

Announcer: 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.

Jim Link: Joining me today is Jim Link. Jim is the Chief Human Resources Officer for the Society for Human Resource Management, SHRM. He brings a rich background from roles at companies like General Electric, Pillsbury, Porsche Cars and Randstad. Renowned for his thought leadership, Link captivates audiences worldwide with presentations on the future of HR, leveraging a data driven approach to highlight the nexus between human capital management and business success. Jim, thanks for jumping on the podcast with me again.

Announcer: Hi, Shari. It's always a pleasure to be here with you.

Jim Link: So we are at SHRM 24 in Chicago. I am not a Chicagoan, but I am from Chicagoland. There's a difference. If you live in Chicago, you can't take credit if you live in the burbs. I have heard Yes, it's a big deal. So we're happy to be here and I want to talk about civility. It's something that's been really important for SHRM. I think it's really important for the HR community in general. And I want to start with workplace policy. As we're thinking about going into this season of life with the election coming up, what kind of policy changes should we be thinking about if we need any at all?

Shari Simpson: In many companies and organizations, I think policy changes are certainly in order. And what we're actually asking organizations to do is to look at the foundational behaviors that they are expecting, not just from employees, but also from managers, leaders, and even executives of those organizations. And a lot of times, those policies are devoid of things that really matter to employees. Things like civility and expectations of a positive employee experience, and even things that managers and leaders and others should be doing with each other in their daily interactions to drive culture. So to me, policies can be described in a variety of ways. And people today think of policy more as do's and don'ts. But to me, it's beyond that. It's more about attitudes and opinions and behaviors that are expected by folks who work in an organization at all levels. So I want those policies to include expectations of civility as a starting point.

Jim Link: What other things do we need to consider beyond policy? I mean, there's so much we have our hands in. Do we need to create new programs? Do we need to go down the training road? Do we need to do all of the above? What are you seeing organizations do?

Shari Simpson: I think it's all of the above. And what I'm really seeing effective organizations do is really set expectations of role models. So if there's a person or a group in your organization that has grasped a concept like civility, and they're demonstrating that and they're seeing positive business outcomes from doing that. That to me is a secret sauce of success. So organizations should get smart about that and they should replicate those things and they should set those expectations that civility is a requirement to work in this company. And it even can go so far as to describe what civility is and

what civility isn't, because that can be a slippery slope for folks. One of the things I was most interested in was our initial research around civility and what people deemed civility to be and not to be. Because there are things that I deal with every day that I might deem to be not civil or might deem them to be civil or just part of the normal course of interaction. But for some people, they have a different operational lens, right, of what they value and don't value around the idea of civility. And it was interesting for me to see that list because some things on that list were, most of them were tied to communication, a lot of it tied to both written and spoken communication. around how people responded to them. So, interestingly enough, people who responded to the survey never saw themselves as being uncivil, yet they deemed some of the responses they got back from people as being not civil. Well, isn't that interesting, right? Because to me, part of the fact that we need to focus on is that it's the dialogue that we need to focus on, and it's rarely one-sided. So the dialogue itself to me is something that needs to happen, and it's a new expectation that we should have in our workplace, that civil dialogue includes elements of both agreement and disagreement. And where the real art of this is, is in determining when we disagree How we do that, you can disagree without being disagreeable. And I think those are the types of things that we've just kind of forgotten about because of the pandemic, because of the rise of technology and social media and those kinds of things. So I'm looking for more, right, when I think about what civility means. But it should be a cultural expectation at a minimum.

Jim Link: And it's a good time to teach your employees how to have conflict, how to have conflict conversations, because it can lead to some really cool innovation when we challenge each other that way. I just had a scenario the other day as we were setting up our booth and I had it set up one way and somebody came in who has a different creative mind than me and was like, hey, I know that you're really loving what this looks like right now. Can I make a suggestion?" And you know, when you own something that's your baby, you're like, yeah, okay, make the suggestion. And it was a great suggestion. It was a better setup, better execution of what I was trying to do. But sometimes you have that gut reaction of like, don't come into my stuff. I don't think you have the right opinion. I don't think based on your experience, it's going to match mine.

Shari Simpson: Do you know how I address that? And I learned this, I think, over the years. I love that example, by the way, that you gave, because they were a little in your space, weren't they? That made you a little uncomfortable. I love that. Whenever I need to provide somebody with some type of feedback, particularly if I deem it to be constructive feedback, the first thing I always say to them is, are you open to some feedback? And that puts the recipient of that feedback on notice because they're either going to say yes or no. If they say no, then I'm not going to waste my time. But if they say yes, two things happen. One is I, as the feedback giver, get permission to say what I need to say that hopefully they will receive in the right

way. And secondly, if they are the recipient of that, we've now engaged in one of the critical elements of civility. We've engaged, agreed to engage in civil discourse. Isn't that, I mean, that's not rocket science, is it? It should be an expectation in the workplace that we're doing that, and we've somehow lost that art. And I am just bent on helping organizations refine the idea that civility is a foundational component of effective organization.

Jim Link: I completely agree. How do we, as HR professionals, monitor the political tone in our organizations? Maybe political chatter would be a better phrase of that. So that we can get ahead of things that might tip over that we have to address. Is there metrics? Is there listening tools that you're seeing organizations deploy?

Shari Simpson: You know, there are a lot of things that actually that idea, Shari, that you had about the political conversation that's happening in the media, in the world, on street corners, and in workplaces, is actually one of the reasons why we really launched this civility campaign in the first place, was that we're entering a time of unprecedented unprecedented discontent in our society and in our workforces. Now, if you were listening to Al Roker yesterday, in his opening session here at the Sherm Conference, he said that this is cyclical, right? He actually talked about the times during the 60s and the 70s, whenever it was, at least in his mind, as rancorous as it is now with potentially negative outcomes for our society. Yet, we found our way through that. He's an optimist. He believes we will find our way through this, and I am as well. I believe that we will find our way through it. But I also know that I'm going to, as an executive here at SHRM, but also as a human being, find my way to help in that civility any way that I possibly can. That means when there are people with whom I disagree, I'm going to listen in an attempt to learn. why they believe that or why they feel that. And I'm not going to always agree with them, but I'm going to give them the benefit and the courtesy of hearing them. And I think that's what we ought to do. We ought to, again, to find value in the idea of learning from each other. in a way, whether you agree with those folks or not. I mean, I hear from folks every day that I disagree with. Sometimes in the conversations I have with my wife, I don't agree with her. But at the end of the day, there's this mindset that we collectively, because in the example with my wife, we are talking about a topic that has a more important outcome. And whether she's right or I'm right or we're both partially right, that matters less than keeping our mind on the prize and the prize is that we're trying to do something effective at the end of the day. I don't think we realize that in our society anymore. knows, at least in my mind, the way organizations are doing this, is the effective organizations are doing this, is they're setting the expectation that that dialogue can occur in their organizations because we're foolish to think that it's not happening. So if it is happening, then let's just identify what the rules of the game are, what the frameworks are for civil discourse about anything. It could be about politics. It could be about religion. It could be about anything else that people want and do talk about in the workplace. But

as long as that framework is the same for any topic and that we are valuing the art of listening to each other, to me, that's where you start.

Jim Link: Somebody gave my husband some advice or he read it somewhere and it has stuck with me and it has to do with when you argue with your spouse. And the concept was that if you go into an argument with your spouse with the idea of being right, of being the winner of the argument. Oh, you've already lost. You've already lost, and you're painting your partner as a loser, and who wants to be married to a loser? And I was like, you can pull that into all of these conversations we're having.

Shari Simpson: I love that example. And you're 100% right. I think that I find actually value if we, just back to the husband and wife situation, I think if most husbands or wives or partners, whatever language you want to use, people who are in relationships, who actually care what each other have to say, I know I sometimes have to force myself to listen, right? Whether it's to my wife or to my kids or to a community member or whatever. But by forcing myself to listen, I'm engaging in the art of listening, even if I disagree. And that's what I want us as a society to learn how to do better.

Jim Link: Yeah. What is your take on encouraging your employee population to vote without getting involved in who you should or should not vote?

Shari Simpson: Yeah, you know, there are a lot of mixed views on that. There are companies who actually give employees the day off to vote or certain numbers of hours of time to vote and those kinds of things. My view is that voting is an act of a responsible citizen, at least here in the United States, and that we encourage people to exercise that right. So you can do that by telling people that we encourage them to vote without saying anything else. And I think that's where we should go. The act of voting is the thing that's important in a society, a democratic society like ours. And I think employers are wise to tell people that it's a great idea to exercise your civic duties and responsibilities. And that's how I would package it.

Jim Link: Yeah, there's no need to kind of go down any more details than that.

Shari Simpson: It's not. At SHRM, for example, we find one of our biggest audiences of people who benefit from our knowledge and information, our content, our research, are politicians. Those people that you're actually voting for when you go into those booths. And our strength is that we provide knowledge and information and content to those people, whether they're Democrats or Republicans or anything else. To us, we have to work with both of them to help move the world of workers in the workplace forward. And so, yeah, while we may agree or disagree with a particular policy position of either one of those respective parties, we can't just go into a shell if the wrong person gets elected into the White House or if the wrong senator gets elected. As a matter of fact, we're more effective because we learn how to cooperate with and to provide that same knowledge, information, and content to those folks.

Jim Link: As we wrap our discussion, SHRM has a ton of resources right now on this. Maybe you can just highlight a couple of them for our listeners to know what they should tap into.

Shari Simpson: Yeah, I think, first of all, go to SHRM.org and go to the website. And you can find through the search bar. And by the way, it's a new and improved website. So we're super excited about that as well. But if you go into the search bar, you can find just about any tool that you want for any of the topics that we've talked about today. Civility. and get advice on policy, procedure, regulatory things, on almost any topic in the human resources space. And I'm really excited about our AI playbook that we have out there because tech is one of those things that we're also dealing with in so many ways in society and in workplaces today. So we have an AI playbook that you can download, and that's free for people who, whether you're a member of SHRM or not, you can download that and learn more. It's about 26 pages long, and it's a great source of knowledge and information for people who are just beginning on that technological journey.

Jim Link: I have seen it. It is great. I totally encourage you, if you're listening, to go ahead and download it. So Jim, thanks for sitting down with me today.

Shari Simpson: Shari, it's always my pleasure. Let's do it again soon.

Announcer: I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at thehrmixtape.com. Come back often, and please subscribe, rate, and review.