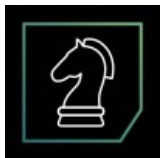




Michele Meyer-Shipp



Strategic CHRO

Conversations with leaders who are transforming the world of HR.

"Eat your Wheaties, Because There's Never A Dull Moment"

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Adam Bryant [in](#)

Managing Director at The ExCo Group (formerly Merryck & Co. Americas)

Michele Meyer-Shipp**, chief people and culture officer at Major League Baseball, shared her key leadership lessons with me and my colleague, **David Reimer**, CEO of **The ExCo

Group, in our latest *Strategic CHRO* interview.

Reimer: Your background includes working for big, traditional companies. And yet you shifted to your current role at Major League Baseball in the middle of the pandemic. How did that pivot come about?

Meyer-Shipp: When the pandemic hit and we were all forced to stay home and quarantine, I had time to think about my career, and I reflected on the fact that I had had three very different professional experiences.

I had worked as an employment lawyer. I had worked in a corporate HR leadership role, and I had DE&I experience. And I said to myself that I wanted to find a role that allows me to bring all of that experience together into one perfect job, and I also wanted to continue to grow.

Out of the blue, I got a call from a recruiter who had been calling me before with DE&I jobs. I had told him that I wanted a broader role that would allow me to engage all of my professional experience. But he called this time, he said, “Well, I have it. It’s a job with Major League Baseball, to be their chief people and culture officer.” When I saw the job description, it was about bringing all my skill sets together, so I decided to go for it.

Bryant: Have you always liked to disrupt yourself with new challenges?

Meyer-Shipp: I get bored really easily. I like the fire of a challenge. I don't know why, but I do. Every move I've made has been in response to the organization needing somebody to fix something, transform a team, or to start something new. I've never just stepped into a job that was going to be easy.

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I love looking at all the pieces of the puzzle and trying to sort them out and pull them all together to make it better. I think that comes from my work as an employment attorney, when I was helping people solve problems. That's what I'm hardwired to do. So this new job presented me with the opportunity to evolve our people-related practices at MLB and help transform the culture.

Reimer: What are some things that struck you early on about the role?

Meyer-Shipp: Two things stuck out to me. First, I had never worked at a place before where the court of public opinion is so front and center. There is not a moment that when I can look away from the news. Everything we do has the potential to be a headline story. For example, when we closed our office during the pandemic, it made the news. When we issued a new code of conduct, it made the news. Simple things that I have done in other organizations have suddenly become newsworthy.

Next, what stood out to me was the close partnership with the 30 Major League Clubs and their senior leadership teams. Not only did my role involve the business of the league office, Major League Baseball, but it also involved close interaction and collaboration with the 30 Clubs.

That meant a whole new set of relationships to build that I didn't appreciate coming in the door. That said, I spent my first 90 to 120 days doing a listening tour across the central league office and the Clubs to ensure I started to build the right relationships. This has proven critical to advancing our efforts around culture.

Reimer: So what is your rubric for thinking about culture?

Meyer-Shipp: I want the workplace to be one where everybody feels fully engaged, so they feel like their voice can be heard and they feel safe. And I don't just mean safe physically, but I mean safe emotionally, like they can open up, they can engage, they can raise concerns, they don't have to sit in a meeting and worry about raising their hand to offer an idea. I want people to have safety in all respects, and I want them to be able to grow and thrive.

That said, I am a fan of employee pulse surveys to gain an insight into the employee experience and their sentiment about the organization. Tell me how you're feeling about your development, your career path, your experience. How are you feeling about the leadership, and the training and professional development?

And I leave a lot of open space at the end for comments and feedback. I

want to know what people need. That, to me, is what the culture is all about, along with making sure that we incorporate our core values into building the culture and being clear about what we stand for.

Bryant: What advice would you give to someone who's about to take on their first CHRO role?

Meyer-Shipp: Eat your Wheaties, because there's never a dull moment, and on any given day, anything can happen, so just be energized, be ready. And you should spend your first 90 to 120 days listening and learning about the culture of your organization, about the leaders in your organization, and the sentiment of your people.

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Really take stock and listen to what's going on around you because that will help you figure out how to prioritize your next steps, how to strategize, and where you need to focus. You need to meet your organization where it's at, understand where your leaders' heads are at, understand where your people's heads are at, and then plan from there. Also, make sure you build your network and get connected with some CHROs both inside and outside your industry so that you stay on top of best practices.

Reimer: Let's shift the focus back to you personally. What drives

you?

Meyer-Shipp: I love people and the power of teamwork and collaboration. I've always been a bit of a sports nut and I think that has a lot to do with my passion in seeing the power of teams coming together to achieve an end goal. In high school, I was the manager of the boys' varsity basketball team. Fast forward and I was the only female coach in town for our flag football team where I got to coach my youngest son and his teammates.

I like bringing people together. I'm a collaborator and a connector. That's what I do. And two of my three sons played football from the age of 5, so sports is always something that's been near and dear to my heart.

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