

Episode 297: CHRO Series - How Did You Start Your Career in HR?



Intro: [00:00:00.96] 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: [00:00:26.43] This podcast is part of a podcast series on the Workology Podcast, focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Chief Human Resource Officer, or CHRO, often called the Chief People Officer or the VP of Talent. The CHRO is an executive level role or C 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 your company. This CHRO podcast on Workology is powered by Daily Pay and sponsored by Upskill HR and Ace the HR Exam. One of the reasons I wanted to do this series is because there is a lot of mystery around that CHRO role. I want aspiring CHROs to know what types of skills and experiences they need to promote into that future Chief Human Resources Officer role. Throughout the podcast series, we have asked each guest about how they began their careers and grew into those roles as the Chief Human Resource Officer, and their answers have been different, varied and really interesting. In this podcast episode, I'm sharing with you excerpts from some of the best interviews on that series of CHROs' with the Workology podcast. We're talking with the VP's of HR, Chief People Officers and CHROs on how some of the most successful professionals in the industry started their careers with an eye on the leadership position. Our first interview excerpt is with Nickle LaMoreaux. She's the SVP and CHRO for IBM. I think you're going to want to listen to this.

Nickle LaMoreaux: [00:02:11.11] rning back after that.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:03:36.27] Our next excerpt interview is from Gealita Greenhill. She's the Chief People Officer with Murphy Hoffman Company.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:03:44.07] 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: [00:05:22.55] 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 with them.

Gealita Greenhill: [00:06:38.03] 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: [00:07:59.21] This next interview with Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar, he's the Chief People Officer for Minted.com was the most surprising. Heads of H.R. come from all places, including academia.

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar: [00:08:12.56] You know, before I was a Chief People Officer, I spent most of my career actually alternating between specialist and generalist roles, which is, it happened by circumstance but it's something I really recommend to people regardless of their HR career aspirations, whether they want to be a CHRO or not. Being a specialist gives you a unique perspective on the challenges of creating something for employees, and being a generalist gives you a unique perspective on delivering something to employees, and the, also, obviously, the daily challenges that leaders and managers face. So it's interesting spending time in either a specialist or generalist shoes I think makes you better at the other. And it's something that I did pretty regularly before before taking on that top role. But honestly, the main reason that I am a chief people officer is because a number of people egging me on and believing that I should do that. And, you

know, I have often, and this is not a new concept, but I've often made the distinction between mentors and sponsors, mentors or people who have your best interests at heart. They could be peers, uncles, managers, anything. But sponsors are people who have your best interests at heart, but who also have the power to create opportunities for you. And I was never really ready for most of the roles that I got. But I was being dragged there by a group of sponsors who just believed that I could do more and believe that I could be in that top role and made opportunities happen for me sometimes, you know, even before I ever felt like I was ready for them, in fact, gosh, I just I like I said, I don't think I was ready for most of the roles that I stepped into.

Break: [00:10:05.25] Let's take a reset. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell, and you were listening to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and Ace the HR Exam. We're sharing some of the best responses from our podcast guests on how they started their careers in HR. This CHRO podcast series has been so much fun. Listen in. Thank you to Daily Pay for powering the CHRO series.

Break: [00:10:30.19] Personal and professional development is essential for successful H.R. leaders. Join Upskill HR to access life training, community, and over a hundred on demand courses for that dynamic leader. HR recert credits available. Visit UpskillHR.com for more.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:10:46.26] I love hearing experiences from HR leaders about how they stepped into this role and where they started their careers. Whitney Bennett is our next interview excerpt. She's the VP of Talent and Culture with CallRail.

Whitney Bennett: [00:10:59.82] So I have always been in a startup environment. I think it's a really great way to grow and kind of try a bunch of different hats and figure out what you like. I was in a company and an admin role and they didn't have any HR. We were about 50 people. I saw a need. I asked if I could do it and they said sure. So I got certified with my PHR and I joined SHRM, and from there was promoted to H.R. manager, then H.R. director, and I left that company and moved over to CallRail to be an H.R. director, and about a year in I was promoted at CallRail to the VP of Talent and Culture.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:11:42.38] I'm always interested in how people transition into the role of HR leader. Marisa Peters is our next excerpt. She's the Chief People Officer at VideoAmp.

Marisa Peters: [00:11:53.10] I think years ago, if someone would have told me I would be in this position, I would have, you know, laughed or been shocked. I'm not sure which. But, you know, I got my start in working in the people's space from a program management sort of point of view when Sony Pictures was really reenvisioning the way they thought about people and talent at their organization. And so for me, it was really special to get to go through that change management process, establishing the systems, the practices, the ways of engaging and interacting with people within a studio environment. I moved out of that program management well into talent acquisition space, and it was around the same time at that our diversity and

inclusion efforts were starting at the studio. So really got my hands and feet dirty in terms of getting to hire people at various levels and stages in their careers from very senior level to those, you know, fresh out of school and then work hand in hand with the executive leadership at the studio to think about how we're bringing people with unique and varied backgrounds and experiences to make the the workforce all the more vibrant and indicative of our customer base on a global level. I oversaw talent acquisition for a number of years and then moved to an internal facing role as the the space of talent management was coming on the scene. And so in that space, got to focus on internal mobility and the way that we thought about having conversations mainly with our employees, that would be indicative of those that we would have originally had had with candidates outside of the company.

Marisa Peters: [00:13:36.59] And so that was a really special experience for me to learn about strategic talent, planning, succession, internal bench strength. Gaps that we had in the business that were really going to hold us back from accomplishing our business strategy. And so that was that was really special for me to see the moments where people would now look at talent inside the organization differently than they would have had we not been investing in those consistent talent management practices. And then I moved into a business partnership role. And at that point I moved over to Amazon and I got to oversee the end to end experience through the lens of the business and the business that Amazon was that of their digital media and entertainment businesses. From doing that role for a couple of years, spanning a number of different individual business segments within Amazon, I moved out of the larger corporate environment into that that was more of a later stage startup. So moved to an e-commerce business called Adam Tickets, that was a digital movie and event ticketing business and spent a couple of years there before then coming over to VideoAmp into the Chief People Officer role. So these last two opportunities have been ones where I've been able to learn a tremendous amount but apply some of the best and next practices of larger organizations on a much shorter and condensed time, timeline, excuse me, and then also at a more rapid pace than you might find some other organizations able to to move and apply these types of practices and, and real changes that they're looking to see within their workforce,

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:15:15.44] HR roles and where people start start in HR, it's different for everyone. It doesn't matter if you are a U.S. based or North American company, or you're an international organization. Our next interview excerpt with Jane Keith. She's the CHRO of IFS.

Jane Keith: [00:15:32.87] So I started in Hewlett-Packard in recruitment. And honestly, I think it was then the role that I cut my teeth on. Having great interviewing skills is a key part of any role in business. But within H.R., it's an absolute essential. I think if you can hire and hire well, you'll be successful in any role. I went from there to an H.R. business partner. HP had just adopted the Ulrich model, so we moved away from H.R. managers to HR business partners. I was given a lot of training and enablement around how to consult with a business. One of the roles I took on I inherited a really dysfunctional organization and I cut my teeth in those roles on some of the difficult decisions I had to make. And that experience, although it was hard at the time, it served me well. I then moved into a new center of excellence that HP created called Talent Management, and that gave me an opportunity to really engage at our C-level. We ran a program where we looked at the top 100 leaders across a region and paired them up with a mentor coach and ran some sort of excellent development program. So that was great insight as well. I was then asked to move into an H.R. director at a global level in our software organization, which exposed me to new cultures, hiring different people from

different geographies and managing a very global team with different needs. Some were more mature, some was in sort of startup mode and growth countries.

Jane Keith: [00:17:14.88] And we were starting from scratch. And again, superb experience that led me really. Then I ended up leaving HP for a role at SAP. Great experience being in another organization after being at HP for such a long time, but I was there two years, HP phoned and said, I've got a great job and it was a role I'd always wanted to do. So I went back to HP as the vice president of H.R. for the EMEA region. So Europe, Middle East and Africa and I felt like I'd gone home again. It was fantastic. And I stayed for a further four years before eventually move into IFS. So I joined IFS two years ago as the Chief H.R. Officer. It was my first CHRO role. I think that everyone had a bit of imposter syndrome to begin with. Could I do this? Was I up for it? But actually, I realized quite quickly the wealth of experience and knowledge that I'd built up in HP and SAP really stood me in good stead. So yeah. So I've been here two years.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:18:26.07] Our last interview is with Michele Lanza. She's the SVP of Global Talent and Attraction and Retention Strategies with Ketchum.

Michele Lanza: [00:18:34.35] I like to say that I've now been at Ketchum for a million years and really what's kept me here is the ability to really change what I have done at the agency and constantly evolving. I think the communications industry has evolved considerably over the last 10 to 15 years and quite frankly, the H.R. function has really evolved. And I think if you think about where H.R. was 20 years ago compared to what we do in H.R. now, it's almost like a completely different industry, which is really what's kept me excited and engaged and wanting to stay in this profession.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:19:18.10] I agree, I love how it's evolving, and that's one of the reasons why we're doing the series, is because I want to catch up with senior HR leaders and hear about their experiences and what, what's exciting with them right now.

Michele Lanza: [00:19:35.04] Yeah, you know, I think that what is exciting to me is is that I think that company's realization of how important and how much of a business imperative people are in in organizations. And because of that, I think the role of a Chief Talent Officer, H.R. Officer, I kind of wish we would come up with just one name for our profession. That's a whole another topic. But I think that the role of a Senior H.R. Person has really evolved. And again, I think it's a strategic business partner that focuses on talent. But the reality is you need talent engaged in delivering to realize your business promise. And so I think that the role of the H.R. has really been elevated to have a seat at the table and a much different way than it had previously had.

Closing: [00:20:31.24] It's so interesting to delve into how a role like the CHRO whose experience more closely connects them to strategy and operations of the overall business and how they work with the rest of the company as well as the leadership team. I love hearing these stories about how H.R. leaders got their

start in H.R. and how it led them to their CHRO role. There are so many ways to grow in their H.R. career and in your H.R. career. I am so inspired by these stories and I hope that you are too.