

## **The Young Members Committee presents**

### **“So you want to be a CEO?”**

**An audience with Russell Higginbotham FCII  
CEO, Swiss Re Europe S.A., UK branch**

**Tuesday 12 March 2013**

## **Part 1 – Presentation by Russell Higginbotham FCII**

A lot of people in this industry say "I never planned to be in insurance or reinsurance". When I was about to go to university, my Dad said to me, "There is an insurance company in the local paper advertising for undergraduate trainees for summer work and they will give you a little bursary to buy books; you should really put yourself forward as it's a great way to get some experience".

My degree was actually in business and marketing – not technical subjects. I applied, was interviewed and became the first non-actuarial person with a marketing degree to be taken on as an undergraduate trainee. I was put in the marketing department and each summer I went back and worked my way through all the departments. When I finished my degree, my friends were going to work for Procter & Gamble, Mars, Unilever and other big brands, so when I started writing to them, their response was, "Your experience is in insurance, you'd better stay there". In that way, before I even finished university, I was cast in the role of insurance – not intentionally – but I can assure you it has been a great career so far for me, and very rewarding even though it wasn't what I had planned.

From that insurance company, which I worked for after my degree, I made the brave move to London to work for Munich Re. After three years with Munich Re, I moved to Swiss Re at the age of 28. This turned out to be a good career move and I've been with Swiss Re for 19 years. Around half way through my career, I hit a point where things were not moving in the way I had hoped. The people around me and my boss were not that much older than me and it felt like a glass ceiling. So Swiss Re being an international company, it asked during an annual appraisal, "Would you be willing to move internationally?"

I soon received a call from the UK CEO at the time asking me to come to his office, where he said "We've got a new opportunity for you". I started thinking perhaps Paris or Milan but instead I was offered to run the business in Japan and I accepted. When you make these types of move your life becomes quite diverse.

Halfway through my four years in Japan, I was running the Korean office as well as Japan. After four years I was moved to Australia, then after four years in Australia I

came back to London to run the business here. And that brings me to where I am now - a whistle-stop overview of my career so far.

Now, on to the things I have been asked to talk about:

### **Succeeding in insurance or reinsurance: skills, qualities and how to cultivate them**

These are things I have learnt over a period of time. Reinsurance, which is where I work, is quite a technical sector and insurance, quite a technical subject. However, I don't believe you have to be a technician to succeed. General management is what I do. I'm a general manager and a businessman. A lot of you in this room are 'technical' people which is great but you don't need to be a technician to succeed. Sometimes I observe in the Swiss Re world, people who are technical, and therefore want to be perfectly technical in everything they do and want to know everything about anything. I am not an expert but there are people around me who can help and I think, in a humble way, that's not a bad place to be. Don't try to do everything yourself because there are lots of people around you who can help – that's point number one.

### **Investing in training and personal development**

This is key. Whatever background you come from it is incumbent on you as an individual to think about how to develop yourself. You can sit and wait for your manager to do it or for the organisation to send you on management courses but, by far the best way to do it is to take personal ownership of your career. Think about what you want to achieve and what you need to do to get there. More than likely, someone is not going to do it for you even if you have a really, really good boss – you may still need to do it yourself.

Common sense and a good business head go a long way. In a world full of very technical people if you have good common sense and you think about the business drivers and what adds value to your business, this can go a long way. This comes back to the point of being a generalist rather than, necessarily, a specialist.

Understand your industry, your sector, and your clients. Mapping it out in your head and understanding how it all works together is quite important as often, when one is starting out in their career, it is difficult to connect the dots. It's a big world out there and I would encourage everyone to think about how it all connects.

Reinsurance. Think about one end of the chain all the way through to the consumer. There are lots and lots of little things that happen in between – think about that in the big picture sense. What I say to our guys here is, when we talk about products and solutions, if you always put yourself in the end customer's perspective, that's not a bad thing to do. Put yourself in the customer's shoes and be flexible.

### **Professional qualifications**

What do I think about professional qualifications, well, education in the broad sense? When I came into the industry having a degree was not that common but things have changed.

If you did not have a degree and came into the industry early, working on professional development you could get ahead of the game. Now a degree has become almost mandatory.

What about a Master's Degree? I did an MBA. One of the reasons I did an MBA, as well as my ACII and FCII, was because I had a business and marketing background. In a world of technical people, as you go through your career, you start to feel that perhaps you do need to beef up some of your skills and fill gaps. I could have tried to really specialise in marketing but I decided to take a broader approach.

For an MBA, when you get to the final year, you really have to specialise in a subject. The easy thing for me to do would have been to specialise in marketing but I remember saying to my boss at the time, "I've got to choose my specialisation – what shall I specialise in?" She said, "I bet you're thinking of doing marketing but what's your weakest subject?". "Well", I said, "Business finance...", so she said, "Choose business finance" which I did. Business finance was really hard because it was something I didn't have expertise in, but I'm glad I did it because now when I deal with actuaries and CFOs I understand their language. I can understand balance sheets, profit and loss statements, and how businesses work – and things like that make quite a big difference.

What I would say is don't always take the easy road, and also, you don't necessarily have to do insurance related qualifications.

A lot of what I am saying here is to fill the gaps but also differentiate yourself. You all want to succeed in your career but how are you going to make yourself different and make yourself, as an individual, stand out? Never stop. Professional qualifications and personal development are things you have to continue throughout your whole career. When you stop, your career might plateau. I really think you should be learning all the time. In my job, I find I'm learning constantly – whether that's formally or informally. You just have to have an attitude that things are always changing faster and faster and, as one gets older, it gets harder to keep up.

### **Getting noticed by people that matter**

I think when you are in an organisation you have to understand the pulse of the company and what's on the minds of the leaders. You can get that by listening to them and looking at strategy; that means you are going to be thinking as they think and talking the language they talk and that's what they want to hear.

### **Asking questions and making observations**

When leaders of organisations make presentations like this one and it comes to Q&A, we are so grateful when someone puts their hand up with a question rather than everyone's hands being down. To get noticed you need to ask the right questions and not look a complete idiot – being on your toes makes a difference because you do get noticed. Of course this is easier for some people than for others.

People who are successful in their career and probably personal life too, focus on things they can influence and change. We can all sit here moaning about the weather, the company strategy and the quality of the copier but I would say to you: if you cannot change something don't spend much time on it. What's the point? I try

to think about things where I can make a difference and put my energy there. You only have a certain amount of energy and time in your working day so why waste it on things you can't do anything about? You might feel better getting it off your chest but in the end everyone around you feels depressed and nothing has changed. It is more positive to think about the things you can change.

### **Elevator pitches**

You get into the elevator and the CEO gets in. If you are a bubbly and outgoing person you probably have no problem talking to that person about what's on your mind but if you are not, it's more difficult. So if you want to be more formal about this you should almost have a list in your pocket so if someone important gets in the elevator with you, you know what are you going to say to them. What's going to make them remember you? Or are you going to let them get their Blackberry out and both of you turn to your respective corners? Then they'll get out and that's an opportunity lost in many ways.

So you have to have three key points to say to someone beyond the general courtesy such as "I really liked your presentation on.....", "I saw you speaking on.....", "I read your paper on.....". Ask a question. It is easy to ask a question, it's probably the easiest way to start a conversation, and have an opinion about it as well.

Now this is one which I would encourage all my colleagues in the room to do. Make your boss look good because everyone wants to succeed and if you can help your boss to succeed, he's going to help you succeed. He/she may take all the glory but, hopefully, ultimately, they will be grateful to you and appreciate what you do to help them succeed. A lot of success in life is making people around you look good and feel good.

A lot of this is about delivery. You can have the best elevator pitch but if you are not delivering anything ultimately you will get caught out. So if you make your boss look good that means you are doing something right. If you are doing something right it's good for you, it's good for them, it's good for the company ultimately and that's the reward.

### **Planning and career path**

As I said at the start, drive your own career. You might have a boss who is really good, an HR or training department who are good but ultimately and at some point in your career, you won't have it. Most companies invest a lot of money in training and development so the money is there for you to grab. You don't want to be a person going on a training course every week but equally you don't want to be a person who goes once a year, or who gets to the end of the year and hasn't done anything. Really take charge and drive it yourself.

I remember asking my Mum how Dad did so well in his business – she replied he was in the right place at the right time. There is definitely something in that but equally if you are in the wrong place or it's the wrong time, you have to change it. If you just sit there and wait, you'll continue to be in the wrong place. I changed my career path by going overseas. It doesn't have to be an international move because not everyone wants to do that, but if it's not the right time or right place you should know it and I would encourage you to do things to change it.

### **Go global – even if only for a fortnight**

It's a big, wide world out there. It's much more accessible than it was when I first started my career. Swiss Re offers rotational opportunities to staff. We are keen to get our people out to Asia, Latin America and to other parts of the world. Some people don't want to move. I was abroad for over eight years, longer than I had planned, but I think companies are quite open to that. Perhaps your company is UK only, then talk to a reinsurer or another company where you can get global experience. A lot of our people have spent time in these markets and I think it adds a lot to their personal development and knowledge.

When your employer or prospective employer looks at your resume it shows you have experience in some of these emerging markets. Again, in terms of making yourself look different, it makes you stand out. It doesn't have to be for eight years; even just going on a project is a great thing to do.

### **Demonstrate delivery**

You can be a bit of a 'suck-up' to the bosses, ask questions, have a great elevator pitch but, fundamentally, if you are not good at your job at some point you are going to be found out. What matters most to people like me is success and delivery – not excuses, not moaning. Sure problems come up and we have to deal with them but what I want to see, and what my boss wants to see, is delivery. What I'm measured against is a business plan we set every year so if I am under that plan that's not a good story. What my boss wants to see is over-achieving against that plan. If I can do that every year, he leaves me alone – which is what I like! So when you think about your role, if you can deliver and even better, over-deliver, that's going to set you on a good path.

Sometimes people say it was good luck or bad luck but you can make your own luck too. If things are not going well – change them. A lot of this is about taking control for yourself and I think it is very important. I have been offered different jobs inside Swiss Re and outside Swiss Re but I think you always have a sense of whether it is the right thing to do or not.

I have turned jobs down and I do wonder sometimes what it would have been like to take a different path but I think I have pretty much made the right choices. When you are faced with a choice, whether it is a new job, a change of position or a move overseas, you probably know inside what the right answer is. I would just say to everyone: sit down and think how you are feeling about it. If it doesn't feel right, perhaps you should not do it. But you also have to balance it against feeling scared or a bit nervous about the new role and thinking: can I do this? When I turned up in Japan and there were all these Japanese people around me, I thought: oh dear, what am I going to do next? That was scary, but it did not mean I had made the wrong decision. It just meant I had to sit down and think about what I was going to do next.

**Part 2 – Interview conducted by Charity Baxter ACII**  
**Assistant Vice President, Property & Specialty, Swiss Re Europe S.A., UK**  
**branch & Insurance Institute of London Young Members Committee Member**

**Charity:**

Thank you, Russell. I think you have made some very good points about differentiation. For a lot of us it is the easier route to sit in your corner and do what you do and not go out of your comfort zone, but it obviously does not get you as far so it is a good thing for everyone to think about.

In terms of your average day, what does a day in the life of Russell look like?

**Russell:**

My diary is kept very full and very busy. Take today. I started off at eight o'clock this morning in this room hosting an event with a company who organise team building days. We use them and they asked if they could use our facilities and if I would say a few words.

I went from there to a meeting, and then I met clients, a broker and attended a lot of internal meetings. I sat down at my desk for five minutes and ate a sandwich....so it rolls on like that. What I love most about my job is that every day is different. It is packed, it is busy, but there is a lot of variety and I feel really lucky and privileged to do the job that I do. It is tiring but a lot of fun.

**Charity:**

You just answered my next question...which was: What is your favourite part of your job? So, I will move on and ask: What is your least favourite part of the job?

**Russell:**

The favourite part is the diversity. The least favourite....I do not know about other organisations but at Swiss Re we have a lot of committees and meetings about 'stuff' and I don't find them particularly exciting. People look for time in my diary and they always seem to want an hour – always an hour – but I try to push it down to 30 minutes or 15 minutes because you can get so much done in a space of time if you are focussed and in this job, time becomes quite precious.

When we do have a committee meeting that I chair it is great because when you chair a meeting it puts you in a position of power. You can have an hour and a half meeting but if you are chairing it you can reduce it down to 45 minutes, so you have bought some time in your diary, and that is a chance to sit at your desk and go through emails or talk to people in the office. So time wasting is my least favourite.

**Charity:**

If you think back over your career what do you think is the best move you have made?

**Russell:**

I would definitely say it was my move to Japan. I had reached a point in my career where I would have had to wait a long time or something would have to break. So although it was challenging in terms of moving to a different country, and challenging career-wise to go from a team of five or six people in the UK to an office of 50

people in a foreign country, I would say it was my best move and a good move by Swiss Re as well!

When I talk about delivery.....Japan is a really, really tough market and has been for Swiss Re, and I would say with the team we delivered. We turned a flat, boring market into some growth in profit. As a consequence of that it was noticed and I was asked to go and run our Australia/New Zealand business which is a much bigger office with 200 people and over a billion dollars in turnover. I do remember walking into the first staff meeting and being introduced as the new CEO and seeing 200 people standing in a room .....so when you go from five or six people to 50 people, then 200 people it seems quite a big step and everyone is looking at you and you think: it's me....I better say something now!

I guess you get these moments of realisation where you think: OK, I have accepted something, now this is the reality and you have to get on with it. It is a key point in whether you succeed or whether you fail.

**Charity:**

We have a lot of young people here, what do you think the market is going to look like in 20 years when the people in this room are running things? The industry as well as society in general has moved on a long way from 20 years ago.

**Russell:**

It is hard to say because when I look back 20 years, I recall those were the days when senior management had their own dining room and washroom and a suite of offices no one ventured into. It is a completely different world now, everyone sits on the same floor, everyone is accessible and everyone talks to everyone. I am sure it is going to be different again, perhaps everyone will work remotely but, at the end of the day, our business is a people business and we all want to interact and have relationships, so perhaps we will be a lot more efficient in the way we do things. In 20 years time, who knows?

**Charity:**

Are there big differences in the way younger people work compared to the way you work, or the way you have seen things work in the last few years?

**Russell:**

I like to think that today most management is in touch and more approachable. I might not live my life through my smart-phone or spend all my time on Twitter but I like to think I am in touch. Perhaps I should reflect on this question a bit. The thing I keep hearing when I talk to older people is that young people expect so much, they come in and think they are going to move up quickly – it is a good thing as we want people with ambition and who have high expectations.

**Charity:**

I agree, there is a big change. The expectation is higher and because of degrees and higher education people do want to move on more quickly.

**Russell:**

What I would say is moving on does not necessarily have to mean moving up. I think you can move sideways which can also be enriching in terms of your career. If

you want to be a specialist then, yes, move up, but if you want to have a broader career and you want your resume to look impressive in a different way there is nothing wrong with moving sideways. Doing the same job in another market, or another sector, is just as good as moving up because you cannot move up all the time.

**Charity:**

Moving to Swiss Re from our biggest competitor, Munich Re, what do you think were some of the challenges in terms of changing organisations? Some people here might be thinking: what is my next career move going to be? It is very easy to sit tight and be comfortable but is that the best choice?

**Russell:**

I have not changed organisations for a long time. I have been at Swiss Re for 19 years. I have moved within Swiss Re but those moves are easier and perhaps better. I have moved markets: Swiss Re London to Swiss Re Japan/Korea, to Swiss Re Australia/New Zealand, so they are all completely different markets in different cultures. However, what you do have if you move within a company is a certain familiarity. You have your network, you know how the email system works, and in that sense when you move within a company you do not have the same type of transition. If you move from one company to another, where you have to build your network and learn the company systems and company culture, that is an added challenge and doesn't happen overnight.

When I see people coming into Swiss Re I feel sorry for them in a way because they have so much to take on board. I have said to some of the people who work for me: in the next six months I do not expect anything from you in terms of production or new deals. If it happens, great, but what I really want you to do is build your network, understand and get to know the clients, feel out the systems, then come January 1<sup>st</sup> let's talk because then you should be productive. It takes a long time when you come into a big company to really become effective.

**Charity:**

I certainly agree with your points Russell – I do think we have probably made it more difficult for ourselves with things like hours of training on compliance and such-like before we actually get to dig into the business.

**Russell:**

That is true. There are a lot of boxes to tick. So, yes, probably an inter-company move is a lot easier.

**Charity:**

What about challenges you have faced in the past that stick out as being particularly difficult?

**Russell:**

I can tell you the worst part of my job, if that would be of interest. When you are in a senior position and companies grow and shrink you tend to find as a company grows, they grow their expenses and their headcount - but at a certain point something goes wrong and you have to cut these down.



When I was in Australia, Swiss Re had a big expense reduction program and I had to fire 10% of our workforce which was probably the worst thing I have had to do. When you are in the position of CEO of Swiss Re Australia and everywhere in the Swiss Re world the same thing is happening you have to do it, there is no option. You just have to get on with it. Facing off 20 people, one at a time, in one day and having to say to each of them, "I'm sorry, it is not your fault but Swiss Re is going to terminate your employment, here is a letter and some money....." it is a really tough thing to do.

For those of you with ambition to become a senior manager, you will probably have to do it at some point in your career. Thinking about those 20 people from the Swiss Re perspective, when we have had to do this, we take care of people very well financially so that is one positive thing. Additionally, of those 20 people, I know of 18 who found a job very quickly and who are in a good place.

There is a short, medium and long term to these things. When you are telling people, there are those who welcome it; they get a cheque and perhaps welcome a change in their career, but for most people it is a shock so in the short term it is quite bad. How you treat people says a lot about the company, about you as an individual and how they think of the company going forward. So, when bad things happen, always treat people extremely respectfully, kindly and with understanding. At the end of the day it means a lot to them. They might not be happy at that point in time but, hopefully, they can understand it, rationalise it and feel they were treated well.

**Charity:**

On a slightly more positive note.....you mentioned diversification and how to set yourself apart. What key skill do you think you have that got you to where you are today?

**Russell:**

I would say it comes down to delivery. I like to have fun in the office and have humour but it comes back to delivery. When I was in Japan, I grew our profit year on year, when I was in Australia, I grew our profit. Since I have been back in London, year on year, I have grown our profit. I am very proud of that record. If you can show delivery, others cannot argue with it. It is black and white.

**Charity:**

In an ideal world what would be your next career move? And, perhaps slightly controversially, what would you do if you weren't working in insurance?

**Russell:**

When I made a career move I always looked to do something next that added value. It might be bigger, it might be different. I always looked at it as resume management. When you look at your resume and you progress through various roles, whether in the same company or different companies, does that progression of jobs make sense? Can you say there is progression here, whatever that may be, even if it is a sideways move, is there a reason for it?

I have always tried to progress. From Japan to Australia to the UK, there was a progression in size and in responsibility. So in terms of my next career move I would not necessarily want to go back to a smaller unit, I would want to do something

bigger or different that is more challenging. You cannot always do bigger things, so do something different. I have only been back in the UK for two and a half years, and I tend to think of things in four to six year cycles, so I still have a few things to do yet.

What would I do if I was not doing this? If I was starting my career again, I would probably become a vet or something to do with animals.

**Charity:**

If you had one piece of advice for the attendees here tonight, what would it be?

**Russell:**

I would probably come back to: if things are not going well, or if you are in the wrong place, it is the wrong time, or you feel the world is against you (and this is the same with professional or career development) take charge of it because no one else is going to do it for you. You might be lucky and things might fall in your lap but if they do not, don't be satisfied with it – do something about it.

**Charity:**

Thank you very much, Russell. I will open it up to the audience now.

## **Part 3 – Audience Q&A**

**Q: Based on your experience, what is good leadership and are there any leaders that inspire you or that you follow?**

**A:** I don't think there are any individuals because I think there are strengths and weaknesses of all leaders. I am not a great reader of management textbooks because there is always the latest one, and a few years later all the things they said were wrong. What I try and do is look at people and look at their strengths and their weaknesses and try and learn from both. You can see what people are really strong at and think 'I am going to try and improve that in myself' and look at what people are bad at and think 'I never want to do that'. I think it is picking pieces, not just from leaders but from life as well.

I can't really give you an 'I love Steve Jobs' because I don't feel that way about people. There are some great leaders in the London market and in the environment but nobody is perfect. We had a great talk last week from the Chief Marketing Officer of Virgin and he talked a lot about Richard Branson....I think some of the things Richard Branson has done are really fantastic but he has failed at lots of things too and has made some really, really bad decisions. I hope that answers the question.

**Q: Do you think in today's industry, women face more career progression problems than men?**

**A:** I think the complete opposite actually. The subject of diversity and inclusion, at least in the Swiss Re world, is really big and Swiss Re really wants to get more women into senior management positions, and also wants to get people from different backgrounds with different styles of thinking into those positions as well.

From the female perspective, I'm sure there are still going to be barriers and difficulties but I cannot think of a time when the path has been more open and clear. When we had our executive team meeting in Zurich at the end of last year and our training and our development people came in, they said "we would like to show you the programs we are planning for next year". There were the usual programs we repeat every year, but we are bringing in a couple of special programs – Women Getting Ahead in Swiss Re and Women Leading in Swiss Re.

All the new programs and development were about helping women move up the career chain. I sat there thinking about this and they said 'Are there any programs that are missing?' so I put my hand up and said, "Succeeding as a middle-aged Anglo-Saxon male!" Sometimes when you get to a certain point in life you can see positions going to younger people. I am in the worst category as a middle-aged, Anglo-Saxon male so it can be quite tough from my perspective as well.

**Q: An underwriting manager at another large insurance entity was recently quoted as saying that claims staff in the insurance market are undervalued. Bearing in mind what a vital part of an insurance company claims technicians play, many would agree with this statement. What are your views on this and would you say that the career opportunities that exist for people working within claims are comparable to their underwriting counterparts?**

**A:** I think there is probably some truth in that statement – that claims staff are probably undervalued a little bit – but I also think it is changing. I relate a lot of this back to Swiss Re, so apologies for that. At Swiss Re, claims is definitely an area that in the last few years has been on the move and I think this has really been driven by the leadership of claims. New leadership has come in and sold the benefits of claims, and again it comes back to proving your worth. At Swiss Re, historically, we have not always had the best claims-paying record or the best process efficiency but these things have been changed quite positively.

Now we are seeing claims people talking to our Head of Claims today, saying they want to get more involved in the front line, talking to their senior contacts in the market: how can they improve business; how can they find opportunities; how can they make things better. So, I see it changing. Again it comes back to this individual thing of don't sit there and feel negative about claims and feel like you are the hard-done-by guys of the industry, because if you do it is probably where you will stay. Equally, you don't always have to stay in claims, there is a big wide world out there. Claims skills can be extremely useful.

**Q: You talk a lot about driving your career and how to take control of it. How do you best approach that with management who either don't share that view or perhaps don't appreciate the ambition at the moment?**

**A:** That's a tough one. I would say it is quite unusual in a sense because if someone comes and presents a good business case of why they want to do something, most managers or leaders would probably be quite open to that. If you have a boss whose attitude is "I am not going to spend any time" or "I am not going to invest" your options are to go to someone else in the organisation – to HR or the

training department – and get someone else on your side, perhaps a coach or mentor.

We do quite a bit of mentoring in Swiss Re. You say to someone senior outside of your area: “Would you mind mentoring me or coaching me? I will come to see you every so often and have a chat about my career and what’s going on.” If that person is mentoring you they suddenly become your friend, they become your supporter and your advocate. If you then want to do some training you might tell them if there is a bit of a blockage, and they might go and have a word with that person to clear it up.

So I think there are a lot of ways to do it but ultimately if you are in a company that doesn’t want to invest in you, you should probably change company. I think that would be an extreme case because there are definitely ways to get there. If your boss is saying ‘no’, find creative ways to get there and find a way forward.

**Q: You have talked a lot about your global experience. What is the biggest thing we can learn from overseas markets that we should be doing in the London market?**

**A:** The biggest thing I learnt is there are lots of different cultures in the world and everyone operates differently, and I think the key to success is to be sympathetic towards those cultures rather than force your own culture on them.

When I was in Japan, I found that a lot of the Americans that came to Japan would struggle with the Japanese culture and they would try to force the American way onto those companies – this is what worked there so it is going to work here – and that is absolutely not the case for the majority of things.

Don’t always agree with the culture but understand it and then if you understand it you can find your way through it. You don’t want to go there and become Japanese; this is another trap people fall into. They learn the language, they learn the culture and start dressing like the Japanese and that is the wrong way as well. It is about understanding, appreciating, adapting, but not necessarily always accepting. I would just reflect that back to the London market as there are many great things the London market can do for the wide-world but in a customised kind of way.

**Q: In regards to being noticed by the people that matter, being in a junior role is it OK to leapfrog in actual experience?**

**A:** Absolutely. Swiss Re operates in a banding system so at the top of the tree is A, B, C, D and so on. My boss would be an ‘A’ band, which is the management board, but he is not really interested in talking to me because he knows me and what I do. His job is to talk to people who report to me and to get to know them. And my job is to get to know the people who report to them. So, no, I wouldn’t worry about those hierarchical things any more. Just go for it.

**Q: I hear it was you who introduced Friday drinks at Swiss Re. Why did you do it and was it successful?**

**A:** When I came back to the UK from Australia – Australia is quite a relaxed business environment – I came back thinking things would have changed but I found it incredibly formal, stuffy and hierarchical and a bit downbeat, so I wanted to bring a bit of joy and happiness into the workplace.

I think if people are happy and having fun, they enjoy work, they want to come to work and they enjoy working with their colleagues. In Australia they have Friday night drinks, and every Friday at about 4.30pm people stop working and there is a big fridge in the office that gets opened, which is full of beers and wine and everyone goes and has a drink. Some people go back to work, some of them go home, some stay drinking until the fridge is empty!

I just thought that would be a good thing to do here in Swiss Re because we are a big organisation, spread over 14 floors in this building and each floor is like a doughnut, so people only talk to those people who are on their half of the doughnut, so I thought at least it would be something that would encourage people to get together. It only happens once a month because with 1,000 people the bill gets rather expensive, but I think it has worked well. There are a whole bunch of people who don't go but there are a whole bunch of people who do and now know each other a little better and at the end of the month relax, have a drink and have a laugh, talk about work stuff or non-work stuff. I think it just makes for a happier, more engaged population.

**Q: My question leads on from there. With insurance being a very sociable industry, how much do you agree with the idea that careers can be made or broken down at the pub by those who play it well or those who play it badly?**

**A:** It is probably a fair point. When you are recruiting people it is fairly easy to tick the technical boxes: yes, we know you are a good underwriter; yes, we know you understand property but what you are looking for is the 'fit' – are they going to fit with the team, with the organisation culture – so doing that in a social environment is good.

I have definitely seen one situation where the candidate was a shoe-in but drank way too much too quickly at dinner and became quite abusive. Needless to say, that candidate went away. But equally not just the pub but social environments and networking are great ways to enhance your career. There is a great big world out there, and having the right networks and being known in the market for the right reasons can be a big plus, because most senior jobs aren't through recruitment agencies or head-hunters they are through people that people know. When you want someone for a senior role you want someone you can trust and that you know can deliver. You know the strengths and weaknesses of your colleagues around you, and if you know people in the market you think, who do I want, who has a good reputation or who has a bad reputation. So, it's an important thing to get right.

**Final Q: During your day to day role you have to attend various meetings where you have to make business decisions with other people. Invariably most people have different opinions about things so what is the best way to manage conflict in decisions especially in technical areas?**

**A:** That's a good final question. The Swiss Re style is quite democratic – we sit and discuss and try and find a common way forward and I would say that works in the vast majority of cases but sometimes there are going to be people who cannot agree and sometimes that is me actually.

I would generally have a view of what the right thing to do is and I would try and persuade the team that this is what we are going to do, because if the team is with you then you will succeed but if the team is against you, you won't. It is quite rare but sometimes I will have to say "you know what; we are just going to have to do this, you might not agree with me but I want you to get on-board". It is quite a cultural thing. You can have a big argument about it and someone might not necessarily agree with you but if the majority say this is the right way and we are going to do it – if you have the right environment, the right culture, the right team dynamic – everyone will say "right, we have heard the argument, this is a group decision, I'm on board". That's what you need to aspire to. If you have three or four different camps all arguing in different ways there is something fundamentally wrong.

**Close and thank you by Anthony Jefferys ACII**  
**Chartered Insurer, Risk Management Division Casualty Underwriter, Chubb**  
**Insurance Company of Europe SE & Chairman of Insurance Institute of**  
**London Young Members Committee**

Thank you very much everyone for coming and thank you for your questions. Thank you Swiss Re for having us, and most of all thank you to Russell for your time and delivering a most interesting and informative presentation.