

# From Average Student to CEO: Prudential Financial CEO John Strangfeld

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## *Having “High Impact” & Quilting Your Career*

Raised in Baltimore and then attending high school in New Jersey, John Strangfeld revealed that he was once an average student, pulling in B grades. He didn’t participate in extracurricular activities and even washed dishes part-time in a restaurant close to home.

One thing he always had though — “Drive.” He just didn’t know how to apply it.



Fast forward and today Strangfeld is Chairman and CEO of Prudential Financial, Inc., and known for his belief that talent and culture are the most important factors in a company’s long-term success. With a history of nearly 140 years of helping individual and institutional customers grow and protect their wealth, Prudential’s own success makes a compelling argument for that conviction.

At a special fireside chat on April 22, in front of a packed house of Financial Women’s Association members and guests, Strangfeld shared his thoughts on talent, leadership and growing a career.

During the conversation, which was moderated by Cathy Marcus, global chief operating officer of Prudential Real Estate Investors, Strangfeld advised the audience to “look at your career as a quilt,” and understand that there will be some positive experiences and some not so positive that will ultimately intertwine and shape who you are.

“I’ve learned that we can be true to ourselves and still shape who we are,” he said. He explained that his greatest opportunities for learning were through personal experiences with people he worked for—both those who inspired him in a positive way, and those who didn’t. These experiences enhanced his self awareness and ability to shape the person he wanted to become.

## **Prudential’s Culture: No Drama, Low Ego, High Impact**

Why does Strangfeld believe Prudential stands apart from other companies? In a few words: an unconventional view of leadership.

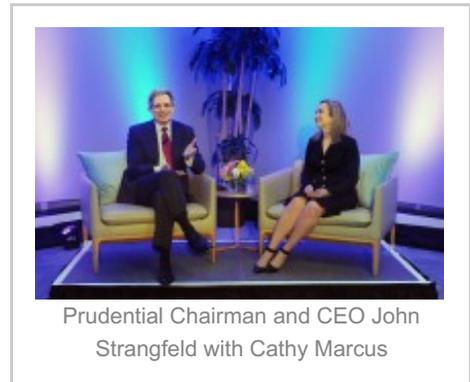
How so? Strangfeld values talented people who can express themselves in constructive ways, and thus create more compelling outcomes. At Prudential, he has emphasized developing and creating a “talent culture” where everyone is engaged. This approach doesn’t mean that

employees are less focused or intense; rather, they are collaborative and interested in the success of the team overall. The end result, Strangfeld explained, provides a “competitive advantage that other companies can’t replicate. Financial services strategies come and go, but talent and culture stay.”

In addition, diversity is a key initiative at Prudential. Two-fifths of the company’s U.S. businesses are run by women, and nearly 40% of its executive team are women, including the CIO, General Counsel and head of HR.

“We’re proud of our progress, yet we have a lot of conviction that the best is yet to come,” Strangfeld said.

Strangfeld advised that keeping egos in check promotes collaboration across the workforce and drives employees to share a playbook that can be replicated. The result is emotional and intellectual buy-in from employees that far outweighs any acquisition strategy, in terms of its power to produce results.



### **Trust Your Colleagues – No Really, Trust Us on This One**

For those of you looking to advance to the CEO level someday, Strangfeld advised that no matter how many hours you spend on the job, it’s impossible to know and do it all.

“If you have a challenge or are struggling, it’s not a sign of weakness to sit down with your colleagues and ask for their thoughts,” he said. “That will enhance the quality of your decision making and the outcome will likely be far superior to what you would have thought of on your own.”

*Special thanks to Prudential and the Distinguished Speakers Committee.*

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