

PS Asks

Christine Sullivan

PS: You were a student of human factors engineering at Tufts University. How have the skills you learned there helped you in your career?

Christine: At Tufts I had the opportunity to do several internships, including one in the insurance industry. That experience led me to my current career, which I love. If I had not had the opportunity to do that internship, I don't think I would have ended up in the safety field.

PS: What prompted you to get involved with ASSE? How has your involvement affected your career?

Christine: I first got involved with ASSE out of college, then became an officer in Colorado when my then manager suggested it. From there I found out about all the wonderful volunteer opportunities and have continued to stay involved. Being involved in ASSE has strengthened many of my leadership and management skills and allowed me to continue to advance in my career.

PS: What's your favorite part about being an ASSE member?

Christine: My favorite part about being an ASSE member is the wonderful people I have met. These people have become mentors as well as friends and are a significant part of my life.

PS: You have been an active volunteer with various ASSE committees and groups. How has that experience helped you in the job you have now?

Christine: My involvement with ASSE has helped me develop many of the leadership and management skills that I use in my job every day. Learning to lead and manage volunteers helped me grow in my role at Lockton and allowed me the opportunity to move into my current position.

PS: One of those committees has been the PDC Planning Committee. How has being a part of that committee affected your conference experience?

Christine: The PDC Planning Committee puts a lot of time and effort into making sure the conference is a great experience for all attendees. Being part of that committee made me appreciate all the work that goes into the conference. As an attendee, I make sure to take part in as much of the experience as I can, as this is the one professional development event I never miss.

PS: The Loss Control Executive Summit panel at Safety 2011 spoke about how important it is to develop and build professional relationships. Why is this characteristic important for technical experts?

Christine: Relationships are important for many reasons. As a technical expert, the relationships built at ASSE and elsewhere are resources that can help when safety professionals are struggling with new problems. Reaching out to the peers who are part of your network can help with development of solutions. No safety professional should be an island, as there is always value that can be added from other colleagues.

PS: Another topic discussed by the panel was value. What are some ways SH&E professionals can demonstrate their value to the C-suite?

Christine: Being able to demonstrate value is a key component in determining the success of a safety professional. Safety professionals need to have strong business and communication skills and be able to relate their responsibilities to the overall success of the corporation. Safety professionals should be able to communicate to the C-suite how they are contributing to reducing the total cost of risk of the company through meaningful data and results.

PS: You are a member of ASSE's Women in Safety Engineering common interest group. How has the career outlook changed for women in the SH&E field since you started out, and what changes do you see ahead?

Christine: When I first started in safety, there were very few females in this profession. Most of my early mentors were males. As the field has changed, there are many bright female students entering the field who will drive change.

PS: What common problems do you see businesses facing today, and how can SH&E professionals best help companies face those challenges?

Christine: The economy is driving many companies to cut their workforce, with remaining employees working longer hours. This increase in work hours often results in an increase in injuries. In addition, this decrease in staff is challenging as many companies do not have the time to implement safety programs.

Safety professionals need to implement innovative solutions to help keep safety at the forefront during times when it is often an afterthought. Safety professionals need to remember that last year's solution is not necessarily the answer to this year's problem.

PS: What do you see as the five biggest issues facing the SH&E profession over the next 10 years?

Christine: The aging workforce and the obesity epidemic are increasing the injury rates at many employers. This is a significant challenge to safety professionals because it requires changes focused on other areas. The integration of wellness programs based on employee healthcare and combining it with workers' compensation can lead the safety professional to innovative solutions for these challenges.

Other challenges facing the safety professional will be the economy because safety is often an afterthought in difficult times, as well as the global workforce and addressing safety needs in developing countries.

PS: What's the biggest challenge you have faced so far in your safety career?

Christine: In my job, each day brings new challenges as client demands change daily. I have helped clients deal with fatalities, worked through OSHA exemptions and helped companies develop programs to allow them to become self-insured.

The excitement of working in the insurance industry is that I never have two days the same. If I were to choose my biggest challenge, it would probably be helping a client through a triple fatality in Utah where the three deceased employees were all young and had young families.

PS: As the SH&E profession continues to mature, what skills do you think will be most important for future professionals?

Christine: Safety professionals need strong leadership skills. They need to understand business and how risk affects business. They need to be analytical, and open to new ideas and solutions. Safety professionals need to embrace the idea of predictive modeling as this will help determine where and how safety efforts should be focused.

PS: If you could tell a new SH&E professional one thing, what would that be?

Christine: Get involved and find a mentor. There are many wonderful experienced people in ASSE who can help you as you enter this field.

PS: What skills do SH&E professionals need to become better risk managers?

Christine: Safety professionals need to become more analytical. They need to gather data and understand the data to find solutions to their challenges. To be a risk manager, the safety professional needs to understand the big picture. There are many facets of risk that a safety professional needs to understand including an employer's appetite for risk and how the company finances that risk.

Christine Sullivan, CSP, ARM, is risk control services manager in Lockton's Denver, CO, office. Christine joined Lockton in 1997, following 6 years as a loss control consultant with a commercial insurance company. She focuses on national accounts, with an emphasis on hospitality, manufacturing and service providers. Christine was recognized by ASSE as the Risk Management/Insurance Practice Specialty Safety Professional of the Year (SPY) in 2007 as well as the Council on Practices and Standards SPY in 2008. She was recently recognized by ASSE as one of 100 Women Making a Difference.