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SELLING SOLUTIONS FOR BROKERS



BROKER of the YEAR

FINALISTS



Derek Winn

PHOTOS BY ADAM EWING

DISTILLING THE ESSENCE OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

By Scott Wooldridge

Before he became a benefits consultant, Derek Winn worked as a history teacher. And that background gives him some perspective on our current troubled times. “Where we are today is reminiscent of where we were in 2008,” he says, referring to the financial meltdown that led the country to the brink of a new Great Depression. “We didn’t have any guidance for that; today is eerily similar.”

Cutting through chaos and helping people focus on what’s in front of them describes the job of both an advisor and a teacher.

“I tell our employees, stop being a salesperson and start being an educator,” Winn says. “If you’re doing your job and you’re educating, everything just sort of sells itself.”

Winn has been with Business Benefits Group (BBG) for nearly 10 years, and his background as a teacher was part of why the firm recruited him. “My journey has always been focused on education,” he says. “I started by educating clients but now I oversee the brokers and help teach them, as well.”

Winn says his approach to training brokers is to let them learn by doing. “I’m the safety net. I tell my team, ‘I’m going to sit here and watch you be uncomfortable and deal with a tough situation. You let me know when you need help, and I’ll step in, but if you’re not put in those situations, you’re not going to grow.’”

2020

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In addition, Winn has developed Distilled Concepts, a subsidiary of BBG that offers benefits consulting services. “Distilled Concepts is a totally different beast,” Winn says. The company prominently displays the slogan: “No cute ideas, only distilled concepts,” and guides employers in finding solutions using innovative-but-proven ideas such as self-funding and direct contracting.

“We saw a need for a strictly advisory and consulting side,” Winn says. “I see it as a natural evolution of where the industry is going. It’s a solution that works in unison to help round out and complement what we’re doing at BBG.”

Stacie Gilles, director of human resources at PIA Automation in Evansville, Indiana, says Winn helped her company find substantial cost savings through a new mail-order, international prescription drug service and by switching to a self-insured benefits model.

“We were seeing more than 20 percent increases annually, and we’re now under zero due to the work that Derek and his team have done,” Gilles says. “It is a true success story, taking us from 20-percent-a-year increases to saving money.”

Gilles says Winn’s clear explanations helped convince both the company’s leadership and its employees to make changes. “He was able to show us where we were and where we needed to go,” she says. “He never made promises about amazing changes; he let us know it would improve but it would take us a couple years. What he said would happen is exactly what happened. Following all the steps he laid out for us got us to exactly where we wanted to be.”

The change to prescription drugs was especially important for the employees, some of whom had expensive medical conditions. Gilles describes one worker who cried tears of relief after finding how much less their family would have to pay under the new system. “The member’s medication was so expensive,



“For me, the fun part is getting clients to take a journey they haven’t taken before.”

“Only a small percentage of companies have a chief HR officer,” he says. “HR departments report to the CEO, but they’re not in the board room. HR has become more of a function and less of a partner.”

“I can tell a lot about a business based on whether they have an HR person featured on their website,” Winn says. Whether a company values HR says something about how it interacts with employees, Winn adds. “If you’re a prospective hire for a business, the first person you talk to might be the CEO, but one of the first people you’re going to meet when you’re onboarded is the HR person. They’re going to give you the important information about your job; they’ll be the person you call with questions.”

“It’s easy to discount HR professionals, but it’s really the last thing any broker who wants long-term success should be doing.”

Winn asks clients to take a hard look at whether their employee benefits strategies are really working.

“For me, the fun part is getting clients to take a journey they haven’t taken before. I’m very clear with them early on. I ask, ‘Has what the industry delivered to you in the past provided lasting and positive results for you and your employees? Has anything you’ve done before actually worked?’ And most people will say no.

“‘Ok, so let’s try something different.’”

Winn adds that he thinks of it not so much as a leap of faith, but a more educated decision on how they provide benefits. “So many businesses have figured out how to cut benefits, but have never reduced their costs. We want to show them how to get improved benefits and cut their costs.”

the deductible was hitting all at once, so we were able to implement a program to take that burden off of that employee.”

She credits Winn with going above and beyond by talking individually to employees about how the plan would work for them. “He was hands-on; willing to help people individually, rather than just work with me behind the scenes,” she says. “I have worked with a lot of people over the years, and Derek is one of the best if not the best—he is knowledgeable and patient; he is a genuinely nice person.”

Winn also develops webinars on a range of topics, and notes that his firm is HRCI- and SHRM-accredited. In his opinion, HR departments have been undervalued in the business world.