

The IIA at 80: A Legacy of Leadership, Collaboration, and Advocacy

Two events occurred 80 years ago this week that are still remembered decades later. The Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor plunged the United States into the middle of a raging world war that had already engulfed much of the planet. Two days later, on Dec. 9, the 11 founders of The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) held their long planned inaugural annual meeting in New York City. After the formalities of the meeting that evening, they took time to gather around a radio and listen to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chat with the nation in the wake of the attack. The president laid out the hard challenges that America faced as it prepared for a war that would reshape the world.

I have always imagined how those intrepid and motivated founders of The IIA drew strength from Roosevelt's resolute message at such a pivotal point in the nation's history. From those beginnings was born The IIA. Eighty years later, The IIA serves the needs of more than 200,000 members around the globe and is the internal audit profession's most widely recognized advocate, educator, and provider of standards, guidance, and certifications.

Interestingly, when I joined the internal audit profession 46 years ago as a freshly minted college graduate, I actually knew very little about The IIA. But as the decades passed, I became increasingly inspired by the organization, its leaders, and its mission. I became a volunteer almost 30 years ago as a member of The IIA's Public Sector Committee, and first joined The IIA's staff 20 years ago this week as vice president in charge of training. Eight years later, I was named The IIA's ninth CEO. I stepped down as President and CEO earlier this year. My 12-year tenure leading this important organization was the professional honor of my life, and I will always be grateful for the opportunity.

As The IIA's 80th anniversary approached, I reflected on its legacy in serving and advancing our profession. Entire books have been written on the history of The IIA, but for me, there are three things that have enabled the organization to serve the profession so effectively: leadership, collaboration, and advocacy. On this important occasion, I want to share my personal reflections on each:

The IIA's success has been built on the shoulders of giants. In first six years from its founding, The IIA was led entirely by motivated and inspired volunteers. Then, in 1947, Brad Cadmus was hired as its first executive director. Brad was the first of now 10 CEOs to help guide The IIA. As I [noted in a blog](#) celebrating The IIA's 70th anniversary 10 years ago, those who came before me were "giants" upon whose shoulders I humbly stood. But, more so than for other professional associations, The IIA's legacy is one of partnership between staff and volunteer leaders. More than 80 individuals have chaired The IIA's Global Board over its history, and since 1947, those Chairs and IIA CEOs have worked closely together to bring the organization the leadership it deserves. I served alongside 13 different Chairs and countless other volunteer leaders on The IIA's Board during my tenure. It was clearly a partnership, but I never lost sight of the fact that the Chair and the board were the senior partners in the relationship. For, if The IIA has exemplified anything, it is as a bastion of strong and effective governance on behalf of its members.

"Progress Through Sharing" is more than a slogan. In the long history of The IIA, only one Chairman of the Board has passed away in office. Ray Noonan died unexpectedly in 1953. His

theme as Chair was “Progress Through Sharing.” In his memory, and because it was such a powerful message, The IIA officially adopted those words as its official motto in 1955. More than a tagline, it has helped define and guide the culture of The IIA in the more than six decades since. I can personally attest to that. Sharing knowledge, insights, and leading practices have been guiding principles of the organization, contributing immeasurably to the internal audit profession. For example, volunteer committees and task forces were instrumental in crafting the pillars upon which the profession has been build, such as:

- *Statement of Responsibilities of Internal Auditing* in 1947
- *Code of Ethics* in 1968
- *Certified Internal Auditor* program in 1973-1974
- *Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* in 1978
- *Vision for the Future* (including a new internal audit definition) in 1999
- *Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing* in 2016
- *Three Lines Model* (for governances and risk management) in 2020

Other professional bodies certainly leverage their members and volunteers to advance their professions, but progress through sharing is in The IIA’s DNA.

Advocacy has forged a strong profession recognized for its resilience and agility. Almost all professional bodies engage in advocacy; The IIA is no different. For at least the past three decades, The IIA has been deeply committed to creating and building awareness about the profession and the value it brings around the world. At IIA headquarters and in chapters and affiliates across the globe, staff and volunteers have partnered to promote the profession to government regulators, global standard-setters, and even legislative bodies. In 2016, The IIA fulfilled a long-planned strategic priority by establishing its first office in Washington, D.C. to advocate on behalf of U.S. members. For The IIA, however, advocacy was never limited to those outside of the profession. Since its inception, The IIA has advocated for professionalism by those who practice internal audit. The pillars I mentioned above, resulting from the hard work of task forces and committees, show the journey has been one of continuously raising the bar for the internal audit profession by elevating standards, guidance, and even certifications.

Reflecting on the 80th anniversary of The IIA, I can’t help but note the disruption the world has faced, especially over the nearly past two years. The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic has been compared to World War II in terms of its global impact. However, unlike those who gathered at the founding meeting of The IIA 80 years ago this week, we have the extraordinary benefit of hindsight and our profession has the benefit of 80 years of growth and maturity. We have proven time and again our resilience in the face of risk-induced disruption. Thanks to The IIA and all that it has done for internal auditing, we are an agile profession that can pivot quickly to address the raging and emerging storms.

Looking forward, I’d like to reflect on a quote by former U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama:

“We’ve got a responsibility to live up to the legacy of those who came before us by doing all that we can to help those who come after us.”

Let’s honor that legacy by each of us continuing to support the important mission of The IIA around the world. As a profession, we will be only as good as we collectively aspire to be. Invest your time and energy into this profession and into supporting The IIA wherever you may be.

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