— Hey, and welcome to PCTY Talks. I'm your host Shari Simpson. During our time together we'll stay close to the news and info you need to succeed as an HR pro. And together we'll explore topics around; HR thought leadership, compliance and real life HR situations we face every day. On today's episode, I have with me Kelly Johnson. She is our manager of interactive learning and design here at Paylocity. So, Kelly thanks so much for jumping on with me.

— Thanks Shari. Really excited to be able to you talk to you today and engage with all of you who are listening about inclusive design.

— So I'm curious your background and why you're so passionate about inclusive design in general.

— Where I really got started with inclusive design was the work I was doing as a manager at Paylocity in the instructional design department. So manager of interactive learning and design. And inclusive design really came through the types of clients that we were trying to meet and address which was enterprise and all of our different clients out there and their employees. So when I went and had historically worked in HR my focus was really on my employee base. And then I moved into organizational development which again, the focus stayed small but just that internal enterprise base for these smaller organizations. And as I moved in learning and development and through learning and development my audiences were very targeted to operations, sales just small client bases. And then as I grew and progressed in my career working in learning and development, as at it in and I had that larger view and that larger impact I started to know what as really how many different individuals we can impact culturally. And that's what really got me excited. And I started to look at, it's not just what we're saying in our content and how we're reaching those people. It's actually how we approach the design and all the elements that we put into it that portrays other messages. So it's almost when you facilitate, it's not just what you say it's how you say it and how we say it in instructional design and learning development.

— I loved hearing that story and I can just hear the passion in your voice. I'm curious for those listening as HR practitioners why do we need to start thinking about design principles in general? Not just inclusivity, but just the general process of design.

— As HR practitioners, really I think all of us strive to create environments and cultures for our employees and really bleed that through to the different clients that we serve that is inclusive and welcoming and supportive. And we do this through different things that we do either training and development through processes or an employee engagement events that we host where we drive this and really, you know live the reputation there. And so as we think about it, design principles it's more than just what it looks like. Of course we want

beautifully designed courses that are engaging and fun, but it's also being mindful and carefully considering the intent of the course and how that intent is represented through our visuals, text and examples, and being mindful of this really allows us to take a look at how we're approaching our different audiences, how we're representing them and how we're including various elements of human diversity that represents stereotypes, maybe promote exclusion or misinformation and how we can move past beyond all that. To really foster that culture of belonging so everyone feels welcome and represented.

— It's interesting as I think about the work that I've done through my HR career. You know, early on in my career I remember spending hours trying to get like the PowerPoint to look the way I wanted to look or you know, the Excel sheet to do what it needed to do. And sometimes you would just get stuck in this like analysis paralysis in design because, you know, frankly I'm not a design expert, but you are right. So I think there's a lot of people listening who aren't design experts. Where do you think we get stuck in HR, when we try to think about design process in the products that we're delivering?

— I think time is our biggest challenge. That's where myself I even get stuck. Is when we're trying to really focus on that deliverable date, let's get it out the door, get it out the door. And that will cause some what I call missteps. You know, we really just narrow our lens and we focus so much on the content that we forget to take the step back holistically and enjoy the visuals and enjoy the scenario and examples also narrowing our lens. Sometimes I feel like as professionals and how busy we all are that we don't feel like we could ask someone a question to give us a second look. That we're really bothering them but really just being able to say, "Hey can you give us some second eyes? How's this resonating with you? Do you think I'm portraying everyone in a positive light? What other examples or images or icons have you seen that can increase inclusion in this stack?" And never be afraid to tap those professionals in your organization? Even though we're always busy as well, we love it when someone's like, "Hey do you have an idea for a visual?" Because that's where we get our enjoyment and our profession and we love it.

— I like that you touched base on just not being afraid to ask along the process. We've talked about that before on the podcast just about being agile and not having to have things like perfect wrapped up in a bow before it goes out the door. You know, when we think about inclusivity and design, right? I mean, we're talking a ton about diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility across the HR space and totality right now. And one of the things that I've really started to push myself on my own DEIA journey is to think about that accessibility pillar differently than I ever have before. And something as simple as like, are the colors on the screen going to be difficult for somebody who's color blind to read. So, as you've worked through your own process, you know why do we have to think about

inclusivity in design? Why is that important now maybe even more than it was before?

– You're absolutely right. Especially accessibility. You know, that's something that I spend a lot of time with my own team talking about is the different tools we use. You know, we use the tools and we try to leverage them the best we can. And as you're talking about the experience across HR it is a learning experience and there is a lot there and it's just really trying to get a handle on it and do a little bit of it a time. So why is it so important right now? Like why are we talking about now? I think it's always been important but I think it's something now that we've had the time and attention to really refocus how we're thinking and examining it. We also have more tools available to us than before. I think back to my early days in my career I didn't have an icon library. I was the icon library. I had to create each one by hand. I had a choice of 10 images to use over and over and over again. And as we have more resources available to us it lets us expand our own view and really think about how are we telling that story? How do we want to tell that story and how do we bring and invite everyone into it?

– I know that you listening can't see me laughing when you were talking about icons though. I can't tell you how many folders of icons and images I've had throughout my HR career. Just trying to find the right thing to represent what I'm talking about. So, there's a special place in my heart for that. You know, I'm curious as we layer on right design thinking, inclusivity, and then this next layer of adult learners, how does that amplify the things that we're talking about?

– Adult learning is definitely one of those areas I get excited about. And I won't go through all the terms and all the books which I know everyone loves. But really when we think about adult learning is simplistically as we wanna be brought into the conversation as adults. We wanna see the connection to our job and how it applies. And when we're not represented in that training and information that helps us connect it to our job. It really leaves out some underrepresented groups in positions, in industries and roles and reinforces those stereotypes within it. So we don't feel welcome to the conversation but it can also distract from your main messaging and content, which is what we don't want. We want people to be able to take what we provide them and apply it to help contribute to their success and growth. So if we messed up a little bit there, you know there is a potential to really distract the learner from the content and not get that message across that you're looking for.

– If you're new to the design space and you're trying to figure this out, you know I think where my mind always goes automatically is, oh, we're talking about images or we're talking about icons. It's definitely more than that. What are all the things, all the things we to consider when it comes to inclusive design.

— All the things, yes all the things. Images is definitely part of it. Images and icons are a huge chunk. And I think that's what everyone gravitates towards. 'Cause that's what you notice. And for some of us that's the fun part, is scouring endless libraries of images and icons just to find that right one that speaks to us and each other. But imagery connects the learner to the content. It reinforces messages, concepts, adds context breaks down difficult concepts. That's the intent of them. So it's really keeping the intent of why are you adding the image beyond just adding some visual pleasing element. And then also recognizing that about 65% of our learners are visual learners. So they're really relying on those images and using those images and icons to help get that message. So our icons and our visual design is a very, very powerful tool. And that piece is really where we can look at how are we representing individuals visually whether it is what we would probably gravitate towards right off the bat, things like gender age, race but how does that apply to the job role they're in. Their physical parents, what clothing are they wearing? What activities are they doing? Is it cooking, childcare? Is it standing in front of a room in a meeting? And what story does that tell how does it represent that individual? And are there any stereotypes, social stereotypes or underrepresented individuals that it impacts such as your very traditional leader is a older gentleman in a suit and tie? Well, we know most companies now are remote so maybe it's not the student tie culture. Maybe it's a casual culture. We have young leaders we have leaders that are non-binary and really just stepping out of what that traditional imagery and icon is. And then the other half is the language we use. And language is really powerful in creating that action, building ideas, sharing ideas and information, but it could also lead to exclusion. Again, expressions and languages that we use in examples or scenarios can support social stereotypes or make generalizations about individuals attributes or characteristics. Where on the other side, the positive side is it really does have the ability to show underrepresented individuals in positions and industries such as healthcare, teaching, construction.

— You mentioned the use of words. And I think back to how we think about job descriptions, you know there used to be this idea that if you were working in the tech space, that the job description for let's say a developer was gonna be like, "Hey do you wanna be a rockstar and be a ninja developer on our team?" And there all this research around and I don't have an exact quote to share with our audience but the idea was like, those words were conveyed to females. This is a certain environment that I don't necessarily wanna work in. And it's just words, right? But like you said, there's so powerful and there's so much behind them, you know, on my own DEIA journey, I've been more cognizant of idioms and phrases I'm saying and they'll come out and I go, "Hey, you know what, I don't actually know the background of that idiom. I don't know where that phrase came from." And so pushing myself to go look those kinds of things up. You know, as you've worked

through just a plethora of design stuff in the learning and development space along your own career do you think that there's a connection between bad design and bad employee experience?

— I think there is. I would say holistically it's about the employee experience we create in everything as part of our culture but design has the ability to not exclude people but design has the ability to really influence how we see the content and the message it's telling us and how we feel welcomed and represented. And when we don't intentionally put thought into that there could be the opportunity and a real miss on our part to leave those individuals out and create a negative emotional experience for them.

— All right, I wanna get tactical for a few minutes, if you're listening and you're like, yeah I don't even know where to begin. I don't know what the list of all the things is that I need to think of. You know, what's your advice on really thinking through inclusive design as an HR practitioner? What's our bucket list that we need to think about?

— Right, I think the first thing is, don't think about it alone. That's probably one of the biggest missteps I've had is I really started this journey alone and thinking about how I could apply it just to me and my space but the impact is really much, much larger. And there are other passionate individuals out there. So for where we started was really looking at who can we bring together? Can we grab a group of individuals and set up reviews and a space for those who are working in the design space to ask questions to sort of those experts or those passion people in your company whether it's your ERG group, internal experts, a subgroup or other creatives who all come together. So a identifying those individuals who would wanna be a part of something and help drive, process change. And then bring those groups together with your creatives. You know, your creatives are the ones who know the intent of the content. They live and breathe, visual design, writing scenarios. They know the ins and outs and they know the best place to actually put a review, place for content and what that means downstream and the impact on time and resources as well. And then think about what does inclusive design look like for you, for your audience, for your type of content. E-learning instructor led training or documentation, and start to break out those practices. And that could be looking at everything, all the things like you mentioned, you know, maybe it's just focusing on scenarios and examples and how we talk about pronouns, names, job titles, roles and expressions. Maybe it's starting just with iconography and thinking about, well maybe we don't need to have an outline of a person in the icon, but instead focus on what the icon represents through the actual action or job role or expression, or maybe it is just images and thinking about how can we blend in different industries and images so it's not just what we would consider traditional corporate thoughts. But we also include people working in coffee shops working at their

home, working in a manufacturing plant and then think about all those individuals that you work with and everything that represents them. It could be age, protected classes, race, religion and start to work your way through how big or how small can we start. And I'm definitely one of don't bite off more than you could chew, start small, learn along the way and then build as you go, because it is a learning process. Make sure you have community spaces for everyone to talk and communicate. It could be simply some place that your creatives and designers and HR professionals can say, "Hey what do you think about this scenario? Or do you have an example of this? Or do you have second eyes?" So it's about putting those pieces and processes in place but then having the channel for everyone to be able to access each other.

— And I would say if you're in HR department of one and you're like, "Hey, I don't an LD team. I don't have a creative team." There are creatives in your organization in general there are people who are more gravitating towards these kinds of things, reach out to them. I think it's a great opportunity to do some networking. And like you said Kelly, get a different set of eyes on things.

— And they don't have to be an expert. I've definitely been the department of one. So I feel for everyone out there and the different challenges you face but it can be anyone that you're close to in your organization and just ask for feedback. "Hey, can you take a look? Does anything seem, you know like I'm intentionally excluding or misrepresenting someone. How does it resonate with you?" Use your LinkedIn network. I have a group of instructional designers I worked with in the past that I still talk to today. They're great folks to float it to or even the different communities on LinkedIn. And if you truly are really new in your HR profession and starting out and don't have a broad network, hey, that's okay. Pick something small, challenge yourself and just continually ask yourself the questions. Is this misrepresenting anyone? Am I supporting social stereotypes? Is this inclusive and welcoming and do a gut check.

— I recently had a conversation with somebody around disability inclusivity. And one of the things that she shared was that when you think about disability, that the iconography I align to that as a person in a wheelchair, that's like the typical go to like you said before there are some images that just good, bad, indifferent come to mind and it does pigeonhole the whole group into a specific icon or specific image. So I really appreciate you sharing that 'cause I think that challenges us to think through, what are we trying to communicate? And is this actually the right image for what we're trying to do?

— So along the same lines, when we get pigeonholed and get stuff on one image, one thing that represents it for us is really taking that step back and saying how else can we represent it? Or can we make it

more inclusive by expanding who is in that image that we're actually using? So I was looking at a course and we were talking about invisible disabilities. And it was an image of a singular individual and absolutely it represented it. It was great, but it didn't tell the whole story. 'Cause when I thought about invisible disabilities, really I was thinking about the impact to everyone. And so we included an image that was much more inclusive across age, gender, race and also job industries. So we had this representation that, and this new story about how invisible disabilities aren't singular to one focus or one thing we had in mind, but across a very large population or what I would assume is a large population across the globe.

— As you think about this space, what's one start small that the audience can do today to start making a step towards a more inclusive way of designing.

— I love the phrase "don't boil the ocean." 'Cause you can't boil it overnight. And when I think start small for me I'm the first to admit I am not a DEIA expert, I'm a a practitioner, and I've come to recognize it's an ongoing journey and it's better to just start with a little bit, see how it resonates with your practice and your processes and grow it from there. So my very start small for everyone is get a second set of eyes. You know, take a step back, look at your content holistically but also float it out there to someone else if you can, if you can't float it out to somebody else you know what, put it away for a little bit, take an hour, go do something else and come back to it and look at it in a different light and challenge yourself to change your lens and say, okay well, if I was the client if I was an employee getting this course and look at it from a different perspective.

— I love that advice. Kelly, this has been eye opening as always. And just another lens for us to think about DEIA and really push ourselves in this space, in the HR industry. So I appreciate your time.

— Thanks so much Shari.

— Interested in taking a deeper dive into design thinking and inclusivity for HR. If so, join us at 12:30 PM central on Wednesday May 25th for a webinar on "How to apply inclusive design thinking in the workplace." During this session, we'll explore; how to apply design thinking in HR, designing for inclusion in print, audio and visual media and the tools and resources for inclusive design. Register today using the registration link in the show notes.

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