

- 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 Kate Grimaldi. She is our Senior Director of Enterprise People Strategy here at Paylocity and a familiar voice for those who are listening. We're glad to have her back on the podcast today.

- Thanks for having me, Shari, love being back.

- So I wanna talk about today, layoffs, and I know that I'm laughing, but that's not a funny topic but it's something that we in HR, I feel like are inundated and even more so having gone through the last two and a half years with the pandemic.

- Yeah, absolutely. Now more than ever, we're seeing, you know, whether maybe it's not our own companies but we're seeing our colleagues we're seeing our friends, we're seeing acquaintances, people in the industry either talking about layoffs, being laid off, trying to connect other people. It's a very hot topic right now and a very stressful one at that.

- My brother was recently laid off and you know it's interesting, he's much younger in his career and we were talking about the conversation that was had with him and you know, he wasn't offered severance, he wasn't really given a good exit strategy. In fact, he was told during the discussion that there was potentially another role available with him in the org and that was actually not the case. So he got wrong information during that conversation. And just to see him go through that amount of stress and what am I gonna do? And you know, all the other like tactical questions, right? Like am I getting severed? Is my PTO getting paid out? How am I going to message this to other people? You know, there was a big concern that if he found a job before, you know his technical end date, he's like, did I, does that mean I quit? Does it go on my record? Like that's a lot for somebody to digest.

- Yeah, it's also confusing. I hate to hear that people don't understand what's happening. They don't understand either the benefits available or not available to them. Sometimes it's even confusing as to you pointed out what is my last day, what does that mean? What do I do with my stuff? Can I tell my next employer I was laid off? What happens when somebody asks me about my resume, what do I say? All of these things that almost feel like education that isn't there. It's tough, it's tough to hear and it's tough to watch people especially, you know, I'm an avid LinkedIn user. People are always posting about layoffs and you know the things I scroll past, the larger comments, the things that I get stuck on where people are asking the community for help. Hey, I don't know what these things mean. I don't know what

I'm supposed to say. Or I haven't had to look for a job in 12 years. I was really happy at my company, what do I do? The job landscape has changed and it's, it's a lot to take in.

- How do we support each other during this time? You know, I think, and what I mean by each other I mean each other in HR but also our peers. You know, just people that we're interacting with in our everyday life because we do have a little bit of a peek behind the curtain to give them some advice.

- Yeah, you know I actually had a networking conversation yesterday morning with someone in the HR industry. She was referred to me through a mutual friend and I wasn't exactly sure what she needed made the time to sit down with her and she was very honest from the beginning, Hey this is what was happening with the company, I was laid off. I'm looking for my next opportunity. But what I really wanna talk to you about today is your HR journey. I wanna learn a little bit more about what you did. Take some, you know, take some feedback. And, we kind of got through it and I looked at her resume, she asked for tips on her LinkedIn profile and I actually ended up connecting her with another colleague for a similar but different purpose. And you know, for me, I guess when I think about helping other people, it's things like that. Making the time to spend 30 minutes to give someone some insight, making the time to connect them with someone else. You know, I love when I see people commenting on LinkedIn like, hey, commenting for reach or you know I will tag people in posts that are hiring a specific people that I know have said I'm looking for a job. I think just reminding people that just because like I'm in a situation where I'm not being laid off, I don't have a concern for my job. Like I can give, even if I can only give my time sometimes that time is actually more than you know, more than what anybody could ask for

- And listening, right. During that time, I like that you shared about that conversation you had because it was, she came to you to seek some information but I suspect you walked away with something, some knowledge there too, right? Listening to the things that she was considering.

- It was interesting where I, what I walked away with that I hadn't anticipated was learning more about the difficulty of being in a position and in a employment landscape where we hear about how many layoffs are happening, we also hear about how many jobs are available and how there's not enough talent for all the jobs available. What I walked away with was the idea of like that's gotta be really confusing for someone like her. She's got great skills, she has a great background. There's really nothing about her that I could find that I would say I wouldn't hire her if I had had a role open, I would've a hundred percent said, hey we should actually consider her for this role. And so I walked away thinking, wow it's probably really confusing 'cause all you hear in the news is how there's more jobs

available than there are talent. And in the same breath, this company just laid off 10% of its workforce, 20%, 15,000 people here. And it's hard to wrap your mind around what you're supposed to do with all that information especially how that might impact you. So yeah, I definitely learned something. And I think too, I always take away little nuggets around experience and communication. So, you know, one of the things I took away from her was, all right, if I ever am in that position where I need to have a tough conversation and I need to lay someone off one of the things I need to be clear about, it's like what does this mean for you getting another job? Because that is the first thing somebody's thinking about. So it was a good, I hadn't expected to learn that so it was definitely helpful.

- Do you think with all these layoffs that are happening you know, and you mentioned a few of them and I feel like every time I jump online it's another tech company laying off, you know tens of thousands of people. Do you think that's changing people's feels about work?

- I think it's changing people's feels about their employer. And the reason why I say employer over work is people feel the same way about work. Most people want to have a job that is, that brings them joy, that they find value in that they're compensated what they believe they should be compensated for, and that they don't mind going to work every day. You know that they enjoy it, they find things about it that they like. I think the layoffs is, it's really I think causing a bridge in trust. I was talking to someone recently who was struggling with someone on their team and they said this person keeps mentioning trust, trust is an issue. And she said, I'm not sure what, where she's getting that, what she's feeling it from. I can't, I've asked her, she can't pinpoint it. I think that's a great example. I think it's changing how people feel about their employers in terms of you tell me that you're not going to do layoffs. How do I actually know that? How do I know that I have job security? And I think it's changing the way people look at what job security actually means and then what kind of job either are you willing to take what kind of job you know, do you feel valued in? I think there's also changing the way people look at their next step. Maybe their next step isn't as, it doesn't need to be as complicated as they originally thought. For some people now have reached out to me they've said, hey, my next step is I need to make X amount of money to support my family and I'm okay if that's a step back, if that's not a leadership role if it's in a different industry, et cetera.

- Which brings up the point of how could we capitalize on all these layoffs? And maybe that's a terrible thing to say, but I think that if we're thinking strategically about our organizations and we know that there's this talent pool out there how are we changing the way we think about work? You know, we've had a lot of conversations around skills, right? Can we think differently about people who are in this space and the skills that they bring to the table that might not be

the exact job, like you said that they've had before or in the past.

- I think one of the ways we capitalize on that is you go back and you look at your own talent strategy and you say, you know what am I doing to prevent having to lay anybody off at my company? I know how bad that feels. So what's a preventative measure I can take? Can I do a skills inventory? Is there a job that's open that I'm holding onto because I'm so afraid that it's going to I'm not gonna be able to fill it or saving it just in case. Is there an opportunity to look at that and say, hey, can a couple people who already work here actually do that job and can I use that budget somewhere else? Or you know, is there a project I can say no to? And by saying no to it that actually means that I'm, I'm not at, you know, I don't need to do anything different with my headcount. I think when people look at the word capitalize, right their immediate, when you said the word capitalized my immediately thought went to money and profit and all of that. I think we miss out sometimes on another definition of capitalize, which is, you know how can we benefit, right? How do we benefit from layoffs? Well, to me it's the same way I benefited from leaders in my past that I haven't necessarily always found the most valuable, which is I can always learn something from a leader even if I don't like their style. We can capitalize on layoffs even if that doesn't mean we can hire all the people they laid off. We capitalize by benefiting on how, what was their strategy. You know we hear about in the news how some people just get mass emailed, hundreds of people mass email bye today's your last day. Well, to me, I capitalize on that by saying note to self, don't mass email all the people that you wanna lay off. Right, you think it's simple. You think you've probably already known that. I think that, you know, for me, I also think about how do we capitalize on it with our leaders in terms of teaching them about more, maybe I'm trying to, I'm losing the word, like strategic ways of dealing with their issues and their headcount and maybe just providing, to your point earlier about listening just spending more time. I think another benefit at least for me is, you know whether it's listening or reading the LinkedIn posts, it's really helpful because it helps me coordinate our talent strategy to be more robust and preventative. Because, you know, I have been at companies where I've had to lay off a lot of people. You know, I will never say that it was worse than actually being the person laid off, but it's not enjoyable and I don't recommend it.

- And having those conversations with leaders about all the possibilities I think is really important for us to lead in HR. Because sometimes I think we go to, you know what it's gotta be headcount, right? We gotta cut headcount. There are other things available to us like right maybe we decide, you know what we're gonna stop matching 401k. And the the headache that you're gonna experience from that conversation with your employees will be way less than the experience you're gonna have by saying we're gonna lay off even if it's 10 people, right? Like there is a component of transparency

though when it comes to layoffs. Like you mentioned, like don't send an email, don't send a meme. Don't do a, everybody jump on the Zoom call and like you just fire everybody that way. Like there's gotta be that compassion to it. But it does open up your opportunity to have more strategic conversations with your business leaders about the business, right? About making money and how that affects your talent strategy.

- Yeah, absolutely. It's interesting when you said a lot of times when people go to saving money their immediate thought is cut heads, cut head count and you know, I agree. I mean I think there's the more severe ways to save money. Like you said, stop matching 401k, you don't do raises. I also think there's things like look at your travel and expense budget. You know, are there things that, you know what yes in the pandemic everyone went to virtual but are there things you're like, hey, you know what we're not actually gonna have that meeting live cause it's gonna save X amount of dollars and it's gonna allow us to save those two headcount. I would guess that if you polled your employees and you said, do you either wanna have this meeting or do you want two of your friends to be let go? My guess is they're gonna say, I would, I'm okay with canceling the meeting if that means that two of my friends get to keep their jobs. I think when you think about things like that from a different perspective, asking your employees would you rather nobody get a raise or would you rather half of you don't show up at work tomorrow? I think you're gonna see the end of the day people are more, most people are more focused on the greater good. Like, I want a long lasting company. I want the person next to me to still be there tomorrow. If I have to forego something extra that I wasn't planning on anyway, I'm okay with that. So there's quite a bit of opportunity out there to capitalize on the things that we're seeing in the market that we don't love. And then you call a spade a spade, there's also really great talent out there that unfortunately their companies couldn't keep them. Go scoop those people up. I mean, interview the heck out of as many people as you can find. You'd be surprised what kind of great talent just happened to be in the department that happened to no longer be needed at that company.

- As I wrap up our conversation, how do you or how have you supported your fellow coworkers in your space, not at your, at your location but I mean the, the relationships that you've built with other HR practitioners as they're going through these layoff scenarios. Because it can be, it can be heartbreaking for them, right? If you've developed relationships with some employees and you value them and now you're the one delivering the message or supporting the delivery of the message which I know you've been in that scenario what advice do you have for them?

- Yeah, I mean what I've told people in the past is I think there's a couple things. One is you gotta save space for yourself. So, and I don't mean that to be selfish but it's gonna be tough to have a

conversation like that with someone. You have to be in the right head space for it. You can't be completely stressed out. People can read that. I am, I know you all can't see my face but I am one who's told on a regular basis that you know exactly what I'm thinking based on the look on my face. If I'm gonna go lay someone off, I'm gonna be very very focused and give myself that space 'cause I want to go in there very composed. And the other thing I always remind people too is you might be, you might be sorry that this is happening but in the moment telling someone, oh I'm so sorry. Most people we say sorry for ourselves, we don't actually say, sorry, doesn't help the other person. It helps you, you know feel better about whatever's happened. Telling someone that you're you're getting rid of their position and that you're essentially upending their life, sorry, isn't actually gonna cut it. The better thing is come with resources, come with plans, be very clear. And the last thing is give people time to process not in the moment and say I'm not gonna go over every single detail with you. Here are the high level things. I'm gonna give this information to you. I'm gonna set up time for us in a couple days for you to come back with questions. I want you to come back with questions. I want you to think about it. I want you to think about what else you might wanna know. Have answers, come with resources, have the information. Give people time to process. Especially people who you know you're blindsiding them nobody processes in the moment. You have no idea what's going on in their personal life. Don't assume that they have somebody else at home to lean on whether it is for financial or emotional support. Give 'em that space and have resources ready. The worst thing you can do in my opinion as an employer is to lay off a bunch of people in your workforce and give them zero resources for any of those things. And I'm not talking just severance and benefits, I'm talking about job placement, resume writing, emotional support. It's to basically just say you meant absolutely nothing. 'cause that leads to the trust issues we talked about before.

- Yeah, I couldn't agree more about, you know, don't make the assumptions and don't leave them stranded right. If you get anything from this episode those are the two things I would say walk away with. You know, and, and like you said resources don't necessarily mean severance. You might not be in a situation where that's part of the, you know exit strategy that you guys have during the layoff. And so what are the things you can provide and some of the basics, like how do I talk about this going forward? You know, the coaching I gave my brother is you say you were laid off like it wasn't your fault, right? It's simple, but sometimes it's not as easy as that. You know, if there's only a couple of you or like why does your particular position get eliminated? So I really appreciate that. I think there's a lot for us to think about the humanity when it comes to this and just really listening and supporting each other.

- Yeah, I think the last thing I would leave you with Shari too is you said your brother made me think of, you know my cousin's actually been

laid off two or three times in his career and the last conversation him and I had is, how do I say that I've been laid off multiple times and people not connect it to me like I did something wrong? And I said, you know that's where you come with the company profile. That's where you come with what's going on with the company and you have the facts. And the only thing I would leave people with is if that is you and you're listening to this like I know it's hard, don't take it personally. Like don't own that as something that becomes a part of you or your identity. It's something that happened to you and you know what? Like you will get past it and you will find a way and you have to own it, you know? And it's okay to own it with facts and it's okay to own it with confidence that you will overcome it.

- Such wise words. Kate, thank you so much.

- Thanks for having me, Shari.

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