

- 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. Joining me on the podcast today is Tracy Klein a senior manager of employee experience here at Paylocity and we have another guest today, actually, Noreen MacMahon our director of organizational development also here at Paylocity. So Tracy and Noreen, thanks so much for jumping on with me.

- So happy to be here.

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- So we have a really interesting topic today and it's something that I've been thinking out loud about in talking to a bunch of different people about when it comes to how we think about employee experience and the pressure expectations that we're putting on our middle managers to really bring some of these employee experience moments to life. So I wanna center our conversation around that and I'd love to start with you Tracy, and your background. You know, when you think about what employees really want when we talk about employee experience what are you hearing?

- So for me, I think employee experience, we do try and overcomplicate it with what are we giving them? What surveys have we done to find out what they want? And I think the reality of it is it starts very simply when they start in the organization, you wanna be seen, you wanna know that that they wanted you there. And it moves into being heard when something is going well or when something is not going so well. Do you have somewhere to go to feel heard? But then eventually once you've created those relationships is what you have to say being valued? Is your expertise and the things you're bringing to the table being valued? And we can value things in different ways. It's by through influence. It's being asked to join at times. It's seeing a project go to to end it's delivering a product, whatever that is that value is interpreted by each individual in a certain way, how they feel that. And then eventually to be empowered to have the ability to make decisions, to make change to see your impact on the organization to see your impact within something that you wanted changed. And so I think if we just break it down to those four things, as we move through our own employee journeys and as managers are we paying attention to those things? And how do we show the employees that that is happening for them?

- How have you seen leadership initiatives or business initiatives change as this push for more experience-based employee moments has risen?

- So I do feel like we have gotten into a space where we wanna map

things and we wanna look at personas and we wanna do lots of surveys because we wanna know like what's happening and how we choose those initiatives how we choose the things that an executive wants to do or leadership wants to do. How are we aligning our business needs with what the employee is asking? Where do those go? And so I think we can do those small moments that matter within a manager space within each other on teams listening to each other and valuing each other in those safe environments. But from an initiative standpoint, I feel like we we're looking more at personas like how did the DEIA path fit in for that specific employee set? How are we treating mothers? We're following those types of paths, but I think we can we can go a little bit deeper with our managers and say you don't have to dig to the persona level. You really can just look at the person level and who you're working with and ask yourself those four things, are they being seen? Are they being heard? Are they being valued? Have you empowered them in every little thing you do?

- I think those are really good points for managers to start to consider. And so this next question is for you, Noreen. When I think about those business initiatives layered on with the expectations we have for employees, where do we even start to begin to equip our managers to meet these business needs and create these great employee experiences?

- I really believe that it all starts off with just recognizing everyone's human. I think sometimes managers forget that they're human as well. And these days, mental health, the whole person at work there's different stressors and they're not the same for every employee, but they're just as impactful. So I think sometimes it's just easier to focus in on the work rather than the person. And I echo what Tracy said. You really have to know how to see your people the way they wanna be seen, value them the way they wanna be valued and include them. It would really just be for the managers to be more comfortable with the human side or the empathetic side of leadership.

- So what is that exactly? What are the skills that our managers either need to learn and or we need to help them deepen or widen their skillset? What are some of those things that you're seeing translate into creating these great employee experiences if the managers have these skills?

- When I think about the skills our managers need especially in today's workforce, it number one is communication. How do you communicate face-to-face? How do you communicate with a virtual team? I think it would also be how do we include everyone? So we see lots of companies saying return to office 'cause we wanna drive collaboration. I don't necessarily think it happens in an office but you do have to be a leader that is sharing what's top of mind and not having everything so perfect or buttoned down. So that would lead me to the next skill which is just being comfortable with being wrong and

knowing you tried your best, right? Showing up the way you want your employees to. I always say it's better to make a mistake really big so we can fix it. And then you don't have to worry about making that mistake again rather than being so fearful or thinking you need to have it all buttoned down that you don't try or you do it you know halfway and you can't really be sure if it landed correctly. I would also say ask your employees, right? Sometimes we're afraid of the emotional side or the people side, but ask them, how did that feel? I know I threw that at at the last minute. How did that make you feel? Or really, sorry this work didn't move forward. I'm sure that made you feel a certain way. And the last thing I would say is remember what it was like when you were an employee and you had a middle manager and how many things did you think that your manager knew? And now that you are the manager, how many things just don't even come your way? So I just think it's important to remember the expectation that your employee has of you, and to recalibrate that whenever possible.

- Communication is so important. And I loved your examples. It made me think of one that I encountered this week which I hadn't before. I was in my one-on-one and I have a great relationship with my supervisor, great psychological safety. And she started the conversation by saying are you open for some feedback today? Which she's never done that before. And I was like, well, that that was kind of a weird question but she explained it something that she's trying herself to be empathetic, right? And to know where somebody's head at, excuse me where somebody's head is at in the moment. And that simple act I thought was really interesting because it put this perspective on the relationship from employee and manager to say, Hey I wanna make sure I'm supporting you and giving you the feedback you need. I also wanna make sure that you're in a moment where you can receive it 'cause those things don't necessarily always match. So I think communication was a really great one to start with, as you think about this Noreen, what responsibility do you think lies in the space of HR and L&D to train our managers to be able to do these things?

- I think there's responsibility in exposing and reinforcing. I would also say that it's more about training the leader of leaders, right? More like you're not gonna send somebody to a class and suddenly they're gonna be empathetic. It's about creating experiences where they can step their toe in and realize, you know what? I didn't lose credibility. They're still following me. Okay, it's safe, right? It's creating those opportunities. In my past life, I worked for a company that had the CEO was just frustrated and annoyed by the levels of hierarchy, the flow down of information and the fear-based leadership approach. Like do what I say and do it now. And he brought in a team of experts and he started doing training from the top down but he also changed the way people were rewarded. He changed how feedback was gathered and responded to. There was no spinning the results. He came right out and said, look, we're low. We're really low. There's nowhere to go but up, but we're gonna get there. And he shared the progress

and he was transparent about what results were important in his mind and what results were not. So that's where I see it more as an organizational approach but HR and L&D support elements of that. But if there's not a culture of transparency from the top or a willingness to be vulnerable and share what you're working on and what's important to you, I wouldn't say it's training and hr, it's leadership acknowledging what's important to them and then lining up their behaviors to match.

- I agree. I think modeling that behavior at the top is really key. You're not gonna change the mindset of anyone else in the organization if it's not being modeled at the top. And if safety and openness and vulnerability is what we believe the culture to be at that organization and you want to cascade that down, it does have to start there. It's not gonna work its way to the top. At some point you're gonna meet the ceiling and those employees are gonna have a very different experience once you hit that ceiling, so.

- With all of these different components, right? When I think about the soft skills we talked about, right? Communication, transparency, you know, the example you gave about changing how this leader was recognizing people aligning performance, rewards sharing what was happening in the organization. So you take all that and then you take in kind of what employees have been expecting now and the way they're defining experience, right? So it might be, I get to go fully remote I have unlimited PTO, I have, you know my medical fully paid for, you know, Tracy as you've kind of gone down this road of employee experience and just digging into it more and more what's realistic to expect for outcomes when you're implementing strategies around employee experience? Because there is a component of some tactical things to change to look at, right? Benefit offerings and those kinds of things. But I think a lot of this leans into what we've already talked about, more communication more leadership development, more transparency. So what can we expect to be able to accomplish in our organizations?

- That is a tough question. What can we expect? And I think that's again, it starts at your leadership spot. Like what tone, what culture are they planning to set? And then that will drive what you can deliver. We can throw in all of the extra pay and the extra PTO but if you don't have time autonomy within your organization and it's not appreciated and given back and empowered employee isn't empowered to make those decisions in their space it doesn't matter how much time off or how much money you give them. So all of those pieces that I think historically we've seen as like the, the perks, the benefits, the employee things, they're just that, they're things. And I think the employee population now has woken up to the fact that time autonomy is important. Being respected, being seen, being heard, their value what they bring to the table their point of view is the most important thing. And when your leadership values that, your

initiatives will come they're all just supporting extra icing on the cake, right? You will see people collaborating better together. You won't need these huge projects to make people feel like they wanna stay or that they wanna participate or be productive. It will be something that will just come naturally because who doesn't want to be around people that see them and value what they have to say and want more and wanna change what they're doing based on the experience that somebody else has that they're bringing to the table. Those are the best collaborative moments and creating those environments to work are the biggest employee experience. And you don't need huge initiatives to do those things.

- If you're listening and you're wondering how do I get my leadership to get on board with this? That's a great question and I'm gonna pose that to you Noreen 'cause I think it's a combination of, there's things of like what's gonna get in our way and then how do we influence leadership to see this as a priority? Because I have definitely worked with managers over the years who are being judged against KPIs but they're creating terrible employee experiences. And so that's something that gets in our way, right? The way that metrics are being looked at. So what are some things that we need to be aware of and that we can help influence as HR leaders?

- I'm feeling that since the pandemic and with the most recent changes in just being able to attract talent, retain talent and now it's flipping again, right? Where maybe the employer has the upper hand but what I'm most passionate about is behaviors lining up with whatever's being said. So don't tell me we value transparency and you bringing the whole person to work and then you tell people they need to be in the office five days a week and you don't care that they have elder care issues or childcare issues. So it's lining up behaviors with what is important and being honest about what is important. I would also say that companies that are going through significant growth or restructure need to think about what can stay and what needs to go and how do we help employees understand. Smaller companies may have people who are always involved, right? So maybe I'm the OD person but I also facilitate new hire orientation. So you start doing two jobs, three jobs and you're used to being able to just do it because you know and now when you get bigger not everybody knows what you bring. Not everybody knows that you are the person that does that, right? Even though it's not on the org chart. So to help our leaders understand is what are the parts of your culture that you wanna proactively and mindfully keep and what needs to change and how do I explain that to employees? That would be the biggest thing. I think what gets in the way is we stay focused to your point on KPIs and money and once your bills are being paid once you know you have that security and safety then you wanna self-actualize. You wanna know that you made a difference that you know you were the go-to person or that you got that done. The last thing I would just say about that though is not every employee brings value the same way and being able to recognize

the different ways. 'Cause being an employee, you're in a relationship, right? Just like there's the five love languages for, you know your relationship with a significant other. There's the five love languages of work as well. So taking the time to get to know what's important and what's valued.

- Such great advice overall. Noreen and Tracy, I think this is a topic we're gonna continue to talk about and it's gonna evolve as the landscape of work evolves as the expectations on what flexibility means, changes. As we put more on our middle managers I think this is a really unique opportunity for us in HR to help support the business goals and really create better experiences overall. And I like that you leaned in and said Tracy, like it's not necessarily about, you know PTO and the the things, right? It's much deeper than that. And so helping our leadership understand that it's much deeper than that. And starting with communication and transparency I think is key. So Tracy and Noreen, thanks for taking a few minutes of your day to chat with me.

- Thank you.

- Thanks Shari.

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