

- [Shari] 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. On today's episode, I have with me Jim Knight, renowned keynote speaker, author, training and development expert, who focuses on teaching organizations of all sizes how to attain their own rockstar status. Jim, thanks so much for jumping on with me.

- [Jim] My pleasure, Shari. Thank you so much. I know we've been trying to do this a couple times, so the day is today. I'm very excited about it.

- [Shari] Totally agree. And we were just talking, before we jumped on, like we just hope nothing goes wrong, that the universe agrees with us today.

- So fingers crossed.

- Stars are aligned.

- [Jim] I'm feeling good, I'm feeling good.

- [Shari] Good. Well, let's start with a little bit about you. Tell me about kind of your background in this space and how you ended up, you know, taking the stage as a keynote speaker on a lot of things.

- [Jim] It's funny that you ask that because this week, actually two days ago was my 10 year anniversary when I jumped from corporate America into entrepreneurship, so I've been doing what I do now for about a decade and I actually was doing it on the side even before that when I was working for a brand. So, to step back a little bit further, I went to school to be a musician. I thought that I was gonna be a rock and roll star and I do have my music degree, but I found out that while I was going to college to make a living of doing that, you actually had to be good. I switched careers and I became a middle school teacher. I did that for six years. I absolutely loved it. Took a little summer job at a "Hard Rock Cafe." Little did I know that was not only the biggest "Hard Rock Cafe" in the world, it was the busiest restaurant in the world when I started in 1991. I was just a host. People can't see right now, but I've got spiky hair, but when I was there, it didn't go up. My hair went down. I had a long mullet, like two and a half feet that I could sit on. So I just loved working for a brand that allowed me to be and say and do and look however I wanted to and it was, you know, just being dunked in the spirit of rock and roll. And then they allowed me to travel on behalf of the company and I worked in London and Paris and opened up Mexico City and just traveled the world and within a couple years, I was running training and development, fell in love with the people and the culture and the

brand itself and I stayed there for 21 years. So, predominantly, my background's food and beverage, but I'm still pulling the levers of all three, music, hospitality and education into what I do right now. And I still use a lot of abandoned brand analogies, I do a lot of music orientation. I'm still gonna probably always forever be known as the culture guy, the rock and roll guy, but you know, my stuff, I'm trying to make sure that it's edutaining. We're gonna have some yuck-yucks and some fun, but I want it to be needy and people push back from a keynote session go, man, that was an awesome use of my time. So, I've been doing that for 10 years and have never looked back. I love it.

- [Shari] Well, I gotta tell you, you definitely have middle school teacher vibes, I will tell you that. There's a special person who runs middle school, so major kudos to you for even doing that for as long as you did.

- [Jim] Hey, to be fair. I don't think I could ever go back. Like, that was the perfect sweet spot in time, but oh man, I am bowing to anybody who works in public education these days. I couldn't do it anymore, but you know, it really did help me a lot for what I'm doing now.

- [Shari] Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you touched base a little bit on it, but like culture's so important to you and it's so cool to hear that you worked for an organization that just embraced you for who you were and were super inclusive about it. How have you seen culture changing after the impact of the pandemic?

- [Jim] Yeah, I think you said it best. I mean, right now, a lot of companies are starting to focus a whole lot more on culture, on purpose, on values. You know, I can maybe go back, Shari, 25, 30 years ago and if I ever went into the CEO to try and make a, you know, a plea for something from training and development, that was my world. I was head of training and development, but I would throw down the culture card and say, you know, we oughta do this because it'd be cool, it'd be fun and whatever. But if it wasn't tied to the objectives of the organization, I was getting laughed out of the room. And I think people really, you know, I'm going back decades now. I think people really weren't focusing on culture as much. I think they thought it was a byproduct, and now, not just because I talk about it and I've written about it, I think I have now discovered just being around so many companies, there's too many awesome rockstar brands that will swear the only reason that they're number one in their competitive set or they're crushing it, regardless of whatever it is that they sell, is because of their culture. And I would even go further and say it's because of their people that are perpetuating the culture, that exude the culture. So, I think, you know, now that we're coming out of the pandemic, I think, you know, you're starting to see a lot of companies focus on culture, people, you know, making sure

that their purpose and the values are really rock solid and I think that attracts a lot of people. But now, it's even more than that, right? It's people that are being allowed to work from home, it's having flexible schedules, it's having strong, really detailed training and development. People don't wanna go into something that's gonna be wishy-washy. Maybe there's growth opportunities, even if it's a small sort of bump and maybe you gotta put the word senior in front of their name because it feels like it's a promotion. I know it sounds silly to us in the HR world, but sometimes those are the things you gotta do to just get people to stay with you a little bit longer. I've seen actually a little bit of a retro in performance-based pay. So I think that scares off some employees who just wanna slide through, but I think for those potential employees that are like, okay, if I can go out there and just absolutely slate this, then I'm gonna wind up making a little bit more money. And then I'm thinking on top of all of that, the more HR groups I'm in front of, I'm starting to notice those that are starting to bring innovative benefits to the table, and I'll talk a little bit about that too, if you want, but you know, gone are the days of just focusing on having health and dental insurance and 401k and an employee assistance program. Like, you gotta start thinking, do I have a mental health and wellness program? Do I have pet insurance? Do I have catastrophic and supplemental insurance, which is like a really big deal now? Do I have flexible PTO, maybe even unlimited personal time off? Maybe I can buy into that. So, I think those companies that are starting to recognize I need to air in favor of the team member. I think they're the ones who are gonna win the war on talent. And nobody can come to me anymore and say there's no good talent out there. There is. Somebody else has just got 'em before you and you're gonna have to do a little bit of wrangling to get your meat hooked on them and get them away from some other company.

- [Shari] I couldn't agree more. We were just on a webinar just before I jumped on this podcast and I was talking about brand recognition and how that can help create a great candidate experience. And I was sharing about how I'm such a fan girl of Bombas, the sock company.

- [Jim] Yes.

- [Shari] They have this fantastic mission. If you don't know about them, you should definitely Google them. They've got really funny commercials too, just as a side note. But they had this model of like purchase one, donate one to the homeless organization when it comes to socks. 'Cause socks are stupid expensive, but I don't care because I know that I'm working with a company that I'm excited to work with and to give my money to. I think the same is true when we think about the cultures that we're creating and how we're advertising our companies. You know, what advice do you have for those that are dealing with kind of the great reshuffle, resignation, retention, whatever great you wanna call it today? How do they really bring their culture to life

externally when it comes to advertising?

- [Jim] Well, I think some of the same things I just talked about, if you can put it in, let's say, you know, a recruiting banner or you're putting it in some sort of a news trade publication or whatever it is, even if you're doing some online recruiting organization, I think, again, you can't just say pay, benefits, you know, flexibility, although all that stuff, that is price of admission type stuff. Now you've gotta start thinking, how can I really get people to join me and be loyal to me? So, again, I'll say it's not just benefits, it really is these unique, innovative benefits. I think you actually have to front and center talk about your culture and your purpose and your mission and your values. Like, if that's not somewhere in the collateral that you're trying to recruit people, I think people are gonna be a head scratcher 'cause then I think they think you're just looking for I need a human who's gonna go and work to make you more money. So, I think there's gotta be a little bit more of that emotional connection. We talked about flexible hours, flexible PTO. Not every company obviously is gonna be able to do it, but if you can allow people to work from home, maybe 100%, maybe it's a hybrid, maybe you just go, I'm gonna take one day, maybe it is Friday and Friday is work from home day, I think if you can advertise that in some way with quick bullet points and then you still come over the top with, you know, personal development, I think people still wanna be developed regardless of what the role is. And there's still something to be said about leadership. And maybe it's just you're gonna get solid communication from leadership. So if you had a bullet point and it's flexible benefits, it's innovative benefits, it's personal development, it's communication from leadership, it's focus on culture, purpose, mission values, like if you can get those things out there, I think you got a great shot of somebody going, I'm willing to take a chance, even if it's a stepping stone to whatever it is they're gonna do.

- [Shari] We talked a lot about innovative benefits and I like that word you're using. And I think something that you can pull into is really looking at the data of your organization to decide what those unique benefits could be. You know, something we have in our org that I really encourage people to look at, if you've got that like 30 plus population, is something called hinge health, which is all about like joint and movement and like just a benefit you wouldn't necessarily think about, or the other side of the spectrum, right? Tuition, not reimbursement, but repayment, right? All these people coming in with these student loans. So yeah, it's one size fits one now. It's not a peanut butter approach. I wanna switch gears a little bit in talking about culture. You know, you've worked with a lot of organizations. How have you helped them go from values on the wall to lived values?

- [Jim] Well, you know as well as I do Shari, I mean values, values are so critical, but honestly, if it's on a poster on the wall,

they're just words on the wall until you act upon them, right? So I think what happens is you'll get a consultant that'll come in and they'll help a company reorganize their mission and their values and they'll do the wallet card, they'll do the poster, maybe they'll go as crazy as making a video, but it doesn't mean anything if everybody ran off to some island over the weekend, the executives come back and they roll it out because if people don't have their behaviors that are matched against it, then what difference does it make? It's liar, liar, pants on fire. It's actually worse than if you just never even talked about 'em. So, I think the way that you actually make those come to life are a couple things. I mean, I absolutely would not ever have a meeting ever without those things being present. Maybe it is the poster, maybe this is the wallet card. I'd have people take it out, put it on the table because we're going to make decisions against it. I mean, there's a whole reason why those things were creating in the first place, they're the guide rails, the guardrails, if you will, for how we make decisions, to keep us honest. So I think having those present, ever present, is important, referring to them often in just our regular conversation. In my world in food and beverage, we used to have a pre-shift meeting. I bet you there's a lot of industries that have some sort of a huddle, a standup meeting before you get going or maybe even a, I don't know, a postmortem afterwards talking about the values. Take one. Have somebody else talk about it. What did it mean? How did you see it actually come to fruition during this particular shift? Whatever that looks like. People can't see me doing air quotes, but you know, that's the thing. I would include them in the job description, number one, on the front end. You talk about making it important. You don't just put the job responsibilities, you actually put the values on here. Here's what we believe in and you're gonna have to operate within 'em, but even more importantly, you put it in the performance appraisal so that you're measured against it, you're rewarded and recognized against it. I think if you were to do all of these things and then maybe you really do take it to the next level. You do create an awesome video just on the values, you create a training program to explain what the heck they are versus you just getting the card, or the poster, the manual or whatever it is. I don't know how many I just rattled off, four or five things, but I think if you did all these things and you made it, I guess the word would be ever present, two words for me, I think all of a sudden, it becomes a whole lot more important than just words on the wall.

- [Shari] You know, as I think about the last two years, there's this change that's happened, meaning that there's these groups that were able to go fully remote or fully hybrid, but then there's another group that had to stay onsite, right? Hospitality was one of 'em, retail was one of 'em, healthcare, And so we're all tackling how do we keep our cultures intact? And I'm just curious your perspective from kind of both those angles is like, how are we thinking about bringing culture to life now that we're not, you know, having water cooler conversations or, you know, being able to leverage things like office

snacks and some of those kind of fun things to build comradery? We have to think outside the box a little bit now.

- [Jim] Great question. I think there's two parts to it, like you were saying. I think one, for those that are still doing hybrid, and by the way, I think this is no longer just the we're waiting until the pandemic becomes an endemic and then we get back to normal. I think this is the normal now. So, you're gonna have a lot of companies that will still do hybrid or work from home. So in those cases, I'll start with that one, I think you're gonna have to communicate a whole heck of a lot more. So, if you're a leader, whether you've got a very small group, maybe two, three people or one direct report, or you're the leader, I think these individuals are gonna have to do more conversations. It could be more meetings like what you and I are doing through Zoom, it could be picking up the phone and having one-on-ones. If I was the ultimate boss, I'm thinking every day I'm calling somebody. I'm gonna call somebody and ask about how they're doing. I wanna have them feel fully seen, fully heard. What are their hopes and fears? Let me ask about their family. Like, all of that stuff, all of a sudden, you know what you get with me, loyalty. Like, you give me a call like that from the head cheese, whoever that is, you just bought me for like another six months. So, I think leadership communication one-on-one is probably one thing. I do think regular virtual meetings, I don't know what that looks like. Is it weekly? Is it monthly? Maybe it's just quarterly. I think that might be too far, but if you were used to the office environment where a lot of cool things would happen there, you just made a great point, whether it's office snacks or just chilling out on whatever the break room is or stopping them by somebody's office and that's how a decision gets made, you lose a lot of that. So you sort of have to interject it with something a little bit more regular, like a virtual meeting of some sort. I think you could also do some very cool contests and games and activities. I've seen everything from wine tasting to we just might use the chat function to talk about what your favorite artists or the first concert you ever went to for no other reason but to have a few laughs along the way. I think there's gotta be some of that because those are the types of things that you would do in the office anyway. I think you have to start looking for some E-learning and virtual personal development. So I talked about personal development before, but now you're really stagnant, you're on your own. There's no physical mentor that you're beside. And so I think a company's gonna have to spend either, you know, if you can find some little to no cost, but you're gonna spend a little bit more money to say I'm gonna offer some type of development for people to get better in their lives. And then maybe every once in awhile, there's an occasional offsite fun event. Let's go bowling, let's get together for a family meal, let's have a music movie night or whatever, you know, something to gravitate everybody together so they don't lose that sort of cultural feel. So those are the ones I think from hybrid working from home. I think the second part of your question is, you know, how do you help and tackle those

industries that didn't have that time off? And they're not going to. You said healthcare, I think you said hospitality a little bit, manufacturing. You know, these are businesses, they're not gonna go back. So I think you're gonna have to bend over backwards and think a little bit. What can I do for them? Maybe I'm gonna increase my benefits where they're gonna have more PTO time. Like, they were killing it for me, A lot of 'em working double shifts. Geez, I can't even imagine working in healthcare. If I ran a healthcare company and knowing how much money flows through that thing, everybody immediately gets an additional two weeks off a year, consecutive. Two weeks, just have a debrief, and get out of dodge for a little bit. I would love to do that. Maybe increase the number of PTO hours. Maybe it's unlimited and whenever people need it and some people, they're cool. They won't need any extra time off, and others, they're gonna need a month and we should be okay with that. There's a shortage right now for healthcare workers and nurses anyway. I think these are the types of things you have to do. I would look to adjust some flexibility with their schedules. As long as they work it out with somebody else, they can come and go and there doesn't have to be somebody who's maybe writing hurt on them. I would think about trying to do more verbal and public recognition. Not everybody needs that and I know you know that, Shari. Some people, they would rather just one-on-one, but in general, I think humans like to be recognized in front of their peers. And I would think about maybe, as a last thought, some quality thank you gifts. And these could be, maybe right now, it's gas cards, you know, gas gift cards, or maybe it's a spa gift card, maybe it's \$100 to go to your local grocery store, maybe it's a bonus of some sort and let people do what they want to with the money, maybe it's earbuds. You know, I don't know. I would think through and go, what can I do to make that Shopify, that instant gratification, something to say, okay, they're thanking me for all of this work that we did before. So, you know, whether it's small, little to no cost, random acts of kindness, I call 'em random acts of culture, ROC, you know, in random acts of rock, I would try and do some of that stuff, but I really do believe some of these bigger organizations that probably have a little bit more money are gonna have to spend a little bit to really love on their people a little bit more because if you don't do that, the loyalty factor is just gonna get lower, and lower, and lower. Now they're just looking for an opportunity for an easier job, perhaps with even better pay. So I know I said a lot there, but I was trying to answer both of those to hit both areas.

- [Shari] I like that you touched base on a couple things, actually. One around autonomy. I think, you know, sometimes we look at manufacturing and go, we can't be flexible. Well, can you create some autonomy where maybe they can own their shift swapping? We've talked about that before on other episodes. The other thing, if you're gonna go down the road of recognition in swag, make sure it's meaningful. I saw this TikTok the other day and this woman was sharing about how her company had sent this gift and she was so excited to open it, so she

opens it kind of live on her TikTok and it's a camping lantern. Not connected to what the company does at all or their values or mission or anything. And she's like, what am I supposed to do with this? I don't go camping. Like, completely missed the mark on an actual recognition.

- [Jim] I hope they had the company logo on it, though.

- [Shari] Right. It did, so I guess if she got lost somewhere, she would have this random lantern. So as we wrap up our conversation, you know, I'd love to hear from you, what's one thing you're worried about or looking at and wondering about the future of culture development and one thing that you're just really jazzed about and excited about that, you know, things are changing towards?

- [Jim] Again, great questions. I guess it's tough for me to talk about culture without talking about service. Those tend to go hand-in-hand. If you're selling a product or delivering a service, there are things you can do. My first book was all about that and I probably had four or five chapters on customer service alone in the culture book. I have a real fear right now that the state of customer service is really, it's struggling. It's a little bit in a quandary and I think it's maybe from both sides. There's a confluence of events right now where I just feel like you're not gonna have as many full-time employees working in a service-oriented position. You're gonna have a bunch of part-time people who might, their other job is the cool one and this one that you're working in isn't so great. And if I'm the customer and I get exposed to you, wah-wah, you know? You represent the brand. And so I feel like there's a bunch of part-time, mediocre, apathetic people floating around in some pretty important positions, but then on the other side, the customers are the worst and I think the pandemic, I don't know what it is, but somehow we created a bunch of frustrated, entitled customers. And so there's all this conflict. You know, people expect so much more from a customer standpoint and then there are other people that are just like, dude, I'm in a band. I like doing that more than I like doing this. So you've got this issue. The really good companies are really gonna shine. The ones that were rock stars before, they're gonna continue to crush it, and the ones that were mediocre, I'm afraid you're gonna see them go by the wayside. And maybe, I don't know, maybe that's a good thing, but the state of service is probably my biggest fear. The thing I'm most excited about, this is a little bit selfish, the things that I actually do, the things that are in my wheelhouse are the things right now that people need. There's a real need for culture, service, leadership, and employee engagement. Those are my four things. Those are the four books that I'm writing, those are the, you know, the four keynote topics. I think for me personally, I'm excited to see that companies, leaders of companies have finally decided these are important things. It's no longer about the product and the atmosphere. You wanna go out there and have the best product, great. Again, price

of admission. You should have been doing that anyway, but yes, you wanna go out there and focus on the music, and the lighting, and the furniture and whatever, great. Yes. Should've been doing that anyway, but that's where everybody stops. They stop there and go, "Look how awesome we are." You're only awesome until you're not and the reason that you're not is because somebody comes along and has the exact same stuff, perhaps at a lower price, but they got better people. The ones that have populated their business with rock stars instead of lip syncers are the ones that are absolutely gonna produce value. I'm pretty excited because one, people are starting to pay attention to it, and two, hello, I'm a resource to be able to fill that gap. So, you know, a little bit of a spotlight on myself there for just a split second, but I'm pretty excited about the future of what I think brands who get it are starting to focus on.

- [Shari] It's such an exciting time to be in HR. If you're not excited, I encourage you to get excited because there's a lot of really great work we have in front of us. And the challenge is, can we step up to the plate and do it?

- [Jim] And you said it best. I've always remembered, Shari, that HR in my mind was always two areas and I reported up to human resources my entire career. There's this one group that they're the rule breakers. I mean, the ones that enforce the rules, right? If you were being called to HR, you're in trouble and they were very strict. And then there's the other group, it was just fun and games and there was nothing really substantial. Nobody thinks of HR like that anymore. Not only do they bring significant value to the table, I know a lot of leaders that will not start a meeting unless human resource is in the room. So, I think the voice of HR is really now just sort of taking a white hot spotlight in the last two decades, but now coming out of the pandemic, oh my gosh, everybody's gotta start wearing their HR hat. And if you don't have yours on, you better make sure you've got a really good person or persons that you surround yourself with.

- [Shari] Absolutely. Couldn't agree more. Well, Jim, thanks so much for taking a few minutes of your day to chat with me.

- [Jim] I had a lot of fun. Thank you so much. Rock on.

- [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.