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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: Welcome to The Hennessy Report. I'm Dave Hennessy. Today's guest is Dawn Frazier-Bohnert, the chief diversity and inclusion officer at Liberty Mutual. We recorded this episode before we knew much about the global pandemic so we don't discuss it, but Dawn's message that inclusion and connection makes it better for everyone is certainly relevant to what we're all dealing with in today's world. She also shares much about an award-winning inclusion and action e-learning series that they created at Liberty Mutual, and gives some specific examples of how that impacted their organization and tells you how you can access it. They've now made it available to everyone and all the proceeds go to charity, so that's a great thing that Dawn, her team and Liberty Mutual are doing for the world. Also, she shares something that she had as a strong belief about diversity and inclusion that she's changed her mind about and I thought that was interesting. Next up on the podcast is Steve Pemberton, the CHRO of Workhuman, also an author. And now our discussion with Dawn Frazier-Bohnert.

Dawn, welcome to the podcast.

Dawn: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Dave: It's our first spin off podcast because we interviewed your head of talent and enterprise services.

Dawn: Yes.

Dave: She mentioned some of your work in your department and that led us to this discussion, so we'll get to that, but why don't we start off, we always like to find out a little bit about our guests. What is or was the driving force behind you seeking a career in this function in D&I? Is there a key moment along the way?

Dawn: It's not as if I woke up and thought this is what I would do. But in fact it really was my early upbringing in an Air Force family being born outside the United States and moving about every two years up until the age of 15. And there is something very consistent about that, which is you are usually the new person always, trying to figure out how to get along, how to kind of navigate new environments at school, hang out with the cool kids, figure out what to wear. And so even though I didn't realize it at that time, clearly connecting, belonging, feeling a part of, was something very important to me. And so it was very natural as I was navigating my HR career that this work around diversity and inclusion would become so important to me because it's very personal.

Dave: Can you describe your role, your mission, here at Liberty Mutual?

Dawn: So I am the global diversity inclusion officer for Liberty. And from day one I knew that it was really going to be important to approach this work as a journey and in phases. So starting in 2013, my mantra, which continues to this day was diversity is about all of us. And that was really important. So then I was bringing everybody along in this process, leaving no one out. It was really important for



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people to understand and at the same time help people understand that we would be looking at the different dimensions of diversity. So part of my role was to define diversity for Liberty Mutual and then define and lay out the framework that we would use, which has been a very holistic framework.

When I arrived, most people understood diversity can be very narrow. And that's not unusual for companies, but I wanted people to understand how diversity is all of the dimensions that make us who we are, the similarities and the differences, which means no one is excluded. And I help people understand that we would also be looking at this work, recognizing that we're multidimensional people. It's not unexpected that we would look at perhaps just race and ethnicity or gender. But I wanted people to understand that we would explore that, which means we would be talking about all race and ethnicities. We would be talking about gender and not in a binary way, but really looking to ensure that we were talking about men and women in a very fluid way. And that we would be talking about the fact that we are multidimensional people, which means we would be talking about ourselves as whole people. And that I think was really helpful for the organization because I think people recognized, I'm included, I won't be left out.

Dave: You mentioned that one of your goals and the beliefs here at Liberty Mutual is that when we're diverse and inclusive, it's better for everyone. It's better for the organization. What kind of language do you use inside the organization to convey that message to make the case?

Dawn: We have to keep coming back to that, basically diversity is about all of us.

Dave: And inclusion is a big part of the work you do here today. In fact, Melanie talked about your inclusion and action e-learning video series that you have received some amazing awards for. It originated as an internal skill-building series for your employees. Tell us why you decided to create a video series? Was it the employees? What was driving this?

Dawn: So, we had done a number of things prior to that point really about building awareness and that's really where you start in this D&I space. And we had used some e-learning and some exercises and speakers. We're at that point where we needed to move to action, really helping our employees move beyond just awareness, which is a good place to start, but you can't stay there. And so having specific actions, behaviors that people could see to learn we knew were important. And today people like video, it's very easy to actually see scenarios and experience it in that way. And so we thought that that was the right approach. And so we went about the process of taking these nine specific guidelines, we call them skills in the series, and created scenarios to bring them to life. Then we launched that and asked people to watch these videos, these vignettes, if you will, the nine of them and they could really do it at their own pace. And then there were actions, exercises that they would actually go through after each session to see what they'd learned.

Dave: And what's been the reaction from the employees?

Dawn: I have to say, first of all, people loved the videos. We really tried to take an approach to make them enticing and interesting, that the characters would be believable.



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Dave: How did you do that? How did you make the characters believable and the stories that were ...?

Dawn: We found an amazing director. So we actually went outside and found someone whose job is to do these kinds of videos. Really, I think that's one of the reasons the video won the Telly.

Dave: Congratulations.

Dawn: Thank you very much. And so because we had someone who this was their job to really create the kind of real scenarios and a lot of the filming was done here in our office.

Dave: That makes it more real too.

Dawn: That makes it more real too, people will say, oh, I see someone in the cafeteria that feels like, it feels very real to them in that way. And so I think the combination of really thinking about who would be the actors that would play the part and really creating the scenarios, looking at contemporary kinds of issues that are happening. Not necessarily specific things to Liberty, but it just made it real. We actually asked our employees as well, we developed this in a sort of co-creation mode. So it wasn't just something coming out of our department. It was really others helping us develop it, which I think also made it more real. It was a good year long investment in terms of the process.

Dave: And we're sitting here today because something Melanie said would happen has now happened. At the end of the year, end of last year, you have now made this available to people outside of Liberty Mutual. Other organizations that are on this journey of D&I – Inclusion. And can you talk a little bit about why you made this decision? What kind of reaction you're getting from the corporate world?

Dawn: Sure. I mean, you're absolutely right. Melanie said we're having such really good reaction. The outcome is what we'd hoped. I mean, again, we're still on this journey, but she said we should make this available to others. Our employees were coming to us and saying, I've shared this with my spouse, my partner, they're very interested. Is there a way they could go and actually purchase it? So a lot of that was really helping us realize, I think we're onto something. We know that it's important to do this work, not just for our employees, but also for our customers, the communities where we work and live. And Melanie really felt it was important not to keep this just to ourselves. And so we found a way by ensuring that all of the proceeds that we get from this will go to a nonprofit.

Dave: I didn't even know that. That's great.

Dawn: Yeah. It actually does double if you will, there's a ripple effect and that we feel like we're helping people develop their own inclusion muscle, if you will. And, the money that we receive from this actually goes to a really good organization that's doing some great work with youth development.

Dave: That's fantastic. How can people access it?

Dawn: Folks who are interested can go to a website, inclusioninaction.com and there you will learn more about the nine skills. You'll have an opportunity to look at a video or a portion of a video so you



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get a feel of the scenarios and really learn more about how you can learn more and who you can talk with to find out about the pricing. It's a tiered pricing. All of that good information is there for people.

Dave: That's great and all going to a charity. That's fantastic. Let's talk in a little bit more depth about the nine skills, what they are? You call them skills. That's interesting.

Dawn: We made a little bit of a shift. We thought that would be easier for people to understand. Internally here at Liberty we talk about them as guidelines and again, that doesn't necessarily translate perhaps for people so we're talking about behavioral practices.

Dave: So it's not just beliefs, right? Inclusion isn't just, it's what the actions are, skills and actions.

Dawn: Yeah because that really is the hard part. So you can believe with all your heart about why this is so important. But how do you actually demonstrate it every day with your teammates, with your leader and vice versa? How do you actually put it into action? And it does take practice. If it were that easy, we'd all have done it and we'd be in a better place I think. And so it's really ...

Dave: Right, so many organizations are wrestling with this every single day.

Dawn: Absolutely. So, it's really moving from just the language or the concept and actually putting it into practice in your day to day interaction at work. And we believe, and we have seen, if people do practice, they get stronger, they get more effective in being able to do it. So for example, the one that comes to mind is "try on." Many years ago we might've said step into somebody else's shoes to get a sense. It's the same idea so that you have an opportunity to kind of stop, pause and think about what's going on for that person. Let me try on their experience, what might be going on for them. It's a way to build some empathy.

Dave: Can you give an example of that?

Dawn: Of try on?

Dave: Yeah. What does it look like in practice?

Dawn: So imagine you're in a meeting and you have someone who has a very strong idea about a particular approach to a problem and you're sitting there and you're feeling like, that just doesn't make any sense to me. And instead of maybe going into a place of judgment or even just tearing down the idea...

Dave: Contradicting.

Dawn: ...let me step back and think about what's going on for them? Where are they coming from with that idea? Let me try on that idea or their experience and maybe that gives you a little bit more room to think about maybe something in between where you are and where they are. It certainly allows you to open up and maybe ask more questions? Because often we're moving fast, we make assumptions. We



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don't stop and ask the questions and we miss perhaps a great opportunity. That one I think is generally easy for people to kind of put on and think about. Most of the day I'm just moving forward with my own agenda.

Dave: Right. I disagree with that.

Dawn: Absolutely. Another one, because you mentioned disagree, is "it's okay to disagree." And actually, this has been really helpful for many people, whether we're talking within a team or perhaps a team member is talking about their leader and we know there's a lot of hierarchy, and often in different cultures that can be very strong to think, can I challenge appropriately my leader or even a teammate? Or do we just all agree to kind of get along? And as you can well imagine if we're not challenging ideas, we may be missing a new one. We may be doing the same old thing and missing an opportunity for innovation.

Dave: I imagine those first two play well with each other.

Dawn: They really can. They can.

Dave: You need both of those approaches.

Dawn: You need both of them. People are like, it's okay to disagree really? And we're saying it's okay to disagree, we always say, but not be disagreeable. So there's a way to do it that really does open up more opportunity for engagement versus shut things down. And so that's part of the practice. How do I get effective? How do I build a skill so that I can appropriately challenge, and I say appropriately meaning in a way that doesn't shut down but really opens up opportunities? So that's another one that we use.

Dave: That's great.

Dawn: One, which we call "step up, step back." And I think it's easy to kind of imagine this or visualize it.

Dave: This is another skill.

Dawn: This is another skill.

Dave: So this is our third one that you're talking about.

Dawn: This is the third one. Absolutely. So step up, step back. Often you have people who are very quiet and, that could be for a number of reasons, in a room where maybe they're sharing ideas. So you imagine sometimes even a brainstorming or just a general meeting, they're holding back. They're not finding a way to share their idea for maybe a number of reasons. Maybe they were waiting to be invited. Lots of different ways. But what we say to those folks is, you know what? Step up. So if you're sitting there and you haven't offered your idea or shared your voice, push yourself, step up. And it's just a prompt to say, wait a minute. You know what? I need to make sure my voice is being heard in this meeting.



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Step back is sort of the opposite of that, so you can have someone who's always talking first, always talking last and maybe in the middle and doesn't leave a lot of room for other people who may need more time to process because we all process and learn differently. And in that case we might say to that person, step back, create more space and more room for your colleagues who may need a little bit more room or prompting to come into the conversation.

Dave: I'm just curious of your opinion on this. Do you think the people that need to step back know that they're the people that need to step back? And do you think the people that need to step up know also? Do people have a general sense? What's your experience there?

Dawn: I think it really depends. I think there are people especially who may know that they're usually not the first ones to speak for whatever reason. It could be cultural, it could be more of a sort of introversion, in terms of how they're processing an idea and they're still processing and they're onto the next thing and they haven't had a chance to speak. So I think it depends. Often the people who do jump in first, they know, but they've got great ideas and they're excited and often they're thinking out loud and so they can't contain it.

Dave: So you have the sense that most people kind of know, if they're on one of the extremes, they kind of know.

Dawn: They kind of know and I think that what this does is in a way that's not, again, in a judgmental way, it allows everybody to sort of determine based on where you are. Because maybe you're on a day where you're just really stepping up because you've got a lot to say and you need to step back. And so for example, one of the vignettes where this is actually demonstrated is that we have a group of people, what we call in a huddle. This group comes together to share kind of the focus of the week and what they're doing. And you have that person who's talking a lot and then they finally say, you know what? I realize I need to step back and actually physically kind of steps back to allow others to step up.

And in this particular scenario, I believe there's somebody on the phone, which often happens nowadays. You've got people working not necessarily in the office next to each other and so they're making room for the person who's on the phone who nobody really has given room to, to make sure that again, their voices are being heard. And so there are things like that, that are real and almost immediate and everybody kind of nods their head.

Dave: So people see it. They see it like it I've been in those meetings.

Dawn: I get that.

Dave: I've been in those huddles.

Dawn: And I'm that person and maybe now I'll think about that next meeting I go to.

Dave: That's great.



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Dawn: There is a focus on, again, the one skill and at the same time you realize that generally things don't happen where it's just one thing that you can learn. And so these things do actually come together so people can see that. It's really taking in bite size pieces and practicing as opposed to taking nine all at once. We want people to practice them and not feel overwhelmed. We also developed a lexicon of language. One of the things we've found is that people would say, "Dawn, I just don't know what to say. I don't know what words to use and I do want to engage in these conversations with my team, but I'm fearful I'm going to make a mistake." So if we're saying assume positive intent, then people need to give you some room as you're kind of maneuvering or maybe strengthening the skills, the nine skills that we talk about, are ways to help people really become more effective in this space. Language is so key. It is so important.

Dave: That's powerful. That's great. We ask every guest this question. If you could write a letter to your 25 year old self, what would you write? Dear Dawn.

Dawn: So later in my career, not in my twenties I wish, I had the opportunity to go through what is called Efficacy Program. It's still happening today. It was established by Jeff Howard who did this work based on some research at Harvard. One of the core Efficacy Principles is this, which is it's not the stimulus, it's the response. What that means is simply we have choice about how we are going to respond to things that happen. And so I remember in my early years really focusing on injustice, really feeling like, oh, there's so many things out there that are challenging and hard and I think it would have been helpful back then, that it's really more the focus on my response to those injustices, whether they're happening to me or others. That there's some things we cannot control, we'd like to, but we can't.

It's really more putting the energy on how do we choose to respond? Do we choose to become victim to the things that happened to us? Do we find a way to sort of work around them or underneath them or jump over them? I mean that really is what I've learned and continue to learn even at this age. Definitely not in my twenties, that that really is where my focus could have been back then. I think it would have maybe helped me be more effective and have less heartache.

Dave: Good answer. And you know we produce this podcast in cooperation with NEHRA, the Northeast Human Resources Association and have the NEHRA Emerging HR Professionals question of the podcast and that's going to come up right now. We're going to Meghan Mandino, our producer who's also part of that group within NEHRA, deliver this question.

Meghan Mandino: What is your philosophy on promoting diversity and inclusion across multiple cultures?

Dawn: Great question. There's some universal truths, if you will, around people wanting to be respected and wanting to feel connected. How that gets played out, may be different, but I know as we're developing and driving our global strategy, we're making sure that we are recognizing that there are certain things that need to look very different and that we can't do this work without our partnership with the different countries and markets where we reside. We are not going out with a US focused



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approach. We're going out with an opportunity to learn from other parts of the world, sharing what we know, learning from them so that we think collectively as Liberty Mutual, we all will win.

Dave: That's great. You already touched on this, Dawn, about things that you're doing to make your culture more inclusive. Maybe you could go into a little bit more depth on what you do and from a hiring perspective to make Liberty Mutual more inclusive, our career advancement and development.

Dawn: We work very closely with our talent and acquisition team and other teams across Liberty and in that partnership we recognized that there are ways that we could expand our sourcing opportunities. So we've taken a good look at many of the universities and colleges and places that we've gone in the past and said, can we expand that? We've done well, but is it really serving us well and serving us as we think about what we want to do for the future? So we're really doing that in partnership. We've looked at many of the conferences that we've attended and really tried to think about are there ways to do it differently? So, making sure that we're not comfortable and really challenging our self to think differently in terms of the recruitment space.

Dave: That's great. You've been in D&I for a few years.

Dawn: Thank you. Thank you.

Dave: And I was wondering if you've had a solid belief that changed and then your thinking has evolved a little bit.

Dawn: I mean, I've always been in human resources. I started doing this work. I may not have understood how important it is to have D&I skill and practice integrated into HR often, especially when I started out, it was very siloed and sometimes even within an HR department or again, it was assumed that it was the D&I folks' responsibility to drive D&I.

Dave: You felt like it was okay to have D&I separate from HR.

Dawn: And I think that I didn't care about that as much, and now I realize for me it is an essential critical skill capability. You name it, we're all HR people.

Dave: It's the major component of the talent strategy. Not a separate thing.

Dawn: Absolutely. Exactly. Absolutely. So I challenge any of my HR colleagues that this has to be something that you build as a skill. It cannot just be one or a small group of people's responsibility. And obviously setting strategy or certain things that perhaps everybody can't be part of, but it cannot be something that you leave to someone else to do. Honestly, I think all leaders are responsible and I hold my HR, my talent colleagues, probably at a different level in terms of expectation and I feel more strongly about that now than I ever have before.

Dave: That's great. What's something that you're most proud of, of your work at Liberty to date?



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Dawn: I am so proud of the Men As Allies work that we initiated back at the end of 2014.

Dave: Say it again.

Dawn: Our Men As Allies work.

Dave: Men As Allies work.

Dawn: So as we were developing our employee resource groups, it was so very clear to me. Even though all of our employee resource groups have a very strong allies component and strategy, all of them. I knew that still, even though we have a Women and Allies employee resource group, that there were men who still felt like, I don't know if I want to go to that. Where can I go? It was really important, and this is well before Me Too I'm happy to say, that we really talk about ally strategy, ally responsibility and really bring our men into this work. It's not so unusual when you look at companies that have employee resource events or D&I events where you don't get as many men participating. And when I looked at the demographics of this organization, I thought I need everybody in, diversity is about all of us.

So I have to say we had a Men As Allies summit at the end of 2017 and we had over 450 men and women attend the summit. It was a day long program kicked off by our CEO and included just a day of incredible learning and sharing. And when I think about standing on that stage and looking out at the audience and seeing all these men thinking with such gratitude and hope about the work that we're doing. And for me, when I think about that day and even the ripple effects that we still feel now we're planning for a future event, I realized that that was really a moment.

Dave: Is there a book that changed your life or your perspective that you'd like to tell us about?

Dawn: I'm going to talk about *Quiet* because I just remember that continues today.

Dave: Is that the introvert book? Yes.

Dawn: So that's from Susan Cain, and I think that was really eye opening to me on several levels. And so I think, yeah, *Quiet* would be the book that I would suggest.

Dave: It certainly plays into your guidelines.

Dawn: Absolutely.

Dave: I forget which one that is. Step up, step back. Great.

Dawn: Step up, step back. Personally for me, I think it really dispelled a lot of the things that are just not true about being an introvert, which I really appreciated. It really helps you really understand. Where does one get one's energy? Where does one sort of draw their strength versus where their energy gets pulled or sapped? And I am at my core, an introvert. So I was quite pleased to read this and understand that I was not alone in the ways that I looked at myself or looked at my work. I do a lot of public



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speaking, I talk to a lot of people. I'm not a shy person and so I was really happy to see that she helped me understand the differences and the things that were not true.

Dave: It's okay for me to go in a quiet place and think through this. I don't need to be at a group to discuss everything.

Dawn: Absolutely. And how I process things at times. And also the fact if I've been on the road or I've been out presenting, I need to make sure I have time to fill up the tanks. That's not going to happen with people for me, but it's going to happen really by myself and that's okay. So *Quiet*. And I've actually shared that book with a lot of people who also have had that kind of aha moment.

Dave: That's good. What's the best performance show you've ever attended?

Dawn: Hamilton.

Dave: Yes.

Dawn: Hamilton. That's an easy one. I mean, I didn't have to think about it. I mean that, still, and then it's been probably a couple of years.

Dave: Did you see it with Lin-Manuel?

Dawn: I did.

Dave: I missed, I just went like a month too late.

Dawn: It's wonderful. All the shows are wonderful.

Dave: Is there anything else that you want to touch on that we didn't?

Dawn: One thing I would say is that often people think about this work and it just seems daunting. It just seems hard and people don't know where to start or they don't feel like they'll ever get it right. A lot of those thoughts can go...and I would say that diversity is not about perfection, that it's more important to try and it's important to understand yourself. So, if you're thinking, what is the first step I should take? I would say really think about who you are and where you have opportunities to grow. Maybe because you haven't experienced people, you haven't been in a place or a culture, but that's the first place you start is really understanding who you are and then there's a certain amount of humility and being humble that you're going to be willing to learn.

Dave: I think that's good advice because a lot of our listeners might not be in an organization that are big enough to have a role like yours. So that's great. Thank you so much for being a guest on our podcast.

Dawn: Thank you. I enjoyed sharing and I hope that our listeners did as well.



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