

Leading Through Change: RTO Transition

Thursday, August 13, 2026
Hosted by CalHR





“What would happen if we studied what
was right with people versus what’s
wrong with people?”

DON CLIFTON

Father of Strengths Psychology and Inventor of CliftonStrengths®

CliftonStrengths at CalHR



CalHR – 2026 Gallup

Exceptional Workplace

Award Winner

*Recognized for strengths-based
development that helps people
do their best work*



**GALLUP EXCEPTIONAL
WORKPLACE AWARD**
2026 STRENGTHS WINNER



What I Studied — What the Data Told Me

Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership

Research focus

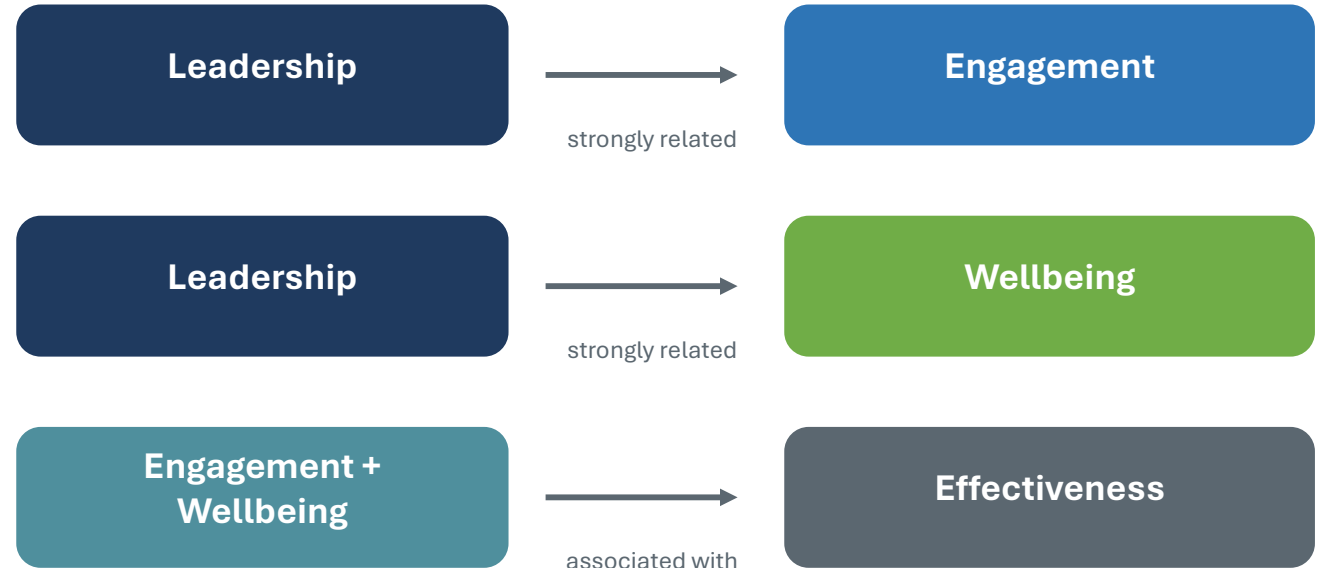
The relationships among:

- Leadership behaviors
- Employee engagement
- Employee wellbeing
- Perceived organizational effectiveness

Executive translation

Leadership is not separate from the employee experience — leadership is part of it.

Key findings



Takeaway: leadership is woven through the employee experience.

What experience are we creating?

Return-to-office is not just an operational change.

For employees, it is an experience.

- **For employees**
clarity • consistency • support • connection
- **For managers**
tools • resources • direction • confidence
- **For ourselves**
space to navigate change while leading others

Spring Health: Proactive support

Gallup: Culture, engagement, leadership

Listen today through the lens of experience.



Agenda



Employee Engagement During RTO

Leading the Reasonable Accommodation Process

Being Supportive Through RTO

Break

Panel Discussion

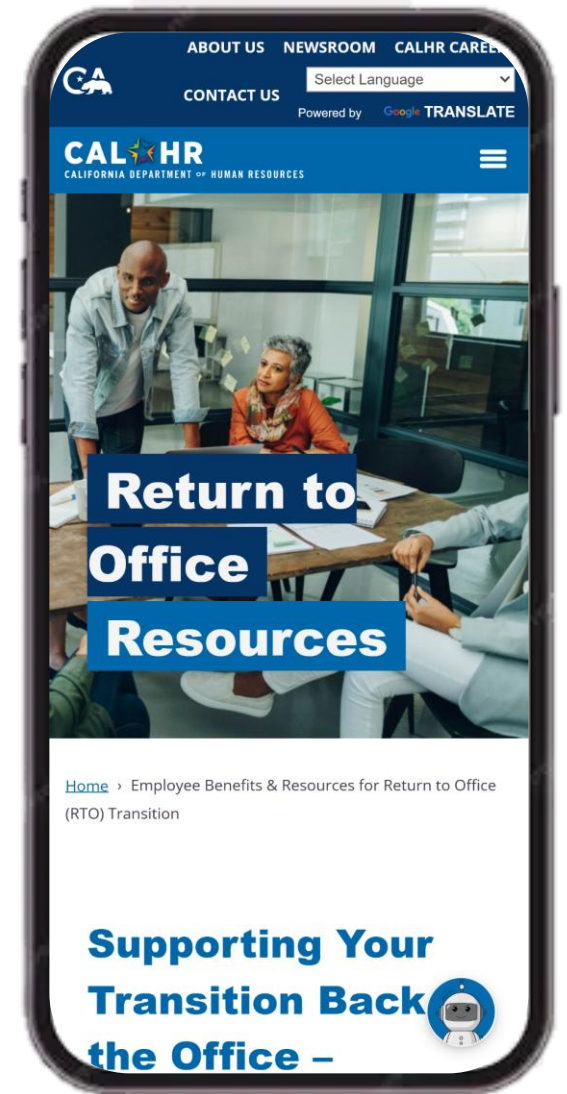
Resource Fair

Key Resources

RTO resources webpage



RTO FAQ document





Employee Engagement During the RTO Transition

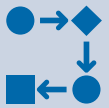
What Leaders Need to Know

State Leader Forum
Presented by Gallup

MASON HULTS
Senior Workplace Consultant

Making the Transition Smooth

Three actions to set your team and department on solid footing



Set Clear Expectations. Have a clear, direct conversation with your team about what 4 days onsite actually means day-to-day for your department



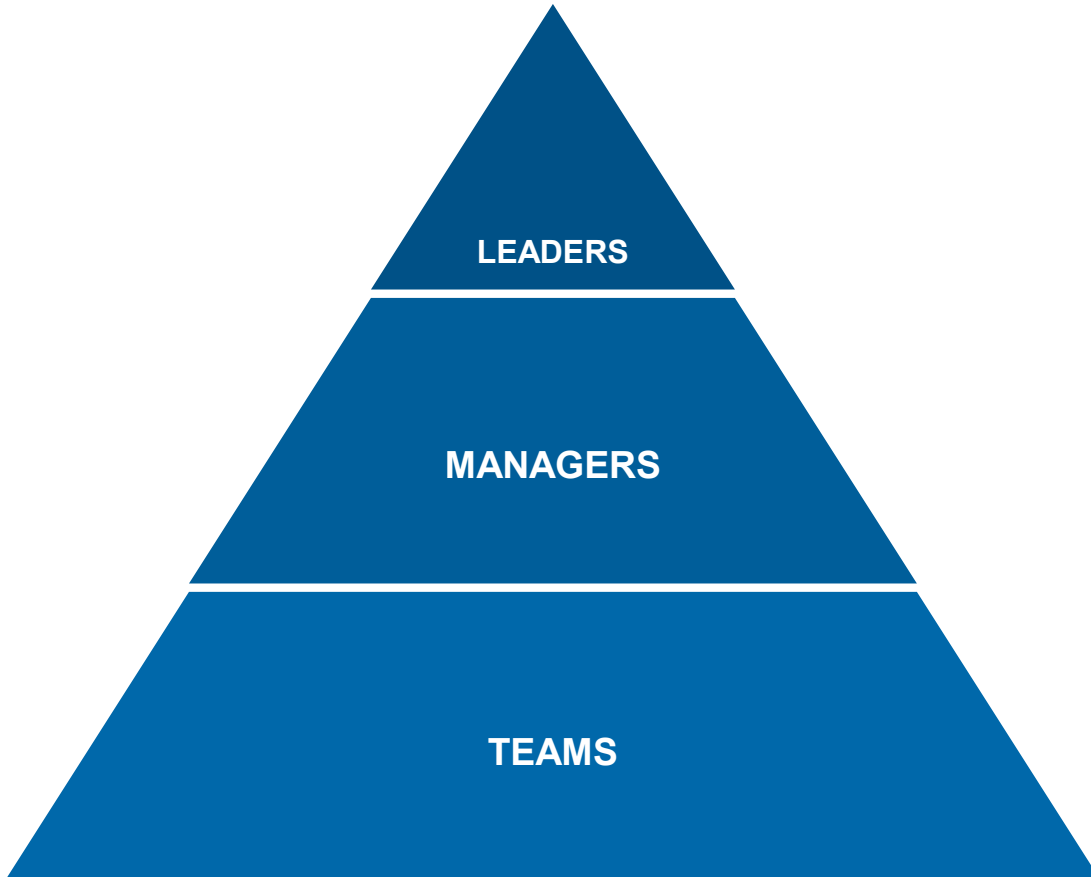
Empower People Leaders. Share the engagement framework and resources with people leaders – ask them what they are hearing from their directs that you can address



Make RTO Worth It. Ask your team what would make the in-office time most valuable

Change Moves Through Three Layers

The order matters: Each layer has to be cared for before it can bring the next one along.



Start With Yourself. Make your own peace with a decision you did not make, so you can lead it with credibility.

Bring Your Managers Along. Give your people leaders the time and space to work through their own perspectives and support them as they navigate this transition.

Equip Them for Their Teams. Hand managers practical tools and clear expectations for engaging their employees through the transition.

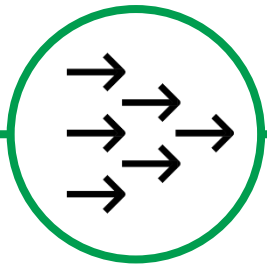
Culture is the Sum of All Messages We Receive

CULTURE:

is “how we do things around here”

is influenced by your organization’s **purpose** and brand

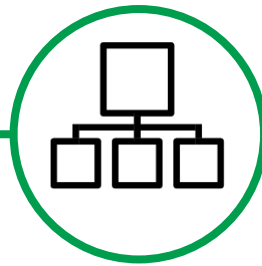
creates expectations for how employees interact and accomplish their work



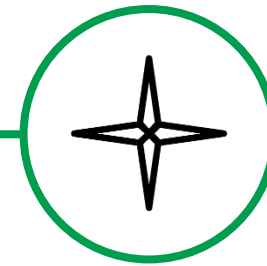
LEADERSHIP AND
COMMUNICATION



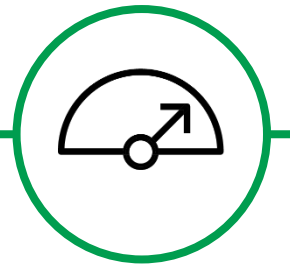
HUMAN CAPITAL



WORK TEAMS AND
STRUCTURES



VALUES AND
RITUALS



PERFORMANCE

Why Culture Matters

In times of uncertainty and chaos, culture brings an **organization's purpose to life**. How an organization operates and maintains culture during a challenging time will define both its **current and future employment** and **customer brands**.



CHROs and Employees See Culture Very Differently

Culture is shaped by everyone with an organization. Positive feelings about culture are not equally felt.

44%

of **employees** rate their organization's culture as **very good or excellent**

75%

CHROs rate their workplace culture as **very good** or **excellent**

Most CHROs say culture is stable
But nearly all are actively working to change it

WF Q1 2026, U.S. Employees MOE: ±1 point. Q1 2026 Gallup CHRO Roundtable Survey of 102 Fortune 500 CHROs.

Leaders Are More Positive on Drivers of Excellent Culture

Employees who strongly agree to these questions, are more likely to say their workplace culture is excellent.



WF Q1 2026, U.S. Employees; Leader MOE: ±3 points, Manager MOE: ±2 points, Individual Contributor MOE: ±1 point

Culture Connection Drives Agility and Trust

Employees who feel connected to their organization's culture are:

4.3x

More likely to believe their organization has the **speed and agility to meet customer and marketplace change**

4.2x

More likely to believe their organization **always delivers on the promise it makes to customers**

4.3x

More likely to be **engaged at work**



Engagement is the emotional commitment an employee has to their work, team and organization.

Engaged employees bring **energy, initiative, and genuine investment**, not because they're told to, but ***because they care.***

Engaged Employees Are More Connected to Organizational Culture

How we engage employees is cultural. Aligning culture and engagement strategies helps boost both.

% Strongly agree
*I feel connected to my
organization's culture.*



WF Q1 2026, U.S. Employees MOE: ±1 point

Employee Engagement Shapes Work and Life Experiences

THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Engaged employees are:

 **71%**
less likely to feel **burned out**

 **67%**
less likely to be **looking to leave**

LIFE EXPERIENCES

Engaged employees are:

 **67%**
more likely to be **thriving in their wellbeing**

 **29%**
less likely to **feel worry or stress**

ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

Engaged teams have:


Productivity

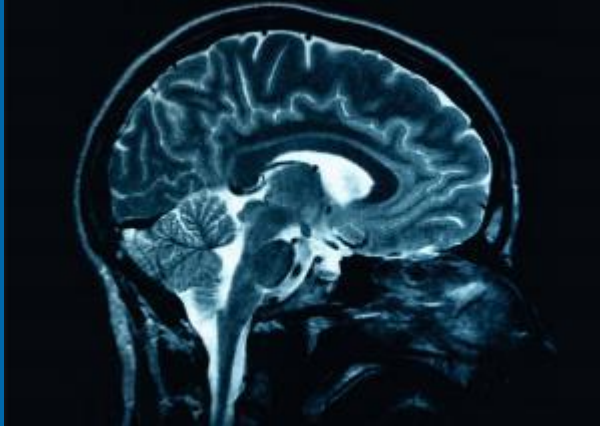

**Customer
engagement**


Retention


Safety

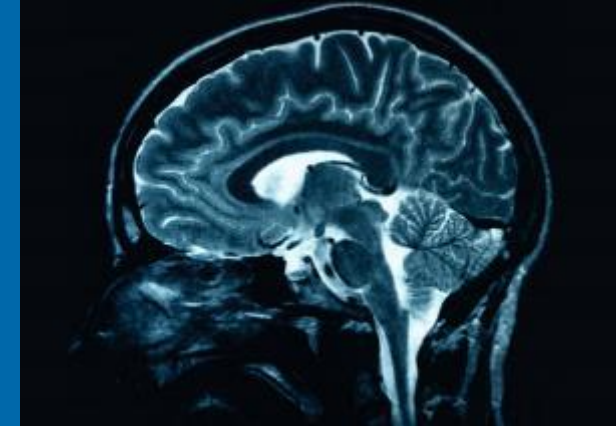
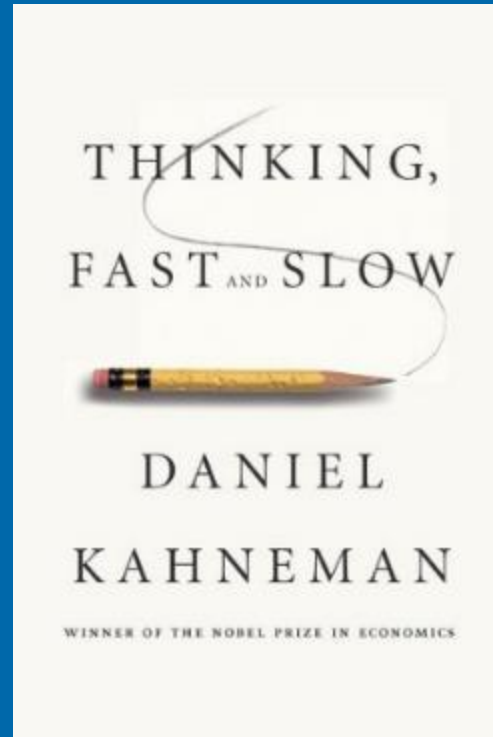
Analysis based on WF Q1 2025 survey

How we feel matters. *Humans are emotional decision makers.*



SYSTEM 1

- Emotional
- 70%
- Limbic System
- Fast
- Intuitive
- Automatic
- Effortless
- Subconscious



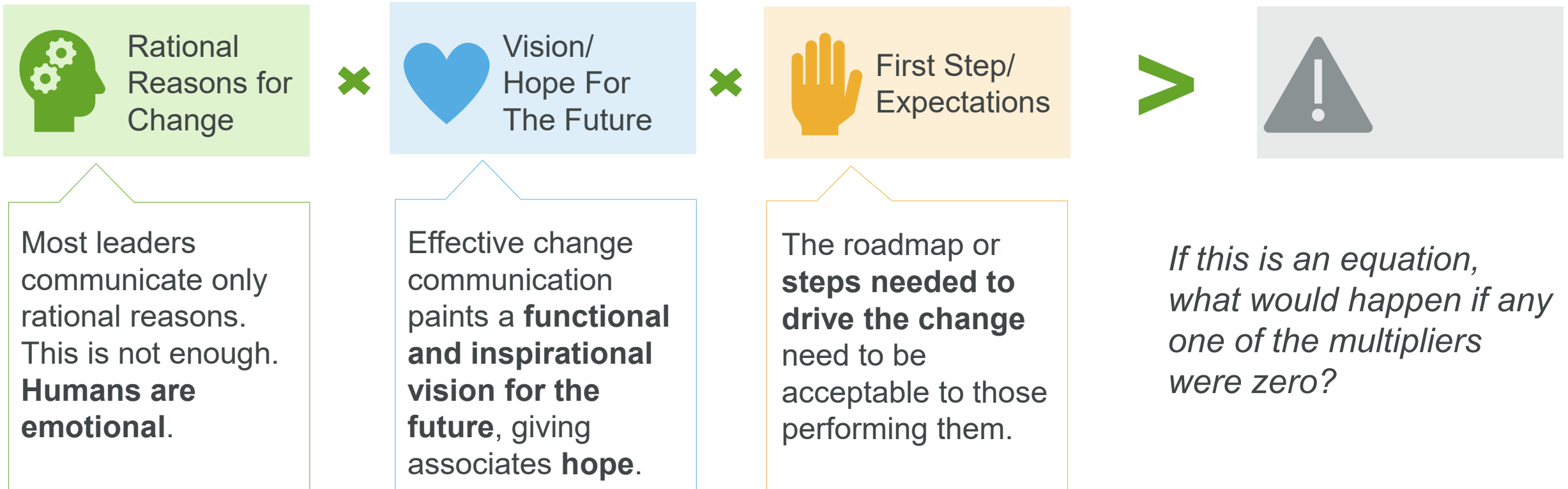
SYSTEM 2

- Rational
- 30%
- Prefrontal Cortex
- Slow
- Intentional
- Choice
- Effortful
- Conscious

To Overcome Resistance, Address the Head, Heart and Hands

Work this on yourself first, then with your people leaders, then have them use it with their teams.

The conditions necessary for change to occur:

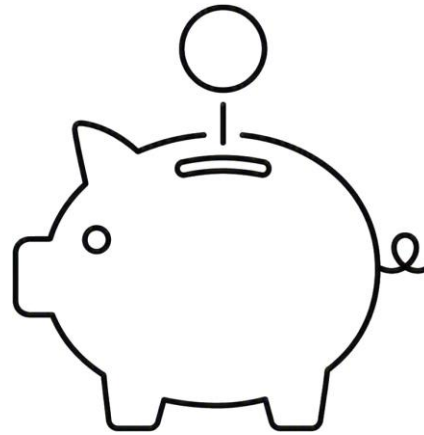


Fill the Emotional Bank Account

You hold an account with each of your people leaders, and their capacity to make deposits with their teams depends on the balance in yours.

DEPOSITS

- + A check-in that isn't about a deliverable
- + Recognizing someone's contribution
- + Giving a straight answer instead of a vague one



THE EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT

WITHDRAWALS

- Repeatedly cancelling 1:1s
- Only reaching out when something is wrong
- Poorly communicated changes and decisions

Deposits aren't more process. They're human connection – and they count most when times are hard.



Your managers are going through this change too. They are hearing the news, absorbing it, and delivering it to their teams all at once, often before they have made sense of it themselves.

Managers do not just manage change. They have to **grow through it** before they can lead anyone else through it. ***That growth is your work to support.***

—
ONE OF GALLUP'S
BIGGEST DISCOVERIES:

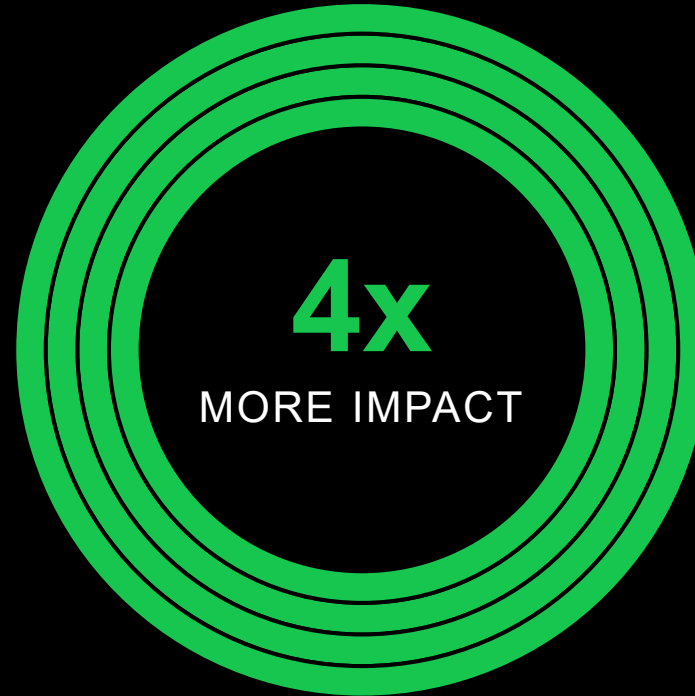
The manager accounts for

70%

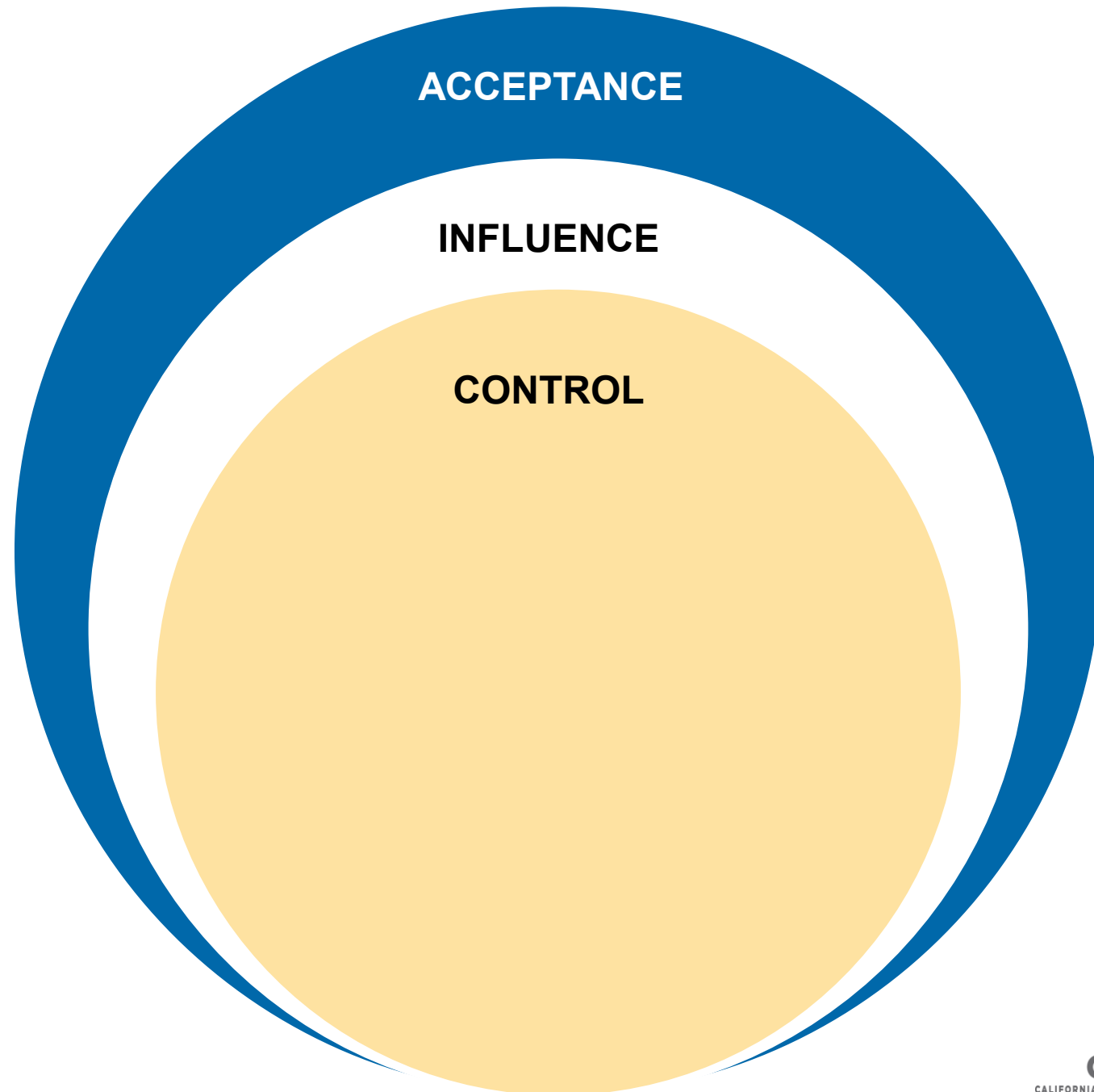
of the variance in
team engagement



GREAT MANAGERS HAVE



on **employee engagement** and **wellbeing**
than a person's work location



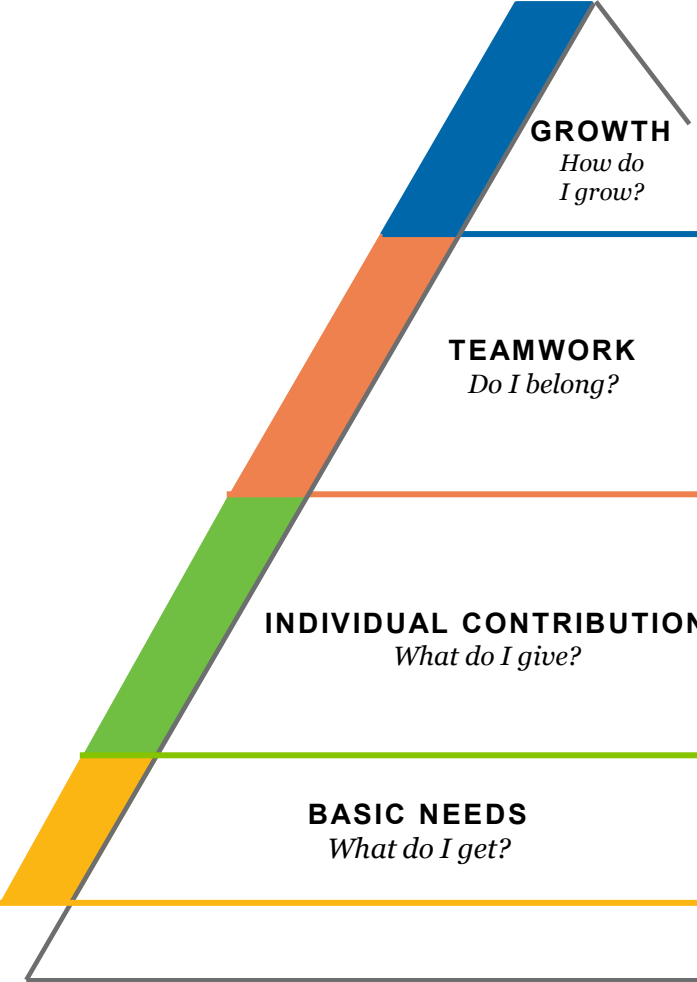
IN OUR SPHERE OF CONTROL

What can we do daily to make a positive difference?

Mindset and behavior modeling
Play to our strengths
Communicate the known and the unknown
Daily habits and routines
Presence in relationships
Intention/why

Manager Cheat Sheet for Engaging Employees

Use it with your own directs first, then show your people leaders how to use it with their teams

		ENGAGEMENT ELEMENT	EMPLOYEE NEED
 GROWTH <i>How do I grow?</i>		Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	Challenge me.
		Q11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	Help me review my contributions.
TEAMWORK <i>Do I belong?</i>		Q10. I have a best friend at work.	Help me build mutual trust.
		Q09. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	Help me feel proud.
		Q08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.	Help me see my importance.
INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION <i>What do I give?</i>		Q07. At work, my opinions seem to count.	Hear me.
		Q06. There is someone at work who encourages my development.	Help me grow.
		Q05. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	Care about me.
		Q04. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	Help me see my value.
BASIC NEEDS <i>What do I get?</i>		Q03. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	Know me.
		Q02. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	Free me from unnecessary stress.
		Q01. I know what is expected of me at work.	Focus me.

Make the Office Worth the Commute: Focus on these Four Pillars

Gallup found that the most successful RTO transitions address these four pillars with intention



Connection

Collaboration

Creativity

Culture

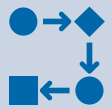
Engagement Focused RTO Checklist

Run it with your directs first, then hand it to your people leaders for their teams

- ☐ Clarified schedules, availability and in-office expectations
- ☐ Confirmed employees have needed equipment and workspace access
- ☐ Held 1:1 check-ins with each employee
- ☐ Asked the team what would make in-office time valuable
- ☐ Recognized employees adapting positively during transition

The Culture Is Yours to Shape

Small actions can make a big difference



Set Clear Expectations. Have a clear, direct conversation with your team about what 4 days onsite actually means day-to-day for your department



Empower People Leaders. Share the engagement framework and resources with people leaders – ask them what they are hearing from their directs that you can address



Make RTO Worth It. Ask your team what would make the in-office time most valuable

Resources To Support You

These slides and other resources can be found on CalHR's website

State Supervisors & Managers

Hybrid Workplace Tools

Find resources for improving employee engagement in a hybrid workplace.



Manager Reference Guide

Employee Engagement Best Practices

A practical reference for people leaders in the State of California
Based on Gallup's Q12 Engagement Framework
Includes RTO guidance on every question

FOR MANAGERS - ALL LEVELS

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What Is Employee Engagement?

Engagement is the emotional commitment an employee has to their work, team and organization. Engaged employees put more energy, care and initiative into their work.

70%

of engagement is driven by the manager. During times of change, engagement matters even more. Employees are deciding whether they still feel connected, supported and valued.

How to Use This Guide

You don't need a formal survey to use this framework. Read each Q12 section as a reflection prompt: how well am I creating this condition for my team? Start with the basics of engagement: clear expectations and having what people need to do their work. Build from there.

Q01 "I know what is expected of me at work."

Clear expectations are the single most predictive element in the engagement framework. This isn't about job descriptions. It's about real-time clarity: what does success look like this week, this project or this quarter?

Manager Actions

- Be specific about priorities, schedules and what success looks like over the next 30 to 60 days.
- After any policy change, re-clarify expectations directly with your team.
- Ask: "What feels unclear about your role or priorities right now?"

RTO Lens

After an RTO transition, expectations around schedules, in-person norms, meeting practices and availability often go unstated. Don't assume old clarity still holds. Name what the return actually looks like for your team day-to-day.

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2

Leading the Reasonable Accommodation Process



Brandi Blue, Chief
Equity & Accessibility Management
Services Division

Disclaimer

This presentation is intended for educational purposes only and is not legal advice. Departments should consult with legal counsel regarding specific situations and before making changes to policies, practices, or procedures.

Where We Are Today

The Process Remains the Same:

- Individualized assessment.
- Interactive process.
- Effective accommodation.
- Ongoing communication.
- Documentation and tracking.
- Appeal rights.

Begin with the Request

When a request is received, it's natural to focus on:

- Requested accommodation
- Medical documentation
- Operational concerns

The request starts the conversation.

The position guides the analysis.

The First Question

What is the reasonable accommodation
(RA) request?

The Next Question

What does this position exist to do?

Determining Essential Functions

Ask:

- Why does this position exist?
- What work is fundamental to the position?
- What knowledge, skills, and expertise are required?
- What happens if this work isn't performed?

Government Code §12926 • 2 CCR §11065

Let's Apply the Questions

Duty

- Supervise professional staff.
- Review complex work products.
- Develop policy recommendations.
- Represent the division at meetings.
- Administrative responsibilities.

% of Time

- 35%
- 25%
- 20%
- 10%
- 10%

The Interactive Process

Once we understand the position, we can begin to:

- Review and gather additional medical information.
- Meet with the people leader for additional information.
- Discuss the employee's job-related limitations.
- Explore effective accommodation options.
- Continue communication throughout the process.
- Document the analysis.
- Determine the outcome.
- Track the entire process.

What We're Seeing Across Departments

Across departments, we've observed:

- The process provides consistency.
- Beginning with the position strengthens the analysis.
- Collaboration leads to better decisions.
- Every request requires an individualized assessment.
- Documentation and tracking support consistency and accountability.
- Timely determinations matter.
- Accommodations may need to be reassessed.

Leadership Matters

Administrative Chiefs help create consistency by:

- Supporting a consistent process.
- Encouraging early collaboration.
- Ensuring roles and responsibilities are understood.
- Understanding the RA process, including procurement.
- Providing resources, training, and support.
- Planning for continuity through succession planning and cross-training.

Leadership Checklist

Ask yourself:

- Do people leaders understand the RA process?
- Are requests referred promptly?
- Are duty statements current and accurate?
- Do people leaders understand essential functions?
- Are key partners collaborating?
- Are requests handled consistently?
- Do employees know how to request an accommodation?
- Are accommodations implemented and monitored effectively?

Building Consistency

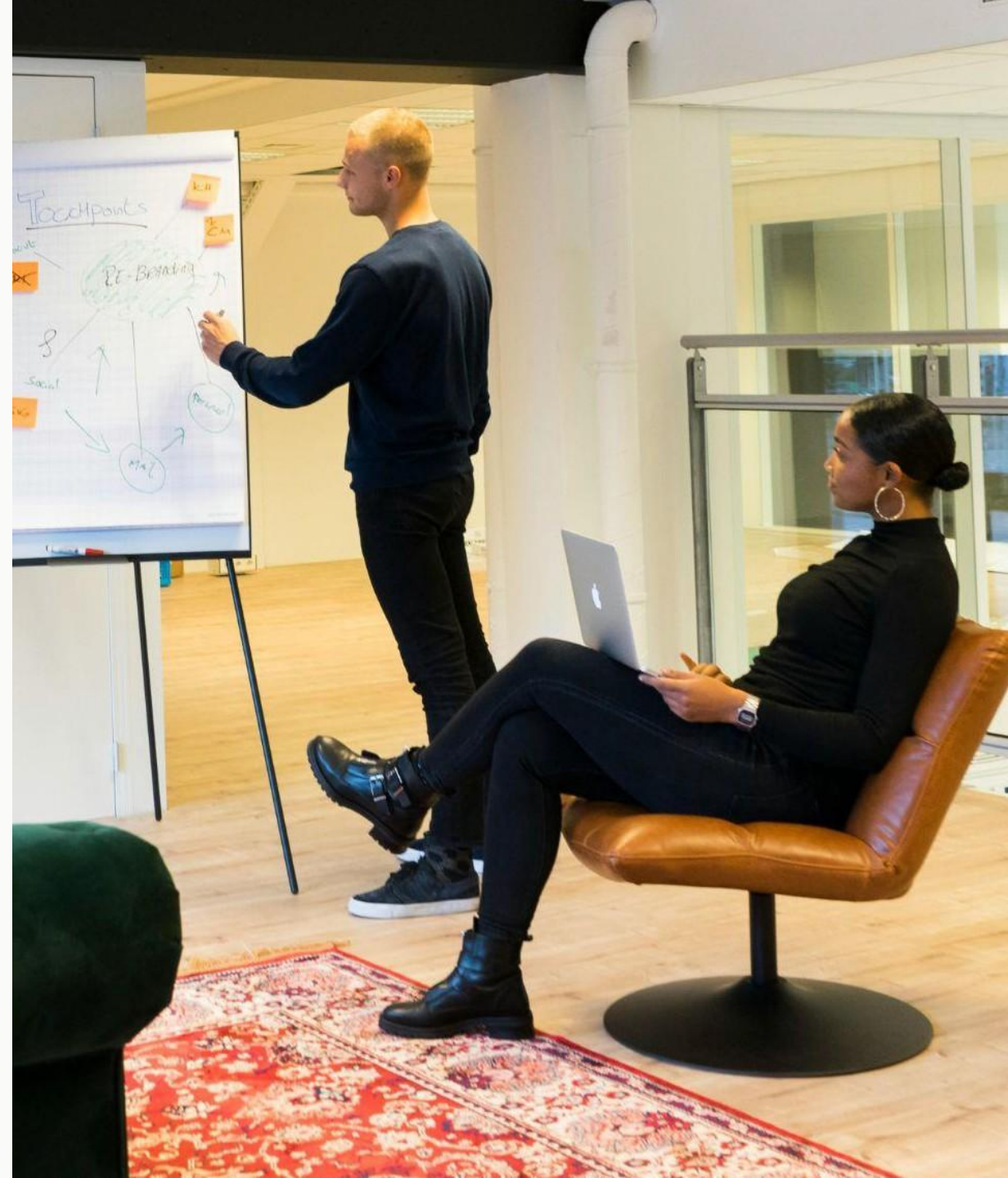
Building Consistency:

- Understand the request.
- Understand the position.
- Determine the essential functions.
- Engage in the interactive process.
- Evaluate effective accommodations.
- Document the analysis.
- Make timely determinations.

Thank you for your time and partnership.



Being Supportive Through RTO



Meet today's speaker



Monica Elliott, LCSW, CPTD (*she/her*)
Director, Clinical Training, Spring Health

Education:

- Masters degree in Social Work from Loyola University Chicago.
- Bachelors in Business Administration from University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Licensed clinician with 20+ years experience working with homeless adults, children with trauma backgrounds, people with chronic mental health challenges and care coordination

Agenda

- The challenges of leadership during big changes
- Ways we can show up for our teams
- Resources available





+ Get care

Home

Appointments

Explore

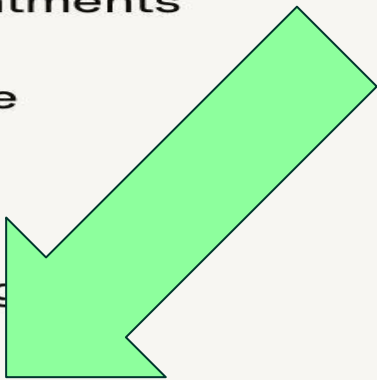
Billing

Messages

Sarah

Help

Log out



Welcome back

Based on what you shared, these are good places to start

Start here

Take steps towards reaching your fullest potential

Find a coach

1

Mood

How are you feeling today?

Add mood

2

Moments

Try self-guided care

Browse library of exercises

3



+ Get care

Home

Appointments

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Billing

Messages

Sarah

Sarah CalHR Test 4

Goals and progress

Membership

Family

Records

Settings

Mood

Turn daily emotions into insights that support healthier habits

Add mood

Jul 26 to A

Sun

×

×



+ Get care

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Explore

Billing

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Sarah

Sarah CalHR Test 4

Goals and progress

Membership

Family

Records

Settings

Contact

Notifications

Location

Preferences

Security

Personal information

First name *

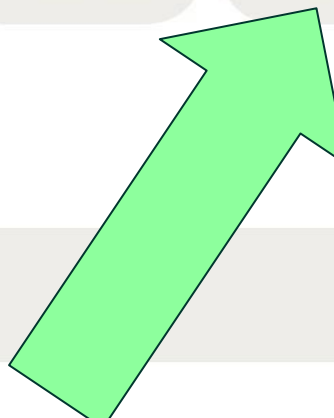
Sarah

Last name *

CalHR Test 4

Preferred first name

Enter your preferred first name





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Log out

Sarah CalHR Test 4

Goals and progress

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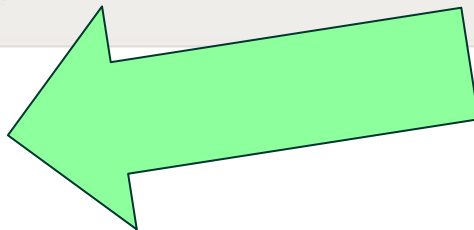
Security

Workplace access For leaders only

I have direct reports and need access to Workplace

Disabled

Enable



Language

Language preference *

English



Save changes



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Goals and progress

Membership

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Security

Workplace access For leaders only

I have direct reports and need access to Workplace

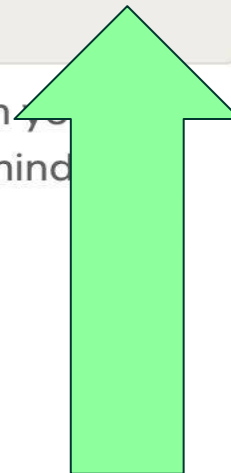
✓ Enabled

Selecting "Remove access" will remove Workplace from your experience. You can turn it back on if you change your mind

Remove Access

Language

Language preference *



Leadership

The traits that make someone a strong leader are the same traits that can amplify worry under pressure.



The 3Ls Framework

Look

- Notice meaningful changes
- Trust your instincts

Listen

- Ask, pause, and acknowledge
- *Validate*
- *Show them that they matter*

Link

- Connect them with support
- *Ask how you can help?*

Scenario: Meet Jordan

- Jordan has been on your team for five years
- Jordan is the caretaker of their parent which causing financial and time constraints
- Since RTO, Jordan has been calling in sick to work
- When they are there, they are distracted and questioning the reasons for RTO

What Can Jordan's Leader Do?

- Schedule a conversation
- Listen to understand
- Acknowledge their feelings/challenges
- Explore supports
- Clarify expectations
- Address concerns
- Follow up



What benefits are available through Whole You, powered by Spring Health?



Therapy

Each member gets free therapy sessions per year.*



Coaching

Each member (age 18+) gets 6 free coaching sessions per year.



Self-Care

Access to Moments digital wellness exercises is free and unlimited.



Work-Life

Resources and free expert consultations for life's needs. For example, Financial matters, legal assistance, major life events etc

*The number of sessions is based on your bargaining unit. Refer to the eligibility table on your member website, eap.calhr.ca.gov, for details.



+ Get care

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1

Mood

How are you feeling today?

Add mood



2

Moments

Try self-guided care

Browse library of exercises



3

Membership Summary >

28

Therapy

28 of 28 sessions left

6

Coaching

6 of 6 sessions left



Medication management

At cost

Focused support



+ Get care

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Expert care

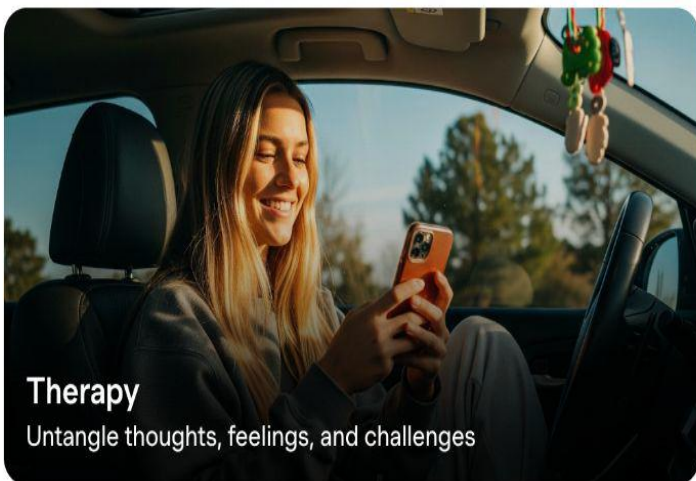
Self-guided care

Local services

Recommended for you

One-on-one

Conversations with experts, wherever you feel most comfortable.



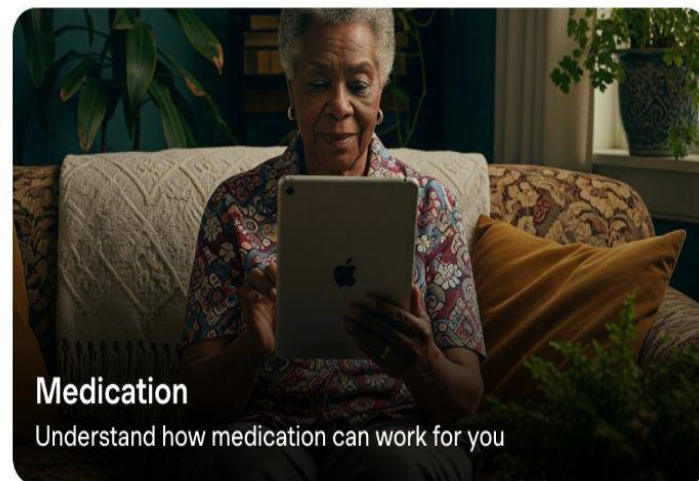
Therapy

Untangle thoughts, feelings, and challenges



Coaching

Work toward goals with habits and momentum



Medication

Understand how medication can work for you

Not sure where to start?

Get answers about your care options, benefits, and what's available to you.

Get answers

Manager resources

Support your team with confidence



Help



+ Get care

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Explore

Expert care

Self-guided care

Local services

Recommended for you

Local services for everyday help

Support for everyday challenges.



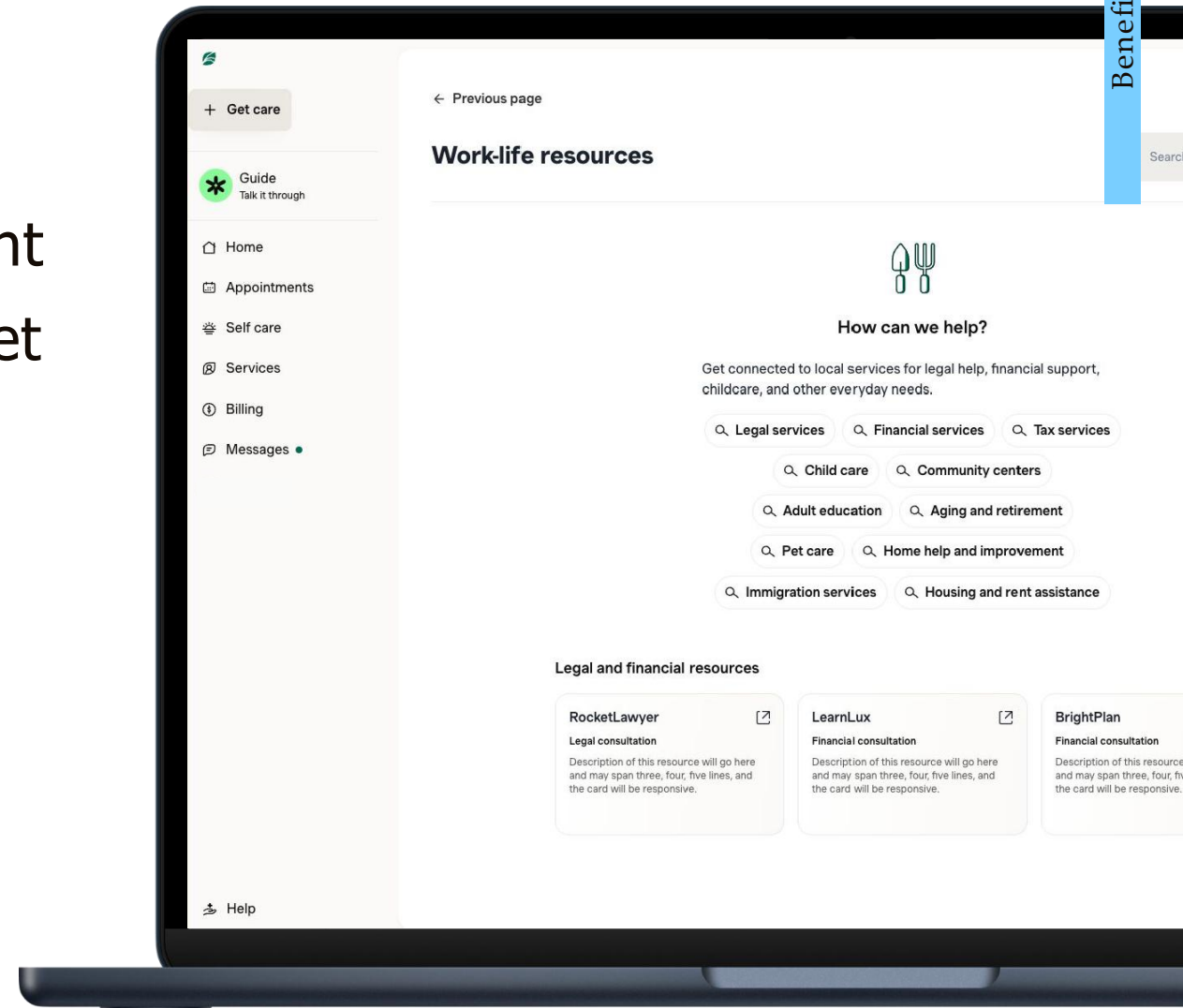
Work-life services

Get financial coaching, legal support, and other services.

Work-Life Services

Work-life services include:

- Financial matters
- Legal assistance
- Major life events
- Health and wellness
- Travel
- Home improvement
- Child, senior, or pet care
- Parenting and education
- Career development
- And much more!





+ Get care

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Work-life services

Adult care



95811



How can we help?

Get connected to local services for legal help, financial support, childcare, and other everyday needs.

Legal services

Financial services

Tax services

Child care

Community centers

Adult education

Aging and retirement

Pet care

Home help and improvement

Immigration services

Housing and rent assistance



+ Get care

- Home
- Appointments
- Explore
- Workplace
- Billing
- Messages
- Sarah
- Help

Here is what we found for "adult care"

- General

ACC Maple Tree Village - Assisted Living and Memory Care Senior Living Community
6.7 mi miles away

[Website](#) [+1 916-395-7579](#)

See more
- General

Hearted Care Assisted Living Facility
4.6 mi miles away

[Website](#) [+1 916-519-0139](#)

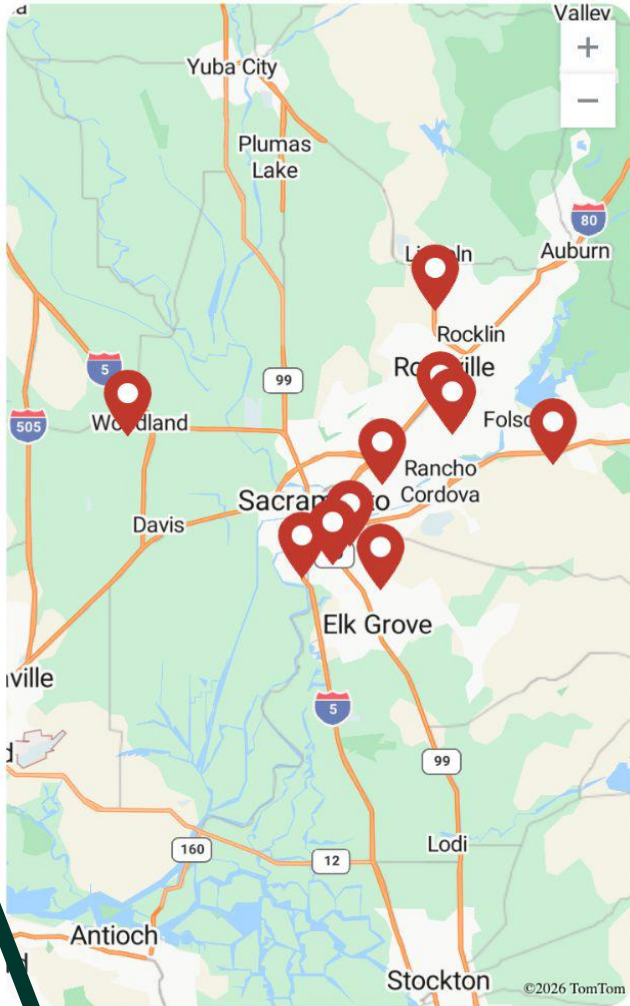
See more
- General

Better Care Senior Living
13.0 mi miles away

[+1 916-542-5306](#)

See more
- General

Ciminocare - Memory Care Assisted Living Independent Living



Can't find the right resource?
Our support team can help you explore other options.

Get support

Whole You, powered by Spring Health Eligibility and What's Included

Whole You, powered by Spring Health is available to The State of California employees and their eligible dependents.

Therapy

Each member gets 28, 12 or three free therapy sessions per year. The number of therapy sessions is based on your bargaining unit. Refer to the eligibility table on your member website, <https://www.eap.calhr.ca.gov> for details.

Coaching

Each member (age 18★) gets free coaching sessions per year.

Work-Life Resources

Resources and expert consultations are free. Specialized services or referrals may be subject to fees.

Wellness Exercises

Access to Moments digital wellness exercises is free and unlimited.

Substance Use Support

Each member (age 18★) can get free guidance from a specialized Care Navigator. Treatment costs vary based on your health plan.

Care Guidance

Support from a Care Navigator is free and optional at any point.

Please keep in mind...

Behavior is often a symptom, not the problem. Be curious

It is not your job to fix people's personal challenges

People want to feel seen, heard, valued and like they matter

You are not alone



**Start your mental health journey at
eap.calhr.ca.gov**

More questions?

Visit: springhealth.com/support

Call: 1-866-327-4762



Thank You

Spring Health 

Mini-Panel Discussions



Mini-Panel Discussions

Reasonable
Accommodation

Navigating RTO

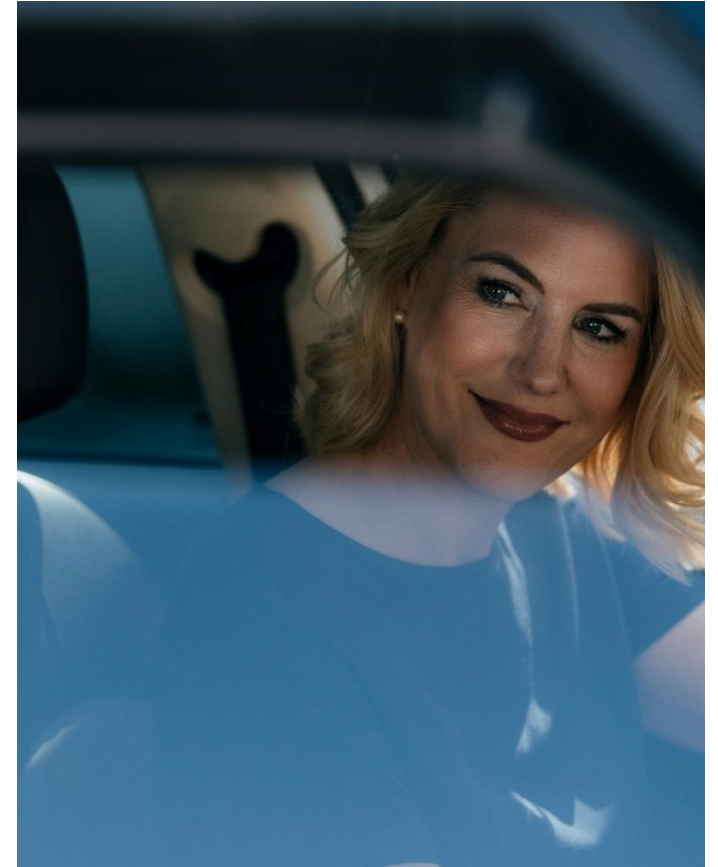
Space, Parking
and Commute

Manager Support
& Employee
Engagement

Third-Party Pre-Tax Parking Reimbursement Account Program

Helping employees save on parking expenses

- Who benefits:
 - Employees with work-related parking expenses who don't participate in a department-sponsored parking program or state or DGS-controlled parking spaces
- How it works:
 - Employees can set aside up to \$340/month for work-related parking before taxes are calculated
 - This lowers their taxable income, meaning more take-home pay
 - Simple [enrollment](#) anytime through departmental personnel offices
- Resources
 - [HR Manual Section 1601](#)
 - [FAQs](#)
- Contact for departmental personnel offices only:
 - Pre-TaxParking@calhr.ca.gov



Commute Programs

Reducing costs while supporting sustainable choices

- Three ways employees can save:
 - **Bicycle** - \$20/month (taxable) for employees biking 50% of scheduled workdays
 - **Mass Transit** – Up to \$340/month toward bus, light rail, or train passes*
 - **Vanpool** – Up to \$340/month for vanpool expenses (combined max with transit: \$340/month)
- Flexibility built in:
 - Employees can mix and match commute methods and adjust their participation monthly
- Resources
 - [Commute Program FAQs](#) and [Commute Programs Flyer](#)
 - [HR Manual Section 1425](#) (Bicycle), [Section 1602](#) (Mass Transit) and [Section 1603](#) (Vanpool)
- New contact for departmental accounting offices only:
 - Commuteprograms@calhr.ca.gov

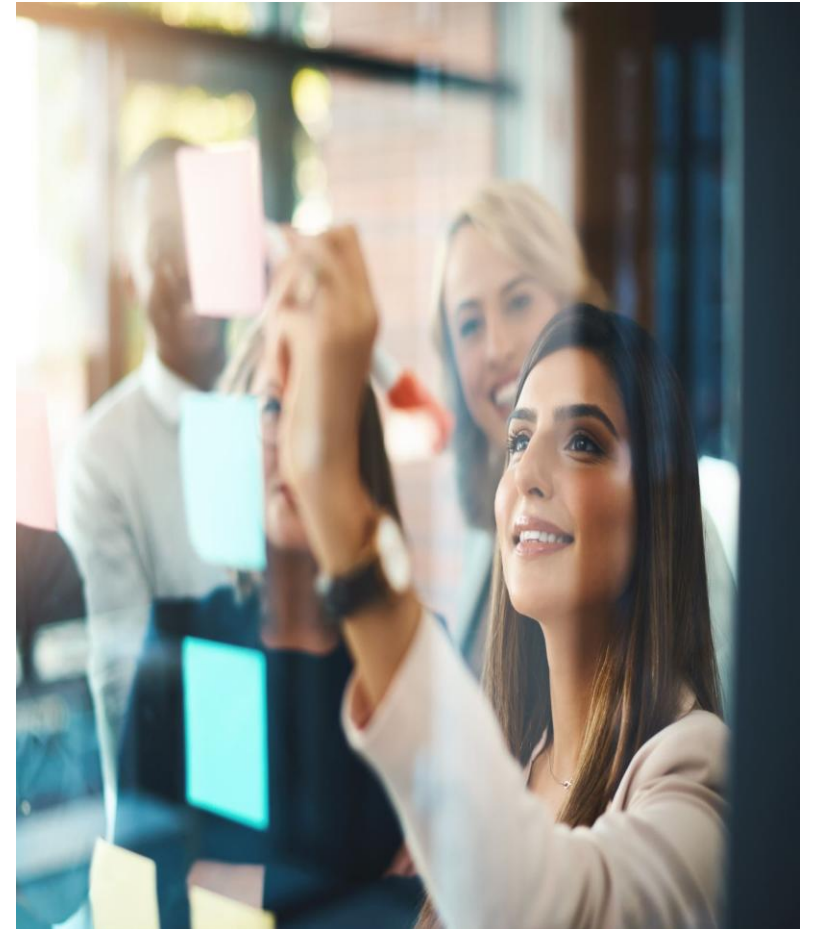
*For example, in the Sacramento area, a monthly SacRT (bus, light rail) pass is [\\$100](#).



CalHR's Parking & Commute Programs

What's New?

- Additional CalHR Outreach:
 - Transaction Supervisors' Forum
 - Transaction Specialists' Educational Forum
 - Additional communications regarding mass transit incentives
- New contact for departmental accounting offices only:
 - Commuteprograms@calhr.ca.gov



Open Enrollment Reminders



Presenter: Sarah Herrera

Project Delivery Manager, CalHR Benefits Division

Benefits Annual Open Enrollment

- **September 14 – October 9, 2026**
- Changes made during the 2026 OE period will be effective January 1, 2027.
- Join us at the upcoming employee events to learn more:

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SEPTEMBER
2026

In-Person Benefits Fair

CalHR is hosting a Benefits Fair
at the State Capitol

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SEPTEMBER
2026

Virtual Benefits Fair

CalHR is hosting a Virtual
Benefits Fair



FlexElect – Dependent Care Reimbursement Account (DCRA)

Allows state employees to set aside money in a reimbursement account (before taxes) to pay for expenses for children under the age of 13, and elderly or disabled dependents.

Two New Permitting Events

Permitting Event	Action Allowed	Permitting Event Code	Permitting Event Date	Effective Date of Action	Time Limit to File Document
Returning to an In-Office setting more frequently	May newly enroll in DCRA	03A	Date of event	Mandatory	60 days after date of event
Permitting Event	Action Allowed	Permitting Event Code	Permitting Event Date	Effective Date of Action	Time Limit to File Document
Returning to an In-Office setting more frequently	Increase DCRA contribution	28B	Date of event	Mandatory	60 days after date of event

More information can be found under the “Enrollment” and “Changes to Coverage” in the [FlexElect section of the Benefits Administration Manual](#).