

Insurance chiefs who smashed ceilings now walk on broken glass



By Emma Ann Hughes

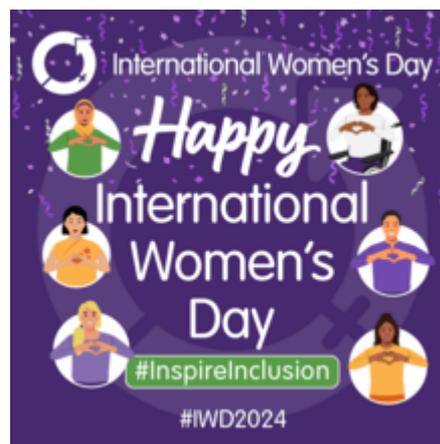
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Indicative reading time: **3 minutes**

Editor's View: On International Women's Day, Emma Ann Hughes argues the insurance industry needs to battle against 'diversity fatigue' and acknowledge the fight for inclusivity must continue until barriers to women's career progression and equal pay are broken.

The lofty positions of Aviva CEO Amanda Blanc and Aon chief Julie Page – plus the many promises to tackle sexism in insurance that are made today by politicians, regulators, companies, on social media – are frequently pointed to as proof of progress in the industry's fight for inclusivity.

Lloyd's reporting it had achieved the 35% target it set for women in leadership positions in the market – an increase of 3 percentage points from last year, and 6 percentage points from when the target was set in 2020 – is sure to be viewed by some as evidence it is time to break out the party poppers, celebrate, and take a break from all this diversity and inclusion work.



As the theme of this year's International Women's Day (8 March) was \#InspireInclusion, I have spent the past few weeks speaking to Specialist Risk Group's Clare Lebecq, RPC's Alexandra Anderson, Gillie Fairbrother at Davies, Kim Alcock at McLarens, Guidewire Software's Laura Drabik, Allianz's Sarah Murrow, Carpenter's Donna Scully, Sedgwick's Vicki Cowell, QBE Insurance's Nikki Lees, and The Insurance Cultural Awareness Network's Maxine Goddard about [work to ensure insurance is a sector where women can thrive](#).

Yes, we have made progress, but that progress has been slow. We cannot afford to rest. We need to keep our foot on the pedal to ensure that women feel bold.

Maxine Goddard, head of external partnerships at Insurance Cultural Awareness Network



I strongly urge you to absorb their advice on how to smash glass ceilings, improve female representation in the sector, tackle prejudice, win men over to fighting for greater diversity, and ensure women earn the same amount for men in the same roles. Their words, as well as actions, are truly inspiring.

But after talking to so many wise women who have managed to climb towards the top of the insurance career ladder, I also found myself

sadly facing the fact that while it is possible to smash through the City's glass ceiling in 2024, you then find yourself walking on broken glass.

Let's be blunt about this: Insurance needs to combat the serious case of 'diversity fatigue' there is in some quarters and push back against male leaders who think having bums on seats in the office is the way to please shareholders nervous about the state of the economy. Continued focus on pushing women onwards and upwards to the heights achieved by Blanc and Page is required, because, as Maxine Goddard, head of external partnerships at Insurance Cultural Awareness Network, observed when I spoke to her: "We should not – and cannot – relax.

"Increasingly we have more women who are more confident, but they too suffer setbacks and are subject to micro-aggressions, for example, that knock that confidence.

"Yes, we have made progress, but that progress, for the insurance industry and indeed business and society as a whole, has been slow.

"We cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We need to keep our foot on the pedal to ensure that women feel bold."

As Daphné Naudy, director of development for continental Europe at Charles Taylor, said: "A collaborative approach between men and women over gender balance is crucial in fostering a supportive environment.

"It's important to recognise the societal shift in attitudes toward gender roles and parenting taking place. For instance, we see an increasing number of men ready to share educational responsibilities, taking advantage of parental leave or being happy to relinquish the shackles of being the main breadwinner.

"This shift contributes to a more inclusive and understanding work environment. It also creates greater results as more inclusive companies are well-known for outperforming less inclusive ones."

Until female CEOs like Blanc no longer need to confront sexist shareholders at their company AGMs or face a backlash rather than praise when they [share tales of Sexism in the City with MPs](#) and how they sign-off all senior white male recruits as part of a diversity drive, then the fight for inclusivity must continue.

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