

Episode 283: The Role of the CHRO and Talent Management



Intro: [00:00:00.15] Welcome to the Workology Podcast, a podcast for the disruptive workplace leader. Join host Jessica Miller-Merrell, founder of Workology.com, as she sits down and gets to the bottom of trends, tools and case studies for the business leader, H.R. and recruiting professional who is tired of the status quo. Now, here's Jessica with this episode of Workology.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:00:25.23] Welcome to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE The HR Exam. Today's podcast is part of our Workology Podcast series that's focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Chief Human Resource Officer, or CHRO. The CHRO also sometimes called the VP of Talent and Culture or the Chief People Officer is an executive level role that deals with managing human resources, as well as with organizational development and implementing policies of change to improve the overall efficiency of the company. This is one of my favorite series that we've ever done. I've dubbed it the CHRO series. Today I'm joined by Gealita Greenhill. She's the Chief People Officer at Murphy Hoffman Company. Gealita is a human resources leader who has worked in the consumer packaged goods and manufacturing industries, leading enterprise wide change initiatives, advancing employee engagement, developing leadership capabilities and shaping the global talent management space. Gealita. Thank you so much and welcome to the Workology Podcast.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:01:27.81] Thank you. Happy to be here.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:01:29.94] That is an impressive bio. I'm like, wow, this is a lot of really good stuff. I can't wait to dive in more with you today. Let's go ahead and start with some background. You've been in the H.R. and the management level for more than 10 years. How have your roles evolved into a chief people officer role?

Gealita Greenhill: [00:01:51.54] Well, I'll give you a little bit of background before I answer that question. I am actually a course switcher, so I started my career in marketing and operations prior to involve evolving into an HRR professional. So although I've been in H.R. for 10 years, I do believe I've always been doing this kind of work. Even when I was not officially an HR practitioner. I led teams early in my career and recognized the importance of leadership on the effectiveness of how an organization can operate from top to bottom. Then I knew that I wanted to influence the trajectory of an organization, so, how do you do that? Is through its people. But I didn't equate that to H.R. earlier in my career. So as I think about, I went to the Vanderbilt Owen Graduate School of Management and specialized in human organizational performance. And I think that specialization was only around a few years before I joined that institution. And so I learned about it. And

initially when they said, hey, what you're wanting to do around leadership and org development, that's H.R. and I immediately said, no, it's not H.R. That's not something I want to do. And I had an opportunity to work in automotive company during my school and during graduate school and working on talent management. And I loved it. I love the ability to rise to help one organization rise to their potential through its people and developing them in that way in planning for their careers, for continuity.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:03:30.03] And so that summer, I went and worked for consumer packaged goods company and learned more about the Strategic Business Partner role on the engagement side, how you engage your employees, our associates, as they call them at that time. And that's when I fell in love and said this is exactly what I want to do. And so I was fortunate to join a company right out of graduate school that put people first. And H.R. was strategic there. So if you think about how H.R. is involved, they were doing it well before it became a thing, in my opinion. And so I built my foundation from there. At that time, I worked in talent management to roll out a system so you think of a performance management system at the time across one of their large in North America business units. And so I had the privilege of also becoming the H.R. Business Partner for the Head of R&D for a Strategic Business unit. And part of that was leading talent and development that ultimately shaped the career path for that R&D department, our function and their success. The company's success is built on the products that they make. And so it's fascinating to be a part of that journey within.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:04:45.50] At that time, having that experience, I recognize, yes, this is what I want to do. I want to be an HR leader, but I recognize that I didn't have the breadth of experience in H.R. to really make the impact that I desire to have at that time. So I saw opportunities to work where I would have to do projects related to compensation. I was fortunate enough to go through an acquisition and then look at talent globally. So what works in North America may not work, you know, in Europe or in Asia. And so having that opportunity to have that experience was tremendous. And then on integration, so if you were to, you know, we acquired companies and the culture work around and integrations and ensuring that you get what you wanted out of those was a wonderful experience, too. So as I think about those experiences, each one of them led me to have more responsibility, broader scope and larger employee impact. And so as I look at the role that I'm in today, each one of those experiences allowed me to be. An effective partner to my president and CEO today, so I didn't, I didn't map it out that way, but it eventually led to where I am today and the desire that I have and in the ideal position that I would want.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:06:06.49] Isn't it interesting when you look back and you see all these twists and turns like your start in marketing, which really I feel like so much of what we do is really communication centered and is in fact marketing. I mean, that's really what recruiting is. We're trying to get people to buy a product, which is our organization. So I love like that you dove into like something like compensation, which most people would avoid and use that opportunity as a learning experience so they can take you with it, with you to the next role and opportunity.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:06:41.05] I couldn't have imagined the journey, but each opportunity I just learned so much and fell in love with this function even more this, this profession. And I, I think everybody if I interview someone for a role on my team and they don't go to the next level, I thank them for what they're doing to advance the HR profession because they are phenomenal what they're doing. And each time they're

doing having success in this arena, it just makes us all better. So, again, you never know where you'll end up. But if you look at the opportunities that they are learning opportunities, they'll get you ready for that right spot.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:07:22.76] Also I just want to like as I'm hearing you talk and thinking, wow, what a great mindset that you have. And like all these opportunities became assets for you so that you could support your executive leadership team, your CEO and the business now. And in the role that you're in, I think more of us need to look at life's challenges, work challenges, H.R. issues, those things as opportunities to be able to learn and grow from so that you can end up in a amazing role at a company that's really challenging you that you're able to support fully.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:07:58.42] Absolutely. Great insight.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:08:01.15] You probably don't even know that you have it, but I'm listening to you talk and I'm like, wow. Like, I love the perspective and the point of view here, because I think all of us in H.R. sometimes had felt unheard or disrespected or like we didn't have a voice. And here you are, like taking this on and moving into different roles, getting that experience. But you also have the confidence to be able to support the organization and be able to make decisions and feel comfortable as an HR leader, as a manager to help grow your people, because a lot of leaders don't want their people to move on to the next level. They want to keep them in where they're doing a great job. And they don't see that as, I think, their responsibility.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:08:49.39] Oh, right. I just I mean, we we do we have this opportunity for eight, maybe a minimum of eight hours a day. If you're full time in this life and you're working, you need to be excited about it and you need to. That doesn't mean every day is great and that it's perfect, but it's why do you wake up in the morning? What's your motivation in and really drawing on that and knowing why you've gotten into what you've got to do to push you through? And there are definitely times I mean, if I look back, you know, there was a role that I took and I think they were looking for internally for 12 months and no one wanted to take it. And I just looked at it as, wow, this will fill a gap for me. But I had wonderful mentors and leaders that I would always communicate with and talk to them about. This is what I desire to do. What am I missing? What do I need to build skills or build, strengthen? And that's why I would take it. I mean, I don't think that I if I looked at it in my own flesh, said, yeah, I want to go through that. And it hasn't been designed or built into me building it, no one would do that. I mean, I don't think I would do that if you don't have a vision or purpose for why you're doing what you're doing. And so I always tell people really understand what drives you, really understand what you're shooting for, and then line up whatever the opportunity that's come to say. Can I get something out of that and can I give back to that? And typically, if you're giving back, you're going to get more. Right? So that's that's been the story of my life.

Break: [00:10:28.62] Well, right now, in your current position, you oversee the H.R. function for over four thousand employees in the US. Can you talk a little bit about your primary responsibilities and how you're supporting the organization?

Gealita Greenhill: [00:10:42.72] Yes. So, you know, as I look at my responsibilities, I think of them into kind of areas. So my first one is to build and lead a team of H.R. professional rock stars. I mean, that's my number one goal, is to have them recruiting them and they will embody the culture of this company. They will attract and help our leaders retain the best talent and that they're rewarding employees for their contribution to our organization and that we're building for our future. So all the things that we do today are building for future, so I don't have to go back to my, it's a privately held company, my ownership group, to say, yep, we lost on my watch and we have to follow the company. You know, we're nowhere near that. The success of my company is just tremendous and I want to make sure that continues for generations to come. But in addition, I have a broader responsibility to try before this call. I'm working on an organizational initiative to make sure we're prepared for the future and those conversations around our business and where we should play and where we should chart new territory. But then also how do we ensure that we're ready for that growth through the leaders? What do we have enough leaders to be ready for that? And if we don't, what is our people strategy around that? Because we don't want that to be the limiting factor. And so those conversations energize me and energizes my team. And we're actually this afternoon going off on off site to talk more about how we make that come to life based on what we have the next three to five years. So I work on building the H.R. team, which is my role. We're evolving. I was brought in to evolve the HR team that we have today, but then also to take a broader look on what we need to be doing to prepare for the next three to five years as a company.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:12:33.69] Let's step back a second and think about individuals preparing for a future role, maybe a CHRO role in an organization, what skills and experiences do you believe are absolute requirements for someone who's in a job like yours?

Gealita Greenhill: [00:12:52.80] Oh, yeah. So I would say this North Star for sure to understand why you want that seat. Why do you want it? Number one, because that's what's going to ground you in the success, the ups and downs of of this role. And so I would say always have your North Star, but then on a more practical kind of skills, I think business acumen is key. So understanding how your business makes money, what stage your business is in, but understanding what impact your investments have on the bottom line and its return. I mean, every conversation I'm having with my leadership team and execs are, you know, what's the return on that investment? And not just in the dollar amount, but are we getting more engaged employees as a result of that? Are we getting more people interested in our organization as a result of that decision? Or are we making it easier for our employees to work and do the work that we need them to do? What's the return? So it's not just this, hey, this is my vision and I want to invest all this money and I want to structure things this way. It's what are you ultimately trying to achieve and tying it to how we exist as a company. We exist because somebody is buying our products or our services, and how do you tie that into what we're doing to get by? Also, I believe agility. So continuous learning, making decisions without all the information, you will never have all the information and you're in that top seat. And so you really have to humble yourself and say, I need to hire people that are smarter than me and whatever area that may be.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:14:32.99] So I could have the most informed set of just a set of information to make the decision that's proper at this time. And if it's not, I can course correct pretty quickly. So having that agility is important and adaptability being able to relate to a diverse population of people and backgrounds. It's not just being around the people that you're comfortable with, who you grew up with, what types of people. I

went to this university want to hire all the people from there or I associate myself with this organization, so everybody, a company must associate with that organization. It's really about meeting people and understanding their lives and understanding what their challenges are and what their dreams are. So you can relate to to doing that. And then the last thing I would say is consensus building. You have to be a good listener, have a solutions mindset and build on common ground. So you're not going to be able to win every battle or win every war even. But you need to understand what the challenges are first and then figure out a solution to meet the needs. And that's why I think that marketing background has been tremendous for me and really trying to seek to understand what issue we're trying to solve and then thinking of creative ideas to address them. And I did say that was my last thing, but I would also add, as I'm thinking through it, is courage. You know, being able to stand your ground even in the most contentious and challenging times, if you know what you're doing is right, if even if you're the only one in the room because you're looking at a broader maybe a bigger picture, it's people you're talking to, a look at their individual challenges and understanding that sometimes that's tied to ego. Sometimes that's tied to wanting to win and be successful. But you've got to pull people back to think about a bigger picture. And sometimes it means taking that unpopular view and you won't be able to do that if you don't take those courageous risks early on in your career, in many ways, take small risks so they become bigger risks.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:16:43.37] That's how you make it happen. You don't just wake up and say, I'm taking this risk today, you know But if you're not standing your ground or are pushing the envelope in a different direction, then why are you there when they're expecting you to add some element to the room? And so I think for all those who are early and start their careers. I would say gain as much exposure to all facets of the profession early in your career so you can see how the innerworkings impact all stakeholders. The stakeholders are potential employees, current employees, leadership executives, benefits, third party vendors, administration, all of those things come into play. And if you are exposed, doesn't mean you have to take a role in each one of those, but you somehow get exposed to those inner workings, it helps you understand more about the decisions that you ultimately will make as the head of the function.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:17:43.20] Awesome. Well, one thing I wanted to make sure to ask you, because we're a year into this global pandemic, and I wanted to ask about how this. Environment situation, global pandemic that we're in has changed the way your employees work, and I ask this because you have a balance of essential field employees and corporate employees. So what has been your biggest challenge during this time when it comes to employees and working? And what did you learn from that?

Gealita Greenhill: [00:18:18.24] Oh, yeah. I mean, wow, what a year. What a 12 months this has been and the coming into an industry that supports an essential industry has been eye opening. I think, you know, 90% of our employees are on the front lines every day. And they were because truckers didn't stop, goods were still needing to be on the road. And we had to look at ourselves and say, can we make this safe for our current employees that we know the work needs to continue because we have that demand coming from our customers. They were still moving. We had to protect our customers in addition to our employees. And so we said if we can't meet the guidelines of the CDC or what's being mandated across local and state jurisdictions, then we wouldn't operate. We would not put our employees at risk from that standpoint. There was a lot of trial and error and how this company was created and formed was with an entrepreneurial spirit. So it's lean. We are flat, flatter than most that I know that would be that will have the same sized revenue and employee base. So there are a lot of people that know a lot about a little, a little, a little about everything. And so taking insights from our field organizations to say like, this is how we believe we can make this work corporate. You

may say this is what we need to adhere to, but if I do a risk analysis on my location or my branch or dealership, these are some other areas I see that's not going to fit that.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:19:53.19] So they would fit that up through our safety department into H.R. as well as to our top leadership so we could understand what modifications we needed to make. And I would say how we work differently is we are very communitive, a community driven organization, and we like to be close to one another and talk stories with our our our customers and our employees. But this pandemic says you need to stay six feet. You need to stay six six six feet away. You need to have a mask. I can't see if you're smiling, what kind of day you're having, and then you need to protect others and not just yourself. And so not having that special touch with our customer, we had to look at what is customer service right now during a pandemic. It's getting the products, our parts to you safely that you need to repair your vehicle or your truck. It's getting you in and out and providing a safe environment for you to wait for your vehicle or service. And so we started to implement more around curbside pickup, you know, text to landline, ordering parts online at our dealerships related to to that. And so it it made us go into a technology advancement that we thank goodness we were prepared for. But I think we thought that was going to be more two to three years down the road to accelerated that. And then we had to learn how do we communicate via Zoom or Skype or Microsoft teams to a field that's not used to that level of technology, not a lot of computers there.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:21:30.18] So we had to be innovative and how we carted off our rooms to make that happen. If I look at our 10 percent, are less than 10 percent of our population is corporate. And so we're in Kansas City, Missouri, metropolitan area where they mandated that, you know, we have a safer at home order and so people had to work from home. We have the technology to do it, but not necessarily the communications infrastructure to make that a feasible thing forever. But we did do that in an emergency situation where our people within 48 hours were able to get and work from home and do those things. But you also have this view of, well, we brought them back because the people that are out there risking their lives every day need support, need our guidance and we were operating, the operating system was set up for in person. So in order to bring our people back, we said we've got to do some things differently. So if you look at our office space, it looks like a, call it kind of like a football gridiron because we've got things marked off to represent six feet. We have masks being warned. We changed how our conference rooms, a number of people walking into a conference room. So all these things to simulate an environment that people can come in and still work in the office, not at full capacity, but that you can work in the office and feel safe. So that took a big turn for us. And if you look at our competition for corporate jobs, many of them remained out.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:23:03.81] You know, so we had to answer the questions around, well, is it really safe? Because some companies are letting their people work from home. And we said some of those companies are doing that because they cannot meet the requirements that have been set for CDC as well. And then also they have other reasons why they couldn't make it work or chose not to make it work. And so we wanted to give it a shot to see how we can make that work. And we have been in the office continuously, I would say, from September on and off and on in the summer. But we've been back in in the office with some flexibility where it's not 100 percent capacity. So we can allow for spacing between our different queues and offices. So it's it's been a challenge. But what I would say that if you told me a year ago we would have made it through, I would have questioned it just because it's such an unknown. And we have such strong ways we've always communicated, and so I think that's the big lesson for us is we've got to figure out a better way to communicate, to have a different cadence of communication so people are up to date on what we're doing,

why we're doing it, and we can add that to our current business model as well. I think it's some enhancement that we can take from this period of time that will make us even more efficient and effective going forward.

Break: [00:24:26.57] Let's take a reset. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell, and you were listening to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill H.R. and ACE the HR Exam. We're talking about the roles and responsibilities of the sea CHRO with Gealita Greenhill.

Break: [00:24:42.00] Personal and professional development is essential for successful H.R. leaders. Join Upskill H.R. to access life training, community, and over one hundred on demand courses for that dynamic leader. H.R. recert credits available. Visit UpskilHR.com for more.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:24:58.54] Can you talk to me about how your HR team is structured? You talked about, you know, this is one of the responsibilities that you've been charged with moving into this role. And I know that when we last talked, you were hiring for a new total rewards manager. So talk a little bit about the structure and then the new role, like how, how do you decide how your HR organization is built and created?

Gealita Greenhill: [00:25:23.44] Yeah, great. I mean, this is I'm excited about this. I think, you know, coming in, we were structured in kind of that enforcer kind of administrative structure that that you would say was typical in a other period of time. Right. And it was necessary. I mean, this is if we look at our industry, you know, it's kind of behind many of if you look at a consumer packaged goods or a technology company. But it wasn't structured to support the business operations. It was built to support the needs of the employee. You know, you get paid, you have benefits and all of those things that we need. So that's at the core. If we didn't have that, we could do all the other what people call fun things. Sexy things, right? I think, so, think about more of, hey, if you call it you need something, it was more reactive. So the way we're structured today is to be more proactive with the business. So today we have an operations team that leads that supports our dealership locations, any of our strategic business units and how they attract and retain talent. Right? Ultimately, they will be focused on how we groom talent up through the organization as well, but for today, that's they're focused on the needs of that population.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:26:48.96] Then we have the talent management and development group that really is charged with building the capabilities of our current team employees and our future, the ones who come on, how do we advance them through the organization so they build our talent pipeline? And that will require some learning building somewhere, but then also outsourcing that capability so we can get through it faster. We also have kind of our total rewards space where we're looking at compensation, benefits, engagement, different ways to incentivize as well as reward the effort that our employees are making, that they participate in the same type of profit and success that the company has. And so that was the best structure. And when I spoke to you, I was looking for Total Rewards leader to provide some grounding and foundation for our team as we go on that journey. And I'm happy to report that they will be starting in May. So I'm thrilled about this person joining. Our team has wonderful experience. And the key thing I was looking for in this candidate was

really a desire to lead and develop. So there's a skill set that we are not strong in and we have people who are dying to have more challenge and to build on their skill set.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:28:23.53] So it was important for me not just to choose a practitioner that is strong in total rewards and pop them in, but one who wants to take us to the next level, but also bring the team along to do that and so we can build that capability and strengthen our team. And so I'm thrilled to have them join us in May. It was a long search just because it's such a key role for us in our, you know, what we talked about we're rolling out another human capital management system and so they'll be extremely involved in that as well, which is a large undertaking no matter the size of your company. So that's how we're structured. It's structured on ensuring that we meet the, meet, meet the needs of the business today. But then also we're preparing it for the future. So we have more evolution to be made, but that's the first phase of that evolution, and I'm thrilled to get into it. It's a year delayed because of the pandemic, so, it's pent up energy from me and the team to get us there.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:29:28.97] Well, thank you for for sharing, I mean, I love hearing you talk, I think there's so many great lessons and just tips, and advice, and perspectives that you've been able to share in our time together on the podcast. I wanted to ask where people can go to learn more about you and then more about the company that you work for, Murphy Hoffman Company?

Gealita Greenhill: [00:29:52.91] Yes, I am on LinkedIn so you can reach me at Gealita Greenhill, Gealita Greenhill, one word, and that's probably the only social presence I have really that I would say I engage with people that are fascinated about H.R., who want to partner and do some things together. And then I would say for Murphy Hoffman Company, MHC.com, you can learn a lot about our company and our industry and where we're trying to go. I didn't know too much about the transportation industry and it's a fascinating industry and it goes under the radar. People are like, I don't want to grow up and work in trucking. It is essential and it continues to grow and it has a significant impact on our country. So if you're interested in learning more about that, happy to talk to you about it as well and to get more interested in it. You can have a very successful career and take care of your family and take care of your, you know, generation. So it's one to consider. So, MHC.com, MHC Careers, is out there. We're on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, of course, that you can, you can find us there as well.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:31:04.37] Well, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. I really appreciate it.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:31:09.74] Yes. Thanks for having me, Jessica. Really appreciate it. And looking forward to your continued success as well.

Closing: [00:31:16.11] Are you loving the Workology Podcast? Our Workology community reaches over 600,000 H.R. leaders every single month. Want to be a sponsor? Reach out to us at [Workology.com/advertising](https://workology.com/advertising).

Closing: [00:31:29.96] It's really interesting to delve into how a role like the CHRO, whose experience more closely connects them to strategy and operations of the overall business, works with the rest of the company leadership team. I love this and I love Gealita's perspective. I appreciate her taking the time to share her knowledge with us today. Thank you for joining the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill H.R. and ACE the HR Exam. This podcast is for the disruptive workplace leader who's tired of the status quo. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell. Until next time you can visit [Workology.com](https://workology.com) to listen to our previous podcast episodes.