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Careers

Lindsay Jones helps businesses navigate benefits, outsourced HR services

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Feb 8, 2018, 7:13pm EST

Lindsay Jones was in college when she discovered that she liked doing “people stuff.” So she made a career out of it.

Fifteen years later, Jones is a benefits manager and customer on-boarding manager at Employer Services Corp. in Amherst.

The professional employer organization has a 50-person workforce and provides outsourced payroll, benefits and HR services and compliance-related assistance to small and mid-sized businesses.

Jones was hired in 2005, two years after she graduated from SUNY Geneseo and the same year she earned an MBA at the University at Buffalo.

She manages a team of six benefits consultants who help clients offer affordable benefits packages to employees, and she oversees the process of bringing new clients into the ESC fold.



PHOTOGRAPHER: JIM COURTNEY

Lindsay Jones is benefits manager and customer onboarding manager at Employer Services Corp. in Amherst. She said clients are getting more creative with the types of benefits they provide to employees. “Maybe they can’t give more toward the health insurance premium, but they can offer flexible benefits like work from home or more paid time off,” Jones said. “It has to be something that will appeal to their workforce that helps satisfy the need for benefits, but doesn’t cost as much as it would to beef up their portion of health insurance.”

What exactly is a benefits manager? I oversee a team of six: an assistant manager and five benefits consultants. We basically follow the life cycle of an employee. We handle all new-hire orientations, paperwork and benefits sign-ups to get them enrolled. From there we process all of that with the various carriers – medical, dental, life insurance, 401(k)s – and then the benefits consultants act as day-to-day resources. Our customers can call at any time of day and speak to us. “What is the cost of this plan?” or “Hey, I’m getting married” or “I just had a baby.” Whatever the issue is, we will answer questions. And when they terminate employment, we process all of that, too; we’re kind of a one-stop shop. I also head up a lot of negotiations, so I deal with brokers and insurance carriers on behalf of the clients to finalize rates and communicate that to clients.

Describe your clients. We have approximately 200 located primarily in Western New York, but we do work in 28 states across the country. We don’t focus on any one industry, though we do have quite a few in the medical field — dentists, pediatricians, medical practices. And we have lots of manufacturing clients, lots of blue-collar employers such as pool installers and pallet makers. It really runs the gamut.

What types of benefits do most employers want to offer? The No. 1 thing they want to know about is medical insurance. That’s the top benefit. “What’s it going to cost me and what’s it going to cost my employees?” Then it’s dental and vision insurance, flexible spending accounts and life and disability insurance. Retirement is a big thing, so a lot of clients who come in may offer a plan, but there have been a lot of changes regarding transparency and fees. So there’s more focus on what it’s costing employees to be in the plan. We want to make sure it’s affordable.

Any unusual benefits that clients want these days? What’s lesser known but starting to grow in popularity would be legal services and identity theft. We have those available. We don’t have a lot of clients asking about them but certainly more than we had a year ago. Especially with the movement downtown and people taking more mass transit, they’re also asking about parking and transportation benefits. That’s starting to pop up more and more, especially in the city of Buffalo.

What about the other half of your title: customer on-boarding manager? I’ve been doing that since 2009. What it means is that whenever a client decides to join ESC, I’m responsible for that. It includes the initial meeting with the client. “Tell me

everything you do today so that I can transfer you over with minimum disruption.” And a large part of that is analyzing the whole package.

How often do you bring on new clients? We have a huge push at year-end. I basically don't sleep at the end of the year because Jan. 1 is a nice, clean time for clients to join. We spend lots of time getting clients ready to roll for that first paycheck of the year. We brought on 15 to 18 new clients this time and we brought on 800 new employees, so we had 800 bodies that needed W-2s and paychecks.

Are more companies moving toward this model of outsourcing payroll, HR and benefits functions? I think the trend toward using a service such as a PEO or a bundled model for payroll, HR and benefits is definitely growing. You can hire a company like ours with 50 experts for the cost of one in-house HR person or administrator-type person. These business (owners) just want to run their businesses. Who gets into business to deal with payroll problems or health insurance?

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