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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. Today's guest is Susan Miele, the Head of Human Resources at Foundation Medicine. Foundation is a fascinating organization, transforming cancer care at the intersection of science and information technology.

I had the great pleasure of working side-by-side with Susan for several years when she was a senior partner at our leadership development division, Camden Consulting Group. So, I've seen firsthand what a great talent strategist and thinker she is. Susan has led the HR function in various industries, but she shares how she's really found her passion working in a field where she can make the biggest impact on so many people's lives. Susan talks about how the cornerstone of her HR focus was built around organizational design, and how that's evolved to one that's also focused on team development.

And next up on the podcast is a two-part series from the NEHRA annual conference at Falmouth, Massachusetts. First up is Cynthia Ring, Chief People Officer at Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare, and then Doreen Nichols, the Vice President of Talent, Culture and Organizational Development at Eversource. And now we bring you our conversation with Susan Miele.

Susan, welcome to the podcast.

Susan Miele: Thanks, Dave. Great to see you.

Dave: To start, could you share maybe an early life for mid-career story that was an inflection point for you and what kind of got you going in this direction?

Susan: My very first HR manager job was at Ziff Davis publishing, which was a very progressive company from a talent perspective, and I had a boss who was the head of HR for the Northeast region who came out of the business. So my very first inflection, if you will, was that HR was a business partner. It wasn't a question of HR having a seat at the table. My very early training as a young HR professional before HR as business partners became a thing, even before the Dave Ulrich book became very popular, was a boss who was like, "You're sitting at the table."

The next inflection point was when I went to Thompson and I had the opportunity to be the founding Chief HR Officer at a joint venture called Omgeo. And Omgeo was a pretty complicated business, and as you know, most of joint ventures fail, and our...

Dave: Fintech, right? I guess.

Susan: Yes.

Dave: Sort of. Yeah.



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Susan: It was exactly that. As the founding HR leader working incredibly close partnership with strategy was when my predisposition to linking HR strategy with business strategy and really being able to tangibly say, "Here's how HR is impacting the business strategy," whether it was through retention, or hiring, or organization design structure processes and systems, that it was our partnership strategy in HR with the rest of the executive team that really enabled the success of that joint venture.

Dave: Mm-hmm. Right.

Susan: Those two inflection points were always be a business partner, and always link the work that we're doing to the business strategy, and never be HR for the sake of HR.

Dave: Excellent. And tell us a little bit about, now this is so exciting what you're doing here at Foundation. How did you get this job? How did you end up here?

Susan: I got a call from a recruiter in December of 2016, which I was not looking for a job. I was at Cambridge Associates and I was finishing my PhD. My mom had just passed away. My daughter was graduating from high school and I was like, "Oh, thank you very much, but I'm not interested." So three months later they called back. They said there had been a CEO change here at Foundation Medicine. Would I be interested in coming in for a conversation? And I was like, "I don't need to come to be told what I already know," which is I've never lead HR in a life sciences company.

Dave: But you did work in life science?

Susan: I did.

Dave: Right.

Susan: I did a lot of consulting work when I worked at Camden in life sciences. In fact, I would say 50% of my portfolio...

Dave: Right, right.

Susan: ...was in life sciences. So anyway I thought, "Well, one meeting's not going to hurt." The CEO was the first meeting so I thought, "It's going to go well, or it's not going to go, and it'll be fine." So I came in. He was new to Boston, new to precision medicine, which is really what Foundation Medicine does. And he's a super eclectic guy, and we connected right away. He was like, "Okay, there's going to be three rounds of interviews."

I was still really unsure, and during that interim period, I had gotten a call about another job. So once you kind of start the process emotionally, I was interviewing at another company that I really liked and I had an offer from them, and I was not sure that I was going to have an offer from Foundation because I knew that I didn't have the leadership of HR in life sciences. And so I was waiting for my last round of interviews and I went to talk with Ralph Roberto, who has been a mentor on and off to me. And I started telling him about Foundation Medicine.



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Susan: He's like, "You need to go there." And I was like, "But I don't have that offer yet." He's like, "You need to get it," because Foundation was doing such exciting work. And because once you join an HR team in life sciences, you're in that club. You're kind of peripherally in it..

Dave: Right.

Susan: ...because I have worked with Ginger Gregory at Novartis. I worked with Maureen Powers at Cubist. I did lots of project work within some really interesting life sciences business. I came back to meet with Troy who was the CEO at the time, and he's like, "You know, I really like you." I said, "Yeah, I have another offer and I understand that I have a whole day worth of interviews next Friday." He goes, "Yeah, no. We're going to decide on Tuesday. We have an executive team meeting on Tuesday and we're going to decide on Tuesday." And I was like, "Okay."

And then on Tuesday at two o'clock, I got a phone call from the recruiter and I was told that I had gotten the offer.

Dave: You're moving to the Seaport.

Susan: Yeah.

Dave: So tell us a little bit about that growth and about the science.

Susan: One of the many interesting things about Foundation Medicine is we are both a science and a technology company, and our mission is clear. You could ask anybody who works here what our mission is and they will be able to tell you. It is to transform cancer care. And the way that we're doing that is through, we have a comprehensive genomic test, which basically tests you to tell you what are the markers of your cancer, and then how do you get the right treatment for it.

It is moving cancer treatment from sort of that blast chemo protocol...

Dave: Like you have this type of cancer, you go through the normal regimen. It's not that?

Susan: Right.

Dave: Not that approach?

Susan: Right, we're trying in fact to move as many patients as we can from a chemo-radiation kind of traditional way of treating cancer, to understanding what your cancer markers are and finding a targeted precision medicine treatment for that.

Dave: And are you developing those treatments or you are sourcing what's the right treatment that is out there in the world for you?

Susan: Yes.



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Dave: Okay.

Susan: I'll give you a great story that will I think make it very simple. We have a great patient story, 32-year-old woman who had very aggressive stage four colon cancer. We only work with late stage cancer patients, too, which is...

Dave: And that's a very high likelihood of not making it?

Susan: Right, stage three, stage four.

Dave: Yeah, yeah.

Susan: Stage four is most terminal. Stage four colon cancer, she had a Foundation Medicine test, which is basically her physician ordered the test. They did a biopsy of her tumor. They sent it into the lab. The lab did its thing. The test showed that her cancer markers, the tumor markers were actually breast cancer tumor markers that could be treated with a breast cancer drug.

Dave: Wow.

Susan: So she is full-remission. Cured, almost.

Dave: Right.

Susan: I don't know if she's at the five year mark yet.

Dave: Right.

Susan: But the uniqueness of that tumor was that it was genetically matched with a breast cancer biomarker. So we were able to tell her that and she was able to get a totally different treatment other than chemo and radiation, which is a standard protocol when you don't know what the underlying genesis of the cancer is.

Dave: How do the patients come to Foundation? Is it their doctors are recommending, "Here, this is a great option."

Susan: Yes.

Dave: Do you work directly with the care providers?

Susan: We have two primary business lines of helping patients get our test. One is doctors, oncology centers across the country that we work with, and they say to their patient, "We think you should get the Foundation Medicine test." They do a biopsy. Right now our main product is a tissue biopsy. Sometimes in late stage cancer patients tissue is hard to get, so we are launching a similar product that



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is liquid, so some from order in, client services, through report out, and that's where the technology piece comes in, which I'll circle back to that.

The science part is, test comes in and there's a whole assay development lab that does the testing on the tumor that spits out a medical report, that basically tells the doctor here's what the tumor looks like and here's the possible treatments. We have a comprehensive database that matches tumor type and biomarkers with treatments. So that's our clinical patient direct business.

We then have a huge part of our business which works with the pharmaceutical companies who are trying to find patients to do clinical trials. So they have a drug that they're trying to get to certain types of patients and we are working with them.

Dave: So there's a partnership component?

Susan: Partnership with many, many biopharma companies to help match their precision medicine with the right client or patient base. So it's super cool.

Dave: That is really amazing. And you recently got bought by Roche?

Susan: Yes. Yes.

Dave: Talk a little bit about that and what that means for the growth.

Susan: When I joined Foundation, Roche had a 57% stake in Foundation because they are very dedicated to precision health for the sake of patients. So Roche is 135-year-old business based in Switzerland. It's family-owned, it's a long game for them.

Dave: Not quarterly earnings game?

Susan: No, no, it's not a quarterly earnings game at all. We feel very fortunate to have been purchased a 100% by Roche because it took us off the street, and it took us off of that quarterly pressure to get profitable, and it was a tremendous infusion of capital to facilitate our growth exponentially. So hence why we, we had high growth, but now we were able to really accelerate that growth with the investment by Roche. And because Roche is a drug company, we are run as an independent unit because if we weren't, then all those other biopharma partners would not want to work with us.

Dave: Oh, that's good.

Susan: I think we all feel very fortunate from a human resources and business perspective that we kind of have the best of both worlds. We're part of this giant pharmaceutical company that has tons of money and is really invested in precision health, and we have the autonomy of being an independent company. So for me and for the team of HR people here, I feel like there isn't really a better place to be doing HR. Because we get to invest deeply in our people. We get to be part of and learn and pull from



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this giant, very successful, very well thought of from a people perspective company, and we get to keep our autonomy.

Dave: That's exciting. That's great.

Susan: It's kind of like win, win, win.

Dave: Yeah.

Susan: Now I have HR colleagues where it's sometimes being the head of HR can be quite lonely. Now I have HR colleagues at Roche and Genentech, which is really the US headquarters of Roche that we can bounce ideas off of...we have regular meetings to say we're struggling with this problem...or do you need help on this. And we can use their comp expertise to help facilitate our work here.

Dave: That's great.

Susan: So it's very positive.

Dave: Can you talk a little bit about your new building, your plan for the Seaport?

Susan: We have grown quite exponentially. We had 900 people at the end of last year. We'll end this year at 15- or 16-hundred and we expect to double here in Boston, Cambridge in the next two to three years. And when we started looking for where we could house everybody, because now we're...

Dave: Because you're scattered around Cambridge. I've been to several offices here.

Susan: Yeah, we have a building that holds 500 people, which is our lab space here in Cambridge that we leased the entire building, but we outgrew it, and now we have people here at this adjacent office building, and we took two floors in the Seaport, in the PTC building a few months ago. And then we started looking around for 3,500 employees co-located, that kind of takes where we are now in Seaport and where we are in Cambridge. So we ended up choosing to work with WS Development and Seaport and we will be the lease holders of a brand new headquarters.

Dave: You'll be the name on the building?

Susan: Yeah, 400 Summer.

Dave: 400 Summer.

Susan: Yeah.

Dave: That's great.

Susan: It's 2022 building completion. We haven't broken ground yet. So it's expected.



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Dave: I know it just hit the news not too long ago.

Susan: Yeah, yeah, it will be beautiful and the location of it is really accessible from public transportation because the 93 and the Mass Pike will be able to pull right into the parking lot.

Dave: That's great, we're learning that so many more HR leaders like you are having much more input on the design of space because it impacts culture.

Susan: Yep.

Dave: It sounds like you're working on that, as well. What are you thinking about as you think about the space? What are your goals?

Susan: Well, it's so interesting that you asked that because the space at our building over at 150 is so much more collaborative than this temporary space that we're in here. And we have noticed a difference just in human resources and how we communicate and work together here versus there. The walls were lower there, the cubes were smaller. We were able to like kind of reach out and talk.

My office was all glass and didn't have a door like this. So just the impact that space has on collaboration is just incredible. So my employee engagement team will be leading the employee engagement effort around what should the space be like in that new building, really to facilitate our values around patients, collaboration, innovation, and passion.

Dave: Yeah.

Susan: We're going to try to infuse and use our values to inform how we work together in this new space.

Dave: That's great.

Susan: So it's super exciting.

Dave: You mentioned the values.

Susan: Yep.

Dave: And why don't we shift to what you're doing and your goals for HR here. Why don't you describe the culture?

Susan: The culture has been in transition because we went from being a venture-backed company, we're only 10 years old.

Dave: It was Third Rock, right, yeah.



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Susan: Third Rock backed startup to publicly traded, small kind of scrappy company, to now like some sizable scale grow, kind of semi-grown up company. So the culture has been really in transition during that time. So part of our work since we were purchased by Roche was to really reestablish, re-energize, redefine what is the culture that we want Foundation Medicine to have.

We started that work really by refreshing our core values. I briefly said them and I'll say them again: collaboration, patients, passion, and innovation. So we are now infusing those values across all of our people programs, to really get some consistency in how the culture feels and seems when you walk into any Foundation Medicine space or you talk to any Foundation Medicine employee. It won't be just here's our mission, but here's how, through our values, we're going to achieve that mission.

So, our work this past year since we were purchased, we want our own unique culture. We don't want to be subsumed by the Roche Genentech machine. So how do we establish that? And for me, as an academic in this world of HR, starting with the core values and making sure that people really understand what those are. And that we start to live them, and hire to them, and develop to them, and measure to them was really important. We're right in the middle of that right now, and we have really...

Dave: Would you say that core values, is that owned by HR?

Susan: No, it's owned by the executive team. And so we had a wonderful, no pun intended, foundation to build from, but we needed to evolve that to be our own from an executive team, and also to help us scale. And help be simple enough, as simple as our mission so that we could rally around it in all of our work that we do.

Dave: Susan, I know from when I worked with you and knowing you over these years, that org design is really one of your passions. Can you describe the design of your team and maybe the evolution you expect as you grow even bigger?

Susan: From my perspective, when I think about org design, I think about first, what is it that we're trying to accomplish from a strategy perspective? So you can do it at the macro level, which is the business level, what are you trying to accomplish from a strategy perspective, and then design the organization to that, which is very much what we did at Omgeo and was a big part of sort of the success of that entity. So that's like the enterprise-wide org design.

When I think about it from HR, it's not dissimilar, but it's on like a smaller scale, which is what is the business strategy, therefore what's the HR strategy, therefore how do we need to structure ourselves? I have been searching a little bit for the more contemporary way of thinking about HR structure because I am really actually structured in a rather traditional way, which is business partners on the front end, and centers of excellence on the back end. And I think we actually need a more nimble model. I see us evolving into collapsing those in some way, to more talent platforms and a different, easier way to deliver HR services. I'm really trying to put my org design hat back on and think about how we can do something a little bit more creatively.

Dave: How do you evolve as the needs of the organization evolve and grow?



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Susan: Yeah, and just the needs of employees, right. Like if you think about generationally just how more constant feedback, it's just like the collaboration space, the way that people work together now is just very, very different. So the way that we give feedback should be different, the way that we develop people has to be different.

We have to be thinking about the needs of the employees to enable the highest level of engagement, as well as the highest level of performance to enable our strategy. We have a sense of urgency in terms of the science of cancer is moving so fast. Everybody who works here is like we can't slow down.

Dave: Yeah. Susan, I want to ask you about how you build your team because you have a strong track record of developing HR leaders. I mean, I can think about just two people that came into our organization when you were at Camden that were really in administrative roles, and now they're both HR executives, and other organizations, you've done that, as well.

How do you spot talent and how do you develop it? You, personally, in your teams?

Susan: I do practice what I preach when it comes to org design. So first I think about, okay, what is it that we're trying to accomplish? What's the role? And trying to really define the role well before I try to find the person to do the role, because a lot of times you kind of get attracted to like a person, or a set of skills, but it doesn't always match up to accomplish what you need.

When I came to Foundation, I did the same thing I've done in most, which is like step back and be like, okay, what's the strategy? What's the structure? And then who are the people? Right. And what I have learned over many years is the more diverse the team of HR people working for me, with me, the more successful we'll be. Over the last many years, I've really evolved to make sure that we're hiring people who are passionate about HR for its impact it can make on the business, as opposed to HR for the sake of HR. So philosophically, I would say that's my primary underlying philosophy, which is if we're not impacting the business, then we're not successful.

Dave: Right, how do you link what HR is doing, the people strategy and culture, how do you link that to people that don't work primarily in that space, inside the organization? How do you make the connection for the organization?

Susan: We always, since my early, early days in HR was to have some specific measures around how we were impacting the business. At Foundation Medicine, it's really easy because we are killing it on our hiring goals and if we weren't, we wouldn't be able to meet the business, we wouldn't be able to execute. So this particular measure of success is recruiting top talent, it's really tangible and easy.

Dave: Right.

Susan: Other places it hasn't been, right. It's been more retention or development. And then you have to really put in some specific things that you're measuring. When I worked with Ginger, one of the things we've worked on was a top talent program, and one of the sort of success elements of that was having many different ways to look at this program, and measure was it effective, and was it helping to achieve



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what it was meant to achieve? We looked at things like how many internal promotions were made at director level? What was the uptake on the development initiatives? Were the executives engaged in the mentoring? Were they seeing progress? Were the projects that were done by the mentor teams successful and implemented? So you have to measure it, but I'm not a data person. It can be qualitative. I know a lot of HR teams are moving complicated analytics.

Dave: Sure.

I think Google does a lot in that area, right?

Susan: Yeah, between now and the time I retire, that is not an aspiration of mine. But I do challenge us continually to measure if we're investing in a program, how are we going to measure its success, and how are we going to measure success, not by people liking it, by actually making an impact.

Dave: How do you stay unflappable? No matter what's going on, you don't seem like you're overly-stressed. How do you do it?

Susan: I would say that's another evolution. Earlier in my career, I took it very seriously. I thought I was personally curing cancer care. I learned that you can't want something for the company, or the CEO, or for anybody really, more than they want it themselves. And I felt like I had to start incorporating that into my philosophical way of thinking.

Dave: Was there a moment that the light bulb went off for you on that?

Susan: I was driving so hard, that I got sick.

Dave: Yeah.

Susan: I was like, oh.

Dave: So you never did that again.

Susan: I never did that again. And partly, at that time when I left, I spent two weeks at a yoga retreat, that has helped me to stay pretty balanced. I would not say that I am unflappable. That is a little bit of a...

Dave: There's some flapping.

Susan: Yeah.

Dave: Susan, what advice would you give to your 30-year-old self if you could write a letter and send it back to Susan Miele of 30 years old?



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Susan: Don't take anything too seriously. It is not your problem to solve, and you're not responsible for the success or failure of the entire company. And I think a lot of people in their mid-career, mid-30s to early 40s, they're so career motivated and so want to get to whatever place they're trying to get to.

Dave: Right.

Susan: And when I was at Thompson, I thought my next step was the next biggest job at Thompson, and then it was the next biggest job after that, and then it was going to be the biggest HR job ever, and my career was defined very linearly, and it was sort of like a conveyor belt. Like I was just going to keep going, and going, and going.

Dave: Susan, we produce this podcast at Keystone in cooperation with the Northeast Human Resources Association, and have a young professionals group, and we have the young professionals question of the podcast, which Meghan Mandino, the Producer of The Hennessy Report is going to ask you right now.

Meghan Mandino: As an advocate for talent management and employee engagement, did you yourself ever have a mentor?

Susan: I did. My very first HR boss was what I would consider my biggest mentor. I've had many over the years, people I've gone to for advice and wisdom, and input into career decisions. But my very first HR boss was really the one who I think I learned the most from because of the story I told earlier, which is she refused to have HR take any kind of back seat to anything. It just wasn't even a question. It was like we were and always had a seat at the table from my very first job. And now, HR in many, many companies has achieved that, but not everywhere. And I guess my advice to young HR professionals would be don't go anywhere where you don't have an ability to have an impact on the business because then you're doing HR for HR's sake.

Dave: Susan, what's an interesting fact about you that we couldn't find on LinkedIn?

Susan: That I'm a Certified Yoga and Pilates Instructor.

Dave: Oh, yes. I knew that.

Susan: Couldn't find that anywhere though.

Dave: Now everybody else does.

What's a book or an idea that changed your life?

Susan: The book that I think was most impactful for me was *How Yoga Works*. It's a parable. It talks about how to let go. And it was very important in that time in my life where I was trying to figure out how to both be a successful professional and not take it too seriously. And there's a particular line where it's like, "A pen is just a pen because you give it meaning to be a pen. And if you didn't, it wouldn't



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be a pen, it would be something else." So it's a very interesting parable about life and about how you give things meaning. And if you don't give them meaning, they don't have any ability to control you.

Dave: Impact you, yeah. That's great.

If you could go to dinner with any person, who would it be? And why?

Susan: Bill Clinton. I mean his story, what he did...

Dave: Where he came from.

Susan: ...and he got to where he was and how he comported himself. Good, bad or otherwise, and how he came out the other side of that was amazing. It's fascinating what he does now for the goodness of the world. Right. So he came from a very humble upbringing and he was just iconic in a time in my life where I was paying a lot of attention to that, and I'd love to hear his side of the story and how he came out the other side, really relatively untouched. Right? I watched it so intently and I just thought, I would love to...

Dave: Hear what he has to say.

Susan: ...hear what he has to say.

Dave: Yeah, interesting.

Susan: And not even saying I would like it, or that I agree with that it.

Dave: Right. You're just fascinated by it, yeah.

Susan: Curious about it.

Dave: Yeah. Well, thank you, Susan. Thanks for being a guest on the podcast.

Susan: Great to see you, Dave.

Dave: Great to see you, too.

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