30 years of Employco

On April 16th, Employco marked a milestone that few companies reach: 30 years in business. What began in 1996 as a small, family-run startup in Chicago has grown into one of the country's leading HR outsourcing firms—serving businesses nationwide while staying true to the same philosophy it started with.

In the early days, the goal was straightforward. Bob Wilson and his sons, Rob and Scott, saw how overwhelmed business owners were by administrative tasks like payroll, workers' compensation, and HR compliance. These weren't just minor inconveniences—they were constant distractions pulling focus away from growth. With just $5,000 in sales in the first year, Employco set out to take that burden off their shoulders.

What made the company different wasn't just what it offered, but how it approached the work. From the start, the Wilson family built the business around listening—really listening—to what clients struggled with most, and then building solutions around those realities. That meant stepping into areas others avoided, including complex union fringe reporting, and finding ways to simplify processes that had long been considered frustrating but unavoidable.

That mindset led to an unexpected turning point. In 1998, Employco took on payroll and workers' compensation responsibilities for a major tradeshow, opening the door to an industry filled with logistical challenges. Multi-state operations, shifting tax rules, union requirements, and tight deadlines created a level of complexity many providers weren't equipped to handle. Employco leaned in instead of pulling back.

Rather than forcing clients into rigid systems, the company adapted to how they actually worked. Whether information came through email, fax, or even a quick photo of a timesheet, the goal was simple: make it work. That flexibility turned Employco into more than a vendor—it became a true partner, embedded in the day-to-day operations of its clients.

Over the years, that partnership was tested more than once. Like any company with a long history, Employco has had to navigate major disruptions—from the aftermath of 9/11 to the 2009 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each moment brought its own challenges, but also shaped the company's resilience.

The recession in 2009 was a particularly important lesson. With a large portion of the business tied to tradeshows, the downturn exposed the risks of being too concentrated in one sector. In response, Employco expanded into industries like hospitality and janitorial services, building a more balanced foundation that continues to support its growth today.

Then came 2020. As the pandemic unfolded, clients faced immediate and unprecedented uncertainty. Within just 45 days, thousands of employees across client companies were laid off. During that time, Employco focused on what it had always prioritized—supporting its clients. The team provided real-time guidance on programs like the Paycheck Protection Program, along with hands-on HR support when it was needed most. Even amid that uncertainty, the company made the decision not to lay off its own staff, reinforcing its commitment to stability and service.

That approach didn't just help clients survive—it strengthened the relationships that have always been at the core of the business. By 2021, Employco had rebounded with record growth, a reflection of the trust it had built over decades.

Today, the company operates in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, delivering comprehensive HR and insurance solutions to thousands of businesses. Through its scale and collective buying power, Employco helps clients achieve meaningful savings on workers' compensation and employee benefits—something that has become increasingly valuable as costs and regulations continue to evolve.

Growth, however, hasn't come at the expense of culture. As the company expanded, leadership made a conscious effort to invest in training, structure, and consistency—ensuring that the level of service clients experienced in the early years could be maintained at a national scale. At the same time, the business has remained rooted in its identity as a family company.

That legacy is now being carried into a third generation. With Griffen Wilson joining the business full-time in 2019, Employco continues to blend its deep history with a forward-looking perspective. Having grown up around the industry, he brings both familiarity and fresh energy to the company's next chapter.

Reaching 30 years is as much about people as it is about performance. Employco's leadership is quick to point to the team behind the scenes—the individuals whose dedication and commitment to service have made this journey possible. And just as importantly, the clients who have trusted the company along the way.

Looking back, the numbers tell one story—from $5,000 in sales in first year to more than $550 million today. But the real story is in how that growth happened: by staying close to clients, solving real problems, and never losing sight of the human side of business.

That philosophy hasn't changed in three decades. If anything, it has become more relevant. In a world that increasingly leans toward automation and distance, Employco continues to build its success on relationships, adaptability, and a genuine understanding of what businesses need to operate smoothly.

There's a sense of pride in what's been built—but even more excitement about what's ahead.