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 Christina Luconi, the Chief People Officer at Rapid7. Christina happens to be one of the first people to rename her HR department to People Strategy and using the term Chief People Officer. We talked a little bit about that on the podcast. She was the first HR person at Sapient, and that was a fascinating organization we talk a little bit about as well. She really shares her passion for her work and how she sees her role as one that drives values and culture throughout the organization in partnership with a visionary CEO.

Christina talks so candidly and openly about her beliefs and approach to her work and her commitment to be all in on the company mission. I'm sure you'll enjoy this podcast. Just a few words about what's coming next on the podcast. We have our diversity and inclusion series of podcasts leading up to NEHRA's D&I gala on March 22nd. The first such podcast is someone who could be described as the father of diversity recruiting in the northeast, and that's Frank McCarthy. He's the President and founder of Diverse Workplace, and he also founded Xavier Associates. Also in this diversity and inclusion podcast series we have Lydia Greene at Tufts Health Plan. Following Lydia, Ed Hurley-Wales from ADP, and maybe even one other surprise guest to follow. Now, I bring you Christina Luconi.

Here we are at the Rapid7 headquarters welcoming Christina Luconi the Chief People Officer. Good to have you on the podcast.

Christina Luconi: Thank you for having me.

Dave: I mentioned this is the headquarters, but not for long.

Christina: Not for long. Another year and a half. It's going to take a while.

Dave: Your news ...

Christina: We are outgrowing our headquarters once again, so I think for the third or fourth time since I've been with the company in the last seven years we are outgrowing our space, and ...

Dave: Those are good problems to have.

Christina: Very good problems to have.

Dave: Growth stories are good.

Christina: Very fortunate.

Dave: Rapid growth, if you will.

Christina: Yes.

Dave: That's the pun of the podcast. I always have one, so I'll just get it out of the way ...

Christina: Excellent. There you go.

Dave: ... very early ...

Christina: You nailed it early.

Dave: ... in this one. Several guests of mine have said you have to interview Christina for the podcast. I've heard about you a lot over the years. I think it's because you've really been a pioneer in leading and pushing the HR function not with external goals, really inside your organizations you've done that, but the word has got out. I'm really excited to be able to sit down with you today and ask you about your background. Before we get into what you've done at this organization and others and your philosophy, what are some of the things that influenced you: people, experiences that helped shape your philosophy and your approach to…

Christina: Sure. Probably a couple of things. A few are people and then one was an instance. I was a psychology major in college, and I thought I wanted to go into therapy work, and I realize this is a horrible admission but very candid, which is a few years into my degree I realized I was probably not nearly empathetic enough to listen to people's problem every single day. My dad who was a very practical three degree guy from MIT said, "Why don't you get a real job for the summer, stop scooping ice cream. Go intern at a company and see if you can find something that actually will get you employed when you graduate."

I found a little growing company in Cambridge, ironically in the same building where we have our development office in Cambridge. It was a little software company, and the company went public about three weeks into my internship. I was an idiot 20-year-old, and I thought, "This is great. Smart people. Good idea. Company goes public, everyone makes money. That's what I want to do." That's what I ultimately ended up going after and finding.

I realized very early on that if you are in growth companies and you are very young with very few skills, surrounding yourself in environments where you just raise your hand and there's so much work that needs to be done. You don't get boxed in. You might have a job description that you have to do, but if you are assertive and say, "Hey, I would love to learn. I would love to help out, or anything you can do to help me, give me an opportunity. I'll learn. I'll work my tush off for you." People jump all over that, because it takes a village to build a startup.

Dave: There's so many needs popping up everywhere.

Christina: There's so many needs. I got very fortunate to figure that out very early on. Just from a growth perspective, I'm insanely curious, love to learn, so those environments were really good for me, and I wasn't always stagnating. The other piece I figured out pretty early on was I asked a lot of

questions, so for me human resources it made zero sense to me. I sort of was like, "I don't understand, if your company is really trying to grow and you're thinking of people as resources, like my printer is a resource." I started questioning, and luckily people embraced that as opposed to saying, "Please shut the hell up and just go file these papers." I got very lucky early on.

I think the most influential people very early on in my career were my dad. He's a serial entrepreneur. He started his first company out of graduate school and with a few of his fraternity brothers, and it actually did quite well. I thought, "It's pretty nice not to have a boss. Wouldn't it be great if you ..." Because it's that easy.

Dave: He's in charge of his career.

Christina: He was interesting on so many different levels, and so much smarter than me in so many different ways, but I learned a ton from him, especially work ethic and being all in. The other very influential people very early on in my career were the team at Sapient. That was my second job out of school, and it was literally a group of 20-somethings running a company before that became a very in vogue thing to do these days. It was a group of people with a lot of magical thinking that we did not know the word no. People like Jerry Greenberg and Stuart Moore, who were the co-CEOs at the time, just had a belief that we could do something pretty spectacular, and we all banded together and created something pretty amazing.

From the time I was there, I think I joined when we were just under 200, and five years later we were at 3,500. That kind of growth is just crazy.

Dave: You mentioned Sapient. I was going to ask you about Sapient because so many great leaders have come out of that organization that are doing super things, especially in the HR function some great leaders have come out. What was it about the Sapient culture that created all of that?

Christina: A couple of things. I think Jerry and Stu set a really good tone for what they thought was really ... Both really insanely smart guys, but also really realized it was going to be the people. It didn't really matter what services we had or what we were doing with the customers. Ultimately it was the people that we had in the organization that were going to allow us to actually achieve those crazy goals. For me that very formatively helped me realize whatever job I ever take in the future I got to choose the job based on the CEO, not based on ... Obviously the company has to look like it's positioned to do well, and all of that, but cyber-security wouldn't have been the thing I grew up and thought, "This is my industry." But it was based on the CEO.

At Sapient what they did was actually less important to me than who I was doing it with. I think that became really important. I think Jerry and Stu set such a balanced tone. They're very, very different leaders. The fact that they shared an office. Before anybody was thinking about all these open work spaces and stuff, we were…

Dave: This is, what, 90s?

Christina: This is 1994/95. Everybody shared an office. We're an executive team, and I shared an office with three other people. We all partnered together on everything. You wouldn't make a move without check pointing it with the team. All these concepts that are becoming really popular now we were thinking about 20-something years ago, and the fact that Jerry and Stu were so balanced. They were both very visionary, but Jerry was very much the face of the company, and Stuart was the mad scientist behind the scenes. There was something for everybody. Everybody could relate.

Dave: Inside and outside.

Christina: Everybody, investors and employees could relate to at least one of them. I think they set an environment where we were all willing to take risks and dust ourselves off if things didn't go well. It was a pretty special place.

Dave: I heard there was something that you might have been involved in, the Founders' Award, which was really about ... Well, you can talk about it. I won't answer your question.

Christina: The way that I have always approached people strategy was to think about what is the culture of the company. I've always been fortunate enough to go in when there was nothing established. I went into Sapient, there was somebody who was doing benefits, but there wasn't really a lot that ...

Dave: There wasn't an HR function.

Christina: ... existed yet. There was no HR.

Dave: Were you one of the first HR people?

Christina: I was the first HR person.

Dave: You were the first HR person there. Wow.

Christina: I have always thought if you start with knowing who you are, so the way I think about culture, culture's getting a lot of press right now, but it gets a lot of press as like free food and ping pong tables, and that's not necessarily how I think about it. I think about it as what is your shared belief system, what's the common thread that binds your entire company together that will allow you to scale. You have to identify that first, and then you have to tie it back to every element of the employee lifecycle, so from how you recruit people, how you onboard them, how you develop them, how you reward them. All of those things become really important.

At Sapient we had a set of core values that were very important to us. Coming up with the Founders' Award was just one more way to tie that back. What is it that we truly value? Back in the day I think we had our employees actually nominate people for who they thought should win the award, and ultimately Jerry and Stu would select the winner. It was based on those values that we really believed in…

Dave: It had quite prestige in the organization if they won that award.

Christina: It did. It went to one person a quarter, I think, and we would do town halls and gather everyone together. For that person that got that and in a very large, growing organization it was a great big deal.

Dave: That's over 20 years ago, before those things were common. What drew you to Rapid7?

Christina: I've been really fortunate. In my career I've done startups. I'm in my fifth or sixth one, and in between I'll leave and go consult. When I leave a company I don't usually go to another company. I go do my own thing and do the same work I do, but with smaller startups, until I fall in love with a customer and say, "Okay. I've got to go join this thing." That's what happened in this case as well. I'd been doing some consulting. Somebody from a former life was working here and said, "We really need some help. We're growing the organization. We think we're going to try to sell it. We need to put some, ultimately, some lipstick on the pig. Can you come help us do this?" And I did.

I thought, "This will be an interesting gig." It's always nice when you know somebody in the organization, and you have a fairly decent perspective coming in. Didn't think I would join it. I didn't think I had another cyber-security company left in me, but I thought it was an interesting project. The longer that I was here, I was here for probably four or five months before Corey, who's now our CEO, he was the COO at the time, started really focusing on what-ifs and what if we really went and played long ball and tried to take this thing and grow it, not just try to sell it, and what if, what if.

I think Corey's a really aspirational, brilliant guy, and I don't throw that ... I think I've used that word twice right now, and I don't throw that around lightly. I've just been really fortunate to work with some pretty amazing people. Super-bright guy. I think what happened at that period of time was people started actually listening to him and started following OK, "I believe we could do that." At the time I think our board ultimately ended up seeing that the team that was in place at that point was really listening to Corey. We had another CEO in place at the time who was great. He was somebody we all respected and liked, but ultimately was focused on some different things.

I think the board ultimately said, "If you're all listening to Corey, maybe he's the right person to run the company." I think around the same time Corey was thinking about what were the next steps for him as well, did he want to stay here, did he want to go try to be a CEO at a small company and learn, and all of those things came to fruition at the same time. Ultimately he and I made a deal at a summer party, Rapid7 party, and did the "I'm in if you're in." That turned out to be an incredibly awesome thing for me, certainly. I don't have more respect for another person. I just think he's an amazing guy to work with.

I also think it was a really special time that we'd gotten to ultimately rebuild a lot of the team. We've had some leadership come and go over the years, and our CTO who was one of our founders is still onboard and still thriving, but we've been able to build a team that we've now been together for most of us for four or five years.

Dave: A little bit about the growth, so I imagine culture is so important to you, and you've built a great culture here, you and Corey and others. When you go global, how does that impact your ability to maintain that culture? How do you keep the most important things to you?

Christina: I think for me it all comes back to the core values, really knowing what you believe in, and they're so tightly tied to everything that we do. That scales globally. We have an office in Dublin, and I was there a while back, and one of the leaders in the office was like, "Look, I totally buy into the core values, but the moose is really stupid." It was kind of funny. I mean culturally they're just like, "That's so hokey, and why do you guys do it?" Our moose is not our core value, it's just one of our symbols of teamwork, and it is a little goofy. We acknowledge that it's goofy, but it also doesn't scale globally.

Dave: Can you explain that concept?

Christina: The moose for us, it certainly predates me. One of our early leaders had come up with the concept of the singular of the word moose is moose, the plural of the word moose is also moose, so together we're all one moose. It became a symbol of teamwork and it ended up taking on a life of its own. Even the day we went public in 2015 and Corey addressed the entire company, and literally it was like moose. He's talking on CNBC about moose, and people are probably looking at him like, "What the hell's this guy talking about?" It is definitely how we refer to each other, and it is a little tongue in cheek and goofy, but it's also a piece of who we are.

To get back to your scaling the culture, I think having that core set of beliefs that ... Our values for us are not just something that we put on a coffee cup or stick up on a sticker on the wall and say, "Everyone, go memorize it." Instead it's so tightly wound into everything that we do. We're going through a promotion process right now for new leadership in the company, and we evaluate people on skills and do they have strong leadership skills and all these other things. We also measure them on their core values.

You could be phenomenal, you could be an amazing salesperson who's knocking it out of the park in terms of hitting your number, but if you are not operating as a team player or if you are not interested at all in learning and growing, but rather you want to do everything by the status quo, you're likely not getting promoted because that is one of the ways that we allow those values to scale. Fortunately because that is such a huge piece of who we are and what we weave in, we look for leaders that embrace that, so globally the people that we've hired are certainly in support and lead through the values.

Obviously in each office they have their own little certain vibe to them. Everything feels a little bit different in Singapore than it does in Belfast, than it does in Los Angeles. However, the mindset is still very similar. For example, we have kick offs that we do each year, and when we bring ...

Dave: Product kick offs?

Christina: Historically we had done it the entire organization coming together. This is the first year that we're just so big that you can't send everyone to Boston. We've split it up. We have a products kick off,

we have a sales kick off, we have a services kick off, and then all our G&A functions end up going to the sales kick off or a piece of that. When we did our last one that was global, we had everybody in the company come in and we had our folks from Singapore, and we had our folks from our European countries, et cetera, and yet they walked in the room and every single person bled Rapid7.

It was like the fact they lived in different countries sort of disappeared very quickly, and everyone had this connection point. We all spoke the same language, and that was just such a moving moment of like, "Wow, it does work."

Dave: The culture. It does. What are some of the values?

Christina: We start, so if you think of it as a compass, we ... First of all, let me give you a little context to how we came up with them. We actually used a group of about 30 cultural icons, if you will, in the company when we were about 90. I'd been here for just probably two months or so before we started working on…

Dave: Where you just identified, "Here, these are people …

Christina: We just said these are people that …

Dave: "… that we want to build…"

Christina: … we believe they're doing…

Dave: We like the way they operate.

Christina: We like the way they operate. No one can articulate what our culture is, but we think these are the people that really get it. They represented every team, every level in the organization. I worked with them for about two months where we tried to articulate what do we believe in. Some of them were aspirational, and some of them we thought we nailed, and whatever, but rather than have the executive team come down and say, "This is what we believe in," we thought, "What is it that we believe in?" Obviously the exec team had to sign off and we tweaked a few words, et cetera, but ultimately this group of people, a third of the company was already bought in by the time we rolled them out. That made it significantly easier for adoption.

Dave: Correct.

Christina: What we ended up coming up with was if you think of a compass and the center of it is meaningful customer partnerships, and that was really, candidly, our aspirational value at the time, because when we were sub $20 million, we were selling a lot of air. We didn't have established products yet. We were just building.

Dave: Trying to make a name.

Christina: Trying to make a name for ourselves and build our brand. We were so fixated on just getting the revenue and pounding the phones and things, and we thought really if we're going to scale this thing we need to operate differently. Customers obviously, I think lots of people have customers in their aspirations, and that's really important, but the word partnership became the operative word there, which is we need to actually listen to our customers. We need to worry with them about what's keeping them up at night. What are they afraid about? Rather than just being fixated on selling them something, let's really understand their needs.

It just became a completely different way of approaching our customers, and it used to be aspirational. I'd like to think that we've gotten much, much, much better at that over the years. Then the reason we did a compass was because on the axes they actually are meant to work together. We have continuous learning and disciplined risk taking on one set. For us the way that we're going to continue to scale this company pretty quickly and continue to innovate is by taking disciplined risks and discipline is important to us because we don't want to be completely stupid, and everyone jump out a window.

Dave: You are in the risk and security business.

Christina: Right. We'll take some disciplined risks, and if they work then we'll continue and invest and take bigger risks. Along the way we need to be insatiably curious. That continuous learning for people that just say this is the status quo, or I've nailed it, now I'm onto the next thing, those people don't necessarily love being here, because we're constantly asking ourselves what could we do differently, what could we do better. The world is changing so quickly, how do we adapt?

Dave: It reminds me of something you said. I was in the audience when you were speaking at the EBS event down at Gillette Stadium, and you talked about how Corey wants people to challenge his thinking and the thinking of the organization.

Christina: I think he's an incredibly confident person to be able to be a CEO who anyone could challenge him and ask questions. Lots of times he's right, and sometimes he's wrong. He has no problem being wrong, because it's pushing his thinking. Corey is the interesting CEO who still takes the bus every day to work so that he can listen to podcasts on his way to work, or read. He's always…

Dave: Maybe he'll listen to this one.

Christina: He knows enough about me. He probably doesn't need to. He's always looking to learn something new, and I think he believes, he really believes that can come from anyone in the company. If somebody is a new BDR who has a point of view on something, he's certainly willing to listen to it.

Dave: That's consistent with one of the values you were just talking about, but I cut you off. There's more on the compass.

Christina: No. Continuous learning and disciplined risk taking are two huge ones that work hand-in-hand. Then the other two are individual excellence and teamwork and those go hand-in-hand too, where we obviously try to hire the best people that we possibly can. That isn't just like you have a great

resume, great skill set, but you are not just understanding but embracing our values; you have a great attitude, but you can't just make it all about you. If you're one of those people that's like, "Sure, I'll take on that extra project. How much more are you going to pay me? When does the promotion come with it?"

We're of the mindset of we're playing for the team. We're all playing for the team, and everyone has to have that "grab the shovel" mentality. By the way, if you operate that way, all that other stuff that you care about is absolutely going to happen. The people that truly live our core values are the ones that get the biggest raises, the most promotions, the most opportunity. It's maybe a backwards way of doing it, but that has worked really well for us.

Dave: How do you know when you're interviewing somebody that they fit the culture? Can you find out through interviewing?

Christina: We try. I think it's hard. Certainly we've made mistakes just like everybody else, but again, every single person that comes in here has a culture interview. Now, everyone else is all the other interviews they have are probing at some stuff, but there is ... I still, everybody director and above, I still interview within the company, because I'm going hardcore on the culture stuff, and I will ask them questions about not just, "Hey, do you know what our core values are?" But really like, "Give me an example of when you took a disciplined risk, and tell me about when you failed at it, and how did you respond?" And those types of things.

I think the fact that we really drill on that stuff, it's hard to recruit. We happen to have offices in some pretty competitive markets, and it would be really easy to just default and put a butt in a seat because you get a little antsy and desperate and whatever. Anytime that we have ever done that it has failed miserably, and the person's never lasting. The culture piece for us, I don't care how good your resume is, if you're not a fit and not just a fit, candidly, but going to contribute to it. I think the notion of culture fit sounds like come morph yourself to be like us, which I don't know necessarily love. I think about it more in terms of what are you going to actually contribute to our culture to continue to have it flourish, so we look for those people.

Dave: Can't somebody be just charismatic in the interview, and kind of ...

Christina: We can cut through that bullshit.

Dave: You can? You can. You can get through that.

Christina: I've interviewed thousands of people in my life. I think I've a pretty decent radar at this point. Sure, people do that. That's happened to us.

Dave: We mentioned earlier the new headquarters at North Station, at the old Boston Garden site. Maybe you could talk a little bit about how that fits in with or will fit in with your culture and your growth strategy?

Christina: Sure. We've grown a lot. When I joined we were in this, I won't make fun of our old space, but it was like classic startup space in Back Bay, and it wasn't very glamorous at all. I'm sure it was some kind of hazard.

Dave: Like many startups.

Christina: Yes. Exactly. Build your own desk and it was very glamorous. Then we grew up a little bit and outgrew that space and ultimately ended up with the Prudential, which felt ... This is probably a horrible analogy, but we felt like, to me, a teenage boy wearing his dad's suit to the prom. It just did not fit us at all. Might have looked good from a distance, but it was a lot of mahogany. If we were a law firm it probably would have been lovely.

Dave: Like a hedge fund or something.

Christina: Yeah. It just didn't suit us at all. When we finally moved into this space in 100 Summer, that was the first time that we actually got a chance to really be creative with what are we trying to create here, what are we trying to do differently. We worked with an amazing design firm, interior architects and they've become such a great partner with us in our other spaces. They really were great at pulling out some of the ideas in our heads and actually having it come to life here. We've been here three and a half years, I guess, and we thought we were so forward-thinking when we came here. We thought this was the most amazing space.

Dave: You'll be here 20 years, or something.

Christina: Oh my God, this is so great. Look at how creative we are. Three and a half years later it feels so dated to us, which has really made us think differently about this new space. What we ended up doing when we knew we were outgrowing this and we needed to start looking for a new space, we didn't just think, "How do we focus on headquarters?" But rather, "What is going to be the physical manifestation of our culture and how do we set the tone with a headquarters, but actually have that work through all of the different offices that we have?" Not so they all look exactly alike, but they all have some key elements.

It really challenged us to think about how are people working today. People are working today differently than they worked when we moved here three and a half years ago. For example, I took my office apart and my 14 year old daughter one night was being really, candidly, very annoying, and I gave her a project of like, "Just give me 15 minutes to finish this. Here's a box of my office. You have a thousand dollar budget. See what you can design." She actually came up with…

Dave: Like on HGTV, that episode.

Christina: Yeah. She did it. I think she went $100 over budget. By the time she was done though she thought, "Well, mom, when you're at home you sit on the couch and you check your email. Sometimes you sit at the desk when you have things to do, and then when you're talking to people you need to be

really comfortable in talking, because it feels like a power move if you're sitting over a desk." I don't know how she learned this at 14, but she was completely right.

Dave: Listening to her mom, probably.

Christina: I got rid of all my office furniture, and I have the one weird office in the company where I bought all my own stuff. I have a great couch. It feels like a ... Ironically, coming full circle; never became a therapist: my office looks like a therapist's office. It's turned out to be great. That one little stupid move actually started me thinking about how do people work now, how do we want to think about the way in which all of our people have different needs throughout the day. We started designing a space that would allow people to sit at a fixed desk and have their own space and be able to do thought work, but also build communities and neighborhoods so that people could do different things, and there's different destinations and spaces where people can huddle together, and you don't have to be in a closed room to have a meeting. You could do a stand up with a tall table.

Dave: This is already designed. It's a year and a half away.

Christina: We've already designed it.

Dave: The plans are in place.

Christina: We wanted to design it really quickly, because we knew, for example, our Austin office is moving in February, and we would want to apply those same theories to these other offices.

Dave: Again, consistent culture across the whole world.

Christina: Exactly. We involved, just like we do anytime we have people-related stuff, we involve a lot of our people in making some of those decisions. We might have the initial thought, but any idea I ever have is going to be infinitely better if we involve our people and sort of, "How does that really work for you? How will this manifest?" I'm pretty excited about being able to do this. We now have, literally just started yesterday, somebody phenomenal who's running workplace experience, and we don't think about it as real estate. We really think about ...

Dave: It's part of your…

Christina: ... It reports to me. It's really the physical manifestation of our culture.

Dave: You were one of the first people to change the name of HR. I think we touched on it a little bit as you talked about the culture here and the culture at Sapient. Chief People Officer, people strategy, you've used that language already in our conversation. Maybe just a little bit about how you started to think about that. I think you did touch on it already at Sapient, but just more of the thinking around how you think about what HR's role is, the words you use. I don't think you use the word employee, or you might. I don't know. Maybe you do.

Christina: We do.

Dave: I don't know…

Christina: I don't have a hang up about that one. I definitely have a hang up about human resources.

Dave: Maybe just a little explaining that.

Christina: Sure. I think, again, I mean I just don't like the word human resources, because I don't like thinking of people as resources. I just think…

Dave: Because it sounds like a physical object…

Christina: …it sounds like a physical object.

Dave: …or a line item on a spreadsheet, or something.

Christina: Honestly they are the lifeblood of your company. I think we have to think about them that way. That doesn't mean I think you have to kowtow and deal with every entitled thing that people want. That's not how I think about it, but I will certainly not suggest that I came up with the notion of people strategy, but I've certainly never heard of it before we started using it at Sapient. The reason that we came up with it that way was because when I joined we spent a lot of time thinking ... Before I signed up, Jerry and I both had some pretty deep conversations about it. He's like, "I hate HR. We haven't had it till now because I hate the whole complaint department, that kind of thing." I'm like, "That's not what I want to build. I don't want to do that at all."

We ended up coming up with that whole concept, I think, together. The way that I ended up getting a job there was because we were in deep agreement that this is the strategic direction of the company, and the people have got to support that strategy. If you marry the business strategy with the people strategy, you're probably going to get people that understand. and understand how to operate in that environment. That's where it initially came from. Then it became really important to not just ... People throw the word strategy around a lot. I don't know. I think that's been one of the challenges in the HR community overall, where everyone wants to be strategic, they just don't feel like they have the voice to be, or the courage to. I don't know. I won't suppose why they don't do it.

I have been incredibly lucky in that I've chosen to work with CEOs who get it. I don't even know how to define what get it means, but they get the people piece of it. I understand that I am incredibly fortunate for that dynamic between Jerry and Stu and then the folks I worked with at @stake and then Corey. I don't do a lot of stuff well, but I choose CEOs well, and to find one that truly gets the people elements of it. They don't necessarily have to know how to do it, they just have to really understand and embrace it.

Dave: Speaking of leadership, maybe a little bit about your views about leadership here at Rapid7 and what makes a great leader at this organization. I imagine it has something to do with the culture.

Christina: I think so. I think there's a couple of pieces to it. Number one, I mean culture fit really it's not just a thing. It is really important to us. For example, we have hired, I'll try to be delicate about this, but we have made mistakes, and if we focus on skill and think, "Okay, well this person, it's a good person." We've never hired too many jerks, but we think, "They'll learn the culture. They'll figure it out." If we don't really believe the person's ultimately a culture fit, we absolutely should not hire them, because we've found that it just blows up in our face, and it can cause so much damage, especially the more senior the person is.

One of the interesting dynamics that I've seen as we have grown larger and I've seen this at every company I've ever been at is that when you grow leaders from within the organization, or when the company's much smaller it's so easy to find those fits and have it all work together. The larger you get and the more people you need to bring in from the outside at very senior levels, they've been successful for a reason. They have a playbook that they follow and it worked here, so it's going to work here, and maybe they just put a different color on the folder but this is my book. I think that's a little bit dangerous. I think everybody has to, you start fresh every place you go, and it doesn't negate any of the past successes you've had, but it does mean you have to understand the environment that you're joining.

We've had some fits and starts with that here with some of the senior leaders that we've brought in. In fact, Andrew Burton who's our COO we ended up with him as one of our leaders by acquisition. We had bought his company right after we went public, which was insane on our part, but again, we take lots of risks. It turned out to be a really good one. I think Andrew's thought process at that point was, "I'm going to come here. I'll do my year to integrate the companies, and then I'm going to go off on my merry way and be a CEO again." When we were doing the diligence, I think I was the last person that Andrew met, and he tells this really funny story about how, "Why in the hell am I meeting with this girl Christina? What are we going to talk about? Maybe she wants to talk about my comp or something."

I was there to figure out whether or not this ... The deal was almost done, but if I didn't think that Andrew was a good culture fit, I was going to put the kibosh on the thing. We ended up having this incredibly candid, honest conversation about his leadership and what he was good at, and what he had struggled with and why that would work here and all kinds of stuff. By the end of that meeting I would have run through a wall for him. I thought he was going to be phenomenal here. I think he walked away saying, "Oh my gosh. They actually take this really seriously. That's great." He didn't really get it until he started and he sat in his first exec staff meeting, and our general counsel was asking all kinds of questions about the forecast.

He's like, "Why the hell would this guy be asking ... You're a lawyer. Why are you asking about this?"

Dave: That's not your department.

Christina: Yeah. What he really ascertained very quickly was they really take this stuff seriously. They are all in this together. They all want to help each other. I think the bottom line is like I might major in people strategy, but I minor in products, and sales. I think we all think about that. I think we all think that way. We're kind of all in this together. We all have to support each other.

Dave: You and I were at, when I first met you just several weeks ago actually, at the HRLF event. There was a speaker that talked a lot about millennials and how you attract, retain, what's different about millennials than other generations. What are your views on millennials here at Rapid7?

Christina: I think they get a bad rap, lots of them. I think that what I've learned is, yes, is it a different generational group? For sure. We've taken a couple of knocks from them and we've tweaked a little bit. I'm not a huge fan of changing our behavior just to accommodate folks. However, we've learned that a lot of our millennials really value progression, for example. That doesn't mean that everyone's going to have a VP title by the time they're 24, but what we've done, so for example, in our sales org we've done micro promotions. If somebody goes from a business development rep to a senior business development rep inside a fairly short time period they're getting the skills, they're growing their career, they're beginning to build things, but they're actually seeing some recognition of, hey, I'm growing and learning, get a little more money, et cetera.

Dave: More steps on the ladder.

Christina: Exactly. That seems to resonate with them. That's certainly an easy thing for us to do, and I think everybody else. Our software developers aren't necessarily expecting to go up the ladder as quickly, but that's become really important. We were able to streamline that a bit. I think another thing that we've learned is they're incredibly mission-driven. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves, and I'm speaking in very general terms because it's not a one size fits all thing. More so than any other group, generational group that I've worked with I think they really care about what is the mission and what's their place in the mission. That actually works really well in this company, because I think we're really…

Dave: Because you're such a values organization.

Christina: Yeah. We're such a mission-driven place. I think that really works for them, and we try to harness that stuff, but it's really helped us think about things. For example, over the last couple of years I've become very focused on giving back to the world, because I think if we're very mission-driven anyway sometimes it's nice to just step outside of your own world and do something for other people. That benefits the community, but it also benefits us as people. For example, a local organization in Boston called TUGG, Technology Underwriting Greater Good, that works with a lot of local tech companies helping social endeavors.

We started getting involved with, years ago, and just helping out with projects and things, and then we started partnering with them on this event they do every fall called Tech Gives Back, and it's a lot of businesses within the local community that will literally go give a day of service within maybe a five or six mile radius. We found that when our people go offsite for a day and work together with people they don't normally work with on a daily basis, they build new relationships.

Not only do they feel great about doing the work and raking a senior's lawn, or whatever, but they now have new people to work with at work, and they're building those cross-collaborative relationships that become so much easier. When we're on a sales call next week and you need help from somebody in that

thing, you, "I actually know somebody in legal that I can call and talk to." It's broken down a lot of barriers. We've done that for the last couple of years, and now we've blown it out to the entire company. For the last two years we've actually done a day of service with TUGG on their day, but every single office in the company will do a give back day.

Dave: Work together and ...

Christina: The same thing, and it's ...

Dave: ... a lot of ...

Christina: ... worked really, really well.

Dave: Multiple benefits it sounds like.

Christina: Exactly. We're doing a lot of stuff like that as we continue to get a little bit larger, and it's helping break down barriers, so it helps.

Dave: That's great. That same speaker had two things. I actually wrote them down, and one of them he talked about was have negative competencies. For some reason things stick out and if you have a value that's do the opposite of that thing, it works better. You have one here, I heard. Is it DBAA?

Christina: Don't be an asshole? Yes.

Dave: That's a negative competency but can you just talk about how that works, that dynamic of having a negative competency, and how does it work here?

Christina: I think it's a little crass, but it's pretty to the point about who we are. We have very well-articulated values, and things that are really important to us, but at the core of it you can't be an ass here. You just can't. It's really hard to get fired here. This is like Harvard, hard to get in but once you're here it's pretty hard to leave unless you do something completely egregious or are failing miserably, and then we try to part ways as humanely as possible. The way that you get pushed out really quickly is if you're an ass. Fortunately we don't have too many of them. We haven't had to do that very often. It's such a crisp way of just saying this is our bar for what works and what doesn't work here. If we see that behavior in someone, it just ...

Dave: People can see it quickly, and they know that's not us.

Christina: Exactly. It's just not us.

Dave: That's cool. The other thing he said that I thought was really interesting, he talked about ... You're much more skilled in people strategy than I am, of course, but he said something about performance and engagement don't come sequentially. You don't have engagement, then you have great

performance, that they happen simultaneously. I just thought that was interesting. I didn't know what you thought of that, or if you have any comments about that.

Christina: I think I probably agree. I think we were all raised, and I'm old at this point so I have years going back of people thinking about the hierarchy and how do I get ahead, and how do I move up the ladder, et cetera. I think here we tend to not think of it as a ladder, but rather a lattice, which is a semantic difference. There's no one way to get where you're going. I look at the people on my team who are all quite different from one another, and the paths that they're taking. They all may end up as chief people officers at some point, but they're taking very different paths to get there. I think that's true of a lot of our folks.

Sure, there's some skills that you need to have, et cetera, but I don't think that any of us believe that you have to follow one prescriptive path to get anywhere, and instead take advantage of every opportunity. Lee Weiner who runs our products organization is such a great example of that. He had been a web designer, I think, at one point in his career. He was a sales engineer. He's done a million different things. I think he was also a music journalist at one point. He's just had a really fascinating career, and now he's running products. He said he ran into an old friend the other day, and they were like, "How did you end up with that job?" He's brilliant at it. He's so strong.

I think he's just, "Because I said yes to every really interesting opportunity, and it really formed the way that I think differently." I think that's probably an undercurrent here. We appreciate that people think differently, that they're not just, "I'm going to have the perfect resume, and go here to here to here to here." But rather, "I'm going to take advantage of every opportunity put in front of me. I'm going to make the most of them, and that is going to make me a much more well-rounded, interesting person."

Dave: Now, we've come to the NEHRA question of the podcast. We do this podcast in cooperation with NEHRA. Advice you'd give to people up and coming in the people strategy function.

Christina: Well, so a couple of pieces. One, choose CEOs wisely.

Dave: You're proof of that.

Christina: Whether you're junior or senior. If you're somebody more senior, it becomes incredibly more important, because you're going to be the person's person. Choose a person that you really believe in and has integrity and truly, again, they don't have to know how to do it, but they have to believe in the importance of it. If you're junior and just starting out, I think it's look at the leadership team, look at every cue that you can take. It's not just about what's your salary and what's your title, but really who is this company, what do they believe in, and how are you going to learn in that environment. I think that's one piece of it.

I think the other piece is if you are fortunate enough to find that person, take full advantage of having a voice. This is such a pivotal time in the world. There's so many different things happening, but I think so many people in HR were raised as either the complaint department or the compliance people, or the people that say no. That is such a waste of our role. Those things are important, but not nearly as

important as bringing the right people into your organization, scaling them, creating an environment where people are learning, and growing, and developing. If you can figure that stuff out, everything else follows beneath that. Sometimes you have to be the dissenting voice at the table. You have to be able to ask the hard questions or challenge people. I don't know why, but I think that's really hard for people to do.

I've some theories as to why HR people aren't comfortable doing it, but get out of your own way, and if you really want to make the impact that you think you're capable of doing, you've got to be able to do that. I have found now that CEOs are begging for that. I think one of the reasons that Corey and I connect as much as we do is that I've no ulterior motive. I'm not trying to take his job. My next job isn't as CEO. I'm not trying to get anywhere. My sole role here is just to make sure that we're staying honest with ourselves about are we living up to the culture that we proclaim that we really believe in.

Dave: That's right. The values. Sure.

Christina: Sometimes you have to challenge things and sometimes you have to push things, and those can be hard conversations to have. Thankfully we've built that trust with each other that we can be pretty candid. We're fortunate to have a team that buys into that as well.

Dave: Good advice. If you could give advice to yourself, to your 30-year-old self, if you could have that opportunity to write a letter to your 30-year-old self, giving yourself career advice or leadership advice, what would you write?

Christina: It would probably be a little younger than 30. I think what I realized, and this is the one downside of Sapient that I realized was when I was there it was hyper-growth to the nth degree. We literally used to have sleeping bags under our desks, and people would come through it, because it became like a macho thing to pull all-nighters and do this crazy stuff. Again, it was kids running a company. We'd lie as people come through: "Are you sleeping here?" "No. No. We have a camping club." It was just so bad.

Dave: You were sleeping there.

Christina: I ultimately left after five years. It was an amazing experience, but I wanted to ultimately start a family, and I thought it would probably be advantageous if I was actually in the same state as my husband to try to make that happen. I ended up going. What I realized when I left was I felt like a cult victim who needed to be deprogrammed, because my whole life was about that company. No fault of their own, it was my own fault, but I think a lot of us…

Dave: It sounds like it wasn't just you.

Christina: I think a lot of us behaved that way, where all your social circle, everything that you did became that place. There was something really, at that time, really great about it. It also made me realize whatever I do next I can't be one dimensional. I have to have other things that are important to me in my company. I see that sometimes with some of our younger people here, where it's such an

awesome culture, these are the people you want to spend time with. Their friend circle is this, whatever, and then if someone leaves it is like absolutely devastating. I think the point is like we all have lives outside of work, and those are really important to have. I think now that we've grown up and I work with a leadership team that actually all has families, and we all have whatever. You don't have to sleep under your desk to have a massive impact.

I would argue, obviously I have a lot more wisdom having played this role for many more years, but I would argue if I had that insight when I was 25 or 30 at that period of time and I had something else going on in my life besides that job, I probably would have been even more effective at my job. I think now I look back and I do everything I possibly can here…

Dave: You're all in, but there's life balance.

Christina: I'm so all in, but, man, I have a probably not balance, but there's other things that I really care about, and that I optimize for, and I think we all have those things, and I think we're probably all healthier and better off because of it, and probably more impactful in our jobs.

Dave: Good insight. Now I got a couple of silly questions for you. We're wrapping up the podcast here. If you could meet any living person for dinner, who would it be and why?

Christina: Living person. Richard Branson is the first answer off the top of my head. He just thinks differently.

Dave: Virgin.

Christina: I think he's a pretty amazing person. You're going to walk away and I'm going to think of 30 more answers, but he would be the first one to pop into my head.

Dave: If you were stranded on an island, what three items would you bring with you?

Christina: Items or people?

Dave: I'll let you change the answer. Bring the people.

Christina: I would bring my two daughters and my cell phone with a cord so I could plug it in and not lose power, because I could do everything from there.

Dave: Do you have a secret life hack that you're willing to share?

Christina: I don't know if it's a life hack, but I think I realize I actually believe you can have it all. I just think you can't have it all at the same time. What I have figured out as ... I'm a single mom with two teenage daughters, which explains all the gray hair, and ...

Dave: I don't see any.

Christina: You're kind. What I realized is there's all kinds of things I want to do in my life and there's not nearly enough time to do them. I've optimized right now for being the best mom I possibly can to navigate these interesting teenage years with my kids. I double down on that, and I double down on work. That means that probably my social life isn't as rich as I wish it was, or I don't get to do some of the things that I want, but that time will come. I keep that in perspective. Right now my life is about as balanced as it possibly could be based on the choices that I've made.

Dave: It was so great to have you on the podcast, Christina.

Christina: Thank you for having me.

Dave: This has been a really great discussion.

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