



A legacy of commitment

Leaders reflect on how relationships drive purpose and innovation

In an industry where change is constant, few things remain as steady and meaningful as long-term professional relationships. Optum Workers' Comp and Auto No-Fault is fortunate to have many employees who not only have decades of tenure working in the industry, but specifically at Optum. From front-line customer service to executive strategy, these professionals provide knowledge and mentoring framed by a keen understanding of how the industry has changed and evolved, the challenges our clients have faced, and the innovations and programs we have developed to solve them.

Recently, we took the time to explore this with four leaders who each have 25 years with Optum. Their insights demonstrate how collaboration, trust, and shared history create a foundation that continues to enable Optum to innovate and transform traditional business practices.





Our shared knowledge supports collaboration and solution-building

Dionne Lacey-Artis, Chief Business Officer; Tron Emptage, MA, RPh, Chief Clinical Officer; Stacey McKee, RN, BSN, SVP of Client Experience; and Jeni VerMeulen, CF APMP, SVP of Business Development together have over 100 years of experience both in the workers' compensation industry and working together at Optum. While each has their own unique professional journey, their paths continually intersect.

Dionne began her career at AIG in 1998 before moving into sales at Progressive Medical Inc. (PMI, now Optum), where she has spent the majority of her 27-year career. Tron officially joined Optum in 2000 but had been collaborating with Optum even earlier to build a national home infusion network. Stacey and Jeni have both been at Optum for over two decades – 24 and 25 years respectively – and have continually risen in the organization through recognition of their professional talents and passion for service.

What binds them isn't just tenure, it's trust. As Dionne puts it, "Strong, caring relationships are powerful time-savers; they allow us to cut through the noise and focus on solving problems." Tron echoes this sentiment, noting that deep trust and familiarity enable the team to build client-facing solutions faster and more efficiently. "We aren't trying to understand each other's working habits – we already do."

This continuity fosters open communication, mutual respect, and a shared sense of mission that extends to their relationships with clients and the injured persons they serve.

Our experience shapes successful programs

Long-term track records don't just make things easier internally; they have a direct impact on Optum service delivery. These leaders have in-depth knowledge of Optum clients and how their programs have evolved and grown. This client and industry knowledge allows them to learn from past experiences to implement successful programs and solutions and anticipate future needs.

Stacey emphasizes how shared knowledge leads to stronger client outcomes: "We have a collective deep knowledge base regarding our long-term customers. That helps in many important situations." Jeni adds that the trust built over years of working together makes collaboration easier and more productive: "We're comfortable being honest, even when we disagree."

While Tron strongly agrees, he also notes the importance of fresh perspectives. "We know that we have built great things together. But we also welcome the fresh perspectives that new leaders and employees bring to the organization. It's important not to become too comfortable with the status quo. We need to be able to see industry challenges from different angles and approaches. Our new CEO, Matt Wolfe, has contributed enormously to our ability to do this."

Our perspectives prompt growth and innovation

Over their careers, these leaders have witnessed – and often driven – major changes in workers' compensation. From the development of enhanced data analytics and artificial intelligence to a shift in how injured persons are viewed and supported, the industry has evolved significantly.

For Dionne, the rise of a more compassionate and holistic approach has been particularly meaningful. "There's a deeper recognition of the role the psychosocial environment plays in recovery," she explains. "An expansion of diversity in leadership, including women in prominent roles, has also fostered a more nurturing approach to how we support injured persons." Stacey agrees: "There's a lot more care, concern, and focus now on the overall experience of individuals who are recovering than there was 25 years ago."

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Tron points to broad systemic change: the adoption of formularies, alternatives to opioids, and increased regulatory guidance, as well as demographic changes such as an aging population. These pivotal changes require strategic and effective business responses. Jeni notes that the Optum approaches over the last 25 years have had a dramatic effect on health and wellness, “Looking back, I think our industry has worked really hard to positively address the opioid crisis, and Optum has been way ahead of many of our competitors in this area.”

Our compassion grounds all of our actions

Experience has also shaped their approach to working with clients, with each leader developing a compassionate, relational, consultative style. Dionne puts it simply: “I want my customers to know I genuinely care about their business goals.” Tron emphasizes listening and connecting: “Ask more questions. Listen more. Connect early and often. Focus on the injured person and doing the right thing – it will all work out.” Stacey shares that involving clients directly in product feedback and solution development has been a major evolution for Optum, with significant proven benefits for clients. Jeni, meanwhile, grounds her work by building and strengthening relationships, whether with clients or coworkers: “It’s about trust, loyalty, and long-term partnerships.”

Why we stay

In a time when the median tenure for salaried workers is less than four years, these leaders have not only stayed, they've thrived. Their reason? The people.

For Dionne, it's about purpose: "Work can be therapeutic. Helping people get back to the best version of their lives keeps me grounded." Tron points to the mission: "When I started in this industry, there were no formularies, no portals, no medication information kits, no continuing education. Opioids were on almost 70% of claims, MEDs were through the roof, and pharmacy spend was near 25% of medical spend, which had risen to 60% of the claim costs. We worked as a team diligently to change the trajectory. We didn't always get the new products and services right, but we never stopped trying. We had each other's back. When you have that, you want to come to work. It's about making a difference and truly caring about the people you work with." Stacey finds inspiration in the familiarity and shared commitment across the industry, "After this much time in this space, everyone feels like family." Jeni sums up the shared feeling: "Some of my dearest friends have come from working here. It's not just a team – it's a family. When people feel safe, when they feel cared for, when they feel like they are part of a team or a family – they will always be more successful because they feel valued and respected."

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How we are moving forward

While Dionne, Tron, Stacey, and Jeni have built a legacy of dedication, compassion, cooperation, and resilience, they are excited to identify improvements and innovation that will allow Optum to deliver even better service, solutions, and outcomes in the future. They are driven to continue leading the industry. As Tron says, “If you don’t care and are “faking it,” people see that: coworkers, clients, vendors, and injured persons. You have to find the why and live the why. For me, when I lose the why it will likely be time to retire.” Stacey agrees, “I spend a lot of time learning all I can about client experience and then communicating the message, philosophy and best practices to my team, peers, and leaders as much as I can.”

As the team continues to lead and mentor the next generation, their collective experience helps ensure that Optum Workers’ Comp and Auto No-Fault remains not only a business leader, but also a place where people grow, belong, and make a difference.

Because in the end, what sets this team apart isn’t just how long they’ve been here; it’s the relationships they have built with their customers and team members, their passion for service, and the hearts that guide their actions.



Learn more

To learn more about how our experienced, compassionate team will partner with you to develop programs that strengthen and grow your business, contact us at expectmore@optum.com.