

5. Jarrod Harden Says Listening Is the Key to Creating Workplace Inclusion and Belonging
Transcription

Speaker 1:

You're listening to the HR Bartender Show, a casual place to talk about all things work. Here's where you get practical advice about how to be a better employee, manager and leader in today's workplace. So grab your favorite beverage, pull up a stool and join us in the conversation. The bar is always open. Now, here's your host, Sharlyn Lauby.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Hi everyone, thanks for being here. I'm your host Sharlyn Lauby, author of the blog HR Bartender. Before we get started today, I want to take a moment to thank our founding sponsor, Ultimate Kronos Group. Also known as UKG .

Speaker 1:

To be a powerfully productive business, you need powerfully happy people. Two leaders in workforce management and HR have joined forces to become UKG, Ultimate Kronos Group. With comprehensive HR solutions, they'll help you create more meaningful connections within your workforce that will make your people smile. UKG, our purpose is people.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Welcome back everyone. As you know, in this first season of the HR Bartender Show, we're talking about the future of work. And with me today is Jarrod Harden, to talk about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the workplace. Jarrod is the interim head of diversity equity and belonging at UKG, Ultimate Kronos Group. He describes his role as being a company liaison, who is focused on listening to, and then serving the needs of people. A firm believer in the power of belonging, Jarrod has been working on employee focused programs for over a decade. His first introduction into the world of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging was working with employee resource groups and we're going to talk a little bit more about that during our time together, from the marketing and communications side of the business. Shortly thereafter, he made an official jump into the world of HR with a focus on culture and diversity.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Jerrold's passion is people of all different identities, experiences, and backgrounds. He mentioned to me that he feels so privileged to be able to do this kind of work and at a company that values people as much as he does. So Jerrod, thanks for being here today. Before we start our conversation, I got to ask you, how are you doing? How's your family? How are your friends? How are you holding up in this very fast paced and uncertain world we've got going on right now?

Jarrold Harden:

I think it depends on the day or depends on the hour of the day sometimes. Thank you for asking that. It truly is one of those situations. We're all rolling with the punches, right? So there are some days where you're flying high and you're like, "Okay, I got this." And then there are

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other days where you're like, "I don't got this." All in all, I can't complain too much. I'm doing really well. I'm doing really well.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Well, I'm really glad to hear that. When we're talking about, some days we get it and some days we feel like we have so much to learn, it does take me a little bit to this conversation that we're going to have about diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Because if you think back at a decade ago, organizations were very focused on this topic, diversity, and then the conversation became, well, we need to talk about diversity and inclusion. Now we're talking about diversity and inclusion and equity and belonging. How do we help organizations understand this evolving conversation? I mean, is there a way to frame the progression so that people get it?

Jarrold Harden:

Absolutely. I always think of storytelling, right? And I'm a communications background anyway. So that's the way that I think we do this work and we make it real for people. Whenever we're talking about making something clear and engaging, you can geek out or I can anyway all day long on like the theory of diversity and what that progression has been and the nuances of it, but that's not what the masses care about. They want bite sized chunks. That's how we get our information, right?

Jarrold Harden:

One of the analogies that we use, the dance floor or a birthday party. So the diversity is the mix of the group of friends that you have at the birthday party. Inclusion is when your parents are like, they look over your invite list. They're like, "You have to include this cousin." And belonging is really being welcomed at the party. You know what I mean? So just different things like that and nuances. There's a dance floor metaphor that I use sometimes. It's about belonging and being at piece of no matter how you're dancing, everybody's celebrating you. I just think breaking it down into pieces that make it more digestible, more understandable. It's a storytelling piece. If you make it real for people. That helps the nuance of the conversation.

Sharlyn Lauby:

I really like the piece of your response that was talking about sort of bringing things to this actionable practical level, to where people understand how to bring the conversation into their organization. I can see that there are organizations out there. I mean, you get notes from HR people all the time who are saying, we want to support DEI programs, but we don't have a lot of bandwidth. And one of the reasons that I wanted to chat with you is you were very instrumental in bringing about some employee resource groups or some people might know of them as employee affinity groups, into organizations. How can companies use something like that to support their employees?

Jarrold Harden:

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I love employee resource groups or affinity groups, associate resource groups. We call them diversity networks that at EKG. The reason that I love them is one, they don't have to cost a lot, but what they do and the purpose of them really, really helps connect employees to the company and each other. I think they're great for building community. I used to run employee orientation at an old company. The story that I always gave about the resource groups was that I was hired into the company as a black man. In my department, I felt so welcomed. They were great to me, but I was the only black person on the team. When we ride the elevator, back in the days when we could go into work and road elevators, if I saw somebody else who was black in the elevator, it would be that knowing like you're here at the company too, where are you?

Jarrold Harden:

And you almost want to form some kind of bond because you just, there are things that about you that you share. And so, building community in the employee resource groups is so key. They do so many other things too. So you can celebrate identities like the special days, like a black history month. If I'm looking through the lens of being a black man or pride month or women's history. So you can kind of celebrate and use those groups as a way to talk about or demonstrate your company's position on any given topic or how you engage with certain groups of people.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Just as a side note, what types of diversity groups does UKG have?

Jarrold Harden:

At EKG, we have six of them currently with three in the hopper. We currently have a group for women. We have a group for the LGBTQ plus community. We have a group for black employees. We have a group for veterans. We have a group for cancer survivors and cancer caregivers. We also have a group for the disabled community. There's six of them. Want to make sure it's like kind of your kids. You don't forget anyone.

Sharlyn Lauby:

And are you able to tell us what's in the hopper?

Jarrold Harden:

Absolutely. One for the Latin X population, one for an interfaith group and also an Asian community. We're looking at bringing those to light in 2021 a little bit later in the year.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Now for organizations that are saying to themselves right now, "Hey, this sounds really exciting. I want to do something like that. I mean, I want to put on my goal list to have one diversity initiative in the upcoming year." What would you tell them are some of the common pitfalls that they need to avoid when they're... because I can see people saying to themselves, "We want to do this and we want to be really supportive, but we're really, really afraid of just messing it up."

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Jarrod Harden:

Right. There are a couple of pitfalls to avoid. One is you have to manage expectations, right? So you got to get clear about what is it you're doing. So often when I talk about employee resource groups, people like to use those or to think about those in a way that solves the problems of the world. And that is a lot to put on usually volunteer led groups that don't have the purview that senior leadership might have, and maybe you don't have even the connections within the organization. So letting people know that we're not changing the world necessarily with these groups, we do have goals. And we want to achieve those goals through these groups of being really clear about what those are for. Another thing that I would say is when you start doing your listening, because that's so key is listening to what the employees are asking for and what they're really saying.

Jarrod Harden:

And even with how big data has become these days, right? And a lot of times people say HR was later to the party with data and understanding what data can do for you, which is fair. Careful getting too excited with data about this type of work, because so much of it is human driven and emotion driven that if you start posting what some of your metrics are and your metrics don't look good, and you don't have a game plan for how to deal with those, then you've got these crazy looking numbers sitting out there for people to react to maybe without a way forward. So you don't want to do that. So yeah, I'd say managing expectations. And then also without the game plan for how you're moving forward and that's even survey data. I've seen when people ask for how are you feeling and what the survey responses, when they come out, sometimes the people don't even know that they've come out. So you want to be careful about leaving your people in this place of not knowing what's happening. Silence is absolutely a form of communication.

Sharlyn Lauby:

I'm glad you brought up the aspect of emotion. I agree with you. I get that data is important, but sometimes when you can connect the data with the story, it's even more powerful.

Jarrod Harden:

Well, that's one of the ways that we absolutely move forward about how we talk about what our goals are and what our plans are for diversity is. It's data point mixed with the human element, the people part of it, the stories, because that's how you really get people to move. And actually everyone has different drivers. So some people are really key into the data part, but there's other people who really just engage on the story side of it. So I think both are critical.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Speaking of stories, I received a note from a reader after the death of George Floyd, it was about an HR person who made some disparaging comments about him and some of the public support that was happening nationally following his death. I'm wondering what should

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organizations do when you have a manager or a leader or a human resources professional, a high profile position within the organization, and these are individuals that don't agree with the organization's views on diversity and equity and inclusion and belonging.

Jarrod Harden:

So the first step is take a breath, right? Because it's one of those things. Again, when we talk about emotion, it plays in that area. So one of the things, even as a diversity practitioner I have to do is I have to suspend parts of my identity, right? The fact that I'm a gay black man. There are elements of that, that if I just use that lens to do my work, I'm doing myself a disservice. So take a breath, right? Then you have to look at yourself as if you're from the organization and say, "Have we clearly communicated who we are as a company?"

Jarrod Harden:

Because you have to be fair if. If your values and what you stand for isn't clear, then whose fault really is it that this manager didn't know, or isn't lining up with those goals or those values. If you have done that, or if you realize that you need to, and then you walk down this path and you have a situation like this, then you make it very clear about the situation that this does not line up with the expectations of you as a leader in this organization. And that's what you go on. So it's not necessarily about you as a person, but it's about your responsibility as a leader in this organization and the culture carrier, you have a responsibility to line up with these values and your comments did not. You fell short.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Now flip the switch. Let's say for example, I come into your office and I don't agree. I understand if I'm a manager or a leader in the organization, I like your term culture carrier. I need to, in my role, I have to support the organization's views. If I'm an employee, do I have an option? I mean, what do I do? What can the organization say to me?

Jarrod Harden:

So I don't mean to sound flippant. I would tell you to update your resume and get on LinkedIn and start networking. And I say that because if your values don't align with where you are, then the power's in your hands. If the company has said firmly, this is who we are as a company. And that doesn't feel right for you anyway, and I'm not talking about any particular leaning or anything like that, but you're working at a company that doesn't align with your values you got to go. You don't want to be there.

Sharlyn Lauby:

And just to offer some perspective, one of the things that I thought was really interesting is I went to a great place to work conference a few years ago. And they had a couple of CEOs there that were talking about things that were going on. And these are organizations that have traditionally been very apolitical. Always, always, always trying to operate in a neutral zone and their employees were saying to them, "Why are you not speaking up? Why are you not taking a

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stand? Why is the organization not doing more and saying injustice is wrong? Why are they not taking that action?" So when we talk about some of the things that are happening, we're not just talking about the company took a stand and we're unhappy that the company is taking a stand. It could be that the company is not taking a stand and an employee is saying, "What are you doing? This isn't who we are as an organization."

Jarrod Harden:

Right, and if that's when I think of mission statements or value statements, credos that some companies call them, it's part of delivering to your employees your why or your North Star. And without that, I don't know what you stand for. And there's a swath of people who are okay with that. Increasingly I think, exacerbated by just what's happening in the world and what has happened in the world, that middle ground is becoming ever smaller. And so people want to know who they're supporting, right? So that's everything from what they're buying, how you're spending your money to where you're giving eight to 10 to 12 hours of any given day. So, yeah, I think the responsibility certainly is on the company to say, "Here's who we are," but the power's in the employee's hands to say, "That's not good for me."

Sharlyn Lauby:

Prior to our conversation today, you and I connected on LinkedIn. And in looking at your LinkedIn profile, I saw this post about diversity fatigue, and I get it. I mean, on one hand, it's really awesome that there is so much conversation going on about diversity and inclusion in the workplace. And we need that conversation, but how do we make sure that it remains a priority without crossing that line into fatigue, territory? And you, and I know that one minute it can be a priority and the next minute it's an overused buzzword. And we definitely do not want it to go in that category. How do we keep it alive?

Jarrod Harden:

I think you're trying to put the toothpaste back in the tube in some ways, right? So I think of three things right off the bat. So one of them is you have to try and own the narrative, right? And it's about being clear about what your company's position is, right? So if I worked with somebody maybe in finance, who has a LinkedIn page, and that person is posting a bunch of stuff about diversity, right, that's another place where I'm getting it. But if my organization is really clear about this is what our message is, it helps me out understand what, okay, I can maybe trim away some of the noise on the other places, but here's the message that I need to be focused on for the work aspect of my life. Right? So that's one of the things.

Jarrod Harden:

Another part of it is make two way conversations a part of it. If I'm just hearing about diversity and I can't react or question or go anywhere with the information that I receive, then I'm just getting full. But if I get these thoughts and my thoughts don't go away just because I don't get to say them to anybody. Maybe then I start holding them as grudges, or I have private side conversations, but if I can engage with you and maybe work through with some of my, okay,

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wait, I heard you say this. Now what that means for me is this. And that doesn't quite feel right. And then you get to say, "Oh, okay, I hear you." So here's another way to get that message. The fatigue doesn't set in as much, because I'm engaging with it. And I'm not just being shouted at or dictated to, or had a finger pointing at me.

Jarrod Harden:

The third thing, which I think is really powerful, and it's one of the things that I love about UKG so much as I sound like the company owner, it's that you don't just let the diversity conversation, so in that part of controlling the narrative, you don't just let that diversity conversation happen from the diversity department. If it's a part of the way that you operate, it's not, "Oh, Jarrod's coming into the room now. We know what this is going to be." But instead you start letting it become a part of how you operate and let that happen, it becomes less about fatigue, particularly if it's done with a great strategy behind it, versus just kind of talent acquisition, they think they want to do something with diversity. And so let's try this. This is what it looks like.

Jarrod Harden:

You know what I mean? Like you hire diversity practitioners for a reason and you can kind of, that's why I look at myself as a liaison, right? Most like the concierge. I can point to the restaurant, or I can point to that attraction you want to go to, but you got to get there and how you get there is on you, but this is the direction we're going. So those are the three ways that I think you can actually deal with some of that fatigue.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Excellent. That leads us to our last question, because you've mentioned a lot of really good things that organizations can do to support employees and demonstrate that they are more inclusive and creating a level of belonging within the organization. And before I ask you this last question, I just want to kind of, I don't know, veer off on a side street for just a second. Let's talk a little bit about belonging as a topic just unto itself. Because I think that a lot of people know what diversity means. You talked about it at the beginning of our time together. This is what diversity is. And this is what inclusion is. Talk about, where belonging fits into this conversation.

Jarrod Harden:

I love belonging and because, and we start there because it's a unifier. We all felt no matter what your background is, no matter what your identity is, no matter what your experiences are, that belonging piece, we've all felt like we really belong somewhere. And the pain, when you felt like you didn't. Right? And so it's just, it's one of those kind of, no matter who I am, no matter what I say, no matter what I do, I'm celebrated here. I'm valued here. My contributions matter. And that part of it has nothing to do with skin color or sexual orientation or level of ability or gender. We all know what it's like when somebody looks at you and says, "no, we want you here. You're valued."

Jarrod Harden:

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I just think that's the perfect way to open the door for the conversation. We've already, I don't want to say ruined, but we've already ruined the diversity word, right? You say diversity right now and everyone thinks like, "Oh gosh, here's what they're talking about." Hey, we think we have a shared definition. We really don't, but belonging, I almost feel like it's that way to slip in the door. And then you can kind of talk about what you're really getting at because you will, we all get it. It's something we all across all identities and experiences we get there. So I do love belonging.

Sharlyn Lauby:

And belonging kind of leads us to our last question because I can see a lot of organizations right now are trying to, in light of the pandemic are trying to create belonging, but how do you create belonging? Or what's a good first step for creating belonging when you've got people scattered all over the place? You have some people coming in and working in an office environment. You have some people who are still working remotely. And while we are hearing lots of really good things about vaccines, my personal opinion is I do think we're going to be mentioning COVID for the majority of 2021 in some context. How do we create belonging? How do we make sure that people feel connected to the organization, even in the middle of a pandemic?

Jarrod Harden:

Oh, so the pandemic just adds a layer of complexity that none of us had to deal with. So I look at it through the lens of like this diversity work, but it makes it all more difficult because we're all asking for the same attention, right? So it's mostly electronic communication that we're doing. And so that's your HR team, important information about benefits and performance. The diversity of people want to talk to you and then there's like employee events. Then there's your team. Then if you've got children, sometimes their schools and it's just, we want ways to get away from the computer versus to be at it. And so then you add in this, like how do we make people feel like they belong?

Jarrod Harden:

What I think works the best, and this is in a pandemic world or without it, is listening. And then letting me know that you heard me. So I just, I think a great first step is that listening to me. Don't try and solve or a problem that you don't fully understand. This is the way I would start any kind of program or project if I wasn't even in diversity. That's the critical part is that listening piece where not only do you solicit what are the things that we're trying to solve for, and then you report back and you say like, "Here's what I heard," two way conversations, so important.

Jarrod Harden:

Then I think employee resource groups are fantastic because it's easy to do so many. Now that we've been living in this for nine, 10, 11, 300 months of a pandemic, I think we've set up some really great ways through trial and error, sure, but of staying connected. So if it's kind of like we did one of our resource groups, the pride group, the LGBTQ plus focus group ran drag queen bingo, which was hilarious, but it was just a way for people to get together and there's websites

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where you go. Everyone gets a unique bingo card. There are systems that you can build community. You can bring in speakers and people through Zoom and people can engage through the chat function. Those sorts of things.

Jarrold Harden:

Our cancer group just did a coffee chat is what they called it, but it was really clear about talking about their mentorship program. They do some really fantastic work for the members. Through that, people who had signed up for it, they saw, and they heard they've gotten someone they were asking about how can they reveal to their coworkers that they actually have a diagnosis. And so these resource groups just do fantastic work that I think we would miss. And because they're led by volunteers who are employees, they're doing passion projects. It's not about building out big teams that are structured. I think they need structures. Let me not pretend that, but they can do so much of the work that might seem like a bigger bite than it really is an actuality. So I'd say listening and build community.

Sharlyn Lauby:

You have given us like so many things. I'm going to have to listen to this show two or three times just to get all of the wonderful takeaways that you shared with us. Let's give a big thanks and cheers to Jarrod Harden for sharing his insights with us. And if you want to connect with him and I know you do, then you can find his contact information in the show notes.

Jarrold Harden:

Absolutely. Please connect. I'm more than happy. Thank you Sharlyn so much.

Sharlyn Lauby:

Thank you. That was a really great conversation. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did, but don't go away just yet. In a moment I'd like to share with you my takeaways from the discussion that we just had.

Speaker 1:

To be a powerfully productive business, you need powerfully happy people. Two leaders in workforce management and HR have joined forces to become UKG, Ultimate Kronos Group. UKG creates comprehensive HR solutions designed to make employees happier and build more meaningful connections within your workforce. They've even done that for themselves. Being recognized as one of the top places to work. And EKG's 12,000 employees helped thousands of businesses build better cultures every day. When you're ready to make your people happier, EKG is ready to work for you. EKG, our purpose is people

Sharlyn Lauby:

My big takeaway from the conversation today with Jarrod was belonging. It was making employees feel like they belong. And there are many different ways that we can do that, but it starts with listening. As I was listening to the conversation today, I really came away with listen

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to what people have to say, hear what matters to them and give people an opportunity to respond. It sounds so simple to say it, but I realize it's hard. Sometimes in this fast paced world that we live in with so many different things going on and so many demands for our attention, it becomes really, really difficult to truly listen. But I can see when we're talking about the future and we're talking about just next year, what do I need to do to be a better person? What do I need to do to be more supportive? It starts with listening. I hope that you enjoyed the conversation as much as I did. And thank you again for listening to HR Bartender, for being a part of the HR Bartender community. We appreciate you. And until next time, have a great day.

Speaker 1:

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