

# A Noble Profession

An Interview with **Dino E. Robusto**,  
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, CNA Financial Corporation

**EDITORS' NOTE** *With a career spanning more than 30 years, Dino Robusto is a recognized industry leader. Before CNA, he held various positions at Chubb, serving as President of Commercial and Specialty Lines, and President of Personal Lines and Claims. He has also held several underwriting and field roles of ever-increasing magnitude where he honed his trade expertise. Additionally, he had responsibility and oversight for several functional areas, including*



Dino E. Robusto

*human resources, information technology, communications, corporate development, external affairs and innovation. Robusto serves on the Board of Directors of Junior Achievement USA; the Board of Trustees for The Institutes; and the Board of Overseers for the Maurice R. Greenberg School of Risk Management, Insurance and Actuarial Sciences at St. John's University. Robusto formerly served on the Boards of Directors of Applied Systems and RAND Corporation's Institute for Civil Justice, and on the Board of Advisors of Catalyst Inc. He earned a bachelor's degree in commerce, finance and economics from McGill University in Montreal, and is a graduate of The Wharton Business School Executive Management Program.*

**COMPANY BRIEF** *CNA (cna.com) provides a broad range of standard and specialized property and casualty insurance products and services for businesses and professionals in the U.S., Canada and Europe, backed by more than 120 years of experience.*

**What interested you in leading CNA and made you feel it was the right fit?**

2016 marked my 30th year in the industry and I consider myself very fortunate that I work in an industry that I love and respect. Throughout my career, I made some very deliberate lateral career moves so I could experience most of the different roles that exist within an insurance company. I chose those varied career moves so that if and when I ever became a CEO, I would be better able

to relate to those across all the diverse functions and would be able to bring a uniquely qualified level of experience to the job.

When the CEO role opened up at CNA, I was familiar with the company since I had competed against it for several years. CNA's focus on its chosen target markets, products and services, as well as its very strong branch network, had similarities to my prior experiences and laid the groundwork for future opportunities. Additionally, CNA had an appealing ownership structure as a public company backed by a long-term commitment from a major shareholder. That commitment resonated with me and with my passion for the industry and drive to evolve the organization. I knew we could achieve an even higher level of performance over time.

**How do you define the CNA difference?**

CNA is one of the largest commercial property and casualty insurance companies with 81 offices across the globe.

Our differentiation has three dimensions: coverage, business size, and industry specialization.

CNA offers a broad suite of coverages, whether property full ground-up, shared and layered, primary and excess commercial liability coverages, ocean and inland marine, management and professional liability coverages, as well as surety and warranty.

We have solutions for small businesses, as well as middle-market and large sized businesses. Obviously, they are different, but we specialize our coverages towards very specific industry segments such as construction, manufacturing, technology, healthcare, professional services, real estate, and financial institutions. We have some of the industry's oldest and most successful affinity programs, which are uniquely tailored to professionals such as architects and engineers, accountants and lawyers.

**How critical is innovation for CNA?**

We look at purpose-driven innovation. The reason we use that phraseology is that innovation has to create value for our agents and brokers, insureds, and employees, whether that innovation is in products and services, business processes, or technology. Many people think of innovation as happening exclusively through technology, but it's much broader than that. We are trying to inculcate innovative thinking in the tasks that people are executing every day.

For CNA, innovation is not a side project. It's not a discrete initiative. It is paramount in everything we do, and that's why we call it purpose-driven innovation. One should never

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underestimate the power of rethinking process versus technology. However, technology and analytics are having an enormous impact right now on the insurance industry.

**Do you worry that the focus on technology is going to take away from the relationship side of the business?**

This is fundamentally a relationship business, and we work very hard at relationships. We have a big branch footprint to facilitate local relationships and our entire executive leadership team has spent the past three years working on being accessible to the distribution network all the time. Technology and analytics, or analytical technologies as I like to call the fusion of the two, enhances relationships because it dramatically improves our ability to be more accessible to our distribution partners and clients.

It's like that proverbial conversation around whether people that use all these mobile devices to communicate are losing their relationship-building skills, but I don't feel that way. On the contrary, it opens them up to a world of interactions with others that would not have otherwise been possible.

The analytical technologies we are focused on are AI and machine learning, as well as cloud computing. I don't believe that the fundamental business of insurance is changing, but effectively adopted into the insurance value chain, the game-changing benefits are unquestionable because you can dramatically accelerate the speed at which you can identify competitive insights and optimize your business processes and customer interaction.

**How will this innovation and technology change the workforce of the future?**

Innovation and analytical technologies enhance the level and quality of work our people are doing. With every new technology tool or operational innovation from the fax machine, shortly after I started in the industry, to computers, mobile devices and process automation, the workforce adapted and leveraged the tools to shed certain tasks and replaced them with higher level functions. But, it requires consistently investing in the continuous training and education of our people in the evolutionary process of adopting these new tools and processes to ensure that we marry their institutional industry knowledge with leading technological capabilities.

The next generation of individuals this industry is eager to attract are interested in that kind of investment, and they are eminently proficient in adopting these ever-newer capabilities. I do not view these new developments in any sort of dire or negative way. Rather you simply have to invest in the evolution of how people utilize and interface with these new analytical technologies, and I think it's one of the reasons some people are becoming very interested in our industry.

**How critical is it for CNA to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?**

It is not only the right thing to do, it's clearly a business imperative. It allows you greater access to more talent and, therefore, more success in the industry because it is all about talent. At the end of the day, you win and lose this game on the talent that you have. D&I is critical to ensure access to a very wide breadth of talent.

We have found that when you're working with people with different backgrounds and lifestyles and in turn bring different experiences, you are going to create a team environment that is increasingly innovative and capable of making smarter decisions. It also fosters a greater ability for the team to adapt to change, and in the end if you can facilitate all of this, it leads to better performance.

We spend a considerable amount of time and resources on inclusive leadership, which requires that the management team fully understands all the traits and behaviors and demonstrates them daily. We empower six employee resource groups so they can better engage with our employees, and we are continuing to create an environment that allows everyone to do their best work.

**Will you discuss CNA's commitment to corporate responsibility and community engagement?**

This is really important. There are several aspects of corporate social responsibility. One is that we have a big focus on community involvement through broad support of employee volunteerism and I am immensely proud of the work that our employees do.

We have programs that address environmental sustainability, reducing waste, and promoting resource efficiency. We also invest in STEM education, which helps ensure future generations have job security.

This industry is a noble profession because it provides an underlying stability to the global economy and commerce, and it mitigates a vast array of risks that companies face. When disasters happen, we help companies, individuals and communities rebuild. Those seeking purpose and social benefits find this aspect, in addition to everything else we provide as a career, to be quite unique to our industry because it really does impact the lives of so many people.

**How do you define effective leadership?**

I like to say to my leadership team that leadership is blisteringly liberating. It is so because as a leader, your value and your output is measured by the entire collective group's aggregate output. I am focused on this because as the world becomes increasingly complex and transforms at a dramatic pace, the skill and expertise of the collective group is needed to navigate effectively.

I am very fortunate to have a group of executives with broad and deep technical management skills. I am most proud that this group is crafted around complimentary experiences, which when combined with my conviction towards collaboration, creates a whole that is greater than the proverbial sum of the parts. Now, as I also say, it can strip you of certain liberties, and within this theme, I have to restrict the urge to do it myself which can at times seem appealing because you think it's just easier or faster to do so, but you weaken the collective power of the whole.

This dichotomy of leadership is intriguing to me as I help CNA navigate and leverage the big changes impacting business today.

**Do you take moments to reflect and celebrate the wins or are you always looking to the future?**

I am somewhere in the middle. I tend to just make it all a journey, and so the process and the journey itself is what you have to find value and personal satisfaction in.

It is less about discrete objectives and more about how you get there. The process itself is what gets me going and what I stay focused on. This is an exciting industry and it has provided an exciting career. I thoroughly love what I do. ●