



Sarah Tilley

Leadership Now: Collaborative, Courageous, Customer- Focused



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Sarah Tilley, SVP of Global Talent Development and Acquisition at [ServiceNow](#), shared smart insights with me and my colleague [Adam Bryant](#), senior managing director at [The ExCo Group](#).

Reimer: A big issue for all companies right now is the shifting expectations that employers and employees have of each other. How do you think about that?

Tilley: I like that employees are more vocal about what they want and need. Bill [McDermott, CEO of ServiceNow] has always understood that talent is the differentiator and the

competitive advantage, and you've got to create the right environment where people feel like the company is their company.

Employees are also being more vocal about wanting to ensure that corporations are placing the world's needs at the top of the priority list. The social issues that need to be solved are only going to be solved with corporations playing a role. So, it doesn't feel like a push and pull from my perspective. And it's allowing us to do a lot of things in HR that may have not seemed as important as other business priorities in the past. But - and vice versa. That's how you're going to achieve things.

The question of balance and where you're going to need to have some compromise comes in when you start discussing how to deliver against those expectations in a realistic way. For example, it's realistic for people to expect that they're going to have access to tools that will help them develop the skills that they need today and tomorrow; that they're going to have the support of their leaders; that they're going to work in an inclusive environment; and that they can achieve their goals. Expecting it all to happen overnight or for there to be a clearly defined linear path - that's where I feel like we're managing expectations at times.

Bryant: What is your framework for what distinguishes the best leaders?

Tilley: The list of what ultimately makes a leader successful can get quite long, and a lot of them are balancing acts—leaders, for example, have to be humble but also confident in their decision-making. So we simplified it, and we landed on this notion of three C's: collaborative, courageous, and customer-focused.

You can layer in a lot under each of those. Collaborative is not just about being a team player; it's about seeking input from a diverse group of people. Being courageous boils down to having those conversations that you may not be comfortable having with your boss, with your employee, with your colleague. I've seen a lot of leaders shy away from those conversations, and the ones I've admired are those who lean in.

Reimer: What are your views about how the talent discipline is evolving?

Tilley: We have to talk about GenAI, because it's inevitable that it's going to change everything. It can still seem like an abstract idea to a lot of people, and they just have no idea where to start. I try to take complex things and simplify them, and in this context, that means breaking down every job into a set of skills, and then using AI to match skills to training and opportunities. That also helps you more effectively and intentionally develop talent for today and for the future.

There are three ways to think about using AI for skills development. Employees can track their skills and build personalized learning plans to reach their goals. Managers can better assess the skills they need on their team to optimize the team's performance. And then at the C-suite level, organizations can build a whole data-driven talent management strategy that ensures the investments it is making from an HR standpoint will have the greatest impact on the business.

It's going to be a game-changer. Any sense that some people might still have of HR playing more of a transactional role is going to disappear. Now it's going to be more about hard metrics, and we are going to approach talent in the same way you would run a supply chain for a consumer product.

Bryant: How do you hire? What questions do you like to ask in job interviews?

Tilley: There are two that I rely on consistently. I want candidates to be able to articulate what they are proudest of in their most recent role. And if they have to reach back pretty far in their career, or if they don't have recent meaningful accomplishments that I would agree they should be proud of, that's a concern. Because I find that talented individuals who are drivers and take initiative can accomplish their goals and aspirations in any environment.

I also like to ask about the criteria candidates are using to evaluate this opportunity. So I will say, "I understand that you're considering this company as much as we're

considering you, so I want to make sure that I'm acknowledging that, and I also want to make sure that your criteria lines up with the values and qualities that will support your success at ServiceNow."

Reimer: When you talk to people who are early in their career or about to enter the workforce, how has your advice to them changed in recent years?

Tilley: There is one piece of advice that I could never have imagined sharing with them even just a few years ago, and that is that not every moment has to be productive. I wish a younger me would have known that. I would have given myself full permission to be unapologetic about taking time off.

It's actually counterproductive when you're trying to make every moment productive with our never-ending list of things to do. Many people, especially when they're younger, can be so proud of how hard they are working all the time. You have to give yourself the space to be creative and to think.

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