



Lindsey Johnson
President, U.S. Mortgage Insurers

WHF Member Spotlight, September 2018

Lindsey Johnson, President, U.S. Mortgage Insurers (USMI)

Hometown

Pampa, TX

Fun Fact

My great-grandmother Virginia was nearly full-blood Cherokee Indian. I really love to cook. I am not a good cook, but I keep trying ;).

Walk us through your journey in the financial services industry and how your career has evolved to your current position.

One of the most interesting things is the different trajectories that people can take to get to great places in their career. Mine was a circuitous route to be sure—and while I may have seemed a bit of a tumble weed to some, I was fortunate to test out a wide array of things that I was interested in (including interning with a veterinarian and at the national network for Fox News along the way) to be able to hone in on my true passions and skill sets. I have always been very interested in politics, but I quickly realized after being in DC that I enjoyed policy work even more. I began my career in DC working for former House Republican Conference Chair J.C. Watts in the private sector. I was able to focus on a number of financial services clients—making me realize that I wanted to exclusively focus on financial services and financial services policy. I then spent time working for the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta representing the Bank in DC at a very interesting and important time for the FHLBanks— as important legislation was introduced / passed including the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 and Dodd-Frank Act—and during the financial crisis. This was a tremendous professional experience and affirmed for me that I wanted to pursue an advanced degree in Finance, which I pursued at night while working at the Bank.

I then had an opportunity to take a pay cut :) and work on Capitol Hill serving as the Minority Staff Director for the Senate Banking Committee's National Security and International Trade and Finance (NSITF) Subcommittee, and as Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Mark Kirk (R-Illinois), focusing on noteworthy banking, housing finance reform, and insurance legislation. This is one of my favorite times in my career—working on bi-partisan housing finance reform legislation, terrorism risk insurance legislation, and many other areas of finance and housing issues. When I left the Hill, I worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) as a Director on their public policy team and was then recruited to serve as President of U.S. Mortgage Insurers.

What do you love most about what you do?

I really love this organization. As President of USMI, I've had the opportunity to work with the Board of USMI (CEOs of member companies) to define and develop our organization's vision, develop the objectives and tactics to meet the vision, and work alongside the talented people in our industry to execute to meet these goals. It's interesting, challenging, and extremely rewarding.



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I am also very fortunate to get to work alongside the individuals that are part of USMI's member companies—these are the smartest individuals in this industry space and they are passionate about what we do to help enable homeownership for millions of Americans.

Hobbies

Running, yoga, almost any outdoors activities; anything with my kids—they're a hoot; Love to travel and love trying new things – including things that I am not a “natural” at doing (a lot of things fit in this category).

How long have you been a member of WHF?

10+ years.

Describe your involvement with WHF.

Since I joined WHF more than a decade ago, I have been the direct benefactor of WHF's mission—educating and promoting women in the areas of housing and financial services, having attended different sessions very early on that grew my knowledge and understanding on key subjects and issues. WHF also provided a fantastic avenue for me to network with WHF members, both ladies who were well-established in their careers and those who were just beginning the journey. Many of the WHF leadership encouraged me to participate in other WHF functions and asked me to join the Board of Directors, where I served two years. I then served on the Board of the Foundation.

What have you gained from being a member?

WHF has been such a great asset for me personally and professionally. Being a member of WHF has allowed me to become better informed on a number of topics. WHF also afforded the chance to grow relationships with its more than 400 members. WHF is truly one of the only places in DC where people from regulatory agencies, private sector, associations, academia, non-profits, and elsewhere come together not to advocate or push agendas—but to simply have the opportunity to learn and get insights. Through the WHF Foundation, I've had wonderful opportunities to engage with different community organizations in the DC-metro area that do phenomenal work to help our community. Among the several groups that WHF-Foundation supports, I developed a relationship with a group called *Hope and a Home*—which helps at-risk homeless women and families find and keep homes. I met a little girl that I have mentored for the last several years. I feel like WHF is an organization that is truly a full circle—you can get so much out of it professionally and personally—but you also have numerous opportunities to give back to the organization and the communities where we live.

How do you make the best use of your day?

While I am still very guilty of this at times, I try to limit multitasking too much. Instead I work to set forth a deliberate plan for my day—including time for emails. During business school, I read a study on multitasking by [MIT](#) that suggests we are not nearly as good at multitasking as we think we are and that we are far more effective if we focus on the task at hand before turning our attention to anything else—



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(including that email that pops up when you are writing!). Some of the most successful business professionals have stated that they're most productive when they schedule blocks of time on their calendars specifically to focus on things such as responding to emails, rather than trying to do them simultaneously or switching back and forth between tasks. The work pace in DC isn't always conducive for this type of approach to work, but I try.

Another tool that's been useful over the years is running or some physical activity each morning (well, as often as I can get it in). For me, it's a good meditation / prayer time that helps bring clarity / focus through the day and gives me energy to be more productive. While it may be different for each person, having an "outlet" each day is very important.

Who or what inspires you?

In terms of *what* inspires me, faith, creativity, and curiosity—not because I necessarily exude these traits to their fullest, but I think they are traits to strive for at all points in your life.

In terms of *who*: I've had some impressively selfless people who had a big impact on my life because they chose to give their time and talents to serving others, including me. This list of people includes several of my teachers, such as my high-school choir teacher, Mrs. Wilson, who handed out sage life advice in each class like it was candy—inspiring me even today by providing a living example of someone who demonstrated how to gracefully overcome adversity and who put their own advice to work each day.

What is the best advice you have ever received?

In my career: "Take risks. There will be failure, but it's from those moments that you can begin to see what success is." (former colleague / sponsor)

Personally: "Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at things that do not matter." (Francis Chan). I read this quote in a book about three years ago... It definitely struck a chord and serves as a reminder to focus on what matters most.

As a leader of an organization: There will be tough times. Be the person that others want in their fox hole when those times happen.

Who do you look up to the most and why?

Visionaries. It's hard not to look at the women and men who have done something that was thought of as not possible—who humbly blaze a new trail in their fields—and not find inspiration. I was lucky enough to attend a ceremony in DC about five years ago where NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson was honored (a couple of years before the movie *Hidden Figures* was released). Johnson's story of her humble approach to solving some of the most challenging mathematic problems for NASA, while at the same time breaking through barriers for both women and African Americans makes her a true national treasure. Katherine Johnson turned 100 years old last month and her story continues to be incredibly inspirational.