

# A Mission for the Military

Interviews with **Laura Bishop, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer,**  
and **Tiffanie L. McDonald, Assistant Vice President-Human Resources, Talent Management, USAA**

**COMPANY BRIEF** *United Services Automobile Association and its affiliates (collectively referred to as USAA; usaa.com) make up one of America's leading financial services organizations. USAA has been serving military families since 1922 and offers its 10.6 million members a comprehensive range of insurance, banking, investment, and retirement products, financial advice and planning, and services designed to help them meet their financial needs. Headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, USAA owns or manages assets of \$210 billion.*



Laura Bishop

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Prior to assuming her current post, Laura Bishop was Senior Vice President and Deputy Chief Financial Officer. Bishop joined USAA in 2001 and has served in a variety of senior leadership roles in Internal Audit, Capital Management, Corporate Financial Planning, and Financial Strategy and Reporting. She was named Deputy CFO in 2012.*

## What is the secret to the success for USAA?

The secret is the culture of USAA. We live and breathe our mission statement, which is to facilitate the financial security of the military and their families.

We were founded by a group of military officers who could not get insurance from anyone else at the time. Other companies considered military personnel high risk. They didn't understand these military folks who moved all over and flew airplanes, so they didn't insure them. That group of officers decided to form USAA and insure each other, and to take on financial risks for each other.

This mission for the military has permeated our culture over our entire history. Approximately 1 in 4 of our employees is still serving now, has served, or is a military spouse. This helps us understand what we're doing for the membership we're serving and how we can serve them better.

## Is it more challenging to maintain the culture as the company grows?

I don't think it gets harder the larger we get. We absolutely stay focused on it and we never take it for granted.

As a financial professional, I worked for a public company before USAA. When I first arrived, this culture resonated with me as I watched the company make a decision that hurt it financially but that was the right thing to do for the membership.

## What excited you about the opportunity at USAA and made you feel it was the right fit?

It intrigued me to learn that there were four major business lines under one roof at USAA: insurance, banking, investments, and advice; this was a big part of the draw for me as I understood how much I could learn in an organization as complex as this one.

## How has the CFO role evolved, and how critical is it in that role to be a part of business strategy decisions?

There has been a significant evolution. At USAA, the role is much more than a traditional financial one. Being a trusted business partner and involved in strategic decision-making is the most critical role a CFO plays today.

We still have the traditional functions, and we run the finance function efficiently and effectively for the organization, but that's just table stakes now.

When I first joined USAA, the CFO function was larger than what it is today in terms of the number of people. We're really proud of how efficient and streamlined we've become. We have improved some of the core processes, which allows us to spend more time on business analysis and predictive analytics that help drive decision-making. This is the real benefit of the evolution we've gone through. ●



Tiffanie L. McDonald

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Tiffanie McDonald has held her current post since February 2009. Prior to this, she was the Senior Director-Human Resources and Diversity for SYSCO. She has also been Director and Senior Counsel with Human Resources and Labor Relations for United Airlines, as well as a Senior HR Representative with Employee Relations and Diversity for TXU Energy.*

## What is the objective of the diversity and inclusion program for USAA?

The objective of our program is really to create a culture of inclusion.

We look to create a work environment where everyone values diversity, and particularly diversity of thought because this helps improve decision-making and performance overall.

## How are diversity and inclusion intertwined?

Diversity is about the unique characteristics that an individual possesses in ensuring that we have a group of employees who reflect our labor market and membership.

Inclusion leads to all of the benefits of diversity, such as improved performance and employee retention. It is about how we leverage that diversity to improve products and services, to drive more innovation, and to ensure that we maintain a workplace where employees feel valued, so they perform better.

I often describe inclusion as the how – How we use diversity to achieve a competitive advantage, because that is the end state. You have to leverage diversity of thought to drive improved performance.

## How critical is it to have the support at the senior level in this role?

It's absolutely critical that diversity and inclusion is viewed as a business imperative. This includes everything from affirmative action and EEO compliance to helping to create an inclusive workplace and identify strategies to source diverse talent internally and externally.

In order for diversity and inclusion to be successful, it has to be integrated into the way we operate every day – it can't exist just as a concept. This starts with leadership who create an environment where employees understand, feel, and believe that diversity is valued.

## Is the dialogue taking place and are the right areas being addressed to provide opportunities for women?

The dialogue around female advancement is taking place. In order to address it at a grassroots level, a company has to really understand its culture. They must dig deeper and understand the factors and criteria for success at a particular company, as well as apply a merit-based approach in making those selection decisions.

As a society, we have to make sure that our decisions are fair and merit-based. We have to cast a wide net and make sure we are reaching out to broad groups of talent so that, when we make decisions, we're sourcing and selecting from diverse talent pools, whether that is externally or internally.

Every company has its own unique challenges and has to understand those challenges so it can put in place solutions that are tailored to address those issues and eventually lead to a successful solution. ●