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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 Tracie Sponenberg, the Chief People Officer of The Granite Group. You've probably heard Tracie's name, or seen her speak, or seen her post on LinkedIn or Twitter, she is somebody that really gives back to the HR community. She talks about how she got her start connecting with the larger HR world, and also how mentoring and giving back is a very important part of who she is. And by the way, Tracie is speaking tomorrow, February 12th. She is the closing keynote at NEHRA's Talent Acquisition Summit, the first summit from NEHRA.

Next up on the podcast is Graham Walters, the Chief People Officer at DraftKings. And now, our conversation with Tracie Sponenberg.

Tracie, welcome to the podcast.

**Tracie Sponenberg:** Thank you for having me.

**Dave:** So, I guess we should start where we met. My brother Mike, who introduced me to you through his colleagues at ADP, Anthony Taliento and Justin Bacon, because the three of you run DisruptHR New Hampshire.

**Tracie:** Right.

**Dave:** I had the good fortune of being invited to speak at Canobie Lake Park, an event you organized. What a great venue.

**Tracie:** Yeah, and you were great. That was a fun night.

**Dave:** It was. We had you, and Michelle Strasburger speak, as well as your CEO, Bill.

**Tracie:** Yup.

**Dave:** And actually, Emma Woodthorpe, who has been on our podcast recently, as you know.

**Tracie:** She is wonderful. I just saw her a couple months ago at OPTIMA.

**Dave:** Oh, that's right.

**Tracie:** I was on a panel with her.

**Dave:** You guys did a great job. You are very involved in the HR community, running DisruptHR, of course. You have a lot of other stuff going on, I'll just rattle it off. You run DisruptHR, you just spoke at



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Disrupt Boston, you've been involved in lots of SHRM activities around the country, you run Reboot with Michelle, who we just talked about. You spoke at Hacking HR Unleash, you've spoken at the Tri-State SHRM, the ABT Tech conferences, I think you're coming up on another one of those again. The Space Coast, we can go on and on, Women in Industry. And you're actually an upcoming keynote, at the Arizona SHRM, the closing keynote. So, you have a lot going on?

**Tracie:** Yeah, that's very exciting, yes. That's in addition to the day job. I have a very, very, very supportive CEO, who I think we'll talk about a little later. But, it's a lot of fun, and it's a great way to give back to the community.

**Dave:** Yes, you're doing a lot, it's very helpful. And you promote a lot on LinkedIn, and social, we'll talk about that, too.

We usually like to start the podcast, and let our listeners get to learn a little bit about where our guests come from, and what their mindset is. Could you talk a little bit about, maybe, an inflection point in your career that, as you look back on it now, it was something that really got you focused on the things you're focused on today?

**Tracie:** I spent a lot of my career as just a heads down, office worker, plugging away, plugging away for years, almost decades. I don't want to date myself too much, but I will. I'm 47, so I've been doing this for a while. I did that for a long, long time, and just focused on giving back to the company, and the people, and doing the right thing, and doing HR, not necessarily working in the business.

Not quite four years ago, I had a friend who was organizing a local HR presentation on transgender issues in the workplace. We had just had our first transgender employee come out, and we're a plumbing wholesaler, so this was something that I was very worried about, we did a lot of research on, to make sure that she really felt comfortable. She was transitioning, while working. It went beautifully, and our people ... I should have expected, our people were wonderful, our customers were wonderful, and very supportive.

So, I called and said, "Hey, can you share the story with the speaker?"

**Dave:** What speaker?

**Tracie:** It was Linda Johnson.

**Dave:** Oh, okay.

**Tracie:** She, who I sort of knew, called me and said, "Would you co-present?" I'm an introvert, and that was terrifying. I didn't speak in public, I just didn't.

**Dave:** So, this was a local HR?



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**Tracie:** Local HR. I was actually President of the group, about 10 years prior. I was so nervous, I had to get up, introduce a speaker, and leave and go back to my office, and hide, because it was so terrifying to get up in front of people. So, I had a chance to say yes or no, and I said yes.

So, this other side of the things that I do – that was really the start of it.

**Dave:** What was the experience like? It must have been a great experience.

**Tracie:** Horrifying, and terrifying, to get up and stand in front of people. But, what I realized was, *after*, I had a lot of people come up, I had a lot of people call, and email, and share their stories, and thank me, and ask for advice. I went, "Wow, I have something to offer, in that way."

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** I didn't connect that. So, that gave me the courage, and the confidence to apply to speak at HR Tech, which was the one year they were offering a small business track, and we had gone through a tech transformation here at The Granite Group, and I spoke about that. Then, that led to meeting Mary Kaylor from SHRM, who led to speaking at SHRM last year, and all kinds of things, so it's all connections.

**Dave:** It's been a snowball effect?

**Tracie:** It's been a snowball effect.

**Dave:** From that first, just saying yes, I'll try. I'll speak at this event?

**Tracie:** Getting outside of my comfort zone, and then feeling comfortable enough being uncomfortable to get, then, even more uncomfortable and make those connections.

**Dave:** That's great. Well, let's talk about your day job.

**Tracie:** Yes.

**Dave:** You've got a lot going on, but you spend a lot of time running the people function in HR, here at The Granite Group in Concord. Tell us a little bit about the business?

**Tracie:** If you're not a plumber, you may not have heard of us. We're trying to change that. Slowly, but surely, I think we are. But, we're a plumbing, heating, cooling, water, and propane supply house. How I usually describe that is if you, or I, a homeowner, would call a plumber and the plumber comes to the house and says, "Yeah, you need a new wax ring." They say, "Okay, I have one at the office, I'll run back and get it," and they're coming to us, and they're buying from us.

Most of our customers are plumbers, the largest majority. That's split among a bunch of different sectors, but plumbers are our bread and butter. That's the best way to describe that, we're a middle



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person. We don't make anything, we're not a manufacturer, we're an intermediary. But, because we have a central distribution network in Londonderry, we have 45 locations throughout New England.

**Dave:** How many employees are you up to now?

**Tracie:** About 600.

**Dave:** 600. In how many states in New England?

**Tracie:** Six states.

**Dave:** All six states? All six states.

**Tracie:** All states. The hub, and the central distribution, the heart of our company, feeds out every day, to all these locations. So, if you want a large boiler, or a shower, we also have 16 retail facing Ultimate Bath stores. So, we have this great network that feeds to all these locations, so any of our customers can come in and get something next day, if we don't have it in stock. It's really a fascinating, complicated business that I had no idea was here, and I live five miles away.

**Dave:** It sounds like it's growing fast. Tell us a little bit about the values and culture that you have?

**Tracie:** We're a bit of a rarity, and this is one of the things that attracted me. We're family owned, and we have been. We've gone through many, many, many changes, and mergers and acquisitions over the years, but essentially the business is somewhat the same as it was in 1971, when we started as a one room supply house in Worcester, Mass, started by Kevin Condrón, and his father-in-law. Kevin's our Chairman now, and his son Bill runs the company as President and CEO. We're privately held, that gives us the ability to be, I think, a little bit more flexible.

Because we're family owned, and this is somewhat controversial but it really works for us, we really treat our people like family. That means going above and beyond, doing the right thing always. I can't tell you the amount of times that I've been out in our locations and someone says to me that our Chairman, or our CEO called them over the weekend to ask if they were feeling okay, or if their spouse was okay, if somebody was going through a really difficult personal illness. It happens all the time. We have almost 600 people, that's not easy.

**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** That's because one of the things that we do that's a little unique, also, is those of us on the executive team we're out in the locations, all the time.

**Dave:** Everybody travels.



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**Tracie:** We all travel. We all travel, that's the best way we get things done here, is face to face. Including our CEO, who can walk in any of our locations, any time, and people don't bat an eye. They don't bat an eye when I do it either, and that may or may not be normal, but when the CEO comes in...

**Dave:** It's not a big event, because it happens all the time?

**Tracie:** It happens all the time.

**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** He talks about being the Chief Communicator. This is his company, this is his job, he's immensely proud, as he should be. People should be able to talk to him.

**Dave:** Yeah. Well, as so many of our podcast guests have talked about, their relationship and how the culture comes from their CEO, and they get to work in partnership with their CEO. Do you want to talk a little bit about your relationship with Bill?

**Tracie:** We have a really cool set of values called PRAISE, that each letter stands for something, everything we do is driven by that. Then, we're really governed by our purpose. It boils down to our people, because you can buy anything that we sell, anywhere within a five mile radius, and usually for cheaper. Which is a terrible business model, and Bill talks about this a lot, but it is true. It is true.

Why would someone come to us? It's our training, our knowledge, our experience, it's our people. All of that, that our people have. I didn't really believe that could exist in that kind of way, until I got here. We have really, truly an incredible, incredible group of people. Part of that is because our hiring is done at the local level, with guidance and support from HR. But, our managers are hiring their own team, and that, they know best.

I remember my first meeting, my first interview with Bill, I snuck out of a conference I was at, at my last company. Went into the interview, was super nervous, called him by the wrong name. I thought I blew it. I'm an introvert, so I turn red. I went home and I went, "Oh, that would have been really cool." Then, I get a call back to come in and meet the crew. Long story short, I ended up here. I think it was a little bit rocky to start.

It takes time, it takes time. You don't come into a company, and just have the trust of the CEO, you have to build that relationship. It took us a little bit of time, but we got there. I feel like I can share anything with him, and he can share anything with me. He's been, next to my husband, and Michelle, the biggest supporter of my career. These things that I do...

**Dave:** The things that are external?

**Tracie:** The things that are external, he's 100% supportive. Not everyone would be.



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**Dave:** Mmmhmm. Why do you think that is? Why do you think he's so supportive of the work you do in the HR community?

**Tracie:** I think I worked really hard here, and I still work really hard here, to prove myself, and to do the best job that I could for the company, and to really bring some new ideas, and to streamline things, and to make things easier and better for our team. Our internal team in HR, and our external team, meaning our employees. It took a couple of years to make all these improvements, and we started seeing the rewards.

Then, when I first started doing it, I think he was probably a little bit skeptical, but he saw the returns, and what can come from that, and the publicity that can come from that.

**Dave:** Oh, and the employment branding, and things like that.

**Tracie:** The branding, and the awards, and the things that, just from putting ... Not just me, but from putting ourselves out there. It was, probably, at least a year of convincing, to even start talking publicly about the community efforts that we had. We did a lot, and we still do in the communities, in every community that we're in, but we didn't talk about it.

**Dave:** Like charitable work?

**Tracie:** Exactly.

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** Exactly. We're a modest New England company, I was a modest New England person, so it's difficult to talk about those things. It took, probably, about a year to really convince him we do this, this is great, we need to start talking about that.

So that, in combination with some of the things that I do, and some of our other folks doing things, and getting that out there in social media has really proven to be wonderful for all of us doing it, for our community, for our team internally, for our customers, and our vendors. Commenting, and seeing the things that we're doing has been terrific.

**Dave:** That's great. You mentioned something, just a moment ago. You said, "treating employees as family is somewhat controversial." Why is that controversial? What do you mean?

**Tracie:** So, in HR we've, I think, long been told that you keep a really serious distance, right? So you don't get emotionally involved, you don't get personally involved.

**Dave:** Business.

**Tracie:** It's all business.



**Dave:** Yes, yes.

**Tracie:** But people are complicated, and people have issues and concerns, and that bleeds into the workplace. So for many years, and I did this too, I was guilty of this, you just, "Call the EAP, I don't want to hear about it." The moment somebody mentions mental illness, "Call the EAP, I can't handle that."

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** That's changing, I think that's changing in the world. That's certainly, I think, always been a little bit different here, where we take a little bit of a higher level of care with our people.

Now, we're not counselors, and we're not mental health professionals, but we do listen, and we do take the time to listen. We do give people the time that they need.

**Dave:** Tracie, as CPO of The Granite Group, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

**Tracie:** One of the wonderful aspects about our culture is failure is embraced, as a learning experience. And I know people really say that, in a lot of companies, but really, it's true.

For example, our learning management system, they hated it, nobody knew how to use it. We found one that we loved, that's really easy to use, but they liked ADP, that was very user friendly for them. So, we didn't want to change something that was working, so we went in and leaned in to ADP, and did that. But, we listened to people, we made those changes over a couple of years, and it made things easier.

Our new people coming in don't know any different, they click a few buttons and do their paperwork, but our managers were spending hours on paperwork, and usually getting it wrong. So, that was a huge change, and something that we're really proud of. There's a lot of ancillary things we've bolted on, and we certainly had a lot of help through the process.

Then, our wellness program, we had double digit increases forever. A couple of years ago, we had our first flat renewal, which was just groundbreaking for us.

**Dave:** That's surprising, yeah.

**Tracie:** Very surprising in our industry, we're not known for being healthy. We had, several years ago, gone through a massive shift in our wellness program, and really trying to talk a lot about it, put together some tools that would help people. We have an app, with challenges, we reward people on many, many different levels. We give them money for doing 5Ks, all kinds of things, normal fitness reimbursements, trying new classes, and that's worked out great. There are other factors, but that certainly helped contribute. Then, this year, we were able to have another flat renewal, and also cut our deductibles in half, which was huge.

Those are, I think, the two things I'm most proud of, because those are the two things that we did that impacted our people the most. There's nothing more important to our people...



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**Dave:** And the business, too.

**Tracie:** ... than paying benefits. Oh, certainly!

**Dave:** Right, it's a double benefit, right?

**Tracie:** Certainly. Certainly.

**Dave:** Getting benefits, as well as the organization.

**Tracie:**

Exactly, exactly. We heard all the time, "Our deductibles are too high, it's too expensive."

**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** So, I spent a lot of time in working in making sure that changes.

**Dave:** Yeah. What keeps you up at night, or what are your goals for the future of what you do in the people function, the HR function here?

**Tracie:** I sleep pretty well, thankfully. I have a wonderful...

So, nothing that we do does. The things that I worry about, I'm always trying to figure out ... This is a difficult code to crack. A customer experience, and our customers being our team members, and we refer to them as team members not employees so much, but this consistent experience. Because we have 45 locations, one of our core values is entrepreneurial, each of our branch managers really runs their own business, so that's a different experience if you're in Bangor, Maine than if you're in New London, Connecticut.

**Dave:** Right, because it takes on the personality of that leader?

**Tracie:** Exactly. We have one culture, and then we have 45 cultures that are a little bit different, depending on the leader.

**Dave:** Right, the sub-culture.

**Tracie:** We don't want to change that at all, but what does it look like as a new hire, or as a team member? What does that look like to come into that location, particularly as a new hire, and are we providing the same level of service?

**Dave:** Right. What are the consistent things, no matter what location?





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**Tracie:** That's what we're really trying to wrap our arms around, and doing that through technology. What does that look like? Now that we've ... We still have more to do, and more places to go with that, but now that we've made a lot of changes, we're able to provide a really personal level of service, which I really want to continue.

It's mostly by phone, but anytime a new hire starts, we're not going out. I also want to get our managers to let us know sooner, that somebody new is starting. But, our biggest thing is that, the buzzword being employee experience, but having that consistent experience across all of our locations.

**Dave:** That's great. I'm sure you're thinking the way you treat your employees is the way they treat your customers?

**Tracie:** You treat your employees well, then everything follows.

**Dave:** Yeah. How would you describe to somebody that never heard of HR, or the people function, what your mission is, and your role here?

**Tracie:** We just did an acquisition a few months ago, of four locations in Maine. They were much smaller than we are, and Maine's a little bit different than even New Hampshire, especially Northern Maine.

As I was going up and meeting with people they said, "Chief People Officer, what's that?" Because it's a title that a lot of people haven't heard of, and the way I described it was just, my job is to make sure that you're happy.

Now, there are a million things that go into that job, but bottom line, we want our people to be happy. Now, that means that they're engaged, that they're performing well, that they are in the right seat on the bus. And that's another massive initiative we're working on this year, using Predictive Index, who we love. They've just blown up their software, in a good way, so that it can do so, so much more.

**Dave:** I know that you use LinkedIn quite a bit, and Glassdoor, and Twitter. How have all these tools helped you do your job?

**Tracie:** I was really technology, not phobic so much because I have teenagers... we make sure we stay on top of things. But, I was not necessarily tech savvy, so I had to learn, and to understand technology, to overhaul technology.

**Dave:** People would be surprised by that. People would be surprised that you're an introvert.

**Tracie:** Yes, I know.

**Dave:** People would be surprised that you're not tech savvy.



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**Tracie:** Maybe I shouldn't share either one of those things. But no, I've become more tech savvy. It's proof, you don't have to know everything. You really don't have to know anything in this world, you just have to know where to find it, and to be able to Google.

**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** You have to have some friends who understand. So, if I need help with something, I reach out.

**Dave:** You have a huge network?

**Tracie:** A huge network. So, I was doing a presentation that involved performance management, and I reached out to my network. Ben Eubanks, who literally wrote the book on AI for HR sent a whole bunch of resources, so that's been huge.

Getting back to technology, you have to educate yourself. I think the more I did that, the more beneficial it was to our company here, because I not only could bring that to the table in the HR world, but I could understand what was going on in the wider world within the company. Because we are much more advanced that you would necessarily think, by looking at us from the outside in.

**Dave:** Right, especially in the industry that you're in?

**Tracie:** Correct.

**Dave:** You spoke at the OPTIMA Conference about how using Glassdoor, and the impact that's had?

**Tracie:** Yeah, Glassdoor's been really huge for us, it's one of our biggest referral sources.

**Dave:** You were telling me before, about the impact Twitter has had on you, personally. Can you talk a little bit about what's that meant to you as a professional?

**Tracie:** Sure. Our social media strategy walks that line between technology and branding, and we didn't have one a few years ago. We've really worked hard on that, and that includes LinkedIn, that includes Glassdoor, that includes Twitter. Most of my posts have been on LinkedIn.

I was on LinkedIn years ago, but I don't think I ever did anything more than like a post, until a few years ago.

**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** Now, I try to post a little something, every day. Nothing really complicated, but something. You realize, again, the impact that you can have. That's been wonderful, I think, for my company and my career, because I share a mix of the things that I do externally, the things that we do as a company, and things that friends or colleagues of mine do. I think that's super important, because there are lots of wonderful HR professionals out there...



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**Dave:** There really are.

**Tracie:** ... who aren't necessarily sharing their own work.

But, Twitter really changed my life. I remember this very clearly, it was the second time I was at HR Tech, and I had hung out with Mary Kaylor, she works with SHRM, and she manages the bloggers, which I did this year, which was really wonderful and fun. She introduced me to Nextchat, which has a different form now, so it's not quite the same. It was a Twitter chat.

What is a Twitter chat? I was on Twitter, and I'd only tweet when I could win something, but I didn't do much with it. She said, "Well, join us in this room, bring your laptop." I walked in, and there were a bunch of people in there, so I walked out. I joined from my hotel room, and just went on. It was a Twitter chat, you follow a hashtag and people do things in a question and answer format. I went, "Wow, there's all kinds of people on there."

**Dave:** All similar functions?

**Tracie:** All similar functions.

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** I think that was the same day as my panel I was on, which was a big panel. Then, I got 50 new followers within a half hour. I went, "Oh my gosh, maybe I should use this thing called Twitter."

So, I started doing that, and I started engaging more. It's as simple as walking to lunch and tweeting, or reading tweets, or responding to tweets, or liking tweets, and I started to enjoy that. I started to *meet* people on Twitter, which is crazy. It's just crazy to me that I would have friends that I would have never met. I met people on Twitter, and I joined the HRSocialHour Twitter chat, and started sharing things myself, and sharing things other people did.

Through those chats mostly, getting to know people a little bit more, about what they did professionally and personally, and then I became a SHRM blogger, and got to meet them all in person, and spend time. That was just life changing. So, I have friends, all over the world, who are doing amazing things in their companies. The wonderful thing about Twitter is you can be a Chief People Officer, you can be an HR Coordinator, you can be an HR Specialist, you can have no job at all, and have a massive impact on the world. It's super cool.

Nobody's on Twitter. Whenever I do a presentation and I ask HR pros, who's on Twitter, one to two percent. Now, this is mostly in the Northeast.

**Dave:** Where would you recommend people start? Is that social HR?

**Tracie:** So, HR Social Hour is run by Jon Thurmond and Wendy Dailey.



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**Dave:** Okay.

**Tracie:** It's every Sunday night at seven Eastern, you just follow the hashtag HRSocialHour. It's a great place to meet new people, it's fun, it's really light.

**Dave:** It's global?

**Tracie:** It's global.

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** They also do a podcast, and they have downloads from all over the world. They really do a wonderful job, they're wonderful people. I got to meet them, and got to know them at SHRM in June. But, you have to engage, you have to ... Like anything in life, you have to participate.

**Dave:** Right. The more you put in, the more you get out, obviously.

**Tracie:** Exactly, exactly. It's a great place to start.

**Dave:** So, you've really become a thought leader, and student, and teacher in the HR function. What are the next chapters for the function? What do you see coming that you're excited about?

**Tracie:** We talk about this a lot, and I think you can read all of these forecasts, from all of these different people, saying all of these different things. Nobody knows what the hell is going to go on. Really, we really don't. But, we do know it's going to be driven by our people.

One of the things that I think has changed in the last few years is the talent crisis, I guess you could say, has gotten the attention of CEOs.

**Dave:** That's true, you can see it.

**Tracie:** Yes, you can see that.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Tracie:** Once that happens...

**Dave:** They're paying attention externally, much more than they used to...

**Tracie:** Exactly.

**Dave:** ...CEOs, right?

**Tracie:** Exactly. Something will change. Now, we're all competing for the same people.



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I do see things like, maybe, high potentials shifting, and not so much of a focus on high potentials. We don't talk about that here, because we feel like everybody has potential.

**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** You might be a high potential in this area, but not in this area. I couldn't be in sales. I mean, I wouldn't be successful in business development, I'm not high potential there, I may be in HR.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Tracie:** So, we don't talk about that.

**Dave:** I agree with you. Kim Scott, from Radical Candor says she thinks it's almost immoral to say somebody's low potential.

**Tracie:** Right, right. We believe every person has potential, and there's a spot for someone everywhere. Now, it may not be in our company. Certainly, you're not a successful company by keeping every person who ever walks in the door, and there are times when that's not appropriate. But, if you hire the right kind of person for your company, there's usually a place for them somewhere, even if they're not successful in...

**Dave:** In the first go-round, right.

**Tracie:** Exactly. Exactly.

I think that it will be driven by how the workforce moves. We had this end of year recap from our industry association, did their most popular articles of the year. 75% of them were people focused. Now, this is the entire industry, everyone reads it, probably very few HR professionals read it. 75% were people focused, which was incredible.

**Dave:** Since you're so connected, and studying other people in the function, who are some leaders in the HR world that we should be watching now? People that you've met, are following, are talking to.

**Tracie:** This isn't exhaustive, but I'm going to throw out a bunch of names.

**Dave:** Okay.

**Tracie:** Then, I'll share them on social media. The Tim Sackett's of the world, and the Laurie Ruettimann's of the world, you just have to be following.

**Dave:** We just had Tim on the podcast too, yeah.

**Tracie:** He's great.



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**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** And Jennifer McClure, who founded Disrupt.

**Dave:** Oh, yes.

**Tracie:** But there are some others, that I think people may not be as familiar with, that have really unique voices. Katrina Kibben is doing some wonderful things in the space of teaching recruiters how to write job ads, it's fascinating. William Tincup is one of the most unique voices in tech. Gina Shield, she founded Women in HR Technology, I had the pleasure of working with her when I spoke on that a couple of years ago. Ben Eubanks, who wrote the book, AI and HR. Joanna Young, who's local, she's a CIO, and she always has wonderful things to share.

**Dave:** She's a Chief Information Officer?

**Tracie:** She is, yes.

**Dave:** Oh, she writes a lot about people and HR, it sounds like?

**Tracie:** Well, not necessarily. Most of these folks are HR professionals in some way, shape, or form.

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** But it's important to follow, and learn from people from outside our function.

**Dave:** Yes, that's a good point.

**Tracie:** She's one of my go-to people for that.

**Dave:** Ah.

**Tracie:** Michelle Strasburger.

**Dave:** You have a podcast, you just had your first year of podcasts?

**Tracie:** We just closed out our first 10 episodes, our first year. We founded it, really, to make the world of HR better, starting with ourselves. We were both at the same conference, a little over a year ago. We just, over dinner one night, hatched a plan. How can we do this?

So, we do these HR Rebooted Minutes that we put on LinkedIn and Twitter. Just one minute topics on HR, hot topics. We do this, blogs, we speak together whenever we can, and just try to share some of what we learn, and try to gain information from our people. We have people that follow us. We have this group of HR Rebels that we get together for lunch whenever we can, people who are positive, supportive, and really care about making the world of HR better.



**Dave:** That's great.

**Tracie:** That's been fun.

**Dave:** Did you tell me that you sometimes record your podcast when you're both driving home from work?

**Tracie:** We do. Yeah, the last one I think I was sitting in the parking lot of one of my stores. We fit it in when we can, we have day jobs. It's usually over lunch, or five o'clock in the afternoon.

Then, Enrique Rubio is changing the world, with Hacking HR.

**Dave:** Yeah right, hacking...

**Tracie:** Which is wonderful, a fascinating guy.

**Dave:** He does the LinkedIn Live stuff, too. Have you used that technology yet?

**Tracie:** I'm going to be on one, soon.

**Dave:** Oh, you are?

**Tracie:** Yeah, I'm going to be doing one with Chris Rainey soon.

**Dave:** Yeah.

**Tracie:** Kate Bischoff is an employment lawyer, who's really, really fun, and she shares some great stuff. Erich Kurschat is a DiSC nerd, self-proclaimed. I'm doing a Fireside Chat, for Enrique, with Erich. He's also an introvert, and he talks a lot about what that is. There's a woman named Micole Garatti, who started this HR influencer ... I'm not one, by the way. I'm not in this, but I love what she did, here. From scratch, she's a marketing professional, and just created this incredible community geared toward HR influencers. Renée Robson's based in Australia, and she speaks frequently at SHRM, and she's got a fascinating take. Mofota Sefali is based in South Africa.

**Dave:** I think you connected me with her.

**Tracie:** Did I? I love her, she's wonderful. Paul LaLonde has an HR philosopher blog, and he's an introvert also, and he just has a really unique take on this street level influencer, he calls, because we all have influence. People in every day, and how they do their work, and they may not get the credit.

**Dave:** Right, the democratizing of HR thinking.

**Tracie:** Fascinating, exactly.



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**Dave:** Right.

**Tracie:** Jenni Stone and Osasumwen Arigbe I adore too, those are also bloggers that I met. They share some interesting things. There are hundreds of people, now, that I follow that are wonderful, but that's a pretty long but good starter list.

**Dave:** That's our short list. It's a long list.

**Tracie:** Yes. I think it's really important. I would spend most of the time on our podcast talking about these other folks, because we're nothing if we don't have a community around us.

**Dave:** Absolutely.

**Tracie:** We can't go it alone.

**Dave:** There's so much that we can learn from each other.

**Tracie:** Exactly. We have to.

**Dave:** That's great. Well, you know we produce this podcast in cooperation with NEHRA.

**Tracie:** Yes.

**Dave:** The largest SHRM chapter in New England. We have the Emerging HR Professionals question of the podcast, every time. You're going to get one right now.

**Tracie:** Okay.

**Dave:** From Meghan Mandino, the Producer of The Hennessy Report.

**Meghan Mandino:** You've worked as an adjunct faculty at SNHU, co-founded DisruptHR Manchester, and serve on a number of Boards from the health sector to the arts, and you're a self-proclaimed teacher to HR pros. We were wondering what your favorite topic to mentor emerging HR leaders is?

**Tracie:** I do a lot of this, and I don't talk about it a lot because I think that once you've been in a profession for 100 years, I think you have some level of responsibility to give back. If someone reaches out to me, I never say no.

So, several times a week I'll have a call with someone, or email exchange. Maybe more often than that. It's one of my favorite things that I do, and I think I've found some threads. Most of the people, but not all ... most of the people reaching out tend to be women, so a lot of the mentoring and encouraging I've done is surrounding a couple of things that are tied together, confidence, and salary negotiation. There are a lot of wonderful HR professionals, and there's a lot of wonderful companies, and sometimes those





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salary expectations, and the needs aren't necessarily aligned. I think we're conditioned to say, "Yeah, I make X," and companies are conditioned to go, "I'm going to give you 10% more."

I've done a lot of mentoring on how that works, and how you should make sure you're being paid what you're worth, and what that position is worth, and not being afraid to ask for what you need.

**Dave:** Now, we have the Beth Grouse question. What advice would you give to your 30 year old self? If you could write a letter, Dear Tracie, what would you write?

**Tracie:** I had my son when I was 26, so that's actually a good time. I think what I did is what a lot of women do. I really admire, Michelle is one of them, Colleen Cohen is another one who I see, who have young children that are just changing the world, because I didn't do that. I was a bit of a late bloomer, in terms of getting out there and doing things. I avoid risks, in general. I don't so much now, but I definitely did.

So, if I could tell my younger self, I would say, "Take more risks. Travel more, do that even with a young child. It's certainly possible." I think, in a sense, held myself back. Every experience I had was great, and was helpful to me getting to where I am, but I certainly would tell myself to take more risks.

**Dave:** Yes, that's great. What's something interesting about you, that we wouldn't find on your bio, or LinkedIn, that you'd be willing to share? Or Twitter.

**Tracie:** Well, I think if you dig far enough, you can probably find it. But, I'm a huge pop culture nerd. Movies, TV. I don't watch a lot of TV, but I watch a lot of binge shows.

**Dave:** We all do now.

**Tracie:** Oh, yeah. I could tell you everything about the Housewives, even though I don't think I've ever seen an episode, so I read a lot about that.

**Dave:** You're a pop culture junkie.

**Tracie:** Pop culture junkie. That's what I listen to, I listen to some podcasts, but I listen to mostly entertainment radio. That's what I listen to in the car, for hours. It's fascinating.

**Dave:** So when you're not doing HR stuff, we can find you following pop culture?

**Tracie:** I'm strictly listening to business podcasts in the car, not entertainment radio, ever. So, I'm listening to a lot of that.

**Dave:** What's the best performance you've ever seen?

**Tracie:** Hamilton.



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Years ago, I gave my son tickets to Hamilton. It was very self-serving, as a gift.

**Dave:** We're going together.

**Tracie:** Yeah. He was obsessed, he was obsessed with it.

**Dave:** Oh, he had the soundtrack?

**Tracie:** I wrapped the tickets up in the soundtrack, he didn't expect them. I bought them just before it became the hottest thing in the world.

**Dave:** Wow!

**Tracie:** I got normal tickets, on Broadway. We got the original cast, Lin Manuel. Miranda left, I think, the next week, and then the whole cast left. I didn't know what to expect, and I had only been to a couple of Broadway shows, but it was just phenomenal. He's a history buff.

**Dave:** A great memory for the family.

**Tracie:** We got to do it together, it was just the two of us. We got matching t-shirts, and sat in the last row of the theater, but it was wonderful.

**Dave:** That's great. So great to have you on the podcast.

**Tracie:** Great to be here.

**Dave:** I think it's amazing, what you're doing for our function.

**Tracie:** Thank you. Thanks for having me.

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