

Speaker 1: You are 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, and thanks for being here. I'm your host, Charlene Lobe, author of the blog HR Bartender. Before I introduce today's guest, I'd like to take a moment to thank this season sponsor, Case IQ.

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Sharlyn Lauby: Hi everyone. I hope you've enjoyed this season's discussion on ethics. I think it definitely gave us a lot to think about.

One of the first questions that I asked all of our guests this season was: What do you think about when you're faced with an ethical dilemma? I know for me, when I'm facing a challenge, it's often related to whether or not I should speak up about something. And I have to admit, sometimes I can be my own worst enemy when it comes to expressing a concern. So I use a process similar to the five whys. And the five whys is a problem-solving method where you simply ask why five times to get to the root cause of a problem. So an example might be, let's say the sales team isn't meeting their goal and you ask yourself the question, "Okay, why are they not meeting their goal?"

And somebody might say, "Well, that's because they're spending a lot of time on paperwork and they're not making sales calls." And then you ask, "Well, why are they spending a lot of time on paperwork and not making sales calls?" And then you hear, "Well, that's because we're short on administrative staff." "Oh, now I know how to address the issue." So where we might say to ourselves we would address the issue one way if you only look at the very first part, the sales team isn't meeting goal. If you ask yourself that question that why, now you come up with a different response and you know how to deal with the issue.

So for me, if I take this back to the ethics piece, I loved chatting with Merrick about ethics and investigations because one of the first takeaways that he shared was the idea of understanding the definition of ethics versus compliance and being prepared to address them both. So as an HR pro, maybe one of the first questions I need to ask myself is, "Am I really dealing with an ethical issue or am I dealing with a compliance issue?" And that might help me in processing how I respond.

The second question, and this is kind of what I do when I'm faced with a dilemma, is I ask myself, "If I speak up, what's the worst thing that could happen?" And then once I identify what that is, I might say, "Okay, well if that happened, then what's the next worst thing that could happen?" So what I do is I kind of go, "Okay, what's the worst thing that could happen like five times?" And then say, "Can I live with this?" And most of the time, if not all of the time, that helps me decide what it is that I'm going to do.

So when we're processing information, it's really important that we ask ourselves those questions so that we can figure out the right way to respond. In the episode where I was chatting with Heather, she talked about HR and being truthful with ourselves, and we need to do that as human resources professionals. We need to be prepared to deal with ethical challenges. We need to be prepared to ask ourselves some really tough questions. And we also need to be prepared for being able to manage change where ethics is concerned. In the first episode of the season with Martin, we talked about the different ethical challenges that organizations might face in terms of things like fraud and security and safety. And it's important to realize that ethics impacts the entire organization and it takes on many different forms and we need to be prepared to manage that.

Also in that episode, at the very end, Martin talked about some strategies for communicating change. I don't believe that we can say that ethics won't change. One of the examples that I immediately think of is views about marijuana. There was a time when marijuana was considered to be an illegal drug, and today there are places where it's legal. So when we're talking about legal, illegal, that changes things and it might change your view on whether or not that's acceptable. I think we're going to see more of these changes in the years to come, and organizations need to be prepared to address them. And when we talk about change, I'm a big fan of Lewin's change model. I think it's really easy to remember it has three steps in it, unfreeze change, and refreeze.

As a side note, I believe that organizations could benefit from finding a change model that works really well for them and sharing that with employees maybe at the very beginning of their time with the company, like an orientation or onboarding because change isn't going to go away. We're always going to be managing some sort of change that's going on. And if we give employees some model that helps them to manage change, then that benefits them and it benefits the company. So if you were to think of Lewin's model where it comes to change and you're talking about managing a new change within the organization, during that unfreeze step of Lewin's model, this is where you realize that a change is coming. We might start getting ourselves ready for that change. We might start have to think about getting organizations ready for that change as well. As human resources professionals, we might have to start talking with senior management about that change and the path that the organization wants to take.

Then during the change step, the second step, this is when we actually put together a plan and start change. We want to have a communication strategy. We'll want to put a timeline in place for doing this. In my conversation with Chris, we talked about ethics training and including the benefit of refreshers. This could be an ideal time to talk about training and refresher sessions as part of a change effort within the organization. Not only are we going to do the change, but how do we help people prepare for it and manage it along the way?

And then finally, in that refreeze step, the bulk of the change effort is kind of in the past. Yeah, there could be some tweaking that needs to be done, but the organization has adopted the change and to use a well-worn cliché, got that new normal out there. Of course, that's until a new change comes along. It's kind of why we need to think about having a change model that we can use on a regular basis, but the idea is that we think about managing change. If you're an organization that hasn't updated your code of conduct in a while, if you haven't established an ethics policy or you're thinking about making some changes to your policy, then this is kind of a way to roll that out and talk about what's considered to be acceptable and unacceptable behavior. And that's kind of the point. That was kind of the reason that I wanted to talk about ethics this season.

Ethics is not a one-and-done activity. Employees should not attend ethics training and orientation or onboarding and that's it. Or read the code of conduct in the employee handbook and sign it and go, "We're done." If organizations truly want an ethical culture, then conversations about ethics have to be infused in everything. Recruitment, onboarding, training programs, performance conversations, one-on-one performance conversations, coaching, mentoring, and even offboarding. The good news is technology can help us manage those pieces. Jacob and I talked about how technology can help us track concerns and potentially see trends to minimize risk.

I know it can be hard to talk about ethics. We want to assume ethics and ethical behavior is a given, but we have to shift from dealing with ethics only when somebody has a concern to openly being in a position to talk about it. We have to shift from that. We're going to take a reactive stance to a proactive stance.

And kind of getting back to my opening story about what do you do when you have a dilemma? It does make me wonder if we spent more time talking about ethics, could we reduce those dilemmas? Because I can't be the only person. There are employees out there asking themselves the same question, "Should I or shouldn't I speak up?"

And so if we change the narrative to where we become an organization that openly discusses ethics and ethical behavior, and we do that throughout the employee lifecycle, then we create a situation where people aren't holding back. They're willing to talk about it. And if we find ourselves in a situation where we need to investigate something, then Merrick talked about in that conversation things that we can do to investigate concerns and bring resolution.

So I hope on that note, you've enjoyed this season about ethics and sort of heightening your awareness about the conversations regarding ethics. I thought it was super interesting.

I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank you for listening to season three of The HR Bartender Show and a huge shout-out to all of our guests. Again, I hope you found their conversations interesting and wonderful and valuable.

Don't forget that for each episode, we've included the show notes in transcripts so that you can use these episodes as resources. You can go back and reference them.

I also want to extend a huge thank to our friends at Case IQ. They are so wonderful and supportive of HR Bartender. I thoroughly love working with them. And if you haven't had the chance to check out their product, I hope that you will. It's really wonderful.

Just to wrap up our time together, if you do have any questions or comments on how we can make HR Bartender better, I hope you will let us know. We would love to hear your feedback as we start to plan for the next season. Haven't finalized a theme yet, so if you have any thoughts, please be sure to let us know. And again, we appreciate you very, very much. Cheers.

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