— 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 Traci Chernoff. She is the director of employee engagement at Legion Technologies, and she actually hosts a podcast herself called "Bringing the Human Back to Human Resources." So Traci, thanks for jumping on with me today.

— Thank you for having me. I'm really excited to chat with you today.

— So you've been doing a lot of speaking on the topic around attracting and retaining hourly employees, which we know right now is so important. So, I'd love to hear your perspective on some of the key differences companies need to consider from that hourly versus salaried population.

— Totally, so this might be a little bit of a hot take, and I'm sure there will be some questions and thoughts coming out of this, but actually, I don't believe there's much of a difference. And I say this having recruited both hourly and salaried employees throughout my career. And the reason why I say that is because hourly employees want and need the same benefits and characteristics of employment that salaried employees do. And that comes down to schedule flexibility and predictability, fair and competitive compensation, and predictable scheduling. So it's not just the flexibility. It's also being able to have the life that people want to design and create for themselves. And so, that's where I would say there really isn't much of a difference. And the closer we can see hourly employees to salaried employees in terms of their demands, the easier it actually is for us to solve some of these challenges. Because really, the biggest difference between an hourly and a salaried employee is how they're earning their income. And at the end of the day, they're all human beings, we're all human beings, and we kind of all want the same things.

— Do you see technology being used differently in these populations?

— Technology is really important when it comes to not only attracting and retaining employees but also meeting the demands. I mean, the reality is, is that Gen Z is going to end up being the majority of the workforce probably in the near future, and we have to, we're already in a tech-focused space as a society, as a global community, right? So everything, I mean, our phones are right next to us, I'm sure, and that just shows that technology, everything being at our fingertips is not only a demand, it's an expectation. And so, when it comes to, like even if we think about a business that is leveraging like the gig economy. Everything is at the person's fingertips, both the consumer and the employee. And so, recognizing that that is driven by technology, that's the first step. The second step, I would say, is

that we, again, hourly employees wanting and needing the same thing as salaried employees, that part of that is having this ability to see a schedule, have a predictable schedule. I really think that has a huge influence on people's experiences. I like to use this example of, you know, you go to your local Starbucks and you order a coffee. And you're ordering a coffee probably from a person, maybe the mobile app, but at the end of the day, there's a human being behind your order. And we're not necessarily always thinking about that human being. Like, what is Genesis, some arbitrary name, right, like let's say there's Genesis the barista down at my local Starbucks making my caffe misto. She might have a baby shower to go to on Friday, but if she doesn't have a predictable schedule or a way to swap shifts or a way to say, "Hey, I need some flexibility this week," then we're asking Genesis to actually give up a piece of her life. And so, this is where, for me, scheduling predictability, flexibility, it's hugely impactful, and I do think there are many technologies out there that you and I are both aware of that really drive this forward.

– It completely highlights the idea of employees wanting inside of their workforces the same experiences they're getting as consumers.

– You know, as you were talking about,

– Right.

– You know, apps and engaging, I was thinking about Instacart. I'm obsessed with Instacart. It was such a huge help during the pandemic, and I haven't been able to let go of it since. But you know, it's, you're right, there is a person at the end of that app who's actually doing the work. And they need flexibility in how they use that app as well as to when they're available, when they're not available, decisions on whether they're gonna take a job or not based on tips. So that completely aligns with what we've been thinking and talking about when it comes to the gig economy. You know, as technology evolves in this space, though, I think there's a lot in the artificial intelligence and algorithm space that can really help influence the technology that these employees are gonna need. What are some of the trends that you're seeing there?

– In terms of trends, I mean, I think that demand forecasting is huge. And what I mean by demand forecasting is really allowing businesses to kind of give up the memorization that they've needed to master in order to schedule and create really this understanding of what their business drivers look like. And I can tell you from my retail experience, you know, everyone says, "No one knows a business better than a store manager," right? Like, you won't find anyone that knows numbers, metrics, traffic like a store manager. But at the end of the day, a human brain, as far as I'm aware, I'm not an expert in this, but as far as I'm aware, the human brain can only compute so much, so often. And so, when we think about artificial intelligence, this is

where we can say, "Hey, store manager, you are really good at this. But our computer is going to be able to take all of those demand drivers that you've had to memorize for years and years and years and be that acting force for you to create a forecast based on those demand drivers." So that's really demand forecasting. And so, if you think about, you walk into your local Target or Trader Joe's, hopefully, there are the perfect number of cashiers. Well, that's only happening thanks to artificial intelligence and technology that enables forecasting and demand drivers to meet in the middle in this perfect harmonious place. And you know, when we think about the trends really, especially with the gig economy, this allows managers and employees to have a harmonious experience. Managers are often saying, "I am inundated with having to manage my employee requests on top of business needs." And I'm always asked the question, "Well, how do you reconcile this? How do businesses have their needs met and how do employees have their flexibility and predictability needs met?" Well, this is how, through technology, finding those nooks and crannies. Thanks to artificial intelligence, which can compute much faster, much better than the human brain, we now have resolved and reconciled the time that managers are spending, which in my experience, was more than 10 hours every time scheduling came up, you're giving, you're taking that 10 hours and giving it back to a store manager. They're able to reinvest that time. It drives revenue up. It allows them to spend more time with their employees, and therefore, it actually impacts employee experience. So, I'm really hoping that, through having these conversations, including the one that we're having now, that business leaders in HR and outside of HR can really see the potential when we think about technology impacting employee experience.

– My husband's in charge of the schedule at his, he's a fireman. He's at a fire department.

– Oh, cool.

– And I can't tell you how many hours he spends a week moving things around when people call in.

– It's brutal.

– So just as, I'm sure that's true for all the managers listening who have that on their task list to do. You know, I think some of the technologies that we've seen out there that allow more choice for the employees, you know, shift swapping, flexibility in maybe shift coverage or job sharing or all those kinds of things, those work really well in tandem with the technology you're talking about, where the algorithms can kind of know, yeah, okay, these people can switch, these people can't, here's where it's gonna be higher and we need more workforce, here's where we don't need as many employees, so like we can adjust our schedule that way. How have you seen these changes in technology actually increase employee engagement and culture?

— So, I have seen it firsthand in my retail experience. I work at
Legion. I had Legion as a customer, so I've seen both sides. And
actually, when you think about what technology does and what I even
experience on the customer side, if you're focusing technology, your
tech stack, whatever it is that a company has, even if it's one thing,
one piece of technology, and the decision-maker is focused on the
audience, I will guarantee you the technology will work. And this, I
have to stand on a soapbox for a moment here. I always, always, always
call out this point that when someone is making a decision, when
someone's adding a tool, technology, or bringing something to an
organization, those decision-makers are usually sitting higher up on
the hierarchical ladder, right? And I've been there. But there is
nothing worse than that decision-maker just making a decision based on
what they know without bringing in such important and critical
stakeholders. When I was in retail and I was rolling out tools myself,
I would always bring in managers, select store managers, district
managers, regional managers, and even sometimes like the hourly sales
associate. Because if you're not solving their problems, then what
problems are you solving for? Like, you're just looking to add
something onto your resume that you've accomplished something? That
does nothing. So, if you are adding to your tech stack, if you are
expanding the tools that you do have, I can only implore you as many
times as you're willing to listen to this podcast over and over again
that you absolutely must think about, who is your audience? Do you
have any of your stakeholders in on the conversation, and are you
actually solving their challenges and their problems?

— I can just feel the pain in your voice from past experiences. And
I've been there.

— I'm scarred.

— There's been plenty of times we've worked on projects where, you
know, you think you're solving for A and it's really, you know, B, C,
D that the employees are experiencing and you've added something to
their list of things to do rather than creating

— Yes

— Or launching a tool that's actually gonna help them. You know, we
talk so much in HR about, you know, people first, employee-centric,
experience-based. Sometimes we just miss the mark with that when it
comes to technology specifically.

— Yes, I, you'll hear this. If you've ever listened to any of my
episodes on my podcast, which I do not expect you to, I will always, I
happen to often talk about this, that you know, you look on LinkedIn
or you look on other social channels and there's such an opportunity
for everyone to have a platform, right? Which is amazing. However, a

lot of the things that I'm reading all the time are like using these buzzwords, right, employee experience, leveraging like people, let's focus on people and humanity, but there's never a clear understanding of like what, why we're doing this, what we're doing it for, and how we're going to do it. Like, the action behind the intention is so important. And I love that now, more than ever, people in HR and outside of HR are talking about this, because that's part of the problem that we've had leading up until really the last few years, that it was just like HR leaders screaming from the rooftops, "We need to focus on people." And now, everyone's saying that, which is fabulous. So I certainly am not knocking that. That, we want to see more of. But now it's like, okay, well, we know what the challenge is. We have to focus on how we solve it truly and authentically, and this even brings up the whole like quiet quitting thing, which I also spend a lotta time breaking down. Like, there's nothing wrong with quiet quitting. All we're talking about are people setting boundaries, right? So why have we made such progress talking about how people matter and they're at the core of every single thing that we have to do, and then we're like, "Oh, quiet quitting, you're setting boundaries, why are you doing that?" We have to embrace the human condition and give people the space to really be who they are and, you know, again, solve, truly solve the problems, not just hitting the buzzwords, but really breaking down what they all mean and how we can actually drive those things forward.

— We've talked a lot about quiet quitting too and I couldn't agree more that it's not what people think it is. So, I appreciate you bringing that up.

— Right.

— And you know, this change in the way we view about technology, I think a part of it is definitely driven by Gen Z coming into the workforce. You know, they are gonna expect answers, you know? "Yeah great, I love that you're rolling out a new tool. Why? Why do I need to use it? I'm already doing"

— Right.

— "A, B, and C that'll solve the problem I have. Is this gonna help me?" And there's onus on leadership in HR to be able to answer those questions now, like there never was before.

— Totally, and you know what? This just made me think about something too. Part of the, like this focus on employee experience, quiet quitting, like this whole bubble, right, that has formed really coming out of COVID, everyone's thought through what their lives mean now, and to just put it plainly. When we think about like the way that business has kind of always operated, at least in the last, let's say, three to four decades, it's been like churning, churning, churning out

results. And I actually feel like one of the biggest differences in the last few years is that people actually wanna slow down a little bit. People want to see a long-term solution that's authentic, that means something, that isn't just like, "Okay, we have to do this, so let's get something on paper." And I think that Gen Z is really to credit this to, because there is this expectation of, "Well, why am I doing this and why do I need to do it? Let's think a little bit more critically about all of the things that we've done up until this point." And I think it's a wonderful thing. And so, when we think about how business probably needs to continue to evolve and change along with the technology that we continue to see evolve, I think that business leaders might need to become accustomed to moving a little bit more slowly, thinking through, "Okay, what is the long-term strategy and how are we going to get there?" And part of that, I think, part of that moving really fast is wanting a competitive advantage, of course. Businesses need that. But I just, I don't know, I'm feeling a tectonic plate shifting and I do think that that is part of the boundary setting, people don't want to work 15 hours a day anymore for the most part. I know I'm generalizing, but you know, hopefully you can get what I'm trying to say here.

- I think everything that you mention about the future of work is so important for everybody to think through, how that's gonna show up in your organization. You know, I do think that, you know, we used to talk about five-year plans and now we talk about, you know, two-year plans because of the pandemic. But there is some truth in, you know, thinking slow but moving fast when you have to, but having that kind of slow thought process and really thinking about, what is the experience I'm creating for my employees and my customers, is a little bit different than I think how we've thought about it in the past. We haven't necessarily led with experience. We've led with program or tactical or process that we have to accomplish. So, I think these insights are really helpful. I hope our listeners got a lot out of our discussion, Traci, so thanks for jumping on with me today.

- Of course, thank you for having me. I really appreciate the opportunity.

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