

# A PASSION FOR COMPASSION

# RALPH MUCERINO

IN CONVERSATION WITH **ERNEST LEGRAND**

Company leaders often combine successful business careers with very rich personal experiences. We at MDS have been privileged enough to have had many such leaders share their experiences, their vision of the markets they have worked in and the challenges they have faced.

With the launch of our new collection of interviews, called Faces of Insurance, we have moved a step forward. In this first conversation, Ralph Mucerino, AIG President, Distribution Partners and Major Accounts tells Ernest Legrand about the lessons he has learned and the wisdom he has gained over the years and the importance of the ‘human factor’ in making business decisions. His true life lessons will be published in the book, “A passion for compassion – Ralph Mucerino with Ernest Legrand” by MDS Publications. Here we share an excerpt from the book.

When thinking of insurance, the layman may imagine a confusing world of numbers, charts, and figures that makes their head spin. The reality of insurance is that it’s the perfect place for intellectual thrill-seekers to feed their need for innovation, creativity, and change, but also leave a positive mark on society. And that’s where Ralph W. Mucerino, AIG President, Distribution Partners and Major Accounts comes in. With a fascinating 38-year career in insurance, he has seen it all, done it all, and helped develop the landscape of insurance we know today.

Speaking with this respected leader leaves one with a deeper understanding of human nature, compassion, ambition, and adaptability, and how they all combine to create a successful business person with an eye on improving lives and providing stability through analytics, careful planning, and expert execution. He shared with me how he achieved such success and how you can, too.

## A thoughtful approach to success

Ralph is passionate, attentive, and understanding, and he brings his unique view of the world to every aspect of his life. Early on, he didn’t just react to the world around him; he watched, learned, and took action to help transform his own life and career. While it may seem to an outsider that he simply made great



decisions with an uncanny natural ability, the truth is that each choice he made was born from the critical need to provide for himself and his growing family.

Careful planning was both a blessing and a curse, but for him, security was key to survival and success, and he put forth great effort to ensure he and his family had that security. Earning his colleagues' respect was another integral part of his success, but he did so in a genuine way, thanks to his upbringing and early life. People were drawn to him and his honesty, and still are to this day.

But how did he manage to make his personal outlook such a big part of his

career? Many executives try to separate their personal lives from their work, but most of the traits that make a great human being also translate perfectly to the business world. His success was largely due to his personal rules:

- Trust people, and allow them to trust in you
- Move through life with honesty and integrity
- Always listen with compassion tempered with accountability
- Plan, plan, plan
- Adapt and be ready to change the plan when necessary

To illustrate these points, we have only to look at his life for examples. He speaks fondly of his childhood and as a husband and father, citing his family as a stabilizing factor that helped him focus on his long nights studying at St. John's University, working his way up in the insurance business, and developing true connections with nearly everyone he's worked with.

Simply put: Ralph learned about people and their unique needs by immersing himself in a world populated by all kinds of people from different walks of life. He understands that society is a living, breathing ecosystem that is constantly changing and growing, and he was eager to go along for the ride and help bring a sense of security and stability with him.

He didn't cling to old ideas simply because they were familiar; he embraced the natural changes in life and used them to launch his career straight to the top.

### Using society's evolution to advance

Looking back on his past, he said, "Insurance wasn't the industry that it has become today. It has gained in respect. It has gained in importance. More people understand what insurance adds to our daily life."

And he was a part of making that happen through his process of watching, learning, planning, and executing his plans all without losing the human factor. After all, insurance is about protecting people.

"I don't believe there's an aspect of society that we don't touch," he said. "When you go back to 9/11, for example, [it] was obviously a horrific event. Many people lost friends, relatives, my nephew was killed at Cantor Fitzgerald at the time. The world came to a stop in many respects. The planes stopped flying and the airlines were uninsurable. Then Hank Greenberg, CEO of AIG, Martin Sullivan, CEO of AIU, and Tom Tizzio, Chairman of Domestic Brokerage Group, stepped in and worked with the reinsurance market to put capacity together and get the airlines and the industry operating again.

"It's a very unique view of how important insurance is to the functioning of society. I think it's an attractive industry for young people to come in and influence."



Ralph Mucerino is one of the true professionals of the insurance industry. He is unique in his capability of blending corporate and personal relationships together so that everyone who deals with Ralph receives equality and 100% of his time and effort.

### James W. Crystal

Crystal & Company

Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

Ralph has a lot of hope for people entering the insurance industry these days. He speaks of Millennials' unique views on the world, current events, and their desire to do more and change the things that just don't work any longer. He believes they are, perhaps, more socially aware than previous generations and can look at insurance for what it provides for society.

It's that new social awareness, that openness that Millennials possess that will help change the face of insurance for the better. And in turn, that shift in respect for insurance has helped the industry grow and change to reach more people, bringing even more stability to previously underserved segments.

"I think Millennials can look at insurance for what it provides in support of society and, as such, become excited about a career in insurance. At the same time, this same group has a different view of how they want to buy a product, how they want to buy a service, what kind of

service they need. We, as an industry, must understand that, and start to adapt our products to this burgeoning group of customers out there."

By watching the trends in society, companies can better serve their customers and their employees. "We must understand what's important to this segment of population and how to present our products and services that meets their wants and needs. At the same time, they're coming into the workforce, and when you look at what has traditionally been important to people within a company, there's a change there too."

Once again, I was able to see how his strong family ties and drive to do right by others affected his view of work life. He went on to talk about some of the specific changes in how companies treat their employees and how that's affected not only their productivity and satisfaction at work, but also improved their home lives.

More time off, flexible hours, and an understanding that personal life



Robert Benmosche; José Manuel Fonseca; Jamie Crystal and Ralph Mucerino @Brokerslink Conference, Madrid, 2012





shouldn't suffer to get ahead at work, are all acknowledgments of the change in society's expectations and the importance of a healthy work-life balance. Beyond simply coexisting, work and personal lives should complement one another. He told me of a recent trip to Seattle that helped drive this fact home for him, pointing out the impact of even a small change in society's expectations having lasting, positive effects on employees and consumers.

"I visited Amazon in Seattle last year. I walked up to the reception counter to check myself in and there was a bowl of something where you normally see mints in many companies, instead there were little dog treats. They allow their employees to bring their dogs to work. There's a population of people where that's an important element. I think, from a standpoint of creativity, they bring a different perspective. They're much more inquisitive, they're challenging."

Innovation, creativity, and fresh ideas are a big deal to Ralph, and he looks for those qualities in the people he works with. Being able to think outside the box, as they say, is what helps the insurance industry stay essential to a stable modern life.

### The human factor is good for business

One of Ralph's greatest values is his faith in humanity and his understanding of people. He is genuinely a "good person" in the sense that he keeps a positive outlook and tries to understand people, no matter the situation. Business, of course, is important, but he values the human beings who make the business work and the consumers that the business protects. It's all a balance and learning to keep it that way is one of the keys to success.

He also has advice for those seeking to grow a career in insurance, but he believes his wisdom can be used in any field: Advocate for yourself, seek help when you need it, and be ready to fill in the gaps.

"If you see a vacuum, fill it. It doesn't mean as if I'm looking for another job within the company, but how can I help fill a vacuum that's beneficial to the company? I know that may sound very sophomoric, but that's one of my life's learnings. If you become known

as a person who can fill the gap, who's not afraid to step up to an additional assignment, somebody who is willing to work. . . That gets recognized."

Along with working hard, finding ways to fill in the gaps, and advocating for yourself, Ralph said, "Check your ego at the door. If you let your ego manage how you behave, if you think of yourself as the most important person in the room, or you're indispensable, you're likely to make some bad decisions and you're not going to be very pleasant to work with."

Respect and courtesy are common themes in Ralph's life, in both personal and work environments. Being able to collaborate with the team and showing respect to leaders in the company, go a long way in making a person easier to work with and more likable.

He uses the same thinking when it comes to family life and experiences outside of the office. That human factor — being compassionate, understanding, and supportive while expecting accountability and self-advocacy — is what Ralph attributes to business success. •

As a mutual friend once said, Ralph is a true titan of the insurance market. Ralph matches vast knowledge with experience and an abundance of humanity. Truthful, straightforward and fair, Ralph is devoted to knowledge, not only technical but also human and social, which he generously shares with colleagues and friends of all ages. A role model to us all.

**José Manuel Fonseca**  
MDS Group CEO & Brokerslink  
Founder and Board Member

### Ralph Mucerino



Ralph Mucerino is President of Distribution Partners and Major Accounts at AIG. He joined the company in 1979 and has held various senior management positions in the United States and abroad, including in Europe as manager of European operations and in Asia as President of the Far East Region.

Ralph also served as Chief Distribution Officer for AIG Property Casualty Commercial Insurance, Chief Operating Officer at Chartis International (ex- AIG) and Chairman of Global Marine and Energy.

### Ernest Legrand



Ernest Legrand believes that business experience will light the way toward a more inclusive and interdependent world. He is a French-American CEO and writer, born in Saigon, raised in Paris, and currently lives in New York. Through candid, one-on-one discussions with top executives, he hopes to share with a broad audience, the personal thoughts of leaders responsible for transforming the business infrastructure of modern society.