



VIEWS&VISIONS

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Change for the Better

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The Health Plan

A West Virginia native, Jim Pennington has over 35 years of experience in the health insurance industry. He received his bachelor of science in journalism and a master's degree in safety management from West Virginia University. Jim's career in the health insurance industry began at McDonough Caperton Insurance Group. He became president and CEO of its Benefits Services Division, which evolved into Acordia National and ultimately Wells Fargo TPA. He previously held the role of president and CEO with USI Administrators, ppoNEXT and HealthSmart.

Jim's knowledge and experience of the West Virginia and Ohio marketplace is instrumental in growing The Health Plan throughout the region. His experience on a national basis will also provide the opportunity for The Health Plan to expand nationally. Jim believes The Health Plan has a solid foundation and position within the region to build a quality oriented and growth-focused company.

In May of 1980, I was offered what I felt was a career opportunity of a lifetime in Charleston, West Virginia when asked to join McDonough Caperton Insurance Group. After five years working in state government, the move to the private sector was the change I needed, both professionally and personally. Looking back on the past 35 years, I have to say that embracing change – building the belief in positive change – has served me well in my career. CHANGE has always presented opportunities for the company and the people who work in the company.

Throughout my career in managed care or with healthcare administration companies, my mantra has been to "re-invent" a company every four years or get left behind. That philosophy has held true since my arrival at The Health Plan in July of 2014.

As an organization, The Health Plan was unknown across most of our service area and had a marketing and distribution strategy that was ancient compared to our competitors.

Change was afoot on July 1, 2014 at The Health Plan, and it was going to happen at a speed the staff was completely unaccustomed to. Surprisingly, the first few months held a certain level of excitement and energy from the employees that was refreshing.

We Attacked All Fronts

First, we retooled the vision and mission statement and built energy and accountability into our vision of the future. We created Core Values to set our focus on our customers, employees, partners and the community. Secondly, we rebranded the company. This was a significant change the company had not seen in over 25 years. The current brand limited the



company geographically and had little energy. The same commercials and jingles had been used for over 25 years. A marketing plan was non-existent. We immediately launched a marketing strategy to create a buzz around our updated name and image. We also reinforced the new look in all of our product-specific print pieces. Most importantly, we developed a plan to review and redirect our marketing on a regular basis, utilizing a Charleston, West Virginia-based marketing firm to assist us with our local, regional and national platform messages. For the company to achieve a prominent position in the ever-changing market of healthcare, it needed CHANGE.

Building and Enhancing a Team

In addition to rebranding and developing a marketing plan for every product line and specific geographic region, a very significant change occurred in how we looked at our employees. Evaluating and measuring employees on accountability and performance is important for a company to consider to stay viable. The CEO can create the vision, but TRUE CHANGE occurs through the team that is created inside the company. The #1 opportunity for success or failure in implementing change inside an organization is how you roll it out and how it is accepted. I was lucky at The Health Plan. The existing team had solid work ethics, energy, desire and an appetite for wanting to be different. The atmosphere to promote and reward behavior was absent, but this changed quickly.



Architectural rendering of The Health Plan's new corporate headquarters in Wheeling, West Virginia

We implemented a top grading program and looked at every member of our staff. We profiled their strengths, opportunities for improvement, attitude and desire to add value and grow personally while giving strength and commitment to the company. Since beginning this program, we have quickly achieved goals that our Board of Directors and staff thought not possible.

Branching Out

We expanded our reach geographically, from five counties to all 55 counties in West Virginia, from 27 counties to 37 counties in Ohio and from regional to national exposure in both market and product development.

- We increased our revenue by 60 percent in three years.
- We increased the size of our staff from 340 employees in 2014 to 565 to date.
- In three years, our membership grew from 358,441 to 407,702.

Our clients now come from throughout the country, and we have offices across West Virginia in Wheeling, Charleston and Morgantown and in Ohio, with regional staff in North Carolina, South Carolina, Minnesota, Colorado and Illinois.

The Next Big Step

By the end of this year, over 350 employees will be moving in to our new corporate headquarters in Wheeling, West Virginia. I'm thrilled to bring the company that started in West Virginia back home – and to be doing it in a way that will really impact the landscape of Wheeling and, hopefully, West Virginia. The Health Plan's

new 53,000-square foot structure will be the first new building erected in Wheeling in over 30 years.

We have changed! But our Core Values remain steadfast. These guide our direction, our decisions and the way we go about running our business and hopefully our lives.

Change is challenging. Difficult for many, if not for most, and impossible for some. But without change, personally, professionally and as a company, it is very difficult to stay alive, vibrant and significant in today's market. What I have tried to do personally at The Health Plan is to build CHANGE into our DNA. Our four-year clock of re-inventing ourselves never stops. We look for opportunities to change and improve our employees, our team, our partners, our clients, all aspects of our business, EVERYDAY. Our market changes, our opportunities differ daily and our potential for the future presents itself at a pace that requires us to change to survive.

We like CHANGE. We embrace it. It is our friend and it fits us well. ▶

