

# HR Mixtape: Episode with Dr. Shari Simpson and Enrique Rubio, Founder of Hacking HR

## **Announcer:**

You're listening to the 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 Enrique Rubio, founder of Hacking HR. Enrique brings a global perspective on HR innovation, technology, and the future of work with a focus on what's practical now. Enrique, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

## **Enrique Rubio:**

Shari, thank you so much for inviting me. Excited about the conversation.

## **Shari Simpson:**

I am too. I've been following your work for a little while and you, you have figured out how to live at this intersection of HR, tech, and really community. So I want to start with like, what keeps you obsessed about like what's next for work?

## **Enrique Rubio:**

What keeps me obsessed about what's next for work? And it's a very good question. You know, I think that because of AI, demographic shifts, you know, the political chaos, at least here in the U.S. and what that represents outside, you know, for the whole world, I think a lot of organizations will be going through a lot of transformation that requires them to update their systems, you know, to adapt to the age of technology. to understand how the new generations work, and how we still tap into the older generations, but slowly transition them out of the workplace, while simultaneously understanding that

we live in a time, at least this is true for 2026, by the way, we live in a time where those of us here in the US are extremely stressed about everything that is happening and that is distracting from work. And, you know, we are witnessing, you know, multiple things happening at once that I think will affect not only our mental health, but even if it didn't affect our mental health, it will definitely affect the way we're working, right? that some of our communities at work may be afraid, or some of our communities at work may be more distracted than others. So I think there is a myriad of things happening right now in the world that are extremely distracting from work, but also conducive to mental health challenges. And, you know, so that's kind of like what's obsessing me right now. You know, how do we make sense of all of this while we continue to do our work? And I don't know, we don't kill each other out on the streets, right? I mean, that's kind of like what keeps me thinking about my work and the power of community to, in part, solve some of these things that are happening right now.

**Shari Simpson:**

You know, it's interesting because I think about that idea and kind of this term that we've thrown out, I don't know, more relevantly or more commonly after the pandemic is this idea of the future of work. And, you know, sometimes these catchphrases, I think, get stuck in our vernacular because I think it's just, you know, work is in constant change, right? We're always trying to figure out what the next thing is. As you've engaged with your community, what changes do you feel like are real? And what changes do you feel like are kind of just noise that we keep hearing about, but actually maybe either aren't happening or aren't having the same kind of impact that we think they have on companies, even though we keep hearing about them?

**Enrique Rubio:**

So obviously AI is front and center in any conversation that has to do with anything related to work, right? And there are multiple angles to the AI conversation. So one of them is how organizations adapt to the age of AI. The second one is how you scale and upscale and risk people fast enough in order for them to be relevant, employable, you know, valuable for their organizations in this age. And the third one that is happening only in a few

circles is the, but it's probably the most important one is what's going to happen when AI becomes a lot more intelligent than it already is, and you start seeing massive job losses, which is going to happen, by the way, you know, I don't shy away from something that for some people is controversial, but I don't think it is. Some people say, well, you want to lose your job to AI, you will lose your job to another human using AI. That is BS. You're going to lose your job to AI. Multiple of us may likely lose our jobs to AI. And yes, there will be new jobs created, but the speed at which we can create new jobs and people for those new jobs will be significantly slower than the pace at which some of the jobs that currently exist will be lost. So I fear that gap in there, right? So that's something that is top of mind for me. Companies are trying to do a lot more with less. I mean, that's obviously, you know, always what they want. And another thing that I'm seeing is the shift in the way we treat people in the workplace. I was reading, I can't remember the name of the article right now. It may have been like about five days ago, about how we thought about employees as important, you know, priority. You know, we're all in for them. You know, when the pandemic was happening, because some people were getting sick, some people were afraid of going to the office. So everything was about the employee. And now that shifted because the job market is difficult, the economy is chaos here in the U.S., and now companies are just doing whatever the heck they want with people, right? It's a pretty sad thing to see the devolution of all that we progressed over the past four or five years, you know, back to even worse than it was before the pandemic. And I think that's something that companies are going to have to deal with. Because one day, I mean, a lot of these companies are falling in line with a you know, sorry, I don't want to get too political here, but they're falling in line with a message from an administration that doesn't believe in culture, DEI, they don't believe in real merit, they don't believe in, you know, humanity in the workplace, you know, they believe in exploiting every kind of resource that is available to be exploited to make the most amount of money out of it, whether it is people or the environment or our infrastructure or, doesn't matter. So a lot of these companies are falling in line with that message, right, which is the reason why you saw a lot of them last year getting rid of all the DEI initiatives. But at some point, I'm hoping that we keep them accountable,

you know, for having made such decisions. So I am hoping that the few companies out there that is still publicly say, we believe in culture, we believe in inclusion, we believe in equity, we believe in diversity, we believe in psychological safety, we believe in people's health, overall health, including their mental health, I'm hoping that those companies are the ones that we continue to look at as a role model for all these changes that are happening right now in the world of work. Going back to your original question, sorry, I was digressing a lot in there, but let me go back to your original question about this idea of the future of work. It does feel like right now we are in the past of work except for AI. It doesn't feel like we are in the future of work. When I think back at 2020 and 2021, going through all this horrendous pain that society was going through because of COVID, that back then we had such a phenomenal opportunity to redesign the world of work and make it better for the future. And we did, but only temporarily. Now we're going back to the ways we were doing this before, or worse, as I said before, which means I don't think we're living anymore in that future of work that we were trying to design, I think that except for AI and maybe a couple of other things, it really feels like we're managing organizations and people like if this was, you know, 1940 or 1950, you know, and it really sucks because I thought that we have evolved and it doesn't feel that way anymore.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah, it's definitely shifted for sure. I have felt it in the conversations I've been having. I'm hearing the same thing. I did have an interesting conversation with another guest. His name was Alfredo, if you want to look and listen to that episode again. But what was interesting, what he talked about is when we were talking about AI. And I was like, how do you see that changing or impacting companies? Because everybody's trying to figure out how to use it, right? Where to implement it, the best ways, that kind of stuff. And he brought up a really interesting point when we think about the evolution of companies. And he talked about, you know, as companies adopt AI, they become more efficient, right? They can better connect their data to strategy, to revenue, those kinds of things. And jobs are going to be lost, right? What's gonna differentiate organizations, because everybody's gonna have the AI, it's gonna be the people. And it's going to be how they show up, how they provide

customer service, how, you know. And it was just such an interesting thought about, you know, even some of the things I experience as a consumer right now with the aid of technology. I'll share something funny that me and my husband talk about all the time. We have a place where we kennel our dogs when we travel. And it's really great. It's got like doggy webcams so you can like check on the dogs when they're, you know, in their room. And they have like an online check-in process. So, you know, you register them and then you do the pre-check-in paperwork and it goes through like, hey, do they have medication? Are you bringing their food? All the kind of things you would think. When you go to drop off the dogs, they pull up that form and they re-ask you all of those questions again to verify the information. And there's one part of me that's like, oh great, like they're making sure that my puppies are gonna be taken care of. But the other part of me, the consumerism in me is like, why am I telling you all this information again? You already filled out, like I already did this work for you, why do I have to do it again? And it just made me really think about this concept of people being at the core of what makes companies great. And so as we've seen this shift, what does that look like next from an HR practitioner, right? If I'm sitting in this organization and I feel the way that you feel about like, hey, we took some stuff back, some steps back as far as how we treat employees, how do we pull the pendulum back? Should we? Should we not? What do you think?

**Enrique Rubio:**

Uh, well, thank you for all that commentary and definitely agree with you on the, on the, on the kennel, the proper side of things, you know, where it's like applying for a job, right? I mean, like, uh, I'm going to upload a resume. Why the heck do I have to apply? Do I have to fill out all the things, you know, that are already automatically read by your system from my resume. So, but going back to the, uh, to the overarching theme here. Yes, organizations that will be differentiating themselves will find a way to get the best out of what humans can provide and to get the best out of what technology can provide. That doesn't mean that those organizations are going to be people-centered, though. They may be customer-centered. That is one part of the story. Being customer-centered doesn't mean that you are people-centered, you know, because if you treat your employees like garbage, you know, or if you're just

like, I mean, Amazon just went out and fired another 14,000 people for a total of 30,000 people in the past, something like 12 months. And they said that it was not because of AI, but we know that it is, you know, most of us know that it is. So if you just with a stroke of a pen, you can fire 30,000 people without any regards for anything about them, you know, and you, and by the way, we know that Amazon is one of the most customer oriented companies that exist in the world. But does that mean that you are a people, human center oriented organization? I'm not so sure about that anymore. In the case of, in the case of Amazon. So do I want to see that pendulum moving back to creating human-centered organizations that care for the employee as much as they care for their customers? Yes, of course, I want to see that. But the truth is that in this day and age, that doesn't mean that your current workforce will remain the way it is. The workforce will change dramatically because of AI, and most likely it's going to shrink. you may need to invent new roles, but as you invent those roles, to think that everybody that you don't need anymore, because AI is doing that work, that all of those people will be re-skilled for the new roles that you're opening, I don't see the math working there. This is not a one-to-one relationship, right? I mean, yes, we are eliminating 30,000 jobs in Amazon, but we're creating 30,000 new jobs because of AI. I don't see that math working that way. So I think that we have to be very clear about a few things, right? So number one is jobs will be lost, and they will be lost faster than the speed at which new jobs will be created because of AI. So that is one thing. if people are going to lose their jobs, and we already know that that is going to happen, the next best thing that you can do, you know, since you can't keep them around, the next best thing that you can do is, number one, map out possibilities for them, you know, in terms of learning, skilling, development, where they can go, even if it's not in your current organization. So, you know, for example, I'm talking about, you know, like we have in Hacking HR, we do a lot of tech development for our platform, and now we're using tools to develop all our websites from various AI tools, meaning we don't use UI designers anymore. We're not using them anymore. But I didn't have UI designers anymore before. I used to find them via contract kind of work. But there are organizations that do have designers like that. and now they have access to AI tools to allow them to do this much

faster, more efficiently. So, you know, map out what those designers could potentially do down the road, knowing, as we know right now, that the job that they have as it is today will not exist anymore in the next few months. So if I already know that, isn't it, you know, creating a human-centered organization doesn't mean that you're not going to make that job redundant, because sometimes you have to. It is making sure that that person has a path forward within or outside of your organization with the tools and the skills that you may be guiding them to learn. So I want to see that pendulum going back in that way, but to think that it's going to go back as far as in, you know, we're not going to replace humans, you know, in the age of technology, that is not going to happen. So the role of HR here is work with your functional leaders in your company, map out the path, the career mapping for the people that you currently have, map out what you think you're going to need down the road in the age of technology. You will have a gap between what you need and you currently don't have, which gives you the opportunity to scale the people that you currently have for those jobs. And alternatively to that, you will find that there are jobs that you currently have that you will not need down the road. And you can, you know, I know it kind of sucks to tell anybody, to tell somebody, you know what, I don't think your job will be a job anymore in six months from now. But to be honest, if somebody, I prefer that, that a company firing me six months from now is telling me, goodbye, thank you, you're done. You know what I'm saying? So that to me is the pendulum back to being a human-centered organization. We know that business decisions will be made, but you can make those business decisions without disregarding, you know, the support that you can provide to these humans.

**Shari Simpson:**

Well, and I think in your example, it's actually going to advance this idea of more skills-based hiring and skills-based views of work and job descriptions, which I really appreciate. Our listeners will know this. My three kids are military, and so as they move out of active duty into veteran status, my biggest concern is translating their skills into jobs for themselves. And, you know, my oldest is already a veteran, and he's already experiencing some of that, where it's hard to articulate, hey, I was a nuclear electrician on an aircraft carrier, and here's what I bring to the table. Because somebody, you

know, in HR will be like, well, did you do this exact thing? It's like, well, no, I didn't do that exact thing. But here's the list of skills. I actually think that could be a positive out of all of this, is having a more skills-based view of things.

**Enrique Rubio:**

Yeah, I like that by the way, because it's not only positive for an organization to open up a talent pool, you know, talent pipelines by, instead of just a job description, you know, a skill description, right? I mean, when you bring somebody for project-based work, but also internally, it allows you to move people around, you know, to have some mobility programs that allow you to move one person from one department to the other, if you know that the project that the person was working on in that department, you know, doesn't have a life, you know, a life cycle anymore. So I definitely like that model. I just think that most organizations have talked about this for so long, and they still talk about it. So that's the other side of things, right? I mean, you asked me before, you know, what is real, what's not real, with all these things that are happening in the world of work. Well, when you look at research about, you know, over the past maybe 10 years about what organizations thought were going to be their priorities, it's like the same five priorities are always the same five priorities, meaning you haven't resolved for them. So if you, if you know, 10 years ago, you knew that you, you didn't think your organization had the right skills for the future. And it's 10 years later, and you still think the same thing. I mean, what the hell do you do in the past 10 years? I mean, you know what I'm saying? So same thing with this idea of a skill based or project based organization, this became very famous, by the way, a very famous concept and theory, you know, in the mid 2010s, you know, maybe the 1517s, where everybody was talking like, Oh, my gosh, everybody's doing like gig work now, everybody's going to be in the gig workforce, and now we have to transition into a skill-based, project-based kind of work. That hasn't happened. That hasn't happened yet. I feel that that's actually going to happen now because we are at the age of AI, but most of those organizations never became ready for that. So that opens up, in my view, a phenomenal opportunity for HR to actually start designing organizations that look like that. Organizations where you say, you know what, yes, we're going to need some full-time people, you know, fully employed. in our organizations, but

sometimes it's going to be project based. Some of the times we're going to need some certain skills, so we move somebody around or we bring somebody with those skills, you know, but that's kind of the work that I think HR could be doing right now to keep their organizations competitive, relevant, you know, valuable in this new age.

**Shari Simpson:**

We've unpacked so much and I can't believe we're almost at 20-ish minutes here. So I guess I'll ask you this as kind of the last question. When you think about this transition and this, you know, I'm always excited about what HR can do. I really am. I think that, you know, if you really can embrace your role of HR, you are a strategic business driver in so many ways if you really open yourself up to realize that. So, that being said, what do you think HR practitioners right now should be teaching themselves or learning more about beyond AI? Because I think we do need to learn that. But as they're preparing for this change, right, to a more skills-based view, what do they need to teach themselves? What do they need to learn to be able to bring that in their organization successfully?

**Enrique Rubio:**

That's a very good question. And I'm going to provide a very general answer to that, right, which has been my same answer for many years. Anything that is not within HR, that's something that you're going to learn, you know, and you're going to learn it easier if you're passionate about it. So I'm going to give you one example. You just told me about your son, a nuclear engineer. you know, from coming out from the military back into civilian life, right? So I imagine, I'm not saying that this, I'm just, this is a very extreme example, by the way. But if you work in HR, and maybe you say, well, you know, there are not too many, you know, HR people specialize in, you know, nuclear energy companies. You know, so I'm going to work towards learning how to be a nature person for a nuclear energy company because there are not too many of those. You know, maybe there are a hundred of those in the world. So, no, I don't have to be a nuclear engineer. But if I can understand what they are talking about when I talk to them, you know, and I can translate that into me, into people's needs and people's strategies, then I have an edge versus

everybody in the city tower who became better in compensation, recruitment, performance and learning, but never learned anything about being a nuclear in a nuclear energy company. Does that make sense? So anything that can be an edge for you that is outside of HR, nothing within HR, you probably are already pretty good at HR and you already have your plan to learn within HR, but anything that gives you an edge versus everybody else in HR who is doing, who is just investing in their HR learning in that vertical, If you're investing in something else, that to me is good. So that means HR and marketing, HR and sales, HR and engineer, HR and nuclear energy. I don't know, you know, HR and community building. So anything that gives you more breadth, not just depth, that is going to be positive in an age where all the answers to quick questions are being provided by AI. So if you are a specialist, you know, I mean, that may be good, but if you're a specialist knowing things that you could ask AI. So one question that you should ask yourself is like, who would want to ask me, you know, to pick up the phone and talk to me for half an hour to get an answer, if they can get the same answer in 10 seconds from AI. So what is my edge then? And that to me is kind of the question that HR people should be asking themselves. What is my edge and how do I, you know, sharpen that edge outside of HR. If we were doing a podcast for, by the way, I am an electronic engineer. If we were doing a podcast for electronic engineers, I would tell them the exact same thing. Learn HR, learn sales, learn marketing, because you can be great in electronic engineering, but if you're not capable of having breadth and thinking across silos and thinking about functional areas and across verticals, then your answers will be provided by a specialized AI tool created for electronic engineers. So, you know, that's kind of like the edge that I'm thinking about.

**Shari Simpson:**

That's such good advice for HR to think about what their edge is. I love that. What a great way to end our conversation. And thanks for just sitting and talking with me about the future of work and your passions. And if people want to learn more about hacking HR, how do they do that?

**Enrique Rubio:**

They can go to [HackingHR.io](https://HackingHR.io). They can go to my LinkedIn, Enrique Rubio, and

we're always creating good stuff, good content. And I'm thinking about all these edges that I'm talking about, right? I'm always combining various fields of expertise, you know, to make sure that HR people know that the real world of business and the real world of work generally don't happen within the HR sphere. They happen across multiple, multiple spheres. So if they are capable of combining them, they will have a unique vantage point that not too many people have. It's going to make them competitive. It's going to make them employable. It's going to make them relevant, valuable, and whatnot. So yeah, reach out to us, Hackinature.io, my LinkedIn, and I'm happy to connect with anybody.

**Shari Simpson:**

Love it. Well, Enrique, thanks for sitting down and chatting with me.

**Enrique Rubio:**

Thank you so much for inviting me.