

- 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. Bethany, thank you so much for sitting down with me and chatting today.

- Yeah, thanks for asking me to.

- So you live in this space around emotional intelligence, and it's such a fascinating topic, but for those listening, maybe we just start with a baseline question: What is emotional intelligence by definition?

- Yeah, so the academics in the world would say that emotional intelligence is how we translate our emotions into actionable behaviors that are positive for us as humans. So it's essentially taking self-awareness, social awareness, and turning that into relationship management and self-management, right? But the thing about emotional intelligence is, we talk often about it in life skills, but it is something that really translates into the workplace to make us better leaders, to make us better teammates, just to make us better at managing ourselves in the workplace. So it's not just the skill for, you know, I'm a leader, I have to be emotionally intelligent, whoever you are in an organization, you become a better employee, a better coworker, a better you if you use emotional intelligence in your interactions with others.

- It's such a great point because, you know, in my HR career, I've spent a lot of time, you know, hearing, you know, "You gotta have business acumen. You have to know the business. You have to know the numbers." And those things are very true. Don't get me wrong. But now we're hearing more about soft skills, about empathy, about authenticity. Why do you think we're seeing that shift now?

- I think that we have to because of what we've seen happen in the workplace over the last few years. So when I started in the workforce years ago, we won't talk about how many years ago, but years ago, I came into the workforce with my emotions on my sleeve. Like, I am just an emotional person. I talk about my emotions. I'm okay telling you how I'm feeling. And I was told so often early on, "Bethany, you have to learn to rein that in. You have to learn to check your emotions. You can't bring your emotions into the workplace." And we were told that this is how we be professional. That if you want to be professional and move up, you need to learn to not be emotional about your work. And I was so challenged by don't be emotional about your work. 'Cause I'm like, "It's work. If I care about it, if it's my values, it's emotional, and I'm going to have emotions when it's going right. I'm gonna be joyful about it and when it sucks. I'm gonna be pissed off and angry about it. And how can I not bring that into the

workplace?" And today we are at a place where we all collectively experienced this emotional charged challenge together, right? The pandemic, a lot of the racial challenges that happened in 2020, like we experienced a lot of issues that brought us together emotionally. And so all of a sudden we're at a place where we're okay talking about emotions in the workplace. And I think that now as leaders, we're recognizing that the check your emotions at the door is no longer relevant. It's more you have to use your emotions.

- You know, I've been talking to HR professionals for a long time about this concept of women crying at work, right? That has come up, right? So many times there's this like-

- I have emotions about you bringing up this topic.

- Right, and I remember when it clicked for me and how to describe it to somebody else in our profession, I said, "Listen, when you have a," I'm very, I'm stereotyping right now, "when you have a woman who comes in your office and she's crying and you're like, 'I don't know what to do with that. She's crying, blah, blah, blah.'" I'm like, "It is no different than when you have," again, stereotypical, "a male come in your office and they're screaming at you." They are both heightened emotions. They're both an emotional reaction to something that they're experiencing. So it's important that you understand how to deal with both emotions, and neither one is good or bad per se, obviously, appropriate, inappropriate, in what they're saying. But emotions are emotions.

- Absolutely. Well, I think, I'll challenge you a little bit too, when we think about women crying in the workplace, right, what about men crying in the workplace? There's this really good story about Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks. So Howard Schultz left Starbucks number of years ago, came back at a time when Starbucks was failing. They were closing stores left and right. It was just after the Great Recession. And there was a lot of challenges in the Starbucks space. And so Howard Schultz stepped back in as CEO, and in his opening address to, like, all the general managers, he cried on stage, and everyone was like, "Yes, Howard. Yes. Show those emotions. That's amazing." And a lot of people sat back and said, "What if Howard was a woman? What if Howard cried on stage in front of everyone at this really challenging time in the organization, and he cried, would we praise her?"

- Yeah.

- No, we wouldn't. We would be like, "She's weak. She's not gonna lead us into..." Well, these are the biases that we hold around emotional expression, right? When men yell, we're like, "You're angry. You need to calm down." When women cry, "You're being too emotional about this. You need to rein it in," right? But these are our expressions and they're also our rules, like our biases, our feelings rules, and we

have to work on our biases around emotional expression. We have to work on understanding that emotions are natural responses to our environment, right? I always say in talks that I give and in the class that I teach, my favorite thing about emotional intelligence is that emotions are data. We all want data, right? We want data around everything that we do. Give me data about, you know, our retention rates and our engagement rates and all those things. Your emotions are data about your environment and what's happening to you. So when you're incredibly angry in a meeting, what's happening in that meeting, probably some value that you hold dear is not being upheld or maybe some boundary that you set is being challenged, right? And so you're angry, the anger is telling you something about what to do, your sadness, your grief, they are helping you understand and process your environment. If we don't use some emotions as data, we're never gonna get to emotional intelligence. So the piece about women crying challenges me because for a long time I would always say, "I'm not gonna cry in the workplace," right? Like, that's my check part. Like, that's where I draw the line on feelings rules. But I've cried in the workplace now. I've cried in meetings now. I've cried to my boss now. I've cried in lots of places. But I've also screamed and I've also pounded the table, but in a, like, appropriate pounding the table kind of way. And I've now realized that it's not so much about the expression that I'm giving, it's about the appropriateness of the action that I'm using in response to how I'm feeling and what that feeling is telling me about what's happening.

- So as I'm listening to you, I'm thinking about my own emotional intelligence, and I can be a very passionate person at times. And that can come across as maybe being overly sensitive. So I guess I'm looking for two pieces of advice from you. How do you have the conversation with the employee who is very passionate and have that encourage them to use their emotions in a way that is productive and helpful but also educating those managers on how to, like you said, just uncover some of those things you were talking about? Like, what is happening in the room? Is there a value being challenge? What coaching have you given people on those?

- So I'll start with the first question. I think that when you're talking about how to develop yourself, right, it's really about your emotions. You have to understand how they're going to be received by others. And so the social awareness piece is crucially important to emotional intelligence. Because if I say, "I'm okay being angry because I'm incredibly angry about this situation and I want to deliver that passion in a way that's effective for what I authentically want to say," okay, but how's it gonna be received on the other end, and who are you talking to that's going to receive that? So this is where the, you know, me being told early on in my career, "Bethany, you have to reign in your emotions and check those emotions at the door." I did that for a while, but I also think that I've learned that doing that in a way to help others receive the

emotion that's coming later 'cause they're not gonna not get it from me, it's really about learning how to deliver your emotions in a way that they're going to be received in the way you want them to be received, right? So you're delivering passion or you're delivering your excitement about something. How is it going to be received? And you want that person to receive it in the way that you're trying to deliver it. So sometimes you have to work on adapting your emotional delivery so that other people receive the emotions the way you want to.

- The second question was, how do you teach managers to recognize when somebody, maybe they're not as far in that journey of developing their own emotional intelligence, but we put a lot on leaders, right? So leaders not only do we expect them to be emotionally intelligent, we expect them to understand when their employees maybe aren't being as emotionally intelligent as we need them to be. So how do they start to decipher, yeah, okay, I can see, Bethany, that you're angry right now, and not have a gut reaction and write you off, oh, she's just angry, and dig into, why are you angry? What is the message you're sending me?

- Yeah, I think for that second part, I think for managers to want to do this, one, they have to be committed to the work, right? They have to understand. So there are some managers who got to where they are today by checking their emotions at the door. And so we have to remember they were successful because they didn't do this. And now we're asking them to lead in a different way that they're not comfortable. And so we have to approach them with where they are and we have to get their buy-in for the work. So we have to help them understand why it's going to make them a better leader when they've been a good leader or a successful leader for so long without doing this work. So we have to help them understand the why. And then I think also we have to help managers understand that the kinds of emotional charged conversations that we're having in the workplace today are not necessarily going to be the same as the way that they've been doing it for so long, right? I was actually just having a conversation with a colleague at here at the SHRM conference, and we were talking about neurodiversity and neurodiversity around, like, emotional expression and how there are so many people in the workplace today who identify as neurodiverse, and the way that they receive emotions, the way that they give emotions are not the way that we typically expect for emotions to be displayed. And so for managers who have been successful for so long by expecting everyone else to adapt to this normal professional way of responding to emotion, we have to help them understand that that's probably not what's going to work in the workplace in the future, right? If we want the skills and the talent of those amazing neurodiverse people, we have to be willing to adapt to how they want to deliver emotions, how they authentically connect because that's how we're going to get their best authentic selves in the workplace. And it's challenging, right? If I'm used to

doing something the same way, if you ask me to go drive my car and all of a sudden you switch me, if I had to go to, like, London and drive on the other side of the road, I'm gonna be like, "I don't know what I'm doing. Like, this is so awkward and uncomfortable," right? It's awkward and uncomfortable to do work in a way that we've never done before, but we have to just teach them, we have to help give them the skills, we have to ask them for feedback about what they're doing, ask them to ask for feedback. And when we do that, I couldn't drive in London on the other side of the road, like, day one of being there, but if you, like, put me in for 10 minutes and then took me out and then, like, as I start doing it by, like, a week, I'm gonna be good. I can drive, right? It'll take me a little bit to adapt, but I can do it. So it's the same thing with this. It's just kind of using emotional muscles that we're not used to using in the workplace for those particular leaders.

- So as we get a little bit tactical, you know, and you're listening, you're like, "Okay, I get it, I need to grow this muscle," what are the resources that you should be tapping into? Is it, you know, a list of books? Is it practice exercises? You know, what in your experience has been the best tools and resources to help people grow in this area?

- Yeah, so my favorite book on emotional intelligence came out a couple of years ago. It's by two authors, Liz and Mollie, and it's called "No Hard Feelings." And it's a really easy read and it's a really kind of introduction into emotional intelligence in the workplace and also, it's good not only for developing, like, managers and leaders, it's also good for just, like, self-reflection about how you respond and the kinds of emotions you bring into your work. When I was reading that book, one of the chapters is on not taking your work so seriously. And I was like, "No, of course I take my work seriously, right? Like, I'm passionate. It's, like, what I do, it's how I add value. Why would I not take it so seriously?" And then I realize, like, I drain myself. I get so emotional about it. I'm so connected in that I can't step out and see the bigger picture about how or where I'm adding value or where I'm not. And so for me, that book was amazing. Even though I've been in this space for a while, it was still even better to read it. That's a book that I use actually in the class that I teach. Brene Brown actually has a new book called "Atlas of the Heart" and it's basically like a dictionary of emotions, right? So you're like, "I'm feeling grief. I'm gonna go to the grief section and pull that one up." So it's a great read. And then she actually did an HBO Max series with an audience all talking about emotions, about work, about the challenges we've had through the pandemic. And that is, if you're not a reader, like, go watch that series, it's really good. It's kind of insightful to the kinds of emotions you'll feel about the things that people are talking about as well. Then also there's a ton of great HBR articles. Look into the work of Susan David, and there's just some really amazing stuff out there that you

can find if you're just like, if you're just peaked in interest about how do I do this better.

- I will make sure to include all of those links in the show notes because, you know, I'm always looking for my next book to devour. So I love those suggestions. I love Brene Brown, and I've never met somebody who doesn't love Brene Brown, so.

- I know, she's, you know, this year, she, like, just sort of stepped back into the space of podcasting because she took time off, and the podcasts that she's put out now I feel, like, are so real because she took this time to step away and, like, figure out challenges she was facing. And so she did some new ones recently with Adam Grant and Simon Sinek. They're amazing stuff. Oh, I thought of one more thing that's like a exercise that you can do. So one of the things that I talk to students about all the time in my classes is building your emotional vocabulary, right? So to talk about emotions, you have to understand your emotions, but if somebody asks you how you're feeling, how do you typically respond? "I'm happy. I'm sad. I'm angry." Okay, those are three emotions, but, like, anger has, like, a whole spectrum, right? Are you, like, furious with me or are you, like, irritated with me? Because irritated and furious are two very different emotions. So if we get better at our emotional vocabulary, we're better able to deliver the data we want someone else to like, "I am irritated with you. I am furious with you." You're getting better data because I described my emotion better. So there's this really easy exercise. Like, give yourself one minute and write down every emotion that you can think of. And if you do that, like, don't do it every day, but, like, if you do it, you know, once a month or something, you'll start to see that you develop emotional vocabulary, you start using different language because you are thinking about the kind of language around the emotions that you use. And so then you make it better for others as they get that emotional data.

- I feel like I should find a link to remember back in the day where that was the magnet and you could, like, move the little square.

- Oh yeah. Right, like, here's where I'm feeling today.

- You gotta bring that back.

- Yeah, and you, like, strategically put it on the one that you want, like, you know, your partner to see. Like, "Do you see that I'm furious?" Furious. That was last night, or whatever it was.

- Yeah, yeah. I love it. Well, this has been such a great conversation, and thank you so much for all the great resources and tools. I think it's something, you know, a lot of people are looking for, so I appreciate it.

- Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

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