



Leader Profile

ANNA PETOSA

Vice President of Talent, Pelmorex Media

with **GLAIN ROBERTS-McCABE**

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Leading Culture, Values, and Passion in HR

Anna Petosa is an HR maverick with a driving passion for building values-driven cultures that produce results. With experience that spans both entrepreneurial startups and established global players, from publicly traded to privately-held companies and from frontline roles to leading the HR function, there's not much that this game-changing HR leader hasn't encountered.

Anna shares her views on why culture is 'job one' and how, in her role as VP Talent, she's helping Pelmorex Media transform their existing cultural strengths to meet the demands of becoming an international and fast growth company.

GRM Tell us a bit about Pelmorex Media and the scope of your role as VP of Talent.

AP Pelmorex Media is the parent company of The Weather Network, MétéoMédia, and El tiempo.es. Pelmorex operates in Canada, the US, Spain and the UK. The Weather Network and its French counterpart MétéoMédia are Canada's most popular weather and information services on TV, web and mobile apps. El tiempo is Spain's leading multi-platform weather information provider. We reach over thirty-one million Canadians on all our platforms combined (TV, Web, Apps) each and every month and our mobile and table weather apps rank #1 in



the weather category in Canada. Our vision is to be the undisputed leader for weather-related information services on all platforms in the markets we serve.

As VP Talent, I oversee everything related to people: acquisition, development, retention, employee engagement and culture across Pelmorex globally.

GRM You've been at Pelmorex for just over a year and one of your big focus areas has been company culture. Why was it so important for you to start there?

AP Pelmorex has been around for over twenty-five years and owned by the same family since its inception. We've been very successful and a large part of that success is because of the strong culture we've built over many years.

We're a combination of a traditional media company, leading in the digital space and growing in emerging technology. As we continue to evolve and

grow, our culture also needs to evolve. Culture needs to be shaped deliberately. It is our culture that will enable us to transition from a traditional media-focused, Canadian company to an international, global company. My goal is to preserve the best of the past while we build for the future.

GRM I've read lots of studies that say cultural transformations can take up to three years and that many don't work. What has been your starting point with Pelmorex?

AP My immediate starting point has been our values. Culture stems from values that resonate with employees at all levels. When I started at Pelmorex over a year ago, I met one-on-one with approximately eighty of our employees at various levels in the organization and I asked them all the same questions. One of the questions was

Leadership Tip

Values provide a platform to grow performance.

“What are the three words you would use to describe culture at Pelmorex?” The variety of answers was eye opening. It highlighted the opportunity to step back and really clearly define our culture.

At Pelmorex, we want to cultivate a culture centered on results, innovation, as well as transparent and frequent communication. I want employees see our culture as a key asset to our business strategy. We weren't looking for radical change. Instead, we've made the transition by building on the values that already exist at Pelmorex while refreshing them to align with the evolving needs of the business. As we move forward on our culture journey, I expect to see more consistency around the answers to my culture questions. It's important that we're all on the same page when describing the Pelmorex culture so that we can focus in the same direction.

GRM So, the message here is to build on what's working. Given that it does take a while to see change, how are you measuring success?

AP In my experience, when you start talking about culture, people immediately go to perks. For example: “Oh, culture is having beer on Fridays and a ping pong table.” My biggest success to-date has been getting buy-in that culture is far more than pizza parties and foosball.

Culture is the DNA of an organization; it's a common set of beliefs and values that guide our behaviours. Culture defines how an organization makes decisions, how it communicates, who gets hired, how leaders lead and how do individuals work together to accomplish goals and results. Culture also frames what strategic initiatives an organization will pursue and not pursue. Getting everybody to understand that culture will drive business strategy and ultimately results, and then seeing the pendulum swing towards that kind of mindset as we implement some of our culture initiatives, has been really rewarding.

GRM You're known as a passionate culture builder. What advice do you have for leaders who want to shift their team or work cultures?

AP Steve Jobs said you have to have a lot of passion for what you do. If you don't have passion, any reasonable person would give up when it gets tough. If you have to do something over a sustained period of time and you don't love it or have fun doing it, you're going to give up. This really resonates with me: Do something you're passionate about. That's the foundation.

Leadership Tip

Passion will get you through the tough times.

I know this is especially true when it comes to transforming culture - you have to be passionate about what you're trying to do, the culture you're trying to create, and you have to really believe the impact that culture can have. If you don't have that passion, it will be easy to give up when it gets tough - because it will get tough.

Once I've built a foundation of strong values that everyone can understand, embrace and believe, I make sure those values are woven into everything we do and don't end up being just 'words on a wall.' Hiring the right people who believe in the values and continue to 'walk the walk' as you develop and promote them goes a long way. It only takes one person to start eroding your culture by being allowed to get away with behaviours that undermine positive progress.

GRM I think HR is one of the most misunderstood and underappreciated functions in business. We say people are priority, but often HR doesn't get a strong voice at the Executive table. You've managed to do that. What has been your 'secret to success' in that area?

AP This one made me chuckle. I've been in HR for about twenty-five years now and people often tell me it's obvious to them why I chose a career in HR because I'm a relationship builder, an extrovert and I love people! The reality is I chose HR as a profession because I love business and I'm really passionate about seeing the human impact on business. When you have the right people working on the right things, the impact on business can be enormous.

When I'm at the Executive table, I'm examining how our people drive our business deliverables.

My first priority is always to understand the business; what are we trying to do, what's our strategy, what are our challenges? Then I add on the HR strategy to that viewpoint; what are the pain points, how can HR help eliminate some of these pain points and really magnify the results? Too often, HR leaders focus on policing policies vs enabling business performance. I think my focus on balancing both the people side of the equation with the business side has served me well.

GRM You have a reputation as being an 'out of the box' HR person. Were you always the maverick or is that a role you've grown in to? What advice would you give to leaders who 'colour outside the lines'?

AP I've often been told personally and professionally that I'm defiant and non-conforming - I like 'maverick' so much better!

The best advice I can give is to have courage. When I think back to my early career, I often felt frustrated in corporate Canada. I've always been opinionated and vocal but in my early roles in particular, I didn't have the courage to be myself.

Leadership Tip

Speak the language of the business.

Over time, as I built my track record and gained credibility, I developed the confidence and courage to bring more of myself to the table. I started to pay attention to what matters most; where I got my 'juice' or energy.

I had the opportunity to work in environments and for leaders who valued my contribution and some that pushed me out of my comfort zone. I think if you're a

leader who 'colours outside the lines,' it's important for you to find a place that values those talents and allows you to grow. I think leaders – whether you're in HR or not – need to look for experiences that help us build on our strengths and grow into who we are so that we can contribute fully.

GRM All of us have defining leadership moments that shape our views on leadership. What was one of your defining moments?

AP A defining point in my career was when I met my mentor, who really validated that my approach was different but also that

it worked. Gaining the validation that we don't all have to do things the same way was an 'a-ha' moment for me. It shaped my thinking around my

own approach as well as how I lead and manage my teams. It also made me recognize the importance of not compromising who I am as a leader. It takes a lot of energy to be somebody you're not and I don't think you'll find the satisfaction in the role if you're feeling like you can't be yourself as work.

Leadership Tip

Confidence and courage comes from outside your comfort zone.

Leadership Tip

Your uniqueness is an asset.

GRM So one last question: What's a piece of advice that you were given early in your career that you find yourself passing along to others to this day?

AP Work in an industry that you're passionate about. When we work for a company or an industry that we're not passionate about, I think it really affects our level of contribution, whether we know it or not. If you're in an industry where you can relate to the product, use the product or love the product, it gives you a lens that allows you to contribute at a much higher level.

GRM Great advice. Be passionate about what you do, work with your strengths and bring your authentic self to your work to make the biggest impact. Great messages for all of us to embrace.

Leadership Tip

Passion drives better performance.



Glain Roberts-McCabe believes great leaders make the difference and that every leader can be their own kind of great. As Founder and President of The Executive Roundtable Inc., she and her

team inspire great leadership through innovative group, team and individual coaching and mentoring programs.

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