

SPEAKER_00: 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. Now, your host, Shari Simpson.

SPEAKER_01: Joining me today is Nicole Bradford. Nicole joined SHRM as the AI plus HI executive in residence, where she'll focus on leveraging artificial intelligence and human intelligence to drive organizational growth. Her experience includes co-founding TransformativeTech.org and holding key roles at Epic Games and Activision Blizzard. Committed to enhancing work through the synergy of AI and human creativity, Bradford's appointment makes a significant step towards preparing the workforce for an AI-integrated future. Nicole, thank you so much for taking a little bit out of your day hosting this amazing conference that SHRM is putting on with the AI plus HI project. Really excited to sit down with you. Thank you so much for having me. So I want to start with your background. I'd love to hear how did you end up here with SHRM as an executive in residence for this project?

SPEAKER_02: I have had a different background. But I actually feel like my entire life prepared me for this moment. So my background falls into two buckets. The first part is interactive entertainment and technology. So it's 20 years in tech altogether. But the first half was in video games. And video games are engaging. They're interactive. And they're also large digital communities. And so there's the interactive software side. And then the second half has been investing in and researching and venture building around technologies to support human potential, specifically mental, social, emotional health, purpose and performance. And so those two things together, I realized, you know, I've always been asking the question about how, how do we fulfill our potential? And for me, it started out, you know, as a, as a kid, wanting to, you know, growing up in a neighborhood where I didn't really look like anyone else and trying to figure out where and how I fit in. And I was actually, people can't tell it now, but I'm actually, I was actually quite shy as a child. And so I somehow got it into my mind that if I could just find the ways to, you know, to, be successful, if I could just find the ways to get really good at things that would help me be successful, then that's how it would all sort out. So it sort of started a long time ago with being interested in how do we become the best of who we are. And then also childhood interest in science and tech also watched. Star Trek.

SPEAKER_01: Did you watch newer Star Trek or William Shatner Star Trek?

SPEAKER_02: Well, you know, all of the above. You know, I mean, I didn't see William Shatner's Star Trek when it came out. Though years later, when I met Nichelle Nichols, I could barely speak. So the quick little background on it is that Nichelle Nichols was cast as Lieutenant Uhura, and early Star Trek was not successful. And, um, you know, and so she was at a fundraiser and the organizer said, your biggest fan is here and he wants to say hello to you. And she was

like, Oh, well, it's a fan, whatever. It turns out it was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And she told him that she was going to leave the show because she loved the stage. Um, she was a Broadway, um, She was a Broadway actor, and so she was going to leave the show, and he said, you can't, because you represent the future that we're working towards. And so she stayed, but because she stayed, And even though initially the role was actually not written for an African-American character, because she stayed, they always had a diverse cast because they had set that precedent with her. And so then, you know, many years later, as a little girl in Houston, Texas, I could look on a screen and see a future where, one, I was there, two, it was a meritocracy, Three, humanity had decided, for the most part, we were on the same page. And our business really was exploration and curiosity. And we were leveraging science and technology to do that. And so it just really struck a chord with me. So between that love of science and tech and a belief that it can make a better world, plus my own personal ambition and interest in becoming the best version of myself that I could possibly be, That led me to a place where between all the 20 years that I have of technology, I've developed this specialty, the ways that you can use science, technology, and medicine specifically around human potential.

SPEAKER_01: Well, I know I got goosebumps when you were telling that story. I didn't know about the impact of Martin Luther King in her career path. So thank you for sharing that. Hopefully, our listeners also got goosebumps as you were telling that. I want to kind of double-click into that last sentence, because I've heard you speak a couple times today and use that wording of advancing human potential. How do you see that connection of advancing human potential and AI.

SPEAKER_02: The way that I see advancing human potential and AI is that AI, the very best thing AI can do for us is to give us more time to be together. So that's number one. The second part is there are things that we are discovering about ourselves that we only know because of technology. So some examples might be when there's a thing called biosynchrony. And what that means is that when human beings, and this is measurable and validated because of technology. Technology allows us to see it. Technology allows us to measure it. When human beings are in rapport, their bio data starts to line up. So what that means is your heart rate variability. Our hearts begin to match. Our pupils begin to dilate. and contract, our micro movements begin to line up. Basically, we dance and sing together. And so that's a great example of things about us, about the human condition, and what we most long for that we're only really able to know and see. because of technology. So that also includes the neural correlates of, well, collaboration and connection and those types of things. And so the second part is that technology allows us to understand ourselves better. And the third part is we have yet to really answer the fundamental questions of who we are and what it is we want to create. We've been kind of busy, like the industrial, the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution. And then now, you know, these questions have been present throughout human history in, you know,

every culture, every philosophy has asked these sort of larger questions about who am I? You know, what am I doing? What matters? And now we're at a place where everything's lining up, where we must actually answer those questions because we have to actually paint a vision. for where is it we want to go. So human potential and AI, all three of those things are coming back to the point where we are evolving. And we're going to have to evolve and decide what it is we really want.

SPEAKER_01: There's a lot of fear still out there about this next evolution for us. You know, I've, I've heard as I've walked around the conference floor, everything from we're really excited to I don't, I don't know how we're going to use this. I'm worried about my employee data getting out. I'm worried about proprietary information of my company getting out. I don't know, you know, how these companies are going to use data long term. Are they going to use it against me? How do we start to change that narrative from a fear view of what's happening to a more exciting, optimistic view of AI?

SPEAKER_02: A lot of the fear comes from not having used it yet. And so, and I don't mean to diminish the fears, but the very first thing is hands-on. In our SHRM research, we've seen that if an HR person works near AI, meaning someone in their company's using it, they're 16 times more likely to believe that it's job expanding than job losing. So just the very first step is to experiment with it and play with it because we're going to have to iterate to what the right use cases are. We're going to have to experiment. And so you have to have hands on to even imagine what your experiment might be.

SPEAKER_01: I recently sat down with Josh Merrill. He's the founder of Confirm, and his organization is working with something called Organizational Network Analysis, or ONA. And what that model is, is you're collecting performance data, but in a different way than we've seen before. So instead of your manager giving you a rating, you fill out a survey, and the survey will say something like, Hey, in the last quarter, who in the organization has helped you succeed? In the last quarter, who in the organization could use some more support that they haven't been getting before? And so giving you this completely different view of thinking about like that 360 review in a different way. So then you fast forward to an article I just read this morning, and it talked about how young people are using AI for therapy to have conversations about their mental wellness. Those two things sound really exciting to me. And you talked a little bit about case studies. What are some things that you're hearing or case studies that are already starting to surface that HR is getting excited about being able to apply AI to?

SPEAKER_02: Well, what we've heard here today at the conference is, you know, using AI to identify if you have a bias. So a lot of the conversation out in the media has been about the bias of AI. But, you know, people have plenty of biases, too, that they don't even know that they have. And so, you know, we've heard some cases here about people thinking about how do we use AI to help us identify our own biases? And so that would be one element. Another element that's

really interesting is, you know, using AI to develop career paths for people. Because, you know, a lot of times what happens is when people are building out new teams, they think of the people that they see the most. And, you know, and they pick those people, you know, it's not, You know, there's no conspiracy. It's just top of mind. And so there might be someone three floors over, next building over, who's perfect for them, perfect for the team. And they don't know them. They haven't seen them. They didn't know that 20 years ago they worked in that industry specifically. And so one of the things that AI can do is really allow an organization to surface all of the skills and abilities of the people in their organization so that when new teams and new opportunities are put together, we can see who we already have who can either do that today or with a little training could do it. And so that's really exciting because that's really helping people develop paths.

SPEAKER_01: We're talking about AI. But I also think that's just one more topic that falls into this concept, buzzword, future of work. What's your perspective on that? I'm so glad you asked me that question.

SPEAKER_02: You know, I think one of the things that's happening is that when people talk about the future of jobs and they sort of tie it to the future of work, you know, it's this really big word and so it gets really scary because it says, you know, AI is coming from your work, AI is coming for your jobs. But really, if you look at what people are actually talking about in that, they're really talking about the future of tasks without knowing it. And so when AI is able to take over repetitive tasks or the painful things that we all have to do that we don't enjoy, there's this confusion that that is work, that that is the work, just because that's how we've always done it. So one of the interesting use cases that we see with AI is really going through task analysis to see what could be done by AI, and what could be augmented, and what can't be at all, or shouldn't be, which is the higher value work. So it's really important to, I know it's hard, but to not assume that your tasks are your work, because it's the, ultimately, It's the outcomes, the business outcomes that matter the most. And so there's a set of tasks that are part of getting the job done, but it isn't actually going to get to the outcomes. It's just sort of like some of the work that must be done around certain things. So part of it is like not confusing tasks with work, being willing to just examine what tasks might be best suited by AI, and then sort of imagine what it would be like if the things that actually drive the most results for you is where you get to spend most of your time. And then you can get excited about it.

SPEAKER_01: How do you see that revolutionizing the way we think about jobs? Are we going to see more jobs, less jobs, different jobs? How does that landscape change?

SPEAKER_02: Well, one of the things that we can look to are companies that are starting to do it well. And there's not many because everyone's at the starting blocks, really. But during the pandemic, there were a set of companies that really started to invest in their

digital core and invest in their people simultaneously. And those companies are seeing 15 percentage points increases in revenues over their cohort peers. And that was sort of like early AI, and they were just getting started. Those are the companies that Microsoft calls the embracers, that Accenture calls the reinventors. And they are going through all of their workflows. And they are looking at how they actually completely reinvent their businesses and reinvent their value chain. And so those companies are expecting, they're forecasting 36 percentage points increases in revenue. And so, you know, because we have to iterate, because we don't know exactly what will happen, you know, can you say to anyone that absolutely nothing about your job will change? We can't actually say that. But, you know, with reinventing the companies and finding new business opportunities, there's more opportunity there for people to find a new place. Um, I'll give you one specific case that I'm excited about or that I think is really telling. Um, it's a, there's Gucci. Um, you know, the Gucci that you, that we all know and love from our, you know, years, um, they have 300 customer service representatives and these people help you get your belt fixed or your sunglasses fixed. Um, they brought in a knowledge base. to help them answer these questions better, but it also included all the new Gucci products. And they brought in AI tools that helped those people do their repetitive tasks. You know, when you think about, you know, the media lore is that customer service people absolutely are ones that people, you know, that should really be worried because why wouldn't you just use a bot for that? What happened in this case is these people, on their own, with access to understanding all the new Gucci products. Because they were able to get rid of their repetitive work, they had more meaningful conversations with the people when they were on the phone. So you call me about your belt, and I tell you about, oh, you like this belt? Oh, if you like this belt, then you're going to love this. And they increased Gucci's revenues by 30%. So the customer service people turned themselves into a sales force, not because they were given sales targets or anything like that, but they had more time to connect and they had the information at their fingertips to be able to make recommendations. And they just had conversations and, and became a new source of revenue for Gucci. So there's more examples like that, um, you know, that are out there, but we have to touch it. We have to embrace it and we have to experiment together.

SPEAKER_01: AI is not going to replace HR. HR professionals who use AI are going to replace other HR professionals. And I think that's such a profound thing to think about as HR people need to really upskill and become more tech savvy and be more excited about this. So as I close our discussion, what is one piece of advice you want to give to our audience to start taking steps in that direction? Embrace it. Embrace it. Wonderful. Thank you so much for sitting down with me, Nicole.

SPEAKER_00: I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at thehrmixtday.com. Come back often, and please subscribe, rate, and review.