

# HR Mixtape: Hosted by Shari Simpson with Guest Jamy Conrad, Vice President of People and HR at TrustRadius

## **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 Jamy Conrad, Vice President of People and HR at TrustRadius. Jamy is a seasoned HR executive with over 15 years of leadership experience who transitioned to the tech industry to join the TrustRadius team after a successful tenure in healthcare. Jamy, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

## **Jamy Conrad:**

Yeah, thanks so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

## **Shari Simpson:**

So we were just chatting and we'll actually be able to see each other next week. We'll both be attending HR West. So I'm pretty excited about that. And you have an amazing role at an amazing company, something that Paylocity actually looks at, TrustRadius. And I'd love if you could start with maybe you sharing just a little bit about your background and how you got to where you're at right now.

## **Jamy Conrad:**

Yeah, and just so you know, we love Paylocity. So this is really exciting for us to be a part of this. So I am, you know, currently working with Trust Radius and the story, you know, I'm one of those weird people that actually wanted a career in HR. I started in a customer service type of role in manufacturing,

and I was always partnering with our HR team. They were growing, and so whenever they wanted to try something new before they'd roll it out to the entire organization, they'd partner with me and my team, and we'd try it for them, give them feedback, and then they'd make adjustments and decisions on how and when and why to roll it out. And I was always just really asking a lot of questions. What are you doing that for? What does that mean? Why is this important? And I was just really intrigued by it. And so left that organization, went to work at a small mom and pop shop in the DME, durable medical equipment industry. And they were growing. And I said, I really want a career in HR. So if you'll give me a chance, All I'm asking for is a chance. I have no background, no experience, no college degree, but if you give me a chance and give me six months to see if I can do it, I sure would appreciate it. And they were gracious enough to do that. And six months turned into almost 10 years with that organization building their HR department from the ground up, their processes, procedures, the department itself, how we supported the organization, the strategy, and did that for almost 10 years before moving on to work in the hospital system, not knowing that that was going to lead to being in a hospital system during the global pandemic, but that's the way it works sometimes. And was with them for a couple of years. I was promoted about halfway through my time with them to the corporate team, and then moved to Trust Radius to learn a different industry. So working now in the tech sector, which is the extreme opposite of healthcare, and having a great time with those changes as well.

**Shari Simpson:**

I love that. I love your journey. And I actually cut my teeth in HR in healthcare. So it is totally different than working for a tech company, which I do now as well. So I feel that in my soul, that journey that you went through. And what a unique perspective to go from kind of building an organization and really trying to have that passion for HR to being in a more strategic role now, which is what we're going to talk about is, is how do HR professionals make that transition, both from a mental perspective and an actual doing the work perspective from that tactical support mindset to that strategic partner mindset. So let's just start there. What is the biggest mindset shift that either you had to experience or that you talk about that HR needs to really think through to make that transition?

**Jamy Conrad:**

I think in my career, one of the biggest mindset shifts has been going from, you know, this idea of employee advocate or working for the organization that it has to be, you know, one or the other. And our role is so much walking that middle line, right? Trying to balance both sides. But, you know, instead of it being like a constant battle, the mindset shift is around how do you create it so that it's a mutually beneficial experience and relationship between the two entities. It shouldn't be working against each other, it should be working together to try and get to the resolution. And as I think about major mindset shifts, I've had a lot of opportunities to lead through a lot of different situations, some crisis, a lot of M&A. And so I think the next future of work mindset shift that we're kind of going through is that we go from, I think as leadership, we need to go into this like from productivity to performance. You know, we've seen so many changes happen in the last five years and the demands of work, you know, they've just shifted. And a lot of that was because of the pandemic. Some of it not, some of it just in the evolution of business. But I think it's really important that we talk about like, in order to retain top talent, what is that going to look like going forward? And so, you know, is it really about how many hours they're putting in and how many emails they're sending or receiving? Is it about butts in seats that focus, that's important to focus on? Or is it about what's the impact that they're making and what value did they deliver? And then designing your systems around it,

whether that's your performance management system, your culture, your vision, and normalizing things that are like stress and recovery and some of the harder, more vulnerable things that we've never talked about at work. So I think that, you know, future of work is moving into this thriving, not just surviving mindset. And productivity is just a number and performance is the mindset. And so I think if companies and leaders start to embrace that shift, that they'll be the ones shaping the future of work, not just trying to keep up with what's happening.

**Shari Simpson:**

Well, and it's such a different view to kind of lead the charge instead of responding to the charge. You know, as you moved into a more strategic role, what was something that really surprised you that maybe you didn't quite understand prior to being in a more strategic role?

**Jamy Conrad:**

What was something that surprised me? Yeah. Oh, well, there's so many good stories, right? Yes, at HR, I said this before on the podcast, but I feel like we're all writing a book in our head of all the things we've experienced. So yes, there are probably a ton of stories you have.

**Shari Simpson:**

Well, I was a little surprised at some of the things that you still are required to say to other adults in a workplace that you didn't think you would have to say, or you maybe even never thought you'd say to your children. And I try to be really respectful when I say that, but it's true. And that even the more surprised me that it doesn't get easier at the executive level than it does, than it is with your frontline employees. So I think the way that I've just worked through that is to remind everybody how important feeling like that you belong and that our employees belong are, how important that is for organizations and for the culture. So when we think about how we respond in certain situations or the words that we're using or how we're approaching it, taking that idea that it's important that we consider everybody's perspectives and maybe not necessarily censor what we're about to say or how we're going to respond, but really think through the long-term impacts of what that's going to have on the organization.

**Jamy Conrad:**

I too have been surprised over the years, the things that executives still kind of lean on HR for, even if you're an equal, even if you're at that executive level. I'm not sure if I shared this story before in the podcast, but in a previous role, previous company, I had a scenario where an employee, high level employee came in and just happened to have a rip in the back of their pants, just to happen. And one of the owners of the company came up and said something to me like, hey, you need to go tell this employee. And I was like, did they walk past you? Did you notice it? And they were like, well, yeah, but I came to tell you to say something. I was like, that's even more awkward that you came and told me to go talk to this employee and I didn't even see it. And granted, of course, the employee was embarrassed and was like, oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. I was like, well, you didn't do it on purpose, but you probably don't want to walk around like that all day. But I was shocked. I was like, you're a co-owner of this company, and you should be able to say those types of things that typically kind of fall into that HR realm. So it leads me to the next question of, if you're in an HR role where maybe you're an HR department of one, maybe you feel like you're still fighting to have a seat at the table. How do you start to show up in a strategic way instead of having that mentality of

fighting for it? Because I think sometimes we get stuck in that I have to fight for it instead of, let me just start showing up strategically. And then my credibility is there and I can start to talk about some of the things that I understand from a business acumen standpoint.

**Jamy Conrad:**

I think this speaks to some of the challenges that we have had in our profession as a whole. As HR leaders, one of the things that I hear about is that fight for a seat at the table. I hear it a lot. And also the burnout that's happened as a result of that in our profession and how we're tired of fighting. We're tired of having to have these conversations. We're tired of trying to justify doing the right thing. One of the things I think we forget as HR professionals that are that these soft skills are power skills, and there are superpower skills, right. And so we may feel like there's a lot of things that we just should do, or it's the right thing to do, or, you know, it's what's important to people in general. But we forget that that's not everybody else's skill set. And while our gut instincts tell us something and our superpowers are to be able to see five steps down the road on what that one word or what that one saying or when that one decision is going to be, that is not the strengths of all of the leaders around us. They have their own strengths. They have their own skill sets. And it's our job to be able to take what we know is the right things to do and the right and what our gut instincts are and be able to translate that into business, right? And what does that look like? How does that feel? What are those metrics that this is gonna impact or could impact and how do you justify some of those things? And so instead of it being a fight or a struggle, it's the ability to take those things that we inherently know a lot or we've experienced and being able to translate that into the business reason for why we're saying the things we are or showing up in the way that we are, whether that's through metrics, people data, KPIs, OCARES, whatever it is, but having that data, telling that story, and then creating solutions that are going to help with business outcomes or prevent business outcomes from being impacted in a negative way.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah, and it makes me think about how HR still probably is in this space where

we need to kind of develop our own brand internally in a lot of organizations. I think, you know, some of the other offices, right, your office of your CFO or your IT or those types of things have more clear defined expectations as they come in the door. And sometimes we get stuck in the squishy category or the, you know, the fluffy category. But you're right, we have a really unique perspective that we can bring to the table. And if we marry that with the business acumen that we can talk about the decisions that are being made and how they're going to impact not only talent from a personal perspective, but also from a business perspective, that really is where we're going to shine. But I think it starts with, in some ways, building that internal brand, that HR brand. What are some steps that you've either taken or you'd advised on to help HR teams start to build that internal brand?

**Jamy Conrad:**

Well, I think you have to be really clear. One of the things that HR professionals sometimes struggle with is, especially when they find themselves in the opportunity to learn from good, bad examples, is where they draw the line and what's the right thing to do when it doesn't matter what the right thing to do as you're being told what to do. And so I think it really boils down to starting with What are your own boundaries? What are your own lines that you won't cross? What does it mean to your integrity? And start with those non-negotiables for yourself as a leader and an HR professional. And then you can take that and help to build your department identity around that. So what do you want to be known for? What pieces of your integrity do you want to be included in your HR department mission statement and vision and values? for your team. I know for me personally, I very much lean into growth mindset, continuous improvement, and customer service concierge. So white glove, customer service, and if you're partnering with me, I expect the same. And the idea of we're going to build a culture that you can rely on, you can trust. And that starts with who I am and what I bring to the table. So if you marry that with growth mindset, there's no right or wrong answers. There's a way that we can approach this in a very professional way. And then you start to develop, you know, how does that operationalize and how do you show up with those things? So if I am a growth mindset kind of person and I lean into that, then I'm going to be putting in all kinds of

feedback loops so that there's multiple different ways for you to communicate with me in a safe environment. Or in a safe way for you so that we feel comfortable with. Yes, we're receiving that information back. We're receiving that feedback in doesn't matter if it's positive, negative or neutral, then operationalizing what we do with it, how we communicate about it and what the action plans and results are around that. Same with the customer service. If that concierge is what that looks like, then how am I operationalizing that? Where are my touch points that are above and beyond what somebody would expect? I had a manager who always said, take it to the nth degree. There's no limit on where that nth ends, right? So if there's one more thing you can do, one more thing you can do, one more thing you can do from a customer service mindset, then do all those things without being told to do all those things, but show up in that way. And so I've embraced those ideas in developing what it means to have an HR team led by me and my presence in an organization.

**Shari Simpson:**

And I want to go back to where you started at the beginning of that with you, you said it, the HR mission and value statement for your department. So many times we miss that. And that is such a good point to help govern what you're going to do, because you might be listening and go, yeah, no, I'm not a white glove approach. Our team is not that that's not how we approach HR. That's okay. How do you approach HR? Yeah. What is your mission value, right? That might not be the right thing for your team or your organization, but what is? And then once you know that, like you said, you can operationalize it and then you can go back to it. When something comes up, you can say, Hey, listen, this is our mission vision values. This is what we stand for. This is how we're going to show up for you. Appreciate the feedback. We're not going to do that or whatever it is, or appreciate your feedback. We hadn't thought about that, we're going to level up now. Such a good point to think about if you don't have that for your department. Even if you're an HR department of one, go ahead and write that out for yourself because it goes back to what you just said. The core of who you are, what are your non-negotiables? I love that advice.

**Jamy Conrad:**

Yeah, and it makes it really easy so that when those things come in, there's no question what lines you're not going to cross. Yeah. And where you stand and how you can navigate around that situation.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah, I want to switch gears for a little bit because being that you work at a tech company that sees a lot of information about other tech companies, you sit in a space where I'm sure you're seeing tons of stuff right now about AI and HR. In fact, next week, you'll be at HR West talking about that on a panel. So I'd love to get just your perspective on that, because I think there's still a lot of there's either a lot of fear out there or there's a lot of trepidation about using it? Or how do we use it? How do we stay safe with it? Is it going to introduce bias? Is it not? I could probably go down a whole list of things that I've heard. What's kind of your experience been in that space?

**Jamy Conrad:**

Well, it's getting adopted quickly. It's evolving quickly. It's evolving faster than we can keep up with. I am an advocate for the Gen AI and have explained to my other HR peers that this is a self-help tool for you. And there's so many different opportunities that you can lean in, even if it's just your day-to-day administrative work and responsibilities that will help you become more effective in your organization. So if I start with just the HR lens and the HR department specifically, there's so many employee internal comms, job descriptions, policy drafts, project management tools, analyzing people data, employee sentiment. There's just so many different variations and ways that you can embrace AI just to get you started. It's not your 100%. It's not going to take you all the way. Your experience is still very much required. Remember those superpowers that I mentioned a couple of minutes ago? Those aren't going to come out in Gen AI. Those are the things that is still needed from you, but there are so many opportunities to help make your life a whole lot easier when it comes to the implementation of Gen AI in your day-to-day and your department's operations. And then holistically, it's going to change the world of work. It's going to change how we approach jobs, how we approach skill sets, how we approach the way that we expect data to be analyzed. It's

just, it's having a major effect on supply chains, it's having a major effect on healthcare outcomes. And, and it's just getting started. So we've got a long way to go. But this there's so many opportunities to jump in. And if you haven't already, start with something small and unemotional and just try it.

**Shari Simpson:**

How have you started to help your own team upskill in this area?

**Jamy Conrad:**

So I am an HR department of one, so I'm running as fast as I can with everything that comes across my desk, just to see what sticks. As far as my influence in the organization, I am on our security and compliance committee, and we have a Gen AI policy in place, and it was put there in place to put guidelines around it, but not to restrict the creativity of usage. We want our employees to lean into? How can they make their life easier? How can they improve their outcomes? How can they improve efficiencies? How can they make their lives feel better, you know, and job satisfaction go up with the use of Gen AI? And so we're heavily leaned in. I'm heavily leaned in. from a utilization and that also means then encouraging them to take courses around the application of Gen AI or how it actually works and what are the different types of AI that's out there because it's not just Gen AI. AI has been around for a long time. This is just the latest and greatest in that. So learn about it, get a certification and go to these courses where Google Workspace and Google's got plenty of education around what they're doing and how they're doing it. with the use of Gen AI. So don't be afraid of it. Just learn it. Empower yourselves to embrace it.

**Shari Simpson:**

And there are so there really is so many free resources out there right now in this space specifically. And you're so right about how quickly it's moving. You know, I think I'm already hearing people talk more about Agentic AI instead of Gen AI. Which is just fascinating. But I think that you're right. It just falls in your night that category like anything else, you know, we do such a good job of watching like state law updates related to payroll and compliance and those kinds of things. This is just one more thing we need to add to our bucket as far

as a skill set to watch and learn about. I actually use AI every day. I think it is a wonderful, valuable resource. Um, you know, I, I just have started to play with ChatGPT's ability to automate some tasks for you. Um, and I started simple. Like you said, I did, you know, Hey, these are the 25 people that I follow on LinkedIn. Send me an email when they post so I can engage with them so I don't have to have LinkedIn up during the day. And I'm like, this is huge. Like I don't have to go back and find it. But I mean, that's such a simple example. There's so much you can do that can help your organization. So I really appreciate those points. You know, as we wrap up our conversation, I'd love to ask you to share maybe one thing for HR professionals as to what they can do today to be a more strategic HR leader.

**Jamy Conrad:**

Join a community. We are moving too fast. We are expected to know and do too much as a profession. And there is no way that any one person can do it by themselves. And so the more that we unite and share resources and we're phenomenal at it, right? So if you're feeling like you're out on an island or out on a limb by yourself, join a community, lean into that community, get involved in that community, volunteer in that community, share your insights, your learnings, your experience, because we have to be in this together. And so don't feel like you are by yourself. We are here. There's lots of really great communities out there and find the one that resonates with you.

**Shari Simpson:**

I love that. Such great advice. Well, Jamy, thank you so much for sitting down and taking a few minutes of your day to chat with me.

**Jamy Conrad:**

Thanks. I really appreciate it. It was so much fun.

**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.