
Change the World Tuesday: Rethinking Recruiting for the Age of AI and Flexibility

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Guest: Myla Ramos, Co-Founder & CEO, SearchPros

[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 Myla Ramos, CEO and co-founder of SearchPros, which she built from a local staffing firm into a nearly one hundred and seventy-five million dollar global managed service provider. She cut time to hire by forty-five percent with AI and kept retention above seventy percent, so she can tell you exactly where automation pays off in HR and where it still falls apart. Myla, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

[00:00:50] **MYLA RAMOS:** Of course. Good morning.

[00:00:52] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** So you built SearchPros from a local Sacramento staffing firm into this global managed service provider over two decades. I'd love if you could take us back maybe to the early years. What did that business look like when it was just starting, and what were you personally doing every day?

[00:01:10] **MYLA RAMOS:** I was recruiting. I'm still a recruiter, and I think most of us entrepreneurs that start a company realize early on that we do something really well, whatever it is, and we're passionate about it. In the beginning, I took pride in making 200 calls a day, whether it was 200 customers I'm looking for, "Hi, this is Myla. Do you need a temp?" Or a candidate, "Do you need a job? I have a job for you." I took great pride in that. But I think what I've realized over the 20 years is that being good at what you're passionate about isn't necessarily the way to scale a company. As we grew bigger and bigger, you learn, okay, now I'm gonna lead by example. I'm not gonna do the job myself. I'm gonna lead by example, and you do the recruiting, and you have your recruiters next to you, and you're recruiting together. Now there's two of you recruiting, and that's really cool, and you double your output. But to grow to the level where we're international and we put 20,000 people to work, you still can't do it by yourself. You can't even do it with two people or three people. So you develop, and it's a very difficult thing to do. Not a lot of people are able to scale, to realize it's no longer about you, it's no longer about your skill as an entrepreneur. The skill has to develop and change into seeing strategically, letting go of what you love to do, to let it grow, to let it breathe. And I think the second most important thing is being able to adapt to that, because people are stubborn. If you're good at something, you wanna do it the same way every time because you've proven it to be successful. Like, gosh darn it, I need to keep doing it this way. If I make 25 calls, I'm gonna get 10 interviews. In my 10 interviews, I'm gonna get three hires. Remember those numbers? Over the 20 years we've been in business, I've seen companies come and go, and I think those are the two things I've learned along the way. One, you gotta learn to be strategic and realize that what you were good at yesterday isn't what you have to be good at tomorrow. You have to keep learning, keep evolving and growing. And part of that evolution is learning to embrace change and being okay with it. So we actually coined a terminology in our company, and they make fun of me because of it. Since change is so constant, especially when you're dealing with people and employment law in California, we have a term I call Change the World Tuesday. What happens is you work all week and you realize all the friction, and Friday happens, and you realize, "This is what happened, and I can't control it." I think about it all weekend, and then Monday I come back to work and I collaborate with my partners, like, "This is what happened. What if we only recruited purple unicorns instead of blue-eyed unicorns?" So by Tuesday we have a new process. "Hey, we're gonna change the world today. It's Tuesday. It's Change the World Tuesday. We're only recruiting purple unicorns." I think that's kind of how we evolved. In the company, the team is just used to Change the World Tuesday, so they didn't mind that tomorrow we're gonna do AI, and the next day we're gonna do agentic. It's just part of the process now.

[00:04:30] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I love that you get to sit in this place where you've been that recruiter, but you get to hear what employers say they want, and you get to hear what candidates say, and often you get to hear kind of that behind the scenes from your candidates as you're talking to them on behalf of your clients. Where do you see the widest gap between those two conversations now, from "Hey, this is what the employer is saying they want" to "Here's what the candidate is coming to the table with"?

[00:05:04] **MYLA RAMOS:** There are so many. It's changed so much, I think more than any industry, because people have changed so much. I think the biggest difference is expectations. As an employee, my biggest hook to a candidate before was, "Hey, you can make X dollars." It was about dollars and cents. You're gonna make \$25 an hour, you're gonna make \$50 an hour, and that dollar difference, that 25 cent difference, would dictate whether they would work for you or not. People just expected to work, and expected work to be what it is. And the employer's expectation was you come to work and you're supposed to do all of these things. You owe me this time, and if you're salaried, I can call you at midnight and expect you to answer the phone, and it's a badge of honor to be the first person in and the last person out. Now it's all changed. The first question a candidate normally asks is, "Can I work from home? How flexible is it? Do I have to be there from 8:00 to 5:00? What if I have Pilates class at 3:00? What if I have to pick up my kids at 2:45 because daycare only goes to 6:00? Is it okay if I use AI to help me do this, because I could do the same thing in 70% less time? Can I go home?" Or, "Can I get three weeks vacation instead of two?" So the biggest sell I'm finding now for candidates is no longer pay, it's how flexible is it. On the customer side, it's the same thing. They're realizing it's kind of like a pendulum. I grew up in the '80s, Generation X, where you're supposed to work till you die, till you burn out, and you can sleep when you're dead. And I remember the days when I was recruiting for companies and they would say, "I want stability in their resume. If they don't have at least five to seven years in every job, I don't even wanna see them. That means they're flighty and they skip around." I can't even find a resume with people who can stick around for a year now. But they're so desperate for people, because there's so much work to be done, that they're like, "Okay, I guess it's okay that they've only been in their job for a year. At least they know how to do it." Or the compensation. There are many states now where compensation has to be publicly posted, so the transparency in pay has absolutely changed the hiring manager's point of view of, "Oh my gosh, I can't just do it this way." They've also changed that. If I'm not flexible, then I won't have anyone doing the job, and then where am I gonna be? If they can do the job from 8:00 to 3:00 because they gotta pick up their kids at 3:00, or walk their dog at 3:45, or take a yoga class, as long as the work gets done, I have to be okay with it, because at the end of the day, it's the work getting done. It's not the hours being logged. There are so many stories about all these things that have changed.

[00:07:56] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I definitely feel that. As you were talking, I was thinking back to my earlier days, when I was job hunting in my 20s. I remember at that point one of the little carrots people would dangle would be like, "We have jeans Friday." You get to wear jeans on Friday, and that was like, "Oh my gosh, I get to wear jeans on Friday." I think back to that now and I'm like, what a silly thing, but that was a thing back then. That was a perk. I think about the younger generation. When we talk about Gen Z, I think sometimes there are misconceptions about what that generation does or wants, and I've heard, hey, maybe they're hard to hire, maybe they're hard to keep. In your organization, you have great retention with your candidates. It sits above 70%, with an average tenure over seven years. So clearly you guys are doing something right. What do you think leaders are missing when they're having this conversation around hiring Gen Z?

[00:08:57] **MYLA RAMOS:** It's that flexibility again. It's that Change the World Tuesday ideology that we just installed into the company. It's the ability to look beyond the norm of what has succeeded in the past, and understand that tomorrow's path is very different than what we learned today. Even something as simple as the KPIs, how many phone calls, how many placements, we took that away a year or two ago, when we'd lived and breathed that coming from the industry. How many phone calls, how many candidates can you interview, how many placements can you make? We changed it to results. The other differentiator is Gen Z lived through all the horrible things with COVID, and they understand quality of life balance. So having a job isn't a badge of honor anymore. It built our identity in our age group. I'm a manager at this shift, I'm so excited. Now they wanna travel, they wanna explore the world, they wanna stay home and watch Netflix all day. That's what fulfills them. So having a job for them isn't a requirement

anymore. It's not something they aspire to. It's something they have to do, so they wanna make sure it means something. So the mission statement of the company, do you stand for what your brand says? Do you actually contribute? What are your philanthropic ideas? What is it that you do that makes you different from another person? Because I can go to In-N-Out Burger and make \$25 an hour if I really just wanted to make a living, and that's okay. Then there's no stress. I come in, it's burgers and fries, you flip 'em, and you go home, and you're stress-free. Why am I gonna go to your environment and take on the stress of your requirements if I don't need to? So it's giving them the idea and the wisdom of the why. Why are we doing this? How does this impact other people, so that they feel fulfilled? And then couple that with the responsibility. But oh my gosh, Gen Z, what they do have is innovation. Because they've survived so much and they don't have to work for the sake of burgers and fries, they wanna be innovative. They're gonna give you fresh ideas, new ways of thinking things, new ways of solving problems. Not that they're lazy, but they wanna be as efficient as possible, and if they can do this in two hours instead of eight, that's what they're gonna do. You learn from that, and that's how you grow the company. That's how you keep them engaged, because if you show them that their skill sets are valuable, you value their time, you share with them the why, then you have a better chance of keeping them engaged and keeping them within your team.

[00:11:38] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I think about that there used to be this ideology that your identity wasn't your job. When you go back to the 1950s, 1940s, your identity was built in the community, whatever club you were involved in, maybe your local religious affiliation. That was your identity, your community. So it's interesting to see Gen Z kind of bring that back, maybe not in the same way, but that idea that my job isn't my identity, and that's also a very unique American thing. That's kind of what we lead with when we ask people about themselves. We expect one or two answers to be family or job. That's kind of how we define things. We don't typically lead with, "Yeah, you know what, I'm really into reading books," or, "I'm really into video games," or whatever the thing is. We don't define ourselves that way, so I think it's a good thing that Gen Z is kind of pushing us in that direction. And it leads me to think about, you've talked about flexibility a lot, and I kind of put that in the benefit category. Benefits used to be a really great retention story. "Hey, we're keeping people because we have these great benefits." Now that conversation about benefits is showing up super early in the hiring conversation. So as you've talked to candidates, which benefits do you think have actually changed a candidate's decision, and maybe which ones look great on a career page but don't really move the needle when it comes to attracting candidates?

[00:13:08] **MYLA RAMOS:** Flexibility to work from home, easily 20 to 30%. They will take 30% less money if you tell them they can work from home every day, all day. When we put a requisition out in the system, we will easily get 10 times more applicants if it has remote or flexible hours as opposed to in-office hours all day, every day. Huge. Pay doesn't matter.

[00:13:33] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Do you see companies... We saw this shift, right? The pandemic happened, and everybody went remote, and then we saw the shift come back a little bit, with organizations requiring or encouraging being in the office, which there is value to. I don't think you can just, I hate the expression, but throw the baby out with the bathwater. I should really look that up and see where it came from.

[00:13:57] **MYLA RAMOS:** It's a biblical term.

[00:13:58] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Right. We have seen that shift change. As you're coaching employers when you're working with them, are you challenging them at all to say, "Hey, I can get you the candidates, but you're gonna have a better response if you consider adding flexibility here"?

[00:14:14] **MYLA RAMOS:** Yes, but it's difficult for our industry because we hire contingent labor. They're contractors to begin with, so you need to have a certain amount of oversight because they're not from your world, your processes, or even their assets. There's a lot that happens that's kind of difficult. But I think at the higher level, people get it, because they're looking at the output, what's the product or the service they're creating. Whether they do it here or there isn't really relevant for them anymore at the higher level. But at the lower level, there's most definitely a little bit of guidance needed. I think most people understand that now, no matter what generation you are, because we all lived through COVID. We all worked from home, we all felt that, so they realize how important it is. But there are just some jobs,

especially in contingent workforce, where they can't do that because they're coming in from the outside. You need to have a little bit of oversight.

[00:15:16] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. We've talked so much on the podcast, and there's so much chatter right now in the industry around AI. I'd love to hear a little bit about your journey, because you were able to cut your time to hire by 45% using AI. I'd love if you could walk us through where that speed really helped improve your candidate experience, and honestly, maybe what were some of the hiccups? What were some of the things that made it worse before you figured it out?

[00:15:43] **MYLA RAMOS:** There are so many products out there. Everyone claims to have AI, so that's your first hiccup, sorting through the noise. Everyone is claiming, "I do AI this, AI that," and there's no definitive way. I found no magic bullet, no one AI that does all of it. Then you realize, okay, it's not AI, it's how you use it. Which one, which language you understand better, and which one you can apply, because each organization is slightly different too. How you process information and how you recruit is all different, so it's about finding the one that makes sense for your company. And again, my Change the World Tuesday is great, because we can test it really quickly, and if it didn't work, we could pull it out and try a different one and say, "We're gonna try this one because this one's not working." You can't really see it until you've used it a couple of times to say, "Ooh, it doesn't do that part very well." So that's the first part, cutting through the noise. I would go to the ASA conference, or the CWA conference, or SIA, and six years ago there were maybe two or three AI companies. Last year when I went to the conference, I swear like 80% of the vendors were all AI related. I'm like, I don't know, they can all do everything, they don't even need me anymore. Then the second part was leaning in to understand, okay, what do they actually do well? What they do well is the administrative burden. It's the filtering, the sorting, and finding data. All of us have these huge databases of candidates with hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of resumes. Career Builder and Monster went out of business, so that point of reference of where you find candidates disappeared overnight. LinkedIn is now kind of leading the pack of where you're supposed to find people, but it's really not an easy system to use, because the person has to reply to you, and there's so much false information about what people say they do and how they're actually qualified on LinkedIn. So what we use AI for, and what we've been able to cut our time in, is the administrative burden of using what we already have. We have a database with millions of candidates. Instead of finding new ones all the time, we use AI to look at the ones out of the millions of resumes we already have, and use it cohesively. You're not just looking for keyword searches, that's a 1980s thing, when you do a Boolean search, do they know Word or Excel, and then Word or Excel pops up. Now you can link social media and the capability. So when they say that they're in Texas and they're an engineer, the AI can look on LinkedIn and social media to say, "No, this person is in New Mexico, not Texas." All their social media and Instagram is posting that they're in California or New Mexico. Why are they in Texas all of a sudden? So it verifies the information, because people have been very good at using AI to make their resumes look like they're the chief dishwasher when they're actually... I can't think of a good example right now, but you know what I'm talking about.

[00:19:03] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I do, and I'm glad that you brought that up, because when I think about candidates using AI now, they're grabbing the job descriptions or the job postings and asking AI to help write their resume to stack it so it matches, their applications, interview prep, all the things. And then I think about, on your side, you're using AI tools to help sort them. You alluded to it, but when is it gonna end up being the robots are just talking to each other?

[00:19:34] **MYLA RAMOS:** We're there.

[00:19:35] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** How do we prevent that?

[00:19:38] **MYLA RAMOS:** They're just talking to one another. And identity fraud is so huge right now. It's something like 85% of applicants pilfer their information. No one does the work anymore. Everyone just pulls the information from the job description, and that's what they do, but they can't actually deliver it. We've had to recently put a filter in so that any applicant cannot get hired until we have an in-person interview, and we have situational questions we have to ask, because they're either using AI incorrectly, pumping up their experience when they don't actually have it. We're verifying their social media to make sure they're actually physically where they're supposed to be and doing what they're supposed to be doing, instead of something else. And you'd still need that human connection of, "Tell me about when you

did this, what actually happened? Give me an example of that," because AI has gotten so smart. But the job descriptions are the same way. Our content is being created by hiring managers with job descriptions they pulled out of AI, and half the time I don't understand what that word is. Then a resume shows up with that word, and you put them together, and neither one of them can actually do the job. So I think it's just there, and we're working our way around it. The other thing is people think AI is a magic bullet, but if you use it as a tool, as an accelerator of what you do, to remove all of the mundane things you don't like to do, that's how we've been able to do it. Like filtering through resumes, making sure the skill sets actually match the words based on the job description, based on the title that they have. Then the recruiters, and then the AI texts them and emails them, so the recruiters actually only get into the equation when there's a conversation that's about to happen. The agent will schedule an interview time and put it directly on the recruiter's calendar. So instead of spending time emailing or calling candidates, 200 calls a day like I used to do 20 years ago, now their schedules are already filled with interviews for the day. And even then, 50% of those people don't even show up to their scheduled interviews with a human being. I don't know why that is, but it's the only way we could filter it. At least now, instead of being stuck in the mundane, the recruiters are communicating, like you and I are talking to each other and learning about the person.

[00:22:11] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Do you think that candidates who aren't using AI to build their resumes are at a disadvantage now?

[00:22:19] **MYLA RAMOS:** It depends, but yes, only because everyone else is using it. Then the system can't even find you if you don't have certain keywords that they're looking for. But it comes down to the people again. A lot of times, I think 30% of our placements right now are referrals, which is huge, and it's because of that. Maybe they don't know how to use AI correctly, and if you don't, you're kind of at a disadvantage, because we're all moving towards it one way or another. I don't know anyone who doesn't use it. If your resume's out there actively looking, I'm like 99% sure they've all gone through AI to fix it, because I don't see spelling errors anymore. I don't see the stuff I used to see 10 years ago in a resume. I used to think, "Did you not finish eighth grade? I don't understand the spelling errors, the grammar errors." Even removing all of that has to be AI.

[00:23:15] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Yeah. I started my career in recruiting many years ago, and I remember chuckling about people's email addresses, that they weren't paying attention to that, and I got some of the most unhinged email addresses from candidates. I was like, "Oh wow, maybe you should have created a new one before you sent this resume." As we wrap up our conversation, I'd love to get your perspective on this. Plenty of companies, I think, are figuring out how to win candidates. They get them in the door, and then they lose them in that first 90 days. I think we're seeing this because we're looking at resumes, and there's not 10 years, three years, five years, seven years anymore. There's...

[00:23:58] **MYLA RAMOS:** One year, nine months.

[00:23:59] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** Or a year and a half. What's happening inside that new hire's first three months that really determines whether they stay, and maybe who owns that?

[00:24:10] **MYLA RAMOS:** I think everybody owns it. Like any relationship, it's a two-way street. On the client side, the company side, they promise the world to get the person in the door. They say, "Yes, you can do all of these things. Yes, we will train you. Yes, there's free donuts in the morning and Starbucks at 2:00." And then the person comes in and they're like, "None of those things are happening." They go, "Yeah, no, we're gonna get to it." And people have very short patience now, a very short leash. We know that our time is valuable, it's the most valuable commodity, and we are not gonna waste our time on a position or a place where they lied to you. I understand that unemployment is the lowest it's been in a very long time, so companies promise the world to candidates, but they can't always deliver, because they have other employees to think about too. So buying donuts doesn't mean you're buying donuts for your one new hire, that means buying donuts for the entire office. It sounds trivial, but I've come across this myself in my office. It's like, "Okay, well, we'll get fresh bagels." Wait a minute, that \$2,000 line item was fresh Noah's bagels for 50 people for two months. That's all of a sudden inflated to \$10,000. Those are real numbers. So those little side promises, you gotta make sure you can deliver on them. And on the candidate side, they look at the why. It's like, "I can make the same amount of money everywhere else I go, because there are 10 job openings if I'm a good skilled worker. And if I don't align with the

management philosophy, with their style, if the flexibility and micromanagement aren't within my expectations, I know I can get another job tomorrow, because AI can help me create the perfect resume and apply to 100 jobs tomorrow." So I think those two have to be aligned, and it just comes down to transparency and communication, especially in those first 90 days. I always make sure that in the first week, we have lunch with the person to learn more about them, what's important to them. We have a little questionnaire, because in today's world, it's all about me. What's in it for me? Why am I going to work? What's important to me? We learn everything from their favorite soda to their favorite candy bar. We make them feel as special as they are. If we expect them to produce 10 placements a week or a month, then our job is to make sure they're taken care of so that they can do those things. And if I promise you fresh bagels every morning and a Dr. Pepper or two, you will get fresh bagels in the morning and a Dr. Pepper or two, because if I don't promise that, then I can't hold you to your promise that you're gonna stay and deliver my 10 placements a month. It's dual responsibility.

[00:27:03] **DR. SHARI SIMPSON:** I love that perspective. This has been a great conversation. I think you've given us a peek behind the curtain on some of the things in the external recruiting world that we can bring into our corporate recruiting mindset. So thanks for sitting down and chatting with me.

[00:27:17] **MYLA RAMOS:** Of course. Thanks for your time, Shari. Have a great day.

[00:27:26] **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.