

A Relationship Business

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 Congregation Emanuel.



James W. Crystal

COMPANY BRIEF 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.

How do you define the Alliant difference and what have been the keys to the strength and industry leadership of Alliant Insurance Services?

The difference and strength of Alliant is due to having groups of producers, as well as underwriting and servicing groups, paired in most cases by industry. This gives our clients a total package of sales underwriting service that understands their business and does not deal in generalities. This has been particularly true of the construction industry, for which we are a U.S. leader.

How do you focus your efforts as Vice Chairman of Alliant Insurance Services?

In addition to maintaining my own personal sales function in the company, my

focus as Vice Chairman of Alliant is primarily within a Board member role, along with a sales function whereby I help other people who would like my assistance. I sincerely believe that without being involved in all these various processes, it would be impossible for me to give a full package of service to Alliant's clients and my fellow employees and Board members. It is very important for me in my capacity as Vice Chairman to look at the entire picture and not just one function.

You have said that insurance is a relationship business. Do you worry that technology is going to take away from the personal side and human touch with clients?

I do not believe that technology is going to take away from the personal side and human touch of what I feel is a relationship between the client and Alliant. Headed by the client's personal contact, we are able to maintain a close-fitting rapport, and while technology does provide Alliant with more facts and data, it also allows us to pursue the personal side of the relationship while obtaining the best service and premium results.

You have spent your career in the insurance industry. What has made the industry so special for you?

Over the years, the insurance industry has become special to me, not only due to my involvement acting as a client representative in various facets with numerous companies, but also due to serving on the Boards of several insurance companies, Alliant included.

In addition, learning about one's clients and their differences that define them make for an interesting and challenging endeavor.

You commit your time and resources to philanthropic work. What has made philanthropy so important to you and how do you decide where to focus your efforts?

When you are as fortunate as I have been to have enjoyed a career, both intellectually and financially, that exceeded your expectations, it is critical that you give back to the community to help others achieve their best results. With the assistance of philanthropists, it is possible for others to accomplish much from both a business and education point of view, no matter what their station in life. This ultimately becomes critical as well for our country.

Do you feel that the insurance industry has been effective at telling its story about the type of careers it offers to the next generation?

I feel that the industry has become much more effective than it was when I first started disseminating information; such as what it achieves and what the future holds for careers. Today, with the aid and positive exposure of the Internet and other forms of advertising, along with experiencing the personal involvement of various individuals who are considering a career in the industry, I feel there is now a better awareness which is why many are choosing this path. When I started in this business it was always looked upon as a "second-class citizen" with many other professions that were preferred. Today I think we are equal to any other profession and ahead of many. ●

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