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Q&A With Greig Woodring

By Reinsurance News

Prior to assuming the role of president and chief executive officer of RGA in 1993, Greig served as executive vice president of General American Life Insurance Company (now GenAmerica Financial LLC) in charge of all reinsurance business.

Greig joined General American in 1979 as an actuary, and assumed responsibility for General American's reinsurance business in 1986. Before joining General American, he was an actuary at United Insurance Company in Chicago, Illinois. General American's reinsurance division led to the formation of RGA. Greig led the company through its initial public offering in May 1993. Since then, after more than 20 years of his leadership, RGA has grown to become one of the world's leading life reinsurers, with offices in 26 countries and revenues of \$10.4 billion for the year ended Dec. 31, 2015.

Greig is a fellow of the Society of Actuaries and a member of the American Academy of Actuaries. He received his Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Mathematics from the University of Michigan, his Master of Science (MS) in Mathematics from the University of Illinois and his MBA from Washington University in St. Louis.

Q: YOU HAVE BEEN A PART OF THE LIFE REINSURANCE INDUSTRY FOR 36 YEARS. IS THIS A GOOD TIME TO BE A LIFE REINSURER?

A: This is a great time to be a life reinsurer. The life reinsurance business is one that becomes more relevant and important when companies and environments are changing. There hasn't been a time in my memory when companies and environments are changing as much as they are today. We are seeing technological changes, demographic changes, regulatory changes, and stresses on primary companies. All of these provide opportunities for life reinsurers.

Q: RGA HAS GROWN FROM BEING A U.S.-CENTRIC COMPANY TO ESTABLISHING ITSELF AS A TRUE GLOBAL PLAYER. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DOING BUSINESS IN A SINGLE MARKET, VERSUS GLOBALLY?

A: There are some differences and some similarities. Every market is different; local skills and knowledge are important. Yet



Greig Woodring is chief executive officer and a director of Reinsurance Group of America, Incorporated, and retired president of the company. He has served as the company's CEO for 30 years.

there are some skills and expertise that are transferable and can be used on a global basis. It has really been a learning experience for us to find out how to maximize the benefits of having local, experienced teams in a given market, and how to help them draw upon the global expertise and information available to them by their peers in other countries. You may have a critical mass of local talent, local experience, and local knowledge, and at the same time you are able to deploy global resources that bring the best-in-class skills to the region when required.

Q: REGULATORY CHANGES CONTINUE TO CHANGE THE WAY INSURERS AND REINSURERS WORK. HOW HAVE REGULATORY CHANGES IMPACTED RGA? DOES REGULATORY CHANGE OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY OR A THREAT TO REINSURERS?

A: While some regulatory restrictions naturally present challenges to both insurers and reinsurers alike, I believe that some of them present more opportunities than threats. For instance, there are opportunities for reinsurers to help companies with regulations such as Solvency II, which can put capital strain on direct insurers.

Q: MANY FINANCIAL COMPANIES ARE NOW BEING CHALLENGED BY “DISRUPTION” OF THEIR TRADITIONAL BUSINESS MODELS BY ONLINE COMPETITORS. HOW HAS THE LIFE REINSURANCE MARKET BEEN AFFECTED?

A: Life reinsurance has been affected in the sense that, if our clients are impacted by something, we’re impacted as well. Disruption has had an impact on the life reinsurance industry because the different ways to assess risk are changing, as is the use of data for underwriting. There is a likelihood that these changes could increase the uncertainty surrounding underwriting decisions. What this means is that we need to be adaptable and nimble, and to evaluate what is working and what is not working as we continue to deal with disruption in a proactive way. I think the future shape of underwriting and other life insurance processes will be forged in the next five to 10 years, so it’s important that we be constantly aware of what is going on in the industry.

Q: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE LIFE REINSURANCE SECTOR?

A: There are two types of technology that we think about when we think about technology’s impact on our industry. The first is information technology, such as data, analytics, and information gathering. Because they substitute for tried-and-true protocols, these kinds of technology may introduce new risks, and a speed of change with which we need to keep up. The life reinsurance industry can actually benefit companies that are trying to deal with these changes. This is because life reinsurers tend to see the whole market and have visibility to the trends across many sectors. In addition to information technology, there’s also technology on the medical side to consider, such as ways to test and treat disease earlier. To give you an example, cancers at ‘stage zero’ and ‘stage one’ are almost universally curable. If we can detect cancers before they get past those early stages, deaths from cancers are dramatically decreased. As medical technology improves, so does the outlook for life insurance.

Q: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF WEARABLE WELLNESS TECHNOLOGY IN THE LIFE REINSURANCE SECTOR?

A: The people who adapt to this new technology for wearables and embeddables are a self-selecting group of health-vigilant people. They are concerned about staying in good shape and tend to be generally healthy. As these technologies become more prevalent I think you’ll see that we are starting to transform our knowledge of what is happening in our own bodies. Rather than relying on a yearly checkup, people may now be able to stay more regularly in tune with their own health, and as a result, may be able to pick up on potential issues earlier and increase the probability of staying healthy longer. Here again, the outlook for life insurance improves as people get healthier.

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Q: IF YOU WERE GIVING CAREER ADVICE TO SOMEONE JUST STARTING OUT IN THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM?

A: I would tell them to prepare for change. I would say that the insurance industry, compared to other industries, has been extremely static and steady to this point. The forces that are aligned to cause change and disruption are coming from both inside the industry, by regulators and government officials, and from outside, by consumers who want to conduct business and make purchases digitally. All these factors are mounting to a considerable extent and we all need to prepare for continued change.

Q: WHAT CAN LIFE REINSURANCE COMPANIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY?

A: Life reinsurers are a step removed from direct-to-consumer life insurance companies, but we believe we have an important role to play in the overall life insurance space. Life insurance is a great benefit to society. It serves an important need to consumers around the world. Life reinsurance tends to make the offerings of insurance companies better, if life reinsurers do their jobs well. Even though we are removed from consumers in some ways, we view ourselves as being an important part of the life insurance industry and providing the same protective shield to human society that life insurance offers.

Q: WILL INSURERS AND REINSURERS PLAY A ROLE IN IMPROVING LIFE EXPECTANCY WORLDWIDE?

A: I certainly hope they will. I hope that the life insurance companies of the future (and, by proxy, the life reinsurers) will think of themselves as being missioned to keep people healthy and to extend peoples’ lives. Rather than simply writing a check to cover a traumatic event, ideally, life insurance and reinsurance companies of the future would actively work to improve the well-being and health of their customer base and the population base. ■