

- You're 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 Woodrie Burich, CEO and founder of The Integration Group. An award-winning thought leader, author, Forbes coaches council member, and TEDx speaker, Woodrie's known for her proprietary approach to setting boundaries and building sustainable strategies in fast-paced and high-demand environments. She brings 20 years of experience as a senior leader and change management expertise working with Fortune 500 companies on global tech projects and billion-dollar merger and acquisition work. Woodrie, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast today.

- Thanks, Shari. Happy to be here.

- You are my first interview here at SHRM Inclusion, and I was so excited to have you and bring you on, and so let's kind of dig in right away. So given your ever-evolving hybrid world that we're all in, do you think that, you know, water cooler chats have simply been replaced by a series of, "Can you hear me?" or "You are on mute" moments? I feel like maybe we're in this space right now. I'm curious your perspective.

- Yeah. Such a great question. So I think where we are is, it's a challenge, right? This whole Zoom virtual teams meeting ongoing, whether it's Amazon Chime or whatever tool we're using, you know, we're kind of stuck in this perpetual, almost superficial transactional modes I think that we're getting into. And we need to be intentional as leaders, as managers, as supervisors, and as team members, as well as organizations to really have and cultivate intentional conversations, right? So that that very short transactional piece is not the norm.

- I love that. There's nothing worse than getting on a Zoom call now and getting that fake couple minutes of like, "How's your day?" "How are your kids?" And you just, you kind of know you're going through the motions. So I love that you have a kind of proprietary approach that really emphasizes setting boundaries. So how do we strike that balance between, "I'm here for you 24/7," per se, or "Sorry, hey, I'm clocked out." Like there's definitely been this switch, I think, as we've gone through the pandemic and coming out of it, or into an endemic, I'd rather say, is that I think a lot of people went into that 24/7 mode and now we're trying to back out and to have boundaries. How do we manage that?

- Yeah, totally. So one of the things that I find, and we see this with the research, is the vast majority, when we went home and started working from home, we're working more hours. All the research points

to that. And we can see that with productivity. If we look at the productivity, our productivity by working at home is actually either the same or increased, right? As many of the things that we're seeing in the organizations. I believe Johnny mentioned that on one of the first days. Or I can't remember who mentioned that. But anyway, when we look at that, we can see it is hard for us to switch off. And so I think we really need to start looking at creating what we call "cultures of permission," preemptive permission, normalizing, right? I was just in a wonderful workshop on mental health initiatives in this space and how to support taking a break and honoring that within our teams. And there's an individual aspect that we have with work boundaries, but there's also an organizational structural workflow piece that we really need to start addressing that cultivates those cultures of permission, that supports the individual to take a break, that recognizes and identifies, "Hey, I noticed, by the way, Shari, you worked until three o'clock this afternoon. Have you taken a break?" Or the simplicity of, you remember way back when, when we were in school, sometimes the teacher would let us out and they would say, "Oh, we're gonna have an outside day today." Why not have creativity meetings? Not every single meeting can be this way, but why not have meetings where there's no visuals on Zoom, there's no on-sign cameras. It's all, we're taking walks during this, and we're gonna have, somebody's gonna take notes, we can rotate turns, something along those lines to get some movement in our body and help our ergonomic shoulders and all the pain that we're taking from sitting at our desk all day, right? You know, so there's so many steps we can take with boundaries from both a tactile perspective as well as a strategic intentional perspective from organizations.

- What do you say to those managers, and I am guilty of this, so I'm putting myself in the same category of those of us who have found a rhythm that maybe we do work at night. You know, maybe we're sitting down and we actually, you know, we kind of do those mundane reply to emails, some of that wrote tasks that we have to do, we might do it in front of the TV and we're sending these emails out, eight o'clock, nine o'clock, 10 o'clock at night. We know our intent. Intent, right? Is not that somebody's going to read that and respond. But let's be real, if you have employees, they might see that and think, "I need to respond. Oh, Shari's working at 10 o'clock at night. Should I be working? The only way to advance in my company is if I show up this way." How do we coach those managers to realize the impact that they're having?

- So, many ways, right? One, have the conversation. We need to have the conversations and we need to talk about the impact that our actions are having on others, especially if we hold leadership positions or positions of power and utilizing delay delivery. We have the technology, right? Utilizing tech delay delivery whenever possible. However, I have talked, I remember a CEO mentioned to me one time, that they did that, they did delay delivery until Monday morning

at eight o'clock, but then they got a slew of emails back. And they said, "Oh, this doesn't work." I said, "Okay, great." You know, it's good to recognize, right? So sometimes we need to adapt it. We need to recognize that. But I think really having and cultivating conversations within the teams and having expectations and we need to recognize, collectively, that we're doing too much. Until we really acknowledge that and identify that and really start to address that from a workflow perspective, from a manageable workflow. When we look at manageable workflows, when we look at people who are consistently working 55 plus hour weeks, and we look at the International Labor Organization who says excessively long workers hours are 48 hours or more per week, and the average US worker works 49 hours per week per Gallup from 2014. And since we've had the pandemic, they say, on average, we're working two to three hours more per day. So we really have to work on identifying that we have a problem in our work world.

- How does human resources put the "human" back in human resources? And what I mean by that is focusing more intention on building community, building connection, and still reaching deliverables. Like we all still have to meet our business goals.

- Ah, full on. So the first piece is I believe people need to process and slow down a little bit, especially with the advent of AI, right? We need to start cultivating and honoring strategic space in our work environments or focus time. I have had different clients call it different things, focus time, strategic space, thinking time. It is very rare for us, as individuals, to have uninterrupted work time. We were talking about it before, right? Whether you look at teams or whether or not you look at Slack channels or whether or not you look at teams channels, or, you know, little instant messages or who knows, maybe some of us have two cell phones. That's not uncommon, especially in leadership positions too. Sometimes three cell phones. So with all of this bombardment and all of this interruption, how can we support workflows that honor focus time so that we can have some of that downtime and quiet space is really what we need. Quiet space to just think strategically and creatively. And then that is gonna foster that inner connection that we have with ourselves. Support and solidify that emotional regulation that we sometimes need in conflict-oriented situations and/or just the ability to be present with someone versus that transactional conversation we spoke about a little bit before, right? How do I connect in? I connect in by connecting inside me first. I connect with you because I'm connected here and there's really only two ways to get that right, time and space.

- What's the neuroscience behind that? I know that there's a lot of research out there around, you know, how our brains respond to different things in our environments and the ways we work and how that actually makes us feel engaged and ultimately retained by an organization. Yeah, so the two studies and the two kind of book spaces, the two pieces of research I should say that I really look at

is research around mindfulness and meditation. There's so much in that space. Now that said, I will say that some of my clients, they do not like breathing exercises. They do not like mindfulness and meditation, and that is totally cool. There is other tools that you can utilize. That said, it's a very easy access point for the vast majority of people. And if you're neurodivergent or something like that, work with a certified meditation teacher because there are so many good alternatives and approaches. Some of my clients utilize Qigong, for example, as an option, or tai chi, 'cause you still get the meditative benefits, but you have some movement option in there. So it kind of helps calm the mind while we still have that physical movement, which is also great if you're dealing with any kind of chronic back pain like I've dealt with before. So my point is, the research around that is really on focus and attention. And if we think about the one thing we always bring into our work environments, it's our minds, right? We always bring our minds to work. They do great work for us. So really doing that weight training, if you will, on providing ourselves that relaxed, quiet space and meditative space, if that's your thing, or breathing exercises. Just breathing exercises, not even meditation- or mindfulness-based exercise, just breath work alone. Harvard Medical School talks about how it quells and alleviates the stress response, right? So that's one piece. My favorite book on that subject, if you wanna look in the meditation mindfulness realm, is the work by Dr. Amishi Jha, J-H-A, and she's out of Florida. She's phenomenal and works with military branches and she's really gotten a lot of great, great recognition for her work in that space. And her book is called Peak Mind. Fantastic. And then the other area besides the focus and attention that I like to look at is this space around multitasking. And multitasking is so fascinating. You know, the research around multitasking, the concept that we actually pulled that from back in the 1960s, I think we started a dual processor computer and said, "Oh, it's multitasking. Oh, we can do that, but we only have one brain." So, you know, the reality is we can't multitask. We task switch and we do it very rapidly and that exhausts us at the end of the day. So every single time we're getting a notification, every single time we're getting that little message, every single time we get distracted by somebody at our cube or somebody at our desk or wherever we are, that's hard. We get a lot of exhaustion from that at the end of the day, and we need to find ways at an organizational level to stop that bombardment. And if you look at the research on multitasking, I think this is really fascinating, not only from a cognitive capacity, but also from an emotional capacity and emotional regulation. So some of the research shows, with multitasking, if you consistently multitask really a whole lot, it really impacts parts of the brain that control not only cognitive control but emotional control. And so when we look at conflict or when we look at having those difficult conversations in the workplace and needing that peace and needing that composure, that comes from emotional regulation and cognitive control, which is directly impacted by how much we're multitasking or not.

- I felt that in my soul when you were saying that 'cause I think about the times that I've been home. So I work remote and, you know, you'll have those days where you have 30 minute meetings back to back to back. And then my spouse might come in and ask me a completely benign question and he gets a very emotional reaction. And that makes so much sense to me because it really has less to do with whatever he asks me and more to do with what's happening through my work environment. How do we become more cognizant of that? I mean, sometimes we're just stuck in that situation where we have to have the meetings, but is there things we can do inside those Zoom meetings, team meetings, et cetera, to make them more productive, more positive, help us work through some of those challenges you mentioned?

- Yeah. So good, Shari. So, permission, expectations, and setting expectations, and renegotiating expectations, right? We can always renegotiate expectations. And then conversations. We need to start having real conversations. People need to be educated on the research in this space. And we can feel it, right? We can feel it. I lead with a lot of research 'cause I work with organizations that are in the tech industry and healthcare industry and a lot of data-driven financial sector. And so when I work with individuals who are very, very data-driven, and I'm data driven 'cause I come from tech, you know, I really lead with that, but we don't really need that. If we check in with our bodies and we look at our families and we look at our communities, we can see we're hurting. We can see we need to slow down. We can see that we need to shift how we are working because this is not working. If it was wellness that was gonna get us through this with \$50 billion a year that we spent on it, it would've fixed the problem a long time ago. The the problem is not just wellness, it is our workflow structures that need to shift and we need to get real about it.

- So I wanna get personal for a minute. How do you do this in your life? We're sitting here, you're speaking, you're traveling, you're talking to different people. How are you setting boundaries to make sure that, you know, you can stay your most authentic self as you go through work?

- Yeah, thanks Shari. You know, well, all my clients know this. Everybody who talks to me knows this. I did not get into this work because I had it all figured out, right? I got into this work because I desperately needed boundaries for myself. That's really the truth of it. When I was in my twenties, I worked absolutely crazy hour weeks, I had massive chronic back pain. It was a real problem. And I didn't know how to support myself in the work world. My parents had their own business. They were wonderful role models in so many ways for me. The one thing they did not know, and they've told me this very openly, we have such a great relationship, I'm so grateful for that. But they're very clear. They're like, "Oh my gosh, I wish that we had you a dream." Like, well I am made because of watching you. Right? I didn't

wanna repeat that because it was exhausting. I saw my parents. You know, I'd be watching TV and we'd be watching TV as a family and my mom would check out about halfway through the movie 'cause she had to work. And I didn't want that, but I didn't know how to get out of it because that was the only way I knew how to do it. You work, you work harder. And that is the motto that many of us live by. But there is a law of diminishing returns on that. And for me, it came because my physical body said, "No more." And so I had to find tools and I was very scared, right? How am I gonna professionally set boundaries for myself? I didn't even know that term back then. But in essence, how do I tend to myself sustainably and still meet all my work demands? I was very scared because I was on the ladder up to the top and I was like, "Oh no, this is not working!" I was so mad at my body at the time. I was so mad. And then I reflect now and I'm so grateful for that journey 'cause it forced me, it forced me to set boundaries. And here's the crazy thing. When I started setting me boundaries, I was doing it just 'cause I needed to survive, I got better at my job. And that blew my mind. I was like, "What? Wait, I don't understand this." And so then I kind of had to catch up a little bit and I had to say, "Well, why is that? How did that happen? Like, how did I get there?" 'Cause I, no offense, but I mean, not to brag, but I was pretty good at my job to begin with, so when I got better, I was like, "Whoa, this is kind of weird." And then people started asking me, right? They started asking me, "How are you doing this, Woodrie?" And at first I started working with nonprofits. I would just go and speak and say, "Hey, let's raise some money and I'll come and talk on this." And then I realized, "Oh, I can actually do this for a living." And I love the work I do. I love supporting people in organizations and really, really deep diving into the depths of where this can go. Yeah.

- So as we wrap our conversation, and if I gave you a crystal ball for time, how do you see the next five years? And maybe that's a little dramatic. I don't know that we talk in five years anymore, but you know, how do you see the future dynamics of connection and engagement really evolving in the workplace, especially with the advancements in tech and shifting in work paradigms, some of the things we've talked about?

- I think there are gonna be individuals and organizations who really get it. And those are the people who are gonna slow down, realize, "Oh my gosh, we're moving too fast." Because the reality is our decisions can come quickly, but it doesn't mean that that's the right decision. And until we start slowing ourselves down enough to recognize the impact that we are having on others, intention and impact, you know, we need some space to really see and witness what we're doing. And for me, I think the younger generation, I'm so excited. I know a lot of people who are like, "Oh, you know, those guys, duh-duh-duh-duh." You know, I'm excited. They're powerful and they're brave and they're ready to go in many ways that I don't think we are aware of yet. And I get excited and inspired by the younger generations and they're gonna

demand it. They already are. They're demanding change. And we are either gonna get on board or we're not, and we're gonna be left behind.

- Yeah, I couldn't agree more. So, thank you so much for spending a few minutes to chat with me. This was a great conversation and I'm excited about some of the things that you shared.

- Yeah. Thanks so much, Shari. So happy be here. Thanks.

- I hope you enjoy today's episode. You can find show notes and links theHRmixtape.com. Come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.