

We've Virtualized Our Workforce— Now What?

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

WE'VE VIRTUALIZED OUR WORKFORCE—NOW WHAT?

The need to shift to working from home came without notice for many organizations. This unpredictable turn led many employers to pivot to a virtual workforce at the start of the pandemic, and most that shifted are still managing a virtual or hybrid workforce. From higher productivity to increased work-life integration, some organizations have reaped positive outcomes in spite of this unplanned shift. However, others are struggling with issues such as inadequate technology solutions, lower staff engagement and morale as well as the impacts of social isolation and distractions at home. In this panel discussion, leaders will be given solutions that have worked for other organizations that have championed this shift to a virtual environment.

Hear considerations as well as positives for organizations deciding whether or not to go 100% permanently virtual:

- Develop effective plans and engagement for virtual operations long term while enhancing the virtual working experience
- Create a virtual workforce that offers far-reaching and positive effects on operations, talent attraction and employee morale
- Prepare your leaders to operate their organizations during a shift to a virtual and develop strategies to reintegrate remote workers when there may be a shift back to workspace

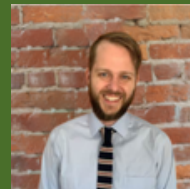
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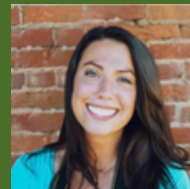
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Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hello, everyone, and welcome. Thank you for joining us this afternoon for Nonprofit HR's Virtual Learning Educational Event. Today's session is entitled, We've Virtualized our Workforce, Now What? My name is Atokatha Ashmond Brew, I'm Managing Director of Marketing & Strategic Communication for Nonprofit HR and I will be your conversation moderator for today. We have a lot of great content to cover. You're going to walk away with a solid understanding of how to develop effective plans and engagement for virtual operations long term, while enhancing the virtual experience as well.

Before we get started, though, I would like to go over a few items so you know how to participate in today's event. You have joined the presentation listening, using your computer's speaker system by default. If you would prefer to join over the phone, select telephone in the audio pane and the dial-in information will be displayed.

You will have an opportunity to submit text questions to today's presenters by typing your questions into the questions pane of the control panel. You may send in your questions at any time during the presentation. We will collect these and address them during the Q&A session at the end of today's event as well. Today's event is being recorded and you will receive a follow-up email in the next few days with a link to view the recording. Along with those assets, the live attendees will also receive codes for SHRM and HRCI recertification.

Now a little about Nonprofit HR. Since 2000, Nonprofit HR has held the premiere spot as a full service talent management firm focused exclusively on strengthening the talent management capacity of social impact organizations. Services we focus on include Outsourcing, Strategy & Advisory, Total Rewards, Search and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. We partner with leaders and human resources professionals with nonprofits, associations, foundations and social enterprises. To learn more about our services, visit nonprofithr.com.

And now, let's learn about today's conversation host, Dr. Tracye Weeks. Tracye is a Team Leader & Senior Consultant for Nonprofit HR's Outsourcing practice. Tracye is a resourceful and results-oriented human resources professional who provides daily value to clients in the areas of thought partnership, HR strategy, leadership coaching and training, and implementing best practices for creating high-performing organizations. She often serves as the HR Interim Leader for clients who value her unique approach and creative solutions to solving organizational challenges. In these roles, Tracye advises leaders on strategy related to organizational structure, policies, risk assessment and aversion. Additionally, she enjoys managing creative initiatives that fit into bigger picture, long-term organizational goals. Most recently, Dr. Weeks completed her Doctorate in Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resources.

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I'll now hand the conversation over to our panelists to introduce themselves, and then to Tracye to share a bit about our Outsourcing practice, and then, launch into today's content. Over to you, Tamika.

Tamika S. Hood: Thank you, Atokatha, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm Tamika S. Hood, I'm a consultant here at Nonprofit HR. I've been in HR for about seven years. I am very passionate about innovative and intricate solutions for performance management, HR assessments, organizational development and organizational leadership. I am also a Certified Professional Diversity Coach (CPDC) and received my master's in Industrial Organizational Psychology from the University of Maryland. I am very excited to be here today. Over to you, Michael.

Michael McElroy: Hi, everyone. My name is Michael, and I am an Associate Consultant here at Nonprofit HR. I'm originally from Washington, D.C., but spent the first 15 years of my professional career in Philadelphia, and I actually just, this year, moved to Baltimore with my family.

I have a background working in nonprofits as an employee, as a people manager and as an HR professional. I've worked for many years at various performing arts organizations before spending seven years at Big Brothers, Big Sisters in Philadelphia and now at Nonprofit HR, where I work with a variety of outsourcing clients and all kinds of HR functions. Some favorites are employee engagement, training and development and recruiting. This summer, I'm finishing up my graduate degree in Human Resources Management at Villanova University, which I'm very excited about finishing, and I'm also excited to be here today.

Aimee Wood: My name is Aimee Wood, and I have been with Nonprofit HR since August. I'm an Associate Consultant, and I have a background in hospitality before joining Nonprofit HR. I hold a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Industrial Organizational Psychology, as well as an MBA from Appalachian State University. My passion for HR lies within onboarding, orientation, recruiting, and I also really enjoy training and development.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you so much, Aimee, Michael and Tamika. I'm excited for this panel today and just to hear more about your discussion, specifically around this topic. But first, I want to let everyone know a little bit about the great work we do, and Michael, Aimee, Tamika and I have an opportunity to work together every day in our outsourcing function.

Nonprofit HR offers on-site as well as virtual outsourcing services that integrate into your culture, and we're really focused on creating sustainable processes that meet your needs as our clients. We offer a unique combination of sector-specific experience, deep functional expertise and flexible service models that accommodate all types of organizations.

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Our clients are various. Outsourcing will really give your organization all the benefits of an in-house HR team, but with less internal, full-time staff and more expertise. You will also have access to Nonprofit HR's full network of practice leaders and experts. And today, we get to spend time with three of them.

Let's dive into what we're here for today, a little bit about our goals and, really, what we're hoping to accomplish. Today, we're really going to be focusing on helping you develop an effective plan to engage your virtual operation. We've been virtual now for over a year and a half, but what does that mean as we embark upon what the return to the workplace actually looks like? We're going to talk a lot about that today and what we've gained from some experiences that we've been through over the last year and a half.

Also, we hope to help create a virtual workforce that offers far-reaching and positive effects on operations, talent, attraction and employee morale. We want to make it better for everyone. And lastly, we're going to talk a lot about preparing leaders to operate organizations during a shift to virtual, as well as help you redevelop strategies to reintegrate remote workers when there may be a shift physically and mentally back to an on-site workspace.

We're very excited to dive into this topic today. Our first set of the program, we'd like to share with you some experiences from our actual clients, actual situations that we've had an opportunity to consult on. And, I think that our first person to kick us off is going to be Tamika.

Tamika S. Hood: Great, thanks, Tracye.

The first case that I'm going to present today is a scenario in which organizations want to virtualize, but they still have many years left on their lease. This particular client did conduct a return-to-workplace staff survey and it showed that most of the staff wanted to remain remote or shift to a hybrid model. And the CEO, she wants to be able to accommodate the staff, however, there are some costs in continuing to rent the office space and not really have staff use it.

So, what should the CEO do?

Some considerations for the CEO and those of you who are grappling with the choice between returning to the workplace virtually, having a hybrid model or going back completely is that you want to be able to understand how to navigate balancing the budget with staff satisfaction and not being locked into a long-term lease. And so, one of the things you want to be able to consider are the roles and responsibilities of staff.

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If there are staff who are mainly operational, let's say you have an office manager or you have finance folks who need to be in the office to make sure that the trains are still running, if you will, or any other employees that may be new and need to get acclimated, those are some of the things that you want to consider when you're thinking about either going 100% virtual or a hybrid model.

The other thing you want to consider is the employee preference. We want to make sure that we continue to engage with employees, and the way to engage with them is by letting their voices be heard. And so, if their preference is to return, then you want to make sure that you're not just saying, "OK, we have to return to the workplace because we can't afford not to," but basically understand what their work-life style is or what their work needs may be, so that it can be a win-win for both the employee and the organization.

You also want to think about projects and workflows. I know many of our clients have annual meetings or conferences, so maybe those might be the times when you have those gatherings in person in the workplace and not have everyone come to the workplace every single day, but only for those important team meetings.

Then, also, you definitely want to make sure that you're considering diversity, equity, inclusion and fairness. Part of what goes into that is making sure that, if you are moving towards a hybrid model or 100% virtualization, you have procedures or policies in place, so that everyone is on the same page. And we can all go to that guide, and that will ensure that there is fairness and there is equity.

And then, you just want to make sure that you are not singling any employees out or saying, "Oh, Susie Q has this special circumstance, so she doesn't have to come in and everyone else does." Again, you want to make sure that you're looking at this from a diversity, equity, inclusion and fairness lens.

To conclude, it's whether a leader decides to renegotiate their office space or they want to share office space with other organizations to cut costs, whether they want to return to the workplace, virtualize 100% or go with a hybrid model. It's important for leaders to remember that you're going to have to reinforce or refine, or even redefine, company culture. Things have shifted since we've moved to virtualization or hybrid during COVID and so, it's important that this is well communicated to the team. Communicating the norms, the values and any assumptions, that is going to be key, and making sure that you're building a shared understanding and shared vision for what the new workplace will look like. With that is communicating intentionally, making sure that leaders are crafting communication that clearly spells out what the rules of engagement are, if you will, for working remotely or a hybrid model.

You want to make sure that there's a communication cadence that's predictable because that fosters productivity and trusting relationships because staff will know. For example, here at Nonprofit HR, we have a Friday Fast Five. That's a constant communication, a constant cadence, and we know to expect that when the Friday Fast Five comes out, we're going to get all of our updates.

And then, you want to make sure that you're effectively engaging with employees. I know it may seem like, "OK, well how do I engage with staff if half of them are virtualized and a part of them is working in the workplace a few times a week?" There are some things you can do. You can have virtual town halls. You can have lunch and learns. You can pull staff to see what they are interested in, what's going to keep them engaged. What is their preferred way to communicate and to build camaraderie with the team?

Then, last but not least, it's important for leaders to lead with empathy. Again, COVID has impacted everyone in different ways. Without get anybody's business, having that compassion and making sure that the decisions that you are making are coming from a place of empathy and are fair and equitable. Then also, lead by example. If you're saying to your staff, "We're going to shut off at 2 p.m. on Friday," but you're still sending emails, then that communicates the wrong message. Again, you want to make sure you lead by example. You want to make sure that you're providing clear communication and clearly defining what the new normal, if you will, or what the culture will look like as we transition to a hybrid model or 100% virtualized environment.

I want to leave you guys with this point to ponder. How will the new workplace model complement or contradict your company's culture? And with that, it's just as important to make sure that you really think through, what is the culture now? What does it look like? It could have shifted with COVID. You just want to make sure that when you are deciding on the right model for your organization, because every organization isn't the same. It has to work for your organization's culture, so you want to make sure that it's in line with it and that it doesn't contradict it.

Thank you. Now, over to Michael.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you, Tamika. That was very interesting, and one of the things that I think was very interesting in the way you started your case study was to talk about how you arrived at this information. How do we know how big the problem is? Or, if there really is a problem or if it's a perception problem with our employees? And the client survey that I know all of us have used and are utilizing a lot, is one of those things that initially, I think, our clients were saying, "I don't want to know how bad it really is."

And as we've now rolled them out and continue to use them to really get a pulse on the organization, we've been able to really pinpoint where the issues are and if there are issues. It's given us an opportunity to step in and address those anxieties to help people transition back into work positively.

Have you had the same experience with your clients?

Tamika S. Hood: Yes. Absolutely. We have surveyed the staff to see what their preferences are. And many of my clients are preparing well in advance, so some of them are looking at a September return-to-workplace date. We started surveying the staff a few months ago, just to see, "OK, based on this response, we want to make sure that the staff knows that they're being heard." So, if we're surveying them, we're going to have to make sure that when we implement this new model, whatever it is, that it incorporates the preferences of the employees.

The other part of it, too, was to make sure that employees understand the safety measures that employers are putting in place, so that was a part of the survey as well. For example, what would make you comfortable to return to the workplace? Sanitizing stations, temperature checks, those types of things? Again, it's to build that trust and let employees know that the organization is thinking about all the safety measures and safety protocols, so that if there is some anxiety, then that can help to mitigate it a bit. But then, it's also asking questions about the work schedule, or what would it look like if you did return part-time? What days would you prefer to work or what hours? Again, let staff know that "Hey, we want to make sure that we're accommodating you, and so let us know what your preferences are." And then, build a model around that for your return to workplace, where it could be a staggered schedule and you have some staff come on some days, some staff coming on others, where we use the calendar so that you can indicate who's going to be the office, where you set limit for how many people are going to be in the office at a time, that type of thing.

Again, make sure that you're planning well in advance and responding to the staff's needs identified in the survey, so that when you do implement these procedures and processes, they will be able to satisfy staff because they they'll know that you've heard them.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you so much, Tamika. I definitely think my takeaways from your case are that we need to remain agile, and agility is key, and that there isn't a new normal. We're in the cycle of creating that right at this moment.

So, Michael, I'm throwing you right in there. I can't wait to hear what you prepared for us today with your clients.

Michael McElroy: Absolutely.

We've been working very closely with one of my clients around culture building and employee engagement in the virtual setting. This particular organization's staff skews a bit younger; many of their staff members are in their twenties or early thirties. And as you can probably guess, research shows that many young millennials and Gen Z employees are looking to expand their social networks in the workplace and looking to build friendships with their colleagues both inside work and outside work.

Pre-pandemic, this particular organization would frequently hold company happy hours or picnics or other types of events to foster these types of connections. Sometimes with younger employees or really with anyone, having a formal event. Maybe a bunch of colleagues want to become friends, but don't know how to do it, so having that company happy hour is that excuse that they have to actually connect, take off their tie, chat, get to know one another and break the ice a little bit.

The big consideration here, now that we're in a virtual space is post pandemic, or during the pandemic, does an IRL happy hour equal a virtual happy hour? Is this a one-to-one comparison? According to our anecdotal research and conversations with employees at this organization, it doesn't. While it's nice to have virtual happy hours or a team lunch, it just doesn't fill the exact same void that's left by some of these in-person events. It's not a one-to-one replacement.

At a virtual happy hour, sure, you have an adult beverage in your hand instead of a coffee, but you're still sitting at your desk. There aren't sidebar conversations. No one really knows how to leave the virtual happy hour or stay later. It just isn't how real workplace friendships are formed.

In our research with our clients, and this particular client, we found that as far as employee engagement activities, it's not just as simple as doing everything that you use to do, but now on camera instead of in person. We really need to reimagine employee bonding in the virtual workspace, and do what we can to foster these organic moments and organic connections between our employees.

So, how do we do that?

If you picture an in-person office, and I'm walking to the copy room, I notice balloons on my colleague's desk and then I stop and ask them if it's their birthday—that's an organic connection. Or I'm making small talk with the new employee about their coffee preferences at the Keurig machine in the break room. Or now I get to the conference room five minutes early for the team meeting and chitchat about my weekend with whoever else happens to show up before the meeting starts.

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These are those organic connections that happen so commonly in the in-person workspace. In the virtual workspace, it's not the same, so you have to actually manufacture some of those moments.

So, the question is, how do we foster these connections and what do employees really want?

I'll say, I'm all about concrete suggestions. I'm going to share with you some of my concrete suggestions. There are plenty others out there, but here's some that we've had success with for this client and some of my other clients as well.

Internal mentoring programs. It can feel really awkward to reach out to that director from another department who you've seen in action and respect a lot. But formalizing internal mentoring and giving an employee an actual excuse to make that connection on a weekly or monthly or whatever cadence basis helps it not feel forced and not feel awkward and helps those employees who are seeking mentorship really have a good excuse to reach out. And it splits the logistical burden between the mentor and the mentee in a well-designed program, making sure it's not all on the mentee or not all on the mentor to create those connections.

Other ideas we had are five-minute chats at the start of each meeting. Instead of diving right into the agenda, even though everyone logs into Zoom, ask everyone to turn their cameras on, ask everyone to turn their mics on and just talk about your day or your weekend for a few minutes. Have a conversation, especially if you're leading the meeting. This is just such a great way to create organic connection. We're all busy, and we all want our five minutes to work, but the extra five minutes you spend just chatting will pay huge dividends in the long run, huge employee engagement dividends. So, take that time, and I promise, it's worth it.

Some other ideas include staff chat forums, to create topical threads on Teams or Slack or whatever communication tool you use, or encourage employees to create their own. At Nonprofit HR, I think we have one about people who like houseplants, which I'm an active member in. We have one for music lovers. We have one for outdoor expeditions local to the D.C. area. So, these are the things that would be conversations, but that aren't necessarily happening, particularly between staff members who maybe aren't working together on a day-to-day basis.

Some other tips there are, try to commit to just one. I know when everyone went remote, sometimes there were multiple internal communication tools that were used. Trying to at least keep these to one stream is very useful. Then, lead by example too. Post a lot. If you're the one trying to up the engagement, just post a lot. It'll feel awkward at first, but keep going, and eventually, hopefully, it will catch on.

Some other ideas are consider a weekly agenda-free meeting. One organization that I worked with had Friday fun time, which was just a quick 15-20 minute completely optional staff meeting, where everyone chatted on Friday morning over coffee. Sometimes they had a facilitated activity, sometimes they didn't have a facilitated activity, and it was just completely agenda free.

And last tip here is, be flexible and get feedback from staff. For years at my previous organization, I lead our employee engagement team, and I'll say this to anyone else who's ever worked on an employee engagement team, never in the history of employee engagement teams has there been an event or an engagement activity that everyone liked. That won't happen. I promise you, someone will not love some aspect of your event, but that's OK, because everyone's feedback is really useful. So, take the time to assess and improve and adapt your engagement initiatives. Tamika was talking about this too, listen and adapt and collect input and improve, especially if you're an organization that's going to have all or some of your employees in a remote or virtual environment for the foreseeable future. There is plenty of time to get it right, and you want to be getting the feedback to get it in the right direction over the long haul.

My point to ponder here is, in thinking about your own workplace, how can you replicate those organic connections that happen in the in-person workplace in a virtual setting and in a way that doesn't feel forced, but does feel formalized? In a way that feels intentional because it's going to require a bit of intentionality in order to make them stick. Ponder that, please. Back to you, Tracye.

Tracye Weeks: I think one of the best things that you said, and something that I think we always say is that it's not by accident, it's by design. And if this is important, we have to intentionally design it and interject it into the organization, into the culture. Now that we have a virtual culture, which will stay with us, we have to have a whole strategy around what that means and how we perpetuate that in an organization.

One of the things that I've found, and what's very interesting, that we didn't expect from the beginning is that all of those things that were so easy to slip away with the formality of meeting in an organization—it's easy to cancel an all staff meeting, it's easy to not have a team huddle because we see each other each day—we've actually been seeing our clients connect more because there's more intention about getting together. Those staff meetings are planned out through the year and people know when it's happening and there's an agenda, a robust agenda, with things that people just need to talk to each other about. Have you seen that with your clients as well?

Michael McElroy: Yeah, absolutely.

I think, especially the client I was referencing at the top of this, they did a really good job pivoting to virtual workspace and reimagining it; so, not having that same agenda that they used for their in-person events and bringing it to the virtual space, but really thinking about new ways to engage. Using different breakout rooms is a big tool that really helps. There's that work coffee, I forget what it's called, tool. You can Google that, everyone. It's a tool where you can randomly pair staff members together. There are all kinds of tools out there, especially as technology is catching up with the fact that, here we all are in the virtual workplace. There's lots of tools you can bring in to enhance these events.

Tracye Weeks: Thanks, Michael. I think that's a perfect segue into Aimee's client that she wants to talk to us about, and this was something that I think all of us have experienced over the last year: having that client who wasn't virtual at all to begin with and that no virtual functions. Tell us about where they are now, Aimee.

Aimee Wood: All right. Yes, happy to. The next client that I am going to talk about is a public parks advocacy organization, and they are pretty unique in their stance because prior to COVID-19, they were already considering a virtual workforce and considering whether or not they could be 100% virtual.

However, COVID-19 definitely expedited that process. They performed an analysis, and they did this in the first place because they wanted to expand the recruitment nationwide, and they realized that if they did want to recruit nationally, they had to allow working from home in other areas if they wanted to avoid paying for those relocation costs. They were actually already allowing telework three days a week, and some staff were on board with this and taking advantage of it. Others were coming into the office every day. Their analysis showed that 95% of their positions could work remotely, and the 5% that could not work remotely were related to maintenance of the building and mainly operations that preferred to be in office rather than at home.

As I said before, the shift of virtualization was certainly expedited for COVID. They were already heading this way, but they were sort of hit with this surprise and needed to speed up the process. They were able to speed this up and they immediately shifted all of their staff to remote work, even that 5% that they identified as not being able to work remotely. They also continued to have their monthly all staff meetings, incorporated one-on-one group activities and established Microsoft Teams as many people have. Additionally, their check-ins increased because the organization was off-site and some people needed that connection.

In this shift, they needed to adapt to the new norm. And so, there were some measures that we took in order to help them adapt. First of all, they created a \$200 stipend for all staff to set up their home offices, and they're currently doing that now as well with all new hires that aren't already set up at the home office to ease that shift. Additionally, they gave all staff a \$25 technology stipend, which they give to them biweekly to help with any additional technology enhancements that they need, to make working from home more pleasurable.

Right off the bat, they struggled with work-life balance and there was no way for their employees to disconnect, their days were much longer. For example, one of their staff members, she reported that she had her home office set up in her bedroom. She said that she would wake up, brush her teeth, sit down at her computer, finish the day, brush her teeth and then get back into bed. Essentially, her whole entire life was confined to this one room. This was obviously not sustainable, and they were eventually forced to find a balance. The organization encouraged walks, they encouraged shutting off your computer at a specific time to allow disconnecting and they also allowed for flexible response times to email. For example, during COVID, when we were in peak COVID times, and everyone's children were staying home, for those parents that needed to attend those big, important meetings during the day but then also care for their children, they allow for those people to send emails at 10 p.m. However, their staff had to understand that they didn't require a response at that time, so that was definitely adapting to a new normal.

They also encouraged open dialogue about concerns and other specific schedule accommodations that other people might have, not necessarily related to childcare. They offered mental health resources through their EAP, and they also really enhanced their employee engagement. Similar to what Michael was saying, they created a book club. The CEO also offered a one-and-a-half hour open office session for anyone to pop in and just express their concerns or things that they weren't happy with. Separate departments hosted virtual lunches and implemented a newsletter. The newsletter was pretty cool because it had personal and also business updates. Similar to our Nonprofit HR Friday Fast Five, they had what was new in business and those happenings as well as proposals and birthdays. So, it kind of created a way for people to connect and really enhance that engagement.

In terms of maintenance of the new norm, there were definitely some challenges. In terms of adjusting to the new norms and expectations, priorities and also social isolation, 5% of the workforce was lost because they just did not enjoy working from home, or they had other priorities that they needed to focus on, like commitment to their families. Additionally, not all their engagement initiatives stuck. Like Michael said, you need to keep testing out what works for you and not every organization is going to be the same. Maybe virtual happy hour works for you. Maybe you'd rather do something else, like bingo. It just depends on your organization.

Additionally, there were no real cost savings due to virtualization. They own their headquarters building, and they have no intention to sell. However, they are reconsidering how to use that space now that there aren't as many employees in the building.

One other change was that they were not able to have their conference that generates a large amount of funds that they usually have access to annually. And so, because of that, they were forced to do a RIF, or reduction in force, for 10 employees and this was necessary to maintain the organization.

However, there were some positive outcomes. Similar to what Tamika was saying in terms of considering fairness and diversity, equity and inclusion. They were concerned that the 5% that they indicated in the beginning was going cause an equity issue for them. What they found was that 5% was able to work from home and so, they could have equity for all positions.

Additionally, they were able to be proactive since they were already considering this move to virtualization. Their IT team was already setup to have training opportunities and ample resources for them to make the shift to some of those programs or platforms that not all staff was familiar with. Productivity also remained the same. They found that people were working from home at the same rate as those working in the office. And overall, the staff was happy with the shift of virtualization. They no longer had to commute to work. Cost savings for employees with was a big positive for a lot of people. For example, they didn't have to take the toll into work. And there was also flexibility of being able to accommodate those personal needs around work.

The conclusion here is that this client really utilized data from the start to leverage decision making. And I think that this is something that we're seeing with a lot of clients as well. You don't have to do an analysis on the ability of your jobs to be virtual, necessarily, because a lot of that has already made the decision for you. We're going to have to be shifting that way, but, like we were talking about with the last case study, a survey or a pulse on how your employees are feeling is really important to leverage that decision making.

My point to ponder is, looking ahead, your solutions really need to be agile and allow your organization to pivot quickly and respond to the unexpected. And, like I said, definitely leverage your data to make those decisions.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you so much, Aimee. It seems like your organization can actually be a case example for a lot of organizations. We were right at the point of deciding whether we want it to be virtual or offer virtual or not, and we were pushed into making a decision. It seems like in this case, it really wasn't a winner for your organization. So, that's a win across the board.

Aimee Wood: Definitely.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you all for sharing a bit of your clients and a bit of your client's situations with us. I think that's always helpful, and I always tell people, learn from what we've been through. You might as well use it, what are the pros and what are the outcomes?

I want to take it now into some questions. We were able to receive questions from participants today that were wondering, and I think we can throw it out to everyone to discuss. We've talked a little bit about leadership, and how leaders have changed, but a lot from the employee perspective. So, I want to know, how do you think your leaders have had to change their styles of managing, managing the teams and managing the work? And also, have your leaders changed the strategic direction of their organization based on where their workforce is now and where we're going to?

Tamika S. Hood: I'll say that one of my clients really capitalized, if you will, on the pandemic by redesigning her workforce. Normally, they would generate their revenue from annual conferences and things like that. What the CEO did was she hired more content delivery people, people who would work on the tech side, so that they could start to deliver those annual conferences virtually. Now, they've shifted from the annual cadence to twice a year. They also have been able to produce more content, just by the CEO strategically redesigning her workforce to support more of a virtual environment, and they've been able to reach larger audiences. And so, that's an example of a leader who's been agile, flexible and really looking at opportunities or ways to grow her staff and world, the organization, just by redesigning their approach. It was very effective and while there were some difficulties in 2020 as everyone adjusted, now they're starting to see the growth and the impact of her strategic decision to redesign the workforce.

Tracye Weeks: That's very interesting. Thank you, Tamika. Michael, Aimee, anything to add on that point?

Michael McElroy: Yeah, I did.

We were talking about this a bit earlier, but the shift to the virtual workplace by nature just makes everything a bit more intimate. Instead of seeing them at their desk, you literally have a Zoom window into your employee's home. You're seeing who they live with, who's in the background, if they have a background, who's walking by, what their childcare logistics are. The supervisor relationship just becomes much more personal.

There are some things I think supervisors can do to adjust to this. Obviously, offering more flexibility when it comes to the cadence of meetings. Clarifying expectations, for example, anyone that uses Zoom or some of the other tools as communication tools, they often have these dots: the green if you're free or red if you're in a meeting or if you're away from your desk. Are you going to be paying attention to those types of things? Do you care when your employee is at their desk or not? You should think through that a little bit, and communicate it to your employees, so they're not surprised because it brings up a lot of trust issues if they're not exactly sure what they're being evaluated on.

Similarly, being more explicit about goals and timelines. You're no longer walking past employees at their desk. As a supervisor, you may be somewhat monitoring them even subconsciously. Are they working or are they on Facebook during the workday? That's not the case anymore, so you really have to extend a fair degree of trust your employees, really focus on them achieving their goals and the objectives that you've set up for them, not just on how they're spending every minute of their workday. Just a few more thoughts.

Tracye Weeks: Thanks, Michael, and taking that one step further, if we think about returning back to the workspace, and now integrating hybrid models, and maybe we have some people that aren't returning, what advice do you have for someone trying to bridge now both of those types of work styles into their organizations?

Michael McElroy: One thing I would say is in thinking about your meetings, think about how to accommodate people. Think about your screen. Think about what your meetings look like, for a remote employee versus an in-person employee. Even just working in organizations that have multiple work sites, you might be used to this already. If your smaller office is called into a meeting where the larger office is, making sure there's space for them to be engaged in the meeting and that they're not just checked out. Think about having our cameras on, where are the cameras positioned, can the virtual employees see everyone at the meeting table? A lot of those are some considerations I would have, especially for meetings and other types of things that are hybrid, in person and remote.

Tamika S. Hood: Yeah, that's great Michael. And to add to that, I would say thinking about the length of the meeting because it's different when you're in person and you can have an hour-and-a-half meeting, chitchat a little bit and maybe have some breakfast with it. When you're on Zoom for two hours, you get Zoom fatigue. So you just want to think about, be thoughtful about, is this meeting best held in a Zoom environment? Could we do a quick Microsoft Teams chat, or could we have a quick phone call? Is this more of an email type of message? In these new hybrid, virtualized environments it's important for organizations to really think about redesigning the structure of their communication to best suit the diverse workforce.

Aimee Wood: Just to piggyback off of that, Tamika, I think that another consideration that deals with timing is also considering that since you will have some employees that are going to be virtual and living in different areas, the timing of when you have your meetings matters, too. Similar to organizations that are global, considering that some of your staff might be located in California and they don't want to wake up at 4 a.m. for a meeting is definitely something to take into consideration.

Michael McElroy: Sorry, Tracye. I would say just memorize the timing. What's the time difference between the east coast and the west coast? I'm terrible at that, and I think any leader should learn that, myself included. I'm making a note right now.

Tracye Weeks: I'm so thankful for Zoom that will do the coordination for you, because that is very helpful. One of the things I think I realized here recently was that we don't plan time to get there anymore. We're not planning a 15-minute walk that it may take me to actually get set up and get ready for the next meeting. And so, we build ourselves in where we're back to back, and that creates fatigue. Just that easy thing of moving my meeting from one hour to 45 minutes, gives you an opportunity to move, an opportunity to think and to shift into that space. Then, you're ready and fresh for the next thing.

Speaking of other challenges that we haven't talked about, or some other challenges you think people may need to be aware of, as I start to think about shifting to these models and these hybrid models, are there any other challenges you'd like to highlight that maybe your clients went through and that you've resolved for your clients?

Tamika S. Hood: I think the technology piece was one of the challenges because for many of the clients, they were used to being in person. It was a bit of a learning curve to get up to speed on the technologies: Microsoft Teams, Zoom, et cetera. So, what was helpful for a few of my clients is I helped them craft a rules of engagement email, if you will. Basically, it went out to staff, and it talked about what the expectations are. Do we, as Michael mentioned earlier, want the cameras on? Do you want the cameras off? If they expect their team to have the cameras on, then they communicated that. The working hours were communicated in the rules of engagement email, saying, "OK, our core hours are 9 to 5, you're expected to be responsive between 10 and 4," or whatever it is.

In addition to that, we also included links for different trainings, like on the technology. We also provided those resources, saying "Hey, if you have issues with teams, please see this link. If you need some troubleshooting with Zoom, go here."

And then lastly, we also made sure that we emphasized the need for self-care and for taking care of yourself during that time because, again, the pandemic impacted so many people in different ways. And by leading with empathy, it was important to show staff that we understand it's not easy. Take the time that you need. If you need help, HR is a resource, EAP is a resource. I think that was really integral in transitioning into this new virtual environment at the start of the pandemic.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you so much, Tamika.

On the flip side of that, and we're talking about the positive things, what are some of the other positive things that this has created for organizations? For example, have we seen an increase in productivity? Or any of those other measurements that we may have had if we were actually in a workspace?

Tamika S. Hood: Yeah, I'd say that's what leaders are starting to see, and we can see that from the different polls, such as Pew, Harvard Business Review and Nonprofit HR. We've done these surveys to see how productivity and engagement has been impacted from working virtually. I think leaders are seeing that the staff is more productive, actually, when working virtually, just because they're able to balance home and work and they're cutting out that commuting time. And, I think, too, the engagement piece ties into the productivity. With going into a virtual environment, being able to keep staff engaged with those virtual happy hours or town halls, lunch and learns or even a fast five to update them, they are seeing that staff were trusting because the employers were empathetic to their needs and showed that they wanted to continue to support. I think that also attributed to the increase in productivity going into a virtual environment.

Aimee Wood: Another trend that I've seen, too, is that leaders in general are trusting their employees more. I think that, for the most part, there were a lot of my clients that never thought that they would ever be a virtual organization. It just wouldn't work for them. Their employees wouldn't be able to be watched at their desks and be able to tell that they're doing their work. But what they found is that with the forced shift to a virtual workforce, like Tamika said, they are more productive and they're still getting their work done. So, it's been an interesting permanent case study.

Michael McElroy: And not to mention the recruiting bonus perk too and being able to recruit all over the country, if you're fully remote. That's been a huge bonus. Particularly for some of those harder to fill positions or some of the higher-level, more senior-level, positions as well.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you.

I think one last question for those who still haven't quite made up their mind yet on whether this will work for them and their organization, and just a final plug from the three of you—what are the positive outcomes? Why should we do this? Why should an organization say, “We should move towards being virtual in some capacity,” may that be hybrid, may that be 100%. This is your opportunity to convince us all.

Michael McElroy: My rhetorical question here is, or not even rhetorical, have you read the news? Have you looked at or has anyone been on employee forums, Reddit or even just social media? There is a lot of momentum from employees wanting to stay virtual. It's not everyone, there are plenty of employees who want to go back to the workplace. But there's a huge wave of support for keeping virtual work environments. And so, I think the biggest plug is that as an organization, you may be a risk alienating or losing or demotivating some of your talent if you don't listen to that; adjust and remain agile and flexible, where possible. Obviously, it's not possible for every position or every organization. It's a tide that's coming and I guess we'll see what happens. It's ever-evolving, but there's definitely a lot of momentum in that direction right now.

Tamika S. Hood: Absolutely, and like Michael said, in addition to increasing your talent pool and being able to recruit nationally, globally, there's also cost savings for overhead. If you go 100% virtual, you don't have to worry about those expenses for the office, rent if you can, if you don't have a long lease, like some of my clients where they still have to decide, but you save on that.

Also too, again, I think that research has shown, this last year has shown, that employees don't need to be sitting at a desk and watched in order for them to be productive. As long as they're engaged, as long as the organization is clearly communicating expectations, norms, values and a shared vision, then you're going to get the productivity of the team. More so than you probably would have gotten if everyone remained in the workplace. And so, that's a huge positive for either going hybrid or going 100% virtual.

Aimee Wood: Just to reiterate, also, in addition to it being a cost savings for the organization, the employees save money as well. They no longer have to get in their car and drive to work and pay for gas. As well, the cost of just their time. A lot of employees that work in D.C., it takes them, if they're coming from the suburbs, at least an hour to get into the city and at least an hour to get back. That's two hours that they could be spending with their family. And that can make a really big difference on the livelihood of your employees.

Tracye Weeks: Thank you all so much. I have been keeping an eye on the chat, and there have been many questions waiting on you from the audience. We want to take an opportunity to hear from the audience and give them an opportunity to hear from you. So, I'm going to throw it to Atokatha to ask her to iterate some of the questions that the audience has for you.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. Thank you so much, Tracie. Thank you, Tamika, Michael and Aimee. What a great panel discussion, what a rich conversation. If there are any other questions from audience participants, please type them into the questions box and we'll just keep getting to as many of them as we can in the remaining time.

The first question, Tracie, is how do you create a sense of inclusion and belonging when onboarding new hires virtually?

Tamika S. Hood: That's an excellent question. It boils down to making sure that you're intentional about the onboarding. Give as much time in advance as possible to onboard the new hires. For example, in this new virtual environment since COVID, when I'm supporting leaders with onboarding, I'm making sure that they know even though you can't meet the person in person, let's schedule some time for virtual lunch where I let the new hire know in advance to have their favorite lunch or snack ready and they can meet with the CEO or the hiring manager. Also, make sure that we send them a welcome package, flowers or plant or something like that to let them know, "Hey, we're really excited that you've chosen to join our team." Also, make sure that the technology and equipment is mailed to the employee well in advance of their start date. At least, five days or so before the start date, just so they can make sure that their technology is up to date.

Also, in terms of the onboarding schedule, I like to make sure that the first few meetings are number one, with their hiring manager; number two with the information technology person, so that they have their phone and email and everything working; and then with HR, so that they know, here are the benefits, here are the policies and making sure that it's not just a set-it-and-forget-it, but we're still continuing to check in with the new hire after week and week two, to see if there's anything that they need. Because, again, it's not like we're in person where they can just reach out and stop by someone's office and ask for help. So, you want to make sure that, too, you're informing anybody who's on the orientation committee to make sure that they are checking in with the new hire and leaving ample time to be able to address any questions that they may have and to follow-up.

Tracie Weeks: We've also seen a re-emergence of the buddy program and the mentee program to make sure, because we are missing those day-to-day interactions, there is always someone who's specifically there weekly, if not more in the beginning, making sure that person is doing OK and has what they need in order to feel connected to the organization. So, don't underestimate the value of assigning someone a buddy. I call it, phone a friend. When you need something, reach out on Zoom and just ask the question, and then I'm constantly checking in, day over day, how's it going today? Are we a one or a five, what's happening? So, don't underestimate that.

Sorry, Michael, to you.

Michael McElroy: I was going to bring up the same point, and I think all of this, that you both have been saying, goes back to my earlier point about these organic connections in the workday. I bet everyone can think of that feeling when you're walking through your office, and you see the person who started on Monday and it's Wednesday, and they look lost. They're just sitting there doing nothing. Checking in with that person, even chatting and seeing if they understand, if they're all set up, just those little check-ins don't happen when they're out of sight, out of mind because it's virtual. So, the buddies, the immediately having a supervisor as a touchpoint, knowing who is owning each day, each week, each hour of onboarding is so important. They need to know that they have someone to go to. It's really important.

Aimee Wood: I think that it also can be really beneficial to have one of those buddies in moments where that new hire might not get a glimpse of the culture of the organization right away. So, maybe a cultural ambassador that can help them adapt to some of those unspoken rules, or someone that they can go to ask, how is this done in this organization? Are we more casual? What do we wear to work? What do people do after work? Do we have those virtual happy hours? And, what groups can I start getting acclimated to? Should I be in this plant group? So, I think that that's also the value in the buddy program.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Right, I think someone just followed up with a question for Tamika, and she mentioned technology a moment ago. They asked if you all have any guidance for work stipends for phone and internet?

Tamika S. Hood: Yeah. A lot of organizations, and ours included, have started to include an amount in an employee's paycheck, whether it's once a month or twice a month or whatever the cadence, to cover technology costs. I think that for leaders, they should just consider what the budget is, consider the number of employees that they have, consider what it was costing them, when everyone was in person, and balancing it out to get to a fair amount to offer to employees for a stipend for technology. I do think that it is important is because we are using our own things right now. Our own electricity, our own phones and things like that. So, I think it feeds into employee engagement and empathy and showing, "Hey, here is a little bit of a stipend to cut some of those tech costs for you."

Michael McElroy: I'm going to advocate for stipends as well because think of the administrative burden and a lot of places do reimbursement, but like Tamika was saying, everyone's using their own internet, everyone's using some degree of their own technology. So, having a stipend and taking out the administrative burden of people having to submit receipts and do it that way I think can save you a lot of overhead in the long run.

Tracye Weeks: And when we think about our cost savings, the savings we're having because we're not in the building, then one way that we intentionally build culture is to reallocate those costs.

How much would electricity cost me a month if everyone was in the building versus me providing a small stipend to my employees based on them using their own? Initially, when we were in the first year of COVID, there was an emergency, so yes, here's a stipend. Now that we're still in COVID, the question is, does this now become an annual thing? Is this now updating or upgrading our benefits policy and offerings overall? These are things that are going to change and are changing that will last with us beyond when we are actually in the office. But it's an opportunity for us to intentionally build that culture and make sure that we're informing a culture where we care about our people. No longer are we able to drop it at the door. It's integrated. It's not work from home. It's work at home, and there's definitely a difference.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. Thank you so much, everybody. We have a question in reference to some of the content and points that Michael shared regarding being able to expand your talent pool for new opportunities. They ask about discussion on the business decisions needed in terms of compliance, state filings, regulations that impact from remote workers and so forth.

Michael McElroy: Yeah, there are a lot of factors to consider. I think that operations teams, certainly, and leadership need to get involved as well, because there are tax implications from having employees working from different states, and also, are you officially setup for business in those states? So, that's a big consideration.

There's also the equity consideration of, are you just making these decisions ad hoc? "Oh, we got a great applicant from Texas. So, we'll have everyone within five miles of our office or 50 miles of our office, except for the one Texas employee," or is this a decision that you are making as an organization going forward?

I think there are different ways to approach it. I think there are different equity ways to approach it. If you're being consistent by a certain line of business or division or type of position, there's a way to justify having only certain streams of business be remote. But these are all considerations, and operations and business leadership should be involved in them as well.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great, and I think this question is a follow up to Aimee's points about using data for decision making around how do you manage up with leadership and get them to use data and want to survey employees to get their insight and perspectives when that may not be a traditional way that the organization has managed their talent?

Aimee Wood: I think that that is a really great point. I actually do have a client that is very apprehensive about sending out any pulse surveys because they already have an idea of what they actually want to do moving forward. And so, I think that it's best to demonstrate the value in gaining insight from your employees when making those decisions. Because, overall, the staff is going to be happier with the decision that you make if they feel that they had a say, regardless of if you actually go with their final decision or the majority decision. If you survey them and ask how they're feeling, what their thoughts are, I think that goes a long way. So, involve them in the conversation. And then, making sure you use that data effectively in the correct way and gathering the data in the right fashion to begin with, I think, can be extremely valuable.

I think the best way overall to do that is to make sure that employees are involved in the decision making from the beginning. Like Tamika said, you get that input far in advance so that you can prepare, plan and overall, they will have a greater buy-in if they had a say.

Tracye Weeks: To piggyback off that, Aimee, something that we've seen now is that the surveys have turned into our actual return-to-work workgroups. They're used for very specific reasons, but one of the reasons is that we want to satisfy all of the objections to the return. And having employees in that work group that are representative of all of the employee communities you have gives them a place and an opportunity to express what those objections are, what those concerns are and bring it back to the group and bring it back to the leadership to say, "Hey, here's what's trending right now. What do we need to put in place?"

For example, I had an employee population. The population was very concerned specifically about riding mass transit to return to work, and so we were able to identify early, "Oh, most people are really concerned about mass transit. What can we do about that?" So, the company decided to offer a parking reimbursement instead. If you would like to drive to work, we have an area where you can park and we'll offer you a parking reimbursement. We were able to combat that objection and combat that anxiety, and people were like, "OK, now I can get over that barrier. What else do we need to return work?"

So, making employees really know, you're a part of us figuring out what these decisions are, what we consider, we value your opinion and we're listening to you to inform the decisions of your work environment.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great, here's another one, and I think this may be general for all of you. How have you addressed staffing shortages effectively with hiring managers from your clients? This person says, "Ours have some unrealistic expectations about the skillsets of candidates and time to fill, and we are creative in talent acquisition, sourcing and community outreach." So, anybody jump right in.

Tamika S. Hood: Back to Michael's point about the opportunity to diversify the workforce and increase the talent pool by being able to recruit nationally and globally. I think for those recruiters in that organization, expectation setting is going to be key. Typically when I'm recruiting for role, I will have a flowchart and a diagram of who's going to do what and when and realistically have touch points with the hiring managers, weekly or biweekly, just to let them know, "Here's where we are. Here are some of the challenges that we're encountering in terms of the applicant pool. Let's revisit the job description and see what we may need to change. Maybe you need to add more about the benefits. Maybe we need to open it up to a broader location." Having those open, honest and transparent conversations, and, again, having that consistent dialogue in coming up with a solution, I think that helps hiring managers and leaders see that we're not just saying, "Oh, we can't find anybody." They're actually coming to me and saying, "Here's where I think we may need to tweak, so that we can get a better applicant pool." Or thinking through, maybe this is something that needs to be outsourced to a recruitment firm, just exploring all options and really being clear with the hiring manager and leadership about what is going on during the recruitment process is going to be key to them understanding the needs of the organization in terms of recruitment.

Tracye Weeks: That also goes along with us redefining and having an opportunity to redefine what their responsibilities and duties of each position actually are. And if we have job descriptions that have not been updated in the last year and a half, I can bet you, if we were to do an audit right now, there would be some things we would take out and change, which may also change what our talent pool looks like.

One of the points Michael made earlier is that one of the things we have been able to take advantage of in those organizations who've now decided a hybrid model is OK, they're 100% virtualized, is they are able to draw from a much larger pool that was very narrow before when they were looking within a specific mileage area.

Michael McElroy: I have one last thought, which is that the different tools out there are also catching up. Applicant tracking systems and websites where people post jobs are catching up about these organizations that are fully virtual, maybe virtual for a while, virtual just during COVID. So, if you have your one way you're used to posting jobs or job descriptions, as Tracye was saying, making sure you're actually exploring what these tools have to offer in terms of where you can post. Can you post a position nationally? Can you post it just locally? Can you make it explicit that your remote until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic? There are tools to help you with some of these big recruiting decisions.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: All right, thanks so much, Michael. And this question is a follow up to a point that was made earlier regarding leveraging your EAP. What mental health resources can you offer to support employees transitioning back into the office after working from home during the pandemic?

Aimee Wood: I think this is a great point and goes off of the stipends that we were talking about earlier.

I have one client who has opted to give their employees a wellness stipend, and they can use that for anything that they would like. They can use it to go to the gym. They can use it for apps, like Calm or Talkspace or for therapy. So, that is one option that you can offer in addition to the EAP that is already available for employees.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Great. And there are lots of questions around a hybrid workforce, hybrid models and hybrid schedules. It looks like we have an opportunity to define that a little bit for our audience and help them understand the different approaches.

Tracye Weeks: I will start because I'm pretty sure everyone has multiple examples. Hybrid has taken on so many meanings. That's not a bad thing. It can just mean different things in any organization, and I think the first thing is to understand, that's OK.

For some organizations in my portfolio, hybrid means that we have some employees that are virtual 100% of the time and some that aren't. And then, in the same organization, we have a phased-in approach. The way we are approaching flexibility for the return is we have flexible schedules, so all of these things flow into it. It's different now, it's not just 9 to 5 for every single employee.

Also, while we are in the phased-in approach of people returning, our workforce is not all there, at the same time, we have core hours and core days. So, you can choose—half a day, starting back for three days a week if you like. Or you can choose to work the full day for two days a week, and those schedules will continue as long as we are productive.

Then, I have another client who has only planned mandatory days in the office that give people an opportunity to collaborate, and it may be teams. If I'm on a meetings team, and I really need to meet with marketing because we have a big event coming up, they may be remote and working remotely by their choice, but they know that every Wednesday for the next four weeks, we're going to be in the office collaborating as a team.

The hybrid model is really built on your level of comfort, it should also be informed by your employees, and it can be informed by your space. In thinking about cost savings, I have a client that decided to downsize during the pandemic. What that means is their employees are coming back and they're going to be sharing offices, so that automatically means there are groups of employees who cannot be in the office on the same day. It means that half of their workforce comes in half the week, and the other half comes in the other half of the week.

So, hybrid looks different, and that's what your professionals, that's what we, are for, to help you figure out what's going to work best for your organization.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Any other points to add to that?

Aimee Wood: I have just one point. For one of my clients, they actually are shifting to three days in the office and two days virtual. They surveyed their employees and got an understanding of what they were interested in at first, and this is the compromise that they came to. However, they're making one small adjustment to their telework policy, that is a consideration of mileage. And so, if an employee lives, say, 50 miles away from the office, then they're allowed to be virtual four days of the week. So, those are some considerations to make to that, although, yes, we need to be equitable, equity is different than equality. For those employees that do live further away, it may be necessary to make those small adjustments to your policy.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Yeah, and I think this is somewhat of a follow-up to that, Aimee, and it is for human resources nonprofits, those that really are public facing, and they have staff that don't have the opportunity to work virtually, how do you facilitate the reality perception of fairness when it just looks like they don't get to the benefit of being able to work virtually like others?

Aimee Wood: I think right off the bat, it's really important to consider fairness in terms of the actual job role. So, if you cannot perform your job, and the duties that are listed on your job description virtually, then I would say that automatically, you can't be a virtual worker.

The important thing to remember there is that if you're making that consideration for one human resources professional, then that should be for all human resources professionals. You really should focus on the actual role, what duties are performed by that position and make it equitable among those roles.

Michael McElroy: I also think there's a compensation angle to this, too, in the same way that there's certain careers and industries that are higher paying because maybe they're less desirable. And so, you have to pay employees more money.

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It may be something you work into your compensation philosophy, where positions that require in-person work, especially if you are hybrid, have some degree of elevated compensation as a result.

Tracye Weeks: And you can also work that into your benefits plan. Some companies, as small as it may seem for those that cannot work outside of the office. They buy lunch for their employees every day, it's a perk of having to be in the office, or some of those reimbursements or those stipends that we've talked about, those mileage considerations, those other things that can come from your job being primarily located at a location.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: This is our last question, and it has to do with mandatory vaccinations. We know there have been some changes, and that organizations, it appears, are able to mandate vaccinations. The question is, how do you initiate that conversation when you know that your staff have already demonstrated some resistance?

Tamika S. Hood: This is a question that, it depends on the organization.

It depends on your organizational culture, your organization values, and I've had these conversations with a couple of leaders. I think the next day that we all found out that the mask mandate was lifted, I got calls, and it's like, "Oh, my goodness, what do I do? I don't agree with that." Or, "I don't want to require staff to have to show proof of vaccination." So, it was a matter of us just having a conversation, and us talking through, what are your company values? If this is not something that you see fit within your organization, then how can we best support your organization? So, we looked at different types of policies that were for volunteer vaccination, mandatory vaccination and I laid out the options for this leader, so that they can make an informed decision. Again, I would say it's not one-size-fits-all. It depends on the organization, the nature of the work. Obviously if it's an essential worker, frontline workers, nurses, they would need a mandatory vaccination, but I think that organizations need to just look at the nature of the work, what their organizational boundaries are and what staff want as well in order to make the best decision for the organization.

Tracye Weeks: There are some organizations and some jobs where it just is mandatory for whatever reason; for sake of public health, if we have jobs where we're going inside of homes and we're putting others at risk. But what we've been able to do, and it goes all the way back to that first case that Tamika talked about, is the survey has been a great tool in us determining how big the problem was. In an organization, we were able to have legal review the questions we wanted to ask about vaccinations and got them very specific to where we were able to determine how many of our employees weren't getting vaccinated, so we could see how big the problem was. What we discovered is there was only one person.

And so, we were able to handle that request through laws, like ADA and FMLA, and we were able to handle that through that.

At another organization, where vaccinations are mandatory because they are client facing—they are going in and out of people's homes that have issues themselves, and it could be worse—what we've decided to do is “strongly encouraged” before “mandatory,” and we've offered perks based on vaccinations, which included an additional stipend for every shot given that was directly add it to your check and a referral for every one of your friends that you convince to get vaccinated, and that's something that worked. Then, every other month, we turn it over to something new, I think this month is scratch-off tickets and saying, “Who wants to win something?” to try to really strongly encourage, before we get to that place and saying, “By September 9, you have to be vaccinated, or...”

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Right, and we're coming to a close very soon. Before we head to conclusion, does anyone have any closing thoughts that they would like our attendees to consider?

Michael McElroy: I had one just based on this vaccination thing, and all of this, it's to be kind to yourself, too, with some of these decisions. No one asked for this. No one wanted this. I say to HR people all the time, this has been a hard year for everyone, for so many reasons. It's been a hard year for HR professionals because we have a lot of changes happening all the time, and for organizational leaders. So, you won't have the answer always, to every question that's happening because this is literally new territory for everyone.

So, take a moment if you don't have an answer, regroup, talk to your team. Take space, take time to develop the right policy instead of rush to have an answer. Remember that we're all trying to figure this out. It's crazy.

Tamika S. Hood: Yeah, I agree with Michael. We're flying the plane while we're building it. Again, you just want to make sure that you're taking the time to do your due diligence, do your research and attend webinars like these to get more information to best support your organization. And then, be agile, be flexible, again, because this is new territory for us all. And then, remember to lead by example and with empathy.

Tracye Weeks: And I would challenge us to be ready to create something new.

This is our opportunity to completely dismantle what we've known, how we've operated and how we've led before and completely do something different that does a lot of good for your organization, but also for your employees, and build it that way.

Aimee Wood: I think going off of what Tracye said, in addition to taking advantage of the opportunity to do something new, be creative as well. There are many different things that your organization can do, like incentivizing vaccines. That is not only new, but it can be fun and creative for your employees.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thank you, again, to everybody. That's all the time we have today for Q&A. Thank you again to our attendees for being on this webinar today. We hope you found it valuable. And, again, thank you to our panelists for bringing such critical and timely information.

There are many more webinars coming up in 2021. Be sure to check out our events calendar at nonprofithr.com/events. Also, be sure to complete the feedback survey that will pop up once the webcast has ended. Your comments help us with our planning and can inform the topics we cover as well.

Later this week, you will receive your SHRM and HRCI recertification codes and link to the webinar recording and presentation slides with the follow-up message. Please also note that we are having a webinar on June 29 about our Return to Workplace Survey results. That webinar will become available for registration this week, you will receive a link to that in the follow-up email as well.

If you'd like more information about available services or support from Nonprofit HR, please email us at info@nonprofithr.com, or visit us on nonprofithr.com and complete a contact form. That's all we have for today. Enjoy your afternoon.