



## From semi pro-athlete to benefit adviser

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Published June 19 2017, 4:44pm EDT

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Eugene Mintze took a unique path to his current status as an employee benefits broker.

Born and raised in Miami, Mintze played football at Youngstown State University in Ohio on a scholarship, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in communications and a minor in marketing. He then became a semi-professional athlete, playing football with the Arena Football League.

Upon his return to Miami, **Mintze** taught at his former high school, Nova High School in Davie, where he also coached the men's step team. From 2010 to 2014, he owned a loan modification business, which started with four employees that ultimately grew to 17, to help individuals who were losing their homes. He then joined North Miami-based benefits agency Sapoznik Insurance and decided to focus on serving municipalities.

Being a football player prepared the 36-year old for a career in benefits because sports is about being a competitor, and group benefits, he says, is one of the most competitive fields he has ever been in.



**Eugene Mintze**

"You have to have lessons learned, prepare yourself at all times and just understand it is not going to come easy. It is not going to always go your way, but you can come back strong," he says.

Although his path to a broker was a unique one, Mintze was recently named as a finalist for South Florida Business & Wealth's **2017 Up & Comer Awards** in the insurance category. The Up & Comer Awards honor young professionals under the age of 40 who have achieved excellence in their careers, shown a commitment to their community and demonstrated leadership. More than 250 nomination applications were submitted in 17 categories and 86 have been selected as finalists. Winners will be announced at the June 22 awards ceremony that will be held in Fort Lauderdale.

To understand more about what drove a former semi-professional athlete into benefits, *EBA* spoke with Mintze. What follows is an edited version of the conversation.

**EBA: You've had an interesting career path. What makes you want to be innovative in employee benefits?**

**Mintze:** For me, after sports were done, one of the hardest things to do was to figure out what I wanted to do next. What is going to give you that thrill of sports again, especially once you step into the corporate arena? I began teaching and then I started a small business.

In 2007, I got my 215 insurance license and I was doing individual insurance, which I did for a few years before started my loan modification business. Once I dissolved that in 2014, I came to Sapoznik.

I had the knowledge to do insurance but I never did municipalities and the group side. Being innovative in this industry is what I've learned here at Sapoznik and how they look at things. It is the education they bring to their employees: it is looking at wellness, understanding where the world is going in terms of millennials and understanding that everything is technology-based.

**EBA: Where does your passion for this business come from?**

**Mintze:** I am from Miami. Knowing the communities, knowing the people and what they need around this area is big for me. I give back to the community. I volunteer at foster care camps and things of that nature. I know what is to grow up in some of the not so popular sections of Miami.

Dealing with municipalities, it gives you a lot of insight into what the government is delivering to the community. It's a cool thing to do. I broker the benefits, you can look at it as I just broker the benefits, but you give back. You donate funds, you donate time, you donate to a book drive, you adopt a school, and so on. Being from this community, that's big for me.

**EBA: What is your competitive advantage?**

**Mintze:** It comes from Sapoznik CEO's Rachel Sapoznik and her outlook on the future. We have different departments to help out the agent, such as a marketing department and a

separate wellness department. Those things are put in place to help service the agent so we can service our client a lot better.

You have some companies in the market where the broker has to take on a lot. That's alright but it makes it hard to give proper service to the client. With the backup we have here as brokers, it makes our jobs a lot easier. By making our jobs easier, it allows us to be there for our clients in the way we are supposed to be.

**EBA: Why do you focus on the public sector?**

**Mintze:** What I noticed in this business is every agent tries to find a niche, a market they are comfortable in. When I first came here, I had relationships with individuals in municipalities and the public sector. In sales, you work leads. You work an opportunity and that is how I grew into it.

Once you get into that, you figure it out. We are consultants but you are selling your service and every sale is different. It is finding your niche and understanding what they are looking for. It makes that conversation just that much easier. You know what ammunition you need to go in and you learn the ropes from there.

**EBA: Where are you going next?**

**Mintze:** My future plans here at Sapoznik are to keep growing. We are a growing firm and we had one of our biggest years in the history of the company last year. The plan is to grow with the company, bring on new agents, mentor them, build a team and see where it goes.

[The CEO] Rachel is doing a really good job of growing the brand. We are all over the place here in South Florida and we are also a national company. Things are going very well here. I am very happy with the company. I've been in insurance for a while and I know what's out there in the market.