

HR Mixtape podcast | Hosted by Dr. Shari Simpson | Guest: Steve Goble, Chief People Builder, The Goble Group

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.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Joining me today is Steve Goble, Chief People Builder at The Goble Group. Steve helps leaders and teams improve performance through practical people strategies and real-world leadership lessons. Steve, thanks for jumping on the podcast with me today.

Steve Goble: Thanks for the invitation, Shari. Excited to be here with you and the team at Pay Velocity.

Dr. Shari Simpson: So you have this great story about reinvention. And I'm curious what, you know, moment really forced you to rethink, you know, who you were at work.

Steve Goble: Well, reinvention is such a unique thing that I think we all have that opportunity to experience at some point. It's just understanding and recognizing it when it happens. For me, that moment for reinvention happened when my daughter was born. She was 12 days old and I lost my job. So having, you know, my wife and I had at the point decided she'd be stay-at-home mom, one income, and we budgeted everything for that one income. Well, 12 days into parenthood, that income goes away. I was kind of thrown into the fire, right? Trying to, you know, that forced reinvention. And it was the fall of 2010, just before Thanksgiving, which really nobody generally hires between Thanksgiving and Christmas, you know, and it was a tail end of the 2008 recession. So I just kind of licked my wounds a little bit. And then in early 2011, the opportunity to partner with John Maxwell popped up as a founding partner of the Maxwell leadership team. And I jumped at it. I've always been a big believer in myself and, you know, my confidence was shot when I got fired. You know, I went through six weeks of a little bit of a pity party going on

throughout those holidays. As I was looking in the job market and looking at what I really wanted to do, I knew that now would be the time to reinvent myself as an entrepreneur because I had been doing entrepreneurial things before, just not for myself. So that moment in time, I was like, you know what, if I don't do it now, the likelihood of me doing it later and given another opportunity to reinvent who I was from a business perspective, I knew would be, you know, few and far between. So that firing at the time was terrible, but ultimately it helped to lead to my reinvention to what I do now almost 15 years later.

Dr. Shari Simpson: That's amazing. You know, I've told friends this before. I don't know that I've said it on the podcast and it might, I don't know, it might sound terrible, but there is something about having been fired in general that like that experience, you know, I've said, like, get fired once in your life. I know it sounds terrible, it does, but you can't describe what it's like until you've been through it. And especially as, you know, those of us in HR that often end up in that role where we have to deliver that kind of information. You have a different, you just have a different perspective, you know, having been on the receiving side of it.

Steve Goble: Right. And I love that you said, you know, everyone should get fired once in their life. And I 100% agree. Because it's one of those things where until you experience it yourself, it's hard to translate that into other opportunities and to other, you know, other experiences, you know, that built in empathy. Oh, I've been there. It's happened to me. But depending on, you know, as long as you're getting fired for, you know, like things that are somewhere out of your control, like don't do anything illegal, don't do bad stuff.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Yes, we agree.

Steve Goble: Yeah, you deserve to get fired for that. I'm sorry. But, and I own some of my fire, that's a whole different story for a different podcast maybe. But you have that experience now that it enables you to relate to people on a deeper level. And so many times situations there's a reduction in forces, the

economy goes bad, just things change that are out of your control. We should stop assigning shame to people when bad things happen to them that are mostly out of their control. And when you go through that firing experience, I think that allows you to do that at a deeper level. It's just, you know, hey, I've been there, done that. You know, I own some of it, sure, but not all of it. So this person probably doesn't own all their firing either.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Yeah, you know, and there's so many reasons why things might change. So I think it was good that you mentioned reduction in force. There also are times when an organization is going to do a reorg, and you have a title change, and maybe you went from, you know, a more elevated sounding title, like a senior director or a VP, and because of the structural changes in the organization, now you're just a director or you're an assistant VP or, you know, and often that title can really get stuck to our worth and how we describe ourselves. So when you went through your experience, what were some of the steps you took to rebuild your confidence and build your identity again? And I actually love that you said that you actually sat in it for a little bit in that pity party. I think that part you almost have to before you can start building again.

Steve Goble: Yeah, absolutely. I think you have to simply because if it's unexpected, it's such a traumatic experience, you need time to sit with it and grieve a little bit. Now, it was easier for me in the aspect that I had my newborn to work with me, you know, and my wife and I, my wife is a professional artist by trade and we're shutting down an art business. So it gave her the extra time to finish up a few things she needed to be done by the end of the year. But if I rushed into something completely different, or if I'd taken advantage of the first opportunity that came along, before I went outside on my own thing, I don't know if that would have been the right decision. And if we don't sit with it and give it time, but we also simultaneously have all these emotions, especially from a male perspective, the need to provide, the need to feel valued, the need to, you know, to be doing something productive. And it really comes down to ego. You know, what am I going to do with my own ego? And ego is not necessarily bad in some ways, but in reality, it can be terrible in a lot of situations. So you have to sit with,

okay, take time on the decisions, get other perspectives, get other people involved, and don't just jump at that first opportunity, because oftentimes, that's not really a reinvention, that's a rebound. And rebounds often don't work.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Yeah. What have you seen or what have you coached people on now on how business leaders and HR leaders should approach these types of conversations with employees? And this can be all over the board, right? So I'm curious to your perspective. Everybody, I think, has a little bit of a different perspective on what that conversation should look like when you're actually walking into, you know, the termination room.

Steve Goble: Yeah. First of all, be honest. Be clear and don't, you know, don't blow smoke. Don't BS somebody. Um, if you're BS'ing somebody, it shows a lack of respect, a lack of care. And this is a time when individuals need to know, Hey, this, you know, depending on the situation, this isn't just about you. This is a company wide thing. This is a reduction of force. This is whatever it might be. But when you're honest with them and you're clear with them on the expectations and what support services you may or may not be offering, it makes it easier. because there's no middle ground for wish washing. What if this, what if that? No, be crystal clear on what is happening and do your best to keep the emotions out of it. And that's easier said than done, because we're human nature, we're emotional, but keep the emotions out of it and be as clear as possible.

Dr. Shari Simpson: When I first had to do this in my HR career, I wish somebody had walked alongside me a little bit like that because I remember not being very clear with the employee and realizing, you know, kind of in the middle of the conversation, like, oh, I'm not being clear that this is their last day and that this is actually the process we're walking down. And it's because, like you said, it's because you care and you actually, you know, want to be nice to somebody. The other thing is you talked about support services, and I think that's something that can get missed as HR departments are thinking about, you know, building out their programs, right? You know, there are some really great organizations out there that provide things like, you know, you're

going to get three months of resume help or job board help or interview prep or, you know, kind of beyond just, hey, here's your required information around COBRA, right? There's there's so much more that we can do to treat people with dignity. And I will say this, even when they are being terminated for cause, that doesn't mean that we can't treat them with dignity.

Steve Goble: Right. Yes. And it's such a small thing to do for them. Now, part of the role with HR is to support the company, support the organization, but support the employees. And until they're fired, until they're terminated, they're still an employee, right? So going through this process is a way to show that you care up to the end, but also it's a reflection of your organization in the community. In today's world of social media, of things going viral and accusations far and wide being spread, how you interact and how this transaction takes place says a volume about the organization and the individuals involved. And providing that, that level of dignity and care is super important, not only for the individual, but for the company and the longevity of the company, because it's a change for both parties, right? Oftentimes, we often, we always look at the employee side, but it's still a change for those, you know, those team members who remain with the organization. They see what you're doing, too. And they need to see, okay, well, hey, you know, John Doe needed to go, but they treated John, you know, in a good way, a fair way. So that's important for both parties to be involved in the C, because it's, it's, business still has to be done. There's still tasks to accomplish.

Dr. Shari Simpson: I like that you mentioned social media, because I can't even tell you how cringy it is to watch those videos of people recording their termination. I mean, obviously, usually they're virtual, and from both sides, you know, from those who are clearly kind of not realizing their own behavior in the moment to, you know, sitting there and listening to HR practitioners just be very robotic, very, I don't know, unempathetic, and you don't know the situation, right? So I'm not trying to judge anybody. Obviously, all these circumstances are difficult, and sometimes who knows how much of it is true, right? Like, you have to take that with a grain of salt.

Steve Goble: That's the other side, right? It's like, it's on the internet, it must be true. Well, no, not always.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Right, so all that to be said, that it's a good point to talk about reflection on your company. You know, things like, it's gonna bubble up to Glassdoor reviews, it's gonna bubble up to, you know, other types of really public information. As an employee, how do you think about building that practical framework for yourself to have that career resilience? And, you know, I think there's steps that you probably need to take as an individual, but there's also steps that I think organizations can help, you know, employees think about this differently.

Steve Goble: Yeah, you have to be willing to continually invest in yourself. There's so many people out there that, you know, they get a degree, they get a certification, and then they stop learning. Yet the reality is there's so much more information, so much more opportunity out there for those individuals who continually learn. And that applies to not only technical knowledge, you know, the skills we need to do our jobs, but also relational knowledge. And within the workforce today, there's four or five different generations, depending on who you talk to, at various levels. And we're all doing things a little differently in our own way, not good or bad, not better or worse, just our upbringings and how we deal with those opportunities and challenges makes a huge difference with how we play things out on social media, but it also how we play things out internally around the water cooler. And we need to understand that. And as social media continues to be prevalent and as AI and all these individuals out there using AI, you know, it's changing the workplace. You can't deny that it's changing the workplace. But the reality is those relational skills with people to people, that you interact with on a regular basis, whether it's, you know, virtually like over Zoom or in the office, you still have to deal with people. So take what you see on social media with a grain of salt and continue to invest in yourself as an individual. From an employer's perspective, you need to be proactive and invest in your people you have. You know, all the data out there says it's harder to replace somebody, both time, dollars, brain drain wise, than it is to invest in your team that you have. So you either need to continue to invest in your team or let them go. Um, and so few

companies are, are, are proactively doing that, that I see. Now I'm in a small community in central PA and you know, I, you know, a lot of people I work with are smaller businesses, so they don't, maybe they don't have the resources, but regardless of what you do have, taking that proactive initiative to invest in your team, so what they're seeing on social media isn't the true narrative of what you're experiencing in your organization.

Dr. Shari Simpson: As you've reflected back on your experience, what do you wish that that employer had thought about you needing before, you know, conducting that termination or layoff? Because I think sometimes we don't think all the way through that. What do you wish they had thought of beforehand?

Steve Goble: Uh, the fact that I have a 12 year old, 12 day old daughter. Um, um, no, just, uh, you know, that experience, I wish they thought, you know, the bigger picture ahead. I was, I was only there at that organization for about 90 days and. When I came in, I was brought in to drive change. The owner of the company had bought the company from his dad, didn't understand the business dynamics, and I uncovered a few things that were bad for business. Nothing illegal, nothing bad, you know, inappropriate going on, just not good business decisions. And it was a family-owned business. and not part of the family makes it a, a bigger challenge. But the short-sightedness of firing me versus the long-term growth opportunities with a little bit more understanding. You know, and this is where I had to own some of my firing. I was, I was, you know, in my early thirties, uh, the title I was given was GM, uh, a multimillion dollar location for, in the truck body shop world. Uh, you know, I had a little bit of an ego myself. So again, I had to own some of that because I didn't handle things as well as I could, but instead of it being a learning opportunity to propel me forward with that organization, it became a learning opportunity for me to go out and do what I'm doing now.

Dr. Shari Simpson: What advice would you have given that Steve to handle that situation differently? And what I mean by that is, you know, being maybe younger in your career, but given a lot of responsibility, there is a sense of confidence that you need to bring to the table. But there's also other traits

that you need to make sure that you can continue to grow and succeed. What are the things that you would have told that Steve to really work on developing?

Steve Goble: Listen more. You don't have all the answers. Because I was brought into change and because I had the business side of it that the owner was missing, I thought I had all the answers in a lot of way. So I didn't listen to the owner sometimes, but I also didn't listen to what was going on with the team. And slow down a little bit. I grew up as a military kid moving around the world, so change was normal for me, and I dealt with it in a lot easier fashion than most other people did and still do because of that experience growing up. But sometimes you got to slow down and recognize that the change needs to happen. But instead of trying to force feed it overnight, give it a little runway so it becomes more adaptable and more adoptable by others on the team as well. So listen more and slow down a little bit.

Dr. Shari Simpson: It is really good advice. You know, I've told leaders as they're stepping into their first management role, I know you're excited to make an impact. Like, I'm excited for you to make an impact, too. Take the next 90 days, though, and don't think about making an impact. Just get curious.

Steve Goble: Yeah.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Why do we do it this way? Why does it flow this way? Why do we have this process? It's amazing the things that you can uncover and the relationships you can build. When you get curious instead of getting accusatory, and it really does make a difference, you know, long term and I think your ability to be successful, you know, as a leader in an organization.

Steve Goble: Yeah. And I love that word curious. And I think this generation has that. And others ahead of this generation aren't as curious because we get stuck in the mindset, this is the way we've always done it. So inviting that curiosity is also a huge aspect of what current leaders can do to encourage that continuity. So I love that word curious.

Dr. Shari Simpson: Yeah. You know, one of the things, though, that the hint or the nugget I will give Gen Z, because I've talked about this before on the podcast, I'm obsessed with the generation. I love their curiosity. I think they are pushing leadership to be transparent in a very valuable way. One of the things, though, that, you know, I think that they could take away from some of this is that there is a time and place for curiosity in the right way. And that's all I'll say about that, because I think I don't want to discourage anybody from actually continuing to do that. But sometimes I think that it shows up in a way that isn't serving them as well as it could. And every generation has their thing, so I'm not picking on them at all. Because I really do appreciate their perspective. As you think about, you know, next steps for leaders who are listening to this conversation and trying to wrap their head around, you know, how do they treat employees with dignity who are going through this process? And how do they, you know, themselves prepare themselves for more career resiliency? What's kind of like your one takeaway for them to think about how they build their next chapter, whatever that might be for them?

Steve Goble: Relationships matter. And do not wait till you need something from somebody to build the relationship. But simultaneously, don't go into a relationship, business-wise especially, with the only mindset of what you can take from it. Be a giver. So start giving now. Give of your time, talent, and treasure, how you see fit within your industry, within your organization. And think long-term. I'd be lying if I could tell you what's gonna happen in the next five years technologically, politically, business-wise. you know, change is coming at such a rapid pace. The one aspect we control as individuals is our ability to prepare the best way that gets, you know, again, continue to learn, continue to build relationships and, and give, bring value to your organization, bring value to nonprofits you care about, bring value to people, uh, who don't ask for it, who are, may not be in a position that you are, uh, and, and help them and do it proactively. And then, you know, I'm fully confident that if you take these steps now, when you need help and you're not afraid to ask for it, and that's not, you know, when you need help, you have to be, you have to be willing to ask, hey, I recently got challenged with, you know, job loss. What do you have, you know, who do you know that I should know? What opportunities does your organization maybe have? So, so plan now, but provide value and give, build those relationships.

Dr. Shari Simpson: I love that, starting with providing value. Such a good nugget, Steve. Thank you so much for sitting and chatting with me about this really important conversation for employers and employees as they go through different transitions in their lives.

Steve Goble: No, I appreciate the opportunity to join you, Shari, here at HR Mixtape, and I look forward to connecting again in the future.

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.