



# Q&A

W/ Jessica Treybick

## Living the Union Life

*Jessica Treybick has deep union roots. Following in the footsteps of her grandparents, she is an 18-year union member and the President of the Dutchess County Central Labor Council. This union experience also guides her work at Ullico, where she is a Regional Account manager for the company's Life and Health division. In a recent Q&A, Treybick talked about her family's union background, winning the Frances Perkins Award, and some misconceptions people have about Life Insurance.*

### **What inspired you to work in the union sector?**

My grandparents were both in unions. My mom's father was an operator; he was an earth mover for 20 years with the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 137. Early on, he spent a lot of time driving back and forth from Poughkeepsie, New York, to New Jersey, to support his wife and four children. Later, he opened his own excavating business in Poughkeepsie. The union gave him the training, support and skill set needed for his business. Later, his pension helped support him and my grandmother. My other grandfather's family came over from Italy. He had a similar union experience—he joined up with the Carpenters and the union became an extended family and gave him the camaraderie he needed.

When I attended my first union rally, I was blown away. It was for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) in Manhattan, and they were protesting a supermarket that fired a group of workers for trying to join a union. After hearing their stories about standing in unity for better wages and working conditions, it made me realize that this is a movement that I want to be a part of.



While working with my previous employer in the Taft-Hartley marketplace, I joined The Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) Local 277 before shifting gears and joining UFCW Local 1. I got really involved in the union and was eventually elected President to the Dutchess County Central Labor Council.

**Wow—you have some serious union roots. How has that experience informed your work at Ullico?**

Well, it's certainly helped. My own experience in a union leadership role has allowed me to learn so much about how the Taft Hartley market works, and how to communicate with business agents, brokers, and union executive boards. I understand many of the responsibilities these union leaders are navigating and what they need to do to support their members. So, when a union partners with Ullico and I'm their account manager, I can leverage that experience to explain how our products support their members in practical ways. In the end, I think it makes clients feel more confident that they are in good hands.

**Can you share a moment in your career when you felt you made a significant impact?**

My group at the Dutchess County Central Labor Council is very tight knit. Our Executive Board is all women, and we are making an impact in our community and our union space—going to rallies and pickets in Dutchess and beyond. We're not afraid to fight for what we believe in and to hold our politicians accountable.

My Central Labor Council (CLC) is proud of our endorsement process. We hold interviews with our local politicians to make sure they really believe in our movement and will stand up for labor when we call on them. That's why our candidates really respect us and believe in the work that we do.

**Well, after winning the Frances Perkins Award this year, it appears that your hard work is getting noticed. Can you tell us a little about what winning the award means to you?**

When I found out that I was nominated by one of my officers to receive the Frances Perkins award [given out by the Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation] I was really humbled. As the Secretary of Labor, Perkins spearheaded a lot of significant policy initiatives, including Social Security, minimum wage, and regulating child labor laws. When these policies were under attack, she didn't back down. She fought for working people.

I think some of the work we've done in the last ten years has followed in her footsteps. For example, Perkins was a huge part of the push for a federal minimum wage. Along those lines, I was invited to join a coalition during the "Fight for \$15" campaign to raise the minimum wage. I just remember being out on the picket line with my kids in front of McDonald's and one of my kids got a pin that said: "there's nothing better than a burger served with justice." The family element to all this is important to me. I like to bring my kids out to show them the importance of labor solidarity and what a group of people can accomplish when they work together.

**That's wonderful that your children are getting a taste of the labor world. September is Life Insurance Awareness Month—what's something you think this next generation coming up should know about life insurance?**

I would tell young people—especially those in their twenties—to educate themselves about life insurance products and to try and think ahead. Most people are healthy in their twenties. That means you can lock in a low-cost rate that you can maintain in the coming years. A lot of people don't think about life insurance until they are in their 40s or 50s, but at that point, the price is higher than it would have been years before.

With a life insurance product, you will be able to help your loved ones financially if something unfortunate happens to you. Something you may not be able to provide without the policy. I would say educate yourself, figure out what's out in the market and what would be best for you.

**What are some common misconceptions that people often have about life insurance?**

My in-laws are from another country, and they used to think it was bad luck to purchase life insurance—like you would jinx yourself by having it. I explained to them it's not bad luck, it's just about being prepared in case something happens.

Another misconception I hear is it's too expensive. It's a difficult subject, you know, but you want to be able to support your loved ones through those difficult times, so why not put a little bit of money aside each week to have a life insurance product. It's something as simple as making coffee at home for the day instead of going out.

**Thanks for those insights. I'll close with this: What is an important lesson you've learned over the course of your career?**

I've learned that listening is really important. Listening to my leadership, peers, coworkers, members, and family. Actually, hearing what someone has to say first is a powerful communication tool. It allows me to offer support and help in a constructive manner.

I struggled to listen when I was younger—I would jump to conclusions and offer advice when I should have just kept listening. Over time, I've learned that you really need to understand the issue before you speak. You want to make sure that people feel comfortable and heard so they will continue to communicate with you personally and professionally.

*This conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

*Policies are issued and underwritten by The Union Labor Life Insurance Company, Silver Spring, MD.*