



Making A Difference: Silicon Valley HR leaders celebrate 30 years of vision, insight, and professional expertise at HR Symposium

SANTA CLARA CONVENTION CENTER—APRIL 26, 2016—Pinterest, one of the companies that routinely shows up in the lists of great companies to work for, was center stage at the HR Symposium last week as top executives shared insight into what helps its creative workforce thrive in the highly competitive tech arena.

The event drew close to 550 HR professionals from all over the San Francisco Bay area who enjoyed diverse perspectives on the changing world of HR as well as personal insights into the journeys of numerous Silicon Valley HR executives.

The annual event also celebrated its 30th anniversary of bringing topical discussions among industry leaders to their colleagues at all stages of their careers. The event, which raises scholarships funds, also awarded funds to 10 promising students for their achievements and vision.

“People got to be challenged at this event and inspired by what is possible in HR,” says Jeff Jacobs, president of the Symposium Board of Directors and co-chair of the Awards Committee. “They got to hear how they could enhance their impact in their role and grow in their career.”

Kicking off this year’s symposium with the hallmark fireside chat between a CEO and HR executive was Pinterest founder and CEO Ben Silbermann and Pinterest Head of People Michael DeAngelo, who took the stage to discuss how they manage change, inspire creative solutions in diverse collaborative teams and maintain a culture of integrity.

“We had an incredible line-up this year,” says Noelle Ritter, co-chair of the Symposium Marketing Committee. “The HR team at Pinterest is world renown for recruiting people who are passionate about what they do—promoting innovation, collaboration and working to improve diversity in the workplace. It was a great way to celebrate our 30th anniversary.”

PANEL OF HR EXECUTIVES

A panel of industry leaders also shared how they navigate job challenges and changes in the industry. This year’s panel of representatives from both public and private companies included: Scott Pitasky, Starbucks executive vice president and chief partner resources officer; Rebecca Cantieri, SurveyMonkey vice president human resources; Jeff Diana, Atlassian chief people officer; and Pranesh Anthapur, Nutanix chief people officer; Tracy Edkins, Splunk senior vice president and chief human resources officer; and Susan Lovegren, Juniper senior vice president, human resources, who moderated the event.

“We embraced a slightly different direction this year and it was demonstrated by the diversity of speakers we brought in and the companies that are so dynamic and different from each other,” says Natasha Hoady, Speakers Committee chair.



The attraction of the event is its simple design and the inherent intimacy of discussions between speakers and attendees, says Jacobs, who has volunteered as a Symposium committee member for 17 years.

“It’s very much about people’s stories, their journeys and how they managed challenges along the way,” he says. “It is very much about demystifying the journey of the HR professional. We’re all very much committed to one another as practitioners, coming together to celebrate and grow our profession.”

THE NEXT GENERATION OF HR LEADERS

The Symposium also focuses on the next generation of leaders by promoting networking through facilitated lunchtime discussions and funding the Lyn Boone Memorial Scholarship Program. The nonprofit organization has awarded more than \$400,000 in scholarships to dozens of upper division college students aspiring to HR-related fields.

This year, 10 students shared nearly \$40,000 in scholarships. This year California Strategic Human Resource Partnership, a nonprofit consortium of 45 senior HR executives from leading Bay area companies, sponsored a scholarship. The recipient was Lauren Lightbody a graduate student in organizational development at University of San Francisco. Lightbody is an HR manager of internal and executive communications at Cadence Design Systems where she leads initiatives to enhance and support corporate culture, employee volunteerism and women’s leadership in technology.

“We had some incredible applicants this year, which made the decision-making very difficult,” says Deanna Fairchild, co-chair of the Scholarship Committee. “These students are truly passionate about HR and want to make an impact on the profession.”

Elizabeth Gomez, a 2013 HR Symposium scholarship recipient who now serves on the Scholarship Committee with Fairchild, says receiving the award in 2013 was one of the highlights of her career.

“I was working full-time and going to school full-time and paying out of pocket, which literally left me with nothing,” she recalls. Now she is a senior compensation analyst at Cadence Design Systems and back at the Symposium to continue learning about the industry. “Today I leave with the goal of diversity, which I can bring back to Cadence and we can talk about it.”

HR EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Also awarded special honors at the event each year were human resources leaders who have made significant contributions in the field. The Human Resources Excellence award recipients included Joanne Taylor, senior director of human resources at NetSuite; Peggy Rolly, managing director of the Oracle Women’s Leadership program; Edward Hernandez, professor of Management/HR at California State University, Stanislaus; and Rich Potter, senior HR business partner at Xilinx.

Taylor represented the company’s successful global women’s initiative to address challenges in female representation and retention in technology, management and the executive ranks.



Rolly credited her team for the success of the Oracle Women’s Leadership Initiative, which develops, engages and empowers current and future generations of women leaders to foster an inclusive and innovative workforce.

Hernandez was honored for his comprehensive college HR program that encourages participation in the greater HR community and the success of his students, two of whom were represented that day as scholarship recipients.

Potter received the commendation for demonstrating the impact HR can have on the business when acting in the capacity of a true organizational effectiveness consultant. He developed and led an intervention and change management roadmap that resulted in getting the company back on track.

“We are thrilled and a bit amazed to be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the HR Symposium,” said Sharon Winston, chair of the HR Symposium. The organization is entirely run by volunteers.

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