

Episode 361: CHRO Series - What Skills and Experience Do You Believe Are Absolute Requirements for a CHRO Role?



Deb Hill: [00:00:00.09] I think for me, in order to be an effective pro, people need to have a really strong understanding of the businesses that they're working for and a point of view on it. They need to have a seat at the table and to be able to offer their perspective in a way that it's received well by the other leadership that they're working with. I think they need to have the ability to produce business results across the organization through strategically aligning all of the HR drivers like development, total rewards, engagement. And I think they also really need to be able to help develop and refine a company culture. And of course, a huge part of that is being able to influence and leverage leadership to shape that culture as well.

Intro: [00:00:42.60] 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, HR, and recruiting professional who is tired of the status quo. Now, here's Jessica with this episode of Workology.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:01:07.83] Welcome to the Workology Podcast, sponsored by Upskill HR, a personal development resource for HR leaders at Upskill HR.com. This podcast is part of a series on Workology that's focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Chief Human Resources Officer or CHRO. The CHRO is sometimes called the VP of People or the Chief People Officer. This is an executive or C-level role, it's a C-level role that deals with managing human resources as well as with organizational development and implementing policies of change that improve the overall efficiency of the company. This episode of the Workology podcast is sponsored by HRBenchmarkSurvey.com. Share your insights on what's happening in your HR organization by going to www.HRBenchmarkSurvey.com. So in this Workology Podcast episode, I am sharing with you excerpts from some of the best interviews on the Workology Podcast with CHROs and Vice Presidents of People and Culture on the skills and experiences they believe are absolute requirements for a CHRO role, especially thinking about those just starting out in the industry. So, the interviews from the episodes that we're sharing in order include Deb Hill, the Vice President of HR for FM:Systems. Nicole Roberts, the Vice President of People and Culture with MVAH Partners. Paul LaLonde, the Vice President of People and Culture for CEDA. And Nikki Salentri, Vice President of People at Gympass. Our first excerpt comes from Deb Hill. She's the Vice President of HR for FM:Systems, and she has been a talent leader for over 15 years with a strong focus on leading and scaling talent acquisition for rapidly growing technology companies.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:02:59.07] I'm going to ask, even though I feel like kind of already started to answer this question, but let's dive in a little bit more. What skills and experience do you believe are absolute requirements for the CHRO role? Especially thinking maybe about someone who's listening, that is just starting out in our industry.

Deb Hill: [00:03:16.11] Yeah. So again, another great question. I think, you know, when I think about the, the skills for a successful leader of people, you know, one thing that I'll say is that I'm not big on kind of absolute, absolute requirement. So, you know, I, I believe that every person has, has kind of a unique set of experiences and skills that could translate well into, you know, any number of roles. But a couple of things really stand out for me as important in, in a leadership role in terms of people. So one is really strong internal and external communication skills. You're the voice of the people, both internally as well as externally. Over the past 18 months, what's really become apparent for me is it's important for HR leaders to have empathy. I think the best HR leaders that I know balance that kind of that empathy and connect the connectedness with their employees with, with ultimately the business priorities and kind of the realities of today's, you know, really competitive market. So, you know, today's HR leader is, is so much more of a business strategist specifically around the people side of things, you know, but they're responsible for kind of that intersection of this of leadership and culture and career development and employee engagement. You asked about, you know, what's important for those just starting out in in the industry and what I'd say there is, you know, I really believe that, you know, a strong HR Partner will come with a variety of exposures to kind of all aspects of HR, so talent acquisition, learning and development, operations. But, but that, that person will never lose sight of the business. So if you're early in your career, you know and, and you don't know how to read a financial statement, right? Take classes on financial statements, learn about sales strategy, spend time with operational leaders. So really, you know, take an active role, not just in kind of honing your HR skillsets, but in really learning and understanding the business.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:05:42.90] Our next excerpt comes from my friend Nicole Roberts. She's the Vice President of People and Culture with MVAH Partners. Nicole has a passion for people-centric transformational leadership, creating space for authenticity and connection, inspiring others to bring their best, most authentic selves to work every single day.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:06:02.79] I want to shift gears just a little bit and talk about your role, so you're the VP of People and Culture and you've been in the space for a number of years. What skills and experiences do you believe are absolute requirements for somebody in your role? Or maybe somebody who is thinking about stepping into that role for the future?

Nicole Roberts: [00:06:24.46] So I would say definitely being comfortable with change and being able to galvanize others around it. Not being afraid of not having the answer. I learned that very early in my career that I actually just because somebody asked me a question didn't mean that they 100 percent counted on me having the answer, but they did count on that I would be able to find the answer, or push, or put them in the right direction, or connect them with somebody. Asking a lot of questions, demonstrating humility when you make a mistake. People don't trust people when they know that a mistake has been made and they're just silent on it. I mean, the biggest demonstration of strength that you can have is to demonstrate humility when you make a mistake. And also not being emotionally attached to a project or a process because it was your idea. You need to be in a mindset that this may have been what was best for us at this point in time, but now we need to grow. And, you know, it's that old adage what got you here isn't going to take you there. You need to, to make changes and you need to be supportive of others that I mean, you don't want to be the only person that comes up with ideas when you have meetings and when you're in rooms, because sooner or later you realize people aren't speaking up because either they don't feel like their input is valued or that

nothing that they suggest is going to be implemented. So you've got to pay attention to whether or not people are contributing and you're in your meetings and in your conversations, and also having a mindset of truly wanting to help others and help the organization and that there's not going to be a parade every time that you do something to make the company better because it's truly not about us. You have got to have that mindset in order to be successful in HR and successful as a leader.

Break: [00:08:30.04] Let's take a reset. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell and you are listening to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR. We are sharing today some of the best responses from our podcast guests talking all about Chief Human Resources Officers. So as VP of HR leaders, we're talking about the skills and experiences that these individuals believe are absolutely requirements to step into that Chief HR level role. This episode of the Workology Podcast is sponsored by HRBenchmarkSurvey.com. Share your insights on what's happening in your HR organization by going to www.HRBenchmarkSurvey.com.

Break: [00:09:08.23] Benchmarking and data is crucial to HR leaders. Workology's HR Benchmark Survey is an always-on survey and just by taking the survey at HRBenchmarkSurvey.com you're signing up to get comprehensive quarterly results, white papers and other research from the survey right to your inbox. It takes 10 minutes or less to complete. Visit HRBenchmarkSurvey.com.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:09:34.76] Our next interview excerpt is with Paul LaLonre. He's the Vice President of People and Culture for CEDA. Paul is a Human Resources Leader with over a decade of experience specializing in organizational leadership, employee learning, development, organizational culture, diversity, inclusion and general nonprofit management. So if you are interested in being a VP of HR, CHRO for a nonprofit organization, check out what Paul has to say.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:10:03.47] I wanted to ask you, what skills and experience do you believe are absolute requirements for a VP of People or a Chief HR Officer role, especially thinking about someone who's just starting out in the industry?

Paul LaLonde: [00:10:17.51] Yeah. There's, when I was thinking about this question, there are three that really have served me and I think that they can serve anybody if they take them seriously in helping to develop them along their HR journey. But the first for me is non-negotiable. It's compassion, you know, without the ability to really feel for others, the genuine want to help solve their issues and put the greatest good above all else. Nothing else really matters in my opinion. So that starts with empathy. But I'm starting to learn and believe that empathy isn't enough. You know, empathy is, I feel your pain, but compassion is how can I help relieve your pain? So if you're a Chief People Officer or a Chief Human Resource Officer or whatever at the top, all those things have "people," "human" in them, so we can't forget about that. Number two to me is having a strategic thought process. A lot of people, I think, act without really understanding the why behind it. But to me, you have to understand the why are we acting. What are we solving for? So if you want a new benefit, you just don't grab that benefit because it's the shiny new thing and it's a trend. It's will this help us solve an issue here? Does it fit with what we're trying to accomplish at a strategic level? So always thinking strategically. And then finally, I would say a love of learning. You know, the philosopher Heraclitus had once

said, you know, no man steps in the same river twice because he's not the same man and it's not the same river. So change is always inevitable. And the only way to really keep up with change is to continuously learn, continuously be curious, and continuously open your mind to changing what you think you know about something. So those are the three things I think have served me incredibly well over my career.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:12:11.27] I love that and such great advice, I think for, for anyone stepping into HR or trying to grow in HR.

Paul LaLonde: [00:12:18.44] Right.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:12:19.99] Our final interview excerpt is with Nikki Salentri. She's the Vice President of People at Gympass. With more than a decade of experience in HR, Nikki has worked in such areas as employee relations, leadership development, training, talent management and recruitment.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:12:37.27] Let's talk a little bit about the skills and experience that you believe are absolute requirements for a CHRO role. I always like to ask this question because it's different for everybody. But with your experience and, and what you know and what you love about HR and the work that you do, what's the most critical or absolute skill or experience maybe for somebody who is just getting started in this industry? Or they're thinking like, Hey, I'd really like to have a Chief HR role sometime in my career.

Nikki Salentri: [00:13:08.86] Yeah, absolutely. I think for me, in order to be an effective CHRO, people need to have a really strong understanding of the businesses that they're working for and a point of view on it. They need to have a seat at the table and to be able to offer their perspective in a way that it's received well by the other leadership that they're working with. I think they need to have the ability to produce business results across the organization through strategically aligning all of the HR drivers like development, total rewards, engagement. And I think they also really need to be able to help develop and refine a company culture. And of course, a huge part of that is being able to influence and leverage, leverage leadership to shape that culture as well. And so I think advice for someone starting out in HR that wants to grow into a role like this, in addition to what I said previously about getting as much different HR experience as you can, I think a really good area to focus on as well is developing your understanding of the businesses that you support and making sure that you're thinking with that business-focused mindset and developing your analytical skills as well to help set you up for future successes of being able to really influence and have a seat at the table.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:14:21.87] I'm finding that more true now than ever that HR is leading conversations with executives and they're asking more questions about the business and how HR can, can help support the organization differently. You need to understand the business so you can speak the language and be able to collaborate and support each other.

Nikki Salentri: [00:14:40.50] Yeah, absolutely. One of my favorite things is when I hear from the people on my team and they say, Oh, I'm working with this new manager, and they tell me that they've never worked with HR like this before. And we really understand the business and we're a true partner for them. To me, that's like one of the biggest compliments that we can get, and it's something I've focused on trying to develop with my team so they can grow in their roles as well.

Closing: [00:15:02.19] I'm such a nerd when it comes to HR, which is why I love this podcast interview series. The CHRO interview series on the Workology Podcast offers so many interesting and different answers and perspectives that we get from our guests, especially the one about skills and experiences, which is why we have a separate podcast that you're listening to now that breaks them down. These insights are from HR leaders who have years of experience in our industry and they continue in their role. They are providing you very helpful insights for someone who wants to step in that role, or maybe you've been in that role or you're thinking like, this is where I want to go, this is what I want to be. I want to learn more about what it takes to be a Chief HR Officer. Thank you for joining this episode of the Workology Podcast, which is sponsored by HRBenchmarkSurvey.com. This podcast is for the disruptive workplace leader who is tired of the status quo. This is why I do what I do. We are changing and influencing the future of human resources and I am so blessed to be a part of that. Thank you for listening to the podcast. My name is Jessica Miller-Merrell and until next time you can visit Workology.com to listen to all our previous podcast episodes.