



The Long View

Insured Retirement Institute (IRI) is pleased to celebrate exemplary leadership within the insured retirement industry. Our monthly article series, *The Long View*, spotlights individuals who have proven adept at seeing change on the horizon and adapting accordingly. Through one-on-one interviews, we aim to learn about each highlighted leader's career, successes, failures, lessons learned, and proudest moments. [Click here](#) to view past articles.

The first year is a critical time for new CEOs. They must establish clear priorities and align the organization with their vision of the future. Will Fuller, President and CEO of Transamerica as of March 2021, knows where he wants Transamerica to go. He is committed to leading the organization with a growth mindset and to strengthening that mode of thinking in Transamerica's culture.

Mr. Fuller brings nearly 30 years of experience in financial services to his leadership position at Transamerica. Moreover, he is deeply engaged in collaborative efforts to advance the industry, including current and former board roles with IRI, ACLI, LIMRA/LOMA, Forum for Investor Advice, and MMI. IRI honored Mr. Fuller in 2019 with its Industry Champion of Retirement Security Award and its 2014 Leadership Award.

Read on to learn more about the leadership approach Mr. Fuller employs, why he prioritizes diversity and inclusion, what motivates him in business, and more.



You've been in financial services for 30 years. What made you decide to make this the focus of your professional life?



I started as an insurance agent and registered representative at Jefferson-Pilot before joining Merrill Lynch as an insurance and annuity specialist. Serving in client-facing roles is a great way to learn because you experience first-hand the customer needs and journey.

What I discovered early on is that this industry fascinates me. It begins with the basic purpose – helping people achieve financial security and peace of mind. And, I enjoy the complexity of the business and how essential it is to get all of the components of the

value chain working together. It puts a spotlight on the diversity of skill sets required to run a company effectively – from actuarial and risk management to distribution and technology. Over the course of my career, I've been fortunate to work with exceptionally talented teammates. I have tried hard to learn from them about new products and market trends, actuarial and risk management functions, financials and investment strategies, distribution, service, and governance. All these functions have to be well integrated for a company to succeed, and I like facilitating that.



You've expressed a strong commitment to inclusion and diversity. What prompted you to make this a priority?



There are several reasons for my deep-rooted belief in inclusion and diversity. First: There is nothing more important to me than respecting every individual and having the workplace be a safe place for everyone. There's no moral ambiguity here.

The second reason is that the diversity of people, experience, and points of view enhances a team's ability to innovate, execute and thrive. There's also the benefit of having your organization reflect your communities and customer base. It helps ensure you're staying relevant and attuned to the people you serve.



How do you view your role as CEO?



At Transamerica, my most important contribution is to lead a growth mindset and culture with strong risk management discipline. I'm very focused on achieving market leadership in our select lines of business with a strategy that delivers consistency and sustainable growth for the long term.

Another aspect of my role is to ensure we are a career destination for top talent. This means attracting new talent and enabling our existing staff to grow in their careers. And, of course, this requires a culture that supports high performance, diversity, and inclusion – and makes our company an overall fun place to work.

Actively participating in our industry and advocating for our customers and our business with policymakers is also an important part of my job.



How has the pandemic influenced the way your organization views the workplace?



Our employees proved they could adapt to remote working and, in some cases, thrive with that arrangement. Our collective experience is that the definition of "work" is something we do, not necessarily a place we go.

However, as we've all learned during these last 18 months, in-person collaboration is at the heart of who we are as human beings. While there is a desire for flexibility, we also need to ensure the sense of community and culture that an in-person environment enables.



What drives and motivates you?



I'm very competitive and enjoy working with people where we are striving to accomplish big things. It energizes me to tackle big challenges and see them through to success. I enjoy learning, what it feels like to win, and creating momentum. The feeling of pride that comes from a team's hard work and success is very meaningful to me.

I'm also deeply motivated by the belief that helping people achieve financial security isn't just a business – it's a higher purpose. Like many people, I want to make a difference in others' lives, and I'm motivated to get up each day and make a contribution.



If you had to choose one word to characterize your approach to your life and work, what would it be?



Optimism. But not the rose-colored glasses kind. I'd describe it as pragmatic optimism that comes from having confidence in our team's ability to respond to the challenges and opportunities we encounter and drive success.

However, I'd be the first to admit that the pandemic tested my optimism more than once. But then I saw moments of incredible kindness and how communities came together to support one another. It restored my belief in our ability to get through challenges when we choose to be optimistic and take the necessary actions.

It's hard to imagine being an effective leader without a strong sense of optimism. We all need to believe we can solve the problems at hand and create a better future. Optimism has the power to lift people up, effect positive change, and accomplish what can seem out of reach. It brings people together – in work and in life.



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