# People Are Living Longer. That Has Big Implications For Careers and HR Leaders.

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*In this Strategic CHRO interview, Christy Pambianchi, Intel's Chief People Officer, shared her key lessons on the evolution of HR, corporate culture, and trust in HR with The ExCo Group CEO David Reimer and Senior Managing Director and Partner Adam Bryant.*

**Reimer:** So many issues are competing for attention in the HR field. What is a somewhat under-appreciated idea that we should be talking about more?

**Pambianchi:** We're living longer, which means the time scale of a career is being completely altered. For my parents' generation, 30 years was the anchor idea when I entered the workforce. As people live longer, they work for 40 to 50 years. What does that kind of career look like?

There's been talk about people having multiple chapters or new phases of their work life, but the assumption is that the individual will figure that out. I don't think we're doing enough yet as companies, as CHROs, to reimagine what it looks like if you start working at 20, but you're going to live to 100. If you work from 20 to 65, will you live for 30 to 40 more years on the income you made for 40 years?

It's amazing that people are living longer, but that has very big implications for how employers should think about human capital—the way we design our programs and policies for hiring, developing, retaining, and managing our lifecycles in a company to better tap into and match what's going on with human evolution.

**Bryant:** Let's continue with this theme of employees' relationship to work and their employer. It feels, particularly in the last few years with the Great Resignation and #QuietQuitting, that the power dynamics have been shifting a lot to the point where some workers' expectations have become unreasonable.

**Pambianchi:** Economics plays a big role in the dynamic. The unemployment rate is below four percent, forcing employers to consider employee preferences more than they have in the past. If the unemployment rate were to shift to six, seven, or eight percent, I think we would see a rapid shift in return-to-office policies. However, some companies have really embraced hybrid, and it works for their business model because they can access a more diverse set of talent rather than one that is geographically based.

People often assume that there are generational differences in how people view work arrangements, but I think it's more about personal preferences based on your life circumstances. I have boomers who like being able to work remotely so they can help care for an elderly parent. And I have young people, including my own children, who say, "I want to work in an office because I don't want to start my career in my apartment."

When all the dust settles, the best outcome will be where there's a core time for teams to work together in person rather than just putting in time at your desk by yourself. What employees really value is the flexibility in the hours they work. If we can find a way to keep the things we learned about working virtually and not make working onsite a draconian exercise in checking on people, then it will be a win-win in terms of balance.

**Reimer:** At the risk of stating the obvious, your role requires a comfort level with uncertainty and new challenges. What were the early influences that gave you that mindset?

**Pambianchi:** It's rooted in my life experiences before I was 15. My mom passed away when I was 11. Because I'm the oldest of four sisters, I had to become an adult quickly. My grandmother and aunt—my dad's mother and sister—lived with us. That was helpful, but I wound up being sort of an adult in the room with them at a young age. I carried a pretty big load in the household, helping my sisters over the years and being somewhat of a parent to them.

I also started working at 13. I did a ton of babysitting, was a lifeguard, and taught swimming. I was jumping in the water at 14 years old to save a 7-year-old from drowning. Because of those early experiences, I always felt responsible. All of that gave me a certain wiring for this kind of work. Given that my mom's life was cut short at 34, I've always felt from a young age that I've wanted my life to matter—to make a difference on a small scale in my community or on a big scale in the world.

**Bryant:** When you take on a new role, what do you share with people about who you are as a leader on the first day?

**Pambianchi:** I talk about two things. I'll share with them about my family: "I have four children. Being a mom is super important to me. I met my husband when I was 17, and we have a supportive home environment."

And then I'll say, "I'm sure all of you have a full life outside of work. That's equally important for me to know so I can support you as you pursue your professional and personal goals. I don't view the two

as separate. They're not extractable. You're a whole human, and I'm a whole human, too."

Then, I talk a little bit about HR. People spend the most hours of their lives at work, and human capital is one of the biggest investments of any business. So, the role of HR is to help optimize that for both the enterprise and for employees, and what an awesome responsibility that is. I also believe we have three stakeholders—the enterprise, the leaders throughout the company, and the employees.

I care a lot about culture. It's important that employees trust HR as a function and know that we are here to help them. I say all that because I've seen over the last 30 years when pressures on corporate costs have meant that the HR function has had to choose which stakeholders it supports. For me, we're going to support all three.

**Reimer:** Is there a lasting lesson you took away from a bad manager early in your career?

**Pambianchi:** I had a few really bad managers, one of whom was super abusive and difficult. In HR, I often had to escalate issues to my manager and share details with them. I found out this individual was using that information to either benefit themselves or insert themselves in a process to change outcomes.

I was in my early 20s, and that experience made me paranoid for a while. I wasn't sure who I could trust and what was happening because the outcomes of the things I managed made no sense. When I figured out what had happened, I couldn't believe it, and then I started to be paranoid. I was not being my best self. I started to assign motives to people and second-guessed everything.

I got myself out of that situation and learned a few things. If you're in a toxic management situation, you should leave it, even if it means leaving your company. It's so important not to violate your values, and my values were being violated by what I saw happening around me. A mentor who helped me navigate the situation said, "If you aren't part of fixing the problem, then you become part of the problem."

**Bryant:** I'm sure you've done a ton of coaching and mentoring over the years. What advice do you often share?

**Pambianchi:** When people ask me for advice or coaching, I often start the conversation by asking what their personal and professional goals are. They often can't answer that question, or they might say something superficial like, "Well, I want that job." Then I'll say, "Okay, but take away the label of that job in this particular business unit. We're sitting here ten years from now. What do you hope to have achieved personally and professionally? Let's start with that end game in mind, and then I can help you and give you more advice and insight." I'm often amazed at how many people I interact with who haven't really taken the time to think about that.

If someone comes to me and they already know what they want, there might be a misalignment between how the organization views them and how they see themselves. So, I will try to engage with the person in some self-reflection. What do they think their strengths are? What do they think their weaknesses are? Sometimes, I'll take on the role of objectively sharing feedback about the person.

That was hard to do in my twenties because I didn't want to hurt someone's feelings. But ultimately, as I got more skilled at it with proper training, I realized I was doing them a service. As long as I'm doing so in a balanced and fair way, from a place of authenticity, and at their request, I'm giving them the information they need, and they can decide what they want to do with it.