

## Beyond Health Care Insurance: What do we *really* want?

By Christine Gust, MBA

Doctor of Naturopathy

As a specialist and teacher in work/life health and balance, I often hear from people who are unhappy, sick, or burned out at work. When I ask why they stay in their job, *one of the things they say is*, “I can't quit. I need the benefits.” I don't doubt that they do because the fast pace, volume of work, and increasing pressure to do more with less in many organizations can take a toll on employees' health, physically and mentally. Confidentially, many employees admit they are struggling with anxiety, depression, eating disorders, insomnia, mood swings, poor concentration, and more. This aligns with company reports: the most commonly prescribed prescriptions are for: depression, anxiety, insomnia, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and related conditions.

If you aren't facing any of these health concerns, you're one of the lucky ones. Just for a moment, imagine what could happen if you could trust that you'd have some form of affordable health care coverage, regardless of your work situation. Here are a few of the possibilities I see:

- You'd be more able to assess the job itself to determine if it's a good fit for you, rather than settling for a less than ideal situation or feeling stuck but thinking, “At least I've got medical coverage.”
- You'd have more opportunities and freedom to create a work schedule that met the needs of you and your family. Instead of automatically working full time to be eligible for benefits coverage, you could consider working part-time, temporary, contract, or seasonal jobs.
- You could do a variety of things based on your interests and skills and where you see a need in the community. This creates multiple streams of income so you're not so dependent on one source of income.
- I also believe if you had more freedom to pursue work that inspired you, you'd be healthier physically, mentally, and emotionally.

How might this affect businesses?

If companies didn't use medical benefits as the bait or handcuffs to attract and keep employees, they may find themselves thinking more deeply about the work environment and satisfaction they offer. In turn, this could very well attract employees who are really interested in the work itself, not just those who are staying because they need health care coverage. This could also make it easier for small businesses that can't compete on benefits to hire good people and for the hours that are needed, rather than taking on the cost of a full-time employee.

And, by taking medical coverage off the table, managers would have more freedom to work with employees on part-time, temporary, and other flexible schedules without negatively impacting them or their families.

Is there a bigger question here?

Understandably, there are concerns about the potential cost, how the system is administered, and how this will impact each of us. However, instead of staying with a system that isn't working, jumping into a new system that we assume will fix the problems, or balking at change because of fear, let's focus on what we *really* want.

As Robert Fritz writes in his book The Path of Least Resistance, “If you ask the “how” question before the “what” question, all you can ever hope to create are variations of what you already have. You have to have a vision of where you're headed, even if you don't know if it's possible.”

Typically, I see my clients get too focused on the “how” or strategies and don't take the time to think about the end results they really want. Or, they don't know what they want, they don't think they can have what they want, they think

they're being selfish if they focus on what they want, or they don't realize they have what they want.

Ensuring everyone had access to health care coverage is one option of *how* to get “there”. But where is “there”? If everyone had health care coverage, what are we hoping that will get us? As a Doctor of Naturopathy who has participated in much dialogue about this topic, I think our hope is that people will be healthy, (an assumption which isn't necessarily true). And, if people were healthy, where do we hope that would lead? Do we hope we'd all pay less in taxes, save money, have more security, or gain something else like happiness, peace, or a deeper sense of community?

I got clear on what I really want, as a professional focused on healthy, productive, and satisfying work for all, after attending an [“Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream”](#) Symposium last year. The mission of the Symposium is bold: to bring forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on the Earth. (Note that environmental sustainability includes the health and well-being of people, as well as plants, animals, and all of life.) Wouldn't this be the ultimate in health— physically, emotionally, and spiritually? That's what I want.

How about you? What are the end results you really want?

#### How do we get there?

For any one of us individually and as a country, once we are clear on the end results we really want, we can focus on how to get there, and the possibilities and options about how to achieve that become broader. The dialogue isn't just about health care coverage then. It's also about the food we eat, the physical environment we live in, how we work, how we spend our time, energy, and money, how we treat each other, expanding what “health care” really means, and more.

For myself, I learned that it had to begin with some soul-searching within me to consider whether my actions are moving me towards our common goal. Am I eating a diet of natural, healthy foods? How well am I taking care of myself? Does the work I do contribute to making the world a better place? Am I using Earth's resources wisely?

There's a lot each of us can do on our own. Now.

And, on a bigger scale, how can we encourage and support our politicians in focusing on the end results for the common good and explore these broader options, rather than fighting against the opposite party to “win” or being lobbied and influenced by powerful corporations invested in the status quo?

So, before we get so focused on a particular strategy, let's step back and dream big about what we *really* want. As author and speaker Lynne Twist says in the Symposium, *“If we work together, we will come up with exactly what we need to know, exactly what we need to do to create a sustainable future for all life. Together, we are a genius.”*