

Spotlight on Women in Privacy™



JoAnne Breese-Jaeck, The Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, Vice President and Chief Privacy Officer

What do you love most about being a privacy professional?

I have always been very purpose-driven in my work. I love to work hard, while making meaningful differences in the lives of others. Privacy is built to meet these needs. Protecting the personal information of others and using it responsibly, partnering with and educating my co-workers, and creating lasting relationships with my peers are the things I most enjoy about my job. Every day I get to help ensure Northwestern Mutual is earning the trust clients place in us is a good one.

What was the best professional advice you ever received?

Earn people's trust by being trustworthy. While this may seem obvious, it has been a really helpful guidepost for me when cultivating meaningful relationships and finding fulfilment in work. I initially received this crucial advice in the context of my law school job search.

At the time, I was interning for Wisconsin Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson. I had accepted a job offer when I received a last-minute alternate offer from my dream law firm. As I struggled to decide whether to rescind my acceptance in favor of the late breaking "dream job," Justice Abrahamson quietly advised me to think hard before making this type of choice. She related to me that the firm I had committed to was comprised of excellent attorneys, my career would be in good hands, and perhaps I would be better served by following through on my initial acceptance. As it turns out, Justice Abrahamson was right about not only the job, but also about following through on promises.

From my first day in private practice, I was empowered by partners who taught me how to be a respected attorney and formidable advocate. They entrusted me with meaningful cases that involved many state, federal, and appellate courts where I represented an array of people and companies. My law partners always emphasized the moral imperative that comes with being an attorney. They imparted me with the wisdom that client development and effective advocacy are predicated on maintaining the trust of those who would put their futures into my hands.

As I transitioned into my next role as Assistant General Counsel for Northwestern Mutual, I took these lessons with me. When I began advising internal clients about issues that could impact scope or delivery timelines, I found the fundamentals of having open, honest, and proactive conversations were essential to building relationships of trust and confidence. Once trust was in place, people would openly take my advice with the understanding that we would work towards meaningful solutions. Ultimately, these relationships were foundational to my selection as Chief Privacy Officer.

Today, trust is central to the mission of the Privacy Department I lead. Importantly, the work I do daily is exceptionally meaningful to me. Ensuring that Northwestern Mutual earns the trust of its clients feeds my intellectual curiosity and meets my need for purposeful work. In the end, the first advice I received as a new attorney was the best advice I ever received.

What one privacy development are you paying close attention to this month?

The National Association of Insurance Commissioners has embarked on bi-weekly meetings to consider updates to their privacy models. I am paying close attention to these meetings because I chair the Privacy Committee for the American Council of Life Insurers and any enacted changes in the models will impact our privacy function at Northwestern Mutual.