

HR Mixtape: Episode with Shari Simpson and Danielle Dinkelman, Co-founder and CEO of Advanced Corporate Wellness

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 Danielle Dinkelman, co-founder and CEO from Advanced Corporate Wellness. Her coaching practice supports people in creating self-motivated lifestyle changes to reclaim their health and live a vibrant life.

Shari Simpson:

Danielle, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast today.

Danielle Dinkelman:

Thanks for having me, Shari. I would love if we could start with you sharing a little bit about your journey as an author, as somebody who is in this wellness strategy space, and ultimately how you ended up co-founding the organization that you're with now.

Danielle Dinkelman:

Yeah, sure. Story time. Let's do it. Well, gosh, first of all, you have to know that I've been married for 18 years and we have four children. And my foray into health and wellness really started with those kiddos in combination with a major car accident injury that I had actually gotten into a few years prior to becoming a mother. And through needing to figure out how to get myself out of chronic pain and then having four children in eight years and needing to

figure out how to feed them so that they're actually satiated. I don't know anybody that has children, you go to Costco, you buy a big thing of goldfish or pretzels and you think it's going to last for a month before you go to Costco again, but it doesn't. It's gone so fast. And so I started becoming really interested and fascinated by nutrition and why is certain food satiating and energizing and other food is just addicting and compulsive in nature. Meanwhile, I was in my own space trying to get out of pain. And I was exploring fitness and exercise, going through a lot of chiropractic and massage and all these things. And so years and years have gone by. And in 2017, I had gotten really passionate about plant-based nutrition. Around that same time, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. And it was kind of like those two things kind of came into alignment that plant-based nutrition can actually be really, really powerful for folks that are trying to combat cancer, especially if you're wanting to do it in natural ways. So that was in 2017, and he is healthy and well now here in 2025. And I'm grateful for the information we had to help him and support him from a nutritional standpoint. And from there, it just became honestly, a bit of a calling. There was a moment where I was feeling a lot of gratitude for the ways that I was able to raise my kids and get myself out of pain and get my husband through cancer. I was actually out on a run. I was in Bear Lake, Utah, and got up to the top of this mountain and just overcome with gratitude. I'm a person of faith and a voice came into my head and the voice said, you know, I didn't give all of this to you for you to keep it to yourself. I gave it to you because I want you to help other people be successful with it. I was not expecting anything like that, but I was immediately excited by that idea. And so I dove into this thought of how could I do more with this? How could I help more people with it? For small children, teaching music lessons from home was my focus at the time. Going back to school to become like a nurse practitioner or a nutritionist kind of felt out of the question. But really the question that I was asking was how do you help a person actually do the thing that they know will help them feel better, whether that's physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, any of the ways. That was the gap that I had run into again and again over these years of trying to help friends and family take control of their health through habits. But I found that I was really good and fast at changing my own habits, but

other people weren't. And I was confused by that. So I discovered that health and wellness coaching was a thing. And it was the thing that answered that question, that bridges the gap between information and application. And I just dove headfirst into that. And I got certified in 2018, ended up going into private practice, helping mostly women get off of the dieting roller coaster for the first three or four years, that was my focus. And eventually we, yeah, we launched a B2B option where we have a whole team of wellness coaches that are working with the employees of our clients, helping people work on diet and exercise, but also working on stress management and mindset and the habits that are going to help them not burn themselves out in the careers that they're in.

Shari Simpson:

What an amazing story to get where you're at today. I'm sure you get asked this next question a lot by even potential clients and other people that you talk to. But why is it a company's responsibility to take this on for their employees? You know, I can hear managers in my head saying, like, yeah, I care about mental health. I care about stress reduction and I'll check in on my employees. But is it really necessary for us to provide this as a benefit?

Danielle Dinkelman:

Mm hmm. It's not. It's totally not necessary. Is it an excellent idea and an excellent investment? Yes. So let's talk about that. At first glance, your middle of the road manager might think, oh gosh, this just seems extra. This seems fluffy. This seems kind of like, oh, we're trying to just send a message of care and concern. Yes, you are doing that. And there is a very real altruistic reason for actually for the business itself. That it is for the good of the business and for the good of the employees. So we are huge believers in the symbiotic relationship between employees and organization. And that's why our company logo is these two overlapping hexagons. So when the employees are healthy and happy and coming as optimized humans, everything's gonna get better. They are going to be more receptive to correction and feedback. They're going to be feeling better about themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, all the ways. So I could go on and on, but it's really an investment in the individual which comes right back to performance and retention for the company.

Shari Simpson:

Have you been able to see with the organizations you work with, increases statistically in retention and productivity and those types of things?

Danielle Dinkelman:

Absolutely. We lay out the math for folks, you know, and as an HR professional, I'm sure you're very familiar with this, but not all managers or business owners are. But the cost to the company of replacing just one person that leaves because of burnout, you can take their annual salary and you're going to be paying probably around the cost of their annual salary just to replace that one person. And that's going to vary depending on what level in the company they are, right? So slightly less for entry-level staff and up to 1.2 of their salary if you're looking at an executive, right? So you can do that math really quick. Like if we can even just save one person from burning out and putting in not even a two weeks notice, but just saying, I'm done, goodbye. Wow, we have saved you a whole lot of money, a whole lot of headache. So yes, we've absolutely seen instances where folks were, as somebody said once, I'm feeling a little crispy. And that was their way of saying, I'm on the

edge of burnout here. I don't know if I can keep going. And so what our coaching does is really give those folks a confidential third party space that they can process what's really going on here. Is it the job? Is it the company? Or is it how you are engaging with your work? Okay, and we don't really address the first two, but we can absolutely address the third, which is something that the company can't address. It's very, very difficult for them to really get into the details of how people can engage with their work in a healthy and sustainable way. So absolutely, we see increased retention. The big metrics that we measure ourselves is looking at three things. We ask folks after they've engaged with our coaching program, have we ask them, how has stress management improved? How has focus and productivity at work improved? And how have your healthy habits improved over the time that you've been working with coaches? And on average, we see improvement around 30% in the stress management, 20% for focus and productivity, and over 60% improvement in personal healthy habits. What's really exciting is if you just think of one of your coworkers and ask yourself, what would it be like to work with them? Or think of yourself, what would it be like for them to work with me if I was 30% less stressed, 20% more focused, and 60% just healthier and happier? So across the board, we see that this works and it does take some time for, depending on the organization, for them to really get a taste of this and see, yes, this is going to work for us. Now, I will say the spaces that we have seen this work the best is in professional services, where there's high pressure, high stress, deadlines, client delivery, all of that. Or in the social services, actually, kind of more in the nonprofit and government agency side. These are the folks that are dealing with what we call secondary trauma or vicarious trauma. They are working with a population that has gone through some of the worst things that humanity can offer. And they are there to help them, right? So we are there to kind of help the helpers make sure that they are taking care of themselves when they're off the clock. Those are the spaces that we see this program really make that big impact.

Shari Simpson:

So in a former role very early on in my career, I was a mental health technician at a residential center for teenage girls who were wards of the state. So that exact population that you're talking about, and there was no

resources for stress management for what you're talking about. I mean, granted, we had EAP and you could always talk with the more seasoned technicians that were there. Having an ancillary resource like that could have been very interesting and honestly might have kept me in that career a lot longer. Because there were definitely days I came home and the emotions were overwhelming because you couldn't express those during the workday. So I can see how that could be very valuable for those different populations. How have you explained to employees as you've come into an organization to provide this service the psychological safety between the coach on your side and them and the employer, because I could see, you know, with EAP there is a little built-in trust there because the employer isn't getting specific records or generic, hey, this many people use the service. How do you build that psychological safety up front?

Danielle Dinkelman:

Yeah, great question. So since we are functioning as health and wellness coaches, everything we do with employees, all of the coaching that we do is protected by HIPAA. So everything that gets talked about between the employee and one of our coaches stays there. It does not get reported to management. And we make sure that everyone understands that that is the arrangement. It's quite different when you bring in, let's say, like an executive coach or leadership coaching, right? Often that becomes kind of a three-way relationship where the coach is saying, hey, manager, what would you like your direct report to work on in coaching with me? What outcomes would you like to see, right? And there becomes kind of this collaborative and three-way relationship. In our setting, it is more like the EAP, like you said. Everything is confidential. And we see anywhere from 20% to 40% engagement rates with the companies that we work with. And we're usually around about 100 employees is kind of the space that we're in, kind of the small to mid-sized space. People get it. They're like, great, you're not going to this. Okay, this is a safe space. This isn't about me, you know, like you said, putting on a straight, a strong face for the people they're serving or trying to just like buck up and do it for their managers. Right. So it's a place where they can kind of let the walls down and really be honest about what's working well for them and what's not working well. And our coaches are more than anything, they are

experts in behavior change. So we're looking at, you know, what do you want to be experiencing that you're not yet? And how can we reverse engineer that into behaviors, habits, rituals for yourself that will help you be able to sustain the work that you're doing?

Shari Simpson:

Wow, really, really cool concept. And it definitely aligns with the trends we've seen in the change in HR and companies over the last couple years. And I think that there is still a little hesitance to the word safe space, I think, because it's not being used in the way that I would say we're probably talking about it. So I could see how organizations have been hesitant to implement programs like this. But what we're really talking about is how do we create an environment where employees can learn about their stress triggers and navigating those things and potentially setting boundaries that maybe they don't have. You know, it's really hard for us in HR to set boundaries because we just we want to be there and a lot of times we want to give that white glove approach, which requires a lot of, you know, mental load for us. So if you have somebody listening who's interested in learning more about your company, how do they get a hold of you?

Danielle Dinkelman:

Yeah, our website is a great space, acwcoaching.com, or they can reach out to me directly on LinkedIn. And we also have a LinkedIn page for the company there. Those are all great places to start.

Shari Simpson:

Awesome. Well, thank you for sitting down and chatting with me today.

Danielle Dinkelman:

Thank you so much.

Shari Simpson:

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