

- You are listening to the HR Mixtape, your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought provoking interviews, and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel, well, like work. Now, your host, Shari Simpson.

- Joining me today is CHRO at Paylocity, Jill Morrison. Jill joined Paylocity in 2022, bringing more than 20 years of dedicated and progressive HR experience. She has spent many years as a change agent and leader in high tech companies experiencing tremendous growth and transformation. Prior to Paylocity, she spent more than seven years in the dynamic higher education tech space leading several areas of HR and supporting the business through significant private equity transactions and acquisitions. Jill, thanks so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

- Thanks, Shari, good to be here.

- So you have kind of climbed this HR ladder and I typically feel like that's a mix of strategy and hard work and maybe a little sprinkle of serendipity. I'm curious, what's the secret sauce that took you from an HR newbie to that coveted CHRO side?

- Yeah, I love that. Such a good way to put it because I really do feel so fortunate to be in the position I'm in. I kind of pinch myself a little bit from time to time. I think if I look back at the path I've taken, I really first have to attribute to the leaders I've worked for. That's both the people I've worked directly for and those I've partnered with in the business. Honestly I think they probably spotted more potential in me early on than I even believed in myself and that was really, really empowering for me. I think I've always gone really deep into understanding the businesses I've worked in. I've never been that kind of behind the scenes partner, I wanted to be up upfront and at the table from the beginning. And I think those leaders saw that curiosity, recognized the unique role of HR to be in that seat and in those meetings and they really kept those doors open for me. And that just carried through to today.

- There's nothing better than a leader or a peer who sees something in you that maybe you don't see yourself or hasn't grown to the level that you feel confident in it. My own journey has definitely people in my space who've done that for me. As you moved into kind of your different roles, I feel like as you transition from role to role it's not just, hey, I got a new business card, it's often you have to really change your mindset. You know, we talk about the Peter Principle, right? Getting promoted beyond what you're capable for. The same is true in HR, you have to change that mindset. Did you have a moment either in your role now or in previous roles where you're like, oh my gosh, I'm not in Kansas anymore I definitely have to approach this differently?

- Yeah, for sure. I can give a really specific example actually. So I moved into this role to the CHRO role and had a board meeting like my first week. That is a completely different interaction. So eye-opening and it's one of those interactions that you just don't get a lot of until you're in that role. There's not a ton that prepares you for it. And like maybe you came up through the comp side. I'd had the good fortune really because of the people I had worked for to have some interactions with the board before but that was in private equity, it's a very different dynamic. Coming to public which was a lot of why I wanted to join Paylocity. But it really is different. So it was this mix of, oh my goodness, I'm sitting in a boardroom with unbelievable people that I had never even met before. But also really fortunate because I got to join that meeting and I didn't own the agenda, right? So the chance to have the timing be such that a quarterly meeting fell that way that I could attend, could kind of get that orientation was really fortunate but also really kind of a little bit scary in the moment as well. So for sure a whole different part of the role.

- Beyond board meetings as you think about the CHRO role compared to being even a VP or a director, senior director level, what is kind of the CHRO toolkit look like that's different from those other roles?

- Yeah, I think, the biggest thing for me that's different is suddenly the decision making that comes with the role. So of course you're still gonna have the scenarios you're getting CEO approval maybe or other stakeholder input certainly. But the actual ownership of decisions is different. And I've spent so much time preparing the recommendations, having a point of view. I've always had a point of view, but suddenly owning it is different and it's decisions that affect people's lives every day. It's not something I'll ever take lightly. I think for me that means I ask even more questions. I look for even more data and people will tell you I already did a lot of that. So it really comes with the privilege and the responsibility of doing that is at a higher level and it's really like, you've gotta own that, you've gotta gotta back it in a new way and you wanna really do it right.

- Did you have to give yourself any self-talk or self-motivation as you went into those moments where you're like, okay, it's my decision to make? I think we hear about this as imposter syndrome and I don't know that I super love that word in general. I think we all have moments where we feel super confident and in moments we don't.

- Yeah, for sure. It's real, whatever we call it, it's real. I definitely have the moments where I get frustrated with myself I wish I could shake it, but I also think there's a really healthy way to use it. So it can be a really good reminder that none of us have all the answers. I really appreciate anyone who is willing to be comfortable with vulnerability, admit what they don't know, ask for the help. So I try to use it that way. I will tell people that like I really need to

understand this more or I have more questions, or I need to process it, right? That's a big one that I use a lot so I really do need to kind of sometimes step away. But I think more broadly, if I really do find myself questioning myself, I go to that network, right? So those same people who've supported me, believed in me, and been advisors and mentors to me over the years, I call on them. So I really do believe in the importance of building that network for yourself, maintaining those advisors, being an advisor to others, it's a two-way street. Sometimes it's my husband, right? Having that group of people you trust that know you really well and help you trust your gut, help you work through the information and remind you to believe in yourself for sure day in and day out. We all need it at times and we all do it for other people hopefully too.

- Beyond kind of moving into a decision maker role, as you think about preparing to be a CHRO, is there two to five skills that you're like, it doesn't matter what industry in or sector, these are the things you really need to think about developing and growing in before you get into this role?

- Yeah, for sure. I've been heavy in tech for the last 15 years or so, I've loved that. Every tech company is a little bit different too. I think that the other industries especially when I talk to our clients now it's fascinating to realize the different challenges everybody deals with. But if you step back from it all, I think the the first one for me is really thinking holistically. So that sort of bigger picture thinking, understanding the overall business needs, asking those broader business questions because you can't get to the right talent strategy if you aren't looking at the full business strategy. So I think that's a really significant, really important one. You've gotta go from 100,000 feet to 100 feet all day long and have that ability to do that but keep it in that context. I think with that just overall business acumen, being data-driven, we've gotta make informed decisions but not everything comes with information sometimes you have to predict that. So how are you combining those things? And then I think the other one really has to be really important is emotional intelligence across the board or however you wanna think about empathy, thinking about how you read the room, put yourself in other people's shoes. If you're leading HR, you are doing that on behalf of every employee. So that ability to do your best to consider the impact for any decision, any action, any policy, whatever the case might be across the board, you've gotta find a way to keep that priority and that skill at the top of the list for sure.

- As you think about those skills, have they changed in the last 10 years? I think about how we are talking about HR now which is very different than I think we talked about it even five years ago. But I'm curious at your level as a CHRO, what have you seen change in the last, I'm not gonna say 10 years 'cause I feel like COVID gave us 10 years in one year itself.

- For sure. Yeah, it's funny, I think a lot of the core skills are probably still really similar but how you apply them is really different, right? The world has absolutely changed around us. We talk a lot about the expectations of a modern employee, it's fundamentally different than what that was three years ago, to some extent probably even one year ago. Some of that's technology based, it's advanced so much. Just everything from supporting hybrid and remote work just to the reliance of having data at your fingertips. I think sometimes about, you just think over the last several years how much the working population has changed. So you think about in the workforce now, how many people grew up with the internet, right? They never received a paper memo like I did. They never had meetings that didn't automatically have Zoom or Teams or Slack messaging, whatever the case might be. We have to communicate across multiple different employee experiences, expectations, generational differences. There's not a one way, one size fits all to that. So there's I think more adjustment needed in how we get through to people. And then I think of the other piece that can't talk about the differences without calling out. It's just understanding the impact now of the future of AI. So if we think about both within our own functions so what does that mean in the HR job but also for the workforce, right? So you think especially for those in certain industries, what will that fundamentally mean for the impact on jobs? What skills do we need to be thinking about now to protect workforces, to adjust workforces, be prepared for the impact both within our own functions but also as we support our organizations. And that's really not something we were talking about even all that much two years ago, maybe starting to in the last year or so. But really, I mean, that's even in the last year that it's skyrocketed in understanding the depth of impact.

- You talked about that 10,000 foot view and the 100 foot view. How do you stay close to that 100 foot view with the work that you're doing?

- Yeah, I do think it's really important to stay in touch and it's really easy to think you're in touch and maybe not be in touch. So you kind of gotta keep that in check. I really do put that lens on any decision of the different audiences, right? What does this mean for the early career worker? What does it mean for somebody who might be exempt versus non-exempt? What responsibilities do people have in their lives? What are those key differences? You're never gonna get to every single scenario everyone is gonna be unique but really trying to work through that and get to the right decision. I do try to talk to people one-on-one whenever I can. I do learn so much from those conversations. Of course, it's not super feasible to talk to everybody regularly. So we have some really good tools here and practices I think at Paylocity that we put in place using technology. So that's everything from using our community tool where we have open dialogue with employees and they really have a space to ask questions and get responses. So that need for two-way communication at scale is really

important. You may know we also have a biweekly meeting hosted by someone pretty spectacular where we have live Q&A, right? I mean, I think a company of our size to have such frequency of live interaction and sort of ask me anything style approach is really special and really something that we put the importance on. So it does help keep the pulse, it isn't everybody's point of view every day but really trying to stay close to that. So I think the other piece just everyone is probably doing more and more of is that engagement pulse. So we're bringing in more tools to do frequent pulsing, to have a better sense for what's working, what's not. How do we take quicker action rather than sort of the days of the big annual surveys. How do we do that more frequently? So that's a big piece of all those things kind of coming together for your listening strategy, your action planning, your engagement management and just trying to have that at the front of decision making every day.

- A couple of those pieces you talked about really fall into creating and maintaining a great culture. At Paylocity we are blessed to have international employees. I'm curious for those that are listening who might be in organizations who they want to be CHRO with multi location, multi countries, what are some of those cultural nuances that you had to consider or continue to consider as you evolve in your own role?

- Yeah, it's really important. I've been really fortunate to work in really diverse, really global companies over the years. Personally, I spent six years living abroad so I was in London and got a chance to be really immersed. I learned the hard way a little bit. I honestly think the biggest learning is that you just have to put your assumptions aside. If you're going into a new market as we recently did here a little over a year ago, you have to learn about the area. You have to ask the employees questions about what matters to them, how do they communicate, what are their priorities? They won't be the same as what you're accustomed to. There are a lot of ways to do this. I think every situation is gonna be a little bit different but I think cultural training and education is just as important as compliance training when it comes to entering new markets. You wanna be successful, you wanna make those connections across borders. You really have to be open-minded, really open to learning the different ways and then really deliberate about the strategies you put in place to make those connections.

- You talked earlier about data and I think we all know that there's obviously basic metrics we need to be paying attention to in HR. But beyond that, what are some real critical metrics and indicators that you look at as a CHRO to help you kind of have a sense of what's happening in the organization, have a pulse and a radar on trajectory and how that aligns to business strategy?

- Yeah, so I do love looking at the data. I love digging into the

data. So I think with any data point and I'll kind of share a few thoughts. You need the ability to filter into it. Go derive the insights, apply context of what you might know into it to start cutting into it 'cause what it might look like at a macro level you need to get a little bit deeper sometimes to find the trends or find the opportunity. So I think that's always really important in how you're building dashboards and how you're thinking about the different ways to filter data or put it in the hands of those who have that context. But for me, I always start with what I call the employee landscape. You just need it to be really easy to understand the org structure, reporting lines, levels, spans, all those pieces to get a sense for the broader design. And that then helps inform some of the other things and where you'll see opportunities. And I think, if we're looking at engagement data all the time, that's super important. Having the trending, having a data point at any given point in time is one thing. The power comes with trending and how you're looking at what changes, what goes up, what goes down, what stays the same, what does that mean and what are you doing about it? Similarly, attrition data, exit survey data, connecting those two engagement data is where it starts to get really powerful, right? You can get a little predictive over time to understand what are you seeing in the engagement data and then what do you see pull through to the impact on an attrition and how do you get out in front of that much earlier to prevent it if it's preventable? And then of course, DEIA metrics, right? I think you've gotta understand the key metrics, trends in the DEIA space. What are you looking to accomplish? What is your set of expectations in order to inform programs, in order to inform strategies around those areas? And then of course there's gonna be performance metrics. So you think about performance metrics achievement on goals, might be commission data, might be velocity data in tech. How do those then connect to engagement, right? So again, you start layering these metrics together, that's where you really have this tremendous opportunity to understand more deeply at scale what might be going on and where the opportunities really are.

- If you weren't taking notes with all of the metrics that Jill just shared, I encourage you to rewind and write those all down 'cause that was such valuable information about how to think about data and to incorporate it together. So I really love you sharing that, Jill. As we wrap up our conversation, I'd like you to imagine for a second that you're having a cup of coffee with your younger self before you've kind of embarked on this CHRO journey. What's one piece of advice that you would give your younger self for somebody who wants to eventually end up in this role?

- I love that. Can be two things, I think they're connected. I think, for me if I really reflect back I think it's that and I kind of touched on this earlier, you'll be ready before you think you are and take the help. So you don't have to do it on your own. It can be really easy to think you've got to figure it out for yourself.

- Awesome, well, Jill, thanks so much for taking a few minutes of your day to chat about what it's like being a CHRO.

- Love it, thanks Shari, I appreciate it.

- I hope you enjoy today's episode. You can find show notes and links at [thehrmixtape.com](http://thehrmixtape.com). Come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.