

Alliant's Growth

An Interview with James W. Crystal, Vice Chairman, Alliant Insurance Services

EDITORS' NOTE After joining his father, Frank Crystal, at Crystal & Company in 1961, James Crystal was named President in 1963. Crystal serves as Vice Chairman and Member of the Board of Alliant Insurance Services. He is also Vice Chairman, Trustee, and Member of the Executive and Finance Committees and Co-Chairman of the Audit Committee of Mount Sinai Medical Center, along with serving on the board of K2 Intelligence.



James W. Crystal

COMPANY BRIEF With a history dating back to 1925, Alliant Insurance Services (alliant.com) is one of the nation's leading distributors of diversified insurance products and services. Operating through a national network of offices, Alliant offers a comprehensive portfolio of services to clients.

What have been the keys to Alliant's growth and leadership in the industry and how critical is innovation to Alliant's business?

I believe that one of the important keys to Alliant's growth is the new employees who are joining us. This is important for growing not only the size of Alliant but, more importantly, it is the welcoming of new people and leadership who bring knowledge and thought processes under the Alliant umbrella, thereby adding diversity, along with new, fresh, out-of-the-box ideas. These new and innovative ideas expand the company from within and, ultimately, impact

our clients. With a changing world, no company can grow simply based on its history, no matter how successful it has been. It has to be open to change which has proven to be an integral part of Alliant's growth. It's "sink or swim" in any business. The insurance industry is so diverse, with so many unexpected turns, that I believe we will always have more options to expand and grow.

How is technology impacting the way insurance products and services are delivered?

This year, more than ever, technology has proven to be a key part of the insurance industry, helping us to keep on top of products and communication with clients, underwriters and brokers. The fact that Alliant has remained on top of its game and has been able to create new types of coverage and effectively communicate their benefits to clients is a testament to this capability. Although we have not been in the office physically, we have not skipped a beat, proving to our clients that the "show will go on" and that we were, have been, and always will be, here for each and every one.

What do you see as Alliant's responsibility to the communities it serves and to being a force for good in society?

We need to be there for our communities, not only for insurance, but also to help them in times of need. Our employee associates, working through our company outreach programs, have a proven connection with those communities.

What do you feel are the key characteristics needed to be successful as an insurance broker?

Being self-motivated is very important, although not easy for some people. Reaching out to see how Alliant can better assist a potential client, as well as being in constant communication with current clients, are a must. Developing creative solutions for challenging insurance issues is critical as it demonstrates to the client/potential client the interest and desire to achieve what they may have thought was impossible. Having experienced this past year with the pandemic, it is also important to be patient and understanding with our clients and to truly listen to their needs, while still being a pit bull when it comes to achieving results for those clients.

What are the keys to New York's recovery and rebuilding from the pandemic?

New York is known to have experienced many challenging times over the years, but we have always pulled through due to the fortitude and resilience of the people. Following the last year living with COVID, I feel that if we remain strong and pull together, we can achieve anything.

What has made the insurance industry so exciting and dynamic for you?

The challenges over this past year, although stressful, have made it exciting and stimulating. When an underwriter or associate says that something cannot be done, it acts as a stimulus for me to get it done, or at least get as close as possible to what is needed/desired by the client. This last year has been especially dynamic and challenging. The pandemic not only affected the United States, but the entire world. Working with people in other countries, hearing their stories about how COVID affected them both in business and personally, puts a different perspective on life because some of it is out of our control. With insurance, we can take what we have experienced and learned and then put that into perspective for our clients in achieving the best and most thoughtful results.

What advice do you offer young people interested in a career in the insurance industry?

I would emphasize to those interested in insurance, or even those who don't know anything about insurance but who are energetic, who enjoy problem solving, who want to constantly learn about an evolving industry, and who are hard workers and dedicated to their clients, that this is the place for you. ●

"With a changing world, no company can grow simply based on its history, no matter how successful it has been. It has to be open to change which has proven to be an integral part of Alliant's growth."