

HR Mixtape: Episode with Shari Simpson and Dr. Andy Garrett, Strategic Growth Consultant, Coach, and Clinical Psychologist at AG Thrive

Speaker: 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.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Joining me on the podcast today is Dr. Andy Garrett, a strategic growth consultant, coach, and clinical psychologist at AG Thrive. With a foundation in positive psychology and holistic integration, he blends coaching and clinical expertise to help people and organizations become the authors of their ideal future. Thank you so much, Dr. Garrett, for jumping on the podcast with me today.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, I'm so happy to be here and excited for this conversation. I know the questions that you sent over were great questions. So I'm very excited to get into them and have what I think is going to be a fun conversation.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Ah, yes, I can't wait. And we're going to start with not an easy one, because your space and the work you do really revolves around thriving and having an authentic identity. So maybe we can start there. How do you define authentic identity and why has it kind of become the foundation, you think, to personal and professional growth?

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, yeah, it's interesting. I saw a post from Simon Sinek the other day about the three, you know, great stuff as always with Simon, but he identified courage, integrity and communication as the three best leadership skills. And I did respond to that and said that, ultimately, I think authenticity is the most important leadership skill. Courage, integrity, and communication suggest that maybe those are natural skills that people have, certainly the things that people can work on. But what I appreciate about authenticity is that it's someone operating in their truest nature. So really, as far as character strengths go, it is the ultimate umbrella character strength, because it's someone having the self-awareness to be able to operate. And I think where maybe my definition differs from the way that I often see it used, I've seen research that suggests authenticity really should be thought of as a moral concept or kind of a values-related concept. And so, when people are operating outside of authenticity, oftentimes it's because they're out of alignment with their values. And so, when you help them to get really clear, both in being able to articulate what their values are, what their guiding principles are, and then be able to understand why those are so important to them and how they live that out or how they operate that in the workspace, it's amazing to see, right? And then, of course, understand what their strengths are and, you know, what they're motivated by. But when you start to operate, now you have someone who is operating with autonomy, right? They're operating in their strength zone, and you're seeing them operate in their greatest capacity. And so, to me, if you can have a whole team full of people operating in that, you're going to see them maximize their potential and really operate at full strength.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Well, and it's so true, the idea around finding your values and what motivates you. I am surprised at how often I talk to managers or leaders or people who are, you know, trying to take that next step and you have that conversation about, you know, you brought up Simon Sinek. So like, what's your why or what motivates you or where are your values? And they've never done that values exercise. I'm sure you run into a ton of people like that.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Oh, yeah, yeah, we just did a workshop in Oregon, and we did one in Jamaica, it's filled with all C suite leaders, and some of them had done but by and large, the majority had not, or maybe they took some assessment that, you know, some online thing that spit out a, you know, a set of answers. I think one of the things that I'm sure maybe that you've done and that we do is, you know, really force them to have to choose their values in their own language. And then have to, again, really give that definition that there was a James Fowler was actually a theologian, but he came up with a concept of identity, an identity model. It's since been used in a bunch of identity constructs, and the reason I mentioned him real quick is that he saw identity existing on a spectrum from most mature to least mature. He said that when people had taken on their identity from their environment, whether it was from their family of origin, from their culture, from society, church, wherever it might be, but they didn't take the time to chew on it to say, well, is this even actually what I believe? That they swallowed those beliefs whole, and so they would have a very rigid kind of reaction. If anybody started to question or didn't share those beliefs, it really was seen as a threat to their identity, and so it got this very intolerant us versus them response. He wanted people to really go through the uncomfortable work of having to question what they believe in. So they'd come out the other end with a deep, strong foundation, a mature foundation of identity. And now when people start to question or say, why do you do that, or they don't share that belief, it's actually responded to with this great tolerance, right, this incredible inclusivity. And so when I see people go through that process, I see their leadership skills take off, I see them become much more inclusive, tolerant, and you know, when people do question instead of that being quickly shut down or seen as a threat, it leads to these amazing conversations.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Well, in your story reminded me of there's a book I read last year called Psychology of Money. And in that, the author talks about these two brothers who grew up in the same situation, obviously the same family, and how they responded to their growing their environment as they grew up. So one became very successful and took his home environment as he grew up and

said, hey, that's I'm not going to be that I'm going to define myself outside of that. And the other person looked at it and was like, well, I'm never going to amount to anything because this is my true self. So that completely aligns with what you're saying around having to really think through what is authentic for yourself and being able to defend it. That extra layer, I think, is what to me kind of stands out as being able to have those tough conversations with other people because now you have a place of curiosity.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, yeah, so well said so many of the leaders that we worked with, you was we got a chance to re engage with them and going to the next workshop and doing our quarterly engagements. You know, they often took those worksheets and those exercises to their teams. And they realized they said, you know, here we were leading based off of what was important to us, we had never taken the time to ask them what was important to them. And as we got to have that conversation, you know, all of a sudden, it was, you not only did they connect on a deeper level, but now they understood what really truly motivated that person, which is powerful information to have as a leader.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Yeah, so you have a concept that you've been talking about called the True North Blueprint. I wondered if you could share a little bit more about that with our audience.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, yeah. And just to quickly show that, I think it's important to differentiate between true north and magnetic north. And it's something really I just discovered in the last couple of years. But true north is a set location, right? It is something that remains very consistent, constant, and stable over a long period of time. A magnetic north, well, certainly reliable if you're hiking or something like that. But it's constantly changing and shifting based off the electromagnetic field of the environment. What I found was that a lot of people I worked with, they were living through that magnetic north perspective, where who they were was constantly shifting depending on what environment, what people they were around, if they were in the boardroom

versus, you know, at home or wherever it was. And it's exhausting. It undermines trust, right? Because people can see these little shifts or variations. But when you help people to define this sense of true north that remains very consistent, no matter where you're at, all of a sudden, not only does it allow you to have to make less decisions throughout the day, make higher level decisions, but it really helps to build incredible trust. So we start from this foundation of the kind of authenticity is being the true north, but helping to define those values, that sense of purpose, as the individual, the leaders we work with, but also for the company, what is the true north of the organization? And then how do those align? If you can't create alignment between those two, you know, fundamentally, I think you're going to see a high level of disengagement, burnout. I think you probably know what some of those national statistics on those are. They're staggering numbers right now. But what we've seen is that when you can help to create that alignment, the individuals have a strong, really clear understanding of what their personal true north is. And then they can clearly make that connection with the true north of the organization. And all of a sudden, we see, I'm going to say I'm on a mission to eliminate burnout. I don't know that we'll ever get to a 0% burnout rate, but I'd love to see it certainly at least cut in half to roughly about 50% right now. And certainly disengagement, too, is to see people highly engaged in the workplace, knowing that they love the work. It's filled with meaning and purpose and impact that they really care about.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Well, and when your values don't align to the values of a company or your team, there's always going to be conflict there because, you know, I think naturally we want to kind of bring our values to life and they just don't align. It's not going to work. How do you think that this approach has maybe disrupted our traditional view of leadership development?

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

I'm putting on my HR hat and, you know, we're all, I feel like one of the trends we've been all talking about the last couple years is how do we really ramp up our leadership development from that middle manager perspective. And there's like, you know, there's the typical leadership competencies that you

talk about, and I'm sure authenticity ends up in one of them. But your description makes me feel like maybe this is a little bit of a disruptive approach to that.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Well, I appreciate that. I think it really is that holistic nature is what we see a lot of times, is we see resources. Often, I feel like middle management sometimes does get not as much training. I think we certainly see the C-suite and get money allocated for them to do things. We see a lot of the pizza parties, the bowling trips, and things like that. Those things might be fun, but they're not ultimately what push culture, right? They're not the things. And so we're really talking about coming in and helping to shift culture and to create something that is holistic. So from top down to bottom up and meeting right in the middle is that we're providing resources for everyone to be able to define those true north for them. And then being able to make sure that the work they do, you know, we focus too on the idea of intrinsic motivation. How do we help people to really be able to clearly say the three levers of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, competency, and purpose? If you can figure out how to light those three levers up for someone, you will see someone that is capable of operating at incredible capacities with very little likelihood of ever burning out because they're doing work that they love to do every day. It's amazing when you help people to really give language to that. What you see, even sometimes people who either are on the cusp of burnout or people who are described as difficult to motivate, suddenly they're the most motivated person in the room. It's really incredible when you start to provide tools. I think a challenge that we've seen a lot of times is, we do have a digital version of True North, and we have offered that sometimes. People want to know infinite scalability. Can we remove the coaching angle from it? But you're missing out so much in doing that. And if you're not changing culture, even as we come in and teach True North and resilience, but it's a toxic culture. We help someone at the lower levels or mid-levels to become more authentic and be more resilient, but the culture hasn't changed because the upper leadership hasn't changed. Well, now they're just trying to be resilient to toxicity. That's not going to ever change anything. That's why you see record amounts of money being spent in the learning and development space, in the mental health

space. But unfortunately, we're not seeing the ultimate results to that, the statistics getting any better.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

And your unique perspective as a clinical psychologist brings something completely new to, I think, the discussion because you're backing your findings on years of research that truly supports those ideas. Things like positive psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy and those types of techniques. How have you wrapped those concepts into this work here around authenticity?

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, I think so much of what I'm doing is certainly influenced by, I think, the positive psychology in Seligman and the amazing work he's done along with so many that have followed him. We put together some of the stuff around intrinsic motivation is based off of self-determination theory, and then Dan Pink and the work he did with Drive, which is, I think, just such a phenomenal book. But I think looking at, coming at things from a strengths-based perspective, I love coming at things and really helping. Again, we're working with a team, but understanding what is foundationally the strengths that you guys start from. Yes, there are areas that you might be struggling in. We can certainly address where there might be holes or challenges, and we put together, I think, great strategies. But if you can't fundamentally start from a place of saying, what do you guys do really well? We just did a workshop, I think I said Jamaica, and we did an inventory of 2024. And interestingly, it was before we set kind of a year vision for 2025, a full one year blueprint for 2025. And a lot of the people there had never done anything like that before. But just the ability to take the time to acknowledge victories. Some of the conversations that took place out of that were amazing. What things did they want to carry forward from 2024 as a foundation of success? What things did they want to leave behind? That was also an interesting conversation. But that ability to start from a place of celebrating victories. There's research around that. It's actually extremely important to celebrate small little victories on a daily basis. It's a great way to keep a team resilient and highly motivated, and yet so many teams fail to do simple things like that, that positive psychology really illustrates the power of.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Well, I'm sure our listeners feel this way. I know that in HR, we're so inundated with the next project, the next thing, you know, supporting our business partners. Sometimes we just don't even think about it. Like you said, we don't think about doing that recognition piece, even though we know, we know we need it. We know it's important. We encourage our managers and leaders to do it. But you're right. We don't take the time to do it ourselves. I was talking to another person on the podcast just recently, and he was talking about he does a end of the day, you know, three things that he's grateful for. And I

think that concept is just, if you can start bringing that into your own life and really thinking about, you know, you don't have to go super deep, right? What are the three things today that, you know, you're grateful for? It just reframes how you're thinking about things. And I liked when you shared, you know, what are the things that you're going to leave in 2024? And what are the things you're going to take with you? You didn't frame it as the, you know, what are the things that really sucked in 2024? And we're not going to do anymore, right? You took a different perspective on it. And I think that's so important to start to reframe that and start to have those different conversations. I do want to ask kind of a difficult question, I think, next, because I'm thinking about implementing this inside of an organization, really shifting that focus to being authentic, you know, having a positive outlook. How do you address leaders when you notice that they're wearing masks, that they're being inauthentic, that they're not showing up in their strengths? What does that talk track look like? Because it's different than, hey, your performance isn't where I want it to be.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, I think it certainly speaks to the importance of having, hopefully, developed a relationship with those managers, right? Demonstrating that we care, that we come in, and that might seem like something that's kind of a low bar to set, but it's amazing when people feel sincerely, authentically cared for, what types of conversations that you can have and how deep you can go. While that might seem like a low bar again, what I've seen is, unfortunately, especially at big companies, like you said, there's always the next project. There's always an emphasis on hitting those KPIs and all these different things. When a leader or a consultant or any of those things in HR comes in, and they really genuinely care about someone, you can have very honest conversations, even have tough conversations. You're seeing things that may be difficult to hear, but when they can sense that that's done in the light of someone being cared for in their best interest, it's amazing how well those conversations can go and the growth that can happen out of them. To me, that's always fundamentally and foundationally. If I'm not starting there, and certainly I've missed a few steps, but I think that in reminding myself going into those and having their values right as a foundation to start from to really

allows me to go into that conversation saying hey look you know we went through this conversation and these are the things that you self-identified and here's how you describe them you know here's what we're seeing is that you know there's there's a misalignment here and so a lot of times helping to reflect back on their own discoveries in their own language really helps them, I think, to be able to both take some responsibility around that.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

As you were talking, I was thinking about how I've seen this practice come to life in my own life. I have three sons, those who listen know. They're all grown now, but often I would use a similar tactic as they were growing up when I had to have tough conversations with them. As you do as a parent, you know, as you're trying to walk them through life lessons. And I would always start with, hey, we're going to have a really awkward five-minute conversation. It's going to be awkward for me. It's going to be awkward for you. We have to have it because I care about you. And they always went well. Were they awkward? Absolutely they were awkward. But I think you can have some of that same kind of courage and that mentality and using the values you've already talked about, then you're going into the conversation speaking the language of the other person and sharing a shared vocabulary that you've come up with. So I really love you sharing that example.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Well, I want to mention too, I love the way that you handled that too. And say, you know, I got two, I got a nine year old and 11 year old, so I was taking notes there. But sometimes setting a limit to say we're going to have a five minute, right, or whatever, knowing that there's going to be an end to it. Hey, we're going to dive deep and it's going to be uncomfortable, but we're going to come out of it, right? And after that, maybe we're going to share a laugh or we're going to have, you know, things will go positive again. But it's amazing too, when you set parameters, kind of boundaries around something, how much more effective that those difficult conversations can be. So I love that example that you set there.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Oh, thanks. As we wrap our conversation, I'd love to get your perspective on what trends or shifts do you think are going to happen in the H.R.

development space, especially with your clinical background? There's just so much fascinating research out there, and it's continuing to evolve as we learn more and more about how the human brain works. And, you know, the things we know today were not the same things that maybe even 20 years ago we approached from a clinical perspective. How do you think that's going to influence the H.R. space?

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, it's a great question. I see two responses to that. One, I'm going to stick with authenticity. I think with the increasing use of AI, it's here to stay, and it brings some incredible tools. I was a little slow to initially adopt, and now I've jumped in and really appreciate how it's really helped me to be more efficient, and there's some great aspects and uses to it. But one thing AI can't do is it lacks authenticity. And so I think that ability for a workplace to really establish that authentic culture is going to allow them to stand out as more and more potentially tasks will be picked up by AI. I think that need for people to have that sense of, you know, connecting to things that are real, having that human component, I think is really going to set companies out that are attracting the greatest talent and retaining talent versus those that aren't. And I think adaptability is another thing. There's just so much change, especially happening literally right now. But, you know, you throw into that just the quick pace of business and how quickly things are growing, evolving with technology and everything else, the ability to have cultures that adapt, you know, whether you call that resilience, agility, but to have tools in place and to equip leaders to lead. We've talked about a lot of times in our workshops that are between cows and buffaloes. Have you ever heard the difference between how they respond to incoming storms?

Speaker: Shari Simpson

I have, but I think you should definitely share it.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Apparently, cows, when they sense a storm is coming, their natural inclination is to start to try and run away. But they're not the fleetest of hoofs, so in their desire to avoid, the storm catches up and they spend the maximum amount of time in the bad weather. Buffalo, on the other hand, one, they gather together as a herd, right? So they know that there's strength in numbers, and they can also protect those that need protection. But then they immediately head into the storm. And so in doing that, they get through it in the most efficient way possible. And so a lot of times we talk, and people hear this in our workshops, and they get all riled up, we're gonna be buffaloes. But if you don't know what makes you a buffalo, oftentimes you will run into things, and you'll be more like a bull in a china shop, right? You're gonna go in, and you're gonna create more chaos. But when you really are able to clearly say, I know the things that make me resilient. I know the values that I anchor to during difficult times that help me to be more adaptive and be more agile. It's amazing how people start leaning into difficult conversations, change, growth so much quicker. And for the leaders that do that, it gives the message to everyone that they're leading. Hey, change is not a bad thing, right? We're going to get through this together. And it's amazing how they start to adapt and grow and thrive in the face of uncertainty and adversity.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Well, very inspiring. If somebody is listening and they want to know more about you, your program and the work you do, how do they find you?

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, I think right now, we're just about ready to switch to a different website. But it's probably the best place is to just send me an email at Dr. Andy, D-R-A-N-D-Y at ag-thrive.com.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

Awesome. Well, again, thanks for taking a few minutes of your day to sit with me.

Speaker: Dr. Andy Garrett

Yeah, sure. I really appreciate the questions and the conversation. So I had high expectations and it even matched or exceeded. So thank you.

Speaker: Shari Simpson

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.