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

**Dave:** Welcome to The Hennessy Report. I'm Dave Hennessy, and today's guest is Graham Walters, who's the chief people officer at DraftKings. Graham has a really interesting personal story, as he grew up in the compensation function, which is unique for chief people officers. He also left the corporate world to start a brewing business, which is still a thriving business today, and he'll share those stories, and also the story about DraftKings and their amazing growth and their amazing culture. And it's one that's based in empowerment, and that starts at the very top.

Next up on the podcast is the chief diversity and inclusion officer at Liberty Mutual Insurance, and that's Dawn Frazier-Bohnert, and that's a lead in podcast to the 25th anniversary of the NEHRA Diversity and Inclusion Gala, which is on April 2nd. Keynote speaker, Abby Wambach.

And now, our discussion with Graham Walters.

Graham, welcome to the podcast.

**Graham:** I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

**Dave:** Really exciting times over here at DraftKings in your fairly new headquarters, and I guess we should start how we met through Weber Torres. He made the intro. It was when your headquarters used to be in our headquarters at 125 Summer. Before we get into the exciting things going on at DraftKings, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you ended up in this place and this career path?

**Graham:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I feel like a lot of HR professionals that I talk to, HR is kind of one of those things that was an opportunity that presented itself that they took advantage of and wasn't necessarily something they were planning on being when they were going through college or majoring in whatever their major was.

**Dave:** Yeah, not a lot of people majored in HR.

**Graham:** Not a lot, or at least as their first major.

**Dave:** We had a few on the podcast that have majored in something...

**Graham:** Some of us...

**Dave:** ...around that area.

**Graham:** Some of us are gifted with an understanding early of what you want to do and some of us are not. But that was not me. No, I started out with a degree in operations management, went into mutual



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fund accounting, which was a terrible profession at that point in time. Not too interesting. And I had the opportunity to go into compensation consulting, but that wasn't really what I quite found my way at in HR is kind of how I got my foot in the door. I realized that this was something I wanted to do for the rest of my career when I took a little break. So one of my other passions outside of work is brewing beer and I guess drinking beer as well. And I helped a friend...

**Dave:** Mine too.

**Graham:** ...always happy to...

**Dave:** ...not brewing. I'm more on the other side.

**Graham:** I'm happy to teach both. A friend of mine that was one of my coworkers when I was in compensation consulting and I had developed just a mutual love of beer, and we had picked up home brewing, and I think this was maybe 10 years ago or so and it right in kind of the middle of the craft beer boom. We liked what we were doing and were like, well let's take a step back. Maybe we can do something cool with brewing. And had spent a good four years putting together plans for a brewery, a lot of home brewing, building recipes and put together a whole business plan and launched a brewery.

In the process of doing that, we got pregnant. I was about to have two children, one of which was a brewery and one of which was a baby and had to make some life decisions about which one was more important to me. And it wasn't much of a decision, because my family is more important. But going through that process was really interesting, because it allowed me to kind of take a step back and understand how the work I was doing was directly influenced by the purpose of the business that we were working in. And having a better understanding of broader business skills and business strategy was helpful in kind of coming back to HR, because I was able to say, "I built a whole business plan, built a successful business, and took a step back before we took the final step." Fortunately he's doing great. It's called Castle Island Brewing Company.

**Dave:** Oh, no way.

**Graham:** Highly recommend it.

**Dave:** I've had it before.

**Graham:** Highly recommend it.

**Dave:** You were right there at the founding of Castle Island.

**Graham:** Oh yeah, it started in my garage.

**Dave:** Wow, I didn't know that about you.

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah.



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**Dave:** That's amazing.

**Graham:** So it's great. He's taken it all the way and executed really well.

**Dave:** Oh it's, you can see it in grocery stores everywhere...

**Graham:** Everywhere.

**Dave:** Around the region. I don't know, are they outside of Massachusetts now?

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dave:** I imagine.

**Graham:** Yeah, yep, in New England. But it also allowed me to take a step back and say, okay, I'm fully committed now. I'm back into HR. I think I've learned a lot of lessons about how not just something kind of in our specific functional area of expertise, but more as a business person. And I was better able to understand kind of the application of what we're doing to a business strategy.

**Dave:** That's really cool.

**Graham:** So that was really the kind of the turning point for me of I think of being a better HR professional, because I think I was better able from that point forward to support the partners that I work with across the business.

**Dave:** Right. You're thinking about the whole organization...

**Graham:** Exactly.

**Dave:** ...instead of just the discipline.

**Graham:** Exactly.

**Dave:** Wow, that's cool. Well, tell us about DraftKings. There's so much going on. You have IPOs and acquisitions and growth and a beautiful new headquarters. This is amazing here.

**Graham:** Yeah, we've got a lot going on right now. I mean, we're right back on the rocket ship. We're right at that point where sports betting is being legalized across the U.S., and it's an opportunity for DraftKings with what we've built throughout daily fantasy sports to be able to go into new states as they open up and they legalize sports betting to really position ourselves to be one of the top operators across the US, which is, it's a huge market.

**Dave:** Yeah, in daily fantasy sports, you are I think the top.



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**Graham:** Daily fantasy sports, we are the leading daily fantasy sports provider as well.

**Dave:** Can you explain the business?

**Graham:** Sure.

**Dave:** Because I think a lot of people know fantasy from getting together at the beginning of the football season with their friends and picking teams. That's not this.

**Graham:** It's part of it.

**Dave:** Yeah, right.

**Graham:** So we have a couple of different products, right? So there's our core business, which is daily fantasy sports. Daily fantasy sports, just think about it for a specific night, or in the case of golf, over a weekend. You have one series of sporting events, and your job is to be the general manager of a team. You have a certain amount of money to spend and each player is assigned a salary. You pick who you think the best performing players are going to be for the salary that you have and then compete either against friends in a small league or against a much larger group of people in larger contests to win millions of dollars to see who has set the best line up.

**Dave:** Like the commercial you had where somebody is jumping up and down and they're wearing a Patriot's jersey, right.

**Graham:** Exactly. It just makes sports more fun, right? When you got something on the line, you're playing against friends or against other people, it's like, who has the better strategy?

**Dave:** Right. And the TV ratings for the NFL have proved that this was really working for them too.

**Graham:** Yeah, yeah, no, I think it's one of those things where when you have other ways to enjoy the sports that you're watching, it just makes it better for everybody.

**Dave:** Exactly. So what are the other businesses? You've talking about that one. What are the other?

**Graham:** There's also sports betting, so that's the one that's kind of new and hot, along with I guess the one I'll get into in a second. But sports betting is being legalized as we speak in more states across the U.S. I mean, sports betting is more straightforward. You can bet on the outcome of an event. So you can bet on who's going to win, who's going to win against the odds. You can do parlays, you can do a bunch of different things. You can do prop bets and teasers. I don't even know all the different kinds of bets you can do, but there are a lot of different things where you can bet on certain specific outcomes, whether it's games or who's going to score the next touchdown or who's going to score the first touchdown or who's going to have however many yards, a lot of different ways that you can get into this sports betting piece. And then there's online casino, which is things like slot machines or blackjack, live dealer things, just different games that you might see.



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**Dave:** And that's newer for DraftKings, that business?

**Graham:** Both sports betting and online casino are both newer, both where we kicked off in New Jersey, and we'll continue to launch those things as we go into different states as we go forward.

**Dave:** Amazing. I think a lot of people don't know all of what's going on in your industry.

**Graham:** Yeah, and absolutely. I mean, it's all new and all just kind of "greenfield" across the U.S. as those things come online. We're really one of the only US based providers. We have a lot of competitors from Europe that are coming in and trying to get involved in the same space.

**Dave:** But the law's a little bit more liberal on this type of thing in Europe or in other parts of the world?

**Graham:** Each country is regulated a bit differently. So I can't say it's more or less strict as much as it's already determined what those regulations are. I think some of what's happening across the US is they're learning from what has happened overseas as well.

**Dave:** So you must have a huge department just keeping track of the laws in all the places you're in now.

**Graham:** Oh yeah, we're very invested in regulatory and compliance.

**Dave:** Yeah, I imagine that's a huge part of your operation.

**Graham:** Yeah, and I think it's very important to us to make sure obviously that we're compliant with all the regulations, but also we're a responsible gaming company, right? So I think those are both areas that are important to us.

**Dave:** So what's it like seasonally? I imagine the NFL is the biggest thing.

**Graham:** Oh yeah. I mean, NFL is our Super Bowl, and everything leads up to NFL season. So we ramp up, we hire a bunch of seasonal customer experience folks. A lot of our marketing and advertising is geared towards NFL season. That's when a lot of our players play. That's where the bulk of the business gets done. It's changing a little bit...

**Dave:** It's kind of like the retail...between Thanksgiving and Christmas is 80% of the year...is it the same kind of thing? The NFL season is...

**Graham:** So, it's getting a little bit different for us as we've expanded to different products. But for daily fantasy sports, for example, the biggest time is from NFL kickoff throughout much of the regular season. And I think the playoffs are still big, but it kind of trails off as the season goes along.

**Dave:** There's not enough players as you go ... right, right.



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**Graham:** Sports betting is a little bit different, because sports betting I think more culminates with the Super Bowl, and I think that casino goes along with that when people have put money on the site and it goes along. But I think that as we've added more sports, as we've differentiated, I think it diversifies a bit. But NFL season...

**Dave:** It is...

**Graham:** ...we ramp up for NFL season.

**Dave:** You wouldn't be what you are without the NFL, right, yeah.

**Graham:** No, no.

I think for most companies, you work at them and summer is quiet. Here, absolutely not. Everybody ramps...

**Dave:** Oh, because you're preparing, yes.

**Graham:** All through ... That's when the planning happens. So we go through the summer and it's like as an HR function, we do not do much that's external facing that requires business involvement throughout the summer.

**Dave:** You don't want to pull them out their chairs.

**Graham:** We don't pull them out of it.

**Dave:** Right.

**Graham:** Everything is geared towards kickoff for September.

**Dave:** You can do your community events now as things are winding down, right.

**Graham:** We're trying to do them very early, so we usually have our summer outing or something in early June.

**Dave:** That's great. So we talked about the growth, the amazing growth, the acquisition, the headquarters. It always hasn't been just a smooth upward trajectory, has it?

**Graham:** That's true. No, it's...

**Dave:** Tell us about...

**Graham:** ...it's been a bit of a roller coaster.



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**Dave:** How long have you been here?

**Graham:** I've been here for four and a half years.

**Dave:** Okay. You've seen a lot of the growth.

**Graham:** So a lot since 2015. No, each year has felt like one or two different lifetimes in a different company. It's funny, when I'm recruiting new people on the team, I go through kind of the history of DraftKings as I've seen it, about how the team has kind of been built as we've gone along and it kind of mirrors different iterations of the company at different points in time. So when I started back in August of 2015, that was really when daily fantasy sports was in its prime. And DraftKings and FanDuel, which is one of our main competitors in daily fantasy sports.

**Dave:** And you almost merged with them.

**Graham:** Almost.

**Dave:** Right.

**Graham:** We were the top providers and we were the two top advertisers I think in the country for the year of 2015. So basically, you could not go anywhere...

**Dave:** All advertising?

**Graham:** All advertising.

**Dave:** Wow.

**Graham:** And leading up to NFL that year, I'm pretty sure there were most people who were not even sports fans were like, "Oh, more DraftKings and FanDuel." You couldn't go anywhere without seeing DraftKings and FanDuel, right?

**Dave:** That's right, I do remember that, yeah.

**Graham:** Which, is still honestly paying off for us, because I think the brand awareness and sports awareness that was built up over that period of time has actually been still very helpful for us today.

**Dave:** It's the first mover play, right? The brand awareness...

**Graham:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** ...is out there, yeah.



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**Graham:** Absolutely. But obviously going into that period of time, we had some regulatory challenges leading in the NFL season, and I think that there were a lot of questions, is daily fantasy sports legal or not? And we had left the state of New York for a period of time, and what that really allowed us to do is kind of take a step back and look a bit inward. And I think one of the things that we'll probably talk a bit about from a cultural perspective, it's allowed us to really lean on kind of the core things that are important to us here in terms of community and passion and commitment. I think a lot of people just believe in what we're doing. So as we kind of fought and clawed to get back into New York and really solidify our regulatory standing across the U.S., we were able to really rely on the team that we had here.

So really for a year after that, a lot of the focus was on, it wasn't growth phase anymore. We weren't another rocket ship at that point in time. And so let's make sure that the foundations of the business are solidified and we have a solid regulatory framework across the US, because this is something we all believe in.

**Dave:** When you talked about the culture really, what do we believe in? What are we committed to? How did it look as far as that conversation?

**Graham:** I think it was more positive than most people probably would have expected. Obviously there were these external forces and factors and challenges that were out there, and I think employees were a bit galvanized by it. I'm like, you know what? We believe in this company, and we're going to make this happen. Whatever it takes. We were almost like a family I think at that point in time. And not that it isn't right now, but I think that those kinds of things bring you together, and a lot of the people are still here now because they believe in what the company's doing.

**Dave:** Right. That's great.

**Graham:** Yeah.

**Dave:** How would you describe the culture today and the values of this organization?

**Graham:** A lot of those things still hold true. I think the first thing I realized when I came here and even interviewed on the first day was just the lack of cynicism. It was refreshing, right? It was like, the passion here, everybody actually cares about what they're doing. They're here because they have cool challenges, cool problems. They like the people they work with. It's a community of people that just enjoy getting work done. So I think that that still holds true.

**Dave:** A lack of cynicism? In Boston?

**Graham:** It's rare. I mean, there is still cynicism when it comes to certain things, but not the company. Everyone wants to be here. They like coming into work. We have a lot of interesting problems to solve. And it's not just sports. I think that there's kind of a misperception.

**Dave:** Yeah. What is the misconception of what it's like to be here?





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**Graham:** I think that people's perception maybe of DraftKings as an employer is the same as DraftKings, the consumer brand. So we have conversations with candidates all the time, like what is it like to work at DraftKings? I'm like, I promise you, it's not a bunch of people running around throwing footballs and doing keg stands.

It's just like probably what you'd see at a lot of other technology companies. I mean, we are a technology company. We have a lot of engineers and people that come to work here not just because they like sports, although that's a great reason to come work here. It's also because the challenges from a technology perspective are just extremely interesting and the volume and the problems caused by thousands and hundreds of thousands of users on the site over the NFL season at very specific points in time cause unique site challenges.

**Dave:** And how's that different than some of the other tech companies? When you're looking for talent, that surge of complex things coming together with a lot of users on the site at the same time or in a particular platform, what does that mean for talent acquisition and the kind of people you bring in?

**Graham:** I'll hit on a couple of things. Number one, that specifically I think just frames the challenge associated with what people can do here. And I think that when you have engineers, what they like to do is they like to solve problems. They like to see interesting things, and they like to see something that your company can offer from a challenge perspective they may not see somewhere else. So that's one aspect of it. The other aspect of it is you're building something that can handle this massive scale. We need builders. And that's not even just in engineering, that's across the board. When you're a startup, things, they need to get built and built to scale. And everything's new. So you want people that come in that are energized by that. They want to come in, they want to see, that's a problem. I'm going to solve it. Or that hasn't been done before, but that doesn't mean we're not going to do it right now. People that want the challenge.

**Dave:** The unpredictable, and you have to ramp up to a big challenge.

**Graham:** Right.

**Dave:** That's great. You've shared a couple things already, but what's something you're proud about with regard to the people function here and the things you've accomplished with regard to people strategy or HR?

**Graham:** So I think for the people strategy as a whole, I think what I'm really proud of kind of continues what we were talking about in terms of the life cycle of the company and being able to support the different phases of the company and having a function that has enabled the company to be as successful as it's been. When we talk about the point in time where we're hunkered down, we're able to kind of bring out the best in people, and through communication and culture able to make sure that the company is able to execute on some of those tough challenges related to what might be a real drain from a talent perspective as people leave, which wasn't really. And we did not actually experience that much of a spike at attrition.



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Actually, the attrition I think was super low in the single digits over that period of time. That's amazing. Going to the next kind of phase in time where we were focused on our planned merger with FanDuel that didn't quite go through where, again, it was back to let's be a bit introspective about ourselves and let's understand what a complementary function might look like. And even though that failed, we still did not have significant attrition. Then getting to sports betting is going to go live. Let's make a big bet here. Let's build an HR function that can actually scale the company to grow two, three X over the course of the next couple of years. So really building a talent acquisition engine that can support that from a group of just a handful of people to now 25, then getting to the next phase where we are right now, where we need to scale.

So, as you build the function, now we need to build out a talent management function that can enable the people that are here to grow their careers at the same pace as the company. So that's kind of the next phase. And now we're in kind of to the next point where we're focusing on effectiveness, efficiency and analytics.

**Dave:** Yeah. You mentioned analytics to me before. Tell me what you're doing in analytics. What's interesting there?

**Graham:** So we're trying to invest a lot in analytics, and one thing that's true across the company that we realized is DraftKings is extremely analytical. Every part of our company has a dedicated analytics team. The one group that really didn't up until the last year was the people team. So talking across the organization, I was like, why do we not have this? We absolutely need this to keep pace with everything else that's going on. So we've built out a team. We have a team of two right now and we have another requisition number...

**Dave:** Dedicated to analytics, two people.

**Graham:** ...dedicated to analytics.

**Dave:** Right.

**Graham:** Another req that we're hiring for that. One, we need to keep track of just regular metrics and KPIs, things that we want to keep a pulse on. What is our attrition? How is hiring going? What did performance management look like for this year? The standard stuff.

**Dave:** Sure.

**Graham:** The next is just wanting to make sure that when we do something, when we have programs, we set it up with a goal, with a target. Did we set out to do what we accomplished and what did we learn from it?

**Dave:** Can you give an example of that?

**Graham:** Yeah.



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**Dave:** What that would look like?

**Graham:** A good example of how we're looking into that in particular would be performance management for... That's probably something that's topical at this point in time for most people anyway. Where we're going into performance management this year, part of it is looking into, I guess what everybody looks at, how many people are actually doing it? What is the real time reporting? Where can we find those gaps in participation? But also an understanding of, did this take less time? Was this more efficient for you? We're in the process of doing real time feedback. Do employees feel like they got better real time feedback this time around? How was their review? We're separating performance review conversations from compensation presentations.

**Dave:** Oh yes, so smart.

**Graham:** How did that go? Did you actually have a better conversation? Was it less of a negotiation? Was it not two sides and just hammering on each other?

**Dave:** Because it's just defensive if you meld them together, right?

**Graham:** So there are specific things that are objectives for this year through performance management that we're going to be saying, did we achieve what we set out to achieve? What does the company believe? And what is the feedback that we need to action on for next time?

**Dave:** Right. That's great.

**Graham:** And then the next piece that's beyond that is we want to be able to link together all of our people systems. From a technology perspective, there is no perfect technology. So I think we're kind of Frankensteining together a lot of different systems, and what we don't have is a true data warehouse. And so, our analytics team for this year, one of their big goals is building an employee data warehouse.

**Dave:** Are you using in-house technology talent...

**Graham:** Correct.

**Dave:** To help you create your own?

**Graham:** Correct. Yes, yeah.

**Dave:** That's really cool.

**Graham:** And fortunately, our engineering team is very passionate about this too, and they really believe in applying technology to people problems as well. And they're one of the first users in this and they're really...

**Dave:** That's great.



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**Graham:** ...really excited. We have our DBAs that are helping out our analytics team trying to set up a database.

**Dave:** That's fantastic.

**Graham:** Yeah, and what we want to do is be able to link together all of that data in one system so that we can have an understanding. We launched something this year where we're trying to measure quality of hire, right? Where everybody's like, what is quality of hire? I'm sure you've probably talked about this a billion times with a lot of people and there's...

**Dave:** It comes up, yeah.

**Graham:** ...there's not been a great answer for it, and our answer is one of those things that go into the data warehouse that will ... And I'll explain kind of the broader vision in a second, but quality of hire in particular, we're just doing point in time check-ins with employees and managers starting after hire, 10 days, 30 days, 90 days for employees that say, is your manager meeting expectations? Do you have everything you need? Make sure that they're enabled, and then check in with managers to say, was this hire to your expectations? Are they performing as you would expect they would? And then have an understanding when they got ramped up to speed. And at the period that ends with 90 and 180 days, more or less, would you have hired this person again?

And so it's a bit binary from that perspective, but it loops into the broader platform that will go into the data warehouse where we can say, okay, how are those scores at the beginning? As we track scores throughout an employee life cycle, we'll also be able to link in performance management scores and attrition. And we can say, when we actually recruit at this school, has that resulted in a higher quality of hire than another school from our campus program? Or is what we all believe, from direct source candidates to employee referrals, how can we actually measure at DraftKings are each of these candidates sources, do they result in the same quality of employee, the same profile? And are there things that we should index more on the hiring side?

Or things like ... And for us, it's inclusion, equity and belonging, but diversity and inclusion, how can we actually empower employees throughout their lifecycle here at DraftKings to experience DraftKings the same way, and how can we measure that from beginning to end? So for us, people analytics is about the employee life cycle and being able to tie things from beginning to end and understand cause and effect and how we might make changes at different points of that life cycle to better impact something later.

**Dave:** That's fascinating. That's great. And it's amazing you're using your own technology, your own talent inside to help you develop that. Analytics is really the overriding thing, because even your customers have an analytical approach, right?

**Graham:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** It's all analytics.



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**Graham:** Absolutely. We don't just want it to be reporting. We want it to be actionable. We want insights oriented, fact-based, decision making.

**Dave:** So going public.

**Graham:** Yeah.

**Dave:** What do you have planned next?

**Graham:** Going public is huge, right? So it's two things coming together, I couldn't even just limit it to going public. It's going public at the same time that we're acquiring a company that's bigger than ourselves, right?

**Dave:** Oh my God.

**Graham:** So we're at 900 or a little over 900 employees. We're in the process of merging in this kind of three way SPAC process with going public and merging with another company called SBTech, which is a European gaming platform provider who has 1,200 employees.

**Dave:** Where are they located in Europe?

**Graham:** So they're headquartered in Tel Aviv and they have offices in Bulgaria, Ukraine, UK. They also have a small office here in Las Vegas. I just came back from there last week.

**Dave:** So you're global now.

**Graham:** We are.

**Dave:** You're going to be spread across the whole world, your employee base.

**Graham:** So, we have the culture...

**Dave:** More travel for you.

**Graham:** Yeah, I just got back. We went to Tel Aviv and Sofia last week.

**Dave:** Right.

**Graham:** So there are challenges I think when it comes to, number one, eating the elephant and bringing onboard and merging together two companies. I think we're actually pretty similar culturally. So I'm pretty optimistic, and I think they have a great team over there and we're very excited to have them. But there are a lot of things you have to go through from a people perspective. How are we going to merge systems and performance management and culture and communication and all of that kind of stuff, and just day to day processes. How are we going to do headcount planning and how is this going



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to roll into talent acquisition? How are we going to get structured? Just all of those questions that you might expect to have.

At the same time we're saying, "And we're also going to go public in a couple of months." So the going public piece in and of itself just requires a different level of maturity and sophistication on the part of business processes, right? So from a people operations perspective, getting up to SOX compliance, it just a bit different for employees, how you communicate, how transparent you can be, how we can transition some of these parts of the company that may not have been as up to public company SOX standard or were just on the doorstep of it. It was in the plans and now we're just accelerating a lot of our plans to get there.

**Dave:** Great. So many great HR leaders we've had on the podcast have talked about their relationship with the CEO. Could you share with us?

**Graham:** Absolutely. So I've been here for about four and a half years, which is ... I think that the company's been around for about eight at this point. And throughout that whole period of time, we have always had the same CEO and the same founders. So it's not even just necessarily Jason. So Jason Robbins, our CEO, he also has two co-founders, Paul Liberman and Matt Kalish. It's been a really great opportunity to spend time with three guys that are kind of as passionate and committed and know as much about the company and industry as they do, and also kind of growing along with them and with the company. So I came in as the director of people operations.

**Dave:** Was it the top job in HR?

**Graham:** No, that was not the top job when I joined. There is the head of HR, and he left five or six months after I started for a different opportunity, and Jason and Matt and Paul were like, look, you're here. Do you want the opportunity? And I'm like, I'm here. I want the opportunity. It would've been I think very easy for them to go out and find a different leader. Jason, one of the things with him is that he will fight for the people that are on the team and fight for what he's passionate about, which is employee development. And he really believes in bringing people along with the company. If you can scale with the company at the same pace of the company or faster, we'll do everything we can to make this a place where you can have that career.

**Dave:** When you were describing the culture earlier, this is a good example of how that culture was built, right?

**Graham:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** It starts at the top.

**Graham:** Right.

**Dave:** I'm sure other employees have had that same kind of experience.



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**Graham:** Absolutely, exactly.

**Dave:** As they've grown in the organization. Right.

**Graham:** And I think that that's kind of one of the unique opportunities that you have in a company that grows as quickly as this. The only place I've learned as much as this is when I worked in consulting where you can see a million different things happen. I don't think I will ever work for a company where I will see as many unique things as have happened here.

**Dave:** Wow, that's cool.

So how do you set the agenda for HR and drive it inside this organization? You have this great relationship with the leadership team, of course. But sometimes HR in some organizations can become reacting to things. How do you make sure that's not the case and that you're driving the people strategy?

**Graham:** I feel like when you're thinking about what your agenda is going to be or what your strategy is going to be, some of that is going to be listening. Not necessarily reacting, but listening, having an understanding of what the business objectives are and also what the current challenges and opportunities are across the business. So once you have a pulse on what's happening, then you kind of formulate your strategy around what the important business objectives are for the year.

So like I was referencing earlier in the podcast for one year, it was focused strictly, like this year, we're going to build the best talent acquisition function we can build out, because the company we know needs to grow. We're at 350 people this year. We need to hire over 350 people, because by the end of the year, we need to basically build out an entirely new business unit to support our own homegrown sports betting application. Or, you know what? This year we have over 600 people. We have the engine for it, but we have a bunch of people that the reason we sold them on coming to DraftKings was the opportunity, the ability to build a career and to develop with the company like everybody else here has. How do we build a function that can support that?

How do we build a talent management organization that's able to support a differentiated offering for employees for something that most people say outside of compensation is the most important thing for what they look for in a company is how can I develop there? Those are kind of the employee facing things, but I also know from a platform perspective, when we think about building people analytics, for example. I consider that an enablement and differentiating function that will allow everything else to get better. So I want to be able to find those things that are both what the business is asking for but I think are going to accelerate growth and combine those into the strategy that I sell back to the leadership team that resonates with the rest of the business strategy.

**Dave:** That's great. Well said. We produce this podcast in cooperation with NEHRA, the Northeast Human Resources Association, and every time we have the NEHRA Emerging HR Professionals question of the podcast. And Megan Mandino is the producer of our podcast, and also part of that Emerging HR Professionals group, will give you that question.



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**Meghan Mandino:** How do you make the move from a career specialist to a generalist?

**Graham:** So I think if you want to make that happen, you can't just say, "I'm going to do it," and transition over. You have to first premeditate it. You have to have enough experience and enough desire to say, "I am interested in doing X, Y, or Z." For example, I moved from being focused on compensation to kind of a generalist leadership type role where I think that my experience in the past, whether it was working in an executive compensation or helping to start a business. And working with different areas of the function allowed me to be able to build a foundation to transition into that role. Part of it's also finding the opportunity. It's a bit opportunistic and lucky. It may be harder when you're trying to jump from one company to another. I think it's much easier if you're already at the company and you say to your manager, "I want to actually go from this role where I am a specialist to being a more generalist. What can we build and add onto my role right now so I can learn a bit more about these different parts of the function?"

**Dave:** Like the foundation for that move, yeah.

**Graham:** And begin adding those pieces to your job, whether they're in stretch assignments, projects, or otherwise where you can do those on a day to day basis. The best way to learn is to do. My path was more of an opportunistic, I'm going to jump in with both feet and learn on the go.

**Dave:** And take some risks? To start your own business and...

**Graham:** A lot of the ways that I learned are reading, networking, trying to find other people who are in a similar spot. I was also fortunate to have Weber here the whole time too.

**Dave:** That's right. Great guy.

**Graham:** It's the combination of preparation and opportunity. If you know that's what you want to do, find every opportunity to meet with the people who are in that position and to prepare yourself.

**Dave:** Graham, you just mentioned you read a lot and follow other thought leaders. Who would you recommend other people in the function follow? Maybe somebody we haven't heard of, or maybe somebody we have.

**Graham:** John Doerr for *Measure What Matters*. Patty McCord with *Powerful*.

**Dave:** Oh, of course. We had Patty on the podcast actually. She's amazing, yeah.

**Graham:** I thought everything they do at Netflix is ... I'm not sure whether I agree with it all or not, but it's very thoughtful, right?

**Dave:** Well, I did in some of your answers...

**Graham:** For a purpose.





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**Dave:** ...I heard some of it in some of your answers.

**Graham:** Yeah, exactly.

**Dave:** For sure.

**Graham:** I really enjoyed that book.

**Dave:** Yeah, that's great.

**Graham:** David Marquet with *Turn the Ship Around*. He was in the Navy, lead a submarine, had some really interesting thoughts on leadership, and I found that great. And then, yeah, I mean those were the three...

**Dave:** Those are good ones. That's great.

**Graham:** ...that I read recently that were pretty good.

**Dave:** Another question for you. Beth Gross at TripAdvisor gave us this question. This is the only question that everybody gets. If you could write a letter of career or professional advice to Graham of 25 years old, what would you write?

**Graham:** I would say, Dear Graham, I think when you realize that if you work harder than everybody else, ultimately that will come to fruition.

**Dave:** Be patient. It'll work.

**Graham:** Be patient, work hard. I went to UMass Amherst.

**Dave:** Me too.

**Graham:** A great school.

**Dave:** Absolutely.

**Graham:** I'm very happy I went there. I can't say enough things about my education there. But I worked at a consulting firm where everybody I felt like had gone to an Ivy league school or something else and I'm like, God, I'm lucky. I made it here. And you know what? I'm like, I'm going to work my ass off. I may not be smarter than everybody else here, but I tell you, I'm going to be the first one here and last one to leave and I'm always going to work harder and no one will work harder than me. And I was like, that's how I'm going to differentiate myself. But you know what? It paid off.

**Dave:** That's great.



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What's the best performance you have ever seen?

**Graham:** So, I think the best performance I've ever seen was, I was fortunate enough working here at DraftKings to go to Super Bowl 51 where...

Dave: I'm so jealous.

**Graham:** Oh, it was incredible. Super Bowl 51 where the Patriots came back from I think, what was it, 28-3?

**Dave:** 28-3.

**Graham:** 28-3.

**Dave:** Was it, how many, three minutes left to go in the third?

**Graham:** Oh, it was so incredible. It was so good. They just, it just kept going. And I was so depressed halfway through the game and I was sitting in...

**Dave:** You were with all DraftKings people?

**Graham:** So I did go down with DraftKings people, but we weren't sitting together. I was surrounded by Falcons fans. And they were actually pretty nice, but I did not like it.

**Dave:** When it was 28-3...

**Graham:** Oh, so depressing.

**Dave:** They must have been rubbing it in and...

**Graham:** The comeback kept going. And by the end, I think I was rubbing it back. But it was the most incredible...

**Dave:** It really is.

**Graham:** ...sporting event I've ever been to.

**Dave:** I don't think a Super Bowl could ever top that.

**Graham:** Oh, it was...

**Dave:** How could it?

**Graham:** ...it was great. And obviously being a Patriots fan, for me it's like, this is...



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**Dave:** The best ever.

**Graham:** ...the best thing ever.

**Dave:** Oh, I am so jealous that you get to go to that. Graham, it's really been great having you on the podcast.

**Graham:** I appreciate you being here. It's been really cool.

**Dave:** It was a lot of fun.

**Graham:** I was looking forward to this.

**Dave:** Thanks, Graham. This was fun.

**Graham:** Of course.

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