



Stacy Eng, chief learning and talent officer at Chevron



X-Factor Leadership

Powerful conversations with heads of talent and learning at leading corporations

"Don't Make Quick Judgments About What You Want To Accomplish."

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David Reimer

CEO - Americas at Merryck & Co.

*For the next installment of our interview series with top leaders in the talent and learning field, we spoke with **Stacy Eng**, chief learning and talent officer at Chevron, who shared her key lessons and advice with me and **Adam Bryant**, managing director at **Merryck & Co.***

Reimer: How has this tumultuous year affected your thinking about grooming the leaders of the future?

Eng: Because we moved so swiftly to a remote work model, we discovered how nimble we could be, and we learned that we need leaders who are emotionally intelligent, adaptable, agile and can pivot quickly. Historically, as a company full of engineers, our people have been focused on safety, process and analytics to deliver business performance. But in this pandemic, we realized that our leaders also needed to demonstrate softer skills like empathy and caring about the personal situations of their people.

Bryant: How are you trying to develop empathy in your leaders?

Eng: This crisis has affected so many of our employees — leaders included. In the regular management meetings for our top executives, our CEO Mike Wirth led discussions where he asked our leaders to share their personal stories and challenges to understand how people are adapting in this new environment. It was uncomfortable for some, but it opened up the opportunity for everyone to share those stories, and to emulate that behavior with their own teams.

Reimer: What has this challenging year taught you about your own leadership?

Eng: The first thing is to be able to show more vulnerability with my team. I'm very results oriented and driven, so my meetings tended to be focused on projects and tasks. I began spending more time in meetings asking employees how they're doing and how they're feeling. I have also learned to open the conversation first with sharing my own personal experiences to help others feel like it's okay to also open up. I have become more intentional to engage others at a more personal level.

When the pandemic began, I started sending weekly messages to my team where I talk about what I'm experiencing at home. I have a son who is being home-schooled virtually, and we have elderly parents who live 3,000 miles away from us. I have to take care of the needs of my family, as well as balance work demands. It has been difficult trying to manage everything well. I have become more comfortable sharing personal challenges that in the past I would never have thought about bringing up in a business environment.

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personal challenges.

I've received a lot of positive feedback from the team, especially from several layers down. I realize that it's okay to show that leaders are humans too, and that we all have personal issues that we have to deal with during this time. This creates an open environment where people can be forthcoming about sharing their personal circumstances.

Bryant: What do you see as future trends within your field?

Eng: I keep closely connected with my peers at other companies so I can stay on top of emerging practices and themes. We also recently added a new team to my learning and talent organization called the Future of Work. With the changes that we're seeing in the business environment, the Future of Work team is our trendsetter or our trend seeker, like an R&D arm of talent management.

For example, we're evaluating whether the concept of gig economy can be introduced into our company at some point, in terms of allowing people to have short, gig-like development assignments. We tend to move our talent from full-time role to full-time role.

This concept of doing a "gig" as development, in addition to one's core role, is new in our culture. But the next generation of talent that we are recruiting into the company is hungry for experiences like these. They want to have diverse career experiences and development in different functions and different areas.

Reimer: If you're giving advice to somebody who's coming in as head of learning and development to a new organization, what are the guiding principles you would share with them?

Eng: Start by listening. Don't make quick judgments about what you want to accomplish. Sometimes, when you come into a new role, you have grand plans and strategies that you want to implement. But it's important to understand the business, listen to your customers and your business, and assess the needs of the organization.

In my first six months, I spoke with multiple business leaders to understand the value chain of our business and leadership. Who are those people who are leading our current organization? What's their leadership style? How are they running their business? What is the feedback from employees about their leaders?

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You can gain a lot of insights about the culture and people through a listening tour to better inform your strategy. I'd also advise those who are going into a new role to get a mentor in the business to help guide them and serve as a sounding board.

Bryant: You've worked in a lot of different roles and industries over your career. You're clearly comfortable with change.

Eng: Yes, in my 25-year career, I've been in seven different companies and probably 13 or 14 different roles. I'm very comfortable with ambiguity and moving into new situations, assessing needs and putting together my plan. I like challenges and driving change.

Reimer: Where did that quality come from?

Eng: As a child, my family immigrated from Taiwan to the United States. My parents were small business owners pursuing the American dream. They also wanted better educational opportunities for their kids. We settled in New York City, where I grew up.

I didn't know how to speak English when I started school here. I had to very quickly learn to read body language, understand what's going on in the classroom and learn the English language in order to adapt in a new culture. That experience helped shape me in terms of being able to come into a new situation, read the environment, and develop ways of adapting and adjusting.

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David Reimer

CEO - Americas at Merryck & Co.

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