



## Expert view

*Interview with Jay Ayala, Managing Director,  
West, Sedgwick*

The "Expert view" column presents a wide range of topics offering valuable insights and information for customers.

**edge:**

With your own background, starting as a claims professional and progressing your career with Sedgwick, what advice do you give to those considering a career in our industry?

**Jay:**

The industry has evolved so much over the years and continues to evolve today, which is also true for the talent populating the industry. As they say, necessity is the mother of invention; the idea of an industry-wide talent shortage, particularly experienced talent, has led us to look for potential colleagues in places

that have traditionally been underrepresented in our industry and to think about the ways we develop and retain professionals.

While some see this as a crisis, I believe it has led to very positive developments. For example, the work we do has evolved from what I would consider a process

orientation that sometimes led to adversarial positions to, now, the idea that our industry is focused on very meaningful work. As we say, helping people is at the heart of everything we do. Within Sedgwick, it's caused us to develop our caring counts philosophy and our diversity and inclusion (D&I) program. Refocusing on advocacy and care – for the people we care for, as well as our own colleagues – has helped us become a more attractive place for people to work. The same principles make our industry a more attractive option for those looking for a meaningful career path.

**edge:**

How have you seen the role of the adjuster change over the years? How are we adapting our training to meet the current and future needs of our clients and consumers?

**Jay:**

At a time, it was enough to provide our examiners with technical expertise to handle the tactical aspects of their job. While that is still important and compliance is essential, there's also a much larger component. On the consumer side, we've talked about principles of care, helping people navigate the system and overcome often challenging and unfamiliar situations. On the colleague

side, we have created our Industry Advancement Program and other career development opportunities to give our talent a more comprehensive understanding of the job, our culture, what they can expect and what we have to offer. Sedgwick gives colleagues a broad career track beyond the training they may be receiving at the time – whether in disability and absence management or the opportunities we are seeing in property loss adjusting and beyond as a result of our increasing global footprint.

The business has become more complex and specialized. We've seen the differences in claims approach, handling, and interaction – our claims teams must adopt a new view of the landscape and understand how their actions impact bigger-picture results for the client, carrier and consumer. The process has evolved from what we'd done for the historical Sedgwick client. In response, we have incorporated more carrier-focused awareness in our training, given examiners more of an understanding of the carrier environment, and placed special emphasis on the accuracy of data and coding for carrier programs. We also are preparing examiners to be better attuned to the nuances of each program, often

inviting clients to participate in education for our teams to give them a glimpse into more than just the requirements of the program, but also on their unique environment and culture.

As we look to the future, we all must be open to change and the demands that come from an innovative culture. At Sedgwick, we're constantly improving our processes, technology and communication to be more efficient and effective. Our new website is a living, breathing example. The idea of creating a website that is designed to improve access to the system – inviting clients and consumers into the process like never before and making it as user-friendly as possible, incorporating self-service technology – is a very significant development and very different from the industry's approach in recent years.

**edge:**

How have principles of diversity and inclusion impacted the claims environment?

**Jay:**

D&I has certainly evolved along with the industry and it's been an interesting journey to follow. We've focused on our own D&I initiative for about five years now. When we first started, we struggled with the idea of defining D&I for ourselves

and making sure we didn't just stop at demographic diversity (representation). You can be very demographically diverse "by accident," so we placed special emphasis on inclusion – creating a culture of belonging where our colleagues feel included regardless of their background, perspective and experiences.

We've come to a point where we have moved beyond building awareness about D&I and we're now focusing on action. For us, inclusion is an action – inclusive behaviors that are tangible and demonstrate caring. At Sedgwick, our caring begins at home. Through our robust D&I strategy, we're building up our leadership's cultural competency and teaching them how to be authentic, caring leaders. Authenticity is important for both our leaders and our colleagues. In addition, recognizing and celebrating uniqueness is one way we build connection between employer and employee. This concept is transforming our company.

Although we don't yet directly bring our clients into our D&I initiatives, I think there is tremendous opportunity to meld our cultures in a way that impacts their most important resource – their employees and policyholders, our consumers. Most of our clients have their

own successful D&I initiatives in place; I can envision working together to share success stories and to find new ways to achieve our shared goals. We know that, as the demographics of the workforce shift, we must adapt our practices to accommodate and support differences for those we serve, finding ways to personalize their experience and meet their unique needs. There is transformative power in coming together, being more open to each other, and finding ways to address these workforce changes.

**edge:**

What other changes are you seeing in the work environment that will impact our colleagues and clients?

**Jay:**

The kind of work environment we create for people who entrust their work lives to us is part of the bargain in place between employees and employers – and employees now expect more from their relationship with their employer. Wellness alternatives are one area of rapid change. We see our clients incorporating new wellness-related aspects in their workplaces – things like sit/stand desks – but also things that improve the atmosphere within the office – like more ambient,

open spaces and light, more communal and collaborative spaces for colleagues to share ideas. These are all amenities that make coming to work more pleasant and rewarding and encourage a healthier environment overall.

Sedgwick is starting to incorporate more of these concepts in our own office development, but I love to see the ideas of some of our more innovative and successful clients, whose environments are designed to improve their connections with the people who work for them. Some of our clients allow people to bring their pets to work and weave that into their culture, and then find it paying off in reduced stress and a growing sense of community – things which can certainly impact health and wellness. Many of them incorporate flexible hours, meditation rooms and other workplace features designed to fit the needs of their employee populations. The idea of being employee-centric has such value. It's all about investing in your employees and seeing how that can pay dividends.