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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* by Keystone Partners. I'm Dave Hennessy. Today's guest is Anthony Williams, the CHRO of Akamai Technologies. Anthony discusses how they're building their IT talent pool from underrepresented groups and what they're doing to support their employees during this pandemic and provide them more flexibility. You'll enjoy this episode.

And I want to tell you about a few more that we have coming up. We have Kelly Primus, the CEO of Leading Women. We recorded her live from the NEHRA conference, which is going on right now. In fact, you could still have time to register and enjoy the second half of the conference. And Jason Harris, a keynote speaker from the conference. We'll be interviewing him right after his keynote, the afternoon of the 15th. He's an air force pilot and a leadership and trust expert. And now our discussion with Anthony Williams.

Anthony, it's great having you on the podcast.

**Anthony Williams:** Dave, thank you for having me. My pleasure.

**Dave:** Well, the first time we met was a few weeks before the whole world changed, we'll get into that, but before we do, it will be good for our listeners to know a little bit about you and maybe there's something early in your life that informs your work, your philosophy, what you do today.

**Anthony:** I do remember our meeting earlier in the year. It was a pleasure. It informed my wanting to sit down and have the podcast. To answer your question, there was one thing that comes to mind, my family, we had the opportunity, a little less than 15 years ago to actually live and work abroad. As a family, it was a pretty big decision for us. We spent the better part of almost a year living and working in Europe. And that inspired and motivated an interest in continuing to broaden our horizons culturally and geographically. We decided to move from there to Asia. Those experiences working and living abroad really heightened my exposure and knowledge to different cultures, people.

And when you talk about the practice of HR, things are done differently in different places. And culture has a very important role in driving behavior and development and growth. And so for me, it was really the right answer at the right time and being able to provide the development and enrichment for me from a career standpoint.

**Dave:** That's great. And you're a global organization at Akamai. Having the perspective of what your employees and leaders around the world might be facing that's different, from corporate headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts is a helpful perspective for you.

**Anthony:** That's right.



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**Dave:** Here on the calendar recording in late September, just having passed September 11th. I always think about Akamai, because one of your founders, Danny Lewin, often thought of as the first victim of the September 11 attacks. What does that day mean to Akamai and a little bit about Danny and his influence on culture and how does he live on in Akamai today?

**Anthony:** Danny played and continues to play a very significant role in our culture. His spirit of tenacity still really lives on in our culture. His tenacity, his energy plays a large part in how we innovate, how we continue to collaborate. In the month of September across the 50 plus offices that we have across the globe, we have something that's called Danny Lewin community care days. There is a focus on community. There's a focus on connection and there's a focus on giving back. We use that as one of a number of different ways to commemorate Danny's impact on the company and as a way to really live and model what he's meant to Akamai.

**Dave:** Great. Can you talk a little about Akamai's business? I mean, I know a little bit about it. I know it's technology that is used to make mobile and web, video and streaming work better. Is that it? Can you enlighten us a little bit more?

**Anthony:** I sure can. We're an internet company. Our services at its core actually help to speed the flow of data and information over the internet. A number of our customers use our products and services to make sure that the connectivity to the internet is accessible and there's a level of speed and reliability. We've evolved over the course of the last seven years or so into an internet security company as well. The evolution from delivering content to as well securing it, has ensured Akamai as a strategic partner to a number of household name brands across the globe.

**Dave:** That's great. It's not just companies that we think of as providing video streaming content. Can you give a sense of the industries as well?

**Anthony:** Absolutely. There are not many organizations that don't do some level of commerce over the internet. And so it's extremely important to make sure that the availability and security of data and information happens to meet its intended purpose. So if you're involved in distributing video, if you're a banking institution and making sure that online banking is accessible and secure, of course, in any other types of retail or organizations reliant on making sure that they are sharing content and information to a subscriber base or a consumer base would utilize our products and services.

**Dave:** Day I met you, I think it wasn't long before that, that you had moved into your brand new quarters, and they're amazing. I know you're not using them as much as you would have liked to this year, but it's almost reminds me of what you might see on The New York stock exchange, there's screens everywhere and they're monitoring data and there's soccer games on, I didn't realize streaming soccer is a big thing, isn't it?

**Anthony:** Absolutely. We've got partnerships with a number of professional sports leagues across the globe.

**Dave:** Maybe discuss the philosophy you have with regard to talent and culture at Akamai.



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**Anthony:** It's driving an engaged culture. It's a focus on developing talent, and a focus on offering transformative and innovative business solutions to the organization. And so we feel like the intersection of those three components is really what we strive for. And we feel if we've got an engaged culture and we're focused on developing talent, we're going to continue to see the type of business results that will help to drive the right level of performance for the company. It's really about the people and making sure that there's engagement and development.

**Dave:** And as you look to the future, are there some things that you're like, this is an area where I want to improve my department or the organization?

**Anthony:** You know, asking that question during a pandemic...

**Dave:** You got a lot things on your mind these days, Anthony?

**Anthony:** It's an interesting question, and I'll tell you why. We're looking at the pandemic and we believe that there will be a number of things that will essentially transform the workforce coming out of the pandemic. Like many organizations, the majority of our workforce is now working remotely. There are a number of technology organizations that are focused on a future is flexible philosophy. Could mean greater remote work, could mean not necessarily having to live near a company office. We're taking the time to look at what's our remote work posture moving forward and how can we leverage this as a strength, and how can we accommodate the interests of employees, but how do we do that in a way that we continue to preserve the culture. We continue to preserve the connectivity, the engagement, the feeling of belonging.

**Dave:** It seems like I'm hearing from a lot of organizations, especially tech firms like yours, that people have been doing quite well working remotely. But one thing I have heard is that a challenge is around new hires, because they don't have all those bonds that you and your colleagues already have having been in the same space.

**Anthony:** The pandemic hasn't necessarily had a material impact on our hiring. We've continued to hire in most markets around the globe, but that hasn't come without some level of evolution. There's definitely an increased level of communication. There's an increased level of virtual handoffs, if you will. So we've tried as best we can to replicate all of the different onboarding processes that would normally be much more in-person to a virtual format. And as a company, we've increased our level of communication and visibility of our managers and senior leaders. Early indications are that it's working well.

**Dave:** And I think I heard you doing some internal communications that are a little different.

**Anthony:** We decided to go remote work in March and without fail, weekly, there has been an employee communication outlining any changes to our guidance around remote work, wellness offerings, how we're continuing to keep the employees engaged, how we're replicating in-person events to virtual. We've focused on a flex culture, less about how many hours you're working and trying to really hone in on productivity, really focus on what's being accomplished and in an effort to accomplish



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that, we've had an acute focus on manager and leader development to make sure that our managers are equipped to recognize it in a flexible culture. Things need to be a little bit different. We've had some focus on Flex Fridays, we've included wellness days. So there are a number of things that we're doing differently.

**Dave:** What is different about flexible Fridays?

**Anthony:** What we try to institute is a limited number of meetings. There are urgent situations and there are customer client situations that sometimes are unavoidable. What we have recognized is that people are meeting more often than in exchange for what would have been in the past a hallway conversation or someone showing up at someone's office. And so people are finding themselves actually working more. So in response to that, we're trying to free up time so that employees can actually have an opportunity to focus.

**Dave:** Slowing down the back-to-back video meetings.

**Anthony:** That's right.

**Dave:** I think it was Biogen where they tried to eliminate internal meetings for a whole week.

**Anthony:** We've tried to do the Flex Fridays or the Focus Fridays. It varies by group. So there are some nuances. The thing that I would say that we consistently were able to institute that we felt really good about, is we gave globally all of our employees three additional days off.

**Dave:** Any time this year or was it during the summer, especially?

**Anthony:** It actually ended up being during the US summer.

**Dave:** There's that focus on the global, the US summer, having lived around the world, you're thinking that way.

**Anthony:** I'm programed that way. So we gave a day that every employee across the globe had off. There are a few exceptions that we do have some business essential workers that keep our network operations center and our secure operations center running. So they actually got a different day, but I'd say, 90% of our employees had three additional days off. It's one thing to have a holiday in one part of the world, but you're still getting emails from another part. And so the email and voicemail traffic was substantially lower when we instituted a global wellness day. And so we keep looking at how we can institute wellness days into our repertoire.

**Dave:** That's great. I want to get into an area that I know you're passionate about because I heard you say that diversity is the gateway to innovation. And I know as you started at Akamai, one of the things you founded, Akamai Technical Academy, could you talk about the impetus for that and the results?



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**Anthony:** Akamai Technical Academy has been just a fantastic addition to, how we go to market for talent. We've got a focus on really driving diversity and inclusion. Inclusion is actually one of our company values. We weren't happy with how much progress we were making and being able to generate talent that was more diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity.

**Dave:** I hear that a lot from my technology contacts.

**Anthony:** What we did is we created a program that actually went out and evaluated people who didn't have a technology background, but had high aptitude and an interest in technology, and essentially instituted a program that trained those individuals for six months, from the training they went on to an apprenticeship within the organization. The program has been in place a little over three years, we've run eight cohorts across three different countries. We've had the pleasure of seeing an increase in our gender representation and our ethnic representation globally within the organization.

**Dave:** That's great. You've got the internal Akamai people that are training?

**Anthony:** No, we actually have had a couple of training partners that we've worked with. Our technologists and our leaders within the organization have worked with partners that have helped to develop a curriculum that ensured that individuals that were coming out of the training were ready to start their apprenticeship and then start a career with Akamai.

**Dave:** Wow, that's great. So there's an aptitude. So if they have an interest in technology and this must be some assessment, we think this person with some good training, can be a great technology practitioner.

**Anthony:** That is. So there's really three steps in the process, an application process, an assessment – more quantitative assessment, and an interview process. There are really three different people that over the course of the years running the program that have applied. One is, recent college grads, recent meaning couple/few years out of college, that decided that they probably should have majored in technology but didn't. The second population that we've recognized is a similar population, but these are folks who 10 plus years in their career as accountants, supply chain people, all different types of backgrounds, and decided they wanted to career pivot into technology.

And then there's a third segment of people that we recognize and that's individuals who are looking to reenter the workforce. There are a number of people who may have decided to leave the workforce temporarily to raise children, care for a parent, or pursue a different path and have recognized that this could be a way to reenter the workforce.

**Dave:** That's amazing.

**Anthony:** It's been a really outstanding way to bring in diversity on a number of levels. So, right, obviously we're trying to make our own talent if you will.

**Dave:** Right. You're broadening the pool of candidates, right?



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**Anthony:** That's right.

**Dave:** You're solving the problem.

**Anthony:** We're working on it. The type of diversity, you've got gender ethnicity, generational diversity. We've also focused on the veteran population and making sure that in the US we're giving them an opportunity as well through this program. It's been a really rich mix of diversity that we've been able to bring into the company through the program.

**Dave:** That's great. That's a great program.

What are some practices that you're proud of as far as attracting talent to Akamai? Maybe some tips that some of our HR listeners could tap into.

**Anthony:** This is a bit of reverse engineering. One of the things that we've tried to focus on is how to expose our current employees to other opportunities internally. I don't want to say that we're not battling for talent in the industry, because we continue to do that. But as we've gotten larger as a company...

**Dave:** How many employees now, Anthony?

**Anthony:** Just under 8,000 globally.

**Dave:** Okay.

**Anthony:** The larger we've gotten, the harder it's become to collaborate, to network, to really know who's who within the organization. We have what we call our APEX career expo, a globally focused opportunity that we do right now, once a year, that's a week-long event, that's focused on exposing our employees to other departments and areas within the organization. We bring in outside speakers, to talk to employees about their development, their growth, their personal brand, but there's really a focus on how can you continue to broaden your horizons career-wise and how can as an employer and as an HR function, how can we foster and help shepherd you in a direction that allows you to continue on a growth trajectory that is important for you.

**Dave:** Is that a virtual kind of conference?

**Anthony:** It's virtual this year.

**Dave:** But there was a physical component last year?

**Anthony:** That's correct.

**Dave:** So, Megan Mandino, who's here with us, the producer of The Hennessy Report by Keystone Partners. She has the NEHRA question of the podcast for you, Anthony.



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**Meghan Mandino:** Throughout your career you've managed many global teams. And right now, even leaders at small firms are faced with this element of remote connection. What advice would you give to emerging professionals looking to develop leaders and managers from your experience?

**Anthony:** I'm obviously looking at this through a lens of the pandemic. What I would share is that a number of these things are still relevant outside of the pandemic. Once the pandemic hit, we decided that we were going to have an acute focus on our leaders and their development, because we believed in order to shepherd the organization along during a really tough and uncertain time, really, we needed to make sure that our leaders were ready and that they had the right answers and response and level of support for employees.

So we've really focused on three things. One is the safety and the health of employees. Two is, are employees being engaged. And three, our employees being productive. From a managerial perspective we've given a number of options to our leaders, relevant to training and development around recognizing employee wellness, making sure that our leaders and managers are more aware of the options that they have in developing their employees so that they can actually stay well and healthy. From an engagement perspective, we've fully focused on the flexibility in the workplace. We try to help our managers and shifting their performance management focus to be less on time and more on getting things accomplished.

And from a productivity standpoint, this one has been an interesting one. The thing that we'd recognize, because they're limited in sort of their travel and limited during the pandemic, a lot of employees are not taking vacation. And so what we've shared with our managers is, hey, it's good for your employees to actually have some time off. It's good to make sure that they actually are able to disconnect and that they create some boundaries between work and home, in an effort to actually keep them productive. We feel those areas have really reinforced a level of productivity and a level of engagement and wellness among our employee population. So I say that this is something we've instituted in the pandemic, but I think a number of these things are still relevant and useful in any time period.

**Dave:** Anthony is there anything that's happened during this pandemic that has really surprised you about the organization, about people in the organization, about how work gets done?

**Anthony:** I continue to be encouraged. And so I go between encouraged and surprised at our leadership and our manager population have exercised a growth mindset. Unlike anything that I would have imagined. If you would have told me last year, this time that we're going to be sending almost our entire employee population home and working in a remote work fashion, and even under those circumstances, the company would continue to perform. We continue to have great quarters of performance.

**Dave:** I've noticed that. You are very busy, right. Business is booming, isn't it?

**Anthony:** That's right. And so, we continue to have highly engaged employees. I'm encouraged. I would have had a hard time believing that we would have transitioned into remote work and we're for all intents and purposes are incredibly productive and doing well.



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**Dave:** You must have some roles that need to be in a control center. Right? You have this thing where you're managing traffic, right?

**Anthony:** That's right. We have a very small population of our employees that we consider business essential, that are in network operation centers and security operations centers in a handful of locations around the globe.

**Dave:** I love asking this question to CHROs. Is there anything that was kind of a long held belief or practice in the way you did your work that you've changed your mind about over time?

**Anthony:** I'm continuing to evolve my perspective on our ability to continue to extend just the essence of our culture. I've evolved my thinking a bit that these relationships are only built in person. I'll give you an interesting perspective. So I was speaking with one of our leaders who is outside of the US, she said that oftentimes she may be on a video call and there may be a number of people that are in a conference room. And it's harder when you're on video. And there are maybe a group of people that are together to be able to feel the connection and to be able to interject or to comment or feel you're part of the discussion. And what remote work has done is it's put everyone on a level playing field.

**Dave:** I experienced that too. And I also think had this pandemic occurred five or 10 years ago, the ability for us to communicate this way. And now the technology that I'm sure Akamai has been working on, it just works so much better than just half a decade ago or a decade ago.

**Anthony:** Technology has definitely advanced and it helped enable the situation for sure.

**Dave:** If you could write a letter of career or professional advice, go back to Anthony when you're 25 or 30 years old, what would you write?

**Anthony:** It's important to continue to embrace difference, to continue to have a growth mindset, to continue to expand your horizons through meeting people that are different from you, experiencing cultures that are different from yours and continuing to gain experiences that are different from what you gained in the past. I've had the last 10 years of my career, an opportunity to exercise that to the fullest, but it took me a while to learn to embrace the challenge.

**Dave:** You wish you didn't wait.

**Anthony:** That's right.

**Dave:** You just joined a group with Mass TLC. Can you talk a little bit about, you've done with 60 other tech organizations in Massachusetts?

**Anthony:** Absolutely. Yes, the Massachusetts Technology Leadership Council, also known as Mass TLC. It's a fantastic organization that is set up to really serve as a professional organization and the thought leader for the tech industry here in Massachusetts. And in response to largely what we're seeing from a social justice and from a racial equality perspective, a number of organizations have banded together to





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really work much more deliberately to create a much more diverse tech ecosystem. Our ambition is that as a collective of organizations, there's a lot more progress that we can make together than working individually in our own companies, in our own silos.

**Dave:** Some of the things you're working on, similar to what you've done inside Akamai with your Academy, are you part of collaborating directly with other HR leaders on this as well?

**Anthony:** The compact is really comprised of a portfolio of different commitments that we believe will make a difference in driving a much more diverse tech ecosystem. So in order to become a part of the compact, you had to commit to doing some things differently. And there is some variety in the portfolio of what that difference is for that company. But you had to commit to a number of deliverables or a number of endeavors. We're working toward creating as a part of the commitments, a measurement that looks collectively at doubling the level of representation that we have in Massachusetts in the tech ecosystem. Not just increasing the representation, but making sure that the tech ecosystem is much more welcoming and inclusive.

**Dave:** That's great. What's the kindest thing anyone's ever done for you professionally?

**Anthony:** The kindest thing that anyone has done for me is my mother. She's taught me and gave me an appreciation for education and an appreciation for learning. And as a part of the kindest thing that she's ever done, is she taught me to value high character and to have strong values. And the reason that's important is, being the head of HR and being in a position that helps to support shepherding Akamai and helping to live our values and model the behavior of the company that we are and that we aspire to be, really goes back to who I am as a person. I was taught early on by my mother to focus on things like my values and character.

**Dave:** That's great. If you could go to dinner with anyone who you haven't met before, who would it be?

**Anthony:** I really enjoy the television show Shark Tank.

**Dave:** Oh yes. Yeah.

**Anthony:** I would want to go to lunch with the cast of Shark Tank.

**Dave:** The whole cast.

**Anthony:** I would not want to present to them any new ideas. But the rich guidance and the difference in experiences, the walk that each of them have had is very different. They're successful in their own right. And I would absolutely enjoy soaking up a dinner with the cast.

**Dave:** That's great. The favorite event you've ever attended, it could be like a show, sporting event, performance.

**Anthony:** You're going to think I'm corny here. The birth of my daughter.



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**Dave:** Excellent.

**Anthony:** It was an event.

**Dave:** Oh, it's an event.

**Anthony:** She came a little bit early. It was one that we relish and appreciate.

**Dave:** That's great. I think that's a good place to end the podcast. We have your mother and your wife and your daughter all here at the end of the discussion. So thank you, Anthony, for taking the time to be our guest here today.

**Anthony:** It's been truly a pleasure. I appreciate the time and thank you for having me.

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