

Meghan M. Biro: "Oh, I so want to work there." How do you get people to actually say that about your company? I'm being serious. Stay tuned to hear from Diane Adams, Chief Culture and Talent Officer at Sprinklr, a culture fixer who has made it her mission to transform cultures and build better places to work.

Meghan M. Biro: [00:00:30] 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.

Meghan M. Biro: What kind of culture do you want to build? I hear from leaders who are building a culture of learning, a culture of kindness, a culture of service. We got options.

Meghan M. Biro: I know what kind you don't want to build. We've [00:01:00] all seen the recent headlines about Silicon Valley employees at companies like Google and Riot Games staging walkouts, right, to protest cultures they call toxic and retaliatory. Not good, right?

Meghan M. Biro: We talked a few weeks ago with Brent Colescott about the tiers of cultures at organizations. And go ahead, by the way, if you haven't listened yet, I dare you to. It was from May 10th, and it's the How to Make 2020 a Transformational Year episode. Check it out.

Meghan M. Biro: But today, we're [00:01:30] going to be talking to a culture champion, Diane Adams. And I asked her about those tiers of culture and her response is that having a culture roadmap from the very first days of an organization can make a huge impact on long-term culture.

Meghan M. Biro: And as many of you know, I've spent most of my career helping organizations build talent and build culture. So, this is a really key episode and it touches my heart and it tickles. No, I won't go there with you, [00:02:00] but it is cool, so tune in, all right?

Meghan M. Biro: Diane Adams is a culture and talent expert who has led people strategy at several major organizations. You may have heard of Cisco, Allscripts and McGraw-Hill. These days, she is Chief Culture and Talent Officer, I mean, come on, is that not the coolest title, at Sprinklr. Welcome to WorkTrends, Diane.

Diane Adams: It's great [00:02:30] to join you today, Meghan. So, I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Meghan M. Biro: I love this accent that I'm picking up. Where... This is south. Is this south?

- Diane Adams: It is south, and interestingly enough... So, North Carolina and, you know I have the privilege, right, and the fun life of commuting from North Carolina to New York City, which is where Sprinklr is located. So I get the best of both worlds.
- Meghan M. Biro: Living the dream. That's all I'll say. [00:03:00] I mean like, "Hey, I get to kind of hobnob here and there," and what a nice juxtaposition. Both really nice places in their own way, right? You're mixing it up, and you know what? You are not unlike many of us now. We're all mixing it up, right? We're virtual, we're traveling, we're remote workers. Whole other topic, I know, I digress, but I had to say that. And thank you out there, WorkTrends audience, for tuning in today.
- Meghan M. Biro: Listen, Diane, you wrote this book called, It Takes [00:03:30] More than Casual Fridays and Free Coffee: Building a Business Culture that Works for Everyone. I know a lot of people out there are nodding their heads at that title. They're going, "Yeah. All right, let's get beyond this." Right? So, how do you start? What's the first step to building a great culture?
- Diane Adams: Well, so, thanks for the question because your question is exactly why. It's what prompted me to write the book to begin with, because I got so many people who were saying, "Gosh, building a great culture. [00:04:00] It feels so complicated, right? Where do you start? It feels overwhelming." So, that led me to think about my learnings, my experiences. Right? And put together or create seven steps to creating a great culture.
- Diane Adams: And the first one is being clear who you are, defining your values and providing clarity to the organization. So that's where you start. And you mentioned I work with Sprinklr now and [00:04:30] it was fun because, well, I've only been here a little over a year, but the very first thing that we did was to create what we call The Sprinklr Way, which does provide clarity to all of us in terms of how we live, who we are, how we operate. So that that's the first place to get started.
- Meghan M. Biro: Mm-hmm. But it's not one of those mission, vision, values that's just generic, I hope. Because we do... There are those out there by the way. You know what I'm saying?
- Diane Adams: [00:05:00] Oh, gosh. And there are lots of them, right? Because most companies do exactly what you just said. We do identify our vision and our mission and our strategy and our values. The difference between great cultures and those that aren't are those companies, and people, of course, that live those values, that make them come alive.
- Meghan M. Biro: You know, a lot of times cultural values sounds great, but how do we actually take this from idea [00:05:30] into actually integrating into an organization?
- Diane Adams: That's exactly what we're talking about, right? How do you make it come alive? And I talked about the first step in the roadmap is to just be clear who you are.

Diane Adams: That second step is exactly this, Meghan. It is integrating them into everything that you do. And I'll share one example is through a recognition program. So, the fastest way to create [00:06:00] a culture where people thrive, personally and professionally, that's how I think of a great culture, and the best way to do that is through a recognition program.

Diane Adams: And to give you an example, we just recently launched a peer recognition program. It's totally linked to our values. And we make it really easy for people to recognize their peers, recognize anyone in the company. And when they recognize someone, the person's leader, automatically [00:06:30] of course, is notified as well. So, you've got the manager thanking them and recognizing them, they've got the recognition that comes from their peers. So, that's one example, certainly.

Diane Adams: And I'll just give you one more example is communications, which happens to be the third step, right? So you've got defining your values, you've got integrating them into everything, and then you've got communications.

Diane Adams: So, one of the things that I think great companies do is ensure there are [00:07:00] frequent, two-way communications. And in all of our town hall meetings, which for us is just strictly Q and A, is we always integrate our values. We always recognize someone who's living those values.

Diane Adams: And again, it goes back to the recognition, right? You ensure that everything that we're doing, if you look at the operating cadence of the company, those values are integrated throughout. And I could give you many other examples, but it's really being [00:07:30] thoughtful about how you operate and how can you integrate those.

Diane Adams: Performance management's another one, right? Certainly, we're held accountable for the results, but great cultures hold their people accountable for living the culture, right? Living the values.

Meghan M. Biro: What's your head count right now? Just curious.

Diane Adams: We've got 1,450 people.

Meghan M. Biro: Oh. That's a nice size.

Diane Adams: It is a great size, right? It's a great size to, well, [00:08:00] to do exactly what we we're talking about. And matter of fact, a story... I shared that I joined about a year ago. Our CEO, Ragy Thomas, who founded Sprinklr 10 years ago, he was very clear about the culture. He is so passionate. One of the reasons I joined.

Diane Adams: And what he would share with you is that prior to joining, that... He refers to the [00:08:30] previous year, 18 months, as the dark year. And his point would be that we lost our way. And that's easy to do, right, if you're not intentional about the culture you're creating. So when you say 1400 people, good size, it actually really is because coming in and partnering with so many great people together, we were able to shift that culture to create [00:09:00] something great again.

Meghan M. Biro: What do you think people get wrong when they try to build a "successful culture," and whatever that means to you out there, by the way. Because it doesn't mean the same thing to me that it does to you and everybody else, right?

Diane Adams: Yeah, Meghan, that's exactly right. That's why I always start off with number one, right? Be clear, be intentional with what you're doing. And I think that is the number one thing that people don't pay enough [00:09:30] attention to, is ensuring that you've got the clarity around what you're building and that you've got buy-in.

Diane Adams: So, let me give you an example. When you're creating the values, you're defining the culture, ensuring that everyone's involved in that. Now, clearly, the founder, the CEO, because you want them to be passionate. So it does start there, but ensuring your leadership team's engaged.

Diane Adams: And I'll give you a quick example of that. With the leadership [00:10:00] team, when we defined, right, who we are, who we want to be, who we strive to be, one of the things that we do to kind of test ourselves... We can say that, going to your earlier point, but are we going to live it?

Diane Adams: And a question I always like to ask is, so, here are our values. If we have our top salesperson, right, our star performer, bringing in the highest [00:10:30] revenue, if this happens, which is totally contrary to our values, what are we going to do? Right? Are we going [crosstalk 00:10:37]-

Meghan M. Biro: Well, at least you're talking about it, right?

Diane Adams: No, and that's exactly right. Are we going to value the results more than the values? Because this is what people watch. They're going to watch to see... They say, and I'll give you one of ours, right, passionately, genuinely care. That is one of our values. [00:11:00] And if they watch someone who is the antithesis of that, right, total disrespect for others, if you watch that, are we going to tolerate it because they have attained strong results despite that. And the answer is, if you're a strong culture, your values are going to come first.

Diane Adams: My favorite definition of culture is what we do or what you do when no one is looking. And [00:11:30] I think that's a great example, right? Are we really

serious about it or not? So I think being intentional and the second, and really living it, those two are critical or you don't get it right.

Meghan M. Biro: So Diane, speaking of getting it right, I know you are known for helping people throughout your organization. Talk to us about how that plays out. What do people feel when you're doing something like that, for example? Right, like case [00:12:00] studies. Give it to us.

Diane Adams: Okay. I will, I will. So I'll stay with a culture of caring, right? We care about the results, but gosh, we care about you, we care about you more.

Diane Adams: One of the things that... Maybe I'll back up for a second, Meghan, is when I joined, and I talked about the dark year, is... Went around the globe and said to people, "So, top of mind for you, [00:12:30] what do you want to see, and what are the top couple of things?"

Diane Adams: And one of those was that they wanted to feel invested in. They wanted to learn, right? Like everybody. They want to be cared about or they want to know their value, they want to know that they're cared about and they want to learn. And an example of what we did is we created what we call Learn to Grow Plan. And so, think of it as a development plan, a learning plan, but we call it Learn to Grow.

Diane Adams: [00:13:00] And what I love about it is the first part of that plan is you create your personal mission statement. And we're a company where we want you to thrive, right? Personally and professionally. And given that, it would make sense, right, you link it to what we're trying to create because... Envision your leaders are talking to their team members and they're having a personal [00:13:30] conversation. Like mine, for example, inspire and enable others to live extraordinary lives personally and professionally. That goes way into my personal life, and it allows people to step back and holistically think about their life versus just bringing the work or the career part of their life to the table.

Diane Adams: And you asked me, "So how does that play out?" I got to tell you, it's been game-changing when I [00:14:00] tell you... You think about the shift... And we held webinars for our leaders, we held training sessions for every employee. They also went through... It's called a StrengthsFinder Assessment. You're probably familiar with it. Gallup's StrengthsFinder Assessment, right?

Diane Adams: So, basically we said, "We care about you. We want to understand what matters to you in terms of your own personal mission. We want to understand your strengths. We want to build off of those." And so, what's great is just [00:14:30] the passion, the energy, and to watch people have such enthusiasm and create these, right? So that's just one way, where you've listened to people, you learn from them and take action. So, when we talk about culture and how to simplify

it, a lot of it really does come down to that, right? Listening, learning and taking action that they care about.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay, so Employee [00:15:00] Delight Assurance Program. I read that and was like, "No, this is not real." I'm not trying to be the naysayer here, but I was like, "Really? Is this real? Come on."

Diane Adams: Meghan, I'm glad you asked me about this. This is-

Meghan M. Biro: Please. Please rescue me from this place I'm in right now, of disbelief.

Diane Adams: So, this is my favorite, actually, because we did a lot of things to accelerate [00:15:30] the culture, right? But this particular one, and let me net it out for the folks that are listening, the Employee Delight Assurance Program is a program where, and we started this monthly, but now every couple of months, every couple of months our leaders ask their direct report, "On a scale of one to 10, what is your happiness factor? And tell me the three recommendations that you would make for your happiness rating, [00:16:00] right, being higher. What do we do from it?" And I call my team Culture And Talent versus Human Resources. No surprise, huh? And we roll [crosstalk 00:16:09]-

Meghan M. Biro: Sounds familiar, by the way. It sounds strangely familiar.

Diane Adams: That's right. And so, we roll that up across the company, and then going back to listening, learning and taking action, we come back to the employees across Sprinklr. There are very specific [00:16:30] actions that are taken.

Diane Adams: So, for example, I gave you one about learning. That was one of our top ones. Another was communications. So, between all-hands and town halls, every leader holds a one-on-one once a week. Every leader has a team meeting once a week. And exactly what you asked me about, this Employee Delight Assurance Program, they have the meeting once every two months with their direct report.

Diane Adams: Now, if I can share [00:17:00] a little bit more about... This goes to your point. Gosh, okay. That means this is totally open, right? This isn't confidential. This isn't the way you see lots of companies do this, right? You've got a pulse survey that you take. Everything's rolled up, anonymous, and that's how you get the real feedback.

Diane Adams: If you go back to what we were trying to accomplish, which was to create an environment where people trust each other, right? They know we care, [00:17:30] that we trust. Because we know that that's how we thrive.

Diane Adams: And what this did was it celebrated having open conversations between leaders and their direct reports. It actually accelerated open communications for the whole company because in those forums I talked about, right, town halls, all-hands, you're always sharing, "Here's what you said and here's what we did." And just so that you know, for the audience who's thinking-

Meghan M. Biro: For [00:18:00] those at home tuning in, wondering if-

Diane Adams: Exactly.

Meghan M. Biro: ... this is real. It is.

Diane Adams: And here's how we know. We still do the pulse survey. So, every quarter, it allows us to check, to see how close we are to what every employee said and what they would say confidentially or anonymously. And we are. We're half a point apart. But for us, I don't think that's so bad, right? We're on a journey. [00:18:30] We've been doing this about nine months.

Diane Adams: And Meghan, the best part, the voluntary attrition has been reduced to one-third. So they've been a 60% improvement in voluntary attrition. So, if you just look at the data and the facts, what I love about it is it kind of goes against the assumptions that we make as HR leaders or culture and talent leaders, that to get the full truth that it's got to be anonymous versus, "Let's really [00:19:00] create this open environment and that's going to allow us to accelerate," right? Getting where we want to be.

Diane Adams: And I give our CEO... This was his idea because we do this with our customers as well, CDAP, right, and as we were putting together those tangible plans for what we were going to do, this... The first thing he said. "Gosh, why don't we do this with our employees just like we do with our customers?"

Meghan M. Biro: Okay. So, HR, talent and culture, can't [00:19:30] build culture alone. So, how have you worked with people outside of HR and such on this?

Diane Adams: Well, you're absolutely right about this. If there's anything I've learned in my career, it isn't about doing anything alone, right? It's all about relationships. And what I think about as a multiplier effect. Who are those people you want by your side so that you can grow?

Diane Adams: And in terms of partnerships, I can just give you a few examples. I mean, certainly [00:20:00] the leadership team. I would start there. And this is just a tangible example and hoping that it would help the audience is, and again, big learning in my career, is keeping that senior leadership team close to you.

Diane Adams: So, for example, we have 57 senior leaders. And every month, we meet, right? It's a very open forum to ensure we stay on the same page. So, when you think about building a culture, it's just critical to keep [00:20:30] that senior leadership team-

Meghan M. Biro: Well, and I'm actually impressed it's every month. Sometimes it's every quarter. So there you go. You're making that extra effort.

Diane Adams: Well, and kind of to your point, you have to ask yourself is that enough to do it every quarter? And I think that is much more standard. And when I just think about the feedback we get from our senior leaders, they really feel like they're now empowered to lead the company and the culture. So, clearly, they're huge partners.

Diane Adams: The [00:21:00] other, I would say, is if... So, we're global in a number of locations, and having culture champions is also huge. So, on my team, again, big learning for me is many years ago, having a communications and culture expert right by my side was critical. And their role is to partner with all of these other countries or other cities, right? The culture champions.

Diane Adams: [00:21:30] So again, going back to the multiplier effect, that we're creating, in every location, a similar culture. So, I'd say it's basically the employees, right, that you want to keep by your side, and the senior leaders. Then maybe just one more. Sometimes we don't think about it in the HR field, but it's the marketing organization.

Meghan M. Biro: Mm-hmm. I'm glad you brought that up.

Diane Adams: Oh my gosh, Meghan. [00:22:00] It's huge. It really is. At the beginning of the year we had our big sales conference, and the Chief Marketing Officer and I did a joint presentation because we were rolling out The SprinklR Way, right, the values, even on our logo. Our logo... The colors stand for different values. And I share that just because it's so integrated.

Diane Adams: But it's so important that cultures... Sharing the stories, the good and the bad, right, sharing those stories [00:22:30] internally and then marketing as well. Sharing them externally and not just with people we're trying to recruit, but... And you know this, certainly, but our customers care about the culture, right? How many organizations buy because of what the company stands for, or don't buy because of what they stand for. Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: No, that's totally real. And speaking of real, what tech and tools have been helpful [00:23:00] for you?

Diane Adams: That's a good question. We talked about the partnerships for... To have full employee engagement for us, we use, or I think the first one that comes to

mind, is Workplace by Facebook because we have the different forums, whether it's everyone in the company sharing. So, for example, we were talking about recognition, right? And you'd have someone... It's just such a great way for employees to go on and share what they see.

Meghan M. Biro: [00:23:30] So wait, wait, hold on. Are the employees actually showing up here? That is question number one. Are they adopting?

Diane Adams: Yes.

Meghan M. Biro: Okay.

Diane Adams: You know what? They absolutely are. And I think, and not just my opinion, right? I go back to the fact that you can look at it and the attrition number, the engagement, right, the EDAP scores all trending the way that you would want. But they absolutely do show up.

Diane Adams: And there's two things that's important because I'm going to give you all [00:24:00] the good news about things. That's the good news. The good news is they show up sharing with each other. But success for me also means they show up and they share when they see what's not going well. Right? And I'm just really pleased.

Diane Adams: It goes back to the open environment. Because we're not perfect, right? We're absolutely going to get employees sharing where they see someone or a leader or a situation where we are not living the values. [00:24:30] And for me that's huge success because it means you've created a culture where they're great speaking out. There's not the fear factor, right?

Meghan M. Biro: They feel comfortable.

Diane Adams: Yeah.

Meghan M. Biro: Yeah, yeah.

Diane Adams: And again, they see action. So, within the executive team, and I think this is important to know, my role is you raise the positives, because we want to celebrate the wins and the progress, but I also raise where [00:25:00] there are things that are being raised that we still need to address.

Meghan M. Biro: Well, I mean, that's important. Nothing's perfect. And when it's too perfect, we start to go, "Oh, what's up here? This isn't real. This is too good to be true." So, I think there's always the positive and the negative, and it's important to see both sides and everybody to understand that, that no organization is perfect, and that's a good thing.

Meghan M. Biro: So, crystal ball time. We've hit it, Diane. We're going to do this together. So, when [00:25:30] you look into your crystal ball, what do you see in how HR is going to change in the next five to 10 years?

Diane Adams: My prediction is, I would say fully integrated work life. And you see a few companies going there now. Think about how many companies don't even have a physical structure, right? So, when I look at the workforce of the future, leaders will absolutely lead in a way. [00:26:00] You hold people accountable for results and they have total flexibility so that people, I use the term that they really do thrive personally and professionally, that they're able to have a full life. And you no longer... It's not about how many hours they're putting in. It's totally... It is a fully integrated work life so that people have, I would say, a very rich, an extraordinary life. [00:26:30] So, I think it will... We're making progress there. The world will be there five to 10 years from now.

Meghan M. Biro: Diane Adams, thanks for stopping by.

Diane Adams: It's been great. Thank you, Meghan.

Meghan M. Biro: Let's keep this party moving. Join us for our WorkTrends Twitter Chat. We are going to be on the Twitters with Diane Adams on Wednesday, June 26th at 1:30 PM Eastern, 10:30 AM Pacific. And wherever you're sitting around the globe, tune in. [00:27:00] Join us to talk about building a better place to work. If you'd like to get our Twitter Chat questions in advance, sign up for our newsletter at talentculture.com.

Meghan M. Biro: Thanks for listening to WorkTrends from TalentCulture. Join us every Wednesday at 1:30 PM Eastern for a live Twitter Chat with our podcast guest. To learn more about guests featured on today's show, visit the show [00:27:30] notes for this episode at talentculture.com, and help us spread the word. Subscribe to WorkTrends wherever you listen to podcasts. Leave us a rating, review in iTunes, share WorkTrends with your coworkers, your friends. Look forward to it. See you next time.