

HIGHER EDUCATION

Chubb's producer school enhances skills with real life practice

By Barbara A. Morris

Seven teams of students, each representing a player in a unique "Cases and Coverages" board game, waited patiently for their turn. One team lost points because they had "miscalculated a commission" and

soon after, another team took a financial hit because "the market softened."

The game—which mimicked the life of a commercial lines account from making the sale to settling a claim—was the culminating classroom event that concluded the two-week Chubb Producer Development School held in March in

Los Angeles. It was one of many creative learning opportunities provided for the 39 new producers from Chubb agencies around the country during "Phase Two" of an intensive four-phase educational program that spans a full year.

The school, says Elizabeth McDaid, Chubb's vice president of agency education, reflects the company's strong and immediate commitment to its agency force as well as to a longer-term philosophy—helping promising producers early in their careers "to differentiate themselves and differentiate all that Chubb brings to the industry and the consumer."

Chubb Producer Development School students (from left) Jill Raab, Gary Sigel and Heath Stockton, pore over the "Cases and Coverages" game during the School's two-week session held in March. The smaller photos illustrate other aspects of the School (from left): a small group discussion including students Drew Sanders and Adrien King; and interactive classroom training: students Mark Schmidt and Jack Bailey with The Rough Notes Company's Linda Ferguson; Chubb's Elizabeth McDaid; and The Rough Notes Company's Eric Hall and student Dan Robles.



McDaid explains that Phase One of the program ran from January until right before Phase Two and required producers to complete an intensive online course of study focusing on basic insurance coverages. During the 10-week period, students were required to pass 11 online examinations covering all of the coursework. This initial course of study, addressing such coverages as property, workers compensation, business, liability, and other commercial lines, prepared the students for Phase Two, which was intended, says McDaid, “to help producers take the information they learned online and apply it to real life scenarios.”

According to Patricia Encinas, Chubb agency education consultant, the students who participated in Phase Two reflect a mix of producers relatively new to the industry—men and women ranging in age from 22 to over 40, with some just beginning their careers and others transitioning to the insurance business from other successful working environments. Common to all, however, was that each was recommended for the program by Chubb’s top agencies identified through the Chubb branch offices. “They are all high caliber,” says McDaid, recalling the commitment and professionalism that students demonstrated during the school. “Each day the class ran from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and students had to complete homework every night. The participants really showed what it takes to be productive, dedicated agents,” she adds.

According to McDaid, Phase Two consisted of interactive classroom training, with an emphasis on both sales and coverages. The curriculum was supported with The Agency OnLine Software developed by The



Scott Addis, President and CEO of The Addis Group in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, leads a session on risk management.

Rough Notes Company. In addition to technical training in a wide range of property, liability, inland marine, business owners, and other insurance topics, students were taught policy and claim reviews, as well as coverage recommendations through case studies, role playing, discussions and action learning groups. Sales training, she continues, “was woven throughout the session. Participants were taught an insurance-specific sales process and were given opportunities each day to practice selling each commercial product.”

Encinas also explains that students were separated into teams of five to six members who worked together during the two weeks to earn points toward recognition as the best overall team. This team approach, she believes, added the elements of excitement and friendly competition to the class, while also serving to further motivate already highly motivated

participants. A secondary competition, in which teams vied for points earned through completion of insurance-related word puzzles, brain teasers, and other equally entertaining challenges, also culminated in team recognition at the end of the session, with each member receiving a sales strategies training book.

Matt Elmore, producer at Swingle, Collins & Associates, a mid-sized property/casualty agency in Dallas, proudly announced that he was a member of the best overall winning team—the “B.O.R.s” (Broker of Record). And while he places a certain sentimental value on the crystal trophy he and his team members received, he places even greater value on the “wonderful experience” he had at the Producer Development School. “Chubb did a great job of anticipating the needs of every producer in attendance and addressing these needs through the programming and

During the School, students learned and worked in teams. (Left photo) Eric Hall confers with “BOR” (Broker of Record) team members (from left) Matt Ellmore, Kirk Dreyer and Ryan Daugherty during classroom instruction. (Right photo) “Wriggs Corp.” team members (from left) Andrew Berenzweig, Heath Stockton, Hans Ambrosia, Jill Raab, Rob Pierce and Gary Sigel investigate possible exposures in a hands-on assignment.



the outstanding expertise brought in from the industry," he says. The team approach, he continues, was also invaluable because it afforded him an opportunity to work closely with producers from other agencies and to "share best practices."

Elmore, has been with his agency for nine months, having previously worked in the technology and consulting industry. He notes that the School significantly changed his

attitudes about the sales process, helping to clarify his understanding that the process does not begin and end with a quote. "I find that I'm a bit more patient and more selective about the accounts I'm working on. The Chubb School gave me a high level of understanding of how to demonstrate value over the sales process."

Hans Ellison cites a similar benefit of the school, recalling the challenges he faced having transitioned from a data solutions environment, in which he sold tangible products, to a large agency in which his product comprised the more intangible benefits an insurance policy represents.

Ellison, an account executive with The Sadler Insurance Agency, Inc., in Nashua, New Hampshire, says the Producer Development School "exceeded my expectations." Not only did the school provide him with the technical training he needed, but Ellison recalls it focused on relationship-building skills that are necessary when the product being sold is financial protection and peace of mind.

"Insurance is definitely more of a relationship industry and I learned many useful strategies for relationship building," says Ellison. He also credited the organizers of the school with "going the extra mile" to offer a balanced program that combined a variety of learning opportunities, while drawing upon the expertise of "exceptional" faculty and speakers. "The organizers mixed it up and got everybody involved which kept everyone interested. Even though there were people with



The beautiful Pacific Palms Conference Center in Los Angeles was the setting for the Chubb Producer Development School.

different experiences and backgrounds, I felt like the program was geared towards me. It definitely gave me the steps to move in the right direction."

One of the instructors was Scott Addis, president and CEO of The Addis Group, a risk management consulting and insurance brokerage company in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. He took the students in the direction of risk management, exploring the process and benefits of a vital service he believes too many agents overlook. Addis stressed the value and application of the risk management process undertaken by the insurance agent, particularly to the middle market business owner/operator who often can't or won't take the time to prioritize risk management issues and identify exposures. "There is a huge need for someone to come in and help them identify risks," says Addis, whose presentation included class discussion, exercises and team presentations.

"We tend to focus on price but insurance brokers need to move away from bidding—they must learn their client's business and identify the exposures," Addis continues. The insurance product, he stresses, is only one component of a broader risk management process. The broker who brings risk management expertise to the table is the broker who will stand out among the competition. This message, observes Addis, was embraced by many of the participants, whom he characterizes as "very responsive," some of whom have since contacted him to share their newly created risk management proposals targeting

specific clients.

Upon completion of Phase Two of the Chubb Producer Development School, the producers have returned to their agencies with heightened technical knowledge and numerous strategies "to help them both in sales and retention of business," says Encinas. They are now in Phase Three of the program, which provides each participant with a

year of follow-up training aimed at reinforcing and building on the skills acquired in Phases One and Two. This training, continues Encinas, will be done via monthly Webcasts (conducted by leading experts from the industry), online training and teleconferencing. Students will also work in study groups to complete AAI 81, Foundations of Insurance Products, which is the first of the three-part Accredited Advisor in Insurance Program, a designation offered by the AICPCU. Additionally, participants will check their production and development goals set during Phase Two using a computerized tracking system. According to Encinas, their input into this system will be monitored and provided to their sales manager, and students will also receive feedback and coaching from the School faculty.

The Chubb Producer Development School will conclude with Phase Four—slated for the spring of 2005—offering participants a one-week classroom session focusing on in-depth Chubb product training. The products emphasized, notes McDaid, "will be those that provide differentiation and a competitive advantage to a new producer." The curriculum, which will also include advanced sales training, will be taught by Chubb field managers and agents who have successfully sold the products.

Looking ahead, McDaid is confident about the competitive edge agents have already realized through their participation in Phases One and

Two of the Chubb Producer Development School. Many have since contacted her not only to express their high levels of satisfaction with both the curriculum and faculty, but to report on the innovative strategies they are applying to current and prospective accounts.

"The program provided all of us with the tools; now it's up to us to use them," concurs Gary Sigel, vice president, Acordia of California Insurance Services, a large brokerage in Rancho Cordova, California. Sigel,

who joined the brokerage about six months ago following a 20-year career with a large food manufacturer, likewise pointed to a change in perspective following completion of Phase Two, which will help his career move forward. "Today," he stresses, "I'm acting more like a consultant than a salesperson."

McDaid says that Chubb is organizing another group to begin Phase One of a new Producer Development School this summer, with Phase Two of that program scheduled

for October 24-November 5 in Atlanta. Those interested in participating in or recommending a candidate for this program should contact their local Chubb branch office. n

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