



From Data to Decisions: Nicole Farley on the Future of Insurance Distribution

Episode 59 Show Notes

As technology, data, and AI continue to reshape the insurance industry, leadership matters more than ever. The challenge is not whether to innovate, but how to do it in a way that supports people rather than replacing them.

In this episode of the Insurance Leadership Podcast, host Ben Markland sits down with Nicole Farley, Sr. VP, Chief Insurance Officer at Bold Penguin. Drawing on her background in law, enterprise partnerships, and Insurtech leadership, Nicole shares how data and AI are being used in commercial insurance today, why excess and surplus business is growing so quickly, and what leaders must consider ensuring technology builds trust instead of fear.

This conversation is practical, grounded, and focused on what leaders need to understand right now as the industry continues to change.

Building Technology That Serves Distribution

Nicole begins by explaining Bold Penguin's role as a technology and distribution platform designed to simplify commercial insurance quoting. Rather than treating technology as a standalone solution, Bold Penguin blends real time distribution insight with data driven tools to better match risks with the right markets.

She also shares the story behind the company's name, inspired by the bold penguin that jumps first. The story reflects a leadership mindset focused on moving early, learning quickly, and solving real problems facing agents and careers.

Technology works best when it is built with a clear understanding of how agents, carriers, and customers actually operate.

Getting to Ground Truth with Better Data

The conversation turns to data, one of the most powerful and misunderstood resources in insurance today. Nicole discusses the reality agents face with inconsistent submissions, conflicting details, and confusing forms. Bold Penguin's focus is not on collecting more information, but on clarifying what is accurate by pulling from multiple sources.

By reducing friction and improving clarity upfront, technology can eliminate unnecessary back and forth and lead to better outcomes for everyone involved.

Better decisions start with better data, and better data comes from clarity, not complexity.

AI as an Amplifier, Not a Replacement

AI can create anxiety across the industry, but Nicole reframes the conversation. At Bold Penguin, AI is used to support agents by handling repetitive and time-consuming tasks such as policy comparisons and faster quoting, while preserving the advisor's role.

She emphasizes that successful AI adoption is not just a technical decision. It is a leadership decision. Teams need to understand where AI fits, how it is being used, and why human oversight will always matter.

AI should remove friction, not relationships. Human judgment remains central to trust and leadership.

E and S Growth and What Comes Next

Nicole highlights the rapid growth of the excess and surplus market, driven by climate challenges, regulatory shifts, and increased carrier selectivity. Historically manual and document heavy, this space presents a major opportunity for modernization.

Looking ahead, Nicole shares a vision for a more conversational insurance experience. One where traditional application may eventually give way to guided interactions that help surface important risk details more naturally.

The future of insurance intake may feel more like a conversation than paperwork.

Conclusion

Nicole Farley's conversation is a reminder that leadership in insurance is not about chasing technology for its own sake. It is about applying data and AI thoughtfully, setting clear guardrails around transparency and accountability, and making sure innovation strengthens human relationships instead of replacing them.

As industry continues to evolve, leaders who balance progress with trust, clarity, and practical application will be best positioned to grow and lead well.

At the Insurance Leadership Podcast, we believe great leadership shows up in how you guide others through change with purpose, integrity, and clarity.

What's Next on the Insurance Leadership Podcast

Looking ahead to March, Ben Markland will be joined by **Sharon Alford** and **Warren Laird** of **VSP Vision Care** for a timely conversation on leadership, innovation, and navigating change in today's benefits landscape.

This upcoming episode will explore how leaders can stay aligned with evolving employer and employee needs while continuing to deliver clarity, trust, and long term value. It is a practical conversation focused on real world leadership and application, and one you will not want to miss.

Let's Keep the Conversation Going!

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Remember: Simple solutions. Real results. That's great leadership.