

Steve Browne on How HR Pros Can Manage Change – HR Bartender Show

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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.

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Sharlyn Lauby: So, session two of the HR Bartender Show is focused on change, and I am super delighted to speak with today's guest. Steve Browne has devoted 30 plus years of his career to human resources. He's currently the Chief People Officer at LaRosa's Inc, a regional pizzeria restaurant chain settled in Southwest Ohio, with 10 locations and more than 1100 team members. And speaking from somebody who used to live in Cincinnati, I've had LaRosa's. It is fantastic. And the next time you're in the area, you need to try it as well.

He's also an active member of the Society For Human Resource Management, also known as SHRM, and has held several leadership roles, including board member. Steve is active on social media. Many of you might know him from social media, and he has a nationally recognized HR blog called Everyday People. He often ranks among the top influential voices in HR, and he's the author of two bestselling books, HR On Purpose and HR Rising.

I've known Steve for years. We volunteered together on conferences and state councils. I interviewed Steve a couple of years ago on HR Bartender, for how to get your first job in HR, and I'll be sure to drop a link to that interview in the show notes. But it is so great to chat with you in person. So Steve, welcome to the HR Bartender Show.

Steve Browne: Hi Sharlyn. It's so good to be here again.

Sharlyn Lauby: So, the theme for this season is change. And I'm going to ask you, what's one change you've experienced recently that turned out well?

Steve Browne: Change is happening here so quickly, that it's good to be able to say that there are several examples. But my favorite is, we are designing roles in our organization in a way we never have before. Where in the past, it used to sit in

my chair, "Hey, we need a this. Come up with a description, tell us what it should be. What's the pay rate." And it was very static and boxy, but I sat down with the leadership of our operations department and said, "What do you want it to look like? What does the business need? Where are we at? What obstacles do you have? What obstacles will keep us from doing what you want to do?"

I left the room after they got done with this introductory exercise, and they came up with roles we've never seen before in the organization. Which, will make a nice bridge for people if they want to be in an expanded role as a general manager, but it doesn't automatically mean upward mobility. It just means depth, development, the ability to grow, the ability to learn, the ability to fail. So, having a much more fluid approach to this, versus a very anchored approach or a concrete approach is huge. I'm excited to see where it goes.

Sharlyn Lauby: You're talking about how HR pros help the organization manage change. But I also want to talk about how we, as HR professionals, can manage our own change. We're often so busy helping the whole organization that sometimes we don't think about how we can use those processes to help ourselves. When you think about the HR team at LaRosa, share with us, how does the HR team manage change?

Steve Browne: I allow a lot of time for breathing, because too often we are just running. And lately, organizationally, both as a whole, especially within my department and me personally, fatigue has been such a huge burden. So, we've tried to build time in, just to breathe and say, "Okay, what's in front of you. Where are you at?" And we put this piece into our company, January of '21, called PDCA, Plan Do Check Act. And so, regardless of what is in front of us, we'll say, "Is it time to PDCA?" And, it's just a common acronym for us now. So if there are things within department that need that, we'll stop, we'll take the time. And we have the ability to do that.

Also, the second part is I try to make sure to acknowledge my team on an ongoing basis for the value that they bring every day. So I say, "Thank you Julie for doing this. Thank you Shauna for doing this. Gosh, Becca, you're killing this. What else is on your plate?" And you kind of do an informal check in, just to see how things, a barometer check, so to speak, to make sure they're not running in a direction they shouldn't be, as well as acknowledging the good work they're doing. And then asking, "What do you need in order to be equipped to move forward?"

Because, one of the things I want to start doing when it comes to change is, we focus on the deploy, and implement and execute constantly. But we forget the equip part. I want to make sure you have what you need, so that when you launch, you're ready to go. And it's more likely to be successful with smaller failures, instead of just get it done. My team's wonderful. They respond really well to that. And we're trying it here, so that we can do it across the organization.

Sharlyn Lauby: That's great. As you were talking about, the PDCA, did I get that right?

Steve Browne: Right. Yes.

Sharlyn Lauby: Somebody once in a training session, told me that their organization thinks about things as, put it in pencil, put it in pen, and put it in Sharpie. These levels of, "Okay, we're ready to put it in pencil. We're ready to put it in pen then." But Sharpie means that it's been fully integrated into the organization. And so, as you were talking about that, I was thinking, "Ah, yeah. Sharpie. Sharpies."

But as we were thinking about change, and I think it's great, the things that you're doing with your team, giving them room to breathe and giving them an opportunity to step back, plan and execute well. One of the challenges that I've seen is when organizations are making a lot of change, and it doesn't matter if it's a big change or a little change, inevitably, there's a change we don't agree with. And we're expected to support it, but we don't necessarily always agree with it.

One of the ones that sticks out in my mind is when you may have to make changes to a benefit plan, and you know it's the right thing for the organization. It's not the right thing for you, but you know it's the right thing for the organization. So, what advice can we give to human resources professionals that are struggling with the balance between, "I need to support this decision because it's right for the company, even though it's not right for me."

Steve Browne: I think the key is context, taking the time to give people the why, as much as you can. Not after it happens, because usually we say, "Oh, well, the reason this benefit changed was da, da, da," but it's changed. It's past tense. You have time. You have time to build in and if not, build it in to say, "Okay, I know my change is going to happen here three months from now. Who do I need to get to in order to give them as much context as possible because the change is happening?" It's not, kind of warm you up and then surprise you. It's, "Hey, well you know this is coming. This is what's happening. And here's what's going to happen." When we've done that, we've had more success.

In the meantime, something could fall apart. There could be a crisis that hits you right away, and rash decisions are made. Some rash decisions have to be made so that the crisis is averted or at least tempered down. But then after that, you need to come back and say, "Hey, I know we made these rash decisions. This is what we're doing going forward. Thanks for playing along while we did this. Thanks for getting through it with us." And then step back into that contextual model. More HR people would be successful if they spent time giving context, instead of reasons. You don't have to justify. You have to say, "Here's what it is." And if somebody says, "Well, I don't understand that." "Okay, well, let me hear you and work through it."

One of the things that we've been doing in order to help that, is we've implemented this new thing called Dump Your Bucket. It's not venting, okay? Dump Your Bucket is, "Hey, you and I are working on something. And boy, something's really eating at me. A decision that was made, I didn't like." Pick something. And you say, "Okay, hey, before we get started, I need to dump my bucket." We quantify that coming in. You let it out. You work it out together, so it's very constructive conflict. And then you learn together how to move forward. We've been doing this, at least at the executive level, for the last year and a half intentionally. It's helped immensely. There have been fewer surprises. There have been fewer gotchas. There are some still. I mean, you're not going to wipe it out, but HR people can't be afraid to be the people, that are in the middle to bring that context. We can bring people together as connectors, if we are more contextual with people.

Sharlyn Lauby: You're talking about time. Spending the time to be that connector. And I think that, that's a conversation. I think that a factor in the conversation about change. There's this constant discussion about our workload. Should we be spending time on administration, or compliance? Should we be spending time on strategic tasks? The whole idea that we need to move from transactional to transformative within the organization. And, that has to do with how we budget our time. Are we spending our time on administration? Are we spending our time on strategy? How personally, what's your secret for spending time on the right things? I mean, I know for me personally, I'm one of these, and this is the joke in my house. It goes on my calendar and if it goes on my calendar, it gets done. But what's your secret for spending time on the right things?

Steve Browne: For me personally, I switched my mindset from managing my time to allocating my time. Where am I allocating the time? So, since I work in a constant state of interruptions, and that's just part of working here. We have an open door policy, legitimately open door, and people can walk in and change your day with one conversation. Since you know that's your reality, then how do you allocate your time around that, because those interruptions are still going to happen.

So, two things. I've taken things that I had been doing and equipped my staff to take them on. So instead of delegating, I find a lot of delegation is, "I'm going to dump this on you." Instead of saying, "Boy, if you take this on and really run this, I don't have to. I want to fill your bucket with something different, and let's do this." Quick example. We have gas cards for our fleet, our cars that people use in the field. And I was doing all the stuff. And I have Rebecca who's on my team, who's amazing. I said, "Hey, I want you to take the cards. I want you to figure it out. I want you to get on the website and I want you to do this. This is why. I'm doing this with my time. I really need you to take this on." In less than a week, she's doing it better than I had for the past three years, but I've been holding onto it because I'm supposed to.

I think, it's making sure that you have time to assess. See what's important, and let things fall to the bottom that need to fall to the bottom. We give top priority to everything, instead of saying, "What really is a priority?" It doesn't mean you

don't get to the things that fall to the bottom, but we spend so much time on the things that are at the bottom, that our priorities don't get our time at all.

Sharlyn Lauby: It's a great point. And just because it's a priority, doesn't mean the same person has to do it. Last question, talking about spending time on the right things. One of the things that I think we need to spend more time on is our own learning. We're spending time allocating, making sure that we're well equipped for everything that we're going to do. Of course, doing the right activities. But, we also have to think about the future. And from an HR perspective, what kinds of things should HR people be learning about? Where should HR people be thinking about spending their professional development right now?

Steve Browne: Well, I think there's two things to that. One, we have to own up that we're terrible at this. We develop every single other person except ourselves. And what we don't understand is, that makes us woefully unprepared to do the good work that's in front of us. We should have the same fervor for our development, as we do for those we develop in the organization. That's the first thing. If that doesn't happen, what you do isn't going to stick anyway. I would recommend people develop things that's going to help move themselves personally and professionally, to help the organization move ahead. I'll give you an example. We said that we want to be a people first company, and we have been for 60 plus years, naturally, but we want to be really intentional about it. So I'm trying to find information, blogs, podcasts, conferences, where I'm learning how to move the company forward, from a people first lens, so it's more intentional for my role.

I look at that for my team. What do they need that'll help them develop inside their role, and to move them forward in the organization? Not up. Forward. A lot of development I think, has still been very vertical, and when you develop use of it, you can become this, this, this, this, all the way up the ladder. We're flat. We're going to be flat. Most organizations are some version of flat. Very few are really deep anymore from a hierarchy standpoint. So my thing is, how can I help you develop in what you're doing personally, professionally, and then organizationally?

Here's the one other thing I've done though. I'm part of the SHRM Executive Network and I love it. I am talking to my peers at my level, and we are talking in-depth, strategic long term, short term, intricate, difficult, challenging conversations that I can't do internally. So, to surround yourself with peers that are at the level you're at is critical, so that you can have rich conversations to learn from others and get different perspectives, and then bring it back into your organization.

Sharlyn Lauby: Out of curiosity, I'm going to put you on the spot. If there is one topic that in the upcoming year, HR people should be paying attention to?

Steve Browne: Role alignment. I think it's just missing right people, right places, from strengths based perspective. How can they get people to use their strengths? We keep

trying to make people improve on their gaps, and it's just backwards to me. "Here's what you don't do well, therefore I'm going to give you training on what you don't do well, in order to close that gap." Instead of saying, "What do you bring to the table, and how can I accentuate that?" And then align my roles in the organization to match those strengths.

Sharlyn Lauby: Talk about a real change. We could spend another couple of hours talking about that, because that's a real shift in the way that we think about performance. We think about gaps and filling gaps versus thinking about, "Okay, this employee has these strengths. So how do I leverage them within the organization?"

Steve Browne: Yeah. And my thing is, I can fill the gaps with other peoples, whose strengths are my gaps. And it's really my other big thing that I'm really working on is, I want talent to move from hiring, which is where the language is. Onboarding, sourcing, recruiting, talent. Talent should reside in the organization. What talents do you bring? How does that talent improve performance? Talent just doesn't stop at the front door. I think we've made a mistake as a profession, to only keep it on the front part of the life cycle of an employee. Instead of saying, "It opens the door and now that you're talented, what are you doing?" And let you shine in your organization.

Sharlyn Lauby: And on that note, we're just going to have to invite you back, and we're going to have to talk about that some more. Everyone, please give a big thanks and a cheers for Steve, sharing his knowledge with us. And if you want to connect with him, if you're not already connected with him and you want to, because I know you do, I'll make sure to put his contact information in the show notes. And after the break, I'm going to look forward to sharing with you my takeaways from our conversation. So, I'll be right back soon. Thanks.

Speaker 3: 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 UKG's 12,000 employees help thousands of businesses build better cultures every day. When you're ready to make your people happier, UKG is ready to work for you. UKG, our purpose is people.

Sharlyn Lauby: Welcome back, everyone. I hope you enjoyed my conversation with Steve, as much as I did. It's always great to chat with him. And there was one thing that we talked about that I want to expand on a little bit. And that had to do with the piece of the conversation that did, talked about delegation, and the idea of prioritizing work and making sure that the right people are doing the right things.

One of the aspects of my work that I had to learn at some point my career, was what my role was as a manager. And as a manager, I think that the biggest piece of my job is to make sure that I hire and train my replacement. And if companies

could just think about that for a second, if companies could have all of their managers focused on that one thing, hire and train your replacement, it's not going to happen overnight. It's going to take time to develop someone to be in a position to take on that role. But, the way that the organization would operate would be so different, with this real focus on the future and strategy, and making sure that people spend their time doing the right things. Because, if we are focused on hiring and training our replacement, that means that managers need to learn the art of delegation.

And, I don't mean like Steve mentioned, I don't mean dumping on somebody, but the art of making sure that people can do things while you're gone. If a manager doesn't have individuals within their team that they can say, "Hey, can you do this task for me? Can you do this for me?" Then they run the risk of never being in a position where they can work on that, the CEO's super secret project, or the going to a conference for a couple of days, uninterrupted, or going to a training session to improve their skills, because they're constantly being interrupted with things that maybe other people in the organization could do.

So, making sure that we have that right balance of the work that we do and when we get it done, is so incredibly important. And if we spend our time teaching managers that their role is to hire and train their replacement, then we put managers in a position where they're constantly out there making sure that they're developing their team members, making sure that they're working on the right things, handing them new things to learn along the way. And this is a change in the way we think. This is a change in the way departments operate, in the way that we ask managers to operate.

It's also a change in the way we develop our managers, to make sure that they're thinking about that main role, when they're thinking about performance and their training, and when you develop leadership and management development programs. So just something to think about as we talk about organizational change, Steve mentioned that one of the things that he thinks that we ought to do a better job of, or spend more time thinking about is that alignment. Is this the time to think about manager alignment, and aligning what a manager does, in terms of future development of employees?

And I think on that note, we'll wrap it up, but I give you something to think about, in terms of how we develop managers and what we ask them to do. If you are looking for some more conversation about this, I would recommend going back to season one, and listening to the conversations that I had with my friend Dan Schawbel, and my friend Alex Levitt, where we're spending some time talking about careers and managers in the workplace. And technology, because technology might play a role in that, as well. Thank you as always for being here and listening in. We appreciate you. And until next time, cheers.

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