

# INSURANCE JOURNAL

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# AMERICA'S BEST INDEPENDENT AGENCIES TO WORK FOR



**EXCLUSIVE REPORT:**  
Employees Vote For Favorite  
P/C Agency Employers of 2011

# The Votes Are In...

## Best Agency to Work For - West

San Pedro and Torrance, California

### Insurance Center Associates

It was 8:30 a.m. Pacific Time on a Friday and Mike Randles was in his office. While that may sound like any other insurance agency president's usual day, Randles wasn't

"My employer is the most generous employer I've ever had," says another employee. "He really cares about his staff, and shares his wealth with his employees."

Nice words that echo the values and environment that Randles has promoted and practiced with all 12 people in the organization.

Part of that reason is how Randles treats his people. "We treat them with respect, we value their opinions, and in the end, we share. If we are able to make our bonuses, we share that with

our staff, including incentives and trips, to show that we really do value them."

The value is played out in the way the wealth is spread. Employees receive monthly and quarterly bonuses. Carrier bonuses are split and shared among employees. Profits are shared at the end of the year. Since the business is split between two offices — San Pedro and Torrance, Calif. — Randles makes a concerted effort to promote harmony through outings and events, including families. Some past events include a suite rental at Angels Stadium.

Why families, too? "We're open in our one office on Saturday, and everyone is assigned some time on a Saturday," he says. "I want to make sure we appreciate the families, as well."

The agency opened its doors back in 1933. In 1960, it became incorporated. Thirty years ago, Randles came on board, and he's overseeing just over \$2 million in revenue. Last

year, the company celebrated its 50th anniversary since the incorporation.

The celebration was an unexpected one, too. Half the staff who were with the agency less than 20 years went to Paris Las Vegas. The rest of the staff — Paris, France. "The goals for that were pretty high," Randles explains.

His staff had to grow both policies in force and premium, plus make goals and bonuses with at least three main carriers. Besides the Paris trips, the entire office has earned trips to San Francisco, Seattle, and Hawaii.

Hitting those goals seems easier with Randles at the helm. One staffer commented: "Mr. Randles ... anticipated the recession and the strategies he implemented have allowed us to be relatively unaffected and continue to prosper."

Randles is modest when hearing such praise. "We're acting ahead instead of reacting. We try to anticipate. We've been lucky enough to get it right," he says with a laugh. "We've done things ahead of when other agencies have done them. Sometimes it's a little bit of bleeding edge as well as leading, but I think that kind of thing has set us aside and prepared us for when we hit a blip."

What sets them apart — the people. "They believe in our agency, they believe in me, they believe in each other," Randles says. "That's what sets us apart. That gives us incredible customer service."

It shows. Over 60 percent of the agency's new business comes from referrals. It's a feat Randles says came from seeing the need long before the competition did. "A lot of agencies now are saying they're going to give away gift cards and things like that. We've been doing it for five years."

"Some of it is being willing to take a chance and forge ahead," he adds. "The nice thing is we have really good buy-in. I can't do it by myself. The credit goes back to the employees. If they didn't give and buy-in and become a team, we wouldn't succeed." It's also in how he positions the company as a resource for his customers. Even on the agency's Web site, all the staff are shown; not just the management. "Everyone's important," he says. "They're more important than I am." ■



Front (left to right): Brigette Porter, Sara Lopez, Michael Randles, Sandra Arambula.  
Back (left to right): Linda Goodyear, Michael Leone, Melodie Wadman-Sidoti, Hershell Mann, Brien McElhoes, Kathy Canto, Patricia Cantu, Lori Gasser.

supposed to be there. It was the middle of his vacation week. And he's laughing.

Randles got the news via text message. It read: "Check your e-mail" In that e-mail was word that his company, Insurance Center Associates, had won the award for Best Agency to Work For in the West.

That news was heartwarming to Randles. "It validates the things we're doing are right."

Randles is an unassuming leader with a positive attitude, a self-deprecating manager who passes his own accomplishments off as team wins. Using plenty of "we" in every sentence, he makes sure credit goes to those around him.

The staff has noticed, too. Here's what that team has to say about their leader: "Working with Insurance Center Associates is like having a second family," says one employee. "Everyone here has a great personality and a positive attitude for business and life."