

Agency for Change Podcast: Susie Keisler-Munro, President and CEO, Assurity

- Connect with Susie on LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/susan-susie-keisler-munro-work-195298b/>
- Learn more about Assurity - <https://www.assurity.com/>
- Listen to Assurity's Good Business Podcast: <https://www.assurity.com/goodbusiness>

Susie Keisler-Munro

We always have more to learn than we have to tell.

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman:

One of the things I really love about our show is that we get to deep dive into topics that otherwise don't get a lot of attention. And today is a perfect example of that. So take a look at your most recent pay stub. You might have a line item listed somewhere at the bottom for either life insurance or disability insurance or both. But beyond that regular deduction from your paycheck, most of us don't give a lot of time to thinking about this type of thing.

Well, today we're talking with an insurance company that's been helping those in Lincoln, Nebraska, and across the country through difficult times for over a century. So stay tuned because we're going to hear exactly what's unique about this particular organization, how they're doing business differently from others in the industry and where you can learn more about their work.

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. Today's guest is Susie Keisler-Munro, president and CEO of Assurity, an insurance company made up of people who work together to protect you and your loved ones during difficult times. Susie, welcome to the podcast.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Well, thank you, Lyn. I've enjoyed listening to many of your interviews, so I'm pleased to be with you today.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, it's so great to have you with us. I've been really excited to talk to you. And to kick us off, could you just help our listeners understand what Assurity does and how you help people?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Sure. So technically Assurity is a life and supplemental health insurance company. But that probably doesn't do us justice. So if we rewind a little bit back to our beginnings, what is the modern day Assurity life insurance company really traces its roots back to the 1890s. And really three startup companies that were conceived during a decade of what was drought and depression. And they all really reflected, I think, the entrepreneurial spirit and the resilience of the pioneers. And if you look at the basis on which they were all formed, it was really just the simple, but I think really powerful concept of people coming together to support each other in moments of need. And it really is that very concept that still underpins our company today. And when you think about it, it is pretty much just the essence of what insurance is all about. We're just really driven to bring people financial protection, a safety that's going to help them withstand.

Lyn Wineman:

Susie, I appreciate that because when you were talking, it takes me back to when I was a newlywed, which has been quite some time. One of the first things my husband did after we got married was set up a meeting with a life insurance agent. And I remember thinking, "Why are we doing this? We are young and healthy and invincible." But, you got to think about these things when times are good. Because if you wait, it's going to be too late. So it's great to have Assurity helping people in that way.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Absolutely. People want protection and they deserve protection. And we try to find ways to make their lives easier when those hardships come and we all know they do come. They come in big forms and small forms.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. So Susie, I know that you were previously an actuary before taking your current role as president and CEO of Assurity, which congratulations, by the way. I am curious, what inspired your interest in actuarial science and at the time you went into the field, did you think it would lead you down this path?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Well, so I had a keen interest in mathematics really from an early age. My father was a college mathematics professor. So, you might say it was in my blood. But the interest actually in an actuarial career was sparked originally in probably my junior high school years by a long-time piano teacher of mine.

Lyn Wineman:

A piano teacher?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Yes. Who knew I had an aptitude for mathematics, and she had a daughter who was an actuary. And so she was the first one to really talk to me about that. So-

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

That intersection of business and mathematics was something that was always of interest to me. In terms of aspiring to be a CEO, I look back on my career and I never really had specific aspirations to hold a particular position. I've been really fortunate in my career to always have the right challenge and the right opportunity present itself at the right time. Where I felt like I was really engaged and challenged by the work that I was coming to do every day. And believing that the contributions I was making were really having a difference in the organization. So I'm honored and humbled to have the CEO position and really just provide some stewardship for this 132 year old company, just for the next little while. We make commitments in the products that we sell today that can extend a hundred years.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

So the responsibility and the privilege is not lost on me.

Lyn Wineman:

That is really a unique part of the business you are in. And I love the story about your piano teacher, as well, because I think inspiration can come in so many different forms. And I think it's a good reminder to all of us as we go through our day. You never know, are we maybe inspiring the next Susie Keisler-Munro. That would be a great honor for anyone.

So how has, Susie, since your product has gone for so long, it goes for so long into the future. I'm sure, though, you've seen insurance change during your time in the industry. I'm curious, what are some of the trends that you're seeing?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Yes, so I've been in the industry over 35 years, so yes, I'm old. As most things in the world, there's been a host of changes during that time. I think as with most industries, technology is clearly one of the primary drivers of change that I've experienced in the industry in my career. When I started my career, there was no internet, personal computers were not something that was just standard issue at a company. You look at all the-

Lyn Wineman:

I have to ask, I'm going to jump in. Did you have a typewriter on your desk?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

I did not have a typewriter. I had a mainframe terminal and a big desk calculator.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh yeah, yeah. I remember that, too.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

But there were typewriters definitely available. I mean, you think about sophisticated modeling software that exist for actuaries today didn't exist. I mean, all the applications, the claims for benefits that were

processed were all on paper. I mean, the list just goes on and on, the things that technology has improved. And I think one of the things, the availability of electronic medical records and all sorts of data, make it really so much easier today to evaluate risk without really being intrusive in people's lives. And then, just all the software, the availability of real time data and information, electronic signatures and forms and payment methods. I mean, it's just easier than ever before to provide consumers with the types of products that we provide.

Lyn Wineman:

That's great. That is great. I think it's hard for some people to even imagine that there was a time before an internet and a personal computer.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Exactly, exactly.

Lyn Wineman:

Times have changed. One of the things that I have always admired about Assurity is your commitment to sustainability and taking care of the planet, Susie. I didn't realize this, but in doing a little bit of research, I understand there's some significance to where Assurity chose to build its Lincoln headquarters in the Antelope Valley, which at one time was a flood plain. I'm curious, what are some of the other ways the company is making an impact from an environmental perspective?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Right, Lyn, we did very intentionally locate this new campus, which we moved to in 2011 in this area. And specifically because it was an area of urban renewal and we felt like it could be a catalyst for other development in this area. We really enjoyed a lot of great partnership with the city of Lincoln and being able to locate our campus here. At the good fortune of being involved in that whole process, which was a great learning experience that I never imagined having. So we opened, like I said, in 2011 here at 20th and Q Street. And in pursuing that location, we really wanted to provide a first-class working atmosphere for our associates. Something that was very ergonomically designed and friendly that had great access to the outdoors. During the construction and building process, we were very focused on making good decisions for the environment. So we did pursue and were awarded the lead goal certification status.

Lyn Wineman:

Not an easy one to get, either, I understand.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Yeah, no. So we're really proud of that. So that was kind of an event, but there's a lot of everyday ways that we try to focus on sustainability, too. And one of those is just trying to divert as much waste from the landfill as we can and we track that. Last year it was over 65% that was diverted away from landfill.

Lyn Wineman:

That's amazing.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

We have a paperless processing business internally here, littler things. We promote and offer reusable dishware and tableware in our cafeteria. One of the other fun things about this campus is we've repurposed some underground storm water collection units, for lack of a better term, that were on this campus. We repurpose those and turn those into an underground system. So we capture all of the runoff water on our site and we store it-

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Down there and then we pump it out of there to use for all of our irrigation needs. I mean, those are a few things.

We also have a sustainability task force that's led and run by a group of associates here that really does a great job providing events here in the building and all sorts of forms of education for associates on sustainability efforts. They can take up not just at the office, but at home too.

Lyn Wineman:

I love all of those suggestions. I think those are great inspiration for a lot of organizations that are working to improve our sustainability measures, as well. And I think in the public, we hear about the big things, but there's a lot of small things that go into that day-to-day movement as well.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Absolutely.

Lyn Wineman:

Susie, also in the community of Lincoln and across the state of Nebraska, Assurity is such a pillar of the community. I mean, there's so many things that the organization does to give back to the community. I also know you do a lot to empower your employees. And I'm curious, are there things that you do with your team members to help them participate in causes that they are passionate about?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Yes, we do. I'm really proud, Assurity associates have really always embraced their capacity to improve other people's lives. When I look at some of the ways that we promote and offer opportunities for our associates to engage in those activities, some of them are very structured and very intentional. Whether it's having Meals on Wheels delivery teams or we recently started a summer math mentoring program with the Malone Center, through an organization that's actually centered out of the society of actuaries. Mentoring students in reading, as well. We routinely sponsored blood drives here on our campus, offer opportunities to volunteer at nonprofits, we clean up the trails that are adjacent to our campus here, as well. And so really proud that it seems like when there's a need, Assurity can be found there.

As I was just walking into this meeting, we're always a proud pay center company for the United Way campaign. And my assistant just notified me that we're just shy of having 70% of our associates pledge to our-

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Campaign this year, which incredible level of participation. Just really proud of the group of associates I get to work with every day. One of the other things we try to do, as you mentioned before, is let people kind of pursue their own personal passion. So we have a program that offers associates one extra day of paid time off in order to pursue some volunteer passion of their own choosing, as well.

Lyn Wineman:

That's really great. Volunteering in a field that you're passionate about is such a great way to, I think, learn about yourself, to maybe explore talents, to get the courage, to try new things that maybe you wouldn't do so in your day-to-day job. So, that is fantastic.

And I want you to know, Susie, you being here on the podcast really represents something very special for us, too. KidGlov became one of Nebraska's Certified B Corporations last year, and it's been a passion project of mine to have representatives from all of Nebraska's B Corp. So I know Assurity was one of the first, pioneering that space for Nebraskans. And you're the sixth one right now that we've had on the show. So first, thank you for being with us. And second, I'm curious how being a Certified B Corp has influenced the business in the years since receiving that designation.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Great, well first congratulations, Lyn-

Lyn Wineman:

Thank you.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

It's always exciting to learn of more Nebraska organizations that are receiving that designation. When I think about our B Corp status and how it's influenced us since that designation, nothing immediately comes to mind. And that sounds like a strange answer, I'm sure. But it reinforces many of the things that we were already doing. Because when we explored the requirements for the designation originally, it felt like who we already were. And it is certainly reinforcing to all of the things.

As B Corp certification has evolved since we first became one, there also have been new things that they've added to their certification program, which had been helpful to us in terms of highlighting ways we could be doing more or doing things differently. As you've probably learned, I find them to be a great resource-

Lyn Wineman:

Very much.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

To explore ways to, like I said, do more and better. When I look back on it, we're somewhat unique because we're a mutual organization. And so it felt like much of that was in our DNA from the beginning, all the things that a B Corp Certification means.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense to me. I don't think that answer is strange at all. I feel similarly about KidGlov. I mean, when we first went through the assessment, we were very close to being there and we didn't change who we were to be a Certified B Corp. But it did make us better and the open door to the resources and the community, I think, has been really such a pleasant surprise. To meet other like-minded leaders like yourself and to learn new ways that they are diving in to be a force for good. So-

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Absolutely.

Lyn Wineman:

I think that's really great. So Susie, I know Assurity is no stranger to podcasts, my understanding is that you have three podcasts and one like ours speaks to people who are doing good in the world. And I love that you are taking time to not only do the things, to walk the walk. But also to highlight these change makers. What can you tell our listeners about why they should listen to the company's podcasts?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Well, because, as we talked, being a B Corp is part of the fabric of our values. We were really looking for that podcast to do something bigger for our brand, to connect us with our producers, our customers, the community, focusing on that element of our business and businesses who are similarly focused. So the Good Business Podcast is something that was born amid the pandemic in 2020. And we've been really honored to interview leaders from a lot of different companies. B Lab was one of them, Whole Foods, Ben and Jerry's, Myers Briggs Company, the Arbor Day Foundation. And just had really great conversations with leaders from those organizations about how we can all work together to make a positive impact. Full transparency, we've taken a little hiatus this past year from that podcast, but we're actively working on future plans for season two.

Lyn Wineman:

I'm glad to hear it because you had some great interviews that I've really enjoyed. So I'm glad to hear it.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

We have. I think it has been helpful for us. I mean, the B Corp status, obviously, as well as doing more with it and making it more part of our brand. Although being a purpose driven company has kind of been in our DNA since the beginning. It is kind of a new corporate imperative for a lot of companies these days. And I think that people want to work for something more than a business and a bottom line, and they want their work to mean something. We've heard time and time again from associates that we're trying to hire, that it's a big part of-

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Why they're looking at Assurity and why people stay at Assurity. Because it does reinforce that sense of purpose in their work. So it's definitely been a good thing for us on a whole host of fronts.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. Susie, you've had some really big names, your organization has on that Good Business Podcast. And one thing I think about is I think a lot of times organizations like Assurity that are Midwest based, "purpose" has been part of your DNA for over a hundred years. But you have been very humble about it. Whereas maybe other organizations have been more open and talk about it frequently. And so I like the opportunity to have a podcast like this, to just be able to shine a spotlight. But sometimes being humble is part of our Nebraska DNA, as well. So I'm curious, what's next for Assurity in the short term or the long term? Are there new goals that you're working towards? You've accomplished so much already.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

We are still really grounded and centered on our mission. Our mission is pretty simply and eloquently stated as to help people through difficult times. I mean, that is what our mission is. And we want to bring more peace of mind to more people. And so that really is the imperative. And in so many ways, it's no different than what it was at our founding 132 years ago. But in a lot of ways, it is different.

And so when we look to the future, we know that the insurance needs that we're trying to solve for, continue to change with the times. And it looks different today than it looked 132 years ago, or even five years ago or 10 years ago. So we're really focused on that. We also know how people choose to purchase what we have has changed. That was true long before COVID, but accessibility to our products is a real and present issue. Despite the fact I mentioned before that it's way easier to actually purchase life insurance or supplemental health insurance than it was 20 and 30 years ago. It's much less common for people to own life insurance than it was 20 or 30 years ago. And that's really a failing of our industry to reach people.

So accessibility is something we're really focused on because when it comes right down to it, there really is no substitute for what insurance can do for people. Savings can't do it, for most people. I mean the wealthy and the highest income earners can self-fund. But for most, there is no substitute for insurance. Because your savings can't do it, your retirement plan can't do it, your family can't do it, charity can't do it, the government can't do it. And so it's really important to get protection in people's hands. And so we're really focused on that delivery mechanism on a number of different ways. How do we make it easier for people to access what we have? Whether it's someone wanting to do that directly online, whether it's someone wanting to do it at the place of their employment or working with a trusted advisor individually. How can we create as many points of access as is possible?

Lyn Wineman:

That makes a lot of sense to me. I mean, I think the whole world was focused on being more digital before the pandemic. But boy, that really put an accelerator on all of that, Susie. I love the way you wrapped up your mission, as well. It was succinct and very eloquent. And I've got to imagine that any of your team members that can really focus in on the simplicity, but the good of that mission, that has to be very inspiring, as well. So shout out to your marketing department or whoever worked on that, I think it's fantastic.

So I'm going to ask you next my very favorite question. I ask this on every podcast because I am inspired by motivational quotes. And I get to talk with such interesting and inspirational people. Could you give us a few of your own words of wisdom to inspire our listeners?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Well, one comes to mind and it's something that I work to remind myself of all the time. And that would be that we always have more to learn than we have to tell.

Lyn Wineman:

Ooh.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

And I think it's really important as a leader because I think to believe that and to practice that really requires some intellectual humility and an openness and a willingness to change your mind. And I think sometimes as leaders, it's easy to fall into the trap of people coming to you for answers and believing that you have all the answers. So we always have more to learn than we have to tell, I think that's the one I point to.

Lyn Wineman:

That is fantastic. I've actually ... and that's why I love this question. I've actually never heard anybody say it exactly that way before. And it's such a truthful and good statement. So Susie, for our listeners who may not know much about Assurity, they'd like learn more, maybe access your products. What's the best way to find out about Assurity?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

As with most companies these days, I think the best way to find out about Assurity is to visit Assurity.com.

Lyn Wineman:

Very good. I love that you got that name and you got that URL clean and simple. So as Assurity.com, we'll have a link to that website and a link to the Good Business Podcast in the show notes on the KidGlov website, as well.

So as we wrap up this great conversation, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing, Susie?

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Oh gosh, Lyn, I think just we have an incredibly engaged group of Assurity associates that are living our mission every day, trying to help people through difficult times. I think we have a feeling here for those of us who work in the office, and we have team members who don't work here in Lincoln, in the office, as well. But a feeling that we have a great place to work, and we have great work to do. And that's exciting every day.

Lyn Wineman:

A great place to work and great work to do. What a way to wrap up this conversation. Susie, I fully believe the world needs more people like you and more great organizations like Assurity. Thanks for taking the time to talk with me today.

Susie Keisler-Munro:

Oh, thanks, Lyn. And thanks for doing what you're doing.

Lyn Wineman:

Ah, thanks.

Announcer:

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from, visit KidGlov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.