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Article

Introducing Wilma Schreuders, our new A&E Underwriter in Toronto

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From turning up to the wrong job interview to building a stellar career based on doing the right thing, Wilma Schreuders didn't have a typical start to her career in insurance...

WILMA, WELCOME! TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND.

Actually, it's a funny story. I went for a job interview at an insurance brokerage in Edmonton, Alberta as I heard they had an account position open and that was the direction my career was going in. I was in the middle of the interview and the interviewer asked why I wanted to be an insurance broker. At that time, I didn't even know what an insurance broker was. She looked at me and said "You're in the wrong interview." I replied, "Yes, clearly I am!" Despite this hiccup, we hit it off. She suggested I consider becoming an insurance broker, because she thought I'd be good at it. She sent me home with all the insurance broker books to read over and study. That weekend I thought to myself, why not? I went for it, got the job, obtained my broker license, and ended up working there for a number of years. After being away from my hometown, Ottawa, Ontario, it was time for me to return. The owner of the brokerage gave me a glowing referral letter. I applied and was hired by a local insurance company as an underwriting assistant in their architect and engineering (A&E) division. The rest is history.

SO WHY BEAZLEY?

It was a word of mouth recommendation that first drew me to Beazley. A former colleague of mine had long talked about it being an incredible place to work. She'd spoken about Beazley and its growth ambitions, and so the company had been on my radar for some time. When I started looking a little deeper, what really resonated with me was the term 'doing the right thing'. That sentiment was right in line with the way I was brought up in this industry and the values that I hold -

because it is an industry in which you have to do the right thing. It is based on trust and relationships. Reputation matters for both ourselves and our clients, therefore, doing the right thing is extremely important. So I did the right thing. And here I am.

HOW ARE YOU FINDING IT?

One of the things I love about Beazley is the flatness of the organization. There just isn't the same kind of hierarchy here as there is in other organizations of a similar size. The advantage of being part of a non-hierarchical approach is that the decision-making rests locally with a focus on the needs of the stakeholders in Canada. I am honored to be part of a team of experienced underwriters who are dedicated experts and specialize in professional liability for the design and construction community.

MOVING ONTO YOUR SPECIALISM, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST SHIFT IN CANADIAN A&E NEEDS RECENTLY?

We are seeing more projects applying non-traditional delivery models such as design build and IPD, integrated project delivery. Owners are looking for better outcomes and more certainty from their project and less delays and cost overruns. There is a shift from the traditional methods of delivering projects to a more collaborative approach. A number of firms have had to catch up. Those who haven't or won't are going to be left behind.

IN TERMS OF COVERAGE, WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT BROKERS AND INSUREDS SHOULD LOOK FOR WHEN SEEKING COVERAGE?

The most important thing that they should look for is a stable insurer that has been around for a long time with a proven track record One of my main concerns is the number of carriers that are coming in and out of this market at the moment. If I was a broker, I would be steering my clients to more stable - both financially and reputationally – insurers.. Cheap is not always good! Claims handling experience is also extremely important. These days, I find claims are much larger and more complex and are exacerbated by the shotgun approach to litigation. So if brokers are placing their clients with carriers that are inexperienced in handling these claims, I think they doing their clients a disservice. As for coverages, the most important thing is to ensure that the cover is tailored to address specific needs of the client.

WHAT ARE THE TOP QUESTIONS THAT YOU HEAR FROM A&E BROKERS AND INSURANCE?

The hiring of subconsultants, how to insure them, who is responsible for their negligent acts, and what kind of limits should they as subconsultants have, are fairly common questions these days. Engineers are not lawyers, and so often they don't fully appreciate the insurability of some of the language contained in contracts documents. Understanding what the words in a contract mean is paramount. Other questions are with regards to acquisition: what do we do with the acquired company's legacy liability? How do we manage that?

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO SEE IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?

We are seeing a lot of growth within engineering firms here in Canada, with the various levels of government focusing on large infrastructure

projects. Inevitably, with growth comes claims. Owners and stakeholders are no longer willing to put up with cost overruns and delays. There is going be a lot of pressure on design firms to make sure that they select the right project team, are communicating effectively with each other, collaborating and have strong Quality Assurance / Quality Control procedures in place on all projects. Instead of low bid selection, we can only hope that owners adopt quality base selection to ensure they get the right people on the project and not just the ones with the lowest price or fee. Ideally, it would wonderful if owners would see the benefits of involving the design team and contractor earlier on in the lifecycle of the project which has proven to contribute in making the project more successful. Something else that

A&E firms are also having to consider going forward are the environmental challenges linked to climate change on designs. With floods, storms and heatwaves increasing in frequency and severity, these new climatic challenges need to be considered at the design stage, as what was once 1 in a 100 year events are now becoming far more frequent to the point of unpredictability.

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