

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work In Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Work In Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers, people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Earlier this month, about 3000 leaders in education, tech, and workforce development gathered in San Diego for the annual ASU+GSV Summit. I got a chance to catch up with Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., the president and CEO of SHRM. We talked a lot about how the way people are being hired is changing. We also talked about the mid-career worker and some of the barriers they're facing reentering the workforce. Here's that conversation.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Johnny, thank you so much for joining me at ASU+GSV. I really appreciate you taking the time.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

It's so good to be here.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The way employers are signaling what they need in the workplace is changing a little bit. It has to, because skills are changing and there's a big push to make sure that skills-based hiring is happening as opposed to resumes.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

That's right.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What is happening with the hiring managers? This is who you represent. What are they talking about and about how they can help those employers find the workers that they need?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

It's tough. We're in the middle of an interesting sort of transition, there's a paradigm shift, to your point, from the resume and the degree being a proxy for smart and capable and having the skills, to a different world where maybe it doesn't show up in a person with a bachelor's degree or a person with a graduate education, everything, it just shows up. Stackable credentials.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

We're in the middle of a level of transition that we've never seen, realistically, in such a short period of time in the workforce, so hiring managers are trying to keep up with it, and it's tough. I mean, it's the only way I can describe it. And so we're relying very heavily on feedback from the customer, and the customer would be people who are actually interviewing for a job.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

I know it's counterintuitive to think that you're our customer, but I want to know who's showing up, what's the language, how are they describing themselves and their skills and qualities and characteristics. I don't mean to dance around it, but it is really difficult. I've been at this work now 25 years in human resources, and let me tell you, even I'm a little flummoxed at times. I don't even know how to take the person who's sitting across from me anymore. I don't know how to read their resumes, for example.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

When you see a resume that says interdisciplinary studies, I'm like, what is that? If you told me you were a math major, a computer science major, or a law major, my mind understands it. I don't know what that means anymore.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

There's no one language for that, though. That's part of the problem.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Precisely.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So if I said that I am a computer analyst, what am I analyzing? How am I working? What skills do I have? So that goes back to those skills based descriptions.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

That's right. What can you do?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Exactly.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

The new resume. What can you do, and how do I have confidence that you can actually do it, that you've done it before?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

There's two good questions in there. So what are hiring managers asking now, then? And then I'll get to my other one next.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

During every interview now, we're focused on two things, first of all, and this is new. We're looking at technical competency, can you do the job, but also cultural alignment, which employers, let me tell you, if you are right now as a prospective employee and you're not realizing that not only am I asking you, what can you technically do, but who are you? In a world of employee activists, in a world where you're going to spend 8-10 hours a day in this captive space called my workplace, and if you're not going to get along with other people, if you don't play nice in the sandbox, you can't work here. So I'm looking at a lot of things, just as you're interviewing me, I'm interviewing you.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

First question, what are you technically capable of doing? During this interview process I'm looking for someone to tell me what they've done, when they've done it, what were the results? I mean, you've got to leave that interview making me know that when I hire you to be a technical writer, that you can actually write. I don't care about what school you attended, I don't care about your degrees at all. Can you do what I'm hiring you to do?

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Does that mean we all have to be storytellers now?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Yes.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We have to tell our own stories?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

You took my language. That's exactly what I was going to say. The interview is very much about me leaving here understanding who you are. And the art of storytelling is more important than ever. It is precisely the point. I tell people who I advise on this, when you come in to interview, you had better be able to make me leave believing in you, a la storytelling.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Can you signal those skills with a credential? Because not everybody... I've been talking for 40 years. Oh my God, I just dated myself. I've been talking since I was a baby.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Since you were a baby.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Since I was a little kid. But people are not natural born storytellers. So can there be credentials and other signals to that employer that you're good at what you're doing?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Yes, but the most important thing you've got to do is to become a storyteller, even if you're not great at it. Think about it. We don't allow people to say to us, I'm not good at this, so trust me. You've got to get good at it. And the person who's going to win out, nine times out of 10 during the interview process, and we say this often. People will come to me and say, "Here's my resume. Look, I can do this." And I said, "Well, you've got to make me know that, because you're competing with thousands, if not tens of thousands, of resumes with people who say, I can do this."

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

So again, you have got to be able to tell the story. How have you evolved if you've been in the workforce for 40 years? I know you've done it for 40 years, but the world changed five years ago, so you've got to

tell me the story. Tell me how this was. I love the movie Hidden Figures, where the women were referred to as computers, and then the computer hardware came in place and they had to up-skill and re-skill and change the way they did business.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

They've got to be able to convince me that I'm agile, I'm flexible, I'm a lifelong learner. Anyone can put those three words, those phrases, on a resume, but if you give me a story, you tell me how you're agile, you tell me how you have been flexible. Give me examples. At its core, storytelling is going to get you the job. And people say, I'm not a great storyteller. You've got to become better storytellers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Are those the most important skills?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Increasingly we talk about communications, yes.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And flexibility, agility, lifelong learners. We've talked about that, and there's a lot of people though, who are afraid to do that. How do we encourage them to become those lifelong learners?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Right. They've got to commit themselves to it. I wish I could tell you there's a magic way to do it, but long gone are the days when a degree that you got 20 years ago matters to us. It doesn't. Because the world changes too much in a 20 year period. Heck, it changes a lot in a five year period. So more and more, you've got to be able to evidence that you can change with the times, because the one thing we know that's constant is change.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

So are there different ways that employers are now communicating what they want, and it's coming through the hiring managers?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

The advent of technology and social media gives you a real opportunity. Before you go into interview with, name the employee, there are people who've been there before and who can give you insights into what the interview process is like, and so taking full advantage of what's generally publicly available. Social media has been wonderful in democratizing information.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

I tell people, go do work. When you come in to interview with me, you shouldn't ask me, so tell me about your guiding principles. You should know my guiding principles. There's LinkedIn. You should know the person for whom you're seeking a job, you should know a lot about them. Don't spend the time, tell me about yourself. What does that mean? I already know about you, you should know about me, so that you can [crosstalk 00:08:21].

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Do your research.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Right. And you can spend more time showing me. Again, first question, can you do my job? I am investing in you. If you make \$100,000 a year, once I layer on benefits and taxes and all of that good stuff, you're a \$150,000 investment. Fundamentally, when I'm sitting across from you, I'm asking, am I going to get a return on that investment? That's it.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

More importantly, is that investment, when I talk about cultural alignment, is it going to complement the rest of my investments? Or is it going to create tension? So you could be brilliant at what you do technically, but then you come into our environment, where we value teamwork, we are desiloed, all of these things, and you don't do that. Then that investment in you is costing me another investment. So it's just we have to really think about the construct.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

We talk about human capital. Guess what? Just like we analyze financial capital, we are now analyzing human capital.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

We need to flip that though, because there's also age bias. A company's culture may celebrate youth and it doesn't celebrate the mid-career worker, so let's talk about that, because that drives me crazy.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

It drives me nuts. It is personally, when I get on my soap box, it's that point. We openly discriminate against people in the workplace based on age. We talk about going to college career fairs. We talk about let's have coding camps in middle schools, in high schools, in college. Why not for the 50 year old? I can still learn, by the way.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

We have to address that head on and sensitize people to the fact that, if you keep waking up, one day you too will be 50, and therefore you have to, 25 year old, understand that this is in your best interest to change the narrative and the way that people... think about it, ageism in the workplace is one of the biggest, most tragic forms of discrimination in the workplace.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That goes to what you said, the culture part of it. And I agree with you. And I think there's so many people out there, especially now, the numbers came out and they say that over half of the longterm unemployed are people over 45, and these are people with-

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Talented.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

They have valuable skills. They have experience. They have the institutional knowledge. So, agreed that we have to figure out a way to do that. How do you work with hiring managers to manage up to their bosses?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Well, that's the challenge, is CEOs, like myself, we have got to establish... diversity, equity, and inclusion, by the way, isn't just race, gender, national origin, it includes age and other forms, dimensions, of diversity, and we've got to say, this is a part of our culture, period. We recruit diverse talent, that means older people, younger people, black people, white people, brown people. We've got to broaden the definition so that it encompasses everyone. Opportunity for all. It starts with the CEO and boards, we've got to say, diversity is not a program and an initiative, it's the way we do business here.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

The other side, and this is a serious conversation for people watching this, we are all resistant to change, and the older we become, the more resistant we general become to change. One of the things that we have to talk about is, yes, there are a lot of things employers need to do with respect to ageism and age discrimination, but we also, and I'm one of those older people, over 40, we've got to do our part to make sure that we are less resistant to change as well.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Naturally it's like, I've been successful, so I'm going to keep doing what has made me successful. And organizations are saying, not so much. You have to be willing to change as well. So both sides of this equation must move inward. Employers have got to change their mindset that young and shiny and bright and new is not the latest and always the best. Similarly, employees have got to get their arms wrapped around the way I did it may not always be the way you're going to do it.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

The phrase, I don't know if it's overused, but lifelong learner, is true though. If I was still doing what I was doing 40 years ago, I wouldn't still be doing what I was doing 40 years ago. There is no demand for it.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

I'm a lawyer for training, for example, and I remember starting my practice going into the law library. No one goes into a law library anymore. I can do it all right here on my laptop, all of the research I need, everything. I had to get with the program. If I were the person who's says, well, I learned on books in a law library and I have to go to the library to practice law, I'd be in trouble. It just changed.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

What do you hear at the conference talking about? Is it what we're talking about now? Is there something else top of your mind that you really feel that we need to address as a society to make sure everybody has a good job?

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

I'm here today to talk about the importance of workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion, but more than just a program, but specifically around what we're going to have to do in an increasingly diverse

workforce. What we know is that America's K-12 public school systems are majority minority. So diversity is coming. We have got to figure out how to hire and engage a more diverse workforce in the future.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

That means post this big pandemic, we've got to make sure that everyone recovers, not just part of the workforce, or otherwise we're going to have such haves and have nots, we're going to create another set of issues that employers need today. We just announced yesterday, the Bureau of Labor Statistics just said, we have 10 million openings. My gosh, we've never had that since they started keeping records. So you got 10 million open jobs and we need every person, irrespective of their race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, whatever we need them in the workforce.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

That's what I'm talking about today is, how do we bring people who've been on the sidelines, back off the sidelines into the workforce? Because we need them all. So times past diversity, equity, inclusion was all about doing the right thing, the moral imperative, et cetera. It's business imperative now. We don't have a choice. We don't have the luxury of weeding out any group of people. And when they come into the workplace, an increasingly diverse workforce, we've got to figure out how to make them feel included.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Diversity is step one. Inclusion is the most important. Because when someone feels like they belong, when they feel like they are included at work, guess what? They take this home to their communities. They take it home to their families. It lifts the entire boat. Rising tide floats all boats.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

At SHRM we say, better workplaces can lead to a better world, and that is incredibly important. We forget that person who now has upward mobility and economic freedom, can now invest in their communities and their children, et cetera. So this is really God's work. It's more than just getting a day's work out of a person and paying them for that, it very much is about lifting us all together as a society.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Johnny, thank you very much for joining me.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM president and CEO:

Well, thank you. I had a really great time.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I really appreciate it. [crosstalk 00:15:45].

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

My guest today was Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., president and CEO of SHRM. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, editor-in-chief of WorkingNation. Thanks for listening.