

SPEAKER_00 0:04

My name is Mark Mitford with HR Catalyst. And today I have the pleasure of talking to Ashley Martin. Ashley is with Exponent HR and she is the Enterprise Solutions Director. So with that, Ashley, how are you doing today?

SPEAKER_02 0:17

Thank you, Mark.

SPEAKER_00 0:18

Great. Well, I'm looking forward to the conversation we're going to have with Ashley today. Why don't you first of all tell me a little bit about your business and when did you actually start with Exponent?

SPEAKER_02 0:32

Oh, wow. That goes way back. How much time do we have? I uh I I'm what they call a boomerang employee. So I started with Exponent back in 2010, pretty fresh out of college. Now I'm dating myself and worked here for five years. And then I left for another opportunity, something I wanted to go try, um, that lasted uh less than a year. And then I went to another company to work in more of like a project management type role, only to find out about two and a half years later that um there was an opportunity opening up at Exponent. And so we I got back together with the leadership team here and came back here in 2019 or maybe 2018. Um and I've been here since. So almost a total of 12 years at Exponent. I've worn a lot of different hats. Uh 15 years ago, my role was more of business development events, events coordination, uh, learning how to move uh a prospective client through the sales cycle. And then um fast forward to today, and I've had the privilege um uh since I've been here of also wearing a lot of different hats in a family-owned uh mid-sized business where I do uh I do serve in a leadership role on the team as well as uh managing all of our partnerships uh with other firms that service clients that are similar sizes to ours. Uh, and then also a little bit of sales. So I um there's there's not a lot that I haven't done here, but that's what keeps it exciting and keeps it fun and keeps it interesting and keeps me learning, quite frankly, and on my toes. And uh every meeting I have with a new potential customer, I get to learn something new about their industry and uh it just keeps it very engaging, keeps the world very engaging. That's great.

SPEAKER_00 2:12

No, and then and Ashley and I have known each other for quite a few years. So my actual ongoing joke is that I've known Ashley since she was single. So it's a we've known each other for a couple of years because I know that you've got two kids now. So congratulations and happily married and two kids. So that's congratulations on that.

SPEAKER_02 2:29

So yeah, that's true. I forget people know me as Ashley McMaster and not Ashley Martin.

SPEAKER_00 2:35

I'm I'm one of them. So it's uh so what was just out of curiosity, so and we'll dive into uh in just a couple of minutes the HR system side and the and and really kind of the the heartbeat of what H Exponent uh Exponent HR does, but what's what was kind of the intrigue or the driving force behind uh joining Exponent when you did?

SPEAKER_02 2:56

Well, in 2010, uh the world was in it, well, the world, the US was in an interesting economic place. Uh, there was not a lot of job opportunity when I graduated from LSU in 2009. So I ended up working at a small state farm agency in my hometown of Shreeport, Louisiana. And uh about a year later, I was contacted by a friend of mine who worked in the service group here who told me that she'd be happy to send my resume over to the marketing and sales side. And that's what kicked off the interview process. And I got in a car as fast as I could and drove from Shreeport to Dallas for the interview that day and was able to secure the entry-level job here. And I was really looking for an opportunity to learn and for someone to give me an opportunity to learn. And I was very fortunate in that uh I came in and had an amazing leader and mentor that uh I still give credit to today for everything that I know and everything that he taught me. And then uh after being here for five years and leaving, I only left because I wanted to try some other things. Exponent was all I've ever known. And what was really interesting is not only did I go other places and learn about their industries, but I learned a lot about myself and how much I enjoyed working in a family-owned, privately held company where it was middle market-based and we wear a lot of different hats. And I'm able to uh have a daily impact on the customers and the clients and the prospective clients and the partners. Uh, it's a it's just it's a very enjoyable for me, anyways. It's what drives me, the ability to have that immediate impact versus one of the companies I worked for in the middle was a company uh that had like 6,000 employees, and it was just and it was big. And um the the big companies need people too, but I just I really enjoy this size company and the atmosphere and the culture here.

SPEAKER_00 4:41

Right. And that's so great. It's it's it's such a true point, what you just said too, because you could um what you mentioned there a couple of times, Ashley, which is interesting, is that you can actually make a difference. And within a large company, and I spent a lot of years in larger companies all the way up to Fortune 50. Um, you know, and and it's just hard to move the needle there. Yeah, just because you're you're trying to you're trying to move a you're you're trying to stare and change direction with a super tanker. So it's kind of interesting that you're

that's kind of the driving force, a little bit of that North Star for you is being with a a business where you could actually make a difference. So good for you. Um so we're actually here today to talk about HR systems and the importance of what they are in the business. So just a level set, Ashley, because this is a world you've been in for a number of years. Why don't you just give, if you could give our audience just a basic definition of what a what an HR system is, uh by your definition?

SPEAKER_02 5:43

Sure. Uh an HR platform, it can be many different things. Um they're all going to have different features and functionality. They're all going to be meant for different sized organizations. They're all gonna, they're all going to solve for different problems. But in a nutshell, if I needed to give you a textbook answer to that, I would say that an HR platform should absolutely support all of your uh HR functions, uh, in addition to all of your payroll functions and your benefits administration. That's kind of core. You have to have those three functions to operate as a business. And then as you grow and expand and need more functionality, you're gonna see systems that also add in applicant tracking and onboarding and employee self-service and manager self-service and time and attendance, along with cost allocation and scheduling. And there, I could name 20 other features that can come along with an HR platform. But in general, the definition of an HR platform should be something that's gonna be in place that's gonna help you automate a lot of what otherwise would be manual processes on the payroll side, on the HR side, and on the benefits side. If it's not helping you automate anything, then I wouldn't really call it an HRIS, so to speak. Um, and I know we'll talk about this in just a little bit, but the there are great very simple payroll only tools that fit a certain company, but at a certain point, when you get to a certain size of employee, you really need to consider having an HRS in place.

SPEAKER_00 7:07

Yeah, so actually that just that segues really nicely into our next question, which is because I know that um you know I'm a small business owner, so we use QuickBooks. We use QuickBooks, but we don't have to do a lot of work on so when so from a business owner perspective or the CFO or controller perspective, when do they need to start thinking about actually getting a what I would consider a real HR system? You know, is there is it employee size, company revenue? What what when you're talking to um organizations that are that are that are reaching out to you, uh what are what what kind of things do you mention to them there or try to find out and didn't maybe in a discovery call regarding whether they're ready for a full a full uh full-blown HR system?

SPEAKER_02 7:56

Yeah, uh that's a great uh good question and always a good consideration. So I have a couple of magic numbers. There's 50 and then there's a hundred and then there's a hundred and above, kind of all the way up to 2000. There are some really great products out there, HR platforms with self-service that have great mobile functionality for groups that are about 50 employees and below. And um, what I've seen for what we do specifically is that when someone hits between 50 and 100 employees, they really are ready at a certain point to let's call it level up and bring on, you know, bring about more automation in their workflows. So employee count is part of it, but also complexity. So a 50-person company that's highly distributed across 13 different states with a bunch of job costing and different activity that they're doing that we're trying to track versus a company that's the same size that's all in the state of Texas and they're all in the exact same building doing the exact same activity for a flat pay rate. One of those companies may need a system sooner than the other one does, right? The one that's more complex. And so there's definitely some different factors to look at. Um, I think that scalability is a huge thing. I think that's what the numbers have to do with is up to about 50 employees, you can usually kind of have one person handle it all. But when you get above 50 employees, you really have a choice to make, or in that, in that number, that range, you're either going to have to hire somebody else, another person to come in and keep up with all the work from an HR payroll and benefit standpoint, or it's time to evaluate technology and get a good system in place. I've had a group, uh, I had a group that evaluated us, uh, this was a couple months ago, that was us uh on the, there were about 35-ish employees, and we demoed them and we showed them our proposal and everything we could do for them. But quite frankly, it was too much. And I that it was too much from a cost and value standpoint because they weren't going to use everything that we had to offer. So they ended up going with a partner of ours that really helped meet them where they needed to be from a budget standpoint and for what functionality they were going to be using. But I've also had a group that was 60-ish employees, and this was last year. They're now a client of ours on one of those platforms that they started on when they were 10 employees and they were still on it and they had just outgrown it. And it was time for something new. And while they had great things to say about that platform, they still needed more functionality, more support to support some of the complexities that they had going on as a business and for how fast they were growing. And they really were setting up or they are setting up for future growth. So I would say somewhere between 50 and 100, uh, it's really time to start looking for a more sophisticated system. Again, depends on complexity as well. But those are the two things that I would focus on when you're thinking about whether or not you're ready for an HR platform.

SPEAKER_00 10:39

So what are, you know, so when you think about from and being in this world for a number of years, how what are some of the important things that, you know, I don't I don't want to say a

selling proposition, but just the value proposition for an organization that has, let's say, 75 or 80 employees. What are some of the key things that you would say the rationale for why they need a good HR system?

SPEAKER_02 11:08

Uh well, one of them I kind of already mentioned that, and then that's scalability. Because as soon as you hire a second person to come in and take over those tasks, you're not just paying them a salary. It's salary and burden and all the payroll taxes and the benefits you're going to be offering. And I think that sometimes that's overlooked, the people aspect of it. So you want to make sure that that you can scale your organization if you're truly trying to build out uh to grow your business. So scalability would be the first one. But the second one, kind of going back to my previous comment, is compliance. So think about that company that's in that's 60 employees, but they're in 13 different states. Well, what states are they in? And what's going on in those states from an overtime and tax standpoint? And is someone paying attention if they're using maybe something as simple as a QuickBooks, is QuickBooks going to be able to keep up with the different tax regulations and over, you know, the tax calculations in uh California and keeping up with the tax and reciprocity rules between New Jersey and New York and Ohio and some of those more complex states. So you've you've got to make sure again that you're looking at your workforce and that you're um you're ready to be compliant in whatever states you decide to do business in. Uh, the third reason that I believe companies at that size should start looking at uh NHRIS is because is really for data. Because if you don't have, you know, a lot of people think it's all about self-service and how the system looks and the employee experience. And yes, all that's important. But at the end of the day, if that CEO or that CFO doesn't have the dashboards and the reporting to show them, hey, what does our labor cost look like? What does our labor cost look like by department? What does it look like by division? Why is it that in this department, where Bob's the manager, overtime is twice as much as it is everybody everywhere else? Is it because Bob needs to hire another employee or is it because Bob is giving all the overtime to Mark, who's been there the longest, who has the highest rate of pay because Mark's trying to put two kids through college? The data will take you, it'll show you things that you would have never known otherwise. If you don't have a system in place, you're not gonna know what's going on in your business. And so when you get between that 50 and 100 employees, it can be extremely valuable beyond what you're gonna be paying for the platform because it's an investment and you're gonna pay to implement and and have a platform in place. But the data that it gives you, making sure it's meaningful to you and that you're utilizing it is gonna take your business a long ways.

SPEAKER_00 13:33

That's interesting, you know, and it's uh that I didn't even think of just some of those nuances and and for uh people that are listening to just those the extreme differences in state law and regulatory law and state some states have income tax, all these things that you really need to you need to check, you know, you need to make sure that your T's are crossed and your I's are dotted there. So that's really fascinating that you brought that up.

SPEAKER_02 13:58

Well, and that's not going, I mean, it's only gonna get it's not going away. It's not gonna get any easier, right?

SPEAKER_00 14:04

Yeah, no, it's not. Yeah.

SPEAKER_02 14:06

Well, and post-pandemic, a lot of people moved. You know, a lot of people went 100% remote. Now they went to live in the mountains or they went, you know, of Colorado, where there's different uh uh paid leave requirements. I mean, it's it's all across the board. There's a there's a lot of things to think about from an HR and compliance standpoint. So that's important.

SPEAKER_00 14:26

Right. I know, and then sometimes even in in my world on the HR consulting side, I always think, you know, you got to remember where they reside, where their where their state of residence is really gonna trump where their job is, quote unquote, because so many people, like you said, they're in a hybrid or remote situation, so that's fascinating. So um with that, Ashley, we'll take a short break, and for our audience, we'll take a short break, and we will be back in just a just a minute. Thanks so much.

SPEAKER_01 14:54

You want to grow your business, but people issues are getting in the way. Managing the people side of your business is complex and can feel overwhelming. Does this sound familiar? At HR Catalyst, People Strategy is our business. We create and implement a people strategy with you so you can give back to growing your business. HR Catalyst was founded in 2013 with the goal of bringing the best-in-class HR practices to small and middle market companies. We are your outsourced strategic people experts. We help you solve the people issues in your business that are slowing you down. If you have HR concerns, you can schedule a complimentary call on our website at [HR Catalystconsulting.com](https://www.HRCatalystconsulting.com).

SPEAKER_00 15:39

Thanks everybody for uh for joining us again. And now we're just uh we're still talking we're talking to Ashley Martin right now and having a great conversation regarding HR systems and the whole system side of the human resource platform and all the solutions that are out there. So um so Ashley, let's see. I was gonna ask you a couple of more questions here. So uh so once a company decides or they think they need an HRAS system, which is and let me just clarify too, I'm using this acronym. So HR information system, so HRAS system. Um you know, what are some things they should be looking for to make sure they're they're making the right decisions for the systems because they have a lot of choices. So what are from your expertise, what are some things they need to be thinking about to make sure they're actually getting the the system that should actually work for them the best?

SPEAKER_02 16:36

Yeah, so I I compare this, and I have this conversation all the time. I compare purchasing an HRIS or an HCM platform to purchasing a roof. So how often do you purchase a roof, Mark?

SPEAKER_00 16:49

Hopefully not that often. Once every 10 years, let's say probably, let's say on Avalon, let's say let's say 15 years. So let's say every 15 years, maybe seven years.

SPEAKER_02 16:58

Every 15 years.

SPEAKER_00 16:59

Yeah.

SPEAKER_02 17:00

Every 15, yeah. Every 15 years, you're not going to remember what questions to ask. And the industry's probably changed, and the relationship with insurance providers has probably changed. So I see this a lot. People are like, I know I'm in pain, but I don't really know where to start. And somebody told me to call you. And that's kind of the type of referral that we typically get. And so my conversation is usually a little bit less about an exponent and more about, okay, well, let's let's talk about you. Um, and I'll start, you know, peppering with discovery questions and trying to extract some pain. And then in a minute, I'll tell you kind of what I really hone in for hone in on. But what I recommend to people typically is hey, if you're going to go through an evaluation process, let's keep it simple. Let's say, you know, the who, the what, and the how. Most people skip over the who. Who are you doing business with? And they gravitate towards any sales rep that's called on them recently, knocked on their door, brought them a pie over Thanksgiving, sent them a gift, sent them a LinkedIn message, whatever it may be. And it's

because that's who's in front of them. And that's why sales works. That's why outbound sales works, is it's because they're saying, oh, well, this person says they have a solution. Now, you could get to know that person and get to know their company, and they may have a fabulous solution. But really dig in behind that salesperson and say, who's the leadership at this company? Uh, who is the uh what type, you know, what's the company structure? Uh, is it privately held? Is it a public company? Do I know the employees that I'll be working with? Or do I know uh the size of the companies? And is that important to me? Because it also may not be important to you, but a lot of times because of marketing and advertising and the way the outbound sales is, people gravitate towards some of these big names, um, which all have fabulous platforms. And, you know, again, we're all good fits for different types of companies. Um, but I just think it's really important to ask that who question, who am I doing business with? Because we're about to be processing payroll through this company. So the who is kind of first and foremost. Uh, I had a client one time, and this has been several years ago, but I maybe I heard this through our service team that uh something had happened and they had changed banks and someone forgot to notify us. So we went to draw their payroll and it just bounced. And um, the good news was that before it bounced, they had called us to let us know. Hey, look, we switched banks, we forgot about it. Here's direct wire information. We've got your pair. So we have that working relationship with our clients that they know that if they call, they can get somebody. We've got that partnership and they know who they're doing business with and that they have access to us and that they can call us. And I'll talk about customer service here in just a little bit. But I think the who is really important. Now, the what is I think what people get most hung up on because what they think is I need an RFP, I need a feature list, I need 300 features listed to make sure it can do everything. But I'll I'll say this again: a feature list is a dead end, and it's gonna be a dead end every time. A feature list is just that, it's a feature list. And if all you're doing is sending out a feature list or you're checking boxes, at the end of the evaluation, you're just gonna have a whole bunch of feature lists that have different boxes checked, and you're not really gonna know where to go from there. So, this is my recommendation on the what. Before you decide to go out and evaluate, sit down with your finance leaders, your CFO, sit down with your operations leaders, your COO, ask the questions. Hey, we're gonna go to market, we're gonna look for a human capital management platform. Where are we hurting in the business? Let's come up with our three to five, keep it simple. Three to five biggest pain points. What do we need to solve for? And what's going on in the business? And it might be that your COO says, oh my gosh, the time clocks are terrible. We're having to do job costing on the backside because the time clocks don't work. And that might be something that you need to consider. It's impacting the business and impacting his or her team. It might be that the CFO says, Well, I don't really like the pricing model, right? I don't know how to predict what our costs are gonna be because we're getting nickel and dimed for this and that. And maybe that's one of the things that we want to solve for. And then, of course, with HR benefits and payroll, you're gonna have

maybe even a longer list of three to five, but try really hard to narrow it down because if you don't narrow it down to what's most important, what's gonna happen is you're gonna get into a sales process with a bunch of salespeople, and I'm gonna pick on them because I'm one of them, and we're gonna woo you and we're gonna come in and get you excited about our product, and we're going to uh, you know, send you a gift and get to know your family. I mean, it's you know, we're building relationships, we're building trust, it's what we're doing, but you have to stand true to hey, these are the three to five things that we have to solve for because this is what's most important to our business, because there's not one salesperson that's gonna have one system that solves uh for everything. And so you've got to make sure you hone in on those three to five things. So that that's the what. That's that's my uh that's my kind of two cents on the what. The how is all about the experience. So once you have the what down, hey, this this company can meet our five needs, five top needs and pain points. What's my experience gonna be like? It's one Thing to say, well, I need a payroll system, but if you look at three or four different payroll systems and you talk to three or four different references, you're probably going to hear about three or four different experiences. And one payroll system might do things completely different in another payroll system. So you've got to dig into what is my experience going to be like using this system? What is my experience going to be like with their customer service? Uh, you know, how are they going to support the product? And then how are they going to implement? What is my experience going to look like from an implementation standpoint? And the only thing you can do to really do your due diligence on that is to just make sure you talk to references. I'm really big on references. When we have a client that's going through an evaluation or a prospective client, I will introduce references via email and really force people to talk because they need to be able to have a conversation with another human being to say, here's what we went through, here's because there's no such thing as a perfect implementation, you're going to have a blip in the road, right? Here's what happened, here's how we overcame it, here's how we work together, or hey, here's what we went through and it was terrible and we don't recommend this. And you hear that sometimes too. So um it's just really important that you check references, figure out what that experience is gonna look like. But to recap who you're doing business with, um, what's the product and does it meet your top three to five business needs? And then how? How are they gonna deliver the product? What's that experience gonna look like from an implementation and then customer service and partnership standpoint long term?

SPEAKER_00 23:28

Wow. That was a great explanation. So that was very that was very helpful. So it's um so on a some it's a similar type of um question, but of course just a little bit different here. So if a company, so they they currently have a system, whoever that's whoever their their their their HCM or you know HR system is currently, and they're just finding that this system it's becoming

a really frustrating, whatever the criteria is for their frustration or there's a lot of pain with a system. What are some drivers they should really they should seriously consider actually moving to another system?

SPEAKER_02 24:10

So, you know, there's a lot of different ways to look at this, but I would say this HR platforms have a lot of functionality. If the basics aren't working, go evaluate. And by the basics, I mean your payroll and your taxation needs to be accurate, and you shouldn't be putting out payroll and tax fires every day. It's not uh it's not a good use of anybody's time. And it creates a terrible experience for employees, for end users. They're not paid correctly, they're not being taxed correctly. So if you have anything uh when it comes to just the basic blocking and tackling of payroll taxation, none of the other feature sets matter until payroll and taxes are correct. So, number one for sure, payroll and taxation. If you're having pain points with that, it's probably time to move on. Uh, in a similar realm, if you're having pain with that and you can't get a hold of anybody at your uh at your vendors in your vendor's customer service group, uh, you should start looking for another vendor. There are really great technology platforms out there with good service groups. And when you call, a human being answers. I know everybody's trying moving towards AI and looking at how to use AI better and AI bots. And not that any of those things are bad, but it's at the end, this is such a um, this industry is, I'm trying to think about the right word. There's so many nuances to it. And you've got to be able to, like, especially with payroll because of how time sensitive it is. Hey, I'm trying to calculate an overtime adjustment for this employee before I click process on payroll. Um, can you help me do that? That has to be solved for right then at 4:30 on a Tuesday. There's no extra time to wait for that, and there's no two business days to wait for a response on that. So, customer service, uh, there's always room to look for better customer service providers in HR Tech. And then also I would say, and I'm I'm giving these recommendations because this is what I hear a lot of times from prospective clients. And it's interesting, just over the last couple of weeks and a couple of the new ones I've met with, a lot of it's been about just disjointed modules. And I think that's pretty common in this industry where, hey, I have to go set up a new earnings code and I have to go set it up in four different places, and it takes me three hours to do it, and then I get stuck and have to call service and wait for them to get back with me two days. And the experience is just really poor because it's because the systems are more modular than they are truly one system, one data set, uh, you know, one application that they're operating in. So I would say if you've got different modules that aren't speaking to each other, there are better solutions out there uh than systems that are uh modular and disconnected.

SPEAKER_00 26:44

No, that's so fascinating. And I know I've I've seen systems like you mentioned where they're just not that integrated. So even though they're they they have all the bells and whistles, in several cases, you know, you've got to you've got to enter into multiple fields. And I would say from a just a user experience, the end user, it's very frustrating because it's taking you so long. And of course, a lot of times it's like, oh yeah, no, we're fully integrated. Well, fully integrated could be unfortunately could mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

SPEAKER_02 27:16

So yeah, integration's a big word. We say I had I had a had a a a wise mentor when words have meaning, right? What is the word what does the word integration mean? Is it real time? Do I have to wait till tomorrow to make sure the data sets are syncing? I mean, it's uh, and those are all the questions, right? You mentioned the evaluation, how do you go about it that you may not know to ask because you haven't done it in 10 years or you haven't done it in 15 years. So it's important to ask questions like that. Okay, you say it's fully integrated, but what does that mean? And then of course follow up and verify by speaking to references to make sure the experience is a good one.

SPEAKER_00 27:51

Right. That's so great. Um so if there are some business owners or you know, your your natural target audience of business owners, uh CFO, controllers, head of HR, um, and they're thinking about this is kind of like a this will be a thought-provoking or thought starter for them. What are some reasons they need to be starting to think about this project now? If they are starting to either look they're they're brand new to having a sophisticated HR system, or they're they found that they're done with the current system, they have the incumbent. What are some reasons they need to start doing this, uh working on this project now?

SPEAKER_02 28:36

I've I've mentioned a few of them. I think one for sure is scalability. If they have plans for growth, it is going to pay off big time. Get a good system in place. Uh, get your, you know, you work on some of the projects around, you know, get everything in place day one. I had a client one time that came to me, they had three employees, and we have some minimum pricing in place. So it was gonna be a little expensive on the front end, but they were on the acquisition trail. But this particular CEO uh knew, hey, we're gonna get the system in place, we're gonna make the investment, we're gonna implement it, we're gonna implement it well. And that way when we start bringing employees on board, everything's set up and we're ready to rock and roll. So um, I would say that's the first one is just making sure you're setting up to scale if you're planning to grow. Uh, be thinking about getting a system in place in advance, as opposed to, hey, let's just see how long we can make it buy on QuickBooks. And maybe in 60, you know, not

60 days, but maybe in six months or so, we'll then look at converting. Well, then you're talking about data conversion. So again, just depends on how fast they plan on growing. We've talked about compliance, really important. Again, if you're going to grow and have a distributed workforce from, you know, the Department of Labor and the IRS and and and paying employees in different states. There's a lot in that that if you're on something as simple as a QuickBooks or if you're on a platform that's not working well for you or keeping you in compliance, it's time to start thinking about that. And then the last one we talked about as well is uh is really just access to data. You should know what your labor costs look like. You should know why are people leaving my company to go work someplace else? And are they leaving because they are finding better opportunities from a pay standpoint? Or are they leaving because um maybe all the employees that are leaving came from a very specific recruiting source that maybe isn't productive for us and we're spending a whole bunch of money on and we shouldn't be because internal referrals are bringing us better candidates and we can save money by just doing internal referrals. So there's a lot of really great business decisions you can make when you have data in front of you. And the longer you put off having a system in front of you, you just you're you're you're kind of flying blind in a way as a business owner.

SPEAKER_00 30:46

That's so true. And it's a and and then some of the clients that that that I work with and then HR catalysts, it's amazing that so many there are they're not small organizations and they still have paper employee files. And sometimes they have 75, 100 people and they have here's all the active files, here's the terminated files, and I'm like, oh my gosh. And they actually kind of cringe because I'm like, oh, I'm sure there's some very interesting things that are in the personnel file that there should be.

SPEAKER_04 31:17

Oh yeah.

SPEAKER_00 31:17

Versus having it all uploaded and stored in a beautiful system that should have a pretty high, high level of security versus a paper file.

SPEAKER_02 31:25

Well, and I I probably wouldn't have said this 10 years ago, but I would also say just if it's if I'm a business owner and I'm looking to grow a business, in the world that we live in today with cell phones, everything's at our fingertip, employees are expecting a level of self-service. So if an employee, uh, let's call it somebody young, you know, gener Z and the upcoming, right? They're expecting to pull up their phone and be able to look at a pay stub and see their PTO balance.

And if you don't have a system in place that's gonna support that um natural just expectation of that employee, you're not gonna be able to keep good talent and develop good talent. And so a lot of it has to do just with the retention of people as well. It's it's expected. When I started exponent 15 years ago, it wasn't necessarily the expectation. It was like, wow, look at that PTO, it's online. Um, but now it's expected.

SPEAKER_00 32:17

Right, sure. That's so true. So, but um any any final thoughts, Ashley, that you wanted to share with the audience before I ask you a couple of couple of things about you.

SPEAKER_02 32:31

Oh gosh. Um I don't I I think for me, I I will share this one final thought. I would, and I've seen this so for whatever reason, post-pandemic, I've seen so much more of this. Work as a team. I understand that a lot of times payroll will roll up underneath HR, or HR and finance will work closely together, but operations is kind of separate. When you go through an evaluation, just don't leave anybody out of the discussion and hold fast what you guys decide as a team that you need. And I think that's going to get you the best result. A lot of times I'll see companies go through an evaluation and we're only talking to HR and not finance, or we're only talking to finance and not HR. And it's not addressing the needs and benefiting the organization as a whole. And if people inside their organizations would work together as a team and collaborate through this evaluation, I think that there would be optimal results for everyone involved. And so I would just encourage to not make it uh to kind of think outside of yourself, so to speak, in your role and what you're trying to accomplish and make sure you're involving everybody that could uh, you know, touch the system or be impacted by the system or its data that it's generating for you.

SPEAKER_00 33:45

Right. Okay, that's great. So um a couple of other just kind of fun things. So um books, podcasts, any place you get good information regarding your, you know, anything that have been helpful. You even mentioned something earlier about mentoring. What are some things you've done just to stay kind of stay current and just to continue to grow and develop in your career?

SPEAKER_02 34:11

Yeah, um, thank you for giving me all the options. Uh I am not much of a reader or a podcaster, and I'll tell you why. I'm not sure I have the patience for books. Uh, I have I have I've worked on that. Uh podcasts I listen to off and on, but I also don't have a long commute. I've lived since I moved to Dallas in 2010 to start with Exponent, I've lived within 10 minutes of this building in Addison. So um I have time for like one song and one phone call, and that's it on my way in and

out of work. Uh here's what I've done. I've I've been busy raising kids for the last eight years. I've got two of them. They're eight and five. Uh, I've not done a lot of books, podcasts, but I will say this I am big on uh mentorship, meeting with uh individuals like you. Like, you know, I've known you for 15 years now. I've been uh I've been, it's been a huge blessing for me to form a lot of the relationships I formed with business owners, even in my first five years at Exponent, because I still talk to them today. The other thing that I'm real big on that I think is huge, if you don't have time to read the books or listen to the podcast, if you're raising kids, um, take some time to find a career coach, take some time to find a mentor, take some assessments. Uh, you'll change over time a little bit. Now, some of the assessments don't change, but I will throw out a couple of my favorites. I took a Strength Finders, uh, the Gallup Strength Finders assessment last year, kind of rocked my world, put it back into perspective, what I should be spending my time on every day. I had an amazing career coach that I worked with on that. I still work with them today. I've taken culture index, I've taken predictive index. And every time I take one of those assessments, I learn something new about myself. And when I learn something new about myself, it helps me focus my daily activities on the things that fill my cup. And it helps me relate to others and understand. I like to see other people's assessments. It helps me be a better employee, it helps me be a better friend because I know, okay, that person communicates that way because of this, or they're asking this question because of that. Uh, that's been a huge growth point for me in the last several years. And um primarily that's what I've done. If I had to pour a book out there, um, there's a book called, I think it's the five dysfunctions of a team that's really good. I did listen to that one, uh, an audio book. Uh, and then I listened to a leadership podcast, it's been a couple of years, but I'm real big on leadership and just in servant leadership and how do we serve others and you know, circling all the way back to the very beginning of our conversation. If I don't wake up every day and have the ability to positively and positively impact the life of someone else, because that's what I we should be doing, right? Every day. That's that's our calling, that's what we should we should be doing. And I mean, I just yesterday, or maybe it was this morning, I sent a resume over for someone that um hadn't had a job in a while, just kind of been dealt a tough hand the last, I mean, year or so. And I sent his resume over to for an opportunity in a an HR role. And and it's like, okay, even if he doesn't get the job, there's an opportunity for him, right? Like I've positively impacted him in that day. And and um, I think that's what we're called to do. So that's what I spend my time on.

SPEAKER_00 37:12

Yeah, that's awesome. Good for you. No, it's it's great because as as we mentioned a couple of times, we've known each other for a few years. So it's kind of fun to watch you and honestly kind of watch you and kind of grow and develop in your career. So good for you. So um last question. So, what advice now that you're you're much more wise, so what advice would you give your 16 with your 16-year-old self?

SPEAKER_02 37:36

Oh man, uh I'd give myself a lot of advice. I'll start with it. It is so easy to be short-sighted as a teenager. My 16-year-old self, I think back to just being 16 and and how hard it is, and you know, being not concerned about the future, but not sure about the future, but you're also not really thinking about the future, you're thinking about today. I I you know just think long-term, right? As much as you can in long-term decisions. And some of that has to do with, I mean, something really simple. I know it sounds silly, but set up a LinkedIn profile. I came to interview for this job when I was 23, and um, Fidel Baca, chief marketing officer, he said, Do you have a LinkedIn profile? And I said, What's LinkedIn? And he's 23, and like, you know, that's so just the little things, you know, step toward that career, set up a LinkedIn profile, start connecting with your friends' parents who have jobs. Um, uh, I will also say, I know 16 is young, but if I could say something to my 16-year-old self, uh uh value learning and be curious, ask lots of questions. I think about the babysitting I used to do when I was young. I kind of think back and wish, man, if I had just like asked the mom or the dad, like, what do you do for a living? Uh oh, what does that mean? I probably could have learned some things at a younger age. Just be curious about business if that's what you're interested in getting into. Ask questions, connect. You're never too young to learn. And uh coming, trust me, coming from someone who's been having kiddos for the last eight years, you you're not gonna be as sharp at 40 as you are at 16. So as much information as you can take in at that young age when you have the energy and the brain capacity, uh, it's it's huge. So um the the the last thing I would mention, this is probably less for a 16-year-old and more for a 22-year-old. Uh when you're looking for a job, do not look for money. You have to look for a person, a mentor, a leader that's gonna pour into you and teach you and mentor you uh in your 20s. And I think that's huge. Uh obviously you've got to pay bills, yes, but in your first or you know, first job, second job out of college, do the best you can to get on a team with somebody that's truly gonna help you grow. And I think that is really in for me personally, is has been what has set me up for success in my life. Is is starting here at Exponent. Yeah.

SPEAKER_00 39:58

That's great. Good for you. That's that was that was a great response. I'm just saying this just because of hearing this. And you know, it is because it's a you know, when you start your career or when you're 16 or what have you, whatever age, when you're you when you're younger to whatever level and just really starting uh a career, I think just a lot of a lot of people are um just a little bit disillusioned. And they are they're chasing the dollar and the big buck and this and that, and they're really in a situation to where they you know, within a year or two, they're miserable.

SPEAKER_04 40:34

Yeah.

SPEAKER_00 40:35

Or for whatever reason, or within, you know, two, three, four years down the road, they're like, I changed jobs, I hated my job. So, like you said, just finding a place where you can learn, yeah, you know, be curious, I think is huge. And and the ability to learn is a gift.

SPEAKER_04 40:51

Yeah.

SPEAKER_00 40:52

And also just finding, you know, whether it's in your side your company ideally, but also outside, finding a good mentor, a good coach, a good person you can bounce ideas off of and not not be worried about if the question's silly or if it's gonna make you feel like, oh, well, that's a dumb question. I'm like, well, there's always there's no such thing as a dumb question.

SPEAKER_02 41:12

So yeah, yeah. Well, and I know I'm gonna sound like an old soul when I say this, but um I also big time believer in I'm all about a hybrid work environment, but these full-time remote jobs for young people, find an office to go to, just learning through osmosis and the people that you're gonna be around. Uh, I I think since pandemic, we've swung back into the office a little bit more, uh, which means we're working as teams together and we're able to impact, you know, the younger workforce. But uh when it comes time to find that first job post-college, be well networked. Look for somebody who's gonna be a teacher and help you grow.

SPEAKER_00 41:47

Yeah, that's awesome. So uh so how can people find you, Ashley, if they'd like to talk to you about uh, you know, like to find out a little bit more about you, find out a little bit more about your organization and payroll systems, how and HRIS systems. How can they how can they find you online?

SPEAKER_02 42:04

Uh online on uh LinkedIn. I uh um you should be able to find me under Exponent HR, Ashley Martin. Uh could be if sometimes it's easier if you type in my maiden name too, Ashley McMaster Martin. Uh online is fine. I also believe I'm on the Exponent website. I'm not sure if my contact information is there or not, but if anyone has questions or just wants some bounce some ideas off of me about maybe going through an evaluation, um, I've I've helped a lot of clients do that. And um yeah, just feel free to reach out. I'm always open to connecting.

SPEAKER_00 42:36

Great. Okay. Well, thanks a lot for your time, Ashley. This has been really insightful.

SPEAKER_02 42:41

Thank you, Mark. I appreciate the opportunity.

SPEAKER_00 42:44

You're welcome. Thanks. Take care. Bye bye.

SPEAKER_02 42:46

Take care. Bye bye.