Melissa Gunn, Recognized By Influential Women, Champions People-Centered HR Through Lasting Strategic Leadership Today

YORKTOWN, VA, UNITED STATES, September 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A Decade of Human Resources Experience Continues to Shape Stronger Workplaces, Talent Pipelines, and Career Opportunities



Yorktown, Virginia – With more than a decade of experience spanning the education and public sectors, Melissa Gunn, SHRM-CP, has built a career around a simple but powerful principle: people are at the heart of every successful organization. As Supervisor of Staffing and Retention for the York County School Division in Virginia, Melissa brings a strategic, innovative, and people-centered approach to workforce development, recruiting, retention, and organizational effectiveness.

In her current role, Melissa leads a team of three staffing professionals responsible for recruiting and supporting a workforce of approximately 2,400 employees. She works closely with executive leadership to align staffing strategies with organizational priorities, helping ensure sustainable growth, strong talent pipelines, and high employee engagement. Her experience across human resources has given her a broad understanding of how thoughtful workforce strategies can benefit both organizations and the people who make them successful.

Melissa's journey into HR began in New Mexico while working at a credit union. There, she discovered a passion for human resources and customer service and began developing the skills that would eventually shape her career. She went on to become Human Resources Director for Curry County, where she oversaw comprehensive HR operations and took on a critical leadership role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the accomplishments Melissa is particularly proud of was the creation of a student internship program designed to provide young people with meaningful career pathways. What began with approximately 60 participants eventually expanded to hundreds of students across two counties. The initiative provided students with valuable professional experiences while helping them develop interpersonal and workplace skills. For many participants, the program also created opportunities for long-term employment.

This experience reinforced Melissa's belief that HR has an important role to play not only in filling positions, but also in developing people for the future. Her expertise encompasses full-cycle recruiting, employee relations, benefits design, compliance, and policy development, complemented by an ability to translate workforce needs into actionable, data-informed strategies.

Leading With The Values That Shaped Her

Melissa attributes much of her success to her mother and the strong work ethic she instilled in Melissa and her brother from an early age. Her mother spent her career in customer service, and Melissa watched her approach that work with dedication, empathy, and integrity.

Growing up, Melissa admired not only how hard her mother worked, but also how consistently she showed up for others. Her willingness to help in any capacity left a lasting impression and ultimately influenced Melissa's own approach to leadership and service.

That example helped shape the values Melissa carries into her work today. It inspired her to lead with compassion, strive to make a meaningful impact, and recognize the importance of treating people with dignity and respect.

For Melissa, success is not simply about professional accomplishments. It is also about the impact a person can have through everyday interactions. She believes in following one's passion and approaching everything with intention and excellence. Even something as simple as offering a genuine smile to someone having a difficult day, showing kindness to a stranger, or helping someone who may be struggling can create a meaningful difference.

Those moments of connection, she believes, benefit both the person receiving the kindness and the person giving it.

Authentic Leadership Beyond The Title

Melissa encourages women entering the human resources profession to remain authentic and recognize that leadership can begin from anywhere within an organization. In her view, leadership is not tied to a title; it is a mindset.

Whether someone is working in an entry-level position or serving in a management or executive role, Melissa believes professionals should approach their responsibilities with ownership, integrity, and purpose. In HR especially, leadership provides an opportunity to influence

workplace culture, advocate for others, and help shape meaningful change.

She encourages women not to feel pressured to change themselves to fit a particular mold. Instead, she believes they should be present, intentional, and true to who they are. When people genuinely care about those around them and strive for the best possible outcomes, their commitment becomes evident in the work they do.

For Melissa, this authentic approach is particularly important in a profession that frequently requires balancing organizational needs with the individual experiences of employees.

Preparing People For The Future Of Work

One of the biggest challenges Melissa sees in HR today is the growing need to balance technical capabilities with essential soft skills. While many job-specific skills can be taught through training and technology, competencies such as communication, emotional intelligence, professionalism, and relationship-building can be more difficult to develop.

As workplaces have become increasingly digital and transactional, fewer individuals have had consistent opportunities to practice face-to-face engagement. Skills such as confident communication, active listening, and professional presence therefore require more intentional attention from employers and HR professionals.

This shift has encouraged Melissa and others in the field to rethink traditional approaches to hiring and employee development. Rather than focusing exclusively on technical qualifications, HR leaders can assess soft skills earlier in the hiring process and invest proactively in development programs.

Melissa's work with student internship initiatives reflects this philosophy. These programs provide technical learning while also intentionally cultivating interpersonal and professional competencies. Watching participants grow in confidence and effectiveness has reinforced Melissa's belief that talent development should be viewed as a strategic, long-term investment.

Integrity And Kindness At The Center

Integrity remains one of the most important values in Melissa's personal and professional life. She believes accountability means being willing to own mistakes, acknowledge when something does not go as planned, and work collaboratively toward a solution.

For Melissa, transparency creates trust and provides an environment where people can learn and grow.

Kindness is equally important, although she distinguishes kindness from simply being "nice." To Melissa, kindness means approaching people with empathy and recognizing that everyone is carrying experiences and challenges that may not be immediately visible.

She also values truthfulness, thoughtfulness, and maintaining a calm, steady presence, particularly when situations become difficult. By leading with honesty, compassion, and respect, Melissa believes professionals can build stronger relationships and contribute to healthier outcomes for everyone involved.

A Career Dedicated To Service And Opportunity

Melissa's commitment to people extends beyond her immediate professional responsibilities. As a military spouse, she is particularly passionate about supporting veterans and military spouses in employment. She previously served as Affiliate Chair for the Human Resources Affiliate of the New Mexico Association of Counties, representing all 33 counties, and holds the designation of Certified Public Official in the State of New Mexico.

Her professional development includes a Bachelor of Business Administration in Human Resource Management from Western Governors University, along with an Associate of Science in Business Administration and Management from New Mexico State University. She holds the SHRM-CP certification as well as certificates in Human Resource Management and Strategic Thinking and Innovation, and she received the WGU Capstone Excellence Award.

Melissa is also a member of Peninsula SHRM, the Society for Human Resource Management, and the Association of School Personnel Administrators, among other professional affiliations.

Through every stage of her career, Melissa has remained focused on the same fundamental goal: helping people and organizations thrive together. Whether developing future talent, strengthening recruitment strategies, supporting employees, or advocating for veterans and military spouses, she approaches HR as an opportunity to create lasting and meaningful impact.

Her career reflects the belief that effective human resources is about far more than policies and processes. It is about people, relationships, integrity, opportunity, and the intentional work required to create environments where individuals can do their best and organizations can move forward with confidence.

Learn More about Melissa Gunn:

Through her Influential Women profile, https://influentialwomen.com/connect/melissa-gunn

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