

**A: What direction were you driving?**

*I: I wasn't driving.*

**A: How fast were you driving?**

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**A: Was anyone in your car with you?**

*I: No.*

**A: Were any of your passengers injured?**

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**A: You live and work at the mobile home park on Cable, is that right?**

*I: Yes, the main trailer is my residence.*

**A: How long?**

*I: It's about 62 feet.*

**A: Um. Do you live alone?**

*I: Since my wife Janice died, it's just me and my cat, Candy.*

**A: Uh.Huh. Does your wife use the office as well?**

*I: Not since she died.*

**A: How about Candy?**

*I: My cat?*

**A: No, wait ... didn't you say Candy died?**

*I: No, I said Janice died.*

**A: Oh, that's a relief.**

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**A: Which direction were you traveling?**

*I: I wasn't. I was coming out of the store.*

**A: How fast were you going?**

*I: I ... well ... I guess about a mile an hour I guess. How fast do people usually walk?*

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**A: Can you tell me which direction you were traveling?**

*I: Yes, I was headed toward the ACE Hardware store.*

**A: And how fast were you traveling?**

*I: Oh, not very fast. I mean, slower than everyone else.*

**A: Were you going the speed limit?**

*I: Yes. Yes. Slower probably.*

**A: And do you know what the speed limit is?**

*I: No.*

**A: Which direction was the other person coming from?**

*I: They were coming from that street where that big tree is.*

**A: How fast?**

*I: Really fast. I mean, super fast.*

**A: Faster than the speed limit?**

*I: Definitely.*

Having a well-prepared strategy along with actively listening can guarantee a quality statement. Silence — don't be afraid of it. ■

# While Others Wait, Some Invest in Training

*RSA Canada Shines Its Light on Employee Development*

*By Carl Van*

**T**imes are definitely tough for most insurance companies these days. When times get tough, training and education usually are the first casualties of cost-cutting directives. This is nothing new; it has been standard operating procedure ever since the first company declared the development of their employees "a top priority."

Nevertheless, there are some companies that realize in the long run, they must keep their employees trained and educated despite the downturn. Why? Because they believe it's more profitable.

This article is the first in a series that will focus on those companies that decided to buck the trend and found tremendous returns on their investments in the talent and skill of their people.

## The Company

RSA Canada has been writing insurance since 1845 and is part of one of the world's largest insurance groups with 20 million customers worldwide.

RSA provides insurance products and services in more than 130 countries and employs 22,000 people in 32 countries.

RSA Canada is part of a leading home, auto, and business insurer, obtaining its business through a large network of independent brokers. It is the largest marine insurer and second-largest travel insurer in Canada. It employs about 3,000 people. In 2008, it wrote \$1.7 billion in net written premiums.

RSA Canada believes its "hassle-free claims service" is a key differentiator in the marketplace. It is also focused on providing leading broker IT solutions. Not only have they invested in these leading IT solutions, but they also have

implemented environmentally friendly ways of doing business by using tools such as EZ-Docs, which allows its personal insurance brokers to receive their copies of documents electronically instead of on paper.

Strong broker investment and relationships remain at the heart of RSA Canada's strategy. They invest in broker education through initiatives such as their Making Partner program, designed in partnership with Queen's University, to provide leadership and business skills to brokers who are on track to becoming senior managers.



*Irene Bianchi is vice president, claims and corporate services, for RSA Canada. She has been a firm believer in employee development, especially in difficult financial times.*

## The Task

Irene Bianchi, vice president, claims and corporate services, and Maria Holland, national claims customer care manager, attended the annual Claims Education Conference in San Diego, Calif. Both Bianchi and Holland had been asked by their company to look for ways to improve claims customer service, but also to save money, since it was aware

that the financial system was going to get difficult all around the world. Among the many subjects offered they believe their people could benefit from was the "Awesome Claims Customer Service" course.

While many who are faced with the directive to save money automatically cut training, Bianchi and Holland decided to go another route. They decided to seek out ways to ultimately save money by investing in the thing they knew brought hefty returns.

What they found was an opportunity. An opportunity to not only improve the

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level of customer service that their claims people were currently providing, but also an opportunity to reduce expenses. What was that opportunity? Training. But training is an expense, isn't it? The answer, according to Holland and Bianchi, is "It depends. If you trust in your people enough to believe they will put their training into place, then the time and money they save through improved efficiency is not a cost at all. It's an investment."

To understand this comment, you must first understand Irene Bianchi and Maria Holland.

**The Decision Makers**

Irene Bianchi is currently vice president, claims and corporate services, for RSA Canada. She is a graduate of Queen's University, where she received an Honours BA in 1981. She began her insurance career in 1986, and joined RSA in 1993 as in-house litigation counsel. From there, she was promoted to various positions such as chief litigation counsel, major case unit leader, national claims leader, director of international claims, and then on to her current position. She now is responsible for setting and executing the strategic direction for the Canadian Claims Division, enabling the transfer of knowledge and best practices throughout the International RSA community.

Bianchi's devotion to education, development, and training was obvious throughout her career. She is a graduate of the Inaugural Executive Development Program, and received the Award for Technical Excellence from the Technical Academy. She is steadfast in her belief that employees need the support that only new and innovative training can provide.

About training Bianchi says, "One should never stop learning from everyone they encounter. Training programs need to build from the input given by front-line people as they know customers best." Customers are always on her mind, which is obvious as she continues, "The most rewarding part of my job is seeing employees enjoy their interactions with happy customers." Asked to what she attributes her success in this area, she replies, "Hiring the right people with the right attitude to bring vision to life."

Bianchi's leadership style has been inspiring others. When discussing her success in this area and her ability to create enthusiasm for the customer, she nods and says, "Hey, as Napoleon Bonaparte one said, 'A leader is a dealer in hope.'"

Maria Holland graduated from Ryerson University with a degree in Disability Studies and second degree in Family and Community Practice Counseling. She also has her Chartered Insurance Professional designation from the Insurance Institute of Canada.

Prior to beginning her insurance career in 1996, Holland was a mental health counselor for 12 years with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and worked for the Ministry of Education in Toronto. She has worked for several insurance companies. In 2003, she joined RSA as a claims team leader. Her dedication to excellence has been recognized throughout her career with promotions to senior litigation specialist, road adjuster, subrogation leader, and claims team leader of commercial trucking.

At the time of the conference, she was national claims customer care manager, responsible for setting national standards for how RSA engages its customers from a value proposition. She has researched and developed the current claims value proposition of hassle-free claims service, providing fast, easy customer-care to their customers, which includes the delivery of new initiatives and service commitments. To celebrate customer service wins, Holland runs a quarterly contest to celebrate letters of commendations from their customers, brokers, and employees. She has also been instrumental in bringing the Voice of the Customer telephone survey system to RSA Canada.

Holland has recently been promoted to proposition manager, personal lines/corporate marketing. She attributes her success to, "Being given autonomy to think outside the box. Being surrounded by positive, passionate people who believe in change and always putting the customer first."

Holland's enthusiasm rings out loud and clear when discussing these responsibilities as she comments, "Currently I am excited about the opportunity to review and develop new customer value propositions based on competitive analysis, customer segmentation, and broker and customer insights." Her view of training and education is molded by her commitment to the customer. In fact, she says the most rewarding part of her new position is, "Being surrounded by people and leaders who are positive and really care about doing the right thing for our customers and employees." Even more impressive is her belief that any employee who wants to do a good job is entitled to continuous training and development.

"You are never too old or wise to learn something new," she says. "Investing in training and education equips our employees with the right tools and knowledge to keep our company moving with the changing needs of our customers."

**The Short Term**

Now, back to the decision to invest in training while others were cutting back. When they returned from the conference, Holland and Bianchi began to work their magic. They were able to demonstrate that by providing enhanced claims customer ser-



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vice to their customers, not only would the investment pay for itself through increased customer retention and even new business, but also four or five times that much in time savings on the part of the claims staff.

"After the first round of training of the Awesome Claims Customer Service," said Holland, "we found not only did customer service survey scores jump immediately, but also our employees were relating story after story about how much time they were saving and how much more enjoyable their jobs were."

Bianchi agreed, and added, "This really was enough to realize for every dollar we invested in this training, we were getting back five, six, maybe even seven dollars in return. That is a good return anytime, but when everyone is focused on ways to cut costs, it makes even more sense. We've been running the Awesome Claims Customer Service, or Brilliant Claims Customer Service course as it is called in Canada and the U.K., for over a year now. The returns continue to roll in. This has allowed us to expand our training to include the Critical Thinking for Claims class, as well as the Statement Taking and Information Gathering class that the International Insurance Institute designed for us."

### The Long Term

RSA Canada has done well. Their current customer satisfaction rating is 97.2 percent, and 95.8 percent say they would renew their policies with RSA based on their customer experience

Other accomplishments include receiving the BOMA Certificate of Building Excellence, and the BOMA Power Partner recognition award for their contribution and commitment to energy conservation and environmental stewardship in Ontario.

Globally, they have won the Dow Jones Sustainability Index Sector Mover award and are a member of the FTSE4Good responsible investor index.

RSA believes its strongest assets are their people. They successfully trade all over the world through their skills and expertise. They insure the assets of millions of customers everyday — so forgive them if they take great care of our own. RSA offers:

A dynamic and supportive environment to help their employees grow and accelerate their careers.

A strong culture of learning and development.

A performance management process with a real focus on the individual.

A range of talent development programs to support their employees at various stages of their careers.

### The Philosophy

But isn't it a long haul from the initial investment in training to the return on the investment? To that Holland replies, "Well, as they say, there are no short cuts to any place worth going." ■

Carl Van is President & CEO of International Insurance Institute and author of the Awesome (Brilliant) Claims Customer Service program utilized throughout the U.S., Canada and the U.K. He may be reached at 504-393-4570 or [www.InsuranceInstitute.com](http://www.InsuranceInstitute.com). The on-line video version is available at [www.ClaimsEducationOnLine.com](http://www.ClaimsEducationOnLine.com).

## Online Negotiation Video Goes Live

Following the highly praised *Exceptional Claims Customer Service* video is the brand-new *Negotiations for the Claims Professional* online training program. This is a must-view for any claims professional that spends time negotiating with customers and/or attorneys. The goal is for participants to:

- Learn the difference between great negotiators and everyone else. Find out what the three critical factors in negotiations are and how to use them effectively while negotiating.
- Learn how to negotiate for cooperation and avoid using the claims hammer; how to say things the right way to get customers to be patient, trust you, and be more reasonable.
- Learn how to identify emotional factors when negotiating, prepare for an opening statement, and staying in your conversation.
- Learn how expert negotiators prepare to effectively negotiate with attorneys.

For more information, go to [www.ClaimsEducationOnLine.com](http://www.ClaimsEducationOnLine.com). ■

## Claims Education Conference Adds Sessions

The program for the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Claims Education Conference continues to grow. So far, the breakout sessions are:

- Awesome Claims Customer Service
- The Think/Feel Negotiation Strategy: The Key to Knowing What People Want
- Teambuilding Games
- Motivating Employees: One Size Fits One
- Critical Thinking for Claims: 10 Pitfalls to Watch Out For
- Making Your Point: Communicating Effectively with Anyone
- Time Management for Claims
- Building the Guiding Team: The Key to Successfully Managing Change
- Dealing with Difficult Customers: How to Effectively Deal with Snide Comments and Angry People
- Litigation Management

The fun activities continue to grow, as well. A river cruise along the Mississippi, a golf outing at a PGA course, a carriage ride through the historic French Quarter, and a Dine-A-Round featuring three of famous chef Emeril Lagasse's restaurants are all in the making. ■

For a complete description of each of these program sessions, go to [www.ClaimsEducationOnLine.com](http://www.ClaimsEducationOnLine.com).

