

- 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 Cheryl Johnson, CHRO, here at Paylocity joining me to talk about all things boundary setting. So Cheryl, thanks for taking a few minutes to chat out with me today on all things, setting boundaries. This is such a relevant topic right now. I just, you know, I was recently on a Facebook group and there was this woman sharing about her struggle with setting boundaries. And she was like, okay, I've I've done all the things. I've set office hours. I've put a sign up. I've I've shut my door. She's like, what am I supposed to do now? And I just loved the commentary coming back to her, and I posted, I was like, lock the door. Like, they'll figure it out. But you know, you've been talking about boundaries, honestly, for the last several months here, both internally and externally, why do you think this is such an important topic right now for HR?

- Well is by far one of my hot topics, and something to your point, I have been making the rounds, talking to as many teams as I can about boundaries. And I'll jump back to like why I think it's important for HR, but I wanna go to like why I started talking about boundaries. I mean, it was over six months ago, I started talking about boundaries and it was actually because I was having a conversation with an HR BP on my team who was struggling with the workload. And listening to her describe what was frustrating to her, what was overwhelming, what was causing burnout, all those different points and everything I was listening to, I just kept hearing in this boundaries. Like, everything she was describing to me were things that she could have control over, but yet she somehow felt she didn't have permission to have control over it. So rather than trying to change all the other people, I immediately started talking to her about here, I need to teach you how to set boundaries because this is you not us. It's you, not the people you work with, not the situation, it's really about you. And then I started talking to other people on the HR team and then Shari, I think you are the one who also said, Hey, I heard you've had these conversations, would you talk to the whole team about boundaries? And so it really started there because of that unique conversation. But then you fast forward to the HR space in particular, everybody's talking about burnout, the compassion, fatigue that we've talked about, and the reality is there are a lot of professions right now that are stressed out, for sure. I mean, we talked about this thing when we did the webinar, like not to underscore the healthcare workers and first responders and all of that who have obviously had a lot of stress and burnout during this pandemic. But if you kind of go into the work world, business world and positions like that, the HR profession has been just getting heaped on. It's like one heap after another of like, okay, you gotta get everybody to go remote. Now everybody's remote, you need to figure out contact tracing. None of us were trained in contact tracing, and still yet have been train in. And

yet to be trained in contact tracing. And then you have to figure out how to make sure people can work remotely effectively. And then people have the childcare, and it's just like this constant new thing to figure out. And then the stop, start, stop, start. Okay, everybody can go back, no, wait they can't go back. And so for HR people, there's just this enormous amount of stress and pressure in the work environment that has not led up. There's not been a period of time where it's led up for the HR profession. At least you think at some point you get a break, no, there's been absolutely no break. And then on top of that I've noticed, in talking to other business professionals, there isn't really empathy for the HR team on empathy or patience for like, why don't you know the answers? It's like, well, do you know the answer? Because this is the first time I've dealt with this too. So there's a lack of empathy and patience for HR, trying to figure out the things that we don't necessarily know the answer to 'cause we don't have a playbook for it. And then on top of that, we're also the same people living through it. And so we're the ones, also we're no different than any other employee. We are living through a pandemic. We are living through the constant change. We are living through kids being at home, in handling all that stuff. So we're living at firsthand and then we're the ones that have to have the empathetic ear and the compassionate ear for the employees and help figure things out for the company. So it's just this constant barrage of stress. So that leads to burnout. And we can't tell HR people, don't worry the pandemic will be over soon and you'll be fine. It's like, that's simply not work. So how do you create a more or empowering situation, you learn about boundaries and what you can do to set your own personal boundaries.

- I like that you made the comment about we're also in this. I think about everything that we're hearing now about like the great resignation, the great reshuffle, the great, whatever great you wanna use, the HR to are also going through that personally. They're having HR people leave for either other HR roles or completely new industries, because they've been burnt out, like some of the other types of roles you've talked about. And so it is important for us to think about setting boundaries. How have you tackled the question when you've had a team member come to you and say like, okay, I get it, I wanna set boundaries. I see kind of the clear defined path to do that, but I'm really worried about acts. I'm worried about me not being seen as a team player. I'm worried about in somebody's ego. I'm worried about disappointing somebody. I'm worried about being proactive or reactive. There's all these kind of triggers that we put on ourselves as to why we avoid setting boundaries.

- Yeah, and so I was actually just talking to a focus group this morning about this topic. And that same question was asked by an employee in the focus group saying like, well, how do I make sure that someone's either got my back? So if I do set boundaries, my boss has my back or it matches the company and the business expectations. Or

how do I make sure I don't seem bad because I'm saying no. And so I, first of all, it starts with a mindset perspective. So truly, thinking about the times that you've taken on more than you can handle, like, because you didn't say no, because you kept saying yes, yes, yes I'll keep doing that. And really asking yourself how good of a job do you think you actually did at all those, I'll say 10 things that you said yes to that you couldn't say no to. Do you think all 10 of those things got your equal attention? They got the best version of you? It was your best work product? The answer I can tell you is no, there's no way, it's just impossible. So what happens is most of the time we take on 10 things and I'm using 10, 'cause it's a simple number. So we take on 10 things and all 10 of those get a fraction of our attention and get a fraction of our skill and gift. And we get it done, we get it over the finish line, I said, well do this. But your work product isn't the best representation of what you're capable of doing. And so if you can start seeing it that way, then what you can recognize is that when you're saying, no, I can't do this. Or these are the five things I can do. You are saying yes, to doing five things great. It's not that you're saying, no, to doing five other things, but you're saying yes to the five things that you're gonna do great. Now, obviously, if you're working for a boss, which most of us are, you can't just be like, nope, I'm not doing those five things. So sometimes it becomes a negotiation. And so if you have someone coming to you, requesting you to do things you don't wanna say no, but you also know if you say yes, you're gonna stretch yourself and extend yourself too far. Then it's a conversation and say, Hey, let me tell you what's on my plate. So I have these things on my plate and by adding this to my plate, I'm probably not gonna be able to get some of these other things done. So can you help me prioritize, which of these things is most important? If it's the person, if the person asking you for stuff that you can't say no to has no visibility over that, then go to someone who does, go to your boss, your boss but, whoever has visibility. So for instance, you're supporting a business leader, you're an HR person you're supporting a business leader. It's actually your business leader that you support, it's their team, their actual team members who are asking you for all this. Okay, go to that business leader and say, Hey, by the way, I'm getting all these requests from your team and I can't do all of them, can you help me prioritize which ones you think are the most important?

- It leads to my next question around employees, right? Whether you're in HR department of one, or you're on a large HR team, we just get inundated with questions, right? We've all had that idea of like, well, if I just create the best resources for them to utilize or the easiest way to access it, the reality is we're still gonna get a ton of questions. And so, how do you create those boundaries not only with leadership, but start to train employees is like, here is when I'm accessible and how I'm accessible and I think really a lot about that HR department of one or a small HR team that is just wearing so many hats all the time.

- Yeah, and this one's tricky because I know in the beginning when you're, let's say you're new to a company or you new to a position or a team, you wanna do everything because you wanna earn some credibility. And then it becomes hard to unwind that. 'Cause before you know it, you've taken on a bunch of stuff that you wouldn't ordinarily wanna take on. So I think it depends, like it depends on where you are in your position. So if you're new, you're probably gonna do more than you would ordinarily do 'cause you're building. Let's just pretend you're established. So you're a little bit more in that position, as a department of one or a team of one, or just frankly, there's too much to do beyond your scope of being one person. It's really about teaching people how to find something out themselves. So what I have done historically, is I'm not gonna say no the first time this person asked me a question. So if this is someone who's never come to me before, what I would typically do, and this is what I advise to anybody is say, Hey, here's the answer, but next time, let me show you the link for how you can get there. So you're answering and teaching. Now, if that same person comes back with another question and they haven't done it, then it's just the link. You just, you don't even answer the question, you don't not respond to the person, but you send them a link where they can go find it and you'll know who the people are that are just, it's just easier for them to go to you than it is for them to look it up. But if every time they come to you and you just look it up for them, they're gonna keep coming to you and looking it up. So you gotta like teach them to fish, so to speak. And then I think the other one, this is what I use, let's say you're not a team of one, let's say you're a team of two and there's someone better capable of answering that question. So it might be that it's a different person on the team and they're better positioned to answer the question, but someone wants to come to you because they like you better or they're more comfortable with you or they like, they wanna go to the highest person in rank, and that's not the appropriate use of your time. So then the next response is, Hey, I'm gonna copy the person who should answer this question and I'm going to basically connect the two of you and I'm gonna pull out of this conversation. And so you are teaching them how to get the information they need, but you're also teaching them who's the right person to go to. So I never recommend just like ignoring and just saying like, no, it's not my job, but you look that up. I recommend answering and then teaching people how to go find what they need.

- What about email? I hear this all the time and I was recently in a MasterClass which talked about how email is everybody else's task list for you. And it's so resonated with me, but sometimes we are just inundated with email. I mean, there have been plenty of times in my career where I've in the office and it's, I have 200 emails waiting for me. How have you tackled that?

- This is probably gonna answer every single question you're gonna ask

me. What you ignore you teach. So, and remember that in every single situation, what you ignore, you teach. If you ignore something that's not worth for you, you have just taught someone that's how they should interact with you. And so, and that's the same thing. Like when people treat you poorly, if you allow people to treat you poorly, you don't say anything to correct that behavior. You've taught them that it's acceptable to talk to you that way, email. If people send you a barrage of email, they copy you on things that you don't need to be copied on, and you never erect that you are teaching them that it's okay putting you on the CC line or keep sending something to you that they should send to someone else. The other, like to me, most like egregious, is when someone sends you a 20 page long email. That clearly should have been a 30 minute meeting or 15 minute phone call. That to me is just not acceptable, it's like cheating. It's like, instead of getting on your calendar the way they should or reaching out and saying, can I get time with you? They're just cheating by slotting it into your email and now it's your problem. Their agenda is now your agenda. And so you teach people on how that works. So what I've done is if someone CCs me on something I don't need to be CC'd on, I let them know right away. Hey, going forward, I don't need to be CC'd on these. And then I talk to the people and say the things I need to be CC'd on are these. So outside of that, you don't need to CC me on it. Other things that you can do is if someone sends you that long email, which I can had this happen, I let the person know this is a meeting. Please set up a 30 minute meeting. Like what you're covering in this email is too long for me to respond to in an email. 'Cause here's the reality, I would imagine most HR people people fall in the same category. We're in meetings all day with people. So, 'cause that is our job, right? We are in the job of working with people. So we're in meetings all day. And when you get these emails that require 30 minutes of your time and attention to read it, think about it and respond to it. That's just another meeting that got tacked on. Like you don't have the time. So that typically has worked for me where it's like, Hey, why don't you set up a meeting? This is definitely not something that's email whatever appropriate. And then the last is just like, anytime you get a chance to let people know the best way to communicate with you do it. Don't wait, don't be reactive, be proactive. So when I talk to people, I'm like, Hey, by the way, don't send me an email. If it's longer than this schedule meeting, if it's something, send me a Team's chat. But don't send me an email because that's not the best way to communicate with me.

- So I wanna switch topics a little bit, but still centered around boundaries. You know, we're fortunate here at Paylocity, we have a very large HR, L and D and TA team so there's a lot of comradery that happens between our team mates but I have been in plenty of HR roles where it feels very lonely. And so you either go to the extreme and you set these very rigid boundaries where you don't talk to anybody else in the org and you have no friends or you go the opposite direction where you have no boundaries and your whole life and all

your businesses out there for everybody. What's your advice on building relationships, being an HR person in an organization?

- Yeah, this, you know, I've faced this throughout my whole career. My first job outside of being in a consulting capacity, so working as an HR person in a company, I had no friends, I was brand new. I just relocated Texas, so I didn't know anybody there. So like the only way I was gonna meet people was at work. So the idea, and I was the only HR person. So everybody else was in a different department. So when you think about it, you do need to be able to form relationships with people you work with. It's just unrealistic to think that you are gonna, you know, not be a human. You have to know your own limits. Are you someone who's able to really kind of draw those boundaries and those lines where you know you're not gonna slip information that you shouldn't slip. If you think that you can't, then don't form relationships with people at work, don't put yourself at risk. If you know that you can keep things separate, then it's totally fine. I will tell you my sister, she worked at this company a while ago and one of her friends that she was a peer with got a job in HR. So she had worked with her in the IT organization and they've been friends for a few years and then this girl gets a job in HR. And as soon as this girl gets a job in HR, she starts getting access to compensation information and goes and tells my sister like, Hey, you are being underpaid, just so you know, you're being underpaid. So my sister's telling me the story and I was like, oh my. Okay, so first and foremost, like, you need to tell your friends to stop sharing information with you because that's gonna get her fired. Like that is the fastest way to get an HR person fired. So I say all that because clearly nobody had this conversation with that person that you're in the circle of trust. Once you get into HR, you know a lot of stuff that nobody else knows, just like finance people, they know a lot of stuff that nobody else knows, and you have to keep it in confidence. And if you're the type of person that can't separate that don't have friends outside of work or outside of your department. And if you can keep it separate, then it's totally fine. Just know work is always off limits. It's just off limits.

- I'm curious, like, what are your top, I don't know, three or five things that you implemented earlier in your career, or as you've grown in your career that are like, these are my non-negotiables and these are the things I've always stuck with that have really helped me create the boundaries I need. I'll give you an example for one, just as you think about this, something you shared with me when you started at Paylocity, almost three years ago now, was around text messages. Like you were like, Hey, I don't respond to text messages right away. It's at least 10 minutes. So that's probably not the best way to reach me if it's an absolute emergency. And I remember telling my husband that story and I was like, I love this idea because we're so like tethered to our phones and the freedom that gives you to go, yeah, you know what I wanna think about that. And I'm not gonna respond to that

right away.

- Yeah, and I still use that to this day and it's partially, so you know, partially it's 'cause you do wanna make sure you have time to think about it. But the other thing is because people know your phone is attached to you, it suddenly gives off this impression that you will drop ever everything on a moment's notice and respond. And that's just not fair. It's not fair, it's not realistic. And you don't wanna set expectations early on that when someone texts you, you're gonna text back immediately. So people know that you're gonna text back when you take the time to look at your message and it's the appropriate time to respond. That is by far one of my favorites. Honestly, one of my boundaries is making time to work out. And that's a boundary because that helps me with my mental health. Like I, in the sense of like, I needed to think, to feel calm, to feel patient. And it's really important part of my day. And so I set up a boundary to make sure that I have found a way to work it into my schedule no matter what. And certainly there's a day here and there that I'll miss, but very rarely do I miss it. And usually if I miss it, I'm frustrated. And so I'm pretty crisp on that boundary. And then I think the other boundary is making sure that I don't let someone else's emergency become my crisis. You know, someone else's crisis become my crisis unless it's truly my job to handle that crisis and then you have no choice. But all too often, I have found throughout my career as an HR professional, that everybody has a crisis, everybody, and that's kind of your job to help people with crisis. So then that means you're constantly in crisis and that's not sustainable. So I had to learn very early on to know when something truly warranted a crisis emergency response, which, you know, there's not that many, frankly, like there's not there really isn't, but we allow there to be, we allow everything. So my boundary has been to make sure that I'm more kind of calm and patient and really look at a situation and know when it needs to be urgent and when it needs to be handled properly, but not as a crisis.

- I love those tips. And if you're listening and you're curious about the webinar that Cheryl mentioned earlier, I'll include that link in the show notes. We did a whole session around boundary setting and covered some of these topics, but some other questions that we didn't get to. So Cheryl, thanks for taking a few minutes out of your day to talk about boundaries with me.

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