

- 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 Phil Albinus. He is an amazing HR tech editor. He works for the Human Resource Executive Magazine, and I'm so excited to have him behind the mic today. We are live at HR Tech. So, Phil, thanks for joining me.

- Thanks for having me. This is fantastic.

- So, I'm so excited about all the technology I'm seeing. I actually just ran into this girl who's a CEO and founder of this new tech around interviewing people and has kind of an Uber feel to it, really exciting. I'm curious from your perspective, what are you seeing on the floor that you're excited about from an HR tech perspective?

- I really like seeing solutions that move from the workstation and the laptop to the cell phone to the mobile phone, and that's happening. There was a woman I think from Nigeria yesterday outta one of the working sessions, and she said, our employees, like our country, is mostly Gen Z, and they don't do paper.

- Wow.

- Don't do paper at all. The older generation, they don't do mobile phones. And people live, they bank on their phones. They're so cutting edge in their adoption of technology, and it's coming to HR technology. We're starting to see more applications that actually look like Tinder for finding a job. You swipe right on this job position. You swipe right on this announcement, and we're seeing they're trying to gamify the soul-crushing task of trying to find a job. I was outta work for two years and trying to upload resumes was really, really tough. It's a nightmare. You upload, they linked your LinkedIn, you upload your resume, and then they ask you to fill these certain cells. It's just a nightmare. And people are saying we need to basically simplify this process, so that we don't lose the talent. People are switching jobs in the middle of a recruitment phase. They're getting a better offer, and you have to be there with this technology to help them.

- You know, I am amazed so many times at how HR tech hasn't caught up in some ways with just how I experience and engage with tech on everyday basis. I talk about when I speak that I have a movie theater that I absolutely love, I love going to see the movies, I have the app on my phone, and every time I drive by the theater, it's like, "Hey, Shari, you wanna buy a movie ticket?" Like, click this button. I want HR tech to get there. One of the things I'm curious your perspective on is with a lot of employees now having to deal with remote work or hybrid work, we're seeing more tech around like employee monitoring

tools. How have you seen that space change?

- I've seen it's a revolution, and it's taking off. It really is, because experts are saying, industry observers are saying that we're going to have a hybrid work model from now on. And getting people into the office, sometimes it's gonna have to be an annual event, and it's gonna have to be catered, and it's gonna have to have an agenda. Whereas, there are some old school managers and old school supervisors, some of the middle managers who say, "How can I do my job "if I'm not watching my employees "at every moment of the workday?" and sometimes even beyond. So we're seeing this whole new class of solutions out there that are I would call it a light version of monitoring to sometimes even heavy duty versions of monitoring. They're looking at other apps that you're engaging with. If you walk away from your laptop to grab a cup of coffee or to take care of a dog that needs to be walked, you will actually have to log back in. And the Washington Post did this amazing article about this law firm where basically once a lawyer was logged outta the system, they have to look into the camera, they have to look to the left, they have to look to the right, and basically it's recorded. So, they make the process so ominous that basically I guess they're trying to intimidate people or maybe just imply the importance of them being at their workstation constantly. I've spoken to an analyst, I think, at a major firm, and they said this can have a serious impact on corporate culture, have a serious impact on trust. At some point you have to trust your employees to work, because you can goof off in the office too. There are people all tabbing and looking at Amazon and checking things out, but I think it comes down to trust, but this is a major change for employers these days.

- Yeah. It's definitely put us in a situation where we think about digital transformation and like how the pandemic really accelerated us in so many areas. And then I think about the difference between those that are still on site like retail, hospitality, healthcare. Their worlds were also vastly impacted by the pandemic, but in a much different way. Have you seen a break in technology down those two paths yet?

- Not really, I mean, we're seeing a widespread adoption of Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and people are working with that. It has created a Zoom and a Teams culture in a way, but for people who actually have to show up physically at their jobs, I think besides COVID restrictions, I think it's primarily the same, but you have to help out those employees as well. You have to basically realize that they're sacrificing a certain aspect of their safety by coming into work, especially in the early days of the pandemic. I mean, my wife is an audiologist in a major hospital in Westchester County, and she changes in and out of a space suit two or three times a day if she has to go into a COVID room. And she's seen COVID babies, and she's seen this population and that population. And it's hand sanitizer and N95 masks

was basically the technological innovation that she experienced. Whereas I had Teams and I had this and I had that. And now, there are phone apps where you can operate and receive work email. This has been around for a while, but it's really coming to fruition. It's become just a baseline reality for firms.

- Yeah, I absolutely agree. As you think about the next five years, and I chuckle when I ask this question, because I don't know if anybody's thinking five years ahead right now, but for the HR professional who needs to usher in this new set of technology, what are the skills that those HR professionals are gonna need to be able to evaluate the tech that they're seeing that's gonna be more advanced, more AI-focused, maybe more virtual reality even?

- I think virtual reality, augmented reality is gonna be a very big thing. They're gonna have to look into this. These are such... Buying HR technology can be very, very expensive, especially a core HCM human capital management system. And this is not a purchase that you make every single year. This is something that you buy and you commit to. So it has to be the right choice, or it has to have fewer downsides than upsides. So the challenge for five years, I think they have to bone up on their technology. They have to work closer with IT, because hr, they always had a seat at the table. However, in March or April of 2020 when everybody's going home, it was an HR crisis. It was just like, how do you send people home? How do you keep them safe? How do you keep them not spiraling down an anxiety hole? How do you keep them inspired? How do you maintain corporate culture? I joined two companies in the past two years. And trying to bond with workers over Zoom is really difficult. I went to a Zoom baby shower, and I went to a Zoom the Friday cocktail parties, and they're nice, but after a while, it's just another Zoom meeting. But for the next five years, AI, I think, is gonna be very important. AI is basically an ingredient found in just about everything these days. We're gonna have to work more on mobile devices. For the younger generation, they love that. I've adopted that too, so you really can't have the excuse of just like, oh, and in my day, we did everything in Excel, and we loved it. Nobody loved Excel. And augmented reality is very important too, especially for training and for people growing a career path. Here, you can put on these goggles and you could experience, okay, this is what working at the front desk is like. Are you ready for somebody to scream at you at three in the morning when there's no towels in their hotel room? Can you handle an angry client? Can you handle a coworker who's going through a challenge? These are things that training happens. I saw one application. I interviewed one person, and he put on the VR reality goggles, and it was how to prepare for an armed robbery.

- Oh, wow.

- Yeah, it gets really intense. And he said those devices are nausea-

inducing as they are, but having somebody point a shotgun at you trying to open up the safe that only has \$50 in it, that's a skillset in and of itself.

- Yeah. I am curious about VR as I think about that becoming more prominent. I have kids. I have teenage boys, and they play VR all the time, and they get a kick out of it. But I think about the applications for that in the workspace. This is not a prediction. It's more of a curiosity on what you think, but do you think we'll ever get to a point where we live as an avatar, and we work as an avatar, and we have interactions with our boss, our one-on-ones, and we're both in our houses, but we have our own mask and our persona we've brought to the table for work?

- I think Bill Gates said that all business meetings in three years are gonna be taking place in virtual reality. Mark Zuckerberg is working on this. We can all laugh at the screenshots and the available art right now, but do you remember texting on your very first phone,

- Yeah.

- What a nightmare it was, but it soon became wonderful and became functional. And now, this is how people primarily communicate. VR and the metaverse, we'll see. But at some point, are you breaking down layers between you and your manager, or are you just building layers between your manager? That's the question. I think that's the question they have to answer.

- Yeah. I wanna switch gears a little bit. You've done some writing around disaster preparedness and had written an article about 9/11. I'm curious as we think forward for the inevitable next pandemic, the inevitable next tragedy, here in the US I feel like we've had a blind eye to some stuff, and it keeps coming up more and more. How is tech influencing or helping us be more prepared, and how should we be thinking about that as HR professionals?

- Well, everything's stored on the cloud these days, so you don't have physical records. I'm old enough to remember around 9/11, a little bit before, there was a crane accident in Manhattan. Nobody died from injuries, because of that. It was just a stupid crane fell into a stupid building, but the hero of the day was the office assistant who grabbed the paper Rolodex, the little file with all the client phone numbers and everything. And she took it and she ran as building inspectors or firemen were saying, "You gotta leave, you gotta leave now." So she was the hero of the day. Now that information is stored on the cloud, people have access to it. Besides manufacturing and maybe certain hands-on enterprises, working from home hasn't really been a disaster. And in fact, it's allowed people to continue working. It's allowed them to stay in contact. I wonder if this technology existed on 9/11, after a pandemic if it would've been as tragic as it

was, because people working from home, and there's something to be said for just having a spread out workforce, people are working where they wanna work, and they're not spending half their salary on commuting.

- There definitely is a new thing that we have to consider as HR professionals when it comes to this increased remote workforce, things like carpal tunnel and ergonomics and all of the kind of things that we're now experiencing, because we've come more digital and more tech.

- Are you standing up? Are you walking around your house? Are you breathing fresh air? Could those sweatpants and sweatshirts use a run through the laundry?

- Yes, yes. I have built into my day like 20 minute breaks every couple hours, because I realized for myself going... And I was lucky. I had a couple remote days before the pandemic, but going fully remote, at first, I was working probably 12 hours a day, because you'd get done and you'd go into your living room and you'd be like, well, I don't really wanna watch TV. I'll just get back online. I'll bring my laptop to the living room. And I think that has changed. I think that's less in people are finding their routines, but, yeah, you gotta get up, you gotta move. I'm curious, in the next several years, are we gonna see things like increased heart disease and some of those things from having a more sedentary life? And it makes me think of the movie "WALL-E" when they go to the buy-in lot and they all just gain weight and become outta shape. As you have walked the floor and you're gonna spend some more time out there, what is something that you wish HR Tech would embrace that you see in other tech places?

- What should HR Tech embrace? They're embracing it right now. They're embracing AI. They're embracing the move to digital transformations. They're embracing mobile technologies. Some of the things that they have to embrace are more concepts. They have to realize that bagels in the break room isn't gonna cut it. There's quiet quitting going on, and that's really just good old fashioned complaining. They're not quitting. They're just like kind of saying, you know what, I'm not inspired. I don't feel valued. I don't feel like I have a career path or a career growth. We all have parents who work extremely, extremely hard. And for what? For a gold watch? I mean, I don't want my 40 years as a professional journalist to boil down to a Timex that's kind of shiny when I'm wearing an Apple iWatch. So I think it's concepts that they have to embrace, and they're talking about these concepts. How do you build a team over corporate culture? What is corporate culture? And are you in TikTok? I love TikTok. HR TikTok is fascinating.

- It is. And I don't know her handle off the top of my head, but she is doing these short videos and she pretends to be talking to a manager. Oh my goodness, completely inspiring. Short, easy, to the point, and the format has allowed her to have all the conversations

that HR people actually really wanna have with leaders sometimes. It's very fascinating.

- It is. It really, really is. There's so much you can learn and so much you can discuss there, and it's basically... And they're not talking about lines of code and bits of hardware. They're talking about how to connect to employees. We've seen the great resignation. People are looking for greener pastures, and a lot of this stuff is out there, and companies are raising their pay and their bonuses and their cost of living expenses, which is really, really smart. An analyst said this time last year at a great resignation panel, she said employers are just going to have to pay more. That's the bottom line. Nobody wants to say it. Nobody wants to hear it. And I get these pitches in my email inbox all the time, employees are leaving, because of bad technology. No, they're not.

- Right.

- I'm not leaving, because I'm using a Think Pad and I'd rather use an Apple MacBook. People are leaving, because they're looking for greater value career paths. They're looking for salaries, or they're trying to escape the orbit of a bad manager.

- Yeah, and I think those who don't have the tech that they want, the more savvy younger generation, they go find the app that fills that tech void for them. I mean, I spend a lot of time doing that. If some tool I have isn't working, I just go find one that does. I wouldn't consider leaving my employer over it, for sure.

- I once edited the story for a young gen... She was a very, very young millennial, and she wrote a news story and I wrote back, "You gotta rewrite this, rewrite that." And she said, "I'm on the subway. I'll do it in one minute." And I'm just like, "How?" And she's like, "I have all the editing tools on my iPhone." And the crotchety old man in me, the Abe Simpson in me came out and was just like, "You have to get back to a laptop young lady, and you have to do this. This is about respectful...." And she did the edits while sitting... She might have been like standing up and like holding the pole while she was just texting in my answers with her thumb, and that worked out fine. It worked out perfectly fine.

- That's how we kind of change this view of where work happens. Adam Grant's talking a lot about that, about the idea of flexibility, and it doesn't just mean remote work. It means where I work, who I work with, when I work with, the tools I have access to, I'm actually really excited about what's next for HR, what's next for HR tech. I think there's so many cool things that we're gonna see in the next couple years.

- And they're so dedicated to it. This is a great market. There is

money out there. There are funds. There are budgets. People, you cannot live with the same solution that's 20 years old, that's 15 years old. You have to update. And just one complaint that I hear from HR leaders, I always ask them, what's your silver bullet? What's the one piece of technology that you want? And more than ever they say, "I really want a clearing house, "a single dashboard where I could see this application, "that application, the talent acquisition things, "everything from like the performance reviews, "survey results, the mood, pulse surveys, things like that." They want it stored into one go-to dashboard that they could say, oh, okay, we have five people calling out, because of COVID. Okay, so there's a little spike in the COVID numbers here who they work with, who are they next to. Where people are asking for performances, this person's 18 months overdue for their performance review. We have to get this done, or that person, they're not showing up at the meetings. They're there, but they're not showing up. And so that's where performance review algorithms can help out.

- I can't wait for the company that kind of unlocks it all, 'cause I think right now we use so many different tools that that dashboard is a dream big for everybody in HR, because there isn't... Nobody's cracked the code on it yet. Once that happens and the algorithms can give you this really rich data that then you can use and go and build the amazing cultures, it's really gonna be a game changer for HR.

- It really will. It really will, and people want this to happen. And I think employers want this to happen too. They're slowly getting the message that the HR tools are key for creating a wonderful, and inspiring employee relationship in a corporate culture. And that's what it is about at the end of the day. This is what they want to deliver and because this is what they want to offer to their workers.

- Well, Phil, this was such a great conversation. I'm excited that you had a few minutes to spend with me here at HR Tech, and I'm excited to see what you write about next as our field kind of evolves in this space.

- Thanks, I hope to see you on the floor.

- Yep, absolutely. This podcast is brought to you by Paylocity, a leading HCM provider that frees you from the tasks 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](mailto:pctytalks@paylocity.com).