

Company Culture Thriving Through Disruption

An Interview with Katherine Richardson,
Senior Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer, PURE Group of Insurance Companies

EDITORS' NOTE Katherine Richardson is responsible for developing core people strategies to build upon PURE's workplace culture. She joined PURE in 2017 with extensive experience as a senior HR leader in the insurance industry, leading companies through times of extraordinary growth and change. She is passionate about workplace culture and creating an environment where employees can be successful and engaged. Richardson is a graduate of Texas A&M University with a degree in business and history.



Katherine Richardson

"In many ways, the past few months have been among the busiest and most rewarding of my career. I am exceptionally proud to be a part of this team and the work we've done to thrive through disruption."

COMPANY BRIEF Privilege Underwriters Inc. (PUI), a member of the Tokio Marine Group of Companies, was founded in 2006 and is the holding company for the PURE Group and related entities. PUI and its subsidiaries provide capital support and operational services to the policyholder-owned entity, PURE (pureinsurance.com). PURE is dedicated to creating an exceptional experience for responsible high net worth families, providing customizable coverage for high-value homes, automobiles, jewelry, art, personal liability, watercraft, flood, fraud and cyber fraud. In return for a fee, PURE Risk Management LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of PUI, serves as Attorney-in-Fact for PURE. The PURE Group's low cost of capital, careful member selection and proactive risk management all contribute to highly competitive rates and a Financial Strength Rating of "A (Excellent)" from A.M. Best Company, Inc. Today, PURE's membership includes more than 90,000 families from across the U.S.

How have your employees changed the way they work in order to be effective with the changes that have been necessary for all businesses to make during these uncertain times?

Empathy has always been a primary driver in our values and emotional intelligence is a critical skill we teach. During this crisis, we understood that we needed to meet people where they were in life; each person's reaction to COVID-19 was different, and we could not presume everyone was on equal footing. We value fairness, but the realities of the pandemic applied the burden unevenly, altering our lives in different and significant ways.

We understood that we needed to tend to our team's collective psychological needs, and that we could not sustain our efforts without addressing feelings around safety and security first. Even though we weren't able to physically be together in offices, it was important for employees to continue to experience that they are a part of a community that cares about them and ensure, above all, that they had what they needed to feel safe and secure as COVID-19 unfolded.

We discovered that many in our very motivated and high achieving workforce were struggling with the realization that they could not be 100 percent productive and that their efficiency was altered by our circumstances. Despite many general communications from leadership

offering support, individuals needed to hear from someone in their own management team that we know 100 percent work productivity is out of reach for many, that we see they are trying and that it is unrealistic to think that our teams and individuals can contribute at their absolute best at every moment right now. They needed to hear that they have our specific permission to adjust their expectations for themselves and the teams they are leading. With that permission, you could see a palpable expression of relief that cleared a safe space to find a way to make things work.

We viewed this as unique opportunity to advance communal development. Every morning since mid-March, we have sent a company-wide e-mail with positive guidance on topics ranging from building resilience, gratitude and understanding one's strengths, to more practical support on staying focused, working ergonomically and attending to physical and financial wellness. We created parent support groups organized by a child's age to give working parents a place to talk through challenges and redistributed access to a professional one-on-one counseling service for parents and caregivers. We increased our monthly town halls to a weekly cadence. We launched a weekly "mail-bag," where employees ask our CEO questions ranging from the playful to serious inquiries on our business, industry and marketplace.

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We channeled our urge to act in support of those hurting the most during the pandemic and are far down the path of our goal to contribute \$1 million through the PURE Insurance Foundation with support from Tokio Marine, primarily to charitable organizations addressing food insecurity. We added a matching grant component to the Foundation to amplify the impact of employee giving to causes in health, human services and social justice. We've improved our confidence in virtual training, continuing our planned schedule of learning opportunities and have developed new content to support effective leadership practices in the face of disruption. We have a large commitment to recent college grads and have retooled our recent grad training programs for virtual implementation.

PURE was built with an entrepreneurial spirit and an ability to be nimble and adapt. How is PURE addressing its business during this time in order to succeed in this difficult environment?

Long before COVID-19, PURE had a strong technology infrastructure in place, which has enabled nearly every member of our team to transition to working from home quickly and seamlessly. With laptops, a secure virtual private network and a highly capable IT team, most of our employees were able to begin remote work immediately.

Creating a smooth transition for employees goes hand in hand with ensuring continuity of excellent service for the PURE membership. We have quickly adapted services such as our PURE360™ Risk Management Experience and claims adjusting to fit a remote environment.

Typically, our PURE360 Risk Management Experience is performed in-person with a PURE Risk Manager to identify and provide solutions for areas of risk in a member's home. However, for the past 18 months, PURE has been working on a technology that allows members to perform this home review on their own.

Since social distancing guidelines and shelter-in-place orders were implemented in mid-March, making it impossible in some cases to conduct in-person reviews, thousands of members have engaged with the Self-Directed to PURE360 Risk Management Experience. The app uses chatbot technology to guide members through their home, taking photos and videos of particular areas and answering simple questions and provides risk management solutions

and advice in real time. The response from members who have used this technology has been overwhelmingly positive.

We have also increased the use of PURE Express, a technology that we already had in place to increase the efficiency in handling auto damage claims and, now, also serves to reduce face-to-face interaction. Similarly, we have introduced a tool for inspecting property damages, guiding members as they document home damage with photos and videos, to limit in-person interaction and keep both our members and adjusters safe.

We also wanted to find a way to stay connected with our broker partners throughout this time of remote working and social distancing. We started a webinar series that has become highly popular – a daily 15-minute exploration of issues and solutions across nearly all functional areas of the business.

During this difficult and uncertain time, what are you telling your people and what would you say to young people across the country who are deeply concerned and scared about the future?

We believe that when we focus on developing our strengths, we can achieve better outcomes than when trying to eliminate our weaknesses. When we tap into our character strengths – the positive parts of our personality that impact how we think, feel and

behave – we can better handle stress, we become happier and more confident, we develop more meaningful relationships and we are noticeably more engaged at work. Identifying and exercising our strengths is helping us navigate these uncertain times with positivity and hope.

Social psychology research also tells us that about 50 percent of our happiness is linked to our genetics and only 10 percent of happiness is attributed to life circumstances. That means that about 40 percent of our overall happiness is within our capacity to change. This is a powerful concept, especially now.

By replacing pessimism with more positive thoughts and experiences – expressing gratitude, nurturing social connections and taking care of oneself – people can learn how to become more optimistic. The benefits of this mindset include better relationships, health, coping, performance and more overall positive emotions. And the most optimistic thing about optimism is that it involves skills that can be learned and put into practice.

Even when the present feels wholly negative, and as hard as it may be to make the case for optimism during a time of crisis, that's when positivity happens to be the most useful. Channeling hope and optimism is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that everything will be okay, regardless of the outcome. ●

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