



Make Time To Step Back And Think About The Big Picture | Stephanie Lepori

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Stephanie Lepori, Chief Administrative and Accounting Officer at Caesars Entertainment, shares key leadership lessons for HR leaders and the importance of taking the time to look at the big picture in HR with Adam Bryant, Senior Managing Director and Partner at The ExCo Group, and David Reimer, CEO of The ExCo Group.

Reimer: You have an unusual portfolio of responsibilities—chief administrative officer, which includes HR, as well as accounting. How did that come about?

Lepori: I'm a CPA by background. I began my career at Arthur Andersen. As I moved up through the ranks, I started to have oversight of HR. It's a natural fit because you need to know your business. We currently have 55,000 team members and over 50 properties.

I joke with our HR team that I'm turning them into accountants. They're making decisions that have significant financial repercussions, so they're getting trained to consider those decisions from many different perspectives, and I believe it's making them a lot more effective at their work in HR.

Bryant: What is it about your background that prepared you to lead in this environment where there are so many new challenges and disruptions?

Lepori: Being in an industry that is on 24/7, every day of the year, takes a lot of endurance and discipline. I have always gravitated toward challenges, and I do my best work when I'm juggling a lot and need to make fast decisions. I was raised by a single mom who was determined not to be a statistic. Seeing firsthand her drive and perseverance has had an incredible influence on my life, and I never take anything for granted.

Early on in my career, I was always trying to prove myself and be the best by going above and beyond. That got me to where I am today, but I've also learned over time that you don't always have to be perfect. There is an element of balance that I've learned over the years. I have tried to coach and teach others that you don't have to get an A+ every single time. You can make mistakes and learn from those, and you don't have to know every single answer to everything.

Reimer: Are there mentors you've worked with who taught you important leadership lessons?

Lepori: There was a partner at Arthur Andersen who was a mentor to me. He was calm, cool, collected, and asked the right questions. There was one moment that has always stayed with me. We were looking at a monster spreadsheet with all these numbers, but he focused on just one number and said, "This looks strange. It just doesn't look right."

That may sound trivial, but it was a reminder about the importance of taking a step back to see the big picture, the forest for the trees. You must look at things through the lens of what's reasonable because if you dive into the minutiae of every little thing, you're not going to see the strategic big picture.

Bryant: What are the most common themes when you mentor others?

Lepori: People often hold themselves back out of a lack of confidence, or they think they must know everything before raising their hand for a promotion. So, I encourage people to learn while moving up the ladder instead of thinking they have to know it all before they go after a bigger opportunity or larger role.

You also have to be open and curious to be effective with your peer groups and in your business. That opens doors, so I often encourage people to think outside of their own particular area, make sure they are building those relationships, and understand how their skills might be translatable to many different areas of the business.

Reimer: What do you see as the biggest challenges and opportunities for the HR function right now?

Lepori: A big challenge is the constant pressure to make decisions quickly while also taking into account the downstream repercussions. You have to balance being reactive to urgent matters while taking the time to reflect on the bigger picture.

The big opportunity for HR is to really understand the business and explore every aspect of it. You can't be effective as an HR leader if you're not out there working with the teams, going to their locations, and spending time to really understand what your workforce needs and wants. Without that level of involvement, it's easy to fall behind and lose touch with what's really happening on the ground.

The final point I'll make is that HR wasn't always viewed as the right hand to the CEO, and that perception is quickly changing. More and more executives are seeing the value of what HR brings. A company is never going to be successful as an organization if it can't attract and retain a solid team.

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