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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. This is our second podcast where we've recorded it live at the NEHRA conference this fall. The guest is Lorraine Goffe, who's the head of HR at MIT and she's also the new chair of the board of NEHRA. Very fitting as Lorraine shares how she uses a scientific and data approach to her HR work there at the world's leading higher ed institution for technology and science. Again, I think you'll enjoy the atmosphere of this live recording. Next up on the podcast is the head of HR at Vertex Pharmaceuticals, Stephanie Franklin.

Now, I bring you my live discussion with Lorraine Goffe.

Welcome to The Hennessy Report. I'm your host, Dave Hennessy, and I'd like you to introduce you to my guest for this second live podcast here at the NEHRA conference. These are being recorded, so we hope to release them to the rest of the world that wasn't here. Today, my guest has over 20 years of healthcare and higher ed HR leadership roles. She has her BA in Business Management from William Wood University and an MBA from National University. She's also the VP of HR at MIT. Please welcome NEHRA's new chair of the board Lorraine Goffe. Welcome to the podcast, Lorraine.

**Lorraine Goffe:** Thank you.

**Dave:** It's great to have you, and it'd be great for our audience and our listeners on the podcast to hear a little bit about your early background, an early experience or a person that helped shape who you are as a person, as a professional. A little bit about you and your background.

**Lorraine:** Absolutely. First of all, it's great to be here, and thanks for being here listening to us today. When I think about the person that's most impacted me and influenced me, I'd have to say it's my mother. My mother was a nurse, and she wanted to become an advanced practice nurse or a midwife. When I was growing up, my mother was always studying, doing homework just like we were doing homework, and preparing herself for her next opportunity. So I grew up seeing that, working hard for what you want to achieve, even though it's sometimes difficult. And, also my mother, because she was very kind and she wanted us to be kind as well. I remember being a child and not being very nice to another child because she was mean to me, so I was going to be mean back to her, right? My mother said, "No. You do not allow the way people treat you to determine how you treat them. You treat them as you want to treat them." I never forgot that, because I can't let others drive the way I behave and we should do that as individuals.

As an HR professional, I often think about that. That how we treat people matters. in spite of how they behave, frankly, we still have to treat people kindly and with respect, and I learned that from my mother.

**Dave:** Thanks, Lorraine. By the way, congratulations on becoming chair of the board for NEHRA. Very exciting.



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**Lorraine:** Oh, thanks. Thank you.

**Dave:** You gave a nice talk today introducing our speakers. Switching to MIT, the place where you work and lead HR, my only experience or view inside MIT goes back to the *Good Will Hunting* movie. Did you see *Good Will Hunting*?

**Lorraine:** I did see that movie.

**Dave:** I've never been at MIT, but all I can remember about MIT is that there's hallways with really difficult math problems that sometimes people that aren't even students can come in and solve those problems.

**Lorraine:** Apparently the janitor could solve it – of *Good Will Hunting*.

**Dave:** Yeah, in that movie. Yes, exactly. So, could you tell us a little bit about what it's like to work with all that technical brain power, and how does that impact your HR work, working in that environment?

**Lorraine:** Well I love being in environments where I'm challenged, and before MIT I was at Washington University in St. Louis, so I'm used to working in higher ed. I was in healthcare, an academic medical center, so again, people who are highly intelligent, very driven and focused on the work they're doing, and so I enjoy those kinds of environments. From an HR perspective, it means that, and I would say applies to all of us, that we've got to be very thorough in the work that we do, in the work that we present because the quality of the work really does matter and they will pay attention. Again, I hope it applies to all of us, but certainly in that environment, making sure we get it as close to perfect as possible, as right as possible, is always important.

**Dave:** What are some of the interesting things you're doing with regard to talent management and HR at MIT now? Some of the things you're focused on.

**Lorraine:** So there's a lot happening in HR, but I will share, one of the things I'm most proud of is a group that I've created: it's an HR analytics team who are focused on data, and we have never had that function in human resources at MIT, but I tend to be a data-driven person. I like to understand what's happening and why it's happening, so I created this function last year. I started with an intern my first summer at MIT, so in 2015, and then last year, created a full function with a manager and a data analyst. Their role is really looking at the data; we have a wealth of information in HR, right? We have all the information about every employee, every applicant, but how do we use that information in a way that helps inform the policies we create, the programs, the services, the benefits? That's what this team is doing: they are mining the data that we have and trying to understand who comes to our organization and why they come, who stays, and if they stay, what happens to them? Who's being promoted? Who's being included? Who's going to development opportunities? Then when people leave, who's leaving and why they're leaving, so really understanding the data to then inform the decisions we make about all the services we provide to our community.



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That's something that I'm really proud of and it really is growing, and my team really sees the value in it as well. Often, we'll have a conversation and people will now say, "Well let's look at the data. What is the data telling us?" That's not a conversation that happened three years ago when I got there.

**Dave:** Really smart to use a data approach at MIT-

**Lorraine:** In my environment.

**Dave:** Do you happen to tap into resources at MIT for the data analytics because you have so much of it there? Secondly, do you have any early results from this work that you're already experiencing?

**Lorraine:** So there are faculty on staff with expertise in this area. We have used them in the past; I have a four-day conference for all HR professionals at MIT. We've done it two years in a row now, so we've just completed the second annual. We call it the People Matters Conference on campus, and our first year, we had faculty come and do a workshop on data using our employee engagement survey information; how to review it, how to interpret it, to help us as HR professionals think about what the data was telling us. We started doing that work, but most of what we now do is in-house for the most part. In terms of early results, the team has been focused on diversity data because that's an area that's important to me, important to the organization, and I really wanted to see if we were making progress. We've been looking at data, looking back over a 10-year period to look at what the trends are to see what progress we've made and where we haven't made the kind of progress we want to make. We've had some areas of nice improvement and some areas where we haven't made improvement, and unfortunately some areas where we've fallen backwards.

When you dig into the data and you really begin to look deeply at the data, there are things you learn, and all that means now is it's a baseline and we can begin to adjust and focus on our programming and our outreach to address the pockets that we want to see some improvement, including our development opportunities, because how do we grow our own talent in a very tight labor market? We all know that we are virtually at full employment, so we've got to fully utilize the talent we have in our own organizations. That's really what we're focused on.

**Dave:** That's great. There's been a lot of changes in higher ed; you've been in it for a while, so you've seen them with Title IX, with things they're doing with tuition to help students that can't afford, and there's all sorts of merit scholarships. Can you talk about what you're doing with regard to HR with this changing higher ed landscape?

**Lorraine:** Certainly there's been a change in the higher ed landscape, but there's a change in the workforce in general. There's a change everywhere, and we're all seeing it. The change is often a generational shift that's happening; we're seeing talent leaving the workforce, we're seeing new talent coming in to the workforce, the millennials and the other generations and how are we addressing their needs, and how do we have to potentially change the way we think about policies and flexibility to meet the needs of the newer generation coming in while also supporting the generations that are already in the workforce, the rest of us. We are paying attention to what's happening with the generations, what it means to us from a program policy and benefit development perspective. Another area that I'm paying attention to is what's happening from a technology perspective. You've all heard of AI. How's that going



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to change the way work is done for the entire organization? That's something that we really are thinking about as well and paying attention. There's work we do today that we will not be doing in a few years from now; there's another way of getting that work done, and what I think that means is there's opportunities for our staff and our faculty, if you're in higher ed, to spend the time differently potentially and do different things.

There's always a space for humans, but how we spend our time is something that from an HR perspective we have to be thinking about.

**Dave:** Great. Well why don't we switch to NEHRA since you were just up there talking about NEHRA and what excites you about it? We certainly have some exciting content and programs; we have the online community now, which is very exciting. What are some other things that you have for the vision for NEHRA? What else can NEHRA bring, and how can we help support the changing HR landscape?

**Lorraine:** So I mentioned when I talked earlier about the growth that I've seen in NEHRA, and I think that's something we want to continue doing. We've had tremendous growth in terms of membership, but I think we want to continue to do that as much as possible because it's beneficial to the HR community and the HR professions. There are many individuals in smaller organizations that may not have the resources that some of you in larger organizations may have, but what they can have is this network of people that have experience, that are colleagues, and that can be helpful to them. I think from an HR perspective, we want to support our employees in our own organizations, but I think we want to support the workforce as well. If there are others in other organizations that are struggling, being helpful to them is important. NEHRA can help build community in that way. I think the membership growth is important, and then also paying attention, again, to the other generations coming into the workforce and coming into the profession, and how do we make sure that NEHRA is relevant for them as well. We are paying attention and thinking about that so that it's relevant for all members of the HR profession.

**Dave:** Well Lorraine, that's an incredible segue because my very next question is going to come from the NEHRA YP member in the audience. NEHRA YP is our young professionals group; you might of heard about it. In fact, Scarlet Abraham is on the board. She's right there waving. She's the liaison and the point person on the board for NEHRA YP. I'm going to go out into the audience and find our NEHRA YP member to ask her this question. Oh, there's somebody right there. Wow, what a coincidence. Why don't you say your name and..

**Laura DiMaria:** Great. Thank you for selecting me. I'm Laura DiMaria. I am the Human Resources and Operations Manager at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. My question for you, Lorraine, thank you for being here, is what is one thing that you've invested in for yourself, your time, your energy, or your money that has contributed to where you are today?

**Lorraine:** I would say overall development. Again, I grew up with a mother who was a lifelong learner, always trying to learn and grow, and so I tend to do that. I tried to focus on developing my skills, but I think the specific item is probably certification. I went through the process of becoming certified 15 years ago maybe, and I learned a lot in the process; because I always want to do well, I studied everything possible. Just preparing for the test alone, I learned so much. I don't know if it necessarily



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helped me on the test itself, but it helped me with my growth. In the process of making sure I was prepared for that test, I read everything, I learned everything, and then it gave me this foundation to explore other things. I think focusing on my development and broadening my understanding of human resources in that process really has helped me professionally. I'll also say that I just have had opportunities throughout my career to do different things in HR, so I consider myself an HR generalist but I have areas of specialty. I specialized in employee relations early in my career, and EEO and Affirmative Action, and compensation and benefits.

I would just say for those who are newer to the profession, if there's an opportunity to try something new, I encourage you to do it. It may be outside of your comfort zone, but it's amazing what you learn when you push yourself in another direction. I think it's what's allowed me to do the things I've been able to do and to find myself where I am today.

**Dave:** Lorraine, I have a similar question: other than technical skills, when you're hiring to bring people inside your organization at MIT, what's important to you about the people that you bring in?

**Lorraine:** Several things, but one of the most important things is someone who is open-minded and willing to learn. I think when you go into an organization, you go in primarily with all of your experience, and so when you see what's happening in the organization, you often think, "Well that's different than what I'm used to, and therefore it's wrong." It's not wrong; it's just different. Being open-minded and being willing to try new things and think of another way of getting things done I think is really important. Also, flexibility. We're in a changing world; there's nothing that we can guarantee other than change, and so how do we make sure that we have people who are adaptable and can adapt to that change quickly if they need to? If we cannot do that from an HR perspective, how can we expect our employees to be able to do that as well?

**Dave:** Good answer. One of my first guests, actually the first person I interviewed for the podcast was Beth Grous at TripAdvisor. She's the Chief People Officer, and it was kind of a funny discussion because before I interviewed her, I asked her, "Are there any questions you want me to ask you?" She said, "I would like to ask me this question," and I'm going to ask you this very same question, is, if you could give advice to your 30-year-old self, if you could write a letter and go back in time and send that letter to 30-year-old Lorraine Goffe, advice about your career or leadership or anything, what would you write in that letter?

**Lorraine:** I think my advice would be just about life in general, and I think it would be, "Take your time in life. It's a journey." I was so focused on getting to the end result and achieving that we sometimes miss all the things that we learn along the way; we're just rushing through all of it. I say we have to work hard and we have to accomplish those things that you want to accomplish, but I'd say enjoy the journey as well because there are so many experiences that I had that when I was living them, I didn't really value them. Now I think, "What a great opportunity but I didn't take full advantage of that." Taking advantage and taking the time if you need the time I think is really important, as well as being focused on what you want to achieve. I think we can do both things at the same time.



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**Dave:** Well, we sometimes end the podcast with some silly questions because we're going to want everyone to know a little bit more about who you really are. If you could go to dinner with any living person, who would it be and why?

**Lorraine:** Does it have to be a living person?

**Dave:** No.

**Lorraine:** Okay, good.

**Dave:** We're very flexible on The Hennessy Report.

**Lorraine:** Very good.

**Dave:** Especially when it's live.

**Lorraine:** I'd have to say Nelson Mandela. I have always admired the courage that he had. First of all, he was fighting for justice. He ended up in prison for a very long time. He maintained his dignity, he treated people well, and when he left prison, he didn't come out with a grudge. He didn't come out with anger. He pulled people together, and he focused on rebuilding his country, South Africa. I think that's pretty phenomenal. He had the gift of forgiveness or something that I think we should all admire. Nelson Mandela would be the person for me.

**Dave:** I don't even think we even asked; you're from South Africa, right? No, you're from Australia...

**Lorraine:** I am not. I'm from England.

**Dave:** England, okay.

**Lorraine:** Another continent.

**Dave:** I'm really good with accents. I have a Boston accent and everything else, I get lost.

**Lorraine:** Well I'm from London, but I moved here when I was 14 when I was a sophomore in high school, so it's not a clear London accent anymore. So, I forgive you.

**Dave:** Thank you, thank you very much. All right, another silly question. This is the last one, this is the last question of the podcast: what's the best performance you've ever seen? Musical, sports, artistic performance. What comes to mind?

**Lorraine:** I love the theater, so I've seen a lot of plays and lots of musicals. I don't know that I would claim any one as the best because often they're quite different. I have two sons: one's 24, one's 21, but when they were small, they were in a church Easter pageant. My youngest son, he was probably four maybe, and he was really cute because he worked really hard on his Easter speech, but when he got up there with all the little kids and they were to do their speech, he was whispering the speech really



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quietly so you couldn't hear him. The teacher said, "Well Jason, speak up a little bit more." And he was like arguing with her why he shouldn't speak up. This whole thing happened on the stage and it was just comical. The audience is laughing at this point, everyone's laughing, and then he's pouting because people are laughing at him. We were just laughing because he was cute. That was probably the most enjoyable of them all.

**Dave:** That's a great answer. Well, it's been great having you as a guest on the podcast.

**Lorraine:** Great, Dave. Thanks for having me.

**Recorded Message:** Thank you for listening to The Hennessy Report from Keystone Partners. Be sure to subscribe to listen to all of our conversations with leaders in HR. Go to [keystonepartners.com](http://keystonepartners.com) and click on the podcast button.

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