

Season 4 | Episode 4

Live from HR Tech: Ben Eubanks on What Makes a Great Manager



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Rob Parsons:

Welcome to season four of Paychex PULSE, an HR Podcast, where HR professionals can find great insights on today's top issues and be inspired to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. Hi, everybody. Rob Parsons here live from the floor of HR Tech 2022. Welcome to season four of the Paychex PULSE Podcast, and I'm joined again today by Ben Eubanks from Lighthouse Research and Advisory. Chief Research Scientist, he's got a lot of great insights, and he's going to give us some great thoughts around the analyst's point of view of what's happening here at HR Tech today. So, Ben, welcome to the podcast, great to have you back.

Ben Eubanks:

Glad to be with you. Absolutely. Always a good conversation.

Rob Parsons:

Great to be doing it in person.

Ben Eubanks:

How cool is that?

Rob Parsons:

I know. I very much appreciate that.

Ben Eubanks:

Absolutely. Well, I'll give you some ideas and you can tell me at the end if they're great or not, is that fair?

Rob Parsons:

Okay, that's fair.

Ben Eubanks:

You can rate me.

Rob Parsons:

All right, so let's start with just overall the conference, what you're seeing, what do you find interesting?

Ben Eubanks:

We could spend a long time just diving into that, so one of the things that I'm most intrigued by in a lot of conversations with employers, both here and on the way here, as well as some of the vendors that I've seen here, one of the things that I'm most interested in is how managers fit in this bigger picture of HR. Are we enabling them? Are we making them part of this team, this thing we're trying to accomplish, or is it this, we're butting heads? What other work is HR giving me today? That kind of relationship is often strained. Some of the things I'm most excited by are the companies who are saying, "This isn't about fighting each other, it's about fighting together for a better future for our employees, a better outcome for our workforce, all those kind of things.

Ben Eubanks:

Some of those companies are doing it in different ways, whether it's with training, whether it's with we're going to give you tools right in the flow of work so you can make it really easy to approve your people's time off or whatever else. All those kinds of things, it seems like little stuff, but if we can take the burden off of those managers so they can focus on getting the work done, making sure their team is taken care of, that's going to create all kinds of great outcomes for that employer and for the people they're serving. That excites me on a whole lot of levels, because I meet people every day that say, "I've never had all those great leaders." If we can give them some more time back, they can start developing those skills, honing that to be a better leader for their people.

Rob Parsons:

I love where you went there. I've been thinking a lot about employee experience and managers are part of that.

Ben Eubanks:

Yes.

Rob Parsons:

What's the manager's experience? How are we going to help them better manage people and not just work? I really like that you're there, because employee experience is broad and managers are part of that.

Ben Eubanks:

Yes, absolutely. One of the challenges is managers are often rated, their performance is focused on the results of their team or on something else, but they're never graded on how well do you treat your people? Have you recognized anyone lately? Are you doing your one-on ones? Those kind of things, they don't get rated on those. The other challenge that decouples this from everything else is HR is the one who reports on retention numbers, everything else. I've been the person in the meeting that has to say, "Okay, I know that our turnover is 10% last month, but here's why."

Ben Eubanks:

Even though none of that was on my team, I wasn't responsible for any of that, and someone else should be sitting in this hot seat telling this answer. Those things all fit into this picture, and I think that's one of the reasons it feels like there's a strained relationship there. But I talk to HR leaders every day that said, "If I just knew what to do, if I knew how to help, I would gladly help my managers. I would gladly enable them to be better at their work." Because it's not just about making them better, but that's good in itself, but for every person they touch, that individual, their family, everyone behind that manager is going to benefit when you start raising them up.

Rob Parsons:

Makes a huge difference. I love what you talked about too, putting HR into the flow of work and not having just... It's an extra thing to do. I know as a manager, it's like, "Well, I have to go and do this now. I have to go and do this now, which has nothing to do with my work." Can you talk a little bit more about the flow of work and how HR can help more seamless, be more integrated?

Ben Eubanks:

In general, what I see is, as I said, I think I said it in a minute ago, I'll say it again. When HR comes to a manager like, "Gosh, what do I think I'm going to ask me to do now? I've already got a full plate, it's spilling over the sides, I'm losing stuff here, I can't juggle it all," and just give your people feedback two more times a week or whatever else. One of the things I love doing is talking about how do we make these managers feel empowered to do the things they need to do? If they understood the impact of really serving their people well, if they're worried about stability of their team, their people are going to stick around. When it comes to giving them feedback, giving recognition, making sure that you're asking that employee for insights and inputs. What's going on with you? How can I help you? What do you need from me? What our brand new studies on the workforce found that if a person says, "My manager understands me," not just Rob and here's your job title.

Ben Eubanks:

But Rob as a person here, I know you have a family, I know you care about this on the weekends, whatever else, I know who you are. If a manager understands you, they are 6000% more likely to say that that manager supports me consistently in my work and makes me better at work. This takes it back down to that very basic level of it's not just saying, "Yeah, attaboy, good job." But I know who you are I know what you need, and I'm able to help deliver that so that you can do your best work. We talk about being your best self at work all the time. It's this thing that's thrown around, and this really allows those managers to help their people truly being their best self at work, because they're getting the other things out of the way that are blocking them from being great. They're enabling those things that those employees already bring that make them amazing at their jobs.

Rob Parsons:

It sounds like you've moved way beyond the superficial rewards and recognition, the band aids, as it were, to the people that really get it. How do companies help those kinds of people get into management roles? Because a lot of times, you promote people who are good at performing the duty, but maybe not good at managing people, and you get this-

Ben Eubanks:

Weird dynamic, right?

Rob Parsons:

Yeah, right.

Ben Eubanks:

Number one, yes, that is a problem right now as we speak someone is saying, "You know what? You're really great at your job. We're going to take you out of this job you're great at, and we're going to make you manage people who are doing that job you used to be great at. The management thing, by the way, it's completely different, good luck."

Rob Parsons:

Yeah, whole new skill set.

Ben Eubanks:

Here's a training pamphlet, or whatever else, it's radically different. The other thing that happens is it's been 18 months since you started, it's time to move you up to a leadership role now. Those things have nothing to do with someone's ability to do the job, and yet, they're common signals for when a company's going to start moving someone. There's nowhere else to go, so I guess I got to move up into management. One of the things, I talked recently with the head of leadership selection at the Mayo Clinic. She told me that one of the things they do when they're selecting leaders is they get them really clear on these are our values as an organization.

Ben Eubanks:

This is what we will believe in, and if you can't align with these things, patient-first, you are here not to be the shining star, but to enable all of your people to be the stars. If a manager or a leader, candidate doesn't agree with those things, they select them out. They move them to somewhere else, you can go be an individual contributor anywhere in the business. Great, but if you want to truly enable people to be their very best at work and elevate them and celebrate them, they're looking for those individuals to select. One other thing, I'll tell you real quick, one other fun story, I ran across a healthcare company recently, different space. They actually had a challenge that every company has. It's hard to get managers to give feedback to the people, we know that's a common problem. So one of the things they started doing is looking at the people in their business who were giving feedback on a regular basis, and they found there were individual contributors who were doing that even though they weren't paid to do it, it wasn't in their job description.

Ben Eubanks:

There was just a natural extension. Rob just likes supporting people and encouraging them, so Rob is doing that, even though he doesn't manage anyone. They said, "Wait a minute, why don't we start using this as a signal for succession?" Who should be a leadership candidate, they're doing these behaviors already of their own volition, they're already naturally bent that way, let's put them in this role to do, go do that. So, there's some great examples of really being more specific about that. Oftentimes, we spend a lot more time picking out a benefit strategy or whatever else, picking out who's going to be leading. That has such a huge impact, which we don't always realize the impact, a positive one or a negative one until it's too late.

Rob Parsons:

Right, the number one reason people leave is because they have a bad manager.

Ben Eubanks:

Goodness. You want to talk about something, Rob? No, just kidding.

Rob Parsons:

I really like where that conversation was going, but I'd be remiss if we didn't talk about technology-

Ben Eubanks:

Yes, absolutely.

Rob Parsons:

... being at HR Tech. Another thing I'm interested in is how can I be a better technology buyer? Just being on the show floor, there is a lot to choose from, there's a million solutions for every problem. Problems I didn't know I had, there's a solution out there. How do I become a smarter, better tech buyer? How do I make sense of all this?

Ben Eubanks:

As you mentioned in the beginning, I'm a researcher, I started at my career in the HR field. I've been a buyer, I've been in the trenches, I've had to use the tools, I've had to buy the tools. I learned some of the lessons the hard way about how you pitch that inside the business, how you don't. Saying, "It'll make my job easier," no one wants to hear that. Hey, it's going to solve problems for our employees, it's going to make retention more sticky. Really understanding the benefits, the value of what you're trying to get out of this, that's critical. One of the things that I've learned though, is a lot of companies, when they go to select technology, sometimes HR is like, "Well, this is mine, this is my space, I own this, I'm responsible for this, so I need to just step up and that's find to lead that."

Ben Eubanks:

But what we're finding our data are that the companies who are high performing, better revenue, better attention, better employee engagement than their peers, those companies have a diverse mix on their selection team. They have leaders from outside of HR, lines of business, they have couple of employees who represent user personas who are going to be using the platform every single day, they have all those people weighing in and not one vote that outweighs all the rest. But at the end of the day, it's not just me as the HR admin, good luck, everybody, use that. But everybody else is going to be either using it or not, and we find in our research that there's a very clear connection, if I have the tools as an employee, that really enable me to bring my best self to work. Taking some of the burden off of me so I can focus on my work, because it could be just paper and all the other kind of fun stuff that nobody wants to do in HR.

Ben Eubanks:

If we're taking those things away from the employees, they can focus on the things that excite them about the job. They can be reinvigorated again, the reason they joined the company in the first place. Anyway, having all those voices in the mix really matters, that makes for a better selection. If nothing else, it's what the high performing companies are doing, so you know someone who has got a great diet or a great exercise regimen, and you're like, "I don't know if I'll get the same results, but I'm going to pursue what they're doing, because it's going to lead to good things for me too."

Rob Parsons:

For sure, and I think that's just great, great advice. So many times, I think HR pros feel out on an island, and if they operate like they're an island, they will continue to be an island versus a valuable part of that team that they want to contribute to.

Ben Eubanks:

That's a mic drop moment, they probably wouldn't like if we dropped a mic, but that's a really great call out there. I would completely agree with that, I don't have anything you can add, goodness.

Rob Parsons:

I appreciate that, bud.

Ben Eubanks:

That was great, that's great.

Rob Parsons:

Well, let's call that the end of this episode.

Ben Eubanks:

Why not?

Rob Parsons:

Thank you so much for joining us.

Ben Eubanks:

Hey, it's always a blast to chat with you, Rob, you and the Paychex team are doing great work, and I'm thankful to know you.

Rob Parsons:

Thank you so much, and can you tell our listeners where they can find Lighthouse and where they can find some of these great research studies that you put out there to help us make better decisions?

Ben Eubanks:

Sure, the website is L-H-R-A dot IO, For Lighthouse Research and Advisory, if you check that out, all of our research is 100% free. Again, I've been in the practitioner's seat, so we'd give that away. We don't want to put any barriers in there so that any leader that wants to know more about recruiting, learning, developing your employees, all those kinds of things, that's all freely available.

Rob Parsons:

Love it, thanks for joining. Great to do it in person.

Ben Eubanks:

Yes, sir.

Rob Parsons:

Thank you to our listeners for joining, season four is going to be great, I promise you we're going to have continuing excellent topics and guests, so I encourage you to listen and catch it as often as you can. Be sure to subscribe to this and our Paychex THRIVE Business Podcast on your favorite podcast platform. Looking for more ways to keep your finger on the pulse of industry dynamics? Visit our resource center for the latest research, thought leadership, and news at paychex.com/worx, that's W-O-R-X. Thanks again for joining us, until next time, please stay happy and healthy.

Announcer:

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