

Shelley Smith: Hello and welcome to yet another episode of The Culture Hour. My name is Shelley Smith. I'm the co-host of The Culture Hour. My colleague in crime Elizabeth is out doing her thing, out and about. This is episode 23, and I'm really thrilled today to go into a deeper conversation with somebody who I consider to be a deep colleague, a respected strategist, advisor, mentor, and more, and her name is Cheryl Mobley.

Shelley Smith: Cheryl is the founder and the CEO of reCalibrate Today. Cheryl's name to game really comes from the hospital environment, and she was extremely successful. She won many accolades. When she left the hospital, she was actually in the 99th percentile of performance, and just a wide angle view, that means your employee engagement was top of the mark. Her customer, or rather her patient satisfaction, was at the top, as well as her financial side and finally the quality assurance piece.

Shelley Smith: All the things we talk about when it comes to running a successful business, or those very pain points that keep us down in our business or stress out, is exactly what Cheryl is really good at. With that again, I want to welcome you Cheryl, thank you so much for being on today. Why don't you tell the group a little bit more about yourself, a little bit more about your company and then we'll go from there?

Cheryl Mobley: All right. Perfect. Well, thank you Shelley, and hello to everybody listening, or in this case watching, to be technically correct. As Shelley mentioned, I had the distinct honor of serving as a hospital president for five years, and we consistently every single year, we had 99 percentile employee engagement. We had 99 percentile patient satisfaction. If you're not in the healthcare field, that may not stand out as much, but it's pretty rare, which is why it's 99 percentile, right? 'Cause you're up here.

Cheryl Mobley: We were also top 2% in terms of our quality performance, again, year over year. Which led to really amazing financial outcomes, which to me are an end result. I'm not all about driving just for those. You have to plan around them, you have to work for it, but if that's your only reason to be, then culture isn't really important to you, because you're missing the point. You're missing the boat.

Cheryl Mobley: One of the things, I started reCalibrate on the side when I was still serving as hospital president because I had leaders start coming to me and saying, "Hey, can you help me? I want to do what you're doing." I said, "Sure," and I had this delusion I would do it on the side and then it just took off, and I had to make a decision, and it was a tough decision. Because if you're listening here, you already care about culture, you already know that it matters, how people feel when they show up every day, how they feel on Sunday about coming back in on Monday.

Cheryl Mobley: Our team was amazing, so to leave them was a really gut wrenching decision, but it was actually one of my team members that pushed me over the edge.

One of my team was out, we were part of a large hospital system, healthcare system, 23ish thousand employees. She had attended another internal event and she came back and she goes, "I like our bubble." I looked at her and she's like, "It's not as good everywhere as it is here and I really like it here."

Shelley Smith: That's nice.

Cheryl Mobley: And that was like a, "Ugh." On the one hand I was like, "Yes." On the other hand I'm like, "I'm feeling like I have an obligation to help other leaders replicate this, because it is certainly doable." That's a little bit about me and my passion. I firmly believe that if a leader really wants to lead his company to 99 percentile, he can. We all know that not everybody does, and reality not everybody could, because then it's no longer 99th. A lot of people are going to do the work, so I'm just excited to be here today, chatting about some of the things that we've done, that you can pick up and play with yourselves.

Shelley Smith: Beautiful. It's even more heart wrenching when you're doing it not from a client perspective, but a patient perspective, the impact that you have. I am certainly thankful that you took the leap and you're doing what it is that you're doing today. You've done a lot of talks, you've been asked to do a lot of different speaking things recently, and I'm sure you're asked this often. Are there some top things that when you reflect back, that got you into that consistent 99 percentile space? What's top of mind that you did and that you do for others?

Cheryl Mobley: [crosstalk 00:04:37]. It was funny, because the first time somebody asked me that I was like, "Oh, that's a stellar question." I've obviously taken the time to reflect back on that, because I can't help other leaders do the same thing if I'm like, "Oh, we just did it. It just [crosstalk 00:04:51]," right?

Shelley Smith: Yeah.

Cheryl Mobley: It really all started with the ... I'm going to back up for a second. You hear two what I would call opposing schools of thought. One says, "We exist for our employees and then they will take good care of our customers." Some say, "We exist for our customers and employees in general, we have to take care of them, we know them." I will tell you when you're running a hospital, you exist for the patients and their families. That's why you exist, that's why we were all there.

Cheryl Mobley: At the same time, we also recognized how incredibly difficult the work could be for our staff. Because they cared so deeply, because they were so invested, because they were with these people and their families and could see how much disruption and pain and uncertainty they were living with. That's just all on top of the physical, right?

Cheryl Mobley: For us, it was really around we're all here, and we would say that to our team. "We are here for the patients and their families." Some of them are going to be easier than others to deal with, and that just is what it is. That's what we're here

for. We put a tremendous amount of effort, though, into supporting our staff. In some ways, we had the dual. We valued equally the staff, but we also recognized that if we didn't have patients, we wouldn't have a hospital. That's just pretty bottom line.

Cheryl Mobley: For us, it was really about what can we do to support our team? That took different ways, right? We had, still do, I don't want to say past tense because it's still continuing and still doing great, but we were very intentional about creating what in that industry we call cross functional teams.

Cheryl Mobley: You would have somebody who was a nurse working with somebody who was a patient care technician, working with a therapist, working with ... All sorts of different people who owned different pieces of the care. We would put them together and charge them with solving the problem. "You live with it, you're close to it, y'all go play with it and come back and then we'll see where you are." We would set the bar really high but let the experts drive what that looked like.

Cheryl Mobley: That was huge. A lot of people were like, "Well, that can't be done." I certainly hear from people that are having a lot of engaged team members is really tough. Well, it's hard for people to be engaged if you say, "Go do that thing" or it's always just about money. At the end of the day, you're like, "I'm not getting really jazzed about continuing to move the margin for the shareholders so that tomorrow our results are good." I mean, that doesn't keep people full. It drains them, they work hard.

Cheryl Mobley: Really that focus of we're here for the customers, but recognizing the skill, expertise, and passion of the people in the front lines. Then, likewise, when things were really hard, we would bring in things to support them. We would bring in people that could support them. We would do a lot of recognition, so we set the bar really high, but we also praised a lot. We kept people really in tuned with what was going on.

Cheryl Mobley: Did we tell them absolutely everything? No, because they've got enough going on and enough things to keep on their plate, but did they know where we were going directionally? Absolutely. Did they know how they fit in? Absolutely. Did they know if we were in a bit of, "We're going to have to watch this and what are your ideas?" Absolutely. We shared a lot more than people probably feel comfortable with, but the reason we are successful is because of all of you, is what we would tell them. We would consistently tell them they were rock stars which they were.

Cheryl Mobley: Our hospital got public recognition amongst about 600 other senior leaders, they were actually the COO at the time literally asked everybody else to stand up and gave our hospital a standing ovation because of our performance on our KPIs. I kid you not, as soon as we sat back down, the first thing we did is we fired off an email to our team and said, "Y'all are just amazing. Want to tell you what just happened, they recognized you."

- Cheryl Mobley: That was just our constant way of being, and I think it's that approach that permeates and allows everything else to really happen. Did we watch operations? Of course we did. Did we insist of high quality? Of course we did. But the people carrying it out were the people doing the work. We were there to support them and they knew it, that my job was to help them remove barriers if they had tried and failed. It wasn't to constantly beat on them.
- Cheryl Mobley: I would challenge if we weren't where we needed to be, but I would also say why we needed to be somewhere. But a lot of really high standard setting and a lot of praise. To me, they have to go hand-in-hand.
- Shelley Smith: They do, and I think that that's a common place that is misunderstood, misguided, and simply not lived. It's not a habit. It's so easy to point out what's going wrong and I think that's just our human nature. Personally and professionally, we go down that road, even hard on ourselves before we do the praise component. It's a mind shift I think for some leaders.
- Shelley Smith: You said some really interesting things that I know to be true about you, but I've always loved the word intentional and the intentionality, and you brought that clear focus. The other things that you didn't use the word but it sounded like it, and I just want to paraphrase it and see if it still fits, is that intentional groupthink, root cause, the fundamentals of how you solve and go out things, it sounded like you talked a little bit about having some agile workforces to be able to think, run, and do on their own, which I think a lot of companies are looking at that agility piece.
- Shelley Smith: You said cross functional, that's what you said, and I think that that is a key component as well, of people feeling seen, valued, and heard. The other thing that I heard you say was the communication piece, the communication through sharing. I don't know who originally said it, but I definitely agree with it, and clearly you do too. Communicate, and when you think you've communicated enough, communicate some more. You can never have too much communication. It's always the reverse.
- Shelley Smith: We assume what people need to know when they need to know it, how they need to know it, instead of just letting them know it. That's a habit that I think it's hard for people to get into that cycle because they think it's exhausting to communicate, and what they don't realize is they spend more time cleaning up what they didn't communicate if they just would have communicated it. I heard those are some really strong fundamental things for those that are watching. Need to definitely take to heart, as pillars of the intentionality, the agility, and the communication piece.
- Shelley Smith: The other thing that I'm going to call out, Cheryl, with your approach, and again I've seen it, witnessed it, felt it, is you as a five star leader, I know you didn't call yourself that, but I'm calling you that, Jim Collins' Good To Great, the five star

leader is the person who when they leave, everything keeps running because they took that approach of intentionality and communication, and agility.

Shelley Smith: The other component of that is being incredibly modest which you are, and always that it wasn't me, it was us. It wasn't me, that was them. It wasn't me, that was we. I think that's the other thing that you do a really good job of working with, again, owners, the leaders, to bring that back, and the win comes back to you when you take that approach. I've seen you do that on a consistent basis.

Shelley Smith: You've talked about what built that success, and now out on your own, doing that, making that success happen with owners. Do you find any parallels or any going back to that bubble, that going out and being able to help now the masses, and you've already helped people, even when you were doing both the president role as well as your CEO role, but are there additional parallels that you see with not just the hospital side, but really any industry that you're finding your conversations are the same regardless of industry? If so, what are they?

Cheryl Mobley: Got you. Yeah. That's a great point, because some people assume when I left the hospital I was only going to work with healthcare organizations, and I'm like, "No."

Shelley Smith: Yeah, this stuff works across.

Cheryl Mobley: You help people [crosstalk 00:13:10]. I mean, for me, part of the richness and the fun is sure there are going to be losses, but at the end of the day, you still have people showing up to do something, they need to enjoy it, they need to do it well, and the business needs to make money, otherwise it's not a business. I mean, I don't care what business you're in, are there other nuances, layers, challenges that are unique? Of course, and I'm not dismissing it.

Cheryl Mobley: One of the words that I've come back against, I've always thought of it as a word that was used in 18th century England, but it seems to have come up with a resurgence, is bespoke, that it's a bespoke model. Which at the time meant that it was a custom made suit. Now it's shifted to mean it's a custom made process or product or service. That fits really well with the work that I do, because I don't come in and say, "You will do this and we will start here."

Cheryl Mobley: Because every organization is where they are. Part of my first work with them is really uncovering where they are, and then diagnosing them. It's not a matter to me of discovery. That to me is part of the curiosity, asking questions, but to your point, to use the word you used earlier, if you don't get to the root of what's driving something, you're wasting your time and theirs.

Cheryl Mobley: And then it becomes a matter of what is the priority of things to manage? Because for many of us, we may see all these things, we don't do anything, because we're so overwhelmed and we don't know where to start. We can go,

"[inaudible 00:14:35] and we do nothing." Then we're overwhelmed and we get more overwhelmed because we didn't get anything done. Part of what I do is come in and say, "What is the main thing we need to do now?"

Cheryl Mobley: Sometimes I will literally say to people, "We need to slow down to speed up. We need to be very intentional about what is the first thing?" Yes, that other stuff is fun and most of us have something that for us is sexy, it's fun, we like it, it jazzes us. We want to spend our time there, which is great, except I can pretty much guarantee as a leader, all the things that you don't like to do are your biggest challenges right now because you haven't been too [inaudible 00:15:08].

Cheryl Mobley: Because the others are too much fun, and so it really is coming alongside with that discipline to say, "This is your next thing. Now, let's get to it." I mean, people certainly right now are, there's tons of conversations around people. Finding the right people, developing the right people, keeping the right people, the unemployment rate. I mean, people being engaged. Because at the end of the day, I don't care what choices you make, operationally, what choices you make from a financial perspective, none of that will matter if your people don't get it done. It just won't.

Shelley Smith: Nope.

Cheryl Mobley: That's your mechanism to see these things happen and come to life. I would say absolutely, 100% of the time, I'm always working on people issues. Whether it's how the leader communicates, if the leader understands they need to communicate, what that communication needs to look like. To your point, I will say when you were so sick of saying it and you think that the mouse five miles away could recite it, you're probably getting close to having said it enough.

Cheryl Mobley: It's just, we don't realize it because for us, especially as leaders, we have a lot of conversations about the stuff that's going on. We forget that everybody else doesn't hear it, because we hear it so much and we talk about it so much, we just completely space on the fact that it's completely hidden from everybody else.

Shelley Smith: Or we think we've said it, because we've said it so many times.

Cheryl Mobley: Or we've said it once and thought that was enough, and I will tell you that's something that I have struggled with, because from my perspective, it was like, "Well, if I told you, then you've got it and I'm insulting you if I continue to tell you." That was where I came from, and I had to unlearn that. I had to go, "No, when you think about all the inputs coming in to you Cheryl, on a daily basis," which are a lot for all of us, right? We don't even want to talk about the emails that come in, we're not even going to talk about the stuff we're seeking out, just incoming, you get so overwhelmed with all the stuff.

Cheryl Mobley: It's like when people would say to me, "Well, I told you once" and I'd be like, "Seriously? You were the only input coming into my world? Really?" It may be highest priority, but it's not mine. Being on the flip side of that experience is really powerful for me to go, "Hello?" I call them dumb moments when I'm embarrassed that I learned something. It's like, "Really Cheryl? Really?"

Cheryl Mobley: That's when I intentionally shifted and said, "I just need to talk about it a lot, I need to talk about it in different ways, different mechanisms, whether it's phone calls, face-to-face, emails, training sessions, whatever it might be." I would laugh and cringe, I always say to my folks, I say, "You know, if the truth would move as fast as rumor, everybody would know everything."

Shelley Smith: I bet.

Cheryl Mobley: I would go, "Read this as a rumor, would you? And spread it." I mean, everybody would just laugh, but it's true.

Shelley Smith: I love that. "Read this as a rumor and spread it." I love that.

Cheryl Mobley: Yeah, 'cause if it's a rumor, it's out there, and it's usually wrong. Part of it is the understanding that people will make up something if they don't have the information. I really haven't run into anybody yet, all of us included that are listening right now, that make up good stuff.

Shelley Smith: Yeah, or say you've over communicated to me. I've never had someone ... Well, maybe my husband.

Cheryl Mobley: That's different.

Shelley Smith: He might have said that.

Cheryl Mobley: That's a huge piece, is to be really intentional and realize how much people are hearing. If you want them to know it's important, they need to see that it's important, so if your words and your actions don't align, you are better off having said nothing, honestly, because-

Shelley Smith: Yes, and because-

Cheryl Mobley: ... you've now created a problem.

Shelley Smith: And to your point, we have to sift through so much, so many inputs that are coming to us, trying to figure out what do we need to digest and what do we need to ourselves, output to that. I was actually going to ask you what one of your biggest learnings was, and I assume that's it.

Cheryl Mobley: That was a big one.

Shelley Smith: And I love that.

Cheryl Mobley: That was counter to my process. I mean, in the past I've done a lot of training and a lot of work with executive teams and this was years ago, and I was working with another facilitator who would say it over and over and over. He just about made me want to pop a cork. I'm like, "Seriously dude, stop it. Stop it." But we had a fantastic conversation about for him, repeating it over and over and over and over and over again was a sign of respect.

Cheryl Mobley: For me it was a sign of respect that I wasn't repeating it, or [inaudible 00:19:32]. I had to shift, he had to shift, but it was a fantastic experience of working with somebody who could not have been any more opposite if somebody had sat in a room and said, "How could you make two humans more polar opposite?" And we were it. Because we respected each other, we were able to go, "Okay, I need to shift, you need to shift, you work on that because you're awesome, this is where I'm stronger, let me do that piece."

Cheryl Mobley: It was a fantastic experience that I've been able to carry forward, and I think of my own leadership, that I just have to talk more than I think I do, say it more than I think I do, and let people know that it's important and show by my action that it's important. That congruence is massive.

Shelley Smith: Yeah, absolutely. The words and the actions. The other thing, and you said this before, it's not that it's saying literally the same thing over and over, it's serving it up differently. It's slicing it and getting it very simple, that clarity piece, and again, I've seen you in action do this. You'll take something that's complex, you'll take people who are riled up and passionate, and excited, maybe overstressed, you bring the calm down through the questions, and pulling that apart to get to the root and setting, literally intentionally setting it aside to come back to that one thing. Then, you dive into that thing and you break that further apart, and you communicate with, "So this is what we heard, this is what we said, this is what we said we're going to do. Did we miss anything?"

Shelley Smith: That's a way of repeating without coming across as, "You're stupid, did you hear me?" Which is different than using the same language. I think for our listeners, the next time that you are getting anxious, that you are getting riled up, or you're sitting in a situation where people are going on and on, and maybe rephrasing what you feel like is the same thing repetitively, try to interject, stop, pause, recount, "So this is what we heard. This is where we are at, this is where we want to move, and here's some suggested steps, and who's going to own that? When are we going to do it?" I think that breakdown piece, and it does take ongoing focus to be able to do that.

Shelley Smith: So, one more question and we'll start to put a wrap on this today. To that very point of people being really excited and maybe stressed and overwhelmed, are

there some things, maybe some tips and routines that you use with those that you work with, to really bring that level down?

Cheryl Mobley: It's funny, 'cause I recently taped another podcast, this was a similar sort of question. We were talking about solving complex problems. What I talked about was we all had a moment when we've got enough mental bandwidth in our frame of mind as such we can be creative. Then, we've got other times when maybe filing is all you can safely do today, right?

Shelley Smith: Yes.

Cheryl Mobley: On those days, you need to respect that, because if your energy's not there, it's not there. For me, when I'm working with people that are already up here, intense, it's like you're dribbling. You're going, and the faster you go, the more stressed you get, the less capable you are of realizing that all you have to do is stop. Just stop.

Cheryl Mobley: Part of my role is really as an outsider, is to come in and go, "Okay, we just need to breathe and chill for a minute. What are we really dealing with? What do we really need to achieve?" Because I can tell you 99% of the time, no pun intended on the 99 percentile, but 99% of the time, if we were stressed, any of us can spew at length on what we don't like, what we don't want, what's not working. I mean, we can just run full tilt.

Shelley Smith: True.

Cheryl Mobley: But if I stop and ask you, "What is it you do want?" We're like, "Well, I don't know," right? That's just, it's that moment of pause, that moment of reflection that says, "We can't design for anything unless we know what we're shooting for." Period. Otherwise, you're just [inaudible 00:23:42] all the time, and you're wearing everybody out, because the people that work for you are like, "I can't keep up. Yesterday it was this, today it's that, tomorrow it's this" and you teach them to ignore any direction you offer, because you're just going to change it tomorrow anywhere. The plan du jour's exhausting. [crosstalk 00:23:57]-

Shelley Smith: And if you do get serious, it gets lost.

Cheryl Mobley: Right, because it's just one of many. So, it really is around whether you've got somebody like me going, "I get why there's so much energy around this and that's great. To move forward though, we need to just step back, slow down, and think about what's our goal forward?" Certainly any leader is more than capable for themselves about, "Okay, I'm going off the deep end here" or, "I'm doing a dribble. I just need to stop."

Cheryl Mobley: Whether it's a two minute break, whether it's walk away, certainly push away from the computer. Push away from the email, the phone, the device. Think about something else that takes you away. You're pushing your own reset

button, basically. You have to know when you've got the mental space and the mental bandwidth to really be creative and deal with a situation. Because I can tell you from personal experience, when I push through that in error, I end up making a bad decision that now will be a lot more work for me to unwind than if I had just waited.

Cheryl Mobley: Because there aren't, we tend to put so much pressure on ourselves, because we're like, "Okay, this is the deadline. It must be." It's like, well, how do we know? Is it really? There are very, very, very few things that really have a hard deadline, but we get sucked into that.

Shelley Smith: We do. It's the pressure. It's the fast moving day-to-day whirlwind, and that need for speed, that need for speed. You just said something that you say all the time, and it's how you do it. You actually say, "What's our go forward?" That's how you communicate and breakdown, and again I love that. For the listeners, that trigger of our go forward, and I agree with you. If we cannot point to success, we have no idea how to get there, and we get wrapped up in like you said, all the wrong ways to do it, and why we can't do it, shouldn't do it, or what have you, versus, "This is what it looks like when it's done."

Shelley Smith: I think when we stop and do that, life's more fun and rewarding and we get on that wave, and then it's exciting, and we're ready to keep going. But it's hard to see that yourself. That's why people like us, working with others, why it not only brings joy, but why it's easier for us to be able to do that, is we're on the outside, the wave kind of hovering for that. We're going to put a wrap on this, so I loved your points. Again, group watching, what's our go forward?

Shelley Smith: My challenge to you, out of Cheryl's map, is what is your go forward plan? What is really top of mind for you? What is your pain point, your choke point? Whatever you're calling it, what's keeping you up at night? What's your go forward plan? Because when it comes to business, there's four pillars, and those four pillars, if you're not hitting them or focusing on them, then what are you doing and why are you doing? That's the strategy, the execution, the cash and the people, and it's all as you've heard Cheryl and I talk today, it all starts, stops, ends, begins with people.

Shelley Smith: Cheryl, how can people best get in touch with you, and any closing comments?

Cheryl Mobley: Sure. Well, I would certainly love to continue the conversation for anybody that's curious. Both email and phone or website are fine. My website is the standard www.reCalibrate.today. It's not .com, it's not .org, it's .today. My email is cheryl@reCalibrate.today.

Cheryl Mobley: And then my phone is 817-301-2211. Just delighted to talk with anybody at anytime, because I just have fun with this. It is so exciting to see leaders progress and see what that does to the organizations they lead and they serve, because it's massive. I would say probably my biggest takeaway in addition to

what we just talked about is one, is to realize you're a finite resource. You just are. I don't care whether you like that concept or not, you're human, you are.

Cheryl Mobley: To realize when you were saying yes to some things, you are by default saying no to other things. And make sure with your finiteness that you are pursuing what you really want to pursue. Whether that's personally or business wise. The add onto that is as a leader, the people that you lead watch you. They watch you. If you are not congruent, and if you don't know where you're going, if you walk into your organization and you feel all this tension, I'm going to tell you with my normal directness, it's on you.

Cheryl Mobley: I'm not saying that somebody's having a bad day because things are going on personally, but if you walk into a place, and we've all done it, we've walked in somewhere where it just-

Shelley Smith: You feel it. Yeah.

Cheryl Mobley: Then you walk into some places, you're like, "How fast can I do a uey and get out of here?" If everybody wants to do a uey including you, as the leader, that's on you. It's all about the choices that you're making, and if it feels awesome. We used to laugh because people would come to work board meetings and they would say, "Y'all make it look so easy and I know it's not." That's because we're vigilant and we're on it every day, and we're clear and consistent.

Cheryl Mobley: My encouragement for you is it is absolutely doable for you to lead your company to 99 percentile performance in whatever that means for you, but it's going to require choices, it's going to require you as a leader willing to be uncomfortable, and to be willing to do things differently, 'cause it's that good old definition of insanity, right? You continue doing the same old thing and expect different results? Hello, probably not going to happen.

Shelley Smith: Not going to happen.

Cheryl Mobley: For me, it should be fun. It should be enjoyable. You shouldn't go, "Oh, it's Sunday. I'm going to back to work tomorrow." It should be, "There's stuff to do, let's go get it done." That really comes from that clarity of knowing you're finite and what are you really going to lead toward, and what are you leading your team toward?" Those would be my final closings.

Shelley Smith: Love it. Thank you so much for being a guest today. This is The Culture Hour. My name is Shelley Smith, the founder and company culture curator. If you would like to know more about culture curators in a conversation membership, or if you would like to know how you can also become a certified professional culture curator, then you need to hit me up. My name is Shelley Smith, Premier Rapport, and remember, culture matters because people matter. Until next time, have a good day.

