

We Are Unum

An Interview with Liz Ahmed, Executive Vice President, People and Communications, Unum

EDITORS' NOTE Liz Ahmed joined Unum in October 2018 as Executive Vice President of People and Communications, responsible for human resources, diversity and inclusion, corporate social responsibility and corporate communications. Previously, she served as Chief Human Resources Officer at AmTrust Financial Services, a multinational insurance holding company. Prior to that role, she served as Vice President of Human Resources at Equity Trust Company after having served as Senior Vice President of Human Resources at PNC Bank. Ahmed also spent 10 years at Marsh USA in human resources leadership positions. She has served on the executive board of the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center and is a past board member of Dress for Success in Cleveland, Ohio. Ahmed holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Sussex in England, and a master's in organizational design and analysis from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.



Liz Ahmed

COMPANY BRIEF Unum Group (unum.com) provides a broad portfolio of financial protection benefits and services through the workplace and is a leading provider of disability income protection worldwide. Through its Unum U.S., Unum U.K., Unum Poland, and Colonial Life businesses, the company provides disability, life, accident, critical illness, dental and vision

benefits that protect millions of working people and their families. Unum also provides leave and absence management services that streamline the leave experience for employers and employees and stop-loss coverage to help self-insured employers protect against medical costs. Unum reported revenues of \$12 billion in 2019 and provided \$7.5 billion in benefits.

Will you highlight the principles of “We are Unum” and how these principles are embedded in the company culture?

We're proud of the Unum culture and have worked hard over the years to deliver on our promise to help our customers thrive throughout life's moments. Our culture is defined by the We Are Unum values: a caring spirit, an unwavering customer focus, a passion for delivering results, an appetite for taking smart risks and an appreciation for differences. We Are Unum is a touchstone for employees to understand where we are, where we're going and how we'll get there. It's a guide for the journey we're on together and supports our long-term company strategy. We continue to develop policies, strategies and programs targeting inclusive social and economic development, environmental sustainability, and security.

Our performance management system, including our approach to setting goals and the curriculum for Unum's leadership programs, are

aligned to the We Are Unum values. Our new onboarding program for new hires, Welcome Aboard, helps our employees build strong networks, develop business acumen, and get involved in community/charitable events.

Will you provide an overview of your role and key areas of focus at Unum?

As Executive Vice President, I manage the people and communications function with 270 employees in the U.S., U.K., and Ireland. Groups include People (Human Resources), Talent Management, Inclusion and Diversity, Corporate Communications, Brand and Reputation, and Social Responsibility. As a member of Unum's C-Suite Operations Committee, I'm a strategic advisor to senior leaders providing guidance on their people strategy and supporting the organization with its business goals. A top priority my team is exploring is the future of work. We're examining the research, preparing our workforce of tomorrow, and creating the vision for the Unum employee experience.

For much of 2020, my daily focus has been keeping our employees safe during the global pandemic, while ensuring we can still deliver for our customers. We continue to adapt to the changing environment. Earlier this year, we quickly shifted to remote working and redeploying staff to key business areas of need. Late in the summer we safely returned about 20 percent of our employees to the office. With adaptability, we continue to support a multi-generational workforce navigating a time of extreme uncertainty.

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How critical is it for the people and communications function to be a part of business strategy in order to be effective in the role?

At Unum, our people are our biggest asset. We create and implement career development programs, provide a modern portfolio of benefits, and cultivate a culture of inclusion and caring with a focus on sustainable growth and well-being for all. Unum is in the business of employee benefits, which makes my team a key strategic partner to the business on a few different levels. We collaborate with our business partners on what is important to large and small employers.

Will you discuss Unum’s commitment to diversity and inclusion and how critical it is to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table when making business decisions?

Inclusion and diversity among employees with varying perspectives and talents enriches our organization and strengthens our ability to serve the needs of today’s dynamic workforce. It promotes innovation and flexibility in our products and services and helps ensure we remain authentic and relevant. Even how we approach our dress code, which was recently updated to include race-based hairstyles, is about helping more employees feel empowered and accepted at work, and they in turn help us better serve customers.

One of our key strategic priorities includes increasing diverse representation among our leadership. We track and adjust strategies to enhance

diversity across the enterprise. It also drives our work to attract, retain, and develop the best talent which includes promoting employee resource groups, multicultural leadership development opportunities and safe-space conversations.

This year, Unum also launched a new Social Justice Fund and will provide \$500,000 to organizations fighting racial injustice and working to end discrimination and bias.

Together, these efforts, coupled with an unwavering commitment to inclusion and diversity, drive our business and deliver on Unum’s purpose to help the working world thrive throughout life’s moments.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

There is tremendous opportunity for women to grow and lead in this industry. Insurance companies typically have a higher percentage of women in the general workforce, but they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. Studies show gender-diverse teams have higher sales and profits than male-dominated teams. More female talent in an organization creates greater job satisfaction, stronger organizational dedication, less burnout, and higher engagement. Unum has pledged to implement the Paradigm for Parity 5-Point Action Plan, designed to help companies increase the number of women of all races, cultures and backgrounds in leadership positions.

We’ve seen success when our senior male leaders partner with our Women’s Professional Network Employee Resource Group on

educational programming related to gender. This group helps remove barriers and creates a safe space where our employees can ask questions and get honest feedback. The network helps high-potential women gain the confidence to take the next step in their careers. Through a year-long sponsorship program, those women can accelerate relationships with executives that might not have occurred organically.

This year Unum also launched a Multicultural Leadership Development Program to prepare racially diverse employees for the next level of their career.

Research indicates women are also overwhelmingly the primary decision makers for their family’s healthcare. We create an environment with flexible work schedules and locations, benefits to support new and working moms, and provide access to medical and behavioral health resources.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this challenging and uncertain time?

Be flexible, agile, and ready for any challenge. Find ways to stand out and set yourself apart. Don’t be afraid to use your unique life experiences, especially now, to showcase your problem-solving skills and resiliency. Keep learning and taking smart risks. Take advantage of internal programs and offerings at your company and embrace online learning. Raise your hand to lead a high visibility project. Remember that professional growth isn’t always vertical or fast. ●

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