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

Dave Hennessy: Welcome to The Hennessy Report. I'm Dave Hennessy. Our guest for this episode is Toni Canada. She is the CHRO of the American Medical Association AMA, our first Chicago area guest and Toni's career blossomed in the heyday of Motorola. And she shares the interesting story about how she made this shift to the medical industry. AMA's goal is to improve the health of the nation. And Toni talks about how they have supported their 250,000 members who are on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. She also discusses how they've just appointed the third consecutive female leader of the organization, all medical doctors. And how they are using surveys of their employees to stay in tune with their needs and make sure their organization stays effective during remote work, and as they bring employees back into the office. You'll enjoy this episode with Toni Canada, and here it is.

Toni, welcome to the podcast.

Toni Canada: Hello, how are you?

Dave: Doing great while we were connected from somebody we both know and like very much. It's Paul Schneider, who is my colleague here at Keystone he's in our Chicago office.

Toni: Yes. A very good friend. And I think probably one of the most popular folks in the HR business in Chicagoland, for sure.

Dave: I'm glad he connected us. We always like to start the podcast, learning a little bit about our guests and before we get into AMA and what's going on in this surreal time that we're living in, could you share an inflection point in your past that informs who you become as a professional?

Toni: My father was very ill and we were struggling with getting the proper care for him. And I was confiding in a friend and he is actually an infectious disease physician, and said that he would be happy to see my father. So the physician was going to be seeing my father for a period of time. And he asked if I wouldn't mind going over and speaking to their chief operating officer who had some HR related questions. I said, sure, of course. I was inappropriately dressed in flip flops and shorts and walked over to their headquarters, and spent a significant period of time talking to her and answering HR related questions. And in the end she said, "Wow, we need someone just like you." And it was a period of time I was trying to figure out what my next move was going to be. And I was hoping to take some time to figure that out.

Lo and behold, I ended up going to work for a multispecialty medical practice in Northwest Indiana and became their chief human resource officer and then moved into their chief operating officer and was there for five years. And that really led me to where I am today at the AMA.

Dave: That's amazing. So really it was a little impromptu pro bono assignment that led...



Toni: Exactly.

Dave: ...led you to the medical world. And here you are.

Toni: Right.

Dave: That's a great story. Well, let's talk about the AMA. I know it's an extremely long history of the organization. So give us the brief history of AMA and a little bit about the organization. When Paul first connected us, I didn't realize how many employees you have for an association. It's gigantic.

Toni: First I have to say, I couldn't think of a more important time to be a part of the medical community than right now. And the AMA has been around for almost 175 years. And we are really the physicians' ally in patient care. We are the voice of the physician. So we advocate for our physicians across the nation. We have about 1,200 employees across the U.S. our headquarters are in Chicago, where we have roughly a thousand people. And then we have satellite offices in DC and then scattered throughout the country. We are dedicated to driving medicine toward a more equitable future removing obstacles that interfere with patient care, all doing this while confronting some of the nation's greatest public health crises from right now, dealing with COVID. But prior to that, dealing with issues around hypertension, diabetes, and now more than ever our relevance and around stewardship around display, as we lead promoting the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health. And that's really the mission of the AMA is to improve the health of the nation.

Dave: Yeah. And you mentioned what's going on with COVID-19. What's the experience that you're hearing from your members that are dealing with the pandemic on the front lines? What kind of support are you giving them?

Toni: First of all, there's a tremendous amount of disruption across the nation right now. From small physician practices to large hospital groups, to medical schools today around education, students, residents. Right now, the whole thing has been turned upside down and is highly disruptive. Physicians are going to need financial support to get practices up and running. Those small practices are really going to be impacted. Even the large hospital groups are impacted, Some of the local Chicago hospitals, the large ones, the University of Chicago, Northwestern are announcing furloughs for some of their staff. And a lot of attention around education and training needing to get that back up and running with medical schools. So the pandemic has really taken an incredible toll.

Also, on the mental health of our frontline physicians. It's been all over the news. You see pictures of physicians just completely exhausted, nurses, completely exhausted. It's really taking a mental and physical toll on them. And also just a real focus on wellness of physician and how to take care of their teams right now.

The medical industry thinks the new normal going forward, will include a significant amount of telemedicine. So during this COVID experience that we've had, a lot of providers are going to telemedicine. I don't believe there's any turning back from that. So we will only see that increase. We're also seeing which has been very public in the news, a huge gap around racial disparities in outcomes



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around COVID. That's pretty significant in Chicago, and a lot of other large cities, New York is seeing huge disparities and outcomes related to COVID. So really focusing and supporting our frontline staff, which are our physicians.

Dave: What's it like to work for an organization that's in the know, with regard to what's happening with COVID-19 and what kind of pressures does that put on your organization?

Toni: Well, my first response is it's difficult. I would say friends and family come to you and expect you to have answers to things that you don't have answers to. I'm not a doctor. I always tell people I play one on TV. But seriously, I wish we knew a little bit more to get our arms around this pandemic at the AMA, but because of our mission, it's allowed us to really have the entire organization focused on the same thing right now. So we're all pulling the oars in the same direction, which is around all things COVID. And I couldn't be more proud of our leadership team and the entire organization. Everyone is focused on the issue at hand and really trying to improve the health of the nation. Really, really proud to be a part of the AMA.

Dave: When did you make a shift from work from home?

Toni: Yeah, we were probably a little late in the game. We went to work from home around mid-March. And we had delayed it a little bit because we were really trying to make sure that we had set all of our employees up to succeed with working remotely. We wanted to make sure they had the right tools. We had not rolled out a work from home program throughout the organization prior to COVID. We had been piloting it in a few pockets of the AMA with small pilot groups, but COVID really made us rip the Band-Aid off. And I'm really happy to say that things are going really well, working remotely. We do have a small group of individuals performing essential work at the AMA. There's about 15 to 18 people that come in through the week. Everything from building engineers, to some of the folks in our mail room. One of the things that we are doing for those individuals, they are getting compensated around hardship pay. And then we're also making sure that they have safe and private transportation to and from work each day, to keep them as safe as possible.

One of the things that we did do early on, we did a pulse survey on our staff to see how they're doing working remotely. And that was really interesting. We had over a 90% response rate. So we were thrilled with that, and we really wanted to get a sense of how people were doing, especially folks that are working by themselves at home. So dealing with social isolation, we have a lot of folks that are working full time that have small children at home. Or also having to put on their other hat as being a teacher and trying to homeschool their children at the same time. So really getting a sense of how they're dealing with this and what we discovered is people are coping. So they're doing okay. And what we will be doing is focus groups of individuals, and really delving down into how we can make their work from home life a little better.

So are there specific things that we could be doing? Do they need more training on [Microsoft] Teams? Is there equipment that they needed? A lot of the open ended questions referenced the need for keyboards. Ergonomics was a big theme. And so we have already made some changes and we've put in place some financial assistance in allowing each employee to purchase some equipment that would



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make their work from home life a little easier. So doing that upfront, about a month in was really important. And I would encourage a lot of employers, everyone to do that to really get an understanding of how your people are doing. The other thing I would add is you can't over communicate enough. When people don't know what's going on, they start to wonder and we have done, I think, a phenomenal job of communicating. We send out weekly communications.

Our CEO is sending out a weekly communication. Many of our senior leaders also send out a weekly communication to the entire organization. And then we've also created resource hubs on our internal website around COVID. So everything from how to cope with working from home, with children to mental health, to wellness, we've been doing a lot of Zoom yoga classes and fitness classes. So within our internal website, you could go to a resource page and it has topical areas broken out that we hope provide some additional support to our employees during this unprecedented time of working remotely.

Dave: Wow. That's awesome. Do you feel like the group of essential workers have high morale?

Toni: We were really worried about that. Yeah, I think so. We do a lot of checking in. I send out regular emails and have been calling my organization, my staff personally, and checking in with each of them. The folks that are coming into the office, a lot of our senior leaders have personally brought in lunches for them to thank them for that. And I believe that they're feeling really appreciated and their morale is up. They love to know that they're able to contribute right now. No one is being made to come in. Obviously, if people do not feel safe or comfortable with this arrangement, they would not have to come into the office it's by a volunteer basis.

Dave: Now we're getting here into late spring. And I'm wondering how you are as an organization. And you personally are thinking about the return to work for everybody.

Toni: Like many companies. We know we don't want to be the first group back. And in Chicago, our mayor and our governor put together a phased approach. And we also have a phased approach. We have a task force working on our return to work plan. We're headquartered in the city of Chicago. Many of our staff rely on public transportation. We know that's going to be a big risk. That's a big concern of mine. In fact, it's probably my largest concern. I believe once we get our staff to the office, we'll be able to keep them safe, but it's the, to and from work. That's the big question mark. We're not a hundred percent sure if we're going to look at volunteers or if we may look at staff, if they're not able to work optimally at home, if they'd be better served working in the office. So we're looking at a couple of different data points that will help us advance our plan and figure out what is the best method for us to go forward. We won't be going back quite soon.

Dave: Right. Still some time left. Are you thinking about reconfiguring your office space to how people sit near each other and not near each other? Is that something that's on your radar screen as well?

Toni: Yes. We have been working with Cushman Wakefield and CBRE, two of our real estate partners in Chicago. They have been helping us with reconfiguration and some plans for physical distancing in the office. So the workplace will look very different for our employees. So there will definitely be six foot physical distancing, dedicated routes that they will flow through the office, going in one door going out



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another door. We will try to have as many keyless entry points as possible. Individuals will have to wear PPE in the office when they're there. We won't have any food service or cafeteria in our office for extended period of time. We are a tenant of a building. So there are certain things that we don't control, which would be the food service. We do have a gym in our facility, the gym won't be there. So it'll be very different.

Dave: Yeah. This is going to be a new normal. And when we're all the way back, if we ever come all the way back, what do you think will be changed forever? You talked about telemedicine. You said that's going to be a change forever. That's going to be a new part of medicine. Is there something about the office work or the way you operate as an organization that you think will always be different now?

Toni: Yeah. I think the fact that we are able to work remotely so well, there will be a percentage of our workforce that will continue to work remotely post COVID. What percentage that is I'm not quite sure. And, not meeting face-to-face anymore, the AMA was a big face to face meeting organization. And I believe the last two months doing everything on [Microsoft] Teams that has allowed us to be very productive. And I think the day of the face-to-face meeting with 20 people in a conference room those days are probably long gone.

Dave: Wow. I imagine the managers, it's a challenge for a manager to onboard a new employee and to get them affective and up to speed as quick as they would, if they were in the office.

Toni: That is a concern that we have. And we're working on different tools and support that we can provide our managers as they're bringing on new folks remotely and just managing people remotely. That's a big strain and it's a concern. And it's also a focus area that we are working on right now.

Dave: Toni, how would you describe the culture of the organization of AMA, your 1,200 employees?

Toni: People join the AMA for the mission of the AMA, which is to improve the health of the nation. It's fantastic that we're all focused on one thing. And so unlike other companies or other industries where they may manufacture multiple things or different lines of business, we really have one line of business and it's improving the health of the nation. We're not going there for stock options or anything like that. We're going there to work on a mission. And so that's really the culture of the organization.

Dave: I'm curious how many people that work for the AMA are medical practitioners. Is there a lot of docs and nurses and people like that?

Toni: We do have physicians and other providers that are employees of the AMA, there are a few practicing physicians at the AMA, it's less than 10%.

Dave: It's a small percentage.

Toni: A small percentage.



Dave: And your leadership. I think you just announced you're going to have your third consecutive woman leader of the organization.

Toni: Yes. We're very proud of that. It's the first time in history. Our current president is Dr. Patrice Harris and our incoming president elect is Dr. Susan Bailey. It's historical times at the AMA that we're very excited and very proud of.

Dave: That's great. How do you develop leadership at AMA? How do you develop management leadership now?

Toni: So I am really excited and really proud of a couple of programs that we've put in place. A few years ago, we rolled out a AMA leadership program and really focusing at the vice president and director level. We put all of our vice presidents through, all of our directors through, and then cascaded the different competencies down to individual contributor level. And this year we rolled out a high potential program called AMA Advancing Leaders. It's a group of high-potentials and they're all formed into different cohort groups, working on real life projects that are at the AMA today, since we've gone to a work remote mode, the cohort groups have continued to meet on their own on the side. So continuing our leadership programs during our work remote times.

I'm also really excited about putting together a talent strategy across the AMA. And I would say that historically, we haven't had one and it's really been around replace-as-you go. And as you know, that's not a real strategy. So we have spent the good part of the fourth quarter of last year, and this year putting together a talent strategy that will work very closely with our business leaders to support them and partner with them on their future needs. Their talent needs for 2021, '22 and beyond.

Dave: I imagine Toni, your talent strategy is working on succession planning?

Toni: It is, we historically have not spent a lot of time and energy around that. But it is something that we have put in place for 2020 and beyond, and putting together a succession planning across the enterprise that we are really excited about. So three real strategic, what I would call talent initiatives that we're working in focusing on for the enterprise this year.

Dave: That's great. Well, we produce this podcast in cooperation with the Northeast Human Resources Association called NEHRA. It's kind of like HRMAC in Chicago. So we have the NEHRA emerging HR professionals question the podcast asked every time by our producer, who's part of that NEHRA group, the marvelous Meghan Mandino. And here she is.

Meghan Mandino: Hi Toni. You're very passionate about your philanthropic pursuits.

Toni: Yes, I am.

Meghan: If anyone were to look up to you, how would you advise emerging leaders to get involved in charity work themselves?



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Toni: It's a very important part of my life and a big part of my life, as corny as it sounds. And I know that there's a saying around those who have been blessed with a lot or given a lot should also in return, give a lot. And I've been pretty fortunate in my life. And I would say lucky. I get out of something that's near and dear to me is an organization in Chicago called West Side Partners [West Side United]. It links directly to a lot of the work that we're doing at the AMA. And there's a physician in Chicago named Dr. David Ansell. And he wrote a really fantastic book. It's called *The Death Gap*. Essentially. It talks about the disparities between the individuals living on the West Side of Chicago versus the individuals who live on what is known as the Gold Coast of Chicago.

The distance between the two neighborhoods are about two and a half miles. The life expectancy of someone who lives on the West Side versus someone who lives in the Gold Coast. That difference is about 15 years. So they call that the death gap. What's happening, or what's not happening on the West Side, that's happening in the North Side or the Gold Coast of Chicago. So that's a big disparity. We are really focusing on partnering with this organization called West Side Partners and other organizations in Chicago to support the health and wellbeing of the individuals that live in the West Side of Chicago. Through education, through training, through healthcare and through industry.

And one way to do that is through volunteerism. We have participated in walks and different activities in Chicago. They have the Taste of Chicago, which is a festival that takes place during the summer where different restaurants come in and you can go and taste all their food. So on the West Side of Chicago, they have something called La Tour of the West Side [Westside Food, Wine & Spirits Festival benefiting Westside Food Bank]. So it's the same kind of concept with different food purveyors on the West side of Chicago. So really getting out and supporting those activities as well as financial support. And we have partnered with an organization that we bring in interns from the West Side of Chicago, into our offices for summer help.

Dave: Toni, if you could write a letter of career or professional advice to your 25 or 30 year old self, what would you write?

Toni: Dear Toni. I'll tell a little story. So I started my career at Motorola. So I was 23 at the time, obviously very junior working with a group of colleagues who were also very junior. And we were putting together a slide deck. You remember those old slides that we used to have and put together a pretty hefty slide deck for a presentation we were making to one of the group presidents at the time. We went through all of our, probably 45 slides. And at the end, the president looked at all of us and said, "How dare you bore me with that level of detail?" I think we all thought that we were going to be fired spot on, but we survived. But that is something that has resonated with me. My entire career is to know your audience. So I would tell my 24 year old self that it's important to know your audience. And that it's more important to do the right thing than to always be right.

Dave: Good advice to all of us. What's the greatest performance, show, sporting event that you've ever seen?

Toni: That's easy. I would say any Notre Dame versus a USC football game that Notre Dame won.



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Dave: Those all tied for first place on your list?

Toni: Yes. For sure, for sure.

Dave: And while working remotely because of COVID-19, has there anything that's been a surprising benefit or something that's new for you because you're working from home?

Toni: I've realized that I'm able to focus more at the task on hand and probably get a lot more done than I have in the office environment, due to less disruption. And I will say I'm probably working a lot longer hours during the day. My commute is much shorter and I definitely start work earlier and work later each day, but I'm really trying to put some constraints in there and some guard rails in there, to get things under control. I don't want to get what I refer to as COVID fatigue. So I'm really trying to be a little more disciplined on that and set some boundaries for myself

Dave: Good for you. Well, this has been great to have this discussion with you. Thanks for letting us interview you.

Toni: Well, thank you very much for having me.

Dave: I'm glad Paul connected us.

Toni: Like wise.

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