– 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. Hana, thank you for taking a few minutes of your day to sit down and chat with me.

– Thank you for having me.

– So you spend a lot of time talking about Gen Z. And I feel like the last, I don't know, 10 years, we've been educating ourselves on millennials, over and over again. And now millennials are in management. So now it's really time for us to start thinking, and diving into Gen Z, and what they want. So what do they want?

– So I'm glad you mentioned the millennials, because one thing that we all have to do, before getting started with understanding Gen Z, and who they are and what they want, I believe that it's important to recognize all the mistakes that we did with millennials. When millennials came on board, they presented a major challenge to the workplace. People just did not know how to cope, or incorporate them, into the workplace, because they wanted very different things, like work-life balance, they like purpose and values, things that people did not speak much about in the workplace. And there was a lot of confusion, and frustration, in that process. And I believe that as a result of that, many opportunities got lost along the way. And there was a lot of trial and error going on, before we actually got it right with the millennials. So I think the first thing is just, we have to step back, and truly ask ourself, and not make assumptions about Gen Z. We cannot assume that Gen Z are just millennials on steroids, because they're not. They're very different. And then, start really understanding who they are, and what they want.

– As you think about some of the markers for Gen Z, what are the differences that we're seeing now in this generation, compared to other generations?

– So there are, there are several things that make Gen Z a really unique generation. One is diversity. They are the most diverse generation to ever live in this country. 48% are being minorities. And it's important to understand that from their perspective, diversity is not just a statistical figure. It is a cultural lens through which they view the world, and it's something that they expect from the workplace. So when you asked me before what they want, diversity is one thing that is quite top of the the list for this generation. They want to see in the workplace, a population that re reflects what they see every day in their homes, in their communities, in their schools. So that's one defining factor. I think the other defining factor, is that this is the most educated generation. And they have the lowest high school dropout and the highest college enrollment, compared to

any generation before them. And on top of that, they are the digital natives. So they grew up with technology. They know how to use technology in multiple ways. And they bring all these things to the workplace. And that, I believe, makes them very different than previous generations.

– What do you see as some of the challenges that we need to consider, looking at this generation? You mentioned mistakes we made with millennials, right? So do you see mistakes, or things we should avoid, as we think about, you know, bringing this generation into the workforce, and really integrating them into to the work we're doing, and some change management that we have to do?

– Yes. I think one of the big thing, in my view, that needs to change, is the entry level roles. Because most companies have entry level roles that were designed for previous generations. And as I said before, we now have a generation that is most educated, that they have highly valuable skills, like digital skills. And we can't assume that they're just gonna come, and be happy, in those entry level roles. We need to think about how we give them meaningful roles that truly take advantage of their education, and their digital skills, to make them flourish in the workplace. And I think the one thing about Gen Z that I always find quite fascinating, is that 64% of Gen Z, will tell you that they will stay five years or more with an employer, if the conditions are right. But in reality, we are not seeing it happen in real life. In fact, what we are seeing is completely the opposite. We are seeing many Gen Zers joining the workplace, and living after three months, or six months, or a year. So that loyalty just simply, that notion of, "I want to stay longer, I want to be loyal, "because I am looking for stability," is not actually taking place in the real world. And I think it's not happening because the roles that employers are offering, are just not in line with the expectations of where this generation see themselves, in terms of what they bring to the table, and where they can contribute.

– Gartner recently did a study around Gen Z, and it was fascinating because one of the, you know, they did like the top five concerns for Gen Z, and you know, I think most people would think, "Oh, it's gotta be pay." It wasn't pay. It was skillsets for the future, which really aligns to what you're saying about, you know, them staying in a role a short period of time, because clearly, they're not getting the skills, or the opportunities that they think will set them up for success for the future.

– That's right.

– So I think that propels us into thinking about that model of skills-based work, rather than just a very generic job description, right? You're bringing in employees for the set of skills that they have. So as we think about that, how do we keep them engaged, and moving

forward, beyond just, "Hey, you're gonna get promoted." How do we think about it differently from a skills-based perspective?

— So you know, I think when it comes to Gen Z, and that's what makes them a very complex generation, there is, on one hand, all the work aspects that they're looking for. So one way to keep Generation Z engaged, is give them regular feedback. And they want that feedback, and they just don't understand the notion of annual performance reviews, that are done once a year. They want to know all the time where they stand. And that's not because they're insecure, it's the opposite, because they're ambitious. They want to know how they're doing, they want to exceed expectations, and they want to move quickly in the organization. So, that's one thing about the workplace, and engaging them. I think the other thing is, what technology are you providing? How do you walk in? How much autonomy do you give them to perform their roles? And then there are things that are not related directly to the role that they have, but what the company stands for. So it's the purpose of the company, it's their values, it's diversity and inclusion. It's, what do you do to support your community? So Gen Z are looking at all this aspects, and they make decisions about employers, as you said, not only about compensation and benefits, but all these other aspects, meaningful roles, and what the company has beyond that role.

— I wanna highlight something that you said, 'cause I think it's so important for HR to understand it. You talked about the ambition that Gen Z has, isn't insecurity. They want the feedback, not because they're insecure, but because they are craving the information to improve themselves in advance. What an exciting type of employee to have in your organization, somebody who's highly coachable, in seeking advancement opportunities. I think that's something we've missed in the conversation, when we talk about Gen Z, is that they are gonna be the highly educated, but I feel like they're also gonna be the most coachable, and the most moldable, in the skills that you're gonna need for your organization.

— Yeah And I think one thing that we didn't discuss so far, that is, again, unique for this generation, is how well they adapt to change. And this is in my view, one of the most important things that Gen Z brings to the workplace. I would say adaptability to change is their superpower. And I think it's important to understand why this is happening. You know, when we talk about generations, we always say, you know, "A generation is defined by some landmark events "that took place during the formative years "of that generation." And we talk about the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights movement, when we talk about baby boomers, or we talk about September 11, when we talk about millennials. When we talk about Gen Z, there isn't two, or three, or four events. It is a series of events that happened so quickly, over the past 24 years, and they absorbed those events in the most visceral way, through their cell phones, and social media feeds. So you just

think about it: the election of the first Black president, the Great Recession of 2008, the rise of social movements, like Me Too, and Black Lives Matter, the growing up in the shadow of school mass shootings, and most recently the pandemic. So if you look at this list of landmark events, there is enough to fill a lifetime, and they are only 24 years old. So Gen Z got accustomed to the fact that life is about change, and change is the only constant. And they just learn to adapt to it. They literally go with the flow. And they bring that thinking, and skill, to the workplace. And I think it's extremely valuable, at a time where the world around us, is changing so rapidly, to have people who are not being overwhelmed by change, but able to embrace it, and move on, and do something with it.

— How do you think we help this generation grow in our organizations then? If they're adaptable to change, and they're willing to learn new skills, how does that change how we work? And I know that's a giant question, but like, I feel like this generation is gonna move us forward in new definitions of work that maybe we haven't even considered.

— Absolutely. And I believe that the only way to do that, is to actually give them the opportunities. Let them show what they can do, give them opportunities to shine. And it could be within their core role, within an organization, but also it could be, give them special projects to walk on, so they can show what they can do. And I think the quicker we develop them, and allow them to move into management positions, I think the better it'll be.

— How exciting. Thanks for taking a few minutes to get us up to speed on Gen Z. And you know, I'm really excited for this generation. My kids are in this generation, so I'm excited to see what they're gonna do for the future of work, and future of the world.

— Thank you so much for having me.

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