- 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.

- Joining me today is Prakash Vyas, a technologist, business transformation leader and strategic advisor at Skillibrium. His experience spans over 30 years from technology startups to large corporations. Additionally, he is an author at the Enterprise Times and is featured in Forbes, Computer Weekly, and ERP Today, just to name a few. Prakash, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast today.

- Hi, Shari, it's good to be here.

- It's not every day that we find a technologist with your level of industry recognition who's also a transformation leader. So, I'm really excited to hear a little bit more about your secret sauce to harmonizing those two worlds and really how can HR aid sales leaders in doing the same thing?

- Yeah, well, harmonizing the worlds is interesting because when you take business and you take technology, they in effect define each other. The consumer demand really tells the suppliers what they should be building. So, they build stuff which really gets the market excited, the consumers use it, and the way in which they use it often is different to the way the suppliers intended it. So, you've got this rotation of innovation on the part of the consumer through use and innovation of the part of the supplier. And in business, you've got to be attuned to both of these.

- I couldn't agree more. And I'm curious in your experience, how do sales leaders usually interact with HR? You know, I think about this from how HR professionals can really shake things up and do a better job of supporting sales performance in an organization.

- What I've just described suggests that businesses are all about people and talent. And so, they need to be held right at the center of what any organization does. Now, if you look at businesses today, they're digital businesses. That's what our sales leadership work in. That's very different to the businesses that existed 10, say 10 or 15 years ago. Unfortunately, most organizations see HR, dare I say it, as a back-office function, and they treat them as a back office function. By that, what I mean is they use them mainly for administrative tasks. But if you actually get curious about the skill that HR have, they should be right at the front of the organization, because this interplay between what a company says and does and the way the consumers take a product or service, it's central to actually what HR can actually advise you in. They've got talent here. So, sales leaders, what they should be doing is embracing HR, the insights HR

have around best practices to develop their people and use that as a value proposition to develop their products, and services more specifically for the consumers.

– You know, it's funny you mentioned how much sales has changed. I was just joking with my sister the other day. We had a set of encyclopedias in our house when we grew up that was purchased by a door-to-door encyclopedia salesman, which doesn't exist anymore. And we had a laugh about that.

– Isn't that a great example? I mean, if you look at the companies today, if you take the encyclopedia example, you have the front office, which is the door-to-door salesperson that's got the encyclopedia. And then what they do is they provide you with the goods. And then there is some fulfillment on the back end where, you know, that's shipped to you, and you get invoices, and everything. Everything's very disconnected. Nowadays, companies, they're digital. So, the front office, the mid office, and the back office have all merged into one transparent organization. So, if you could get those encyclopedias today, for instance, from a retailer like Amazon, everything now is completely changed. The distribution of the content to you, the visibility of what Amazon does in terms of the logistics, these are the modern-day organizations. And sales has been hit a lot by this change. And this consumerization of IT and business is actually driving a lot of the change we see in sales.

– You know, you've worked with startups to giants like Dell, EMC, and Splunk. I'm curious, is there a tale that you have where HR really played a pivotal role in boosting the performance of a sales team?

– Yeah, great question. I mean, if you look at these brands that you just mentioned, all of them are high-growth, progressive organizations. And I spent a good number of years at each of them, but those organizations were very different in terms of the organizations that I joined to those that I left. They changed a lot. And HR was key in developing the talent, which then helped you change the organization, which then you help win the market. So, they understood that if you actually get the people correctly defined, correctly orchestrated, and in the right roles, then you can actually start building an organization with very strong excellence and cadence. And if you mentioned Splunk and EMC, very, very strong operational excellence and customer attention in both of those organizations. So, HR played a critical role by being at the table. They were a part of the strategy. They were a part of the decisions that were being made on a quarterly basis, if not monthly basis. They understood what the company was seeking to do, and they also understood how the people should be changing as a result.

– You mentioned, you know, joining an organization and it being different when you leave it. That kind of makes me think about how

much we've seen changed in the technology space in general with AI and automation, you know, with your background as a technologist, how do you see those trends helping HR enhance that productivity of sales leaders?

– Well, AI, like other technology trends, is a capability and what it does as a capability, it offers you opportunities. So, in terms of HR, it gives you insights into what's happening in terms of your organization, what your people are feeling, what, how they need to be developed, how they need to be supported in a way where all of that information that you couldn't get, and curate before can be made available to you in the moment. And in making that available to you in the moment, HR can start rethinking about their contribution to a business, their processes, and actually start being more, so should I say, they could actually start being in a role where they're supporting the front of the business with their best practices and skills and experience.

– So, I've been in HR a little over 16 years now. I did a short stint in my HR career in some business-to-business sales in a dual role. And I always think about how HR can be better at supporting a sales organization. So, here's the question. If you are just starting out in HR, supporting a sales role, and you've been handed the task of revamping your company's approach to sales leadership, what's the advice you have for them?

– Well, change is interesting. It can be difficult. It can happen for the right reasons, and it can happen for the wrong reasons. So, I would say, understand the goals for change and the evidence behind why you want to change. That's absolutely critical in any change program, whether you're in HR or whether in the business. I think the best advice I could give an HR team is to empower sales to lead. Sales actually understand what they need to do. It's a very complex situation. Sometimes what I find is that HRs would look at sales as two-dimensional as an org chart. It can be the managers, the directors, the individual contributors, spanner control exercises, et cetera. It's not as simple as that. A sales leader needs to orchestrate skilled individuals to a point of value. And I think HR needs to understand what that point of value is and have an intimate understanding of the value proposition. And if they do, that, they can see the dimensions of individual contributors, managers and leaders, and then how a team works to a baseline collectively. The other thing is sales works in very structured ways. And you can compartmentalize each of these stages and find areas of opportunity to develop individuals and to, for instance, develop things like onboarding, ramping, IDPs, building capacity plans, and the necessary support structure that you need to prevent things like regrettable turnover, which is a real issue for sales.

– Have you ever had an HR professional tag along with you in a sales

meeting?

- Yes, I have. Some of in the earlier days, there were some examples where we used to do some very large business outsourcing and transformation. And there's a lot of people implications associated with that, whether you're doing an outsource, a merger, or an acquisition, or you're building such a large technology solution that the adoption of that solution can be a bit tricky. We've had HR in the room as individuals that can read more of the emotional intelligence that's happening at the meeting. Because you know, dare I say it, when you've got a lot of technologists, there's a lot of good IQ, but very little EQ. And HR can bring that element that we often miss. And so, when we address that early in a sales cycle, what you find is that the problems traditionally associated with adoption, where there's a bit of cultural resistance or lack of understanding, those things are reduced significantly when HR tag along. So, I've had HR tagging along with me on deals in practically every company that I've worked on.

- That's so exciting to hear. You know, I once in my career was working for a grocery delivery company in an HR role. And part of the requirement of your salaried employees is you had to go on the road and deliver groceries for a day. Get in the truck, get dirty, deliver groceries. And it gave me such a very unique experience of what employees were going through and it made me a better HR professional in that organization. So, I love to hear those stories.

- Yeah, I mean, look, there's a set of skills that HR bring, which is around listing, discovery, playback, to make sure that everyone is agreeing to the same principles and concepts. Those are really powerful areas where HR can help you direct a meeting and just digging a little bit in terms of the needs of what customers are looking for makes things a lot better. And the more they join, the more they come to customer-facing meetings, the bigger their role in terms of building strategy and helping us tune in the value proposition.

- So, you've written and been featured in many publications. I'm curious, you know, for those that are in HR listening, what advice do you have for them to stay kind of on top of what's happening, both in technology and in the sales world, so that they can better support their organizations?

- Yeah, I think twofold. HR as an industry is going to get disrupted by technology generally. And I would say that HR professionals and leaders should get very curious about how they can use technology to innovate their own space. The creativity of what happens in HR is with the people in HR, as it has been with all of the other sectors. Yeah. The second piece is, is that it's really important to understand intimately that concept that we're talking about in terms of the consumer demand, and then the supplier innovation. I think HR must feel that they're a part of the field, that they must feel they're a

part of the go-to-market team. And in understanding that and questioning it and looking at the interplay between those two things, that can help build an organization for sales leadership that can be built well in advance of the demand. So, the traditional war rooms around capacity planning, you know, right sizing, you know, not hiring the right folks, all of those things are symptomatic of trying to run a traditional model within a digital market. We can get past this. And I think HR can use technologies like you mentioned earlier, like AI, to help them distill information and bring that to the point of value within sales strategy, business strategy.

- Yeah, I have incorporated some talk tracks in my recent speaking opportunities around using ChatGPT as a resource for HR professionals. And it's funny because there's those in the room that have really grabbed onto it and understand it and are utilizing it and those who are a little scared of it still. So, I love to hear the encouragement to really get deep into technology for HR people and to see how we can leverage that as a resource instead of being afraid of it.

- Yeah, I mean, I would go as far as to say is that some HR folks might feel that this whole push through artificial intelligence is a little bit worrying. And I know there's a lot of press in terms of the rate at which this industry is developing and where it's going. What I would say is that HR as a community work with actual intelligence. IT on the whole work with artificial intelligence. And this is a little bit of a play on words. So, I think the expertise and the innovation really sits within the HR community to look at AI, artificial intelligence as a capability, as something that can help them, but we should continue to be focused on actual intelligence. And I think what we have is the opportunity to spend more time on the things that we can actually make contributions on using things like AI.

- I love that. As you think about the future for a moment, what do you predict are going to be the biggest challenges for sales leaders in the next, I don't know, three to five years, and how can HR prepare them now for that?

- Yeah, I think the the biggest challenge is gonna be getting the right people because the talent shortage is quite complex. Now, we've got things like ChatGPT and data analytics. They're not the preserve of just certain organizations. Everyone's using them. You just mentioned it. You guys are exploring them, right? And so, you've got very critical technology skill sets and experience that are in demand everywhere. Now, this is very different to what it was before. If you remember, like 10, 15 years ago, if you're looking for a banking professional, guess what? Banks are going to hire them. But banks are hiring the same people that retail are hiring, hospitals and healthcare are hiring, right? So, HR need to understand what makes my organization different. And by listening to what sales leadership say, because sales are with customers all the time, they've got the

feedback, they've got the actual intelligence of what's happening in the market, and hearing that they can then start developing protocols, and they can start developing plans that can support an organization to build a unique identity. In the same way HR used to provide support, and they do provide support, to build individual development plans, they can extend this to make an individual business plan. And so, I think this is gonna be critical in the next five years, that HR are there pushing and innovating with sales to build an organization that becomes a destination employer for the talent that's in shortage. I think the other thing is executing and being intentional with things like coaching. Regrettable turnover is gonna be a real problem in the next five years for some of the reasons that I've just expressed. Coaching to generic frameworks and coaching in a way in which you're giving anecdotal evidence maybe six months after the fact, it just won't work. You know, I've got this analogy that if you think of performance sports like basketball, baseball or football, the coach is at the game and the feedback is at the game. If you look at our industry, sometimes the coach might not even be present and a year later, you might get some feedback that's too generic and not specific enough. The demands of our employees and the demands of our customers now is much higher. So, I think in the next five years, HR needs to be more specific in terms of the way which coaching frameworks are built. Coaching is critical to making sure that employees stay, and they develop. And if they develop, we can change the company and then we can win the market.

- If you're not excited by what he just said, get excited, because I think there is so much on the horizon for HR and the idea of using sales to create individual business plans from an HR perspective. I absolutely love that. Thank you for sharing that example. Your organization just launched Skillroom in August, and I'm curious if somebody wants to learn more about that. Maybe you could share a little bit about what that organization is and how they can learn more about it. Yes, you're absolutely right.

- In Skillibrium, we launched our first software release of coaching, and that helps organizations build talent and generate very structured go-to- market teams that are highly performing. And to find out more, it's at www.skillibrium.com. You can also find us on LinkedIn. And what we're building is a one-of-a-kind framework that addresses some of the problems that we've spoken about today that you don't really need to suffer in your organization today.

- Wonderful. Well, thank you for taking a few minutes of your time to chat with me today.

- Thanks, Shari. Thank you for having me.

- I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at the HRMixtape.com. Come back often and please subscribe, rate

and review.