



Maximize Your ROI through Benefit Integration

An interview with **Gene Raymondi**, founder and CEO of eni.

Benefit integration is a hot new trend emerging in the world of human resources. Although still flying under the radar, employers are slowly beginning to realize the great return on investment that can be achieved when all of their employee benefits are working together. Benefit integration is the coordination of any combination of employee benefits that were previously separate from one another, in a way that they are monitored, managed, and processed in cooperation with each other.

Why do you believe integration is the wave of future in regards to benefit offerings?

Benefit integration is proven to lead to higher employee engagement which is critical to a successful benefit package.

Today, employers tend to offer a multitude of separate benefits. It's not uncommon for an employer to have an offering of over 10 independent employee benefit packages. The problem is that engagement tends to be low for all the ancillary benefits. Employees may not know how to access them or even that they exist, due to the complex nature of having a separate process for using each benefit. In contrast, when all employee benefits are integrated, engagement rates tend to double and even triple. Once benefits are integrated, they can be promoted as one comprehensive program, with one easy to use process to access them. When employee engagement is high, employers



start to see their desired return on investment in the form of lower health care costs, increased administrative efficiency, improved morale and increased productivity.

Why is high employee engagement so important?

When employees are highly engaged with their benefits, employers experience a much higher return on investment (ROI). High engagement means that employees are being adequately supported by their benefits, which often results in employees utilizing fewer healthcare dollars, taking fewer sick days, being more productive while at work, and enjoying a much higher level of job satisfaction.

You may be thinking that benefit integration is great in concept, but does it really increase employee engagement by any significant amount? Let's take a look at a real life case study that successfully illustrates this concept. Recently, a large company with over 12,000 employees and more than 100 locations integrated their existing medical benefits and employee assistance program/work life service (EAP) with a new wellness initiative. After the wellness program was integrated with the EAP/work life service and incentivized with health care, employee engagement levels for the EAP/work life and wellness program skyrocketed.

Gene Raymondi

Gene Raymondi is the founder and CEO of eni. Over the past 28 years, Mr. Raymondi has earned his reputation as an innovative leader and active pioneer in behavioral health delivery systems. He continues to create dynamic EAP, wellness, and work/life solutions that maximize employee engagement, wellbeing, and productivity within large organizations across the nation.

Gene's undergraduate training in criminal justice and psychology, as well as his experience as a counselor, originally led him to the EAP field. He has received graduate training at Binghamton and Cornell Universities. Active in EAPA and SHRM, Mr. Raymondi has been instrumental in advocating continuous quality improvement for all managed behavioral health organizations. Additionally, he is widely recognized for his creative vision, developing solutions which integrate traditional EAP, Work/Life and Wellness solutions with sophistication and depth. Mr. Raymondi is a national expert in the field of behavioral healthcare and benefits integration and has contributed to many related conferences, associations and publications.



THE CONNEX CHRONICLE

What specific outcomes result from employees being highly engaged in their wellness plans?

There are many statistics that highlight the importance of a healthy workforce. According to the Worker Health and Productivity Report Presented by Corporate Wellness Advisor, healthy workers are 3.1 times more productive than their unhealthy counterparts. In addition, industry research suggests that companies may save, on average, \$3.48 in medical costs and \$5.82 in absenteeism for every dollar spent on workplace health/wellness promotional programs. These exceptional results can only be accomplished if your employees are actively engaged in your wellness program, simply offering a program is not enough.

Prior to integration the company had an existing wellness program, EAP service, and medical benefits. At that time all of these programs existed separately, in silos, and engagement was average to low. The decision was made to integrate all of these services. A robust promotional campaign was conducted portraying all of the services as pieces of a complete employee benefit program designed to address all aspects of employees' physical, behavioral, financial, and environmental health. By providing a comprehensive benefits package, the employer proved that they cared about more than just saving money. In fact, after integration employees reported feeling truly appreciated and that the integrated benefit offering was extremely valuable as it helped them to make positive life changes.

Once integration was accomplished, engagement rose dramatically. The wellness program experienced unprecedented levels of utilization, as 87% of employees reported engagement (the national average is 41% for highly incentivized programs) EAP/work life utilization increased from 7.68% to 38%. This was accomplished by cross referrals between services and the exceptional continuity of care that was supplied by various departments within the vendor company. For example, a wellness coach may pick up on an underlying psychological barrier preventing a person from achieving their fitness goals. The coach is able to continue working with the client on fitness goals, while also warm transferring them to a clinical staff member within the Employee Assistance Program who can conduct an intake and provide a referral to the needed counseling.

With such high engagement, a significant return on investment was achieved. Measurable decreases in stress, obesity and cholesterol levels as well as increases in healthy diet and exercise were recorded. The company reported a shift in corporate culture, with a more engaged and productive workforce consisting of happier, healthier employees.

What is your view on how benefit integration will work on a broader level?

I believe that benefit integration will begin with examining each benefit that is offered and looking for opportunities to develop specific processes that will drive operational flow between all of the benefits. This will help ensure that employees understand their total compensation package and how their benefits can work together to meet their specific needs.

Offering a strong total compensation package attracts top talent while maintaining high employee morale and productivity. However, when your employees do not understand, know how to access, or even realize that certain benefits are available to them, your compensation package could end up being a waste of money. By integrating your benefits and marketing them as 1 robust offering, employees become aware of the great compensation package that is available to them and are therefore more likely to utilize all of their benefits. Engaged employees are happier, healthier, more productive employees who yield better results and promote an enjoyable and dynamic corporate culture.

Do you believe that the concept of benefit integration will change the industry?

Yes, I feel that benefit integration will revolutionize the way benefits are presented, offered, and connected. It will result in an entirely new platform for delivering benefits to employees that will simplify the administration of the benefits for both the employee and the employer.

Gene Raymondi will be conducting meetings at the Employee Benefits and Human Resources Sector Meeting, taking place August 28-30 in Chicago.