

- Hey, and welcome to "PCTY Talks," I'm your host, Shari Simpson. During our time together, we'll stay close to the news and info you need to succeed as an HR pro, and together, we'll explore topics around: HR thought leadership, compliance, and real-life HR situations we face every day. Mira, thank you so much for spending a few minutes with me on the podcast today.

- Thanks for having me.

- So, you have such an amazing background and it's one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you. You know, I have a passion for women in all facets of their lives and how they grow. You know, one of the things I have the privilege of doing in my role is I get to co-lead our women's ERG, we call it Sheero. So, seeing the work that you're doing, I was like, I really wanna talk to you about, you know, just helping women grow in those leadership positions, and so I thought I could start our conversation around a recent study on women in the workplace that was conducted by leanin.org and McKinsey & Company. You know, one of the items they talk about is the pipeline problems we have with women, specifically the broken rung to first level management and women leaving the workforce. So, with that in mind, I wanted to ask you, why is it so important to help women stay engaged? And what I mean by that is, you know, I don't read articles about, like, let's help men stay engaged. It's very focused on women. What's the difference?

- Yeah, so, you mentioned the McKinsey article and when they started doing this, one of the biggest issues that they said was the broken rung issue, right? And that phenomenon is when there's more men than women who are being promoted into that first leadership role, that management role. The most recent study, so that was two years ago when they reported that, and now, we're two years later, having known the problems and implemented all the things, and now, we have a second pipeline problem, not one pipeline problem, but two, and that second pipeline problem is now, that for every one woman who is promoted into a director role, they found that two women leave.

- Wow!

- And so, they didn't find that with men. That's why we focus on engagement for women.

- What do you think distracts women then from staying engaged in those management roles?

- This is a complicated question because I often wonder, is it that other people or things distract them or is it something else? And I think it's a couple of things. One is life circumstances. The women who have younger, you know, kids at home, there's a lot more research that has come out that this is not getting better in terms of the burden of the household and childcare or other dependent care. Burdens

still fall on women way more than men and I think McKinsey also found that women, once they get into leadership roles, there's at least double, they might have said quadruple, there's at least double, the sort of childcare issues or household, you know, management that they have compared to men in leadership roles, and so, is that a distraction? I'm not sure I would call it a distraction. I would call it an inequity. The other is there's a lack of mentorship or sponsorship that is appropriate and sufficient that provides 'em with the support and so, they're not given the same level of guidance and support on how to move through the organization in terms of getting promoted, career advice that is appropriate and sufficient to get into new leadership roles, not knowing how to navigate complex organizations. It's not because they don't have the skillset or couldn't gain the skillset, it's that they're excluded from conversations that men are provided with about navigating those workplace politics. And then there's, you know, things like microaggressions that's highly distracting. That can be highly distracting, as well as frustrating and upsetting, and it really, it is another layer that men don't often have to deal with and when those things happen, when you get negative messages, when you get undermined, when somebody takes credit for your work, which happens more for women than men, all of these are distractions because we're just trying to do our work and then we've gotta deal with all of these other things. The final one, again, I'm not sure I would see it as a distraction, but it can actually be seen as a distraction, which is that women are socialized to support other people really well, and so they work really hard in order to get promoted to that first leadership role by supporting other people, especially their leaders, and understanding what their leaders need really well. And so, at some point, they're so good at anticipating and supporting other people above them, their teams, that I often see them lose themselves and not sort of sure where to go. At some point they hit, like, a real milestone or monumental sort of shift in, who am I really and is this what is right for me or have I been doing this all along for other people? And that can be incredibly distracting, as you can imagine, just, like, all of a sudden realizing, is this my identity or not? And if not, then where am I going with my career? And what, you know, there's the core life crisis, the midlife crisis, there's this woman life crisis too

- And it's interesting to think about that from the perspective of how you framed it on women are brought up in these support roles. So, I suspect, you know, I know for myself, but I suspect this is true for a lot of women, we're kind of multi-passionate because we've responded to what's being asked of us in very different ways and very different roles, but we've always shown up. We've always stepped up to the position. So, we're not really deep in a niche in particular, but we might have this really broad set of skills and so, when we're asked that question, "Hey, what do you wanna do when you grow up?" You have probably 10 paths you could take, you know? And so, it's interesting

to kind of go back to that thought process of how we are trained to support and how that can complicate things. You know, I've been talking a lot with my peers around this idea of the mental load that women carry, and you validated it by talking about, you know, women in childcare, and I had a funny situation with my husband the other day where, you know, I'm really conscientious of when my senior, he's in high school, leaves for school in the morning. I can hear him get up and go out the door and I was laying in bed and I was like, "Hey, I don't think I heard, you know, our son leave for school yet." And my husband was like, "What are you talking about?" And I was like, "I bet that's not something that you have on your mind every morning. It's like, hey, did he get up and go to school?" And he's like, "It never crosses my mind." And I'm like, "Yep. That's somewhere in my brain every morning that, yeah, did he get up and go to school?" And that's such a very simple example, but there's so many things that women carry from a mental load perspective. You know, how do you balance all the life stuff that women have in our heads and then, like, let's layer on the career stuff, right? Yeah, it's a lot to navigate for women.

- Yeah, and I just wanna sort of highlight first, well, number one, I loved how you thought about the strength of being able to support people in lots of different ways, is that you get to have an incredibly wide skillset and women don't necessarily realize that that is a strength or a value, so I appreciate that you've just brought that up. It's gonna get me thinking for the rest of the day. In terms of the different experiences, I want us to be really careful not to equate what's on our minds related to childcare with women because I know a lot of men think about these kinds of things too and really, it's a parent issue, and at the same time it is true that often, on average, not for every woman, not for every man, but on average, it is the case that, you know, they're thinking about all of these additional things and juggling it. I often think, when you think about leadership roles today, in this day and age, and how hard it is to be a leader, period, but also how hard it is to be a leader right now in this complex world, how much more women can bring to the table given how much they've practiced managing all the things, all the time, and thinking about multiple people's needs at the same time, for example, and having so many distractions and still cutting through all of that in amazing ways, and, you know, they say women work twice as hard to get the same things and all of these put together make women incredibly set up for leadership in today's highly complex, uncertain, volatile kind of, you know, world and workplace.

- We need to talk about that more, you know? Everybody should be talking about that more, that very unique skillset that women bring to the table that is probably often overlooked. I'm always amazed when I meet a woman who's at, you know, higher levels of leadership and I start to hear their stories and, you know, they are balancing a bunch of different things and they have all these passions and it has set

them up for success in so many ways. You know, as you think about the unique role that women in leadership have, how do you think they are gonna be shaping the future of work?

- Yeah. I think we need to really move past this old model of leadership that worked when things were quote on quote simpler and move past the sort of single hero model of leadership where there's one leader and they have a specific idea or vision and it is doled down to the masses and, you know, all of that. The skillset that we just talked about in being able to float through lots of different circles, different individual employee needs, different team needs within an organization, their experiences of even having a non-traditional, usually non-traditional, leadership pathway where they move laterally. They move backwards to move forward. They take pauses and breaks. They move in and out of leadership, and in and out of organizations. That brings incredible perspective as compared to the traditional old models of one person moving up the same, you know, single rungs of the same ladder. And between that and their focus, or it could be socialized. Mostly, I think it is socialized thoughts about sort of how they build community, how they network, how they interact with people, is a shared leadership model, and we need team leadership more than ever for different people to bring different skill sets, different knowledge, different experiences, and I've seen women be able to do that really well and in fact, most of the women that I work with are women who say things like, "I'm not sure that I could be a leader in the way that I see because I like collaborating." I'm like, "That's a problem?" Right? I like to take the time to gather perspectives and information to make decisions and what I see is that leaders have to make really quick decisions and I'm like, and that's a good thing?

- Right.

- Making really fast decisions without all the information is a good thing? I don't hear a problem here.

- Right.

- I hear a real strength and you can create that leadership pathway and the perspective and map it the way that makes sense because that's exactly what we need right now and we don't see a lot of that and they find that so refreshing. They're like, oh, because it feels authentic to them. It feels like, well, that's how I think anyway. And so that, I really think that's what they can bring, you know? If they've had those experiences and if that resonates for them, that's an incredibly powerful skillset.

- Well, I thank you for your insight and if you're a woman in leadership right now and you're listening to this podcast, I hope you're walking away with all the confidence in the world because you

bring a very unique skillset to the table and you have so much to give your organizations and if you're a man listening, here's a great opportunity for you to realize how to be better allies and provide mentorship 'cause I think, you know, you mentioned that and it's so important for women to have, you know, mentorship, and that doesn't necessarily have to come from another woman leader, you know? Anybody in leadership can provide that. So, Mira, thank you for taking a few minutes of your day with me.

- Absolutely. It was a great time. Thank you.

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