

Nate: Welcome to Illuminate HR, Eric.

Nate: Thank you for having me, Nate. I appreciate it. Looking forward to this.

Nate: Yeah, me too. I've been looking forward to it for quite a while. You were named the 2017 voluntary advisor of the year by Employee Benefits Advisor magazine. That's a pretty awesome a feat in itself.

Eric: Yeah, I think so. I kind of joke when I say this, but I kind of mean it in that you know, I'm not a, I'm not a singer, I'm not an actor, so I'm not going to be up for a grammy or a horror an Oscar. So in the insurance and benefits space for what it's worth, I think that's about as close as I'm gonna get to a grammy or an Oscar and I, and I'm proud of it.

Nate: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You should be. And before we dive too deep, I thought you could start the conversation by giving an update on the world of voluntary benefits as well as sort of framing what we're talking about when we hear terms like voluntary.

Eric: Sure, sure. So let's start by level setting the a, the playing field. So I am a big proponent in word choice. And I write articles for a number of the industry trade publications and and I speak nationally. I get hired to speak across the country on various topics in sales, marketing, management and of course insurance benefits and, and quote unquote voluntary benefits. And I'm not, I'm not keen on the term voluntary. So I'm single handedly trying to rename an entire industry I think all by myself, but slowly but surely, I see other people in our industry, in my industry adopting the phrase ology that I use. So I don't believe in the term voluntary benefits because ultimately anything in everything in employee benefits wise could do, an employee could be asked to spend money on it. It's all voluntary.

Eric: So it's voluntary for us to be on this podcast today. It's voluntary for your awesome listeners to, to take time to listen to us and thank you. Appreciate it. It's voluntary to do anything and everything. So I just feel like voluntary benefits, which are typically the term used for what's called an accident plan or a critical illness plan, a cancer plan, a hospital plan, disability, life insurance, vision, dental. These are all a lot of times known as or referred to as voluntary benefits. And it's frustrating to me because everything's voluntary and and, and there's other terms that are used, right? So you may be familiar with, your listeners may be familiar with the term ancillary or work site or supplemental or or things like that. And these are all variations of the term voluntary. And here's the commonality that they have.

Eric: Nate. They all have, in my opinion, a negative connotation. Let's talk about the word ancillary for just a second. Again, it sounds crazy, but words matter. When you hear the word ancillary, if you look up the definition of ancillary or voluntary, any of these things, they all mean second class citizens, third class citizens, they all are taking a backseat to something else. They're not. They're, they're not on the forefront or or what a lot of people consider quote unquote important. And you know, a lot of times people will use the term ancillary as an example for, for disability and life insurance. Well, I don't know what's ancillary about somebody who needs cash to pay their mortgage and rent and

put food on their table when they're disabled and they can't work. I, there's nothing ancillary about that at all. There's nothing ancillary when when you have an employee or a family member pass away and they need a benefit check, there's nothing ancillary about life insurance.

Eric: So again, maybe I'm crazy, but I've been getting a lot of traction over the years because I really just don't like these terms. And if you think about it too, right, I wherever your listeners are from, whether it's cvs or Walgreens, you know, think about it. It's to say ancillary as an example. It sounds like you're going to get a prescription at the CVS or the Walgreens. It sounds awful. It's ridiculous ancillary, Hey, you want to buy some ancillary insurance? I mean, you might as well say, do you want to go get a prescription of penicillin? The answer is going to be no. So I I try to frame all the benefits that I specialize in in a positive light. And I'm a big, you know, perception is reality. So I use the term enhanced benefits and the reason I chose the word enhanced as a terminology or phrasiology is because everything that we do is in support and designed to wrap around the major medical health insurance, the Blue Cross Blue Shield, United healthcare, Cigna, Aetna, or if they're being self funded, whatever it is.

Eric: Everything we do is designed to wrap around the health insurance that the advisor or health broker is bringing in and strategizing for. And and, and they have to work in concert too often I find that that companies have all these random products in the quote unquote voluntary ancillary space and they're just, they're really what I call a product dump that ultimately led to the salesperson getting what I call a commission grab. And to me, it's criminal. And I've had so many, countless at HR professionals and small business owners tell me they completely agree that they don't even know what's being offered. They have carrier people come in and sell their employee stuff and they don't even know what it is and they don't like it. They just sadly have dealt with it. So we go in and we put together a whole strategic mission centered around making sure that the right products are in place at the right price points with the right carriers and the right solution providers. And again, it enhances everything that the broker and the advisor are already doing.

Nate: Yeah, I love this and there's a lot to unpack here. I want to go back to something you and I connect on and just the power of terminology, the power of verbiage. I think what you're describing is a bit of just less leftover HR, if you will. So, you know, back in the day, life insurance was called death insurance because that's what it is, right? It's insurance for death, right? They right. You're not gonna sell very many products if you're, if you're calling something, you know, death insurance. So they changed the name to life insurance and it became a really popular thing. Another great example is just the transition that's occurred in what HR people call themselves. So it used to be human resources or HR. Right now folks are going by a people professionals or they're going by employee experience. And one of the things I think it's easy to say enhanced benefits is just you trying to do a marketing trick.

Nate: It's easy to say employee experience when I took that title is just me trying to do a marketing trick. However, I think what it really is is an evolution of what's happening in the world of managing folks benefits managing human resources departments and that

it's more descriptive to say employee experience. HR is extremely broad now and it does dive into all sorts of things that you never would have thought fall into that employee experience or in your case enhanced benefits. They're much more than ancillary. And the final thing I would say on this, cause again, you and I are super passionate about this topic is enhanced benefits is much more descriptive of what employees think these things are. Right? Yeah. I can't tell you the number of times I've spent, you know, eight, 10 months coming up with the greatest health plan in the history of the earth and the employee sits down and they don't appreciate it and they just want to know where the dang pet insurance is at.

Eric: It's true.

Nate: Another topic that I wanted to hit on here is something you talked about a little bit and we're, we're kind of dancing around, which is that these benefits are extremely popular amongst employees. As an HR person. Sometimes we have a tendency to not pay attention to what's happening in this space and to just go with the broker's advice, throw out some legal plans, some pet insurance, some life insurance, whatever it is. And we don't look under the cover the same way we do with other benefits. What are you doing in this space and, and what are your, I guess, deeper thoughts on that world and how an HR person should attack this problem?

Eric: Sure, sure. Well, first, I mean, you're spot on. You know, I o the first thing I say to to eight human resource professionals, when I meet with them and, and small business owners, mid size c-suite, et Cetera, is I asked them, you know, what are they doing in the enhanced space? Again, for, for clarity, for the rest of the, for podcasts, I'll say enhanced, but again, for lack of a better term, a lot of people are still referring to it as ancillary or voluntary. But so I say, what are you doing in the area of enhanced benefits? And a lot of times they'll say, and I'm not gonna mention carriers here, but they'll say, well, we have Xyz carrier and we've had them for, for five, 10 years or whatever. And you know, that we ask them what their experiences do.

Eric: They like it, not like it, what do they love, what do they hate, blah, blah, blah. And a lot of times the, they're just indifferent. They're ambivalent. They say, well, you know, I don't know. And I asked, I always said, I'm with the broker, right? Their, their health broker. And I say, well, you know, you don't know. So tell me, I mean, every year or every, at least every other year, are you shopping the market for these benefits, these enhanced benefits and, and digging in and, and, and, you know, looking under the hood and peeling back the onion and deciding, figuring out and realizing that, you know, let's face it, the only reason we do benefits is to attract and retain the best quality person and to ultimately be competitive in the market and bring loyalty to the, to that employee, to that, to your to your company.

Eric: And you know, what benefit, I don't say this to be blunt or mean or negative, but the genesis of it is what benefit are you really doing your employees by, by not shopping every benefit and really vetting out every carrier and solution provider at least every couple years in a, in a cycle. I mean every year you do it for health insurance every couple of years you do it for life or dental or disability. A lot of times because it's is a two

year rate lock or something like that. But when it comes to an accident plan or like you said, pet insurance or you know, a hospital or a cancer plan or critical illness, and these are the most popular plans right now and they have been for a years, what are you doing? And their answer is, well, Geez, we've never done that. And I say, well, what if I was able to, to, to, to find an ultimately designed cause.

Eric: Everything we do is bespoke for our employer groups, even down to three or four lives. What if we can design a plan that is more rich and benefit than the one you already have in place? And it's at a more affordable price point for all your employees. What if you could be a hero? What if we could tell all your employees Christmas came early, Hanukkah came early. We're giving everybody a pay raise in the form of a rate reduction. You're now going to have a better benefit, a better experience, a more robust PR plan on something you've already been paying for. Literally you've been spending your money on it for years, we're now going to give you a better rate at a better on benefit. Is there any reason you wouldn't do that? And the the, the answers I get are obviously no. Why wouldn't I do it?

Eric: And they say, I didn't know this existed. Like a lot of times they just, it Kinda just sits there. And to me it's tragic. And again, I use this term to grab attention, but I do meet it. To me it's criminal. I mean as an employer group you're saying, hey employees, we love these benefits. We know you're going to love them. You have people spending money on them. Why wouldn't you be shopping and allowing your employees to get better opportunities if and when they present themselves? I mean, my goodness, you do it on health insurance because it's employer money. Why would you not treat employee money the same way?

Nate: Well, and you hit on something extremely important there, which is also again, times change. And as a innovator in a person in HR who's trying to keep up, you gotta be aware of these things, but deductibles have risen, there are more and more people in high deductible health plans. So there really is a place here that's way different than it was 10 or 15 years ago for these enhanced benefits in helping folks manage these large deductibles, helping folks manage things like you mentioned cancer insurance and some of these sorts of things. So how do you think about how these ancillary benefits, voluntary benefits, whatever we're gonna call them, baked into the overall healthcare strategy in this new world?

Eric: Sure, sure. So let me give you an example, right? So we have a we have a case where we were a broker hired us to bring us in. It's it's one of the first cases we've done with this broker team. And they just got the case themselves as the, they took over the broker of record for the health case. And when we peel back that onion that I talked about and we started digging in, we realized that it was truly in place a carrier driven product dump that led to a commission grab for a year after a year, but it got worse. So here's the, and I see this too often, it's really, again, it's criminal in that we have, we found out and the employer didn't pay attention. The HR team is, oh, and by the way, this isn't, we're not talking about a six man group.

Eric: This is a 500 life groups. So they have a, a chief HR person. I mean, it's a, it's a serious, legit business and nobody was paying attention. The fact that they actually had the carrier reps in there selling as an example, disability insurance, short term disability, and quite a lot by the way, and the employees participated because it's a popular product, a very important vital product that people should all own, right? Paycheck insurance. But the reality is nobody knew that the employer was already spending money on an employer funded short term and longterm disability plan. So in essence, I said, well, Geez, there's no way. There's duplicate a duplicate coverage. So we peel back the onion and we realize, oh yeah, we're not talking about buy-up. Well, you know, I was hoping for the employee's sake that it was employer paid disability and the voluntary quote unquote enhanced benefit of disability was just the buy up.

Eric: The difference too, to get a higher piece of the Pie, but that wasn't the case at all. It was truly duplicate coverage for many years, multiple years, the employees were paying for the same coverage that the employer was paying for with two separate carriers. And I got to tell you is as crazy as that sounds, and as much as I'd love to say, that's the, that's, that's the exception to the rule. Unfortunately that's not, I see that on various different programs and plans in large mega sized multi thousand man companies all the way down to the small companies alike. And it's because nobody's paying attention to that world. It's it truly this world that I specialize in, that I've been in for 20 years, my heart and soul, it truly is the, the redheaded stepchild of the insurance world that most health brokers and advisors and sadly HR people, and again, I don't mean that to be negative, but it's, the fact is it just kind of sits there and, and things like this happen.

Eric: So I am just on a mission to help employer groups all across the country stop this nonsense or as I would say, the madness. And it's nothing more than just doing some, some research and, and really having somebody dive in and, and offer to design a program that compliments and works in concert with the health plan to make sure that it matches and mirrors the deductible and the co-insurance and, or what the self funded as set up as, or the level funded or, or where the gaps are and the holes are, et Cetera, et cetera. And most times I hear brokers tell me, well, I didn't know you could do that for this size group or I didn't, you know, that's a lot of extra work. And, and they're right, it is extremely laborious, Nate. It really is. But that's not their job. That's my job. That's why I have an entire office full of trained benefit advisors and staff and back analysts that do this and we designed these products and plans for our clients to really go into detail as opposed to using quote unquote shelf product that a lot of the big carriers just push because it's quote unquote easier and more simple.

Nate: Yeah. And I have to say this resonates with me for a couple of reasons. One, I'm not the biggest fan of the traditional broker model and I, and I think that's probably a huge understatement, is second reason is gone through setting up benefits from scratch versus what you're talking about where you might have some legacy there. I did get to see, and I have seen some pretty incredible egregious commission structures on these products. And it's just, it's unbelievable to me in a lot of companies will just sign on the dotted line because they're kind of thinking, you know, this isn't the company money, this is the employee pay. And a a hundred percent of it. But I mean come on your responsibility as an employee experience or HR person, you're the finish.

Eric: Yeah. You're to protect that employee.

Nate: Not only that, but you should just be making sure that, that everybody's getting paid a fair shake. And some of these things are that cash grab you're talking about. I want to kind of dive into that a little bit. Is there a difference in your experience, because you work primarily through brokers, you're not going direct to employers, which is, which is an interesting model we should talk about, but right. Do you see a difference between somebody who might call themselves a broker and somebody who might be seen as more of an advisor?

Eric: So, great question. So correct. I only work through I would say a a third party, right? So I don't care what their title is. So a broker advisor, I've had people crack me and say, no, I'm a consultant. And by the way, I'm not making fun of them at all because we just spent five minutes in the beginning talking about how word word choice proves paramount. Right? So I, I completely agree. If somebody prefers and wants to use the word consultant or advisor, bro, I don't really care. The traditional example is that a broker is transactional and that they're just out there completely shopping the market and just bringing you the race to the bottom line. They're bringing you one less bad increase over another. Think about that, right? So Mr Ms HR person, Mr owner, Ms Owner, Miss C-suite you know, we went out, we shopped the market, here's the best two year rate lock and it's still more than than what you had before.

Eric: But it's better than, than what we can get elsewhere. So it's one less bad increase over the other. So brokers typically are, are known as doing that and I'm not trying to offend brokers, but that's the stereotype, right? Adviser is typically somebody who, yeah, they can do everything I just described, but they also in, in addition or more so they spend their time focused on fee for service or pay for performance. So a lot of my top advisor partners over around the country who hire and bring me in to help their employer groups in the enhanced space. They don't take commissions whatsoever. They literally say, Mr Employer, here's what I would get if we were in commission. I'm stripping out all the commissions for health insurance and here's what our fee is going to be based on performance, based on doing what we just told you we're going to do.

Eric: We're going to lower your healthcare spend by whatever I'm making up a number. We're gonna lower your house, but healthcare spend by 40%. And not if, but when we do it we, we we expect that's a word, but we expect I'm making up a number 20% of the savings or 30% of the savings on top of the monthly fee. Kind of like a retainer, if you will. You know, you don't pay your lawyer or your CPA a a commission, you pay them a fee, you pay them whatever they charge per hour. So advisors and consultants typically put themselves up into that upper echelon. And and I don't blame them. They're doing some incredible work and they're saving employer groups even small, 30, 40, 50 man employer groups a lot of money and they're putting, they're not afraid to put their money where their mouth is.

Eric: I've even had, I've advisors who will tell an employer group and put it in writing and contract legally, that if they don't perform the way that they're saying that they will give back their fee or a portion of their fee depending on whatever it is. So it is, it is just a

really, really, really great time to be in the benefits world because when you're innovative and you're not afraid to prove to your clients how serious you are about lowering their healthcare spend, it's incredible. And then you couple that Nate, with everything that I'm doing and it just becomes a win win.

Nate: Yeah. It's amazing actually because not many people know this, but when I left the HR world and started my own consulting firm, I did have to get my brokers license because I do some work in the healthcare space. And, and so I ended up learning a ton about this. And it's fascinating to me that in certain spaces you can't not take commissions. And I am not a big fan of commissions, especially I think taking a step back, if you're an HR person and you're doing your due diligence on employee benefits, you should really be looking at your advisor, broker, consultant, whatever we want to call them. And taking a look at how much commission they're making because there's a point at which you crossover in size and dollar figures where these commissions can get absolutely ridiculous for the value that your, they're providing you.

Nate: So they could be making half a million dollars, \$1 million. I mean, these are ridiculous fees. And, and I love the approach of flat fee structures. That's I think why a lot of folks call themselves advisors or consultants because they can say, look, we believe there's this much work. Here's our scope of services that we're going to offer and it's going to be \$120,000 flat fee for the service. And you can see what you get. It's transparent as you talked about. So these are really interesting issues. And one reason I think it's a little bit tough to be a broker is just navigating that world of you may be getting commissions that outstrip the value you feel you're providing. And that's a tough situation to be in.

Eric: No, 100% agree. I mean, you'd look the, it's, it's tragic but sad but true that a lot of companies large and small still work with the same broker that they worked with 30 years because of the good old boy network, quote unquote, you know, they golf together, they go to dinner together. But I gotta tell you, man times they are changing, that the millennials are taking over the family businesses and, or they're getting hired and taking c-suite positions in companies that certainly they're not part of their family and the millennial generation and the Gen z. They don't, they're not, they don't care about that. In my experience, and I'm, I'm barely a millennial, but I don't care about that. Yeah, I'd love you to take me for a nice steak and I, and I don't golf. You can take me to a baseball game. But the reality is that's not swaying my decision.

Eric: Like I, and I tell my partners and my call and my carrier reps managers and the vendor solution providers, I, that, that work through me, like, yeah, I'll eat your steak. But that doesn't mean, I mean I'm not, it's not a motivating factor. I mean, at you, I don't feel guilty either. Like years ago it was, you know, you buy somebody a steak, you take them for a round of golf and you know that you're going to have groups come in and they're going to be loyal to you. That the, the generation that we're in that starting to take over the world, they just, yeah, it's always exceptions to the rule. Somebody might care more than another, but by and large, I'm finding they just don't care. They don't, they don't need that. They want transparency. They want the truth, and they really want to do what's in the best interest ultimately of the employee base. And sadly, in my space, I see that enhanced side get ignored more often than, than not.

Nate: Yeah, it's really interesting. And I think the other final point on this that I would make is just when you start to get up to the, the jumbo size, it really is ridiculous what some of these consulting firms are able to charge on an hourly basis. You know, and you can go with a smaller bespoke solution, a smaller firm, and get 10 times more value for the price. It's, it's quite insane what some of these jumbo clients are paying for consulting services.

Eric: Oh yeah, man, come on dude. Here's the thing too. Right? And I don't, by the way, I don't, I don't not work with them for any specific reason. But the reality is I don't work with a lot of big house top 50 brokerages. And again, I'm not going to name names here cause it's not relevant and I don't, I don't believe that's fair. But the big, big, big ones that work with the multi hundred thousand man groups out there I don't work with them typically, not because they haven't approached me, but a lot of them, I just, they're it to me, it's just an, I'm just another person, just another cog. I don't want to, I want to be part of something bigger. And I think that employer groups think that if they, I'm making up a number, if they have 5,000 employees or 50,000 employees, they feel like they have to go with the bigger, biggest affirm.

Eric: The reality is you're still, even with 50,000 employees, you're still just another one of their large mega groups. I mean, as opposed to if you go to a regional outfit that is excited and, and, and, and big in their market. I don't know, I found personally that your service level and your, the, the fact that they pay more attention to you is there just because you mean more to them from a, from a business profit wise, absolutely. But you're more meaningful them because you're, they're not that big national firm there. They're right there in the community with you. So you know, to each their own. And I just, I would advise HR people for my 2 cents, right. Nate, I would say is a c suite and HR don't be fooled by the smoke and mirrors that are always the big firms and the 67 vice presidents of nothing that float around the country and tell you that they're the best. I mean, really, really, really take a take the time to, to peel back that curtain and, and understand how meaningful you are to them and vice versa.

Nate: Eric, you don't sell directly to HR people. You don't really have a horse in this race, so to speak. So you know, there's not really a catch here in this thing. And the book, I just want to say real quick before you jump in, it's, it's full of information. I mean, it's chapter after chapter, it's like drinking from the fire hose. Some of this stuff in HR person might already know, some of it might be duplicative of of their knowledge base. But man, if you can't find a few nuggets in this thing of interesting stuff, I would challenge you. So I'll just leave it there and you can tell me maybe a little bit about breaking through the status quo, a little bit about the fact that a, you know, you're just out there doing the good fight and the HR folks listening don't have to worry about you praying on them.

Eric: Yeah. So that, that's the key right there. So I don't, I made a firm, I was a I always say I'm over, I'm a recovering carrier Rep. I say, Hey, my name's Eric. I'm a recovering carrier rep because I am, I was a carrier rep at a very high level with a very prominent carrier in the enhanced space for, for the better part of my whole career for at least what, 13, 14 years. I've been doing this now 20 years. And and when I left the carrier world and when

I was always independent, but I wanted to be completely independent and not tied to one carrier or one provider or one solution. So when I went out, I made the firm stance that I will not bring in a new group or a new case unless it's through an advisor, broker, consultant type person who already does business with that, with that group, and is bringing me in at a very high strategic level.

Eric: And I made that decision because too often in my career, I was going in, honestly and candidly, I was going in the back door and trying to meet the owner around HR and hoping that the owner would tell HR that they have to work with me or vice versa. I'd go into HR and hope the HR person could get the owner to say, yes, use Eric. And I'm not going to tell you it didn't work. I mean, and, and I'm not, I'm not trying to be a mother Teresa here either. I mean, it worked. We made money, my firm made money, my family made money, and that's fine. And we did good. But, but the reality is I didn't like that model and I didn't want to perpetuate that model. I truly wanted to be a partner with the advisers, consultants that I work with that they bring me in proactively, not re, not retro or not reactively, which is oftentimes the way it was.

Eric: And and to the point where, you know, if you have a, if there's somebody listening to this as an example, an HR person or a small business or a c suite type person and they'd like a copy of my book, it's an Amazon bestseller, I'd be glad to send you a copy. There is no catch. I e if you called me a month after reading the book and said, I want to work with you, I love you Eric, by the way, that's fun. I always love hearing that, but I would, I would politely tell you, that's great. Introduce me to your adviser, broker, consultant, and let's all together work on a partnership and a synergy to see if we can do something together. But I will not work directly with any group without that. That advisor partner there I just, it would be cutting the legs from, from my core values as a company and, and what we stand behind, what I preach on stage at the places I'm hired to speak at and what I write about in the book and in all the magazine articles and other podcasts and video things that I've done.

Eric: I just wanted to be a true partnership. The other thing I'll say just so, so folks understand this is I'm not ashamed of it or, or shy about it at all. I'm just a small piece of this book. So I I belong to what's called the next generation mastermind, a partnership, next gen benefits mastermind partnership. And it's a conglomerate of advisors and brokers and consultants in the health space, my world and the traditional health world who pay exorbitant amounts of, of money and, and travel and time to meet four times a year to strategize about what's working in their various parts of the country. So you'll have a lady in Seattle telling the the lady in Tampa Bay Florida, what works in Seattle and how it could potentially work in Florida and vice versa and all occur in Texas and California and Maryland where I'm at in Michigan and you name it, it doesn't matter.

Eric: And we all come together and we're sharing best in class, best in breed strategies that we're doing innovation wise with our clients. And we're not competitors at that point. If we all were in the same city, we'd probably be considered our tribal competitors. But we are all open to sharing and bettering the industry. We all have the same abundance mentality, which is key and, and paramount. So we all just got together and were like, look, we get together, we have all these ideas. Why don't we put a book together? And

one thing led to another, we put this big old book together. We each wrote a chapter on something we're passionate about and lo and behold, it became an Amazon bestseller. And I'm not a single one of us is selling the book at a profit. We're not selling it at all. We literally are giving it away to our clients and prospects to understand what we're all about.

Eric: And and in when I do speaking gigs around the country, I have a lot of times people who buy the book for their audience. So as a, as a take home, just because they know it's chock full of, of great ideas. So I will say it's not something that somebody is going to or wants to read, cover to cover in order. It doesn't have to be read that way. It's more of a look at the table of contents, whatever the chapter strikes your fancy, go to that chapter, read about it, and then ask your current advisor or broker how to do it. If, and sadly, when they tell you they can't do it or they don't understand it, that's when they can reach out to whoever authored that chapter and who it, myself or whomever can guide them and advise them accordingly. So like I said, no catch, I'd love to send it out. I just love bettering the industry again. I promise I'm not Mother Teresa. I do have to feed my family, but at the same token I do, I just come from that abundance mentality.

Nate: Great. And it is a, a very good resource. So what I'll do is make sure that we get a link up there where folks can contact you to get a copy of the book. And as you said it's a, it's a handy reference and you really can just look at that table of contents and sort of dive in to whatever whatever suits you and whatever you're interested in at the moment. The last thing I wanted to hit on here is you, you mentioned something when we were speaking a few weeks ago about a benefits shopping spree. Tell me a little bit about that. What's that? What's that about? Sounds interesting.

Eric: Yes. So I, I appreciate you. You mentioned that that's something that I'm passionate about as well. So there's actually two quick things I wanted to talk about before we finish up. So that's one of them. So shopping spree, I always ask 'em HR professionals and business owners kind of as a hypothetical or Ritter or a, or a weird question. But I say, listen, if if you if I worked for you and you called me into your office and you said, Hey I'm excited you've been working here forever and, and you're one of my top employees and we want to give you a raise. So I'll, I this all sounds great. And then the bottom line is I say, okay, great, thank you Mr boss, Mr owner, Miss HR. I, I love raise what's, what's my raise?

Eric: And if you came back as an HR person and you said that my raise was literally the equivalent of 14 cents per hour, so I don't care what I make, I'm a salary person making 80 grand a year and you just told me I get a 14 cents per hour pay raise. I'm a, I'm hourly, I'm a blue collar worker and I make \$23 an hour and you just told me I get 14 cents an hour or whatever it is. The question I ask is, is that exciting? Does the, does, does that, it, does that exude loyalty from the employee to the employer group? Do they go home? Do they put on their Facebook wall? Oh my God, I've got to raise, I can't believe at 14 cents an hour and right. And they come with you, send you sense the sarcasm, right? Nope. Nobody's jumping from the off the ceiling, about 14 cents an hour.

Eric: And by the way, it's real money, but nobody's jumping head over heels in love with it. So what I, the reason I say that is I say, where else in your company can you spend the equivalent of 14 cents an hour and get value bang for your buck, if you will, to get the employees more loyal to you than they've ever been before. And I always get answers like, well, I don't, you know, 14 cents an hour is nothing like it. We can't do that. And what I do is I introduced them to the idea of a shopping spree. And what that is, is ultimately if you're still an employer group that is offering the same old status quo benefits that your broker and the broker before that and the broker before that and the broker before that has told you to do for the last 30 40 years or 10 or 1520 years.

Eric: The question is why. And let me give you a quick example. So if I ask any HR person why they offer benefits, they tell me the old song and dance. Well it's because we love and value and cherish and care about our employees and we want to attract and retain good people and all that's great, right? I'm not denying that that's all true. But bottom line is I say, when you do it and how you do it, are you doing the same thing that the broker 30 years told you to do? And he basically said, or she said, well, you know, most employers in your industry are paying for disability and part of life and paying for this. And typically the answer is yeah, we just do it because everybody else's do it. So then the question is how is that innovative? And the answer is, well, it's not innovative.

Eric: All you're doing is keeping up with the Jones's. All you're doing is keeping up. You're not doing anything new or different to help attract and retain talent. So I say, how about this? Why not take the collective spend that you're on for life insurance, disability, dental, vision, all the other bands, all of these, they're important, don't get me wrong, but why not take that money as a company and divided up over the co, over the employees and simply give them a per employee per month shopping spree, a visa vi, what's the technical term would be defined contribution. Why not give them an actual amount instead of just assuming that they want, need and value all the benefits you're giving them? Because the reality is if you're giving all the employees dental and vision and life and disability, just because everybody else is, how does that help you stand out?

Eric: How does that create value and loyalty to your employee base? Right? How is the employee, maybe the employee just doesn't care. Maybe they don't know or understand these benefits, but yet you're spending all this money on it. It's not doing anything. So rather, why not say, hey, we're going to give you 14 cents an hour, which by the way, if he didn't run the math, 14 cents an hour is \$25 a month, which is \$300 a year. Why not simply just give your employees the money, let them have a one-on-one educational session about dental, vision, life, disability, accident, critical illness, pet insurance, you name it, and let them truly become empowered to be that true consumer of healthcare. We're trying to make consumers, our true healthcare consumers here. Why not empower them to spend the money in the way they see fit that best suits their individual and or personal or family needs?

Eric: And what we find is from an attracting and retaining perspective, imagine your recruiting department being able to go out to the marketplace and say, yeah, we offer the greatest benefit package. In fact, we give you a shopping spree and you can pick what benefits best for you. And then anything over the shopping spree, we'll simply

payroll deduct for you or I, we don't have time for today, but we, it doesn't even have to be a payroll deduction. I always say on a side note, if you're an HR person and you hate dealing with payroll deduction, why are you even dealing with payroll deduction? You don't have to do payroll deduction in the year 20, 19 and further, there's technology out there that eliminates the need for payroll deduction, which is one of the biggest headaches for most HR departments and payroll departments. So I guess what I'm saying is start using your dollars that you're spending for employees in a more smart and wise way.

Eric: And it's incredible what it can do from a marketing perspective because let's face facts, right? We don't want to admit it, but you're marketing to your employees when you're recruiting them and you're marketing to them throughout the year to remind them how great it is to work here. So when you ask an employee, when's the last time they had, they worked at a company that offered them a shopping spree, you'll be very hard pressed to actually have an employee say, oh yeah, yeah, I'm used to that cause it's not normal. But I truly believe in the next 18 to 36 months it's going to be, it's going to become more than norm. In fact, as a, as a last thing here, I, I spoke at a big industry conference where I was sandwiched. I kid you not, I was on the general main stage in between.

Eric: I just followed the chief global officer for benefits for Facebook. And then I went on stage right after her and then right after me was the chief global benefits person for a Walmart all talking about different things. I don't want to lead your audience on to think that we collaborated on a big talk, but I shared the same stage with the same audience of HR professionals and sea sweep. And my talk was about shopping spree and innovating with the money that you're already spending. And it was pretty cool honor and, and I just, I can't stop talking about it. And more than half of our business last year and this year has come in by way of a shopping spree. A were employers are allowing their employees to become empowered and make decisions for the dollars that frankly the employer spending. Anyway.

Nate: Yeah, I, I love this. I'm a big proponent of a defined contribution approaches and a, a lot of the work that I did during my time at Tesla was around trying to create technology to be able to do just that, to make a choose your own adventure style employee benefits platform. And there are a million reasons that we, we don't have time to get into today around why I believe this is the future. But I'm, I'm 100% on board with what you're talking about. I love it.

Eric: We have had tremendous results with communicating to the masses via the, the technology that's our, at our fingertips. I mean, I have a five year old son who goes to a, a local chain, a haircut place, and every three weeks I get a, I get a text message that says, forget my son's name is Devin. Don't forget, I'm, it's to get Devon's haircut. Click here to schedule your his next haircut or click here to confirm. And I get that from my dentist and my doctor's office and I get that from my oil change who says, you know, hey, your, your car's ready. Come pick it up. So if all these different services that we rely on are communicating via text message why on earth are we not communicating open enrollment and claims and so forth through text message. And sadly, you would, you

would hope and think that big companies are, but I still, I mean, we just literally, literally yesterday finished a 40 hour or near 4,000 million group in Indiana that we were doing the enhanced benefits for.

Eric: And that's a big group. They have a big broker. And they had, they were blown away. They'd never had communication technology given to them, to to the masses. With respect to text messaging automated voicemail systems, auto schedulers, I mean all this stuff we provided value add. There's no cost for the employer. There's no cost for our broker partners. We Invest Heavily in technology at our firm and the employees rate, they raved about it like they were caught off guard in a good way and that they're used to getting a postcard in the mail or getting an email that gets buried in 500 other emails saying that it's open enrollment time. Instead they got a text message where they could literally enroll on their smart phone. They could watch videos on their smartphone. They could schedule one on one counselor driven educational sessions on their smart phone.

Eric: They could do facetime or I guess the, if that's not iPhone of what it would be like a, like a Skype, if you will zoom. They could do that on their smart phone. They could do they could they could watch they could, they could download PDFs right there. It was mobile friendly. It was smart tablet friendly. It was website friendly and again this stuff is not complicated if you have the right advisor, I'm showing you how to do it and there was no work for the employer group and now the employer group is hooked and they said they never want to go back to old fashioned communication methodology. So anyway, I'm glad to chat with anybody if they want more details. But the reality is ask your advisor and broker how they're communicating. Cause if it's still, we put up a poster in the break room over the time clock and it's, you know, we send out a mass email and we do a big dog and pony show in a big group meeting and anybody that wants it, they sign a paper. Oh my gosh, they are behind the eight ball. And you really ought to push them and challenge them to break through that, that status quo.

Nate: Yeah, I love it. And you know, it just speaks to the fact that what the modern workforce is really looking for is something that resembles the way they live their life. Yup. We've got Google and information and just all this stuff at our fingertips and employee benefits and HR needs to continue to accelerate. And I, I commend you for the work you're doing. It's amazing stuff, unnecessary stuff. So thank you for that. And also, thank you for joining me today, Eric. I really appreciate your time.

Eric: Absolutely. I appreciate you having me and asking me to come on and I look forward to to continue into fight the fight.