



Nonprofit**HR**

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Strategic HR  
Leadership in 2024:  
Navigating Talent Dynamics  
for the Future of Work

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# Strategic HR Leadership in 2024: Navigating Talent Dynamics for the Future of Work

In the fast-changing world of managing people, the real innovators are the nonprofit organizations that understand the future of work. As we navigate 2024, forward-thinking groups and companies are taking a comprehensive approach, understanding the importance of breaking down jobs into skills and improving their talent management by introducing programs to teach new skills. This insightful webinar designed for all leaders, where our experts will explore strategic actions that can put your organization ahead in managing talent.

**In this webinar, learn about the strategies leading nonprofits use to support their current employees in unique ways.**

**Access it to:**

- Learn proven methods to empower your team and move toward creativity and success
- Gain a fresh HR function perspective for impactful talent development
- Equip your leaders with insights and essential skills to help teams thrive in dynamic situations, driving adaptability and success
- Stay innovative with examples of implementing modern workforce learning programs for ongoing growth
- Discover powerful techniques to boost engagement, ensuring your organization retains and nurtures top talent

Take proactive steps by leading your nonprofit into a future where strategic talent management is your organization's driving force.

## PRESENTERS



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Thornquist, MBA,  
SPHR**  
Senior Consultant,  
Outsourcing



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Kelley, ACC, CPCC,  
SHRM-SCP, SPHR**  
Managing Director,  
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**Laura Laney,  
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Team Leader &  
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**Chantel Simms,  
MBA, SHRM-SCP,  
SPHR**  
Team Leader &  
Senior Consultant,  
Outsourcing



## Strategic HR Leadership in 2024: Navigating Talent Dynamics for the Future of Work

**Lindsey Otto:** Hello everyone, and welcome.

Thank you for joining us this afternoon for Nonprofit HR's Virtual Learning Education Event. Today's session is entitled Strategic HR Leadership in 2024: Navigating Talent Dynamics for the Future of Work.

My name is Lindsey Otto, I am the Marketing & Communication Associate for Editorial & Content at Nonprofit HR, and I will be your conversation host for today. We have a lot of great content to cover on its very important topic. Before we get started, though, I would like to go over a few items before you participate in today's event.

You have joined the presentation listening using your computer's speaker system by default. If you'd prefer to join over the telephone, just select telephone in the GoToWebinar pane and the dial-in information will be displayed.

You will have the opportunity to submit text questions to today's presenters by typing your questions into the questions pane of the control panel. You may send in your questions at any time during the presentation. We will collect these and address them during the Q&A session at the end, and throughout the presentation.

Today's event is being recorded, and you will receive a follow-up email within the next few days, with a link to view the recording.

And now, just a brief note about Nonprofit HR.

Since 2000, Nonprofit HR remains the country's leading and oldest firm focused exclusively on the talent management needs of the social sector, including nonprofits, associations, social enterprises and other mission-driven organizations.

We focus our consulting efforts on the following practice areas: Strategy & Advisory, HR Outsourcing, Total Rewards, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice and Search.

Again, you will have the opportunity to ask questions of our presenters throughout the webinar and we will get to your questions as soon as we can.

Now a little about our presenters.

Samantha Justice Kelley.

## Strategic HR Leadership in 2024: Navigating Talent Dynamics for the Future of Work

Samantha joined Nonprofit HR's Outsourcing practice in 2013, bringing with her several years of HR generalist experience across various industries. Building upon these years, Samantha is now the practice area's Managing Director, serving as a creative thought partner in her consulting approach, advising her clients through labor law compliance, workforce planning, employee relations, recruiting and onboarding strategies, benefits and compensation equity, and employee performance and development.

Laura Laney.

As a Team Leader & Senior Consultant, Laura is an accomplished leader in the domain of People & Culture. Deeply committed to collaborating with organizational leaders in steering strategic talent management endeavors, her approach is marked by its impactful and inventive nature and infused with a conscientious focus on people-centric HR practices.

Chantel Simms.

As Team Leader and Senior Consultant on the Outsourcing team, Chantel is a transformational talent strategist and leader who champions workplace culture and influences innovation. Chantel's experience includes over two decades of establishing values-centered workplace climates and promoting standards of excellence with a nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Anne Koo Thornquist.

Anne is an accomplished senior consultant with over 20 years of demonstrated success in the nonprofit and corporate sectors. She has built multiple best in class organizations through the development and implementation of robust HR strategies. And now, Anne, I'd like to turn it over to you to get us started with our conversation for today.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Excellent. Thank you so much, everybody, for joining us. We have a wonderful panel where we're going to ask some questions. Before we begin on the questions, I am going to make sure that the group has a chance to do a quick intro. I think it was just real quick on something that wasn't shared in the bio that Lindsey shared.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Thank you so much, Anne. Thank you, Lindsey. I'm so pleased to be a part of this panel with some amazing team members of mine. I lead the Outsourcing division and there's brilliance on this team. We are really looking forward to this conversation.

I am an HR professional by trade with experience across several industries and certified through SHRM and HRCI. I am also a Leadership and Executive Coach certified through the International Coach Federation and Co-Active Training Institute, so I bring both perspectives to this conversation.

Laura?

**Laura Laney:** Thank you, Anne and Samantha. Similar to Samantha, I am a true HR generalist with experience in both the for-profit and nonprofit sector, as well as in higher education and having worked for an international nonprofit. So [I'm] really excited to have a great discussion with my colleagues today about this important work.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Chantel, would you like to do a quick share?

**Chantel Simms:** Sure, thank you so much, Anne, and thank you. I'm excited to be here, also with my wonderful colleagues and panel members. Again, my name is Chantelle Simms. I've been in the human resources profession for many years. I am passionate about supporting the talent management needs of nonprofit organizations and cultivating a positive employee experience through employee wellness, engagement, empowerment, coaching and development. I, too, am, also certified through SHRM as well as HRCI, and also bring many years of experience. And so ... I'm looking forward to this wonderful conversation today. Thank you so much.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you, Chantel. And I am Anne Koo Thornquist. So pleased to be here. Really, my focus has been taking the strategies in HR and making it doable, making it very tactical, so that you have deliverable results, which is why I'm so excited to be part of this panel, because we're going to have a lot of learnings where you all can take something away.

Lindsey, if you would put [up] the next slide, we will quickly run through the agenda.

So, we are — I'm not going to read through the agenda, but I really want to focus on the fact that those who are here will be able to take some of the strategies that are in the human resources space, really navigating the talent dynamics, especially for the future and the constant changes that happen, trends that are going on, and how do you manage all of this? We're going to give you some strategies and then break it down into very practical, usable pieces for all size organizations, as well as different industries. I think you had heard from the panel, there is lots and lots of background, anywhere from nonprofits specifically to the for-profit space. And all those in-between, so we're excited to really jump right in.

Lindsey, next slide, please.

All right. We're just going to jump into that first question.

How can nonprofits create a culture that not only attracts, but also nurtures and retains high performing talent? I'm actually going to ask everyone on the panel to answer this question so we can really set the stage for you and then start diving in deep. Samantha, could you please start?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Sure, Sure. As an organization, consider that your talent is assessing you similarly to how they might assess the viability of any relationship. That's potential talent making this assessment.

I love this question from a book on relationships, but are you the person the person you're looking for is looking for? The most authentic and honest way to not only attract, but also nurture and retain high-performing talent, is to be authentic as a leader.

No matter in which space or function that you lead, you cannot fake it. Folks can see right through it. And so, that attraction will be to you showing up authentically and honestly and allowing your respective talent to assess whether they are aligned with your leadership style and the culture that you're building.

And furthermore, the curtain was pulled back on leadership in the early days of the pandemic. Staff were assessing their leaders' levels of emotional intelligence, care, authenticity, again, support, agility, and it's not that the hard skills or expertise didn't matter. But, they didn't matter as much as, say, the most impactful as part of Dr. Angelou's quote, how you made them feel. That's what people remember. So that expectation has sustained itself in most work environments, and it's important for leaders to brush up their coaching skills, would show up differently than supervising or giving advice.

**Laura Laney:** I'll go next. Thank you for that, Samantha.

I agree wholeheartedly with everything you said. And I too, love this question because I think, especially in the nonprofit realm, gone are the days when the mission drove the culture, right? It was just the mission attracted that talent, and it got them there. In today's world, our culture has to be intentional. It's not going to happen by accident. If anything, we know people will run themselves into the ground supporting this mission that they love, right? So how are we as leaders intentional and setting them up for success?

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And, from a very logistics standpoint, I've seen that it requires us to have an honest look of where our culture is now, not where we want to be. That's a part of it. But where are we now, the good, the bad. You know, what are our strengths and where do we have room for improvement? Really doing an inventory there. And then where do we want to be, right? So, what that does is creates that map for us to figure out what steps do we need to take?

We know in nonprofits, vertical growth isn't always an option, right? So, then we, we explore, what can we do? How do we engage our staff beyond just titles that go straight to the top? Because that may not make sense within how an organization is structured.

And I think, when it comes to nurturing and retaining, retaining, retaining talent, how do we keep our people challenged and engaged? This work, — they are committed, they are passionate, but how do we ensure they feel like they're growing and developing, especially as we think about the needs across the generations, what the different generations are looking for. We know that the Gen Zs, the Millennials. They want to be growing and learning and if it's not happening, they are happy to look elsewhere. So, how can we leverage that?

**Chantel Simms:** I'll chime in here. Thank you so much, Laura. I appreciate that. And I wholeheartedly agree with everything both you and Samantha has shared. I also would just like to add and highlight the importance of creating a positive work environment for all employees, fostering a positive and inclusive environment, where employees feel valued and respected and supported is so very important. Encouraging open communication, encouraging positive opportunities where employees have the opportunity to provide positive feedback is also important.

And then, maintaining healthy work-life balance as well. And then also, making sure that we are recognizing and celebrating achievements, as well, is so very important.

And [I] just want to highlight something that Samantha mentioned in terms of leadership. The importance of building strong leaders within your organization, leaders that lead by example, that inspire others within the organization, is so very important. We need to make sure that we are providing leaders with training, and building those people management skills within our organizations. High-performing individuals, they really thrive in environments where they are trusted to take ownership of their work and contribute their unique skills and perspectives. And so, having a leader behind them that is supportive, encouraging and inspiring is so very important.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** I mean, I don't know how much more I can add to that. I put down here, "Don't chase the unicorn." There's not a solve-all problem out there that's going to change your culture. You have to be true to who your culture is now and where you want it to go.



So ... these great ideas may not fit where you're at, but how do you develop? How do you create the leadership, how do you create the staff, to support that type of work?

I think there were some great ideas that were thrown out. I know we didn't go into detail, some people love to get those details. We will be sharing those as we progress in this panel.

But, you're an organization that wants to hear feedback. And you put out employee engagement surveys, but do nothing about it. How is that going to show up? How does that look? So, those little things, in terms of how you want your culture and the steps and practical areas you're focused on to get there may have some ramifications, good or bad depending on if a culture is ready for that.

I think there was a question from the attendees about remote work. Laura, I think you wanted to jump in on that?

**Laura Laney:** Yeah, specifically, talking about creating a culture in our remote environment, right? I think one result of the pandemic was organizations who were thrust into being remote. That may not have initially been something they had ever thought about doing before but they were agile enough, right, to adjust to the needs of their workforce.

And, I would say, especially with a remote workforce, that leadership, your talent management function, every leader, must be intentional about creating opportunities for culture to happen. It is so easy for organizations — you go to a meeting, every camera's off, every mic's off. There's no agenda. And, those who are going to talk will talk. And those who may not naturally do that are just going to fade into the back, right?

And so, how do we create opportunities for engagement [and] ensure everybody's on the same page in a remote environment? Obviously, there's exceptions to the rules, right? I tell my team, on our internal meetings, I don't care to if you eat, I don't care if your camera's off, save your energy, right? But when it comes to the bulk of our work, we have shared expectations around how we show up and how we interact together.

So, I would say, it's really important that you engage your staff, get their feedback. That's number one. Find out how they — what their thoughts are on where the culture is, and where do they want it to be, and what would they recommend. Because no one person has all the answers. And once they're involved that creates that shared ownership and they're more likely to buy into, you know, this is where our culture's going and we've all got an ownership. We all have a stake in this. So that would be my recommendation.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** I love that, Laura, speaking about the rules of engagement, and establishing those, because I think among teams and departments, especially as you're welcoming new team members, there's a new culture being established, and when it's virtual there are the nuances there. So, don't make any assumptions as a leader as to what people know and expect, in terms of engagement. So that's what I took from your comment, Laura, rules of engagement. I like that.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Wonderful. Thank you so much. I love that. There's some idea there, hopefully, you've picked those up. I am going to move to the second question, unless there's another question in chat, Lindsey?

Nope, all right. What essential skills should nonprofit leaders focus on developing to help their team thrive in an unpredictable or rapidly changing environment?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Laura, you want me — I can take that first.

Laura, I think you have some great ideas toward this end, but I'll go first.

To add to the earlier mentioned soft skills that leaders should demonstrate, effective communication is ever more important. Even more so, tailoring communication to the audience because most organization staff will be diverse in a multitude of ways, not just by visually what you can see, but skill set, age — we'll talk about multi generations, that's been touched on a bit already — race, gender, learning style, neurodivergence, and the list goes on. So, then the question becomes, what are you communicating about?

Well, to be effective in pulling your staff through unpredictable or rapidly changing environments, be very honest and open about what's happening to and within your organization. And with discretion, organizations should make a concerted effort to share what they know and what they're reading related to their mission's audience. Be collaborative in ways that invite staff to share what they know, and what they're reading, and also experiencing. Those lived experiences are important to hear.

And, for example, any advocacy-based nonprofit is going to feel some consequential effect of this year's political election ... Helping your staff prepare for that means inviting them to the conversations now on trends you're seeing, and then inviting them to contingency planning. But with discretion, right? They don't need to be pulled into every layer of the conversation, but where their insight is helpful, recognize that.

But empowering employees to move through the organization with you, and all of these changes means there's a presence of psychological safety. That is a key element. It's a safe space for staff to contribute and to challenge the status quo without fear of retribution and to create an inclusive space and to create a learning space. So, there's an environment that needs to be cultivated before you can even expect that your staff will move with you in the organization and psychological safety [and] trust, those are some really important key elements to that.

**Laura Laney:** I mean, I second absolutely everything that Samantha just said, especially in these hybrid or remote environments. You cannot — I cannot overstate the importance of effective, open and transparent, to the right degree, communication.

Gone are the days of swinging by someone's office or poking your head in, right? We don't have that and because that's missing now, there's very little room for ambiguity... for staff to feel confident, right? Because if there's, if nothing is said, they're going to fill in the blanks, whether we want them to or not. So how, as a leader, can you get ahead of that?

To the point about transparent communication as a leader, knowing your audience. It's worth the extra preparation to ensure, who am I speaking with? What lens are they receiving this through? Is it my frontline staff? Is it my middle management? Are these my fellow executives? [Know] your audience, because they're going to come with a different focus, different concerns, and different questions as to, how does this impact me? What does this mean, right?

As we know, as talent management professionals, we're used to being privy to pretty much everything. However, the staff that we are communicating this very important information to, there's a lot of why's. There's a lot of questions from them, so also trying to anticipate in your communication what their questions may be.

On the flip side, as a leader, if you don't know, there's nothing wrong with saying, "You know, at this time, we don't know. But we will be in touch. We will follow up."

I've found, yeah, knowing your audience, and then really tailoring that communication is crucial to help staff feel comfortable, as comfortable as they can be in these ever-changing environments, that's the one thing we can count on, is change. And so, if we're able to show that agility, then, in turn, they will be looking to us and hopefully hone their skills around pivoting and being agile to the changing times.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you, Laura. I'm going to just give it a second to see if there's any questions or comments that came in. Otherwise, we will go to next question.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Anne, I just want to add one more comment related to this because I think there is ... Environment is different depending on the organization and how they're situated. Environment can be taken into a lot of different contexts.

But one of the really important conversations that rose to the top for leaders over the last four years is this hybrid space. So virtual versus physical presence, the evaluation of a role to determine how it may, how it may be best optimized, how it best shows up. If you are requiring as an organization for staff to come back on-site, and what is the why? What are the rules of engagement going back to that?

And so, we are working in a hybrid workforce. No matter if your organization is 100% virtual or a mix of on-site presence and virtual or completely off site, it's hybrid in that it's important to recognize the individuals involved in this, especially as you continue to evolve as an organization.

It's important to continue to evaluate the needs of the individual, whether they are showing up, face-to-face, figuring out the communication methods that way, or virtual and how they're interacting with their colleagues and their team members.

Look for the signals where there may be some silos happening and figure out the connectivity points to make sure you're mitigating that. There's a lot that can be said about hybrid spaces. But in a changing environment, we've got to make sure that we find those connective tissues, if you will.

**Chantel Simms:** Mmhmm, good point, Samantha. I like what you said about thinking about the individual in all of this.

Good point.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** All right. Thank you so much. Soft skill, soft skills, soft skills here. All right, next question, please.

With the future of work, continuously evolving, what are the key trends nonprofit HR leaders should prepare for?

Now, I was thinking a little bit about this, as I was navigating through updates to handbooks and what that looks like when you are in 50 states or 20 states or three states and they all have competing priorities were competing requirements.

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So, some of the things that came up that really rose to what the clients that I've worked with have focused on were small organizations who don't necessarily fall under the FMLA, the Family Medical Leave Act, the protected side of it ... offering that as an opportunity for staff ... And also, looking at the paid family side of things, too. So helping contribute are helping cover if the state that their employee doesn't reside [has] a paid portion. Now, depending on the size of the organization, each org does something slightly different. They either do a up to a certain amount, or there's a state disability or a short-term disability or long-term disability they're using to coordinate benefits for.

So the employee going out on these leaves, if it's for a parental bonding, for example, has some type of coverage. Even those in other states that don't have a paid parental, there's some coverage for them. So, that is one of the trends I've been seeing from smaller organizations, and also organizations that don't necessarily fall in states that have a paid parental leave.

The other one is this unlimited PTO or the PTO kind of bucket that people have or this kind of flexible kind of mindset of work, but the flexibility also comes with it.

The leadership role modeling of it, right? If you're saying that you're going to have time off to step away. Leaders also need to take that time to step away and not send messages and not send emails when they're on PTO. Because even though you're not saying it and you're saying, "Answer when you come back," the mindset, that culture, gets reinforced that well, I'm on vacation and I'm on time off and I'm working.

So, we want to make sure that as we're evolving, some of the trends of these like time off that we are doing what we say and enacting as we do too, so if they're off the clock, they're off clock. So should you as a leader.

**Chantel Simms:** Yep. I agree with that, Anne, thank you so much.

Those are those are great trends as well that I've also been seeing lately. A few that come to mind, for me is, one is mental health. That has been increasingly important for employees.

Employees are expecting employers to support that and their overall well-being in general. Nonprofits can integrate mental health support in their benefits packages.

They can provide wellness resources, such as workshops or seminars or even webinars related to stress management or mindfulness.

Or, even, I'm offering to pay, some portion of either a gym membership or fitness class or nutrition class. And even, creating policies around promoting healthy work-life balances, all of that is important in promoting and supporting mental health and employee well-being.

And then the other trend I'm seeing as we are constantly evolving in our work environment is the need for upskilling and rescaling, right?

The need for continuous learning and professional development is even more important now. We're going to get into this, I know, later in the conversation. We have our tech guru here, Laura. But AI, that's a trend in topic, as we know, and with AI coming in and able to make a lot of what we do in our jobs more efficient, alleviating time for us to spend ... on more higher level, more strategic initiatives. We are going to need to be sure that we are being mindful of creating opportunities for continuous development for our staff. And making sure that we are upskilling and reskilling, that we have these programs within our organization for employees, so they can stay relevant and adapt to changes in their roles in the sector.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** That's critical, Chantel.

**Laura Laney:** I wanted to add to that. I love that you, Anne and Chantel, both touched on benefits in different ways, whether it's, "OK, we're not federal, we're not legally required to offer paid time off, or certain parental leave or anything," [or] you, Chantel, talking from the mental health perspective, right? How do we get creative with our benefits? I think ... I agree that that is something that's often overlooked... I have a client who offers acupuncture. Really [find] out, what do your staff want? You might be surprised.

But when you're working within these limited budgets, if you can tailor it to exactly what your people want, it's even better. So really, I would encourage organizations to think bigger than just, "We have ... medical, dental, vision, right? 401K, retirement." Let's think bigger. Let's think day-to-day. What do they need? What do they want? What are they going to use? What's going to have that immediate impact?

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Laura, thank you so much. I did have a question pop up, so I do want to put it out there: One of the trends in my organization is an increase in unionization — goodness — in some of our states. Any tips to navigate a workforce that is partially you not unionized and maintaining the culture of the organization.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Anne, I have seen you navigate these spaces expertly. I would love to hear from you on this.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Wow, thank you, Samantha. I do appreciate that.

With an organization that has a union, it is important to, obviously, honor and respect that.

I think one of the best ways is to really become partners with the union rep to understand what those needs are, to understand what those challenges [are] that the employee is stating. Because in the space, they have, with the union rep, it is completely third party. It is not somebody within the organization, and you get to hear some amazing and wonderful things that the employee is calling, is asking for, or is calling out for that, given a survey, or listening to the staff, sometimes, they may not hit on that point.

So, it's about understanding the needs and then creating that into your own culture or delivering that as part of their culture. Again, it's not about changing your culture to what the needs are for the union. It's about, how do we incorporate the needs from the staff into our current culture?

If the culture is asking for flexibility, for example, what does that flexibility to look like as an organization overall? So, the staff that are unionized are getting some benefits from that, but also the staff who aren't a part of the union are feeling like, great. I don't pay union dues, and I get this great benefit, right?

And so, it's really listening, understanding, and then being able to go back and deliver on some of those by tying that in – this is what we're hearing, this is what we're putting out there. Because sometimes we, as HR leaders, think, “Oh, well, they would know that we're doing the flex time because they're asking for it.”

Not all the time, because it looks differently from what they're asking for and how it's being shared out, so tying that in sometimes even helps. Saying, “We've heard feedback in this area, this is what we're doing. We're trying it out, and being completely transparent and upfront about it. We're gonna re-evaluate this, see how this works, and then maybe come back and tweak and modify.”

That's one idea.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** That was so clear, Anne, and what I took from that is to be very analytical and get really curious about the needs and what challenges staff are facing, and what you're hearing about. Just stay very curious about those. Get creative about those, as well. Invite conversations around, how can we approach this need in a way that would best be received?



And then also, just essentially ensuring that, we are not pulling apart cultures or pulling apart the organization, if a piece of it is unionized, and another piece is not. That's the — mitigating those kind of rifts is key. And I think that communication that she spoke about, keeping those lines of communication open and not assuming that staff know your approach and what's available, will help to prevent those kind of those rifts and leadership missing the mark altogether on how they're addressing the needs.

That's what I took away from it. That was perfect, Anne.

**Laura Laney:** Mmm hmm.

**Chantel Simms:** Yeah, and let's not forget, let's not forget the importance of the partnership with the union rep, that is so important.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Absolutely. All right.

Thank you so much for chiming in. Next question, Lindsey.

All right, so I know we were waiting for this when we threw it out there earlier. What are the top techniques you found most effective for boosting employee engagement in the nonprofit sector, especially for virtualized workforces? We're kind of tying in this remote hybrid work as well as techniques for boosting employee engagement.

**Chantel Simms:** Laura, you touched on this a little bit earlier in conversation, but I'll just throw out some of the things that I was thinking and have seen done with some of our clients.

But the importance of just building community and connection through virtual team building activities is so important. I know we do that also as a team regularly. But just organize ... regular virtual team building exercises, such as coffee breaks or happy hours, online games, it's important. We have team challenges that we do online and just encourage that. Encourage collaboration and fellowship just to build that camaraderie among your staff is very important.

Also, and I think, Laura, you touched on this earlier, but the importance of transparent decision making. Like just ensure that you are involving your employees in the decision-making process. Keeping them informed about organizational changes ... and also involving them in the decision.

Especially with decisions around — that may impact their work. That is so important. Transparency builds trust and also it empowers employees and they feel more engaged in their in the organization's mission. When you are transparent and you involve them in the decision making, so it is so important.

So, Laura, I'm going to pause there and see if you — I know you have some amazing things to add.

**Laura Laney:** No, thank you for that, Chantel, I agree with what you shared. I think that creating opportunities for staff to engage and connect that aren't necessarily work focused. We are whole beings, we know the work. We have to do the work. We are constantly doing the work. That engagement is going to come when we allow them to leverage other aspects of themselves, whether it's, you talked about virtual happy hours. At the beginning of the pandemic, virtual — so many happy hours. No one wants to hear that now, right?

But, for example, affinity groups. And even beyond that, the standard, we need X, Y, Z. I know I sound like a broken record. But engaging your staff find out, what are they interested in? Because you might just be surprised.

And in addition to that, I'd say, as you engage staff, it's equally as important to take action. Now, that does not mean everything that comes up you're going to be able to do. Right? Let's be honest here. That's not possible, every shiny thing we can't pursue.

However, if you bring your staff along, bring them along on the journey, and, “Hey, here's what we heard, and here are the top two pressing items, or the top three things that came, you know, rose to the top. And here's what we're going to work on. Do we need a focus group? Do we, does anyone want to partner up?”

Staff are going to be excited because they are seeing action happening on what they have done and how they have engaged. I feel like everybody, everybody's familiar with survey fatigue, how many surveys have been taken and nothing — into the black hole? They've never been heard from, thought of again, or followed up on.

Even if it's just one or two things, doing what you say you're going to do, makes all the difference, and especially with the virtual workforces. And priorities shift, let's be honest, priorities shift, whether it's our financial priorities, our strategic priorities, whatever they may be, that's OK. What's crucial there is communicating that.

“Hey, we said we were going to do this. Due to shifting priorities, right? It has now been moved to XYZ. We are going to come back to it,” and then doing it. That's what builds that trust, that foundation.

And so, I think, yeah, that's huge when it comes to supporting your workforces, but especially your virtual workforces. Again, because in the absence of communication, they're going to fill the gaps in with information that may not be correct.

And another thing that I think boosts employee engagement in the nonprofit sector, especially for virtualized workforces, we're all familiar with work-life integration, work-life management, partnership, but what's crucial to that work-life integration is respecting it.

And, similar to what my colleagues said earlier about modeling it as leaders, that means we also have to respect it and enforce it. It's so easy, "Oh, well, I'll just send this text," or "Oh, I'll just do that. I know they're not there."

Um. No, it's important. We say, listen. I see this. You've done what you need to do. Your calendar is up to date, the work is covered, you know, we've done what we need to do. So we're going to respect that.

Because every time we don't, it chips away at that trust a bit. Right? And overall, we don't want that to happen. We want to do what we say we're going to do, and mean what we say.

**Chantel Simms:** Hmm, and that's the important Laura in a virtual environment where the boundaries between like work and live can get blurred. So, you want to make sure that you are respecting, the work-life balance there.

Because, sometimes, working virtual, you can work longer and the lines get blurred, so it's so important to respect that and also encourage, just to make sure that you're encouraging employees to respect that as well and offering flexible work arrangements, encouraging employees to take breaks, and prioritize their well-being as well.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you so much for sharing all of that. The only thing I can chime in on is these virtual happy hour groups, sometimes things happen organically and allow those.

I think in a recent meeting, there [were] a few of us who were visiting the same area for [Modernism Week] and we just found out that we liked the certain architects, and we kind of connected offline and started talking about it.

There was a group of us who like just love books. Now, I can't wait to see what books Amy is reading because of what kind of similarities [there are]. So you don't always formalize things. They don't have to always be like here's a book club. Here's a mid-modern century architect group. You can allow it to happen organically, but provide space for that.

Again, going back to the giving things, giving space, right, and modeling it. There is a question that popped up, so I want to jump right into that.

Obviously, not every employee can be involved in every decision, especially at a larger organization. What kind of framework or taxonomy do you suggest to help guide degree of employee involvement?

I think there's two people who said they wanted to jump in, so I'm going to give them a space.

**Laura Laney:** So I love this question. Thank you to whomever asked this because it's a very real challenge and kind of going back to what I mentioned earlier about knowing your audience, right? A framework that we have at our firm and that I've actually shared with clients it's the three V's which are voice, vote and view. Reach out if you want more information.

But, what this does is not only do we know who's in which category, but let individuals know, so then they know, "Is my role, ok, do I have a voice in this decision?" Or am I being made aware of it, right? Do I have sway? What is my input? Identifying and clarifying the roles and expectations for individuals involved is really helpful, because you're right, not everybody needs to be involved in every decision, or we would never get anything done.

But on those, where staff, the broader staff, can be involved, what does that look like? Is it a poll, is it a town hall, how are we going to get their engagement, or are we letting them know, "Here's the decision. We welcome your thoughts. But the decision is made." Just really clarifying the expectations, so people know what's expected of them, whether they are going to have a sway in the decision, or they're just going to view it, or you just want their feedback, really helps in that process.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Could not have framed that better, I think that it is important to understand where and how you want to pull staff into the decision-making process.

And this is a key indicator of engagement.

So when you are finding that staff are on the spectrum of highly motivated and engaged, plugged in, communicating, to the other end of the spectrum where you're not hearing as much, they don't seem as comfortable stepping up and involving their voices, whatever it may be — I mean, engagement and disengagement looks different depending on the individual — it's time to start asking questions.

So, you've got your process, your framework, voice, vote, and view. Right? You're very clear about your expectations on how you want to pull staff in. But if it seems like the staff member is not showing up or rising to that occasion, it's time to start asking questions about, where they might be challenged, where there might be room for clarity, again, just staying very curious.

So, love that, we all love their framework, Laura!

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you, that's Laura Laney at Nonprofit HR. She can be reached. You can get more details. All right. Thank you so much. Great question.

Lindsey, if you would move to the next slide.

What's one things leaders in nonprofits may be missing when it comes to leveraging strategic talent management to better align with the organization's mission and objectives?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Ooh, I want to take this one.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Samantha, I was going to ask if you wouldn't mind jumping in with this one.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** I mean, the one most obvious thing is not even creating the strategy.

I think fear often gets in the way of building strategy, because the perception is, there's less risk from doing nothing, than from doing something. Right?

We can continue to mosey along and engage in our regular activity and hope that we're achieving our mission, but without the vision, without the strategy, there's definitely a higher cost to achieving your mission, and, more importantly, in the context of talent management, a higher cost to staff engagement.

So, I want to speak first about organizational strategy and its significance and realizing organizational mission and objectives. Because as HR practitioners, thank goodness we have in most recent years been called to that table to share our insights on the importance of aligning talent to strategy.

But we also can continue to improve our talk, our vernacular, around organizational strategy and how we have insights into this strategy that informs our work. So let me just break this down a little bit.

Strategy is simply a plan of action or policy designed to achieve an overall aim. That's it.

So, not, again, thinking through a strategy comes at a higher cost. So, it's just important to think about, what your overall aim is. And whether your organization is a startup, in a growth mode or maturation phase, how that strategy unfolds may look a little different but the concept is not different.

And, as it relates to talent management or human resources, an organization that's prepared to hire or retain staff, right — that's a wide open gap, no matter how large or small your organization is, no matter where you exist in your phase, your organization's phase — if you are prepared to hire and/or retain staff, you can't afford to not have a talent management strategy. And it should happen concurrent with any organizational strategy conversations. They weave in together nicely.

Strategy is broken down to specific actions and resources needed to achieve their overall aim and it's that keyword, that operative word, resources that covers so much, but in the context of this conversation, we're talking about staff, the very talent that will mobilize toward the organizational strategy and mission.

Without that talent, your strategy goes nowhere, so if you're thinking about what skills as you should, are needed to achieve the next steps, those actions, those objectives, you're looking at, where do I find those skills? Where do I identify that? That's the recruitment strategy.

You're thinking about, how do I best assimilate our new talent into what we're trying to achieve, introduce them to all the very, all the moving parts of our organization, all the key players, and help them to see the vision. That's onboarding.

You're talking about how do I enhance professional, personal, skillsets, right, of that individual, in ways that are creative that might require monetary investment or not? I mean, whatever it may be, how do I enhance those skills that are already present and demonstrate an investment in talent? That's learning and development strategy.

I'm oversimplifying some really important functional areas of HR, just to demonstrate that it's — your organizational strategy will be rendered ineffective without that talent management strategy. And strategy does not have to be such an overwhelming concept. It is simply: What are you trying to achieve and what do you need to get there?

Can you tell how much I love this question?

**Chantel Simms:** I was going to say, come on through Samantha. That was awesome. Yes. Thank you for that.

**Laura Laney:** Samantha, I know you said, you know you were speaking – oversimplifying, in some cases – but to your point, it can be that simple when you think through it. People hear “strategy” and they think this theoretical, overwhelming concept, and you gotta take it bite-sized piece at a time, and what does that translate to? So, thank you for those examples.

**Chantel Simms:** Yes.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Oh, thank you so much. You know, talk about – I think you're going to keep paying [attention to the] same words: being intentional, being mindful, taking these big, lofty goals and making them doable, really narrowing it down. So, thank you so much. Those were great.

**Chantel Simms:** Hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** I think I'd like to add something, Anne. Just a thought. If that's OK?

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Absolutely.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Can I steal the floor just for a second? Talent optimization is not just a buzz word or a buzz term. We talk about it as a team all the time, internally and what we're advising our clients on. Optimizing talent in the nonprofit environment is about maximizing performance and productivity.

Developing your talent management strategy is one thing, aligning with the organizational strategy. Optimizing the talent that's there to effectively achieve your organization's mission, is just the enhancement of things.

So, in addition to making those strategic decisions in each functional area of talent management, rely on some people analytics to make sure you're hitting the right marks. Engage and survey your staff on their performance, their career interests, benefits, utilization, [and] learning opportunities to ensure the greatest and highest use of your talent and the skill that's there. And useful data will inform or where there are roadblocks to success to optimizing that talent. And having that data means, you know exactly what paths to clear for your staff.

All right, I think I got it all out.

**Chantel Simms:** All right.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you so much, Samantha. Lindsey, can you advance to the next slide, please? We've got a few more questions here. I know there might be some questions in chat. We will take some time for that.

How can nonprofits adapt their HR functions to more effectively support developing their people in today's dynamic environment?

I think –

**Laura Laney:** Oh go ahead, Anne. I'm sorry.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Oh no, no, no. I know Samantha was on this role, I wasn't sure if she –

**Laura Laney:** Oh, keep going Samantha!

Uh, I really love this question, Anne. I think that there is so much room for opportunity within our existing structures and our existing talent. Again, engage with employees to identify their needs, right?

Of course, it's our role to identify opportunities, but don't forget the crucial next step of, what's missing? How do we find out by what they're not saying, right? Where can we fill that in?

In thinking how this might show up in our workplace, a very real example [is a] multi-generational workforce. We have now, I think it's up to five generations in the workforce. Five generations that is – it blows my mind. And what's important to recognize is there's no one size fits all, right? So how do we leverage the unique strengths that each of these generations bring?

Do we have a, for example, mentoring program? But most people think a more senior role to an entry level role. I'm going to ask you to think outside the box here and turn that on its head. What if we have mentoring? Yes, that can be an aspect of it, but tech mentoring, what if we have, you know, skills mentoring, really, all across the board? So it's a give and take among these different generations, right? Find out who wants to be involved in that. You may have people who are passionate about sharing what they know who just haven't had an opportunity to share that, right, or an opportunity to showcase the skills. They may want to help facilitate that, so really, dig in, and find out. I'd say, ask your staff.



And then, as we think about it, again, another tactical thing, AI. The buzz word, I'm waiting for Merriam Webster to come out. AI is [the word of] the century.

I think when it comes to us in HR, specifically, it's, how do we leverage AI so that we can focus on that people-first strategy? That human and human resources, right? We know HR is not an administrative function.

I haven't touched a file in years, like, not paper pushers and we have not been for a long, long time. We have a seat at the table, or we should have a seat at the table, as an organization makes these strategic decisions, right?

That being said, how can we leverage AI to make those pieces that are administrative, that do eat up a lot of time, but that aren't necessarily pushing the mission forward? How did we do that, right?

Whether it's around policies, around interviews, around competencies, many, many ways, and how do we do it safely, right? So that we are safeguarding our information, our client's proprietary information, our employee's information. So, there's so much to consider when it comes to that. It is a very powerful tool, but how do we ensure we're using it in the right way?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Yeah, Laura is so skilled and equipped at integrating technology, the right technology at the right time.

The only thing I can add here is embrace new tools that take on those routine or rote HR tasks because we are far beyond the paper pushing that Laura just mentioned, right? There are so many platforms and tech solutions available for recruitment, for learning and development and rescaling, just to name a few HR functions.

So, seek support in identifying what's scalable for your organization, and I, just the other day, came across a statistic in a Gartner report, that stated that AI can potentially unlock up to 30% in productivity gains.

There's a lot to be said about integrating this new digital worker and how to effectively manage it alongside the natural, ingenuity, empathy and creativity of staff, just all the human components that Laura just mentioned.

When employed thoughtfully, organizations can absolutely experience productivity gains. And, in fact, we offer an AI-Driven Talent Management Framework for social impact organizations that helps to direct this effort and think through the talent management function.

**Chantel Simms:** Mhmm, I like that. I read an article the other day on AI where an organization was using it to personalize the onboarding experience. And you can have it speak to whatever voice you would like, right? It can use whatever voice. So, the voice it chose was a very soft-spoken voice that really personalized the onboarding experience for the new hire and also walked them through each part of enrolling in their benefits platform.

It was like their own personal assistant throughout the whole entire process. And I was just thinking how, right now, in some of our current organizations, how they're – we actually take the time to do that now and to be able to alleviate that time up to focus on more strategic and/or people-centered initiatives would be awesome.

So, I personally ... I'm looking forward to [digging] more deeper into AI, and seeing what it actually can do for us and being more efficient in my work products with it.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** We're rolling into this question, which, really stemmed nicely into my question slide, Lindsey, please.

What are some other innovative HR practices, maybe even tools, since we've been talking about it, you've seem to have made a significant impact on talent development within nonprofits over the years?

So, you've already started talking about this, some very specific tools. Are there any more that this council can share? I have a few, too, so I'll chime in in a little bit.

**Chantel Simms:** Yeah, I think Laura mentioned earlier what I was going to share, which I think you all probably know this is near and dear to my heart, but mentorship and coaching programs. Love them. I think they are so beneficial, pairing employees with mentors or coaches within the organization or external coaches.

We also offer that program here at Nonprofit HR, and then also, that can really help facilitate the employee's personal and professional growth. I think those programs are very beneficial. I've benefited from those, from coaching and mentorship through my career and still do, and so I think there are great. They also are really great with leadership development in succession planning as well.

Another, another thing that I have seen a practice is a collaborative performance management system.

Gone is the way of the formal performance management systems. Not doing those anymore. They are very collaborative now, shifting away from the top-down annual reviews, where we adapt in a more collaborative and continuous performance management systems and process.

We're emphasizing regular performance feedback, peer reviews, check-ins, creating more dynamic, responsive approaches in employee development and improvement conversation. I love this, like absolutely love this. I'm such an HR nerd, but I really love this new, innovative practice when it comes to development. I really am passionate about making sure that employees are aware of how they are performing and providing them with real feedback, right? Daily, regularly, so they can improve and be successful.

You all know how passionate I am about supporting the growth and development of others, so I love this new approach.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you so much, Chantel, and again, that goes to the multigeneration and the way we learn things, right? The way we learn and hear feedback, and the way we're getting insight. [It's] so critical to be able to be agile and flexible. I just have a few.

Compensation philosophy. I know that seems like real simple. Well, what do you mean? Well, having a very clear and distinct compensation philosophy, by the way, our Total Rewards department here can definitely help you with that, because not all comp philosophies are the same and if you don't have one, or not sure where they fall, how they fall, what's going on, that leads to the retention effort. Is it an equal pay for equal work? I have an organization that does just that. Everybody gets paid the same as a level one. Everybody gets paid the same because the work is expected to be paid the same, right? That's the same type of work. If you progress and grow, there is promotion opportunities and there's a very clear step, but it's equal pay for equal work. Doesn't matter how much background, experience, skills [or] knowledge you bring in, if you're producing the thing, you're being paid the same.

There's also the equitable pay kind of matrix, right? Meaning people adjust your experience, your services, skills, background above and beyond...

Sorry about that.

... beyond the expectation and the requirements that are listed in the job description so that's not the same type [of] comp philosophy.

So, understanding your culture and putting that out there is very important. Transparent career progression, understanding specifically how people move forward. Cloud-based tools, I think we just talked about that. And using people analytics, again, helps your HR team, people solutions team, be more agile and present.

Employer brands and tools. Social media has absolutely taken over, everybody's on it, but how you control and create the narrative and the culture you want out there so that staff, we're looking for, whatever culture you are willing to give and provide, is going to be wanting to work for you. Again, that's going to help with your recruitment and retention.

Leadership coaching open to all eligible staff. So, a lot of times if it's only for the executives were for senior leader. But having and creating an opportunity for all level staff with some specific goals and objectives that are agreed upon by both groups really shows the investment to those individuals. And I'm just going to say one last one. I have a whole list of them.

One last one: Gamifying health care and mental health.

You know, I don't know about you, but we have these watches. I want to close those circles, right? At the end of the day, I want to close whatever circles are out there, but gamifying that health plan as preventative competition, having opportunities to gain points and win prizes or cash/gift certificates. Staff engaged in their health helps reduce claims, [and helps] people show up and a better space. [Go ahead and set up some teams], so there's like some fun, collaborative effort. I know Chantel mentioned that earlier about really being creative in the way we do things.

I'm going to stop because I am telling you, I can go on forever, and ever, and ever, and then some in this space.

**Laura Laney:** May I add something to what you Chantal said?

I mean, listening to the amazing ideas you both have shared, I agree wholeheartedly, but the most impact – the single most impactful, innovative HR practice – that I've seen have the biggest effect on my clients has been around performance feedback.

Over the past several years, there's been a trend, we're all probably, if you've been working more than three years, you're familiar with once a year, annual review, once a year. But what we know from the data, what our staff want, is continual, ongoing feedback, and so for organizations who have gotten away from that, I'm not saying, without any structure at all, because some organizations have gone too far. And when there's no expectation, suddenly people aren't getting anything, right? But whether it's quarterly, or it's an expectation that [at] regular check-ins, you're providing that feedback.

The responsiveness from the staff – it's like night and day.

So, I would say, you know, if there's one takeaway from an innovative HR practice, think about what's your performance management system look like right now? Because if it is the once a year, we have a formal conversation, it is not working. It is not optimizing the talent that you have, and I would encourage you to explore. Again, not only what do they want, but what can we do? And, yes, it's going to require training. Managers need to learn how to have hard conversations, and that's OK. We also want employees to learn how to at our conversations, right? We want – hard doesn't mean bad.

We want our staff to be empowered to have those discussions, but if there's one thing that is going to make a difference, think about your performance management process.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Love it.

**Chantel Simms:** Agree, Laura, love that.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Absolutely. All right, Lindsey, let's move to the next question. I feel like they just all build upon each other.

Looking further ahead, what strategic action should nonprofits consider taking to ensure effective people management and data-driven decision making becomes a driving force in their organization?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Yeah, you're right. Our questions have really built on each other and the responses to those. Immediately what was starting to come to mind was just the need to remain human-centric.

We have, as humans, a habit of overanalyzing people in ways that cross boundaries and are unnecessary. Keeping the human in mind just means respecting the individual for who they are. And if you are utilizing a regular performance feedback culture, right? If you're cultivating that kind of culture, you have already given half the tools that a person needs to be successful.

So, in terms of innovation, some of it is just practically thinking about: You have humans behind this work, so respect them as such. Whether you're developing your talent management strategy, integrating AI as a digital worker, establishing just more integrated internal teams. So reducing those silos and bringing teams together regularly on projects.

The most important asset, which is staff, has got to be the foremost thought. They're human. In the same way that an organization cultivates its funder relationships, let's say. The same has to be done with respect to relationships with and among staff. In every interaction, business interaction, you're dealing with a human on the other end. I can't overemphasize this enough.

If we are talking about innovative HR practices, it is really just taking a step back at having all the data, evaluating all the data, utilizing all the tools and everything. It's really just taking a step back and seeing how it's landing on that individual.

So, even if it's not a formal survey of your culture, if it's just keeping the lines of feedback and communication open, so you know immediately whether you're hitting the mark on effective people management or not, make sure you are checking, have some checkpoints in place, to know whether you're hitting the mark or not. That's a very, kind of, holistic view I shared on just people management and innovative HR practices. But I think that I, as an HR practitioner myself, have to check myself when I start thinking about overprocessing or overanalyzing something, we really have to keep the human in mind.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Very well thought, Samantha, thank you so much. Was there anything, [or did] anybody else wanted to jump in?

No? OK, we have one last question that we had planned for, and then we're going to move into Q & A. Lindsey, could you move to the next slide?

How can nonprofit ensure that their people management practices are not just reacting to changes in the workforce landscape but are actively shaping their future?

**Chantel Simms:** I can jump in here Anne, and start off by saying, I think it's important to keep a forward-thinking approach in mind when you think about this. Ensure that you are creating mechanisms for employees to contribute their ideas and feedbacks on organizational practices, the culture and the future direction, right, of the organization.

I would also say, identifying and nurturing future leaders within the organization through the mentorship programs that we mentioned earlier. Leadership training [and] succession planning is very important. Also, encouraging leadership that is inclusive, adaptive and capable of navigating through change because change is inevitable, it's going to happen whether we want it to or not. And so, we need to be prepared for it.

And then lastly, I'll add the importance of cultivating an organizational culture that values and encourages continuous learning and adaptability. And then also, just quickly, ensuring that we are investing in training and development programs for our employees. It's so important as well.

**Laura Laney:** May I add something to that?

Chantel, every example you shared, spot on. Yes. The one thing I want to go back to is how Samantha so eloquently spoke about strategy.

I'm not, I'm not nearly as eloquent when it comes to strategy, but as far as I'm concerned, and I'm may be biased, I am an HR practitioner, there is no organizational strategy without talent strategy, without talent management, people management. So, if you ensure that that is a part of the discussion, whenever you are setting strategy, then it should lead you to thinking ahead. It is not to be an afterthought because without our people, we can't do anything.

So I would say, again, there's no organization strategy without our people strategy, and allow that to really carry and drive the steps that you take to ensure you are able to be proactive instead of reactive in this climate.

**Chantel Simms:** Mmhmm, exactly. Did we hear the other day in conversation, Samantha, I believe, culture eats strategy?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** For breakfast.

**Chantel Simms:** Yes. Absolutely true.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Maybe for lunch and dinner at this point. Thank you so much for all the insight. Is there anything that anybody else wanted to add? So many, I will tell you, so many wonderful nuggets, I hope those who are on this webinar was able to take at least, at least, one or two back to [your] organization and try to figure out how it would best work in your culture.

But I know we have some questions that popped up in [the] chat, so I think we're going to move to that base right now.

**Lindsey Otto:** Hi Anne, yes. We did have some questions coming in from our audience. Many questions based on our discussion today. Thank you so much for everything.

So, we're now in our Q&A portion of the event. And for our attendees, if there are any questions that you have, please type them into the questions box of the control pane in your GoToWebinar panel, the team will get to as many questions as we can in this time that we have remaining. So let's go ahead and get started.

This question is: What are your recommendations for how to lead people strategy when you are head of HR but not on the executive team?

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Mhm, that's tough, and unfortunately not uncommon.

I would ask, what are the channels used to communicate anything around the HR function?

Whether they're people, who is your person on the executive leadership team, if you will? What are the communication channels used to connect with the executive leadership team? Continuing to optimize those channels, such that you are being open and transparent about what's needed, what you're seeing in terms of trends and people practices, but making sure also that you're speaking the language of the executive team because HR practitioners and you know, I'm not going to bash my people here, right. I think in every function, in every profession, we can do a better job of learning the vernacular, the language, of other functions to best translate what we're trying to convey.

As HR practitioners, we have to continue to speak operationally and with the strategic mindset of the entire organization. And then, right when do you have throwing that talent management piece that aligns just perfectly with what that team, that executive team, is prioritizing. We can't be talking about one thing as it relates to people management, if it does not align with the priority of the organization.

The other challenge is your organization may not be prioritizing talent management and that is another issue altogether, right?

There's lots to be said about leadership that does not prioritize its people. But if we're just talking about not having the space or the seat at that table, we need to make sure we are at least leveraging what communication channels and people [that] do exist and marrying our language with that of the executive teams.



**Laura Laney:** Samantha, if I could jump up and down right now and clap and do a cartwheel, I would because you are so spot on with making sure we're speaking the right language. Sometimes people, they think of HR, they don't think data. But so much, in fact, the bulk of our work is data, it's quantifiable, so it's not just "Oh, need this. Here's why: if we lose XYZ people, this is how this impacts our bottom line." This is what it's going to cost to recruit, to hire, to fill and then for them to get up to speed and be a contributing employee, right?

So, make it, it has to connect to the broader, the focus, but don't be afraid of data. Use it. Drive the point home, because when we start talking money, suddenly everyone wants to listen as they should, right? So leverage that.

**Chantel Simms:** Yeah, exactly, right. You hit it right on the head, Samantha and Laura. And I was going to add that as well, Laura, to just ensure that that they are sharing the justification behind, the initiative, the decision or whatever, that they would like to bring forth, because that's so important to connect the dots.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** And I know Lindsey's got another question, so I'm going to give her the opportunity to ask it of us.

**Lindsey Otto:** Thank you, Anne and everyone, for your responses.

Here's the next question: Due to the nature of our organization, we serve and work with individuals with a lot of trauma. How do you suggest we support our team members so they can serve our guests without projecting their own trauma onto the guest?

**Laura Laney:** Me, again.

So, I've worked with several organizations, and continue to work with several organizations who, the mission is... They're intense. Everything from child trafficking to domestic violence. I mean, it's all over the board. And very often people who work at the organization may experience secondhand trauma, if they haven't also experienced it first hand themselves. And what is crucial at these organizations is continually building a foundation of trust.

I cannot overstate that, but really leaning into the resources available to staff and acknowledging this work is hard. And you know, we may need to structure, it may need to look different from another organization because the individuals working at these organizations will absolutely drive themselves into the ground. This work is not easy and the mental, physical, emotional toll that it takes is not equal.

And so, as an organization, we have to make sure whether that is, hey, you know, getting creative with our benefits. Do we contract with a therapist who comes on site? Do we have paid time that they can go? You know, really get creative, but acknowledge that secondhand trauma is very real and we have to prioritize. How do we care for our staff, so that we can then care for the community that we support?

**Chantel Simms:** Right, exactly, Laura, hit, again, hit the nail right on the head. I was going to add, as well, I too work with many clients that [are] also in those same areas as well, and they have some creative benefits that they implement [with] their employees as well as leaders within the organization, and mental health programs and mental health support is so important.

And also, some of them have... they take mental health weeks and days off to allow their employees that break in time they need to decompress and come back to work refreshed, [with] a fresh mind, et cetera. It is just so important. So, the same benefits and resources that you are, you are providing to your employees and/or your mission, you also want to extend to your leadership staff, as well.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** All right, I think we have one last one before we have to start closing out. So, Lindsey, do you want to share that last question that came through the chat?

**Lindsey Otto:** Yes, Anne. Thanks, everyone.

This question is: I love asking our team members what they want. However, we don't have a lot of participation. How do you suggest increasing participation for pulse surveys throughout the year?

**Laura Laney:** Is it fair to answer a question with a question? My question would be tell me more about the culture, talk to me, so I hand it over to my fellow panelists. That's where I would start ... Let's learn more as to why maybe people aren't responding or aren't engaging.

**Chantel Simms:** I think I've seen some clients offer incentives for completing those in the past – gift cards, a variety of different thing – but I've seen that in the past. Have you all seen that? Where your clients offer incentives for completing their surveys?

I think that's one option that can be extended.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** I've seen the team approach because a lot of times the surveys are anonymous, so they've done a team approach where it was like, after we hit 70%, we'll put the whole staff team into this drawing to win a gift card, so that way, you're not trying to [reveal] those who participate to those who get the gift card.

Right, but I've had that same question with Laura. You know, why [isn't] there more participation? And I had a whole list of other questions to go in there with, is it because we weren't listening and we didn't ... they were just ... all this feedback was just going into this feedback hole and nobody knew what was going on? I mean, I have lots and lots of other questions about that.

But I think there are ways that you can backtrack a little, get those surveys, deliver on some of the things that you're hearing [and] then relaunch it. Sometimes it's the lack of movement, maybe, or lack of acknowledgement that [this] feedback, this insight, that staff are providing, it's actually — something is being done about it. If you ask for the sake of asking and nothing gets done, actually, the pulse survey is the worst thing to do because it doesn't provide a safe space for feedback. I'm going to hear what you have to say and do nothing about is ultimately what is being said, which I'm maybe saying it a little too harsh.

**Chantel Simms:** No, absolutely true, Anne.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** Yeah. I think getting to the basis of why ... you're not getting the responses you need is important before moving forward. I think that a refresh of your intention behind asking some of the questions is a conversation that should be had among HR, among leadership, perhaps a focus group of staff, but getting back to the basics of why are we doing this, what are we after?

And that's one of those areas of, as mentioned before, the three Vs, where with some of your questions, you really need some insights sharing ahead whether you need a vote, a voice or a view. And trying to get practically, what do you need out of this ask? It's just being transparent in the communication. We all, I can see in our team members, have questions about organizational trust, culture of trust, communication, like there are lots of other climate-type questions we might have. But get back to the basics of why we're even doing this.

People are motivated in different ways, intrinsically or extrinsically, so I think in terms of incentives, that's just based on culture, an individual, but get back to the basics of the why.

**Lindsey Otto:** Wonderful, thank you all so much for sharing that, and that's all the time we're going to have for Q&A today. Thank you to all of our attendees for participating.

## Strategic HR Leadership in 2024: Navigating Talent Dynamics for the Future of Work

For those who've submitted questions, we will connect with our team after this event to get you answers, if we didn't give you an answer here on the presentation. I want to hand it all back over to you, just to share any of your final thoughts that you have to share with our audience today from all of our panelists here.

**Laura Laney:** Me! I'll go. I think it's important to acknowledge the magnitude of this work, talent management. It is big, and it is dealing with real people, and it can be heavy, and seem impossible. But what I would encourage each of you to do is take it one step at a time, one day at a time.

There are so many resources available, we're available, but truthfully, there are supports out there and just recognize you can't do it all at once. And with this work, for example, if there needs to be a culture change, this is 9, 12, 16 months of work. This isn't something any one person can accomplish in three months, so keep it in perspective.

This is important work, but it is long, the long-term goal here.

**Chantel Simms:** I'll go next. I'd like to leave you with, just thinking about the importance of proactivity and adaptability. And, as nonprofits, because of your mission-driven nature, you are positioned to lead by example in creating a future that is inclusive, flexible and aligned with values that appeal to many in today's workforce. So don't be afraid of that.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** I'll go. I would ditto everything that's being said and future, for Samantha. But be present where you're at and acknowledge where you're at. And sometimes we want to get somewhere, but understand where you want to go and does it make sense for your organization? This is the long game. This really is. Taking that time to really strategize [and] plan out. And when I say strategize, we're not talking about a big cumbersome – what is the ultimate goal? What is the North Star? [Where] is it you want to go? What baby steps can you take to get moving one step closer? That's what I'd like to leave you all with.

**Samantha Justice Kelley:** All great points.

In the context of this conversation, [stay] innovative as HR practitioners, pay attention to the external environment and the impact it has on your particular organization. The environmental factors, if we haven't recognized the significance of the impact to the nonprofit sector as a whole, and then certainly the missions that you are serving in the last four years, [you] really got to pay attention, particularly with this upcoming political election.

There are lots of environmental factors, we could cover probably in another webinar, but as an HR practitioner, being conscious of what's coming down the pike for your organization and translating that into people needs is always going to be key.

I'm forever grateful to this group of team members. I told you all there was brilliance here. Thank you! I love feeding off of your energy. I really, really enjoyed this time with you.

**Chantel Simms:** Thank you, everyone.

**Laura Laney:** Thank you.

**Anne Koo Thornquist:** Thank you.

**Lindsey Otto:** Thank you to everyone who attended today's webinar. We hope you found it to be valuable. Thank you again to our presenters for leading today's incredibly dynamic discussion.

There are ... more webinars coming your way in 2024. Be sure to check out our events at [nonprofithr.com/events](https://nonprofithr.com/events). Also, please be sure to complete [the pop-up] once the webcast has ended. Your comments help us with our planning, and it can inform the topics that we cover in the future as well.

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Thank you, everyone, and have a wonderful rest of your day.