— 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. Joining me on the podcast today is Jason Averbook. He is the CEO and founder of Leapgen, and here at HR Tech, he's talking about disruption. I absolutely love it. Jason, thanks for jumping on with me today.

— Oh, thank you so much for having me.

— So I'd like to start by asking you about some of the biggest mistakes that companies make when deploying new technology.

— Yeah, that's a great question. And well, let's just start with probably the biggest. And the first, the biggest is that they actually implement technology, not deploy technology. I love the way you said it, which is deploy technology, but most organizations implement technology. And implementation of technology is basically the flipping of the switches, to quote-unquote, "Go live". Deploying the technology is actually going back to whatever your strategy is, and you're really deploying a strategy in order to fuel some sort of outcomes, fuel some sort of predetermined outcomes. So when we think about that really quickly, the difference between implementation and deployment, implementation is the easy part. Deployment takes more work.

— When you've worked with HR leadership when it comes to these concepts, how have you helped them prioritize business requirements when they're talking to people who are non-technical? And I think I've run into that before where you're trying to explain like, "Hey, I really need this solution, or the software or this tech," but they're like, "Yeah, so what? Like, connect the dots for me."

— Yeah, I mean, it's a really important question for HR leaders to ask the business, and to align the HR strategy back to the business strategy, and ask the question, what do we wanna be great at versus what is it okay to be performing at? So when you think about that, and drill down one step further into it, what I wanna be great at are the things that are truly differentiating to me as a business, that are truly differentiating to making me different as a business. When I think about the things that are performing, there are just things I have to do. It doesn't mean they're not important. Because they're most important in order to get to the things I want to be great at. So some examples, I want to be performing at payroll. Performing means you're 100% accurate all the time, which is awesome, right? But to say you'd be 110% accurate at payroll, that's certifiably insane. Because you're not gonna be 110% accurate, but if you can make sure that you're 100% accurate at payroll all the time, guess what? You can then focus on the things that I want to be 125% great at, like finding the best talent, inspiring future leaders, truly thinking about how do I

drive training, development, et cetera, et cetera. So really helping people think about that. What do we wanna be great at? What is it okay to be performing at, and make sure I've got the foundation covered. Because if I get that foundation covered, I can truly focus on those things that are differentiating.

– HR practitioners often fall into routine, right? We have to do a lot of things over and over, and we have to get it right, and it prevents us I think sometimes from thinking agile or thinking, disrupting our thoughts, like you've talked about in some of your sessions. How do we get there? How do we push ourselves to think more agile, to think differently?

– I mean the way that we think about this is we think about the concept of every function in the world today has to be digital. Every function in the world today has to be digital. And digital does not equal technology. Digital is a combination of mindset, an understanding of your audience, realizations of processes and journeys. And lastly, the technology. Okay? But it starts with mindset. So the question is do I want to have a transition mindset, where I'm just gonna transition from one technology to another? Or do I want to have a transformation mindset where I'm really changing the way that I work? And those two, that question right there, like we could stop, but to go one step deeper into it, you then start to ask yourself the question, what do I need to unlearn? Okay, and there's a ton I need to unlearn. Employees aren't gonna use technology. Stop. Every employee uses technology. Our employees don't know how to use a mobile device. Stop. Every employee knows how to use a mobile device. Our employees don't like going to training. Stop. Your employees shouldn't be trained. They should think about how do they use tools that allow them to be better at work. Our employees don't adopt or adapt technology, HR technology. Stop. Guess what? We didn't design it for the employee, we designed it for HR, and then pushed it out to the employee without designing it with the employee in mind first. So a human approach versus a user approach. So all of those things I just mentioned are examples of where we need to adapt or unlearn some of that old school thinking. And what happened as we moved from Y2K to 2020, we didn't do a lot of that. We just transitioned from one tech to another, one tech to another, one tech to another. All of a sudden, 2020 hit, which we faced multiple pandemics at the same time. A public health pandemic, a social justice pandemic, as well as the expectation of outside world tools and inside tools. So, hey, it's 2022 outside of work, what year does it feel like inside of work? Well, guess what? When all of a sudden people weren't going to work, they were dealing with these two things simultaneous, and they're like, I'm not working in an experience like that at work any longer. I'm a human outside of work, but guess what? The things I'm asked to do inside of work are not human. They're machine, and I'm not gonna do that. So all of that stuff, I know that's a long, long answer, but all of that stuff is the mindset required upfront to unlearn before you go into your technology

implementation. If you don't spend the time up front doing that, your technology implementation is just going to be a rinse and repeat of what you already have in place today.

— I couldn't agree more. And I'm working through or reading through Adam Grant's book, "Think Again". And I find it interesting just how much value, actually there is in forcing ourselves to reexamine things, take a different angle, unlearn the things we've learned before. It's such an important skill for HR. How do we force ourselves to do that? How do we, I mean, I understand everything you're saying, like I totally agree, but I think sometimes we just get stuck in our routines. So how do we create process, and I'm using air quotes, here to remind ourselves to be disruptive, to think again, to push ourselves, to do the exercise you just talked about? Stop, like, is that really the best way to create an experience for an employee?

— The the easiest way to do it, and it's not that easy, but the easiest way to do it is to set in stone what are your measures of success? So what are my goals and what's my why? You know, if you're reading Adam Grant, you've probably read Simon Sinek. So what's my why? We don't spend enough time in the people function on the why. We spend a lot of time on the how and the what. So what's my why? What are my measures of success gonna be? And I have to honestly wake up every day with that in mind. As the CEO of a company, I have to wake up every day with that in mind. Otherwise, I'd go back to the way that I was before. The thing that I think is compelling right now is since 2020, work has changed forever, workers have changed forever, business has changed forever. So what should HR do? Stay the same? I think we really have to look at ourselves in the mirror and say since everything else changed, what are we gonna do? I like to think in 2022, we are all actors in a movie. And in 2030, people are gonna look back at us and say what did these people do? Did they do the same thing they've been doing all along? Like, "Hey, guess what? Is it gonna be mandatory for us to return to the office?" Are they gonna do stupid stuff like that? "Hey, guess what? We're gonna go back to the once a year performance review where people have to sign it." Or are we actually gonna change to where the world is? And I think that's the biggest challenge right now. But for me, if I look in the mirror every day and say which one do I wanna be on? I want to be on the change. And I think that concept of change, I don't know if you're gonna ask me this question, so I'll just really quickly, change is a strategy. Change is not the enemy. Change is a strategy. Change is not the enemy. And the sooner that we can understand that and bring that into our mindset, the better off we're all gonna be.

— I work in a high change organization, and so living in change actually really excites me. I think it's fascinating.

— Yeah, is there an organization that's not a high change organization? Just really quickly, is there one?

- Yeah, no, you have a good point.

- Should there be one? Should there be an organization that's not a high change organization?

- Everybody should be looking at change frequently. And it goes back to my question about agile. Like we have to think agile all the time, otherwise we're going to get stagnant, like you said, you know?

- And we can't get, so there are no more concepts of three-year strategies and five-year strategies. I mean, the way I like to think of what a paper map used to look like. A paper map doesn't change, right? Like once you look at the map, it's there. So how do I take my strategy from a paper map strategy to a true GPS, online, real-time map? So I can see where the traffic is. I can see when there's new streets added. I can see where there's an accident. Because guess what? Then I can actually maneuver. But so many of us still work with these paper map strategies instead of a real world, real-time GPS strategy. And that paper map strategy will kill us.

- As you think ahead for HR, where are you most excited about the disruption that you're seeing in the HR industry?

- I don't look ahead to HR to start. I look ahead at work to start. So when I look at how work is transforming, I think about the concept of the hybrid work model. I think about the concept of people being and demanding to be treated like humans. I think about women and minorities being treated and demanding to be treated like everyone else. I think about pay transparency I think about all of those things. And I say that is the now of work. Now from there, what does HR need to do? HR shouldn't change just to change. Back to my concept about why. HR needs to look at patterns, look at signals, look at what's happening in the now of work. Notice I'm saying now, not future. Okay, anyone that thinks they're wise enough to predict the future of work right now, they probably shouldn't be on a podcast. Okay, I mean, they're probably some random machine somewhere that's making up some weird algorithm. But let's focus on the now because we're already so far behind. Once again, like I said before, we're humans outside of work. Inside of work, we're oftentimes treated like inhumans. And if we can just make up that gap to at least where we are right now, then going forward, we can be ready for what the signals and patterns look like they're gonna be into the future. But for those that are saying, "Oh, guess what? I think I'm gonna wait and see what the future looks like before we make any changes." It's a fatal mistake. And that's killing a lot of HR organizations because what's happening is CEOs and CFOs forever have said people are our most important asset, but it's been lip service. In today's world, what they're realizing that people truly are the most important asset because guess what? They can't find enough. Because guess what? People

that are the most important are leaving. And if HR doesn't actually act, the seas are. So this whole landscape of what should HR do to stay relevant, to be strategic, to quote-unquote, "Get a seat at the table." You know, HR's had a seat at the table for the last 15 years, and it hasn't shown up with anything that the business needs. That's a fatal flaw.

— Now is the time for HR to finally step up, the way they should have been doing for the last 15 years. And I wanna go back to one of your examples, how you were talking about work informing what we do. I can't give it the the due that it's that it's due, 'cause I don't remember where I saw it. But McDonald's is making a change where, I don't know if you've seen this, where they're hiring remote workers to be order takers. That is fascinating to me because you've had this idea that oh hey, restaurants fast food can't go remote, there's no way we can do remote. And it took somebody to disrupt that thinking. You can absolutely have an order taker who's in a different state even, if you have the right process in place.

— The right process, and then if I could just add to that comment, the right journey to make sure that the customer, or in this case, the employee actually is comfortable with that. So for example, I was in Australia a few weeks ago. In Australia at the McDonald's, we'll go back to that, at McDonald's there were nine kiosks to order. And guess what, by the way, if you didn't want to just order on a kiosk, you actually could do live video with someone who was actually at home. And there was one lane where you could actually order without that model. Guess what? There were 50 people in the one lane, waiting for the one person to take their order. And there were nine empty kiosks. Now, what that's an example of is just a really bad deployment. Because what did they not do? They didn't help the person realize at first that A, there's going to be value if you do it this way. Like there's actually might be some gamification tied to it. There may be some rewards points to it or something like that. And B, I have to take away that other model 'cause guess what? If the only way for them to order is through that kiosk or start there, and then if it doesn't work, then go to someone for help, they're not gonna do that old way. But as long as we offer both ways, guess what people are gonna do? The one that's least change feeling. "Oh, I've always done it this way. What do you mean I have to change?" So if we're gonna drive change, we have to truly drive change, not just offer another route and still keep the other one there. The journey has to be the way we want it to work. So I'm all for that example that you brought up, and I think it's brilliant. It's transformative, but once again, it can't just be implemented. It has to be deployed with the change enablement infused into that journey.

— That's such a good point for us to end on. 'cause I think it—

— Oh, we're ending already?

— I think at HR, we implement, we don't deploy, and we leave that other option still out there. And then we go, "Well why didn't this work?"

— Right, and then what we end up doing, crazy, is blaming the technology. And say, "Hey, guess what? This technology doesn't work." And then now what do we do? And RFP, and then what do we do? Put a new technology. And then what does it not do? It doesn't work. And then what do we do? It's a vicious cycle. So until we break that and actually get out of the mindset of implementing technology, and realizing that we have to stop doing digital, but being digital, and being digital means I start with the mindset where I'm deploying for a human, not for a user. Stop saying user experience. Stop saying user testing. I'm truly focusing on that human. That's what's gonna switch the needle, or move the needle from that tactical implementation to a true deployment of a strategy.

— Well Jason, thanks for a few minutes of your time today. This has been great and I love the nugget about thinking about deployment versus implementation. That's a great takeaway.

— Thank you so much, and thank you so much for having me. Hope it was helpful.