



Deanna M. Mulligan

EDITORS' NOTE Deanna Mulligan assumed the role of President and Chief Operating Officer in November of 2010. Mulligan was appointed Chief Executive Officer in July 2011, at which time she also became a Guardian director. Mulligan joined Guardian in July 2008 as Executive Vice President in charge of the company's Individual Life and Disability business. Mulligan joined Guardian after having run her own consulting firm. Earlier in her career, she held the roles of Senior Vice President at New York Life and Executive Vice President at AXA Financial, and was a principal with McKinsey & Company's New York office. Mulligan is on the board of the Life Insurance Council of New York (LICONY). She has an M.B.A. from Stanford University and a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Nebraska.

COMPANY BRIEF A mutual insurer founded in 1860, The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America (www.GuardianLife.com) and its subsidiaries are committed to protecting individuals, business owners, and their employees with life, disability income, and dental insurance products, and also offer funding vehicles for 401(k) plans, annuities, and other financial products. Guardian operates one of the largest dental networks in the United States and protects more than six million employees and their families at 115,000 companies. The company has approximately 5,000 employees in the United States and a network of over 3,000 financial representatives in more than 80 agencies nationwide.

How do you show what makes a company stand apart within the space?

Guardian is differentiated because we are a mutual company – we are owned by our policyholders and are managed for the long-term – and our culture is very strong and goes back to our founder who said a life insurance company should live forever.

Each time we sell a policy, we are making a promise that goes very far into the future.

Managed for the Long Term

An Interview with Deanna M. Mulligan,
President and Chief Executive Officer, The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America

So we manage the company with the next 100 years in mind. It's the extent to which that philosophy permeates our culture that makes The Guardian different from other companies.

How has Guardian been positioned during the economic downturn?

From 2008 to 2011, while total life insurance sales in the industry shrunk 3 percent, Guardian grew at a 9 percent compound average growth rate. That's because our clients and potential clients are, more than ever, focused on quality, strength of earnings, financial strength, culture, and reputation.

What major technological advances has Guardian made in recent years?

Since 2005, Guardian financial representatives have been armed with a Web-based tool we call The Living Balance Sheet to help clients understand their financial position and risks that they need to protect against. This tool helps them understand the value of their lives and others in their families, and how to protect that life value with insurance. It has been very successful.

It also provides our clients with enhancements like an electronic vault, where they can keep documents online. They can access a number of their other accounts online as well as their Guardian account to provide a consolidated balance sheet, as well as a view of their cash flow and where their money goes each month.

That Living Balance Sheet view, combined with a relationship with a Guardian financial representative trained to help people look at their total financial picture, has been one of the drivers of our sales and relationship growth over the past several years.

What makes for a successful financial advisor today?

The first characteristic is concern about the client and the desire to help a client improve his or her situation.

We place particular emphasis on people who want to learn and grow, who have the capability to meet our stringent requirements for education and licensing, and who have the same beliefs we do about the importance of compliance with regulation.

The life insurance industry is currently trying to bring more women in because they're not equally represented in terms of the numbers. We have a lot of female clients and women tend to end up with the money because they live longer. There is a need to serve them and we're hoping to attract more women into the financial representative position in order to do that.

Should more be done to raise the awareness that most significant undertakings require insurance?

Guardian has a protection first philosophy in our Living Balance Sheet tools and we say that before you think about investing, you should make sure that all of your risks are protected. That's not just life insurance risk, but disability risk, property casualty risks for your home and autos, and risk of being sued. We train our financial representatives to consider risks first and to make sure that clients are protected before moving on to the investment portions of their clients' portfolios.

Protection is underrepresented in the minds of the American public among things they should be worried about. We are trying to change that.

How critical is the focus on corporate responsibility?

Corporate social responsibility is a part of who we are as a company. We're a mutual company owned by our policy owners and we are members of the community in which our policy owners live, so it makes sense that we focus on our communities. We have a large employee volunteer program where we not only give money but employee time.

It has been this way throughout our 152-year history and it's a part of our corporate mission.

What are the latest innovations in the industry?

Life insurers are known for helping people ameliorate the risk of dying too soon, but one risk that most people are now facing is the risk of living too long. We offer an annuity portfolio and are in the process of developing more products to help our clients with that risk.

Is regulation at the right level today?

Guardian has grown since 2008, so our performance would suggest that we haven't been impeded by new regulation. We work very closely with all of the authorities that oversee us and we believe we have a good reputation among our regulators.

What are you most focused on to ensure growth for Guardian continues?

Many in America today are underinsured. It's our responsibility to educate the public on how they can be better prepared to meet some of the financial challenges that occur throughout one's lifetime.

We primarily accomplish that through our financial representatives but we're also looking at including financial education in our charitable activities. ●