

- 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 Jess Von Bank. She is the head of brand and vendor services at Leapgen. Jess, thanks so much for jumping on the podcast with me.

- Thank you so much. I'm excited to be here.

- So, I'd love to dig into a topic today around women in the workforce. You know, I recently read an article that was posted by SHRM in 2022, early 2022, that talks about nearly two million fewer women are in the labor workforce now because of the pandemic. How do you think that's changing our organizations?

- Oh my god, first of all, if you look at the global labor data, it's really easy to look at it at a surface level. The workforce is made up of 50% women, 50% men. But when you break it down by the availability of labor, men participate in the workforce to the tune of 80%, and women are 50%. So you have to, like, I hate surveys, I hate data, because people love to look at it and see the number they want to see. And it's really easy to say, "Oh, the workforce is 50% women, 50% men. It must be equal participation." It's not equal participation. Far fewer women participate in the labor force for paid work. We should talk about paid versus unpaid labor. So it's really important to understand that, even when the pandemic destroyed the workforce and 5.3 million women fell out of the paid workforce, when that came back with economic recovery, when the labor market bounced back, women came back less in every single state of the United States. So we're still underemployed, you could say, in every single state. It's craziness.

- It is crazy. How do you think our organizations should be addressing that to attract women? And maybe the question is a little different. Like, what has changed now and how do we have to think about attracting women differently?

- I love to call bull on the talent shortage. There is no talent shortage. There is a shortage of our ability to see available talent. That's in every capacity. We don't see those that are underemployed, underutilized, underpromoted, underrepresented. It should be illegal that there's a pay gap, period, end of story. I can't believe it's not a fireable offense for there to be a pay gap in your organization. But I guarantee there is. Race, gender. So, when organizations think about the future of work, they need to deeply understand the labor market. They need to deeply understand the talent economy. And they need to start viewing the availability of talent, not by head count and bodies, necessarily. That's a mistake we make a lot in diversity recruiting. We check boxes and we count the number of people by demographic category, and we say, "Oh, we must be doing okay." You

have to understand how to utilize people fractionally by skills. You have to learn how to evaluate their capability to do a job, not necessarily based on their historical performance in the same job, or you're never going to think about how to better utilize people based on their skills, their capabilities, not just their current acquired skills, but their future desired skills. That's the future of the labor force. Every organization complains they have to reskill and upskill the labor market to keep up with digitization and the new skills required in the now of work. We say the now of work at Leapgen, not the future of work. But they literally haven't changed anything about the way they view talent to keep up with all of these trends. And so, I actually think it's a huge challenge and a huge opportunity at the same time to deconstruct jobs and reconstruct people based on new ways to match people to opportunity.

- I think that's such an exciting idea. Because we talk about interview, right? Interviews, you ask those behavioral questions and you go, "Okay, well they performed here in the past, so they must be able to perform at a certain level." But I love that idea of just disrupting your thinking about it and looking at talent differently. That's so cool.

- Yeah, I mean, it's a fact that women are less likely to apply to a job, unless they consider themselves 100% qualified. Men will apply to a job if they consider themselves at least 60% qualified. It's been proven. We can all find the stat. I'll go find the source. But we know that that's true and there's a thing called imposter syndrome, and there's just historical underutilization and underrepresentation of some members of the labor force. Not just women, but other people who require accommodation or who haven't been historically promoted or advanced. And so, that affects our confidence when we consider ourselves qualified for a job. So employers have to remove the barriers that we're used to having to overcome. Don't make talent jump over obstacles and consider their own ways to get around the barriers that have existed. Do the job for them. Employers need to remove those barriers. And one really easy thing to do is to reconsider your job descriptions. All of those minimum required qualifications, are they truly required? Knowing that some people in the workforce won't apply unless they feel, and we're gonna be hard on ourselves, they check every single box, so the more boxes you put in your job description, you're limiting and narrowing your candidate pool with every single thing you put in your job description. So consider what's truly required. Make it feel approachable, accessible. You know, describe all of the alternate ways somebody might have achieved that experience. If somebody took a break from the workforce, by the way, if they stepped out of the workforce during the pandemic to provide caregiving, to manage the household, to school children, you cannot tell me they weren't gaining valuable skills, making incredible contributions, learning new things. That was work too. It just wasn't paid work. But we don't know how to advocate for ourselves. We don't

know how to sell that on a resume. So again, employers, this is nothing more than empathy, basic human accommodation, and it's really just sort of understanding where people are at and what they bring to the table and opening the conversation a little bit more.

- You bring up a good point about those skills that you might've acquired while you were working differently, that's how I'll phrase it. And we've seen programs now that have started to rise up called returnship programs. Have you seen those and do you think they're valuable or do you think we're missing the mark there?

- Yeah, absolutely, returnship programs are accommodation. It's finding flexible, creative ways to invite people into the workforce on their terms. I love saying that. Let people work on their terms. That's so accommodating. We do, you know, we have all kinds of diversity recruitment initiatives, but we don't consider what the groups of people we're trying to attract, who we haven't historically attracted, perhaps, that's why we call it diversity recruiting, but we don't consider once they get into our workforce what work will feel like for them, what might feel jarring, what kind of support they might require. So if we attract them in and then they come in and they go, "Oh, my gosh, I don't, number one, I don't know if this, I don't feel like I belong here," or, "I don't know if I can be successful here," or, "I wonder if I'm providing value." Think about all of those things and then meet that person where they are. "What would work for you to feel like you're contributing, for us to gain value and for you to feel like you're making an impact?" So I love the concept of returnship programs. It's just creative accommodation.

- Have you seen any changes on how we attract women in positions that are more hourly or more, not knowledge workers, so more retail, more manufacturing? Because I think there is different flexibility that women need based on some of the very traditional roles we have to play in our families. Have you seen a change there at all?

- Yeah, I think those are great opportunities to get women engaged in the workforce, again, on their terms. Because shift work, let's say, can be a lot different than the traditional nine-to-five, even in our knowledge, our salaried positions and the knowledge worker positions. Even though we've broken a lot of the rules when it comes to how and where work gets done, we still have a mindset about the fact that that work is performed Monday through Friday, nine to five, even though we're in our laptop at midnight doing the exact same work we're doing at 12:00 noon on a Tuesday. So it's still a little bit of a mindset that that kind of work has to be performed during traditional business days and hours and synchronously with other team members. I think we're getting really creative and to a lot of people's benefits about the fact that even salaried knowledge worker positions can be performed asynchronously, around the clock, in shifts, so to speak. You know, teams will get creative in the ways they communicate with

each other and collaborate with each other, even if they're on the same team. But to the other end, to your point, positions that aren't performed so traditionally, which also overlap, by the way, with school hours and activity pickups and family activities and that kind of thing, that those are great options. I think we still have a lot of work to do around living wage increases to make that work feel more approachable so that it doesn't, I don't think we've caught up yet. We definitely haven't caught up yet in terms of making that work pay off, but it's a great option.

- You talked a little bit about imposter syndrome. And I've often wondered, you know, there's this balance of making sure that we're providing the right resources for women, the right flexibility for women, but I also think there's a component, as women, we need to make some changes in how we approach things. How have you coached women to do that, to step up or to show up in a way that still feels authentic, right? I'm not talking about, you know, showing up masculine compared to our feminine nature. But I think there is ways where we can be a little bit more bold or a little bit more assertive in a way that feels naturally, though. How have you helped women do that?

- I love that question. Yeah, imposter syndrome is unfortunate. It's unfortunate that it's a thing, that it exists. I think once we give ourselves a label, it's, you know, becomes sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy, perhaps. So, I like to reject it, actually. Like, oh my god, really? But honestly, when you think about imposter syndrome or sort of feeling like you don't belong in the room or what if I don't actually have what it takes to sit at this table, I guess my best response is, no wonder, no wonder. Like, we're literally, I'm gonna go back to the pay gap. We do the same task. We could sit here right now and perform the same chore and you could hand the man next to me \$1 and then hand me a bunch of nickels and dimes in change. 85 cents to the dollar, still today, for white women in the workforce. Next week, at the time of this recording, we still haven't reached Equal Pay Day for Black women. Last week, we had Equal Pay Day for Working Moms. Working moms are the largest group of diverse talent available in the workforce, in the labor market. And you're asking me how to get women back to work? Pay them.

- Yeah.

- Pay them. So no wonder imposter syndrome exists. Like, we overcome barriers every single day. We're invited to the table, but our voices aren't always equally heard or given the same, you know, sort of impact and contribution. We treat hiring women like it's some celebratory, you know, check box on, like, "Oh, congratulations to us. We have equal representation at this tier in our organization." Okay, great, congratulations, you attracted women. Show me the boardroom.

- Yeah.

- And then show me, open all of your payroll books and show me that you've overcome the pay gap. And we won't even ask for back pay, by the way. Women aren't even demanding back pay. Again, this should be illegal. And so, when I think about imposter syndrome, it's sort of like, okay, it exists, let's just accept that this might be something you have to overcome. No wonder, like there have been all of these historical barriers and wrongdoings and that kind of thing. And we'll overcome that, but at an individual level, it's sort of owning your voice. I have three little girls, and they're getting older now. But when they were all in grade school, now they're grade school and middle school, I teach them how to advocate for themselves. And honestly, all of the playground rules I've been teaching them for years apply in the world of work. Every single rule on the playground. Know your voice. Use your voice. Use your voice to stand up for others. When you need it, find a trusted person to help you. And if all of that doesn't work, mom comes in. It's really the same rules. Advocating for yourself and looking out for bullies and standing up for what's right, all of these rules apply in the world of work, honestly. Know your voice, take up space, use your voice with confidence, and sometimes you just have to like go for it, right, even if you're not feeling it. But also, championship and allyship. Use your voice on behalf of others. See something, say something. If that doesn't feel right, it's probably not right. If a job description or an application process or the way you're being assessed or considered for a promotional opportunity or advancement, if that's not transparent, a transparent process is likely to be an equitable process. Because if you've made it transparent, you're self-accountable. And it's nothing more than sort of dignifying the process to say, "Here's what we're going to do together. And here's how we'll assess your qualifications so that you know how to show up." And it would be even better to say, "Given all of that, what accommodation might you require to show up the way you'd like to?" Oh my gosh, like there's such small, easy things we can do to meet somebody halfway so that they can have some confidence and overcome, perhaps, their own, you know, imposter syndrome. But we are also giving them a chance to step into the process with more confidence, with understanding and transparency about how they'll be evaluated, and with a little bit more trust, hopefully, that they'll be considered fairly because you've taken the time to explain what goes into the process.

- I really like that. It's showing up to the interview process with empathy and not just, you know, the sheet of paper where you have your list of questions and you're gonna check them off. But it's really connecting with the person and making sure that they have the opportunity to speak their truth.

- Yeah, absolutely.

- What are you most excited about for women in work now, as you said

it?

- Well, I think what we learned in the last couple of years, we're trying to create, we've certainly seen the need to create more empathetic leadership. Employers are starting to understand that people-first organizations, building people-first cultures, literally putting humans at the heart of your organization, it's not just lip service anymore. It's actually the only way you'll attract and retain talent. We learned that over the pandemic, and the power shifted. We saw this shift of employee power, where people, whether or not, you know, whether or not we're in a recession, honestly, people are still making choices on their own behalf and in their own best interests. And so, employers don't get to be ass anymore. They don't get away with stuff like they used to. And again, that's true regardless of the market conditions. Employers used to get really fancy about their employer value propositions and their culture and their perks and their benefits and everything would be very employee-rich when talent markets were really, really tight. And then maybe that work and those initiatives were de-prioritized when talent abounds, right? Now, we're learning that employees really truly have to have or employers really have to have a heart. And there's so much transparency in our brand, our talent brand, our employment practices, that again, it has to ring true. You can't just make PR statements or, you know, put something that looks really good on your brand page. It actually has to ring true or you'll be called out for it. And so I think that's really exciting. Because I think women, I hate to gender things, but I think women are accustomed to providing that kind of nurturing leadership. I think we're accustomed to caretaking those around us in good and healthy and positive ways. I think, I hate saying women more than men, but in some cases, women have really natural people leadership abilities, extending empathy to people who, look at well-being in the workplace. It's huge. And women are good at checking in with each other, checking in with people, not checking up on people. It's a big difference. And so I'd like to say that women maybe are getting a little bit of newfound confidence that the type of leadership that's desperately needed right now is the way some women, a lot of women, are naturally inclined to lead. So step up, like, women, we need this kind of leadership more than ever, and so many of us are really well-suited for it.

- I had Jeff Harry on the podcast. This was weeks and weeks ago. But he talked about kinda going back to gender things, he talked about masculine traits and feminine traits and kinda removed gender out of it. And I really loved that perspective, because he talked about some of these feminine traits of empathy and how that can really motivate organizations. And if you can tap into a more feminine way of looking at things, the impact is going to be amazing and you'd just be surprised at that.

- Yeah, absolutely.

- Well, Jess, thank you so much. This is a topic I'm very passionate about. I help lead our women's ERG at Paylocity, so I'm always excited to hear what other people are doing in this space. And I'm excited to see what women, how we change the workforce. I think there's so much that we've been untapped to utilize, and I'm just excited about the future.

- And I love it, thank you so much for having me.

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