

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.

Shari Simpson: 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, thank you so much for sitting down and chatting with me again. It's been, I think, a year since we got to talk on the podcast.

Jim Link: It has, but I'm very much looking forward to today on this great topic.

Shari Simpson: Oh, good. OK, so I've been thinking a lot about how the world is changing. AI is kind of this buzzword, but in reality, it's actually a really serious topic for HR. And we are here right now today at Sherm's AI plus HI project conference. Why now? Why this topic? Why for HR?

Jim Link: Well, you know, there's never been a more important time for human resources professionals around the world to think about how they utilize technology effectively. And what we're seeing, not just at this conference, but we've been seeing over the course of the last three to four years, is really a rise in how technology is utilized by HR professionals. Fast forward to what we're seeing now with generative AI, and we have the capability to do all kinds of unique and exciting things in the human resources space to really lead our businesses forward. This is a new undertaking in a lot of ways for human resources professionals. And the purpose of our being here today is to explore those opportunities of artificial intelligence, to hear from people who are a step or two ahead, but also to educate the rest of us who are very keen to understand the impact and the potential of AI for our workplaces.

Shari Simpson: So HR professionals, I think, sometimes fall in a category where we talk a lot about risk mitigation. And I've heard, as I've kind of walked around the conference, there's these two groups. There's a group that's really excited, can't wait to dive in and see how we're going to apply AI. Then there's this other group who's still very fearful. How do we make that transition as HR people and still have our risk mitigation hats on, but not approach this with so much fear?

Jim Link: Yeah, I think the first thing we're finding is giving people at all levels in human resources permission. And that permission is centered around the opportunity to go in and explore, to learn, to gain new insight. Most organizations will want you to do that behind your own firewall as an organization, but there are multiple tools out there for you to go and play. And I've been doing it myself, right? I mean, the fantastic thing about this is I'm going in on my own account, right, my personal accounts, and looking at, asking the AI

tool that I'm using interesting things about things other than work and business, right? Just to explore with it, to see things I know. For example, I think you knew, or you think you know I grew up in a farming environment. And so I ask it questions about things where I know what the answers will be, and to see if the AI will produce an outcome that is aligned with my own lived experience. And surprisingly, it's been very, very helpful. One of the things I ask it, for example, was one of my current struggles, which is how to find a low, a growing, low-maintenance shrub that deer won't eat. I know that sounds crazy, but if you load that into the artificial intelligence engine, you get recommendations, and not just recommendations about the answer to my inquiry or to my question, that's officially called a prompt by the way, but to my prompt, but actually getting deeper so you can go for another layer of questioning. Which one grows best in Georgia? Right, not just generally asking which one grows best in Georgia. So it's that level of inquiry on personal things where you can just play around to get comfortable. Because I think as human resources professionals, to mitigate that risk that you described, one of the things we absolutely need to do is to increase our own literacy with what's happening in artificial intelligence today. And you increase that literacy by exposure. So I encourage everyone listening to this podcast to go out there and in a safe environment where you feel comfortable, play around. Ask the AI tool questions where you know the answer and then test the reliability and authenticity of that information. Once you get comfortable with that, then it's time to begin thinking about how to apply that in a business situation.

Shari Simpson: You know, I love that you shared that example. I was talking to my sister a few weeks ago about how much I love chat GPT and how much I use it on a regular basis. And she's like, yeah, but like, I'm a mom of three. I live at home. Like, what am I going to use AI for? But she's really big into crochet. And so I was like, all right, give me an animal or a stuffed animal that you want to make for my niece. And she's like, what about a unicorn? I was like, great. So I ask it, I'm like, can you give me a crochet pattern for a five-inch unicorn with a pink horn? And it spit out this beautiful crochet pattern for her. And she was like, what? It can do that? And I was like, yeah. I love that example because just start testing it with your everyday life. Hey, I want meal planning. Hey, I'm going on a vacation. Help me plan. You know, I want to visit this place, but I don't want to see just the touristy stuff. I want to see maybe kind of how the local people live. Give me some suggestions, really simple ways to get your feet wet. But I also love that you shared, ask it stuff you already know the answer to. Test it out to see if it's going to be applicable or work the way you think it's going to work.

Jim Link: That's right, because there is a downside to artificial intelligence. And when producing those results, which you might read or listen to in an audible format, whichever your preference is, there is a risk of what's called a hallucination. And that's where the artificial intelligence engines pull data that draws their own

conclusions. So, we have to be savvy as human resources professionals or as people in our own personal lives to at first understand where the data is being created and what that output is that you're reading or listening to. That impact becomes stronger for you whenever you put trust into the AI tool. And that's why it's trust but verify for me. No one ever should take anything that artificial intelligence says as the final answer, right? You have to put your own human intelligence into determining if the tool has produced an outcome for you that's actually usable for your personal life or in your workplace. That is the trust but verify concept and it's absolutely something that we believe you should do. For example, job descriptions. I can't tell you the last time I wrote a job description from scratch because we will load that into the AI tool. Tell us a job description for a chief human resources officer, right, as an example. And what comes back is a good place to start. And you then spend 15 minutes editing and improving upon what the AI tool produces for you, rather than spending 45 minutes writing it. So you're saving two-thirds of the time, just in that one task alone, of time that can be better spent by an HR professional doing something else that's on their plate. So that's just one example of real-life application that we're utilizing at Shure. One of the most exciting things I like about this, though, is the coaching concept. The ability to take a particular need that an individual has, a skill or capability or competency that you want to enhance, go to the AI tool and ask what are the best practical ways to enhance that particular skill, competency, or capability, And then you can even get more specific based on that person's performance, their backgrounds, their performance, anything that's in that portfolio of what you know about that individual. And when you get really good at the prompt engineering, right, which is another way to say asking it questions, when you get good with those queries, you absolutely have a very formidable tool now in your back pocket that you can use to advance the success of someone in the workplace.

Shari Simpson: And you can do that all by remaining private. You don't have to share that employee's name. You don't have to share your company. You can use it in a way where you're talking to another HR professional to some extent. Say, hey, I'm dealing with this thing. Give me some ideas. I love that. You mentioned the human element that we always have to consider. And we're seeing that as we hear about legislation, as we hear from the EEOC and how they're looking at how HR organizations are using software, and they're saying, hey, listen, the software is great, but if the software makes a bad decision, you're held accountable as an employer. That's really important for us to remember.

Jim Link: It absolutely is, and that is precisely why this is called the AI plus HI project, because we should be informed by what the technology provides to us, but we need to ensure, we need to ensure our complete human intelligence is intact and in place whenever we utilize those tools and concepts. And I think that's what the EEOC commissioner was talking about yesterday whenever he was here. We're still the human, not the AI. The human is still ultimately responsible

for the regulatory pieces, the compliance pieces, ensuring fairness and equity and equitable outcomes in the workplace. AI isn't going to make that happen for you. AI is going to give you tools to think about how to do that effectively. But it's still up to the human element to do that in a way that meets those guidelines and those compliance expectations while advancing the cause of whatever is occurring or whatever you need to have happen in your workplace.

Shari Simpson: You mentioned app descriptions as one application of using AI. What are some other ones that you've heard kind of walking around that you're like, oh, I hadn't thought of that? Or one that you're really excited to see how it kind of evolves?

Jim Link: There are so many. It's a very, very long list. Of course, AI's been around in the recruiting space for many, many years. I remember back in 2014, 15, whenever the first chatbots came into place for people who were applying for jobs in specific organizations. Fast forward 10 years, and we're in a completely different place now. So obviously, on the attraction of candidates into your workplace, and the initial screening of those is a place where the artificial intelligence is going to play a huge role. So that's number one. Number two is onboarding. So when you think about the specific needs an individual has in the onboarding space, each of us, there are things which will attract us, there are things that we know already, there are things that we need to know that we may not even be aware of, right? And artificial intelligence can help us identify what those unique needs are for those individuals as they're onboarding and coming into an organization. and then designing specific tools or resources for that individual to be able to be successful more quickly and productive more quickly in your workplace. Employee health and well-being is another. I absolutely love the idea of artificial intelligence helping you with an employee becoming more successful because they're in a great place in your organization and that their well-being is intact right, that you are looking at everything that's associated with that person's happiness and success in the workplace and artificial intelligence can help you identify what some of those gaps might be as an example. And then finally, coaching and learning and development. When you think about what an individual needs to do next in order to achieve whatever it is to get smarter in their current job or to get prepared for a promotion in an organization, Clearly, artificial intelligence can help you identify what some of those things are that are needed for that specific individual. Again, you can be anonymous in describing who that individual is, but put their particular condition and circumstances into the prompt engine and come out with a fantastic response. And a lot of times there are things you probably knew about at some point in your life, but never ever really put together in such a way as the AI engine will generate.

Shari Simpson: I love that. And you're so right. You know, it's funny. So I've been an HR practitioner now for a little over 17 years, and I just did my certification a couple of years ago. And it was funny because there's all these concepts and practices that I was doing, but didn't necessarily know, oh, that's this leadership model. That's this

thing. How cool that you can get access to that information so quickly, like you said, and just learn something new that you kind of already knew, but now you have this tool that can help you elevate yourself and use it to elevate your employees. Really exciting.

Jim Link: Absolutely. And the best way to think about this, I believe, is we all now know what it's like to put something into a search bar in a search engine in a tool or online to be able to find the answer to something. So what we're going to be doing now is instead of inquiring in a search bar, we're going to be inquiring in an AI bar. and we're going to get a more robust narrative that's comprised of different solution sets out there. Rather than just giving you something to click on, it's actually going to give you an answer for your own consideration and your own human intelligence to be able to then sort through for applicability. That's new, that's novel, and it's a more complete way to help someone in a business situation or to help move a business forward than we've ever had before. HR practitioners, therefore, need to think about how to utilize this tool in such a way that it makes them smarter and more capable business leaders, just with that human intelligent component in their back pocket.

Shari Simpson: What are you saying to HR leaders who are coming to you and saying, I totally get it. I'm really excited about it. But I've got 200 million other things that my business is asking me to do. How am I ever going to invest time to become tech savvy and be the prompt engineer that I need to be to utilize this tool?

Jim Link: You know, I first of all think that you should go in there, as we talked about earlier, I think you should go in there and play around. Because what you're going to find is that your own productivity gets incredibly better with a little experimentation. So that experimentation will lead you to comfort. Comfort leads you to capability, and capability leads you to competence. So I encourage all of my HR teams, all of the folks that we counsel and advise as SHER members, the 330,000 of us around the world, every time I get asked that question, I absolutely say, sit down and give it a whirl. Because if you're not giving it a whirl, you're missing out on understanding exactly what the capabilities are of this incredible technology that's out there and available to all of us. And much of it now free.

Shari Simpson: Yeah. Free is so important because we all know there are so many HR departments of one out there. that don't have access to teams of people that can help them with this stuff. So we talked a little bit about tech, upskilling yourself in tech. We talked about, you know, testing it. How is this going to evolve how we think about change management in our organizations and applying some of these tools?

Jim Link: You know, change management is clearly a competency that human resources professionals need to have in spades. The way I think about artificial intelligence is it gives you new opportunities and new ways to look at what change actually might mean for an individual in the organization and gives you a unique individualized approach to change management for that human. Let's face it, all of us deal with

change and other things that happen in the workplace differently. Some people are change masters, right? They absolutely are good at that concept and they relish it. For other people, it's absolutely paralyzing. So the best way to think about this is if you prompt correctly into that AI engine around change mastery, it's gonna give you alternatives for the one who is reluctant to change as well as the one who grasps change just like they grab a cup of coffee in the morning. That concept of even understanding who those people are and what it is that drives them differently can also be informed by the artificial intelligent engine. That's the beauty of this is if you learn how to prompt, if you learn how to ask and to inquire correctly into the prompt engine or into the artificial intelligent engine, you're going to be able to just make yourself smarter, quicker, and more capable as an HR practitioner in dealing with that specific instance at that specific moment.

Shari Simpson: Tim, this has been a great conversation. I can't wait to see what SHRM does with the AI plus HI project as it moves forward. So thanks for sitting down with me for a few minutes.

Jim Link: It was my pleasure and I look forward already to the next time.