- 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. Alex, thank you so much for taking a few minutes of your day to sit with me.

- Oh, it's wonderful to be here. I really appreciate it.

- So you have a really unique role in the knowledge and learning space at SHRM. And so I wanted to start with what skills do you think HR professionals are gonna need for the future?

- Oh, good god, I get asked this question so much, it's not even funny. You know, there's the bread and butter that we always take for granted when I think about HR, and some of it is just the stuff that we've seen over the course of time. You know, whether it's the compliance things that we always think about, the engagement areas that we always think about and those types of things. Those are the bread and butter. And I think what we're seeing is spillover of those skills into other parts of the world of work, right? So that's people, managers and what have you. But you asked me specifically about the future skills for HR professionals and I've got three of them that stand out in my mind. The first one is being an engineer of engagement experiences. And notice I said experience, not engagement by itself, right? And I'd actually argue that this profession is ripe for a name change to call ourselves really engagement engineers or experience engineers for people that work. That's one thing that I see over and over again. And in many cases, we talk about this specifically in the concepts of, you hear it over and over again, HR professionals need to be better marketers, right? And the more I see it, it's actually about building that experience. How do I create that experience that people will want to have over and over again? In addition, the other thing that sort of strikes me is I see people really looking for the notion, we always used to say change management or that change agent. And in reality, what I like to think of it is you need to be a reimagineer. And the reason I say that in large part is what we see is people are being asked to, how do I reinvent this organization and this workforce and what they deliver on a recurring basis, right? I have good colleagues from the Department of Defense who always share with me, we're constantly dealing with this term VUCA, which is actually volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. And one of the things that they always ask is, people say that this is a novel thing, but in reality this is the common cadence of any organization, any mission. And to me it's the reimagineers that will actually ensure that we're engaged in that reinvention over and over again. And then the last thing I always look for is I need somebody who's gonna be a data architect, right? And when I say that, I'm talking about somebody who can actually provide the architecture around the data that we want to collect about our workforce over and over again. And I'm borrowing

from a guy by the name of John Boudreau when I say that. But it's really the key component in terms of how well we create and craft those other experiences.

– For those three pillars, where do you see HR going to seek those skills and learn more in those areas?

– So some of it, whether we like it or not, is actually gonna be from those bread and butter kind of organizations. But some of it is gonna be trial by fire and it's actually gonna be on the job kind of thinking. What I always espouse though is, and I tell people to do this, is there's three ways that you can really develop yourself and build these skills. The first is take a cross-functional operational assignment. Do not waste your time just being in HR, try to get yourself an operational assignment. The second is make sure that you go about actually engaging in work and learning that is atypical for yourself, right? I'm an HR professional by birth and by background, right? And I'll share with you that one thing that I love is lectures. And I love going to training programs. Problem with that is, that's not gonna get me the learning that I need in this case. And the last thing that I always espouse is find yourself a true mentor, but don't make it such that you're actually forcing that individual to teach you. What you want to do is you wanna make sure that that mentor actually says to you, take this problem, tell me how you'd solve it. Walk me through the way that you go about that cognition and tell me how you determine what the problem sets are and what the solution sets might be. Having that conversation gives you half the development that you need.

– What a great example on how to think about mentorship differently too. Not just check the box do as I say, but like, let's have a conversation so I can, like you said, understand what you're thinking to get you to the next level. So important.

– You know, it's interesting, a lot of people don't actually think about that. They always think about the tried and true. What are the things that every mentor is supposed to do? What does a coach look like? And I tell you, I'm stunned at how it can be reinvented and rethunk or rethought, I should say, over and over again.

– Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, being in the learning space in SHRM and looking ahead at, you know, the future of work and the future of the HR role, do you think we're gonna see a change or influence to SHRM's BASK model because of that?

– So we've started to see some of that as it speaks, right? And it's sort of funny 'cause if you go back 11 years, I was actually involved heavily in the development of the SHRM competency model, which became the SHRM BoCK and then now is the SHRM BASK. And it always strikes me how far we've come and people don't really see it, 'cause on paper it

looks so small. But, you know, one of the things that we talk about specifically is in the first set, the competency model, we really didn't even talk about DE&I. And here we're sitting at the SHRM Inclusion Conference and back then 10 years ago, we didn't even invest in it. We didn't memorialize it enough to do something about it. And here we are today. It's one of the leading kind of competencies that exist out there, one of the skills and knowledges that we ask people to really take into account. We're starting to see that, I would tell you that we're still another five years away from when we're gonna have just what we're looking for, which is having that person who's a data architect, having that person who understands re-imagination and understands how they go about doing these things.

— I'm excited to see where these experience curators land. It's such a fascinating topic for me. And there's so much from the marketing world that HR can learn from that. And just how that translates into our employees and especially with Gen Z coming on board.

— Oh, it's amazing to me. And you know, the one thing I do is, and I share this with a lot of folks, is I actually try to influence degree programs to do this, right? I know that education is not typically where we want, we force people to go have these real life experiences. But what I will tell you is I've actually been working with a variety of different programs that are relatively new with the idea of forcing them to build their programs as if they were experienced curators. Rather than actually thinking about them as HR. A prime example of this is the University of Miami and their Experience Curation Program, which is really their HR program.

— Wow, I hadn't heard of that before. That's fascinating. Do you think SHRM will start to be putting content out around that as well?

— I would love to see us do that. And I'm pretty sure that we will in the very near future. Ironically, we have a series of different kind of toolkits that are coming out just for that.

— Oh, that's awesome. You know, as you think forward then, for the next few years and those that are new in the HR space and new in their career, what's your advice to make sure that they're getting up to speed? You know, should they become more focused on a specific topic? Should they still think of themselves as generalist? What are you seeing and what advice do you have for the industry?

— So when I think about who's entering the profession and what they're doing in terms of entering that profession the first thing that strikes me is I almost encourage 'em to have come from a different path. Make sure that you're doing that. And I say that in large part because when you look at the people that end up leading organizations, they've never taken a straight line. There are very few people that jump in and say, I was gonna be an entrepreneur and I'm gonna go lead

an organization. It's so atypical for that to happen that it's unusual for that to really be the case. I almost ask them, go take some other kind of developmental assignment or take a whole other world like operational sales, take your pick, and you end up jumping into that, right? And jumping into people experiences. The other piece of advice that I always give people is make sure that you actually get in the heart of doing the bread and butter HR work. Most people say, well go be a generalist, right? That's not what I actually espouse. I call for doing a little bit of a rotation within HR and I say in large part because you don't really understand the depth of what's being asked of you until you've done about three months in each place. I'll never forget my experience, I was working at an airline and I was asked to jump from employee relations to compensation all the way through to benefits. And then after that, culture and org development.

– Wow.

– Right? And I thought to myself, man, I'm so woefully under-skilled in all of these. I can't even understand what's going on. But having done three months in each made a real difference in my perspective. And then the last thing that I actually ask people to do is focus on what they can do to be a better people manager. 'Cause any good HR professional understands what it means to manage others. And if you don't, even if you're just an individual contributor go get assets, training, whatever it might be to really understand what it takes to lead others.

– Alex, what great advice you have for those listening. I appreciate you taking a few minutes of your day to chat with me.

– I really appreciate the opportunity, and it's wonderful to be here with you.

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