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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'm Dave Hennessy. Our guest for this episode is Beth Grous, the Chief People Office from TripAdvisor. We'll get to Beth shortly, but first I want to tell you about our next podcast. Russ Campanello, who heads up HR from iRobot will be on episode three. Back to Beth Grous, she's someone who's moved up very quickly in her HR career, been quite successful.

I first asked her questions about how she did that. She shares some interesting stories about the challenges she had early in her career and some opportunities and some key people that really influenced her early on. She also has some great stuff about TripAdvisor's culture and values and specifically what she looks for when she hires candidates. I think you'll find that all very interesting. You also hear what Beth wishes she knew when she was 30 years old. Lastly, she reveals a personal effectiveness trick that's kind of fun. I bring you Beth Grous.

Dave Hennessy: Well, it's great to have Beth Grous, Chief People Officer from TripAdvisor here at the headquarters at TripAdvisor; the incredible headquarters at TripAdvisor, which she's given me a tour of. It's very impressive. Hello Beth.

Beth Grous: Hi Dave. Thanks for having me. I hear this is your inaugural podcast.

Dave Hennessy: Well, to be honest, yes it is. We have this and we had/did one other actually. There's already two.

Beth Grous: I'm looking forward to having a great conversation today. Thanks for coming to visit us here at the Needham TripAdvisor headquarters.

Dave Hennessy: Thank you. Thank you for making the time to do this as well. I know you're busy, a lot going on here at a fast-moving company. We got together a couple of months ago with Elaine Varelas and you shared how you ... Before we talk about TripAdvisor, can you tell that interesting story about how you came to the HR function and maybe a little bit about how your career evolved too from there.

Beth Grous: Sure.

Dave Hennessy: I think the initial story was very interesting.

Beth Grous: Yeah, well this was a whole big happy accident as I think I told you over lunch that day that you and Elaine and I had a good laugh over it because my original career aspiration was to be a large animal veterinarian, which had been the story I told myself for my whole life was what I wanted to be when I grew up.

I went off to Cornell to be a biology major. Cornell has this wonderful vet school on the campus. It's that beautiful school up in Ithaca, New York and I thought I totally got this. 17 years-old, I've got this all figured out, I'm going up to college, and the rest, as they say, is history.

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A semester or two in I realized that I didn't really love being a hard sciences major. Still love the idea of being with animals, but didn't think I was going make a profession of it. Had no idea what I was going to do. Asked my parents, my dad in particular, for advice who said pick a major that you love.

Dave Hennessy: Follow your dreams.

Beth Grous: Follow your dream. I became an English major with a triple concentration in women writers, poetry, and modern literature. I distinctly remember my parents sitting at graduation and they had a front row seat at graduation because my mom was recovering from pneumonia and so they got these handicap seats. I had this bird's eye view of the stadium with thousands of other students graduating. My father just wringing his hands like, "Oh my God, she's never getting off our payroll with an English major."

I graduated, I had no job. I had this very happy series of events happen to me during college where I had some summer jobs, one in retail. I ended up working for a retail store and then becoming a manager for a local chain of stores here in New England. I had a temporary job that put me in my second temp assignment as the office manager at an executive search firm. A women-owned executive search firm; it was very ahead of its time in the late '80s, placing part-time and temporary mid to upper-level executives. A company called the Pickwick Group that was located here in Wellesley.

I had these two experiences, this HR experience, and I parleyed that temp job with the Pickwick Group into going back every summer and every vacation and doing a variety of search and HR related things. Working for two really inspirational, female entrepreneurs in the HR space. This retail career that I really enjoyed, but didn't think I wanted to make a full-time profession of it and networked my way into my first HR job working for Macy's in New York as an HR business partner.

For the younger podcast listeners who are tuning in today to hear this, that was the day, really before the internet, and so you printed out a resume and you typed a cover letter on a typewriter. You put them in an envelope and then you just waited for someone to call you. There was none of this instant feedback emailing and very electronically connected, but I got really lucky and I picked up and moved to New York. Started there shortly after I graduated from college and worked for Macy's in New York for seven years.

I remember telling someone, the first year that they were hiring for business, that Macy's had never gone through ... It was a privately held company who never had a lay off. In the first 18 months of my tenure there, we filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and had a number of lay offs and were bought by our biggest competitor Federated Department Stores. Here I was, this young kid not even two years out of college going to a company that I thought was pretty stable and ending up really having the fortunate experience of a ton of business transformation that I now look back on with the benefit of hindsight and say, "Wow. That was the best training I could have ever had." Both in terms of exposing myself at a young age to the disruption of change and the way that industries consolidate and merge and disrupt and evolve, as well as, having the opportunity to get jobs in an organization that was moving pretty quickly. Where my managers would look at me and say, "We think she's smart enough to do this job and we think she's dumb enough to say that she will."

I had this really whole host of great jobs there ending over a seven year period. I was the HR business partner, I did special projects for the head of HR, I consolidated and merged stores here in
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the Boston area. I used to joke that they'd send me from the New York HQ 'cause I was the only one that knew how to pronounce the names of the Boston towns; you're like, Peabody.

Dave Hennessy: Worcester.

Beth Grous: Worcester. Billerica. It was a tremendous start. I just found that I just loved, just absolutely love the profession. I ended in that job as the head of training for all the east coast stores, learning development for all the east coast stores. Then parleyed that into a number of other experience in services and technology and bio-pharma, all of which have led me here today to be the Chief People Officer at TripAdvisor. I am celebrating my two year anniversary in this job.

Dave Hennessy: Well, congratulations.

Beth Grous: In September of 2017, so just a couple short weeks from now.

Dave Hennessy: That's amazing.

Beth Grous: Yeah.

Dave Hennessy: That's great. Well, we know you head up the HR function here. In layman's terms, or just in not HR-speak, how would you describe what your role is inside this organization?

Beth Grous: Yes. I think my role here at TripAdvisor is a little different than probably many HR organizations in other companies. My title, as you know, is Chief People Officer. I actually have three distinct or main areas of responsibility. The first would be what I think most of our listeners would know as the core functions of HR. The HR business part of the organization, total rewards, which is called benefits and HR systems, learning development, talent acquisition.

I also head up the Office Experience Group here at TripAdvisor. In many organizations, that's referred to as facilities, but we really believe that having great, collaborative workspaces that have their own distinct personalities that reflect our travelers, reflect our employees, and reflect the business and where we do business around the globe is really important to employee productivity and collaboration. Running our work sites like a hotel, with a concierge level of services to make employee's lives easier. Helps enhance productivity and therefore our business results. I lead up that group as well.

Then the third leg of that stool is a group that we call Philanthropy and Inclusion. It started two years ago when I was here. It was confined to the TripAdvisor Charitable Foundation and all of our employee volunteer activities. Over the last, I'd say half a year, we've expanded the remit of that group to include a very specific focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion both in terms of how we think about it internally to TripAdvisor in the experiences here and then externally, are we living our values in the world. A little bit broader than just-

Dave Hennessy: Yeah, I didn't realize that.

Beth Grous: I like to think of it as a stool with really three very equal legs. How we help employees work better in this cool, great space and is how we manage all the elements of the employee life cycle. From hire and training development, all through when they ultimately go from TripAdvisor to

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something else. Then how we live our values internally and externally through the work of our foundation and our equality and inclusion efforts.

Dave Hennessy: What's the employee experience like at TripAdvisor from your view? Where do you maybe want to take it? Is there some place, a higher-level you want to go?

Beth Grous: I think this is a pretty neat place to work. I am probably a bit biased in saying that because I do work here and I am the head of people here so I guess I would-

Dave Hennessy: Well, people do look happy. We walked in and people are playing Frisbee on the front lawn. It looks like there is something to this.

Beth Grous: Yeah, this is a very collaborative, collegial place to work. We believe in a conversation rich, documentation and policy-light kind of framework, if I were to put it that way. For example, we have beer on tap 24 hours a day in our two pubs that we have in our headquarter buildings. We just trust people to manage it like adults and they do. There are no posted warning signs, and we don't lock down the taps because we think people won't behave. We give people a lot of freedom and a lot of opportunity and a lot of amenities in a place like this to help drive productivity and collaboration.

The Frisbee that you saw on the lawn, in my view, serves a couple of purposes. Number one, it gets people into community with each other doing something that they love. Number two, it provides what you sometimes really need, to have a mental and physical break from the work so you can get back to it in a rejuvenated way. Number three, it gets people up and moving, which is just good for their health.

This is a place where we move fast. The work is intense. We work hard and we play hard, as cliché as that sounds it is true. It is a place where we want people to come to work and be happy. I talked earlier about office experience and having on-site amenities and things that just help make life easier like the mobile barber coming once a month or the opportunity to have a manicure on-site. Employees pay for those things, but it just takes less time out of their day to do that.

We're also a dog-friendly environment, most of our offices as well. You can see around here dogs of various shapes and sizes, all of whom are well behaved. Because, again, it is a very self-regulated community. People just don't bring in poorly behaved dogs, which is why my dogs don't come in 'cause they are poorly behaved. The people with well behaved dogs bring the well behaved dogs in. To the extent that a dog is bothersome to someone in their workspace and a colleague says, "Hey, I'm afraid of dogs. I'm allergic to dogs." What we find is that for the most part a colleague will say, "I understand that and I'm not gonna bring my dog in 'cause I don't want to disrupt your work experience." There's that kind of give and take here, which I think is really special and really unique and something that we really try to nurture.

Dave Hennessy: It sounds like a lot of things you mentioned attract Millennials; the environment, the policy, what you do here to give people freedom and amenities. What else keeps people here, engaged in TripAdvisor?

Beth Grous: We're a very values-driven organization. We spend a substantial amount of time, almost two years ago, shortly after I started ... At that time, a 15 year-old company with a lot of folks

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who had been around since the early days, we thought it was really important to document what our values were. Both so we could have a consistent way of living those values and then as new people came in, that we had a consistent way of articulating those values. I think being a values based organization does attract employees of all types, Millennials and non-Millennials.

We're a very fast organization. Speed wins has been one of values since the very earliest days. There's a handwritten note on our CEO, Steve Kaufer's door. If you walk by it on your way out today you'll see it, it says, "Speed wins." It's been there since the very earliest days of this company in his very first office in a different building here in Needham.

This is a place where people come because they love travel and they love the opportunity to help travelers around the world share experiences and enrich their lives through seeing different parts of the world. Whether they are very far from where they live or right in their own backyard, in that just joy and love of travel I think is something that we all feel equally. We really love just making the world a better place for our traveler community. I think we had a lot of fun doing it.

Dave Hennessy: I noticed that the brand is one that everybody knows. TripAdvisor is well known. The advertising campaign, I noticed as somebody that was interested in animals and being a veterinarian, the owl is now front and center. I'd really like to know who brought that concept back to the organization. That was a pun. That was a bad pun. Pun of the podcast. I don't really want to know.

Tell us about some of the other brands. The TripAdvisor is well known, some of the other brands some of our listeners might not know about. What else is TripAdvisor involved in?

Beth Grous: I think most people know TripAdvisor because of the travel opinion and researching site. I'll say a few words about that, I think even today many people think of us as a place where you go research your travel before you book. A big part of our business is actually the ability to book on TripAdvisor either through one of our partners, another online travel agency or direct hotel, or directly through our TripAdvisor Instant Booking product. We've really evolved over our years from being a review and opinion site to a review, opinion, and book-

Dave Hennessy: Transaction now.

Beth Grous: Transaction network. That TripAdvisor umbrella is pretty broad. We have other brands as you wisely know as well. Some of them more well known of those brands, a brand called Viator. That's a company that does curated tours and attractions. We sell tickets. Skip the line at the Vatican if you're going to Rome. Or tickets to a duck tour here locally in Boston, you can buy directly on the app. Viator is a standalone brand, a company we bought a few years back, but part of our broader TripAdvisor attractions platform.

We have two parts of our company in Boston on Causeway Street. SmarterTravel, it's a media company that has a whole bunch of brands under it. One that some of the listeners might know is a website called Cruise Critic. Where if you are a cruise aficionado, it is a place where you can both research cruises and there's an incredibly active cruise community on that site. Another one of the SmarterTravel brands is Oyster, which is a high-end curated photographs of hotels that really give the viewer something much richer than you'd get just from stock photography. Then we have a

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vacation rental business as well. As TripAdvisor vacation rentals, but there are some legacy brands like FlipKey that people-

Dave Hennessy: Heard of that. Yep.

Beth Grous: That are part of that family as well. Then if you travel outside of the US and you're in Europe, particularly in Paris or across France or Spain, you will see a website called Laforchette, or The Fork, which is a restaurant business that is really big in Europe. That is also a TripAdvisor company. We try to be all things to all people throughout that travel life cycle.

I think your point is a really good one 'cause a lot of people think of us as TripAdvisor, the site, but our span is literally dozens of sites.

Dave Hennessy: Some of them might not work here. It sounds like some of them are standalone organizations, some of them might be housed here as well, at headquarters.

Beth Grous: Yeah. Exactly right. Our Viator business, our tours and attractions business, although there are Viator folks in a lot of our locations, their core place of location is San Francisco and Las Vegas. Our Laforchette business is headquartered in Paris. Then Holiday Lettings, legacy Holiday Lettings business is in our London-Oxford office. We definitely have businesses all over the world. All of whom still are under that TripAdvisor umbrella and really feel like part of that same TripAdvisor family.

Dave Hennessy: What else about TripAdvisor do you think people might want to know that is not common knowledge from an insider? 'Cause I think there's a lot of intrigue about your organization. We hear a lot about it.

Beth Grous: We're a really interesting place. Our headquarters are here in Needham, Massachusetts. We are back to our roots being in Needham. We moved into this fabulous building just over two years ago. We started here, locally, in Needham by a trio of co-founders over a pizza shop here in Needham in a very, very small office space. When we moved into this building, we had been headquartered in a small office-park kind of building right down the street in Newton for a number of years. It was really a sort of homecoming for us here to come back to our roots in Needham with this big, fabulous headquarters. I think we were really also feel very humble to be back in Needham, the place where it all began. Two of our three co-founders are still with the company.

Dave Hennessy: Amazing.

Beth Grous: Steve Kaufer founded the company with Langley Steinert, who now is the CEO of CarGurus, and Nick Shanny, who's our head of technology, our head of engineering. Nick is here, right in an office right on the other side of this wall from us. Steve is right over about 20 yards away from where we're recording this today as well.

I think some viewers may also not know about TripAdvisor is that ... I think when you see a business like TripAdvisor particularly one that's so known for the reviews and opinions you think, "Wow, that was a great idea that someone had to open up this portal where consumers can write reviews on hotels." That actually wasn't our original business model.

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Dave Hennessy: What was it?

Beth Grous: Our original business model, Steve tells this story famously. If you go to YouTube, you can see many clips of Steve Kaufer telling this story of how TripAdvisor was founded. I'm sure he'd do it way better than I will. Steve was booking a trip to Mexico with his wife. They went to a travel agent, as many people did in the year 2000 or 1999, said, "Give me brochures for the high-end, mid range, and low-end resorts." Steve got the brochures and took them home and was leafing through them and thought, "Wow. They all kind of look alike with just different price points." Same white sandy beach, same attractive food items photographed, probably the nicest hotel room in the place.

Dave Hennessy: Like you said before, stock photos.

Beth Grous: All stock photos. His wife said to him at that time, "Hey, there's this thing called the internet. You should go and see if you can find out anymore about these reviews." What he saw online when he did that was just travel agencies starting their websites posting pictures of these same brochures that he'd already seen. His conclusion was not super helpful. His original view was that they were going to start a site where they would publish aggregated reviews from places like Foders or Frommer's or any of those travel guide books that we used to all, when we were travelling years ago-

Dave Hennessy: To be a clearinghouse for all that.

Beth Grous: To really get aggregated all that stuff together. At one point ... The business actually wasn't doing particularly well. Someone had the idea, let's open a comment box on one of these pages and it just took off like wildfire. I think those are some of the moments, for any start-up business, but certainly for our business where you just follow the idea where it takes you. I think it was right idea, right time.

It's amazing to say that 17 years ago was, in some ways, the beginnings of the consumer internet as we know it and this level of connectivity community. Here we are in 2017 and the TripAdvisor platform of reviews, unbiased reviews and opinions from a community is a platform now that, as you know and I'm assuming our listeners know, is shared by countless businesses and countless industry verticals now.

Dave Hennessy: Right, you don't want to know what an organization says about themselves. You want to know what their clients and customers say about it.

Beth Grous: Yeah, what the community says. I think we're really proud of this community that we have. We have over half a billion reviews and opinions. We hit our half billion review mark several months ago and growing every day. It's still something that we're really, really proud of.

Dave Hennessy: It was innovation. It was a simple idea, but it took off. What do you do to instill that same culture of innovation here? 'Cause I'm sure that's something you want to keep happening, right?

Beth Grous: One of the neat things about TripAdvisor is that we feel like a pretty non-hierarchical place. Good ideas can come from anywhere. We are pretty explicit about that in our values and

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saying that we believe in transparency. We want people to speak up and lean into the conversation. Irrespective of the role that you have in the organization, the level that you're at in the organization, and we really expect that, that happens. This isn't the kind of organization like perhaps in some other companies where ideas get generated at the top of the house or get credit taken for at the top of the house. This is a pretty democratic place in that way.

Then we do other things. We just had a whole group of over 100 interns in here this summer. We had a week long intern hackathon, where we're having interns in these mixed groups, product, marketing, engineering, really coming up with great product ideas. Many of which may make it to the site someday. We are constantly innovating and having product reviews and letting people surface their ideas up for consideration. We really do try to keep that spirit pretty fresh here.

Dave Hennessy: It made me think about is there a leadership philosophy here that is stated at Trip? Do you call it Trip or is it always TripAdvisor?

Beth Grous: That's a good question. We call it Trip. We definitely call it-

Dave Hennessy: That is the nickname.

Beth Grous: That is the nickname.

Dave Hennessy: Okay good. I want to be cool, so I'll call it Trip from now on. We want to save more room for your comments. Of course, this conversation is taking all away from it right now. Trip, go.

Beth Grous: Or TA. Or TAMG, TripAdvisor Media Group. But I digress. We do call it Trip here internally a lot. To your question about the leadership philosophy, I guess I'd say a couple of things. Number one, I think it starts with our values. People who love travel who want to be fast, but do really good work. We absolutely believe in transparency in the giving and sharing of ideas. We believe in a, a diverse workforce and a diverse traveler community and really honoring that. This is a fun group of people. We really do try to live by our six stated values I think all the time.

One of the things, not exactly the question that you asked, but I do think it bears noting that I think it makes us different than some places that I've worked. I alluded to it earlier, it's a very non-hierarchical place. Employees feel like they can go to whoever is the person that can best solve their problem. Senior people can go to the person who's got the complaint, or the idea, or the question, or the concern. I routinely have people swing by my office saying, "Hey, do you have a couple minutes." Or talking to me by the salad bar, giving them feedback-

Dave Hennessy: Maybe outside of HR and different level in the organization.

Beth Grous: I think that is something that I'm really proud of this leadership team because I think we do try, genuinely try hard to foster that sense of community here.

Dave Hennessy: Is that hard though? 'Cause somebody like you and other senior leaders here, you're well known throughout the organization, you're often speaking. Is it hard to manage the amount of contact you're receiving from employees?



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Beth Grous: So no, and I say that because I think when people come to me and they want to share an idea or ask a question or just have some face time, it comes from a very good place. There's usually something, even if it's not in that moment, that is useful to me, to my team, to the organization. There's usually the genesis of something really good there.

I think actually to the contrary, it is easy particularly when you've got a very full day to go, "Oh, I don't have time for this right now," but I also think most people understand that. If you say, "Hey, listen, can we schedule this conversation tomorrow or next week? This just isn't a good time," they're generally there because they've got something worthwhile to share.

I think as a leader, part of what our responsibility is, is to listen and to prioritize that kind of feedback. Rather than to view it as a distraction or an encumbrance, but as a beneficial input to how we're thinking. Listen, there's more efficient ways you can do it as well. I try to get out and talk to employees, have focus groups. When I'm in the office, just have lunches with an assortment of people.

Dave Hennessy: You create forums where people can

Beth Grous: Create those forums for dialogue.

Dave Hennessy: Gonna ask some questions about the HR function. I know you do more than HR here, but I feel as though there's a lot of our listeners that would love to hear some of your philosophies about HR and your approach. In fact, I have a question to kick it off. This is the NEHRA question of the podcast, the Northeast Human Resources Association has submitted one for us. It is that question, what things would you recommend to young professionals interested in moving in to this function of HR? I know, you don't call it HR, but what advice would you give?

Beth Grous: Yeah, that's a great question. I would say get your foot in the door wherever you can and don't be too selective about the role. What do I mean by that? We have folks come to TripAdvisor and talk to us in HR either right out of college or with other work experiences who say, "Gee, I'm really interested in going in this domain space in HR." If you are interested in doing that and someone offers you a job as a recruiting coordinator, don't believe that's beneath you. Get in and prove your abilities because you'll see a whole lot of the function being inside of the function.

I think, be persistent and try to find a company where you can have either a good first experience or a good multitude of experiences. For HR, and I'd say this really for any function, it so matters the person that you work for. I mean, your managers can either make or break your ability to learn, your interest in your velocity of progression inside of an organization. Being really selective and thoughtful about the person that you work for, who's gonna understand and give you those experiences.

Dave Hennessy: I know you gave the example, earlier in your career when you worked for the recruiting firm and that was a-

Beth Grous: Yeah, 100%. I have to tell you at my first job at Macy's, the group vice president of HR for all the Macy's stores at that time really believed in me. As a relatively young kid out of college and gave me some opportunities to work directly for her that I am forever grateful for because they gave me experiences that I just wouldn't have otherwise had.

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Having a manager who believed in me and said, "This kid has got some capability. I'm gonna take her under my wing and try to make something of her." I mean I had no experience and I was fresh out of college. I had my temp experience during the summers that ultimately turned into a part-time job. I didn't know, I wasn't smart enough at the time to recognize that, that was so important.

Knowing what I know now, having those great mentors in your life and taking those bosses who are gonna believe in you, and when you make a mistake are gonna say, "It's okay. This is all part of the learning," and are gonna pick you up and not let you get defeated by that, especially early career, I think is really, really important.

Dave Hennessy: Looking at your career, you have got very senior HR positions pretty early in your career. Where did that confidence come from? Is it from that experience then? Where do you point to? You look like the kind of person that's always been confident, for example.

Beth Grous: I really enjoy what I do and so it's easy to be excited about it and it's easy to be confident. There were lots of times, there are times every day now that I come across things that I'm like, "Oh, I'm not sure I know how to do that." Or I think I know how to do that or I think this is the right direction, but it's not. I think we all have those moments of self-doubt.

Surrounding yourself, like hiring people that are smarter and better than you, number one, is the best thing that you can do. Building a great team, which I have been able to do here at TripAdvisor, build a great team of HR professionals, both my direct reports and their teams.

Dave Hennessy: Before you finish, I want to get what you look for at HR talent.

Beth Grous: I think early on, frankly, your question about confidence ... I was thrown into this situation with Macy's where it was complete chaos. I say that in only the most positive of ways. Going from privately held to bankrupt to acquired by your biggest competitor in such a short period of time. It was kind of all I knew.

Dave Hennessy: And the speed probably helped. You didn't have time to worry about things.

Beth Grous: You didn't have time, and I used to joke with this 'cause I was from Boston and I knew how to say Peabody, but at 24 years-old, I was up here closing half of the of our stores. Telling these seasoned store managers, "So, the company has made the decision we're going to close your store and I am the messenger." I was this kid. I would go stay at my parent's house during these business trips. True story. My mother would make me dinner and do my laundry and it was awesome.

It was just like, okay, this is what you're gonna do, and you got a manager that's confident that you can do it, you become confident. I've certainly made some mistakes along the way. Again, knowing that you got a boss and a group of colleagues around you that will go, "Okay. Probably not your best move today, but you'll live to see another day," I think helped.

Dave Hennessy: If you could write a letter to your 30 year-old self, what would it be? About your career-

Beth Grous: Oh, about my career. Okay.

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Dave Hennessy: Or maybe it's about something else.

Beth Grous: It's a great question because when I came into this job at TripAdvisor, I realized that there was so much that I didn't know. I grew up professionally pretty much through the HR generalist domain, as I think a lot of folks do-

Dave Hennessy: Recruiting or generalist.

Beth Grous: Recruiting or generalist. I had recruiting experience in my background and I had a fairly sizable level of exposure to organizational development and organizational design, learning, had been the director in training at Macy's. The once piece of the puzzle that I really had never filled in terms of sitting in the chair was total rewards, benefits, compensation, executive compensation.

Dave Hennessy: You never had that discipline specifically?

Beth Grous: I never had that discipline specifically. I will tell you Dave, no one ever said to me, "Psst, hey by the way, it would be a really good idea if you went and had one of those jobs for a year just to see what life is like on the inside of that function." When I got to this job, I realized that, wow, if I had gone done a year or two in exec comp or broad based comp back in my 30s, some number of years ago, it would have served me well. My learning curve would not have been as steep in that part of the HR space coming in.

I guess I would say to any HR generalist who aspires to be in the top job, go get a job in comp. Ask for a comp rotation, get yourself the exposure especially at the exec comp level because you will need it when you get into the head of HR job. It's a bit of this catch-22, you don't get exposed to the exec comp stuff until you're in the top job. When you're in the top job, you need to have had exposure to the exec comp stuff.

Dave Hennessy: It's a paradox.

Beth Grous: It's a paradox. The way I think they solve for that, and what I wish I had known was to really actively seek out opportunities for that exposure. Ideally, to sit in a chair doing that for a year or more would have been an invaluable asset. I learned the hard way, but I would have preferred ... the hard way meaning just the learning curve was so steep as if to be a vertical, but learning the easier way over a longer ray of time would have been less painful.

Dave Hennessy: What do you think about people coming out of other functions outside of HR into HR.

Beth Grous: I think it's awesome.

Dave Hennessy: You do?

Beth Grous: I do.

Dave Hennessy: You'd pursue that for people?

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Beth Grous: I do. Because I think that at the end of the day, we are here to help the business. I think back about when I started my HR career and people will interview, they'd say, "Well I love people," or "I'm really interested in recruiting." I think one of the fundamental shifts that's happened over certainly the course of my career is that we're a business enablement function. We are no longer a support function. When people say, "You're a support function," no, no. We are a business enablement function. Our lever is people. I think that any HR professional who has lived in the business before and really understands what your programs look like, what the people impacts look like.

Dave Hennessy: What the needs are.

Beth Grous: What the needs are. I would amend my earlier answer about comp and exec comp. Even better if you can go do a rotation in the business because I just think walking in those shoes makes you a richer HR professional.

Dave Hennessy: I noticed that, maybe you disagree, I don't know, but I don't see a lot of CEOs coming out of the people function or the HR function. Do you agree with that too?

Beth Grous: I think that's a fair statement.

Dave Hennessy: I can't think of any. Why is that? Is it bad? Should we change it? How do we change it? I guess all those questions.

Beth Grous: I think the reason being is most HR folks, unless you've been in the business and you haven't been in HR your whole life and you've not run a full stack P&L, you've not had to make the business trade offs between sales and marketing and new product and you're gonna spend money on this kind of advertising versus that kind of advertising. What partnerships are gonna do and how you acquiring things. I just think it's a different set of experiences when you're a general manager. I do think that those things are necessary to be a good CEO.

Conversely, I think most CEOs never had any experience in the HR domain. One of the things that I think is really important is the relationship between the CEO and the head of HR. Ideally, there's a triumvirate between the CEO, the head of HR, and the CFO. That, bipartite, is that the word I'm looking for? It's not really a partnership, it's a three-way conversation. I think really good CEOs recognize that they can't have had all of the experiences. They rely on their HR leader as a partner, as a confidant. They expect their HR leader to have fluency of the business. Steve expects me to know enough about the business so that my opinions are steeped in that rationale first.

I don't think it's uncommon to have few CHROs that go directly to the CEO chair because I just think some of those relevant experiences that you need, you just tend not to get. You get them a different way, but you tend not to get them as directly as CEOs.

Dave Hennessy: We started to go to it, what do you look for in talent in HR when you're hiring?

Beth Grous: When I'm hiring, I think the first thing I look for is a real learning agility. Is the person confident, but humble, flexible in wanting to learn, hungry to be part of a team. That's sort of the "we" mentality versus the "me" mentality. Someone who really gets excited about the opportunity to use people strategies to help the business forward. The person that can make that linkage and

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really understand how they can add value in that process. Those are the intangible things that I look for.

Dave Hennessy: Can you get that in interviewing? Can you get at that stuff you think?

Beth Grous: I think that you can. I think the truth of the matter is that the interview process isn't a one-and-done. Most good interviewers, groups of good interviewers can get a good sense of that, but I think that the reference checking is important too. I think really understanding how someone else experienced this person in the workplace. Recognizing that no two workplaces are alike, no two views are alike. I think you can get a pretty good sense of that.

I think the other thing that we've tried to do on our team, is not to have everyone be exactly the same. When we're hiring, sometimes the conversation we have is, is this person gonna break a little glass 'cause that's okay.

Dave Hennessy: 'Cause you want to move fast here. Speed is important.

Beth Grous: We want someone who's got a totally different way of looking at things because the debate and the dialogue and the diversity of opinion gets to the best outcome.

Dave Hennessy: Right, you said at the beginning when you talked about diversity and inclusion.

Beth Grous: Yeah. I do think, and I recently had this conversation with a group of folks that I was with on panel, I do think as we're interviewing for fit in some ways can be a very dangerous path because you can end up with a lot of sameness. I think that's not always good. I think this deliberate decision around how you recruit for, not just things that will work in your environment, but also purposeful difference is important too.

Dave Hennessy: You've worked in a lot of different industries. Sometimes we hear from HR people that are looking to change roles and change industries, going to biotech, you worked in life sciences biotech, which is one that's a big target. This is tech travel, hospitality, I don't know you probably mash few in there, so TripAdvisor. What's your feeling about hiring HR talent, maybe other talent too, from different industries? You have done this well so I was wondering what would you say to people that want to make that shift from different industries?

Beth Grous: I think it's a great question. I guess I have two answers for that. The first is, I actually, two resumes side by side, someone who's done a lot of the same and someone who's done more different, I will always bias to the person who's done more different. When we're looking to build our own HR team here, we aren't just recruiting from travel or technology. We got people with lots of different backgrounds because diverse perspectives and different views yields better outcomes. We really, really do believe that and I'm not just saying this over and over again because I get a prize at the end of this podcast if I say it enough times.

Dave Hennessy: You do get a prize by the way.

Beth Grous: Oh I do? All right. Are we done? I'll wait 'til the end for the prize. With that, I also think that there is this purposeful, that you shouldn't stay in one place for too long. I'll tell you a quick story. My brother-in-law, who's been with one company for the entirety of his career, when he hit
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about year 11 or 12 with that company, I remember saying to him, "You're at a crossroads. It's now or never. If you don't leave now, you're gonna be there for the rest of your life." He chose the rest of his life path 'cause that felt comfortable for him. Just like there is a danger in job-hopping every 18 months or two years, I also think you can overstay your welcome in one industry or-

Dave Hennessy: You're saying more than overstaying your welcome, it's really about preparing you for the future with more experiences.

Beth Grous: You just don't grow and develop and get exposed to either different businesses or different people. The multitude of those touch points just broadens your perspective.

Dave Hennessy: Right. More prepared for different things that might happen.

Beth Grous: Listen, I think I've been able to ... Although the industries have been different and a lot of the terms and the acronyms and the things have been different, the core way to think about how you leverage people in an organization is the same. Honestly, a lot of the core learnings transcend to industry around the importance of having great leadership talent and leadership really being a multiplier in an organization and preparing an organization for change and really doing that purposefully. Recognizing the changes and to be embraced and plan for any other business condition and not something that's hoisted upon you. I think the core skills are relatively consistent. I think diversity of industry is a positive not a negative.

Dave Hennessy: What is the biggest change, you talked about some of these already, biggest change of scene in HR in the last 10 years? Maybe what do you see changing again in the next 10 years? One of the things that comes to mind is how people are viewing performance appraisals. I know we've talked about that in the past. It might be something else that you're looking to and say, this has been a big change and I think this is where it's going.

Beth Grous: There's two things that jump out to me and I'll answer them not in any order of importance. The first is the use of workforce analytics and data in the people space. I think 15, 20 years ago HR was this very touchy-feely soft space, that people who liked being with people went into. Now we've got the ability through our HR tools and through all of the data and analytics to really do predictive analytics on people. I don't think a lot of companies do it well. I'll tell you why I don't. I think we're at the beginning steps here at TripAdvisor, although we're thinking very seriously about it and building capability, both technical capability and people capability in order to do that. I think over time the use of HR being a data-driven organization as much as a people-driven organization, I think we're just gonna continue to see that enhance and accelerate.

The other piece, I think people just communicate differently now. At the advent of the internet and in the last 10 years, smartphones. How people consume information is just different. When I started out in my career, you would do training, you would sit people in classroom and that's how you communicate to them. Or you'd send them a very long email or there would be a big meeting.

I've got three children, my oldest is entering high school this year and I look at how she consumes information. It's through videos, it's short bits. It is mobile-enabled, it's in her hand, it's multimodal media, text, voice. I think we are seeing that come into how we deliver learning to this organization, how do we deliver information to our organization, how we communicate, how we get feedback. I think we're really just scratching the surface.

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I think the world will look really, really different in that space in 10 years. We'll look back on those binders that we used to have with training materials and go, "Oh isn't that clever. I remember those olden days when we used to do it that way." It will be here in your hands. I'm holding up my phone for those of you in podcast land who can't see.

Dave Hennessy: I can confirm she did that. Going forward, just more of that? Can you say anything more about what you see down the road a little bit here?

Beth Grous: Yeah. It's the way that we give feedback fundamentally evolving to a much more real time on demand, video enabled, quick touch-

Dave Hennessy: It seems it.

Beth Grous: I think it is.

Dave Hennessy: There's a lot of success that we're starting to hear from different organizations.

Beth Grous: I think the other thing about it is work just never gets turned off. I do think my parents, when they were working many, many years ago, just didn't have the ability to bring home work with you when you move away.

Dave Hennessy: Turn off the switch once you left the door.

Beth Grous: You left. I'm really excited to see the trends going forward. Another thing that I think about, is we're moving in some parts of our economy to a more gig-based economy. People who rent out rooms in a home as part of their income and maybe drive for driving services as part of their income and who pick up jobs on an internet job. What applications does that have inside of companies. Do we move toward a more gig-economy inside companies? Do we think about people over in the next 10 years will it be less of a traditional, you come in and do the same job 40 hours a week or will it more of a gig-based].

Dave Hennessy: Rotations.

Beth Grous: Projects and tasks at their own will versus the company saying, "Here's your role." A number of my HR colleagues from the west coast have been actually having this conversation lately. I think that it's an interesting question mark for the future around how organizations organize work and distribute work. Will it change? I think we're in for some changes.

Dave Hennessy: It sounds like it's a strategy to retain talent too because instead of somebody going somewhere else, you can find them something new inside your organization. It keeps it fresh and there's challenges of course.

Beth Grous: Yeah, I think the question is, how do you do it? How do you manage supply and demand of projects and skills? I'm not sure any organization has figured that out.

Dave Hennessy: Ramping people up quickly.

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Beth Grous: Yeah. I think this is gonna be a really interesting thing to keep our eye on for the next decade.

Dave Hennessy: Who do you look to for thought leadership? Maybe in HR, maybe in just regular leadership.

Beth Grous: Listen, I've had the benefit of having some really great managers.

Dave Hennessy: You told us about at least two of them.

Beth Grous: And frankly, some not so great managers.

Dave Hennessy: You learn from those too.

Beth Grous: I learned from those too. There are times when I think to myself, in my own experiences, how would I want to experience this both plus and minus in terms of people that I look up to and I apply those in my daily world. Listen, I think I find leadership examples to look up to in a lot of places. Not all of them, many of them not in the business world. In sports and athletic performance. In my community and people who are really just doing selfless things around trying to better the community. Teachers that teach my kids in school in a way that gets them curious about learning and understanding new things. I try to be open and opportunistic about seeing those things and considering could I be doing something better or how I reflect that in my own work.

Dave Hennessy: Look for it in not the usual places sometimes.

Beth Grous: If there was one great person that I would say, this person advises it all, I'd tell you. Then you could sell this podcast for a lot of money.

Dave Hennessy: What's the answer Beth? What's the answer?

Beth Grous: I don't have it for you Dave. I don't have it for you today. That's for our next podcast.

Dave Hennessy: What's the craziest HR story you've ever had? You can be very discrete on when it was in your career or where, we don't need to know all that.

Beth Grous: It wasn't here at TripAdvisor.

Dave Hennessy: I like this ask this question. All right, that good.

Beth Grous: It was several jobs ago. It's funny, you asked me this question and of course I'm like, "Oh well there was this one," and then in my brain it's like, "Or this one. Or this other one."

Dave Hennessy: Every HR person could write a book, right?

Beth Grous: I think those of us who have done this for a long time say, "Wow!" You could really write a book. I mean we've probably all said it at one point in time. Listen, I think that they often cluster around inappropriate personal relationships that are accidentally on display for one's coworkers, put it that way.

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Dave Hennessy: That's a quite delicate, the way you phrased that.

Beth Grous: I have seen or heard about that, fortunately haven't seen it, but heard about it secondhand at least three or four times with varying degrees of awfulness in my career. I'm sure we've all seen it.

Dave Hennessy: Next is your secret life hack.

Beth Grous: Oh, my secret life hack my children and my colleagues tease me about. Everyone listen up 'cause this really gonna enhance your productivity. That on your phone, you can do almost anything with voice texting. I answer emails in voice text, I text in voice text, and I'll ask Siri to do things for me. I'll say, "Siri, can you set me up a reminder at six o'clock tomorrow night to pick Jennifer," who's my oldest daughter, "up from softball." I'll just press my voice and she'll see and she'll go, "Okay. I'll remind you." Then it will come up. I don't have to do any typing, which is great because I now sadly need glasses to read. Very often, I can't see the small letters on my phone. Being able to speak into the phone-

Dave Hennessy: I didn't know you could do that. You can actually just say to Siri-

Beth Grous: I'm gonna demonstrate for our podcast. Watch. "Siri, please make an appointment for me to see Dave Hennessy at 5:00 PM."

Siri: Okay, I can create your meeting. Note that you already have an appointment about Trip Fest at 5:00 PM. Shall I schedule it anyway?

Dave Hennessy: Oh, it tells you have a conflict.

Beth Grous: Yes.

Siri: Your appointment is scheduled for 5:00 PM today.

Dave Hennessy: Wow. What a nice commercial for Siri and the iPhone.

Beth Grous: Yeah and you had a conflict with Trip Fest. We're having a little employee-

Dave Hennessy: What a great demo. This is amazing.

Beth Grous: Thank you, I am full service. Honestly, my kids and my team make fun of me all the time that I voice text stuff. I will for a listening audience, you do actually have to reread it because sometimes Siri or whomever your voice texting utility is will misrepresent what you said and so it can come out a little crazy, but it is a super time saver for me.

Dave Hennessy: I didn't know about that thing that would put it in your calendar. That's good. I like that a lot. Okay.

When's the last time you failed at something and how did you overcome it?

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Beth Grous: Okay, what time is it today?

Dave Hennessy: Or doubted yourself. You can say that it happens all the time. Can you think of anything?

Beth Grous: I think I doubt myself every day. Being a CHRO, in many ways, is like being a parent. There's no owner's manual and every day is new adventure, and you look to people that you respect and admire. You know it takes a village and you hope that most things turn out well. If they don't, that you can move forward. I think 90% confidence, 10% huge self-doubt and I think that's probably about the right ratio. It keeps me pretty humble most of the time. I am fortunate, I've got a great group of colleagues here at TripAdvisor and it is a very safe space for failure and for crazy ideas and for stuff that's nuts and for things where you say, "I don't know the answer to this," which helps us all work better.

Dave Hennessy: This is a safe place to do it at TripAdvisor. That's great. That's a great culture.

Since we're on a podcast, The Hennessy Report, and it's Hennessy Report for HR, so this little acronym there.

Beth Grous: Oh, I get it.

Dave Hennessy: Get it now?

Beth Grous: Yes, I get it.

Dave Hennessy: You listen to podcasts.

Beth Grous: I do.

Dave Hennessy: In addition to The Hennessy Report, what else do you listen to?

Beth Grous: Well, I might have told you over that lunch. I turned off the TV back in November because I don't really watch much TV anymore, but I love podcasts. I love them because I think it's a really great way to have a long forum, in-depth, sink into something. I listen to a lot of things. I love This American Life. I've been a This American Life listener for more than 15 years at this point.

Dave Hennessy: Before they were podcasts.

Beth Grous: Before they were a podcast, when they would be broadcast on Saturday afternoon on NPR. Then I remember being so excited when they finally became a podcast 'cause I got access to all these back episodes that I'd never listened to. I've really lately been enjoying the WBUR New York Times collaboration Modern Love, the Modern Love podcast. They're short, they're 20 minutes. I love the longer forum stuff like Serial and S-Town.

Dave Hennessy: I hear a lot about those.

Beth Grous: Then I listen to a lot of specialty podcasts very similar to this one.

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Dave Hennessy: In the HR field? Is there anything in the HR field that you listen to?

Beth Grous: Honestly, I don't listen to a lot of the HR field for no reason other than my time to listen to podcasts is so limited that I tend to try to listen to things totally outside of my-

Dave Hennessy: It's your escape. On route 128.

Beth Grous: On route 128 or if I'm driving to pick up my daughter at summer camp or going to the beach or whatever. I have a lot of hobbies. Dave, you know that I have horses and ride horses. That's a part of my life that I really enjoy that kind of life-long learning and so I tend to listen to a lot of stuff in that domain that's really interesting and makes me think about something that's not work and not my kids or my family. I also believe that you're a better professional and you're a better member of your family if you've got something just for yourself; a passion that is all your own and you have that kind of balance. I love podcasts. I hope your viewers like this one as well.

Dave Hennessy: I think they will. Thank you so much for being on The Hennessy Report.

Beth Grous: It is my pleasure. Thanks for inviting me Dave. I'm glad our lunch conversation came to this great fruition.

Dave Hennessy: Me too.

Beth Grous: All right.

Dave Hennessy: See you soon.

Beth Grous: Until next time.

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