

# HR Mixtape: Hosted by Shari Simpson with Guest Leslie Vickrey, CEO of ClearEdge

## **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 Leslie Vickrey, CEO of ClearEdge. She is a recognized entrepreneur and author and a strong advocate for women in leadership. Leslie brings powerful insights on brand building, talent strategy, and creating workplaces where everyone can thrive.

## **Shari Simpson:**

Leslie, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

## **Leslie Vickrey:**

Thank you for having me, Shari. It's wonderful to be here with you. As two women in leadership, I think this topic is so important and you have sat in a space where you are such a huge advocate for women's advancement in leadership positions. So I want to start with this. What do you think are some of the biggest myths about women's advancement in leadership today?

## **Leslie Vickrey:**

Oh, thank you. I love this question. And I actually think there's a lot of myths. But what I'd like to do is focus in on three myths that immediately came to mind as I was thinking about this. So the first myth that I see quite often is that women don't want top jobs because of family. So you know, Shari, I have my own podcast called the edge. And it features executive women in recruiting. And I have to tell you, I noticed a trend as I was recording, and it was about five episodes, and I'd say, and I had to stop and reflect because

every woman who I spoke to had something in common, they had a stay at home partner, and a strong support system behind them.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So I feel like at least sitting back and looking at that, what's not talked about often in this space is that many of these women and their partners are typically men, have stepped up to support these women in their careers. But we still haven't normalized that. So there's this default that it's the women who will pause or pull back. And that families should do, you know, I believe what's best for them without judgment. So I still hear things, Shari, which I can't believe things like, oh, she's getting married, we know what's next, a family and she'll be checked out. And I've spoken to women who they could be pregnant. and they've told their companies, you know, don't count me out, or single moms who constantly have to raise their hands and say, I'm still in the running, please, you know, just think of me when things come up.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So too often, these decisions are made for them. And I believe it's based on, you know, outdated beliefs, quite frankly. So my takeaway for leaders on that myth is, we have to stop making assumptions about who's open to stretch, it could be stretch assignments, bigger roles, based on family status, we have to ask and not assume because a lot of these women absolutely want that top job. They're designing careers to reflect, you know, really what matters most to them at work and at home. So that's the first myth to me is women don't want top jobs because of family. That's just not the case.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

The second one, real quickly, is if you work hard, someone will notice. This is definitely a myth. So this one is, I think, especially dangerous because it kind of feels fair, right? Like if I work really hard, I should get noticed and be promoted or work up. But at the executive level, it really only works if visibility is added into that equation. So, a quick example, I interviewed a woman who said her male counterparts had moved up faster simply because they asked and advocated for themselves. That same woman realized that she could have risen up years earlier if she had just been her own best career

champion. She eventually got there to the same level as her male counterparts. But it took years to get there. So if you think about the lost income or opportunities to rise other up, it really makes you kind of pause and think.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So remember, hard work alone doesn't get you promoted. Strategic visibility does. So leaders need to coach women on how to do that to be seen and be heard. OK, my last myth for you, Shari, is that women aren't invested in networking or visibility. That just simply isn't the case. However, it has to be something where it's seen and important to them. It's not a lack of interest. To me, what I've seen happen a lot is it's about access and design. So when networking, if it's always at 7am for breakfast or a happy hour, We're kind of unintentionally designing programs where it takes women out of those opportunities.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So we have to really think about how we diversify that connection. And I always give women this advice, or really anyone this advice, build your network before you need it, not in a time of need. Women are really great at building relationships, but we don't always feel comfortable leveraging them for growth. And that's kind of a behavior we can unlearn. We just have to be really intentional about that and what we're doing. And I think that these myths really persist because our systems still reinforce them. And smart companies are actively dismantling those outdated assumptions and really thinking about redesigning leadership pathways that really work for everyone.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So again, women don't just want jobs because of family. That's not the case. If you work hard, you'll get noticed. You got to be your own best career champion and put yourself out there. And networking and visibility can really make a huge difference.

**Shari Simpson:**

I love myth number two. I mean, I think that plays into all the statistics we've

heard before about, you know, women don't apply for jobs unless they meet 100 percent of the criteria and that kind of stuff. And I saw this post on LinkedIn just yesterday. You know, somebody that I respect, admire is consistently on, you know, have 100 lists of tech influencers and he's redoing his home and he put a quote on his wall that says, stop sucking and then his name. And he posted this on LinkedIn. And I thought my first reaction to it was like, wow, that was pretty brazen. But I know this person and they're actually a genuinely amazing human being, create really great connections.

**Shari Simpson:**

And I think my gut reaction to it is because I don't see women do that. First, they take a very humble brag approach to things instead of really standing in and championing themselves and the work that they've done and say like, Yeah, I'm really excited about this thing I accomplished or this thing I'm doing or this award I got. And I want to tell other people about it because I want people to understand that you can get there too. Really love, let's break that myth number two, cause that's so true. Like there are so many ways that we can show up if we're coached and given the right tools and space to do that.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

And we're taught it's not okay to say I, but really it is okay to say I. You have to put yourself out there. There's one of my favorite books on this topic is How Women Rise. And there are 12 different traits that hold women back. And what you just described is one of the 12 that we have to self-advocate for ourselves. I always say, if I'm not my own best champion, who's going to be and why should they be? I have to believe in myself first and foremost and put myself out there all the time. It's not saying that my team isn't great and it didn't take other people and I'm pointing out my whole team like, you know, Abby Weilbach, it's you, you, you, you. It is, but it's also me. And, you know, if I want to move up, I have to put myself out there.

**Shari Simpson:**

As you looked at the landscape and with the amazing conversations that you've had on your podcast, what trends are you seeing and how women leaders are redefining what success looks like?

**Leslie Vickrey:**

Yeah, I think that's such an important question because it has changed. I know for myself, I've witnessed a complete fundamental shift in what I'm hearing from talking to different women, you know, over the past several, several years. And I, what I like to say, Shari is, I think that we're starting to move from no longer chasing someone else's definition of success. Maybe I'm going to project this out there. So we start thinking this way, but just defining it on our own terms.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So some of the trends I'm seeing, you know, a first one would be purpose over prestige. So I know, you know, typically you think moving up the ladder and that is by Title and not all of women want that big title or feel like they need to have that are people in the world in general You know traditional markers that give you that title or that, you know old proverbial corner office So to speak it doesn't mean we're less ambitious. It means that we're focused on other things impact, authenticity, sustainability.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

I literally had a call from a leader this week. Yesterday I was chatting and we were talking about that and they said, I'm kind of over this type of company. I really want that type of company. And it was impact, that authenticity and sustainability. So really focusing in on that purpose over prestige. The other thing is, and this one I think is really important, A second trend would be challenging the flexibility penalty. And let me explain what I mean by that. And I'm really curious to hear your opinion on this one.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So I have seen a lot of my friends who are in the C-suite accept less compensation in exchange for flexibility. And I feel like that trade-off really contributes directly to pay inequities a lot of times. And we have to challenge that kind of internal narrative that we think that I'll take less than I'm worth. This is basically what you're saying to yourself, because I need that flexibility. Now, I have to tell you, when we reach out to men about roles, they almost always ask about compensation before they'll have a conversation about the

role. Hands down, women ask about everything but compensation and then hesitate when we're, you know, about to negotiate a pay and so forth.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So I would say to challenge that thinking, you deserve to be paid for the role, the results and the value you bring. full stop, take that kind of flexibility piece, you know, off the table. And then the third trend I would mention is just leading without pretending. And this is redefining success. I don't know, Shari, how many people you've heard say, I needed to act like a man when I walked in the room or and they feel proud about it, that this is something they had to do. We have to let go of the idea that we lead like someone else.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

And recently, I live in Breckenridge, Colorado, and Summit County women of the Summit had this fantastic event. And there was this high ranking woman in fire protection on a panel last week that I went to. And she's often the only woman on the job site. And in fact, she's running the site. So imagine any sign of a fire here, they put together a plan and go out. And one thing that really struck me about what she said was she doesn't show up trying to prove she can do it all. And as you can imagine, in that role, it takes a lot of different strengths to do things.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

But she said she leads with purpose, and she asks for help when she needs it. So she didn't show up, you know, like, I am like a man, and I am strong, and I can do these different things. She saw it not as a weakness, but as a strength, and then expected that from her team as well. And one last thing I'll say, and this is personal for me, is I have been told, you know, and again, this is one you may have heard about, and then I'll kind of stop, and I want to hear your feedback on this, but I'm so passionate about these topics, not to cry at work.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

I have to tell you that as a CEO, when I'm addressing the company and in all hands, I find myself, I choke up during town halls. If we're all in collective pain, feeling something, I look out and I see my team hurting, I can't help but feel it

too. And you know what, Shari, sometimes I hurt, I'm human and my team needs to see that way too. And I don't take it as a lack of strength on my side. I find it's really a connection and builds that trust and I guess finally the last thing would be balanced to grace and that's giving myself grace in those moments you know, we talked about work-life balance and some days I'm thriving at work and I Dropping the ball at home or other days.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

I'm really crushing it at home, but work struggling some days I've got it both are great and that is fantastic and that is okay I'm trying to teach myself not to ruminate on that and to give myself More grace and the more I talk about it the more human I seem and the more I can show up fully to what I'm doing so I I don't know. I think there's a lot of trends. What do you think? What's your reaction to those and anything that I didn't cover?

**Shari Simpson:**

I wrote down a lot of notes as you were talking, actually. You know, a couple of things. I'll start with emotion. This is something I have talked about on the podcast before, my own journey and the concept of female emotions at work. And I came to the conclusion, you know, several years back that our definition of emotional is usually linked to crying, which is usually a trait that we see in those that I identify as female. And the reality is emotions in general, when they're heightened, show up in different ways for different people.

**Shari Simpson:**

If you have a identifying male who starts to yell and scream and pound their fist, that's an emotion, right? But we look at that and go, oh, wow, that they're angry or they're powerful or whatever. And we look at the emotion, you know, of crying is that's weak. It's just an emotion. They're both emotions. They're just, they come out differently. So, you know, kind of divorcing myself from labeling an emotion and understanding the passion behind it has really helped kind of reframe that. And like you said, you know, when you get up in front of your team and you're speaking from the heart and you get emotional, That's because you're speaking from the heart, right? It has nothing to do with how it's manifesting.

**Shari Simpson:**

So I love that. I think that's really important. The other thing you talked about was purpose over prestige. I feel this one in my core when it comes to public speaking. I do a lot of public speaking and when I first started, I would stress probably more about what I was going to wear on stage than actually the content that I was delivering because I felt like I had to show up a certain way. And the reality is nobody's going to remember what you wore on stage. I mean, granted, if you come in looking disheveled, that's a whole different topic. But you know, I wear gym shoes on stage with my dresses. I don't wear heels. I'm not comfortable in them.

**Shari Simpson:**

And so kind of getting out of that idea of how do I bring purpose to my discussion and not focus on this prestige piece really changed my interaction with the audience. I was able to connect so much deeper by not worrying about that kind of stuff. So I love that. And then the last one around flexibility. You know, I think it's really good to highlight you know, how, how women do need to lean into compensation and those negotiations upfront. And I think what I've observed anyways, the difference is that men assume the flexibility is there at that level. They're not asking for it. It's already baked into what they think they're signing up for.

**Shari Simpson:**

And if they didn't get it as they got into the role, they would bring it up and be like, what do you mean? I don't have flexibility at this level. Like I'm doing my job. I'm meeting like, are some things we just need to start assuming that we have access to, that we've earned it. We don't have to justify it or we don't have to defend ourselves to get it. So I agree with all those things. And I definitely heard the, you know, show up like a man stuff before. And there's a speaker that I have gotten to know over the years, his name's Jeff Harry, and he, he focuses in this space about bringing play to work.

**Shari Simpson:**

But he talks about the concept of masculine traits and feminine traits. And I think that's such a great way to anchor ourselves into what traits are going to



work best in the moment and in the environment and in the things we are doing instead of I have to show up like a man. There are some traits we need to lean into, but that doesn't necessarily mean showing up as a man. It means picking the right traits for the moment.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

Right. Yeah. And at the end of the day, be yourself. And yeah, yeah. And cultures, stable stakes on the flexibility piece that should just, I mean, in today's world, a lot of companies do have that. Some are moving in different directions, but you should be asking that it should not relate directly to your compensation. I agree.

**Shari Simpson:**

When you think about women and their growth journey to leadership, I have heard this concept over and over again, mentorship and sponsorship. And let's be real. It sounds good on paper. It does. It sounds good on paper. It's really hard sometimes to pull that off as a female. finding somebody who is willing to do that for you, both from men and women. You know, I got to tell you that I've had a handful of female leaders who have not been great mentors. And so that's complicated. What are you seeing? How does that look like in organizations that are doing it right and are high performing?

**Leslie Vickrey:**

Right, right. I, again, so I had co-founded a company called Aura to track routine in advanced women in technology. We had about 6,000 people part of the program. And the piece that we anchored ourselves on was mentorship. So it's something I'm extraordinarily passionate about. But what I didn't realize, Shari, at the time was how important sponsorship was actually and the differences. So one, I think it's good to understand the differences because it's not always obvious to people. So really, those mentors can offer advice, feedback and perspective, they can help you grow by sharing their own experiences. And that can be incredibly valuable.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

But a sponsor, a sponsor, they really put their name on the line for you, they

advocate for you when you're not in the room, they say, she's ready for that role. Put her on the main stage, or she should be considered for that board seat. And that role in your life and your career is critical. And you don't just need people to guide you. That's the mentor piece. You need people who are willing to bet on you. And I'll just share an example or two for me where it's worked well.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

So then people can, I think, kind of personalize that and think about how maybe you actually sponsor more than you realize. The podcast, you know, you're hosting is a great example. You're sponsoring and putting trust and having me as a guest and putting yourself out there. to give people that room to grow and to get their stories out there too. And then getting people to submit for your podcast, that's sponsoring people and having them there. So for me, a dear friend and work colleague, Penny Queller, She had put my name forward for a board position at Central Michigan University where we both went.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

We didn't know each other when we were there, but she had put my name up for a role. So not only did I get the position, but it was something that I wouldn't have even thought to pursue with the university. I didn't go to business school there. I studied journalism and PR and political science, but she put me up for a board position with the business school because of being an entrepreneur and a graduate. And then later I was recognized with the Distinguished Alumni Award. That's the power of sponsorship. None of that would have happened had she not put my name, you know, out there, so to speak.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

And I think we have to intentionally create that space for both, and we have to challenge ourselves to identify potential sponsors and become those sponsors, especially if we want more women in leadership. We can't just help them grow. We have to help them be seen. So to answer your question specifically, high-performing companies, they understand this. Mentorship

helps you evolve. Sponsorship helps you advance. And the best companies are creating those cultures where leaders are expected to do both. You've got to be nurturing and get people to that potential and also actively advocate for that. And that's how you can accelerate careers and talent pipelines for that future to build the future talent in the room.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

One thing I will say for myself too is I have the saying, you know, if you don't ask, you won't get yes. So when you know people who are sitting on boards or you know of different people who are making decisions for speakers and so forth, you can put yourself out there and simply say, hey, listen, when you're in the room talking about speakers for X, Y, and Z conference, remember me, and I want to be top of mind, and here's why. Did you know I have 50 clients from the healthcare industry talking to a healthcare conference person, or, hey, this friend of mine who I network with all the time, they speak to this topic and that topic.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

It can become natural and a part of something you do every day if you work at it. All of us can be sponsors when you're in a position of power. It's easier to do that. If you're in the room, you have to ask yourself, what are you doing to bring others? you know, in that room and talk about them when they're not in there.

**Shari Simpson:**

It can be that simple. Such good advice all around. I feel like there are so many nuggets that you've dropped that hopefully people are taking notes and retweeting or re-axing. I don't actually know the correct terminology anymore. But, you know, as we wrap our conversation, I would love for you to just share with our audience You know, if they want to know more about you, you've got a lot of things going on, a podcast, you have a book coming out. Maybe you could share a little bit about that before we wrap up.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

Oh, sure. Thank you, Shari. Yes, I started the Edge podcast. It actually is to

elevate women in the recruitment industry. I have this feeling that representation really matters. If you see it, you can be it. And the more we can have conversations like this and talk about people who have been successful and share their ups, downs, the full sides of their journeys that people can learn and grow from that too. And yeah, I have a second book coming out. So called the second one's around courage to rise. So there's 15 authors who are part of it. So I'm one of 15. Our first book was called Together We Rise. That one was a much more, I'd say deep personal story of my journey as an entrepreneur overcoming self-doubt, imposter syndrome, building confidence, and being able to share my story and journey more openly.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

The next one's really about entrepreneurship journey. So having that courage to be a leader and what goes into that and what that means. So best way to follow along is really on LinkedIn. And I love to connect and share stories and help each other learn and grow. And thank you, Shari, for your podcast and all of the things that you're helping get out there as well. It's really fantastic.

**Shari Simpson:**

Thank you so much. And you're always welcome back. I'm so glad that you were able to take a few minutes and sit down and chat about this really important topic.

**Leslie Vickrey:**

Oh, thank you. It flew by. So lots to cover.

**Shari Simpson:**

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