

Striding into a PR disaster

Insurance Business America has made no secret of our support for women in the insurance industry, whether it's through our weekly Women in Insurance newsletter or our highly successful Women in Insurance conferences (which have proved a massive success worldwide, with events in Atlanta and Miami already on the books for this year). It's clear that our readers, too, have a desire to see women succeed in the industry.

However, when does the talk turn into legitimate, measurable action by those in power? Recent reports suggest that for all the posturing from the industry and the handful of inspiring female CEOs who have emerged, there is still a significant problem to be solved. Bloomberg's recent exposé into the Lloyd's market highlighted a "deep-seated culture of sexual harassment" that one industry player described as "basically a meat market."

"Women at Lloyd's [are] still being called names, including 'totty,'" and are rated from 1 to 10 on "shagability," an insurance PR specialist claimed. Most in the industry reacted to the report by noting that any form of sexual harassment is "indefensible," and many were also quick to point to the "strides" the industry has made with its diversity and inclusion agenda. Yet having an agenda isn't the same thing as taking real action.

Perhaps we can talk about "strides" when measures are introduced as standard rather than on the back of a shameful report

Take Lloyd's as an example. To its credit, it responded to the Bloomberg report with a "wide-ranging and robust" plan of action – making a commitment to hearing the accounts of the women in the article, incorporating women into its nomination board, and promising a comprehensive review of its policies and practices, including a confidential channel through which to report inappropriate behavior.

Steps in the right direction? Absolutely. "Strides," however? Perhaps we can talk about "strides" when measures such as these are introduced as standard rather than just on the back of a shameful report. It's one thing to hurriedly attempt to counter a PR disaster – it's another to implement a truly open and diverse culture where anyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race or sexuality, has the same opportunities to achieve success.

In this regard, insurance might have finally found the right path – but make no mistake, it still has a long trek ahead before it claims true success.

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