

Announcer: You're listening to HR Mixtape, your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought-provoking interviews, and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel, well, like work. Now, your host, Shari Simpson.

Shari Simpson: Joining me today is Dr. Eric Canny consultant and assistant teaching professor of education at the University of Southern California.

Shari Simpson: Eric, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

Dr. Canny: Absolutely. It's wonderful to be here. It's my first term and a little overwhelming, but I'm really excited to be here and able to do this.

Shari Simpson: Yeah, well, we're glad you're here. I want to talk to you about social trends impacting HR today. Give us the overview. I think so.

Dr. Canny: I have a presentation that I and the title changes, but underneath it, the subtitle is always tsunami in a river. all of these social trends were actually happening before COVID. that they're being sped up and just ramification and they're feeding off of each other. And so it's, but I think the other piece is we're being very reactive when we know what's coming in the future. I love data, right? And so data can help us predict what's coming. And I think that's important for HR, both to be scanning externally, but also when I speak with HR professionals, their business partners don't understand what's happening in the workforce. And so there's a lot of tension. Why can't you get this person or things like that? And so I think it's here to stay and use data, you know, absolutely.

Shari Simpson: What are some of the cases where you have seen HR adapting to some of the social trends?

Dr. Canny: Absolutely. So I think remote work, right? Bringing an employer of record. And it really started from a compliance perspective. But, you know, I think about it from a recruitment perspective. If I can hire the best person from Singapore or LA, and fill the position. We've seen that. Rethinking training, you know, anything from upskilling, which is good to just get faster and faster with AI, but also people aren't staying in the job as long. And so, you know, there's one person I know, AVP, or Assistant CHRO, their average tenure is now two years. So how do you even think about leadership development in two, in two years? And so that, but again, it's not going to go away. So let's work together and try and figure this out. Those are the ones that are standing out.

Shari Simpson: That is such a good point. The comment about how do you even do leadership development in two years? Because literally you're having them try to get their head around it, um, within, you know, let's say the first 90 days they're trying to learn everything, let alone like, Hey, let's put together a giant leadership plan for you.

Dr. Canny: But I think it's also really important because one of the things we are seeing is people move, right? And so one of, another data, another thing that we know is if people don't believe in the culture, they're usually on about six months now. They're making that

decision really fast. And so there is an opportunity. I mean, yeah, we're going to, there's micro learning. There's lots of other tools that we could bring in and rethinking training and development, but you need to start it right away because if they don't feel like you're invested in them as their employer, they will leave. And we're starting to just build more and more of that to see the people. It's not an employee's market like it was two years ago, but it's probably going to swing back that way.

Shari Simpson: Yeah. I recently read an article on, I think it was a LinkedIn article. Yes, I'm pretty sure it was a LinkedIn article, but it talked about Gen Z taking more roles in blue collar jobs than ever before.

Dr. Canny: It's fascinating. It's fascinating. And I think It's not just blue collar, but it's also, so the public's perception of education, K-12 as well as higher ed, is the lowest it's ever been. And people are starting to think about, do I really need a degree? We have multiple states that have removed degree as a requirement. And so there are more pathways forward. Those traditional pathways aren't you know, always going to be there. And I think that's also important for HR, like with social media, how do I reach these people? Because you're looking at an environment where you've got a lot more ways in and out. And, you know, the behaviors are different, Gen Z, Gen X. And the other thing to keep in mind is that that's the future and there's fewer of them. So we have to figure out how to attract, you know, retain, repeat, and just keep doing that.

Shari Simpson: Yeah, it's interesting to see all the changes. How does HR stay ahead of all these trends?

Dr. Canny: My recommendation is to actually have people that are scanning outside. How I keep up on it, and I do it to teach and consult, but every day I'm just scanning what comes through. I'm looking at the education pipeline, because that's our 10, 15 years. I'm looking at data, SHRM updates, higher ed dive, all of these five, 10 minutes a day, and it's helping me keep up. And so I think it's more of that constant, don't let it go. I also think that higher ed needs to be thinking about partnerships, looking at, so there's three very large funding bills that are, it's a once in a generation funding that's coming down, Infrastructure Chips Act, and it's going to put more pressure on the market than we already know to find jobs. The good thing about it is it's funding partnerships between corporate research universities and community colleges across the United States. And I think it's that type of rethinking partnership, right? What can I get from a research institution? What can I get from, or how can I engage with a community college with workforce development? And so there's money out there for it. And I think that's also part of it. And then just really looking constantly externally.

Shari Simpson: Yeah. Well, and you mentioned, you know, just spending 10 minutes a day, you can set up Google alerts for simple topics, right?

Dr. Canny: Exactly. I have simple alerts that come up, you know, and I probably get them two times a day, in all honesty, and you just start

getting used to it. I think at first, it probably takes more than 10 minutes, right? But once you start getting used to it, then you just start bringing it in. You could also go to your team and say, who has an interest in what? I really have an interest in DEI, or I have an interest in generations, and start breaking it up. And that actually starts building a new dynamic within the team. of we're actually interested in this and want to be a learning culture to figure this out. And so I think that's another way to do it as well. You know, we have to move beyond the transactional into really transformational of things need to change.

Shari Simpson: How does HR think about using social media to do that?

Dr. Canny: you have to be really transparent on social media. Again, social media is here to stay. It's continually morphing. And it's a way in which you message your culture. It's a way in which you message your values. And it's also a way in which if those are not good, people can post back and it becomes public very quickly. Yeah. And so I think it's, for me, it's about transparency. And it's about being real. I mean, one of the things higher ed, sometimes student made material actually resonated better than the marketing made material, because it has this authenticity. And I think that's something to think about, right? I also think it's a way to talk about career paths and trajectory back to that. We will invest in you stay beyond two years. Yeah. And it's also a way to reach the demographics which are shifted. Each culture response, each culture, each generation responds to social media differently. So you got to be thinking about multiple channels.

Shari Simpson: I absolutely agree. I do this talk about leadership development for middle managers. And one of the things I talk about is communication and how much it's changed. You know, when I started off in HR, part of my responsibility was going and replacing the papers that we had slid in those plastic holders in the back of the bathroom doors. Because we knew that our employees, for whatever reason, that was the method that worked then. You can't do that now.

Dr. Canny: And I think, again, it's social media, but it's also technology. I mean, you know, not even with AI, but like the use of talent communities, right? Where someone comes in, you keep their information, and when you have a job that matches, you push it back out. And so, again, it's really this react. People would come to us, we need to start thinking about how do we go back out with that communication. ERGs is another way, right? social justice, we know it's coming up, environmental, and it's actually starting to come up in requests for benefit packages. And so I think, again, it's pushing that out of we hear you and we care.

Shari Simpson: Well, we've already started to see candidates ask in interviews, what is your carbon footprint? Absolutely. I mean, never heard that before.

Dr. Canny: So it's, it's out there. And I think a lot of awareness came from COVID and working at home. And people realize, like, I spent almost an hour in the car. And how much gas was that? And what is my well being? And so that's why I say like, all of this started before

COVID. It's just bouncing off of each other. And yeah, financial wellbeing and the climate is really important.

Shari Simpson: What other things do you think have changed socially because of remote work, because of the pandemic?

Dr. Canny: People, um, I think a couple, one is the, the wellbeing, it's at the top, right? It, it, it just got replaced by financial wellbeing over, you know, my physical and mental wellbeing. And I think, but I think that mental health and physical health is here to stay, right? It, people really learned, I, there's a limit and limits are about money. And I think that's where also remote work comes in. I can move and I can be okay and find a job. I, I think that it also, organizations have to figure out how to build culture online. And we're starting to, for about two years, we had no idea what to do. And we're starting to build tools that we can do. I talk with my hands. You can see my hands. And that's one of them, right? How we actually use hands or visually. And so I think those are here to stay as well. It, And I think back to, and I know I'm repeating this, but it's like, how do we reach those people? And they may not come on to the site for an interview. And so rethinking all of that has to be happening.

Shari Simpson: Well, and you you said something that made me think about how I've changed using social media. So I have noticed that when I post something on LinkedIn, that's very polished, very well written, it doesn't necessarily get the same traction as the stuff that I write that's really personal, and shares a little bit about my journey. I think that's true for organizations, too.

Dr. Canny: Absolutely. I mean, you know, and I think sometimes it's, you know, it could be asking those employees to tell the story, but then backing off. Yeah. Right. And let them actually tell the story in their voice. And, and I think it's also one of the things too, is you need to be thinking about the breadth of the organization. It is not just about the C-suite or the leaders, but people, you know, what is the story of, um, blue collar, right. You know, and, or historically marginalized. And so there are lots of different voices that you need to be putting out there, even the generations. Ultimately, we all have financial worries, but the worries for a Gen Z and a boomer are completely different, even though underneath it, it's still a financial concern.

Shari Simpson: How do you see HR leveraging social trends to make positive change in their organizations?

Dr. Canny: I think it's a numbers game. And one of the things that really sort of disappoints me is we're going back to that business case for DEI. I thought we were past it. And why I say it's a numbers game is if we just look at what's happening with race, ethnicity, gender, generations, we're going to need to actually engage these people. And so if we're not doing that, then that's when I think we can have a conversation with you know, the CFO or other individuals in the organization around, this is what's going to be here in 10 years, or in five. And that will help sort of answer those ROI questions, or that question of, is this too far on the left or the right of the social grouping that's happening right now? Because even though it's a

smaller number, we know that just Gen Z, Gen X, they have really different feelings and we have to actually be welcoming for them to come in.

Shari Simpson: Yeah, for sure. As I think about just some of the other things, you know, it's interesting that I've seen some more information out there on social justice issues, issues around women in the workforce. I'm not going to get the trunch cracks, but there is something going on right now about women wearing red and not working. And there's all these things that our employees are very passionate about. How do we, how do we support employees without necessarily taking a stand as a company?

Dr. Canny: Can we? I don't know that you can back to that, back to that sort of authenticity and transparency. You know, I think one of the challenges too is DEI is all encompassing. And so it is, it's a great question. And because if I support one, then how do I say no to another? And there's limited resources, right? It comes down to that. And so you may have to decide, right? What are the ones you could do an internal survey? What do people care about the most? Um, you know, or the other thing too, that I, I think about is how do I manage polarities? And right now we've got a lot of polarities going on and you could say like, I'm going to manage what's the largest part of my workforce and, you know, dedicate to them. Underneath it, what we're seeing is it doesn't, some of the data, some, um, is whether it's gender, race, you know, uh, ADA, as long as there are programs that cut across identities, you're probably going to, it's going to help. I think what we are seeing though is a pullback on the corporate responsibility. And that's really pulled back. We're also seeing some pullback on DEI. And again, back to the prior question, I think it's a mistake because people are seeing it and they're responding to it. And so I think it's, you know, do some internal survey. What do people actually care about?

Shari Simpson: Yeah, well, and the polarity is definitely going to stick around for the rest of the year. We all know that. I have a conversation later today with Jim Link, the CHRO at SHRM, to talk about civility and all the work that SHRM's doing with that, because we're going to see it more and more.

Dr. Canny: It's here to stay, right? And it's here to stay probably for a decade or more. And I think it is. There are concrete tools. There's a part of, you know, there is healthy disagreement in an organization. There's healthy conflict. how do you actually have it in a civil manner? And that's where back to COVID, we have people that are entering the workforce that, you know, they went through high school in isolation. And so it's not only thinking about some of that forward, how do we develop a leader, but we may actually have to think backwards and how are we also developing people to come into an organization when they've been studying at home for two years?

Shari Simpson: Well, it's the same concept as all the kindergartners who had to do remote kindergarten. Then they came to first grade and they had no classroom etiquette because they weren't taught.

Dr. Canny: Right. You know, same thing. And so I think it's just

employers need to be ready for that. because the etiquette is different and then it gets magnified by the generational differences as well. And that's where the social media can come in and also be a negative of that capability to just sort of broadcast anything I want without consequences. And there is a, again, there's a positive side to that in making, you know, making change go forward, but it's not always welcome in the workplace. And so, yeah.

Shari Simpson: How do you, how do you feel about the gig economy? And I'll add something to that because I came across this term, it's been around for a while, but I've just started to see people use it more talking about fractional employees, right? Fractional, fractional CHROs or C-suite leaders. And I'm like, that's just the gig economy. We just want to make it sound fancy.

Dr. Canny: Exactly. And I think, again, the gig economy is here to stay. You know, part of it is COVID. You know, people realized I can have two jobs, or I can do the job that I want, or we can live on one person's salary and the other, or I'm going to do what I really care about. And so I think that's where it goes back into some of that employer record. It's interesting, you know, the updated laws around independent consultants and statement of work. you know, all of that is a sign of it's here. How are we going to manage it? And I think, you know, I think of it as like, from an HR perspective, how do I conduct an orchestra now? Because it's gig and it's, you know, MSP and it's EOR and SOW. And I need all of these lines going, but I need to figure out when one goes away and one comes louder. But if I don't have the whole orchestra there, I might be in trouble.

Shari Simpson: Yeah. And it's going to, I suspect it's going to change from a legislation perspective many years from now. But when we think about how we pay people, how we think about overtime, how we're stacking on different roles, you know, I mentioned that article about blue collar Gen Z and blue collar jobs, and they're not only doing their blue collar jobs, they're recording their blue collar jobs, posting it on social media and making income from it. On top of that, that's genius. I think it's very creative.

Dr. Canny: And again, I think that's where, you know, HR could be back to how could it be a leader within the organization is looking at what is, what are these trends? You know, I hate, could an organization make money from it? Yeah. A lot of times there's something that we call interest convergence. How can I make my interest converging with yours? And I always think about the CFR. Like how can I help the bottom line? And they may not, because they're going to come back with ROI. And if I can come back and tell I can help the bottom line, I actually might get their buy-in. Yeah. And so thinking that way as well.

Shari Simpson: Yeah. All right. As we wrap up our discussion, how does HR promote inclusivity through the social trends that we're seeing so that DEI can stay at the forefront of some of the work we're doing?

Dr. Canny: I think it's I think it's about a couple of things. I do think it's good about really looking at the identities and potentially the intersection of those. If we look at it's women's rights,

reproductive rights, it's looking at race, ethnicity, it's looking at age. And so I think it's around developing some new, again, transformational programs that might actually look at some of how we intersect and stop. And we see this in the generations. I don't just identify in one way. Yeah. And so being more of a sort of we're inclusive, I do think it also means taking a stand. The question I get a lot when I speak is should we lean into it? My answer is yes. Because it we need the people, the people need to feel welcome. And that means we actually have to probably lean in in a way that we're not right now. And the other piece of this, this is, it's, it's going to keep bouncing off of each other, tsunamis are going to keep coming. And so I think it's also about building programs that are very flexible, to sort of pivot in two or three years.

Shari Simpson: Flexibility is key now. It absolutely is. Eric, thank you so much for sitting down and chatting with me.

Dr. Canny: It was wonderful.

Announcer: I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at thehrmixtape.com. Come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.