

Meghan M. Biro: We're going to Vegas baby. Yup. I'm back there and it is one of my favorite times of the year. Almost time for the SHRM Annual Conference where hundreds of ... Well, what feels like hundreds of thousands of HR people just like descend on Vegas and go crazy. But it is really honestly a big conference. And today on WorkTrends, we're talking all things SHRM.

Meghan M. Biro: Welcome to the WorkTrends podcast from TalentCulture. I'm your host, Meghan M. Biro. Every week we interview interesting people who are re-imagining work and join us on Twitter every Wednesday, 1:30 PM Eastern using the hashtag, #WorkTrends. For the first time in my life and career I'm actually planning my packing list for SHRM. I mean it. So watch me on Instagram. You might see something there. Okay? And if it's not already on your calendar, it's June 23rd through 26th in Las Vegas, Nevada. One of my fav places to relax by the pool. Win a little moolah and oh yeah, maybe even learn a little bit about HR. There's ... well, I'm just going to say there's a lot happening every year at SHRM, which we know and I think it's worth spending time with some of the agenda because there's just so much. So I want to run it through with you.

Meghan M. Biro: Here is a short list of what I'm doing in Vegas. If anyone wants to join me, I look forward to seeing you and maybe meeting you if you're out there in the WorkTrends audience and I've never seen you live. It's going to be kind of fun. First we've got Ms. Martha Stewart as the keynote on Sunday. Factoid for you, I grew up a town over from where she did so I have seen her and met her in person so it's going to be kind of fun to see her again. Maybe she'll recognize me in the big crowds. And then after her keynote I'm going to be going to head over to the exhibition hall to hang out with some of my buds at Reward Gateway. Very cool company. I want everyone to check them out and they're going to have a special guest and some sweet treats at their booth and maybe even a little bit more, dot, dot dot.

Meghan M. Biro: Then on Monday afternoon, my friend Gregg Lederman is speaking about how to enhance employee motivation. I'm also going to be checking out the Smart Stage where you're going to be able to see short little 18 minute talks, which I always love. Love that TED Talk style, SHRM. Points for you. Innovating. We love that. And other than that, I'm circling all the tech sessions. I love learning about the AI and the future of HR tech. I will be giggling out there. So I hope to see you. So that's sort of an initial schedule from my end. Tell us what you're planning. I want to hear from you. Tweet using the hashtag, #WorkTrends and would love to hear from you. Now let's get to our guest.

Meghan M. Biro: Alex Alonso is chief knowledge officer at SHRM, and for those of you who've been living, I don't know, in a tent in the Mojave Desert that don't know what SHRM means, it's the Society for Human Resource Management for any of you newbies out there and he is here today to talk about SHRM and their annual conference, which is literally right around the corner. We are so stoked to a return to Vegas once again for a conference. A welcome to WorkTrends, Alex.

Alex Alonso: Thank you so much Megan. It's a pleasure to be here and I look forward to sharing all of my insights about Vegas and or SHRM 19.

Meghan M. Biro: Wow. We've got ... I mean you realize you just what you just said, right?

Alex Alonso: I do know what I said. Hey, I've been there for three SHRM conferences. I know how to ride through that city better than anyone.

Meghan M. Biro: There you go and there's a lot to talk about, Alex. You came to SHRM from the world of applied research where you studied organizational psychology. You and I have that in common. We're both like psych nerds, right? Tell us about your work at SHRM. What you're up to.

Alex Alonso: So my work at SHRM is an interesting kind of a slice of what we do here at SHRM in that certainly my title is extremely descriptive, but what it speaks to really is the work that I do from a thought leadership perspective and really research in leading research but also leading our credentialing program here at SHRM. And in more recent months I've also had the good fortune of doing a lot of work with regard to our policy initiatives as well as everything that we're trying to do from a workplace innovation perspective. So you could think of me ... if you were to think of me in any way, shape or form, I would describe myself as the chief nerd at SHRM.

Meghan M. Biro: You hear that everybody? If you're listening in utilize the hashtag, #WorkTrends. Is this a hot new role that we're going about to hear more of? Right. We might. It could be something that starts to trend. I mean, no, I'm being serious.

Alex Alonso: Yeah, I could easily see a scenario where we've got a lot of new innovation officers, we've got a lot of new transformation officers and new chief knowledge officers across a variety of different organizations and I could easily see a scenario where we could be groundbreaking here and start a whole new trade.

Meghan M. Biro: If you're out there listening to us, remember this time you were here when this all unfolded. We hope you join us for the whatever's going to come next basically. I mean the bottom line is Alex and I are about to go to Vegas for SHRM Annual, and you know, anything's possible. Right?

Alex Alonso: Exactly.

Meghan M. Biro: So listen, you've been at SHRM for eight years. What do you love about the SHRM Annual Conference?

Alex Alonso: You know, the best part about the SHRM Annual Conference is, is really the attendees and getting to know so many of the attendees. I think of it really as the best kind of manifestation or SHRM coming to life, right? Because it's the

one opportunity where the staff get a chance to and all of the people who serve our membership and serve the great HR profession get a chance to interact with one another and not only work towards learning but also work towards connecting, networking, doing everything that you can do to kind of find people who are going through the same things you're going through and have the same kind of questions you have and want to do the same kind of learning that you want to do. So to me, the best part about the SHRM Conference is really getting to know all those different people who bring a different, unique perspective to really human capital issues.

Alex Alonso: Now the other thing that I love about it, I'll be honest, is I love the opportunity to see SHRM members supporting each other in action. I really enjoy that. I do this every once in awhile when I go to SHRM Annual Conference, I love to just look out on the exhibit hall and watch everyone getting to know one another. Everyone having lunch. Everyone kind of getting to know one another and really seeing just how awesome this profession really is when you've got that many people in one room trying to get to know one another.

Meghan M. Biro: How many people do we expect this year? What's the head count do you think?

Alex Alonso: I think we're probably looking at somewhere just over 20,000, if not a little bit more than that.

Meghan M. Biro: Nice. There we go everyone. Vegas, you've been warned. Okay? That's ... We'll just leave it there. What do you not so much looking forward to about either the conference or Vegas, because not everything is like rosy all the time.

Alex Alonso: Yeah. I think the thing that I always worry about whenever we're in Vegas is really the summer heat or just the general pain in your feet. Because we're all going to be doing a whole lot of walking. Right? And that's what I worry about. But get myself some comfortable shoes and find that air conditioning and I'll be okay.

Meghan M. Biro: You're a good sport. We like that about you. So what are you looking forward to in the coming year? What's happening?

Alex Alonso: I really look forward to a couple things. I think when we think about this, I think specifically about we've got a whole lot of investment in some of the things that we're doing for creating new development offerings for the HR profession as well as things that help the HR profession kind of support their stakeholders, good managers or making good people managers as an example. And when I think about what SHRM's doing and what we're doing at the annual conference, I think about kind of some of the opportunities that we have to come and be inspired by our attendees, by our peers and to gain knowledge on some new trends and some pressing issues that are impacting the workplace. And then I also look specifically at the opportunity to kind of see some things that are

brewing in terms of our annual conference and really conversations that are happening out there regarding or dialogues that are happening with regard to workplace culture and how it is that the HR profession really contributes to that workplace culture.

Meghan M. Biro: In a real way. Dot, dot, dot. Not just ... we're not just talking about it anymore. We actually are taking action, which I find exciting and refreshing as somebody who, as many of our listeners know, I've been attending SHRM for what feels like 20 years. It's probably more like eight years now, but it's been awhile. And so for all of our listeners out there who have been attending SHRM for years, what are some of the new things we should be looking out for this year?

Alex Alonso: So first and foremost, I'd love to highlight a couple things. One is we've got a whole new Changemaker Series that features HR leaders from some of the best known brands that are really kind of cutting edge in the space of inclusion, equity and workforce development. I would expect to see folks from Zappos and Universal Music Group in particular there. I think we got something really big kind of brewing and I think it's coming. You'll learn more about it in the coming weeks, but it's something that's brewing in terms of our crucial workplace conversations that we want people, managers and leaders and HR leaders to kind of ... thought leaders to really think about and kind of engage in. And then I think one that's really personal to me because I was responsible for the development of the pledge as well as the toolkit is our getting talent back to work toolkit, which is really where attendees can come to sign our pledge to support second chances hiring and second chance at best practices.

Meghan M. Biro: Oh, that's interesting. And where do we find that in this giant hall that we're going to be in? Like is there a location?

Alex Alonso: Yeah. It's actually just inside the registration desk of the Connection Zone. So you'll be able to find it real quick. And we look forward to bringing everyone on board and finding as many folks that are interested in supporting these important initiatives as far as we think about the American workforce.

Meghan M. Biro: All right. So what about the speakers? I know the list of speakers at SHRM is really, really long, so we can't cover it all here today, but who should we make sure we check out?

Alex Alonso: So I'd argue you're probably going to want to focus on a couple folks that are really kind of big names that are participating in some of our SHRM Studio activities. So we've got a live broadcast studio taking place in terms of our Connection Zone as well. And so you're going to see folks like Chip Conley who is a strategic advisor and talks a lot about ageism at Airbnb for instance. We've also got folks like [Peter Kai 00:00:10:41] Bansal, or I [Pankaj 00:10:41] I should say, Bansal, who's from PeopleStrong and he's going to talk about technology and how it supports employee engagement. We've got folks like Blake Mycoskie

who obviously is the founder of TOMS, and is going to share his thoughts. As far as SHRM speakers, some folks that I think are important that might be worth exploring are folks like our own Nick Schacht who's kind of our chief global development officer and he's going to be doing a session with some of our partners here looking specifically at critical workplace issues that involve veterans.

Alex Alonso: I think we're also going to have Emily Dickins, our chief of staff and our chief external relations officer who's going to be doing some ... discussing some work around elevating the voice of HR as far as policy makers are concerned. We've got Celia Swanson who is the the first female EVP ever at Walmart and she's going to share something. What it's like to navigate your career at a Fortune One company as a female executive. And then on a personal note, I'm going to be a little bit vain here and talk a little bit about my session, which is based on the price of pettiness, which is a study that we've engaged in here at SHRM that looks at workplace pettiness and what are the depths of human pettiness in the workplace. We actually have over-

Meghan M. Biro: Oh boy. Sign me up by the way. Anyone else feeling that? I'm like pettiness. Sounds familiar. That's very cool.

Alex Alonso: Oh, thank you Megan. We've got about 1,500 examples from actual real workplaces where folks shared with us what it was that they experienced in the way of pettiness. And they range from the absolutely mundane all the way through to the really silly ones. Everything including putting [inaudible 00:12:10] in somebody's car just to let them know you don't like them.

Meghan M. Biro: What time and date is this? I have to be here, seriously,.

Alex Alonso: So I'll be on the Smart Stage on Tuesday.

Meghan M. Biro: Sweet. All right. I'm definitely going to check that out. So tell me, we're all about innovation here at TalentCulture, WorkTrends, as you well know. So speaking of, how do you think HR has changed in the past five years? And then second question, what are you hearing from SHRM members about new challenges that have come up? I mean, we talked about managers and culture. Give us some more specifics about what's unfolding on your radar.

Alex Alonso: Yeah. It's interesting. We do a lot of study of what are the big trends that are coming and we actually couch them in two perspectives. What it is that HR professionals are experiencing as well as what it is that corporate boards are most interested in when it comes to the big talent conversations. The big talent challenges. And what we find is they really align very well. Three that stand out right away are as far as challenges is how to manage and customize the employment experience for a multigenerational workforce. We also hear a lot about how do I strike the right blend between my regular workforce and my

regular staffing and talent shortages as well as a contingent workforce. And then the third one is what is the rise of technology really mean for my business model? In other words, my employment model within my business model, how do I sustain my workforce and plan for what I know is coming down the line with the advent of AI and machine learning and those things.

Alex Alonso: What we hear from SHRM members in particular and then also from research that we do as CEOs is that SHRM ... really that good HR professionals are focused on what we call The Four Big Rs of HR and those are really people who are focused on results. Being resourceful. Being interested in how they reimagine the workforce and the business. And then also being really interested in reconnaissance, meaning, data and information that helps them be not just sustainable, but also successful beyond their current state. If I think specifically about where it is that HR plays a key role in that, I think there's a lot that we're seeing lately in as like being a labor economist or using some of your labor economist skills, being an HR technologist to some degree, being an employment ... engagement engineer to some degree and then the last piece is really being somebody that finds and creates solutions.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay. There's an R word that's missing here. Retention.

Alex Alonso: Retention. I agree.

Meghan M. Biro: That, to me, is huge and I think we're overlooking it still in terms of talent management and how we're viewing people's career pathing. So I'd like to add that if that's okay with you. Might as well, right?

Alex Alonso: Absolutely. And when you talk about a multigenerational workforce, that's a big deal when you're talking about career pathing because the expectation that someone would have as far as a career path four generations ago, while the values are the same, may not be the same as what we see with Generation Z that is expecting somewhere between 10 to 12 career jumps and shifts. And instead of having a linear career path, they're looking at having a all around circuitous career path.

Meghan M. Biro: No question about it. So Alex, listen, I know you've written about how you've encountered bias in the workplace. How could we all understand and rethink our biases to create ... and I hate to sound like this, but a better place to work. I feel like to me that sounds a little bit too fuzzy and I don't know ... We all use that word, but I'm not sure it always means something to everybody that's tangible. But you know where I'm going with this.

Alex Alonso: Yup. I do. And I think that one way to think about this is really, it's not about denying bias because at the end of the day, biases are just a natural psychological state. They happen in many ways that are not terrible. And then in some cases where they're extremely terrible and so the way I think about it

specifically is, I think about if you can recognize your bias and actually be comfortable talking about why your biases exist or what the cause of those biases are, that's a big step forward in making sure that you are successful to some degree in overcoming them if you want to, or at the very least, being able to deal with them.

Alex Alonso: I think when it comes to the workplace, what I find most interesting is HR plays a big role in helping people understand what their biases are and helping them understand what it is that is expected from a specific level of common decency and dignity in the workplace, and that those biases can not play a role in that. So when I think about a workplace and a culture that we're all looking to kind of strive to, I think specifically the first step is making sure that you're aware of the biases that exist. And the second step is understanding how they play a role, if any, in what to do at the workplace.

Meghan M. Biro: Do you want to tell the audience a little bit about your personal experience with that?

Alex Alonso: Yeah. It's funny. Years ago, I wrote a piece or a blog that focused specifically on overcoming bias. And my personal experience was an interesting one in that I had a work colleague who was notorious for making backhanded comments and compliments at me, including, I'll never forget one time we were at a meeting in Miami and that colleague actually shared that she just assumed because I was Cuban that I grew up in a barrio. And I'll never forget thinking to myself, it's funny you don't think that that's that big a deal, but we psychologists actually call that a racial microaggression. Right?

Meghan M. Biro: There's a fancy term for it, everyone.

Alex Alonso: [crosstalk 00:17:33] thing is. Yeah, there is a fancy term for it. But at the end of the day, it was just a backhanded way of saying, I just assumed these things about you and came in with a bias towards you. And the interesting thing was for years I sort of just accepted it. Didn't even really think that ... make a big deal about it until I said to myself, you know what? It's tainting the way that I think about other people so I need to go ahead and address this. And I did address it with that individual. I was very direct with that individual. And what was amazing was that the person didn't realize that they were doing it. Just did not realize that they were doing it.

Meghan M. Biro: See that? Everyone out there, check yourself first. Right? And that's what you were talking about earlier. It's like it starts with each and every one of us. You have to look within first, whether we're talking about building culture, building leadership, building a talent plan, right? I mean we're all needing to look at ourselves first. And then you communicate it. I mean, these are ... and I mean there's a bigger story here when we talk about how HR is changing, because we have so many new ways to communicate, but it's still important to

communicate and check yourself. Even though we have all this innovation and technology around us, we're still human, you know?

Meghan M. Biro: And I think it's just an interesting angle on that. So thanks for sharing. All right Alex, so I can't let you go without touching on some of the controversy out there. The buzzy buzz surrounding SHRM's recent policy stances. Some people aren't so sure about SHRM's relationship with the current, shall I say, presidential administration. Do you want to talk to our audience about that? Because I know that there's a lot of passion around this issue. I'll leave it at that.

Alex Alonso: Yeah. I certainly understand the passion that exists around the issue, but in my mind, I view it as really an imperative that if SHRM is to elevate the practice of human resources and if SHRM is really to serve the work, the worker and the workplace and create better workplaces around the world, I think it's important for us to be part of the dialogue on workplace issues. And in my mind, it's important for SHRM to be a part of the workplace issue debates both in the executive and legislative branches of government, just the way that we would also submit amicus briefs when it comes to the judicial branch.

Alex Alonso: So while I understand that there may be some controversy around this, in my mind it's really, would you rather that SHRM or the HR profession was not part of those conversations? And in my mind, I'd rather be part of those conversations and to have some impact that is negative towards the entire economy really hurt employers and American families. We have kind of a little saying that we use around here, which is we are not about politics, right? We're policy, not politics. And so we want to be part of the debate and we want to be part of and weigh in on certain important issues and policy issues. But by no means are we being political.

Meghan M. Biro: Because there's some out there that would say that's not really the case. That they're seeing this as an alignment with what's happening in the administration somehow.

Alex Alonso: I can certainly see folks saying that, but we used to do work with the Obama administration as far as our second chances work as well. We've done quite a bit of work with both parties over the years, whether the administration was Democratic or Republican. And so my sense of it quite honestly is it's just us being a part of the important workplace issues dialogue.

Meghan M. Biro: Got it. Well, and we can all get together in Vegas and have a couple of glasses of wine about it and then see what happens.

Alex Alonso: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Meghan M. Biro: Right?

Alex Alonso: Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: I mean anything is possible and it's all about debate and dialogue and it's nice that we're all getting together and have an opportunity to continue to communicate. And it's not always one sided and it's not always linear. It's complicated. Right?

Alex Alonso: Exactly. I think of it this way. If we can agree to disagree on some things and there are things where we can agree on and the important thing is that we have the dialogue.

Meghan M. Biro: All right, so I want to hear some of your predictions. It's crystal ball time, everybody! So when you look at how work in HR will change in the next five to 10 years, what are you thinking about? What are you predicting?

Alex Alonso: I'm going to go a little counter to what most people are saying in that I believe we will have a great influence of artificial intelligence, but it's not going to be the artificial intelligence that everyone is worried about. It's not real generalized artificial intelligence. In other words, something that can replace the human mind. It's going to be real use cases of a thing that helps us automate. So it'll be more automation than that. I think we're going to have an influx of nearly 20 million new workers in the workforce that are what I call the iGeneration. So meaning born with an iPad or an iPhone, and I think that's going to change the way that we look at devices in the workplace, especially the Internet-of- Things devices. I'm also fairly interested in the way that this is going to affect the employment experience and the people experience in the workplace.

Alex Alonso: So I kind of look at how we start to see a blending of human resources and marketing to create a customized people experience. In fact, I recently did a talk at the National Academy of Sciences who is studying this very issue. What does work look like five to 10 years out, and how is it that different professions are affected by that. And then quite honestly what I see is, HR playing a bigger role in what it means to actually source talent and really source talent not just within the United States but outside the United States. In other words, globally, because a within the next 10 years we will have 25% of the global workforce will come from Latin America and Africa, which is a big shift over the next 10 years.

Meghan M. Biro: Oh boy. We have a lot to work on Alex, but it's all good and I am excited to see you in Vegas! Thank you so much for stopping by.

Alex Alonso: Thank you. I really appreciate it, Megan and I look forward to seeing you there.

Meghan M. Biro: Let's get this party started! Please join us for our WorkTrends Twitter chat. We are going to be on Twitter with Alex Alonso and the SHRM team and hopefully some of the SHRM bloggers. I'm also on the blog squad, by the way, and we're all hanging out Wednesday, June 12th at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 AM Pacific.

And as always, if you want to get our Twitter chat questions in advance and show up and be a smarty pants, sign up for our newsletter at talentculture.com

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