

In Conversation: 5 Minutes With Keely Autrey

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JLT Public Sector NSW General Manager Keely Autrey has had a somewhat unconventional insurance career. From physiotherapy and workers' compensation, to the JLT offices in London and back.

Now tasked with setting the strategic direction for our business, Keely's varied background makes her a unique although many of you've met Keely (as she loves getting out to meet our member councils), her career journey may surprise you. So grab a cuppa and settle in.

Q: When did you become General Manager?

I've been General Manager since November 2019. However, I wasn't thrown into it suddenly. I've been transitioning into the role for quite a while.

Q: What does your role entail?

I sit across our account management, risk management and claims teams. Essentially, I see myself as a team coordinator – making sure we're on track and that our Member councils are getting the service they need.

Championing innovation in the business, my goal is also to figure out where we want to head and how to get everyone onboard with that direction.

I'm also very focused on building and maintaining a positive workplace culture – one where we have each other's backs and strive for excellence in all we do. Because when we're working seamlessly as a team, it means we're bringing better service to our clients.

Q: How did your career in the insurance industry begin?

I was actually a physiotherapist before I moved into insurance broking – a more logical career pathway than what you may first think.

I initially chose physio because I've always enjoyed helping people. Even as a child, if someone was hurt, I was the one who wanted to put the band-aid on.

But physiotherapy didn't end up meeting my expectations. Aside from its physical demands, I sometimes felt like we were churning through patients just to make more money. This meant I wasn't always able to provide the quality of care I wanted to.

So after five years, I decided it was time to branch out. When I turned to my physio boss for advice, he encouraged me to look at the transferable skills I had developed in my role.

That's when I discovered workers' compensation. I knew I had the interpersonal and negotiation skills required. And I liked that my physio knowledge would be a real asset in this line of work.

After making the move, I quickly knew it was the right one for me.

Managing workers' compensation claims is a challenging job but I really enjoyed finding out what the employees needed to get better – and helping them (and their employer) get the best possible outcome.

Q: How has your background in allied health helped your insurance career?

Aside from the obvious connection with physio and workers' compensation, I believe my background has equipped me with many relevant skills.

A while ago I participated in a leadership course with JLT, and the trainers identified several people who they believed showed promising leadership qualities.

Interestingly, quite a few of those people had backgrounds in allied health.

Insurance brokers are out talking to people a lot, so they need to be skilled at active listening. This means spotting cues and working out the source of a problem – rather than pre-emptively jumping to solutions. Health professionals are well trained to do this.

For instance, when a patient came to me with a sore back when I was a physiotherapist, I would ask many questions to figure out the cause. So by the time I started formally assessing them, I would already have a fairly good idea on what was causing the issue.

I love problem solving and helping people, and I think my background in allied health has set me up with the skills I need to do this as a broker.

Q: What's been your career highlight?

After a few years in workers' compensation, I wanted to try something new. I had only tried my hand at one area of broking, and I was excited to see what else was out there.

My boss at the time suggested I do a rotation through different areas at JLT. And I replied, "Okay, could I possibly do that in our head office in London?"

You see, at that point in my life I wanted to travel, but not at the expense of my career. I saw this as the perfect solution.

Thankfully, I was offered a job in the liability claims team in London for 12 months. After that, I moved into the London placement team, where my insurance knowledge grew exponentially. The people in that team were a fount of knowledge, so I was constantly learning. I also got to work with underwriters face-to-face.

I ended up staying in London for three years, which was a definite career highlight for me. To this day, I still work closely with my London-based colleagues.

Q: What's the best part about your job?

My favourite part of the job is meeting with our Member councils. Obviously, things have been a little different lately – with COVID-19 forcing us to stop our in-person visits. But before March 2020, my team and I took regular road trips across NSW to visit our Members. We would sometimes visit up to four or five councils a day during these road trips.

The main reasons for these trips were to get to know our Members better – and to update them on what's happening with the mutual and the insurance market.

Given that we can't do these trips for the moment, we recently held a webinar about the insurance trends we've been seeing. (If any of our Members missed it, they can still access the recording.)

Q: What are you most looking forward to right now?

As many of our Members would be aware, our annual Risk Management Conference is usually held in August. With the pandemic, we weren't sure if it would go ahead. So rather than sit and wait to see what happens, we've gone for a change of plan this year.

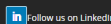
In October, Statewide Mutual will be conducting a roadshow across the state. We will take our mini half-day conference out to our Members.

I'm really looking forward to seeing our Members again. And I think the roadshow will be a great way to catch up with everyone. Can't wait!


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