



From MIT to ICHRA

[Episode 51 Show Notes](#)

This week's guest, Chris Ellis, is the kind of leader who doesn't just disrupt industries—he rebuilds them from the inside out. A former cancer researcher at MIT, Chris pivoted from the lab to launch Thatch, a company on a mission to fix the way we pay for health care in America.

At Thatch, Chris and his team are empowering brokers with smarter tools to make individual health coverage not only accessible, but actually *workable*—especially through ICHRA. With co-host Ben Markland keeping the conversation sharp, grounded, and real, this episode digs deep into leadership, innovation, and building solutions that stick.

[From Cancer Research to Health Tech Disruptor](#)

Chris didn't leave healthcare; he just changed his approach. He opens up about leaving MIT's cancer labs to dive into tech startups, chasing a bigger way to solve the same problem: helping people get care that saves lives. That path led him into the economics of health insurance—and eventually to found Thatch.

You don't have to stay in one lane to stay true to your mission. Chris's story is a reminder that innovation often begins with discomfort and pivots.

[Cracking the ICHRA Code for Brokers](#)

ICHRA (Individual Coverage HRA) is complex, but it doesn't have to be chaos. Chris breaks down how Thatch acts like an "escrow general agent," taking over the administrative burden so brokers can stay focused on strategy, relationships, and results.

Brokers don't need more software; they need real solutions. Thatch makes ICHRA a viable, scalable option by handling enrollments, payments, reconciliation, and plan setup behind the scenes. Less busywork, more opportunity.

Build for the Problem, Not the Pitch

Chris and his team built Thatch by using it first themselves. Their developers became test pilots—giving raw feedback, breaking the product, and helping shape a better user experience. The result? A platform that takes 60 confusing insurance options and reduces them to 2–3 personalized picks that actually make sense.

A clean user experience is nice, but clarity wins every time. Thatch's recommendation engine helps employees choose coverage confidently, not blindly.

Mission, Money, and Meaning

Raising capital isn't about impressing VCs with flashy projections. It's about showing up, delivering results, and choosing partners who believe in your mission. Chris shares how he built long-term relationships with investors and why he refused to compromise just to close a deal.

The best investor pitch? Do what you said you'd do, and then do it again. Chris didn't just raise money, but he raised trust. Trust fuels sustainable growth.

Why This Episode Matters

With Ben guiding the conversation, this episode dives into how innovation and trust can coexist in a highly regulated, relationship-driven industry. It's candid, it's actionable, and it's a must-listen for brokers, benefits leaders, and entrepreneurs who want to lead well in the messiness of modern health care.

Whether you're thinking about implementing ICHRA, leading a team through change, or just looking for real leadership perspective, this episode delivers clarity, conviction, and a little fire.

What's Next on the Insurance Leadership Podcast

In our next episode, we sit down with Terry Ward of United Vision Plan to talk about how vision benefits are evolving and why they're more important than ever. From smarter plan design to building broker trust, Terry brings real-world insight into what's working in today's competitive benefits space.

Don't miss it—this conversation explores where insurance, innovation, and real impact collide.

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