

Episode 375: CHRO Series – What Skills and Experience Do You Believe Are Absolute Requirements for a CHRO Role?

Part 2



Noelle Burke: [00:00:00.09] When I think about the requirements and where people may want to develop skills, I think firstly it's talent, leadership overall and strategic business partnership, which for me means being able to understand the business. Think like a business leader and connect the dots for what the people, practices and programs are needed in order to support the mission and objectives and help drive success.

Intro: [00:00:30.33] Welcome to the Workology Podcast, a podcast for the disruptive workplace leader. Join host Jessica Miller-Merrell, founder of Workology.com as she sits down and gets to the bottom of trends, tools, and case studies for the business leader, HR, and recruiting professional who is tired of the status quo. Now here's Jessica with this episode of Workology.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:00:56.45] Welcome, welcome. Welcome to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE the HR Exam. These are personal development courses for HR leaders and you can learn more at Learn.Workology.com. This podcast is part of a series on the Workology Podcast focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Chief Human Resource Officer or CHRO. The CHRO is sometimes called the VP of People or the Chief People officer, and it's an executive or C-level role that deals with managing human resources as well as with organizational development and implementing policies of change to improve the overall efficiency of the company. The CHRO series on this podcast is powered by HR Benchmark Survey. I need your insights as an HR leader. Take the survey at HRBenchmarkSurvey.com. One of the reasons I have wanted to do this podcast and why I continue doing the CHRO series is because there is so much mystery around the CHRO role. I don't know why other than there are so many different moving parts and bits and pieces. I also want aspiring CHROs to know the skills and experiences they need to promote into a future CHRO role, along with hearing from senior HR leaders how they are partnering and collaborating with their executive peers. These are just things that you don't hear about at a conference or in a panel conversation because we've talked to CHROs from all types of organizations, their answers are very varied and extremely insightful. Before we get to that, I want to hear from you. Text "PODCAST," "PODCAST" to 512-548-3005. That's "PODCAST" to 512-548-3005. You can ask me questions, leave comments, give me feedback, make suggestions for future guests. You can do that by texting this number. It is my community text number and I'm going to read it, but I want to hear from you.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:02:59.03] In this podcast episode, we are listening to excerpts from some of my best interviews on the Workology Podcast and the CHRO series. So I am talking to CHROs, Vice Presidents of People and Culture on the skills and experiences that they believe are the absolute requirements for the CHRO role. Especially thinking about those who are just starting out. So if that sounds like you listen up

because we have a great podcast for you. In this podcast, I am talking to Noelle Burk. She's the Chief People Officer at ESW. Sung Hae Kim, she is a Fractional Chief People Officer. And John Reeves Whitaker. He's a Chief HR Officer at MPH. And last but not least, Dona Costa. She's the Chief People Officer at Gordon Ramsay North America. I'm hungry already. Let's get started. Our first excerpt comes from Noelle Burke. She's the Chief People officer at ESW. Noelle is based in ESW's Dublin headquarters and leads the company's cultural evolution and people strategy. She has more than 20 years of experience in senior management at multinational corporations, and she sits on the Multiple Sclerosis Ireland Board. She's also a governing board member for the Technological University of Dublin and a key contributor to the advisory board for Lift Ireland.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:04:15.72] Another thing I wanted to ask you about, because everybody's answer is different, but given your expertise, your experience in sales and your multinational HR experience. What skills and experiences do you believe are absolute requirements for somebody stepping into a CHRO role? Maybe thinking about somebody who is just starting out or they've got a few years and maybe they kind of see or starting to create a career path towards that Chief People Officer.

Noelle Burke: [00:04:48.26] Yeah. So look, I think, you know, I've been fairly consistent in this over the last few years. I think it took me a number of years to get this kind of clear in my own mind, but look, commercial acumen I've talked to. So I think understanding the business that you're serving is really important, to understand the business that you're supporting, if you want to add value is hugely important. So commercial acumen is number one, customer focus is number two, for definite. Looking for ways to, to make, as I said, add valuable contributions to your customers. Courage, I think, is really important. I think the role of HR is to challenge the status quo if it leads to a better outcome. You know, being willing to stick your neck out on the line when others won't be brave enough to do so. So for me, it comes back to my magic three Cs: Commercial acumen, Customer focus and Courage.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:05:32.63] I like that and I do think that we have to be really courageous to be in, in HR because, number one, so many people are unfamiliar with what we do as strategic HR leaders. But also sometimes even if you have that business acumen, it, it can be a challenge to make change or bring forth new initiatives at an organization.

Noelle Burke: [00:05:56.33] Absolutely. Yeah, totally agree.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:05:58.52] Our next excerpt comes from Sung Hae Kim. She is a Fractional Chief People Officer. Sung Hae has over 20 years of experience helping multinational organizations address their toughest challenges. Her career is focused on people, strategy, talent development and organizational transformation. She holds a doctoral degree in human and organizational learning, a master's degree in IL psychology and a Bachelor's Degree in psychology. You're going to love this interview.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:06:25.70] What skills and experience do you believe are absolute requirements for a CHRO role, especially thinking about those just starting in the industry? And I'm really excited to hear your point of view here because you do have a different educational background than most Chief People Officers.

Sung Hae Kim: [00:06:42.41] Yeah, and that's an interesting question because when I was starting out, I never anticipated or dreamt of being in a Head of People or Chief People Officer role. My initial thought was to do consulting, teaching, but more research-based. So as you ask that question, I'm like, I didn't actually plan it out, but when I, when I think about the requirements and where people may want to develop skills, I think firstly it's talent, leadership overall and strategic business partnership, which for me means being able to understand the business. Think like a business leader and connect the dots for what the people practice is and programs are needed in order to support the mission and objectives and help drive success. Then it's having a solid understanding of the full spectrum of the people function across the entire employee life cycle and also the organizational life cycle. And then I would say deep expertise in at least two functional areas, like a lot of us may be generalists, but I think it's important to really deeply understand two functional areas. For me that has become learning and development. And then kind of on the opposite spectrum is compensation. Third, I would say, is strong people management skills. You're looked at for teaching others people management. And so you yourself having really strong, solid people management skills specifically also the ability to lead other senior leaders at that level. So going from a manager to the manager of managers. Professionalism and integrity, I think it goes without saying, but it's this you are seen as the person that needs to have high, unwavering ethical standards. And the last thing I'll say is thick skin. You can often be the complaint department, so you have to have really, really thick skin.

Break: [00:08:57.66] Let's take a reset. This is Jessica Miller-Merrell and you're listening to the Workology Podcast sponsored by Upskill HR and ACE the HR Exam. We're sharing some of the best responses from podcast guests on the skills and experiences they believe are absolute requirements for that Chief HR-level role. The CHRO podcast series, which this podcast is a part of, is powered by HR Benchmark Survey. Visit HRBenchmarkSurvey.com to take our survey. And last but not least, I want to hear from you. Text me at 512-548-3005. You need to put the word "PODCAST" when you text 512-548-3005. This is me. Ask me questions, leave comments, make suggestions. Feedback is a gift. I am here to receive. If you have an idea or suggestion, I want to hear it. This is my community text number and I want to hear from you.

Break: [00:09:50.83] Benchmarking and data is crucial to HR leaders. Workology's HR Benchmark Survey is an always-on survey, and just by taking the survey at HRBenchmarkSurvey.com, you're signing up to get comprehensive quarterly results, white papers, and other research from the survey right to your inbox. It takes 10 minutes or less to complete. Visit HRBenchmarkSurvey.com.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:10:17.64] Our next interview is with a friend of mine, John Reeves Whitaker. He is the Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer at National Partners in Healthcare, also known as NPH. He has more than 20+ years in HR. John has worked throughout the spectrum of health care, and he's worked for companies like CVS Caremark, Baylor Scott & White, Bausch & Lomb, Genentech, DentalOne Partners and Sage Dental Management, all before joining NPH in June of 2020.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:10:47.20] So, along those lines, I wanted to ask you thinking about, like, pandemic and now hopefully post-pandemic, what skills and experiences do you believe are absolute requirements for somebody moving into a Chief Human Resources Officer role? Thinking about maybe somebody who is really green, they're just starting out like you and I were 20 years ago.

John Reeves Whitaker: [00:11:13.49] I would have said this before the pandemic to communication. I think you have to be your communication skills, but since then I think that times ten, as far as your communication, I think that, the, probably, the whole country has gone through this, this pretty traumatic time where we're dealing with some real serious issues and then not sure if we're getting all the information right. We're not sure if we're getting the right information or there's disinformation or misinformation or conflicting information. And, you know, you as the HR leader at your company, you have to be a supplement to that communication because your people are still concerned about the same things that that everybody was. They just need to hear it from a source of somebody who's calm and can just sort of lay it out for you can be a curator almost. We got this information. You've probably noticed this. I mean, throw it out, share an article. Many of you saw this, you had questions about this. Let's talk about how that might impact your role here or if it does. Because, you know, the we've seen all these studies about mental health, the real crisis that we're going through right now with mental health. I have some friends in different roles, like a sleep expert, or, sleep deprivation is a national emergency. Our mental health is a national emergency. You have suicide rates that are climbing. I mean, these are all real fun topics. But the fact is you have all these people feeling all this angst and when we got separated and we're working remote on top of that, HR, we have to go into people's homes now and comfort them and still try to build some sort of engagement with them. Because whether we see them every day or not, they're still dealing with some of these big problems. So your communication skills have to be top notch, I would say, first and foremost.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:13:05.07] Our final interview excerpt is with Dona Costa. She's the Chief People Officer at Gordon Ramsay North America. Gordon Ramsay North America comprises the rapidly growing North American restaurant business of acclaimed chef, restaurateur, TV personality and author Gordon Ramsay. Dona has been in HR leadership roles for more than 20 years in the restaurant, hospitality and food service industries, she began her career in the restaurant business. In April of 2021, Donna was named one of the top 100 diversity officers by the National Diversity Council.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:13:39.81] As you think about your progression from dishwasher into human resources and now into the Chief People Officer role, what skills and experiences do you believe are absolute requirements for a Chief People Officer? Especially maybe thinking about people who are just starting out in the industry.

Dona Costa: [00:13:57.48] So much comes to mind. For me what I feel is important it's understanding the operations. In order to partner with operations. I think it's really important that you understand what it is that the operations team is going through, and that starts from the hourly team members up to management and even now partnering with the SVP of operations or the Chief Operating Officer, it's knowing what their role entails. I think, I think that, for me, is the foundation, is understanding operations, speaking the language,

knowing what they're going through and knowing what their challenges are so that I can be the best partner possible. I also think it requires flexibility and openness. I know that one thing that I preach to my team is we will be seen as supportive. We will be seen as, while we have to keep everything in compliance, we'll be seen as Yes, tell me what you need and how I can support you. I think coming from a, I think, I think that servant leadership is used an awful lot. But I do think it's like that. It's you have to have that servant mentality of, I'm here to serve you, whether it's the hourly team members in the restaurant or the senior leadership. And how can I best serve you? What is it that you need? So just an openness, flexibility, and then understanding operations. I think those have been the top things that have been most important in my role.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:15:28.23] I love that you said operations. I feel like in the restaurant industry, especially HR leaders are heavy into like the business operations, retail also, and hospitality. And it's not something in my experience that a lot of HR leaders outside of those industries often have the experience with reviewing panels and, and being involved in the day-to-day of the business.

Jessica Miller-Merrell: [00:15:52.71] It's so interesting to hear the different answers we get from guests, as maybe you've listened in this series, the CHRO series on the Workology Podcast. I love it. HR is special. We are, it is such a requirement, it's an essential resource for highly performing businesses. So if you are planning on stepping into that CHRO-level role, having different experiences and skills are important and hearing from our CHROs who have years of experience in the industry can be incredibly helpful, I've found. Especially for you, whether you are stepping into a new role in HR or you are putting together a plan to move up along the ranks. This podcast series is powered by our HR development courses at Workology called ACE the HR Exam at Upskill HR. You can go to Learn.Workology.com to learn more. Now I also want to hear from you. If you have a suggestion idea, general feedback, specific feedback, any and all, give me a text. Text "PODCAST" to 512-548-3005. You can ask questions, leave comments, and make suggestions for me. This is my community text number. It is really me, I promise. And I want to hear from you. Thank you for joining the Workology Podcast sponsored by HR Benchmark Survey. This podcast is for the disruptive workplace leader who is tired of the status quo. I'm tired of it and I'm going to change it one person at a time. My name is Jessica Miller.-Merrell. Until next time you can visit Workology.com to listen to all our previous Workology Podcast episodes.