



## RGS Service Line Leader Workshop Input

### **HR MANAGEMENT OBSERVATIONS**

- Agencies are having difficulty recruiting in general. Those with less flexible work schedules have the most difficulty attracting and retaining talent.
- The talent pool for experienced public sector employees willing to work in traditional public employment settings is shrinking.
- Many agencies are now asking for assistance conducting salary and benefit surveys to determine if they need increases to recruit and retain. But this may not be the answer. Employees may be more willing to come aboard or to stay if they can improve their quality of life via part time and or remote work.
- Employees who have been doing their work remotely with success for the past two years don't see a reason to come back in the office and will seek out an employer who is more flexible. We have seen employers lose very good employees who have been working successfully at home simply because they are making return mandatory.
- Some employers are adamant that the employees come back into the office but cannot really express good reasons. Employees challenge this thinking: "The remote work has been getting done and successfully, so why do I have to come back into the office?"
- Given the choice to work for an employer who offers a flexible work situation vs working in a traditional 9-5 onsite job, employees will usually opt for the former, even when the pay rate for the latter is higher.
- Patience and communication are essential skills for leaders. The COVID pandemic on the heels of natural disasters, allowed little time for processing. 2020 was a year of constant change with rapid fire messaging, constant meetings, retooling organizational protocols and methods. Fear was prevalent in our workforce; fear of getting sick, sustaining family income, or how to work and support children in school. It is essential for agency leadership to take a little more time to listen, even if there was a mandated procedure or unknown solution. Listening on both sides improved outcomes.
- As employees returned to in-person work, some organizations moved faster than others. We learned that the priorities and values of many in our workforce had shifted over the pandemic and not everyone was thrilled to return to the workplace. Organizations need to ask themselves; do we have to do things we way we used to? Is there another way? Watching the light bulbs pop on is rewarding.
- The resilience of people, a focus on work-life balance, and the flexibility that can be possible in public organizations are bright lights coming out the pandemic.

### **DISABILITY & LEAVE MANAGEMENT – Some specific new legal challenges to navigate.**

- Employee requests for workplace accommodation and medical leave unrelated to COVID are on the rise as employers are welcoming staff back to the workplace. We're fielding leave requests of all kinds, with a significant rise in the number of requests



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related to mental health issues and family care needs. We're also learning how effective our case management is in resolving long-term mental health leaves.

- Many work assignments which would have had never been considered for remote work as a reasonable accommodation before COVID now have a higher burden to consider (and in some cases to also *provide*) remote work as a reasonable accommodation due to the new precedents set via remote work during COVID (related to changes in policy, process, practice, technology, & security/access, etc.).
- The fatigue that employers are facing after seemingly endless rounds of new temporary rules for COVID responses has caused many employers to overlook the newly expanded workplace accommodation requirements for all California employers with 5 or more employees. Employers who have not sufficiently updated their leave administration programs in keeping with these legal updates are not only experiencing increased liability and exposures risks but are also experiencing delays in holding staff accountable for attendance concerns and in implementing discipline where needed. See [RGS's CFRA Guidebook](#), updated for 2022.
- The workplace accommodation and interactive process work that RGS already facilitated largely via remote interactions before COVID has been better understood and valued now that COVID has forced many employers to learn how to work remotely. This has made it faster and easier for RGS to work with employer partners and union advocates as we assist employers in responding to employee disability and leave management needs.

### **RGS TRAINING SERVICE OBSERVATIONS**

- Most agencies pivoted to virtual. Only a few did not engage in virtual training at all.
- Agencies continue to develop employees and leaders virtually, even as workers return to the office.
- Virtual format expanded access, and produces a greater variety of agency attendees than our in-person model.
  - Office, remote, and field employees.
  - Remote/smaller agencies historically unable to send employees to in-person training.
  - Agencies outside of California, which expands interstate collaboration and networking.
- Agencies have also been able to pivot to virtual forms of strategic planning and coaching. However, team-building and mediation remain activities that most prefer to do in-person.
- Challenges to virtual training:
  - Technology issues on the attendee/agency side.
  - Limitations on length of time for virtual training.
  - Navigating agency by agency preferences for in-person vs. virtual training.



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- Equity is also an issue. Not only who gets access to training, but where they access training. People out in the field or in plants, traditionally blue-collar employees, not given adequate time, resources, and environment to focus on the training. White collar professionals have access to all those things.
- Broadly, virtual leadership is a skill that has become increasingly important as remote and hybrid work options expand. Learning in a virtual platform and teaching virtual skills can help leaders adapt to these roles.
- Learners across agencies have embraced virtual training, and appreciate that they can learn, connect, and engage from wherever they are doing their work.

### **GENERAL REMOTE WORK OBSERVATIONS FROM RGS ADVISORS**

#### Challenges:

- Obsolete software, stagnant IT culture, paper processes, obtaining remote access to agency files.
- Keeping up with the constant, ever-changing legislation regarding COVID mandates.
- Ensuring that employees are following COVID guidelines/policies.
- For the first few months of remote work, some employees struggled with adjusting:
  - Distractions at home
  - Lack of interaction with others
- Acquiring sufficient internet access from remote locations.
- Navigating large format documents on laptop computer.

#### Successes:

- Increased employee satisfaction with work/life balance.
- Work productivity and goals are being met.
- Learning to have more valuable interactions, including in person when required.
- Establishing protocols for preparing communications and using communication tools.
- Participating large public meetings remotely.
- Remaining flexible in a rapidly changing environment.
- Reducing travel creates more productive time.