

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.

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Sharlyn Lauby: Today I am so excited to speak with today's guest. Season two of the HR Bartender Show is focused on change and our guest today is Sarah Morgan, director of equity and inclusion at Humareso, where she works with customers nationwide to create workplaces where people from traditionally marginalized identities can better thrive. Prior to joining Humareso, she worked as an HR executive at brands such as Jiffy Lube, KFC, Taco Bell, and ADT Home Security. Sarah and I got to know each other for her work in the digital space where she focuses on cultivating positive workplace experiences through diversity, inclusion and social consciousness. She's well known for her blog The Buzz on HR and her podcast Leading in Color. So welcome, Sarah. Thank you so much for being here today.

Sarah Morgan: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited to be on the show.

Sharlyn Lauby: Well, you know that the theme for this season is about change, so I want to start out by asking you, tell me about one change that you've experienced recently that turned out really well.

Sarah Morgan: I would definitely have to say my move to Humareso. Prior to that, as you mentioned, I had been an HR executive in various companies for many years, almost 20. I was beginning to find myself just getting burnt out on traditional HR and because of the work that I was doing through my blog, through my podcast, I was doing quite a bit of speaking and writing and consulting outside of work, and I was starting to feel like two different people. The person that I was from nine to five, and the person that I was from five to nine when I was doing all of this other stuff. The division of those two people was just really starting to wear me down. So I started talking with John Baldino, who's the president and founder of Humareso, about what it would look like for me to potentially come on board with them, because John had been referring business to me for a few years. He and I had worked together on a few projects. He actually sponsored an event that I hosted called the HROI Summit back in 2020.

We took some time to kind of figure out what the right timing would be and what the right position would be and what things I could do and how do we work out compensation and the clients that I had that I would bring with me. And what about the podcast and how does all this work? Finally, we were able to come to agreements that we both felt comfortable with for me to make the transition. It was a huge leap for me to go from a very secure human resources leadership role in a organization that span 42 states and we were a national footprint organization. I had a team of 10 people reporting to me, and to walk away from that into this kind of unknown thing, as excited as I was about it, it was also really terrifying because I just didn't know how it was all going to work and how it was all going to come together and if everything that we envisioned we were going to be able to manifest.

I'm glad to say that it did. I have not had a moment pause or a moment of looking back and feeling like I shouldn't have done this or I should have done this differently. It is a major change, but it has been exactly what I needed. It's not only been helpful to me in bridging those dual identities that I was feeling, but my health is better, my relationships with my family are better, I'm more available for my kids, my parents who are getting older, all of those things that you look for when you talk about work life balance, work life integration, whatever you want to call it, it all really came together and I feel like for the first time in my career in a really long time, I'm thriving and that feels really, really great.

Sharlyn Lauby: That is fantastic and I think that the story that you're talking about in terms of making that transition and then being in a place where you can see, "Hey, this was the right decision for me, I made the right call," I think that everybody's challenged with that when they think about creating change. "Am I going to make the right call? What happens if this is the right decision? What if I have to go back to the way things were? Am I prepared to do that?" That kind of leads into a little bit about the conversation that we're going to have today when it comes to organizations making decisions about change that they want to create. I mean, I honestly believe they want to create the change. They're just trying to figure out how to do it.

Sarah Morgan: How to do it. I agree. Yeah.

Sharlyn Lauby: You and I started talking about being on the show after a conversation that we had at the Workforce Institute board meeting. We're both on the Workforce Institute board together and you made a comment about how organizations need to do more than just talk about diversity, talk about equity and inclusion in the workplace. They need to act, they need to start taking the words and turning them into something. How do we as HR pros help the organization realize, "You need to start doing more"?

Sarah Morgan: It starts with us as HR practitioners really familiarizing ourselves with the concepts of DEI, because there's this argument that DEI should not be a part of

human resources, that it needs to be its own separate specialty that kind of sits on an island the way that finance or marketing does and that it should not be folded under the HR umbrella. I think that there's good and bad to that approach. Regardless of what the organization decides about where DEI needs to sit, just like in human resources, we have to understand accounting concepts, we have to understand operational concepts, marketing concepts, because the things that we do, the things that people do within the organization is all going to intersect with that. We have to understand DEI as well, the concepts of that, how that impacts the business, how that impacts the people within the business, and we have to begin to speak that language with the same fluency that we speak finance, that we speak marketing, that we speak all the other areas of the business that we all have to get to know.

I think that's the first thing, is embracing the idea that this is a specialty within business that we are just as responsible for understanding, speaking the language of and figuring out how to infuse that into the people functions as any other area of the business that we already speak to. The second piece of that I would say is beginning to take initiative when issues occur, whether that's issues within the organization or whether that's an issue that occurs in society as a whole. We recently had the experience of seeing Roe versus Wade overturned here in the U.S. and the outpouring of emotion that came from people because of that, on both sides.

People who were happy that the ruling got overturned, people who were super duper unhappy that the ruling got overturned, and this idea that in those moments, leaders and organizations have a responsibility to say something affirming to people that goes beyond just get back to work and embracing those moments to have first really difficult conversations about what is our organization's position on this and how do we want to articulate that as the second piece and learning to put some of our personal feelings about controversial issues on the shelf in order to see humanity and what humanity as a whole needs.

Usually that's going to be understanding and that's going to be support and it's going to be hope for a way forward that doesn't make anyone feel as though they're being left out, left behind, infringed upon. I think we in the people functions, whether we call ourselves human resources, people, operations, talent, whatever we're calling ourselves in our organization, we get that instinctively in our guts. Now it's about how do we put that into words and then put that into action that backs up those words so that our people in our organization see that we see them, and that we're willing to support them even in those moments where we may not necessarily fully agree with whatever that position is.

Sharlyn Lauby: You're talking about Roe versus Wade and some of the things that are happening outside of the corporate environment. It makes me think the recruiting market is tough right now and one of the things that I'm seeing is

candidates are starting to say, "I'm going to apply to companies that share my social values." So after the Dobbs decision, people looked at how are company's responding? To your comments, some people responded, some companies responded, some companies did not respond. Can you give us an example of how an organization can demonstrate that their comments align with their actions? Where can they show candidates and employees that they're prepared to back it up?

Sarah Morgan:

So there's a couple things that come to mind and it's a little counterintuitive, but I feel like in today's climate we are looking for organizations to kind of proclaim what they believe in from a social value standpoint more than any other time in our history. Once upon a time we were very comfortable with organizations kind of quietly supporting causes. Now we are looking for that to be a part of what they talk about on their website, a part of what they talk about in their social media presence, a part of what they talk about when they're recruiting and onboarding me so that I know that this organization donates to X, Y, Z sorts of charities, that they're partnered with this organization to help this particular underrepresented group, builds in a particular area, that they're supportive of whatever the social value issue might be.

Organizations have to become more intentional and comfortable speaking about that publicly and openly in ways that we've seen as taboo for such a long time. It's going to be uncomfortable and unfamiliar for us. I think a lot of organizations are afraid of either feeling like they're bragging, like here we are doing this super cool thing, we're out volunteering at XYZ event, here are some photos. You feel like you're doing it performatively and you don't want to that to be the case so you shy away from feeling like you're bragging, or you're nervous about what the potential reaction of your support for a particular thing might be by customers, vendors, clients and so you don't want people to know that this is what you're doing because you don't want them to then make a decision not to do business with you because of it and it has a negative impact on you.

I think that organizations are going ... if they're really wanting to recruit and retain loyal talent, because I think we've got to get past the part where we're talking about top talent. What does that even mean? Ultimately you want talented individuals who are qualified, who are ambitious and who want to be aligned and loyal to your organization. That's really the goal. If that's your goal, then you've got to put the signals out that are going to attract those people in and trust that they will find you, that they will stay and that customers, clients, vendors, partners, et cetera, will see those same things and make a choice to be aligned with you also. If they don't, believing that the mission of your organization, the good that you're putting out into the world will be enough to sustain you until you find something to replace that. I recognize that that's a hard ask for organizations when we've been so far from that for so long. There's not even a business blueprint in terms of business theory, books.

No one's really talking about this. It's still a very new concept, this corporate responsibility, in terms of environment, social governance, values. That conversation is still pretty new and it's always been kind of underlying in organizations, but now it's being really thrust to the forefront and I think organizations are going to have to find ways to become comfortable with that. Going back to your original question, when the verdict came out about the case, I had several clients reach out immediately saying we want to make a statement, we want to make this type of commitment and help us to kind of craft that one client, and I won't say their name because I didn't ask their permission to do that beforehand, but 60% of their employee population are women. They have a very generous leave policy for parents, not just women but also men. They have a super generous policy surrounding help with fertility and things like that.

They believe very wholly in taking care of their employees and their families. They're paying for something like 85% of their employee benefits. The CEO immediately sent me a message through Slack and said, "I want to close the office. Is that okay? Everyone is upset, I'm upset and I don't think anything productive is going to come out of this day and so I just want to tell everybody to pack it up and go home. Can I do that?" I'm like, "You own the place. If you can't do it, no one can, but there may be some people who need the distraction of work."

I'm one of those people. When shocking things happen to me, I grasp at normalcy immediately. I am the one who wants to keep working because I need to just feel normal in that moment. So don't assume what it is that people need, but at least give them the option to say, "This is shocking, this is upsetting. I'm going to shut it down for the day. If you want to shut it down too, that is completely and totally okay. If you feel like you need to continue working, that's okay too. Coordinate with your teams, managers be supportive of that, and let's just collectively get through this moment and I will be in touch with you about what we're going to do to continue to support the women in our organizations and our families within our organization as a whole in the coming days while we figure out our strategy in light of this"

And that's what they did and the out pouring of feedback from the employees, men and women, saying just how grateful they were that the leader of their organization stepped up, said something, allowed them the space they needed to feel and process and do was huge in that moment. That's what builds loyalty. That's what builds the progressive culture I think that we're all striving for. So it's really about harnessing your gut reaction into something that can be supportive and productive for everyone involved in those moments.

Sharlyn Lauby: During the conversation you mentioned that we're kind of entering this new territory and one of the things that I'm seeing, which I think is new, is when we think about ... the conversation used to always be about just diversity and then it became about diversity and inclusion and then it became about diversity,

inclusion and equity. Some organizations are including the letter B for belonging, but I'm seeing something new right now. I'm seeing the addition of the letter J for justice. I'm going to put you on the spot. Tell me what you think of this and if organizations are struggling right now with the D, the E, the I and the B, how do you get them to add justice?

Sarah Morgan:

I am of two minds about ... and bear with me as I've talked through this out loud. Anytime that we have acronyms for stuff, I'm always nervous to start adding more letters to it because I feel like it starts to lessen the impact of whatever the thing is trying to achieve. I feel like we go through that similarly with STEAM and then it became STEAM and then sometimes I see it as STEMM with two Ms, STEAMM with two Ms, like LMNOP, all these letters. Then I've seen organizations that will say DEIJ, and they remove the B and then they're changing it to JEDI and then that becomes its own ... then people are likening it to Star Wars. It becomes this whole really strange and in many spaces problematic thing. So I get nervous anytime that I start to see acronyms that are built around creating a feeling of bringing people from the margins into the center and suddenly it gets turned around to become something gimmicky and performative. That makes me nervous.

At the same time, justice is an important thing. It's about removing barriers, it's about taking a stance on justice related issues. That may be social justice, criminal justice, environmental justice, pick the one, but taking a stance on those things. That's important, that's an important part of this work. In the work that I do with clients, I feel like equity includes that already, but I also understand that organizations struggle to see equity as a justice act and that they look at it more of a stance of pay equity and fairness and resources and they're not seeing ... and when they think of justice, they think of a thing that's much more firm. If to make it work, you need to separate the words, do it. I don't think it harms anyone by separating them. As long as you have definitions for what that means within your organization and what falls under the purview of that particular thing, then I think it makes sense to do it.

But I caution people against continuing to add more letters into these sorts of things because I do think it hits a tipping point where it just lessens the impact of the work. At the end of the day, it's about getting the work done and getting us moving in a better direction. For me personally, I don't see a huge difference between inclusion and belonging. I know why we've separated those two. Inclusion is the effort, belonging is the impact. Equity is the effort, justice is the impact. If we keep having to separate the words from intention and impact, we end up with just this alphabet soup of thing and I'm just not sure that that's the right way. But right now I don't have a more effective solution to recommend, so I say if it helps your organization to set its intention, define its impact, and keep yourself moving forward into what you feel is a better and more progressive direction, add all the letters, do what makes the most sense for you to get where it is that you want to go.

Sharlyn Lauby: Is it fair to say ... I mean, what this really is, it needs to translate into culture and it needs to translate into the employee experience. If you can do that with three letters, then great and if you need five-

Sarah Morgan: If you need five, go for it. I don't want to pick apart people's naming of things. Naming is important and if by putting five letters to the name, it makes you feel like you're encompassing everything that it is that you want to do and accomplish and it gives you a structure with which you can do that, you can put a framework to it and do that, by all means. For me, I always just say DEI, that works well for me. When I throw in B or I throw in J, I use them all pretty interchangeably. They pretty much mean the same thing in my mind. But if I stumble upon someone who feels very strongly that it should be DEIB, it should be DEIBJ, out of respect for them and what their needs are in that conversation, I'm going to use the words in the way that gives them the most impact and makes them feel honored and heard and supported in the conversation and it doesn't harm or hurt me one way or the other.

Sharlyn Lauby: I love your point about respecting the other person. One of the things that we're seeing right now is businesses, business leaders are struggling to make decisions that impact culture. For instance, a company might make a decision that's really popular with employees but maybe not with politicians or the vice versa. You've touched on it a little bit, but how do we advise organizations through these tough decisions when you know that there's going to be a backlash?

Sarah Morgan: It's difficult because again, like I said before, organizations fear that backlash. If you are in a heavy compliance sort of organization, which I've worked in before when I was working in security, every state has different regulations about how things need to be done. If you are making decisions about how you structure your people operations, that they proceed to be in opposition of what they're trying to accomplish from a compliance standpoint, you're at odds with someone who you need to be aligned with in a way that puts your business at risk. If you support certain causes as an organization, we've seen that. People will call for boycotts of various things because the decision of the corporation to donate to a specific charity or to support a certain politician, whatever the case, you put yourself at risk.

As we've gone through this pandemic, as we've experienced the racial and civil unrest that has come alongside it, I think the message of taking care of the people who take care of you and your customers and your clients has been pervasive. That was what honoring our frontline workers was about, honoring our essential staff, honoring our doctors and nurses and healthcare people. It was about taking care of the people who take care of us. I think as we continue to go through this pandemic and figure out what this all means for the future of work and the future of how we live, taking care of each other has got to continue to be a central theme. If your business is at a crossroads where culturally it can't do both, right? You can't take care of people and continue to



function in this industry and be profitable, you've got to begin looking at ways to pivot because that's not a sustainable way of doing business anymore.

Particularly as our younger generations begin to take up more space in the workforce, now this presumes that the younger generations that are in the workforce aren't going to do what the rest of us have done, which is really buy into capitalism at some point. If you look at Boomers, Boomers were at Woodstock and now they're heading up corporations that are making record profits while their people are struggling to deal with inflation. Gen X grew up in the age of the LA riots, and we're doing the same thing. We're leading organizations and backing away from women's rights and gender support and care. We're still those people, but presuming that Millennials and Gen Z are able to proceed forward into their future and hold onto the ideals that they're bringing with them into the workplace now, I don't know that they're going to stand for the stuff that we stood for.

I think social media has been the equalizer in that because it allows you platform and influence in ways that we didn't have. There's always those kind of joking memes you see on Facebook and Twitter, like if people had tweeted at Woodstock, if people had tweeted during the march on Washington, what would that have looked like and would the energy ... that's the question I ask, is would the energy that came from hashtag Woodstock hashtag March on Washington, whatever we would've called it, would the energy of that have continued further into the future if we've had that sort of overwhelm of social support and platform that we all seem to have today?

We don't know yet, because we haven't gotten to that point in the future, but it certainly feels like it. Knowing that, Millennials and Gen Z are just not going to ... they're very much vote with their feet type of people and so they're not going to stay in organizations, they're not going to shop and buy from places that are not willing to do well by their people and/or pivot until they get to a place where they can. So I think for organizations who are struggling with how do I please the people, how do I please the politicians, how do I please the public, you got to choose your people. Hopefully somewhere in there you have a purpose too, if we're going to stay with the P words. So hopefully somewhere in there you have a purpose that is bigger than all of that.

Instead of just, again, bowing to capitalism, that you'll take a moment to reevaluate your strategy and figure out how you can be profitable without taking advantage of people. I don't know that we've seen that in any kind consistent basis in the history of industrial America, but I sure would love to watch some organizations give it a go in my lifetime, that we could study and make sense of.

Sharlyn Lauby: You mentioned profitability and we could spend all day talking about this, but I have one more question for you. This is the time of year to me in my corporate life where we were always thinking about the budget. This is budget season. We



were talking about our upcoming year strategies, the things that we wanted to accomplish, trying to get money in the budget for the next year. If organizations, if HR could go to the table and say, "Look, I want to do one thing to show commitment to diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging, justice, all the letters, I want to do one thing," what's the one thing that they should consider doing?

Sarah Morgan:

My answer to that is always going to be choose equity. Because for me, diversity looks good. You come into an organization and there's visible diversity of men, women, people of color, disabilities, on and on and you can visually see that, that feels good and it looks good when you start to market it. It looks good. Like, "Look, look how diverse we are." Inclusion feels good. People are together and they feel good about being together. They feel seen. They feel supported. Great. Equity is good, though. Equity is the thing because equity is at the heart of justice. It's at the heart to me of belonging. It's what makes visible diversity more than just performative. It's really looking at are we paying people fair and living wages, right? Like if I got budget. But inflation is crazy right now. The cost of a tank of gas, the cost of food, all of those sorts of things are going up for people and that is not good.

If we have an opportunity to invest in living wages, if we have an opportunity to make sure that people in similar roles are being compensated equitably and appropriately, we should do that. If we have the opportunity to invest in more comprehensive healthcare at a time where we're dealing with arguably two pandemics between what's going on with COVID and now this kind of rise of monkey pox, like where did that come from, and then there's been reports that there are people with polio in parts of America. Polio? Seriously? So yeah, comprehensive healthcare is really, really important right now. Supporting people in their development, supporting connection to your community in terms of giving back, in terms of diversity within your vendors so that you're supporting local, smaller businesses, that you're supporting businesses from marginalized communities versus just going with the typical large vendors. That's really important right now. Filling those gaps.

We talked a little bit earlier about STEM and STEAM. We know that there continues to be a problem in those areas with, again, people from underrepresented groups, marginalized identities being a part of that. If that's a part of what's going on in your organization, if you can't achieve diversity because there's no pipeline, how do you make sure that that's not a problem in the future? How do you start to, one, build your own pipeline and then build a pipeline for the rest of the world so that that's not a problem in the future? Because that's really about how your organization creates its legacy so that it's more than just profit, that there's purpose too, that there's goodness too and that there's some consciousness to the capitalistic side of the work it is that we do. I believe that that's possible. I believe that those of us in charge of people functions have a responsibility to speak to that. If I have the budget and the influence to be able to do it, that's where I'm sticking my money.

Sharlyn Lauby: Thank you so much. Everyone, let's give Sarah a big thanks and cheers for sharing her knowledge with us. If you want to connect with her, and I know you do, I'll be sure to put a link to her blog and her podcast in the show notes. Please don't leave just yet. I'm looking forward to sharing my takeaways with you after the break.

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. 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: I loved this conversation with Sarah, in particular the takeaway about the difference between intention and impact and organizations and individuals can intend to do all the right things, and we have to turn that intention into impact. The whole conversation about not just talking about all the right things, but how do we turn that into something that is actionable that people can see from an HR perspective, that candidates can see so they're attracted to the organization, that employees can see so that they continue to align with the organization and its values, and that customers can see that we're an organization that means what they say. I have to say, this was a really direct conversation for me about making sure that your actions speak for your words. We talk an awful lot of time, it's sort of an old cliché, but it's time that we do that and HR people have an opportunity to influence culture, to be a part of the team that makes this transformation in the workplace.

It'll be a change. It definitely will be a change, but it'll be a good change for everyone involved. If you want to hear more about change and impact, I hope you'll listen to the conversations that I had with Pat Waters and Steve Brown who also talk about organizational change and how to communicate organizational change and how to make change happen within the company. I think that coupled with Sarah's comments about impact, that could be a very powerful lesson in terms of what maybe you want to transform within your company. Thank you again for listening. Thank you for supporting HR Bartender. We appreciate you and we'll see you again soon. Cheers.

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