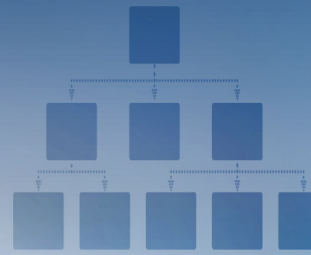


# HR NEWS



## HR Priorities at All Levels of Government



This issue of *HR News* focuses on priorities for human resources professionals at public agencies. I was excited to read articles submitted by IPMA-HR members on reinventing communications with candidates for city jobs and on creating a weekly e-newsletter to keep employees of the Richmond, Va., sheriff's office informed and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.



We also present a Q&A with the director of the Personnel Review Commission for Cuyahoga County, Ohio, in which she describes her agency's use of quarterly check-ins to supplement annual performance reviews. Thanks for sharing their experiences and insights are due to David Kitchen, the HR director for the City of Lehi City, Utah; Billie C. Winzor, M.Ed., IPMA-SCP, HR director and payroll manager for the Richmond City Sheriff's Office; and Rebecca Kopcienski, M.A., SHRM-SCP, IPMA-SCP, of the Cuyahoga PRC.

August also marks the month when IPMA-HR members vote for president-elect. I encourage everyone to cast their ballot. The next president-elect will join the Executive Council in leading IPMA-HR during a pivotal time as we continue implementing the [top 10 priorities](#) identified in our current strategic plan. Please visit our website to [learn about the candidates](#) and the voting process.

Choosing a new leader provides a good opportunity to discuss the Executive Council and its roles and responsibilities. [IPMA-HR bylaws](#) establish the council as the governing body of the Association. As a body, the council oversees the mission and vision of IPMA-HR, defines its overall goals and strategic priorities, and looks toward the future to ensure the Association has the resources it needs to remain relevant and strong.

Council members are responsible for carrying out the strategic vision and goals of the Association. Their tasks include approving IPMA-HR's annual budget, ensuring regular financial audits, and reviewing and approving all tax forms.

So, how does one become an Executive Council member? I am glad you asked.

There are 14 members on the Executive Council. Four members represent and are elected by their respective regions. These regional representatives are joined by three nationally elected members who form the Executive Committee of the council. They are the current president, president-elect and immediate past-president.

The full IPMA membership chooses a new president-elect each year. Once elected, that person serves on the Executive Committee for one year as president-elect, for one year as president and for one year as immediate past-president.

The rest of the council consists of seven individuals who are

appointed by the Executive Council. Interested IPMA-HR members who meet the qualifications to do so may apply for council positions. Submitted applications are reviewed by the Executive Council Nominating Committee and forwarded to the full council for selection and approval. Positions are staggered to ensure no more than one-third of the council turns over at any one time.

All members of the Executive Council have a fiduciary responsibility to IPMA-HR. That is, each member has a duty of care, loyalty and obedience to the Association as whole.

The duty of care is broad. Meeting it requires an Executive Council member to act in good faith and in ways that could reasonably be considered to be in the best interest of the Association.

Meeting the duty of loyalty requires an Executive Council member to place IPMA-HR's best interests above their own and to refrain from using their position or trust to further their own personal gain. This means that any actual or potential conflicts of interest must be disclosed. Additionally, Executive Council members should refrain from voting on any issues when there may be a conflict of interest.

Last, the duty of obedience is a requirement for Executive Council members to act in accordance with all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, as well as with IPMA-HR's articles of incorporation, bylaws and policies.

The person who becomes the 2022 IPMA-HR president-elect, along with 2022 IPMA-HR President Jennifer Fairweather, M.S., SHRM-SCP, IPMA-SCP, PHR; and 2022 Immediate Past-President Pam Dollard, SHRM-SCP, IPMA-CP, will form the 2022 Executive Committee. Association bylaws task this standing committee with assisting the Executive Council in fulfilling its responsibilities for overseeing the affairs of the Association. The committee also acts on behalf of the council in matters requiring immediate attention between council meetings, and it works closely with the executive director to implement the priorities of the Association.

Which is all a long way of saying the president-elect is essential to the future of IPMA-HR. We ask each of you to participate in this month's election. Make your voice heard. Vote. This is your Association, and your choice of leaders matters!

Balloting will be open until Sept. 7, 2021. The new 2022 president-elect, along with new members of the Executive Council, will be announced at our upcoming IPMA-HR business meeting this fall.

Thank you for your support.

*Cara Woodson Welch*  
Cara Woodson Welch  
[ipma@ipma-hr.org](mailto:ipma@ipma-hr.org)

**August 9-October 25**

**2021 Developing Competencies for HR Success — Session 3**

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**REGISTER**

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**September 15 | 1:30 pm Eastern**

**WEBINAR: Leading Your Community in an Era of Anxiety: How Do You Make Sure You Hear Them and They Hear You**

*Hosted by ICMA*

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**WEBINAR: The Future of Work Strategies for Adapting to a New Reality**

*Hosted by ICMA*

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**WEBINAR: Growing Your Career: Tips for Redefining Yourself in the Minds of Others**

*Hosted by ICMA*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**



**Have an idea for a webinar? [Let us know!](#)**

## Don't Forget to Vote for 2022 IPMA-HR President-Elect



*Cheryl Lewis-Smith*

National members should watch their emails this August for ballots. Learn more about [Cheryl Lewis-Smith](#) and [Mark B. Van Bruggen](#) by clicking on their names to access candidate statements and professional biographies.

Lewis-Smith is the human resources director for the City of La Vergne, Tenn. She finishes a term on the IPMA-HR Executive Council this year. Van Bruggen currently serves as the HR consultant to the Chief of Staff at the New Jersey Civil Service Commission. He was a member of the Executive Council from 2018 through 2020.

The winner of the president-elect contest will serve as IPMA-HR president during 2023. —*N*



*Mark B. Van Bruggen*



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## Executive Council

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*Senior Human Resources Consultant  
City of Goldsboro, N.C.*

**Cheryl Lewis-Smith, IPMA-SCP**  
*TPMA Chapter President, Tennessee  
City of La Vergne, Tenn.*

**Sonja Stanchina, IPMA-SCP**  
*Director of Diversity & Inclusion  
Contra Costa Water District, Calif.*

**Gail Strobe, IPMA-SCP**  
*Director of Human Resources  
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# HR NEWS

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Coming up in the September issue of  
**HR NEWS**

**Health and Retirement Benefits  
for Public Employees**

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# Lessons Learned From Infusing the Hiring Process With Empathy

By David Kitchen

Recruiting and hiring are complex and difficult. Doing both effectively requires making authentic connections with qualified candidates, assessing those connections during the selection process and sustaining the connections in order to encourage employee retention.

The key to establishing authentic connections is showing empathy, which is done by ensuring others feel seen, heard and valued. Putting empathy at the heart of your hiring process will make you a better recruiter, a better communicator and a better professional. I learned this firsthand last year.

## Start by Considering Different Perspectives

Hiring is a two-way street. Applicants persuade you why they are the right fit, and you persuade applicants why they should commit to your agency. Both the candidate and the agency must develop and extend trust in each other. Trust is the foundation for a healthy long-term relationship because it is critical for exchanging accurate information.

To gain trust with candidates, think from their perspective. Ask yourself what you would want or need to know about the job if you were applying. Two reflective questions that will help you begin assessing your processes are

- How frequently would you want to hear from a potential employer?
- What tone or culture are you looking for?

Once you answer such questions, make adjustments to your process. Candidates will take notice, and they will develop a positive impression of your organization.

## Recognize That Communication Is an Investment

Consistent communication strengthens connections with job candidates. It is easy to limit communications to only setting up

interviews and notifying the top candidate they will receive a job offer. It is much more helpful to communicate at other times and for other purposes.

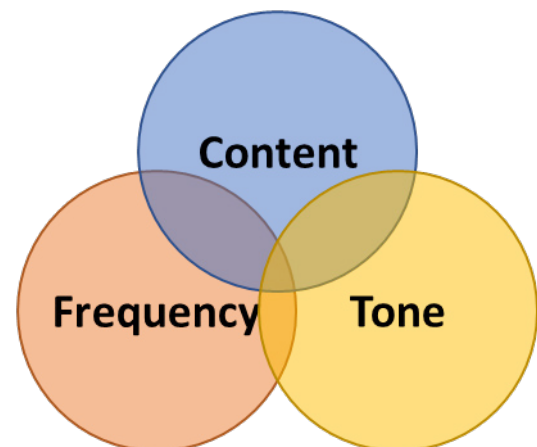
For instance, alerting candidates they are still under consideration communicates respect and dignity. Such emails or texts could be as straightforward as “Our process is taking longer than anticipated. We are still considering your application. Thank you for your patience.”

Candidates crave feedback. Meeting this demand while balancing the three keys of communication identified in the accompanying figure builds and maintains positive relationships with high-quality candidates while also setting you apart from other potential employers. All of that helps establish a pipeline of talent through word of mouth and reapplications from people who did not get hired the first time around.

At the same time, communicating effectively requires practicing radical candor. Here is where empathy proves its worth, especially when it becomes necessary to inform most candidates they did not get the job.

It is true you have no legal obligations to contact candidates you do not hire. Likewise, it is understandable if you feel full

### 3 Keys of Communication





transparency about a hiring decision creates more risks than rewards. Remember, however, that each applicant has the potential to become a future employee. It is worth playing the long game, especially with finalists for a position. Honest, constructive feedback may be just what a candidate needs to develop into the person you are looking for to fill an open job in the future.

## Prepare to Ride an Emotional Roller Coaster

Job applicants subject themselves to a pressure-packed selection process. Doing interviews requires them to be vulnerable. Knowing the odds are against them makes the experience even more intimidating. Still, they have hope of succeeding.

Applicants believe their future can be brighter than their present. This hope motivates them to stand in an intense spotlight and answer tough questions.

Acknowledging, rather than ignoring, candidates' emotions allows them to be authentic with you. It also enables you to assess applicants more accurately, which leads to better results. So, be real with people and provide psychological safety throughout the hiring process. Meeting vulnerability with empathy cultivates connections and trust.

Preface difficult interview questions with examples from your own career. Encourage candidates to share how they have grown from past challenges. Thank interviewees who openly share ideas, and share your own with them. Not only does this create better connections, it also leads to better decision making and sustainable innovation.

Above all, make it comfortable to admit and move on from mistakes. Tell candidates it is OK to be nervous and anxious. On your end, acknowledge when you forgot to send an email. Nobody is infallible. Model honesty and accountability.

## Lessons Learned From Putting Empathy to the Test

A highly valued member of my human resources staff announced in January 2020 she was leaving to take a job with another city. The move amounted to a promotion.

As hard as it was to say goodbye, I looked for a silver lining. I decided this was an opportunity to experiment with how to communicate with job applicants. I would not completely overhaul the hiring process, but I would change a key component.

Up until then, I had tasked HR team members with handling communications with applicants and hiring managers. Now, I wanted to take full control.

### *Put Yourself in the Candidate's Shoes*

A discussion with a colleague about my plan prompted me to ask, "If I was an applicant, what communications would I want to receive?" Well, I concluded, candidate me would want to see status updates. I would also want to know the reasons I was eliminated from consideration, even if the truth was hard to read. I would want feedback on how to improve. And I would appreciate honesty over politeness.

I realized giving candidate me what he yearned to see would take considerable investments of time and effort. But I was optimistic that positive results would follow from my attempt to communicate with applicants frequently, transparently and individually.

### *Make It Personal*

I identified 10 top candidates and worked with HR staff to set up interviews. I made quick judgements based on applicants' resumes and answers to prescreening questions.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

# Pandemic Musts for Public HR: Communication, Confidence and Consistency

By Billie C. Winzor, M.Ed., IPMA-SCP

The Richmond City Sheriff's Office (RCSO) entered March 2020 with COVID-19 looming in the background of every work process. Employees were raising operational questions. Obviously, the appropriate response from agency leaders was to increase communications.

The RCSO is a first responder and law enforcement agency serving the City of Richmond, Va. With a workforce of approximately 350 sworn employees and 85 civilians, RCSO has responsibilities for supervising inmates of the city jail, transporting inmates to and from court, assisting with medical care for inmates, and applying health and safety protocols in all areas where jail inmates are housed. Meeting these responsibilities requires employees to stay in close contact with inmates. Working remotely simply is not possible for the majority of RCSO employees.

Maintaining operational stability and trust throughout the pandemic demanded that leadership communicate clearly, concisely and consistently about rapidly changing policies and frequently evolving best practices. Identifying the most-effective communication platform was an immediate priority as COVID-19 began to spread.

Leadership understood that putting all essential information relating to COVID-19 and how it affected operations into writing was important. Ensuring the information shared with employees was factual and trustworthy was equally important. Waiting to start communicating was not an option as private sector business started closing offices, public health measures took effect and RCSO employees grew more stressed.

The sense of not knowing and the reality of receiving inconsistent messages that did not relate to their first responder and law enforcement jobs led to rumors and negative dialogue among employees and their family members. Employees voiced their fears and concerns regarding the agency's operational parameters, safety protocols and restrictions, and managers called for quick action.

Dr. Antonette V. Irving, Sheriff  
**Weekly Pulse Check**  
 Term: Summer | Issue: 60 | Date: 07/09/2021

## Information About COVID-19 Vaccines for Essential Workers

You can help protect yourself and the people around you by getting vaccinated.

Studies show COVID-19 vaccines are [safe](#) and [effective](#).

COVID-19 vaccines help prevent severe illness.

Depending on the kind of [COVID-19 vaccine](#) you get, you might need a second shot 3 or 4 weeks after your first shot.

If you are an employer, consider time off for employees to get vaccinated. After vaccination, some people have side effects. Common side effects include:

- Pain, redness, or swelling where you got your shot
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Chills
- Fever
- Nausea

These are normal signs that your body is building protection against COVID-19. Learn more [about what you can do when you have been fully vaccinated.](#)

## A Weekly E-Newsletter to Fully Inform Employees

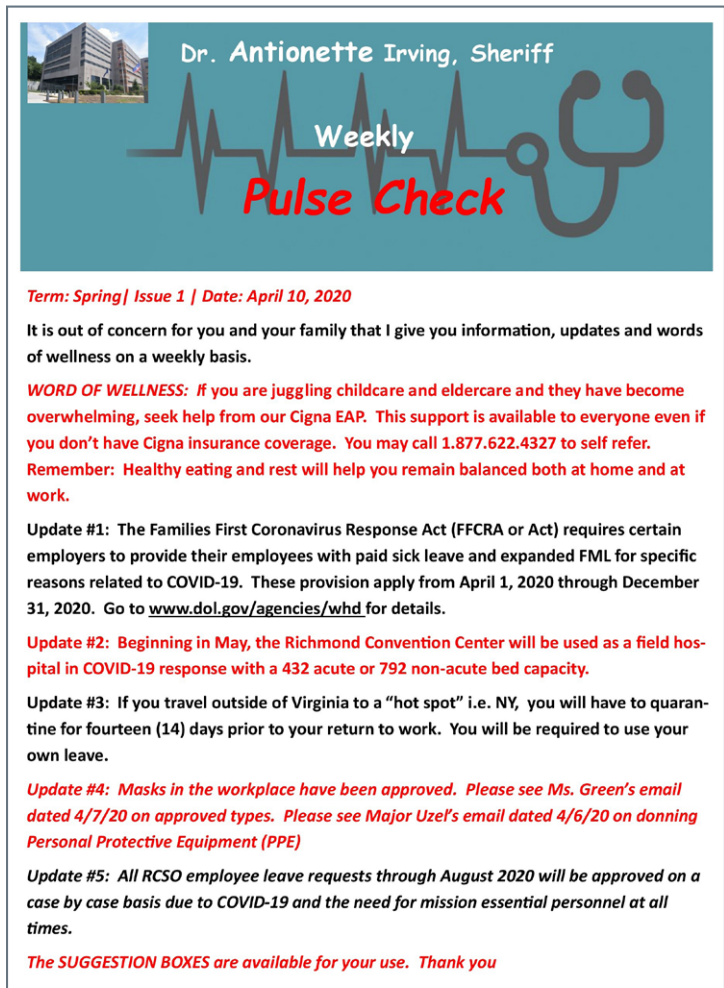
Sheriff Antonette V. Irving, Ph.D., met the urgent desire for trustworthy information by creating *Pulse Check* as a weekly e-newsletter to be written and published by the human resources team. The first issue was disseminated on April 10, 2020. The 60th issue went out on July 9, 2021.

Failing to have this critical tool in place from the onset of COVID-19 through the wide acceptance of vaccines would have made consistently sharing factual information with confidence difficult or impossible. The result would have been invalid communication and a growing disconnect between leadership and



employees as trust eroded. Without the e-newsletter, leadership could not have demonstrated its care and respect for the agency’s most valuable asset—employees.

That first *Pulse Check* included a section titled “Words of Wellness” written by the sheriff, the agency’s face mask protocol and factoids from the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) with links to additional information. An RCSO employee could also read an update on the City of Richmond COVID-19 field hospital, review guidance on requests for leave and learn about the process for returning to work after testing positive for COVID-19. Importantly, employees were given the opportunity to submit questions or ideas.



New editions of *Pulse Check* subsequently arrived in employees’ in boxes each Friday afternoon. The e-newsletter has become a mainstay of the agency’s COVID-19 response.

Throughout the pandemic, the e-newsletter served as an effective means for communicating safety guidelines and protocols. Many editions also included videos from Sheriff Irving’s food drives. Once vaccinations became available, updates on locations where employees and their families could receive shots became a

regular feature. Late summer and early fall editions shared open enrollment information.

For 17 months, *Pulse Check* was a point of reference for employees, as shown by the positive feedback received by managers and HR. It also affirmed leadership’s commitment to keeping employees informed with factual and trusted information.

Continuing to publish the *Pulse Check* accomplished seven goals for the RCSO and its HR department. Specifically, the e-newsletter:

- Created a positive and functional communication platform;
- Set parameters around employee engagement;
- Clarified requirements for stocking and wearing personal protective equipment, especially masks;
- Clarified the agency’s FMLA and FFCRA leave policies for employees;
- Kept employees informed on CDC, state and local government guidelines, regulations, and best practices relating to COVID-19;
- Magnified agency leaders’ voice and directives when rumors and speculation could have overwhelmed facts; and
- Established HR as a key partner on the agency’s critical communications team.

The July 2, 2021, *Pulse Check*, which was distributed just before this article went to print, communicated how safety protocols had been updated as Virginia’s COVID-19 state of emergency expired. It also included information on coronavirus variants spreading in the state, vaccination rates and new state laws and city ordinances that took effect July 1.

## HR Lessons Learned

Looking back, the RCSO HR team learned critical lessons during the pandemic. First, we found out that listening to the workforce is essential. This is true at all times. Employees’ concerns are valid. Taking them seriously establishes and maintains trust.

Second, we could not ignore the necessity of vetting information prior to disseminating it, especially since details often changed from day to day. Transparently distinguishing COVID-19 myths from facts was essential to ensuring we protected the RCSO workforce.

In this regard, we strengthened our existing partnership with the Virginia Department of Health to make sure each *Pulse Check* contained the most timely, accurate and relevant information for RCSO employees, employees’ families and Richmond residents.

Last, including HR on the crisis communications team helped

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

# How a County Agency Met Employees' Need for Timely, Actionable Feedback

In Ohio, the Cuyahoga County Personnel Review Commission implemented a practice specifically to meet the needs of its multigenerational staff. Commission Director Rebecca Kopcienski, M.A., SHRM-SCP, IPMA-SCP, first shared details of improving the performance review process with IPMA-HR members [via Engage](#).

Responding to a request for examples of what public sector organizations were doing in the area of continuous performance management, Kopcienski described how she and her fellow managers developed and began using the quarterly check-in form included with this article.

“We use the check-ins to focus on progress toward goals, need for modification of goals, resource and employee development needs, and challenges,” she wrote. “We still use the annual performance appraisal for pay-for-performance decisions.”

*HR News* performed its own check-in with Kopcienski to learn how members of her team have responded to giving and receiving feedback every three months. We also inquired whether what she describes as a “very basic ... guide for the quarterly dialogue” is serving its intended purpose.

“The anecdotal feedback we’ve received from staff is very positive,” Kopcienski noted. Here is what else she had to report via an email interview. Answers have been lightly edited.

**Just for background, tell me about the Cuyahoga County Personnel Review Commission. How many people work for the commission, and what are your responsibilities?**

The Personnel Review Commission was established by a county charter in 2011 with responsibilities similar to a municipal civil service commission and some add-ons. In addition to civil service test development and administration, we administer the county’s classification and compensation systems for non-bargaining unit employees. We also hear appeals from classified employees, and we have an HR auditing/reporting division. We employ 16 full-time employees, a part-time hearing officer and, when we can get them, master’s degree-level interns.

**What led the commission to survey employees about how and how frequently they received feedback from managers on their job performance?**

The PRC’s managers came on board about five years ago, and

we immediately adopted what was then the county’s approach to performance management. It was essentially an annual performance review.

As the PRC grew, we added a number of younger workers to our staff, and we noticed they seemed to be seeking performance feedback more frequently than our seasoned staff. This is what initially spurred us to survey employees; it was an attempt to verify this perception.

The quarterly approach is really a compromise. Some folks wanted to have weekly or monthly check-ins, but we’re a small agency. Our managers wear multiple hats, so we felt this was a manageable compromise.

**Did that initial survey cover other aspects of performance reviews and professional development? If so, what was included and what was revealed?**

Yes. We asked one question about professional development to gauge satisfaction with our program. We also asked how people felt about the different uses of performance evaluation and learned that most of them appreciate how the evaluation was tied to compensation.

**You mentioned in your Engage post that senior managers felt scheduling monthly feedback sessions with employees would be impractical. Was that simply a matter of time, or were there concerns over having too little to discuss when meeting each month?**

It was a little of both. Much of the work done by the class/comp and testing teams is fairly routine, so their managers were concerned it might become less valuable to meet monthly. Also, since we’re a small agency, the managers wear multiple hats and they were concerned more-frequent meetings would be challenging.

**The quarterly check-in form is short and organized to focus discussions between managers and employees on which goals are being reviewed, which goals are being revised, and the employee’s development and resource needs. Do you have a sense of whether the check-ins are so tightly focused, or do discussions about job performance range more widely?**

It seems to depend on the individual employee. In some cases, employees who are seeking job enrichment or career progression



**Cuyahoga County Personnel Revision Commission  
Personnel Review Commission  
2017 CheckIns**

**EMPLOYEE INFORMATION**

<b>Employee Name</b>		
<b>Classification / Position</b>		
<b>Supervisor/Manager (name and title)</b>		

<b>CHECKIN # 1</b>	<b>DATE</b>	
<b>Goals Reviewed</b>	1	
	2	
	3	
<b>Any goal revisions?</b>		
<b>Developmental Needs?</b>		
<b>Resource Needs?</b>		

<b>CHECKIN # 2</b>	<b>DATE</b>	
<b>Goals Reviewed</b>	1	
	2	
	3	
<b>Any goal revisions?</b>		
<b>Developmental Needs?</b>		
<b>Resource Needs?</b>		

<b>CHECKIN # 3</b>	<b>DATE</b>	
<b>Goals Reviewed</b>	1	
	2	
	3	
<b>Any goal revisions?</b>		
<b>Developmental Needs?</b>		
<b>Resource Needs?</b>		

# Make Learning and Development Central to the Post-Pandemic Employee Experience

By Jonathan Finkelstein

Organization across all industries and sectors are hiring once more. This means employees who were displaced during the pandemic can return to the kinds of jobs they previously held. This is not guaranteed to happen.

Survey findings reported by the Pew Research Center in February 2021 indicate 66 percent of U.S. workers “seriously considered changing their jobs or field of work” while they were unemployed over the preceding year. One explanation for this reluctance to simply resume pre-pandemic careers was highlighted in a report McKinsey and Company published on April 5, 2021. “Nearly two-thirds of U.S.-based employees we surveyed said that COVID-19 has caused them to reflect on their purpose in life,” the consulting firm wrote. “And nearly half said that they are reconsidering the kind of work they do because of the pandemic.”

Job site Monster.com more than confirmed these findings. Its mid-June 2021 “quick poll” of 649 of currently employed individuals revealed 95 percent of respondents were currently considering switching jobs. A full 92 percent of people said they would “switch industries to land the new position.” Imagine conducting a Zoom meeting when 9 of every 10 squares shows someone who, at that very moment, is looking for another job.

It should be clear to every employer that a trying year-and-a-half has left members of the workforce with much lower tolerance for doing work they consider unfulfilling. An employer that takes its employees for granted will see mass resignations.

Organizations that continue operating as though employees should feel lucky to have jobs at all put themselves in peril. As business and people leaders reopen and restaff workplaces, they must also rethink the employee experience. Providing opportunities to learn and develop must be front and center as a business priority and a strategic imperative.

## Enhance Employee Retention and Engagement Through Learning

The pandemic proved that each worker—whether they are employed or not—is a human resources department of one. Given a reason or opportunity to do so, people will seek out meaningful jobs and learning opportunities. Consequently, many spent the second half of 2020 and first half of 2021 upskilling and reskilling.

They may have wanted to ease quarantine angst. They might have needed to actively carve a path toward a new job. Regardless of their motivation, CommercialCafe found that as of late December last year, 92 percent of people had learned new skills over the past 12 months. Those new skills ranged widely, but fully 30 percent specifically related to preparing for a career change.

The lesson for employers is to commit to fostering employees’ professional growth and development. Meeting this desire by offering time to learn new skills will be appreciated. Making that a real and valued benefit, however, will require offering time to learn outside of and as a compliment to the organization’s formal training schedule.

An existing learning and development (L&D) program can be a great place to start, but it is important to go further by encouraging and explicitly sanctioning employees to use paid worktime to pursuing self-selected goals. Doing this leads to happier, more fulfilled employees and less turnover—which combine to deliver greater productivity overall.

The gold standard for investing in employee growth is going on record to recognize employees who reach L&D milestones. This commonly takes the form of issuing digital credentials that document the acquisition of skills in verifiable and portable ways. Such credentials can make it easier to match qualified individuals with open positions that require specific skills.

In addition, in the private sector, companies with certification programs that recognize skill acquisition and development achieve better financial results. An analysis done by my company showed that among publicly traded U.S.-based companies, having a strong L&D program consistently correlated with outperforming the S&P and NASDAQ by significant margins, year over year.

## Help Employees Set Achievable Goals for Growth

When employees identify areas of expertise they want to learn more about or pursue professionally, it is important for managers to become stakeholders in setting achievable, sensible goals to foster and scaffold their growth. Establishing checkpoints to discuss progress allows a manager to encourage employees. Each



incremental goal serves as a real mile marker for the employee's journey.

Having the manager become a stakeholder also sets up a dynamic of shared accountability. Both the employee and the manager mutually commit to the development project. This helps keep the employee engaged and encourages the manager to act as a coach or mentor and to provide necessary resources. Knowing their manager is in their corner makes an employee less likely to look elsewhere for a job that offers growth opportunities.

Should managers hesitate to take an active role, remind them that employees who work toward achieving professional development goals position themselves to contribute to achieving the organization's goals. One way to make this connection visible is defining measurable objectives and key results, or OKRs. This benefits all parties by prioritizing targets and recording progress toward those targets. An employee's OKRs can be explicitly aligned with those of the organization.

The theory of self-determination posits that an individual's motivation is tied to their ability to master a skill, a sense of autonomy and a feeling of connectedness to something larger than oneself. Defining OKRs and aligning them with the organization's fosters the necessary sense of connection. It also contributes to creating an engaging organizational culture of people wanting to stay and become their best selves.

## Reward Change and Progress


Practically all employers are competing for the same talent right now. Workers have more freedom than ever to explore other options. Organizations that lay out clear pathways for employees to move up from one role to the next reduce the odds that their most talented individuals will seek professional opportunities elsewhere. In short, winning the battle against talent attrition is possible when an employer invites employees to grow in their present roles or even change career tracks within the organization.

Allowing employees to transition roles as they complete in-house courses and programs or third-party trainings can increase their job satisfaction. At the very least, employees who are learning and feeling challenged in ways that help them grow are less likely to search for new jobs. Somewhat paradoxically, then, helping employees become more marketable goes far in keeping them with the organization.

Recognizing and promoting those who consistently reach their L&D goals is essential. But doing that does not mean ignoring individuals who struggle to meet expectations. Understand each employee deals with unique circumstances and that this reality makes it important to meet people where they are. Be prepared to offer alternate training pathways or higher levels of support to keep high-potential employees on track.

To rebuild its workforce and retain top talent, an employer needs to value people's professional ambitions. It must then create time and incentives for enthusiastic individuals to take advantage of opportunities to learn, develop and advance in their careers. When this happens, employees become more engaged and will want their own development to track with and contribute to the organization's growth. Best of all, employees will stay with an organization that demonstrates its understanding of how its existence and operation are inextricably tied to the growth of its most valuable asset—its people.

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*The author of Learning in Real Time, Jonathan Finkelstein is the founder and CEO of workforce development and learning solution provider [Credly](#). He previously co-founded HorizonLive, which was acquired by Blackboard, and LearningTimes. You can connect with Finkelstein [via LinkedIn](#). —*

# Strengthen Cybersecurity Habits by Approaching the Problem as if It's a Wellness Program

By George Finney

An employee responds to an email that appears to come from their boss. Millions of dollars are wired to a cybercriminal.

At another organization, an employee clicks on a notice to install a software update. Within seconds, no one else in the organization can use their computers because every machine is infected with ransomware.

You have heard these stories. They are true, and they're proliferating.

Cybercrime is booming, with business email compromise attacks alone costing organizations \$1.77 billion in 2019. The following year, victims of ransomware paid out \$18 billion to regain control of their computer networks and digital data. The problems are only getting worse.

Cybercriminals have taken advantage of fear and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic to increase their efforts. Phishing attempts using the coronavirus as a hook grew by more than 600 percent during the first three months of 2020. And as employers depend more on digital technology, cybercriminals will find more employees to target as potential weak links in cyber defenses.

It is little wonder that CEOs surveyed by The Conference Board in 2019 identified cybercrime as their biggest concern. At many organizations, human resources is the team called in to help train employees on cybersecurity. Which raises three key questions for HR leaders:

- How do we know what training we should be giving our teams?
- What is the most effective way to prepare employees for defending our organizations from cybercrime?
- What metric should we use to measure effectiveness?

The first two lack clear, consensus answers. All kinds of security training are offered. Some courses and exercises are conducted online. Others are delivered in person. Some organizations conduct simulated phishing exercises and direct employees who click on what would otherwise be a malicious link or attachment to a training website.

The most valuable metric being behavior change is not in doubt.

With the authors of an Aug. 8, 2014 *ScienceDaily* article noting that decades of sociology and psychology research show “about 40 percent of people’s daily activities are performed each day in almost the same situations,” the most effective cybersecurity training is clearly the one that does the best job of changing employees’ habits.

The good news for HR is that lessons from psychology, neuroscience, history and economics can be applied to changing cybersecurity habits in measurable ways. The first step is to stop viewing security as a skill or competency and to recognize it as a behavior that can be changed.

After reconceptualizing the task, focusing on cultivating nine habits will improve cyber defenses across an organization. The trick is to make developing the habits easy.

## Create New Habits

Over the past decade, books such as Charles Duhigg’s *Power of Habit*, James Clear’s *Atomic Habits* and BJ Fogg’s *Tiny Habits* have topped bestseller lists. Each author uses different terminology, but they all agree on the operation of a hardwired three-step habit loop inside every person’s brain. A habit begins with a prompt that triggers a behavior. Next comes the behavior itself, which is followed by the release of endorphins that serves as a reward and reminds the brain to repeat the behavior in response to the prompt.

Successfully changing any behavior requires removing obstacles to creating a new habit loop. For instance, you may have heard that if you want to start running in the morning before breakfast, you should go to sleep in your workout clothes and keep your running shoes right by the bed. That actually works, in part because the prompts are specific and the recommended changes in behavior are concrete. Plus, forgetting to dress before falling asleep is not a moral failing. The oversight can be quickly remedied upon waking. This is the kind of recipe for success that HR needs to develop for inculcating good cybersecurity habits.

While there is a lot of security advice out there, practically all of it leaves doing the hard work up to employees who receive little support or guidance on actually figuring out how to incorporate

new behaviors into their work lives. A cybersecurity trainer will say, for instance, “Never write your password down.”

That makes perfect sense. But in the real world, people have dozens of passwords to remember. Some of those are shared with family members, and each is essential for some purpose. How can someone remember each unique password, or at least find the appropriate little-used password when they need it?

I recommend using a password vault, but even that solution requires integrating the use of a new technology into one’s daily behaviors. And how does someone go about performing that integration?

The answer is similar to how HR professionals already help employees change their behaviors by encouraging participation in wellness programs. The three-step loop of habit formation is definitely the same. The recipe for creating and retaining secure passwords might look like

- When I set up my email account for the first time,
- I will use my password vault to create a long, complex password.
- Then, I will play some air guitar to celebrate.

Setting up the account is the prompt. Using the password vault is the behavior. Last, rocking out releases rewarding endorphins.





Now, playing air guitar may not work as a reward for every employee. As with any recipe, an ingredient can be substituted. Likewise, the prompt does not have to be setting up an email account. What matters for HR is finding the prompt, behavior and reward that work best in combination for each person.

## Combine Individuals’ Strengths to Build Strong Teams

Just like in other parts of the organization’s wellness program, choosing the most effective methods for changing cybersecurity habits starts with assessing where an employee is and where they need to improve. It also helps to assess how strongly an employee values security. Administering a questionnaire to reveal the employee’s perspective on cybersecurity will help identify the amount of training they need.

Developing a full picture requires learning what an employee knows, how they behave and what they feel in regards to cybersecurity. That is, delivering targeted training and focusing on changing habits requires understanding how an employee is going to act when they, for example, receive a phishing email.

This brings us back to the nine cybersecurity habits mentioned earlier. The four habits of secrecy, vigilance, skepticism and literacy are all things an individual can develop within themselves. Developing and practicing the remaining five habits of culture, diligence, community, mirroring and deception involve interacting and cooperating with other people. Depending on each person’s

CYBERSECURITY ARCHETYPES					
	CULTURE	DILIGENCE	COMMUNITY	MIRRORING	DECEPTION
LITERACY	 BELIEVER	 ENFORCER	 PROFESSOR	 NAVIGATOR	 ROGUE
SKEPTICISM	 SCIENTIST	 DETECTIVE	 REFEREE	 MENTOR	 REBEL
VIGILANCE	 DEFENDER	 EXPLORER	 BEACON	 OBSERVER	 STRATEGIST
SECURITY	 EMISSARY	 ANALYST	 MASTERMIND	 ORACLE	 ENIGMA

strengths and weaknesses in acting independently or as the member of a team, the habits manifest themselves in 20 different cybersecurity identity archetypes. These archetypes are shown in the accompanying chart.


It is easy for some people to convince themselves that practicing cybersecurity is too complicated and too hard for them. Such individuals may fail phishing email tests. They might even become repeat offenders who click the bogus link or attachment each time.

It is essential that HR never make those employees feel like they simply cannot get it. Managers and supervisors who decide how to handle poor performers must take into account whether people were especially busy or even just prime targets because of their role in the organization.

In all instances, it must be emphasized that cybersecurity is a team sport. Security is everyone’s job. When certain employees display weaknesses in some areas, their teammates need to step in and help. On teams, members’ cybersecurity archetypes complement each other to protect the organization.

Certain organizations or projects might call for a team made up of individuals with, say, more skepticism and culture habits. Perhaps broadly balancing each of the habits across the organization makes sense. The important thing for HR to know is that each habit can be identified and cultivated. Once brought forward, the habits can be stacked to reinforce strong cybersecurity behaviors.

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George Finney is the chief information security officer at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. He is also the CEO and founder of [Well Aware Security](#) and the author of [Well Aware: Master the Nine Cybersecurity Habits to Protect Your Future](#). Connect with [Finney on LinkedIn](#) to learn more about the nine cybersecurity habits and to access a free test for determining an employee’s cybersecurity archetype. —

## Engagement Now Matters More Than Ever

By Bob Lavigna, IPMA-SCP

For the past 17 months, much of the nation's attention has focused on how to equip employees with the technology they need to work remotely and, at the same time, communicate with them without creating Zoom fatigue. This focus, however, has overlooked much of the work of government, which is performed by many who cannot operate remotely.

Compared to people at private sector companies, fewer public sector employees are office workers who can work from home. People who work in fields like public safety, firefighting, emergency services, public works, health care and public transit can't phone or Zoom it in. In local government, these occupations can account for a majority of the workforce. These dedicated people have been risking their health and lives to continue to deliver services to the people government serves.

So, the coronavirus pandemic increased stress for all employees as they struggled to balance the demands of their remote or in-person jobs with their lives outside of work. This situation created what some have described as a worldwide mental health crisis.

It is no surprise, then, that research by the Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement and others has shown that what happens at work affects how we feel about our lives in general. Employees who are engaged at work are significantly more satisfied with their lives in general than are disengaged employees.

Perhaps that explains why the pandemic has caused people to reevaluate the work they want to do post-pandemic. A national survey done by Robert Half revealed that one-third of employees who responded during March and April of this year planned to look for a new job. Many said the pandemic has given them a new perspective on work, and 71 percent

said they would leave an employer whose values don't align with theirs.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data reinforce these survey results. Job vacancies in the United States are at an all-time high, and Americans quit their jobs in record numbers in May 2021. The number of retirements has also accelerated. Journalists have dubbed these trends "the great resignation."

The public sector is not immune. The number of quits in government increased by 13 percent over the past year. As a local government HR director recently told me, "We're losing good people—they can go anywhere they want right now."

And then there is the looming retirement surge. In the 2021 version of the annual survey of HR leaders conducted by Mission Square Research Institute (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence) in cooperation with IPMA-HR and the National Association of State Personnel Executives, 69 percent of respondents predicted that a wave of retirements will occur soon or in the next few years.

In this new world of work, building engagement is more important than ever to both recruit and retain talent. Public sector HR leaders recognize this. Seventy-seven percent of respondents to the Mission Square survey identified engagement as a key issue in their organization. Engagement's cousin, employee morale, was identified as a key issue by 83 percent.

### What Is Engagement, and Why Does It Matter?

Unfortunately, when some folks hear "employee engagement," they think it's just another touchy-feely scheme, or about planning social activities or making sure employees are happy all the time.

While we do want our employees to be happy at least most of the time, engagement is really about performance. It is about creating the environment and conditions for employees to feel good about their organization and how they contribute to accomplishing the mission of the organization.

Engaged employees believe their employer values them. In return, engaged employees will deliver what is known as "discretionary effort"—a research-y term that simply means they are willing to do whatever it takes to help the organization succeed.

The result is a win-win. The employee excels because they believe in what they and their organization are doing. Their commitment and performance then translate into superior organizational performance.

Decades of research have documented this business case for engagement, including in government. Organizations with highly engaged workforces achieve their strategic goals, operate more productively, deliver more responsive customer service and retain talent better. According to Gallup, high-engagement organizations have 43 percent lower turnover than do low-engagement organizations.

Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement research has also shown that engaged employees in government are three times more likely than are disengaged employees to believe their organization is accomplishing its mission. This is critical for performance and retention because many public servants were attracted to government precisely because of mission.

### We Can't Manage What We Can't Measure

I have a book in my library titled *180 Ways to Improve Engagement*. It's a good book with solid suggestions. But how is a reader supposed to figure out



which of the suggestions will improve engagement in their organization? Work through them one at a time?

Good luck.

I recently spoke to the HR director of a city that has a longstanding employee engagement committee composed of employees from across the city, including representatives from labor organizations. I asked what the committee has done to improve engagement. The answer? The committee has organized social activities such as happy hours and picnics.

I'm sure these were nice activities. But as I wrote in *Engaging Government Employees*, "Free pizza and Coke on a Friday afternoon is not an engagement strategy."

The most effective way to build engagement is to measure it and understand what influences engagement in your organization. Ideally, this should be done by surveying employees to collect data on how they feel about their jobs and the organization, and then acting on the results to improve engagement.

While the Mission Square survey showed that 77 percent of HR professionals believe engagement is a key issue, only 33 percent of respondents indicated they are surveying their employees. I call this 44-percentage point difference the engagement data gap.

Employees want to be heard. At the Institute, we experienced this firsthand when we administered our national Employee Connection Survey to find out how public sector employees were handling the COVID-19 work environment. The survey generated almost 20,000 responses from government employees across the United States. Those public servants clearly wanted their organizations to know how they were coping with the



workplace conditions created by the coronavirus.


Measuring engagement to create a baseline is critical. In our work with individual government organizations, Institute staff see wide variations across organizations in the level of engagement.

Even within organizations, engagement can vary by department. For example, a survey we recently conducted for a county revealed that the percentage of fully engaged employees ranged from a low of 14 in one department to a high of 76 in another department. Clearly, a one-size-fits-all solution to improving engagement won't work for this jurisdiction.

The influences, or drivers, of engagement can also vary by organization and department. Engagement can be influenced by such factors as leadership, mission, the work itself, supervision, training and development, compensation, and diversity, equity and inclusion. In other words, and as with so many things in life, it depends.

This is why collecting data is so important. You can't prescribe a solution without understanding the condition. To succeed in our new world of work, government organizations need to measure engagement and then act to build high-engagement, high-performing organizations.

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# Wrap-up on Workforce Recovery

The public sector workforce was dramatically impacted and changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, government services had to be delivered. Local, state, federal and international agencies altered the ways they operated, but they met their missions. Now, a top priority is rebuilding agency workforces.

New data is out on workforce recovery. For a global perspective, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a [2021 employment outlook](#) showing a long and uneven recovery.

According to the OECD, more than 110 million jobs were lost around the world due to the pandemic. Some countries can expect to be back to pre-pandemic employment levels this year. Others, including the United States, are predicted to recover by late 2023. Still other countries will feel the workforce impacts of the pandemic much longer.

Here in the United States, workforce recovery is tied to vaccination rates. San Francisco in June became one

of the biggest municipal employers to announce that it would mandate vaccines for city workers. Smaller employers in other states have done the same, including major public health systems. Mission Square Research Institute (formerly the Center for State and Local Government Excellence) [reported that](#) as of mid-May, 70 percent of state and local government employees are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The federal government has issued updated guidance on how all employers can handle workforce recovery. Regarding vaccinations, the CDC has stated that employers may mandate them for employees while granting religious and medical exemptions.

Some of the other questions addressed [in the updated guidance](#) include the following:

**How can employers encourage employees and their family members to be vaccinated without violating the EEO laws, especially the ADA and GINA?** (5/28/21, updated 6/28/21)

Employers may provide employees and their family members with information to educate them about COVID-19 vaccines, raise awareness about the benefits of vaccination, and address common questions and concerns. Also, under certain circumstances employers may offer incentives to employees who receive COVID-19 vaccines, as discussed in K.16–K. 21. As of May 2021, the federal government is providing vaccines at no cost to everyone ages 12 and older.

There are many resources available to employees seeking more information about how to get vaccinated:

- The federal government’s online [vacunas.gov](https://www.vacunas.gov) site can identify vaccination sites anywhere in the country (or <https://www.vacunas.gov> for Spanish). Individuals also can text their zip code to “GETVAX” (438829)—or “VACUNA” (822862) for Spanish—to find three vaccination locations near them.
- Employees with disabilities (or employees’ family members with disabilities) may need extra support to obtain a vaccination, such as transportation or in-home vaccinations. The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services/Administration for Community Living has launched a hotline to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining such help. The Disability Information and Assistance Center (DIAL) can be reached at: 888-677-1199 from 9 am to 8 pm (Eastern Standard Time) Mondays through Fridays or by emailing [DIAL@n4a.org](mailto:DIAL@n4a.org).
- CDC’s website offers a link to a listing of local health departments, which can provide more information about local vaccination efforts.

## How Long to Return to Pre-Pandemic Employment Rates?



“Recovery to pre-pandemic level” refers to a sustained increase in employment level above its Q4 2019 level. Source: [OECD Employment Outlook 2021](#).



- In addition, the CDC offers background information for employers about workplace vaccination programs. The CDC provides a complete communication “tool kit” for employers to use with their workforce to educate people about getting the COVID-19 vaccine. (Although originally written for essential workers, it is useful for all workers.) See CDC’s Essential Workers COVID-19 Toolkit. Employers should provide the contact information of a management representative for employees who need to request a reasonable accommodation for a disability or religious belief, practice, or observance or to ensure nondiscrimination for an employee who is pregnant.
- Some employees may not have reliable access to the internet to identify nearby vaccination locations or may speak no or limited English and find it difficult to make an appointment for a vaccine over the phone. The CDC operates a toll-free telephone line that can provide assistance in many languages for individuals seeking more information about vaccinations: 800-232-4636; TTY 888-232-6348.
- Some employees also may require assistance with transportation to vaccination sites. Employers may gather and disseminate information to their employees on low-cost and no-cost transportation resources available in their community serving vaccination sites and offer time-off for vaccination, particularly if transportation is not readily available outside regular work hours.

**OSHA also updated regulations** for maintaining safe workplaces to help stop the spread of coronavirus infections. Those updates focus on protections for unvaccinated and otherwise at-risk workers, and OSHA encourages COVID-19 vaccination for everyone who can receive them.

Most employers no longer need to take steps to protect their fully vaccinated workers who are not otherwise at risk for hospitalization or death from COVID-19. The exceptions, of course, are at high-risk workplaces subject to federal, state, local, tribal or territorial laws, rules and regulations that require the continuation of COVID-19 safety protocols.

OSHA defines high- risk workplaces as those where workers have

- **Close contact**—where unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers are working close to one another, for example, on production or assembly lines. Such workers may also be near one another at other times, such as when clocking in or out, during breaks, or in locker/changing rooms.
- **Duration of contact**—where unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers often have prolonged closeness to coworkers (e.g., for 8–12 hours per shift). Continued contact with potentially infectious individuals increases the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.
- **Type of contact**—unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers who may be exposed to the infectious virus through respiratory droplets in the air—for example, when unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers in a manufacturing or factory setting who have the virus cough or sneeze. It is also possible that exposure could occur from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects, such as tools, workstations, or break room tables. Shared spaces such as break rooms, locker rooms, and entrances/exits to the facility may contribute to their risk.

■ **Other distinctive factors that may increase risk among these unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk workers include:**

- A common practice at some workplaces of sharing employer-provided transportation such



as ride-share vans or shuttle vehicles;

- Frequent contact with other unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk individuals in community settings in areas where there is elevated community transmission; and
- Communal housing or living quarters onboard vessels with other unvaccinated or otherwise at-risk individuals.

States are also continuing to issue updated guidance. Here are a few that were released earlier this summer:

- **In California**, fully vaccinated individuals have fewer restrictions.
- **Kentucky** revised its general guidance on staying healthy at work.
- **New Jersey** encourages returning to physical workspaces.

Expect to see continued easing of restrictions and a mix of legislation and regulations as we move through this year. IPMA-HR will continue to keep you informed as we all work together toward a full workforce recovery. Watch the IPMA-HR website and read the weekly *HR Bulletin* email for ongoing legislative and regulatory updates.



## Daniel Hunter, MPA, SHRM-CP, Human Resources Director for the City of The Dalles, Ore.

*Pronounced “dalz” and stretching out on the southern bank of a long bend of the Columbia River that forms the border between Oregon and Washington, The Dalles is the county seat for Wasco County. It served as the original end of the Oregon Trail. Hunter answered the following questions via email.*

**Your resume describes an indirect route into public sector human resources. You earned a bachelor’s in political science but then worked in regulatory enforcement before completing a master’s in public administration. What confirmed your decision to work in city government?**

I started my bachelor’s right after my service in the Air Force ended. Part of the reason I had enlisted at 24 years of age was the G.I. Bill.

At that point, I had no ultimate aim for a career. Consequently, I spent several years at community college, where I changed my major several times. Ultimately, I landed on political science as a major and local government as a career.

This was largely due to the influence of my political science instructor, Dean Darris. He is also an Air Force veteran. I also liked the idea of a career working for local communities. After completing my core curriculum at Clackamas Community College, I transferred to Linfield University to complete my B.A.

Two things impacted my career trajectory at that point. First and foremost, my two children lived in Montana with their mother. I moved there to be closer to them. Second, as anyone with an undergraduate degree in poli sci can tell you, it is good life knowledge but very limited for finding a career.

What you have to realize about living in Montana is you either take what jobs are there, or you don’t work. Due to this, I started working for the Montana Department of Transportation inspecting roads and bridges. It was an enjoyable and informative position that gave me insight into infrastructure. The downside was, being Montana, it was seasonal.

When a regular position opened in MDT’s Motor Carrier Enforcement Division, I went for it. It was while working in this position that I started, and ultimately completed, my MPA with an HR concentration.

**Have any of the skills and practices you acquired in earlier jobs served you particularly well in your role as HR director for The Dalles?**

The skills and practices I learned earlier in my career definitely helped me in my previous positions in local government. In my current HR role, they have given me insight into tasks and tools



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needed for others to do their jobs well.

In addition, that experience taught me two big lessons for my current role. The first is to go to the source when dealing with regulations. I read the legislation or local ordinance rather than relying on secondhand summaries. The second lesson is to always look for the exceptions to the rule.

**The Dalles looks to be the kind of place where a lot of HR News readers work—pretty much the city in a large rural county. Does this situation make recruiting for open positions easier or more challenging? Do the city and county workforces overlap? If so, how is that handled by the HR departments?**

Since this is my only experience in human resources, I don’t have a point of personal reference to say whether it is easier or more difficult than anywhere else. Generally, I would say the difficulties have more to do with the position and qualifications required, and, of course, the political environment.

For instance, recruiting for anyone with a finance background and working knowledge of or practical experience in local government is exceedingly difficult. Recruiting for police officers was once relatively easy; that has become more difficult over the last year. These difficulties are not specific to my organization, or even my region.

The City of The Dalles and Wasco County do cooperate in several ways. The cooperation is generally in law enforcement and public works. However, we also partner with the county through an enterprise zone, as well as a middle mile fiber optic network provider called Q-Life, which is an intergovernmental organization.

In addition, Nicole Biechler, the HR director for the county, and I coordinate on mutual HR and risk management issues. Nicole also formed a regional HR professionals’ group that communicates regularly.

**Looking back at your six years as HR director, do any projects or programs stand out as notable successes?**

For me, the city safety program and workers’ compensation insurance project is most notable. Our record was not good when I started, and the workers’ comp premiums reflected that. We averaged 13.6 claims a year, with incurred losses averaging \$35,794 a year. Time-loss days averaged 70. And all of this was for just under 100 employees.

We have since increased city staff to 103 full-time employees in 7 departments. Since 2016, our claims have fallen to an average of 7

a year and our total annual incurred losses now average \$12,794. Our time-loss days average is also down to 10, which is an 86 percent reduction. The financial result of this has been prorated premiums under \$60,000, down from \$279,893 when I started. The experience rating went from 2.67 to 0.73 in 5 years.

The human side of this has been more employees going home safe and coming back to work at a place that values them, their safety and their contributions to the community.

**Simply making it through that past year-and-a-half counts as a success. What did you and your team do during the pandemic to ensure city employees stayed safe, healthy and equipped with the information and resources they needed to continue serving residents?**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we adjusted like many employers to what seemed like ever-changing conditions and restrictions. I assigned my safety officer to work with the county emergency operations team on countywide responses. Employees who could work remotely were instructed to do so. Our IT department quickly responded by setting up laptops for personnel to work remotely. Administrative offices closed to the public. Operational employees like police and public works went to split shifts and were provided the appropriate personal protective equipment.

The PPE was procured early at local retailers, and we distributed it to each city department through county emergency operations. We

also put temporary policies in place to help safeguard employees who could not work remotely.

None of this would have gone as well as it did without responsive staff who seemed to shift into another gear instinctively. It was like watching a team that had just been practicing and playing pickup games until then. When it was go-time, they all stepped up!

Staff who needed to have contact with the public did so either remotely or by appointment when and where safety measures could be maintained. The public was very understanding, and services were not disrupted for the most part. Some exceptions to that were the municipal court and development review processes. In those cases, staff quickly adopted new technology and procedures to assist them in meeting the public's needs.

**Now, forget all the preceding questions. You're actually the tourism director for The Dalles. What can we look forward to seeing and doing when we come for a visit?**

Regardless of whether you are in the hills among the cherry orchards or on the river, this is a beautiful place to be. For a small city with a population under 20,000, there is a broad variety of restaurant choices, breweries and wineries. One of my favorite things to do is walk along the trail that follows the Columbia River before heading over to my favorite brewery for a bit of refreshment. —*N*



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# Empathy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

As for the rest of the applicants, I created a template email that included general information, nonspecific advice and space for a paragraph addressed specifically to the person who would not be interviewed.

In all, I wrote 66 personalized paragraphs. Again, I knew this was not going to be easy, but I wanted each email to deliver valuable feedback.

In fact, writing more than just “We’ve selected other applicants,” was even more difficult than I anticipated. Worrying about how my communication was going to be perceived slowed me down to a greater degree than did concerns that I could be accused of filtering out candidates for unfair reasons. Even if rejected applicants could live with my decision, would they accept my radical candor?

I decided to be honest regardless. The reasons I shared for deciding not to interview an applicant included

- Other applicants had more HR experience.
- Other applicants had more local government experience.
- You have great education, but very little experience.
- You had grammatical and spelling errors in your resume and cover letter.
- You used an online resume template and forgot to personalize what you sent. (More than one resume included the line “Award Section—Go ahead, brag about yourself here!”)
- A member of your family currently works for the city. (I’m sensitive to nepotism.)
- Your resume and answers indicate very little understanding about what HR really does.

Pausing to ponder whether the hiring process was truly fair to applicants also slowed me down. I contented myself with the knowledge that no decision is ever based on complete knowledge. The only way to choose between applicants was to personally review resumes and make decisions according to the limited information I had. Selections would always seem less than comprehensive, but I did the best I could to act fairly and without bias.

Back to the emails. It took me hours to write each personalized message. As a result, some applicants waited six weeks after the job closed to learn they would not be interviewed. I am not proud of this. Indeed, that kind of delay is unacceptable.

But I did keep my commitment to provide specific feedback to everyone. And I made sure to send interim emails saying I was still reviewing resumes. Those updates included the total number of applicants for the position and the number of people who would be interviewed.

## *Some Job Applicants Noticed*

As I wrote email after email, I wondered if it was all worth it. How many applicants would notice or reply to my emails? Would it matter to them? The response rate to my emails was only about 25 percent, but the quality of responses was very high.

Candidates expressed appreciation for the personalized feedback. Some verbatim replies were short, “Thank you so much for the return email and for taking the time to review my resume,” wrote one applicant. “Good morning David,” wrote another, “thanks for the note. It’s better to know where you stand, even if the answer is no.”

Some replies were longer:

I just wanted to say thank you for taking the time to provide feedback in regard to my application and resume. I rarely receive acknowledgment of application for a job and didn’t expect to receive so much feedback and advice. It’s refreshing and appreciate it very much.

And:

Thank you so much for the opportunity to apply and for the thorough feedback. I am awed at your willingness to go through each applicant and give each individual specific feedback. I will look into getting a certification and try to expand my HR network as you have suggested.

And my personal favorite:


I really appreciate the time and consideration you took with me (resume) and the genuine feedback. Lehi City is lucky to have such a thoughtful and considerate HR Director. I hope you find the applicant that feeds your needs. Thanks again for your feedback.

To my friends in the public sector, I learned so much from my experiment. Ending old habits and adopting new ones takes intentional effort. Growth is uncomfortable at times, yet it unlocks unforeseen potential.

What I learned on a professional level is how important it is to view recruiting and hiring from the candidates’ perspectives and to treat job applicants as you would want to be treated. I also learned why it pays to communicate consistently and leave a good impression. Candidates will invest in your organization.

Most of all, I learned authenticity and empathy lead to better connections and better results. Stand up to stand out.

---

*David Kitchen is the HR director for Lehi City, Utah, and has more than 10 years of experience with local and state government. He loves to connect, empower and appreciate public sector employees by showing empathy, compassion and trust. Connect with him via [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). —*

## IPMA-HR Welcomes Its New Members

The Association looks forward to serving and connecting with these organizations and individuals who joined during June 2021.

### New Agency Members

City of Highland Village  
Highland Village, Texas

City of Las Cruces  
Las Cruces, N. Mex.

DC Office of Contracting & Procurement  
Washington, D.C.

Muchmore Than Consulting, LLC  
Rohnert Park, Calif.

St. Lucie County Board of County Commissioners  
Fort Pierce, Fla.

### New Individual Members

Tracey Allen  
Austin, Texas

Margie Lynn Barr  
Woodland, Calif.

Stacie Bentley  
Juneau, Alaska

Christina Cecil  
Denver, Colo.

Yanli Chen  
Beijing, China

Carrie Cichon  
Carpentersville, Ill.

Karen L'Rhena Clarke  
Tamarac, Fla.

Laura DuClos  
Denver, Colo.

Tracy Hennessey  
Pleasant Prairie, Wis.

Steven Kiebzak  
Spring, Texas

Yang Luo  
Beijing, China

Lia Maksoud  
Pacifica, Calif.

Kisha McDonald  
Redlands, Calif.

Anthony Thomas Percy  
Williamsburg, Ohio

Lissette Smith  
Beltsville, Md.

Tracie A. Sorrells  
Granbury, Texas

Danielle Sosa  
Mesa, Ariz.

Emma Stowell  
Orem, Utah

Zina Wilkes  
Gaithersburg, Md.

## Certification Corner

*Congratulations to these newly certified individuals!*



Zina Abram, IPMA-SCP  
Sr. Personnel Analyst I  
City of Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, Calif.

Alyssa Budden, IPMA-CP  
HR Technician  
City of Klamath Falls  
Klamath Falls, Ore.

Susan Crew, IPMA-CP  
HR Assistant  
Johnson County Government  
Olathe, Kans.

Robin Davis, IPMA-SCP  
Human Resources Consultant  
Culver City, Calif.

Christina Flores, IPMA-SCP  
Human Resources Director  
City of McAllen  
McAllen, Texas

Kristy Larson, IPMA-CP  
Human Resources Director  
City of Waseca  
Waseca, Minn.

Marisa Lehnerz, IPMA-SCP  
HR Manager  
City of Ashland  
Ashland, Ore.

Katelynn Mahaney, IPMA-SCP  
Human Resources Analyst  
Placer County  
Auburn, Calif.

Gina Mendez, IPMA-SCP  
Human Resources Director  
City of Mesquite  
Mesquite, Nev.

Malena Murray, IPMA-SCP  
HR/Risk Director  
City of West Jordan  
West Jordan, Utah


Theresa Walker, IPMA-SCP  
Sr. Personnel Analyst  
City of Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, Calif.

# Pandemic Musts

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

RCSO leadership manage unforeseen crises. This happened, in part, because HR has a direct line on employees' concerns. We heard things employees felt they could not tell managers. We also utilized internal and external relationships with HR teams across sectors to analyze workflows and processes for safety purposes. Once HR knew the needs of employees, we passed that information along to leadership so they could develop guidance and messaging.

HR professionals must take the pulse of the workforce and be ever-ready to analyze, diagnose and provide solutions that best fit the operational conditions, needs and culture of the organization. At RCSO, the e-newsletter was one such solution, providing a platform for communicating hope, commitment and strength during a time of extreme uncertainty. In the months and years ahead, it is imperative that we look back to these times while developing new solutions as the need arises.

*Billie C. Winzor, M.Ed., IPMA-SCP, has more than 20 years of experience in human resources and has served as HR director and payroll manager for the Richmond City Sheriff's Office during three administrations. Email her at [billie.winzor@richmondgov.com](mailto:billie.winzor@richmondgov.com). —*



Dr. Antionette V. Irving, Sheriff

Weekly Pulse Check

Term: Winter | Issue: 40 | Date: 1/29/2021

## A MESSAGE FROM SHERIFF IRVING

On Tuesday, the Virginia Department of Health administered doses of the Moderna vaccine to inmates and detainees at the Richmond City Justice Center. Every inmate within the facility was offered the vaccine, 118 of the 709 inmates and detainees, (17%), took the vaccine. Prior to the actual event, only 46 signed up to take the vaccine. It was good to see that many more participated.

We are hoping more will change their minds and roll up their sleeves at the next opportunity. There are some that have fear and many still contemplating due to the unknown. When surveyed two weeks prior, many stated uncertainty surrounding the vaccine and their distrust for the government as reasons not to take the vaccine. Additionally, many of our staff members took the vaccine (Pfizer or Moderna) this week at various sites.

[Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine](#)  
[Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine](#)

Education of our staff and inmates is critical. As we know, many in our community still have questions and apprehension regarding the COVID-19 virus and the vaccine. VDH has worked with RCSO to educate our residents and staff members regarding the safety and effectiveness of the approved vaccines. We will continue to send out educational material, and our medical providers will continue to answer any questions that inmates may have regarding the vaccine. Again, we are hoping more inmates will roll up their sleeves at the next opportunity. Our staff members will continue to take the vaccine as the rollout continues throughout the area. We cannot mandate anyone to take the shot, it's an individual choice and right despite our best efforts to encourage everyone to take the vaccine.

It becomes a public safety threat, as well as, a public health threat and we, here at the Sheriff's Office, want to do our part to stomp out this virus.

**This virus impacts us all.**

**Wear your mask, wash your hands and social distance as best you can as much as you can.**

**RCSO VACCINATION VIDEO LINK**



# Feedback CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

opportunities sometimes use the discussion to talk about possible promotions, training and development, in addition to their annual goals. Some of our rock stars—folks not currently interested in career advancement—are content with the opportunity to get the feedback on how they’re progressing toward their annual goals.

## Were quarterly check-ins and annual performance reviews handled differently during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. The senior management team was quite busy with a number of other issues during COVID, so our attention to quarterly meetings waned for the first few months. We renewed the practice during the fourth quarter of 2020 as we completed annual evaluations, all the time being mindful of the changes everyone experienced during COVID and while working almost 100 percent remotely. We’re now back on track with quarterly check-ins during 2021.

## Has the planned three-year follow-up survey on use of quarterly check-ins been conducted? If so, what did managers and employees say?

This was delayed due to COVID, but we sent it out recently and the staff response is still generally positive. However, when we were working remotely during the pandemic, our senior staff was required to have weekly video meetings with employees to stay in touch. This is still continuing while we are working on a hybrid schedule that requires two days in the office each week. The quarterly check-ins still serve as a mechanism to discuss progress toward longer-range performance goals. —*N*



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