



Be Kind, Unwind

The Society of Actuaries in Ireland (SAI) Annual Convention is typically designed to make us better actuaries but one session was aimed at helping us become better human beings.



Ireland has one of the highest rates of mental health illness in Europe. In 2016, 18.5% of the Irish population were recorded as having a mental health disorder. At the convention, these statistics were given life by Michael Fitzgerald's honest and moving description of what it was like to walk a mile in his actuarial shoes. With humour and candour, Michael's presentation on 'Enhancing Mental Outcomes for Those We Work With' took us on a musical journey through a life impacted by depression and offered guidance on how to positively influence the mental health environment of those we interact with and be better work colleagues.

While one might argue with some of Michael's feelings on music albums ([Bruce Springsteen](#) isn't that bad), no-one could argue with the feelings expressed in this discussion of mental health and the part that we all play in the mental health of those around us.

Plato told us "be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle" and Michael brought that battle to life with his presentation, helping us see the person, not the illness. He reminded us of the impact we have on those we work with due to the amount of time that we spend with them. Offhand remarks that may be forgotten instantly by the speaker may continue a cruel life in someone else's mind. Equally, we sometimes underestimate our positive impact on others and don't always appreciate the powerful impact that a kind word can have.

No actuarial convention is complete without the actuarial control cycle and Michael delivered. He demonstrated how the control cycle could be applied to employee wellbeing within business models. Just as he encourages actuaries to develop empathy, compassion and kindness for others, he recommends that business models be developed that include the objective of meeting employees' wellness needs. The control cycle can then be used to monitor and assess the effect of the business model on employees' wellbeing.

The poet Maya Angelou taught us that "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel". How people felt about what Michael shared was clear from the emotive standing ovation that drew the session to a close. His parting words were a call to action: be kind to one another. You can start by listening to and sharing his [podcast](#).

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This article was originally published in the SAI September 2019 Newsletter and it makes reference to the SAI Annual Convention held in 2019 at the Convention Centre Dublin.



World Mental Health Day 2020

As people, we all have different struggles hidden below the surface - Michael is brave, courageous and strong to share some of his with us. Whether we want to admit it or not, life is hard at times, and it has an impact on our mental health. We need to be kind, compassionate and empathetic towards each other.

As actuaries, we influence and shape the environment in which we work. This World Mental Health Day, we need to challenge ourselves to create an open culture that is conducive to better mental health outcomes for staff and our fellow professionals in Ireland.

You can listen to the original podcast for Michael's talk by clicking the link [here](#).
A link for the accompanying slides for the original podcast is available at the link [here](#).