

- 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. Emily, thank you so much for taking a few minutes to sit down with me today.

- You're welcome, Shari, I'm excited about this.

- So you have a really interesting role at SHRM. Your title is Chief of Staff, Government Affairs, and Corporate Secretary for SHRM. So you have a lot of hats in the SHRM organization.

- That's what they say.

- So I wanna start with what's your perspective on the current legislative landscape? And I know that's a big question but from the work you do with SHRM for the HR space, what are the things that you're paying attention to?

- Okay, so look, I'm always thinking about things from the perspective of the HR professional that has to comply with all of these great ideas our elected officials come up with at the state and at the federal level. So that's the first thing. And then the second thing is people managers. We don't talk enough about their role. So first let's start with the compliance and then the new laws. The biggest issue for me is that the federal government hasn't gotten a lot done. And so states have run out of patients and they're trying to solve those issues. But the problem is you're solving it at a state level. And if I'm a multi-state organization, I now have to make sure I'm in compliance with what's going on in Colorado, what's going on in Virginia, what's going on in California. And that is creating much more work for our HR professionals, and it is creating work for our people manager. 'Cause imagine a people manager who's got someone in Colorado, someone in Washington, you got a team that's remote, 'cause this remote work thing complicates things. And there were things that you could require in terms of their time in one state that you can't require in terms of their time in another state. This is one of those things that came up earlier this year in California was the prospect of this 32-hour work week where you get paid for 40 hours but you work 32 hours. And so, of course, everyone wanted us to say, "Oh, that's a great idea." So think about it, how do I explain that to my employees in Virginia if that had passed in California? How do I say, "You're working 40 hours, you're getting paid for 40 hours, but you can only talk to the staff in California 32 hours a week?" So that means you gotta base your schedule on their 32 hours and then the other eight hours of the week they're doing whatever and they're getting paid for it. How do you explain that? As a people manager and as a HR professional, as a CEO, how do you talk about that? So those types of things are happening, paid leave. So how do you explain in one state

your people... Well, you do gotta explain it. The state legislature here has just said that in this state, paid leave is a requirement, and then in another state it's not. And so how do you think about equitableness and fairness across your organization? It's hard right now and you gotta put the blame a little bit... I put it a little bit on our federal government, our elected officials in Congress, but I'm also putting the blame on business too. 'Cause here's the thing, had we figured out a way to handle paid leave before the state legislature had to get involved, then we probably could have something that works for everybody. We've been working for a long time at SHRM to try to figure out what a framework looks like that could be passed at the federal level, that gives enough flexibility for a company no matter what their size and no matter their industry. And we're still working on that, I think that could solve this problem, but while we're trying to work on that, the states are coming up with their own ideas, and you're seeing different states do different things. Actually, I said to my team this year, "What if we tried to take the best of what we're seeing at different states and make that a sample bill, and then float that across the remaining states?" So any state who has said, "We wanna take this up next year," we say, "Look, here is a bill that we think is a great sample for you and it has all the things that would be good for the work and the workplace, and we're tryna get other states to pass the same thing because that works for your economy. Because now you're gonna have multi-state companies that are like, I don't wanna go to this state now because they got a whole different rule on how we manage it." So state intervention is the biggest thing that I worry about when I think about HR professionals, and because it ties into all the other issues that are important when we talk about that. The next one I think about is workforce development all the time. As a people manager, as a leader, as chief of staff, upskilling and reskilling is so critical. And everything you hear right now about work is so negative. And it's disheartening to me because I've had such great experiences at work, personally and I want that for other people. And I don't understand why it's not like that for other people. So you're sitting here trying to be empathetic and tryna understand what the deal is. And then you think about people's careers and what are they investing in their careers? And I give this talk about, are you investing in you? And because for years I work for the state. So you know you work for the state. The state does not have money to send you to all... They're gonna send you where they need to send you, bare minimum, what the legislature has approved for the budget. So I made a decision very early in my career that I would set aside my personal money to get trained in whatever it is I had an interest in. And I think we employees have to own their skilling. Your employer definitely has a vested interest in you being upskilled and reskilled, but why don't you just decide what it is you wanna be trained in and do it yourself? And we saw that for years, people who went to night school, but you hear all these stories in the '70s days, oldest person went to night school to better themselves. They did that on their own; employer wasn't paying for that. And I'm someone who

worked my way through law school at night. I worked full time during the day as an EA and at night I was in law school, and actually kept that a secret for... I got almost to the end of the role before somebody found out I was actually doing that. And so I just think it's really important that we talk about upskilling and reskilling, and the fact that it takes both the employer and the employee to address the issues we're gonna see. I talk about you go into Chop'd, which is one of my favorite salad places, and they put a brand new one in Boston right across from where we stay. So I was so excited. You walk in, there are four terminals. You don't see a person at first, then you look beyond, and the people who are making your salads. That's the only people who are in there are the salad makers. You go on that screen and you tap in. So that means that I don't have a cashier. But what I do have is somebody who has to maintain those machines now. So that's what I'm thinking about the jobs of the future. I want people to walk in the store and say, "Okay, yes, this job isn't there anymore, but there has to be a job that replaced it because of what the new thing is." And I want someone to get that idea and say, "Okay, maybe I can't be a cashier now, but maybe I can be the person that fixes this machine, that maintains it, that enters in all the material." I just think we all have to want something else for ourselves, and not be 100% dependent on the employer to do it for you. Because remember, you take that knowledge with you wherever you go. So that's just a little bit of what's on my mind. I didn't even get to people managers right now. We treat people in empathy and all that stuff, but I'm sure we'll get to that.

- Just a couple things, it was just a couple things that you're thinking about. So two things before I ask you the next question. If you're listening and you didn't know that SHRM has a multi-state comparison tool, it's a great resource. So you definitely should jump on the website and look at that. And I'll include the link in the show notes for those that are interested in using that tool. It's has saved me many times in my HR career being able to tap into that. And when it comes to upskilling, I've seen this a couple times and I've talked about it on the podcast before, but I'm fascinated about how technology is changing our workforce. And one of the things I keep talking about is, if you've seen it, so McDonald's now will hire remote employees to virtually take orders. So you can come up to the drive through and it's somebody sending at their home, taking your order virtually, and that that gets fed to the restaurant. And I'm fascinated by the innovation that McDonald's has thought of as to how can we take this role that we've said is required to be on site, and has thought differently about it?

- Oh, my gosh, I didn't know that. 'Cause, okay, a happy meal will make me happy. I'm that person. So I'm shocked. I didn't know they were doing that. This also makes me a little sad. There was a time when McDonald's, you knew where people were in their life. You knew if you went in the morning time, you were gonna see that person that's 65

or older, who retired but want to be able to do something, right?

- Yep.

- And you do in the afternoon, you're gonna run into your classmates with the bad acne that... 'Cause they said the oil and McDonald's was bad for you. So you knew it was gonna be these teenagers and young college people there, and it's just change. And you also knew that those people who were there in the afternoon had the opportunity to go to like Mickey D College.

- Hamburger you.

- Hamburger you. And so you, everyone knew that there was a path for them. And that something changed, I don't know where it was, and so now that's gone. And now that you may not see anybody when you go up to the drive through, it's just like, wow-

- That's different.

- That's so different.

- It is, it's different. They did something a couple years ago, and not to get off on a McDonald's tangent, but they did... I think, this was 2019 I was talking about this. So pre-pandemic they were doing where you could apply to a McDonald's role via Amazon Alexa. You could just talk to Alexa and put your application in for McDonald's. So just an organization that's really thinking differently about how they manage a remote or hybrid workforce. So I find it fascinating.

- Wow! I follow their CEO on Instagram. I found him very interesting 'cause it was the whole thing with how he got to that job. So that's interesting that he's really moved in that direction.

- Yeah, we talked about compliance and state by state. I think that's something that's difficult for HR professionals and really CHROs right now, I have a lot of compassion for them, is managing and staying ahead of all this legislation that comes out. Like when Colorado said, "Hey, you gotta post the salary information." Well, if you're a multi-state organization, now you are thinking about your equity and how you're gonna post. Are you gonna post it in every state? Is it the same for every state? All that different stuff. And then Roe v. Wade came out. And some organizations added new benefits, some just stated benefits, some went a different direction. But that all really fell on the hands of HR and employment lawyers, let's be honest, to figure that out. How do we stay abreast of all this stuff and in a way where we're serving our businesses, but also just being really compassionate with where our employees are at?

- You gotta know your people. So I started this conversation always

talking about culture. I think some people laugh at us now when we're saying you gotta lead with culture, but if you know your culture and if you know your people, you'll know whether an issue is important to them, and you'll get ahead of those issues. So if you are an organization where 70% of your people in your organization are past childbearing age, this you know is not really that much of an issue for you. What do you do? You do a check of what your healthcare, what you providing, your current healthcare benefits, you do a temperature check and see if there's anyone who lately has intimated that they're trying to have a child, you just look at it from... And then you look at it holistically. Don't look at it just at the point of what DOPS deals with. You look at the whole reproductive spectrum, and you say, "What are other needs that we may have?" But you have to know your people and the organization's culture. If you are in small town Tennessee, and there's a church on every corner, and you see your staff in that church, and they're very open about what their beliefs are, you know who your people are, then you know how far you can go in terms of announcing what you're doing. 'Cause you may decide that you do want to proactively do some things like add money to the HSA or do the travel benefit. You can quietly do that without announcing it, and those people might appreciate it more, than you going out and doing a big front page article about announcing that our company's gonna do this. And what made me a little unhappy about how this whole thing unfolded in terms of what companies were doing, a very large company who people are dependent on, got thousands of employees in multiple states and things like that, they can go out and make these huge splash announcements. My small company, 25 & Under, that is just very happy that they've gotten back to pre-pandemic levels in terms of their income. Where does that leave them in terms of retaining their talent when you gotta compete with these splash announcements from these large companies? And so it's so important that you know those 25 employees and what's important to them, and you communicate. So that's when you have... We have our little CEO updates, we have star coffees quarterly, but every once and again our CEO will say, "I wanna update you all on what's going on in the world and how it's impacting our organization." That's when you really have that heart to heart with them and say, "Here, this is what we make, this is what I can afford to put toward the benefits. So what is it that you all care the most about? Is it that you want me to pay student loans? Do you want me to give you the 52/50 a year back to cover student loans or other ways or tuition reimbursement?" What are those things? What is important to your people? And then you provide it. If you lead and you start there... And I know there are people who have to worry about what's important to your customer, but let me tell you, ultimately, your people are the reason that you retain your customers, and if they're happy and satisfied, you start with them. So everybody says everything starts at home, start at home. And don't think you have to do something because someone else is doing it, do what's best for your people.

- Culture is so important.

- It is.

- There's so much that's wrapped into culture and just authenticity of culture. There's that, hey, what we think culture is and what your actual culture is.

- Oh, yeah.

- So I appreciate that you started with get to know your people. Because you're right, in those examples you gave, your answer to the dobs thing could be very different.

- It could, and it's so much pressure, I feel so bad. Middle and small-size business' probably like, don't feel bad for me, Emily. But I feel 'cause I'm like, look, if I gotta compare and I'm competing for talent here, and I'm in the same town with company A, and they're out here saying, "We're gonna do this, this, and that," I can't pay for that marketing. No one's paying attention to me. So that's why it's gonna be so important that personalize as much as you can that experience for your employees and find out what's important to them.

- As you've worked with different organizations and you've spent some time in the political space, how do we as HR professionals support employees without stepping into that political debate on benefits or practices that we have?

- Again, it goes back to your culture, what works for the culture? Here's what we can afford, here's what we do for you currently. Where are the gaps? And it's not about the politics of who's gonna support, who isn't going to support? If I've got a workplace and 70% of the people are childbearing age, first of all have this discussion with all of the employees. Don't just think you're gonna call the women employees together and say, "What do you think about reproductive health?" Hey, we don't get there without a guy half the time? So if you think about it, I want everyone in the organization because this even goes back to things like paternity leave. And so it's part of that whole reproductive circle, I can be saying maybe I wanna put more funds into X to cover travel costs related to termination of pregnancies, but my manner's saying, "Well, for those of us who are about to be dads, I need to be able to help my spouse and be there for them. And so can you add paternity leave as an option?" And maybe you just make it paid leave for a child. Maybe you don't have leave for people who adopt children. So here's an opportunity to be more holistic with little cost if you think about it. 'Cause if you already had some form of leave, and you just incorporating it under new rating those things that will be important to your workforce. So just doing the whole circle. This is the best opportunity for you to say, "That whole reproductive circle we know is important to all of you men,

women, and anyone else in the workplace, where it's important to them, and let's deal with it there." I think that's the type of thing that we've gotta do. And you're staying out of the political. Now, look, I know there are some people... Think about it, if you're an entrepreneur, this is your company that you founded. You wanna say what you wanna say 'cause you're the one that made the sacrifices so that you can build this business, and that makes sense. Again, I say to employees, "You have a choice." You don't have to stay there. The good thing about what's going on now before we go deep into this recession everybody keep talking about, that there is a war for talent. And so at some point if you feel that that doesn't align with the business goals and what the business talks about, don't align with your personal perspective. The great thing is you don't have to stay, and you can find a place that aligns better with you. And I think do that. I dunno why we think that's bad to say, 'cause even when you have an employer who says, "You all, if this doesn't work for you, it's okay," people don't trust that. And I know people can be retaliatory at some point, but believe in you. This again goes back to my thing about upskilling and reskilling. When you own that process of how you learn new things and you're not dependent on someone else when you're earning it on your own, you are like, look, I can roll out here, and I can go do something else in a place that's gonna be good for me.

- There's so much opportunity out there right now, when you talk about the war for talent, from the employer perspective, but as an employee, as a worker, man, this guy's really the limit. You can do so much now, and especially with side hustles, and gig economy, and all that stuff, which that could be a whole nother podcast.

- That's a whole other issue right there. Look, what they talking about these people who got the moonlighters, that's the new thing. So I'm like, I dunno how you doing three jobs when I got one that keeps me going from sun up to sun down, but that's a whole other story.

- That's right. So as I wrap up my discussion with you, what's one thing in the SHRM space in your role that you're most excited about or research that you're doing, or just as you look forward in this landscape, what gets you excited?

- So lemme tell you, SHRM turns 75 next year. I don't think you that, yeah.

- Wow!

- So we are doing a whole lot. We're pulling history and we're learning things. But the story I tell when I go and do my Washington updates at Chapters is, SHRM was founded in Berea, Ohio. So we ended up here in the Alexandria area, in 1984 because HR professionals, and at that point they were called the personnel, got tired of not having

a seat at the table as it related to federal issues about the workforce. So these huge pieces of labor legislation were being passed and no one was asking the personnel man about it. So they said, "You know what? We're gonna pull up stakes, and we're gonna drive, and we're gonna find some place, and we're gonna be near DC." So that's how we ended up in Alexandria. And then five years later the name changes, in 1989, to SHRM, Society for Human Resource Management. And so I think there are so many things we can learn about our journey over the last 75 years. And I'm most excited about what we can do in the next 25 years leading to Centennial. So next year's gonna be a year of reflection and discovery about, for so many people who've just been SHR members and not realize all the great things we've done over 75 years to really influence the world of work. And then it's a time for us to be really proactive and think, how can we change lives so that 25 years from now, someone can say, "In a century, in one century SHRM has done this thing, HR professionals have done these things," and we are changing lives every day. So that's what I'm most looking forward to.

- How excited. I'm getting goosebumps listening to you talk. I'm excited too. So every time I get a chance to talk to some SHRM leadership, I walk away with just being invigorated in the profession that I'm in, and excited that I work where I work and what I do. So thanks for taking a few minutes of your data chat with me.

- Oh, my gosh, it's an honor, it's always an honor to talk about what we're doing. I gotta get a shout out to our ultimate leader who's not here with us, Johnny C. Taylor Jr. Because you gotta have a leader that empowers all of us to do what we need to do every day. And that's why we're so excited. He's excited. He talked about the 75th anniversary one more time. But it's on my mind because he knows that we've made such an impact and that there's even more we can do.

- Absolutely. Thanks again.

- Thank you.

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