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In this series, PLC Advisory Board members talk about their current work and key legal developments in their practice area.

Education: 2000: LL.M., with distinction, in Taxation with Employee Benefits certificate, Georgetown University Law Center; 1995: J.D., SUNY Buffalo Law School; 1990: B.S., *cum laude*, Alfred University.

Career in Brief: 2001–present: Groom Law Group, Chartered (2006–present: Principal; 2001–2006: Associate); 1995–2001: Internal Revenue Service, Office of Chief Counsel (Tax-Exempt and Government Entities Division), Attorney (initially in the qualified plans litigation branch and later in the health and welfare branch).

What do you think is currently the biggest challenge facing Employee Benefits & Executive Compensation lawyers? The area of employee benefits is constantly evolving, through changes in federal and state legislation, and regulatory and enforcement initiatives at the federal and state agency level. To add value, an employee benefits and executive compensation lawyer not only needs to have a solid grasp of current law, but also needs to understand the direction in which Congress, the agencies or the states are likely to move. Sharing that information with a client is important because it not only helps with strategic planning, but also gives the client an opportunity to help shape the law or agency interpretation. This is both the biggest challenge of the job and the aspect that is the most interesting.

Are there any changes on the horizon that you think will significantly affect Employee Benefits & Executive Compensation practice? One trend in employee benefits is for individuals to be responsible for saving for retirement on their own, and making their own decisions on investments and regarding how their health care dollars are

spent. I think this trend is likely to continue, particularly as employers balance the need to compensate employees with the need to control costs. For example, the evolution of “consumer directed health care,” involving the use of Health Reimbursement Arrangements, Health Savings Accounts and Flexible Spending Arrangements seems likely to continue. It is not yet clear how far Congress and the agencies will be willing to go to facilitate this trend.

Have any recent legal or market developments had a significant impact on your practice? Yes, recent health care reform legislation, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, has had a significant impact on my practice. This legislation is historic, in that it made many sweeping and fundamental changes to the way health coverage is provided in the U.S. It not only affects all health plans, insurers and administrators, but also all Americans. In response, the manner in which employers and insurers choose to make health benefits available to individuals will continue to evolve for many years to come.

What do you like best about your job? Employee benefits is a critical aspect of business and affects so many individuals that being able to work in this area is both challenging and rewarding. I particularly enjoy being able to build relationships with people throughout the country who I would not otherwise have met or been able to help in ways that I can now. It is also terrific to be part of a team of talented individuals at Groom who are up to speed on all of the most cutting-edge employee benefits issues.

Why did you decide to be a part of the PLC Employee Benefits & Executive Compensation Advisory Board? It was a wonderful opportunity to be involved with a company that produces

information about relevant and important topics in an interesting format.

If not a lawyer, what would you be?

I like to write fiction. I have been working on getting a Master of Arts in Fiction at Johns Hopkins. I would live near the water and write novels about life (with a little employee benefits worked in).

What one piece of advice would you give to a junior attorney considering specializing in Employee Benefits & Executive Compensation? Decide on a couple of areas within employee benefits to concentrate in and learn everything you can about those areas. Then build your knowledge from there.

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