

- Hey, and welcome to PCTY Talks. I'm your host Sherry 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. On today's episode with me, I have Lauren Rivera-Haire. She is a senior HR business partner here at Paylocity. She has supported a multiple of different business units in our organization, and currently is our rock star that supports client services. So Lauren, thanks for jumping on with me.

- Always good to join and excited to talk about a very important topic today.

- Absolutely. You have been such an advocate for mental health, not only in our organization, but in our friendship. And so I really wanted to bring you on and have a pretty frank conversation about HR and mental health. You know, you personally have been dealing with mental health issues during the pandemic and I appreciate your vulnerability and courage to share your story with the audience. So what has your experience been like trying to manage mental health and your job in HR?

- Yeah. And so I kind of wanna talk about this first from the perspective of just HR itself, because I think that's a really good place to start and thinking about how the pandemic has really just flipped the rules of HR, just turned everything over on its head. You know, we've gone from a more transit action type of role to now a very strategic kind of role. We've had to support the business leaders and employees with things like going remote, trying to figure out when we're gonna go back to the office, managing COVID exposures, assisting employees who are ill, managing childcare at home keeping on top of all the changing legislations and, I mean, unfortunately some have had to manage layoffs as well. So with all of this change, it is difficult and it takes a toll on everybody's mental health. So if you couple that with someone like me, who specifically me have had to manage multiple mental health conditions and even some and physical conditions that have put me in high risk category for COVID, it's been a lot to handle. You know, I personally, I have a four year old that we've had to hold back from preschool and I know there's so many others out there that have very similar stories to me. So at some point personally, a lot of these things combined really least set my mental health into a tailspin. And I know that individuals with mental health conditions across the board while everyone's journeys are very different. I think that's been an experience across the board. And I've heard of many stories where HR professionals are feeling burned out and just kind of struggling to cope with all of the change and honestly the difficult times trying to support leaders and employees through the pandemic. So, you know, as you think about that, I mean, I personally was encouraged to start to put first for once and that was really powerful. So I took some time off and I've come back. And so,

I'm gonna talk a little more about not just my perspective but kind of things that can help HR professionals overall.

- As you've thought about your experience in sharing with others in the HR space, what have you learned that you can share with HR professionals about taking care of themselves to prevent burnout as they continue to try to take care of employees needs during this time?

- The first thing I would say is learn from my mistakes. So with many HR professionals having to go remote, this has been a new environment for us too and it's created a little bit of an additional challenge in that we've become so accessible and it can be very difficult to disconnect, even myself personally, I struggled with that as I kind of used it as a coping mechanism to get through the difficult times. So things that I would suggest to help with this that I've sort of learned through my own journey is to really start to implement boundaries. There are times where leaders may sometimes or employees may reach out with something that maybe is a little bit of a lower priority and maybe is something they can find themselves through a resource. Maybe you have to tell them, yeah, I'm gonna be done at this time, or I'm taking an appointment during this time or there's another priority. And many times they may figure it out on their own. So really sticking to those boundaries is important. And also, I know you hear this all the time but I cannot stress enough putting blocks in your calendar. I was very guilty of stacking meetings on top of each other on top of each other to the point where you're just exhausted at the end of the day. It is so important, I actually do this now at the end of the week for the next week, throw in some blocks and hold those sacred. Use those to step away, use them to get some exercise, use them to just enjoy lunch, something, just take that time to disconnect. It is gonna be great for your mental health, as I've started to do that, I've even noticed that it's almost like I get a second win for the afternoon. So I can't stress that enough, it is so important. Also one thing that's helped me is kind of knowing when you're at your peak in terms of work. This sounds really kind of funny so I'm gonna try to explain it as best as I can. Me personally, I'm not a morning person, no way. If you put a meeting before nine on my calendar, I'm probably not gonna be very functional. Part of that is I'm on some medications that take a little while to kick in but I know that I work best in the afternoon. So my blocks actually start more in the beginning of the day. And I use that time to just do things like administrative work, focusing on my emails, things like that. Then I can start to again, get more motivated to go about the day. And I found that it's actually helped me just be better in my job overall.

- It's interesting that you shared at the beginning of of your response or around using work as a coping mechanism at the beginning of the pandemic, that so resonated with me. I remember putting in like 12 hours a day that those first few weeks that we were in lockdown because it's like, well, I have nothing to do, I might as well go do

work. And that's not sustainable for sure. So, I mean, thankfully I've made some changes but if you're listening and you're still functioning at that level almost two years later, it's absolutely time to take a break and I love calendar blocking, I've talked about it before, I think it's so important. And if you don't have the ability to block it and per se, do a walk, use it as heads downtime. Even that, that mental break from the phone calls and the meetings is super helpful. You know, one of the things that we lean heavily on in HR is our managers being able to kind of be that frontline response, frontline observation of what's happening with employees. How do you feel about, or what do you think about training managers on mental health warning signs?

- So I think that there's a couple aspects to think about there. And one thing I actually forgot to mention in your prior question that just came to mind for HR professionals as they're trying to navigate their own mental health is something that my psychologist told me that just resonated with me which was try to find things that give you joy. She even asked me, what do you do for joy? And I said, that's a great question. You know, in the pandemic, I forgot to think about things that actually make me happy. My hobbies were not a thing anymore. So that's another thing that I can't recommend enough is to just remember, even though it's a difficult time, find those ways, find those hobbies and just find ways, discover ways to give yourself joy again. Going back to training managers, I would say first of all, that we are not experts. I don't try to be one, even though I've been through a lot of experiences with it, I'm not a medical professional. So it is very important when you're coming up with training content, partnering with a mental health professional is really ideal.

- I like that. And we did a webinar with Dr. Lia Knox. She's a registered psychologist and she had a lot of really great feedback around that. I'll include a link to that recording in the show notes if anybody wants to watch that recording. Lot of really great questions from employers on how to handle different mental health issues. You know, one of the things though that she did touch base on and we've talked about before is, there are things that managers can build into their practice, not necessarily to diagnose mental health issues but to just start paying attention to. So I'll give you some examples, like if you're an organization that's cameras on right now, if you're hybrid or you're remote and all of a sudden you have an employee who no longer wants to be on camera, that would be a flag, right? That's like, what's going on? You know, maybe it's something simple as they're working from a family member's house and they don't like the background and that kind of stuff. But maybe it's more complicated, or if you have somebody who's very social, very engaging, and then all of a sudden they're quiet, right? Some of these behavior changes are worth looking into if somebody typically comes to a meeting and they're energized and now they seem tired and they're yawning, those are things that we can pick up now on. And don't

necessarily mean there's a mental health issue going on but it should be a good trigger for you to think about, hey, what's going on? Is their workload right? Is their home life more complicated right now? Has something changed that? I should know about as a manager and HR professional to help them succeed. Those are all good things just to kind of have in your back pocket. You know, a lot of the programs that we work with in HR around mental health are specific to maybe EAP or another mental health software that you might have in place. What if you're recommending those to employees and because of the bandwidth of the mental health community right now, the professional community, you're not getting feedback from them, or it's taking forever to get scheduled with somebody through your EAP. What's your advice there?

- And it's funny you mentioned that because that is absolutely something that I've heard a lot that mental health professionals are very busy, they can be difficult to get ahold of. So I kind of have my little I guess my resource guide outside of things like the EAP that can be helpful to others. A big one is if you recognize that an employee is in sort of a crisis mode, you know they're having things like suicidal ideation, that is a time where they need to be directed to places like the emergency room to get immediate care, make sure that they're not alone. Also, there's some really great resources in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. There's actually even one that I personally have used in a crisis time that you can actually text with someone. So it's called [crisistextline.org](https://www.crisistextline.org). That's a great resource if someone is just to the point where they can't even physically talk to someone, you can actually text with someone and get some help. You know you mentioned that there's some apps out there, there's apps not just for finding mental health providers, but for meditation, for mindfulness, for journaling, there's just a wealth of information out there, it's just a matter of knowing where to find it. I've also personally used places like Psychology Today. There's a huge list of providers, NAMI's a great resource. So outside of things like EAP, you can really put together sort of a resource guide of things like these to be able to recommend to employees who are having this struggle or if you are even having this struggle yourself.

- As you are thinking about implementing a program, so let's say you have an EAP, but you're going down the road in this journey and say, you know what? We need to give more, we need to provide more. Maybe we need to purchase some sort of mental health subscription for people. Maybe we need to implement yoga Fridays, whatever it is but we all know you have to bring that up to your executive team and have the conversation when you're gonna back something with dollars. How have you helped to influence those types of changes when dealing with senior leadership?

- So I think there's a lot of ways to work with senior leadership now to get them on board. Now I hate, it's pretty known at this point that the pandemic has really impacted mental health. It's out there in the

media everywhere. So the approach that I recommend and that I've taken with working with leadership at this level are to look at things like turnover and interview data, and maybe even stay interviews, just any kind of data that you can get that kind of puts together this story that shows that there is a mental health impact here. And then from there, once you've got their buy-in, you can start to think about different types of programs, things like, even webinars, I'm just mental health awareness, whether it's for leaders or for employees, or for both, you know, there's all kinds of things. And then to even take it to the next level, to be more impactful, just like you mentioned, there's also great resources there that employers can use to help really support their employees through some of these challenges.

- So as we kinda wrap up, this idea around mental health and HR, one of the things that I think about a lot is how do we keep employees engaged right now? Because there's this mental toll, I have had a Zoom chat and chew, I'm gonna call it that with a friend the other day. And it was so funny because it was the end of a day, it was on Friday and we both jumped on and we were both very happy to see each other, but at the same time, we were kinda like, yeah, it's another Zoom meeting for the day. And it was this dichotomy of trying to stay connected and invest emotionally but also just being completely mentally burned out because you spent all day in front of a screen I know there's been some research out there that you should start turning off your self view when you're on Zoom meetings 'cause it's not like you're looking at yourself when you're in a physical meeting, is an opportunity to kind of give yourself some more brain energy. But if you think about engaging your employees, how do you do that in a way that makes them feel comfortable and engaged instead of fearful on being able to say to HR management, I'm struggling, it's too much work. I can't do it on top of A, B and C. The work life right now, it's different if you are, and this is true, whether you are in an office still working, if you are hybrid or if you're fully remote. The stress that we're experiencing right now in so many ways is hitting all of us. So this isn't just for knowledge workers who are salaried in a remote environment, it's for everybody. How do you create that conversation or that safe space for employees to say, yep, I'm struggling, I need help?

- So I think that there's a lot of ways you can do this. And I love that you talked about having sort of a chat and chew because those are great environments to be able to stay connected. You know, leaders can host things like breakfast with the boss or just ways for leaders to interact with employees, in those meetings, cameras on is optional. I know I'm one of those two that gets Zoom fatigue, and if I'm having a rough day in terms of my own mental health, it is nice to be able to turn that camera off, but then, there's that element of connection. So as a leader or as an HR professional, I just think it's so important to be vulnerable yourself. So when people recognize that leaders or HR professionals as well are going through the same types of things you

are, it actually creates a better connection and it makes them feel like then they have the comfort and that psychological safety to be able to talk to you about their struggles. And it can actually help you be more supportive too since you started to think about it from your own perspective and understanding. So I've been very fortunate that the leadership has been phenomenal in supporting me with my mental health. And again, like even hearing some of their vulnerabilities has been just huge for me in terms of even myself

- Such a great practice to be vulnerable, right? So many times in HR, I think we get stuck in this. I have to present myself in a very polished, very put together way. And the reality is we're human, like, we talked on an episode at the end of the year about office parties. It's like, I still wanna go to the office party and have fun. Like I'm still dealing with the pandemic just like everybody else is. And you're absolutely right, we've had some really great leadership say, you know what? I had a conversation with my doctor and I asked for help. And that just, it levels the playing field for this conversation and it's so important. So Lauren, thank you for being vulnerable and sharing some of your experience and really pushing HR professionals to think a little bit differently about their own mental health and creating some space for themselves. So I appreciate you.

- Well, thank you for having me on, always a joy.

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