



Episode 74 Show Notes: What it Takes to Be a Successful HR Warrior

Are you passionate about a Human Resources career but concerned about the perception of HR? Does making an impact on the human experience in the workplace bring you satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment but cautiousness about choosing HR as a career for the long haul? Do you have what it takes to be a successful HR warrior? Keri Ohlrich discusses the function's reputation and challenges. She explores what it takes to be successful and introduces listeners to the HR CHARGE framework that ambitious HR professionals can leverage to reach their potential.

Dr. Keri Ohlrich is CEO and co-founder of Abbracci Group, an 'Unconventional HR Consulting' firm that works with companies to address their organization's specific needs and develop sustainable solutions, with a focus on solving the problem the first time out. Keri obtained her Ph.D. in Human Development and Organizational Systems from Fielding Graduate University. She holds an MS in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University, an MS in Global Human Resources from Loyola University Chicago, and a BS in Psychology and Business from Carnegie Mellon University. Recently, Keri and her co-author Monica Frede released their new book, *The Way of the HR Warrior: Leading the CHARGE to Transform Your Career and Organization*.

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **The Revolution in HR.** There is a need for change and innovation. Historically, the HR profession has not been well-respected. While there have been many technological advances, e.g., typewriters to computers, corded phones to cell phones, HR hasn't made the same advances in the practice of HR and people as we have in technology. How can HR help companies figure out the human aspect? We can have AI and robots, but we will always have humans and the psychology of humans. How can HR, as a profession, be the business people 'minding the humans' versus being the party planners, getting the coffee, and being the person to do the firing? How can HR push forward to have a seat at the table?



- **HR needs to bring the human perspective to the table.** Just like Finance brings in the Finance perspective and IT brings the IT perspective, HR needs to bring the human perspective – becoming an engaging culture, demonstrating how to treat people, and being clear on what you stand for. Companies are increasing their hiring of a remote workforce. They hire who they need wherever they can, regardless of where they are located. Therefore, the culture needs to be strong to attract people.
- **Does HR attract people who have a hard time thinking this way or are business leaders historically attached to a compliance, parent-oriented HR function?** The business itself has created a problem. Historically, organizations moved under-performers who liked people into HR. The business also viewed HR as ‘compliance’. When Keri asked an Operations leader, ‘what does successful HR look like to you?’ the response was ‘COBRA and keeping me out of jail’. When asked, ‘is there anything else?’ The response was, ‘no, I want you in the background’. Fortunately, others’ perspectives are evolving. There are leaders who care about HR but the function didn’t start from the strongest position.
- **HR’s historical development and reputation.** In the past, HR was needed for compliance. People stayed in their jobs for 30 years, so companies did not have to flex their HR muscle. The ‘employment contract’ has since changed. People change jobs and companies much more frequently now. HR has been subordinated by business leaders who did not view the function’s role as necessary or important other than to address legal or compliance issues. Second, the ‘right’ people for HR have not always been in HR. When someone says, ‘I like people – that’s why I’m in HR’, they are probably not right for HR.

You don’t want to be in HR because you like people and you want people to like you. HR is usually the profession where no one likes you. If you want to make people happy, you should probably be in Sales. Even Finance sometimes makes people happier than HR. The profession has also been female-dominated. Unfortunately, being seen as a “women’s profession” does not help HR’s reputation.

- **What can rising HR professionals, early in their career, do to break down the biases? What gut check can they perform?** There are fundamental qualities needed to be a successful HR person.



- **Resilience** – Sometimes you won't be liked or appreciated, you will have to make hard decisions, and you will be surrounded by drama. You are present when people lose their positions and when they get promoted. It's important to understand humans from a scientific perspective and not be an enabler. You cannot be so involved all the time that you are 'crying with them'. How can you have that resilience to bounce back? In the first hour of your day, you could be firing someone and then conducting interviews. HR professionals need a thick skin. HR is tough. You need mental toughness and agility.
- **Courage** – How do you stand up and say something when something doesn't sound fair or right? How can we stand up and do something great for the employees and recognize them? It can be very hard to be assertive, to go against the grain, to speak out. You need assertiveness and drive. If this is a challenge, get a coach and work that muscle.
- **Follow up** – Early in your career, you can easily develop a bad reputation if you don't follow up and do what you say you are going to do. Meet your commitments, or explain why you can't. Most times, people don't know what HR people are doing. You are working on confidential issues, and you cannot share how you have been spending your time. When you don't deliver, people immediately go to the negative stereotype. You need to deliver and keep your promises. When you deliver, it builds trust. When you have the trust, you can be more courageous.
- **What about HR leaders who are more senior in their journey?** Hopefully, senior HR leaders have already built the foundation, so it is important to recognize that when you are leading an HR team or organization, you are in a very visible position. You must operate with integrity. Everyone is looking at you. When you don't 'run' the way you are telling everyone else to, you and your team will be totally



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NEED ASSERTIVENESS
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A COACH AND WORK
THAT MUSCLE.*

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discounted. All eyes are on you, so if you aren't managing your own team in the right way (e.g., delivering development plans, giving feedback), you will lose the brand and trust, and that damages the entire HR team. The team suffers from their leader's reputation. HR is visible. You cannot hide, you work with everyone, and everyone knows you. HR always has to be on their best behavior.

- **What is the CHARGE model?** CHARGE stands for:
 - Courageous
 - Humble
 - Accurate
 - Resilient
 - Goal-Oriented
 - Exemplary

- **Where did the CHARGE model come from?** Working in HR and having leaders say that they did not like HR fueled Keri's desire to change it. She wanted to understand the 'why' behind the successes. She discovered it wasn't just about being strategic. There was something else beneath it, which led to a discussion about understanding the fundamental qualities. If you don't have the fundamentals, you cannot be strategic, you cannot have a place at the table. The CHARGE model focuses on building a great relationship with your leader, having the trust.

- **What advice or new ideas can help guide HR professionals in the challenging environment of 'bias against HR, HR needs to shift', and concerns about the ability to demonstrate these new kinds of required behaviors?** First, know yourself – have self-awareness. Decide, 'is this right for me?' Be true to yourself. If you want to go with the flow, then maybe HR is not for you. Then, once you have decided what is right for you, then look at your company. Is it the right company for you? Are your expectations realistic in effecting change? Maybe the company is not good for you or your career, and, if not, then you may need to make some difficult decisions. Be introspective, develop yourself. Figure out what you want to do, and then figure out if the company is right for you.



Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Abbracci Group Website](#)
- [The Way of the HR Warrior: Leading the CHARGE to Transform Your Career and Organization](#) by Monica Frede & Keri Ohlrich, Ph.D.

To Follow Keri Ohlrich

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