

ABCD Advice for New Actuaries: Top 10 Ways to Immunize Your Professionalism

WE ACTUARIES HAVE A LOT OF OFFICIAL GUIDANCE in the form of the Code of Professional Conduct, the Actuarial Standards of Practice, qualification standards, various laws and regulations, exam materials, seminars, and so on. But what about the unofficial ways to make it easier to comply with professional requirements? The following is a list (with apologies to David Letterman) of the top 10 ways to provide preventive care to our professionalism. A reasonable actuary could disagree with these 10 or with the examples in them, but that's OK. The goal is to be thought-provoking and entertaining, not prescriptive. *Contingencies* welcomes any comments you have in the form of a letter or an e-mail to the editor.

10 VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME
Spending time away from the office will give you a perspective on the relative (un)importance of yourself and your work. Actuaries volunteer in professional activities such as exam grading, teaching seminars, helping write actuarial standards, and providing research on actuarial issues to the NAIC. Actuaries also volunteer at non-professional activities sponsored by schools, community organizations, political campaigns, and religious organizations. Either setting provides the opportunity to develop judgment and to help maintain balance in your life.

9 INFLUENCE YOUR COWORKERS
The group of people you work with has a tremendous influence on you, and vice versa. In the many conversations that go on every day, you have an opportunity to establish yourself as an upstanding, ethical person. It's also important to listen to your coworkers and let them know they've been heard. Knowing where your coworkers stand can be critical in successfully handling an ethical dilemma.

8 MAINTAIN A SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE
Working as part of a team can be extremely exciting and satisfying. But there may be times when your teammates disagree with your conclusions and want to change your viewpoint. It's important that you learn to foster positive working relationships while maintaining your ability to think and act independently of and separately from your coworkers.

7 TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION
Not only will you learn facts and methods by attending a meeting, class, seminar, or webcast; you'll also have many opportunities to network with colleagues and ask questions. Getting feedback from someone with an outside perspective can be very helpful in choosing what you want from your career.

6 LEARN TO SAY "NO"
Many actuaries will say, "Can I get back to you on that?" to give themselves time to gather information before making a commitment. Some actuaries will actually say "no" to any request that requires work and then negotiate from there. If you promise to do something too quickly, you may end up regretting your promise. (See No. 3 below).

5 CREATE RECORDS
Recording the details of what you did can be a life-saver if a question arises later about whether you acted appropriately. Writing a memo or an e-mail to a client or a boss (and saving it) can serve as documentation and also can make it clear that the work will be done properly and appropriately.

4 TALK WITH OTHERS
Many of us are more comfortable making our own decisions. However, when faced with a difficult ethical or practice issue, you should discuss it with others you respect. Their insights will often help you find the right solution. And the ABCD is always available to talk over a ticklish issue.

3 UNDER-PROMISE; DELIVER RESULTS
One consulting firm tells its consultants never to say, "I'll fax that to you." Instead, they should fax it first (assuming it's not confidential or otherwise problematic) and then say, "I just faxed it to you," with the

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confirmation sheet in hand. Of course, it's often necessary to make a commitment, but it's well worthwhile to have a contingency margin in your deadline. That way you can give yourself an internal deadline and review your work for any problems before distributing it widely. If you get a reputation for always having the information early, and never having an obvious error, your work will be in demand.

2 EXPECT YOUR COMPANY TO BE UPSTANDING
Company cultures vary dramatically. If you work for a company that cares only for profit and is not concerned about its customers and the wider community, you might want to ask yourself whether you would be better off at a company that is upstanding.

1 START BY ASKING WHY
If you're asked a question, ask why it's being asked (either out loud, or to yourself). Then ask more questions. This is useful in a variety of circumstances. Sometimes you don't understand the question, and would deliver an inappropriate answer. Sometimes the person asking the question is trying to get you to do his work for him or wants to use the answer in an argument with a third party. Sometimes it doesn't make any difference, but you won't have lost much time by checking. If you take a course in negotiation, you'll find that information is the critical element in most negotiations. It's what we don't know that hurts us.

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