

- 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. This episode was recorded live at SHRM 2022 in New Orleans. And joining me during this session is Wade Larson, Chief Human Resource Officer and Workforce Development at Wagstaff Incorporated. Wade, thanks so much for joining me on the podcast.

- Hey, thanks for having me here.

- I'm so excited, we're on the SHRM floor so you'll hear a little ambient noise here, but I'd love to start with you sharing a little bit about your background in the HR space and what led you to write HR Transformation?

- Oh, absolutely. Now so I've been in the game for almost 30 years, don't yeah, don't hold that against me. I'm not, I don't think I'm old, I still think I'm about 30. Pretend like I am, but really, I mean the HR Transformation thing when you think about it now, I was there in the, okay, I was there in the late nineties, but I was listening to Dave Ulrich when he was out on the road, right? When he was out with his whole transformation concept of this shift to become HR business partners, right. As we were transforming from personnel and that, that HR 1.0, that we had to do things different. And so it was that push to get HR to the table, right, to be partners and such. And it was revolutionary. It was, I just figured that that's how we did things. And, and so for the last 25 years you think about this, the last 25 years we've been trying to be making a difference, be part of the business. Now that's how it should be. I mean, CFO deals with finances VP of Sales deals with revenue generation, operations deals with operations. We should be dealing with the people, which you know on the bottom line, is the top one and two most expensive things on the, on the revenue source around the, on the expenses. But us, we've been struggling for 25 years to get this right and we still have a problem with them, but when it comes to models, right when it comes to models, that model that Dave wrote, it's 25 years old, the world's changed. It's time to change our model too. So, and that's, that was the generation behind it is. And we're still trying to get it right. But to be honest, we need a model that's gonna match how the world is today. That's it.

- I think that's very fascinating. I had a conversation with Johnny C. Taylor and he was talking about the future of HR and like, HR is the only thing that's getting in the way of itself. Like we have to transform and change so I absolutely love that. You know, you're doing a session this year at SHRM titled, You Can't Fix What You Don't Know: Crucial Conversations for Optimal Performance. I love this title because so many times we want our employees to improve and they may need to be told exactly what is needed. So why do managers fail to

deliver like, that clear feedback?

- It's the same reason that, I mean, you're right. We do get in our own way, right? And, and a lot of it is fear. It's fear, it's and I find there's three reasons, right? Number one, you know what happens if, if they don't like me, right? How're they going to know if I hurt their feelings?

- Yeah. If I hurt their feelings like, or what happens if I make it awkward, right, after I give them feedback, or I don't know how, right? So, I mean, if I hurt their feelings like, you're not gonna hurt their feelings. They're adults, if you do it the right way, then it's gonna be fine, right? Let's, let's figure out the way to make this happen, but about making it awkward, it's already awkward. You're already avoiding the conversation. So, you know, balance the equation, but in terms of how to make it happen, like it's, it's a skill, we have to figure this thing out. And so, I mean, that's part of my, my session today is, but, but it's not rocket science. So then creative leadership helped us come up with the SBI model years, I mean, decades ago. So it's not rocket science, but even in HR, we do get in our way. And a lot of it is for fear. We don't, it's almost like we suffer from imposter syndrome.

- Yeah.

- We don't belong with the other C-suite, you know? Oh, they're so smart. They're so, whatever, like. And that's part of our challenge, is we go in thinking that we're only in charge of people. So we all, we go to the business table, talk about FMLA and sexual harassment and company parties. We need to do a better job of understanding our role in the business. And we need to enhance our business acumen. And if we do, and we understand our role in the ecosystem of the business, how people play out, where our role is to enhance the entire organization, profitability, the margins, lean, everything else. That's where we step in and that's where we make a difference.

- You know, I think it's important that HR professionals start to teach themselves and their managers how to start giving this feedback. And I think when you're trying to learn a new skill, there's never like a one size fits all approach, where you can just teach everybody the same skill set, set the same way. So as you've coached HR on how to teach giving rich feedback as a core competency, what are some of the things that you talk about that really help you know, HR and managers learn this skill and practice it?

- The first thing that I, that I teach is to do it, right? Like the value of feedback diminishes with time, it really does. The longer you wait, the less valuable it is. It's, I use the analogy today of it's fresh fruit, right? You wait too long and that just gets nasty. It's great up to a point. But even with positive feedback, it's there but

you also have to, dad always taught, if you it's, nothing is dynamic, unless it's specific. Hey, good job, kid. Well, for what?

- Right.

- You know? And so we need to be more specific, but the biggest thing is you gotta do it. They can't read our minds. Well, they should just know better. I know they should, but they don't, they didn't, they weren't raised the same as you. They didn't go to the same school, the same church, the same parents. They need the communication. And that's just it, you need to lean into it, you need to just do it. And let's be honest, you're a manager. And that's what we pay you to do, is to go do this.

- Yeah, I like that you, you centered the whole conversation a little bit on fear. Like, you just, you gotta get over it, you know right before you came into the studio, I was doing an Instagram video with Matt here in the booth. And I was like, I feel so cheesy doing this. I was like, we're just gonna do it. We're gonna send it. And it's just, you're gonna get better at it as you practice, you know? How do you think or where do you think the accountability falls with employees when it comes to feedback? You know, obviously there's the responsibility managers need to give it in a timely manner, like you said, like the rotten fruit, but I also feel like employees have some ownership in this process. How have you talked about that?

- They do. At the same time, they don't know where to start. And they, they really don't. They walk into their job thinking, all right, here's my job. I go to work, you pay me, I go home. And that's how we've set it up. And the longer we go, the less accountability that we've created for our employees. And we've set it up that way too. Everyone wants to be nice, we want to care for their feelings, we want to make sure that they're not touched. And, and at the same time, we've also created this this whole Facebook perfection, right? This quest for perfection, if I don't have five stars, oh my gosh, right? I'm gonna die. Oh, anything less than a 4.9 rating is, is impossible. Oh my, you know, wow. I can't. And we have this Instagram phenomena, like if I don't have this perfect life, and we get to work and even as managers, it's like, oh my gosh, if I do anything less than a five star rating they're gonna freak on me.

- Yeah.

- And, and so that sense of accountability, right? The employees go in thinking, well, you I double dog dare to, to rate me anything less than a five. And, and that's just, it, we haven't created this sense of accountability to say, let's open a dialogue. And that's just it. The first step to feedback and accountability is to set clear expectations and creating those metrics. And so from the manager's perspective, it's like, okay I hired you, I gave you a job

description, we're good to go, right? Right. No, we've read job descriptions, they're terrible. Creating that open dialogue starts from day one. And it's, hey, let's talk about what you need to do, right? What do I need you to know, be and do? Setting those expectations. What do I need you to deliver? By when? That's part one. Part two is, what's the cadence? How often are we gonna talk? My open door policy means it's open door. Let's get you into the rhythm. Number three, what's the feedback, the relationship? I want you to feel comfortable giving me feedback as much as giving you feedback. And so what's that cadence and that relationship? Let's create that, that stream so it's continuous. I don't want you to have to wait for once a year evaluations 'cause those are awful. They're terrible, they don't work. Let's be honest, they don't work, but instead let's create the cycle. Number one, set expectations. Clear expectations, but they're continuous expectations. That's gonna define metrics. And if I, if we understand what those expectations are, then comes feedback. All the feedback's doing is creating a calibration. How are you doing compared to what's expected? And we can create this gap analysis. How are you doing? Here's where you're at, compared to where you need to be. And then part three is accountability. All right. If you're doing well, I'm gonna say, keep going. You're doing a great job. Awesome. Because I want to continue to motivate you to do well. If you're not there, I'm gonna coach you, guide you, do correction. It's not negative feedback. It's not criticism, right? No, it's, it's, it's, it's constructive criticism. Nobody likes to be criticized.

- Right?

- Right. It's corrective feedback 'cause we're going to correct it, give it back, and I'm gonna say, all right, let's get you back in the lane, right? And let's keep going. I'm gonna say, all right what resources do you need to be successful? I'm gonna let you have that and we're gonna go through it again. Lather, rinse repeat, we're gonna recycle this. And that's where the success comes in.

- I think it goes back to, you know when people go into performance reviews, if they haven't had this great conversation, great feedback they're like, okay, I'm gonna rate myself a five and then we'll work our way down from there, right?

- And I have to justify why I took points away.

- Yes.

- I look, I've been teaching for 25 years at the university level and, and it's not, and I have to tell them up front look, this is how grading works. You start at a zero-

- Right.

- And we're gonna add to it. And instead they're like, well, why'd you take points away? I didn't. I gave you 97.

- Right.

- And we're not having this argument. You got an A.

- Right.

- You got, you got 97.

- Yeah.

- Good on you. Well, why'd you take three points away? I didn't, I gave you 97 and it's that same thing in performance, right? You did well, you're doing great.

- Yeah. There's that idea that if you're not, exceeding, right, when you're looking at the performance scale, if you get that performance rating some people are like, I'm just performing. It's like, yeah, you're doing your job. I don't have any concerns. You're learning, you're growing. Like, okay, you didn't exceed this year, but that, you met the expectation and that's what we want out of you. You know, I think, I think as we went through the pandemic and we're now in this space where you have knowledge workers who are struggling between hybrid or remote, how have you seen that changed on how managers are approaching feedback? Is there any variances you're seeing?

- Absolutely, absolutely. So, and let me tie in, I'm gonna do a Paylocity plug here because this is where it's, it's really huge. There are processes and there are systems.

- Yeah.

- And they are different. And this is where the difference maker has been with the pandemic and the success there too. The biggest difference between those who did and did not on the success factor, is communication and connection. Right? How do I feel connected? Those who were there, those who weren't, it actually didn't matter whether you were there or not. Everybody felt the same. Did we feel connected?

- Yeah.

- So we have people who stayed on site and they still feel, you know, like, hey everybody stopped talking to us. All right, so how do you create connection? You know, I could be out there talking to people. Well, now we can't because, hey, we don't wanna see you. Right, we have masks on whatever else. That's not it. So how can I do that? What I found, and this goes back to my model, right, what I share in the book, is how can I, to be honest, how can I automate some of this

stuff and make, and take some of the process, right, to the point where I can automate the processes, create the systems to do that. So I can spend more of my time working with people! Weird, huh? And so if I can do things such as, hey, let's set up the expectations, but let's do it in a way so that, hey, we can, we can systematize that. So then why don't I come out there and have a conversation with you, let's have the conversation. You have it on your phone, I have it on my phone, I don't have to call you into the office.

- Yeah.

- Have the walk of shame, we're gonna sit here and we're gonna suck an hour of your day so I can have a check in conversation. I go out to your workplace and this is it, we're in manufacturing. They can go out to the CNC machine say, hey, how's it going? Great! You know I have these five things we're working on. Great, how's this going, this going, this going? We have a 10 minute convo, right, at the machine, machine's running. That's it, great, you know, the, the manager clicks. All right, cool. We had the conversation, we're done. To the employee, we just had a one on one. We just had a conversation to the manager. They had a one on one. They can pop a couple of notes on their phone.

- Yep.

- Done. The human factor is done. The manager saved a shingle load of time, we didn't disrupt any kind of production time, and from the HR side, all right, you know, our systems are done. We don't have to do anything, acknowledge anything, the farm's already set, right? We saved a ton of time, they save a ton of time. The people have connection and it's all good.

- Yeah.

- Wow. I mean, that's just a microcosm of this whole automation piece, but that's just, it, it's not impersonalizing the relationship, it's actually helping us to personalize it. I can increase communication through this. I can use my, my, I can connect people, right, through the systems as they start chatting with each other. I can build these networks. I can start to, to say, let's talk about this. I can, yeah, if we have performance evaluations, that's cool. But all these micro conversations all align with, you know at the end, all this is, all the evaluation is, it's not taking us, you know, I'm gonna evaluate for the last 12 months. All it is, is saying like, at this point in the flow of the river, I'm gonna check in and say, this is, this is our update of how things are today, looking back, alright this is fine. But the most importantly, this is where we're headed. Right? There's a reason why the windshield is bigger than the rear view mirror. Right? It's important to understand where we were at in the past, but it's more important to say this is where we're going 'cause

I can affect that. And so the system helps us to do that.

- Yeah, I absolutely agree. Technology should be your tool, not your crutch, for sure.

- Amen, it's a facilitator. It needs to be.

- Yeah. Well, Wade, thank you so much for jumping on with me and taking a few minutes out of your SHRM Expo to chat.

- Hey, thanks for having me, I appreciate it. This is great.

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