- 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 pro leadership, compliance, and real life HR situations we face every day. I'd like to welcome Gita Barry to the podcast today. She is the EVP and GM of Immersive Healthcare at Penumbra. I'm so excited to have you on the podcast today. And this topic around VR is so exciting.

- Well, thank you so much for having me, Shari. This is awesome.

- I'd love to start by talking a little bit about your session you did here at HR Tech. It was called Using Virtual Reality to foster a positive work culture. And for those listening who may be very new to the concept of VR, let's just start there. What is VR?

- So virtual reality is this opportunity to use technology that immerses you in an experience. The way that you typically look at it is you're gonna say, oh, they're wearing a headset. What is that thing on someone's head? And that thing on someone's head is fundamentally a computer that's generating the imagery that creates a 360-degree experience. And it can create an experience with video. So live video like something like you'd see on Netflix or other ways that you'd see video, or it can be something that's been computer generated in terms of animation. And so, there's all different ways to make the content that can be delivered. But virtual reality is about an immersive experience.

- How do you see that changing the workplace?

- Wow, that's such a great question.

- I know, it's a deep one.

- Well, 'cause it depends on the workplace that you're in. And so I think for us, why we're here at HR Tech is that we see this is an opportunity to bring complicated topics to the forefront that are really hard to do in a 2D format. And even sometimes in an in-person format. And so we are really focused today for example, on sexual harassment and discrimination training and you think, oh, how did this healthcare company end up in sexual harassment and discrimination training? But the idea was is that we saw in healthcare and all of our products as we're working with patients of providers, that VR has this incredible opportunity to engage someone in content. And if you engage them in content, they can go well beyond what they think they can do if they're doing it through traditional means. Even with the most incredible practitioner and the most incredible provider, the incredible leader or teacher, or guide for content, VR just adds that element of I'm there. And if you are there, all of a sudden you're so much more engaged. And so if you go back to sexual harassment and discrimination training, I may not wanna necessarily do my standard

compliance training this way. But with sexual harassment and discrimination, it's really about, I gotta put myself there to really understand what's happening. Because if it's not happened to me, I'm watching a video and I'm like, oh my god, that's kind of lame. Right, like is that really gonna happen? Oh, that's a canned video. What does that look like? But in this case, we can not just put you as a bystander, that third person who's watching a skit or watching something happen, we can also put you in the first person. So we can put your eyes as the person who's being discriminated against, we can put your eyes as the person who's being harassed. We can put you in as the bystander who's going watching two people and going, oh, this is really uncomfortable now. Because you're really feeling the experience in a totally different way.

– I never thought about that application of this. And just as you were talking, I'm getting goosebumps thinking about having a training that way where, I mean, like you said, feeling the harassment. I mean, it's amazing. It's amazing the changes we can make about helping people understand DEI with a tool like this. You know, you talked about a recent study from PWC that found employees in VR courses can be trained in soft skills up to four times faster. How do you start to evaluate like the quality of a VR training and the tracking tools? 'Cause that's kind of an age old dilemma that HR has in general is like quality of training and then tracking if it got done.

– I think it really comes down to a couple of different elements. The most subjective way that I can describe it, which is sort of that immediate piece of feedback is, are people talking about it? I think, if you think about so much training and things that are developed, people do them because they're trying to check a box, they go to training, no one goes, yay, I wanna go to this compliance training. Like I have yet to meet that person, I'm a business leader, I don't think I found anyone on my team that's like, yes! I can't wait to go to that training today. But the difference is if they're talking about it after the event, what we see in the scenarios and the scenes that we build is that people wanna know how the stories end. And I've never been to a training where someone actually cared to know where the stories end. That to me is what gives you that subjective sense of like, are we making progress? The next step then becomes, okay, are there qualitative ways to do that? I mean, beyond the qualitative, can you get to quantitative ways to do that? And you start to ask yourself the questions of retention, You can test later to see how are things going. You can also look to see how are my instinct going over time, right? So if you're specifically in this case doing sexual harassment and discrimination training, you train your entire employee base. You know what that looked like when you were doing traditional training. You can do the VR training and say, did we improve? Did we get better? Or are we having different conversations? Again, that's more qualitative not quantitative, but that's how you start to know whether not the training's making an impact. You start to see it pretty

immediately 'cause people talk, and you don't get people to talk about this kind of training at all.

– No, I totally agree. We just went through, basically our security training and you know, the things that you need to do when you work in an organization that has very sensitive data. We do it every year and it's one of those things where you kind of get used to doing it so you know how it's going. But again, nobody's talking about it. Nobody's having these kind of sidebar conversations like, hey, did you take the security training this week? Wasn't it awesome? So to have that experience, that's fascinating. Do you ever see the tech involved with wearing a headset get in the way of training? Or I guess I'll ask the question a little bit of a different way. How do you get over maybe the barrier or the phobia of, hey, I'm gonna put this headset on to get my training?

– So one of the things that we've done is that we've really looked at how do we have something that's really easy to use. If you take just a straight gaming headset, right? So if anyone's out there with kids who have an Oculus headset, a VR headset, they're out there gaming. You know you're gonna end up with a headset, some controllers, you gotta figure out how to use this, you're setting up all these safety barriers, you don't need that for training. You're gonna be sitting. No, I don't know anyone who's interested in standing and using Beat Saber for example, to go ahead and do their, you know, sexual harassment discrimination training or other trainings. So if you build a really simple user interface such that you can walk someone through a tutorial, it's really straightforward and they can get into that content relatively quickly. That's what we see is the opportunity to get someone comfortable with VR. And what we know from healthcare is we've seen people of all ages really respond incredibly well to VR. There are gonna be some people just like anything else where it may not be the thing for them, but that's not different than putting somebody on a computer or putting somebody on a mobile device, that's just everyone's comfort with technology but people really get into VR. It's kind of amazing.

– One of the reasons I asked the question about the tech getting in the way is you actually brought in a model of what you're using. And I know if you're listening, it might be a little harder and we'll post a link in the show notes so you can actually see this. But maybe you can describe a little bit about the actual product of wearing a VR headset and what it looks like and how you interact with it.

– So what you're gonna do with a VR headset, I describe it as like wearing a hat. You're gonna put on this hat, the part that's the goggles is maybe used another way of describing it that has the lenses and the cameras in it. Sounds so complicated and detailed. Really, you're just putting on a hat with a computer on your head. That sounds really strange. You're gonna sit down and put a computer on your head.

But the key about putting that device on your head and getting it comfortable and snug is that you are going to now be immersed in a different kind of experience. And so, it's that experience, I describe the headset and the hardware, just a piece of hardware, right? Like to me, we all care about our phones, but really what we do with our phone is what's on the inside, right? It's about the apps that you use, it's about the calendar, it's about your email, it's about all those other functions, whether you embody it in an Android device or in an iOS device. It's how you personally choose them but fundamentally still hardware. And it's important hardware. I don't wanna distract from anybody's recent release, but the key is what's on the inside and how comfortable are you with that user interface? How comfortable are you with that content? Is it easy to use and easy to access? Because like any other training tool, if it's not easy to use, it doesn't matter how good the training is. People will not accept it. They won't choose it. They won't incorporate it, whether it's at an enterprise level or if it's even just the individual user, who's gotta go in and do that training. So as much as I've talked about VR and the generalities just like how does this technology work, the specific technology that Penumbra makes is our real vision VR training and wellness. What we've done to solve those questions around how do we make this easy to use is we've gone to complete gaze-based navigation. It means that you just move your head in order to select, to choose things, keep it really simple for the user to get comfortable with the VR experience. What we've also done is we've built our own content. So the content itself is intended to be really engaging. No one wants to go and put on a headset and just watch something that they could watch on another screen. The goal of this is that one, you've got 360-degree view. There's stuff going on in the background around you. There's just like you would be if you were standing there, watching something happen, whether it's happening to yourself or happening to you as a bystander. This experience feels like you are there, and that is ultimately our goal with the technology. And that's what unlocks the kind of the training experience and the quality of the training experience that you were pointing to earlier, Shari.

— That quality is so important. And I'm curious if you could elaborate, you know, for those listening and they say, yes, you know, what I'm totally bought into this idea of VR. I wanna bring it to my organization. I wanna think differently about training. How do I evaluate a good VR offering? 'Cause I suspect just like any other training, there's probably offerings that are very robust and immersive, and there's offerings that I would consider check the box.

— So what I'm gonna say is like anything else at the forefront of technology, you gotta try it. Until you try the experience, any professional, HR professional is gonna know their teams best. They're gonna know what fits for them. They're gonna know what feels right. They're also gonna know whether or not an enterprise training like environment, like an office environment makes sense, or if they're

looking for something in a different kind of environment. It has to make like, if you've got a whole bunch of folks, for example, in a manufacturing environment, the office environment may not feel like the right place for them. So the same way that you would look at training for your broader other tools, you wanna apply that same type of thinking for VR. But probably the most important thing is you've gotta try it. One of the hardest things with VR and I think it's not just our VR or any VR that's out there, it's really hard to describe in a 2D format what an immersive experience is like and how transformational that training can be by being immersed in the training. So make sure you ask to try it. Run a pilot, right? Run a pilot and see how your employee population feels about it in that experience, right? Build that confidence just like you would with anything else before you made a major purchase opportunity. It should be accessible in a way that you have that opportunity to learn from that. And then you get more comfortable and you know, you'll know the differences pretty quickly.

— I love that you're encouraging our listeners to try it. So I have kids, I have boys who are into VR and recently got an opportunity to try a game where you walk a plank off of a very tall building and this girl could not do it. I was like, yep, nope, not doing that. Thank you for the experience, I'm good. But the idea of doing it in this format really resonates with me. And when I switch gears just a little bit and talk about kind of the evolution of where VR is gonna take us. And I'm curious your perspective, do you ever see VR replacing face to face and kind of what I mean by that is with things like Facebook's metaverse, right? Are we gonna end up maybe in a space where we're doing one-to-one as avatars?

— So I think it really depends, right? So as Penumbra to myself, I believe in real people. The real human interaction I think is so important in what we do whether it's in business, whether it's in our family or friend relationships. If you think about human culture, it's been based on how humans interact with each other in our real sense. The metaverse I think has places. I think if you're having difficult conversations, I think if you're in an avatar versus if you are yourself in a moment, you may feel more comfortable having a conversation, that's a difficult conversation. But I think in general, our philosophy is that real people matter and that you use VR to help real people in the real world but in a way that is difficult to do, if you try to do it in the real world. So I don't think anything's all or nothing, but I think we just have to be cautious about using it in the best way to achieve the goal that we're trying to achieve.

— Do you see VR being a tool or how do you see VR being used as a tool to advance DEI initiatives?

— So I think with VR we can touch on topics that are really hard to demonstrate and really sometimes very difficult to discuss. If we

think about the diversity of our workforces and not just the diversity of our workforce overall, but also the locations of our workforce. What one might experience where I live in just outside San Francisco, maybe completely different than someone in Omaha, Nebraska, for example, versus someone in New York City, versus someone in Miami, Florida. Diversity means different things to people in different locations. What you can do with VR is you can bring similar experiences to all of those locations regardless of what diversity means there and really demonstrate it in a unique way. Again, it's a lot more engaging than what you see in a 2D video.

– Yeah, yeah, I'm just really excited about this topic overall. I can't wait to see where the future of this goes. I think we are just at the cusp of really embracing this kind of technology. You know, somebody on my team, we've often talked about using VR now that we're, you know, fully remote or mostly remote and we still have physical locations. So like how do you bring in the culture using VR and have them walk around the office, come to a meeting, and just experience the environment that we've tried to create in an office space, but at home. So I think there's so many opportunities there for us to just think differently about using this kind of technology and sexual harassment training is one of those areas where like you said, if you've never experienced that and never felt that, VR is a really great way to immerse yourself in that. I am curious though, as you talk about that kind of tech. Has there been any talk about the user feeling trauma from going through a training like that?

– So the research would show is that, and that's what we've been really cautious about and how we've thought about the training and this is where the experts that we've worked with. The last thing you wanna do is create trauma. So again, the way that we've built the content, the how we've built the scenes has been done in a thoughtful way to not just create new trauma but bring back trauma for someone who's been in that same experience. We've tried to be really respectful about the experiences, but also be meaningful. It's hard to say, you know, again, when you think about the diversity of people and the different kinds of experiences, but our goal is again to be teaching and winning forward. No one wants to create any trauma.

– I think that's true no matter what training modality you're gonna use, right? You've gotta be sensitive to the room. I was very curious about how your organization kind of thought through those things, so that's good to hear.

– Yeah, so we did that with experts in the training area. I mean, again, I wish I could say that we're all experts in everything, not possible. And so we've reached out to experts, we've reached out to people who've been doing a ton of sexual harassment and discrimination training. What they've learned over time, their PhDs, we've gone to legal experts to say. What is the best way to approach this? Do I

think that we've got a great way to do it? I absolutely think we have a great way to do it. Will we learn a lot as we continue to train folks? Absolutely, and we'll continue to hear that feedback and innovate our product from there. So as you're talking about where will VR go and how that will that continue to advance over time? I think it will come from experiences like this that will then branches in so many different areas. But I also don't think it all has to be VR. I think that's the other thing, right? I think like any new technology we should apply it where it makes sense, where we can really help people versus just saying, okay, everything's gonna be VR based now. I don't think that'll make people feel good either. And I don't wanna miss out. So I also wanna touch base on the wellness product, 'cause if you start to talk about the concepts around what else can you do with VR, this platform, this real system vision VR training and wellness also has a hundred plus experiences, 20 hours of content around just wellness. It has guided mindfulness. It can take you to a beach. You can go visit cities. So it has the ability to teach more in the middle of providing you a training experience or completely separate from a training experience. Because if you think about those employees who are working remotely for and also those employees that are working in physical locations, everyone's a lot stressed. This has been a rough few years. And we are, I think, happily talking more about mental wellness and the challenges and technology like VR can also, when you can't take a break or when you can't get out to that beach or you can't get out to that location, we can get you to a beach, we can get you to a forest, we can get you playing with sloths. We can get you lots of different places that where the 15 minute break in your day or a five minute break, whatever that time that you have, you could take a short break and just chill out it for a little bit. And I think having technology like this that can not just be your training product 'cause you don't want that to be like, uh-oh, there's the VR headset. Training must be coming. You don't want that kind of experience. What you want is to be able to say, that experience really transformed me and I was able to do something. And so for example, like these could be available in break rooms. And in a break room you wanna take a break and jump into a VR headset that could be a really normal experience as we continue to grow. So it doesn't just have to be about training. There are so many other ways that we can put VR in the workplace to help people, but in a really meaningful way.

— It's such a good example. We were just talking before you got in here about taking breaks during the day because we're remote and like, you know, can we take, you know, hyper naps or whatever, you know, those kinds of things. And we were just trading secrets around, you know, meditation apps and stuff. But I absolutely love the idea of putting on a headset, hearing the ocean for five minutes in between a call. Man that could really calm your nerves in a lot of ways.

— You can go snorkeling, you go swim with whales, we got all sorts of great things that you could do.

— Absolutely.

— That's amazing.

— And you could do something different each day. And I think that's also the fun of it, is that you don't have to choose the same experience every time. But if you do have an experience that you love, you could put it on repeat and do it for as long as you want and just hang out there. So many different ways that you can use the technology.

— Gita, what a great conversation and I'm excited that you came and shared it with not only me but our audience. 'Cause I think it's something we really gotta think about for the future of how we create great employee experiences and this is just one more tool to do that with.

— Well, I'm so thankful for the opportunity. Thank you so much, Shari.

— This podcast is brought to you by Paylocity, a leading HCM provider that frees you from the task of today so you can focus more on the promise of tomorrow. If you'd like to submit a topic or appear as a guest on a future episode, email us at pctytalks@paylocity.com.