

- 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. Holly, thank you so much for taking a few minutes of your day to sit and chat with me.

- Thank you for having me.

- So we are talking all things ERG, employee resource group. This is obviously a passion of mine as a co-chair for our ERG for women inside of Paylocity. So I'd like to start with why are employee resource groups so important?

- Well, employee resource groups bring a very dedicated lens to all the different things that we do at the County of San Diego. We have 11 ERGs within the county. We have one that's being built at this time, which is close to your heart. Yes, at this point, we don't have a women's group yet.

- Wow.

- It's in the funnels. We have some very passionate individuals who are helping to get that going. And we hope, I guess I should say, ideally it'll launch within the next year as well. But our 11 ERGs are usually more culturally based, I guess you could say, in that sense. But we also have our veterans group, and our emerging work group, and all of those different pieces inside there. And we're excited now to have the women's, we have Diverse-ability, which is all the accessibility groups inside there. So our ERGs started off probably 20 plus years ago with our Latin American ERG, and now it has grown into all of these many beautiful voices that come to the table. In the county we use those voices as a sounding board a lot of times. However, for a while they were all singular. And I know a lot of different industries, they have their ERGs and it's like, "Look, we have people and they're diverse. Check mark, here's ERGs." But what are they doing? How are they feeding the life of an organization? So a few years ago, the county said, all right, how do we bring all these voices together to have multiplied impact? So we have an ERG Council. The presidents of all of our ERGs meet monthly and they get together on different initiatives. One of the things that our team, so I sit in the Department of Human Resources in the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team that brings an internal lens to all things that we do. And we get to also sit on other spaces in other things, such as we get a voice with the council. And we've helped to assist them in creating a united internal network, a quarterly opportunity for mentoring. It's a passive mentorship, but they bring in their leadership and they talk through, and it's bringing to the 20,000 plus individuals at our county a way of looking at what it looks like to build your journey as a career. So that's one of the few things that we do.

- Wow, 11 ERGs. I feel like we're a baby ERG organization when I hear that number. So that's exciting. I mean, I know that there's so much out there when it comes to really hearing the different voices of your employee population, and it's been exciting to hear, just as I've networked with other HR professionals, the different types of ERGs that exist. One of the things I think that we all struggle with when we think about ERGs is increasing participation. And I heard somebody recently talk about, specifically in a women's ERG, is having representation of everybody in that ERG, even men, is so important, because you're talking about inclusivity. With 11 ERGs, and now almost 12, how have you really worked on making sure that there's robust participation in each one of those groups and in the initiatives that they want to accomplish?

- So I will say that with COVID, like many things, we saw a reduction in participation. People were scrambling just to cover basic life, right, figuring out what that looks like and how to cover their own mental health, their physical health. So we're building back up in a lot of our ERGs at this moment, but we do have a way that they've come up with you can buy into, I guess, or you can join all at once. So there's an all ERG pass.

- Wow.

- Which means if you have trouble choosing which one do I wanna participate in, you can do the all ERG pass, which means what's calling to you, and each of these might be community service, and there might not be a community service ERG, but you then join in to all those opportunities throughout the ERGs, and it's like a build your own adventure. And when you feel completely connected, or you wanna be more connected with a group because they're more in line with the values that you bring to it, you can participate a little bit more in that space. Or even just say, "Okay, I'm going to back this more," by becoming a board member, by going off for an officer's position, and that sort of thing. I loved this morning at that opening session, I'm not sure if you were in here or if you got to participate in it, but Sint from the Mavs was talking about her expression and her experience with sitting around having coffee with a lot of the guys who are board members and talking about, "Okay, I see these gaps." And they came back at it and said, "We're already full members of these ERGs. Just because it doesn't say my title doesn't mean it doesn't speak to me." And I wish that that was the verbiage around all ERGs.

- It sounds like with the model that you guys are using, that you've opened the door for a lot of intersectionality while also supporting individual goals of ERGs. And that's an assumption on my part. Does that seem to be true for you?

- Correct. The hope is that where you see yourself reflected or where

you see your values being modeled, that's where you're going to participate. And we're hoping that ERGs will pick up even more because there's this draw to and for connection that we're seeing all throughout our organization, and from what I hear on different podcasts, and everything else, belonging is necessary, right? It's part of the fabric of us as humans, and ERGs feed into that in ways that sometimes organizations just can't. But what we have at the county is a little different. And that's kind of what we're talking about tomorrow in our talk is our champion network, that internal network happens in everyday work life. So our ERGs are nonprofits that are affiliated with the county itself. So each ERG is its own nonprofit. And then within inside the county itself since about 2014 when a task force came together, they decided there needed to be something more robust. If we were really going to move the needle on this, if we were going to have equity, well, not at that time, it was just diversity and inclusion at that time, if we were going to have diversity and inclusion really mean something for the county, it had to be spoken of and through and for at every level in every space. And so we had a D&I task force come together and they came up with a strategic plan, and they laid down the foundational work for the county. And that did two things. It opened up the D&I Executive Council, which gives us more of the operational view, seeing it threaded at the very highest levels of our organization. And they said, "Well, that's not enough. It needs to come from every direction." And so what way can we do that? By identifying departmental champions all throughout and seeing how we can get a united, consistent voice. And that looks like every department or office throughout the county, which is about 60, have departmental champions. And those champions have committees so that in every division, ideally people are speaking of the same information and then support resources go out so everyone's kind of on the same page at the same time moving forward.

- So I'm gonna ask a very tactical question next, 'cause as I hear about this, this seems like there's gonna be a lot of change management involved and a lot of communication. How do you make sure that all the information that all your ERGs are doing can come through these champions in a way where it doesn't get drowned out or it's not like, "Okay, yeah, there's another thing." How have you tackled that? And maybe you're still working through it 'cause I think it's a challenge we're all experiencing right now.

- Absolutely. I mean, there's so many layers. You have benefits, and health, and all of these different things that you want people to be aware of it on their plates, and surveys. So what we've found is our consistent way of making sure that it comes through is A, there's that leadership component to it, and B, we've taken out the vetting process for a lot of the resources that our champions have to go through. So in HR we put together a quarterly newsletter digest, and it has podcasts, and articles, and videos, and internal resources that we're

hoping people will pick up and utilize for that whole three months, whatever it's going to look like for them. They still need to talk with their leadership, see what's consistent and on-point for them, but they don't have to spend the hours that champions used to searching for and then getting vetted resources. They can turn, they can pivot and put all that time that they had reserved into the connection, into the humanness of what we need, which creates belonging.

- And what's so great about that is that, let's be honest, HR is crafting the message, right? So you know it's gonna be consistent. I've heard of that before. Some people call it newsletters. We called it internally for a while HR Mating in a Box. You know, just a really great resource that you can do. Now we do a weekly leadership PDF that has information that comes out every week from our organization. So I think whatever way that you're looking to communicate having that consistency, reliability, and really thinking about the different mediums that you mentioned it, right? So it's a PDF, but it's also got podcasts, and videos, and articles. So the way people are digesting information is even diverse which I think is really important to think about. As I wrap up our conversation and as somebody who has a robust ERG program in their organization, if you were creating ERG from scratch right now, what are the things that you would do differently, or the advice you'd give for those listening on. How do I get this started in a way that's gonna be impactful and be able to grow, and really hear the voice of the employee, but in a way that's gonna impact the business. You talked about strategy. Maybe DEIA isn't in their strategy yet, but you still wanna start an ERG. What advice do you have for them?

- So the county went through a big re-imagining the core processes of what we do. And what I love, and I think this goes out to all this work, is we put community engagement at the very center of it. If you aren't talking with those that you hope will be members prior to even getting your logo and all the other marketing, if you don't have their voices at the table then maybe you're just speaking to your own little friend group. Pull the people in and once you get your support network, you're going to lighten your own load because somebody's gonna say, "Oh, I love doing this and I love doing that." And you come online with a robust network already in place. In that network and in that engagement, it's not just about one group of people in one sector. It's who's the leadership that you're already gathering as your sponsor or multiple people so that they're kind of fighting, clamoring over, "Oh, no, I wanna be their sponsor. I wanna be their sponsor." Do it in fun ways. Get pizza and say, "All right, if you could imagine having this space and what kind of events it would contain, tell me." And then you just record it all but in a really fun, relaxed, casual way. And then it just melds into who that ERG is. You're creating the culture before it exists. You're creating that culture before there's this logo and this ERG and it's just natural.

The more organic it is, the more sustainable it is.

- I think that's such good advice and very practical, because you might be listening and go, "Okay, I don't even know where to start." But then you might know, oh, hey, I know that there's these women that meet and maybe they got a book club, or they are helping each other grow in a different way, or maybe there's this group of underrepresented minorities that you know volunteer in a specific way, and so you can tap into that stuff that already exists. So I really love that advice. You've got an amazing story as to what you're doing with the county and I was just so excited to take a few minutes to chat with you and I can't wait to hear about what's coming next. As we wrap up with our conversation, what are just some last thoughts that you have for our listeners?

- One other thing that I would add is who's already done it? Have conversations with people who've already walked those steps because not only do you want your community that's going to be there with you, but why reinvent the wheel? There are people who've done the hard work and they want to pull you alongside. So have those conversations in those spaces as well so you see those who've gone before, and you have all of your people there with you, and then you're just having fun getting to create connection all the way through.

- What great advice. Thank you so much, Holly.

- Thank you.

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