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## HELPING CLIENTS NAVIGATE THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

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COVER STORY

# THE GREAT RE-EVALUATION & THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

Burton M. Goldfield, TriNet

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VOL. 26 ISSUE 1

FEB 2022

# TRINET

## THE GREAT RE-EVALUATION & THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

BY CHRIS CHANEY

**F**ew now dispute that the American workforce underwent systemic changes due to the COVID pandemic. Remote work is more prominent than ever, employees feel more empowered in their roles, and businesses face new hurdles in supply chain disruptions and public health mandates. The pandemic has ushered in a new era in the workforce that employers who hope to remain successful must adjust to. As the president and CEO of one of the industry's largest PEOs, TriNet's Burton M. Goldfield has seen small and medium-size businesses (SMBs) across the country grapple with these changes, and he's also confronting this new reality himself as he leads TriNet's more than 3,000-person internal workforce.

A visionary and innovative leader, Burton has empowered his people to embrace technology and innovation while strengthening the company's culture, values, and identity. He works to keep all his employees engaged and connected with the company's mission of supporting SMBs. His clients have relied on TriNet's expertise to guide them through the changes happening in the workforce, and he's proud that they've grown and thrived. He spoke with *PEO Insider*® to offer his take on what's driving

the changing workforce and how companies should adapt.

### COMPONENTS OF CHANGE

Burton sees two main components of the changes occurring, and the first is fairly obvious: remote work. To be sure, remote work was not a concept invented during the pandemic, but it was a trend greatly accelerated and one that has been more widely adopted.

"After numerous years of people going to offices, now we're in all different locations," Burton says. "TriNet went from having 24 offices to 3,000—in the homes of our colleagues."

Burton notes that efficient and strategic communication is key to building a growing company, and that businesses' newfound reliance on remote work means that they need to find new ways to effectively communicate. This leads to the other main component Burton sees responsible for changes in the workforce: greater reliance on technology.

"The magnitude and the complexity of the technology that we need to be truly as efficient as we were when we could walk across the hall doesn't exist yet," Burton explains. "It's fairly nascent, so we need to evolve technology. The biggest problem I

see is being able to effectively communicate in an asynchronous manner."

He means that right now, it can be hard to really bring people together over video conference calls in a collaborative and creative manner. Plus, it's not realistic to expect that everyone will gather together virtually several times per day. Burton envisions technology solutions that will allow one employee to develop comments, documents, ideas, or visuals and then allow another employee to pick up that project at another time and move it forward, without the need to be called into a Zoom meeting.

To put it differently, Burton is looking for ways to replicate the in-office experience while working remotely. He's searching for tools that help him formulate ideas and decisions in a way similar to being in a room with his senior executives. He hasn't found that solution yet, but he is optimistic about emerging trends in technology. However, he cautions that businesses must show a willingness to adopt new technology for innovation to continue.

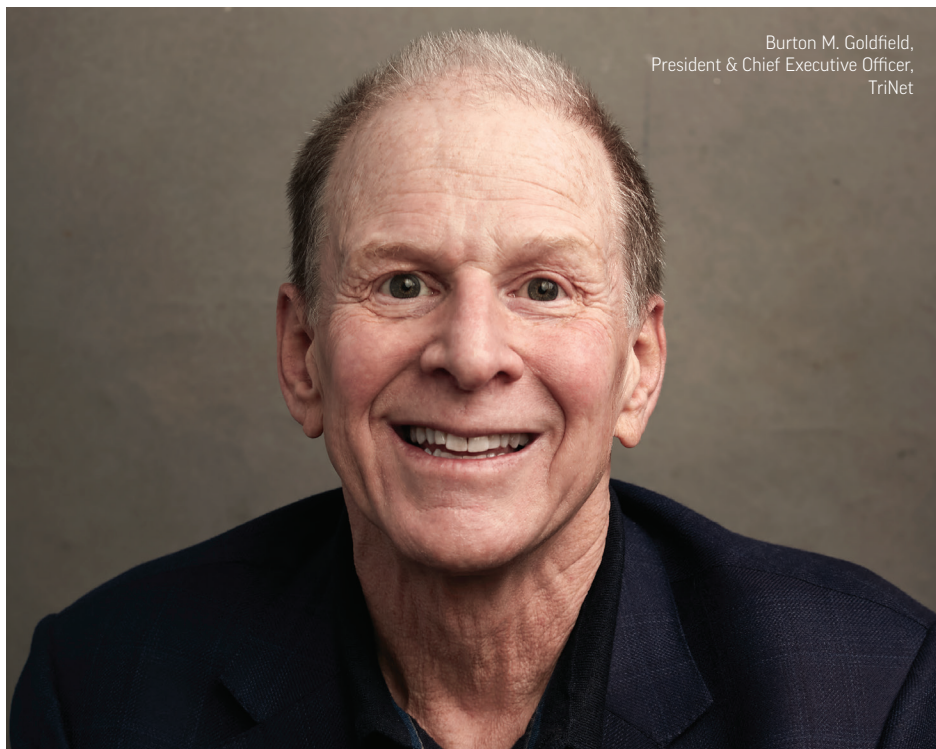
"Companies must see how the value of it [innovative technology] links directly to employees, shareholders, and customers," he adds. "I've tried to embrace that at TriNet, and I'm proud that we invest so heavily in our technology platform."

### TECHNOLOGY, TALENT, & CULTURE

Some executives may be hesitant to embrace new workplace technology tools or invest a large number of resources while holding out for employees' return to office. However, in Burton's view, remote work is here to stay. As he puts it, it's hard to put the genie back in the bottle.

"There's a simple reason why, and that's the war for talent and the re-evaluation of lifestyles that's occurring," he believes. "Companies have now come to the realization that they need a great team of people





Burton M. Goldfield,  
President & Chief Executive Officer,  
TriNet



*Burton is looking for ways to replicate the in-office experience while working remotely. He's searching for tools that help him formulate ideas and decisions in a way similar to being in a room with his senior executives.*

to collaborate to deliver on big visions. You need great people, so you're going to go anywhere to find them."

Having the right team of people is more important than ever, and the rise of remote

work means that the talent pool has vastly expanded. No longer are companies limited to looking for candidates in a nearby radius or who are willing to relocate for a job. Talent searches can span far and wide with the single focus of finding the very best person for that position.

However, a remote or mostly remote workforce poses a challenge to developing a cohesive workplace culture. This problem is compounded by the fact that workplace culture has emerged as an area of increased importance among employees. It's an issue top of mind for many leaders.

"How do you get people to feel an affinity to the vision, identity, and values of your company? This is coming to the forefront because of what I call the great re-evaluation that's occurring," Burton says.

He explains that remote work has made using innovative ways to communicate a key component of developing a workplace culture. For example, because he can no

longer walk the halls of his offices, Burton now uses an in-house studio to produce video messages several times a month. It's a way for him to communicate directly with his people and it helps TriNet's workforce feel connected. For Burton, a strong sense of culture and connectivity is critical to TriNet's success.

"You need people who feel engaged and are willing to give you feedback," he says. "We do an employee survey each year and I get more than 100 pages of comments. I read every single one of them and I'm proud that so many of our people felt comfortable replying and making comments."

To be sure, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are also a huge part of building a cohesive culture and there are many ways to develop a strong culture, but the central purpose is ensuring people feel connected, engaged, and comfortable. This then leads to people feeling motivated and productive in their roles.

## THE GREAT RE-EVALUATION

Much has been written about the Great Resignation and persistent labor shortage, but, in Burton's view, re-evaluation is a much more accurate term. People now feel more empowered to take stock of their situations and evaluate what they want out of life. This has created a greater willingness to make a career change. Employees are now more likely to leave a company whose values and mission they may not align with.

"People understand now they have choices, and they are making them," Burton says. "I would rather have someone re-evaluate their career and decide to leave rather than stay and not feel connected."

This has partly contributed to a persistent labor shortage, but that problem has not been felt equally among all companies. PEO clients are thriving.

“My clients hired at a faster rate last year than any year in the last 30,” Burton says. “The war for talent has not limited our clients’ growth. The people they hired had to come from somewhere. At the end of



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the day, the companies that have a vision, a compensation plan, a customer base, and an executive base that is attractive are not having problems attracting talent. It’s a realignment of talent, not a shortage.”

Leaders will have to think more about the culture and values of their companies to attract talent and be willing to innovate, adapt, and change.

“As attracting talent becomes harder and requires greater effort, companies should also be investing in ways to keep talent,” Burton says.

Companies must be willing to retrain and reskill their people as in-demand skills evolve. As automation becomes more and more prevalent, the skills gap will continue to widen.

“I measure great people on core values and motivation, not knowledge or experience,” he says. “If I have a great person working for me, I’d rather teach them AI rather than find someone who already knows AI but who may not align with our values.”

To Burton, not reskilling is the ultimate limiter to growth. If new skills

are necessary to evolve, adapt, and grow the company, leaders must reskill their people because it’s very hard to find great people right off the street.

**VISION, COMMITMENT, & VALUE**

Developing a cohesive culture, implementing a remote work model, adopting new technology, and reskilling employees is not an easy set of tasks. It takes vision, commitment, and a willingness to try new ideas. Burton says that CEOs think about the ultimate vision they have for their companies and then work to put in the steps necessary to get there. This is why partnering with a PEO is such a powerful way for any business that hopes to grow and evolve. Working with entrepreneurs and passionate leaders is one of the many reasons Burton enjoys leading TriNet and working in our industry.

“I love the PEO industry,” says Burton. “I came from the outside and from the first day I fell in love with it. What I love most is that we get to share in our client’s success. It’s the absolute best win-win model that exists in business, period. I do not believe there is similar model that can deliver the same level of value that PEOs deliver.”

He’s especially committed to being a true partner to the SMBs he works with each day. He knows many of the founders personally and he takes a real interest in their ideas, stories, and success. Admittedly, Burton has a big vision for his company, but he says it has to be that way to match the vision of TriNet’s entrepreneur clients.

He’s always looking for new ways to provide meaningful value to clients, and TriNet’s PeopleForce conference is one example. Last year was the second annual conference that brought leaders in government, business, technology, and innovation directly to TriNet’s clients to offer

real education and insight on important and critical issues. TriNet also recently announced a definitive agreement to acquire HR software provider Zenefits (as of press time, the acquisition was still pending final government approval). This will allow TriNet to serve a broader range of clients who may be looking for a different solution to their current needs. It’s another reminder of Burton’s commitment to and belief in the importance of investing in technology and finding innovative solutions to grow.

As the workforce changes and adapts, Burton is bullish on the PEO industry. He’s confident in the PEO model’s ability to provide real value and help SMBs navigate and thrive in the new world of work.

“There are a lot of SMBs out there,” he notes. “The market is underpenetrated, so every PEO has an opportunity for success. There’s a lot of room for the industry to grow and I welcome it. I really appreciate NAPEO and the community of PEOs that are working to grow our industry.”

His confidence in the industry stems from the belief that entrepreneurs want to focus on their own dreams and success. Partnering with a PEO offers real value and HR solutions that help entrepreneurs do just that.

“I do not believe that many entrepreneurs can do it better themselves than they can with a PEO,” he adds. “We are positioned to help SMBs succeed in a way that no other industry can. At the end of the day, we help clients hire great people.”

Achieving success starts with great people, and that’s where PEOs come in. ■



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