

Realising the potential of the mutual leaders of tomorrow

Ellie Anderson, Senior New Business Development Specialist at Thrivent Financial (USA), offers a personal account of her experiences at the 2015 Biennial Conference and recent High Potential Course in Copenhagen, highlighting the importance of developing Gen Y talent at mutual and cooperative insurers.



Ellie Anderson

As I turned the corner and walked down the corridor to the conference area, the gentle hum of hundreds of leaders communicating across language barriers filled my ears. My mind raced in anticipation as I grabbed various reports and publications from the neatly organised tables, each bursting with valuable insights. Handshake by handshake, leader after leader, I made my way to my seat for the start of the 2015 ICMIF Biennial Conference. As a first-time attendee, I was in awe that this epic gathering was taking place only a few blocks down the road from the grey-toned cubicle where I would normally be sitting during any other work day. As I glanced at the agenda and put on my headset for the first panel discussion, I knew this was just the beginning of an exciting new chapter to support the growth and development of ICMIF and other young leaders like me around the globe. As Day One came to a close, I walked to my car with a pocket full of business cards of innovative leaders around the world, a notebook full of learnings, and the motivation to be a change agent in my company. However, I could never have anticipated where this experience would lead me.

The birth of an idea

After reviewing the Minneapolis conference evaluations to discover the overwhelmingly positive feedback about the Gen Y panel, friends at ICMIF and I began to ask ourselves some big, transformational questions: How will our companies win the hearts and minds of employees and customers of tomorrow? What will it take to become leading insurers in the age

of digitalisation and changing customer expectations? How will we respond to potential disruptors? We came up with a radical idea. Rather than having only senior leaders and external experts continue postulating what Gen Y wants and expects, why not lead by example and develop a platform for fresh perspectives to be shared first-hand by young professionals themselves. With a desire to develop future talent and have the Gen Y voice heard at the strategic table, ICMIF commissioned a group of young professionals from around the globe to serve as the Young Leaders Forum. Together, we would lead a panel at ICMIF's *Why Gen Y?* event in York, England, attend the ICMIF High Potential Course in Copenhagen, and design a proposal to ICMIF's Intelligence Committee to expand the Biennial Conference to include a Young Leaders Programme.

A changing workplace

My recent experience in Copenhagen strengthened my passion for getting more young leaders plugged into ICMIF and the global community of mutual and cooperative insurers. Through our three days of leadership training, we were challenged and inspired to a new level of commitment to intentional leadership— and guess what we discovered? People matter most! Through dynamic exercises and discussion, we explored what skills leaders of tomorrow will need so that mutuals can thrive. First, a leader needs to be authentic. Authenticity means having the humility to listen, the ability to disrupt oneself to respond to new learning, and the courage to create a team

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ABOVE AND LEFT Ellie Anderson at ICMIF's High Potential Course, November 2016, Copenhagen, Denmark

culture that celebrates failure. Second, leaders of tomorrow must learn to lead their teams at the intersection of freedom and inspiration, in contrast to fear and control. Many in Gen Y want to be given inspiring challenges that contribute to a greater purpose. This sense of purpose will then translate to intense devotion and drive. Finally, we desire the liberty to approach opportunities in new ways. It may not be 'the way it's always been done,' but by fostering openness to creativity, radically new ways to serve our members and protect communities will arise. These are the types of leaders we want to develop.

Investing in innovation

During our time, we also examined critical issues facing our organisations. No matter where the conversation took us, we'd return to one common root problem - mutual and cooperative insurers are resistant to change and slow to innovate. What a tough conclusion to hear from a group of potential leaders representing mutual and cooperatives around the world! We carried this message - and the urgency to change - into our meeting with the Intelligence Committee and felt honored to be a part of the planning of the 2017 ICMIF Biennial Conference in London, *Redesigning insurance*.

Together, the senior leaders and our team of eight young professionals collaborated to identify the questions the conference agenda will address about how the mutual insurance sector must respond to serve the needs of a changing world. I can assure you the Young Leaders Programme we've crafted will include professional development and networking opportunities, as well as rich additional content at the plenary session that will challenge your bright talent to grow their networks, gain new insights on best practices in the industry, and deepen commitment to the future of cooperative and mutual insurance. With my story as a testimony to the value and necessity of engaging the leaders of tomorrow, my hope is that you make the investment in the future of your company and send your bright young leaders to London in October. I look forward to seeing you there!