



Angela Santone, EVP and Global CHRO for Turner



**Strategic CHRO**

Conversations with leaders who are transforming the world of HR.

Biweekly Series

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## Angela Santone, CHRO of Turner, On Adding "Agility Quotient" To IQ And EQ

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Adam Bryant |

*For the next installment of our interviews with leaders who are transforming the role of the CHRO, [David Reimer](#), the CEO of **The ExCo Group**, and I sat down recently with [Angela Santone](#), global chief human resources officer at Turner. She shared smart insights about developing talent to handle inevitable industry disruptions. Stay tuned for more interviews in this series.*

**Reimer: What have been some key lessons for you since taking over as CHRO?**

Santone: I've been in this role for five-and-a-half years, and no year has been the same. I have more of an appreciation today of the critical skill set of being agile, being able to adapt, knowing how to read an audience, and knowing when to fight the war, not the battle, because you're not always going to get everything you want. You have to figure out your long-term objectives and really be able to keep them in mind, because every company and industry is changing dramatically.

The other thing is the need for data. More than ever, you can make informed decisions with data to help you make sure that we have the right work at the right level and the right place. We have a very simple mantra of "find, grow, keep." We're here to find the right people, make sure we develop them, and we need to retain them.

**Reimer: Any advice you would have for a first-time CHRO that they might not anticipate?**

Santone: Sleep is invaluable. Don't underestimate it. When you're in a new role like this, you can feel like there's so many different priorities and demands on you, but you have to take care of yourself first.

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I would also tell them that you are in this position for a reason. You need to be clear about what the reasons are, you need to be clear with your CEO and your executive team about how they define HR and how you define HR, and make sure you have alignment. Then I would also tell them to be confident in your skills, be confident in what you bring to the table, be open to saying "I don't know the answer," and be open to leveraging the smart people on your team.

**Bryant: You mentioned the importance of agility in your workforce. How do you test for that?**

Santone: The best way is through behavioral interviewing. You can ask questions like, "Tell me about a time your company or your team was moving in a direction and something changed quickly. Tell me how you reacted. How do you deal with ambiguity?" You've got to focus on what you can control because things are moving so fast right now.

When we hire, we want people with high IQ and EQ, but today AQ – agility quotient -- is more important than ever, because if people can adapt and change, they'll be successful. They can figure out ways to fill voids that we didn't even know we had, or they'll take on more responsibility beyond their job description.

**Bryant: Besides agility, what other qualities are you emphasizing in your culture and developing in your leaders?**

Santone: Accountable, innovative and collaborative are the other traits, besides agility. I worked with our CEO at the time and our executive committee to define what we were looking for in our leaders. Those qualities grew out of the fact that we wanted people to be all in, and we wanted our leaders to be very clear about our expectations. It was a collective exercise, and everyone bought into them and then we rolled them out.

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You don't want everything to feel like an initiative. You have to be very careful in HR that people don't feel as if you're trying to sell them medicine. You want people to have a consistent language about our expectations because we are dealing with so much change. It should be part of the culture.

**Bryant: AT&T acquired Turner last year. Integrations can create some uncertainty for people. How do you help them work through that?**

Santone: We're at such an interesting point in our company, and I spend a great deal of time talking to people about ambiguity. My concern is that we have two pools of people. We have individuals who have "anticipation fatigue," because anytime you go through a major acquisition, you have individuals who are so excited and ready for change. But if it doesn't happen in the timeline that they anticipated, they get tired of waiting because they're impatient.

And then you have the other school of thought – people who think nothing's really going to change at all and so they feel very comfortable. Then they're going to be shocked when things do, because at some point they will. They have to.

**Reimer: Imagine you're speaking to a room full of newly minted, first-time CEOs. What's your advice on how to get the most out of their relationship with their CHRO?**

Santone: It depends on the CEO, but oftentimes they're focused on the bottom line, and I am a firm believer that your people capital is just as important as your financial capital. Make sure they are being compensated competitively, feel valued, have the opportunity to hear from you on a regular basis, and that are very clear about your expectations and your vision. Those are the people who are going to make it happen, so don't ever take them for granted.

**Reimer: If you were hosting a dinner party for a group of CHROs, what's the industry topic you'd propose to get everyone talking?**

Santone: It's how the rules of engagement have changed in regard to men and women in the workplace. The #MeToo movement has had such a positive impact, and many people are questioning how they operate today in this new world. I don't know if we all have clarity on

that. I'd love to hear from other heads of HR on how they're dealing with it and how they're setting new norms in their organizations.

What I would never want to have happen is for women to be put at a disadvantage because men are now afraid of being accused of something. There was a day of reckoning, and it continues to happen, and I'm so grateful for that. But the question now is what does that mean and what is the impact?

**Bryant: What were some early influences that shaped you as a leader?**

Santone: I come from a very small town in the panhandle of Florida, and I grew up the youngest of three. At a very young age, I think I learned that the world doesn't revolve around me. Growing up in a very small community taught me that you're only as good as your last interaction. Your name, your reputation, your credibility, the way you conduct yourself -- it matters.