

- You're listening to 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. ♪ There's no one back up ♪ Now your host, Shari Simpson.

- Joining me today is Dr. Britt Andreatta, CEO of Brain Aware Training Incorporated. Dr. Andreatta is an internationally-recognized thought leader who creates science-based solutions for today's challenges. As CEO of Brain Aware Training, Dr. Andreatta draws on her unique background in leadership, neuroscience, psychology, and learning to unlock the best in people and organizations. Dr. Andreatta has published several titles, including her recent book, *Wired to Become: The Brain Science of Finding Your Purpose, Creating Meaningful Work, and Achieving Your Potential*, published in May of 2023. Britt, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

- I'm excited to connect again, Shari, I always love talking to you and connecting with your listeners.

- So I will have to share this story, and I shared it off air, but I think it's important to hear on air. We had some coworkers who recently saw you speak and they were completely enamored and they're like, you have to have her on the podcast. And I was like, yeah, I actually have, I know her and it's great, so a lot of fans here at Paylocity for the work that you are doing, so we're really glad to have you back on the podcast to chat about some things, and let's start with what prompted you to write the book *Wired to Become* at this time?

- Yeah, great question, you know, I had started working on it right before the pandemic hit and then like everybody's life, my life paused too to do homeschooling and get through that craziness. But as it happened, I realized we were all being changed by what we were going through, and I saw this shift kind of bubbling up with all the clients I was consulting with and these organizations, and it was happening all around the world and I realized, wow, you know, we've all engaged in a very traumatic experience, we all faced our mortality, and that causes you to reflect on what's important and what matters. And then we saw it drive the Great Resignation and it continues to kind of drive what people are seeking in the workplace. So I feel like it was kind of this synchronicity of my interests and then watching it kind of unfold in real time. And then what was really interesting is there was a lot of research being done in real time about burnout and purpose, so I was able to get my hands on some really fresh data and realize that not only the pandemic, but also moving through grief causes us to look at purpose, as does what scientists are calling post-traumatic growth, which is, instead of going into PTSD, people can move toward post-traumatic growth, which is also where they kind of dig in around what they want their lives to look like and how they can use their strengths and who matters in their lives. So it was

really this confluence of four or five pressures that came together that I feel like I got to write about in real time.

- There are so many things you just mentioned there and it kind of felt like a walk back through time as I thought about my own, you know, pandemic experience from the very beginning where, you know, we were Lysoling our groceries because we just didn't have enough information to, you know, we're talking about how you stay social in this very remote environment, so, you know, I'm glad that the timing was right for you. You know, I think some of this has really helped bubble to the surface this idea of what makes me happy, how do I stay happy? And I'm curious, as you've dug into the data, what's the difference between happiness and purpose?

- It's a great question 'cause they are both really important to our wellbeing. In fact, they're considered two types of wellbeing. So even ancient Greek scholars kind of looked at these as two different types of wellbeing. They call happiness or pleasure hedonic wellbeing. And it's really that focus on that moment of joy, right, like that great piece of chocolate cake or playing with your friends. So there's an immediate focus, it's kind of a fleeting sense of pleasure, joy. It's kind of this idea of, you know, quote having a good time. And because we're focused on ourselves, it's an experience that's self-enhancing, right, what makes me happy, what gives me joy? But the other type of wellbeing is also really important, scientists call it eudaimonic wellbeing. And it results from striving toward meaning, purpose, your potential. And it's more long-term, right? It's what gives us a deeper sense of fulfillment or satisfaction, but it's not always fun. So sometimes, you can be on purpose and it's hard and it's a struggle, but there's satisfaction in it. So we need both, so if happiness is having a good time, purpose and meaning is kind of living a good life. And what's really interesting about purpose is by definition, it's self-transcending because we're focused on others in some way, being of service or benefit to others in some way. So we need both, and if we overindex on one versus the other, we end up harming our wellbeing a little bit. And so we really wanna lean into having both in balance.

- I love that definition and finding that balance, you know, I feel like so often, your brains seem to be like hardwired for purpose. You know, we talk a lot about, you know, the why, right? And I think sometimes, our employees have a why, but it's like in this untapped reservoir, maybe. So as I think about, you know, our role in HR, how do we nudge people to unearth this really vital source of motivation and realistically, without making it a corporate initiative, right, like just being very genuine about it?

- Yeah, I think that's really important. I mean, this is kind of where I see a big gap, and I talk about this a lot in the book, is this should be a core conversation managers are having with your employees, right? What gives you a sense of meaning, what's your sense of

purpose, what drives you? And some employees will be able to answer that question and others will be like, huh, I don't have a ready answer, but I can tell you some things that feel right. But I think this should be a conversation, we can offer book clubs or workshops and help people kind of answer some questions and start to identify from their past and from their feelings, we have a lot of hints in our lives that kind of point us in the right direction, and in fact, the book that I wrote ended up being half scientific, half personal journaling. I mean, literally every chapter is kind of like, okay, so try this on and journal, what did you learn about yourself as you looked at purpose from this new way? So I think absolutely, we need to support this conversation and as managers, learn more about what make their employees tick, then they can do a better job of helping connect the job or the role or the task. And sometimes, they're like, oh, there is no connection, but if I do this one little tweak, it's gonna fit this person's desire better, their needs. So it's also gonna empower managers to make those tweaks. Sometimes, doing a quick switch between two people's job descriptions can enliven everyone. And then there's a role for leaders too, you know, and HR professionals, I think, can play an important role. We need to be talking in meetings about the good that the company is doing. And I think a lot of organizations know that, but they're not weaving it into all-hands meetings, they're not sharing those customer success stories and the good that they're doing in the world. And yet those are the stories that give employees pride in their work, pride for working at this organization. So I think there's lots of ways we can play with this, and I give a lot of strategies for how to do it, but I think this conversation is really important to have at all levels.

- How do you see managers really encouraging employees to fulfill their potential? You know, I think about this so much as we think about, you know, the concept of coaching or feed forward or really helping people grow, but I love that idea of fulfilling their potential. What are some ways we can encourage or challenge others to do that?

- Yeah, it's a great question. You know, when I think about potential, what I know about us biologically is we are designed to learn and grow, Like that is our very nature, and when we set goals for ourself and we achieve them, we celebrate for like a day or two, and then the next thing we do is set another goal. Good managers help you do that and good managers actually push you out of your comfort zone because they can see what you're capable of, that maybe you're a little hesitant or not so confident about, and then all of a sudden, you achieve it, and now your potential has grown. So potential is an ever-moving target in the sense that we keep growing and then we set new goals, and so managers need to be in that conversation. But that also means that they need to be dealing with things that undermine people's potential, right? Highly stressful environments, lack of psychological safety, microaggressions in the workplace, all of these things get in

the way of people performing their best, so we need to support, coach, nudge, encourage, and we also need to be clearing the roadblocks that get in the way. And when you do those two things and when we teach managers how to do that, most managers want to do a good job, but they don't necessarily get the training. When you give them that training and those tool sets, they can just do phenomenal things for creating a really vibrant and exciting workplace.

- That leads right into my next question about, you know, that intrinsic purpose in your day-to-day productivity. You know, where do you see the most common missteps happening for organizations and with, you know, your background in research in neuroscience, you know, is there a little neat hack or maybe something you can use that can help us, you know, steer us back on course when we're thinking about, you know, that day-to-day productivity and aligning it to a greater purpose?

- Yeah, I mean, I think the hack that we can do is take this idea of purpose and make it a common conversation. You know, when we're hiring people, we ask them all kinds of questions, but do we ask them about their sense of purpose and what drives them? When we onboard people, you know, that should be one of the things a manager learns about an employee along with, you know, how do you like to be supervised, how do you like to receive feedback? You know, we're already doing some of these behaviors, we just now need to add purpose or meaningful work into the behaviors we're already doing. But I think what's funny is that the reason folks don't do it is, and I've heard managers say this again and again, like I'm scared to ask this question, like what's your sense of purpose or where do you wanna be in five years, 'cause I'm worried their answer is not gonna align with their job or their career path here and then that's gonna make them wanna leave. And so we end up just not talking about the elephant in the room. But what I have found is when we engage in these conversations, two things happen. One, the employee feels incredibly seen and heard. Two, the manager gets information they can use right away to say, oh, okay, Susan wants to own her own business five years from now. All right, well, what committee can we put her on, or maybe we can encourage her to use her employee benefits to go take a couple business courses at City College or whatever. When a manager looks at that and supports you in that way, employees become incredibly loyal and they work harder and stay longer when they feel like they're really supported. So the opposite of what our fear says actually happens. And what we know, the data's really interesting, employees who say that they can live their purpose at work, so when managers help find that alignment, they're six and a half times more likely to report higher resilience, four times more likely to report better health, six times more likely to wanna stay at the company, and one and a half times more likely to go above and beyond to make their company successful. So it ends up being a win-win, even if ultimately, the employee goes elsewhere, you got the best out of them while they were there. And I feel like a lot

of people, once they have this information, managers can actually tweak the jobs to make someone go, oh, it's here, here is where I can live my potential. I don't have to leave to go do that. So I think it's really just about moving it into the center of the conversation.

- And what an amazing way to think about retaining employees, right? Like we've had so many conversations around the labor market right now and like, what can we do to retain and attract employees now? What if we made that switch, right, what if we honed in on purpose, right? Even if the person is going to leave in, you know, five years, most likely, they're gonna leave in three, in three and a half years anyways, right, like that's, you know, kind of pretty common. You know, you don't typically see people in roles, you know, beyond that much time. But man, I just, I'm trying to think of having that conversation with a leader, and I've had one or two in my career, and you're right, there's that intrinsic drive to give more because you feel seen, you feel heard, you feel like the work you're doing really matters. So I love those examples and what a great thing to bring back to our management teams. You know, you've, in your career, have focused on creating some really great brain-based training programs and certifications. They've been hailed and accoladed. I'm sure that you have experienced some unexpected things as you've gone through creating those programs. I'm curious, did you have any like, well, brain, you've surprised me again moments as you kind of develop those things out?

- Absolutely, and for me, it always happens in the research phase, like when I decide I'm gonna study change or I'm gonna study teams, it's when I'm doing the research. We are just such fascinating creatures, and what's really cool is scientists are figuring out a lot about these bodies we walk around in every day. But they're not necessarily sharing them in the way that the rest of us have access to. So my work has been to learn what the scientists are finding and then, you know, share some of those surprises and explain how they're impacting the workplace and more importantly, give people tools to address it, right? So it's not just like, oh, that's fascinating but I don't know what to do, I want folks to know what to do. So two examples, when I was studying for the book *Wired to Resist*, which is all about how we respond to change, what really fascinated me was bottom line, the brain sees all change as potential danger. It's the earliest sign that something's going badly. So our amygdala is highly tuned to see change as, oh, wait a minute, this could go badly and it could threaten my survival, so that's just how humans are wired. We will see change as potential danger and we only settle down once we get enough information. And so where leaders can do a better job is we spend a lot of time designing the change, announcing the change, rolling out the change, and then everyone is so surprised when people freak out and resist the change, and yet that is what we are wired to do. And so when you understand that as a leader, you can announce it differently, you can have more patience when people go through this

biological process. Eventually, we get on board and we're adaptive, but not, but we complain first, we freak out first. So that was funny to see that, oh, that's literally how the brain sees change. And then the second one was, when I did the book on teams and what helps teams collaborate and perform at their best was the research on how the brain codes exclusion. And when we experience an excluding moment, even if it's super minor, by people we don't even care about, our brain codes it as pain, it registers in the same part of the brain that codes physical pain. And even the researchers were surprised by this and they thought, well, huh, if that's the case, what happens if we give people pain meds? And they found that, when you take a pain medicine, it reduces your feelings of exclusion, just like it reduces our feelings of pain. And I think this is what's contributed to the opioid epidemic, is when people go on painkillers for legitimate injury, they're getting this invisible unspoken break from their social pain. And then when they heal and it's time to come off those medicines, they're flooded with all kinds of feelings that no one's talking about. And so that blew my mind that the brain sees exclusion the same as physical pain.

- But I don't know how we as HR stay on top of all of this data, you know, I think back to earlier in my career and, you know, it was all about kind of compliance, like you have to know all the compliance things, and then it was, you know, oh, hey, you know, now you gotta become a marketer, right? You gotta really learn about marketing and related to communication and change management, that kind of stuff. I feel like we're entering this phase now where we need to be kind of like pseudo-neuroscientists because of this thing that you just shared, like if we have that insight, we can approach conversations so differently. How do we tackle that as HR people?

- Yeah, it's a great question. I mean, I think that it's part of our job, like in the title is human, HR stands for human resources, so understanding humans is core to what we do. And what's funny to me is that many of our standard work practices that come from compliance, that come from maximizing profits, all the things that we do to make an organization successful actually go against human biology. And then we're confused when stuff doesn't unfold right, you know, like 50 to 70% of change initiatives fail, think about the billions of dollars lost because of that. And yet when you look at how humans respond to change, of course they do unless you, you know, help people move through that difficulty. So I think it's imperative that HR professionals stay up not only on the policy and practice side, but be deeply steeped in the human people side. And yeah, it's hard to go do all that research, so my answer is follow me, like this is what I do, I will translate all that stuff and give you the tools you need. But I think it's really important and I, for one, was completely convinced of this when I started doing my own research, I was like, oh my gosh, this is a treasure trove of all the things we need to make our organizations and our people really thrive.

- I absolutely love that, and what a great plug. You know, I think it's akin to those that have psychology in their backgrounds and they're really thriving in the HR space as they deal with employees because they have a different perspective, a different experience in, you know, how humans work. As we wrap our conversation, I'm curious, in your own life, was there a pivotal moment or a spark or an incident that really nudged you on this journey towards, you know, intertwining neuroscience and leadership and purpose that got you here where you are today with the books and the backing and just the ideas that you bring to the table?

- Yeah, it was two moments, one was, I was the chief learning officer at Lynda.com and I'd come over from the academic side of the house and I was like, okay, this is corporate America, what do I need to know to thrive in this side of the world? And so I started to look at the neuroscience of how the brain learns 'cause I wanted to be better at my craft, and it was fascinating what I found, and what started off as a lunch-and-learn that I was creating for the company turned into the marketing and sales teams putting me out on the speaking circuit and then it became the book. And that was all it was gonna be, and then one morning, I walked into work and it was announced that we'd been acquired by LinkedIn. And I'm certified in all the change models, and I realized that none of them explained what me and my peers were going through. So I thought, huh, I wonder what the science says about change. And that became book number two. And then I realized, I guess this is what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna be the person that kind of translates the scientific research and brain science into things that will help us thrive in our workplaces. And I love doing it, I love geeking out on the science, I love helping people take this information and have tools and strategies they can implement right away. And I love seeing the evidence of that play out in the organizations, really big shifts in their culture and their productivity and engagement and all that good stuff, so I love my job, I feel so honored to get to do it, and I get to talk to cool people like you and work with really neat companies around the world.

- Well, Britt, I know that you definitely have a following definitely at Paylocity, like I mentioned, we have a lot of coworkers that have nothing but wonderful things to say about your work, so I'm glad we were able to jump on and talk a little bit about your newer book and some of the work that you're doing and just, you know, really encouraging the HR community to stay on top of neuroscience and really dig into it because it's just gonna make us better at our jobs and better at how we bring strategy to the table when we're talking to our business partners. So I really do appreciate this conversation.

- Me too, absolutely. And if folks wanna find me, connect with me on LinkedIn, and my website is my name, brittandreatta.com, and I'm the CEO of Brain Aware Training.

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