

Mass. agents trying to sell insurance careers

Association takes to the community college campuses to attract young people to insurance

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by Pat Healy
InsuranceTimes

BOSTON — Area agents frequently complain that not enough new blood is coming into the industry. Even Bob Vaudreuil, the incoming president of the Massachusetts Association of Insurance Agents, cites this problem as a major concern in an interview in this issue (page 18).

"It's a problem that is rampant throughout the industry," said Tim Larovere, chairman of the MAIA's Career Development Committee and an agent for F.J. Larovere Insurance Agency in Everett, Mass.

"The word we get from our members is that people just can't find anyone," he said.

So MAIA decided to take up the challenge of helping agencies find new people. The association created a committee of agents who are willing to visit area community colleges to discuss insurance careers and act as recruiters of new agents.

Larovere said the biggest needs are for customer service representatives and producers, and the problem with recruiting for these positions is that most college students don't have any idea what these jobs entail. It is the type of job that people seem to fall into, and when they get there they like it, but it is usually not a first-choice career.

"I think it's not on the top of the list for a lot of people," he said. "The public perceives it as being a nowhere job, but actually it's the opposite of that."

Beth Sylvia Caldwell said she fell into the industry, and has found it very exciting. She is one of the owners of Sylvia and Co. Insurance Agency in Dartmouth, Mass., and at 29 years of age she chairs a group called the Young Agents Committee, dedicated to recruiting new agents and networking with other agents under 40 years of age.

"It can be a very profitable and rewarding career," she said. "It's definitely a long-term relationship you can form with clients and a lot of agencies are family-oriented so once you get in it's very easy to make it a long-term career. It's also pretty entrepreneurial because you may be working for somebody else but you control your own destiny."

This is the pitch she delivers to the students she speaks to on career days and at networking events.

Lori Carvalho, director of agency services for MAIA, said it is good to have members of the Young Agents Committee representing the industry because they seem to be able to relate better to students than white-haired men in suits.

Carvalho said when she goes to the college fairs to recruit, she touches upon the security of a career in insurance.

"You are always going to have a job," she said. "I tell them that it's a very stable industry with a lot of opportunity and compensation is comparable to accountants and professional careers. You can really name your own salary if you're a good producer."

Larovere agreed.

"Unlike other industries, we're not laying anybody off," he said.

Larovere also said many students don't realize how much money can be made in insurance.

"The job is rewarding monetarily, specifically for a producer," he said. "Typically you can start off in the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range plus 20 to 30 percent commission, and after a few years of being successful at it it's a six-figure salary. That fact usually causes them to take a little more interest."

The agents plan on visiting as many community colleges in the next year as they can, and will soon expand their focus to include recruiting at junior colleges. □