



Shatter the Limit: Building Resilient Leaders Who Thrive in the Uncomfortable

Date: Tuesday, July 14, 2026

Host: Dr. Shari Simpson, Thought Leader, Paylocity

Guest: Aaron Golub, Founder, Aaron Golub

[00:00:00] **ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to The HR Mixtape, a podcast for leaders who wanna understand people, strengthen culture, and navigate change with clarity. Today's conversation starts now.

[00:00:16] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Joining me today is Aaron Golub, founder and speaker at Aarongolub.com. Aaron made history as the first legally blind Division I athlete to play in a game and now helps leaders and teams shatter limiting beliefs and turn resilience into real lasting results. Aaron, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

[00:00:42] **AARON GOLUB:** Yeah, thank you for having me. Excited to be here.

[00:00:45] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** So you have a pretty interesting story. First legally blind Division I athlete, team captain at Tulane, NFL free agent, but all of that really isn't the story. It's not about football, it's about something much bigger, and I'd love for you to tell us a little bit more when you learned that it wasn't about football, it was something much bigger that you could bring to organizations to talk about.

[00:01:10] **AARON GOLUB:** For me, it's about resilience and, more importantly, building resilient leaders. We all have challenges, adversities in our lives, and we all go through change and difficult scenarios, and it's how you navigate them. Some of us learn to navigate them in a way that allows us to make a difference, to accomplish our goals, and others don't. And for me, that's something that I was learning my whole life, and so when I wanted to get into the world of entrepreneurship and build my own business, in the beginning it was a natural fit of how can I take that skill set and translate it to others?

[00:01:51] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** So many people sit in that space of limiting beliefs. But if you're curious about Aaron's story, we're not gonna be able to get into the whole thing on the podcast, so definitely look that up in advance. You kind of conquered that idea of those limiting beliefs. How do you bring that into organizations to help people get through some of the limiting beliefs that they have?

[00:02:16] **AARON GOLUB:** People need to understand that their past doesn't always equal their future, and you can determine whatever you want for yourself by making choices. Now, yes, you might not have done well in certain areas in the past. You might not have been the smartest, the most athletic, whatever that is in your scenario. But that doesn't have to define who you are and what you can do. For me growing up, my limiting belief was I'm not athletic, I'm not good at school, I'm not confident. And the second I decided to not allow being legally blind to control my entire life of what I thought I could do, I was able to make that transition. And so for me, it's the same process with organizations. It's helping individuals understand and accept where they are, because I strongly believe that the second you accept your past, who you are, your challenge, that's when you can start to move past it. I had to accept the fact that I'm legally blind, and there's nothing I can do about that. If you can't accept that for yourself, whatever that is, there's no way you're gonna move past it. Once you can accept it, you can start finding ways to think differently about it and form new perspectives around it. That will eventually lead to that change and that break in those limiting beliefs. But if you can't accept it, you'll never be able to form new perspectives.

[00:03:34] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I'm curious, when you stepped into that role of team captain, it's so fascinating to me because I think sometimes we think that leadership equals the most talented person in the room gets that role. That's usually not the case from what I've seen. What was your experience, and what did you learn from that experience of leading the team that way?

[00:03:57] **AARON GOLUB:** It taught me how to lead others from different backgrounds, from different settings, from different personalities. I took it as a lesson to teach me when does someone need to be helped and supported? When does someone need to be pushed? And I used that. If someone was in the weight room and they grabbed a weight that was too light for them, how do I push them to pick up a heavier one? If someone was in the classroom and didn't do well on a test, how do I help them and



support them to study differently and do better on the next one? And people need to understand that when you are a leader, you need to be able to read people, not only their body language, their personalities, what works for them, because what's gonna work for one person isn't gonna work for somebody else or everyone. There's certain people that need to be helped and supported in a very calm fashion. There's certain people that need to be pushed in certain ways as well. For me, my coaches learned very early on that, and this didn't work for every athlete, but if I'm in the weight room and we're lifting a heavy weight and I was struggling, when they came over and screamed in my face and yelled at me, it worked very, very well for me. You can't do that to everyone. But it's understanding what someone's personality is and what they respond to, and I think that's what leadership is, because you shouldn't be soft and warm and helpful to every person. Yes, it's gonna work for a lot of people, but there's certain people that that's just not how they respond, and you need to mold to be able to help them in what they respond to, in what way they can get it through their head. And I think that being a captain and leading up to that is where I learned those lessons of how to help different people in different ways.

[00:05:31] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** That adversity that you described, the being yelled at, that friction that was created, that really worked well for you. I think there probably is a lot of spaces where adversity and that challenge can really help people rise to the moment. How do those in HR listening find that sweet spot for their employees, and really how do they teach their managers to find that sweet spot?

[00:05:59] **AARON GOLUB:** Look, I'm not saying that at a company you should go yell at your employees. That's just an example, and you need to take the analogy from that, obviously. But it's understanding when you're having a conversation with someone. If someone isn't performing well, let's just say, how are they gonna respond? There are certain people that will respond really well to that calm conversation and figuring out, "Hey, this is what you've done wrong. This is how we're gonna work together. This is how we're gonna fix it." There's also certain people that are gonna respond a lot better to a direct approach. "Hey, honestly, you are underperforming. This isn't going well. We need to fix it, and we're gonna put a 90-day clock on it and work on it together." You never know what someone's gonna respond to unless you get to know them as a person and you understand that about them. And so that's why I always talk about, hey, before you can accomplish this goal, if you wanna increase revenue, if you wanna increase growth, how do you fix and understand the culture, the people, the environment that you have around you? Every time I go in to speak or do a workshop, I do a very extensive what I call needs assessment process, because if I don't understand those aspects, if I don't understand the people, if I don't understand the culture, the environment, what's going on there with everyone, not just as a whole, but try and understand teams and individuals as much as I can, I can't be effective unless I know that. Because that allows me to figure out when I'm doing certain things, certain activities, certain groups, how do I handle certain situations? How do I respond to what they're doing, and what's actually going to get the point across? Because there are certain activities that I bring to keynotes, that I bring to workshops, that for one team might go over really well, and for others it won't, and I need to shift what I'm doing.

[00:07:44] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Being able to pivot is so important. I'm not sure if I've shared this on the podcast before, but I definitely have been on stage and told a joke or used a reference that did not land with the audience, and you have to very quickly pivot and figure out what resonates with them. And it makes me think about the framework that you've talked about in the work that you do around gratitude-based leadership. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what does that look like to lead with gratitude in a way that really does have the business impact that we all talk about, performance, not necessarily just morale.

[00:08:18] **AARON GOLUB:** Look, both positivity and negativity are infectious. If you are a positive leader, that's going to spread throughout your organization. If you are negative, that's gonna spread as well, and you're gonna see that in your growth, in your numbers, in your performance of people around you. I believe that everybody has something to be grateful for. Even if you're someone who doesn't practice gratitude in certain ways, you can find something to be grateful for. The fact that you woke up this morning, you put your feet on the floor, you opened your eyes, that's already three things that you can be grateful for. And I'm not someone who says that you should wake up and write down three things that you're grateful for. I don't really believe in that type of stuff. But I believe in figuring out every single day what are you grateful for, and how can you identify things that you care about? The fact of the matter is I'm grateful today that I have the opportunity to have calls with lots of different companies, that I can,



after this, have a call about an event with a company that I'm having a speaking engagement with next week. I'm very grateful for that chance, that opportunity. Tomorrow it might be that I have a much more flexible schedule. It might be gratitude for the fact that I have time that I can spend five hours doing deep work and focusing on projects that I couldn't do today or I couldn't do over the past few weeks. But I think that you can find gratitude in so many situations, and when you can learn to do that, you can eventually learn to have that within your challenges, within your roadblocks, within your adversities. Look, I'm not saying that someone who's legally blind, for example, should wake up tomorrow and say, "I'm so grateful I'm legally blind." But what I am saying is you need to ask yourself in every situation, how can I learn from this and how can I grow from this? Because that leads to gratitude. The acceptance is what starts it, then that causes you to start thinking differently and having a new perspective. When you can start thinking differently and having a new perspective, you can start asking yourself how you can learn and grow from each challenge, each situation. And when you can understand how you can learn and grow from each challenge, each situation, that's when you find gratitude within them.

[00:10:27] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Man, it's so inspiring to look at that framework from that very tactical perspective, like how do we build this muscle in ourselves? With your background and being that team leader, I'm sure you had to figure out how do you leverage all the differences in the room? How do you make everyone feel like they belong in that space and in that time? And that's something we as HR leaders definitely struggle with. How do you think about inclusion and policies that impact those types of things?

[00:11:00] **AARON GOLUB:** There are a couple sides to it. It starts with that needs assessment I talked about, understanding what's going on, who's in the room, what their personality's like, what their goals are. That's the base of it. When you actually get into the room, it comes down to making sure you have a mix of different activities, different ways to engage people. For example, one activity I oftentimes do is I have these goggles that simulate my vision. People come up, they try and throw and catch a ball. Oftentimes it's gonna smack them in the chest or wherever, and they're not gonna hit it. And we're using it to teach different things, whether it be understanding and empathy, whether it be resilience, whether it be teamwork and communication. There's lots of ways to take it. But at the same time, there's gonna be a certain percentage of people who think that that's incredible, and they jump at the opportunity to do it, and there's a certain percentage of people who are like, "No, I don't wanna get in front of the group," and that's fine. But you need to have other ways to engage those individuals through other activities, throughout that keynote, throughout that day, because if you're just focusing on one side of people who are more extroverted, you're gonna miss 50% of the people there. Now, the other thing I always ask and always say is, when something like inclusion comes up, it's asking people what they want. So often we assume. We assume what's best for someone because we think we know what's best. And I always give the example of when I go to the airport, I get a meet assist. They help me get through security, get to my gate. If they didn't, I'd never find where I'm going. There are a couple airports, my home one, the terminal that I travel out of, I know like the back of my hand. But besides that, most airports I need help finding my way to where I'm going. And most times they come out and they have someone with a wheelchair and they're like, "Here, take a seat." And it's this back and forth for a couple minutes being like, "I don't need it. I just need to walk with you. Can't see the signs. You're in my way." And they put it back and they say, "Okay, come with me." They automatically assumed what I needed because they didn't know. But if they took the two seconds to ask what I needed, ask how they could help, they would avoid that situation, which for me I don't mind, but for a lot of others, they do. And so one example I give in the corporate world is honestly, I feel like I haven't seen it as much the last six months, but there was a solid few year period where people were doing in companies what I like to call visual descriptions. I am strongly against them, very much so. Now, that doesn't mean that I'm against them for everyone. If someone wants them who's blind, visually impaired, be my guest. If that's what you want, then who am I to tell you not to? I personally am of the belief if you sit there and you say, "Hey, I'm a white man with brown hair and blue eyes," it's like you're bringing more attention to something that doesn't need attention to. Like, I know I'm legally blind. Why are you calling this out in this way? And I would see it oftentimes on one-on-one calls with people. I'd get on a call like this with a sales call with a company, and they thought that that was the right thing to do. And I'm very much against it, because my belief is why create more tension, more awkwardness than needs to be? Now, if you want to ask if someone wants that, great. Some people



might say, "Yes, that would be super helpful." But automatically assuming someone wants that, I completely disagree with.

[00:14:24] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** It's such a good point that I hadn't considered. I've definitely gone down that road, have talked to people who have suggested that you do that in meetings. And you're right, I haven't seen it as much the last year as well. But you bring up a good point that it's not just about those scenarios, it's in totality that we need to think about asking people how they want us to support them. That could be everything from performance to recognition to support like you said. What makes it less awkward, or how have you coached managers to have those conversations when they are in scenarios where it's not maybe a performance or a recognition, but it is dealing with maybe somebody who's deaf or has a vision impairment or some of those things, because I think people do get scared about what to do and want to do the right thing.

[00:15:16] **AARON GOLUB:** It comes down to just asking. We're so afraid to ask. We don't wanna do it, but asking is what actually helps. And so here's another example. I grew up skiing and snowboarding my whole life. I volunteer, my sister does, my dad does, as ski and snowboard instructors for people with different disabilities. And growing up, my sister and I would have this, we call it a sophisticated way of going down the mountain. I'd go first, she'd go after me, and she'd yell, "Aaron, left. Aaron, right. Aaron, tree." And it would work, and today now we have Bluetooth stuff in our helmets, and it works a lot better. But one day, she was going up the chairlift with this 10-year-old kid, and he was legally blind, and she's like, "I know exactly what to do. I do this for Aaron all the time." Thankfully, she took two seconds to ask, "How can I help you? What can I do to make this the best experience for you?" And he looks at her and he goes, "I wanna follow you down the mountain so close that I can see every turn and follow you everywhere you go." Two people, same challenge. Complete opposite ways of how they wanna be helped. Now, for me, part of that also goes with the trust factor, it's my sister versus other people. But same thing. It's two people, same challenge, opposite ways they want help. And you could have 15 people who are blind, 15 people who are deaf, and unless you actually ask them individually how you can help and support them, you'll never know, because they might want something completely different than what you assume.

[00:16:46] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Yeah. We talk about clarity being kind in performance expectations. It's the same thing here, right? Clarity in asking the question is actually the kind thing to do. You've worked with a lot of teams, a lot of different leaders. I'm curious, as you've had these conversations and you're seeing these changes, what do you think the next generation of leaders are gonna be like, and what do they seem to be leaning towards that we can be cognizant of?

[00:17:14] **AARON GOLUB:** One thing that's interesting, I recently signed an agreement to speak at an event in mid-May, and they really wanted about getting uncomfortable and how to thrive being uncomfortable, and how there's a lot of growth there. I personally believe that everything in the world of inclusion, of helping and supporting others is fantastic, and we need that. But I also think there are certain environments where it gets to a point where people are too comfortable, and when we can learn that it is okay to be uncomfortable, that's when we become better leaders. Not every conversation's gonna be comfortable. Not every situation you deal with is gonna be comfortable. Not every client who's yelling at you, that's not always gonna be comfortable. And I think the next generation of leaders needs to learn how to get uncomfortable more. Whether you're in high school or college, whether you're right out, whether you're in your late 20s or early 30s, the more you can learn that it is okay to be uncomfortable, that we crave certainty in life, but it's okay to be uncertain, the better of a leader you will be. Because if you can't learn to deal with uncomfortable situations, you won't be able to thrive in them when they come up.

[00:18:37] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Yeah. And that goes into building resilient teams. As you've worked with people, how have you uncovered the leaders who say, "Yeah, I have a really resilient team," but then you start to dig into it, and you realize, oh, you just have a team that's really good at tolerating hard things, and you're calling it a strength instead of actual resiliency?

[00:18:57] **AARON GOLUB:** It's challenging them through different activities. I gave you an example of the goggles. Last year, I did a six-hour training in October with a team of about 15 leaders of a company. And whenever I do that and I have that much time, and it's a smaller group, we get really fun with the



activities. I basically had a few people leave the room, and we set up this entire obstacle course with just tables, chairs, bags. Honestly, it probably wasn't the safest thing. But it was so fun. We brought these two people back in, and they were blindfolded, and they had to find a way to navigate through this room and get to the other side, and we had one person who could see who had to help them do it. And it's showing very quickly, are there gonna be arguments? Are there going to be controversies? Is someone gonna trip on a chair? Or are they gonna learn that, A, if you have a blindfold on, you need to ask for help, because if you ask for what you need, you will receive what you need. If you don't ask for what you need, you won't. Is the person who can see gonna learn that they need to be a leader, they need to communicate, and the more they communicate, the easier it will be, or are they gonna let their teammate fall over a table? And it shows really quickly, it reveals those weaknesses within groups.

[00:20:16] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Such a good example. And I love the things that you're bringing to your workshop because that idea and some of the examples you gave really tap into that play that adults don't get a lot of. And that's a good opportunity for us to let our guard down and do some things that way. As we wrap up our conversation, what's one takeaway that you really hope our audience will take away from your story and the work that you're doing?

[00:20:42] **AARON GOLUB:** It's understanding that the limitations you face don't have to define who you are. The same way we talked about your past doesn't have to define your future, it's the same thing with limitations. Just because you have a challenge, you have a disability, you have an adversity, that doesn't mean that you can't do something. It means that maybe you haven't been able to in the past, but you can reshape your thinking about how you can in the future, and the language we use is really important. And so instead of saying, "Oh, I can't play football because I'm legally blind," maybe it's, "Hey, I haven't been athletic in the past. I haven't been able to play these sports, but how can I find a way to do what I wanna do?" And reframing it in a way that allows you to find success instead of assuming you can't.

[00:21:25] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Such a good takeaway, Aaron. Thanks for sitting down and chatting with me for a few minutes.

[00:21:29] **AARON GOLUB:** Yeah. Thank you for having me.

[00:21:39] **ANNOUNCER:** Thanks for tuning in to The HR Mixtape. Like, share, review, and subscribe to support the show and help more people discover these conversations. Until next time, keep the conversation going.