

Survival Skills

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I recently was invited to give a lecture to the actuarial students at Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. The professor asked me to talk from the perspective of an employer looking for young graduates about things I look for when hiring.

I entitled the lecture “Survival Skills for Actuaries” and used examples from my own career to illustrate the skills that have helped me over the years. I identified seven things students should have:

- Strong technical background, plus...
- Big Data competence (manage, handle, analyze large data sets).
- Multidisciplinary focus, particularly history and economics.
- “Big Picture” mindset.
- Master of communications techniques.
- Attributes of flexibility and adaptability.
- Global thinking.

I reminded them that very few of us who have been fortunate enough to make it to our late fifties had any idea at their age what we would be doing forty years later. In today’s world that is an eternity, long enough for me to have started working before there was widespread use of laptops, spreadsheets, mobile phones, ATM cards, or the internet. In order to survive the introduction of so many potential disruptions I had to continually learn new skills and be flexible in how I applied those I had.

If you get the opportunity to mentor a young student, help them understand the value of skills like those I have listed above. Having worked with many of them in recent years I have been struck by ones who assume that getting a 4.0 in university and passing some exams will lead them directly to a great career, or who think they can confidently predict what they will be doing in ten years.

As you consider how to accumulate your Continuing Education (CE) points, think about broadening your own learning outside your immediate practice area. Education is a lifetime activity, and as actuaries we are fortunate to have many options for CE. I try to allocate a portion of my CE time to things well outside the scope of my current role, as one never knows when circumstances will change and knowledge of a new area can help. That is particularly true for people in consulting.

