

Traits of Modern Insurance Leaders



The state of the insurance industry has come under deep scrutiny, particularly as the pandemic revealed new risks and weaknesses against a backdrop of market volatility. The future of the industry depends upon modern insurance leaders who have the visionary traits to disrupt and innovate within their organizations.

An Omnichannel Approach

More than ever before, consumers have come to rely on digital tools across every facet of their lives. It was an imminent reality, accelerated by the shock of the pandemic. Online insurance purchases have skyrocketed, and the ongoing emergence of insurtech only reinforces the inevitability of the journey ahead.

Having cut its teeth in industries like retail and customer service, omnichannel is now an expectation, and customers will flock to companies that deliver it most effectively. And to do that, the experience must be seamless, easy to use, and deeply integrated with sales support and other key insurance functions. It also must be comprehensive—it might seem easy enough to introduce an omnichannel approach to auto insurance (which many insurers have) but health or life insurance is trickier to do so (and fewer insurers have led the way)—but consumers want it across the board. And insurers must respond accordingly.

What does that mean for modern insurance leaders? It means that legacy insurance experience cannot be the sole cornerstone. It must be complemented with skills and understanding in digital approaches to insurance, including omnichannel but also data intelligence, AI, and more. The role requires a fresh perspective in order to harness new efficiencies and connect with customers at a deeper, more valuable level.

In some cases, this may require hiring external talent to bring new thinking to the table. In other scenarios, many insurers are focused on upskilling their employee base, developing leadership talent to prepare them to take the helm as the company evolves.

Domain Expertise

Fresh perspectives and digital understanding are critical, but deep domain expertise cannot be underestimated. The insurance sector is a highly complex business. It's faced with a host of regulatory challenges, multi-layered distribution, and capital-intensive demands. There's also its position in an often-volatile market; it's highly sensitive to the impact of macro-economic activity. Thus, deep experience combined with critical thinking are key traits for the modern insurance leader. You can't move forward unless you know where you're coming from.

Hand-in-hand with this niche expertise are the foundational skills that everyone in the insurance industry needs to thrive. That means back-to-basics competencies like mathematical acumen and problem-solving, analytical skills and high attention to detail, not to mention, of course, strong communication. It sounds simple, but these are the building blocks of talent that is agile, adaptable, and relevant. These are the people who can identify a company's strengths and weaknesses and move forward with confidence and vision.

Leadership and Accountability

It might seem like a given for insurance talent to need leadership skills, but the reality is that many professionals in senior ranks got there because of their superior skills and experience *regardless* of their leadership abilities. They're excellent at what they do—but is that the kind of talent who can lead the insurance industry into brighter days?

Instead, modern insurance leaders should have a unique blend of soft skills that allow them to naturally manage, coach, and shepherd their teams and companies at large toward success. Accountability is critical; these are leaders who follow through and commit to a certain outcome. Accountability is driven by discipline and consistency, two more key traits for insurance leaders.

But perhaps most importantly is that they must be able to build trust with the people they are leading. Trust requires communication, honesty, empathy, listening, and often, charisma. It also goes hand in hand with humility. A true leader knows there isn't always a right answer; they don't always know every detail or facet of this hugely complex industry at their fingertips. They ask for collaboration and knowledge-sharing, and in doing so, they are able to reach new levels of creativity and innovation.

Diversity

More organizations are beginning to recognize the deeper value of a diverse workforce, particularly within their leadership teams. Historically, the insurance industry has been dominated by a largely white, male workforce. The modern insurance leader needs to turn this around. Diversity sparks greater innovation and higher performance—but it also better serves a company's diverse customer pool. Customers want to feel seen and supported by companies that look and think like they do. Gender and racial diversity is the first step.

Nowhere is this more true and critical than the insurance industry, where every resident of the U.S. is impacted. Health insurance, auto insurance, life insurance—these are things people need regardless of gender or racial or ethnic background. But reaching a more diverse customer base is inevitably more challenging when a company doesn't have the diverse workforce and leadership to respond appropriately.

The future of the insurance industry depends upon diverse leaders—but also leaders who promote an inclusive work culture. Without an inclusive environment, individuals will end up feeling isolated and discouraged, which is antithetical to an innovative, future-focused culture.

In closing, it's clear that in order to innovate within an established sector like insurance, there must be an investment in the right talent. Key traits of modern insurance leaders include omnichannel and digital understanding, deep domain expertise, accountability and leadership, and, finally, a focus on diversity.