

wait
a minute



with kevin harrington

AS WITH the Nebraska weather, the landscape of employee benefits is constantly changing. While the winds blow and the rivers cut new channels into the land, insurance carriers and our well-intentioned government add things that even many of the experts have difficulty deciphering. Human Resource professionals are being challenged like never before - to offer the most comprehensive benefit packages available to attract and retain the most qualified employees, while staying within budgets that make a skeleton look like a before photo in an ad for a weight loss clinic. An employer's need to keep costs down while getting a bigger bang for their benefit buck is not a new concept. However, the addition of Health Care Reform (PPACA) and more regulatory requirements makes any business owner's head spin and heart beat faster. There are ways to continue to offer benefits to a diverse workforce with varying needs, while managing the requisite to control benefit costs and wrestling with regulatory provisions.

Voluntary benefits give companies the opportunity to expand their total compensation packages. They are a much-needed boost to the employers and a welcome choice for employees. Many traditional voluntary products remain a viable option to manage an employee's financial wellness. As more employers move towards lower premium, high-deductible plans, an individual's out of pocket costs can be augmented with critical care, accident, disability and cancer policies that provide value even beyond assisting with cost of medical care. Much of the overall costs associated with an illness or injury will not be paid by health care policies. In fact, individuals often overlook planning for the additional costs of being sick or injured. These voluntary plans step in and pay for the everyday expenses that people often do not consider until it is too late.

Voluntary benefits are just that – voluntary. The employer does not pay for the benefits offered and employees have the option of purchasing any coverage offered. There are still many advantages to the employee if an employer offers a voluntary benefit plan: underwriting requirements are limited or waived, plan provisions are better and premiums can be lower than if purchased individually. Many voluntary plans can be payroll deducted and some even on a pre-tax basis, making it even more attractive.

By incorporating more non-traditional policies, both employers and employees can greatly benefit. Programs such as group legal plans, financial planning, and employee purchase or discount programs will continue to expand and grow in popularity into viable financial support tools. In the upcoming months, many advisors believe that the voluntary market will expand from the health field and employee purchase programs, to the services industry as well. Look for employee wellness programs, gym memberships and many other life-enhancing products to be available through your employer and the voluntary product system.

Just as with the Nebraska weather, one thing is for certain in the employee benefits world – If you don't like the way things are right now, wait a little bit and things will surely change.

For more information, please contact your trusted advisor at Swartzbaugh-Farber – 'Client Centered – Client Advocates™'.