

claims ADVISOR

INFORMATION FOR TODAY'S CLAIMS PROFESSIONALS

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

www.claimsadvisor.com

Wanted: The Next Generation of Claims Adjusters

By Jeffrey T. Bowman

In a time when large-loss expertise is critical to carriers, a generation of experienced adjusters is preparing to leave the worldwide insurance workforce. Yes, their retirements might be delayed due to the current global economic situation. However, with the leading edge of the post-WWII generation well into its 60s, it's safe to say that significant expertise will exit the workforce in the coming decade.

At the same time, the insurance industry has long had difficulty attracting and keeping adjusters who could learn from their predecessors. Insurance adjusting, for example, doesn't appear on the *U.S. News and World Report* best careers for 2009 (though "politician" did make the list, which gives pause for thought). And according to the *2009 Robert Half International Salary Guide*, you might want to become a dental hygienist or personal financial advisor—the potential of the latter being understandable today—but not an insurance adjuster.

The perception of insurance careers runs counter to the wide range of jobs and higher-than-average salaries that are possible in the industry. In the United States, for example, the mean hourly and annual wages for claims adjusters, examiners and investigators are 36% higher than those for all occupations, according to recent Bureau of Labor statistics.

Plenty has been written about attracting and keeping multi-tasking, technology-savvy 20-somethings in the workforce. But even if they are interested in climbing the corporate ladder, adjusters with only a few years of experience generally are not going to be ready to handle the same kinds of claims as adjusters with 30 years in the industry. This is doubly true of those who handle complex, high-loss claims; in those situations, clients want experienced, specialized adjusters.

How, then, do we make sure we have the right people in the right place as retirements accelerate? Just as important, how do we capture and pass along both the industry and institutional knowledge of experienced adjusters so others are ready to follow in their footsteps?

One promising avenue is promoting claims adjusting to those who are contemplating a career change, particularly from moribund industries and particularly during today's high unemployment. It can be faster and more effective to teach claims adjusting to someone with industry experience than to bring a claims generalist up-to-speed when specific industry knowledge is required. Professional specialists,

supervisors and middle managers all can put their experience to good use in claims adjusting. Those who develop adjusting skills to match their industry knowledge can evolve into the executive general adjusters of tomorrow.

As for passing along knowledge, technology might be the best enabler. One growing component of online learning is functionality that enables the best information in an enterprise to be shared within the organization. Company-designated experts receive online questions and post responses, which are then maintained in a database. Anyone can search answers by keyword, phrase or category. This functionality empowers experienced employees to share knowledge with and, in essence, provide training for others for a small investment of time and money.

Finally, we need to muster all of our own enthusiasm and excitement and actively promote careers in the insurance industry. For every person who tells a tale of an insurance claim gone wrong, there are countless others who have received fast, fair settlements and been able to repair their homes or re-open their businesses. That is the essence of what claims adjusters do—help people get their lives back together—and it's one of the chief attractions of the job, whether an adjuster is fresh out of school, switching careers or at the pinnacle of the profession. Add interesting opportunities, intellectual stimulation and a fair amount of independence and you have a career that would suit many. Groups such as the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters Society and the Chartered Institute of Loss Adjusters are working to raise the profile of our industry. We all need to join them and mount our own corporate and personal PR offensives to help others understand how rewarding working claims can be.

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