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# Professional Biography

**April Simpkins, SHRM-CP, PHR**, is an HR leader, speaker, entrepreneur, and mental health advocate with more than 30 years of executive-level business strategy experience. A former Chief Human Resources Officer for a national organization, she now serves as the President and CEO of Paragon Strategy Partners, a leadership development consultancy that helps organizations strengthen and support new and emerging leaders.

April is an international keynote speaker known for bringing real-world insight, practical strategy, and an engaging presence to every stage. She has spoken for organizations and institutions, including Harvard University Extension School, Netflix, Eli Lilly, Coca-Cola, The Citadel, and Johns Hopkins Medicine.

Her commitment to the HR profession has also shaped her leadership beyond the workplace. She has served on Winthrop University's HR Advisory Board, where she helped develop HR curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Her board service has also included leadership roles with the York County Regional Chamber, the South Carolina Small Business Development Center, Duke Energy's South Carolina Advisory Board, and the State Workforce Development Board by appointment of the Governor of South Carolina.

April's work and impact have earned wide recognition. In 2022, she made the list of 100 Women to KNOW in America. She received the Charlotte Business Journal's Women in Business Achievement Award in 2020 and was recognized by Mecklenburg Times as one of Charlotte's 50 Most Influential Women.

A passionate advocate for mental health, April serves as an Ambassador for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and as a board member of NAMI Piedmont Tri-County. Her advocacy is both professional and deeply personal. After losing her daughter, Cheslie Kryst, to suicide in 2022, April became even more committed to helping others confront the realities of mental illness with honesty, compassion, and courage. She and Cheslie co-authored the New York Times bestselling book *By the Time You Read This: The Space Between Cheslie's Smile and Mental Illness, Her Story in Her Own Words*. In honor of Cheslie's legacy, April founded the Cheslie C. Kryst Foundation.

She is also the host of the podcast *As I Was Saying*, where she explores the connection between professional life and mental health with candor, insight, and heart.

Beyond her professional life, April is a classically trained pianist, avid runner, athlete, wife, mother, and entrepreneur. Everything she does is grounded in resilience, purpose, and a genuine desire to help people lead, live, and work well.