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Leader Interview

With Steve Tutewohl

Steve Tutewohl, FSA, MAAA, is the chief actuary at Evolent Health. He has nearly 25 years of health actuarial and analytics experience and built his career on combining those two disciplines to position both providers and payers for financial success. He recently led the merging of two actuarial departments during a corporate acquisition. Brian Pauley, FSA, MAAA, conducted the interview.

ON BEING AN ACTUARY

Health Watch: How and when did you decide to become an actuary?

Steve Tutewohl: While I was in high school my father shared with me a magazine that ranked the top jobs and had actuary ranked number one. Given my interest in math and business, I immediately made up my mind that this was the job for me.

HW: What other careers did you consider? Or if you have had other careers, can you describe them?

SW: Up until that point I was leaning toward engineering.

HW: What was your favorite job before you became an actuary?

SW: I spent a year in college being a “runner” at the Wisconsin state capitol. Literally what we did is pick up and deliver documents from one congressman’s office to another. This certainly ages me, as I would guess this is all done electronically now.

HW: What has been most crucial in your development as an actuary?

SW: Two things: good mentors and opportunities. Both of these are all about learning. You need good projects and good people to learn from, and equally important, you need to be motivated to learn. Never settle for just doing the work. Think critically and what and how you are doing it.

HW: Looking at your career as an actuary, do you see any important learning milestones or turning points in your career?

SW: I think achieving my ASA was a milestone that stands out. It felt like my credibility with both internal and external clients leapt forward overnight. Of course, an increase in professional responsibility came with that.

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HW: As an actuary, what keeps you awake at night?

SW: Not a lot. Like anyone, I fear missing something that causes my company or my clients harm that could have been avoided. However, I trust in good planning, good people and good processes that we put into place.

ON BEING A LEADER

HW: How much did your actuarial training prepare you for this role? What additional training—formal, informal, or otherwise—did you need to be successful?

SW: The actuarial training has prepared me for the “X’s and O’s” of the job. It taught me approaches and strategies to measure and mitigate risk. That is a key foundation for every actuary. However, leadership training comes with experience and good mentors. Just like the actuarial credential, experience is earned by hard work, trial and error and learning from your mistakes.

HW: What are the most important lessons you’ve learned in your role?

SW: There are three essential components to success: planning, good people and passion for what you do. It is really easy to get caught up in the priority of the moment, but you can never go far without thinking of what is ahead. You need to carve out time every day to think about what’s ahead. What do you need your company, your team and yourself to be doing? How will you accomplish it? Build a plan, involve your team in the plan and communicate the plan. Involving your team in your thought



process and the “why” behind a plan is how you build loyalty and passion.

HW: Let’s say you’re hiring your successor. If you’re presented with two actuaries with equivalent experience and training, what characteristics will help you choose one over the other?

SW: Success in leadership positions is not achieved through training and credentials. It is your ability to execute on the important lessons noted previously. Finding someone who can excel with planning, people and passion is key. In some cases, one individual won’t have all of these characteristics, but if you can pair that leader with someone else who can fill in the gap, that can be equally effective.

HW: Describe the biggest one or two challenges that you have faced in your role.

SW: The largest challenge in my current role was around people integration. We had two equally large companies coming together and we also brought together people within the existing organizations who previously had not worked together. It was a large amount of change for everyone and morale was a problem. Fortunately for me, I had some great leaders, and I knew that if we could build a great plan and showed commitment to it, that eventually we would get the full team onboard and get things moving. This is not an easy or a quick challenge, but one that many of us will face at some point in our career.

HW: What advice would you give to another actuary going into a leadership position for the first time?

SW: Listen to everyone but trust your own instincts and decisions. Have confidence in the plan that you think is most appropriate. Also, spend the time finding and developing your team members. They are your greatest asset. ■