



Nonprofit**HR**

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

[NONPROFITHR.COM/EVENTS](https://nonprofithr.com/events)

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

If there's one thing that the Great Resignation has taught us, it is that employers must be intentional in approaching their total compensation package, especially benefits. Organizations can fall into a routine of simply renewing the same benefit plans year over year with very little changes. But this will rarely deliver the targeted results needed to remain competitive in attracting and retaining top talent. Join our experts in Total Rewards to get their insights on deliberate steps you can take to evolve your benefits, program offerings and investment in your employee experience.

After this webinar, you will be able to take action in the following areas:

- Connect with your benefits broker to uncover additional value
- Identify opportunities to integrate equity into your compensation practices
- Drill down on employee resources for mental and emotional health
- Streamline information to meet increased flexibility regarding hybrid or remote work options
- Amplify technology solutions that increase understanding and benefits access

WEBINAR PRESENTER



Eric Salyers
Former Senior
Consultant,
Total Rewards



Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Rose Gebken: Hello, everyone, and welcome.

Thank you for joining us this afternoon for Nonprofit HR's Virtual Learning Educational Event. Today's session is entitled, Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits and Program Offerings. My name is Rose Gebken, I am [a] Marketing and Communication Manager for Nonprofit HR, and I will be supporting our presenter today.

We have a lot of great content to cover. You're going to walk away with a solid understanding of how to take steps to evolve your benefits and program offerings. Before we get started, though, I would like to go over a few items, so you know how to participate in today's event.

You have joined the presentation listening using your computer's speaker system by default. If you would prefer to join over the telephone, just select telephone in the audio pane of your control panel and the dial-in information will be displayed.

You will have the opportunity to submit text questions to today's presenter by typing your questions into the questions pane of the control panel. You may send in your questions at any time during the presentation. We will collect these and address them during the Q&A session at the end of today's presentation.

Today's event is being recorded, and you will receive a follow-up email within the next few days with a link to view the recording. Along with those assets, live webinar attendees will also receive a code for SHRM recertification credit.

And now, just a brief note about Nonprofit HR.

Since 2000, Nonprofit HR remains the country's leading and oldest firm focused exclusively on the talent management needs of the social sector, including nonprofits, associations, social enterprises and other mission-driven organizations. We focus our consulting efforts on the following practice areas: Strategy & Advisory, HR Outsourcing, Total Rewards, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice and Search. We were founded with one goal in mind: to strengthen the social impact sector's talent management capacity by strengthening its people.

Today's content will be delivered by Eric Salyers. As a Senior Consultant in Nonprofit HR's Total Rewards practice area, Eric Salyers provides advanced subject matter expertise, advice, insight and strategic-level guidance to our clients for the full suite of employee benefit plans.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Eric is a highly skilled thought partner in auditing benefit plans to ensure compliance [and] providing guidance on bringing plans into compliance in all areas of employee benefit law ... Eric is focused on developing processes for improved efficiency and ease of administration [from assisting new organizations with developing employee benefits to implementing benefits administration systems].

As a reminder, you will have an opportunity to ask Eric your questions throughout the webinar. We will collect your questions and answer as many as we can during a formal Q&A session at the end of the webinar.

And now I'll turn it over to you, Eric.

Eric Salyers: Thank you, Rose.

Hi, everyone ... I'm Eric Salyers and I'm thrilled to be here today talking about 10 tips for evolving your benefit program ... Rose, if you can go ahead and advance to the next slide, that'd be great.

I want to set the stage before we start getting into the 10 tips because I think it's important to ... understand where we are, and it helps to understand the context of some of the tips and advice [we'll] be talking about today.

So, the shifting workforce and the Great Resignation, right? You can't open LinkedIn without seeing these words pop up on your phone or in your face. It's ... everywhere ... You've probably heard these phrases by now, but it's important because we ... know that the workforce has shifted. Some of that is, we think, due to what took place in the pandemic with the lockdowns. Individuals were at home [and] some priorities shifted. And it just brought about a change in the way some individuals view their relationships with their employers and the workforce in general.

So, we keep hearing about the Great Resignation [and] we see it truly is a job seeker's market right now. [There are] tons of jobs out there, and this environment is a little different than what we were dealing with four or five years ago. So, [I] ... wanted to bring that context to the forefront to ... set the stage about what we're going to talk about today. So, Rose, if you could advance, please, that'd be great.

Number one. So, like I said, we're going to do 10. And I love the social media, and YouTube's, the TikToks, all that kind of stuff, and I ... thought about wanting to do this in that style and go like number 10! Number nine! And work my way down [to] ... make it big and exciting.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But in reality, so many of these things are interdependent upon each other. It became difficult for me when I started, thinking, "Well, which one is going to be number one? Which one's number five? And number 10?" They're all important, and the successful launch or utilization or completion of one of these steps is going to influence of the other ones.

So, these are in the order our marketing department came up with. Some that came to my brain at the time ... They're all important, but [we'll] start here with your broker.

And you may be thinking, "Well, the broker, well, that's not very exciting or something that I didn't already know." But it may surprise you that, in my client work, one of the first things I tend to notice is that our clients don't quite know how to utilize their broker relationship. They know they have a broker ... they reach out to a broker once a year around renewal, or when something's sort of broken or has a problem. But, on the whole, I've discovered that our clients don't quite grasp the full possibility of the broker relationship. It's something that I discuss with my boss all the time ... I think it's something [for which] we could ... do further trainings ... with our clients.

So, the broker, it could be because of the term. It's really, if you're currently thinking of your broker as only somebody you talk to once a year, let's try to switch that. And think about them as a consultant or an advisor. They should be your number one go-to when you have employee benefits questions, and especially when you're thinking about your strategy.

So, if you're only kind of thinking about a broker one time a year, let's change that. Let's try to get ... if you have a synergetic relationship with the broker, and it's an engaged relationship, and you're meeting regularly to talk about things, how the program's going, new initiatives, then you're doing great. If you're not, let's just start with some baby steps. Just try to get one meeting on the books that's outside of your annual enrollment renewal period and begin leveraging that relationship.

Sometimes what happens, and it's inevitable and it's really at no fault of anyone, but we're all busy. All of our industry. Me as a consultant, you as an in-house HR or finance person, the broker in their role. We all get so busy that, sometimes, we're kind of reacting and we don't always have time to be proactive. And when that happens in a broker relationship, you're missing out on the opportunity to fully leverage all that your benefits broker can offer. They're going to be your number one right hand for things like if I want to consider some new plans or some new plan options. They're going to be able to help cost model those for you and walk you through some different scenarios.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

They're licensed to place insurance lines in the state in which your organization is organized and headquartered. And they also offer a lot of tools usually as well, they can sometimes have access to practice leaders and leave administration. They can have Arista counsel, things of that sort.

So that's, to me, it seems like ... a non-dramatic tip, but I find it so underutilized. So, I would encourage you to dig deeper, especially if you're only meeting once a year. Make these guys your best friend. Call them up. Say, "Hey, whatcha doing?" When I was in-house working in HR, I had great relationships with the broker. They should be the person you're calling first and they're advising you, they're consulting with you. Try to make that mindset front of mind, if you're not already thinking that.

Rose, let's go on to number two, please.

Integrate equity into your benefit program. So, there's some exciting things happening in the benefit space. Also, HR in general. And I'm really thrilled to see these initiatives taking hold. By no means are we at the finish line. The journey, in my mind, is where we're kind of just outside of the gate. We've started down the path. Equity in your benefit program. You might be scratching your head and thinking, "Hmm, hmm. What does that really mean?"

We've partnered with, a trusted relationship of ours, I think it's been—you know how time goes in your head, especially with the lockdowns recently—two years, maybe one or two years ago, Nonstop Wellness and Administration Services. We co-authored a white paper on integrating health equity into your health benefits. And that white paper produced a nice little checklist in there. It basically just helps you, as an in-house HR administrator, [to] begin to think about these different ideas and help you come up with a game plan.

So, what are we talking about when we say integrating equity into a benefit program? It can look a few different ways. One way that we can see this is the health plan design itself.

What we're talking about here is, how easy is it for employees in your workforce to access that health plan across different things, like social demographics, income, regions of the country, et cetera? And the things that can lead to inequities and making those plans harder to access are often the flip side of us trying to fix another problem, which has to do with cost.

Excuse me, to take a quick drink.

Right?

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Cost and finances are always going to be hand in hand with administering your benefits program. But sometimes when we do get bad renewals, which inevitably happen, or renewals that are higher than we had hoped for, it's easy to be tempted to say, "Well, let's change the plan design and that will help bring the premium down." So, what do I mean by that?

Maybe your current deductible is only \$500. And if we changed that deductible, the broker might model some options with you, and say, "If we take it up to \$750, that drops the premium this amount, a thousand, and so forth." There are other elements that can be tweaked and a plan to help reduce premium when you're in that tight spot of having the renewal that's higher than you budgeted for. The problem with doing these things is, sure, you might be offsetting some of that renewal and you might be reducing your premium. But eventually, you could end up with a plan, especially if you don't create some offsets for some of these changes, that is suddenly not easy to access by your staff.

So, let's say you knocked that deductible up to \$1,000, and you don't have any health savings account, health reimbursement account, kind of safety nets. And so, suddenly your employees have much more skin in the game. And if you think about ... employees on the lower earning end of your compensation program, that could be a deterrent. I'm not feeling well, it's kind of going on a couple of weeks, and I'm like, "Yeah, I don't have the money for that deductible. I don't want to get into that boat." So, I put it off, and then it keeps going on and keeps going on. And then eventually, one night I wake up, I can no longer put it off, I'm going to the ER—the most expensive place in the United States to receive health care, right? Things there are so many factors times higher than if you go elsewhere. It has so many additional effects and impacts.

So that's just one area of equity. Another easy place to look at is in your leave policy. This is an actual easy change that you could potentially do this week. You could at least start looking at your leave policies, kind of having some conversation with leadership and peers and come up with a plan.

So, what are we talking about there?

Some leave policies internally deal with definitions of family. Think about your bereavement policy, for example. Granted, there's not a high utilization. There are no one's lining up to take bereavement. We understand that. But, it's just an easy example, it will help introduce that idea, and then you can look around in your own organization, according to what leave policies you've got, and then you'll be able to apply that same principle.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

So, let's say your family definition is somewhat narrow. You've got spouse, parent, grandparent—it's just kind of narrow. Think about the way that families look today. What if you have individuals within your organization that are in same-sex relationships or marriages? The family unit has changed a great deal. And by no means do we have to talk and have a philosophical conversation of whether that's wrong or right. It's just the way it is. And we need to support those employees in that manner. So, I will use the phrase, "Look at some of your policies and try to break them."

What I mean by that is, sit there and look through the eyes of all the different types of employees that you can imagine, the different types of demographics and where they're living. Like I said, you need to really think broadly. And if you can find a situation where you're like, "Oh, I can see how that would make it difficult for Bob to access that program."

That's kind of what we're talking about when we talk about equity.

There's other places, too. We've got 10 points to get to, like disability, life insurance, all those types of things. Really, it's about looking through your program, finding out where obstacles are being created, unintentionally in most cases, and find ways to offset it. And, like I said, we have that asset that we can share out later, that white paper that you can request. And it includes like a really nice guideline to get you started with that conversation.

Alright, let's try number three.

Review mental and emotional health resources, right? So, this one really got a lot of attention when we were all in lockdown and we were all just kind of at our wit's end, right?

And one of the phrases that I like to use is that ... it's not like emotional or mental health needs weren't around before lockdowns and the pandemic. They were, right? It's just that mental health in the United States has — and again, I'm not going to try to go down that rabbit hole and get that deep — but we know there's been a little bit of stigma around mental health and mental health care. And you've had family members are like, "Oh, you went to the psychiatrist, you're crazy," like that kind of stuff. Which we're finally, as a society, slowly moving past that kind of stuff and realizing, "Hey, there's nothing wrong with mental and emotional health."

So, one of the things I think the pandemic did for us, a sort of unintentional benefit, it made it OK to be not OK. We suddenly saw employers reaching out through Zoom meetings. At the beginning we were trying all kinds of things, weren't we? If we could have put t-shirts in t-shirt cannons and shot them to our employees, we would have done it. We were trying lots of things.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But it really did sort of change—just open the door to be able to talk about it in a different way. And it brought attention to it, and that attention allowed us to start to think about solutions.

So, there's things that you probably already have in-house today. You could very well have what's known as an EAP, Employee Assistance Program. Now, those are not all created equal. Some of those are what we call value add-on programs to a life and disability line. And all I mean is that it's a way for the insurance companies to just do business that's like, "Hey, come over here. Take our life insurance line, we'll give you this free EAP."

And that's a great business strategy for them to self-cultivate more business, and it's not inherently a bad program. You just have to be aware that those value-add programs, the one's that if you're not paying for them—you can't expect, or you shouldn't, rather—you shouldn't expect to get the same level of support that you would get from a more robust program that you're potentially paying per employee per month or per employee per year on.

So just keep in mind that there is a range, and you might think that paying for one is like, "Eh, we just don't have the budget," or, "It's going to be too much money." Broker. Go back to the broker, ask them to just look. It doesn't cost any money to look, right? Ask them to lift up all the stones and look under them and find a way to maybe get access to a more robust EAP.

There are some other really cool things that popped up during ... as I said, businesses, every business out there is looking for a way to make money and bring some new solution to the market, no matter what industry you're in, right? So I did see an uptick in some of these companies providing different ways to provide some mental and emotional health resources.

I've seen brokers bring forward some tools, like very specific types of health — like, call lines. What am I thinking of? Telehealth. Sorry, got in my head there. They are, so you'll probably already know what telehealth is because that came up into the pandemic as well, right? But that's a dedicated type of service where you're calling in to get some of that additional mental and emotional health.

And beyond that ... there's so many other things you can do. So, don't try to solve this on your own. Don't go out there and just try to Google it ... Google is a great place to give you some ideas. But, again, go back to your broker, ask them some questions, tell them what you want to accomplish and — we're going to talk about this later — but the steps you need to do when you are making these kinds of decisions. I'll loop back to this and kind of connect that dot and tie it back together later.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But there's a process, and that will allow you to get the most benefit out of doing that kind of a process, that kind of review and potentially putting in additional programs.

So, alright, let's go to number four, please.

Rose Gebken: We have an attendee question here, Eric. If you wouldn't mind, we can get some more of these answered.

So, this is related to something you were mentioning earlier. This attendee is looking for how they can, as a small nonprofit, provide family benefits to their team without breaking the budget? And they currently cover 100% for employees.

Eric Salyers: Hey, that's a great question, Rose. And I've seen that in our client work here at Nonprofit HR, at least a half dozen times now.

Organizations have come out of the gate some time ago, and they're like, "We're going to do really well for our employees." Like 100%? That's pretty awesome. You don't see that in many places. So, how to do the rest of the family without breaking the budget?

And one of the things that's trickiest in this equation is the unknown. You don't know how many employees might step forward and suddenly start covering their family with you. So that's one part of it.

And we're going to talk about this a bit later, but something that can help you start getting an idea of what some of this might look like is doing a benefits survey, and saying, "If, employees, if we offered a contribution toward dependent-level coverage, how likely would you be to take it?" And figure out a couple of questions that you can ask them from a different couple of perspectives so you've got a good idea of what the interest level is. Now, that's only an indicator, but it's more than you had a minute ago, right?

From there, we start thinking about if you don't have a lot of budget and I mean, these things cost money. We get it. Not everybody is sitting on a bucket of money. Well, I don't think anybody is, right? If you all are, tell me where it is, because I need some. But ... we do have to work within the constraints of a budget.

So, consider stepping into a contribution strategy. You don't have to go from 0 to 60. It's perfectly fine to start crawling before you walk and run and all that stuff we always say, right? So, maybe what you do is you start smaller, and you see how many of your employees actually take that coverage. Maybe you just contribute 30% or 40%, something that allows you to step into it, start doing it and see how the response is.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

You can potentially try to start playing around with, maybe go 90% on employees. It's very difficult to start doing those kinds of things, because it can be perceived as an adverse action to the employee. You know who's your best friend in this? Who's the best friend? This is where I need you to be able to talk back to me – your benefits broker. There's always a numbers guy on the team. We love the numbers guy, they're a numbers nerd crunching the data, they love the data. Contribution strategies. There's somebody at your broker that can just knock that out of the park. They love making those spreadsheets for you.

Start there. Find out how many might be interested, and then start talking to a broker, look at some models. And ultimately, you're going to have to test it, and just see where that lands, and then you pivot from there.

Thanks, Rose.

On to number four. I love this one. Take full advantage of your HR technology solutions.

So, in addition to the benefits consulting that I do for Nonprofit HR, I also do quite a bit of HRIS work, or HR technology. There are a few buzzwords that all kind of point at the same thing. And what we're talking about here is, more than likely, you are using some system in your organization to keep track of HR transactions, right? When somebody's hired, when somebody gets a pay increase, their seniority date, all that kind of stuff. Correct?

So, what I've noticed, again, I talked earlier, the things I notice when I start a new engagement with the client. It always surprises me because after a while, I start seeing trends. And, ultimately, what happens is a salesperson comes through your door, or your virtual door these days, and promises as you a dream, right? It's great and grand and they're always excited about it. I've sat through those pitches, you've sat through those pitches. And we do our best and ultimately, we choose a vendor. And then implementation starts.

It's always a different set of clouds that rolls in and it's a different feel and vibe, and we do our best. Usually, we always have to get payroll and benefits stood up, right? We've got to pay people. We've got to have a way to administer benefits. Some of those other things, we might run out of time, we don't have the bandwidth, there's nobody in-house to help with it. Ultimately, some of these features that you're probably already paying for, like an onboarding module, an applicant tracking system, document storage, there's quite a – performance management, I could just keep going on. There's lots of modules that these systems have and you could very well, your organization may have purchased it and you've just not had the time to develop it.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Those things can be gold in benefits administration. So, what do I mean by that?

I have seen, I've walked into some clients before and I'll say, "Hey, tell me how you are handling benefits administration today? Pretend I'm a new employee. Talk to me." And they're like, "Well, we're going to open an email, we're going to attach 29 PDFs, and we're going to email it to you. And then, you're going to print them out, and you're going to write on them and then you're going to have to go to Kinkos and scan them," right? It's just like, oh, my gosh.

Number one, why do you want to do that? Because that's such an administrative burden and an employee isn't going to want to do it either. So, there are, if you choose a system that has these capabilities, and most of them do, for the clients that we work with, there's a specific, sweet spot of vendors that kind of cater to the size of our typical organization. Most of them are fairly robust, and we'll touch on almost everything, to some degree.

And if you flush those out and you build them out well, that takes time. But you know what it takes even more of? It takes somebody that knows how to do it. Somebody that's sat in that seat, somebody that knows what the net gain can be by doing it and has the passion for it. To me, this is some of the most fulfilling work that I do at Nonprofit HR. I get to go into an organization and see an individual that's been doing things manually, and they're just like, "Oh, my gosh, save me."

And we're able to do things like automate. Automate enrollment. Make it to be where when you hire somebody, an email goes out that says, "Welcome to the organization. We're going to guide you through these steps in the system that make you stop along the way." I kind of call it a train. There's different stops on the train. You're going to do your tax form and demographic data. You're going to do some acknowledgements that you've got a handbook. Eventually, we started the benefits stop, and you're able to get in front of them the things that you're legally required to get in front of them. If you're a D.C. employer, there's things like the D.C. Paid Family Leave Notice, there's D.C. Universal Paid Leave Act Notice. All those types of things that right now, you may be just kind of handling one-off or in an email. You're going to have a way to make sure that they've got those and that you can one day—also, you've got a record. You can go back and say, "Look, this is where the employee checked the box. They saw this document."

So, there's so much potential in taking full advantage of an HR technology solution. It's just, it's night and day.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Like I said, I love this work. I just love the client's reaction when we get them to that healthy spot. They're tickled. They're just like, "Wow, you've saved me so much time. I no longer have to sit in front of a computer and get onto an Anthem or an Aetna or a CareFirst website and say new hire's name enrolled in this and check, check, check," and save. File feeds in the background. That's technology. So there's a lot that can be done there.

All right, enough of that. Number five, please.

So earlier I talked about a benefits survey. Sorry, one more drink, please.

A benefits survey—

We'll hop back there, please.

A benefits survey is a really great tool that's going to give you some vital information. So why do we need the information? Information helps us make decisions. So, when I think we were on number three, we were talking about the mental health resources, I said was going to connect the dots and bring it back full circle. So, ultimately, when our clients come to us for some help and some assistance, one of the things I do is like, "Tell me, why are you coming to us?"

Are you hearing from employees that a benefit is not great? Are you seeing it exit interviews? Are they saying, "Hey, I just can't work here anymore because your medical plan deductible is \$3,000. I can't swing it. I've got a child that has needs, health care needs that are ongoing, and it's just doesn't work for me anymore."

So, understanding where you've come from and what the nature of the problem is is the best way, in my opinion, to craft your solution. And a benefit survey is going to give you information from your employees, how they perceive, right? Perception, that's a big thing as well.

There are times that in-house, you're sitting at the table, right? Virtual, however we're doing it these days. You're sitting there with a CFO and see—if you're a larger a CHRO, or however your organization looks—the people that make the decisions. You're sitting there thinking about how much to spend on what or what you're spending on what. And you might look at the thing that is costing you the most, and in your mind, you're like, "Well, that's the most important thing. That's our crown," and or—no, jewel in our crown. I've got it backwards. But what if your employees don't perceive it that way?

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Getting their feedback and their perception is really going to help you know what needs to be attended to, tweaked, maybe removed. Perhaps you're spending—I wish I could come up with a good example. I know I've seen one or two in my time working with clients and in-house, where somebody was just spending money somewhere, and we surveyed and one, some people didn't even know about it. Others were like, “Yeah, I know about it, but I don't really use it.” So, I'm like, let's shift those dollars. Instead of leaving that money over here for something that most people either don't care about or don't find a lot of value in, let's reallocate those funds, right? That's not impacting your budget. You're just shifting stuff around.

So, what's important when we talk about administering a survey? Think about the surveys you've done on your own, when we're consumers, retail or whatever or in your email. For the most part, I'm going to admit, I'm human, as well. I see those, and I'm like, “I don't have the time.” Even if they're like, “You get into a drawing.” I think Walmart or Target one does that all the time, like, “Answer this short survey and you might win \$500 gift card.” I'm like, “Yeah, it's never going to happen,” but I'll start it. And depending upon what I see in that survey, I'm either going to adhere to it and find it all the way through, or I'm going to say, “Nope, that's too much work.”

You've got to—you need to spend time designing a benefits survey, you need to sit with it. You need to look at it for a few days. The goal is to ask the least amount of questions that give you the most amount of data, and that takes a very strategic mindset. I mean, honestly, a lot of benefits is strategy. And I know that word evokes images of sitting in some conference room with a whiteboard and PowerPoints and sticks, right? Don't make it that difficult. Strategy just means honesty, right? You need to have, you need to think through it, come up with some plan and write it down. Don't get so lost in, “I don't know how to write a strategy statement,” or whatever. Don't get lost on those kinds of thoughts, just think it through and capture that.

So, you have to be strategic when you design a benefits survey. I'm going to give you an example. So, refrain from asking questions like, my organization's health plan is beneficial to me. And your options are highly agree, somewhat agree, blah, blah, right? You've seen those types of questions. What does that really give you back? It doesn't give you an actionable item. Start asking questions, like, “What's more important to you when you're choosing your health benefit: a low deductible or the cost of the premium?”

And then, also, later down the line, try to ask a question that pairs up with that. It's a strategy. It's almost like playing some of those sudoku games, like in the morning, you just kind of sitting there and thinking, “What if I do this and put this there and put this there?” And that kind of stuff.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

It needs to be, it needs to generate a lot of data, useful data, and it needs to be short. If you make it long, you're not going to get a good response.

And the other great thing that you can do, use the carrot-stick approach. If you can throw, I don't know, a gift card, I've seen organizations do things like an Apple Watch. Anything that you can do, where you say, "Complete this survey by date X, we'll put you on a drawing for whatever." Maybe you can give an extra day of PTO or vacation or something like that. Be creative. Find some way to make it incentivizing, and make it where it's not like a pain. Nobody wants to do a big survey, but you can get tons of gold mine data that's going to really help you.

Then, once you that once you're armed with that data, you can go to your broker—best friend—go to your broker and say, "Hey, we're aware that we've got a problem in our dental plan. Folks say they find that, it's almost as good as if they don't use it," right? Whatever the problem might be. That gives you an actionable problem that can be worked on, and you know that you've got some data to support it, rather than just saying, "Well, I think people don't like it."

Can't say enough. Do a survey. It's going to be great.

All right, numbers—I think we have another question. Is that right, Rose?

Rose Gebken: Yeah, Eric, that's right. So, this is from, even though we're right at the midway point of the year, this is right around the corner, one of our attendees asking, what are the main questions that they should consider to prepare for the annual open enrollment process?

Eric Salyers: This is a great question, and we're actually going to talk about open enrollment, annual enrollment, here in a minute.

And Rose, you mentioned it's midyear, but actually a lot of nonprofits will sometimes have fiscal year plans, which don't do the January to December things. So, I see our clients have annual enrollments starting in all months of the year, so it could be very applicable right now for some folks. But if you are a calendar year plan, certainly we're coming right up on that. So, what are the main questions?

I don't want to give too much away because that's one of my points later on, but you need to think about what you want to change or improve. How do you do that? Benefits survey. How do you know what needs to be changed? You need to think about, what's the appetite for change internally, as far as, from a budget perspective? You need to think about, how am I going to involve my broker, how am I going to solicit new ideas?

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Again, I don't want to say too much. Because, it would make my other point kind of null and void. So, I'll tie that up, Rose, when I'm over into that point, how about that? Is that OK?

Rose Gebken: Sounds great, Eric.

Eric Salyers: Thanks.

Look, you set it right up for me, right? Start your annual enrollment planning earlier.

So, my point is a tad bit different, but it's still on that same boat.

So, I'm going to start, from the perspective of my point, as I've got it written here, but it will certainly tap into that other thing a minute ago. So, you know what? I can't stress this enough.

Every time I go into an organization, I see the same thing over and over again. It doesn't matter what size, it doesn't matter what part of the country. It seems like, and I kind of alluded to this earlier when I was saying, how often are you talking to your broker? Are you only doing it once a year at the annual enrollment?

And it seems like that the attention on the annual enrollment planning starts about, hmm, a month and a half out from the enrollment. And you should really consider at least doubling that or tripling that. And I know that's going to blow some people's minds.

Number one, if you go to your broker three months earlier than usual, and say, "Hey, I want to start talking about annual enrollment planning." Most likely, one of the first things they're going to say is, "We don't have the renewal yet." And that's a true statement. The renewal, when I say that, that just means, year over year, your insurance companies—like your medical, dental and vision—they're looking at how the plan fared in that previous year. How many claims were paid out? How many high claimants? How much premium did they take? Basically, how did the plan do? And they're going to give the renewal to you to say, "If you want to keep the plan as this, this is how much it's going to cost you in the next year."

So those renewals, those are generated by the insurance companies and the broker can knock on the door and leverage their own relationships and say, "Hey, can we get this? Can we get this?" But to some extent, that's out of most people's hands. And you're at the mercy of waiting for the insurance company to do it.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But, I challenge you to say, “OK, broker, I hear you, but that doesn't mean we can start talking about other things,” and you absolutely can. It floors me that this—so benefits spend is easily the number two or three line item on your budget. If we've got any finance folks, surely, you're nodding your head. You're spending a lot of money on benefits in your organization. Why would we only dial into this for a month before we're making such significant changes that impact our budget? It doesn't make sense. Start earlier.

And as I sort of, I'm going to tie a couple of items together now. Back at point number one with your broker, this needs to be ongoing throughout the year. I'm not saying that you're planning for your enrollment all year, but you can be talking about other things you want to—maybe—OK, let me set it up better. Let's say that your renewal is in June and then your enrollment is in September and your plan year starts October. OK? You go through all that step. You launch. You're good.

Let's say by January, you've learned of something that's shifted in the workforce, right? I used the buzzword, shifting workforce. You learned of something that has changed and you're like, “Hmm, I think we need to do this.” You don't have to wait until the next enrollment to bring that up. You can say, “Hey, we've noticed this, we think this is going to be something we want to watch,” and start kind of vetting that and kicking it around earlier.

But there's just so much. Some of my other points that follow are going to tie into this too. Starting your annual enrollment planning earlier gives you more time. Just being rushed is—who wants to be rushed? Those are important decisions. It's stressful.

And not everybody is going to be the benefits nerd that I am, that likes compliance and the roles and all that kind of stuff. Some people see this as a necessary evil and they're like, “Oh, I don't want to talk about benefits enrollment planning. I just don't want to do it.” That's like me and emptying a dishwasher. Somehow, I do a great job putting them in there. But god, it takes me two days to get it out of there sometimes. It's not everybody's cup of tea.

But, start earlier, please. You're going to have more time. You're going to be able to have time to do your survey, get your data back, and that time is needed to start the conversation with the broker. Have the broker go out to the market, do some research and come back and say, “We think these items will appeal to you,” or “This could be a solution, what do you think?” Like, you need some time to go back and forth, think on those things and be strategic in your decision making. The more time—I mean, yeah. Just do it. It'll be great. Please. Start earlier.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Let's, in the interest of time, let's go to number seven, I'll also talk about enrollment in some of these others, too.

And this is one of them, develop and implement a strategic communications plan.

I tell this story a lot, people hear it, but it's still floors me. One of my first clients at Nonprofit HR. They were primarily an HR outsourcing client, that's our biggest book of business here, our biggest thing that we do. We provide outsourced HR for organizations that don't have their own HR department. And occasionally, our outsourcing consultants will come to me and say, "Hey, Eric, this is above my comfort zone," or "I think we need more specialist help." I will step in and listen to the problem and offer some guidance back down to the consultant or the client itself.

And this happened once when they were like, the client was saying, "Our employees don't like their benefits. They don't like them. Help us. What can we do? We've talked to the broker, they're kind of stumped," and they just didn't know where to go. So, I come in and I started looking around and number one, I look at the benefits of my jaw drops. And I'm like, "I would like to have these benefits." The dental plan had an amazing maximum annual benefit of like \$5,000.

You see those every now and then, but that's a very rich benefits philosophy. Typically, that's going to be a \$1,500 annual max. And then you're going to see things like a \$50 deductible and you're going to see preventive services covered, and basic services at \$80 and major services at \$60 or \$50, right? Sort of what you typically see. This was all super rich, it even had a carryover provision on unused benefits so you could carry over that to the next year. And, other plans were similarly well structured. And you know what the problem was? There wasn't a great communications plan on how to use these benefits, which is going to kind of tie into topic eight here in a minute—how to use these. And as a result, the experience was poor.

So, if your employees don't understand your benefits and don't really know how to use them well, then they're going to just go out there and do the best they can. And that rarely is a recipe for success, is it? If you're just going out there and pushing buttons and hoping you get something out that you like. So, ultimately, the experience is like, "Well, this isn't a very good thing," and then people talk about negative things, right? Rarely do we say, "Oh, I used my health plan, and it was great." As soon as something doesn't work, though, we chat about it.

So, strategic, again, I'm using the word strategic. It's an important word. Communications plan is part of your annual enrollment. OK, I told you, I promise you, it's going to tie back together.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

The reason you need more time. So often what I see is, like I said, engaging them a month, a month and a half before, you get the renewal, you make some financial decisions, and then you're like, "All right, we're done. Let's have open enrollment."

There needs to be more consideration to what's being changed, how are we going to communicate about it and how are we going to be fresh and innovative?

I know earlier in the call, I was just sharing about some personal things I like to do when I want to just change gears and blow off steam. I love getting on TikTok. I never thought I would, but I'm a TikToker. I don't post anything. I just consume it.

But, I've seen some really cool and innovative communication strategies for organizations using some of these tools. And I'll just give you a quick example. So, one, there's always an individual in your organization that's going to be very conservative, not very lively, just kind of keeps their head down and works. It's often finance guys. Love you, finance guys. I'm not picking on you, but your tax accountant or something, right? The person that says, they're just always at work, they're not laughing, they're not out talking at the water cooler, all that kind of stuff.

So, this organization took that guy and put him in like a Superman outfit. So it was a juxtaposition of his serious character against this crazy costume. And then, they wrote this benefits story around that about, I forget how they worded it now, but it was like benefits hero. And they cleverly included all their communication things in that little skit. And that skit was viewed and seen by the staff, because—why? Everybody wanted to look at Ken. Look how Ken looks in that costume. Can you believe Ken actually did it? It's like Trojan horse communication, right? The skit is what's selling it, and what's getting it to be dispersed, but you've got the communication built-in, and they're hearing it and learning it too.

So, a communication plan is really important. That ties in with number eight, unless there's another question, Rose. Ready for number eight, if we're ready for it.

Oh, question, OK.

Rose Gebken: Yes, well this is from somebody looking for help with smaller organizations.

What is your, what are your thoughts on some of those more comprehensive menu benefits when it is just a smaller organization, 1 to 30 people?

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Eric Salyers: Yeah, this is a great question. It's actually one of the things that brought me to work for Nonprofit HR. My career had me in very large organizations, like 25,000 employees. So, I knew the large market well, and I wanted to kind of find out what life was like in a small market. And I've seen some small organizations here, folks. I've seen three and a half employees, seven employees. And it's tough.

You do, again, you have to know what strategies work in that spot. You have to know which people to call. In general, most group health plans and stuff like that are going to want a minimum of 10. But I'm going to tell you a couple of things that you could consider. There is—we have some relationships with, I'm not going to remember the name at the moment. Darn it. A nonprofit alliance, basically it's like you can join this membership and then they have what's called a MEWA. That's just the acronym for multiple employer healthcare arrangement. I'm getting letters kind of mixed up.

Let's make it easier. It's like a benefits trust. Basically, this membership is getting groups, smaller groups, in. And then they're able to take all of those groups collectively as part of the trust. And then they've got larger volumes to negotiate with the insurance companies.

And there's also, there's a TPA up in the northeast that we sometimes do some work with. And they do something very similar. So by utilizing those solutions, you're able to sort of get some of those things that you wouldn't be able to get because you are smaller. And one of those that I think is really one of the coolest aspects of that is technology.

Because you can get a dental plan for 30 people, you absolutely can. But they're probably not going to be keen—when I say “they” I mean the insurance company. They're not going to be keen on allowing you to take advantage of what we call EDI, file feeds. It's just a secure connection between an insurance company and a system that says, “Eric's enrolled. Keep him enrolled.” And then, it goes once a week and it keeps the changes and eligibility synchronized. And that keeps you from having to go on to a Humana site and say, “I hired a new employee, add him. This person left, take that person away.”

They typically don't want to do those file feeds when you're a smaller organization. There's a cost to doing those and they just don't see it as something that a smaller group should need. And they're like, “Yeah, you should be able to do that on your own.” And, you can, but let's leverage the technology, the fullest—technology in these systems to our fullest advantage.

So, by going to some of these services like this, because it's that trust, and it's like that, you've got that pool of organizations behind it, they can do file feeds, it's pretty cool.

Thank you.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

We're ready to go on, yeah. OK.

All right, rethink employee benefits education initiatives.

This goes hand in hand with the one we just left. You might think they're the same, but they're not. Think about how you are educating your employees. I've said it a lot to clients. We, and it ties back to what we've said today, right?

Too often, we're only engaging in the annual enrollment process about a month and a half out, and we're letting the finance part of that renewal sort of dry when that starts. Finance is an important part, and budget is sort of shaping the decisions. Then we decide what we're going to do and then suddenly you've got all this stuff to communicate. That's number seven, right? To rethink how you're communicating.

Also, you got to think about how you're educating. The education process is then communicated outward.

So, this is a really important step and try to refrain from doing it all at once. Think about what happens at an open enrollment. It is a flurry of things, right? Emails are going out saying, "Don't forget, the broker is going to do a meeting. Don't forget, it's time to go out and enroll." And we're always chasing folks trying to get them to go to the enrollment process. There's things out on a shared drive. There's things in email. It's just information overload.

Now, you absolutely have to communicate it at annual enrollment time, you do. But don't let it stop there. Think, communicate the essential things that are changing during your annual enrollment period. And then, create a strategic education and communication campaign, and do that throughout the year.

So, maybe a month out, you say, "Hey, did you sign up for the newest XYZ benefit that we offered over this year?" And then, spend a session where you're just kind of going a deeper dive on that one benefit. Do another one a month or so after that. Spread it out. It's going to have more time to sink in and you're going to have more impact than if you just dump it all out there at once.

So, lots of creativity here goes hand in hand with number seven. So, let's see what number nine is, please, Rose.

Reimagine your leave policies in support better work-life balance.

We talked about leave policies earlier when we were talking about equity.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Now, what we're going to talk about—this is actually, and when I see some of the questions like, what trends are happening? What can employers do to help support remote and hybrid? All that kind of stuff. I think this lines up there. And, honestly, it doesn't even have to cost you anything more.

When I say reimagine your leaves policies in support of better work-life balance, what I'm talking about is, and some of this is scary, but come with me, right? Come on, let's come in and think about it. Can you, can your organization support compressed work schedules? Can you move to four days a week? What kind of flexibility do you have in your organization right now? Can you enhance it? That is what we are hearing over and over and over again when we're hearing about the Great Resignation and the shifting workforce. Folks do not want to give up that flexibility that they gained when we all were in lockdown and we moved to a virtual environment.

Things are important, like, I actually have heard people and just out at social events and stuff and hearing about that. They're like, "I never realized how much I was missing in my kids' lives," right? And they don't want to give that up. So, what can you do already to help support better work-life balance?

And I want to say a very important point here. A lot of times, I get brought in to do this work, and one of the things I like to say to leadership, and it's a hard thing to hear, honestly. And it takes some bravery and looking in the mirror and saying, "Who are we really, as an organization?" Our CEO loves this stuff. She loves workplace culture, and it's a very conscious decision for her. So, you need to be like her and really think about your culture. Are you creating an environment, A, number one, that supports a better work-life balance? I can design the best policy for you in the world, but if you don't have that culture, it cannot succeed.

I did a focus group with a nonprofit organization up in New York, and we were talking about this exact point. And the employees were like, "Hey, we've got plenty of time in our banks. It's not like we need more time off. It's just, I feel guilty because if I take time off, I know I'm going to make Pam's week an absolute living hell, because she's going to have to do three or four jobs already," because there's been this trend of folks leaving. And either there's not enough headcount to replace, or we just consolidate, and everybody's doing... You hear the phrase, "Everybody's doing more with less," and that's creating more pressure and more stress.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

So, employees sometimes are hesitant to even do that, because there is this implied culture in your organization that says, “You really got to be on all the time.” Are you sending emails outside of hours? And I said, this is a hard thing for leaders to hear. It's easy to talk about it and nod heads but if you go out the door, and you do it again, you've not changed anything.

So, consider whether or not you can implement some of these things. You're already most likely accounting for the employees' potential full leave on the books. You're holding that as a liability. Meaning, if I have—whatever the numbers are—I have 120 hours of annual vacation in my bank, you already sort of have that booked as a liability that could potentially give you that cost. You're not going to incur in any more costs by making this more accessible to them and changing and tweaking the policies to support some better work-life balance. It's, to me, it's an easy thing that you guys could start doing right now.

Again, you don't have to you don't have to go into the sprint mode. You can start crawling before you'll walk, but just take a look internally. What's the culture? Do you like that? If you don't, you have to be honest that it's a problem and that you're going to change it, and that takes work. Because we have form habits, right? I talked about how we're all doing so much and moving so fast, and it's easy to sit down because you're like, “My day tomorrow is going to be so much, and I'm going to shoot out a few emails.” Well, you can do that. Flexing is another great perk of working, to be able to work outside of hours. But there are tools that your IT department can implement that can say, “Let's hold these emails in a queue until it's working hours, then we'll release them and shoot 'em on down the line.” I know Outlook does some of that on its own in the version that we're using. And obviously, you could be using a different version, but Microsoft today, that's a filter on the 365 and the cloud kind of version. And it kind of sometimes even reminds you, like, do you really need to send this right now?

But, it's an easy step, so take a look at it. So, in addition to like compressed schedules like, meaning, if you're working 35 hours right now—that's your work week, about seven hours a day, five days a week, at 35 hours—could you do 32? Could you do for four 8 (hour) days? I know it's scary making those kinds of changes, but give it a trial run. See how it goes.

If you don't already offer flexibility, like, say, maybe you establish core hours, like everybody has to be available between 9 and 3. Outside of that, you want to start your day at 5, and then you end at whatever that is—5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10—1 or 2, like early afternoon, you can. I'm not a morning person, I would be the type that would be like, “Starting as late as I possibly could, and I'd be happy to work until 7 or 8.” If you're not doing that, look at that kind of stuff.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But there's easy ways to make some tweaks and support a better work-life balance. And that is something that employees are 100% looking for. They don't want to lose that flexibility.

All right, Rose, what do you have for me next?

Number 10. Review your benefits program for competitiveness every three years minimum. So, this is, I do this kind of work with clients a lot. This is one of our products that we sell at Nonprofit HR.

And what we do is we'll come in, and we'll talk with you, and say, "Hey, tell me how you want to be compared to other organizations. Do you want us to only look at other nonprofits? Do you want us to look at specific types of nonprofits, like associations? Do you see more value in being compared by the type of, I mean, the size of your budget, the size of your staff, maybe the type of industry? Are you a nonprofit that's the membership type of organization, versus a nonprofit that provides the public societal benefit?" There's different data cuts.

This is a due diligence thing that just keeps your program in good working order. Think of it as the oil change in your car. Now, your broker can do some of this already. They're typically not going to do the deep dive that we will do. They—brokers usually, unless you're dealing with a very small, regional one, typically they have a rather large book of business. They have quite a few clients on their books and they're going to have some data they can pull from already.

Their types of assessments tend to be ones that are just like a PowerPoint slide or two. And it just kind of says, "Here's peer A, peer B, peer C." I've seen those types of things when I've been in-house before. Ours goes deeper to where I'm providing some initial responses like, "Hey, this program is sort of typical of what I see, you're doing this great. Here's a place where you can improve. Here's my recommendation. You've got a compliance issue. Here's a way to incorporate equity in this benefit." And then at the end, I provide all these really nice data tables. So, you should review your program for competitiveness, like I said, every two to three years, it just keeps it in good working order.

All right, Rose, we've got to number 10. You got some questions for me?

Rose Gebken: Yes, absolutely, Eric. I'm going to come and join you here, and get started. We have a couple of questions coming in. If anyone has any questions, feel free to send them last minute, and we'll get to as many as we can in this time.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

So, starting off questions from our audience. This one has to do with HR technology and platforms.

Are there any top recommendations or technology platforms that are able to manage HR for an evolving hybrid structure? I know a lot of organizations are dealing with hybrid now. What would you have to say for that?

Eric Salyers: Yeah, so I touched on a little bit, so let's kind of tie that back. I'll reiterate some of those points and tie it all together.

So, typically, these technology solutions are geared toward certain sized organizations. Like I said, we have some relationships with some vendors that we use all the time that are great for the types of organizations that we work with. And there are others that—I can throw out names, the PeopleSoft, the Workday, those are for really, really large organizations. Could you use them? Absolutely, but it's probably a bigger tool than you need.

So, first off, there are a suite of vendors that sort of are marketing towards the size of your organization. And then, when we think about what technological solutions those products offer for the hybrid workspace, then, that's a lot about what I talked about when I said, fully utilizing your HR technology. Creating those workflows, creating those automations. So, if you—let's just do a scenario, that kind of helps teach sometimes—if previously you were an HR administrator and the way that you were bringing new employees through the door was mostly through email, you were like, “Hey, welcome. Your start date is this. The day before I'll email you a tax form. Print them out.” If you're doing it that way, that was maybe somewhat manageable when you were in person. If you're virtual and hybrid now, that's much more cumbersome. And also, you have to you have to think about, you shouldn't be emailing unprotected documents over email anyway. If you've got your tax information, you should be using more secure means.

So, when you get these systems that offer these tools like onboarding modules, and an onboarding module is really cool to set up, and it just nets so much value. It can be like, once you, as an HR administrator, if that's you, Rose, and you hire me, I get an email that says, “Welcome to XYZ organization. We're glad you're here.” And that's usually customizable and the very best products out there allow you to do things like videos, and the sky's the limit. You can be super creative.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But, as I talked about earlier, allowing them to do the stops on the train. You can stop here, you're in the system, you're filling out the tax information. It's not going, you're not emailing anymore, right? You're in the secure system, and you're filling out your tax stuff. Then, you're being directed to look at your demographic data. Maybe the address that you applied for has changed. I mean, I just moved recently. So, let's say I applied for your job, Rose, back when I was an apartment 1129 and now I'm in 1517. I can do that when I'm doing my onboarding, I update my demographic data.

And then, the benefits enrollment is such a life saver. And you can configure those really nicely. If you've got more than one medical plan, you can sometimes set those up to where you can compare them. A grid pops up, shows you the deductibles. It shows you the co-insurance. It shows you all of those things that are important. And in short, you're taking away this manual stuff, manual emails, paper, all that stuff, you're putting it in the product already. Product just means the system, I use that term interchangeably sometimes. You're putting it in the product, and it's already there. No one's having a key it in again.

So, yeah, there's a lot of functionality there, and the sky's the limit. And, we have an individual in my practice area who leads that work, and we have several in our pocket that we're ready to deploy at any given time.

Rose Gebken: Thank you, Eric. That's great. I know that organizations are going to appreciate all these ideas.

The next question from our attendees is, what are some popular voluntary benefits? This point ties in a little bit with what you were just discussing.

Eric Salyers: Yeah, some of these benefits have been around for a while, but sometimes organizations haven't jumped on. So I'll talk about some of the older ones first.

Voluntary just simply means a benefit that you're offering to which the employer is not providing any contribution. You're really just providing the service, you're the middleman. You're providing access to enrollment. Then the premium comes out of the paycheck, and then the employer is shifting those premiums over to that vendor. Some of the easier ones that a lot of folks already know about are, you see the commercials on TV for, Aflac. So, like an accident plan. A critical illness plan. A hospital indemnity plan. Those are popular, and if you don't have any of those yet, you could consider implementing some of those, but do so strategically. If you've already got a provision or a rider, a rider's just like a mini policy that modifies big policy, if you've already got something like that in another plan, maybe you don't necessarily need to offer one of those. But again, your broker can help you with that.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

So, let's talk about some of the newer ones. Earlier in the webinar I talked about how during the pandemic and lockdown, I saw some businesses respond by going, "Ah, there's a new need out there and I have a new solution." I saw a lot of rise in what is being called lifestyle benefits, and actually some of those really excite me. I would love to have some of those.

So, different models, different ways they look. Let me just talk about one that I know pretty well. Basically, it's a system where the employer can decide how much money per month they want to give an employee. Let's make the number easy, let's say, \$25. And then, the employee can then go on to this website, where all of these services have been vetted and evaluated. And then, you can use those to, the things that excite me, right, because I'm a geek and nerd, I'm just happy to get my Spotify paid for. Maybe, I choose to get my Spotify paid for, my Netflix paid for, maybe I want to use that to do an online yoga class.

So, obviously, it's not going to be Peloton, but think about Peloton. That kind of service where it's a marketed exercise type of venue. There can be eldercare, childcare types of things. It's vast. When I show clients this, they're always, like, "Wow, I didn't I didn't realize there would be so many things." So that has been a really exciting and new thing. And just for you finance people out there already wondering, yes, they provide a report, so that you can properly tax. Because if you're giving employees something of value, the IRS says you're supposed to tax that.

So, they have all of those, they've already thought through all those problems that could make it difficult. And the nice thing about these, they're not ERISA plans. And again, most of you on the call probably know what ERISA is. It's a federal benefit law passed in 1974. It's where a lot of our benefit regulations live, it's not the sole place, but it's a lot of them. With it not being ERISA-bound, it's easier to create eligibility. You're not bound by all of those restrictions, and you can put them into place quickly.

Rose Gebken: Thank you, Eric. I appreciate that.

So, this question has to do with the attraction and recruitment stages of employer relations. What are some tips for highlighting benefits packages during that stage of attracting and recruiting new employees?

Eric Salyers: Yeah. It's a vital stage in the recruitment process, isn't it? So, earlier I talked about, this ties into so many things, honestly. It can tie into your system. It can tie into your education, and all of that. This is one place where it's vital.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

If you're the person in the organization that is doing benefits, and you're not also the person in the organization that's dealing with recruiting, you should be at least talking a little bit, and make sure, like if the recruiter's hearing anything, like, "Oh, I really am excited about your mission. I'd love to work here, but I just can't do that medical plan." That's great feedback to help realize, "Hey, we've got a problem here and that we can work on." So that's just a tangential point I want to make.

But, how you're communicating it. So what I most often see is a Word document. I mean, hey, that's not bad, but can you do more? Absolutely.

Like I said, I like all these new communication tools that are out there. It's what appeals to us. Nobody really wants to another email in their inbox. I know I don't, so please, Rose, don't send me an email later. We like the new styles of communication. I mean, when we sit at night in our beds and are just kind of chilling, we're looking at the Twitter's and the TikToks and the YouTube's. Am I saying you have to do it on YouTube? Absolutely not. But just be a little bit more creative, if you can. There are some tools out there that you can play around with. Take baby steps, too, put it on an intranet site, or have a—you probably, Rose, you're part of our marketing department. If I was the recruiter at Nonprofit HR, I'd be like, "Hey Rose, here's the content. Let's make it dazzle, make it sparkle, make it shimmer, right?"

Do little things, just to make it appealing and look at it with—make sure you're looking at it through the eye, and that's sometimes hard, right? If you're the administrator, you're used to that all the time, but you got to do a small little focus group with some folks and just kind of sit and like, "What does—tell me what's glaring out that we're missing." Just get a different set of eyes on it.

Rose Gebken: Thank you, Eric. I love the idea of having the newer forms of communication. Don't think aren't going to get away from emails that soon, but it's nice to think about.

Our next question goes back to that hybrid and remote environment that's becoming increasingly common. What are some of the new benefits employers are using to retain and attract their hybrid and remote workers? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Eric Salyers: Sure. I mean, one of those, what I'm seeing an uptick in is, it's not necessarily always logged under the benefit checklist, but it kind of is. Sometimes there's those gray areas, where you're like, "Yes, it's beneficial to the employee, but it's not considered a benefit plan or organized through an insurance company," and that's one of these things. It's a realistic stipend to support your employees that are working virtually, right?

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

If you're only giving something like \$25, and that's supposed to be covering your internet and your own cell phone and then your office supplies. Is that really realistic? Are you really supporting that employee the best you can? Look at those types of things and make tweaks. Because I've seen some nonprofits offer like \$1,500 a year. I've seen \$500 offered two times a year. Be supportive and help them set up an office. I don't remember who it was, and I wouldn't say that anyway, but I do know that when the pandemic rolled through, one of our clients here, because the consultant on the call was telling me, because even she was impressed. She's like they're giving everybody—I forget the dollar amount—\$500, \$700, something like that to build an office at home and I think that was awesome.

Can you give me the, I want to hear the question one more time, because I got so excited about that. I think I've got more to say though. I need to hear it again.

Rose Gebken: The benefits both used to retain and to attract the hybrid and remote workforce that we have.

Eric Salyers: So, I want to touch on again, flexibility. It really is key. I have seen, I've got a friend, and she's down in North Carolina. She used to live in D.C. She was one of those folks that was like, "I'm going to get out of here." She had family in North Carolina. Her job let her do it. She's down there now.

She's kind of been thinking about looking for a new opportunity and she has no interest in returning to an office. Flexibility is going to be key. So, again, that also, it's not a benefit you're going out to your broker and an insurance carrier to help, it's just internally being like, "Can we accommodate this? Are we brave enough to go into the space and embrace a hybrid world? And look at a four-day workweek, compressed work schedules? Really nice flexibility on both ends of the day?" That kind of stuff.

I think those things speak quite a lot to, I mean, we all want work-life balance. We just really want it, and sometimes we hear it's there, but again, the culture doesn't truly support it. You got to fix some of these things in-house, and then communicate it and advertise them appropriately. But that's just a few things off the top of my head.

Rose Gebken: That makes a lot of sense. Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts on that.

Our next question is sticking with that virtual environment, especially in an organization I think that is fully virtual. What thoughts would you have for us on organizations' approaches to paid time off? Including both vacation, and then their sick leave, whether it's sick, personal time, mental health, those types of leave.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Eric Salyers: We had just had that technological hiccup, where one of the words got a little bit fractured for me.

So, maybe just, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry to have to do that, Rose, but that's the virtual world, so I just need to hear the question again.

Rose Gebken: No problem. No problem at all. So, this is staying with the virtual world. For virtual organizations, approaches to paid time off, including both vacation time and then their sick, mental health, personal time, however they structure that piece?

Eric Salyers: Yeah, I mean, it's really extending what we were just kind of talking about, honestly.

I've seen some organizations, they've struggled with this a little bit. Because, again, back to your culture. Like some managers were kind of unnerved by having to manage folks that they could no longer watch over. And they were like, "I don't really know what they're doing with their time." And so, the idea of time and that construct, and the structure around it shifted a little bit. And it was like, "Well do we need to tweak the time off because they're already home?" Kind of stuff.

I still think that we adhere back, and certainly, there is survey data that we can pull that tells us what other organizations are doing. But things you've got to remember about survey data is one, it's a slice in time that happened in the past, and two, it simply tells you what others are doing. Well, do you want to be like others or do you want to be a leader? Sometimes you have to be brave and decide, "Hey, I want us for us and in order for us to get to A to B to C to D, whatever, whatever the finish line is, we're going to do something a little bit more." And we're going to offer, there's unlimited leave programs. Our firm uses one of those.

You can certainly do a study and see if you're offering the right amount of hours. But what did we talk about, I'm going to quiz you, Rose. What tool can you use as an HR practitioner to get information from your employees to determine?

I won't put you on the spot for too long. If it doesn't come, that's OK. Because you didn't know to expect—a survey, a benefits survey. Deploy one of those and ask your employees, "What's your feelings on your paid time off program?"

Yeah. That's the ball. And again, I can't reiterate enough. I could help you get the greatest program in the world on vacation and sick. If your culture is not one that supports being out and has adequate resources to support employees being out, it's never going to work.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Because, if we take vacation, and we're worried about what the quality of our life is going to be when we get back—you hear all the time, “I’m going to have to kill myself for taking this week off,”—Not, literally, that sounded bad coming out of my mouth.

Metaphorically, I’m going to have to work myself so hard to compensate for the fact that I’ve been out of the job because I don’t have a backup.

So, that's a problem, right? That's not the employee's problem, if the organization doesn't have that support. So what can you as a leader in your organization do to help with that? If you can bring additional bodies in, you have to be creative. But the point here is, sometimes it's not the program. Sometimes it's the culture. And you've got to know the difference.

Rose Gebken: That makes a lot of sense. I think all of us can relate to being in that type of position where we're debating whether it feels worth it to take time off, and that's not a great feeling.

So, our next question comes for part-time employees. Anything coming down the pike as far as new trends for benefits and part-time employees?

Eric Salyers: I don't know that I've seen anything super new, I mean, those lifestyle benefits were sort of applicable to the part-timers. Because typically, you do tend to structure your plans to where employees have to work a certain number of hours to qualify. And most part-time employees, at least with our clients, tend to be working enough hours to do that already.

And, of course, if you have 50 or more employees in your organization, you've got a whole other set of rules under the Affordable Care Act as an applicable large employer that you have to contend with. But if you have a part-timer, I'm trying to think of realistic hours. They're only working 14 hours a week. You're likely probably not going to make that employee eligible for your healthcare plan. They could still have some paid time off. They can take advantage of this like lifestyle benefit thing, like they could get—maybe they don't get \$25, they get \$15 bucks, right? You can do some different things that still give them a benefit plan.

And of course, you absolutely, if you've got the budget, you can of course offer them. There's nothing that says that you can't offer that coverage to the employees. It's just typically it's done from—unfortunately, healthcare in the United States is still a business, right? So, I mean other things cost money: premiums, budgets, all that's part of the game. So there's usually a strategic reason why we structure our eligibility rules the way we do, to say you've got to work a certain number of hours for you to qualify for these benefits, where the employer's put money in and contribute to those.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

Rose Gebken: That makes a lot of sense, thank you. And it gives people some ideas to think about with their part-time employees.

So, our next question is, we just have a little more time here left. Looking at health equity, do we expect more thinking to go into health equity? And especially looking at smaller employers, is this something that they can truly bring forward in a way that matters to their staff, especially if their benefits are not very competitive? What does that look like for people?

Eric Salyers: Oh, you saved the funnest for last. The trickiest one. I mean, of course.

So, I'm going to back up. So I was in-house, and I know what it would feel like if I was hearing this at my time six or seven years ago. Benefits does tend to be thought of financially, at first. That's why earlier I said, if you go to your broker and say, "Hey, I want to start planning early," they're like, "They don't have the renewal yet." The renewal is what? Money, cost. It's thought about from that perspective first, often. And I hope that you find the courage and the strategy to change that in your organization, if that's primarily how it is. You can't pull it out of that forever, it's an important part of it, right? We can't just forget the money aspect, but to start to introduce it, that can be daunting.

I spent three years at an employer one time just to get one initiative changed. Each year, I was told this costs too much money. We don't have it. I would go back and do another business case, another video, another slide or whatever tap dance routine I had to do to be tenacious to get leadership to move that needle. It's difficult, I'm not going to lie to you.

So that's why one of the reasons, there are more, but one of the reasons we did the white paper with Nonstop Wellness Administration—gosh, I just butchered that name. So sorry guys. Nonstop is what we collectively call them, but they have a more formal name. One of the reasons why we did that co-writing of that white paper is it has those, sort of like a guided list to help individuals like that say, "All right, how do we start? Because it's really daunting."

Number one, just the idea. Hopefully, you're walking away with a better understanding of what it means, equity in your health care plan. But, how to start talking to your guys that are really looking at this from a finance perspective, to change that mindset a little bit and say, "Hey, yes, that's there, but let's open the door and start looking at it through this lens as well." It takes—and I don't have a magic wand. When I do, it doesn't work. But, we don't have a magic wand that actually does magic.

Shifting Workforce Needs? 10 Tips for Evolving Benefits Program Offerings

But you have to—that's a tough question to give to—an answer to give to an entire group because it's going to matter in your organization. When I needed to move the needle on something like that I knew wasn't successful, you've got to know the person that you're talking to. What's going to appeal to them? Are they a detail-oriented person? Are they numbers? Like, what is going to attract their attention? Have the ability to influence others and build your business case and show what the impact is going to be.

Now, I would recommend, because sometimes you can use case studies, a vendor will sometimes have already done some of that work, because they know that's a challenge. I don't know that there's going to be a lot of case—I don't think there's going to be any case studies for health equity just yet. But, we've certainly done a ton of webinars. A lot of those are recorded. I think you could reach out to our marketing department, and we could potentially put you in the hands of one of those, and you could maybe use that as a tool to start the conversation.

But I acknowledge and empathize with you that it's a tough. It's tough to get it going, but it's an important conversation. And it's really going to help propel HR forward in that space of DEIJ.

Rose Gebken: Thank you so much for all of your great information that you shared this afternoon, Eric, and really appreciate it. That is going to be all the time that we have today for our Q&A session.

I'll wrap this up. Thank you to everyone who attended today's webinar. We hope you found it to be valuable. And thank you again for leading our discussion today, Eric.

Eric Salyers: You're welcome. Thanks, Rose.

Rose Gebken: Absolutely. We have several more webinars coming your way in 2022, so be sure to check out our events calendar at nonprofithr.com/events.

Also, please be sure to complete the feedback survey that will pop up once our webcast has ended. Your comments will help us with our planning and can inform the topics that we will cover in upcoming webinars as well. If you'd like more information about available services or support from Nonprofit HR. Please email solutions@nonprofithr.com, or visit us on the web at www.nonprofithr.com, and have a wonderful rest of your day today.

Thank you, Eric.

Eric Salyers: Thanks, Rose. See you guys later.