

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 and today's guest is the Chief People Officer of Southwest Airlines, Julie Weber. Southwest is celebrating so many people coming back to travel again and also celebrating their 50th anniversary of their founding. In fact, Julie shares how their founder Herb Kelleher's philosophy of put people first and the company will succeed has been a guiding principle through the organization's history and especially during the pandemic. Julie is an authentic leader, loves Southwest Airlines, and she takes us under the hood of one of the most well-known and talked about cultures in corporate America. And she shares how their secret sauce is hiring for attitude. And you'll enjoy this discussion.

Next up on The Hennessy Report by Keystone is the CHRO of Moderna, Tracy Franklin. They created a little vaccine you might've heard about over the last few months and now our conversation with Julie Weber.

Julie, welcome to the podcast. It's so great to have you.

Julie Weber: Thank you.

Dave: I'm so happy that my Keystone Dallas colleague, Debbie Noschese introduced us and we might have her pop in a little bit later in the episode. We'd love to start learning just a little bit about you. Julie, if you look back, is there an inflection point in your life/career that set you on this career path or has a big influence on what you do for work today?

Julie: Absolutely. There's two points. One it's the decision I made to go into HR was really one of survival, more than anything. Since I put myself through undergraduate and graduate school with student loans, graduated at a time where jobs were scarce and the ability to get into what I thought would be my profession, which was becoming a therapist, it was difficult. And so I reached out to one of my undergraduate advisors who told me to seek a career in Human Resources. That that might be a really good opportunity. I got a job as a recruiter at an agency and found my passion. It was not the path I thought I would take, but once I began my career as a recruiter and then learning more about Human Resources, I absolutely loved it. And that whole idea of one day I'll go back and be that therapist. That day's never come because I've enjoyed what I do so much. After I was an agency recruiter I had the opportunity to begin my HR corporate recruiting and HR profession at a software company.

And it was a startup software company. The founders of that company really believed in people's potential. So here I was, an individual with two degrees in psychology, two years of agency recruiting, being brought into the software company to be a recruiter and was given the opportunity to just start building the human resources practice for that software company. All because somebody believed in my potential. And that is really been quite a powerful lesson for me in terms of how I think about talent, how I think about how to develop others. People just need to have their potential unleashed.



Dave: That's great and a perfect role to help do that. We have a lot to talk about, but first you're celebrating 50 year anniversary of the founding of Southwest Airlines this year. When you were founded, it was a much smaller organization, of course, but really revolutionized air travel and the way we think about corporate culture as well. What could you tell us a little bit about how the company has evolved over its 50 years and what you're proud of?

Julie: It is very exciting to be celebrating 50 years, to be able to be a part of Southwest during such a momentous occasion. Southwest started with three airplanes serving three cities, and many people are familiar with our founder, Herb Kelleher. Absolutely brilliant businessman and had a love for people. From a Human Resources standpoint, I think what is remarkable when you look back over the 50 years is how revolutionary Herb Kelleher was and how he thought about employees. He really believed that if you put your people first, your company will succeed. So his philosophy was, "Happy employees make for happy customers, which make for happy shareholders." That people first philosophy really has carried us through 50 years. We have had a lot more competition right over the years. We started off as a low-fare carrier. We democratize the skies by bringing low airfares to the traveling public so more people could enjoy air travel.

As the years have gone on, there is a lot of competition from other low-cost carriers. So we have to think about what differentiates us, and it's certainly the service we provide. It's the reliable air travel, but I also think it's our people. Our people are our differentiator. When you fly on Southwest Airlines, you hopefully have a very enjoyable experience. We hire people who put others first. We hire people who are just famous for their hospitality and exemplary service. They also are the ones who have carried us through some of the most difficult times we have gone through as a nation, as a world.

So, they have carried us through 9/11, they carried us through the economic downturn in 2009, they carried us through the pandemic. That people first philosophy, which began from, in Herb's own personal philosophy has really set amazing precedents when it comes to human resources. And you think about today and over the past 10, 15 years with a focus on employee engagement, a focus on corporate culture and it was something that was really very organic in the beginning. And it's something that we work really hard at.

Dave: When you started to mention that a lot of organizations have focused on these things. I've had a couple podcasts guests talk about Southwest Airlines. I remember back in business school in the 90s, I was reading cases about the fun culture and the overlap with the marketing brand as well. I think your organization has really been the pioneer. You're talking about this right now, but if you could go into a little bit more detail about those tenets of the culture and the kind of person you hire and what do you hire for and how do you keep that culture over 50 years what you want it to be with different leaders and different people over generations now?

Julie: We work very hard at not only maintaining our culture, but continually enriching our culture. Our purpose is to connect people to what's important in their lives, through friendly, reliable, and low cost air travel. And the vision that we have is to be the world's most loved, most efficient, and most profitable airline. When you think about both of those things, our purpose and our vision really helps us bring focus operationally, what do we do? How do we hire, how do we treat each other? And how do



we set our strategies? If we want to be the world's most loved, most efficient, most profitable airline, then what do we need to do? And they're simple statements, but that is something that you can bring an entire organization behind. We have a promise to our employees as a people department, human resources, it really does help ground what we do.

So, our company promise is that Southwest will provide a stable work environment with equal opportunity for learning and personal growth. Employees will be provided the same concern, respect, and caring attitude within the organization that they are expected to share externally with every Southwest customer. And when you start to unpack those words about having stability, a stable work environment, equal opportunity for learning and growth, and that our employees will be provided with respect and care. That really helps shape then what you do as a human resources organization. A big part of what we do is we focus on hiring the right people. You've probably read this before about Southwest, or we have said, we hire for attitude and train for skill. I want you to know we hire skilled people. So our pilots are highly, highly skilled.

Dave: And the people that maintain those engines and everything very highly skilled.

Julie: Very highly skilled, but the point is, and where that came from is that we will not put skill over attitude. So having values that align with Southwest values that is of utmost importance, that is more important than skill. So we first will interview candidates, of course, who meet the basic requirements for the job, but we'll first interview for people who are going to work incredibly hard, have that sense of urgency. We've called that warrior spirit. We're going to hire people who put others first, who really want to serve others. That's the servant's heart that we've talked about. And then, we want people to take their job really seriously, but not themselves, which is really important for teamwork. That's that fun loving attitude, but over time, and as you grow, people need to understand what those words mean. They have to be able to articulate that, and act accordingly. And so, we've just worked to really refine and develop almost a double click, if you will into all of those values to themselves.

Dave: Could you give us an example of maybe an evolution to give people a picture of how it might evolve or how it gets enhanced the culture, over time.

Julie: Absolutely. So it's really thinking about it a little bit differently. It's thinking about me. So how do I show up? And we have values underneath that, which is pride, integrity, and humility. And then how do we work together? So it's about teamwork, honesty, and service with love. And then as an organization, how do we operate? So Southwest and that is efficiency, discipline, and excellence. And under each of those things, you really can do a double click and it starts to help you understand a little bit more when we say warrior spirit, what does that mean? Having these a little bit more clearly defined helps us as we grow and evolve and we welcome new employees into our organization.

How I show up and how that translates to pride is having that strong work ethic, taking initiative, and being accountable. That's what we mean by warrior spirit. And we took the time a couple of years ago to really dive in and make sure that we had that clearly defined. So every individual, every employee would understand what we mean. Also, when you double click into the values and you see the specific behaviors that align to those, one of the specific behaviors that we have identified is don't be a jerk and



I think that's pretty clear. People can understand what that means. That is officially in our values at Southwest Airlines still feature.

Dave: It's right in there. Don't be a jerk. It's right in there. It is vivid, I think we all know what that means when we see it. Right?

Julie: Yes, yeah.

Dave: Perfect. Awesome. You also add to that perspective from the person, from their team, and also global, the whole organization.

Meghan Mandino: After hearing you talk about purpose and vision, before our call I was watching a video that Southwest had put out eight years ago called, *Our Purpose and Vision*. And it goes through different customer experiences with the employees that you have those working in the check-in, in the airport, to the flight attendants, to the pilots, and all of the different ways that they've touched the customers, whether it was bringing a full family on to say goodbye to their dad who was going to go overseas in the military. And one of them was sending a little boy his bear back, carrying someone's military flag in the cockpit. So it just shows how those values are represented every day.

Julie: I think you bring up something really important, Meghan. The kinds of experiences you just mentioned are things you really can't train people to do. You hire people who have that desire to really put others first, but I don't know if you saw the video of one of our supervisors, Reesie. one of our customers was going to go run a marathon.

Her bag did not make it on that plane. And it had the shoes that she really needed to run that marathon. And Reesie knew how important these shoes were to our customer. She took it upon herself. She drove the bag out to the customer and I believe it was something like a two or three hour drive.

Dave: Wow.

Julie: You can't have a rule book for that. You can't have a training guide for that. You have to hire people who want to do that. And that's why we do focus so heavily on hiring tough. But that's part of my advice to others. People say, "Well, how can we as an organization, learn from Southwest? Think about how your values translate into your hiring." And that can be incredibly difficult in times like, 2019, you have the lowest unemployment we had ever seen prior to the pandemic, right? And we were growing, we were needing to hire quite a few folks and it can be easy to just hurry up and get people in the door. But we take that harder right, which is to ensure that we are hiring individuals who have these values and who are going to continue to have the service that our customers expect from us.

Dave: Maybe it's trade secrets. You don't want to give it away, but is there anything that you could share about, how do you actually find these things out through the interview process?



Julie: We've developed behavioral based interview questions that are tied to the values that help to elicit a discussion about these topics. So, a question that is fairly common that we'll ask is, "Tell me about a time that you went above and beyond to help a coworker?"

Dave: Oh yeah.

Julie: That helps us dive in a little bit more into teamwork and to putting others first.

Dave: Right. That's good. I mentioned it before and I was wondering if you'd just like to comment on the fact that Southwest Airlines has this very well-known culture, this fun culture and also the branding like the commercial and the advertising also brings in some of that fun spirit and that overlap of corporate culture and marketing branding. I was wondering how it helps you as the HR leader to have those two things consistent where your product marketing has a similar attitude as the things that you're looking to foster in your culture. How has it helped? And what are some of the challenges of that?

Julie: We ride on the coattails of our marketing branding. Of course, we have this strong connection between what you see with our marketing, which is incredibly fun.

Dave: Yeah. And it could be really silly, it's yeah.

Julie: It can and then the experience that you end up having when you fly on us, they're similar.

Dave: Right. You see the flight attendance almost act like they could be in one of those commercials. They have those qualities, of fun and silliness.

Julie: They have those qualities. And so, it's important that we hire for that. But one of the fun things about talent acquisition at Southwest is the sheer interest that we have in our jobs. And when you ask a job candidate, why are you interested in Southwest Airlines? Why did you apply? So many times we hear, "Well, I enjoy flying on Southwest Airlines. I enjoy the comradery among your employees and I want to be a part of that."

Dave: Ah, right.

Julie: So, some of our greatest recruiters are our employees in our stations. Our employees, our flight attendants, our pilots because so many of our job candidates started out as customers.

Dave: Right. That's a differentiator, that's for sure. Any challenges about having the corporate branding and the corporate culture marketing branding similar?

Julie: The work that our employees do is really hard. There are ground operations personnel who are responsible for your bags. They do this day in day out. It's a lot of pressure and in not the best conditions. In Phoenix, it can easily be over 110 degrees outside. In Denver, doing that fighting ice and snow. It is hard work. The work that our flight attendants do, the work that our pilots do, their number



one focus is on safety. And that sometimes perhaps is what some job candidates may not understand. This is going to be a fun career. It's going to be incredibly rewarding, but it is going to be hard work.

Dave: That's good. That's interesting. Well, I'm sure your corporate culture has been very beneficial to have during this particular time. I think maybe we should shift and talk about what you've been through as you think about how you've dealt with this pandemic. Can you talk about how the culture has helped you through it? What are the things you've done to help protect your employees, your customers, your passengers?

Julie: Our people first culture helped guide us through the pandemic. You had to pivot so quickly as an HR department, we were hiring like crazy. We had a whole HR transformation we were doing, with looking at new technologies and new service models. It was a lot of work going on that just had to come to a complete stop and putting people first meant our number one priority became protecting our employees, protecting our customers, and protecting Southwest Airlines, protecting our business. This is a terrible disease. We need to understand what policies, what procedures, what things we need to put in place to protect our employees and to protect our customers. We need to focus on health and safety. And then we had to focus on how do we now protect the business. As we all know, air travel really was impacted.

Dave: Yeah. One of the top two or three industries to be really impacted directly by this. Right?

Julie: Absolutely devastating. Think about the staffing levels our organization had, and as air travel drops dramatically, we are faced with overstaffing. How do we protect our organization and protect jobs and protect pay? And so we worked very hard to develop some programs that would aid us in reducing that staffing cost, but at the same time helped us protect jobs. So we developed a voluntary separation package that was very, very generous for those who were ready to voluntarily separate from the company. And then we developed some paid leave programs where employees could take... It wasn't even a leave of absence, active on all of our benefits and received some pay for taking these extended time off programs. And we had a lot of interest. We're very grateful for those employees who participated. We did really have to think about furloughs and pay reductions and because of notice requirements, we did go as far as issuing some furlough notices to some of our work groups and pay reduction notices to our employees who are not covered by collective bargaining agreements.

So we went as far as doing that to provide notice, but I'm very proud to say here in our 50th year that we were able to avoid those actions. So we can still say today that we have 50 years of job protection and pay protection, 50 years of doing that.

Dave: Wow.

Julie: But I want to just share something that makes me tear up every time I talk about it. This speaks to the heart of Southwest Airlines and the heart of our employees. When I issued these payroll reduction notices from my email account to every individual, telling them that there was this potential for their salary to be reduced by 10%, it would have been effective January 1st of this year. The amount of thank you, emails that I received from that was, it's overwhelming to send a notice to someone to say, "We're



going to reduce your pay." And to get a response back saying, "Thank you for protecting my job. I happily will take this pay cut. Let me know if I need to sign something. I am willing to do this for Southwest Airlines."

Dave: Wow.

Julie: That is the heart of this company. And that's why I said earlier, our employees really carry us through these difficult times and that's an example. We were all rallied together to protect Southwest Airlines, protect a company that we love so dearly and protect that legacy. It was just overwhelming.

Dave: That's amazing. What an amazing story. And it's like a mutual commitment to each other, you to your employees and them to the organization, all of you to your organization. That's great.

Julie: I think that's what happens when you put people first, when you focus on your employees and you truly care about your employees, then they care about you. They care about the company.

Dave: That's great. Julie, as you look forward now, now that we're pulling out of the pandemic, hopefully, what are the learnings that you can use going forward for the organization or for your department or for you personally?

Julie: One we've learned that we can be incredibly agile. That goes back to some of our roots when Southwest Airlines was younger and we were scrappy and we were very agile. So we've learned that we are still agile and we've learned the importance of agility. From a Human Resources organization, we really came together. Not that we weren't, but this clear focus that we had on protecting our employees, it just really brought us together. And some of the things that we've learned as an organization that I hope that we carry forward, how we communicated with each other and how we celebrate it with each other. Like pretty much everyone, we had to learn how to use new tools and technology in order to interact with each other. My leadership team, we started meeting daily for a couple hours versus the one day of the week that we would meet for a staff meeting and became very much a collective team that was working together on these initiatives.

And we're going to continue that focus. It's easy to get into your silos, but when you come together and understand how these strategies that you have for talent acquisition, about how these things all intertwined and you work really closely together on those. I think it just brings a tremendous value to our employees in terms of what we end up producing. And so our communication has been very tight. We can probably finish each other's sentences. We want to continue that, and we want to continue with that for a broad organization. So as a people department, we've got people department employees dispersed throughout the US, we've got recruiters, we've got HR business partners. We've got folks everywhere. And prior to the pandemic, for years, we would have our all hands team meetings in Dallas. I was always very sensitive to the travel that would be required to come into Dallas for those meetings.

We would try to provide a virtual option, taping it, something like that. But I learned that the experience wasn't good, that when you are participating virtually there may be some things that you really miss with that live audience that's happening and that live experience. Going 100% virtual gave everybody



the same experience and we realized it's a really good experience. So I plan to continue that in the future so that every member of the people department has an excellent experience. They're able to get the information that we provide in these all hands meetings, but it also takes pressure off of them to travel into Dallas when they're recruiting plates are usually quite full. And so it can be difficult to pull away for two to three days to attend a meeting. So it's taught us some efficiency.

Dave: Based on what we've been through. It sounds like you've noticed with your leadership team and with your own HR team, that there's more teamwork and it's been more effective in some ways, right? I mean, we lose something, not being in person, but you give two examples of team effectiveness improving and you want to keep it going. So that's great.

Julie: We want to keep that efficiency. So, the question of 10 years from now, what do you hope you don't regret? What I hope I don't regret is losing some of these new ways of working that we developed through the pandemic.

Dave: That's great.

Julie: I think we've all learned more about work-life balance. I think we've all learned the value of being at home and enjoying your family. We all had to do that and we all learned to do that. From a meeting perspective, when you think about work, and I was talking about efficiency. Virtual meetings, they start on time and they end on time.

Dave: Right.

Julie: I think we've gained so much in terms of efficiency and agility that just starts to... And why are those things important? Because it gives you then capacity.

Dave: It seems like you're just excited about the future for Southwest and the way you operate as a team.

Julie: I'm really excited. I'm really excited about the future. We're coming out of this and to think about life and travel returning to normal. It's very exciting.

Dave: It is. I'm curious, is Southwest passenger base more corporate or leisure travel?

Julie: We're seeing leisure travel. I think what we're all experiencing is this pent up demand to get out and about, go see family, go take trips, go have fun. Some people are calling it, revenge travel. It's like, I'm tired of this pandemic. I want to get back out there and go take a vacation.

Dave: Right.

Julie: But we would love all of you on the call to really think about some of these trips that you need to take, whether it's for business or leisure.



Dave: Well, it's time for the NEHRA Emerging HR Professionals question of the podcast. We're going to bring Meghan back.

Meghan: Many of our guests cite their start in HR as a chance opportunity or something recommended to them by a colleague or manager. I know in one of your interviews, you said the same and even earlier in the podcast. You work a lot with the internship program at Southwest and through the work that you do with the University of Dallas and Colorado State University. So I was wondering what advice you give to those graduates and that you would give to anyone listening, who are just entering the job market. Maybe they don't know what their calling is.

Julie: Number one, focus on finding a company that aligns with your values. When you do that, you'll be surrounded with people who also align to your values. You spend a lot of time at work, and it is important that you enjoy what you do and important that you enjoy, who you do that with.

You might get too focused on the actual job. And that puts a lot of pressure on you, especially if you're not quite sure what you want to do. The second piece of advice is, don't worry, if you don't know exactly what you want to do. Any job that you take will be an incredible learning experience. Whether it turns out to be something that you love, or it turns out to be something that you don't love, you are going to learn something from it. Over the span of your career, you're going to continually evolve. Rarely have I run into somebody who is 20, 30 years into their career, and they are doing exactly what they set out to do when they were leaving school. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to find the right job first, put more pressure on yourself to find the right company.

Dave: I think that's really good advice. I remember there was some career expert. I think it was one of our NEHRA conferences. And he was saying, "In the early part of your career, try lots of different things, lots of different functions, other industries. And then as you get mid-career, then go deep and narrow in the things you love." But you're adding another component. First, find the values, find the people and organization that has that shared values. And then you can focus on what you want to do. That's great. You're in Dallas, so NEHRA is not close to you, Northeast Human Resource Association, but DallasHR is, and my Keystone Dallas colleague, Debbie Noschese is with us. Debbie, do you want to throw out a DallasHR type of question?

Debbie Noschese: I do. And I actually have one directly from the Director of Membership, Tim Gunn from DallasHR. I asked, what question would the membership have if they met Julie, it kind of goes along with what Meghan was just asking. What advice would you share with a young professional who aspires to work in Human Resources?

Dave: A little different spin on it, right? A little bit more focused on HR.

Debbie: A little different spin... more specific to Human Resources.

Julie: Join DallasHR, join SHRM, Society Of Human Resources Management, such a wealth of knowledge. And there are so many people who are willing to help you, who are willing to mentor you. Don't be afraid to ask for help and support. I would not be where I am today had it not been for SHRM. And I'll



tell you why. So when I started at the software company I mentioned. As a recruiter, I was given this opportunity to start building an HR function. I joined SHRM. oh, golly. This is back in the mid-90s.

There was a forum, Human Resources Professionals. You had folks asking questions and all these incredible people freely gave up their time to respond to these questions. I learned so much from that forum. And I'm so grateful to that organization. I'm grateful to the members of that organization who give so freely of themselves. The second piece of advice I would give, do not put limits on yourself. So many times I run into someone who they want to get into HR, but they're already starting to limit themselves and say, "Well, I don't really like the numbers side or the benefits side." Learn it all. Set your sights on becoming a Chief People Officer and don't limit yourself.

Dave: Don't forget to learn about comp. Right?

Julie: You've got to learn about compensation. As a Chief People Officer is absolutely key that you deeply understand compensation, benefits, talent acquisition. In many companies, salary, wages, and benefits is the biggest expense. And you're managing quite a lot of budget and very complicated, difficult things. Don't decide you have to have a certain job title or don't even decide you have to have a certain amount of pay. Think of starting out your career as a continued investment in your learning.

Dave: That's great. Both DallasHR and NEHRA are both SHRM chapters, since you brought up SHRM. I know when you hire for HR, you're looking for the warrior spirit and the servant heart and fun-loving attitude. In addition to those things, what else is important to you about the people you bring in to your HR people function at Southwest Airlines?

Julie: Some of it will sound a little funny, but I mean it. I think human resources professionals should really like humans, individuals who have empathy, who are good listeners and have a lot of care. You've got to have strong business acumen and you have to have the ability to think critically and objectively about not only business issues, but people issues. Those two things can be difficult to balance, care about people, care about people deeply, but then you've got to have some strong objectivity.

Dave: I know what you mean, because sometimes they can feel like they're in conflict, right?

This came from one of your peers in the travel industry. Beth Grous at TripAdvisor was my first HR leader guest. And she said, "Ask me this question." And then I asked her this question. If you could write a letter of advice, professional career advice to your 25 or 30 year old self, what would you write? Dear Julie...

Julie: Dear Julie, don't lose your confidence. You might question yourself. You might question your abilities. We've all probably read something about the imposter syndrome that plagues some people. Feel like, "Well, I'm not worthy. I'm going to be found out that I don't really have what it takes." Earlier in my career I was worried that I did not have degrees in Human Resources. And so I would just tell myself, "Be confident. You are building all of the skills and abilities you need to do the work that you're doing."



Dave: That's great. Something interesting about you that we wouldn't find on your LinkedIn profile that you're willing to share, with just all of our listeners.

Julie: So, many people probably don't know that I am very crafty. I love making cards. I love making jewelry. I love cooking. That is how I relax. That's how I escape.

Dave: What's one of your favorite things to cook, curiously?

Julie: I like making homemade pasta and then continually working on developing some good sauce recipes.

Dave: If you could cook for any person who you don't know, who would it be and why?

Julie: Wow. See, now that would be that intimidating part. I would tell myself, I need to have confidence for what I'm doing. So I wouldn't want to mess it up. If I had the ability, I would love to just cook for some of these healthcare professionals who've just given their heart and soul over the past 14 months. They certainly have provided so much to all of us, caring for us. Those who've been working so hard on developing these vaccines. If there was a way for me to invite them all over for dinner and provide them a good meal, I would.

Dave: Well, that's a good way to go out. That's very well said, and so great to have you as a guest on our podcast. Thank you Julie for spending the time with us.

Debbie: Thank you Julie.

Julie: Thank you. Wish all of you, just the best and get out there and go take some wonderful trips and build some new memories.

Debbie: Will do. Will do.

Dave: Thank you.

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