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Recorded Message: The Hennessy Report from Keystone Partners. A free-flowing conversation with leaders in the HR community talking about themselves, the industry, and their work. Brought to you in cooperation with NEHRA, the Northeast Human Resources Association.

Dave Hennessy: Welcome to The Hennessy Report. I am David Hennessy. Today's guest was already a Boston human resources legend before she became the president of Simmons College, Helen Drinan. Helen has an unwavering moral compass and has been the mentor of so many other great HR leaders. I reached out to Helen in light of recent news, and I'm so thankful for her willingness to share her story about how she dealt with sexual harassment at the most senior level in an organization. This case became quite public as it unfolded 11 years ago.

In fact, before listening to this podcast, I recommend that you read an incredibly powerful letter that Helen wrote to the Board of Directors, and that letter was published in the *Boston Globe* not too long after she wrote it. I posted a link to that letter on my LinkedIn post of this episode, number six, of The Hennessy Report.

By the way, we're looking for your ideas with regard to future speakers and topics for the podcast. And please feel free to email your suggestions to us at THR, we won't make you type out "The Hennessy Report", just THR@KeystonePartners.com. And stay tuned for Episode Seven where my guest is the Chief People Officer of Kronos, Dave Almeda.

I bring you Helen Drinan.

Hello, Helen. It's good to be here with you at the president's office at beautiful Simmons College, overlooking the Fenway right here.

Helen Drinan: We do live in a beautiful neighborhood.

Dave: And as of this week there's a little bit of news here at Simmons College.

Helen: Yes there is.

Dave: I'll get you to comment on that. You just named your new media, arts, and humanities college in honor of Gwen Ifill.

Helen: Yes we did. Yes we did, Dave. That's right. We are very proud to claim Gwen as a 1977 graduate of Simmons College. She was a communications/journalism major. She worked very hard here. She was always known as a very focused student and always wanted to be a journalist. Left here and had an internship, a quite eventful internship at the *Boston Herald*. There's just an apocryphal story about her being there and finding a note on the copying machine that said, "Go home," and the N word. And in her own inimitable way, Gwen wasn't sure who that note was directed at, and she just went right on.

So that's so Gwen to behave like that. And she always had time for Simmons. She always had time for anyone who was trying to build a career in journalism. She was just a remarkably generous-hearted person. And we were so proud of her. And we were so saddened by her very untimely death.



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Dave: Definitely so young, yeah.

Helen: We were thinking about her. At the time that she passed we had a memorial service here at Simmons and we started thinking about...we have a top-ranked archives management program in the country, because our library information school is top-10 ranked in the country.

Dave: We have one of your employees working at Keystone, actually. I mean, one of your graduates, I should say.

Helen: Well, there you go. There you go. And so our archives management program is the top archives management program in the country. And so we immediately thought, "Well, maybe the family would let us archive her papers and people could come here and study Gwen's style of journalism." Then, the more we talked about it we thought, "You know what? We're revamping our colleges, and wouldn't it be wonderful if they would allow us to use her name?" So, we began a relationship with them, and last summer we finalized it. So, it's just been so exciting. And we just thought, "Well, now is the occasion. It's the first anniversary of her death." So we announced it yesterday, it was very exciting. We had over 800 media outlets in the country interested. And, you know, she had many journalist friends. So Chris Matthews mentioned the story on this show, Chuck Todd did on his show. So we've had a lot of exposure. It's wonderful.

Dave: That's great. Well, that's nice to do that in honor of her legacy.

Helen: Absolutely.

Dave: But also, congratulations on the new school.

Helen: Thank you. Thank you.

Dave: Great. Well, I've been in this field 17 years of HR and there is no one that I've heard more about in the HR community than you. All the people that have worked for you, mostly HR people that worked in your HR organizations at Bank Boston and other organizations, they speak so highly of your leadership, your fearlessness, is a word I've heard, the mentoring that you gave them and coaching, your self-awareness EQ, commitment to diversity is something I've heard as well over the years. And then you have this uncommon ability where you crossed from HR leadership into organizational leadership. And that is uncommon.

Helen: It is uncommon.

Dave: It would be great to talk a little bit about that.

Helen: I'd like to see more of it.

Dave: Yes.



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Helen: I think HR people are really well-prepared for top leadership. So I think you're right. It's something we should be seeing more of.

Dave: And before we get into some topics that we know we want to cover, what were some of your early experiences and influences that shaped who you are; these things that all of the HR community talk about?

Helen: Well, you know, I do recall as a child thinking that I sort of walked to the beat of a different drummer. I was never particularly a joiner or a person who spent a lot of time in organized activities. And some of that I think was just your nature as a small child; you begin to discern who you are. But the things that I loved the most as a child were going to the library and going to church. And I remember as a seven or eight-year-old I would get up in the morning and walk to mass by myself. Why my parents let me do that...In this day and age I would say, "What?" But it was a different time. And faith became a very big part of my life and it became a very big focus in my life. And it wasn't in any way as if it took over my life, but it was something that gave me a great sense of self.

And the combination of the library and the church, they were right next door to each other. I would spend time in one or the other. So I spent a lot of alone time as a child. And I talked actively to myself. I know people think that's a funny thing. But I would go through the day and think about the day and wonder about what I could have done differently that day. I remember that so actively as a child.

When I went to school I was a good student and I worked hard...

Dave: Where did that come from? That ability to replay and say, "Could I have done it differently?" Do you know where...Was there somebody in your life that made you think that way? Or was there anything that...

Helen: Well, actually, I would say I would relate that back to my church experience. I mean, I was raised as Roman Catholic, and there's a lot of reflection required when you grow up as a Catholic child. There's a lot of rote knowledge required. And I think it taught me a lot about thinking in my own mind about things. So, that sense of reflection was...I think it was a valuable thing. I really do think it was. Of course, I didn't know that at the time. I was a good student. I was not a brilliant student, but I worked hard. And that always served me well: the combination of being motivated to work hard at school and seeing that that got results. But I was not the kind of student that was going to become the science fair prize winner. I didn't have that level of intellect. I always admired it, but I didn't have it. I was a voracious reader. I was very intrigued spiritually. I had an active interior life, even as a child.

School was important to me. I saw it as a means to an end. And I think of it now because, as I said, I was a good student, but not a fantastic intellectual student. But education turned out to be key for me in terms of moving on in my life. I was fortunate enough to go to an all-women's college at a time when that was such an important formative experience that I didn't even know it. I mean, I went because I wasn't eligible to apply to most of the men's colleges. They didn't allow women, they didn't admit women when I was an undergraduate student. And so that was a life-changing experience to me. I went to Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley Massachusetts, and I just realized the world was a far bigger place than I experienced it. So, my Mount Holyoke years were very important to me.



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Then, I happened to marry the person I met at a junior high dance in the 9th grade, St. Patrick's Dance. And we got married...

Dave: You remember the name of the dance?

Helen: Oh, yes. I absolutely do. Well, it was just too much, you know? 9th Grade St. Patrick's Student Council Dance. And we had children very, very quickly. We adopted a child within six months of our marriage, and then we had a child within a year after that. And we joined the Peace Corps. And we were there for almost three years. And that was another life-changing experience. And when I think about my commitment to diversity and inclusion, it grew out of that experience, because I lived in a culture that was radically different from the one I grew up in and I learned very quickly that culture is so much a part of how we live our lives. And when you get that realization at 23 and bring it back to the US and see what a huge difference the culture is from one nation to another, and then you realize in this culture, in the United States, it's multicultural. So, it was definitely a big experience...

Dave: It really broadened your horizons?

Helen: Huge. Huge, huge, huge. And then I came to Simmons as a student. When we came back I studied here, did a degree. And then took a year off, did a second degree. So I would say that between my own childhood experience, my Mount Holyoke undergraduate years and my Peace Corps experience, those were probably the most important early building blocks for other things.

Dave: Yeah. You can see it. You talked about thinking...It was kind of ironic as you were talking about, "I didn't want to spend a lot of time with people." And then you ended up leading the people function at so many organizations.

Helen: Yeah, but...

Dave: But the Peace Corps ties it all together, of course. That you...

Helen: Yeah, well, and also, I think we offer courses on introverts as leaders. And I would say that I am an introvert and an extrovert. A lot of my time is spent reading, thinking, reviewing, that kind of thing. And so, I think it's not inconsistent to be somewhat introverted and to lead large groups of people, because I think hard about that.

Dave: Yeah, you recharge your batteries when you're doing that thinking.

Helen: Yes. That's right.

Dave: Well, did you know early on that you wanted to be that leader, or a leader of a large organization? Is that something you were thinking about when you were going through these things you were just describing, talking about?

Helen: Well, you know, I had a couple of leadership experiences in school. I was elected to secretary of my class and things like that. But I never really aspired to leadership in those years. I felt like I could do it



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if I needed to, but I wasn't aspiring to that. I really had very, very limited expectations until I went to college. And I really expected I was going to go to college, become a teacher, raise a family, and that was it. That was my plan. That was my plan.

Then, going to college opened my eyes to, "There are many more alternatives than that." And I think without...I'm not being at all negative when I say that I think I grew up in a very, very closed and protective environment. So that's not necessarily bad, but it was limiting in terms of my worldview. And between college and the Peace Corps, my worldview changed dramatically. And they were very early experiences: college, and then immediately after that the Peace Corps.

Dave: Well, you know, I reached out to you, I told you when I called you that I reached out to you now because of what's in the news everywhere. It started, I think...It didn't start there. But the biggest news stories were in Hollywood. But now, every day it's a new organization that we're reading about that has had major and all sorts of levels of sexual harassment. And you had a rather public experience in 2006. And I reread the letter, that public letter that was in the *Boston Globe*. And it was such a powerful letter that you wrote. And I know that document, and because you made it public, changed the course of that situation and the people that were victims.

I was wondering if maybe you could share as much as you want or are willing about what led up to that point and maybe some things that happened after? Because it's been 11 years, and people forget. And there's a lot of things people don't know as well. So, you can only get so much from reading articles that were posted in the *Boston Globe* or other periodicals.

Helen: Right. So when I went to Caritas Christi Health Care I went at the invitation of Michael Collins, who was then the CEO. And I had known Michael for a number of years before going to Caritas. And he called me. There had been a search on for the job of head of HR for Caritas. And I had spoken to the recruiter and made some suggestions, but I wasn't thinking about that as a job for me. I had just finished my time with SHRM, and I was really trying to decide, "What's the next step for me?" And one of the things that Michael said to me was, "You know, I know you didn't ask to be considered for this job. But I wonder if you would consider being a candidate because I'd really like you to come here and do for Caritas what you did for Bank Boston with an HR agenda." And I said, "Huh, that's interesting." Because I kind of thought, "Well, I've done big HR agenda. Do I want to do that again? And if I do, would I do that in a different environment?"

And he said, "Well, I'd really like you to give that some thought, because we could use that." And so I thought, you know, "I loved that experience. The best job of my life," before I became president of Simmons College, "was as the head of HR for Bank Boston Corporation. It was a wondrous job. It was a great job. So why not?" And as I mentioned before, I was raised Catholic, so I'm familiar with the Catholic health system and all of that. And there are complexities to that that I understood, and maybe somebody else might not have understood, but I did.

So I went there thinking, "Okay. My mandate is pretty clear." We talked about the things that would be included: making it a more patient-centered experience for employees, and really looking at, "How do we help employees to develop to the best possible employees they can be in service to the patients?"



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And that was exactly what we had done at Bank Boston, but it was about employees and customers of a bank, rather than of a healthcare system.

So, I joined in November of 2003 and in the spring of 2004 Michael Collins was terminated as the head of the system. So, all of a sudden, the guy who brought me there and gave me my agenda was gone. And that had never happened to me in my career before, except when CEOs changed at Bank Boston, but my employer didn't change, and that was much less disruptive. It was a highly chaotic time at Caritas. There was an interim, and then there was another person appointed. And it was just really greatly disruptive. So my job as head of HR really became just trying to keep things in order and keep things moving along from an employee's perspective.

And then the system appointed Dr. Robert Haddad as the president. He had been the president of St. Elizabeth's Medical Center where I was situated.

Dave: It was like the main campus at that time. Right?

Helen: Yes. And so I knew him quite well, and knew of him, and we'd worked together fine in previous experiences. And I began to realize that his agenda was not Michael Collins' agenda. His agenda was much more focused on elevating the reputation of the health center and really working on things that would compliment that. And so while I always felt that the employer agenda would in fact compliment that, he didn't have the same interest in the agenda that Michael Collins had hired me for.

So I thought, "Well, okay. You have to move with leadership." And I did do that. So I was there approximately, oh, two and a half years. And one afternoon in February of 2006 a young woman came to my office. She was very nervous and she said, "Could I talk to you about something important?" And I said, "Sure." I knew this person quite well. And she said, "I have had a very difficult experience with our leader." And she didn't say any names.

And so I'm listening to her talk, and I said to her, "Are we talking about Dr. Haddad?" And she said, "Yes, we are." And I said, "Okay." Long story short, she had had a series of experiences that were behind closed doors. There was no witness. There was no record of anything. And it's so interesting, because it was really a classic he-said/she-said kind of situation with her. And I explained that to her. And she said, "I'm aware of that, and that's why I'm here." She said, "I just have to figure out some way that I can get to the point where either I can figure out how to get this resolved, or I have to leave." And I said to her, "Well, you know what? Let's just make sure you're safe until we figure out how we can pursue this more carefully."

And so we had an agreement. She had all my phone numbers, and I had hers. And we had strategies that, if he approached her, that she would step away from a room where she could have a door between her and other people, that she would push a chair between her and him. We had really physical strategies like that so that she felt safe. And a couple of times I met with her, and so far so good over the next couple of weeks. And then a woman came to see me whose position was being eliminated. And she said, "Before I go, I need to be sure you know what my experience has been with the head of this organization." Exactly the same thing. And I thought, "Okay, now we have two cases."



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And you can say he-said/she-said all you want, but I absolutely believe. Neither woman knows each other. They're not colluding."

And so I, fortunately, had insisted, insisted that we hire a labor attorney, because I've never worked in an HR organization without access to good legal resources. And to sort of cut through all of the process, I won't take you through all the steps of this, but I was immediately working with our in-house attorney to strategize how to handle this, because the governance structure of the hospital system was actually related directly to the Archdiocese of Boston. It wasn't independent of that. And so the person for whom I worked, worked for the Archdiocese. And governance-wise, I had no relationship. I was an employee of the hospital system, as was my boss, but the entire system was owned by the Archdiocese. So who would make the decisions about the leader of the organization? That was not so clear as it was in a corporate environment.

And it took some time. Anyway, not a lot of time. I'm talking hours and days, not weeks and months.

Dave: Time for what?

Helen: Time to figure out what would be the right process for investigating these complaints, because they had to be investigated. So we agreed that it would have to be escalated to the Archdiocese. And it was only escalated though after we had done the investigation. We had to determine that we had genuine cases here. So both women were separately investigated. And it was all confidential. There was no exposure to these women.

Dave: How did you make sure of that?

Helen: Because the attorney that I had insisted we hired as our labor attorney executed the investigations himself. So it remained a very closed conversation. And I would say to any HR person who does not have direct access to legal counsel, it's a dangerous way to run an HR organization. You need to know that you have that opportunity to protect anyone you need to, because you have the confidentiality and the privilege of working with an attorney.

So, once those two investigations were done we definitely had to obviously escalate the concern to the system. And then all of the rest of it is public. I was asked to come to a meeting to share what I had learned, and then I was uninvited to that meeting. Then, the meeting was held and the determination was made that Dr. Haddad would have to go to sexual harassment training. Which was kind of funny, because...And I don't mean really funny, but...

Dave: Funny weird, or sort of...

Helen: Funny weird.

Dave: Yeah.

Helen: Because he signed the sexual harassment policy that was in our policy handbook, and yet the resolution was going to be that he was going to go to sexual harassment training. So I have to tell you, I



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personally was devastated, and I was unbelievably devastated on the behalf of these women, because they had exposed themselves to an investigation. Their identity was confidential throughout the whole thing, and I was never asked and I never would have said who they were. So to that extent, they were specifically protected. But emotionally, psychologically, they were not protected. And by this time other women had been identified for me by these two women. They knew about other cases. So I was aware that this was just a terrible outcome for all of these women. And I could not imagine how they were going to stay employed. I certainly couldn't imagine how I was going to stay employed there.

Anyway, through a process that I honestly could never explain, the content of the meeting and of all that transpired...

Dave: Which meeting?

Helen: I'm sorry. The meeting at which the Archdiocese decided that he would be punished with this sexual harassment training.

Dave: Oh, right. That meeting. Yep.

Helen: There was someone, obviously, who spoke about that to the *Globe* because the next thing I knew I was getting a call from the *Globe* asking me if I knew about the press release from the Archdiocese of Boston about the investigation of Dr. Haddad. And I said, "No, I don't." And in this press release it explained that there had been complaints with Dr. Haddad, there'd been an evaluation of the situation and that the legal counsel involved had said that these were minor infractions of our policy and that he had agreed not ever to behave in any way like this again, and he would go to sexual harassment training, but that the HR function was going to be reviewed for the process it had used in this investigation. And I thought, "Whoa."

Dave: So, it was almost an attack on you?

Helen: Absolutely. The gloves were off. And I thought, "Oh, that's very interesting. Now, I'm going to... not me personally...yes, me personally, but also the HR function is under review now." So the focus shifted from the sexual harasser to the investigation forces, resources, those of us in HR...

Dave: Investigating the investigation?

Helen: Yes. And so I thought, "Okay. So, I need to be very clear and particular about how I go from here." And I will say, and I've not said this before, I hired an attorney to protect my own interest, and I engaged my friend who was a public relations specialist to answer for me. Because I knew that I was now beyond my own personal sense of competence in dealing with legal issues...

Dave: Because this was so big and so public?

Helen: Yes. And this is my life and my career. And if someone's saying that my work and that of my associates needs to be investigated, then I can't take that innocently or lightly. Well, I went to work the



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following Monday and I had...I mean, at the time emails were not anywhere near...I didn't have a device to bring home over the weekend where I could follow my email. I had...

Dave: You came in on Monday...

Helen: I came in on Monday to a pile of emails in my email about women who wanted to make complaints. And so then I'm in a situation where, "Okay, now what do we do? Now what do we do about these women?" Because, okay, that decision was made and...

Dave: Can you share how many? That's not relevant, but I just...

Helen: I'm trying to remember, Dave. I'd say maybe 15 or 20. And if you could see the mail that I was getting from women who had left the organization, it was very clear that there was a whole different thing going on here than two or three people that we had investigated. And at that point, it absolutely required another meeting. To which, in fact, this time I was invited. I would say that was probably one of the darkest hours of my professional and personal life, because as I told you before, I was raised Catholic. And though I've had as...I don't know a Catholic that hasn't had differences with the church if they've remained in the church. So I've had my differences with the church. But I really believe the kinds of principles that I was taught about the church.

And so for me to be sitting in a room with all of these higher officials of the church, that I hold up this church for me, it was a very difficult time.

Dave: You were torn.

Helen: I was totally torn; with these attorneys from a firm that Bank Boston had used all the time, so I knew them all very, very well, asking me questions about how I regarded this event, when I very clearly regarded this event as serial sexual harassment. That's all it was. And to try to minimize it as innocent hugs or innocent expressions of affection, it was not innocent. It was one after the other. And they were all women who were in positions, either less powerful positions, or vulnerable. I mean, you're terminating someone, they're vulnerable. When they're junior, they're vulnerable to a power dynamic that existed there. And I had nothing more to say other than, "It's very clear what this is. This is not unclear."

And so after I left that night, it was on the radio later that evening that the decision had been made to terminate Dr. Haddad. So I went home thinking, "At least these women have some peace from this." And one of the things that I think is really important, and I've thought about this really in the last couple of weeks when I watch the stories of these women who've come forward, and I know how hard that is for them, even though there's been a lot of encouragement that women come forward to make it clear how rampant this is, the women at Caritas Christi were never identified by name. And we did things, the right thing, we hired a couple of people to help them sort of get their lives back in order and help them decide whether they wanted to stay or leave their employment. And three of them stayed, one of them left.



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But I was really pleased that from the point of view of the women involved, they never had to suffer the public exposure of this. Because there are many people who, even though it was proven to be legitimately their complaint, don't believe them. Even today we see people who say, "I don't believe them." I don't understand that, particularly when you have woman, after woman, after woman identifying the same pattern. The psychological impact of that is extraordinary. The job impact of, "Do I stay or do I leave depending on where I am in my job? How do I find another job?" It was just hard for them on so many fronts. And I felt really good about the fact that all of that remained their private business. And the solutions they found to the problems that they had, created by their employer, they were empowered to solve them with resources we provided to them. So to me, that is one of the great benefits of HR being the facilitator of these kinds of troubles; organizational troubles.

Dave: And HR is getting a little bit of bad press right now at some organizations that have had similar things where it wasn't dealt with as effectively as you did at Caritas. What would you say to the HR function with regard to this? And it's not just HR, right? There's other people on these leadership teams. A lot of these are very public. You know? These are not secrets.

Helen: No, they're not. No, they're not. And as...

Dave: I'm sure there were others that knew of his behavior...

Helen: Oh, there were. And...

Dave: Before people even came to you...

Helen: That is absolutely the case. And I would say that's also the case, you know, you listen to some of the stories we're listening to right now. And certainly at Caritas there were men who had observed this behavior and had warned Dr. Haddad that he was going to get in trouble if he kept this up. So when you think about that level of knowledge in an organization, yes, the HR person is the person identified as a resource for employees. But any leader in an organization is responsible for the wellbeing of people in that organization if, in true, they are a leader. That's why they are a leader. They have the power and the authority to call bad behavior when they see it in an organization.

You know, my longstanding view is that people in an organization will give their very best if they feel that they are respected and treated with dignity. If you don't do that, you will get what you deserve as an employer. And it will be behavior that is protective, because people aren't irrational. They'll give their all for an employer that reciprocates that. But if you don't, you will get a very careful, and cautious, and not fully engaged employee. So, all leadership has that responsibility. But I do think that in the end the loyalty of the HR person is to the organization, not to the human being that is its leader. And you have to be able to see that clearly. Because that's why you're there.

Dave: That's the balance. Right? You have to...protecting the individuals in the organization is the whole organization.

Helen: That's right. You know, in many ways, we all have had that lifeboat experience in training, where you all have to understand that at the end of the day if the lifeboat goes over, all is lost. So we have to



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be able to maintain order in that lifeboat in such a way that everybody can survive and succeed. And it just can't happen if you have toxic leadership.

Dave: How did you develop the trust of...I guess it happened before they came to you. So why did they come to you? Why did they know it was safe to come to you? How did you create that environment? I mean, you weren't there that long, but there must be something about what you did to make the women that were victims feel like, "I can go to Helen with this," or, "I can come to HR with this."

Helen: Well, I think, honestly, HR, the individual HR professional and HR as the function or the profession, has two genuine obligations in an organization. The first is to know the business inside and out so that everything you do from a policy perspective, from a performance management perspective, delivering the HR agenda is all aligned with the business. That is an absolute imperative. And that's the only way you have credibility, from my point of view, at the C suite level. That's the only way.

The second thing is to understand that the human resource of the organization is its single most distinctive and most competitive resource. And to be entrusted with that is the ultimate responsibility of an HR person. So the two working hand in hand mean I'm not the agent of the corporation, nor am I the agent of the employee. I'm the agent of the corporation and the employee integrating as closely as possible to the success, ultimately, of the community, the shareholders, and the employees. So if you keep those two things straight, you should be credible with the people who run the organization, of whom hopefully you're one, and you should be credible with every single individual. And part of being credible with every single individual is I don't care whether you're the first person we hired in the door and you have the most junior-level responsibility we have, or you're the person who's the top person in the organization. Every single person should be treated as the distinct human being that they are.

So, I've always found that you make friends with everyone. As the HR person, you're always speaking to everyone. You try very hard to get to know the names of as many people as you interact with all the time, because you want people to know that you too are a person that is holding herself to the same expectations.

Dave: And that's that approachability; that they felt comfortable coming to you, right?

Helen: Yeah. And I think, frankly, it doesn't happen immediately. I mean, I had been employed for almost three years at the organization when this happened. And it had been going on for a while. So clearly, it took a while.

Dave: One person, or a couple people to have that courage.

Helen: It's hard. And I think the stakes are high.

Dave: What would you recommend to HR people now that are wrestling with how to protect an organization from this happening inside their organization? How do you keep these things from happening?



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Helen: I think the only way you keep these things from happening is that when you are aware of situations that are going on, even in the growing concern level, so when you see somebody whose humor is really not quite right, it's humor that's leading in a direction that concerns you, or you see an exchange you don't like, that you as the HR person have to be willing to say, "You know, I just want to take you aside and say that behavior concerns me. That's not consistent with the way we expect to treat other people in the workplace." So you have to be willing to do that, be vigilant.

You know, if anything, you have to be willing, perhaps, to be a little bit more on the side of stepping in than waiting and watching. I do think though that at times you're going to find out, "This is well-developed. This isn't something I can nip in the bud." And in that case, you have to have the courage of your convictions. You don't have to do it alone. As I said before, I think it's vitally important that legal counsel and HR work very carefully together when these are very high-level intense situations. And you have to be willing to say, "I've got to call it."

And, you know, I know that means that employment may be at risk and reputations may be at risk. And I think in the long run, your employment and your reputation is at risk if you don't do it. Because then you get categorized as, you know, a person that keeps the trains running. And that's the best people can hope for from HR. And if that's what they can hope for from HR, there's not a lot of future for HR.

Dave: Anything else about this story that you think people should know, or you want to share?

Helen: Well, I think a values-based organization would have known what to do immediately in the situation I was in. And I wasn't sure that the values squared with what I was looking for. Because when you have a leader who's not living the values, it definitely disrupts the sense of, "What should a person think about the values of the organization?" I mean, I certainly understood what the organization said its values were. But when the leader is not walking that talk, it's very disruptive.

So, I would say that I think that values-based leadership makes for incredible relationships between employees and the employer, between employees and each other. And I think when you disrupt that, you do so at great peril. It's the difference between being able to run a sustainable organization and not, as far as I'm concerned.

Dave: And where does it go wrong? Where does the leadership team veer off from that when the values aren't matching from what their actions are? Because we talked about it; that other people certainly knew what was going on. It wasn't just when somebody came to you. And we're finding out in all these other stories that they were open secrets. So where do they lose their rudder; organizations, I guess? And how can an HR leader influence it to keep them consistent with the values?

Helen: So go back to what I said a few minutes ago about an HR person really understanding the business, and then being the person that's truly committed to the human resource resource of the organization. I think oftentimes organizations think that, "The business is in such trouble I have to do whatever it takes. So I'm going to compromise on my values."

Dave: The economics?



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Helen: Right. And I don't believe that. I believe that when an organization is in trouble is when you need to stay values-based the very most. And I do think, frankly, I do believe that women are able to see this differentiation more easily than men can. And I don't mean to be just generalizing that women do something good and men do something bad. I think it's part of the reason why, when we think about, for example, the 2008 financial crisis and you look at the fact that there were virtually no women making financial decisions at that time. I think, for instance, in this college, when I came here we couldn't meet payroll on my first day. We could not meet payroll with the cash available. We had to go to our line of credit. Everything we've done since then has been to get the business in order. But not at the expense of the values that we hold. And it's doable.

I mean, I think very recently I was talking with one of my colleagues, we did this wonderful project at Daly Field. That's our poster over there. It was a public/private partnership with the commonwealth of Massachusetts and the city of Boston. Simmons invested \$13.5 million. We are not a rich school. We saved that money out of our surpluses every year. And we did it because we need playing fields for our students. But it was a community investment as well. So it's playing fields for Brighton High School and the Brighton community. So it's a joint effort.

Literally the day before we were laying down that field that you see in that graphic, we had knowledge that the Obama administration had identified that the substance that is used on playing fields called crummy rubber was being investigated.

Dave: Yes, I've heard about this. Because some goalies are having...

Helen: Dying of cancer. Soccer goalies in a large...in a very unusual number dying of cancer. And the belief is that the crummy rubber, they're inhaling it when they dive for a goal.

Dave: Because they're lower than the other players, right.

Helen: Because they're lower than the other players. So the Obama administration had said it had to be investigated for its carcinogenic properties. We learned that the day before we were signing a purchase order for the crummy rubber. And to replace it added \$1 million of cost. And there was an interim which was...encapsulated crummy rubber. So it was the crummy rubber, the bad stuff, but it had, like, a coating on it.

Dave: Delayed the effects maybe, or whatever?

Helen: Well, we don't know. But one of our trustees said to me, "Well, okay. So that would be half again as much. What do you think about that?" And I said, "You know, I happened to be in a classroom at Simmons College with a student who said, "If you don't know what's in the crummy rubber then putting a cover on it is not going to protect you. Because if it comes out of that cover, then you're still dealing with it." So, no, we're going to go for the organic coconut shell fill." And that cost us \$1 million. But we did it.

Dave: That's an example of what you were just saying.



Helen: Exactly.

Dave: You know, you're an educator now, and you're educating leaders in business school, and even leaders that are in undergraduate school.

Helen: Absolutely. We provide...Our entire undergraduate curriculum is provided in the leadership framework.

Dave: Right. So is what's going on, what you experienced then in your whole career and what's going on now impacting how you educate women about working in the workforce or leading?

Helen: Absolutely. Absolutely. One of the things that is so important here at Simmons is we want students to leave here with the skills to go into the workplace. We want them to go with a positive attitude. This is not about warning them about all of the possible things that could happen so that they are constantly on the lookout for bad things to happen to them. But it is to say, through casework and coursework and student experience here, that the world is a gender-oriented place, and you have to understand gender at work in any organization that you're involved with. Whether it's your employer or your avocational interest, there's always going to be gender dynamics. And better that you understand gender dynamics and you understand how you can interact in those situations than you're learning on the job. That's something we're very hopeful to avoid; that our students go into the world aware that gender dynamics do drive a lot of behavior.

Dave: So go into HR, Helen. How did you get into the HR function? How did this happen?

Helen: Well, you know sometimes you think certain things are meant to be. My mom was an HR professional. Yeah, little known fact. I finished my degree here at Simmons in library information science. And then I got my MBA. And I had traditional job offers to work for a bank, including First National Bank of Boston. I didn't want to do any of that. And I saw an ad here at Simmons for someone who had an MBA and a library science degree and I thought, "You know, there can't be many of us in the world who have that combo."

Dave: That combo, right.

Helen: And I went to work for Executive Search. And I started their research department. It's a firm that's no longer even alive. And I really got the bug. I thought, "This is fascinating work." And when I left, I'd learned a lot about systems training, and I'd done a lot of the systems work for this research department. And all of a sudden, when I left there I saw a job advertised at Bank Boston for a person to do systems development for the HR organization. It was on the user side, not on the technology side. I applied for that job and I got it. I had a job offer at Fidelity Investments and one at Bank Boston Corporation, same day. And so Fidelity Investments, Bank Boston Corporation.

Dave: Not too bad. Two nice offers.



Helen: But totally different. When I looked at that job at Fidelity there were at least five HR heads at Fidelity after that. There were only two at Bank Boston. Now, I was the second. So I made the right decision.

Dave: You did.

Helen: I did. You know? It never would have worked, I don't think. It was not meant to be. I believe strongly that we have to discern our path in life. Anyway, Bank Boston changed my life in terms of HR as a profession. The first five years there I was on the systems side. And we got a new head of HR, who was my predecessor, and he said, "I've terminated virtually everybody, and I hear you have a decent reputation as a manager. What job would you like?" "Well, welcome." You know? And I said, "You know, I've always been intrigued by compensation. I'd really love to do that job." He said, "Done." So, and you know, Bob...

Dave: Which turns out to be a great bedrock of HR experience to have.

Helen: Oh, huge. Huge. And tied so nicely to my background. And Bob Gatti said to me at the time, the late and great Bob Gatti. We all loved Bob.

Dave: Yep, we do.

Helen: He said, "Helen, there are people in this town who would give their right arm for that job, and you just...it fell out of the sky. You know?" And I said, "Lucky me, Bob." You know? Really. And so that was my start at the bank.

Dave: As the former president of SHRM, the national organization, which NEHRA rolls underneath, the question from NEHRA is, "What advice would you give an up-and-coming HR person, somebody that's in the function that wants to move up like you did in the function?" What advice would you give them? And you just gave some already.

Helen: So, I think that so many people who are thinking about, "Where would I like to work?" Think, "Oh, I'd like to work in HR. And not just because I like people," those days are pretty gone, I think. But people see it as an entrée. And it is an entrée to an organization. But if you can't bring some solid business know-how to that, I think it's really hard to gain a foothold in HR. And so I would strongly recommend, I don't know that you have to get an MBA. But I would strongly recommend that people who are thinking hard about HR know how to read a balance sheet, understand what drives the organization, and it can be a not-for-profit, but still understand where the revenues come from, where do the expenses go, how integral is the size of payroll to the size of this business.

So in banking, the payroll is the largest thing they're dealing with other than the cost of money. So you can be sure an HR person who has that kind of skillset is going to be full of opportunities. So, think strategically about how you tie what that business is about to what you can contribute as an HR person, and what do you need as skills to do that kind of...

Dave: Right. And it sounds like you're speaking the language of business, which is finance. Right?



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Helen: Yes. Well, and the other thing is, read the *Wall Street Journal*. Read it. Just read the left-hand column so you know what's going on in the world. Because you'll get intrigued and you'll say, "I wonder why that head of that corporation lost his job in five minutes. What went on there?" And you read the story and you think...

Dave: "What's the backstory?" Right.

Helen: "What's the backstory?" Yeah. I mean, get more and more literate about what makes the world tick, organizationally.

Dave: Be a student of business, right?

Helen: Yes. And I must say, I would say of organizational life, because I've worked in for-profit businesses, and I've worked in not-for-profit businesses, and I would say that it's harder to generate revenue mindsets in not-for-profits. And it's critical. It's absolutely critical. You know? Some nuns famously said, "No margin, no mission." That's true. That's true.

Dave: Well, this is a little bit of a different question. I mean, I get different answers from this question. If you were to give advice...write a letter of advice to your 30-year-old self, what would you write?

Helen: "Get your MBA sooner than you did."

Dave: And you got it pretty early.

Helen: I did. I was in my 30s when I finished my MBA.

Dave: Oh, okay. Yeah. So get it in your 20s is what you would have done? Right?

Helen: Yes. My library degree was...I've never regretted having that degree. But if I could only have one, it would be the MBA.

Dave: Well, Helen, this has been really great to sit down with you and have this conversation.

Helen: Thanks.

Dave: I think we could go on a lot longer. I didn't ask you nearly half of the questions I had prepared. But it was so great to hear, first of all, you tell that amazing story of what you did. And I think a lot of people can learn from that going forward, especially in this environment.

Helen: Well, you know, Dave, sometimes I think about the four women that, you know, I knew the stories so very well, and I've been able to...I'm not in touch with them on a regular basis. But I've been able to kind of get information by third and fourth hand to know that their lives have gone on. But I do feel like there's so many people in our organizations that are suffering unnecessarily from bad management, whether it's sexual harassment, or bullying, or just excessive pressure that's put on people. And I just think, "You know, it doesn't have to be that way. It doesn't have to be that way."



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Dave: You know, I'm surprised about all of these stories. But women aren't surprised. The women I talk to, they're not shocked at all about all these things that we're finding out in the news now.

Helen: No. I was sexually harassed as a waitress when I was 16. I was sexually harassed by a senior-level manager at Bank Boston Corporation and discussed that with the CEO of Bank Boston Corporation in addition to the head of HR. It happens to women all the time.

Dave: Well, society's learning a lot right now.

Helen: I hope so. I hope so.

Dave: And hopefully we can move forward in the best way possible.

Helen: Yeah.

Dave: Well, thank you again.

Helen: You're welcome. Thank you, Dave.

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