



Episode 21: Making Retirement Cool – J.D. Carlson & Retireholi(k)s

Episode 21 Deep Dive—Injecting Surf-Shop Energy into 401(k) Land

Host Mike Webb sits down with J.D. Carlson—former pro-surfer, onetime beach-town retailer, and now CEO of TPA firm Plan Design Consultants—to unpack how the four-man Retireholi(k)s crew turned a dry subject into appointment viewing for advisors.

How a Surfboard Became a Compliance Manual

Growing up steps from the Pacific, Carlson lived the surf-bum dream until family finances nudged him into his father's 1970s-era third-party administration business.

Once he grasped the back-office rigor—plan documents, nondiscrimination tests, Form 5500s—he applied skate-shop branding tactics: hoodies over suits, Nerf-golf in the office, and candid client talks that ditch ERISA jargon.

The Case for Specialist TPAs—Even in Mega-Plans

Many advisors still assume TPAs belong only in the micro-plan market. Carlson argues the opposite: his happiest clients often manage hundreds of millions in assets and need bespoke testing, controlled-group consulting, and rapid document updates that bundled recordkeepers struggle to deliver.

His litmus test for sponsors: don't choose "bundled vs. unbundled"; vet who is doing the compliance work, what their checks-and-balances look like, and how quickly they adapt to legislative change.

Why Retireholi(k)s Works

- Weekly YouTube shows mix technical segments (SECURE 2.0, fee litigation) with beer reviews and game-show trivia—proving retirement talk can be both accurate and genuinely entertaining.
- Industry luminaries such as ERISA attorney Fred Reish appear in hoodies, reminding viewers that even legends are real people.

Takeaways for Plan Sponsors & Advisors

- Authenticity attracts attention. Employees tune out boilerplate but engage when content feels human.
- Evaluate compliance depth, not just platform convenience. A nimble TPA can add value well beyond small-plan administration.
- Education before entertainment still wins. Humor lands because the technical foundation is solid.
- Stream the full conversation to hear Carlson's marketing tips, surfer-to-CEO journey, and why he thinks every committee meeting could use a little craft-beer energy.

Legal Notice

This material is intended to be informational only and does not constitute legal, accounting, or tax advice. Please consult the appropriate legal, accounting, or tax advisor if you require such advice. The opinions expressed in this report are subject to change without notice. This material has been prepared or is distributed solely for informational purposes. It may not apply to all investors or all situations and is not a solicitation or an offer to buy any security or instrument or to participate in any trading strategy. The information and statistics in this report are from sources believed to be reliable but are not guaranteed by CAPTRUST Financial Advisors to be accurate or complete. All publication rights reserved. None of the material in this publication may be reproduced in any form without the express written permission of CAPTRUST: 919.870.6822.

© 2026 CAPTRUST Financial Advisors