

# Beyond the quote

How to identify a great insurance broker/agent **Interviewed by Elizabeth Grace Saunders**

**M**ore with less. Every day you look for ways to maximize productivity and minimize cost within your organization. When you're partnering with a great agent, he or she is working alongside you to maximize the value and minimize the administration of your benefits plans.

"What makes an agent great is not just delivering a quote to you," says Betty Goodman, an agent with Sapoznik Insurance. "The agent-client relationship has evolved into much more. An employee benefits agent should be a company's top ally in identifying ways to reduce expenditure and maximizing the health of your employee base. An agent should embrace your corporate philosophies and become an extension of your company."

*Smart Business* spoke with Goodman about how to identify a great agent who will add value to your business.

## What are some of the key attributes to look for in an insurance agent?

Look for an educator. You should choose an agent who can educate your employees on plan decisions and will truly take the time to provide valuable information to your employees. Your company needs to work with an agent who will be able to relay new rules for health savings accounts or provide insight as to which plan works best for a certain situation. Your agent should be able to guide employees on plan decisions, such as explaining why it is important to sign up for a certain line of coverage. And your agent should educate employees on correct usage of the plans, such as the use of urgent care facilities.

Also, seek out an advocate. Make sure your agent is an independent agent who is not affiliated with any of your carriers. Working with an exclusive agent can lead to conflict-of-interest issues and disadvantages. Your company should look for an independent broker/agent who can objectively evaluate the different insurance and plan designs and help you decide on one that will best fit your needs. Remember,



**Betty Goodman**  
Agent  
Sapoznik Insurance

don't just look for a broker — search for an unbiased adviser.

## Why is it important to choose an agent who will partner with your HR department?

In today's marketplace, your agent must become much more than a rate negotiator. An agent should be able to educate, give advice and solve problems so that your HR department can concentrate on its core duties. The scope of HR departments includes hiring, training, disciplining and many other responsibilities. The additional pressures of open enrollment periods coupled with the long and arduous negotiation process can bring an HR department's productivity to a halt.

Decision-makers must look for an agent who has the desire and the ability to take on the day-to-day activities of administering employee benefits for the company. Look for an agent who will take charge and handle that difficult claim issue on behalf of your employee. Remember that your agent must be willing to function as an extension of your HR department in order to make it run more efficiently and to help employees maximize the benefits from their insurance.

## What impact does your broker have in terms of the negotiation process?

Traditionally, a broker simply supplies you with a quote for a given line of coverage, such as health, life or disability insurance. If the broker only works with a single insurance company, you will need to contact many different brokers to find the best option. But if you partner with independent brokers, they can use their reputation and negotiating ability to obtain quotes from multiple carriers. This can greatly simplify the insurance decision-making process.

Also, strong brokers and agents can negotiate rates on your behalf that can result in huge savings over the course of the year.

Another point to keep in mind is the agent's ability to renegotiate favorable contracts, particularly during renewal times. Companies that achieve reduced rates during their first year often can be jarred by high increases in rates in the following year. Your agent plays a key role during these renewal periods. Your agent should act as your strongest ally during this intricate negotiating process.

## How can businesses determine if an agent is a good fit?

A good indication of whether an agent is a good fit is to evaluate the work performed before and during your company's open enrollment period. It's essential to remember that a great agent's work begins after open enrollment. Use this time as your barometer to track their performance. The agent must work to ensure that there are no errors on the applications, that ID cards and policies match up and that dependents' Social Security numbers are included.

A good insurance agent should have the infrastructure to support all of these important activities for you throughout the year, so your staff members can focus on your core business and do more with less.

**BETTY GOODMAN** is an agent with Sapoznik Insurance. Reach her at (877) 948-8887 or [bettyg@sapoznik.com](mailto:bettyg@sapoznik.com).

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