

Transcription - Karan Rhodes Part 1

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn even though she's still not with us, she will be very soon, and this is Inside Exec. Today, we have a guest with us, and that is Karen Ferrell-Rhodes. Karen's going to talk to us about leadership, particularly, but we're going to learn some things along the way about what our capability is and how we can optimize that for ourselves. So, welcome, Karen. Good to have you.

Thank you. Thank you for having me. I am super excited to talk to someone on the other side of the globe.

There you go. Karen, I will say, is a self-confessed Georgia peach. So, we're going to let her talk with her beautiful accent and enjoy that for the next little while that we're talking together. Let me first of all give you an introduction to Karen. Karen is an organizational strategist who is obsessed with up-leveling leadership capability and optimizing workforces to do their best work

after years of witnessing the dark side of chaos and trauma caused by bad leadership within organizations. She ditched her comfy job as a corporate HR executive at Microsoft to commission a research study to uncover the critical success factors of over 10,000 high-performing leaders. From her data, Karen was able to pinpoint the top tactics which accelerated their rise to the pinnacle of success that few others achieved. We're going to talk to Karen about her company, which is called Shockingly Different Leadership. I love it. And about the things that the research showed her as well as perhaps some hints as to the issues that we might find coming to the fore, given that we're in a different kind of workforce now to what we might have been five years ago.

So, Karen, is there anything else that you'd like to give us as background before we go into the questions?

I think it's spot on. I was just saying the kind of uber view is that I consider myself and my team really experts on the people side of business, kind of the strategic people side. You know, throughout my career, I've found that there have been numerous core issues that go on the people side of business, but two that really stood out that I'm really passionate about helping to address. One, as you mentioned, is about leaders and making sure they're skilled at a level that is positively impacting their sliver of the world, if you will. And then the second is around human resources and making sure that HR functions are resourced and available and have the right skills to be able to take care of the very people that are responsible for helping organizations succeed. But the rest, I think you covered it perfectly, beautiful.

Okay, so just in that very brief overview, I know that there are people who are based in the HR field that struggle constantly because of perhaps the industry they're in and I know Fulyana and I were both in the construction industry for a long time before we moved into other industries. And so within the construction industry particularly, HR was not something that was important to them. Did you find that there were sectors of business that were not interested in HR generally, like at a very broad level?

Oh, absolutely. It's definitely mentioned because I have a very close friend who's an HR director in a construction company and she has to fight for every second of attention to gather from the leaders and the staff. So I totally empathize through her and the story she tells of what you had to get through. There are some sectors or industries that are a little bit more advanced and having HR as a chief business partner, in my opinion, I learned more about that when

I founded the firm and we have over 250 consultants that work in the HR leadership area.

Most of my background had been in tech, tech engineering and healthcare. All of those industry sectors for me really seemed to appreciate HR as a business partner. Specifically technology. They were a little bit ahead of the game, but I think they had to because the technology was changing at a nanosecond and they needed to have the talent and the skills and the people to be able to compete in that evergreen industry. There are other industries that, similar to construction, are having to fight for attention and it's usually based on the industry and sometimes even the size of organizations as well. A lot of the mid-size and smaller-size organizations don't even have a dedicated HR person. It might be someone that got it under their umbrella, but you're right, there are a lot of industries that still don't have the, in my opinion, the right appreciation for the power that a skilled HR strategist can do.

Do you think then that perhaps some of that gray area where an organization knows that they need to focus on something to make them better, but that they don't have the structure, let's say, or the understanding of their structure to know where to sit it, that they bundle HR in with something else that they don't understand. And so we get the HR in with quality management or HR in with finance.

Or legal. And we talk a little bit about that, but yeah.

So is there a way for organizations, if we look at it from the organizational point of view, is there a way for organizations to understand that it needs to be a separate issue, not bundled in with someone else?

I agree. Yes. I definitely think it is needed, but I think it needs to be a separate rhythm of the business for those who may not be as astute of knowing what a great partner the HR function could be. You could definitely leverage third parties, you know, such as Gallup or some workplace think tanks to, you know, do webinars and informational sessions to help them better understand how if they took a more strategic look at the people function, how it really can truly

help the bottom line. But I think it's an educational and awareness piece that needs to be done before they move to implementation, because to your point, Kim, when they are a desperate, they just think, I need to do something with the talent that we're working with. They don't know where to start. And sometimes you're, you know, picking yourself, you know, in the need when you do something wrong and it's not informed and it's not directly tied to the business, there's not that authentic belief or tied by your staff, by the leaders, and ultimately people are not rallying around it, because they don't understand the value.

So is there a case then for people, those organizations to go external to look at something

like a consultancy and just to say, okay, come in and then again, we're talking in the podcast with people who are in that situation as an organization. So okay, they're going to take our advice, they're going to go to a consultant, how often do they have this extra resource come in? And what do they do in the meantime in between, you know, when they have an issue?

Yeah, that's a great, great question. I think I would recommend that they have a, someone like myself or strategic partner at a director level or above, to become on call that they could reach out to or they could partner with at least for a few months to have conversations to better understand what is possible. But that person needs to be someone that is willing to get in there, understand their business, understand the dynamics of their culture, understand their business parties, and just put a people enablement spin to their normal discussions that they're having as they talk in staff meetings and make decisions. And once you have a few months of that, honestly, then both parties can probably get a good feel on whether they're the right match or to what extent.

In that sense and from your own experience, would you think it would be better to have someone who has worked with other organizations in your industry or do you go for someone who's never been in this industry before?

Now you're going to hate these two words, but I'll say it depends. (That's fine.) There are instances, as you can imagine, like in the oil and gas industry, where I do think it's helpful for someone to have at least some exposure or understanding about how that industry works because there's some dynamics definitely in play that will affect recommendations of how you want to handle the organization as a whole. There are other industries where you just don't have to have that particular expertise. As a HR person, you just have to have the willingness to dig in and start learning very quickly about it. So it just depends upon what you find out once you go in and talk and start discussions with those leaders of that entity.

And again, from the organizational point of view, what works for you when you go in as a consultant? What would you like them to have done as background to give you an idea of what their issues are?

Well, you know what? I don't ask for issues upfront. (Okay.) What I negotiate with all of them and one of the things that we love to do at Shockingly Different is we say, we'd love for you to give us as much background material that you have, like company reports or org charts and summaries of the year review, whatever it is that they do to look at the entire business as a whole. We then do our own research on the industry as well, to see what reports are out there, what trends are out there. And then we ask them because we try to co-create the experience with them. We don't comment with a playbook. I mean, we have a ton of resources and things that we can use based on what ends up being the priority, but we go in with a clean slate and say, okay, let us get in there, let us observe, let us talk to a few people, leaders, focus groups of employees, let us fill around for a little bit. And it doesn't take five years to do that, right? A couple weeks. You can get a good initial picture. And then once we do that, then we have a more strategic conversation about where are the highest opportunities for impact that will really make a difference. And we brainstorm

with them. And then we come up at the end of our discovery and evaluation process with a strategic plan on what to address initially and then what we need to address in a more longer term and what that end result would look like. And we come to agreement with that and then that's when we start putting things in play to help the organization.

Okay. That gives us a good introduction to Karen and to her topic. Join us for part two, where we start to look at leadership and your leadership brand. But for now, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.