

- 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. On today's episode, I have with me, Steve Gilliland. He is a keynote speaker, has many years in the HR space, and a real passion for helping people, elevate and kind of get to the next level and think positive. So, Steve, thanks for jumping on the podcast with me.

- Absolutely Shari, glad to be here.

- So I hope we could start with you sharing a little bit about your own HR journey, and why you're so passionate to share with others what you've learned along the way.

- Well, if you know anything about me, I'm very transparent and I will be transparent. So if you're gonna talk about HR journey, I'm just gonna go backwards and say, when I was in corporate and I was in leadership, I didn't have the same view of HR that I do today. And I'll tell you why, it was more of a thing that I didn't understand it. It was like, oh, come on, do we really need this training? And oh, say, okay, I'll get you the performance reviews when I get you the performance review. Didn't understand it. And again, it was more of a thing of you're focused on what you're doing and you're not really in that world. Then you get outside, you leave corporate America, you write a couple of books, you begin to speak, you begin to travel and before you know it, you start to realize that, what you used to see training as you now see it completely differently. You believe it now to be like, whoa, not only do people need the training, from a culture perspective. Then the first time I was ever invited to speak at the National SHRM Conference, the Society of Human Resource Management, all of a sudden it became evident to me that there are thousands and thousands, if not millions of HR professionals, that absolutely are unsung heroes. They go in every day, they set the tone, they try to bring to an organization the things that not only are just necessary, but they're critical. And so for me, after that first SHRM conference I was hooked and now 16 years later, here I am.

- Wow, that's so amazing. And you actually have two sessions coming up at annual SHRM this year titled, "Hide Your Goat" and "Making a Difference." And both those sessions have a component of leveraging attitude. Why do you find this such a powerful tool?

- Well, attitude, it's kind of like I always say, people in information, they produce your thought process and those thoughts produce behaviors. And so for me attitude comes into play with everything. Because again, as you try to establish and create a culture that is a fun culture, a culture that people wanna work in. I just had a conference call prior to this podcast and their theme is, people do matter. And they said, "Can you work in the things that you

say?" And I said, "Well, people are your most appreciable asset." But here again, the right people. And that's a key. You can say, well, we need people. Well, you need people, but you need the right people. And the attitude is what really, really is the, and I call this, it's the differentiator. A person with the right attitude can influence people in such a way that it creates even more energy, more positive, attitudes are contagious. You just have to ask yourself, is yours worth catching?

- I think about attitude a lot in my own career as a practitioner and in the people I've encountered. And there's always those people in an organization who just always have a bad attitude. Like why do you think that is? I'm curious with all the work that you've done what have you uncovered as to, why people stay in an organization with a bad attitude?

- Well, here again, I think there are two primary factors that stimulate people every day. One is other people and information. And I've always told people, surround yourself with a character of people that resembles who you wanna be. And the other thing is you take in the right information. And I don't tell people what they should do or shouldn't do as it relates to whether it is, reading a particular thing, watching something on television, on the internet. But I just tell people, when you really think about what it is that you center your focus on, you gotta ask yourself. And I think people come to work, their attitude is negative, and it's because of the culture around them outside of work. I think sometimes, I used to say this, some people just need to break up with their friends because they're toxic. I mean, everything about them is negative. Everything they do, everything they talk about is negative. And they talk about other people, and that's their day.

- How as managers, can we help people break that cycle?

- Well, I've said this to a lot of people is, you have to ask yourself, do you influence them or do they influence you? And I think that's something inside that you have to yourself be the person that influences them. And what you have to do is you gotta stop giving people permission to ruin your day. Because when they ruin your day, it causes you to become distracted from what it is you should be focused on. And all of a sudden, it's reversed, instead of you influencing them, they're influencing you. So it starts with just making sure that you yourself, you're the influencer.

- I had a session earlier this year with Cheryl Johnson, our CHR, here at Paylocity. And one of the things that she said that has stuck with me is the things you ignore, you allow. And I think that's so relevant for what you just said. What do you do if the tactics you have in place are actually reinforcing negative outcomes? And specifically I'm thinking about, employees that I've had, where their output was good

and it met business objectives, but their tactics were terrible. And we kind of excused their tactics, their bad attitudes, their poor management, because they were delivering outcomes. And I think we've all learned that, like you've said a little bit about culture, and people, and talent, it's all so important. So how do we stop reinforcing those negative outcomes and really hold people accountable to do better?

- Well, and by the way, I love what she said, because I've always believed that behavior not confronted never changes. You have to confront the behavior because if you don't confront the behavior, it's never going to change. But then you have to look at results. And when you say to yourself, well, they're producing, they're getting good results of course, from a strategic and a tactical standpoint, they're just not doing the things that we'd like them to do. Maybe they're not approaching it, the wrong attitude. What you have to understand is if you don't confront that situation, it's not about their performance and it's not about their outcomes, it's the people that they're surrounded by, it's the influence they have on them. And as an HR professional, you all know, sometimes it's not the direct, it's the indirect that happens. So here is a person that maybe can't handle that approach. They can't handle that tactic, and they begin to mirror what that person's doing. And now all of a sudden you've allowed this person to do what they do while granted, they may get results. The other person looks at 'em and says, "Well, if they can get away with this, or if that's their attitude, or if that's the way they're gonna do it, then I'm gonna do the same thing." So that's why that behavior is so important because let's face it, sometimes people have a belief system, but their actions don't match that system. And people are very, very susceptible to being influenced. And I always say, that behavior has to be modeled. There has to be an example. So for me, you may give me the result, but I need other people who watch you and see you to make sure they understand, 'cause you can't say to them, well, that's just them, just ignore them. They're not going to, they're going to see it and go, "Hey, if it's good for them, it's good for me."

- I have so been in that situation where somebody higher up has said, "Yeah, just ignore so and so." And it was heartbreaking 'cause I'm like, you guys just don't see the impact this is having. So let's say you have people that are modeling the right behavior that you want, and they are getting the outcomes, right? So they have the kind of, both sides of the coin there. How have you coached leadership on how to reinforce that positive behavior? How to recognize that and really highlight those people as like, hey, not only is this person getting the outcomes we want, but they're doing it in a way that we want it to be done.

- Well, behavior and again, leadership is kind of an interesting subject matter here because sometimes, and I'm just gonna say this to

indirectly get to the answer of your question. I think there's a congruency of behavior that sometimes leaders don't model. There is an expectancy of what they, as leaders say, hey, this is what we should be doing. But then you look and go, well, wait a minute, is your behavior modeling what it is you're expecting from us. And the way, the best way to make sure that everybody understands is number one, and I've always said this, when somebody's behavior just matches everything that you want, as an HR professional, we have a tendency to confront people, and we'll bring them in and we'll say, you know what, this is not easy for me, I wanna have this conversation. But how many times do we call somebody in, shut the door, and say, "Listen, I just wanted to say to you, thank you. I wanna thank you for who you are as a person. I wanna thank you for the things that you contribute here. And I don't think I would want to be in my position if it wasn't for you doing what you do in your position. So I just wanted to take this opportunity to say, thank you." So many times the recognition is done. And by the way, there's nothing wrong with it, sometimes it's in front of a whole team. But I think taking the time and we don't do that, we have a tendency to, it's kind of like, I'll give an example of when your child opens the door, you're walking into a store, and here's an adult and your child opens the door for another person, okay? Do you walk up to them, and literally say to them, "Hey I gotta tell you, I am so proud of you. Thank you so much for doing. You were such a gentleman, That was such a great thing to do as a young lady." But I'll tell you what, if they don't open the door, and they go in front of the person and they dart in, guess what we do? Same thing that we do in the business world. Same thing we do in organizations. We'll confront the negative behavior, but sometimes, Shari we have a tendency not to really, and I'm calling this take the time to reinforce the positive because once we do that, that just grows. And other people say that because somebody might say to them say, "So what was that all about?" "He just wanted to say, thanks for." And they'll look at him like really. And what it does is it makes a person say, "You know what, I really wanna come into work. I really enjoy who I work for." I had a situation, and if you don't mind, I had a situation with a son that left a company. And great company, a company all of your viewers would know. And I said, "You've got to be kidding me." Here's exactly what he said. He said, "Yeah, I'm fully vested, and I've got this and I've got this." But he said, "I'm not working one more day for the person I report to." And it proves people don't leave bad companies, people leave bad bosses, they leave bad managers. So the best thing to do is reinforce it, make sure that they are known that you appreciate. Not just recognize, but from your heart, you tell 'em how much you appreciate them and what they do.

- As you were telling that story as to what that conversation would look like. I'll be honest, I'm getting goosebumps over here, because I can just imagine what I would feel like as an employee sitting in that room with my supervisor and having that very authentic, thank you conversation. That would go super long way. So if you're listening,

you take one thing away from this podcast, it's that. Start teaching your managers that, because I feel like that's hands down, gonna do way more than getting some branded swag, right? You have this authentic conversation. Sometimes I feel like the reason things don't get addressed in an organization is because frankly, supervisors, leaders, managers don't have all the information. And it seems to always come down to there isn't a good sense of psychological safety when it comes to open door policies, right? We say, hey, we have open door, come talk to me. But then you kind of know that there's either a back channel or there's a click or there's, whatever it is, how do we help our leaders and our managers truly embrace psychological safety when it comes to implementing things like open door policies so that we can address, the issues we're seen in our organizations?

- Well, I said it earlier, Shari, your actions have to match your beliefs. And I serve on the board, I'm the vice chair of the board at a credit union, very large credit union in North Carolina. And when we recruited a new CEO about five years ago, one of the things that we were wanting as a board was that we wanted that, call it what you will, we wanted people to feel like, those employees, like it really was an open door. Like there wasn't this C-suite, and they were removed from everybody else. And there was this Taj Mahal effect. And I got a level with you, when I'd go into the building, of course I had a fob as a director, and I could make my way around the building. And of course I could get up to that floor. And I could use the fob to get past that. Let me share this with you. The minute he came in and was hired, the first thing he did was the fobs went away on the inside. It was basically, yeah I mean, there was security 'cause of the building, but as employees, you didn't need fobs to get somewhere. And by the way, he took the door off of one thing. And then I was amazed, I started to talk to some of the employees, some of the tellers, some of the loan people. And they said he is so visible, he is just so visible. And the other thing, every time he says, he's going to do something, he does it. So he built up trust. He built trust, and another thing is we genuinely know that he cares. And I think sometimes the reason why there's that safety, that net isn't there is you kinda look at a person and go, do they really care, or is there another agenda here? But when you start to realize that a person you can truly trust them and they do truly care about you. And again, I think it goes back to something that bears repeating, it's all about your actions. People watch what you do. Why do children feel safe? Children feel safe because they watch you act in a certain way. And when they see the way you are, and who you are and what you do, and they believe in you and they trust you, and they know you truly care about them, then they feel safe. But if you're not that person, if you're not that person, they're gonna know you're not that person. So it's not just talking about it.

- It's amazing how much we lose as we grow up. I think about that a lot in coaching managers on how to talk to employees. And so often I

have to remind them, think about when you were little, and somebody would try to teach you something, it was very positive, it was very motivational, it was very feed forward, right? Here's how to do it better next time, less negative. And I'm always amazed that we lose that sometimes as we grow up, and we forget those lessons. I love the example that you gave on the CEO and what he did. How have you seen that same concept come to life in this remote or hybrid environment where you don't have some of that same, like, I can take off a door, I can change key fobs, I have to do this all virtually now.

- Well, one thing that, and wow, I wasn't prepared for the question, but I will tell you the first thing that came into my head was there were organizations that allowed people to not have their screen on. There were organizations, there was no screen on, and there was mute. And yet as a professional speaker who was asked to do, innumerable virtual presentations, one of the things I never, I never demanded I only request. I said, would you please ask them to have their screen on. Because I said, number one, when you're doing a virtual gives you a lot of energy, it's people are there, you can see them smiling, you can see them nodding, you can see them taking notes. But I was amazed at the times where people just weren't, and I had this vision of somebody, supposed to be at this Zoom virtual presentation, and they're back there vacuuming, they're dusting, they're getting the knots out of their dog or their cat. I was like, I can't believe this. So, number one, that was, again, in that Zoom environment, in that virtual environment, you have to create a culture of trust, a culture of openness, a culture of transparency.

- You brought up a good point, and I think it's something we talk a lot about when it comes to remote work and being successful. And one of those things is kind of creating some separation between home life and work life. We'll call it that. You know I'm with you, I get up, I get dressed, I don't wear jogging pants during the day. For me that works, and that's really kept me focused on my work, and motivated and excited about the day. So I appreciate you sharing that story. I wanna wrap up our conversation. You recently wrote an article expressing gratitude, talking about expressing gratitude when things get tough. And I'm not sure how much tougher things can get for HR professionals right now. But there was one line in the article that really stuck with me, focus on the journey instead of worrying about the outcome. Every roadblock is preparing you for the future. Patience is key. Wow, I think this is so applicable right now, more than ever. And I think about that journey, because so often we're thinking about the next step, like what's the next rung on the ladder. So how have you helped people make that shift and have a different perspective when it comes to just focusing on the journey?

- Well the challenges. And by the way, I know HR professionals are watching this, first of all, the whole recruitment retention, the retention piece now, I mean, who would've ever thought, I mean,

retention's always been something of, hey, we need to have this as an initiative, but now more than ever, people are just looking different directions. And so that retention, so there's a lot of challenges. But focusing on the journey is this, where you've been and what you've done has brought you to where you're at. But where you're heading, what you need to stay focused on is the fact that what you're doing right now, this moment, you cannot be distracted. And at this year's SHRM, I will tell a story of a situation where my wife was with me, and she looked at me and when she said to me, she said, "That's amazing." And I said, "What?" She said, "I have allowed everything that has happened to us to distract me, and actually upset me. whereas for you, what you've done is you've stayed focused." And I said, "But I enjoy those moments, I'm enjoying now." Because I said, what ends up happening, is I said, if you get beyond where you're at, number one, it's gonna change possibly, or probably before that ever happens anyways. So what I wanna do is I wanna make sure that I know what I'm supposed to be doing now, enjoy doing what I'm doing now, like this podcast, this is a perfect example. I have a call, I had a call before you with a client, and I've got a call within an hour within another client. these are programs that I'll be doing. And I don't even think about anything else other than, okay, I'm on a podcast, here's my audience, and I'm gonna enjoy this. My personality is, it's like, I'm into this because for so many years, Shari I lived my life, it was always what was next, what was next, what was next? And if you live your life 30 minutes ahead, you're never gonna enjoy what it is you're supposed to do now. And in terms of challenges, everything you face in life, it's either gonna make you bitter or better or stronger or weaker. And that journey should be making you stronger, and it should be making you better. What we went through the last 18 months, two years, I made it an absolute action item to get better. I wanted to become a better writer. I wanted to become a more passionate speaker. I wanted to learn more about technology. And by the way, podcast, I do a lot of podcasts now as a guest, where before I didn't do that many interviews. But I said, you know what, I'm gonna make me better, I wanna do this. And you can tell your listeners right now, the questions that you just asked me, and I'm smiling as I say this, I said, just ask me questions, I wanna be organic. I don't wanna have this because it makes you just that much better, more comfortable. And I think it makes you feel more authentic in terms of, who's ever listening to this, I don't have written answers, I'm not referring to a sheet, I just wanna speak for my heart. And it's the way I speak at a National SHRM Conference as well. When I'm on stage, I don't want a PowerPoint to, not that it's not important, but I don't use it. It's just something that I want people to understand. I'm in that moment. And if something happens down in that audience, I wanna be in that moment and I wanna enjoy that part. And last year again, I had a situation and a moment where I just, I literally, and I gotta share this with your audience, I literally, I'm a Pittsburgh Steelers fan. And of course I made a comment about the Dallas Cowboys. And if anybody was there, a woman walked up to me as soon as it was over,

gave me her business card. And she was the director of HR for the Dallas Cowboys. And I got the biggest print in my face. And I said, I guess that's a person, I should have read the audience. And those are fun things. And those happen in those moments. But if you're so distracted with everything else, and oh, I gotta go, and gee, I need to run over here, and gee, I gotta, aha I'm there, the audience is there, that's where I'm gonna be. I'm not gonna be anywhere else. And I'll spend as much time as possible, the bookstore can wait till I get there. I wanna have some fun times. So just like this, I just love what I do, but I know that I'm only gonna enjoy it more if I'm doing it as I'm doing it, not gee, what do I got today at four o'clock.

- Absolutely love that advice, and so applicable right now. Just live in the moment. So Steve, I hope that I get to see you in person at SHRM. And if you're listening and you're heading to New Orleans in a couple weeks here, check out Steve sessions, he's got two, I'll make sure I link all of his details in our show notes. So Steve, thanks for taking a few minutes to chat with me.

- You're so welcome. And may I say if you're coming to SHRM, and coming to my sessions come early, because we have a lot of fun and there's usually a pretty good size audience. So come early, I will love to meet you in person.

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