

Employee Benefit Adviser

July/August 2019

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**“WE HAVE THE
OPPORTUNITY
TO SAVE LIVES.”**

Top

**“IN THE FACE
OF ADVERSITY ...
I WAS ABLE TO
RETAIN CLIENTS,
GROW OUR
REVENUE, GROW
OUR TEAM.”**

WOMEN *in* BENEFIT ADVISING

**“ALL OF THOSE THINGS
THAT I HAD GOING AGAINST
ME JUST REALLY DROVE
MY SPIRIT.”**

Quoted, clockwise from top left:
Jill Goldstone, Gallagher;
Charity Daniels, Bottom Line Benefits;
Casey Armstrong, Armstrong Fairway Insurance



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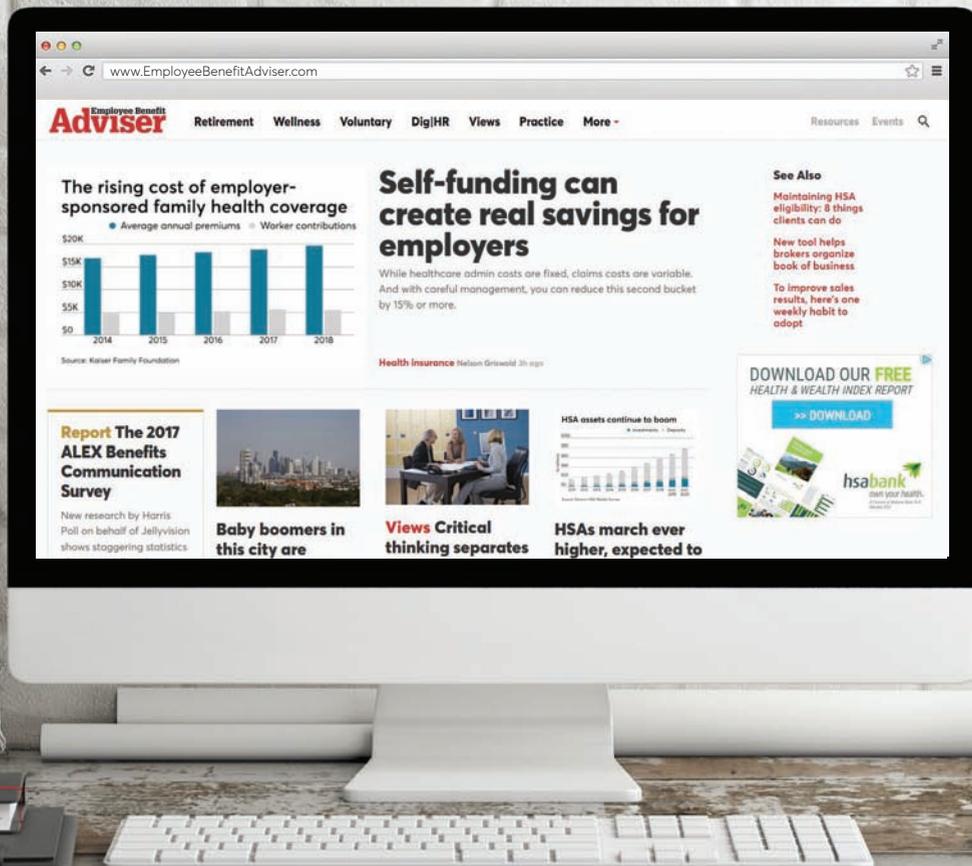
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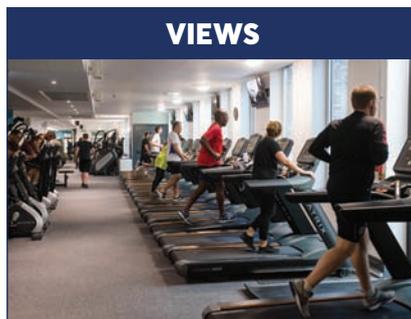
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USI plans organic growth with third reported acquisition

The brokerage's acquisition of Employee Benefit Concepts is the latest of the firm's mergers this year.
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Making wellness work: 5 ways clients can improve programs

Offering workers the right incentives and leveraging big data are key to getting the most out of programs.
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Brokers worry over Washington's benefits impact in 2020 election

"I do have a lot of long-term worries about erosion of the employer providing group health insurance," says one consultant.
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From the Editor

Reaching for the top

Top Women in Benefit Advising include employees of Aflac, Alliant Employee Benefits and Hodges-Mace.



What is the most challenging thing you've ever faced, and how did you overcome it?

That question always elicits interesting answers, and it's one of the questions we asked all of the candidates for our annual Top Women in Benefit Advising feature, one of my favorite projects to pull together. I'm always particularly curious about how people answer the second half of that question.

For Casey Armstrong, a benefit adviser and president of Armstrong Fairway Insurance Agency, that challenge hit when she was 21, the day she suffered a stroke in her apartment, leaving her with limited mobility on the right side of her body, and starting her down a path of physical rehab and speech therapy.

Armstrong, 41, now has been a benefit consultant for more than two decades and is one of *Employee Benefit Adviser's* 2019 Top Women in Benefit Advising. As she recounted to associate editors Amanda Schiavo and Caroline Hroncich, Armstrong used that physical setback to motivate her, as well as to better empathize with her clients and help them navigate the health insurance marketplace, one that she found so frustrating.

For other honorees, the small indignities of being called "sweetheart" or "pussycat" in the workplace were some of the petty remarks and annoyances to endure. She and all of our 20 honorees this year faced similar stories of setbacks and perseverance, which made them better, more experienced advisers.

Contributing writer Bruce Shutan also examines new, emerging strategies advisers should consider for clients looking for an edge to improve their talent management strategies — soft perks and lifestyle benefits. As Paul O'Reilly-Hyland, CEO and founder of Zeamo, which provides a flexible monthly subscription for boutique health club access, sees it, traditional offerings don't cut it anymore, and with unemployment at its lowest level in nearly half a century, employers must "be at the forefront of offering really innovative and key benefits." —Walden Siew



ADOBE STOCK

Finding the right voluntary benefits broker may be tricky

The best bet for small and midsize companies is to use a third party that doesn't sell or receive commissions on insurance.

By Jay Schmitt

In selecting a provider for voluntary benefits like life and disability, AD&D and financial wellness, small and midsize companies often turn to the same broker that serves their medical or retirement plan needs.

That's a problem. Many brokers who are perfectly reliable partners for medical and retirement benefits may lack the knowledge or impartiality required to deliver optimal service in the voluntary benefits space.

For instance, many brokers work for a large insurance provider, so they steer customers to choices from that provider. When brokers do work with multiple provid-

ers, they often specialize in one type of benefit. Those who offer a broad array of options across multiple benefit types may have only a superficial knowledge of each choice.

It can be difficult for smaller employers to choose the right broker. One approach is to enlist the help of a third party to evaluate insurance brokers. This is a sensible tactic on paper, but in practice broker searches are commonly performed by companies that have an interest in bidding for services they are supposed to be objectively evaluating.

So what's a plan sponsor to do? The safest bet for small and midsize companies

is to engage an unbiased third party that neither sells insurance products nor receives commissions when its clients select insurance products.

The process should begin with a thorough analysis of each benefit or service under consideration by the plan sponsor. An experienced search provider will ask questions like:

When a plan sponsor engages an unbiased search provider, the combination of reduced broker fees, expanded broker services and meaningful service-level agreements should far outweigh the search provider's direct fees.

- What is the plan sponsor's level of satisfaction with the current program?
- Are participants complaining about some aspect of the vendor's delivery?
- Are there tasks the sponsor wishes the vendor performed?
- How would the plan sponsor rate the relative strength of the vendor team?
- Has there been a lot of turnover in vendor personnel?
- Are there compliance risks that need to be fixed?

The search provider also should evaluate the current program fees and help plan sponsors understand whether those fees are in line with the effort being asked of brokers. It's also important to understand how potential broker partners get paid.

The parties can then define a baseline service set — crite-

ria that a broker must meet to satisfy the plan sponsor's needs — as well as a wish list of additional services and behaviors valued by the plan sponsor. Together, these are the key criteria that determine how each prospective broker will be judged.

Next, the search provider and plan sponsor should create a list of potential brokers. The search provider can add value here by reporting on market developments, emerging vendors and new benefits trends.

Comparing potential brokers against the key criteria will help pare down the list. From there, the search provider will contact each broker to explain the



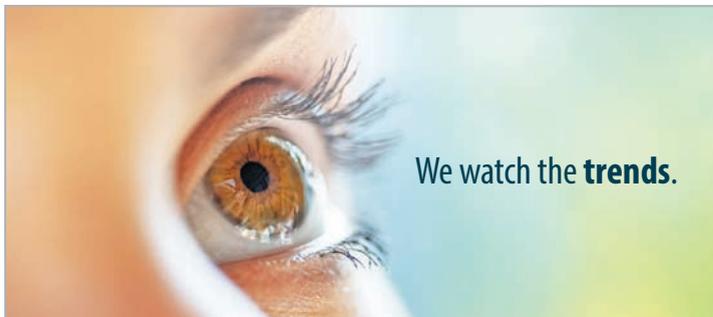
Many brokers who are reliable benefits partners may lack the knowledge required for the job, says Strategic Benefits Advisor's Jay Schmitt.

RFP process and desired services and assess interest. It can also play an active role in broker evaluation and selection, including facilitating finalist workshops.

Once a broker of choice is identified, the search provider should offer guidance on negotiating contract terms and service-level agreements. It's important to find terms that are fair for all parties.

When a plan sponsor engages an unbiased search provider, the combination of reduced broker fees, expanded broker services and meaningful service-level agreements should far outweigh the search provider's direct fees. **EBA**

Jay Schmitt is a principal at Strategic Benefits Advisor, a benefits consulting firm in Dunwoody, Georgia.



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Want to elevate your game? Stop talking benefits

Moving to the C-suite is imperative to become one of the advisers who can win bigger groups from larger competitors.

By Nelson L. Griswold



The benefits industry is changing, and the one change most perplexing to brokers and advisers is the elevation of the sales conversation from talking benefits in the HR Department to

talking business in the C-suite, the domain of the company's C-level executives, specifically the chief executive officer and the chief financial officer.

Changing whom you sell to is one of the most wrenching shifts in any business, in this case raising a series of challenging questions. The first question usually is, "Why do I even need to move to the C-suite?"

Today's top advisers are delivering remarkable results to their clients: lowering year-over-year spending by 10 to 20% or more in the first year alone, while improving benefits. To achieve similar results, you need the support and commitment of an executive with P&L responsibility, which excludes anyone at the director or manager level.

The strategies that advisers are using to take control of the client's benefits spending and manage the healthcare supply chain to lower costs usually require

a serious disruption of the status quo that few HR directors or benefits managers are willing to accept, never mind embrace.

So moving to the C-suite is imperative if you want to become an adviser who is winning bigger groups from bigger competitors by delivering real bottom-line results that status-quo brokers can't match. But other questions follow.

What do I know about the CEO and CFO them?

To master the C-suite, you must understand the psychographics and behavioral personas of the executives working in the C-suite. I lack the space here to go into details but C-suite authority Trey Taylor, author of the soon-to-be-released "A CEO Does Only Three Things," explains that the CEO and CFO are dramatically different. According to Taylor, the CEO and CFO have different concerns, priorities, perspectives and buying patterns that you can leverage to make the sale.

Why would the CEO or CFO meet with me?

While the C-suite has delegated to HR operational responsibility for benefits, the CEO and CFO remain intensely interested in the impact of healthcare costs on their

bottom line and are open to credible strategies to lower those costs. But you have to get and keep their attention.

What do I say to get in the C-suite?

First, you have to be capable of speaking some C-suite, the language of business — for example, EBITDA, OpEx and CapEx, ROI and capital allocation. (Google them.) You also should be able to relate your strategies to top executives' standard business practices. You must know how to engage their emotions in order to move them to action.

What is my value proposition?

This is critical. You offer to help the C-suite take control of their benefit spending and manage their healthcare supply chain to lower costs, while putting your comp at risk to guarantee results. You must have proven cost-containment strategies that will support your value prop. Yes, moving to the C-suite is a lot of work and is almost surely outside your comfort zone.

But brokers who keep talking benefits in HR will lose their book to those who talk business in the C-suite.

It's a simple choice: Stick with the status quo or master the C-suite. **EBA**

Nelson L. Griswold, an Employee Benefit Adviser columnist, is an agency growth consultant and author of "Do or Die: Reinventing Your Benefits Agency for Post-Reform Success."

As a savvy market strategy, try narrowing your focus

One of the most powerful and effective opportunities is market segmentation. Here's how to do it.

By Jack Kwicien



Over the years, we have helped dozens of benefits advisers develop their marketing strategy and business development plans. I'm not talking about creating a sales pro forma, although we have done that numerous times as well.

No, I'm talking about a focused marketing plan that provides the focal point for all your proactive business development activities.

One of the most powerful and effective strategies is market segmentation. Part savvy artistry, part pragmatic opportunism, market segmentation enables a business to accelerate its growth through the disciplined, focused pursuit of target industry verticals.

By focusing on a specific industry vertical you gain a multitude of marketing advantages. For example, your firm will gain institutional knowledge of that industry, its issues and challenges, and trends. This will enable your team to talk the talk and walk the walk.

As a result, your marketing message will resonate with your target audience leading to increased sales opportunities.

In addition, your team will develop an appreciation and understanding of the culture of organizations in that industry sector and

your firm will be credible as a trusted advisor and an insider that gets it.

Imagine knowing the top two or three business issues confronting virtually every business in an industry vertical. Your credibility will increase exponentially.

You will also find that the word-of-mouth publicity about your organization is enhanced as your reputation grows. This will result in increased referrals since most finance and HR professionals communicate with colleagues in their field.

In addition, most industries have trade associations, which can provide you with speaking opportunities for "seminar selling," where you will be introduced as a subject matter expert. Those associations likely communicate with their members through newsletters and webinars, which can provide you with opportunities to publish pertinent articles and white papers.

Finally, depending on the industry sector, there may be opportunities to create proprietary products, customized benefits communication and enrollment strategies, and a number of voluntary benefits, including lifestyle benefits. Your team will become known as industry thought leaders and market innovators. Your clients and carriers alike will seek out your advice and counsel.

Clients of ours have segmented the market to serve employers in the following

sectors: healthcare, public schools, municipalities, state government agencies, private schools, nonprofits, gaming, utilities and hospitality, among others.

One firm does business with 6,000 plus school districts. Another does business with 23 state government agencies and 12 state universities in their home state and has over 125,000 policyholders. Another has seen its revenues grow at a 40% compounded annual growth rate for the last six or seven years.

How do those metrics compare to your practice? .

Which industry to focus on will depend largely upon your location, contacts, capabilities, experience, and product offerings.

A logical place to start would be to consider any "natural" markets that you might have.

Or a firm like mine can help you to analyze your circumstances, develop your strategy and implement your marketing plan.

Regardless, market segmentation represents a huge marketing opportunity.

And once you implement your marketing plan, your prospecting and business development activities will quickly become easier and more effective.

Market segmentation can broaden your opportunities by narrowing your focus. **EBA**

Jack Kwicien, an Employee Benefit Adviser columnist, is a managing partner at Daymark Advisors, a Baltimore consultancy.

Using social media to advance business goals

Advisers need to put clients and prospects at the center of their online conversations.

By Wendy Keneipp



Brokers and benefit advisers have significantly increased their social media presence, but now that so much activity is taking place, advisers need to clarify their online marketing goals to take a more strategic approach.

Increased social media engagement is great if it helps advance the adviser's mission. But while activity for the sake of having an online presence may feel rewarding, if it doesn't advance the adviser's business goals it is probably a waste of time.

Some advisers spend a significant amount of time online connecting with their peers — but less so their clients. Making peer connections is an excellent use of the platform and spending time discussing ideas to help everyone grow their business is extremely worthwhile.

But interacting exclusively with peers and industry insiders can begin to feel like a members-only club, where clients are not permitted. Conversations are going on about clients — but without their participation. The solution isn't to stop making industry connections, but rather to expand

the adviser's online activity so that it encompasses clients.

Drawing clients into the circle

Bringing clients and prospects into conversation takes a concentrated effort. It's a mistake to expect them to wade through an adviser's feed to find a nugget of relevant information. They most likely won't, and the adviser will miss out on any potential opportunities.

Instead, call out employers — either generically (for instance, "Hey CEOs, this is relevant to you!") or even by name if appropriate (tag them using @ and selecting their name).

The idea is to use the adviser's online presence as an opportunity to engage with clients and prospects and share relevant ideas that have surfaced through peer sharing. For this to work, the adviser needs to share specific messages with the clients to which they pertain.

Will this help boost sales? Indeed it will, if the adviser is diligent about sharing only relevant information, drawing in the right targets, paying attention to who is engaging, adjusting as necessary and, when appropriate, reaching out as a follow-up.

One adviser that I work with offered this advice: "I always suggest to brokers that

when posting, they need to see if any of their top prospects are engaging or if it's just connections/friends that they've had in the past. If your top prospects are engaging, then that gives a great sense of some ROI and additionally a reason to reach out to them to chat. Take the time to evaluate who has engaged with your posts that week — spend an hour a week to go through all of the posts/engagement and see if there is anyone new worth reaching out to."

Some advisers spend a significant amount of time online connecting with their peers — but less so their clients. Making peer connections is an excellent use of the platform and spending time discussing ideas to help everyone grow their business is extremely worthwhile.

Those advisers who master educational marketing will own their markets.

There is so much information flying around every day, and employers are drawn to people who introduce them to new ideas.

Don't let someone else be that person. Advisers should be the ones drawing it to the attention of their clients and prospects; those who make that their mission will win new clients hand over fist. **EBA**

Wendy Keneipp, an Employee Benefit Adviser columnist, is a partner with Q4 Intelligence, a St. Louis-based consulting firm for insurance and benefits agencies. Follow her on Twitter at @WendyKeneipp.

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ADVISER'S MEDICAL CRISIS SPARKS NEW IDEAS FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE

"She's been through the struggle and understands what we're all going through in life," says a client of one of *EBA's* Top Women in Benefit Advising, Casey Armstrong.

By Amanda Schiavo and Caroline Hroncich





When Jennifer Kelley's husband Jay severely fractured his ankle in a motorcycle accident in 2013, her first call was to Casey Armstrong, a benefit adviser and president of Armstrong Fairway Insurance Agency.

Kelley is the president of Kelley's Underground Construction, a 28-employee company based in Apple Valley, California. She has worked with Armstrong both personally and professionally for about 15 years.

Kelley remembers backing out of her driveway to head to the hospital and calling Armstrong on speed dial. At the time, Kelley and her family did not have health insurance — she says rocketing costs after the Affordable Care Act went into effect led them to cancel their coverage (it was not mandated given the small size of her company). So when Kelley received the emergency call, she knew they were in trouble.

"I was like, you need to get me insurance now," she recalls telling Armstrong on the phone.

Armstrong got the couple an HMO plan that took effect the following month and was able to refer them to an orthopedic trauma surgeon at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine. The surgeon would later operate on Jay's pilon break, a severe fracture that can drive the foot bone into the shin. If not for the insurance that Armstrong was able to put in place, the Kelleys' medical bills from years of treatment would have cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"She's just more personal," Kelley says of Armstrong. "She's been through the struggle and understands what we're all going through in life. She doesn't just sit behind her keyboard."

Armstrong, 41, has been a benefit consultant for nearly 22 years and is one of *Employee Benefit Adviser's* 2019 Top Women in Benefit Advising. But it wasn't too long ago that she was struggling to navigate the healthcare system herself. When Armstrong was 21, she suffered

"I CAN'T OVERCOME BEING A WOMAN, I CAN'T OVERCOME BEING YOUNG," ARMSTRONG SAYS. "ALL OF THOSE THINGS THAT I HAD GOING AGAINST ME JUST REALLY DROVE MY SPIRIT."

a stroke in her Apple Valley, California, apartment. This left her with limited mobility on the right side of her body.

The stroke was initially misdiagnosed as encephalitis and then multiple sclerosis. Armstrong quickly became frustrated with how difficult the healthcare system was to navigate as she jumped from doctor to doctor.

"[I was] really confused at that point," she says. "I was still so young and I was just angry at the world."

Armstrong was eager to be back at work almost from the moment she entered the hospital — armed with a new passion for helping people navigate the health insurance marketplace.

"Every time I hear of someone having a stroke, I tell their caregivers, 'I know it's a struggle and it's hard to even fathom getting better at this point, but you have to force yourself to get up and put your all into physical therapy and speech therapy because those things are so important,'" she says.

After a two-year recovery, Armstrong emerged as an advocate for client healthcare issues. She is now the owner of Armstrong Fairway, where she manages 10 employees and brings in \$8.7 million in benefits business per year.

Seeing the complexities of the healthcare industry from the eyes of a patient also galvanized Armstrong politically. She feels strongly about achieving greater transparency in healthcare and ending surprise billings. While recommending insurance and being an advocate for clients is important, change needs to come from the top, she says.

"I'd like to be more involved in the political side of things," Armstrong says. "When [leaders] make changes with the swipe of their pen, it's detrimental to a lot of folks."

Some advisers, like Armstrong, have been vocal about the need for more transparency in the space. Armstrong travels once a year to Washington, D.C., to speak with representatives about the issues she sees in Apple Valley. She has tapped elected officials, including U.S. Rep. Paul Cook, R-California; Republican State Sen. Scott Wilk and State Assemblyman Jay Obernolte, also a Republican, to bring attention to healthcare issues that will impact her clients.

A black and white photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a white dress shirt and a dark tie with thin white stripes. He has his arms crossed and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a plain, light color.

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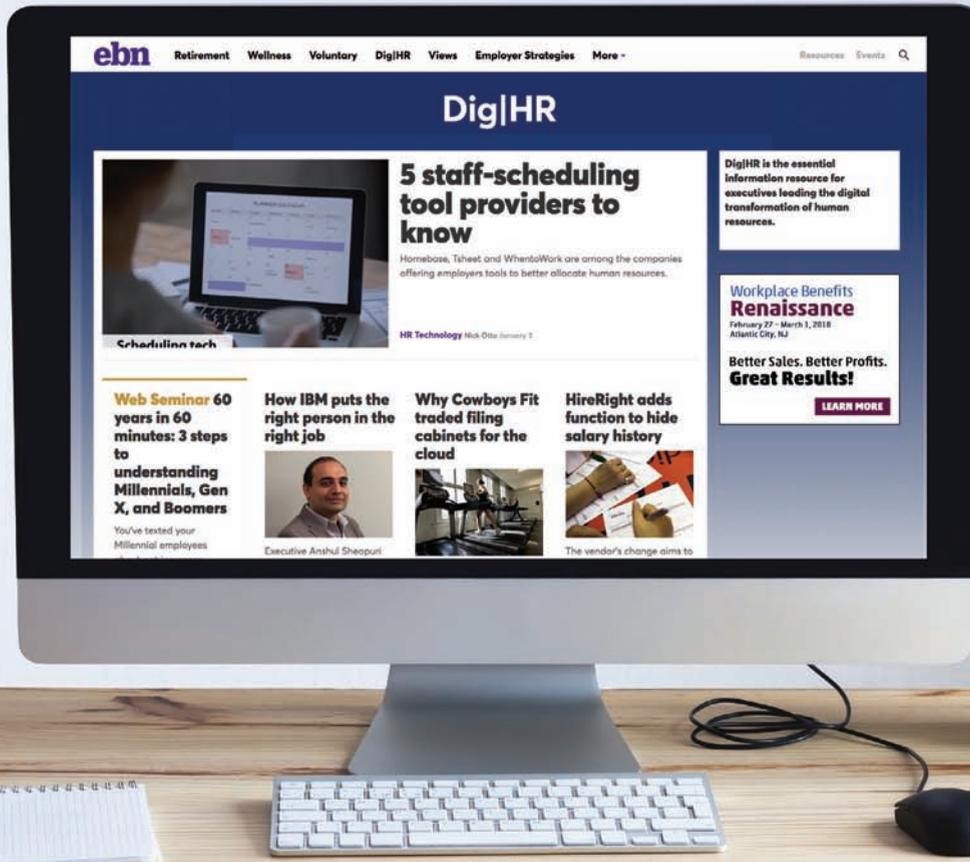
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Employee Benefit News

"I do think we have a lot of work to do in the political side of things to help them understand how difficult it is to change insurance as a whole," she says.

There is also a need for more health-care education, she says. Offerings like low-cost, self-insured plans that are non-ACA compliant can confuse workers into selecting an inadequate amount of coverage. The average citizen may not know enough about health insurance to make an informed decision and "a lot of people are just like, 'Well, it's cheaper; I'm doing it,'" she says.

Making her mark on the industry

When Nancy Rodriguez, who has worked in the benefits space for more than a decade, found herself being passed over by less senior male employees for job opportunities in the industry, she knew it was time for a change.

She eventually made her way to Armstrong Fairway, where she has worked for three years, most recently as a benefits account executive. Rodriguez's own experience in the industry drove her to seek a role at Armstrong's firm because she wanted to work for an experienced and savvy businesswoman. Most benefit advisers are men and in her previous roles, several of the clients preferred to work with men — impacting her career aspirations, Rodriguez says.

"I was so excited about a woman boss; I thought maybe this will be good for me," she says.

She found a mentor in Armstrong and the two developed a strong bond. Armstrong herself has struggled with bias in the workplace, and she understood where Rodriguez was coming from. In the past, she has faced discrimination because she was a woman.

"I have come across unconscious bias"

"SHE'S JUST MORE PERSONAL," A CLIENT SAYS OF ARMSTRONG. "SHE'S BEEN THROUGH THE STRUGGLE AND UNDERSTANDS WHAT WE'RE ALL GOING THROUGH IN LIFE. SHE DOESN'T JUST SIT BEHIND HER KEYBOARD."

she says. "Some people flat out [say] 'I think a male would be better doing this.'"

Armstrong says she has had to work harder at times to win clients, because of her youth, gender and previous health issues. In some instances, clients were hesitant to do business with her based on those factors — one client even went so far as to question her backup plan in the event of another stroke.

"I can't overcome being a woman, I can't overcome being young. I couldn't overcome the things he wanted me to overcome," she says. "All of those things that I had going against me, just really drove my spirit."

That spirit was part of Armstrong from a young age, her father, John

Armstrong, says. She became fascinated by the benefits business after seeing him work in the industry. When she was about 8, she started to pay regular visits to her father's office, answering phones and taking notes in client meetings.

"She was a natural," he says. "Customers would come into the office and she'd be there and interact. She'd ask if they would like water. She was so proud to be part of the organization then, and I was so happy to have her with me."

Armstrong remains close with her father. She learned from a young age to be a more consultative seller, using a holistic approach to attend to a variety of client needs — even if it doesn't bring her additional income.

"One thing about health insurance, people don't pay much attention until they have to use it," John Armstrong says. "Casey steps right in with families and helps them. That is what separates her from the majority of brokers."

Working in a tight-knit community like Apple Valley has brought Casey Armstrong close to many of her clients. She develops relationships with local doctors and helps clients navigate their medical needs — something she feels passionately about after her stroke.

She is grateful to her father for helping her through the experience, including dealing with hospitals and insurance issues. Her own knowledge was a contributing factor in her ability to get the help she needed, including extending her physical therapy sessions. Without all of this help, she says, she may not have been able to get the care she needed.

"I could not imagine how it would be for a regular person trying to navigate this on their own," she says. "I would have given up at the first hurdle." **EBA**

“WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAVE LIVES.”

Top

“IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY ... I WAS ABLE TO RETAIN CLIENTS, GROW OUR REVENUE, GROW OUR TEAM.”

WOMEN

in **BENEFIT**

ADVISING

“ALL OF THOSE THINGS THAT I HAD GOING AGAINST ME JUST REALLY DROVE MY SPIRIT.”

From managing millions of dollars in business and taking on leadership roles to being the only woman in the boardroom, these 20 women exemplify the best the benefits advisory space has to offer.

Each of Employee Benefit Adviser's Top Women in Benefit Advising has stood out both professionally and personally, some overcoming heavy odds to build successful practices and develop skills in demand by all clients.

Charity Daniels, president of Bottom Line Benefits, recounted how she started in the industry under her father's tutelage, and

shared her later struggle of running and managing her family-run agency after her father died unexpectedly in 2015.

"I learned that I would have to demand the respect I knew I deserved, even if it meant turning down prospects and clients," Daniels says.

She's among many making strides in a largely male-dominated industry. See this year's winners, chosen by EBA's editors and listed in alphabetical order. Please share your thoughts and experiences with us and on Twitter using the hashtag #TopWomeninBenefitAdvising.

BY AMANDA SCHIAVO AND CAROLINE HRONCICH

Q&A



CASEY ARMSTRONG

president, Armstrong Fairway Insurance Agency

What are you most proud of in your career? My agency was honored with the 2016 small business of the year by California Assemblyman Jay Obernolte and has also been honored with the best insurance agency of the year, voted by local residents, for nine years straight. I am proud that I found the courage to step out of my father's business and start my own agency from scratch.

What is your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? My biggest challenge has been finding my voice and gaining the respect as a professional businesswoman. We have to be twice as smart to even get in the door, then four times smarter to earn the business.



CATHERINE BORBONE

executive vice president, Alliant Insurance Services

What are you most proud of in your career? Recently I had a difficult sale — one that took more than eight years to close. I just won this account in February. It was a tremendous process that took many meetings. It was a true victory. I had "captured my whale," as my managing director called it. I also take pride in the mentoring I have done for the young talent in my office. It has been incredibly rewarding to watch them grow and develop and achieve their goals.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? I am often the only woman in the boardroom as our industry is male dominated. But being the only woman does have its advantages.



MEGAN COOK

founder and CEO, Company Adept Benefits

What are you most proud of in your career? I'm most proud of the recent work I've been doing with employers to reduce their healthcare costs by 30 to 50%. I've also been working to provide free healthcare services to employees and higher quality care.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry?

The biggest challenge has been dealing with the perception of being a woman-owned employee benefits consulting firm in a good old boy's club industry. Also building the confidence to not second-guess myself. I know I'm capable and continue to prove it to myself, but fear and insecurity sometimes slip in. I constantly have to work on my self-talk.



I KNOW I'M CAPABLE AND CONTINUE TO PROVE IT TO MYSELF.
MEGAN COOK



CHARITY DANIELS

president, Bottom Line Benefits

What are you most proud of in your career? I started my career under my father's wing. He was the founder of our agency and passed away unexpectedly in 2015. In the face of adversity ... I was able to retain clients, grow our revenue, grow our team.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? After my father died, I received a call from one of our clients. The CEO wanted me to meet with his team in order to "plead my case" as to why I should remain their broker. ... There will always be someone who questions my knowledge and my expertise simply because I am young and a woman.



ALLISON DE PAOLI

founder, De Paoli Professional Services

What are you most proud of in your career? Moving the medical portion of our business to a fee-and-pay-for-performance structure, rather than a commission basis. We have a few older groups that we are paid a commission on, but all the new business is fee for service. It forces us to prove our value everyday.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? I do think the rules in any industry are a bit different for women than they are for men. But, if you are smart, creative and passionate about what you do and believe, those rules will work themselves out. I believe that the employee benefits field allows a better-than-average chance for that to happen.



AIMEE DIBARTOLOMEO- CODY

president and owner,
Premier Benefit Plans

What are you most proud of in your career? Running and growing my family-owned business. Today, we have 20 employees and more than 500 clients. I am also proud to mentor other women in the insurance and benefits industry. Being able to help women break into the industry and advise those who have already started their career has been an honor.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? A big hurdle I faced early in my career was gaining access to the male leadership and decision makers I needed in order to add new clients and grow my business.



ASHLEY FERGUSON

senior vice president of sales,
Hodges-Mace

What are you most proud of in your career? The best part about being in sales leadership is seeing associates achieve their goals. That could be selling their first deal, selling their largest deal, breaking through with a referral channel, getting promoted, exceeding their yearly target or exceeding financial goals that impact their personal lives and families. My proudest moments have been witnessing these achievements for associates that have worked for me. It never gets old to see people work hard towards a goal and achieve it.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? The biggest challenge is that there are not enough women in high level executive roles. When you get there it can be a lonely place.



AMY FOSSOM

senior vice president,
Alliant Employee Benefits

What are you most proud of in your career? My success as an employee benefits broker. I have helped so many employers over my 19-year career. I love what I do and that alone is something to be proud of for sure. I've built such special relationships that will last me a lifetime.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? When I started in the insurance business, it was dominated by men. I am competitive by nature and was sure I could be successful. I got married and had my first child within a year of becoming a broker. I recall [being] nine months pregnant and reassuring potential and current customers I would always be there for them. Balance is sometimes tough in this role, but ... I have overcome the challenges of being a working mom.



I LEARNED THAT I WOULD HAVE TO DEMAND THE RESPECT I KNEW I DESERVED.
CHARITY DANIELS



JILL GOLDSTONE

area vice president, innovation, Gallagher

What are you most proud of in your career? I have had the opportunity to develop strategies and resources focused on the impact opioids have on our clients and their plan members. By proactively addressing substance abuse and prevention in the workplace and the stigma surrounding it, we have the opportunity to save lives. Leading this effort has truly been a passion of mine.

How has the benefits advisory space evolved since your career started? I started in the early days of HMOs, paper enrollments and manual underwriting calculations. When you needed to consult with an underwriter or connect with a client, phone or in-person were your only options.



TAMERA HOLLERICH

executive advisor, Insurance & Benefits Team

What are you most proud of in your career? I am proud that before the ACA was implemented, I took the agency to a fee-based model, forcing transparency in a field that was totally commission-based. This really gave us a point of difference and secured our integrity with our clients.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? The early years, while I was still in my 20s, were the most difficult. Due to the fact that this industry is primarily male-dominated, a young female was stereotyped as a secretary. When I would show up for a bid opening, I was typically asked who I worked for instead of assuming I was there to help them as an adviser.

Q&A



JANETTE L'HEUREUX
managing advisor, Baldwin
Krystyn Sherman Partners

What are you most proud of in your career? The ability to always do what is right for the client. To hold myself to a high standard and demonstrate professionalism, integrity, grit and a passion for what I do.

Why would you recommend this career to another woman? Being an adviser is challenging and has its highs and lows. But when you partner with a client and successfully manage the second or third largest line item in their budget, it is very rewarding. When they refer you to another potential client, you know you have made an impact. I encourage all women to consider a career in the insurance business as it is not only rewarding, but a business where you can build relationships that last a lifetime.



TONYA MANNING
U.S. wealth practice leader
and chief actuary, Buck

What are you most proud of in your career? Attaining my fellowship with the Society of Actuaries required dedication and hard work. It opened many doors in my career. Without it, I would not have been able to serve as chief actuary for two large consulting firms, lead Buck's Wealth practice or hold various leadership roles as a volunteer for the actuarial profession.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? I have spent much of my career as the only woman in the room. It has taken me some time to develop a leadership style that works for me in this environment. Unfortunately, I have not had female mentors during my career, so I was left to observe men and their approach to managing and leading.



RHONDA MARCUCCI
practice leader, HR & benefits
technology, Gallagher

What are you most proud of in your career? My involvement in startup work. I am most proud of my work as CFO of Viaticus, a viatical settlement company formed in the mid-1990s. A viatical settlement is when a terminally ill person sells their policy to pay for life-extending medical treatments or to fulfill a personal wish — it can make a huge difference in their lives.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? I never bought into the idea of challenges related to gender. Both my parents worked in a small business and there was no conversation around men versus women. I'm the oldest of four daughters, and there were high expectations placed equally on all of us.



I HAVE SPENT MUCH OF MY CAREER AS THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE ROOM.
TONYA MANNING



BRANDY OGLESBY
senior vice president of benefits consulting,
Alliant Employee Benefits

What are you most proud of in your career? The impact I have on the employees I work with. Typically, their first interaction with me is full of confusion, anger or fear. This can be due to a change in their benefits, an acquisition or even a newly diagnosed condition of their own or for a loved one. They are looking for someone to help ease their concerns.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? Finding my voice was a hurdle. Getting carrier partners, executives, C-suite and male peers to view me as a fellow expert and value my consulting, opinions and contributions.



JENNIFER PARKS
founder and president,
HealthPointe Insurance Services

What are you most proud of in your career? Leaving the giant agency I once worked for and starting my own in 2008. It was a tough road at first due to my noncompete and the recession, but I knew that I wanted to serve my clients and their employees with a more customized and nimble approach.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? When I first started in the insurance business in the late '90s, most of the women in the industry were in service roles and there were very few women producers. I proved myself early on by winning three very large benefits accounts.



PATTYSUE RAUH
executive vice president,
Brown & Brown

What are you most proud of in your career? I was asked to become the national benefits leader for Brown & Brown, a position that had not existed within our organization. Brown & Brown needed someone to take a leadership role to develop and execute on national initiatives to not only help our teammates, but our clients. This was the beginning of what has become a focus within Brown & Brown, and now an entire leadership team works together transforming our company and the industry.

What is your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? Balancing work and family. Having two children while maintaining a demanding career has, at times, created a situation where I was not always able to be at my children's activities.



POLLY THOMAS
president, employee benefits,
CBIZ

What are you most proud of in your career? I am proud that I took the risk of leaving a career in another industry 10 years ago to join this profession. The work has been challenging but far more rewarding than I would have anticipated. I am also proud of the innovations and successes my clients have achieved in evolving their total rewards programs. From winning national and international workplace well-being awards to managing plans, our clients have achieved meaningful results.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? The biggest challenge has been getting a voice and a seat at the table in a traditionally male-dominated industry. Fortunately, my firm has the CBIZ Women's Advantage program, which helps women in our industry.



STEPHANIE SHIELDS
senior vice president,
broker sales, Aflac

What are you most proud of in your career? I am most proud of the teams I have built and developed that deliver strong financial results to the business. I am an advocate for setting people up for success by leveraging their strengths. I have always aligned my team's work assignments based on individual talents versus job titles. Creating a high performing culture based on collaboration, taking risks and having honest conversations has been core to how I have operated.

Why did you choose this career? I chose this career because I loved the idea of consulting with clients to solve problems or find creative solutions for delivering employee benefits. I was drawn to the rich talent and the fact that much of our business is built on long-term relationships.



I AM AN ADVOCATE FOR SETTING PEOPLE UP FOR SUCCESS.
STEPHANIE SHIELDS



MICHELLE SULLIVAN
senior vice president, USI Insurance Services

What are you most proud of in your career? I am most proud of building a substantial client base with more than \$5 million annually in consulting fees. I am also proud of building a dynamic account management team with impressive credentials, meaningful experience and diverse backgrounds.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? Early on, I was one of the only female benefit consultants in Atlanta, and it was difficult to be taken seriously. Once people understood I had a master's degree in actuarial science and agreed to meet with me, their opinions changed. I believe being a female today is an advantage. My clients know I will always answer my phone.



TAMARA VOLKERT
senior vice president and director of employee
benefits, Hunt Insurance Group

What are you most proud of in your career? I am most proud of being an out of the box thinker and having the ability with my current employer to design creative insurance solutions. I am passionate about educating our clients on making the most of their benefits. I was the lead on building an innovative medical consortium for one of our programs and that has been one of the biggest accomplishments of my career.

What has been your biggest challenge as a woman in the industry? The stigma of insurance sales being a man's domain. Women are rising up and it's been really exciting to be a part of that.

The rise of lifestyle benefits



Soft perks emphasizing experiences over financial protection are meeting changing expectations — and sweetening talent management strategies. Here are 5 emerging ideas and benefits to consider.

BY BRUCE SHUTAN

Core benefit offerings will always play a role in talent management, but times have clearly changed. With group insurance products and services increasingly commoditized, brokers and advisers are looking to stand out in the crowd.

That quest has taken on a sense of urgency in an airtight economy with pressure to recruit and retain top talent across multiple generations with changing expectations about their employment contract. The answer may be the growing category of lifestyle benefits that transcend traditional fare in favor of soft perks or unusual offerings.

With unemployment at its lowest level in nearly half a century, employers must “be at the forefront of offering really innovative and key benefits,” says Paul O’Reilly-Hyland, CEO and founder of Zeamo, which provides a flexible monthly subscription for health club access. He believes that brokers who suggest innovative lifestyle benefits with a wide appeal will have an easier time retaining corporate clients and growing their business beyond core insurance options.

While the word lifestyle implies nice-to-have benefits, such offerings have become necessary in today’s competitive workplace, says Lindsay Bailey, founder and CEO of FitPros,

a health and fitness company that brings wellness to the workplace. She says lifestyle benefits that include well-being offerings should be woven into corporate culture.

But what exactly are these emerging benefits? Greg DiCarlo, co-founder and CEO of the perks and rewards startup Work2Live, defines lifestyle benefits as purchasing an experience over goods and services per se, “with an experiential component that is delivering in a tangible way on work-life balance and satisfaction.”

1. COURTING MILLENNIALS

There’s no denying their appeal to younger workers. Millennials prefer “almost anything that makes their lives seamlessly easy and accessible via the internet, primarily mobile,” explains Jay Parkinson, M.D., who co-founded Sherpa, which was recently acquired by Crossover Health, where he’s now chief designer. Every startup in San Francisco “is designed to do what your mother used to do for you,” he quips.

Since expectations are driven by consumer experiences, Netflix, Uber, Open Table and similar services have raised the bar for today’s employee benefit offerings. “Your service has to be easy to use, mobile, incremental, intuitive and consumer-like,” insists Dave Freedman, general manager of group plans at LegalZoom. “It’s about engagement, consumer experiences and things that are relevant to employees’ lives.”

With experience-oriented millennials moving frequently from one job to the next, retention of this group is a challenge. “Lifestyle benefits ties into an employer’s need to

expand their benefit offering in a way that truly speaks to what the employee market is now looking for," explains Beverly Beattie, co-founder of Work2Live, as well as CEO and founder of SeldenBeattie, and an EBA advisory board member named one of the Most Influential Women in Benefits Advising.

She says medical, dental, vision and other traditional benefits pale next to unconventional benefits that offer opportunities to "do things that are separate from work that expand them on a more personal level."

"We see innovation and new experiences around team-building, fitness and personalized perks that are evolving with today's workplaces," says Alexa Baggio, co-creator of the PERKS Convention, whose regional events in four major U.S. cities showcase nontraditional service providers.

For example, she says virtual reality

technologies, escape rooms and play-based experiences for employees and their families "leave the party tricks of yesteryear in the dust."

In fitness, she notes that ClassPass, Peerfit and Zeamo have created flexible programs that allow multi-generational and multi-skilled workplaces to customize their exercise schedules.

2. HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS

Wellness is foremost in the lifestyle benefits category, considering that employee health benefit costs represent the largest P&L expense after payroll and two-thirds of the nation is overweight, O'Reilly-Hyland notes.

While the average gym member is age 36 and up, the age falls to 26 for subscribers to Zeamo, which has sought to make health clubs more accessible to millennials and Gen Z, who account for more than two-thirds of the U.S.

workforce. The service provider's digital platform offers employees and their spouses no-strings-attached access to a network of more than 1,000 fitness facilities worldwide.

With the emergence of low-cost, high-volume clubs like Youfit, Retro and Planet Fitness, O'Reilly-Hyland says pricey memberships, which were once largely confined to executives or managers, are now accessible to more working Americans.

A recent Unum survey of 1,227 working adults shows corporate gym membership or health club access as one of the top five benefits requested by employees. "An employer can offer over 700 clubs on our platform for less than the cost of free coffee," he reports.

One hot trend Bailey has noticed involves one-on-one wellness coaching for sessions that last 25 or 50 minutes. Some focus solely on nutrition, while

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The rise of lifestyle benefits

others involve well-being issues. For example, dermatologists have met with employees to address concerns and offer safe-skin tips.

There are even corporate social responsibility programs with community partnerships that involve painting murals that are donated to hospitals or writing get-well cards to their patients.

Some emerging lifestyle benefits in the healthcare category Parkinson has seen involve breastfeeding services on corporate campuses, egg freezing for possible future fertility treatment, and erectile dysfunction treatments.

3. LIFESTYLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS

The number of potential offerings under the lifestyle benefits umbrella may seem nearly infinite.

It's almost like necessity is the mother of invention. "We were one of our own early customers before we took it out to the world," says LegalZoom's general manager of group plans, Dave Freedman.

Work2Live's portfolio is partitioned into a travel and leisure package featuring more than 13,000 hotel properties, as well as experiences and well-being. These options are respectively branded as "explore," "live" and "breathe" – a break from conventional descriptions.

Those verbs "really help someone envision how their interaction with those components in our system were going to work," DiCarlo explains.

These benefits are enhanced by a unique lifestyle spending account (LSA) that Work2Live created whose funds can be used to finance a variety of endeavors. The concept, which has been used in Canada and Britain, is new to the U.S. Although taxable to employees, unlike a health savings account (HSA),

it's a tax deduction for employers.

The LSA is much sexier than an HSA, Beattie opines, noting that "the ROI for employers is tremendous because employees would be a lot more excited to talk about experiences and travel."

If retention is the chief objective, she says, an employer could earmark a certain amount of money into the LSA for every year of service. It also can be used as a team incentive in sales-driven companies to help achieve targeted goals or reward loyalty.

4. IMPROVING FINANCIAL WELLNESS

The financial component of lifestyle benefits may be just as important as it is for core offerings. While most of FitPros' services involve physical health, other related hot topics include mental health

and sleep hygiene. In addition, financial wellness workshops have proved popular with millennials looking to paying off college loans and baby boomers needing help with retirement savings.

While Freedman has noticed many younger employees are health conscious, that's not the focus at his company, whose LifePlan service focuses on comprehensive legal services and financial wellbeing for LegalZoom employees. "It's almost like necessity is the mother of invention," he says. "We were one of our own early customers before we took it out to the world."

With so many employees part of the club-sandwich generation, Freedman says LifePlan's price covers children and elderly dependents living within the

home for LegalZoom employees and customers alike. "The fact that it's accounted for is table stakes at this point because that's the need in the market," he explains.

Indeed, mounting student loan debt and rising real estate prices, particularly on both coasts, have forced more people to cohabit "in ways that they probably haven't in a few decades," Freedman says.

5. CREATIVE APPROACHES

Mindful that most companies cannot match Google's breathtaking benefits package, Bailey explains that smaller businesses can still pursue meaningful team-building activities without any budget. It could be as simple as a squat challenge in the mid-afternoon or a walking meeting with packed lunches under a nearby tree. She says managers need to learn more about what team members do in their everyday lives and which benefits would resonate most.

While onsite physical fitness will appeal to some employees, she says a lunchtime cooking class with healthy fare might be more appealing to others. FitPros has about 25 offerings to choose from as part of a holistic approach to employee well-being.

Affordability is critical to this category. "These benefits are awesome for all companies, and especially among smaller groups who might not have larger buying power for the entire team, but still want to opt in on a larger array of perks and benefits at smaller group sizes and price points," Baggio says.

Awareness of these benefits could pay meaningful dividends for producers. "The best brokers and benefit advisers are those that are highly curious and always paying attention to the latest and greatest things that might not be popular just yet," Parkinson says. **EBA**

Bruce Shutan is an Employee Benefit Adviser contributing writer in Portland, Oregon.



ADOBE STOCK

PwC's student loan price tag: \$25 million and counting

More than 8,000 employees have enrolled in the benefit since the firm launched its program in 2016.

By **Caroline Hroncich**

PwC has paid more than \$25 million toward eliminating employees' student loan debt since launching its repayment benefit in 2016.

The accounting and consulting firm was one of the first employers to tackle workers' student debt by adding a pay-down program for employees. The benefit pays \$100 per month toward workers' student loans. As of March, about 8,700 employees had signed up and 8,069 were receiving payment.

"Even employees with no student loan debt tell us they are proud of the pioneering benefit," says Michael Fenlon, PwC's U.S. chief people officer. "They are proud the firm is taking on such a complex, im-

portant issue in our society, especially one they see negatively affecting their own friends, family and colleagues."

PwC estimates the program reduces employee loan and interest obligations by up to \$10,000 and shortens payoff time by roughly three years. The firm offers the program through Gradifi, a student loan benefit provider that also works with Honeywell, First Republic Bank and Peloton.

"It's amazing to see that three years later, PwC has contributed [more than] \$25 million to its employees' student debt," says Gradifi CEO David Chang, adding that PwC is the company's charter customer. "This just shows how these benefits actually change the lives of those

burdened with massive student debt. We're excited to see more of these types of milestones as more employers extend the SLP benefit to their employees."

Even though student loan debt in the U.S. has ballooned to nearly \$1.5 trillion, just 4% of employers offer student loan repayment benefits to workers, according to data from the Society for Human Resource Management. While the benefit generates buzz among workers, many employers are still hesitant about the cost, says Peter DeBellis, total rewards research leader at Deloitte.

"A program like this is a personal decision for an organization. It depends on your demographics, how your employees are feeling, what your industry is, what your financial well-being profile is," he said at the WorldatWork Total Rewards Conference in May. "It's not something to do lightly. It can have some serious financial ramifications, so it's something to step in thoughtfully if you are thinking about going down this road."

Regardless, some employers have been investing in student loan repayment benefits. For example, CSAA Insurance, Travelers Insurance and Advance Financial all offer some variation of the benefit. Others, like the carmaker Fiat Chrysler, offer employees student debt refinancing options.

PwC's Fenlon says the issue of increasing student loan debt has reached a "tipping point" and is now overwhelmingly impacting professionals. He calls the benefit "game changing" for employers.

"It's affecting when they are starting families, buying homes and how they're saving for retirement," he says. "By providing the student loan benefit, PwC is helping staff be better prepared for their financial future." **EBA**

Caroline Hroncich is an associate editor of *Employee Benefit Adviser*. Follow her on Twitter @chroncich1.

How Prudential used benefits to reduce stress

By gaining tools to more efficiently manage their personal finances, employees become more focused and satisfied.

By Evelina Nedlund

When Prudential surveyed its workers in 2009, it found out a surprising thing for a financial services company. Prudential's own employees were stressed out about their finances.

It found that 34% of its workforce was financially stressed — about five percentage points higher than the WebMD national benchmark. This stress carried into the workplace; employees

were less productive and more likely to struggle with mental health issues like depression, said Matthew Bahl, vice president of financial wellness customer strategies at Prudential.

So the firm doubled down on its benefits. It added budget coaching and made plan design changes to its health-care, retirement and disability plans. It also expanded childcare reimbursement, paid parental and caregiving leave.

What happened then? Prudential employees began to report lower levels of stress. By 2016, only 16% said they were financially stressed at work. **EBA**

Evelina Nedlund is a reporter at Employee Benefit Adviser. Follow her on Twitter @EvelinaNedlund.



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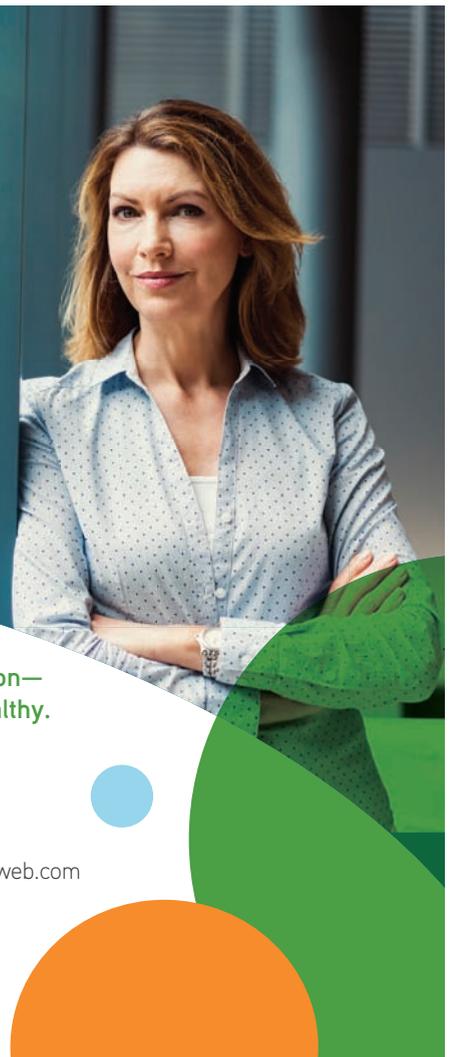
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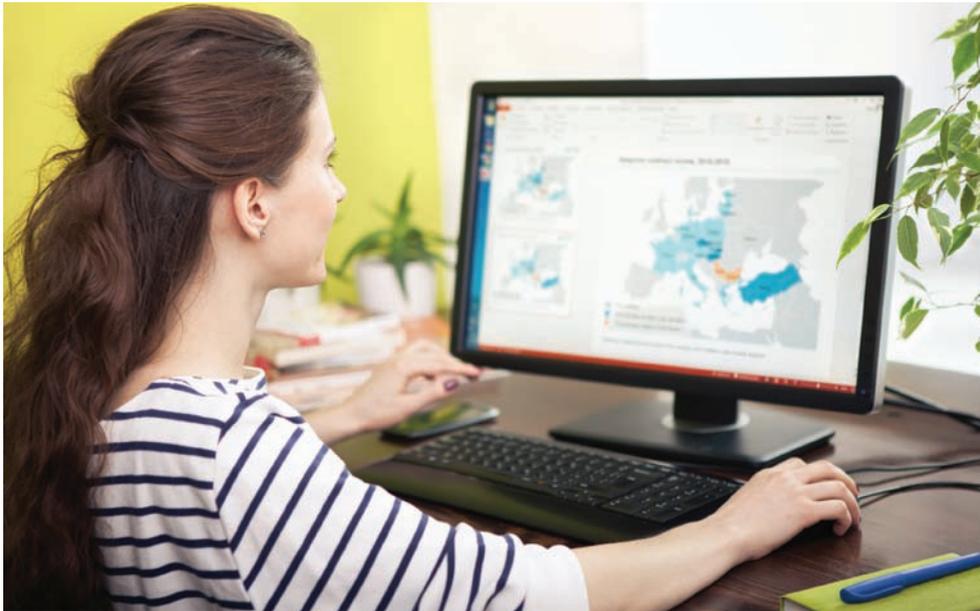
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ADOBE STOCK

This is the voluntary benefit clients are clamoring for

Employers are interested in rolling out pet insurance and LTC benefits, but more are seeking out this offering for their workers.

By Caroline Hroncich

Corporate Synergies benefit consultant Nicholas Park knows what voluntary benefit clients are most interested in, and he has a rapid response.

Student loan repayment programs top the list as the most requested benefit addition for employers, Park said, speaking recently at Spark HR, an HR and finance forum in New York. That's due to employers' increasing focus on helping their employees improve their financial well-being.

There is a fear that the nearly \$1.5 trillion in student debt will have long-term implications for workers and their employers, he added.

"It's a balloon," Park said. "It's almost like the housing market in 2007; there's an under-

lying implication that this could potentially blow up."

A number of student loan benefit providers have emerged over the past few years to help tackle the problem, Park said. Many provide high-tech platforms, direct student loan repayment through payroll deductions and a new IRS allowable match swap. Tuition.io, Commonbond, Gradible, Peanut Butter and Vault are just a few of the vendors that provide repayment benefits, he said.

"It's something hiring managers are noticing is a stress factor [for employees]," Park said. "How do you help them help themselves?"

More employers are interested in student

loan benefits but they may not be sold just yet. Just 4% of companies offered the benefit in 2018 — a percentage that has remained about the same since 2016, according to data from the Society for Human Resource Management.

Some of this hesitancy comes from concerns over finances, says Peter DeBellis, total rewards research leader at Deloitte. "A program like this is a personal decision for an organization. It depends on your demographics, how your employees are feeling, what your industry is, what your financial well-being profile is," he said during the recent Worldat-Work Total Rewards Conference. "It's not something to do lightly. It can have some serious financial ramifications, so it's something to step in thoughtfully if you are thinking about going down this road."

"A program like this is a personal decision for an organization," says Peter DeBellis, total rewards research leader at Deloitte. "It depends on your demographics."

Regardless, employers including Hulu, Staples, Travelers Insurance, marketing agency Fingerpaint and Sotheby's all offer student loan repayment programs. PwC, one of the first employers to add the benefit in 2016, has paid nearly \$26 million toward worker debt since the start of its program.

But student loan benefits aren't the only offering com-

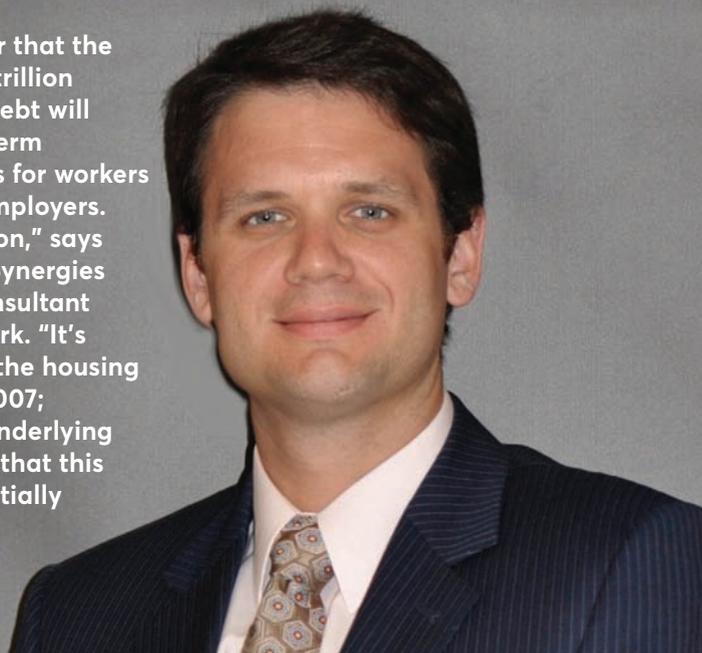
panies should invest in, Park said. Other voluntary benefits employers should consider include individual long-term care, executive reimbursement plans, executive individual disability insurance, telemedicine and pet insurance.

"The voluntary category is evolving at a rapid pace," he said. "I do see an evolution toward a total rewards program."

While voluntary benefits can be attractive offerings for companies, Park warned that if employers don't have an implementation plan, the benefits may fall flat. Employers should avoid a "set it and forget it" mentality, he added.

"If you fail to plan you plan to fail," Park said. "There is strategy involved, it's not something you can just hang up on a Christmas tree as an ornament. [You've] got to have a coordinated effort." **EBA**

There is fear that the nearly \$1.5 trillion in student debt will have long-term implications for workers and their employers. "It's a balloon," says Corporate Synergies benefits consultant Nicholas Park. "It's almost like the housing market in 2007; there's an underlying implication that this could potentially blow up."



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BLOOMBERG NEWS

CVS Health unveils a new benefits management tool

The service aims to help ease the administrative burdens of using multiple health and wellness vendors.

By **Caroline Hroncich** and **Evelina Nedlund**

CVS Health has a new health and wellness benefit management service for PBM clients.

The tool, Vendor Benefit Management, is meant to help employer clients contract, implement and manage third-party health and wellness vendors. Clients can use the tool to access negotiated pricing, member eligibility verification, billing and reporting.

Derica Rice, president of CVS Caremark, the PBM business of CVS Health, says the company seeks to ease the administrative burden on clients by enabling them to access health and wellness vendors in one place.

He says the company found that clients wanted a tool that would allow members to more easily access wellness benefits. "As healthcare continues to evolve, plan sponsors have begun looking beyond the standard medical, pharmacy, dental and vision health benefit offerings, and are increasingly considering supplemental benefits to help improve health outcomes and reduce overall medical spend," Rice said in a statement.

CVS Health has signed the digital therapeutics company Big Health to the service.

Big Health, which develops apps based on cognitive behavioral therapy, has two solutions on the market: Daylight, which helps employees better address negative thoughts and feelings, and Sleepio, an app to help workers improve sleep. Employers using Big Health include Activision Blizzard, The Hartford, Boston Medical Center and Comcast.

Peter Hames, co-founder and CEO of Big Health, says the partnership with CVS Health will make Sleepio available at scale for the first time.

"These interventions were previously not available at scale until the advent of digital therapeutics," he says.

Employers are looking for more integrated benefit solutions, industry experts say. More than a fifth of companies use 10 or more digital tools at work, and roughly 60% are using more than five systems every day, a recent Reward Gateway survey finds. Clients need tools that can combine a variety of vendors in one place, says Dan Staley, global HR technology leader at PwC.

"Every year there's a new application that organizations are rolling out," he says. "I think it's a problem with HCM that there's all these different vendors and applications you have to tie together. It does make integration one of the top challenges for chief human resource officers." **EBA**

Caroline Hroncich is an associate editor of *Employee Benefit Adviser*. Follow her on Twitter at @chroncich1. **Evelina Nedlund** is a reporter at *Employee Benefit Adviser*. Follow her on Twitter at @EvelinaNedlund.



ADOBE STOCK

BerniePortal rolls out a searchable network

More companies will have access to the software platform's database of benefit advisers.

By Nick Otto

HR software platform BerniePortal has launched a searchable broker network that allows employers to easily find and access local HR and benefits expertise.

The BerniePortal Broker Network has more than 100 local brokerage firms across the country in its database. Employers are able to search by location and view brokerage descriptions, scope of practice and client reviews.

"More than 200,000 employers Googled the term 'HR software' in 2018," says Alex Tolbert, BerniePortal founder and CEO.

With the new broker network, he says, "they will be able to more easily find our partners in their local markets to provide them with industry-leading benefits and HR technology and advice and support."

There is no cost to employers to search for a local adviser on the broker network, Tolbert says. The base version of BerniePortal, which includes onboarding, benefits and 1095-C, is available through many of the advisers on the broker network at no cost.

The BerniePortal Broker Network was

announced in March at the platform's annual user conference, Weekdays with Bernie. "We created the network to help streamline the process of referring employers who are interested in BerniePortal to our broker partners," Tolbert says. "So far, we are thrilled with the response, as within two months over 140 of our broker partners have created profiles and almost 20% of those have already been connected with employers interested in help with HR technology."

"We've always held a view that the brokers were critical to the small business ecosystem," Alex Tolbert says. "That's important to small employers because of how much they rely on their brokers and how much they spend on benefits."

One of the benefits for a small business connecting with a local adviser is that it is able to offer more flexible, tailored plan designs and funding approaches, Tolbert says. "When it comes to having a commitment to understanding the full scope of transactional challenges that small employers have when it comes to managing HR, no one has made a bigger commitment to understanding those challenges and adopting technology to help employers address them than BerniePortal broker partners."

Earlier this year, BerniePortal added 86 new brokerage partners and 15 new services, including the job posting site Indeed and the insurance carriers MetLife and UnitedHealthcare.

"We've always held a view that the brokers were critical to the small business ecosystem," Tolbert said at the time. "That's important to small employers because of how much they rely on their brokers and how much they spend on benefits." **EBA**

Nick Otto is a senior editor at Employee Benefit Adviser. Follow him on Twitter at @ottografs.

Voluntary



ADOBE STOCK

Target adds enhanced family-friendly benefits

The retail giant is expanding paid leave and boosting backup care benefits to its workforce.

By Nick Otto

Target is expanding a number of its family-friendly benefits, including paid leave and caregiving benefits, to the 350,000 full- and part-time hourly employees at its stores, distribution centers and headquarters.

Beginning this fall, the Minneapolis-based retailer will offer workers 20 days of backup child care or elder care through Target's partnership with Bright Horizons network.

The backup care benefit gives workers access to child- and elder-care services when their usual arrangements are temporarily unavailable.

If an employee's child or elder care arrangements fall through, they can bring their child to a daycare center for \$20 a day or ar-

range for in-home child-, adult- or eldercare for a low hourly rate, a Target spokesperson said. The balance of the cost will be subsidized by Target.

In addition to the caregiving benefits, Target is also boosting paid leave and adoption benefits.

Under the new paid family leave policy, which begins June 30, employees can take four weeks of paid time off to care for an immediate family member. This includes time off to bond following the addition of a new child to the family through birth, adoption, surrogacy or foster placement; and time off to care for a child, spouse or parent with a critical illness.

"Retail workforces are unique in their

mix of hourly and salaried positions, and one of our philosophies is to offer the same family-focused benefits to both hourly and salaried team members," says Melissa Kremer, Target's chief human resources officer.

The company also is doubling adoption and surrogacy reimbursement. Beginning April 1, eligible employees are entitled to \$10,000 in reimbursement fees, which may include application, filing, placement or agency costs as well as court costs, immigration and translation fees, attorney fees, transportation costs and surrogate parenting expenses.

"Like many retailers, our team includes individuals, from high school students to working parents, who need flexibility in their work schedules in order to meet their commitments outside of work," a Target spokesperson said. "In fact, 40% of our workforce are student or retiree age, and chose to work part time. With such a broad mix of part- and full-time team members, one size does not fit all when it comes to benefits. We work hard to offer the benefits needed for the full range of life stages."

Target is the latest large employer to invest in benefits for employees who are parents. Many employers are enhancing their policies as a way to attract and retain talent in a tight job market. **EBA**

Nick Otto is a senior editor at Employee Benefit News and Employee Benefit Adviser. Follow him on Twitter at @ottografs.

Voluntary



ADOBE STOCK

Namely partners up on college prep benefit

The company's 1,300 clients will have an education benefit that can help organize college planning.

By Amanda Schiavo

HR platform Namely is offering its 1,300 corporate clients a new education planning benefit by teaming up with MyKlovr, a growing virtual counselor for college-bound students.

Employers using Namely's brokerage services in order to manage their employee benefits will now be able to offer MyKlovr's virtual college counseling services to their employees.

The service allows students and parents to gain personalized, step-by-step guidance on college admissions, the planning process, and financial preparation. The benefit will be offered post-tax on a voluntary basis and will be

paid for through payroll deductions.

"Part of the reason why the college debt crisis is as large as it is can be attributed to the lack of information," says Vin DiDonna, Namely's director of benefits consulting. "By using artificial intelligence and proprietary algorithms, companies like MyKlovr are arming families like never before to make an educated decision that can essentially prevent a student from being forced to attend a school which will leave him or her in a massive amount of debt."

When CEO Gustavo Dolfino started MyKlovr in 2016, his feeling was that the kind of specialized guidance families

need to navigate the college admissions process was only accessible to the wealthy. He wanted to create a platform where anyone could get the help they needed.

"We raised money and decided to create algorithms which are based on artificial intelligence, predictive analytics and machine learning that will fulfill the role of a counselor in a virtual way and would be more specific to each individual based on his or her EQ (emotional intelligence) and IQ," Dolfino says.

After a little time went by, the MyKlovr team realized their services would make for a useful and unique employee benefit.

Part of the reason why the college debt crisis is as large as it is can be attributed to the lack of information," says Vin DiDonna, Namely's director of benefits consulting.

The company signs up benefits distributors to get their product into the hands of employees.

Namely was signed up as a professional employer organization and Benefitfocus, an online benefits enrollment software provider, enrolled as did several other benefits brokers.

The program is web-based and works by asking each student a series of questions and then determines what each individual needs to do to reach their goals.

For example, if a student wants to attend Harvard the algorithm will determine specific steps the person must take to give them better odds to make that happen. While two students may have the same goal, they will not necessarily need to take the same steps to get there, Dolfino says. **EBA**

Amanda Schiavo is an associate editor of Employee Benefit Adviser. Follow her on Twitter at @SchiavoAmanda.

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