



**Meet CCA Member:
Travis Gaertner**

Title: Senior Director
Employer: Willis Towers Watson
Location: Seattle, WA
Area of Practice: Retirement

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CONSULTING ACTUARIES

“Gold Medal Optimist”

There is no doubt that we are living in trying times. All of us have been asked to adjust our daily lives in ways that can be difficult. Some complain and then there are people like Travis Gaertner. Travis was born without his lower limbs but has never looked at that as a hindrance. Quite the contrary – Travis has achieved things many only dream of, such as becoming an actuary! Then there’s also the fact that he is a two-time Paralympic gold medalist who recently became the USA national handcycling champion, won gold at the final UCI 2019 Para-Cycling World Cup, and finished the 2019 season with a bronze medal at the 2019 World Para-cycling Championships...and his aspirations don’t end there.

Yet, that’s just the kind of guy Travis is. He puts the most optimistic of optimists to shame. While it seems like everyone else is out there trying to find a way to be less miserable, Travis is simply out there – being his best self. You’d be hard-pressed to find a photo of him where he’s *not* smiling whether he’s with his wife and three kids or after a particularly hard day of training. Life is simply exhilarating to Travis, and it’s precisely for this reason that we could all learn to be more like him – consulting actuary or not.

So, why not let the man speak for himself? Please take a moment to discover more about this actuary, CCA member, and gold medal optimist: Travis Gaertner!

Name: Travis Gaertner / *Location:* Seattle, Washington / *Employer:* Willis Towers Watson / *Title:* Senior Director, Retirement Risk Management / *Area of Practice:* Retirement Risk Management

How did you get in to the actuarial profession?

My mother is a piano teacher, teaching small classes of ~6 students with their parents present in class. She used to use her children as examples of what TO do and what NOT to do in her classes. After one of those stories, a parent suggested I'd make a good actuary based on how I think about things...that's all it took, well not quite. 😊

Where did you go to school and what did you study?

I studied Actuarial Sciences at the University of Illinois Champaign Urbana.

What is the strangest thing someone has told you they assumed about being an actuary or what it means to be an actuary?

That we're morbid or that we have no personality.

What is your favorite part about being a CCA member?

Well since you asked me to be a part of your member spotlight, I honestly have to say this particular endeavor. I think it's great that you recognize members for what they contribute both in the corporate world and outside of work. It can't all be about what we do at the office and anything we can do to share inspiring stories is very beneficial. Thank you!

Do you have a favorite book, newspaper, blog, or writer?

I read the bible more than any other book, it gives me peace and direction. My favorite writer is CS Lewis, both his fiction and non-fiction are fantastic! He makes me think in a very logical manner.

What is your greatest accomplishment to date – professional or otherwise?

I am a two-time Paralympic gold medalist in the sport of wheelchair basketball! I earned those to medals in the Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 games. I retired after 2004 to focus on my career as an actuary given my love for this job. But I picked up a second sport in 2017. I am now a handcyclist with Team USA attempting to go back to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics. After two short years of international competition I finished third in the world at last year's world

championships! It's taken a lot of hard work and sacrifice but has been extremely rewarding to work to achieve new levels and do things I never imagined I could do at the onset.

How do you define success?

I define success as doing the best with the cards you are dealt. We all have things to contribute in different ways. Working hard to achieve new things in the areas we can control and using our gifts for the betterment of others. You can control that, and you are equipped for that! I also define success as having a balanced lifestyle. Working hard at your career, in your extracurricular activities, and focus on your family and the ones you love.

Do you have strong opinions about calculators?

Yes, HP 12C is the only way to go. Make sure you not only have one but get the app on your phone it's always right there and you never leave home without it.

What is the most important thing you've learned in the last five years?

To slow down and listen. I'm overly anxious for action. The best result often comes when you take the right action at the right time. You won't know the optimal way to do that without listening to others and their specific needs and objectives. If they don't know what they want, slow down until you can help them figure that out. My time as an actuary at Willis Towers Watson has taught me this and so many other valuable lessons that apply both at work and in everyday life situations.

If you weren't an actuary, what else might you like to do for work?

Professional athlete.

What do you do in your free time?

As mentioned above, I am a handcyclist with Team USA. This means I train 12-15 hours a week doing things like basic endurance miles on the bike, high impact interval training 2-3 times a week, plyometric strength training to help boost my power, and roughly 40 minutes of recovery every day. I also enjoy working on home renovations and playing with my children.