

Attracting New Talent to the Insurance Industry

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Worldwide, the insurance industry fails to attract new recruits to its gates. With most insurance organizations suffering from an aging workforce, with more than half of their employees on the brink of retirement, it is indisputable that a prominent push by the industry to attract fresh blood is desperately needed. Why? Well, for the future of the industry, of course.

Unfortunately, most experienced insurance professional's lack the knowledge and technological skill set required to meet the industry's current needs and the techno-savvy youngsters lack the experience the industry demands. The truth is- the industry needs the tech-savvy graduates in order to take advantage of the market and the capabilities technology has to offer and the tech-savvy graduates need the support of the experienced seniors to help spot trends in the market and translate data.

It's not only the technological aspect of an insurance organization that suffers when there is a lack of new recruits walking through its doors. A lack of innovative marketing campaigns, products and other ways to reach a customer also comes into play when the demographic of the industry is 'over-the-hill'. Take the GCC for example, 68% of the population in the Gulf is under 35. It seems only logical that you would have an 'under35' team working on ways to attract that target age group to your company. That's not the case. Instead of making insurance attractive to the under 35's with hip, fun, fresh new approaches to making insurance products more approachable and easily accessible, we get to witness the same mundane advertising we see across all of the financial institutions in the Gulf. A few companies have picked up on this and made their products and campaigns more 'trendy', but many still fail to do so. This is probably because the decision makers are 50 + and not up to date with what the under 35's find appealing.

The insurance industry offers something many fields don't: advancement, flexibility, security, a steady field that survived the financial crisis and a skill/experience that you can take anywhere in the world. So what's the problem? Why do so many companies across the globe find it so hard to attract new recruits to the industry? Is it a disconnect and denial from senior executives who refuse or feel threatened by new trainees coming in and taking over? A lack of opportunity for graduates entering the industry? A struggle to market the industry to fresh grads?

All of the above. There is indeed a disconnect between the need for new recruits and executives. Senior executives in the industry are facing the challenge of being able to keep up with the pace of the ever-changing demands of today's techno-savvy world and highly competitive markets while at the same time maintaining organizational focus.

Some argue that it is very difficult to get executive teams to consider the future happenings as opposed to only focusing on what's happening today. We see this especially in the Gulf and more specifically in the UAE.

Senior insurance executives from all over the world come to the country to make their mark and claim their stake in the growing market. Despite UAE being one of the smaller GCC or MENA countries, it is in fact accountable for almost 45% of the regions gross written premium and is the biggest and fastest growing insurance market in the region as well. Unfortunately, many focus on a 5 year plan, versus a ten year plan and do not budget for marketing campaigns, improving customer centricity and building customer/broker loyalty, and last but not least investing in technological services that will help their organization's overall capabilities, revenue and customer touch-points.

It's a somewhat known phenomenon where a GM will fly in, 'hold down the fort' for the 5 year term he/she has committed to serve, and leave a trail of mishaps behind for a new venture in a new organization or city and let the next 5 year executive pick up the pieces. A smarter investment for many organizations in the industry in the region would be to invest in local talent and train the ones who fit the criteria so that instead of a 5-7 year plan, the organizations can benefit from a senior executive who has long standing ties and relations in the community, a lifelong plan (seeing as this is their home country) and a way to implement effective ideas today that will benefit/prepare the organization and country for future business transactions.

On that note, it should be pointed out that for this reason many executives are hesitant to hire new recruits as they pose a threat to their position in the organization, their new life in the big city of Dubai, etc. New recruits pose a threat to the job security and the status quo that many of these senior executives have created for themselves. Selfish? Just a little. In an Insurance conference a few years back, one of the panelists asked a question to the audience (made up of mostly GM's and CEO's in the UAE's insurance industry - all foreigners) where the question stated "how many of you are willing to work yourself out of a job" ie; the topic was on new trainees. The polls came back and a graph was displayed... the answers were pretty significant and spoke for themselves: not many execs were willing to work themselves out of a job.

So, how can we 'hype up' the appeal of the industry to new recruits? By creating more in house internships and training programs for college students and fresh grads, raise awareness and market the industry to universities about the opportunities available, not to mention the rewards of working in the industry and last but not least- create more job opportunities in the organizations. By accepting the fact that some people are on the outs and making room for new talent to come in and take over, learn the laws of the land and apply their own fresh approach to the industry, insurance organizations will more than likely succeed in gaining new talent that will help the market in the future. Don't be afraid of change. In the words of Winston Churchill, "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."

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