America’s Got Talent and Here’s a Good Way to Find It

By Deborah Pickford, Executive Director, InVEST

America’s got talent and you need it ASAP.

Here at InVEST, we are working hard to channel some of that talent straight into your insurance agency. We are the non-profit insurance education and talent development arm of the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America (IIABA) – providing free resources to educators and support to insurance agencies looking to build pipelines of educated young people who WANT to sell and service policies, manage your office, and provide the best customer experience possible for your clients.

Our phone lines ring and e-mails ding daily as inquiring independent agencies want to know: where can I find a sales producer, a CSR or an intern? You’ve told us that the number one challenge you have in growing your book of business is finding qualified, motivated employees to join your agency. At InVEST, we’re looking to grow the next generation of leaders who have a passion for insurance.

So, what exactly is the InVEST program? Well, InVEST is a unique national program using volunteers to teach high school and community college students about many aspects of P&C insurance including the basics of auto and home insurance, risk management, aspects of agency business operations, commercial insurance, careers in insurance and more.

Our mission is straightforward: to educate, prepare, and attract diverse talent to the insurance industry. We have recently sharpened our focus on bringing new talent into the independent insurance agency system and know some of the most successful independent insurance agencies have grown their own talent pipelines from local high schools and colleges. They are building strong and long-lasting relationships with students who they later employ. Agents who are enthusiastic about their work attract the interest of young people who have not considered insurance as a career.

InVEST also provides log-ins for teachers so they can access our vast collection of InVEST insurance education materials via our award-winning website – and the best part? InVEST educational materials are FREE to our schools. We can’t say that often enough.

We match volunteers, like local insurance agents and staff, to teach insurance in high schools and community colleges, bringing much needed insurance expertise into classrooms across the United States. For students who have participated in InVEST courses throughout the year, we also offer scholarships for those who intend to study insurance in college or need support paying for their state insurance license.

The demand for our InVEST programs continues to soar and we have doubled our growth over the last five years. In 2012, we supported nearly 400 InVEST programs with 15,000 students studying insurance; today there are 885 programs with over 31,000 students studying insurance through InVEST. We continue to explore new and creative ways of bringing young talent into the industry, including developing high school-to-career and high school-to-community college/talent pipelines, and are working on developing insurance
apprenticeships in several states. In addition, we have a renewed emphasis on bringing a diversity of talent to insurance agencies to better reflect America’s changing demographics and marketplaces.

It’s a competitive world out there and winning the hearts and minds of young people to join our fantastic industry can only be accomplished in partnership with you and our state associations. InVEST and the IIAI can support you in building those important classroom relationships. We would also like to offer a few tips for attracting new young talented people to your agency:

- **Get out and tell your story** – why did you become an independent insurance agent? What are some of the challenges you have faced and the successes you have had as an agent? What is it like to be a small business owner with unlimited potential for income? Also, let young people know that insurance is a noble profession and you take pride in restoring people’s lives when they face bad situations such as house fires, totaled cars, flooding, or even the loss of a loved one.

- **Build your own agency talent pipeline** – we’ve seen this done successfully in Maine, Florida and Texas. Reach out to local high schools and volunteer for career days or see if a local high school would like you to teach a ‘basics of insurance’ course. Get face-to-face with the students and see who might be a good fit for your agency. And remember: what’s good for the community is also good for your business.

- **Emphasize technology** – most young people don’t consider insurance a cutting-edge industry because they are unaware of our breakthroughs in technology. Let them know that insurance is an innovator when it comes to technology – we are involved in artificial intelligence, drones to survey damage and assess claims, new products for the upcoming driverless cars, telematics, and use of cell phones to file claims.

- **Offer meaningful, paid internships** – having interns in your agency builds strong relationships with future talent. Give interns meaningful work and teach them the interesting aspects of insurance. We know that interns that have a good agency internship experience are potential future employees with high retention. InVEST has former scholarship recipients looking for internships, as well as an agency internship guide that you can download free from our website.

- **Leverage the free resources of InVEST**

  **and join us on social media** – our resources and support for agencies is free; please use them: www.investprogram.org. We appreciate any donation (large or small) you can contribute to our program and to our scholarship fund www.investprogram.org/donate. Engage with us on Facebook and Twitter at NationalInVEST, join in the insurance education and talent development conversation, and like and share our content. We’ll share your content too.

With 400,000 insurance jobs projected to be open in 2020, we can’t move fast enough to fill this critical talent shortage and we know you need America’s talent right now. Let’s partner together and shout this message from the rooftops: “We know the secret to a long and happy life, and a lasting, rewarding career – come join us in the insurance industry!”