

In the C-Suite

Homesite Insurance's SVP and Chief Claims Officer **Grace Hanson** discusses her early adoption of analytics and why she loves the claims department as a career choice.

By Taylor Smith, Contributing Editor

Where did you grow up?

I have a diverse background. I am Sri Lankan (my parents are Sri Lankan), but I was born in Ghana because my dad, a doctor, was doing research there. Although they didn't know it at the time, the research he was doing was on AIDS. From Ghana, we moved to England, Canada, and then to upstate New York when I was six. I graduated high school in Florida, and then I went to college and law school in New Orleans, where I stayed for 22 years.

Did you know what you wanted to do after college?

I knew I wanted to be a lawyer from the age of 11. The idea of fighting for justice appealed to me. So I was a litigator for about 14 years before I moved to an in-house role.

What made you want to transition from private practice to in-house?

I had an infant and litigation can be demanding, so I looked into moving in-house when my son was one. After 9/11, AIG and Chubb formed Allied World, and I was offered the position of CCO, the fourth person hired to work for Allied (after the CEO and two underwriting vice presidents). Allied didn't have any claims at first, so AIG asked me also to manage Starr Excess' claims department in Bermuda. In 2004, I transferred to Allied World full-time, as it had grown enormously.

You were one of the claims industry's earliest adopters of analytics. Tell us about some of the challenges you faced.

Analytics to me is about understanding what is going on in an organization. It seemed intuitive to me to want to know those things based on objective data. I quickly learned that the data wasn't as readily available as I thought it should be, so I began to focus not only on the accumulation of data, but also the analysis of it. In the beginning, of course, we had to hire experts from other industries since the analytics discipline was not as developed in claims. My first analytics hire was in 2003 and came from the investment sector. Building out our analytics capability was a logical thing to do, but it had—and continues to have—its challenges.

What do you say to those considering a career in claims?

I love working in claims because I think it's an important, dynamic role. There are so many different things to do. You're close to the customer. We're at the cutting edge of what's important in the

insurance company. The industry also is changing quickly and innovating, which makes the career very exciting. There's always something new and challenging, and that appeals to many people looking for a new career.

Tell me about your family and hobbies.

I have a 15-year-old son who just finished his freshman year of high school. My husband passed away last year, so there have been changes in our lives, but we continue to work through them. I'm an avid gardener and landscaper. I cannot walk into a garden store without spending a lot of money. When we sold our last home, I'm told it sold quickly because of the garden. I like to create an environment that unfolds over the seasons, so there's always something in bloom. And I particularly love butterflies and hummingbirds, so I plant to attract them.

Any other passions?

I recently joined the board of directors for an international non-profit called Build Change, which works to save lives in earthquakes and typhoons in emerging nations through improving construction practices. I am very impressed with this organization and excited to be a part of such a great cause. Their mission is to reduce deaths, injuries, and economic losses caused by school and house collapses due to earthquakes and typhoons in nations where insurance has not yet taken hold. This ties in perfectly with my professional work. Our goal is to make 10 million people safer by 2024, which will increase the economic incentives for private insurance companies to flourish. We currently have ongoing projects in places like Nepal, Haiti, and Indonesia—really around the world. You can find out more about them at buildchange.org. [CM](#)



Grace Hanson, J.D., CPCU

CURRENT POSITION:

Senior Vice President and Chief Claims Officer, Homesite Insurance

YEARS IN INSURANCE INDUSTRY:

15

SIZE OF CLAIMS ORGANIZATION:

About 300 (and growing)

FIRST CLAIMS POSITION:

Vice President, Starr Excess

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