

What's the rate?

I had a great response from last month's article from those of you who came into the profession via languages, music, and – yes – history. Clearly our industry isn't going to fall down if we let a few 'not-we' in.

The big issue I've been hearing about this month is the SA3, general insurance, fellowship paper. I understand that for the third sitting running the pass rate has been the lowest in the SA series, slightly under 20% at the last sitting, while the Healthcare paper has had the highest pass rate (currently 56%).

Does anyone else feel hard done by? I appreciate that Healthcare has far fewer candidates but I find it hard to believe that GI students are consistently underperforming compared to their peers.

Technically, is there anything to prevent a frustrated GI student from qualifying by taking the paper with the highest pass rate? Unless we have some sensible standardisation across the practice areas this farcial possibility will become increasingly attractive.

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How to make people give you what you want

HERE'S A NOVEL IDEA. RATHER THAN merely accepting what life throws at us, we could push back with ideas on what we want. This is especially true in our careers. There are tonnes of opportunities to negotiate ourselves a better position in our working lives but, in my experience, actuaries are rather more passive than most.

Armed with a few negotiation techniques we could argue our way to better pay and conditions, or a place on that project that could really enhance our prospects. We could reduce deadline pressures from our superiors, or squeeze a little more juice from those we delegate work to. We could talk our accountant colleagues down from window ledges.

I'd love to see more of this sort of thing, so I've outlined below some of my favourite negotiation techniques. There are two types of negotiation and I hope these tips will apply to both. The first involves getting something you want from someone who doesn't want to give it – like squeezing an extra percentage point out of your salary review or that phone number at the end of a night. The second is not giving up something to someone who wants to take it from you, like the remote control during a riveting episode of *Deal or No Deal*.

(Those of you successfully cohabiting with a member of the opposite sex may wish to skip this article and wait for the advanced course, which is also suitable for hostage negotiators.)

The Brooklyn Optician

The Brooklyn Optician charges for his frames, then his lenses, and so on. In this strategy, break what you want down into small packages and negotiate one at a time. Focus on the main item you want, accepting a reasonable position. Your opponent will be so relieved at reaching

Tristan Walker-Buckton on the lost art of negotiation.

easy consensus on this, they will hopefully grant any small ancillary requests you make, which add up to a better result for you than if you had asked for it all outright. The key is to avoid mentioning the total cost.

Mummy Walker-Buckton was an expert at this one. I'd be so pleased at scoring money to buy sweets that the phrase 'while you're out, could you get me a few things?' would fall on deaf ears until hours later when I realised she'd had her week's shopping delivered for the price of a Toffee Crisp.

Deadlines

I'm guessing we've all fallen for this one. Setting arbitrary deadlines reduce the time available for opposition and can be used to create tension and anxiety in your opponent, especially if you emphasise the consequences of not delivering. Deadlines are easily challenged but actually rarely are. When told 'I need this by this afternoon', how many of us respond 'Why?'?

If you still need convincing at how widely this is employed, just think how often that incredibly urgent work that simply must be done before you go on holiday is still on your desk when you get back.

The Russian Front

This is a wonderful way of getting your opponent to accept the position you want when you anticipate some resistance on their part. First offer them something they will never accept – the Russian Front. Make it seem inevitable, paint a picture of pain. Just as they're beginning to panic you come to the rescue, relent, and suggest an 'alternative' that you wanted them to choose from the start. They'll grasp at whatever you throw them.

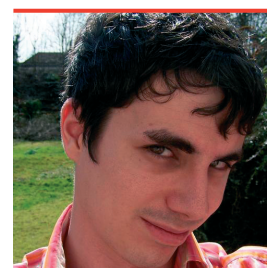
If you've ever walked out of a

salary review happy with a less than impressive pay increase because at least you haven't fallen victim to the downsizing you've heard so many nasty rumours about, then you've fallen for the Russian Front.

Negotiation do-nots

If I've tempted you to have a go, then good luck getting what you want! Just bear in mind the biggest barriers to successful negotiation:

- 1 Assuming the other party won't change their position.** You shouldn't be put off trying to argue yourself a better deal. My motto – 'If you don't ask, you don't get'.
- 2 Squeezing too hard for what you want.** This automatically pushes the other party into 'fight or flight mode' and you're likely to walk away with nothing.
- 3 Thinking the other party has all the power in the process.** If our bosses could get everything they wanted, our offices would be like sweat-shops. Come to think of it...
- 4 Hurting the relationship.** If you're being aggressive, or you win at another's expense, just make sure you can still sit down for a drink together.
- 5 Adopting a win/lose mindset.** Try to find ways to increase the size of the pie so that everyone wins. Each of you gives up something to gain something you value more.



Tristan Walker-Buckton