



We Need To Build The Time And Space For People To Create Resiliency In Their Minds

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Jordana Kammerud, chief human resources officer at Corning, discusses resiliency in the age of AI, leading with curiosity and humanity, and helping leaders close the gap between intention and impact in this Strategic CHRO interview with The ExCo Group CEO David Reimer and Senior Managing Director and Partner Adam Bryant.

Reimer: What issues are top of mind for you these days?

Kammerud: I'll share the topics we discussed with our top 50 HR leaders at our meeting in December. AI is an obvious one, but also the power of the data, insights and analysis that are created by AI. Another big theme was the resiliency of the human mind. I bring those together because work these days can sometimes feel like that movie title: "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

There is so much more data coming at us. There is such a fundamental change in the skills we need and the way we will need to work. As these technological processes embed in our workflow through things like AI, our ways of engaging, thinking, and working are rapidly changing.

But the human mind isn't evolving as fast as technology. That is why resiliency should be top of mind right now. How do we ensure that we marry the human mind with these new technological capabilities? How can we, as human capital experts, incorporate how the mind works into these productivity workflows and provide support systems for people.

Bryant: How do you do that?

Kammerud: It's about bringing multiple disciplines together. Traditionally, we've thought about human resources and human capital management in a more business, workforce, and planning-centric way. But we haven't really married it up with the science around brain heuristics.

How do people really operate as they make decisions? How does the brain react to multiple social or data inputs? We need to build new routines into work to account for how all these broader changes in the world are affecting our minds. All this data and everyone working at top speed creates both physical and emotional fatigue.

We haven't traditionally built structured rest periods into our workflows. We haven't taught people to manage themselves to that degree. We may say that we have, but we haven't actually encouraged it. We need to build into our processes the time and space for people to create resiliency in their minds.

Reimer: Given all the polarization in the world, how do you think about creating a shared narrative, a sense of "us," within your organization?

Kammerud: It's about aligning around a common set of beliefs or norms. That's not new, but it's something that organizations have to be playful about. If people are questioning everything in the world at large, it's likely that they are questioning everything inside your company.

That's why there is so much talk about the employee value proposition. It boils down to what you really believe in, your values, and your shared stories. Then you talk about them continuously, even relentlessly. That way, you hold yourself accountable to them, as well.

When someone joins your organization, you're really clear about who you are, how you operate, and how you make decisions. The more consistent that is, the more people will see reinforcements that what you're saying is true; even if they question it, they see it.

Bryant: To thrive in a role like yours requires a lot of stamina and a level of comfort with ambiguity. Where does that come from for you?

Kammerud: I love challenges. I don't love the feeling of challenges all the time, but I love the accomplishment of getting through challenges. I was raised in a family of educators. My mom was a teacher and my dad was a school superintendent. That's probably why I went into HR, because she was part of the teachers union and he was in management, so there were a lot of good conversations around the table.

As educators, they always impressed upon my sister and me that everything you see in the world has additional layers and elements behind it. A table has a physical structure, for example, but it also has a history that led to its design. There is a history to everything. Being challenged to think like that really formed in me a desire to figure things out and to see challenges as interesting rather than daunting.

Reimer: How does that translate to your leadership style?

Kammerud: There are a couple of tenets to my leadership approach. I want to optimize employees' experience and optimize their achievement based on their capabilities and what they want. I'm really focused on enhancing capability across the enterprise and for individuals, too.

I also believe as a leader that we need to see the whole human, including their history and everything they bring to the table, while challenging them to be their best. I learned an important lesson about leading with humanity earlier in my career. I was working incredibly late on a massive project. My leader stopped by my office at 9 pm one night to check in on me, and the next morning she had left a tray of homemade cookies on my desk.

I don't even know how she had time to do that, given that she had left very late and got in so early. She left a note with the cookies that said something like, "Jordana, I really appreciate your dedication. It was the least I could do to go home and bake you some cookies." These small moments of gratitude and humanity in leadership are so powerful and meaningful. I would have run through walls for that woman.

Bryant: What do you see as the key X-factors that really separate the best leaders these days?

Kammerud: The most powerful core competency is curiosity. It's a cornerstone for learning, critical thinking, and innovation. And I can't think of three things that are more important right now. We need to encourage, cultivate, and amplify curiosity.

Reimer: When you've coached and mentored senior leaders over the years, what theme comes up most often?

Kammerud: The biggest blind spot is always how they manage themselves and the gap between their intended impact and the actual impact of what they say and do. So the coaching I give is to make fewer assumptions and to pay more attention to how people are reacting, including their body language, to help refine your leadership style.

This is true for even the best leaders. There's always going to be a gap between our intentions and motivations and how people are interpreting them, but you have to work to close that gap as much as you can.

Bryant: What do you consider to be the hardest part of leadership?

Kammerud: The hardest part of leadership is being what everybody else needs, but it's also the most gratifying. As a leader, you want to get the best out of people and be the best for them. So you're always altering your style, thinking about what they need. That requires a lot of energy and agility and thought process, but it's critically important and it's also so gratifying. It can be exhausting but it's a good exhaustion.