

ERGO

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BBC GOES FULL MONTE PYTHON

THE FUNNIEST STUFF IS THE TRUEST — HUGH BONNEVILLE STARS AS THE 'HEAD OF VALUES' AT THE BBC.

ESCAPING THE VORTEX OF IRRELEVANCY

WHAT'S FUNNY IN A TV SERIES ISN'T SO FUNNY IN REAL LIFE. POPULAR BLOGGER AND SPEAKER LAURIE RUETTIMANN DESCRIBES THE FUTURE OF HR.

MILLENNIAL DEMANDS

DEMAND #1 (OF 1,000) STOP CALLING US MILLENNIALS!



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BY MIKE BONIFER



The HR Issue

For the past couple of years, we've heard lots of buzz around HR automation, which sounds, to my ear, like an oxymoron, like the work it does is turn humans into automatons.

My history as a storyteller is rooted in Disney. One of the great joys of working at Disney when I started there was watching the legendary Disney animators animate by hand, with pencils, on paper, a practice that was in its last days at that time. Animation was getting automated, like HR is today. It was like working at the buggy factory when the internal combustion engine came along—a huge change in how work got done, and in the skills required of the workers doing it.

Today, take away the cartoony accoutrements and we'd be hard-pressed to tell Disney animators' workspaces from those of its IT developers. This is where the enterprise HR tech solutions don't do it for me. They flatten work that's already been flattened onto screens. Consequently, they can be like another coat of paint on organizations already wearing a lot of coats. More splatters of color on start-ups whose operations already look like Jackson Pollack paintings from all the investor input. On global companies for whom the color of the new coat always a neutral shade, and the idea of Yet Another Enterprise Paint Job dismays their employees and flattens them emotionally.

The opportunity we are seeing with HR tech is to dimensionalize it in our workspaces. What do we mean by that? You know how CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) added dimension to the old Disney hand drawn style of animation? Advances in technology made all kinds of new effects possible. Shading, lighting, movement, textures, depth—all these new dimensions made the animation more lively, and engaged audiences as never before. Our opportunity today is to do that, not for *Wreck-It-Ralph*, but for

ourselves. How? The same way the animators do. With storytelling. The different being that ours is not story-as-product like it is for an animation studio, ours is the living story of the organization.

The leaders of a storytelling organization use story as a primary sensemaking and guidance system. Storytelling helps them get more value out of data by contextualizing it quickly and intuitively. It adds emotion, meaning and a sense of purpose to the operations of the company and to its customer communication. Story is the beating heart of the organization.

One day, there will be a CEO of a successful company whose workspace will look more like a music studio than what we think of today as an office. Every working day, she will compose and perform 30 minutes of music. Some days it will be a solo performance. Other days it will be in groups that can range in size from two to 200. On occasion, she will deejay, and play mashups of other peoples' music. Instead of a conference room, she will have a concert room. The workspace will be wired to translate the CEO's music algorithmically into different functional languages that are shared across the enterprise, offering insights, guidance, and context for operational activities. The CEO knows her communication will resonate with her company's network, because that's what stories do, and her music is a story engine.

We've seen enough slivers of this future to know it's a possibility. World building, intelligent workspaces, biomimicry, VR, AR, improvisation, MIDI, Agile development, Minecraft, Walmart's morning chant, gamification, neuroscience—it all works in the direction of the future CEO who's as much an artist/storyteller as a strategic thinker. For now, it's fiction. It's a better future, anyway, than filling out fields in flat forms all day long, in a Brazil-Meets-Office Space movie, a dark comedy about enterprise HR Automation designed to make humans more like machines, instead of the other way around.

BBC GOES FULL MONTE PYTHON

WITH A TONE WORTHY OF MONTE PYTHON, *W1A* IS A COMEDY PRODUCED BY THE BBC, ABOUT THE BBC, DRAWN FROM REAL LIFE AT THE BBC, SHOT INSIDE THE REAL BBC HEADQUARTERS IN LONDON, WITH REAL BBC EMPLOYEES AT WORK AS EXTRAS. GENIUS? MADNESS? YES!

by **MIKE BONIFER** photo **JACK BARNES**

It's stunning, really. Ballsy beyond belief. A large corporation, the BBC, commissions a televised comedy series about itself, in which it exposes its own culture to razor sharp ridicule.

It casts its biggest star, Hugh Bonneville, as a likeable and well meaning, but thoroughly ineffective BBC executive, Ian Fletcher, who has heady title of Head of Values, a lofty but completely vague mission, and what appears to be no authority whatsoever beyond the ability to call meetings that half a dozen BBC employees and one publicist working for an outside agency feel compelled to attend, though none of have a clue why they're in these meetings, or what they are supposed to accomplish. Everyone is relentlessly positive in these meetings, though.

It's maddening because it's so real. It's also hilarious because it's so real. We've all been in those meetings. Watching *W1A* is a liberating experience, all the petty ass kissing and ass covering getting called out, even as you wonder if the people calling it out are going to get blackballed by the Beeb for doing so. Ian Fletcher has no office, and holds his



W1A is a British comedy television series that was first broadcast on BBC Two on 19 March 2014, created by John Morton. The series is the follow-up to *Twenty Twelve*, a BAFTA-winning comedy series by the BBC about the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

Its name comes from the postcode prefix of the BBC's headquarters, Broadcasting House and sees the reprisal of Hugh Bonneville and Jessica Hynes as their *Twenty Twelve* characters, alongside a new cast.

Source: Wikipedia

We think it's brilliant that the BBC decided to show itself, in all its weird glory, to the audience whose opinions the politicians will poll before deciding how they'll vote on renewing its licence.



meetings in tight, awkward spaces inside the BBC headquarters that he has to squat in like a monkey claiming a tree.

He has an assistant, Will Humphries, who is so unhelpful that a viewer begins thinking Fletcher would be better off if he didn't have an assistant at all. Humphries' knee-jerk response to anything Fletcher says is "Yes... Say again?"

Fletcher must fight for his management's attention with the likes of Simon Harwood, the BBC's Director of Strategic Governance, whose knee-jerk response to anything Fletcher says is "Brilliant. Brilliant. Brilliant." Harwood is a vicious, bloodless in-fighter. He's the self-appointed gatekeeper to 'Tony,' the BBC's Director General, who is never seen, but whose name Harwood invokes like a magic incantation, the source of his power and status, in Fletcher's meetings. So fascinating because it's so real.

What makes *W1A* all the more daring and controversial is that the BBC's licence, its funding from the British government, is up for review this year. As Charlotte Higgins

pointed out last year in *The Guardian*, it's an open question whether exposing the BBC's quirks and peccadillos to the world is a good way to win support for a new round of funding. We think it's crazy brilliant that the BBC decided to show itself, in all its weird glory, to the audience whose opinions the politicians will poll before deciding how they'll vote on renewing its licence. It is a huge, high-stakes bet.

We emailed, separately, five different BBC publicists for a comment about *W1A*, emphasizing to each that we are fans of the series. None of them responded. It may be the first time in modern media history that no publicist has responded to a friendly media inquiry. *W1A* must still be a super hot potato at the BBC. We like that. It takes troublemakers in an organization to crack open the dialogue about what will make the organization a better place to work. A place where roles are clearly understood. Meetings are purposeful. Where *The Idiocracy* can be called out for what it is, asses can be kicked as well as kissed, and it's all in the best interest of the organization.

ESCAPING THE VORTEX OF IRRELE- VANCY



THE STORYTELLER

Laurie Ruettimann is a former human resources leader turned influential speaker, writer and entrepreneur. She owns a consultancy that offers a wide array of services to HR departments and technology companies. Ruettimann is also the founder of GlitchPath, an early-stage startup focused on business insights and risk mitigation.



Laurie Ruettimann is a former HR executive who, today, writes a popular blog about matters of interest to HR professionals, works as an independent HR consultant, and speaks at conferences and events around the world.

She shared her observations with us about The Next Act for HR:

Q: WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH HR AUTOMATION? WE'RE HEARING ABOUT IT EVERYWHERE.

A: Consultants who work in HR are feeling the squeeze. Much of what they used to do for smaller companies and management associations has now gone the way of automation. I'll take it a step further. The modern Human Resources generalist doesn't do the same work that he or she did even five years ago, because much of that work is done either by bots in the cloud, by robots, or it's been sucked up into the 'Vortex of Irrelevancy.'

For example, you used to go to the bank, you used to speak to a teller, take your money in and out. That doesn't happen any more at a bank. You use your ATM or do your online banking.

Not that work has been automated as much as it's been 'optimized.' That's the word most companies are using. Automated sounds cold and heartless, whereas 'optimized' sounds like they're taking the money that they've saved and applying it elsewhere to make the organization run better. That they're saving money on a head count and investing it in a technology that's going to make your employee experience a little bit better. So the shift is actually away from HR existing for the sake of HR, but really whatever we do [in HR] is around an employee-focused experience.

ADP, Paychex, Ultimate Software, there's a million of them that now can do everything from changing an address form, or even managing low level employee grievances.

There's a lot of disruption happening in the legal space, where people are entering into mediation—'people' meaning two people who have signed a contract. An employer and an employee. A vendor and the person that they work for. Because many people are now part of this 'gig economy' now. And if something doesn't go right in that agreement, it's mediated under the terms and conditions of the contract. So there's 'implied automation' there.

If anything needs to be accelerated there's a lot of disruption about "Okay, let's escalate it and see what the algorithm has to say."

These low level tasks are being snapped up as it happened in retail, as it's happening in the restaurant industry. You now have kiosks on the table to order at Applebee's, and then somebody brings you your food, and one day that somebody will be a robot.

Q: THE IRONY IS THAT THERE ARE HR PEOPLE DESIGNING THE AUTOMATION TOOLS THAT ARE PUTTING HR PEOPLE OUT OF WORK. IF MACHINES ARE DOING THE WORK, WHAT'S GOING TO BE LEFT FOR PEOPLE TO DO?

A: The great HR technologists are thinking about this right now. And they're thinking about it from a couple of different ways: What's the technology look like? What's the implication on the employee experience? (Quite honestly if any employees are left.) And then what do we do with all these workers who are displaced?

You can go online and see a lot about this happening, an article popped up in The New York Times the other day,



about that universal economic payment. UI, Universal Income, if I'm not mistaken. So it's all about Friedman's concept of "All right, everyone's benefitted from all this automation, theoretically, but now they're out of work." Does it make sense to give people a Universal Income and encourage them to go to school and continue their education, and to be innovators and disruptors in the technology space, or thinking about art or thinking about other things, and let the robots do robot shit. Let Uber drive you around in your driverless car. And you don't have to worry about that any more...

So there's a ton of stuff happening around that. It's robotics. It's artificial intelligence. It's Universal Income. So this really isn't about squeezing out the HR generalist, because the HR generalist, the HR consultant, the HR business partner has been squeezed out. It's almost like the sentence has been written, and they're just like—what's the movie with Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn where she's the nun and he's on Death Row?

Q: *DEAD MAN WALKING?*

A: HR is *Dead Man Walking*.

Q: OH, NO.

A: I hate saying it. I hate it. Because part of what's happening is that there's still an economy, you know because it's not completely obsolete. It's going to take a generation or so. But there's this economy building up to the obsolescence. And so that's where you get recruitment and social software coming in and automating the recruitment process so you don't need recruiters any more.

There's also all these weird initiatives happening around financial wellness. When I worked in Human Resources,

we would have a lawyer come in, and our accountant come in and talk about estate planning and legal trusts and retirement. That's not happening any more. Now financial wellness programs have you take a self assessment online, in the cloud, and from there they make all sorts of recommendations, whether it's budgeting software, or maybe it's a MOOC [Massive Open Online Course] on how to care for your elderly parents who have lived past their retirement savings, and now you don't know what to do with them in providing elder care. And so it's starting, right? And these used to be real jobs, where I would bring in Sally From Fidelity to come in and talk to my employees—Sally From Fidelity doesn't have a job any more. So this is really depressing.

Q: IN THE BIGSTORY MODEL, WE CALL THIS TYPE OF STORY FORMATION A SPIRAL, AND WOULD SAY THAT THE HR NARRATIVE IS CAUGHT IN A DOWNDRAFT. A DOWN SPIRAL. HERE'S THE INTERESTING THING: A SPIRAL HAS BOTH DOWNDRAFT AND UPDRAFT ENERGY IN IT. THAT'S WHAT CREATES THE SPIRAL IN THE FIRST PLACE, THE FRICTION BETWEEN THE DOWNDRAFT AND THE UPDRAFT ENERGIES. SO IF WHERE HR IS RIGHT NOW IS THE DOWNDRAFT--WHERE PRO FORMA FUNCTIONS, AND FUNCTIONAL ROLES DISAPPEAR--WHERE'S THE UPDRAFT? WHAT KINDS OF OPPORTUNITIES AND OPENINGS CAN WE FIND IN THE UPDRAFT OF THIS SPIRAL?

A: That's a great question and thank you for helping me be not such a Debbie Downer. There are opportunities, at least in the short term. There are opportunities for HR professionals to become performance coaches. Organizational performance coaches and consultants. There are Chief Performance Officer jobs opening up all over. You can Google it. You can see them. These jobs

work collaboratively between Finance, IT, Legal, Human Resources, to understand the health of the organization. They report directly to the CEO or directly to the Board. It's not about taking IT metrics. It's not about taking HR metrics. It's really about seeing the bigger picture, and trying to help that organization figure out the strategy so they can navigate around the failure points sooner. I think that's a huge opportunity, and not only in big companies, in small companies. So if you're an HR consultant at this point right now, how can you become a Chief Performance Officer for a company or a client of sixty people? There's opportunity there. How can you partner with a management association and offer your knowledge and expertise about business performance across an industry?

There are also opportunities to be coaches and advisors on the ground and in the trenches, because insights and analysis on a flat screen are great, but without action, without a strategic roadmap, you've got nothing. And right now, without consulting, a lot of organizations will get these flashy dashboards, they'll get a lot of information, and then they sit on it and don't know what to do with it. That's why employee surveys often fail and engagement surveys often fail. Gallup will give you these great pieces of data about your organization, but A) you don't own that data, Gallup owns it; and B) if you want to implement it, you have to use a Gallup consultant or you can't do anything with it. And so I think there's a great opportunity out there to take some of these smaller technologies—quick, agile, nimble pieces of HR technology—get to be an expert on that, and help organizations interpret their data.

And I think the third opportunity if you're in HR right now is going into the HR tech space and becoming a subject matter expert in one of the pieces of technology, whether that's WorkDay, SAP, Oracle, or even a vertical, like you could say, "I'm an expert on employee engagement software," and then you can go through all of them and understand the pros and the cons and the trends

Q: COOL. I WISH I WERE IN HR ALL OF A SUDDEN.

A: Oh god, no, it's super depressing. [Laughs] But I do think there are opportunities, not only out of Silicon Valley, but also out of the Mormon Silicon Valley. These are not 'sin' items, right? You don't want to invest in tobacco. You don't want to invest in alcohol. You want a socially responsible return on your investment, well, HR technology is—you're investing in human beings and technologies that are going to enable culture, theoretically, right?

Q: YES. THEORETICALLY.

A: There's a lot of money from churches, from teachers' pension unions, nurses' pension unions, and faith-based organizations within the HR technology industry.

for certain segments of America. When the money is flowing and things are good, things are good. The real test of a culture isn't when the economy is doing well, the test of a culture is what happens when budgets start to tighten. What happens when leaders need to make tough decisions. How do they operate under stress and tension? That's really what defines your culture, and what defines your environment, your atmosphere—not what happens when there's plenty of money, and cash rolling in the door. When there's cash rolling in the door there are a lot of luxuries.

I will say also, a couple of things: When there's no Human Resources person in a facility, which is becoming more and more common—companies are moving maybe to a regional model, maybe to an outsource model—when someone's not there—you know, people are under the illusion that HR professionals are union stewards, and that they're there for the employees, but at the very least employees believe they have someone they can go to if there's a compliance issue or a safety issue, or something legally happening that may be a little sketchy—take that HR person out of the office, that does send a message. TBD. We'll see what happens. But I think companies are in for a little bit of a reckoning when the economy starts to turn, and maybe there are some layoffs, and there's no HR person on the site. What the hell happens? Where do these workers go? Do they go to the local news? Do they go to social media? Where do they tell their story if there's no space-place, and no advocate within an organization, where they can share their concerns?

Q: WHAT ABOUT IN TERMS OF RECRUITMENT, AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT? WHAT'S HAPPENING THERE?

A: I think there are a couple things happening in the workforce. Companies don't want to hire unless they find someone at a hundred percent of what they're looking for. They're gun-shy

WHERE DO (EMPLOYEES) TELL THEIR STORY IF THERE'S NO SPACE-PLACE, AND NO ADVOCATE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION, WHERE THEY CAN SHARE THEIR CONCERNS?

Q: AS THE HR ENVIRONMENT ITSELF IS CHANGING, WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE CULTURES OF ORGANIZATIONS? HOW ARE THEY RESPONDING TO THIS? HOW ARE EMPLOYEE BEHAVIORS AFFECTED? EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION? AND ULTIMATELY THE ORGANIZATION'S ABILITY TO TELL ITS STORY IN THE WORLD?

A: I think it remains to be seen. Right now, we're in a pretty decent economy



You can find more of Laurie's observations about the next act for HR at www.laurieruettimann.com

IN A BUILDING, IN A SINGLE BUILDING, THERE IS NO ONE CULTURE THAT APPLIES TO EVERYBODY.



because they went through all of these layoffs after George Bush left office and Obama came in. The George Bush economy left us with a ton of stuff from TARP. 2009 was a horrible year, '10 was pretty bad, '11 was awful, and in '12, '13, '14, things calmed down, but they're still really gun-shy. So what you have in the American workforce are a class of workers who are W-2, and then a whole bunch of people who are 1099s. And they shouldn't be. The 1099s for an extended period of time, the company's not paying any of their taxes off their payroll, they're responsible for it on their own, they're not accruing any retirement benefits, they're on their own for health insurance. We learned this lesson once before, in the '80s with Microsoft. There was a huge lawsuit, and Microsoft had to pay a ton of money on all these contracts they had for years.

For eighteen or twenty years they had all these contractors, and had to pay a big fine. So what's happening in the American workforce today, there's a stratification. So if you're a W-2, things are really great, but if you're a 1099, it's very confusing, because if you contribute as much as the guy sitting next to you, why is he on payroll and you're not? Why is he part of the culture? Why does he get a bonus? Why does he get health insurance, and you're in the freakin' Obamacare pool—which, there's nothing wrong with that, thank god that exists now, but you know, it's not great for a lot of people. So it's like that.

When people say the word 'culture' as in "My company's got a great culture"—yeah, maybe for fifty percent of the people who physically enter the building that day. But the janitorial staff is not

on payroll. The security staff is not on payroll. You see those people every day. So there's a disconnect. In a building, in a single building, there is no one culture that applies to everybody.

Q: GOT IT. THAT'S A GREAT OBSERVATION. IF WE THINK OF AN ORGANIZATION AS AN ENTITY THAT'S PUTTING STORIES OUT INTO THE WORLD, WHAT IS THIS DISCONNECT DOING TO THE ORGANIZATION'S STORYTELLING?

A: I think a lot of the storytelling that's out there now is marketing and PR. It's done with an agenda. For me, that's not storytelling, that's manipulation. As a consumer, when I later find out that I've been manipulated, I'm no longer a buyer. I'm no longer a consumer.

THE STORYTELLER

JOHN NELSON IS A SPEAKER, ADVISOR, CONSULTANT, AUTHOR AND BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION THOUGHT LEADER. HE HAS 25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN GENERAL MANAGEMENT, ENTREPRENEURIAL, CORPORATE SENIOR AND EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT ROLES AND EXTERNAL CONSULTING WITH SOME OF THE MOST RESPECTED COMPANIES IN THEIR INDUSTRIES.



John Nelson has held key HR/OE leadership and consulting roles with respected global companies: Apple Computer, AlliedSignal (Honeywell), ARAMARK, Baxalta, Hallmark Cards, Reebok International, SCJohnson, InterContinental Hotels Group, Cargill, Medtronic, Kohler, Northwestern Mutual, Delta Faucet Company, QBE Insurance and JohnsonDiversey.

We spoke to John about leadership in a changing business environment.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP WHEN THINGS ARE CHANGING LIKE THEY ARE IN HR?

A: I contrast change management with leadership storytelling. When I'm taking a group of leaders through a transformation, I first talk about what they teach you in change management. A vision of a future state, business case reasons for doing it, burning platforms, there's like seven pieces—so I'll first describe the change using that approach, you know, speaking to the rational side, the left side of the brain. I'll be as articulate as I can to enroll the group around the need for the change. The logic and the rationale behind change management. And then we'll debrief.

And then I'll tell the story. And I'll be authentic, genuine and personal about what I'm trying to enroll them in. And I really was, the first time, trying to be as compelling as I could. And then the second time, my mannerisms, my style, are much more authentic, much more personal, and connect with people on a personal basis. And then we'll debrief. And they're like, wow, we'll remember that. You were really genuine. We can tell you care. And we feel like we're ready to sign up and help you.

The two are left brain / right brain approaches, and it gets to a little bit of the concept around the book, *Switch*. Organizations that are more data driven may be more compelled to rationalize people into following them. If that's the case, what are they losing? That's where storytelling—and being genuine and authentic and having personal stories to connect people to an outcome—is so much more powerful.

One thing I'll say is that you can't rationalize storytelling. It has to start with a shared sense of purpose. this happening, an article popped up in The New York Times the other day, about that universal economic payment.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP WHEN THINGS ARE ERGO: HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT INSTILLING A SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE IN A COMPANY?

A: We've always looked at cultural imperatives, and tried to build those threads through what we're trying to shape.

Q: WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY CULTURAL IMPERATIVES?

A: The prioritized areas. Culture imperatives is about the two or three most critical levers you know you want to get at. Culture is usually so holistic and you've got a number of factors that represent a culture. When you think in terms of strategy and differentiation and how your company's performing internally, you say, well what are the real cultural imperatives, what are the one or two things that we really want our leaders focused on over the next two to three years that shape and affect our performance, our engagement in a pro-active way? And then those threads get woven formally through different levels of leadership, in formal programs as well as any other levers you have. Annual events where we bring leaders together. Positioning around

succession planning where we'd say to a CEO doing talent reviews, look, these one or two cultural attributes come to life when a leader demonstrates these things. So for the next two years of succession planning sessions, you should be testing those one or two behaviors with everybody. Once the organization hears, oh, those one or two behaviors have a lot to do with succession, if I don't have those two things, if I'm not demonstrating them, I may not have a future [with the company]. That's much more powerful than even saying your incentives and your bonuses are tied to performance.

So you know, we find levers like that and try to get at those one or two most critical things, and recognize that it takes a couple of years. What are all the levers you can affect, and how do you get your chief executive or executives saying those things, and how do you programmatically build them into your agenda. So when we're building leadership programs, account programs, those threads cut through everything. So that it really becomes clear that those are areas of focus culturally that we need to move the needle on in the coming years.

Q: GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF A CULTURAL IMPERATIVE.

A: It could be innovation. Maybe they're diagnosed—an imperative is one that is strategically important to whatever industry you're in. When I was at Cargill, diversity and innovation were important. And if you're diagnosing internally that there's risk avoidance, or there's things that are contradictory to innovation, you could say strategically it's important to our business and here are the reasons





why, we're noticing that our culture is counter-productive in this regard, so what leadership behaviors and employee behaviors do we need to call out, like risk-taking, or creativity and learning, learning from breakdowns? Instead of them being avoided or penalized, there's active learning, where we learn from it and we become stronger because of mistakes or breakdowns. So you start to drive those couple of behaviors into the agenda. You highlight it ahead of everything else as what's most important.

Let's say you're moving into more of a matrixed organization, so that instead of hierarchical and directive leadership, we need more collaborative, consultative, trust-based environment. So maybe that whole collaborative environment has to be built in order for your matrix to be successful, and you've diagnosed that maybe it's a competitive environment, with finger-pointing, etcetera etcetera—what kind of behaviors and culture are needed to make the new operating model work?

That's an example of a cultural imperative that's tied to something really important strategically or operationally, and maybe you've diagnosed where you're at risk, or there's counter productive behaviors. So how do you make that focus part of the agenda in the transformation to whatever you're trying to drive culturally?



MILLENNIAL DEMANDS

BETTER
IS
POSSIBLE

JOCELYN ALLEN IS A PARTNER IN THE ALLEN LEWIS AGENCY IN DETROIT, WHICH SPECIALIZES IN BRAND MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION. SHE WAS PREVIOUSLY WITH GM, WHERE, FOR 19 YEARS, SHE HELD A VARIETY OF MARKETING AND DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP ROLES, AND HEADED THE COMPANY'S GLOBAL DIVERSITY MARKETING EFFORTS. IN THIS ROLE, ALLEN SHARED THE COMPANY AND ITS BRANDS' STORIES WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN, ASIAN, HISPANIC, LGBT AND MILITARY VETERAN AUDIENCES, HELPING THE COMPANY GAIN ENTREE INTO THESE MARKETS.

WE TALKED TO JOCELYN ABOUT COMMUNICATION IN A CHANGING WORKPLACE.

Q: FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WHAT DOES THE CHANGE IN HR'S ROLE LOOK LIKE, JOCELYN?

A: The advent of social media changed everything, everywhere. For HR folks, it's not just surveys and focus groups any more. They really are having to go after talent in a different way. They're having to fight for talent in a different way. The HR people we're working with, I won't say they're struggling with it, but it's new for them, because they're being forced out of their comfort zone.

Q: TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENT WAY OF FIGHTING FOR TALENT, IN THE 'NON-COMFORT ZONE.'

A: At the college level, the students they're fighting for are savvier than they've ever been, and are more demanding than they've ever been. And the fact that it's a global marketplace—the HR person used to have to convince you why you had to come work at X company in Michigan versus going to Y company in Ohio. Now it's that I've got to convince you to come here versus going to backpack across Asia for a year or going to work for a company in Panama. That whole thing has forced the HR folks to up their game.

Q: UP THEIR GAME HOW?

A: The way in which they talk about the company they represent has to be different. Because the marketplace is so competitive. It's no longer about here's where you're going to sit, it's how do you talk about the company in a compelling way that makes someone, when they've got all these other options, say "This is where I want to come."

Folks nowadays are not going to say "You're going to get a quaint little space, you're going to work at this company

for thirty years, you're going to get a watch, and you're going to retire. That's not the world we live in any more. When you're talking to people just out of college, you're going to say, "Here's the job you're going to do for eighteen months, and that's going to get you a global assignment, and that's going to get you to CEO." And while we know that's not realistic, HR people have to communicate with their audience in a very, very different way, because the needs of the times have changed so greatly, and the tastes of the audience have changed so greatly that people can't talk the way they used to talk just five years ago.

Q: SO IF I'M AN HR PERSON, AND I'VE GOT TO CHANGE, GOT TO ADAPT TO THIS NEW KIND OF AUDIENCE, HOW DO I GO ABOUT DOING THAT?

A: This is incredibly tactical, but I think it's important: I think every HR person nowadays, especially those who are out recruiting, needs—I don't want to say diversity training—but they need to understand cultural differences. How people want to be communicated with. What motivates them. And it's not just cultures. It's LGBT. It's West Coast versus East Coast people. It's diversity. It's multi-culturalism. It's having all those sensitivities.

How do you motivate a sixty-year-old in a company that's being overtaken, honestly, by thirty-year-olds and Millennials? I don't know exactly what it is, but some kind of diversity, cultural, gender, inclusion class.

I think every HR person needs to have a working knowledge of social media and the tools—not just LinkedIn. Every HR person understands LinkedIn. You have to know so much more than that. And you have to know how those channels affect what you do, and affect the



THE STORYTELLER

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audience you're talking to. We are in the Hundred and Forty Character Generation. If you can't communicate with folks in that kind of language—and I'm not saying throw good grammar out the window—but this generation has grown up in that environment, it really has defined them in a lot of ways. Another course every HR person should take—I think everyone should take this—is a public speaking course. And that's because I think you have to be able to communicate your ideas orally, in an effective manner. And a lot of HR people don't get that. A lot of HR people aren't good salespeople. And I think they need to be, because they're selling the idea of a company. It's not just in recruiting. It's in performance reviews, it's talking to employees who seem disgruntled, and I just don't think a lot of Human Resources folks take that first word—the Human part—as seriously as they should.

There's cultural sensitivity. There's diversity awareness. There's the understanding of the audience they're going after, who's not ever not had a laptop, and how that has changed the way we communicate with one another.



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