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## Effective Benefit Plan Communication

How employers communicate benefits information to employees has a tremendous impact on how well employees understand, utilize and perceive the programs. Managers and supervisors are usually in the best position to share important benefits information with employees. As an employee's primary point of contact, managers and supervisors also tend to be more approachable with questions. Opportunities to ask questions, express dissatisfaction and discuss problems regarding benefits information with supervisors and managers should be encouraged.

However, communicating inaccurate information to employees is always a major concern when using managers and supervisors to relay benefits information. Keep in mind that misinformation causes an employee relations problem and has the possibility of leading to litigation as well. Consider these tips to avoid miscommunication:

- Provide managers and supervisors with specialized training to discuss benefits information.
- Remind those who may be asked questions regarding benefits, such as supervisors and managers, to review their plan documents carefully and refer questions to the HR department.
- Whether formal or informal, do not make promises regarding any aspect of the benefits plan the company will not be able to keep.
- State in the plan documents that plan amendments are to be made only in writing and approved by the corporate representative or plan administrator, if applicable.

Keep in mind that even if written material about benefits information is not an official plan document, informal written promises can still prevail in court. Therefore, make sure even informal written communications about the plan is consistent with the official documents before distribution.

## Wearable Technology and the Workforce

According to Pew Research Center data, nearly 1 in 5 Americans (21%) regularly wear a smartwatch or fitness tracker. In fact, wearable technology—any device that's kept on someone's person, connects to the internet and logs activity—has grown so commonplace that employers are leveraging it among their workforces. Essentially, employers are looking into how they might be able to track worker productivity, identify potential efficiencies and otherwise take advantage of this burgeoning technology.

Wearable technology has been particularly prevalent among manufacturing and warehousing employers. Through technology, some employers monitor how employees physically move as a way to identify and prevent ergonomic issues. Others use devices to help employees track their work schedules, communicate with co-workers and find products located in a store or warehouse. Lastly, wearable technology has also seen adoption in workplace wellness plans. Some employers provide fitness trackers to employees to incentivize healthier habits.

Wearable technology presents an exciting opportunity for workplaces. Individual employers will need to examine available wearable technology and choose solutions that will be most impactful to their organizations.