– You are 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 Dee Kendrix, leadership expert executive advisor, organizational cultural strategist and CEO and chief strategist at DC Global Group. Dee, thank you so much for jumping on the podcast with me today.

– Oh my God, it's my absolute pleasure to be here. You know how much I love you and I love Paylocity. I'm still waiting for my like honorary employee badge.

– Oh, well the new thing now is have you seen the orange Vans that we have? That's the thing. Maybe I can hook you up with some of those.

– Please, please. I'm surprised I don't have my Paylocity mug that you were generously sweet enough to send me the last time, but yes

– It happens. I'll forgive you this time around. So you are an expert in the DEI, A, B, whatever other letter we wanna add to it space. And I just wanted to have a really great conversation today around kind of what's happening in that space how HR professionals can show up and really have a good understanding of belonging especially. So I'm gonna tee us up with this question. You know, when you think about somebody's journey in this space and how they show up at work, you know what kind of differences are you seeing that continue to play a role in people feeling like they belong or don't belong in a particular situation?

– That's an excellent question and I think, you know I think if you were to ask 10 people these question you'd probably get seven different answers. But what I found though recently especially with a lot of, you know, we're at this state in the year where a lot of the '22 reports are coming out, right from different key industry leaders, whether it's, you know EY or some of my other fun ones that I love and all the symptoms seem the same. And so what I found is that some organizations are building strategies and leading into the symptoms and some are digging deeper to say what's the root? And I would say that the symptoms are from a belonging perspective have shift drastically post pandemic. And they consistently tend to shift, people's at home lives continue to weigh on them in ways that seem a little heavier than it did pre pandemic. And I don't know if it's that they're weighing on them heavier or that the shift in how we balance life how we kind of say life is short and how we're prioritizing our personal lives is really put anything us in this place of a struggle that we didn't have before. I won't say that it wasn't a struggle before I'd say it just became the norm for us to kind of keep those worlds as separate as possible and now we're not doing it. And so I

think most of what feels like belonging to individuals today really fall into the buckets of how inclusive is this culture, this work environment of my ability to show up and be my best at home and at work, to be able to navigate through if it's so what I choose, to navigate through leadership opportunities, promotional opportunities yet still feel like I'm a great fill in the blank mom, wife, spouse, partner, sibling, you name it, right? And I think everything, right, and comma and feel like I can see myself represented in different spaces as peers and leaders. And I think that representation piece has become a bit more of an expanded mold, if you will. I think pre pandemic and right in the epicenter pandemic it became very hyper ethnicity focused, orientation focused. And now it's expansive, right? It's not just my race and culture, it's subculture. It's not just my gender identity, it's sub gender identity it's roles and identities that people, it's also right diversity and thinking, the style of how I work. And so what I'm finding is that there are two big blocks that are coming up as important for people to feel like they belong. It's can I exist here successfully and at home coexist and do I see myself represented in more ways than the quote unquote DEI, right? A, B spaces, but literally the deeper parts of the core of who I am, which really go down to am I fully accepted and I feel fully accepted for who I am when I see versions of that represented. And I think we, you know, the symptoms of that look like a whole lot of things but I would say those are what's coming up. And I would say organizations are most organizations are doing their best that they can. I think work from home policies are still the hardest thing for organizations to figure out right now. Because the reality is especially if you are not an organization like Paylocity where remote was kind of your anchor state, right? So I think you all kind of came into this with a fortunate perspective but I think some of the other organizations they only know their baseline and in their mind some of the productivity and efficiency ratios aren't balancing back to what they think it is. And so I think for them, they immediately think, well the one thing missing is everybody being together. I think some folks are trying to figure out how do we have that happy medium? But there's folks have options now and I think other people are trying to figure out how do we expand the conversation and the strategy within the sense of belonging. And so they're trying to figure out what that looks like in and outside of spaces like ERGs, councils and things of that nature. I think they're finding out that that alone isn't going to get the job done. So those would be I know that's a long answer to your question. I would say that would be what we're all I believe seeing is the biggest face and I see kind of a need to come back, a global need to come back to the basics of what we call culture, which I feel like DEI is a part of, a very important part but a part of, and not necessarily just the epicenter. And I would say that's the biggest in my personal opinion, trend, if you will.

— You know, you were talking about the the definition of, you know, who you are and cultures and subcultures and that kind of thing. And

it made me think of an example of where it really hit me, the idea of inclusion and and showing up as your authentic self. And I'll give you this example. So it was a little bit earlier in my time at Paylocity, and you know, being a tech company obviously we have the tech company things, right? We get the jeans and the hoodies and the pool tables and you know, all the things, when you think of a tech company and I remember we had one employee who would come in every day, dress pants, dress shirt, jacket, tie and he was getting made fun of like, "Hey dude you can relax, it's fine." And whatever. And I remember having a conversation with him and he's like, "This is how I feel most comfortable. I wanna show up in the way I feel most comfortable and I'm getting kind of this chatter about it that maybe I'm stuck up or maybe I'm this or maybe I'm that." And it really hit me how even when we're trying our best to be progressive, right we've completely shut somebody out. There's so many examples of that. How do we even start to tackle this as HR and I'm speaking about this as obviously a white woman. So my experience is one thing. So I can't say I know anybody else's experience but as an HR person, I wanna make sure that they can show up in their authentic way. I know this is a big question, you know what are some things we can start to hone back to when it comes to, like you said being culture at core and helping to have that conversation.

— This has probably become one of my passion points. In fact, I've created a keynote around it recently and a workshop around it because, I go down rabbit holes. I mean, you have to in my business and you understand it, right? You follow a study, you follow an insight you're really trying to come to confirm a conclusion and then it'll lead you down this other path. And one of the things I'm gonna try to figure out how to say this with as much concision as possible, one of the things that I and my team have really uncovered in the last I would say year is some some very basic tenets and insights. Number one, it is a data proven fact that it's like 99.999% of the world, not of America, of the world literally comes to work with at least one similar intention. And that is to be of use, of purpose and experience success. That no one, not no one, but most, there's a, you know, the folks who end up on that very small fraction I don't have the degrees to kind of support them in the certification, but there are titles, right? And diagnoses for them. But most of us do not wake up every morning getting through who we are, what we're dealing with all of our baggage, all of our greatness to show up to an organization, whether that office is in our kitchen, down the street, across town, or in another state to literally create havoc and disharmony. Most of us want to come for maybe different reasons but to be a part of a progressive success, right? Where we tend to probably miss the mark as a human race there. Is for some reason we tend to think that all of us are going to pursue that with the same approach and the same work style and the same thought process. And so I would say when you ask the question, you know as an HR profession where when we think about belonging, inclusion even as you say as a white woman, I would would

say peel back the layer even further just down to the human point. If there, you know, a couple of years ago anti-biased training was the thing to do. I had my thoughts about it, we won't go into that. I'm not against it. I just felt like it was kind of unbaked a little bit and created in my personal opinion, a little more fear and shame in an unintentional way than it did awareness. So if there were to be a 2.0 bias training I would say the next iteration that folks and and HR leaders should really kind of lean into is how do we create a space ability, knowledge and awareness of the humans within our organizations to create a bias for and not against difference? Because the reality is we all have biases. And so sometimes the anti-bias I mean the language in itself makes us think that the word bias is the wrong, you know, four letter word, right? So, but the reality is I have biases. Some of them are healthy, some of them are unhealthy, right? My healthy biases are the fact that, you know I'm curious about people and that I tend to like to get to know people. Another healthy bias of mine is that I actually love smoothies and unhealthy bias that I have is I have a significant bias for fatty foods, right? Like, it's not the healthiest bias it doesn't make me a bad person but it's not gonna lead to great results, right? But what we all have an innate bias against I think is difference. And I think the spectrum of difference. And so I think who you are and how you're wired and your background really determines where you fall in that challenge. But the reality is, even some of us who are the most open and internally inclusive, when we get into work teams and someone has a different approach than we do there's that little pinging inside our chest that's like, eh, eh, eh, right? And that that's the little body saying, that's different. And I think what happens is when we can really tend to get back to some human leader training in organizations that aren't just given to leaders and we kind of teach humans how to deal with other humans in this environment. I think what we do is tell folks you're going to have some irritation when people don't think, look, feel, seem, smell, approach like you. But what do we do so that we can collectively regroup to our center goal of wanting to create success in this space? How do we move from having a bias against it to having a bias for it so that we move to curiosity and then move to understanding and connection which then, right, creates this space of belonging. And so that's what I would say is probably the direction that we are as a firm helping organizations go to. It's where I'm seeing a lot of other practitioners tend to kind of point to and it may be called different things. Some folks are focusing more on what they're calling it going back to the fundamentals you know, self-leadership, self-awareness, right? It's called all different things. But I think at the core of it, is how do we engage humans to understand and be curious about other humans, but also recognize that that doesn't mean that we're going to still like the same things, that we're going to be the same. I'll say this real quickly. One of the things that cracks me up about us as humans is that there's a fine line between self-pride and self-awareness. And the thing that makes us the most amazing spaces is also the thing that typically makes us

headaches in spaces, right? And so when people respond to that in a way that feels that brings about shame, sometimes people cower and and reduce and they become small and then they're not showing up right as the thing that's going to make the difference in that space. And then you have others who over-leverage in it and the thing that makes them brilliant actually then becomes the thing that also makes them a liability because they're not operating within self-awareness of how it's impacting others and understanding that everyone else may not be used to that.

– I'm curious your perspective on this and you talked about the shift in kind of the training and the talk track that you're seeing. Do you think any of that is being propelled by our millennial friends that are in leadership roles now and and often, you know, very stereotypically, right? I'm stereotyping a whole generation.

– Yes.

– So we know that that's not the case. I'll put that caveat out there but they typically are a little bit more sensitive and I'm not using that word in a bad way. I actually think it's a positive thing.

– Yes.

– They have more conversations around mental health and caring and and those types of things. Do you think that shift is coming from them or do you think the shift is coming, you know for those of us who've kind of been in the DEIAB space and are feeling something different and we're making the shifts?

– That is a fabulous question. And it's funny because I'm having more and more of this conversation. I think it's all of the above but I do think that it is being, how would I say I think that it is getting, you know how when you're in a a webinar and questions get voted up?

– Yes.

– I think that it is getting voted up to the top of the decision table because of the fact that our younger millennials and some of our older Gen Z are in this space where older Gen Zs are in the workplace now and our older millennials are starting to get seats at some tables. And HR leaders and practitioners within kind of the inclusion space cannot ignore them. I had a conversation with a leader yesterday and I won't tell the whole story but I'll get to the point of it where he has a an employee that also holds kind of a, what do you call it like a city council seat if you will, but they're also, I think like an intern or something. And they had said some things that they were like, eh it's nothing wrong with what they said but as representatives of this organization it kind of crossed the world that we sit in and we don't want it to seem like it's a representative. It's a statement

on behalf of the company. And then he had saw another example of something someone else said and something someone else wore. And he said, and I think it hit me that and this is someone who is of, I would say kind of the Gen X, like younger Gen X, older millennial, right? He said, "I think what we are used to considering professional now has to be revisited." And I said, exactly you are ding, ding, ding, ding. You are being faced with, now we are the ones who are having to visit difference. And it's not even he hit the nail on the head of it. Doesn't mean you automatically accept it it doesn't automatic but it does mean you don't automatically dismiss it. And I think that that is the difference between the style and approach of how older millennials and younger millennials, gen Z, I think older millennials really had that part of Gen X and baby boomers that kind of said, look speak your mind, but don't kick up too much dust. And the younger millennials in Gen Z are of the empowerment age and they are of the life is short and if this ain't the place for me, some other place is, right? And so their approach, while we may not all appreciate it and at the same time while may need some guidance is disruptive enough that a pause and a reflection and a discussion and a revisit of what matters what should be standard and what is considered culture tolerant has to be revisited. So I say all of the above, and I think the leaders that are in HR and practitioner spaces within the four walls of organizations that are forward thinking are the ones that are raising their hand to be like now I'm not gonna say it's my approach but what I will say is we can either lose some of our most forward thinkers, right who are especially in tech spaces, right? Because to be honest with you they're the ones who have the pulse on the finger, right? The finger on the pulse. And so tech spaces and startups don't have the luxury as some of the traditional legacy companies to lose that generation in bulk. So you all are kind of also really at the helm, honestly of this HR movement, to be honest with you.

— I like hearing that Dee, I'll take that one to the bank with me.

— It's the truth. It really is the truth. I think it's innate in your, you know, it's once again you used the example earlier of the employee coming in dressed up, but yet feeling shamed. The beauty is that was a perfect example of the, you know Paylocity's culture strength being over leveraged to the point where it was a liability by its employees. But fortunately enough, right? You're in the HR space and you're like, oh, wait a minute. And so I think it's innate in a, you know, tech company's culture to be forward thinking, you have to be. 'Cause you all are leaders in space. And so that is where I think you all become not just industry, but workforce leaders.

— Yeah, well I appreciate that, Dee and this has been such a great conversation. You know, I wrote a few notes down, but if you're looking for a takeaway from our session today, you know I wrote down bias for and not Against Differences. I absolutely love that. And if

that's just, you know, the one thing you write down and you put on your desk as an HR professional I think it's such a great reminder to get curious and go, "Oh, why are they approaching it that way?" "Why do they think about it that way?" "Help me understand." "Help me seek to understand" and not automatically go, you know we've talked about assuming positive intent for a long time. I think this is one more step towards that.

— Yes.

— Like let's not only assume positive intent but then let's get really curious about how your mind works why you think that way, what you are seeing. 'Cause I'm probably not seeing something that you're seeing. So Dee, this has been such a great conversation. Thank you for taking the time.

— Oh my God, it was a pleasure. Thank you for the invite as always. You got me charged up. I'm charged up for the rest of the day and I love that takeaway because it literally is my favorite phrase to say right now. And I should probably hashtag Dee Kendrix that. So thank you Shari, and always thanks for Paylocity for just being such an amazing organization in the space of human beings and how we lead them and how we support them.

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