

SALUTING WOMEN IN NEW ENGLAND INSURANCE



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How did you get your start in the insurance industry? I started right out of high school. My first job was with General Accident Insurance Company as a clerk typist. I eventually worked my way up to supervisor of the commercial lines rating department. I was fortunate to have worked for a company that recognized potential and promoted from within. I immediately loved the insurance industry's abundant opportunities for growth and advancement.

What different roles have you held?

After General Accident, I worked for most of my career in the retail agency segment at Chase & Lunt Insurance Agency in Newburyport, Mass. I began as their commercial lines manager and was eventually promoted to vice president of commercial lines. The agency was sold, and I moved on to Preferred Mutual Insurance Company, where I worked for seven years as the N.H./Mass. eBusiness training/marketing territory manager. For a short time after that I worked as the New England marketing rep. for Insurance Innovators (now known as AmWins).

I started with SIAA in 2015 as the director of insurance portfolio management and five years later I hold my current position. I am responsible for the overall book profile and profitability standards of SIAA/SAN by monitoring results and identifying trends throughout SIAA's countrywide footprint.

What were some of the biggest challenges you have faced in your career?

I've had many fantastic leadership opportunities throughout my insurance career. I even had years of relevant experience performing the duties assigned for some of those executive positions, but I was sometimes challenged because of my lack of higher education. I quickly realized that staying in one's

comfort zone usually isn't a good way to bring about change! I recognized this as a setback and did something about it — the decision to continue my education changed the trajectory of my career. As Ben Franklin said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

Has the role of women in the insurance industry changed since you began?

I started in the 80's. The insurance industry was very much a male-dominated industry at that time. Over time, I've seen progress in the number of women represented in leadership roles, but because we don't have a large population of females in the C-suite, young women don't see role models or potential paths towards executive-level leadership and are more likely to deselect themselves out of higher-level leadership roles.

What would you tell young women who are interested in entering the industry?

My best advice is to keep growing and learning. Never doubt yourself or your abilities. Often the only thing holding us back from success is ourselves. Don't talk yourself out of being successful! If the opportunity comes up, embrace it.

I love this quote from Sheryl Sandberg, national bestselling author of "Lean In."

"If you're offered a seat on a rocket

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ship, you don't ask what seat. You just get on!"

Think about networking and joining one of the many professional insurance organizations that promote women in insurance. One organization is Massachusetts Association of Insurance Women (MAIW). The mission is clear: "To provide quality professional and personal development through education, networking and community support." MAIW is a great way to network and build strong connections with women at all levels of experience in the insurance and risk management industry.

How do you see women's roles developing or changing in the next 10 years?

Today's insurance industry is powered by technological disruptions, and that has led to the creation of more jobs and new kinds of jobs. This represents a tremendous opportunity for companies to actively increase the number of women in executive leadership roles. Sure, there will be corporate barriers to navigate, but effective coaching will allow women to achieve gender parity — particularly with executive leadership positions.

Through workforce education and formal mentorship programs, the insurance industry can help foster a culture that reduces the gender gap and more adequately represents the potential women have in leadership roles. Mentorship is vital for career progression. A strong mentorship program will bolster

professional development, leadership skills and personal growth.

With more and more women taking leadership roles in corporate America, it is crucial to have mentorships where women can learn from each other. I strongly believe that for women to be more empowered, organizations need to build structured mentorship programs into their workplace.

Organizations also need to include women in succession planning by proactively developing their internal pipeline for the next generation of leaders. Successful succession planning begins at the top. C-suite executives need to show their support by sponsoring/mentoring high-potential women.

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