**Interview with**

**Catherine Hernandez-Blades, Senior VP Corporate Communications, Aflac (USA)**



1.       The USA is the birthplace оf the communication industry. Please tell us one important fact about the history of its formation.

       It is fitting that our industry was born in the **U.S.** because one of the most important founding principles of our country is the **freedom of speech**, meaning that everyone has a right to **express** a meaningful opinion. What our industry provides is the assurance that those meaningful opinions – reflecting what may be important to a person, business, not-for-profit, or educational or religious institution – are **heard** by the maximum number of people, the media, or other specific target audiences in ways that are clear, concise and relevant.

2.       How did you become a communication specialist?

      I started out as a journalist, wanting to do something good in the world by creating important and meaningful work. Over time, I learned that the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others could be done another way – through work with large corporations that had an interest in being good corporate citizens with what today we would call robust corporate social responsibility programs with resources like their own foundations to support causes that impact the public good. It has been a wonderful way to have a strong impact and help those who are often the most underserved.



3.       What are the main principles, which the communication team of AFLAC is following in their work?

      Do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do, especially if it is difficult. Today, how a company publicly manifests its ethical standards can be as important as the products or services they provide.

      The most effective and elegant solution is often the simplest – don’t overcomplicate matters.

      Take risks, but be smart enough to not risk more than you’re prepared to lose.

      Be kind; help others – it’s all about the team first and foremost.

      If you can’t measure the impact of your work, ask yourself why you are making the effort.

4.       What are from your opinion the main challenges of the modern communication industry?

         With all of the great things technology has given us, it does have downsides. For example, if I read something from an online source, I sometimes don’t know if it was written by someone with credibility who might be an authority on the subject or the teenager next door with an overactive imagination.

       Currently, some 24-hour news channels seem to provide more opinion than factual information. It used to be that the news was considered the fourth estate and a way to keep people honest and expose corruption – a bastion of the truth. While that still exists to an extent today, by and large it unfortunately isn’t what it once was.

       The immediacy of information and the need to respond instantaneously. With the advent of social media, smartphones and tablets, communications professionals can no longer wait until the next news cycle to react. In fact, there isn’t a “news cycle” anymore. It is all one continuum, and if you are late to address an issue or a crisis, you are behind the curve and may never catch up because the issue or incident has already been defined by someone’s narrative that may not be correct and is often highly sensationalized.

       In all of this, our industry has an opportunity to shine and fill gaps created by these three important issues through strong ethical behavior, rigorous fact-checking and not tolerating spin.

5.       Please tell us three main characteristics of the “communication of future”.

         Ethics

         Transparency

         Accountability with speed