



“What Really Sets Brilliant CHROs Apart Is Their Ability To Be A Magnet For Talent”

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Jennifer Tippin, group chief operating officer for NatWest Group, whose portfolio of responsibilities includes HR, shared her key leadership lessons with me and World 50 Group as part of our “Passing the Baton” series. Each interview, featuring HR50 members and advisors, will include their insights on the critical skills needed for the next generation of HR executives. [Subscribe here](#) for future interviews.

Q. What are the X-Factor skills and capabilities that the next generation of CHROs is going to need?

A. With everything that’s happened over the last few years, change has been the only real constant. And so, the number one capability you need is to be able to see around corners. You may not be able to predict the future, but with so much complexity and ambiguity and change, being able to see around that corner is a tremendous capability.

Also, you have to prioritize talent, because people, culture, and talent are what set businesses apart. Do you have the right people? Are they in the right positions? Have they got the right skills and capabilities? How do you think about succession planning? These are such important topics for boards and executive committees.

Finally, the most successful CHROs take data from a variety of sources to drive powerful outcomes for the business. Building strong data capability within an HR function is absolutely pivotal, and I see

that as being a big differentiator if you want to be a strategic partner for the CEO, the CFO, and the board.

Q. You have a huge portfolio of responsibilities — not just HR, but also Corporate Affairs, Corporate Governance / Company Secretariat, Legal, Regulatory Affairs, Marketing, Investment, Customer Journeys, Property, and Supply Chain. It does seem to be part of a trend to have CHROs run more parts of the business.

A. During the pandemic, CHROs were getting involved in all sorts of discussions, including how we prepare people to work remotely, and then how do we get people back to the office? How do we deal with the Great Resignation? Then how do we deal with improving productivity? I also think that talent, performance, culture and people matters have occupied much more attention around the boardroom and the executive committee.

As a result, the CHRO role has broadened, often starting with real estate because it was linked to ways of working, and return to the office and productivity. Communications is also a natural fit because we have to engage our talent. Increasingly, CHROs are being asked to solve some of these big questions across multiple specialist areas.

And that's great, because 10 to 15 years ago, perhaps the CHRO was fighting to have their place at the executive committee. That is no longer considered even a question. It's great to see people with a HR background taking on expanded roles as well as much broader roles within businesses.

Q. It takes a certain background and wiring to be comfortable amid all this ambiguity. Where does that come from for you?

A. I've always loved diversity and breadth of topic and task. What I really love about the role is that no two days are ever the same. One minute, I can be talking about talent and succession management. The next minute, we're talking about how to really make a step change in performance culture. Then we're talking about how we improve the operating model of the business. That's always been something I've really enjoyed.

I loved many subjects at school when I was younger. I'm an avid reader, and I find interest in lots of different subjects. I was the kid reading a book with a flashlight late at night, and my dad would come in and say, it really is time to go to bed. I find life intriguing.

And you have to have a real passion for people — their stories, their journeys, their potential, and how you can help them. If that doesn't excite you, you won't find a lot of joy in this job. But if you find energy and excitement in helping and supporting others, and if you like huge variety, this is a dream job, particularly at this moment.

Q. What is the hardest part of your job?

A. The judgment calls. And that's why I love data, because it helps me make those judgment calls on very complex, difficult issues that have no obvious right or wrong answers. There's a lot of ambiguity and grey areas, particularly with all the different stakeholder groups you have to manage. But I also think it's the most interesting part of the job. You almost certainly will not get every decision right, but if you're getting seven or eight out of 10 decisions right, that's pretty good. And you learn from each and every one of those situations.

Q. What are the dos and don'ts you would share with a CHRO who is stepping into the role for the first time?

A. First and foremost, and as with any role, it is about building a strong team around you. Secondly, you need to spend a lot of time looking out. Of course, you have to pay attention to what's going on in your organization. But you should be spending a lot of your time looking externally to understand what is changing for your customers and other stakeholder groups, and what those changes mean for your business.

The power of data is an absolute non-negotiable from my perspective. And finally, what really sets brilliant CHROs apart is their ability to be a magnet for talent. You're spotting that talent, attracting it, nurturing it, and growing it. You're the person making the phone call to say, "Please come here, this is the reason why you'll love working for this business, and here's how it's going to make a big difference to your career."

The biggest don't is, don't wallow in process. Lift yourself out of process. Really think about some of the critical business outcomes. That's where you will add value as CHRO, rather than in the tick-box exercises. You need really competent, brilliant people on your team dealing with the day-to-day work so that you can deal with the much more strategic topics.

Q. How do you not get burned out, given everything that's on your plate?

A. If you've got the right team around you, it becomes a lot easier to delegate and share the work. And with these super-difficult topics, it's easy for executive teams to say that it's for the CHRO to solve. But CHROs have to say, "This isn't a HR issue. This is a business problem. We need to face into that, rather than letting it simply fall on one person's shoulders."