



2023 HR Impact Awards: Kierstin Janik, Heritage Construction + Materials

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Kierstin Janik (IBJ photo/Eric Learned)

Kierstin Janik said that, when she joined Heritage Construction + Materials nearly 10 years ago as strategic HR manager, human resources didn't exist, and the company had bare-bones payroll and benefits functions.

“We've really built out an HR function that's strategic, that I think my leaders in the business would say is critical,” said Janik, now the company's chief talent officer. “The team is well-respected. I think we're a leader in our industry in a number of capacities related to talent.”

Also at the time, there were few people like her—young and female—in the business. “We've put a lot of effort into not only driving an inclusive culture but driving one that is much more diverse than we've historically been. We've got a long way to go, but I'm proud that we have a lot more faces that look different—different backgrounds and upbringings—and bring different experiences. We've begun to change how leaders think about diversity in the organization.”

To move the needle, the company became a major sponsor of Women of Asphalt, which strives to advance and support women in the asphalt industry. Heritage has more women in their mentorship program than any organization in the country, she said.

Janik went to Michigan State University planning to study pre-dentistry. After a year in a dentist's office (“that was a horrible job for me”), she switched to psychology. She helped a professor run a lab at MSU—that helped her rule out becoming a professor—and did juvenile delinquent counseling, which was too emotionally taxing. In her last semester, a guidance counselor suggested the university's graduate program in human resources. She found a mentor (professor Elaine Nakura) and a career.

Janik joined Heritage Construction + Materials, part of The Heritage Group, which has a portfolio of 30 companies in heavy construction, chemicals and environmental services, from the much larger Ingersoll Rand. She liked the idea of working for an 80-plus-year-old, family-owned, “values-based” business. “I appreciated the connectedness employees had with the business.”

Among her achievements at Heritage has been starting development programs and coaching to help people achieve what they want to in their careers.

She has been in her current role as chief talent officer almost three years; in that time, the company has more than doubled its revenue and added employees through both organic growth and acquisitions—12 in the last five years.

“As you can imagine, particularly with acquisitions, HR is a really important piece of that and being able to set up the organizations on both sides to be successful,” she said. “If people don’t have success in those transitions, it makes the rest of the change management very difficult. I’m proud to say that my team has supported all those acquisitions that have allowed the kind of growth we’ve had.”•

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