

THE ASTRIX DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PODCAST SERIES

Digital Transformation in HR with a Focus on Life Sciences

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Digital Transformation in HR with a Focus on Life Sciences

A conversation with Baher Rizkalla, VP of Scientific and Technical Staffing, Astrix



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About this Program

Digital transformation is a process of change that affects all aspects of an organization, from how it operates to how it connects with customers. Human resource professionals must find new ways to recruit and manage employees to stay competitive in a rapidly changing workplace. The life sciences industry is no exception, and the ever-growing demand for talent challenges HR professionals in this field. They must find ways to attract and retain top talent while also managing the ever-changing needs of their workforce.

In this podcast, we discuss the challenges that come with digital transformation in HR, specifically within the life sciences industry. We explore how HR professionals can adapt their recruitment and management strategies to keep up with the demands of a changing workforce.



Baher Rizkalla

VP of Scientific and Technical Staffing,
Astrix



KEVIN: I want to thank everybody for joining us for today's podcast, part of the Astrix podcast which we've been putting on here, a Digital Transformation podcast for what seems like a good 10 episodes about 10 months now, we're coming up on our 10th episode which is great. We're excited about the podcast; it's definitely picking up a nice little bit of steam on all the major players out there which we'll talk about at the end. So definitely some folks are starting to catch on and enjoy the content that we're putting out in these little pockets, which I know you're going to enjoy today.

We've got some good stuff going on today. It's a little bit bent towards the HR spectrum. The topic is officially called Digital Transformation in HR With a Focus on Life Sciences. So, if I can give you a quick summary of what you're going to hear about today, really in today's rapidly changing workplace, digital transformation is becoming much more prevalent in the HR landscape.

So, companies are kind of racing to keep up with the latest technology, HR professionals are challenged to find, engage and develop new talent that can drive innovation. So, in this podcast we will discuss how digital transformation is impacting HR, and how life science companies can stay ahead of the curve.

So, we're excited to get into it. This is our episode number nine. In a recent interview which was on podcast number six with Baher Rizkalla, our VP of Scientific and Technical Staffing here at Astrix, we discussed digital transformation for life science-based companies and how implementing a staff augmentation model was critical for success.

So, we brought Baher back, everybody really enjoyed the conversation with him before, so I'm thrilled to have him back today. My guest is Baher, and he joined us on our last podcast on this topic.

As a reminder, Baher is the VP of Scientific and Technical Staffing here in Astrix.

Baher, I'll let you talk a little bit about your background before we kind of dig into it.



BAHER: Yeah, thanks Kevin, and thanks for having me back on. Really enjoyed the last one and I think we've got a great topic today. So, as you mentioned, I'm the VP of Scientific and Technical Staffing here at Astrix.

I've been in the scientific staffing world for about 20 years now, and performed pretty much every job out there, from recruiter to salesperson, and management and sort of everything in between. Prior to that I worked as an analytical chemist in the CRO world. So, I do have some lab and biotech and pharmaceutical experience, as well as a bachelor's degree in chemistry.

KEVIN: Great, great and we're thrilled to have you back. I enjoyed the last conversation. Let's just jump right into it. Baher, from your perspective what is HR Digital Transformation?

BAHER: Yeah, you know Kev, it's not really different than digital transformation in any other department really. It's a changing of the process, changing the operational structure to become more automated to use the data that we can collect now, and just to be more streamlined and efficient, and to get a better result for the organization. So, I mean that's pretty much it in a nutshell.

KEVIN: Yeah, that makes that makes perfect sense. I know we'll dig into some of these topics a little bit more. I think the one is, digital transformation obviously is very broad based in an organization, it's touching IT, it touches systems, it touches operations, it touches many things -- how can HR support it within their company?

BAHER: Yeah, several different ways. You know, first you think about

"...how HR can support digital transformation within maybe some other departments? And I think the quick and easy answers is, of course, people. HR is essentially the people function, so being able to attract the right type of person, being able to retain the type of person, deploy and train the right type of person so that the departments that HR supports they're able to achieve their digital transformation goals."

So, I think that's how they support organizational digital transformation.



Now, within their own department, there's a lot of things that we've seen our HR partners do. And being in scientific staffing and staff augmentation so many of our partners, the people that we talk today in day out are in the HR function, talent acquisition and related functions, so we see this daily. But you know, it's something like updating their applicant tracking system is huge, making it easy for candidates to apply, making sure that you're using the right marketing tools to advertise your open positions and some of the great things about your company, I think that's really, really important. You see the digitization of benefits and compensation modules; I mean that's been around for a long time but it's just getting more and more interwoven and intricate and automated.

And then you're starting to talk about training, that's huge.

"Everybody's trying to upscale now because the market is so tight. So having good training modules and those that are available to the general population, leadership, everybody. Then, of course, the reporting, the metrics, the data that we need to see what's working and what's not. That's really the important things, or the main things that we're seeing within the world of HR when we're talking about digital transformation."

KEVIN: You can almost see, it feels like back in the day, you lure people into the organization by saying, we've got these benefits, we've got these benefits, we've got Hawaiian shirt Friday, etc. Now, it's more about you know, what's that onboarding process look like, how can we put you in positions to make you better advance your career with, like you said the additional training pieces, and just that overall process of getting people in the process of onboarding. And oftentimes that's obviously driven by systems, so I can totally see where you're coming from on that on, that makes a lot of sense.





BAHER: Absolutely. And now Kev, so

"...much of the workforce is remote, so it becomes even more important to have those systems in place and running well, because I can't walk down the hallway and help you. Oftentimes we're going to have to do it through a digital interface. So why not have the digital transformation and the right systems and tools around it to be able to really get that best in class experience, you know, make sure that your onboarding is smooth, make sure that you're well trained and ready to go and know what you're doing and ready to be successful and lead the company forward."

KEVIN: Yeah, it sounds like you have to really kind of think about taking a proactive approach, which leads you to one of the other points I wanted to bring up, what is the importance of HR transformation? We know it's important but, one, why is it important? And then why do companies have to be so proactive with this digital transformation now and today? And you could probably expand on what you're just talking about a little bit, I guess?

BAHER: Yeah, absolutely. I mean the reason it's important and why it's becoming more and more important is, in spite of some of the recent changes in the job market where we've seen some layoffs, it is still very, very much a candidate's market within life sciences and most technologies that are impacted.



So, it's tough to get the right people, it's tough to get them through the door. We know some of the factors that we're dealing with in terms of wage inflation, and we were hearing all sorts of crazy stories out there, so to make sure that your ducks in a row to be able to get those right people is just absolutely crucial right now.

So, when you're looking at some of the metrics like I mentioned before, time to fill? How long does it taking me to get somebody through the door and how can I improve that? Are the tools that I'm currently using within my applicant tracking system? Are they getting me what I need? Are they able to identify the right person? Is it making the process seamless for the applicants? Are we able to retain these people? Are we able to train them? Are we able to roll out organizational change management in a fashion that is sort of painless?

So those are some of the factors that we're seeing. And some of the companies that are out there that are doing that successfully certainly have a leg up these days.

KEVIN: What are some of your favorite tools that you've seen pop on the market in the last couple of years to make your life as a leader in HR easier, any preferences?

BAHER: Oh man, you know, there's so many out there. I'm not going to maybe name specific tools, but I will say that that's

"...probably the biggest challenge is identifying the right tool for your business, for your needs, getting the buy in of the stakeholders, making sure that C Suite's involved, making sure that the business owners are involved, you're all on the same page, making sure that you have a way to assess the success in choosing the systems."

What does success look like to you when it comes to these sorts of things? Being able to kind of prioritize the most important things. This is what we really need, this would be nice to have, this is not important.

So rather than specific buckets and specific tools, Kevin, it's really about I think that the factors for a successful rollout and the successful implementation that really make the difference.

KEVIN: Yeah, that's great, I appreciate that point. I didn't mean to put you on the spot for a specific vendor there, but I was just kind of curious if you had things that you like to use on a day in day out basis?



BAHER: There's a lot of great ones, I'll say that, and I think they are becoming more and more adept each year and I've just seen some really, really cool stuff out there, but you know, it's really up to each individual company to go out there and really see what makes sense for them.

KEVIN: Yeah, I guess obviously, you can be successful or unsuccessful with virtually any technology depending on how well it's implemented. I mean Astrix of course is knee deep in that with all of our customers on a day in and day out basis, trying to get them to be successful with a myriad of technologies that were implemented for them. You know what makes a transition, or a digital transformation from the HR perspective in an organization successful, or what are some things that could potentially make it fail?

BAHER: Good, good question. I think success and failure is really based on adoption.

"I think like you mentioned, there's a lot of systems out there that could work, but are you getting the adoption, both within the internal HR function and also for the other departments that use the tools that are supported by HR."

So, to get that sort of adoption, you need them to establish the goal, as I mentioned, get the buy in from the stakeholders. Make sure you're all rowing in the same direction, make sure that you're prioritizing the needs of the organization and knowing, this is what we have to do first, this is what we have to do second, this is what we have to do maybe next year.

And then providing that constant training and that OCM, change management around it to make sure that people are comfortable with it and are happy with it and are using the tools. I think if you can do those things then you're going to be well on your way to a successful transformation.

KEVIN: Great, great, great. And obviously conversely there's obviously lots of opportunities there, biggest challenges in your mind that would stop a company from being successful at this digital transformation from the HR side?

BAHER: Yeah, that's another one. We've seen this pain with a lot of our clients, I think. First and foremost, if you have sort of disparate needs and aren't able to get everybody on the same page, it's always a challenge. One department needs one thing, another department needs another, HR's there trying to bridge the gap and making sure that all the stakeholders have what they need, it's extremely difficult.



So, making sure that you do those assessments and the requirements gathering and have really good business analysts and project managers around that. Then choosing the right tool, that's what it kind of comes down to is just crucial.

"But then once you choose the tool, making sure that the implementation goes smoothly, I mean, that just is important."

And making sure that you have timelines that are realistic, you know, there's a lot of like hurry up and wait with implementations, people can get frustrated, and you start to lose buy, so it's just kind of managing that along the way is really, really important.



And I think again after the implementation is completed, just making sure that you have the training around it and the OCM around it to make sure that you have adoption and happy people out there that see the changes as a big positive. Because, you know unfortunately we've seen it the other way too, where they think, wow why do we do this? And I think usually you look back and there are some errors and mistakes made in the process of getting this thing lodged.

KEVIN: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I understand even Astrix is implementing their own training via some digital transformation now internally, is that correct?

BAHER: Oh yeah you know we've got an LMS system, we've got a lot of digital benefits and compensation models, of course we've got our own internal ATS for our core employees, and we've got of course our external ATS that we use for our client projects.

We've got a lot of different data tools to be able to track the things that are important to us and the things that are important to the clients that we serve. So, being a technology company Kevin, we're always looking to also improve our technologies, so it's always a work in progress. Seems like there's always something going on in the background, which makes it fun.



KEVIN: Definitely, and you know obviously having someone like yourself not only on staff to help internally, but as a customer facing resource it's great to have someone with your depth and expertise to help shepherd us through this and shepherd customers through that as well.

As we're wrapping up, any kind of final things that jump to mind from our conversation, where when you're working with life sciences companies, what are some unique challenges to them that you're addressing on a day in and day out basis?

BAHER: Yeah. It's a great thing to end on here, Kevin, because we see this all the time and just, the work for talent, it's real and it has not slowed down. Maybe it's taken just like a slight pause, but demand is still really, really high and it is definitely outstripping the supply.

So, when you're talking about that the best people, to get them to buy into your organization, you need to have a real smooth operation to be able to onboard them, to identify them, to be able to retain them, train them. That's one of the things that you hear about a lot when people leave positions, is that they didn't get that type of experience and support from human resources that they expect, that maybe another firm is going to give them another, another company is going to give them.



"So I think the companies that are really winning that work for talent have invested, have done the research, have done the leg work so that they can retain these folks, they can develop their careers, they can give them a pathway to maybe a management track or a senior research track, if that's what they're looking for. And just really, really investing in people. "

I think that's what HR is really there for, right? It's to invest in the people that really make your organization tick. And these tools and the digital transformation of the HR function is really enabling that.

So, the life science industry man, it's tough right now. I think if you talk to any of these companies, they're having a hard time finding that top talent and this is going to help you, for sure.



KEVIN: Great. Well, that's some great insights obviously we always appreciate having an opportunity to chat with you, get some thoughts on it.

Certainly, digital transformation as we mentioned in the beginning of the podcast is a pretty big topic, maybe not the most easily identifiable for some, like you know, I kind of get what that is, but what is it really? And within organizations we see on a day in and a day out basis, it's a lot of things, you know digital transformation of a laboratory is putting in systems and processes to get people, not just to the cloud but to get them working out of paper and working differently. Certainly, it's applicable in other departments as we see with HR in terms of putting the type of, I guess HR technology stack in place that helps you acquire, retain and hopefully develop from within a good employee base.

Any final thoughts you want to leave us with Baher before we wrap up today's session?

BAHER: Yeah, I think just final thoughts, Astrix is a company that's been doing this for a long time, both on the digital transformation side and supporting workforce management, workforce expansion, workforce augmentation. So, if anybody has any questions, we would welcome any discussions. We're happy to kind of share some of the things that we're seeing that have been really successful, and of course, maybe share some stories of things you might want to avoid.

We're always happy to have those conversations with our clients in the life sciences, and we wish them all well and hope we can help them achieve their goals.

KEVIN: Definitely. And obviously working with the right partner is going to be key when you need resources and tools to do digital transformation to drive that forward in your business.



Astrix absolutely is an organization that has great expertise and great experience. We help companies navigate this in a variety of different ways, from HR through the core departments where we've been working for 20 some odd years. The company itself is highly, highly staffed by scientific professionals and we solve very highly complex problems in scientific organizations. This we believe is on matched expertise in the scientific community and allows us to help our customers achieve their goals.

So that'll wrap us up for today's session. It's always a pleasure to come on and hear from folks throughout the industry, the life science industry and hear their different perspectives.

Stay tuned, we've got a number of great sessions coming up for the next few episodes. I know I've got a little bit of insight into what's coming down the pike, to complement this one. Thank you for listening, keep an eye out for the new episodes on the website. Baher, thank you for your time today, have a great rest of your day and the session is now complete and we will talk to you again next time.



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