

Grace Crickette

Chief Risk Officer
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Age: 50



Grace Crickette is chief risk officer of the University of California, where major initiatives for the risk services department she leads include reducing the cost of risk, implementing safety programs, improving claims management systems and developing risk financing strategies, as well as implementing enterprise risk management, emergency management and business continuity planning throughout the university. Ms. Crickette joined the university in 2004 after 13 years at United Rentals Inc., where she was vp of risk services. She graduated with distinction from the University of Redlands with a bachelor's degree in business administration and holds a variety of professional designations.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN ENTERING THIS FIELD?

I think I would give two bits of advice. I had a great boss, who's since passed away, and one day he said to me, "Grace, your desk is a dangerous place to do your job." And I said, "Well, Bill, what do you mean by that?" And he said, "You're not going to make the best decisions on implementing policies and procedures and programs if you don't get out in the field and really understand the business." So I think that would be one bit of advice: Don't spend too much time at your desk. There's not a lot of risk at your desk; and if you want to be of value to the organization and really progress in the organization, you really need to get out and really understand the business in a holistic way. The other one is also then to learn the language or the taxonomy of the other people you're working with. I think in risk management, you can tend to become insular and just focus from an educational or professional standpoint on being with other risk managers and studying just risk management.

WHAT IS THE MOST INTERESTING THING YOU'VE LEARNED IN YOUR CAREER?

Every day's interesting. Particularly with the university, I get to learn a lot about science and research, and I get to experience things from a scientific standpoint that the majority of the world doesn't get to see or get to learn about. Going back to that not spending a lot of time at my desk, just being out in the operations and meeting people and learning what they're doing, that's the most interesting.

DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR EARLY IN YOUR CAREER?

I had several, but the greatest mentor I had was Bill Berry, who was president of U.S. Rentals and then United Rentals. He was a great mentor because basically it was the rental and construction industry—obviously very male-dominated—and he supported me, he promoted me, he made me an officer of the company.

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM JOB, OUTSIDE OF YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

I think it would be to be Anthony Bourdain and cook and travel. But within my given profession...I believe every job is what you make of it. You either can make it a nightmare or a dream. Right now, this is my dream job. I'm very happy and fulfilled here at UC. But I'm sure if something happened and I went somewhere else, I wouldn't take it if I didn't think it would be a dream or I could make it a dream. I never had a job I didn't like. I'm sure there are many other dream jobs out there; I just don't know what they are right now, other than being Anthony Bourdain.

OUTSIDE OF FAMILY AND COLLEAGUES, WHOM DO YOU ADMIRE MOST?

I don't have any one individual.

WHAT'S YOUR CAN'T-MISS TV SHOW?

I don't have one.

BEYOND WORK, WHAT ONE THING DO YOU WANT TO DO OR ACCOMPLISH IN LIFE?

I have three children, so I would like to see all of my children and perhaps someday grandchildren be successful. The other is I really enjoy traveling, and so I hope to be able to continue traveling and seeing the world and learning more about the world.

DO YOU USE SOCIAL MEDIA? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Yes, I use Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn. Obviously working in a university setting, our students are very tied in to social media. If you go online and you Google "James Buck CNN"—James was a student who was arrested in Egypt—there's a videotape of him, actually, on our website. He was our first extraction/rescue when we put our travel program in place. He used Twitter when he was arrested to quickly tweet to his dean at UC Berkeley, "I've been arrested." His dean then contacted our office, and I ended up basically staying up all night tweeting and emailing and texting James. We were able to get him a lawyer, get good process and stay with him virtually the entire time to get him out of Egypt. We're friends still on Facebook. Social media is part of the university culture, but it also has some real practical applications in managing our risk. It's very important to us.

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