# The Cloud Standard:

4 Hints to Improve Your Agency's
Move to the Cloud

Few departments in the federal government are primarily cloud-based; a majority use some combination of on-prem and cloud services. In the final two installments of the "Conversations with Cloud Leaders" video series, Chief Information Officers from two fully migrated agencies let us in on about their experiences in migrating to the cloud.

# Introduction

Ever since the introduction of "Cloud Smart" in 2017, the federal government has ramped up efforts to move its applications and infrastructure to the cloud. Even though agencies have made significant progress over the past four years, most agencies have yet to migrate fully. So, what do agencies need to know to improve migration efforts?

This is what leaders discussed in the final two episodes of "Conversations with Cloud Leaders," in which Aaron Boyd, senior editor for technology and events at Nextgov, sat down with Chief Information Officers Gary Barlet from the Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Postal Service, and David Shive of the General Services Administration. During their conversation, Boyd uncovered valuable information that can help in-transition agencies improve their cloud migration strategy and ultimately reach their goal of becoming fully cloud-enabled.

Here are four takeaways from their discussion.

**1**
Be Purposeful in Your Acquisition Efforts

**2**
Don't Wait Until "Workplace 2030" to Implement Cutting-Edge Technologies

**3**
Empower Your Departments by Allowing Them to Act Independently

**4**
Migrate Services and Applications with the Constituent in Mind

## ① Be Purposeful in Your Acquisition Efforts
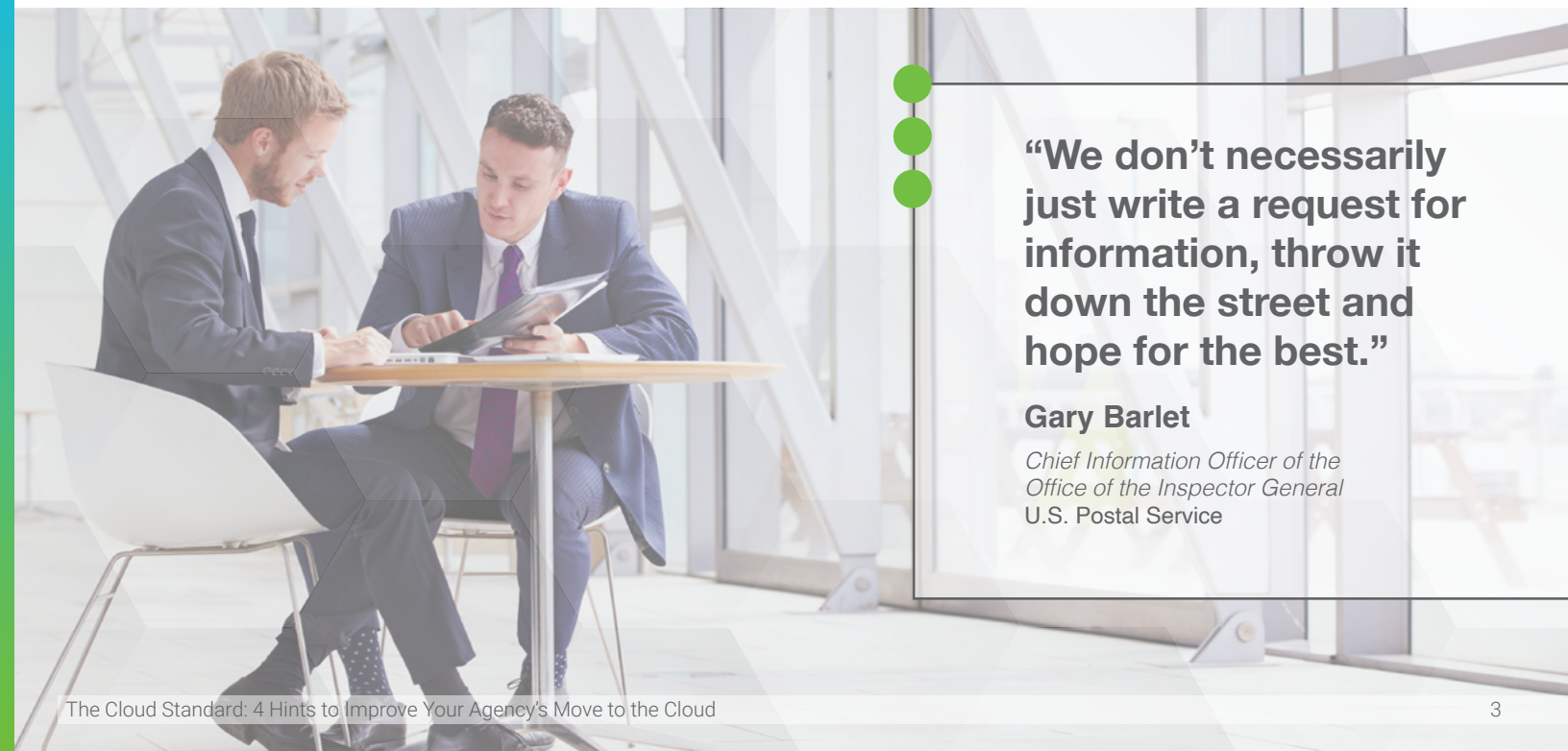
Federal agencies that are seeking to migrate to the cloud face steep odds, with one in three cloud migrations failing. One aspect that helps the OIG "beat the odds" is its dedication to purposeful collaboration. During the process, Barlet sits down with potential industry partners to understand the technologies available and how they would apply to the agency as a whole.

"We meet with companies and we're going through that information-gathering stage as part of the process, trying to do a couple of [Proof of Concepts], as it were, to start testing out the technology and seeing what works, what doesn't, and what's kind of in the art of possible," Barlet said.

Barlet's approach turns the cloud migration process into an intentionally collaborative effort where the OIG can test out products and services instead of merely guessing what platform or tool will work best.

"We don't necessarily just write a request for information, throw it down the street and hope for the best," Barlet explained.

For this reason, agencies looking to start their cloud migration journey or "re-vamp" their approach to cloud migration, should place an emphasis on purposeful collaboration. Leaders need to be ready and able to reach across the metaphorical aisle and sit down with potential industry partners.

> "We don't necessarily just write a request for information, throw it down the street and hope for the best."

**Gary Barlet**

*Chief Information Officer of the Office of the Inspector General*
U.S. Postal Service

## (2) Don't Wait Until "Workplace 2030" to Implement Cutting-Edge Technologies

One of the most common documents found in federal workplaces and private sector companies is the "company vision statement." Usually, these types of documents help agencies plan out long-tail adoption strategies or cultural changes. Before the pandemic, documents like "Workplace 2030" or "Vision 2020" were commonplace, but even then, agencies struggled to meet the deadlines found in these documents.

However, due to the pandemic, it didn't take long for "Workplace 2030" to become "Workplace 2022," according to Shive.

"The GSA had started just before the pandemic an initiative called 'Workplace 2030,' and it was envisioning what the federal workplace... might look like in 2030, that naturally has been accelerated to 'Workplace 2022,' because the need is right now," Shive stated.

Although "Workplace 2022" isn't a public-facing document, the FY 2022 Congressional Justification Report from the GSA does highlight the need for rapid movement within the federal landscape to "fulfill the needs of Americans in a rapidly evolving and complex world."

With this sentiment in mind, agencies should feel empowered to acquire and implement innovative technologies, processes and workflows; because a lack of movement will result in the government adopting legacy technologies well into 2030.

"Tech is a place of massive change right now...knowing that what's possible right now is going to be very different than what's possible in six months or 12 months from now," said Shive.

**（3）** **Empower Your Departments by Allowing Them to Act Independently**

Frequently departments and offices within larger agencies may feel the need to wait for "top-down" directives regarding cloud migration. Theoretically, this approach helps to consolidate an overall agency direction. Oftentimes, however, this "top-down" approach can cause stagnation within individual departments, as employees do not feel empowered to deliver on the agency's mission.

Instead of allowing individual departments to stagnate and waste resources, IT leadership within agencies should make sure each section feels empowered enough to adopt IT workflows and tools to fit their objectives.

No one knows this better than Barlet, who, at the beginning of his tenure, was given approval by USPS leadership to build a separate cloud network, one aimed at serving the needs of the OIG. Instead of copying the USPS' network, Barlet used this opportunity to transition the OIG into a fully modernized cloud-based organization.

"For the most part, we are a completely cloud-based organization. I don't consider us as having a data center anymore. Almost everything that we have is in the cloud," said Barlet.

## (4) Migrate Services and Applications with the Constituent in Mind

Amongst all of the talk about cloud migration, agencies can quickly become bogged down in overanalysis. More often than not, this leads to perfection paralysis, leaving agencies unable to move forward and no better off than when they first started their cloud migration journey. In Shive's case, the GSA was able to combat this cloud migration pitfall by focusing on selecting applications with the end-user in mind, the constituent.

"The GSA is going through a digital transformation…we'll be consuming technology and using technology in ways that are very familiar to the citizens we serve right now," Shive stated. "New technology is neat, but it gets stale pretty quick and only certain parts of our population actually care about new technology, larger parts care that it works."

In attempting to build processes that work and feel familiar to constituents, agencies can create target personas. By working with these representative constituents and running A/B tests on interactions within the application, agencies can refine the consumer process and ensure the technology employed within their agency is as seamless and transparent as possible.

"I think the best use of technology is if the technology disappears into the ether, and people are just able to do the thing they wanted to do without thinking," said Shive.

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