



# Keystone Partners

**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 your host, Dave Hennessy, and today's guest is Christopher D'Arcy, the VP of HR at Liaison International.

If you don't know about Liaison International, you're about to get a behind the scenes look of how the college application process works. They are kind of the middleman in that process, especially with regard to graduate schools. You'll hear a little bit more about Chris and an interesting first job he had that really set the tone for his whole career, and he links that quite well. Chris shares some interesting HR practices that support this mission-driven organization.

Also, later in the podcast, Chris mentions Christina Luconi, the Chief People Officer at Rapid7, and she happens to be our next guest on the podcast. Look for that posting towards the end of the month. Now, I bring you Chris D'Arcy.

Well hello, Chris. It's good to be here at Liaison International right here in the hotbed of technology at the Arsenal in Watertown. And before we get into your background and Liaison, I think we should tell the listeners how we met. We used to work in the same building...

**Christopher D'Arcy:** That's right.

**Dave:** In Burlington, when you were the head of HR at Silverlink.

**Christopher:** Silverlink.

**Dave:** They had a gym, and they still do.

**Christopher:** I think it was built in 1963. It still feels like late '60s.

**Dave:** Well, they actually upgraded the gym since you left. So...

**Christopher:** Yeah, that's why.

**Dave:** New management, and they're doing a great job. You were working out at lunchtime...

**Christopher:** Yes.

**Dave:** ...like a great executive, balancing physical fitness with your work, and I too was doing the same thing.

**Christopher:** Yes, you were.

**Dave:** But you thought I had an approach that just made you chuckle.



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**Christopher:** Yes.

**Dave:** And all right, I'll let you embarrass me.

**Christopher:** So I was, again, proper workout attire, mind and body wellness is what we talk about in HR. David was doing what I call the executive workout, suit and tie, doing his curls, and watching the news. This is...

**Dave:** I think you're embellishing a little bit. I think it was casual Friday, and I might have had jeans on and a shirt like this. And I did a couple pull downs while we were watching the Masters Tournament.

**Christopher:** Right.

**Dave:** I think you've exaggerated that story. Ever since...

**Christopher:** I think our listeners should know that Brooks Brothers now is in the sports apparel business as well. So lookout Under Armour and Nike.

**Dave:** I think it'd be great just before we start and talk about Liaison and what you're doing here, a lot of exciting things and a very interesting company, to just get a little bit about your background, how you got into HR, and some of your early life experience that helped shape who you are as a person.

**Christopher:** Sure. I grew up in Brockton, Massachusetts, the son of teachers and coaches and nurses. So people...

**Dave:** And boxers.

**Christopher:** And boxers, and folks who were doing things for the greater good. So that was my path in high school and college was at least getting into something either nonprofit or something that was helping people get better. And my first job out of college really was helping out these displaced companies, when in the early '90s these companies were really moving and offshoring their labor. Really not offshore but really down to the south. And so these neighborhoods and these towns like New Bedford and Fall River had this influx of displaced workers who lost their job for no fault of their own, and the state had to look to re-employ these folks. This was back in the late Reagan, the late Bush, and the Clinton years.

**Dave:** So this was the early '90s.

**Christopher:** '92, '93...

**Dave:** Yeah, sure.

**Christopher:** Where we had this real...

**Dave:** Not a good economy.



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**Christopher:** No, it was really bad, and my job was to help these displaced workers find new jobs. Now, this was before the Internet, before email really, so what I did...

**Dave:** So you were in my business. You were in the sort of the outplacement business..

**Christopher:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** But not really.

**Christopher:** Right. We had a big budget for training, but my job as a job developer was really to knock on doors to the employers within those communities. So my job is to make sure I want to tie in the local residents to the communities, especially in these tight-knit towns like Fall River, New Bedford, Taunton, and Brockton where keeping the folks employed, keeping the families intact were super important for education and culture. And just, again, this is pre-technology actually literally walking and knocking on doors. We had a lot of...

**Dave:** So you're actually trying to go find job openings for these displaced workers.

**Christopher:** Correct.

**Dave:** You'd go call on businesses...

**Christopher:** Correct.

**Dave:** ...and say I have this population of workers that have these skills.

**Christopher:** Right.

**Dave:** Do you have these kind of openings?

**Christopher:** It was a really fun, interesting labor of love, if you will, back in those days.

**Dave:** I didn't know you had that background.

**Christopher:** Yeah.

**Dave:** So that was kind of a transition to HR because that's close to HR, right?

**Christopher:** Correct.

**Dave:** It really is a lot of HR things involved in that, right?

**Christopher:** Yeah, and I was at Thanksgiving or a holiday at my family's house, and my Uncle Ray, at that point a C-level exec at a company called Interactive Data in Bedford and Boston. And he said, "Chris, you know what you do? Companies like my company need that type of thought process within HR and



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recruiting. You've got to think about maybe going to the private commercial side and away from ... Don't stop what you're doing, but just think about if you had any inkling going to the private business."

And back in those days, as you know, David, where the big companies back in the '90s to work for were Fidelity, John Hancock, Scudder, State Street, and all that.

**Dave:** Then EMC started popping up at that point.

**Christopher:** Correct. And that's when employment became booming, in those days, back in the late/mid '90s. And my uncle secured an interview for me at Fidelity Investments, and I got hired as a staffing specialist in '94. And that's when I caught the staffing/HR bug.

**Dave:** And what a great place to learn.

**Christopher:** A phenomenal place to learn, yes.

**Dave:** Recruiting and HR. I mean, there's so many great HR people that come out of that. But what was it like inside Fidelity, as a staffing and recruiter? What kind of things did you learn, and what skills did you develop there that you might even use today?

**Christopher:** I think a lot what I learned... Of course I was with... Instrumental to me being where I am today, that's Brian Johnson. Brian is, I know, a very senior executive at Fidelity. He taught me how to listen. Where, when you did kind of that non-exempt recruiting, where it's like really volume type of recruiting of those sales reps. Instead of looking to fill a position, it's really listening to the hiring manager. What do they really want? What are the things they're looking for that's not on the resume or on the job description. So, really, kind of getting into those layers of listening and feedback. Brian really gave me that skillset to do something that was really interesting and yet high volume recruiting. Because we had to fill 25-30 seats a month.

**Dave:** So you had to do it well, but you had to do it fast.

**Christopher:** Correct. And Fidelity, which is great, and they had that phrase of "kaizen," that constant change. And that's where I learned...

**Dave:** Japanese term, right.

**Christopher:** Exactly. And I learned the bones and the infrastructure of HR and staffing. And that was, again, a great place to build my skillset and knowledge.

**Dave:** You know, I've been doing this podcast for a couple of months now, and I'm surprised how many HR people started in recruiting or on a recruiting agency side. You're kind of almost both, in a way. So it's not uncommon.

So, then Fidelity to, what led to the next role in your career? How did you get into the non-recruiting side, or the larger part of HR? The leadership side of it?



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**Christopher:** So, you know, years later, I was at Fidelity then I spent time in Mass Financial Services. This is when the internet and the technology started to boom, in like '97, '98. And I said to myself, the longer I stay in financial services, I might miss the boat on this new cool thing which is called the internet... Netscape, back in the day and all of that.

**Dave:** Right. A Houston grad created Netscape.

**Christopher:** And so I know I maybe had to pivot in terms of my domain in financial services and look to what's going on in technology. And I got hired by GTE Internetworking, that is now Verizon, to jump in there and head up HR. Head up with the manager of HR for their sales and marketing team. A tremendous organization, and built some great relationships that really led to me to Silverlink where great... I met one of the best leaders in technology, and just leaders of people, his name is Stan Novak. And Stan was tremendous, and kind of learning from him as a great business leader... Where I was, on the HR side... And then Stan went on to found Silverlink back in 2002. And years later, we stayed in contact, and he called me out of the blue when I was at Iron Mountain and said to me, "Chris, I came out of a board meeting and we're going to grow by X percent. The board asked me what was my HR strategy and I said, 'It's Chris D'Arcy'" So he said, "Let's go."

**Dave:** And that brought you here, to Liaison.

**Christopher:** No, to Silverlink.

**Dave:** Oh, to Silverlink, okay.

**Christopher:** And he said "Let's get the band back together." And that's when I spent five years at Silverlink with Stan, building out a great healthcare/communication company.

**Dave:** You say he was a great leader. What made him a great leader? What did you learn from him?

**Christopher:** Stan was a person who could really... Besides Brian Johnson at Fidelity, Stan could really inspire people in a way that really got into their, you know, what makes them tick. He was really good at finding that diamond in the rough in terms of an employee and talent and get them to really emotionally invest in the company. And at that time, even today, that's something you really bring here to Liaison, is finding that emotional investment. Not only individual folks, but also teams in general.

**Dave:** And how'd you make the transition to this organization?

**Christopher:** So we go through an acquisition at Silverlink and I realize quickly that the people I work with probably weren't going to be around the next phase, the next evolution of the company. And that's when I got a call from Heidrick & Struggles and heard about this company. And, course, I heard Liaison International higher ed. I thought initially higher ed seems kind of sleepy. Not as really dynamic as the things I want to do. But the more I learned about the business and of course, learning quickly that Warburg Pincus was their investor, and knowing the private equity world so well, I said, geez, if Warburg is behind this company, I'd better take the meeting.

And, I met the founder, George Haddad, our CEO at the time, Michael Behringer, and fell in love with the purpose-driven mission-driven of what this company is about, around higher education and tying in



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technology as well. So, I really thought that was the right time to jump. I had long discussions with my CEO, Stan Novak at Silverlink and he said, "Listen. This sounds like this really a good move for you. You should take this." And I think I implore any HR executive out there that, if you have that real strong relationship with your CEO, you can talk about anything if that relationship is strong, good or bad. And I leaned on and really cashed in my chips in terms of my relationship so I could have that hard conversation, really. It wasn't easy, I mean, to this day...

**Dave:** You actually involved him in the decision, it sounds like, yeah.

**Christopher:** Yeah. Because I respect him so much, and I respect what he's built. I didn't want to leave to leave. I wanted to walk him through why I was thinking about leaving. I think people don't... They fear that conversation. But, if you have built a strong relationship, you should lean into that relationship, you should shoulder into that and have that. And I think I wouldn't be here if I didn't have that relationship with Stan to allow me to explore this opportunity at Liaison International.

**Dave:** Can you tell us a little bit about this business? Because it's unique. I mean, I don't think there's any other organizations around here that do this work. When I heard about it I'm like, wow, I didn't realize that that's the way the application process works for higher ed. So can you tell us a little bit about what you really do.

**Christopher:** So, most listeners out there when they think about online admissions, they think about the Common App. That kind of really manages the undergrad world of admissions. What we do is, we really dominate the grad side of admissions. Specifically in the health professions. So, the company was really started by having great partnerships with all the healthcare associations in this country, from nursing to dental to ophthalmology, to veterinary medicine and all that.

So, what George Haddad, our founder and CEO did is build tremendous relationships with the higher ed associations in the health profession world. What they did is that they partnered together to sell what we call a CAS, a centralized application service, to their member schools. And so, what would happen is...

**Dave:** So these are medical schools, nursing schools?

**Christopher:** Correct.

**Dave:** Dental schools.

**Christopher:** Dental schools. You think of all your... you know, osteo. All of it. Pharmacy as well. Things like that.

**Dave:** Any graduate program that has something to do with medicine or health.

**Christopher:** Correct. Or health profession, correct.

So what George did is build this company solely on that relationship with those associations. What they did is that they really partnered and marketed to their member schools, saying, "This is the reason why you should move your admissions practice to this CAS." So, it'd be nursing CAS, or PT CAS, which is



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physical therapy. Or osteo, or dental. And once, in higher education, once people see this is a real standard, they all follow. And I think that's the secret sauce that George found is that, once you find a real interesting way to apply that was best for the applicant, and most importantly, best for the school. Because, what we also do is take a lot of the operation and administrative work off of the admissions officer desk. Meaning, we verify transcripts all day long. We do GPA modeling. We do what's called coursework... So a lot of that, they don't do that. We do it.

So, if I'm Boston College and the Boston College Nursing School, I have more time as an admissions officer to build a better class because I'm not inundated with the busy work of admissions.

**Dave:** So, you just present the top...

**Christopher:** I verify the...

**Dave:** The top candidates? The top applicants?

**Christopher:** Well, or really, best fit candidate, right.

**Dave:** The best fit candidates.

**Christopher:** Where the application is mirrored with the verified application. It's a fully vetted, if you will, "applicant..."

**Dave:** What they said is true, yeah.

**Christopher:** And now it's up to the school to make that decision.

**Dave:** Right.

**Christopher:** We're not in the selection business. We want to kind of buff up and give you as many great best fit applicants as possible.

**Dave:** I see.

**Christopher:** So it's better for the school, because they can build a better class. They have more time. And it's better for the applicant because they have more of a shot to get in, because of the time now that the admissions officer has time to potentially select somebody, because they're not busy with the transcript or the administrative or the operational duties.

**Dave:** It streamlines all of it.

**Christopher:** Yeah. And that services business really is what separates us in this world of admissions management. There are other companies that we compete with that are all about the easy to apply, the application, and the software. But we tie together the software, which is really cool. UI is really interesting. Coupled with really strong... We hang our hat on service delivery, which is really the hard labor, and it'll be tied up together. And what's really interesting is that nobody in the country, if not the



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world, does this. We do it here, in Watertown. So, it's an interesting concept that as our growth projections, David, are going away from health professions, going into the non-health profession association deals. Like, law, business...

**Dave:** Oh, you're moving into those...

**Christopher:** Into architecture.

**Dave:** You're moving into these fields?

**Christopher:** Correct. Exactly.

**Dave:** Okay. Still graduate? Still focusing on graduate?

**Christopher:** Yes. Yep.

**Dave:** Why not the undergraduate? Is it what's...?

**Christopher:** No.

**Dave:** Okay.

**Christopher:** We'll get into that. Okay.

That's our core business. We signed a deal with the Common App, as I mentioned earlier. And the Common App is like us, they dominate undergrad. As I said before, we dominate grad. And what the Common App said to us is that, "We really love and have been watching Liaison for years. We love your technology." What they're realizing today is the path from senior year high school to freshman year undergrad is not such a direct line anymore. It's more non-traditional. They're taking gap years, there are financial issues around the cost of education, there's military service...

**Dave:** It's not just this, oh, you're a junior in high school, you apply in your senior year, you go... right, it's not like that.

**Christopher:** Correct. And so Common App school are now finding a non-traditional applicant, didn't come in right from high school or prep school into... And they realize the application to manage that is much different. And even a transfer may...

**Dave:** It's closer to what you do.

**Christopher:** Correct. And they say, can you guys help us build a great non-traditional application, help us really identify and really match that potential applicant school to our client schools. And we're doing that right now. So, tremendous relationship we have with the Common App. We sing from the same sheet of music. We have great leaders. And I think that's a relationship... Us, it's almost like, to bring it back to the '80s, it's like the *Wonder Twins* coming together. And I think we enjoy that relationship with the Common App, I think that...





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**Dave:** I like that show, the *Wonder Twins* show, Chris.

**Christopher:** Us and them can really... Oh, it's fantastic! 11 o'clock ABC.

So, it's a unique business model with that partnership for us to dip our toe into the undergrad world. And I think for us, we're just looking at more opportunities to really apply our domain expertise. And not only do we help when it's the high admissions season, we have great domain experts in this company that help these associations see around corners. So, for example, if the pharmacy schools don't see those numbers. You know, why is our application numbers going down. Why aren't people applying to pharmacy schools anymore? We help them and say, well, this is the reason why we're seeing a dip in pharmacy applicants. Or if we see nursing spiking, or if we see veterinary medicine spiking, we help them kind of look at their businesses as well.

**Dave:** Because you're seeing all of it.

**Christopher:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** You can see the trends and then present them back to them.

**Christopher:** Correct.

**Dave:** By the way, this is just an aside. Do you use this applicant process to hire your own people here? Do you use any of your own software that you use for the higher ed inside HR, to hire employees here?

**Christopher:** We do some of that.

**Dave:** Okay.

**Christopher:** So we kind of eat our own dog food a little bit. There's a company that we acquired in 2014 called Spectrum and one of their great products is called EMP, Enrollment Management Platform, and it really helps identify small schools to recruit and identify the best fit student to come to their school.

**Dave:** Now you came here, did you say... Was it five? You just told me how many years it is...

**Christopher:** Yeah. About four years.

**Dave:** Four years ago. And around that time, you were going through a culture shift at this organization. A culture shift, and you had new president and... Can you tell us a little bit about the evolution since you've been here? I know you and your HR team have been working on that and have made some great strides.

**Christopher:** Yeah. This company, prior to the acquisition of Warburg Pincus was a tremendously successful company. They were small and they dominated this really niche-y space of admissions management. But it wasn't a high-growth dynamic company. Meaning, if they had X amount of partnerships and they knew, they could really forecast out year to year how the year would look like.



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Again, not like any other services-based company with a real installed base of customers that weren't really going anywhere, because they dominated this space of higher ed.

And, once Warburg invested in Liaison, of course, they're looking to be dynamic, and what's next, and growth and all that. And for me coming in here, it was really a way to look at our talent internally, get people inspired about what's next for this company. Find some internal champions and leaders, and really look at taking some real talented people who were doing one task, for example, and training them to do two or three tasks. And realize, what we're doing is good, but we could be great. And we want to win. And this is why that we're going to win and dominate this business. But it wasn't easy. People liked what they did. Obviously they were here, and they liked their job and they liked the pace of what we did. And, to really help and get fit, if you will, this company, it was a labor... It was lot of work for my team to make sure that we weren't the new people coming in here trying to change a tremendously successful company that's been around since 1991. But to really improve all of us as individuals and get better.

It was speed, it was really... People didn't know each other here. There was a real kind of ... Our technology team and development and product folks did one side of the business... And, as I said earlier, our service delivery, our operations team was... Actually, the way we're constructed here, there's two sides of the building. And literally, the culture was two different cultures. And my job was to kind of bring these cultures together. And we did with just, not top down, but I was looking for internal leaders. Folks with influence in this company. And we just did a lot of events that tied people together.

**Dave:** How did you find the leaders? Through the events? Or was there other...?

**Christopher:** Sitting down and speaking with these employees. Just shadowing, or just showing up to staff meetings. Looking at backgrounds and resumes and, what motivated people, what was their background and so forth.

**Dave:** So, you just went into the business yourself. You and your team, you just went in.

**Christopher:** Yeah, like Spiderman, yeah. Just in there. And you have to, and you have to spend time...

**Dave:** Back to the superheroes.

**Christopher:** Yes. Spend time, and the employees have to know that you're emotionally invested in them, and in the company. You just can't be a nine to five person speaking platitudes. You've got to roll up your sleeves, do the work, and earn the respect of the team.

Once we were getting there... And we did this by, again, great rewards and recognition programs. Social events. Recognizing the small things and made them big things.

**Dave:** Can you tell me about Final Friday?

**Christopher:** Final Friday was... I would say my second month here, I wrote a Jerry Maguire letter to the company. And I said here's what we're going to do...

**Dave:** That sounds like it could be risky.



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**Christopher:** It was! But I said, I have to be bold here. If I'm going to make change, let's be bold. And I wrote a letter to the company, what are the things we're going to do to get to know each other? How are we going to celebrate small achievements, make them big? How are we going to publicly recognize good work?

Because sometimes, in companies like us, the reward for good work is more work. And we want to make sure that we recognize that success. I said I just want to get together and get to know each other. Get to know our employees and build friendships. Because I believe friendships and relationships are key to benefiting the outcome of a business, or even a commercial business. So, we had a social event and I called it Final Friday. The final Friday of the month, and we'd celebrate the work we've done for the month, we would highlight and welcome the new hires of the month, and we'd do what's called the "you rock" award. Where an employee would nominate somebody else for what they've done. Most importantly, that nominee would read their nomination for that person. Really connect emotionally with that. And that really took off.

It's really, shaking hands, talking about work. But most importantly, talking about each other and our lives. What makes us, and why we're here. Why do we drive... I live in Easton, Massachusetts. It's not an easy ride. Coming to Watertown is...

**Dave:** Crossing the Mass Pike...

**Christopher:** Right. West Newton into Watertown square.

**Dave:** Right.

**Christopher:** But, we want to show that is not a barrier to building a great company. And why all of us take this journey to Watertown, because we believe in the mission. We believe in what we're doing. And I said to George Haddad, our founder- another tremendous leader I'm going to learn from down the road, as I have with Brian and with Stan, is that, we impact people's lives in a significant way, every single day. Every day, where somebody who's applying to grad school is making a significant life choice. And we have a team people here who do, really it's customer service, where applicants are nervous. "Did you get my transcript?", "I forgot my login."

**Dave:** Oh, because the calls come in...

**Christopher:** The calls come in here, correct. Absolutely. And so...

**Dave:** Do they know they're calling Liaison? Or is it like the BC number?

**Christopher:** They know they're calling... like, nursing. So, the nursing centralized application server. They're calling nursing CAS. So we say "Hello, nursing CAS." Not, "Hello, Liaison International."

**Dave:** Right, okay.

**Christopher:** And I always walk the floor of my reps and when we're busy like we are, you know, we're right in the height of our busy season. Remember that you're speaking to somebody who's making a life decision. And I make sure that, in the letters that we have of, "Thank you for helping me make this



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decision." Because now we're the company that helps identify and work with these institutions to find the next doctors, nurses, dentists, things like that. I take that personally. And when we hire these folks, they have to really understand that every day, we're effecting somebody. And I believe, in the grad side, that professional designation is so important for themselves, their families, compensation, the community. And there's a real ripple effect to higher education across this country. And I think that, we have to make sure that, although we're a high flying, fast moving software company, understand the crux and what we're about at the core of this company.

**Dave:** Interesting. What's unique about recruiting people to this organization? Here in higher ed, and also in technology and services?

**Christopher:** It's unique, because we're looking for the same people as HubSpot are looking for. As Mike Volpe and the guys over at Cyber Reason. And we're seeing over at Rapid7. So looking for the same kind of employees, if you will.

**Dave:** Talent. Right.

**Christopher:** But what makes a Liaison employee different, David, is that we want to find somebody who is curious, they're inquisitive, and they want to ask questions. They want to also be part of something bigger than themselves. But also scratch that itch which is about high growth technology, cool technology, high growth, being part of a winner and all of that. So, I think that's what kind of makes us different in the marketplace.

Now, I know if you talk to my colleagues in technology and software in Boston and Cambridge, they'll say the same things. But when it comes to this world of higher ed and connecting... Again, mission-driven, for the greater good. That's really the secret sauce that attracts somebody. Because once they come in here, David, and they meet our executive team, they meet our staff, we got them. We do a really good job of that as well. And sometimes, for the applicant, or for the candidate, this isn't the right place for them. And so I think we make that determination quickly, as well.

**Dave:** I heard you put in a very extensive and robust onboarding program not too long. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Christopher:** Yeah, as I mentioned earlier on when I got here, two things make us different. One is our technology and our software and of course our product. The other is again, what I think what makes us famous, is that the service operations piece of our business. And, my first year here, when we were doing onboarding and hiring like crazy, our new hires didn't get an understanding or an appreciation of the other side of the house. So our developers and technology people were solely focused in on getting better, doing what they do, scaling their learning...

**Dave:** Business stuff, yeah.

**Christopher:** Skating their lane, just kind of doing that. And the operations side, same thing. And I realized we're missing something. And we're under-clubbing onboarding. Where I think a well-rounded, highly educated employee has a real good baseline understanding of our business, our products, and every single asset of our company and what makes us great.



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So, what I did is create what's called Liaison University, which is a two day event, literally bring all of our new hires, all of our operation... Because we're in Poughkeepsie, Buffalo, now we're in Dallas, Texas and we just acquired company called Time to Track in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Dave:** And how many employers altogether?

**Christopher:** We're about... right now, about 375.

**Dave:** Okay.

**Christopher:** And growing, obviously. So, we'd bring the new hires of the month in here. The first day is learning the bones of the company, from sales to finance and all that. And we'd have a nice reception that evening where all the executives and the employees would come in and meet them in a very social way, and make them feel comfortable and relaxed and so forth and kind of get the feel of the culture. Day two, everybody is on the operation side, they're opening mail, they're helping verify transcripts, they're on the phones listening in to applicant calls. Really getting a feel and appreciation of what really, what I call Santa's workshop. Or what is really the blood and guts and what I think the operation is.

And since then, we've really received... And also the people who participate in this and really lead that, are people in our operations who probably wouldn't have an opportunity to stand up, present and to have great pride... And what I found quickly, after year four, is that...

**Dave:** It's not just for the applicant, I mean for the new hire. It's for... right.

**Christopher:** No. Yeah. It's for a supervisor of transcripts, or processor, or the mail, with appreciation... Now, they're out there, out in front of 20 people. We have the executive team there, and it's a great way for them to kind of buff up their skills and have...

**Dave:** Right. Pride in their department. Pride in their work. Yeah.

**Christopher:** Yeah, and it will headline and shine some light, and have the stage. And that has been a tremendous program for us. And, down the road, as we head into 2016-17... Glass Door has recognized us last year as one of the best places to work.

**Dave:** Yeah. I noticed that you have a very high Glass Door rating.

**Christopher:** In 2017, if you were to say that to me walking in the door, "Would you be a Glass Door best employer to work for?" That's an absolute goal of mine. But I thought it would take a little bit longer to get there. But, due to some great employees and great management team and a great founder and CEO, who believed in the mission, who believed in what we're doing. And I think a lot of HR people who are fortunate as me to have that relationship with the CEO, board, and the founder all together, that is such an amazing relationship to have. That helps you as you try to drive culture, spirit, and really inspiring employees.

**Dave:** You have a reputation of trust and accessibility at all levels of the organization. What do you do to instill that, that level of trust that you've developed?



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**Christopher:** A lot of folks can speak in platitudes and have a great presentation. But it's about delivery. If you don't deliver the work or deliver a project to your internal client - be it the head of marketing, head of sales, your CEO, your CFO - then, that trust and that credibility comes into question. And I think for HR folks who now are pivoting towards - as back, probably in the 2000s - as what's now called a business partner. If you're not part of the business and spending time to learn the business, understand it at a real, complex level and deliver HR services that inspires and moves their business along, that's where you lose some credibility. And you become just the personnel office. And that's not why I chose this business. And to me, being a real, right hand person to my executives, but most importantly, being a trusted advisor and counsel to my CEO and founder, that's what I love to do. And I think you just don't do that by walking through the door, day one. You earn your keep by again, doing the work and saying what you do. And also being present. That's very important.

You know, we talk about telecommuting, working from home. I believe what we do as HR professionals, you've got to be in the building. Because you cannot plan what's going to happen on a random Tuesday. And by being here, being present, living the brand 24/7, I think that's incredibly important to...

**Dave:** And having all those relationships throughout the organization.

**Christopher:** Right.

**Dave:** What do you see that, some of the biggest changes you've seen in the function, over the last several, ten years or so?

**Christopher:** I've seen much more on the recruiting and talent acquisition side. It's more innovation and technology early on. That now, what I like is they're bringing more of that evaluation process into the decision-making process. For example, The Predictive Index, I really love. I love the PI, I love the folks over in Wellesley.

**Dave:** Headquartered locally here.

**Christopher:** Yeah, right. And I think, bringing as many tools as you can to do the assessment upfront. To poke, prod, stretch your candidates is what makes, I think, our profession changing and becoming more different. Years ago, post a job, if you build it, they'll come. Now I think bringing the creativity and kind of the art into recruiting, I really love. Because I grew up recruiting, obviously, as I said earlier, Fidelity. Which is all about the phone, and the phone, the phone, the phone. If you're not calling people, talking with them, building a relationship with candidates, you're going to lose that connection to really acquire and bring folks in here. So I think, how we have blended technology and now brought that, the creativity and the art of recruiting, I love.

**Dave:** So, looking forward, what changes do you see, coming in the HR function? Or what do you want to see as the next evolution for the function?

**Christopher:** I would like to see, honestly... I would love to see the next founder/ CEO of a company or a brand or a product coming from the HR world. I would love to see that. I know, again, not to go back to Fidelity, but you look at Jim Kirby. And Jim was Ned Johnson's COO for many, many years in the '80s. Jim came from HR. And I would love to see the new founders in the next generation come from my world. And I think that a lot of HR folks might not be given the benefit of real smart business acumen, but I



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would love to see somebody in my profession become a founder, an entrepreneur, be part of a real venture capital, private equity company that's about identifying trends, identify industries and acquiring companies, and being a CEO. That's what I would love to see.

**Dave:** Yeah, we're seeing some people come into HR that haven't been in HR before. Do you do that? Do you bring people into your HR group that haven't, here or in the past that don't have HR backgrounds?

**Christopher:** Typically, again, what I like to see... Earlier on, we said what is the DNA or the table stakes for a Liaison employee. Again, curiosity, being inquisitive, solving problems. I think those three things are the tenets of a good HR rep or a good HR manager. I haven't done that yet here, but I would not be close minded to having somebody that came from product management or who came from marketing or sales. Who, I think, want to get into HR not because of "people" or culture, but it's about building about business, and outcomes and impact. That's what I look for.

**Dave:** Well we've come to the point of the podcast where we ask the NEHRA question of the podcast. What advice would you give to young HR professionals that are already in the function but want to move up in the function. You've had a great career path. What would you recommend to them?

**Christopher:** I would say, if you have the opportunity to learn or go to business meetings, to go to the sales meetings, go to the weekly marketing meeting, go to the weekly strategy meeting, for example. If you can get your toe in the door and learn the business and show that you can add value as a business partner, not just as an HR administrator, you're going to move quickly in your career. Because if you can show that you're leaning in to the business and knowing, again, why we're here, which is driving revenue and bottom line EBITDA. If you can show your impact to that, your career will take, specifically here in technology and software in New England, that is what is going to separate you from your competition or peer group right now.

**Dave:** If you could write a letter of advice to your 30-year-old self, career advice to your 30-year-old self, what would you write?

**Christopher:** Patience. And I think sometimes just, for me personally, I tend to have really good instincts and kind of act on instinct. But I think my 30-year-old self would act too quickly instead of really taking time, have some pace, and learn and listen and be patient.

**Dave:** Bit more information...

**Christopher:** Absolutely. And I think being earnest, wanting to do the right thing and check that box when you're getting your career started, especially your early 30s, that's okay. But, I think if I could write the letter, I would say that.

**Dave:** How do you define leadership and how do you hire for it? I mean, you mentioned some assessment tools. There's more than that too, though, right?

**Christopher:** It is. Leadership, to me, is somebody who not only can really own the room, if you will, in terms of their language, their speech, how they connect with people, a real good connector. But it's somebody, going back to what I said, who's doing the work. So a leader, I think, is somebody who wouldn't ask you to do something they wouldn't do themselves. And I've learned from people who did





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the opposite. They would just tell you what to do. But to me, leadership is about doing the work. It's staying late. It's doing the hard work.

Back in the day, before... when the Boston Globe Sunday was the big Sunday edition on Monday and Tuesdays, you're date-stamping resumes. You're doing the envelopes. And I learned early, working for Brian's organization that Brian's managers and VPs were with me doing the envelopes, doing the hard work. And to me, that's leadership. And also one last thing I think that's important... I think, when you talked about my background and so forth... early on, coming from a really "prove it to me" type of city like Brockton, I wouldn't be here without my parents. And my Dad was an inspiration to me, one of the great teachers and coaches in Brockton High School history. Again, I learned a lot from him of being a leader. And my Mom, who was a real inspirational person and a Mom who was a fantastic nurse and what she did in her profession. Without that leadership from my parents, David, I wouldn't be here. And that's what led me, when I said early on about connecting family and employment to success... Again, we talked about my inspiration and mentors in business, but I wouldn't be here without my parents, that's for sure.

**Dave:** Yeah, as you look back, when your career's all said and done, what do you hope to be remembered for?

**Christopher:** I want to look back and look at the folks I've mentored, and leave my fingerprints on something of significance. That's either a business that really did something special and changed the game in terms of whatever that domain was. Like, in our world, we'll change the way that people apply to school. Or the way that institutions of higher education change the way they do their admission and selection process. But most importantly, I want to look back at the people who worked for me and I want them to be Vice Presidents, CHROs. And look at how it's changed their lives and families. Leave that Belichick or Parcells trail if you will, of great leaders.

**Dave:** Now I've got some silly questions for you.

**Christopher:** Good.

**Dave:** What gives you energy?

**Christopher:** I think, to me, it's knowing the responsibility I have for this business and for people. That, if I don't bring my energy, if I don't bring the passion of what I have, then I'm not doing my job. I think I get that from the expectation we have of this company. Of the people who I see every day. And most importantly, my family. And I believe that, without getting myself wound up and getting myself really to that place to perform, I do this... We talk about company and who you work for, but my company is back in Easton, it's my family. So that's what really gives me energy is my two children and my wife and I think that's what I look at every day on my desk when I drive home. I'm doing this for them.

**Dave:** And your favorite movie?

**Christopher:** "Slap Shot" and "Good Fellas." With a little "Forrest Gump" sprinkled in.

**Dave:** A trifecta of movies.





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**Christopher:** Trifecta, yeah.

**Dave:** Some of the Brockton stuff's coming out there. There's some rough movies, right, some of them.

**Christopher:** Right. Yeah.

**Dave:** Well, Chris, this is great. Thank you so much for taking the time and having me in to have this discussion. I really appreciate it.

**Christopher:** Thank you, Dave.

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