, how well is it *actually* working? In particular, it's the perceptual elements of ethics training that are suspect:

• How does one become more aware?

• What are the "facts"?

• What might others think?

Organizations are investing significant resources into improving their "ethicality" via internal policies and guidelines, codes of conduct, compliance officers and ethics training. Some of these initiatives have been mandated by law, like Sarbanes-Oxley. What's clear, generally speaking, is that these efforts are expensive—and if they worked they might be money well spent. Yet "bad acts" continue to surface in the media and the courts. What remains unknown, however, are the quantum of ethical transgressions that lie beyond public view—iceberg-like—beneath the surface, and their deleterious influence on business and social interactions.

2. EMPIRICISTS ASCENDANT

Human perception and how it influences ethical decision-making has been at the forefront of the emerging field of "experimental philosophy." Philosophers, who in the past rarely collected data, are now getting up from their armchairs to learn what other people think about their thought experiments. This search for an empirical foundation is akin to the revolution in microeconomics, namely behavioral economics, that has taken place over the past 30 years. And what's new is that technology is enabling better experimental design, thereby expanding the range of statistical inquiry into ethical issues.

Whether we view an action as being ethical largely depends on whether we think that it was intentional or not, and armchair philosophers have weighed in on this topic for centuries. Here's a recent thought experiment formulated by Joshua Knobe targeting the influence of "perceived intent" on one's ethical opinion of others:

Seeking More Profits—Suppose the CEO of a company has to decide whether to adopt a new program. It would increase profits and

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The institutional details and the distractions of everyday work life can lead managers to fail to see the ethical consequences of their decisions.

help the environment too. "I don't care at all about helping the environment," the CEO says. "I just want to make as much profit as I can. Let's start the new program." Would you say the CEO intended to help the environment?

During a session at the 2011 SOA Health Meeting, less than 2 percent of the attendees said yes:

Table 1: Seeking More Profits

Did the CEO intend to help the environment?			
Yes	No	?	Total
2	104	6	112
1.8%	92.8%	5.4%	100.0%

The follow-on thought experiment is similar, but its environmental impact is different:

> **Still Seeking More Profits**—The same situation as before, but this time the program would harm the environment. The CEO, who still couldn't care less about the environment, authorizes the program in order to improve profits. As expected, the bottom line improves, and the environment suffers. Would you say the CEO intended to harm the environment?

This time more than 22 percent of session attendees said yes:

Table 2: Still Seeking More Profits

Did the CEO intend to harm the environment?			
Yes	No	?	Total
25	80	7	112
22.3%	71.4%	6.3%	100.0%

The direction of the shift in opinions expressed during the Health Meeting session, a 20 percent swing (from roughly 2 to 22 percent), was consistent with Knobe's results, even though the absolute levels of support differed.[2]

This so-called "Knobe Effect" suggests that observers may not decide whether an action was intentional until they learn whether it led to a good or bad outcome. Hence, people tend to "back-in" to their view

regarding intent—and ethicality—only after the outcome of a decision is known.

3. ETHICAL FADING

Max Bazerman and Ann Tenbrunsel[3] are experimental philosophers. Their findings suggest that ethics rules are bent or at times broken in the workplace because those in charge are often blind to unethical behavior, and may even unwittingly encourage it. Unfortunately, such cognitive biases and institutional barriers have the potential to more than offset the otherwise beneficial influence of ethics training and compliance programs.

Cost-benefit analysis, for example, often fails to deliver an ethical outcome because its ethical dimension was simply not considered. Bazerman & Tenbrunsel refer to situations where ethical considerations fall outside the scope of the analysis, and are relegated to being mere externalities, as "ethical fading." The institutional details and the distractions of everyday work life can lead managers to fail to see the ethical consequences of their decisions.

Actuarial analyses are often subject to ethical risk. Greater uncertainty about actuarial outcomes—in terms of what they comprise, their likelihood and their ethical impact—can increase the chance of an unethical choice being made. And because the time horizon of some actuarial projections can extend for many years into the future, this can contribute additional uncertainty to the analysis and hence more risk of ethical fading.

4. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Another obstacle to ethical decision-making identified by Bazerman & Tenbrunsel is "unintended consequences." This is a fairly recent term used to describe the unraveling of an outcome (usually in a bad way) after a decision has been made. What's not quite clear, however, is whether unintended consequences are a genuine surprise to decision-makers, or simply a blunt rebuttal of their unduly optimistic or even wishful thinking. Unintended consequences are sometimes accompanied by a "How was I sup-

posed to know that could happen?" observation by the decision-maker. Whether this constitutes an acceptable reason or merely an excuse (or perhaps a little of each) for a poor ethical decision is open to debate.

5. MOTIVATED BLINDNESS

The act of overlooking information, when it is in one's interest to remain ignorant, is described by Bazerman & Tenbrunsel as "motivated blindness." Motivated blindness can be due to decision-maker apprehension, misaligned incentives, organizational loyalty or other cultural norms. Not surprisingly, motivated blindness can also arise from a basic conflict of interest.

A recent example from the news involved credit rating agencies that went on the record and repeatedly asserted that their appraisals of CDOs and other financial instruments were not influenced by fee income received from the rated entities. Choosing to "note and disclose" that such a situation exists is a possible solution. But third-party awareness of a possible conflict, by itself, does not eliminate its potential influence on the decision-making process.

Peer review represents a potential opportunity for motivated blindness. This may seem surprising, especially as peer review is generally thought to be a good thing. In principle, peer review is undertaken to improve the quality of actuarial work product by obtaining feedback from another actuary. Such feedback transcends informal conversation by the watercooler, and can result in a formal written review.

Peer review has obvious benefits, including an exchange of perspectives, identification of alternate actuarial approaches and clarification of the communication of the work product. Yet, in its strictest sense, such a review is not completely independent if undertaken by one's immediate peers, actuaries who work for the same organization. Indeed, motivated blindness may influence reviewers closest to the work product—those who would potentially have the most to contribute by offering candid feedback. Once again, simply disclosing that there is some lack of independence may alert the user, but it doesn't necessarily enhance the stringency or quality of the peer review.

The American Academy of Actuaries published a helpful discussion paper, *Peer Review: Concepts on Professionalism* (2005) addressing some of these issues. In principle, when seeking a peer reviewer, "… one would normally look for three traits … (i)ndependence from the work product being reviewed … (e)xpertise … (and i)ndependence from the preparing actuary …" The discussion paper then offers some practical advice:

> When selecting a peer reviewer, the preparing actuary may choose to consider how independent and skilled possible candidates are, striking an appropriate balance to attain the desired level and type of review that, in the preparing actuary's professional opinion, will provide useful support to the preparing actuary, in completing the final work product version released to the user.

In a similar vein, the Canadian Institute of Actuaries' *Consolidated Standards of Practice* (§1640.14) makes a nuanced point (emphasis added): "The *perceived* objectivity of the reviewer is enhanced if the reviewer is independent of the first actuary."

Cost may also influence motivated blindness. For example, it's a small step from *"If we paid an external actuary to undertake a peer review, then its cost would very likely exceed its anticipated benefit"* to concluding that a peer review is too expensive before knowing what it might say. So, how much should a peer review cost? Or, perhaps, what's peace of mind worth to an actuary—bearing in mind The Ed Lew Rule[4] mentioned previously?

6. SLIPPERY SLOPES

Bazerman & Tenbrunsel also note that we are more likely to accept ethical lapses, so long as each successive breach is only incrementally larger than the preceding one. Hence, abiding minor ethical infrac-

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tions inevitably has a signaling effect, and promotes the familiar slippery slope syndrome whereby individuals become progressively inured to poor ethical behavior. The obvious antidote is to adopt a vigilant attitude toward even seemingly minor ethical lapses.

7. OUTCOME BIAS

Organizations tend to exhibit an outcome bias by rewarding positive results rather than high-quality decisions. After all, everybody likes a winner—even if, for example, an athlete sets a world record with the help of a "pill." Hence, a poor decision that results in a good outcome may be rewarded, while a poor outcome stemming from a good decision may very well be punished. If this sounds like "means and ends" once more, it is.

It might be worth noting that our criminal laws, in a similar manner, often punish bad outcomes more severely than foul intentions. For example, Tom points a gun at Harry, shoots to kill, misses, and Harry survives (good). Dick, in turn, points a gun at Harry to scare him, the gun goes off accidentally, killing Harry (not so good). Dick can expect to receive a much more severe sentence than Tom.

Bazerman & Tenbrunsel suggest that what's frequently missed by managers is a thorough *ex post* analysis of the consequences of a poor decision (that happened to turn out well) under alternate "less lucky" circumstances. Unfortunately, such analysis risks being viewed as nitpicking or unproductive second-guessing, and contrary to much of contemporary corporate culture. The solution is to recognize the human tendency to reward success "at any price," and factor in some reward for quality decisions too.

8. COUNTER MEASURES

Organizational change can be difficult, but safeguarding or somehow reinforcing the "ethicality" of our behavior seems especially daunting. Bazerman & Tenbrunsel emphasize that a key part of the change prescription for individuals is aligning their "should" and "would" self-views.

Generally speaking, we tend to predict that we will behave as we "should" behave, but at the time of decision we instead revert to how we "want" to act. In retrospect, however, we tend to believe that we actually behaved as we thought we "should" have. Due to our unconscious biases, both i) our predictions about how we will behave, and ii) our reflections on how we actually behaved, are frequently unreliable—and our ethical decision quality suffers thereby. More than 300 years ago, François duc de La Rouchefoucauld similarly observed how theory can fail to translate into practice at the point of contact: "Philosophy easily triumphs over past ills and ills to come, but present ills triumph over philosophy."

How can we increase our self-awareness, and move closer to our ideal "should" ethical self-image? Bazerman & Tenbrunsel suggest that this may best be done by deliberately tackling our cognitive biases before, during, and after making decisions.

Prior to making decisions – One way to prepare for the influence of the "want" self is to anticipate the adverse motivations that are likely to influence you at the time you make a decision. This doesn't mean simply acknowledging that you will be influenced by self-interest, but to prepare to withstand its influence (akin to visualization techniques).

Publicly locking-in a pre-commitment to a particular course of action can help, perhaps via a written statement of intent. You can also share your "should" ethical action with an unbiased individual whose opinion you respect. This person could be a mentor, but in any case needs to be someone with the wherewithal to understand the actuarial aspects, and implications, of your situation.

When making decisions – The influence of abstract thinking is often far less pronounced when making decisions than during the planning "should" stage. This is particularly so the busier and more rushed people are in their effort to get things done. Rather than focusing on the immediate and tangible benefits of a given outcome, revisiting those values and principles that you believe should guide your actions may help.

For example, I know an actuary who routinely re-reads the *Code of Professional Conduct* each time she writes a report for a client. A second approach that can provide support to your "should" self when confronted by a possibly unethical choice is the "How Would I Ever Tell Mom?" test.

A third technique is to transform your decision set from a single yes/no option—*"Should I behave unethically or not?"*—to a choice between two explicit options, one that's ethical and another that's unethical.

For example, suppose actual claim rates have been significantly greater than expected rates for an extended period of time. A single option, *"Should I behave unethically or not?"* could be phrased *"Do I ignore this data, yes or no?"* A better dual option approach might be stated as: *"Do I ignore this data, or do I i) commission an experience study, ii) examine the granularity of my model points, and iii) re-read the original pricing memorandum?"* Reformulating the question in this way helps to bring the ethical option to the forefront, and makes it very clear that by selecting the unethical option … one is *not* choosing an explicit ethical option.

After decisions have been made – We're predisposed to reinterpreting our unethical behavior in retrospect so that we (and others) see ourselves as behaving ethically. Setting up decision quality feedback mechanisms can alert one to distorting biases, but the feedback has to be delivered both promptly and candidly, or its effectiveness will be diminished. Implementing systems of governance that hold individuals accountable for their decisions can also help reduce *ex post* rationalization.

Bazerman & Tenbrunsel's prescription to improve ethical decision-making may be summarized as follows:

1. Be aware of cognitive biases—ethical fading, unintended consequences, motivated blindness, slippery slopes and outcome bias—that can lead to unethical decisions for you and others in your organization.

2. Strive to continually counteract these biases before, during, and after making decisions.

More generally, when contemplating important decisions, it may be worth asking both yourself and your colleagues (including non-actuaries), "What ethical implications might arise from this decision?" Then listen very carefully to what your co-workers have to say.

9. REASONABLE CREATURES

The punch line to an old joke suggests that the best way to get to Carnegie Hall is to "practice, practice, practice." In a similar manner, advance preparation can pave the way toward improved ethical decision quality. Using thought experiments and case studies, and becoming more familiar with what actuarial guidance says in principle and means in practical terms, can help when you're confronted by ambiguity and tough decisions on the ethical plane. Contrary to what the adage says, practice does not make one perfect … merely *better*.

The interrelated themes of perception and self-awareness, how actuaries see things and themselves, are central to ethical decision-making. It's been suggested that the honey bees' heightened olfactory sense enables them to "smell in color." Similarly, actuaries (due to our training and experience) are able to see financial risk and probabilities, not in black and white terms, but in living color. Actuaries see things that non-actuaries often do not when it comes to risk, and we tend to see them differently from those that do. This is a great strength of the profession and to our credit. But with strength there often is weakness—in particular, the twin threats of certitude and self-deception.

The risk of certitude is straightforward, and stems from the conviction that actuaries have all the answers—and they're "right" without a doubt!

The risk of self-deception is more subtle, but no less dangerous. Perhaps you've encountered "reasonability tests" frequently used by actuaries to assess

The risk of certitude is straightforward, and stems from the conviction that actuaries have all the answers. …

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

the robustness of their work. Unfortunately, what's "reasonable" to one actuary is sometimes less than clear-cut. Benjamin Franklin succinctly captured the risk of reasonability tests, and indirectly the threats posed by certitude and self-deception, as follows:

> So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do. This is one more reason for actuaries to take some care when assessing outcomes and weighing their decisions.

At the outset of "Ethical Decision-Making for Actuaries – Part 1," I referred to a quote by Edgar Degas, *"One sees as one wishes to see ..."* suggesting that one's esthetic taste might serve as an analogue for one's ethical sensibility. They're both very personal and prone to subjective bias, yet how overt or conscious is one's "wish" to see something—esthetically or ethically—a certain way? Without taking anything away from Degas, an epigram from a somewhat unlikely source, Anaïs Nin, may be closer to the mark:

> We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.

Our professional responsibility to make effective actuarial decisions, while keeping the ethical big picture in view, remains undiminished. Yet losing sight of what's important can easily happen when confronted by challenges on the gray ethical plane. That's why it's necessary to step back from time to time and liaise with other actuaries, to seek out implicit biases and gain perspective—all in order to make better ethical decisions. ●

EDITOR'S NOTE: CORRECTION – There was a typo in "Ethical Decision-Making for Actuaries – Part 1" published in the August 2012 issue of *The Stepping Stone*, which may have confused readers about the conclusions of the Footbridge Problem. The second to last sentence of the first paragraph on page 20 should read: "Yet, four out of five said they would throw the switch, while only one in six said they would throw the fat man off of the bridge."

[1] Editor's Note: Published in the August 2012 issue of *The Stepping Stone*.

[2] When asked about the first experiment, 23 percent of Knobe's sample said the CEO had intentionally helped the environment, while 82 percent thought that the CEO had intentionally harmed the environment in the second case. Hence, a greater proportion of actuarial session attendees saw the environmental outcome of the first experiment as an unintended consequence than those in Knobe's sample did (i.e. 93 versus 77 percent). And far fewer actuaries apparently saw the environmental damage in the second experiment as intentional or a deliberate act (i.e. 22 versus 82 percent).

[3] The cognitive risks to ethical behavior discussed in this and the following sections draw on their recent and insightful book *Blind Spots: Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

[4] Editor's Note: See Ethical Decision-Making for Actuaries – Part 1 in the August 2012 issue of *The Stepping Stone*.

BOOK REVIEW:

You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader, by Mark Sanborn

Review by Scott D. Haglund

If you don't want to take much time and still want to expand your skills, I highly encourage reading the book *You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader by Mark Sanborn.* The concepts are clearly laid out with examples that illustrate the points being made. Instead of focusing solely on the identified leaders within an organization, this books focuses on, as stated by the author, "little l" leadership. The concepts in the book will pertain to your work, volunteer and personal life, and can apply to almost anyone.

Throughout the book, you may need to rethink your concept of what a leader is. As Sanford writes, "In my opinion, fame is based on what we get in life, but true greatness is based on what we give in life." Very clearly the author is defining leadership as service, not fame. As a leader you may, and likely will, get recognition, but it will be based on your influence in the world around you.

SANFORD PRESENTS SIX PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP:

1. Power of Self-Mastery In order to lead others, you first need to lead yourself. By discovering what gives your life meaning, you start down the path of leading others.

2. Power of Focus
As you focus your life, you need to prioritize and live intentionally. The author makes a distinction between waiting and drifting. Waiting is intentional and serves a purpose, while with drifting you are just following the tide in your life.

3. Power with People
As a leader, you accomplish things *with* people not *through* them. There is a team dynamic that needs to occur instead of a dictatorship.

4. The Power of Persuasive Communication
Communication is not the objective, understanding is. The goal of communication needs to be gaining understanding.

5. The Power of Execution
Change your nouns into verbs. For example, you need to take a vision into visioning. Visioning is active and causes influence; a vision is something you hang on wall.

6. The Power of Giving
The last principle may also be the most powerful one. In Sanborn's words, "When you make the world better for others, you make the world better for yourself."

In addition to the concepts provided, Sanborn also provides leadership action points at the end of each section. These points will give you something concrete to work on as you finish each section. By taking these points seriously, I believe you will see a difference in how you approach leadership as well as how you view your influence in the world around you.

As I wrap up this review, I will do so in the same manner as the author. As a leader, you are most interested in your legacy to the business or to your family. By becoming a more effective and influential leader, you will leave something behind that reflects your leadership. I will part with the last line of the book: "In my experience, the marks in life we leave—our legacies—are most often left not in stone and steel, in history and politics, or poetry and literature, but in the lives of other people." ●

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Vulnerabilities of the Actuarial Leader: Part II

By Brian E. Pauley and Andrew Marley

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In the August issue of *The Stepping Stone,* we presented the first four vulnerabilities of the actuarial leader:
1. Adding too much value
2. Suffering from 'The Lone Ranger' syndrome
3. Disregarding the importance of culture
4. Relying on past achievements

Now let's get into 5 through 8.

VULNERABILITIY #5: SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME IN THE (TECHNICAL) DETAILS

No one would argue that technical details are unimportant. Our businesses and employers rely on ensuring key business drivers are understood, measured and monitored. The problem arises when leaders neglect their real jobs in favor of satisfying their inner-technician. You know this vulnerability is present when a leader is too busy, yet has a team of people who are undertrained, confused, or have little to do. As absurd as it sounds, this is quite common.

Perhaps you used to be quite the spreadsheet guru or query manipulator. While noble skills, these take time away from critical leadership tasks such as monitoring employee morale, dumping nonsense policies that inhibit productivity, and filling that open position with the right person (to name a few).

To begin the process of spending less time in the (technical) details, consider the following:

• When working with staff on a technical problem, resist the temptation to supply the answer. Coach them by asking questions, sending them off to do the necessary research, discussing their findings, and then allowing them to communicate directly to their audience. If you happen to lead leaders, do the same for leadership problems as well.

• Sit down with your team and define everyone's responsibilities (including your own). Your team will welcome the clarity.

VULNERABILITY #6: INEFFECTIVE DELEGATION

Of the possible things that frustrate employees about their leader, "he doesn't delegate" is one of the most common. Vulnerability #5 will certainly lead to a delegation problem. But issues with delegating go deeper than one's tendency to spend too much time "in the weeds" and not passing work to direct reports. Dan Rockwell, author of the blog, Leadership Freak, says, "Delegating is more than getting something off your plate; it's the path to developing leaders." Thus, leaders must intentionally use delegation to invest in the team's knowledge and growth, including their leadership development.

As mentioned in Vulnerability #2 ('The Lone Ranger' Syndrome),[1] some technical leaders find it difficult to delegate without micromanaging. Resist this temptation. Effective leaders understand the growth opportunities gained by team members who are stretched to take on more challenges. A growing team is an engaged team. Rockwell says, "The less control you exert the greater engagement you inspire." Don't hog opportunities. Choose to inspire engagement instead.

To begin the process of more effectively delegating and fully developing your team, try the following:

• Read the book *Equipping 101* by John Maxwell. It is short (less than 100 pages), but packed with great insights on what it means to invest in your team.

• Find something significant to give away to a team member. This could be a critical process, a key project or something else. Your only role should be to coach and teach. Resist the temptation to micromanage details or hinder progress with too many questions (see Vulnerability #1). This is only a start. Aside from a few absolute necessities, the most effective leaders engage this way for a majority of items in their world.

VULNERABILITY #7 – DESIRING TO ALWAYS BE RIGHT

When others speak, do you frequently correct them? Do you often refer or think back to the many times you successfully came up with an effective solution for the team? When someone disagrees with you, do you get frustrated or mad? Have you ever not hired someone for fear that they were smarter than you? If you said yes to any of these questions, you might have a desire to always be right.

Rather than striving to be right, leaders need to be heat seeking missiles for the truth. It is important to be competent and knowledgeable, but equally important is creating an environment where the right answers and solutions to problems are sought after, regardless of where they come from. Don't allow being wrong to bother or crush you. As Colin Powell advises in his book *It Worked For Me – In Life and Leadership,* "Never let your ego get so close to your position that when your position falls, your ego goes with it."

To begin the process of separating yourself from a desire to always be right, try the following:

- Make an effort to learn something from everyone you work with regardless of their position. Remember that every person can teach you something. Be careful about talking too much. It is difficult to learn when you do all the talking.

- Openly admit your failures and mistakes to your team. Discuss how you are growing. Your team is probably already aware of these failures and mistakes anyway, so you stand to gain a level of credibility and respect far exceeding one based on the false perception having all the right answers.

VULNERABILITY #8 – LETTING EXPERIENCE BE A CURSE

Several years ago, we saw an experienced leader claim that a critical Excel tool mimicking the results of a complex, software-style application could not be built. As time passed and personnel changed, the need to build this application heated up. The task was assigned to two relatively new employees not far removed from college graduation. Having no bias for large barriers or difficulties, they accepted the assignment. After several months of work and despite a lack of experience, the employees successfully built the tool.

In his article titled, *The Curse of Experience: Think like a Rookie*, Jon Gordon writes, "…Sometimes experience can be a curse. Such as when your experience in business causes you to focus on the good ole days; when everyone was making money; when everyone was successful; when life was easier; when you didn't have to go after business, it came to you." Gordon encourages us to think like a rookie and adds "…regardless of how much experience you have in your industry and profession…let your experience be a blessing not a curse. Let your experience provide you with expertise and let your rookie mindset fuel you with optimism and passion."

To begin the process of positively leveraging your experience, consider the following:

- Are you sharing your knowledge and experience with others? Be careful to not hoard knowledge for personal gain. Leaders are judged by the value they add to others, not themselves.

- Examine existing processes under your leadership and push for continuous improvement. University of Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino, in his book *Rebound Rules – The Art of Success 2.0* advises, "Don't stagnate. 'We've always done it that way' is not a good reason for continuing to do it that way. See if there is a better way."

If you work diligently to avoid or reverse these eight vulnerabilities, you will find your leadership as an actuary soaring to a higher level. ●

[1] Editor's Note: See Vulnerabilities of the Actuarial Leader, Part 1 in the August issue of *The Stepping Stone.*

> Be careful to not hoard knowledge for personal gain. Leaders are judged by the value they add to others, not themselves.

Hard Core

By Rich Junker

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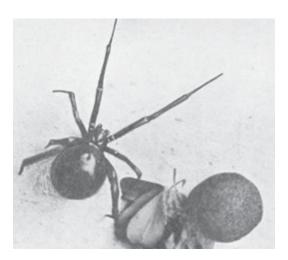
ARE YOU AN ACTUARY LITE OR AN ACTUARY HARD-CORE?

It is all relative, of course, as the non-actuarial community considers every one of us hard-core numbers merchants and grinds. But finer gradations are possible in any stratification of human inclinations.

If you are a senior officer removed from the trench work of manipulating numbers, you might fall at the 'actuary lite' end of the continuum. If you are wrestling with implementing Solvency II or pioneering predictive modeling tools and struggling to make it sensible and sellable to senior officers, then you surely fall at the 'hard-core actuary' end of the continuum.

Let's consider two actuarial affinity groups: the Technology Section members likely feel they hold in their ranks a preponderance of hard-core actuaries. Perhaps the Management and Personal Development Section members will grudgingly acknowledge that their ranks house a lesser share of hard-core actuaries.

Each of us to this day feels permanently deserving of **hard-core actuary** status as we recall our tenuous connection to human society while running the interminable gauntlet of actuarial exams. Glory days, to be sure.

Still that was long ago — what does it now mean to be truly a **hard-core actuary**? The question to ponder is "Compared to what?"

Alex Boese has recently written a book about scientists maniacal in their pursuit of scientific truth, *Electrified Sheep: Glass-eating Scientists, Nuking the Moon, and More Bizarre Experiments.*[1] Examples of the extremes of hard-core behavior among scientists in pursuit of knowledge include:

"When the Navy conducted its atomic bomb tests at the Bikini Atoll in 1946, more than 90 people volunteered to man the ships stationed in the target area, so that scientists could gather data about the biological effects of the blasts. Navy researchers admitted that human test subjects would be "more satisfactory than animals," but they worried about the public-relations aspect of using people, so all were turned down.

There's also a long history of seemingly rational scientists who were willing to sacrifice their physical comfort, as well as their lives, for the sake of knowledge. Some are remembered as genuine heroes, such as the researchers led by Walter Reed who in 1900 let themselves be bitten by mosquitoes carrying yellow fever, to prove that the insects carried the disease.

Other cases of suffering for science are regarded more as historical curiosities. In 1933, University of Alabama professor Allan Walker Blair induced a female black-widow spider to bite his hand. He allowed its fangs to stay in him for 10 seconds, so that he could get a full dose of venom, and then spent several days writhing in nightmarish pain at the local hospital. The attending physician said he had never seen 'more abject pain manifested in any other medical or surgical condition.' A fellow entomologist had conducted the same self-experiment 12 years earlier, but Mr. Blair apparently felt the need to experience the sensation himself.
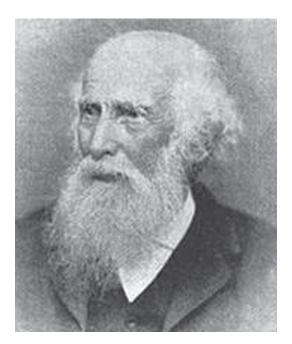
Then there was the Japanese pediatrician Shimesu Koino, who ate 2,000 eggs of an intestinal roundworm in order to study the life cycle of the organism firsthand. His infection became so severe that he began to cough up the worms from his lungs.

Even mathematics offers an example of physical self-sacrifice, through repetitive stress injury. University of Georgia professor Pope R. Hill flipped a coin 100,000 times to prove that heads and tails would come up an approximately equal number of times. The experiment lasted a year. He fell sick but completed the count, though he had to enlist the aid of an assistant near the end."

We are advanced practitioners of actuarial science, true? Our life actuary counterparts in Germany commonly have a job title along this line: *LebensVersicherungsMathematiksWissenschaftler.* That reads in English, *Life Insurance Mathematics Scientist.* German actuaries are indeed among the stoutest, the most hard core, of all actuaries.

For example, the first actuarial model office was constructed by **August Zillmer**[2] (1831-1893), he of Zillmerized reserves fame. In addition to these Augean Labors, he also supervised a mortality study of astonishing depth:

Zillmer was the head of the commission which published German Mortality Table from the Experience of Twenty-three Life Insurance Companies (Deutsche Sterblichkeitstafeln aus den Erfahrungen von dreiundzwanzig LebensVersicherungs Gesellschaften) in Berlin in 1883. The report of the mortality study was unique in that it included: 1) the complete methodology of the study including form letters, questionnaires, data forms, and worksheets. 2) separate mortality for men and women. 3) separate mortality for medically underwritten and nonmedical business. 4) separate mortality for industrial and ordinary insurance. 5) juvenile mortality. 6) select

Elizur Wright

mortality. 7) raw data which allowed users to perform their own graduation and analysis of the mortality. The text of the study is a veritable tome of some 880 pages. At the turn of the century, the basic table in this study (M & F I) was the actuarial basis for about 75% of the medically underwritten, ordinary insurance written by the German companies.

Surely Zillmer was the Steven Jobs for his day, of monomaniacal vision.

We Americans can proudly point to our own nineteenth century all-star actuarial counterpart to Herr Zillmer. **Elizur Wright**[3] (1804-1885), the first insurance commissioner of the state of Massachusetts, was hard core in the extreme. In addition to enlisting his children in computing the first reserve factors for regulating life insurance, he also invented a calculation engine to speed his labors:

"…In 1852 he resigned the editorship of the Chronotype, and from that time till 1858 he was occupied with life-insurance work, the

editing of a paper called the Railroad Times, and making a number of mechanical inventions, most important of which was a calculating machine, enough in itself to give a man distinction.

This machine was simply a Gunther rule 30 feet in length wrapped on a cylinder and turned by a crank. Gunther's rule is a measure on which logarithms are represented by spaces, so that by adding and subtracting spaces on this cylinder Mr. Wright could perform the longest sums in multiplication and division in two or three minutes of time. "

Now that we have contemplated the exertions of our actuarial forbears, and personally resuscitated to mind all our own extremes of effort over our careers, isn't it just too tidy that the *Jobs Rated Almanac* on actuaries reads: *"The actuarial career ranks high for… job security and low stress"?* ●

END NOTES

[1] *Wall Street Journal Review:* The Pleasures of Suffering for Science http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405270230375390457745443 1281272936.html

[2] Editor's Note: You can read a biography of August Zillmer at http://www.washburn. edu/sobu/broach/zillbio.html. You can also find "August Zillmer, An Actuary With Less Reserve" from the March 1989 issue of The Actuary on the SOA website at http://www. soa.org/library/newsletters/the-actuary/1989/ march/act-1989-vol23-iss03-roach-aklsnis.aspx.

[3] Editor's Note: A tribute to this giant of the actuarial profession appears at http://pages. stern.nyu.edu/~gsimon/Wright01.pdf.

Settling in an Alien Land

By Khurram Masud

Striking the correct work-life balance is a notion only few comprehend with a degree of pragmatism. It is one of the biggest challenges we face as actuarial students making our way toward fellowship. How we handle this challenge has a strong bearing not just on our exam results, but also on how we progress in our careers. For example, a request for study leave during peak valuation season is usually not a strong career move.

Things become even tougher when you decide to move abroad for "greener pastures." I recently had the experience of switching not just my employer, but also my country of residence by moving from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia. As guided by the actuarial principles we study, I prepared a full list of "to-dos" before and after landing at the airport. Despite my thorough a priori study, I was confronted with myriad problems I did not anticipate. More so, the execution of my "planned solutions" for the ones I did think of was itself an uphill task.

Before setting foot on foreign land, here are some things to consider:

• Always talk to someone living there, not just the HR department of the company, to hear the real deal. HR was extremely supportive, but the "on-the-ground" issues can only be known by someone who has also moved offshore. Learn important phrases in the local language like "how to find the exit", "how to go to xyz place", and of course the national greeting and the basic customs. Study maps of the city you are going to and mark your hotel, airport and office. Also use the Internet to locate restaurants and modes of public transport. Find a few favorite eating places close by. You may want to spend an extra hour or two exploring newer recreational and/or eating places on the weekends, but don't expect such liberty every day.

• Keep an internationally working mobile SIM card for the time you reach the airport. It may be a while before you are released from Immigration Control and Customs and have access to a public phone. Find a place to live close to your workplace so your commute is easy. Prepare to arrange for a short-term loan from your company (if they do not give you a relocation allowance), because you may not be able to get one from a bank in the early stages of your move.

With all this happening, let's not forget the first few months at a new workplace are a challenge and takes some "getting-used-to." Numerous hours are spent going through the documentation and existing models, sometimes off working hours as well. This necessitates systematic learning and complete devotion. Add the extra pressure of things you have to think about at home (finding a laundry, a barber shop, a place to eat, a grocery store, a pharmacy, acquainting yourself with the local language) and you may already fancy heading back home.

Yes, it is quite normal to be thinking of repatriation within the first three months of your relocation, but it is critical to maintain your focus. Always return to the objectives you set out at the time you chose to switch. These are (expectedly) of long-term nature, (supposedly) free from distressed sentiments and carefully thought through.

A companion at this stage can also help. Sharing your thoughts over the current circumstances fitting your overall plan can, at least, relax your nerves, even if you do not expect any meaningful advice! Therefore, it is important to try and socialize with the people around you. These may be your work colleagues, neighbors and fellow actuaries.

As time unfolds, you will become more familiar with the environment and the people. You will begin to learn the local language along the way, which will catalyze your familiarity to a great extent. You find the right places to go to enjoy your leisure time. Gradually things begin to fall in place and you feel at home.

One year later you may hear about someone else also endeavoring to relocate from your country. This is the time to repay your loan and help him or her during this difficult phase. Best of luck! ●

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When a Deadline Looms, Breathe!

by Doreen Stern, Ph.D.

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It was only 7:15 a.m., yet actuary Jon Anston was already having a no-good, very bad day.

"I told you not to leave your sneakers in the hall," he shouted at his eight-year-old daughter, Sara, as he limped into the kitchen.

"It looks like your razor won the battle this morning," his wife Judy smugly observed from the kitchen table, where she was reading *The New York Times* on her iPad.

"Why don't you shut up?" Jon impertinently replied, as he dabbed his neck with a Kleenex. The wad of tissue in his hand was quickly becoming bright red.

"Don't forget that we have plans to meet Hal and Hope at the Nomad Hotel tonight at seven," his wife reminded him, without missing a beat. "Hal made the reservations a month ago, since Hope's been dying to try it."

That's when Jon exploded.

"Maybe it's fine for you. But I can't leave the office until our Medicare pricing proposal is out the door. Every year it gets more complicated. This week's been one fire-drill after another. I'm exhausted."

"Yeah, you tossed and turned so much last night that I was afraid aliens had invaded your body."

"Gimme a break. This pricing proposal is a big deal. If I were the only one involved, it would be one thing, but I'm relying on five bozos for information."

"Daddy, Daddy," Sara suddenly called out. "It sounds like your amygdalae are all shook up."

"My amygdalae are all shook up? What are you talking about? And why are we having this conversation before I've had my coffee?"

"My teacher says the best way to calm yourself down is to breathe," said Sara.

"What the heck does your teacher know about the Medicare pricing proposal I'm working on? And about how competitive the insurance business has become?"

"We have huge posters of brains in our classroom. That's how I know that your amygdalae are small almond-shaped pieces of gray matter in your brain: they have a big effect on how you feel and act. When you feel scared, your amygdalae secrete hormones that shut down your prefrontal cortex, where all rational and creative thought takes place. That way, you can fight or flee without having to think about it. But when it happens, you can't think straight."

"My teacher taught us a foolproof way to calm ourselves down, so we can think clearly again. Wanna hear it?"

"Sure, smarty-pants, I'm all ears."

"Just breathe. Take slow, deep breaths."

"Your teacher is supposed to teach you English and math. When did he become an expert on the mind-body connection?"

"Jon, it's part of the new program being piloted at Sara's school," his wife interjected. "Research has shown that children, as well as adults, function at higher levels when they can control the emotional storms raging inside them."

"There are studies that show deep breathing actually changes the chemical balance in your brain, to help calm you down," she continued.

"Indeed, my company has started a wellness program, focusing on mindfulness. Deep breathing is integral to it. You can't be ruminating about the past, or feeling anxious about the future, when you're concentrating on your breath."

"Yeah," said Sara. "my teacher says you can change how you think, act and feel just by deep breathing. He says to inhale to the count of four, hold your breath for a second, and then breathe out slowly through your mouth. Inhaling and exhaling three times. That's all there is to it!"

"Daddy, Daddy, try it with me. Right now," Sara begged.

"This is silly, Sara. Besides I've got to get to work. I've got a lot to do today."

"Please, Daddy. Just once."

"O.K. Just for you. Make it quick, though."

"Close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose."

"One, two, three, four," counted Sara, in a soft voice.

"Picture yourself being filled with fresh energy."

"Now hold your breath for a second. It opens up the blood vessels on the sides of your neck, decreasing stress."

"Finally, open your mouth and breathe out: One, two, three, four. Imagine yourself expelling stale air and tension."

"O.K., Daddy, now open your eyes and see how much better you feel."

"By God, Sara, you're right, Sara. I *do* feel better. I don't know why, but something tells me that things may not be as bad today as I was expecting. Maybe I'll even be able to make it to the Nomad Hotel by seven. I don't know what they're teaching you at school, but I do feel remarkably better. What a lucky man I am to have a daughter like you. Gimme a kiss, sweetie. And you too, Mrs. Anston," Jon said, with a wink at his wife.

When you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace.

~Author Unknown ●

When you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace.