

# The ASHHRA Podcast

featuring Bo & Luke from The Bo & Luke Show

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## Episode Time Hacks

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## Raw Transcript

**00:06 - Luke**

Hello ASHHRA listeners. Welcome to the ASHHRA podcast. My name is Luke Carignan, your co-host, and I'm here with our other co-host, Bo Brabo. And Bo, I've been looking forward to this episode for a long time now. We have two awesome guests, we normally have one, we got two today. And the background on these folks is incredible. I'm going to introduce them right now. So let's talk about what they have in common. And there's a lot that I can go through both of them started in HR and health care, on the nursing side of things so that they have that experience. Both went to the University of Illinois, go fighting Illini. Both worked at Cleveland Clinic for a while as well. And now they're both c-levels at Houston Methodist, which is, by the way, one of the top-rated health systems in the entire country. We have with us Carolee Hackett, Chief Human Resources Officer and Senior Vice President, and Tom Vernon, Chief Experience Officer, also from Houston Methodist. Carole and Tom, welcome to the show. Well, we've been so pumped to interview you. I know we're talking about a few things beforehand. But I wanted to kick it off with just setting something out there to the listeners when we were talking to Tom and Carole before the show. We're talking about culture, that's what they're most passionate about; what they really drive through. One thing that's going to come to life, I think, in this episode is these folks are not playing defense, sitting on the sidelines, they are playing offense and scoring points in the HR arena. And we're just saying, you know that culture is one of those things where if you're not super intentional about it, you're gonna have one either way, if you don't focus on it, it could be bad, but you'd have zero control of where it goes from there. And Tom, and Carole, I'd just like to open it up from there and say, you know, how are you intentional about it? And what are the goals, you know, speak to us as the HR

community of what can I do to improve?

## **02:10 - Carole**

I'll kick it up. And then I'll let Tom continue. But for us, culture is what differentiates us. If you don't have a culture that's in alignment, with business success and business goals. And if you don't have a culture of engagement, you're not going to be able to retain top talent, you're not going to be able to hire the best into the organization. And so what we do is we plan for it. It's very purposeful. We have a vision for our second century (we turned 100 years old in 2019); it's to be unparalleled in safety, quality, service, and innovation. And we have spent years describing that explaining that to our employees what unparalleled means and unparalleled means simply the best. Are we there yet? No. Are we on a journey? Absolutely. So everything we do is connected to safety, quality, service, and innovation in that order. That's a prioritized order. We also have a foundation of values. Now a lot of organizations have values, and they aspire to them, and they put them on the walls, but we truly live out our values. We call them the "I CARE" values. And it's for integrity, compassion, accountability, respect, and excellence. We also have defined these, what they mean in behavioral terms, and level set expectations for everyone in the organization, and how to achieve these and what that looks like. We, you know, we reward for it every year. We give people gold badges that are exemplary, you know exemplary in that in their behaviors and what they do around our patients and around each other and our physicians, but we also terminate employees as a result of lack of values. So we take it very seriously. And it's integrated into every thread of our organization. And lastly, we are a Methodist organization. So we have a very spiritual culture, not religious, spiritual, everybody is welcome here, all religions, and we all respect each other.

#### **04:32 - Tom**

Yeah, culture is probably the biggest differentiator for me as well. It connects you to your purpose. So when you start out in healthcare, it's not an easy career path, you really have to have a sense of purpose to be able to do that. And we are differentiated in that space. And so when we look at culture, a lot of times from the HR perspective, people look at what do we need to do from the employee culture? We look at it collectively with the patient culture as well. So how do we create an environment that we can deliver the Houston Methodist variance, which includes our values, our patients, and our employees. And we are very, very intentional about what we do. And earlier I was talking with Bo, and he talked about everyone can speak and communicate the spoken word. But how do you listen, it's the other part of the equation. So good communication is being able to speak and listen and communicate. So people feel connected, and they feel their sense of purpose. And I feel that it's done here quite often, which is connected to my sense of purpose. That's, that's what excites me.

#### **05:29 - Luke**

That was amazing. One thing that just stood out to me, a lot of organizations do try to live out their core values. Carole, one thing that you said was, you protect it by terminating as well, you don't hear a lot, very often anymore. And to me, that might be one of the most important things that you hit on, you know, I try to look at, I like to envision culture as a garden, right, we have these beautiful flowers that are blooming and growing up, but then we also have weeds that can grow up and take over the garden. And sometimes, you know, it's just got to be weeded out. I don't hear a lot of folks saying that when it comes to culture. Do you get that add in there?

## **06:11 - Bo**

Now, can I add in there? Before you guys answer that? Back in 2018, 2019, I started doing research and I wrote a book and it was my journey, my past from the battlefield to the White House, to the boardroom. And I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what, what was it that I had through 26 years in the Army to include 10 of those at the White House under President Bush and President Obama? What is it from a leadership perspective, that was different from what I was experiencing in the corporate world. And I landed on values. And so the subtitle of the book is values, you know, leading organizations to values based results. And throughout the book, and, Carole, I just love that you said it, it's about behavior. It's like how our are leaders behaving? Are you capturing what behavior looks like? Is that what you're training on? Is that what you are expecting and sharing what your expectations are of your team members? What does values adding up to Luke, what Luke was talking about? Why do you think organizations aren't all doing this? I did a lot of research. I went to different consulting companies that speak on that. And it's, it's amazing how I would say few in the grand scheme of it, how many companies there are in the world that actually land on values. And I would say figure it out, that this is where it lies right here. You want to be the best; this is where it's at. So I'll leave that with you.

## **07:46 - Carole**

I will tell you why we are doing it, which would probably tell you why organizations are not. It depends upon where their focus is. If they're focused on the bottom line, and profit, and profit margin, you're going to cut in other places to get that profit margin, right? You're gonna do things that, you know, oh, if you're not making budget for that month, I'm gonna wipe out a layer of employees or leaders, so I can make that bottom line. But if you're, if you're steadfast and

steady on what you have to achieve, and you get the fundamentals right, rewards will come. And so what I mean by that is what we found out, and it was before my time and Tom's time, this organization got together in the early 2000s, as a system, and these values were created from people in the organization, frontline workers. And we created a whole support unit called values integration and spiritual care. We and they helped drive the values through reflections, etc. And what I mean by reflections, every time we open up a meeting, we have a reflection that grounds us. It's not necessarily a prayer, it could be a video, it could be you do video, but it's something that exemplifies our values, and level sets everybody for that meeting, right? And so it grounds everybody, we recommit to these values every year, every department, every person, we have a recommitment exercise which helps us come together and explain the values that are most important to us. And this year, it's around connectedness and how we connect with each other. And what does that mean for respect and how does that create teamwork to create excellence? So it's on the front brain of everybody to really, really, really feel that glue that keeps us together to move forward. For our business and for our patients.

#### **10:00 - Tom**

I think to tag team on what you said about leadership Bo earlier, depending where you are, right now, these are real here, we bring them to life and leaders and everyone's expected to commit to those and demonstrate those. So we've had an opportunity, we probably all have to visit and benchmark with many organizations. And from my perspective, if he walked through any healthcare organization, 90% of the values are about 90%, the same, the words might be different, but the meanings are the same. The difference is, is it just on a wall for people to look at? Or do they talk about them? Are they recognized for them,

like Carole says, we'll hire, we'll recognize, we'll invite people to join our competitors if they're not living those values. So the difference to us is that they are very real. And if you were to walk down our halls and you say, why are you at Methodist? Why do you come? Why do you stay, 90% of the people within the first minute are going to talk about our values, because it's very, very real. It's on your performance review. It's on our application. We just recommitted to ours. We have a celebration tomorrow, the annual recommitment of how you live what you're doing. So I think that's the big differentiator, the values are real.

**11:08 - Bo**

So when you're speaking and you're training, and you're having meetings with your talent acquisition team, for bringing new people on board, do you use them? Are you like infused with behavioral based questioning, to see if you can actually find someone who's going to fit with your values gives you a higher probability that they won't be invited to go work for your competitors? And if you haven't, how do you work those in with talent acquisition?

**11:32 - Tom**

You have to attest to those on the application itself, you have to attest that you understand and agree to them. And we have a lot of different tools that we use, but the values are integrated, that everything that we do with behavior-based questions, we have a pre-hire assessment, that when we partner with a company, we made sure that our values were threaded through that pre-hire assessment. So it just, it's just part of what we do.

**11:56 - Bo**

I like that you have to attest to it. I think that's fantastic.

## **12:02 - Carole**

I just wanted to say a long time ago, we decided that we were not hiring for fit. And that we were hiring people because we were in a rapid growth mode, building new hospitals, building new bed towers, and we were just trying to fill them as fast as we could. And we saw a dip in our engagement scores. And it was, we're on the fortune 100 Best Places to Work For 10 years in a row. And the 11th year, we didn't make the list. The same year, we also were hiring one in four people were new, that was due to our growth and a little higher turnover than expected. And we realized that our culture was diluted, we needed to go back to the fundamentals and start hiring for fit and emphasizing the expectations around behaviors for our values. The next year, and we did some realignment we'll talk about, but next year, the next year, our engagement scores went up to 95% engagement. So focusing on what's really important and aligning people to the purpose of the organization will make them more engaged, you know, working at the top of their game, and also retain.

## **13:29 - Tom**

So why don't we talk a little bit Carole about pathway unparalleled sessions that were born out of that little bit of a dip. I think it was back, I started in May, our results came down lower than usual. In September we had to make sure it wasn't me that dropped them. But what we did is we bring the entire organization together each year to have a conversation about being unparalleled about our values, about the employee experience, the patient experience, and we bring people together. Right now we're about 30,000 employees, and each one of them will sit in a group of 10 at a table having a conversation, what does it mean to be the safest organization on the planet from a nurse's perspective, from EBS, from a doctor, from an administrator, you know, from an executive,



when we have these mixed groups talking about that every year. And the first time we went to our executive team, and we pitched it, we got their buy-in relatively quickly. But when you look at the expense of taking all of your people in an organization out of staffing, probably about an hour and a half by the time you get to and from the session. It's a huge investment. I don't want to say expense, I want to say investment. We've been doing it every year since, where a lot of organizations, they'll do it once every three years. But for us, we really look at it as an investment, very intentional in our culture. And when people have conversations and they're answering the questions, Bo they listen to each other. And they may think that I don't have much of a role in supporting our patients because I work in the back-office accounting function. And the people at that table are saying, "are you kidding me? Do you know what you do when you Get the bill accurate? Do you know what happens when I get paid appropriately?" So the person could have heard that from their leader for years. But when you hear it from your peers, you really absorb it, and you really connect to it.

### **15:12 - Carole**

Yeah, we call it pathway to unparalleled. Remember, our vision for the second century is to be unparalleled on safety, quality service and intervention and innovation. And we've defined what each of them means. We've also said, what you can do in your role to exemplify that. And then we start to hear stories, the stories of when they had an innovative idea, when they really exemplified, you know, compassionate communication. And it's the stories that people remember. And it's the stories that align them to the organization. And all of a sudden, they feel a sense of purpose, and they see themselves here, it's very powerful. And we do this once a year, every year. We missed 2020, because of everything COVID. But it's been an amazing realignment of people to culture.

**16:12 - Bo**

That's powerful. It sounds super powerful to me, Luke, what do you think?

**16:16 - Luke**

Oh my gosh, that's amazing. I'm sure you know this, but you have an amazing brand. And the healthcare industry, I don't think I've ever heard anyone say anything bad about Houston Methodist, at all, right. And now after talking to you, I kind of get it like, I feel like you're at that point in doing the work on culture, where you're really starting to see the benefits of people, the benefits with business that like everybody aspires to its next level, from what I've seen across the industry, let me ask, was it always this way? Or was there a point in time where you had to do a lot of work? Or like, has this evolved over 100 years? Like, how did it get here? And how can other people get here, too?

**17:05 - Carole**

Yeah, I do think when things happen to organizations, big changes that happen, make you rethink how you're going to approach forming new organizations. So we had an organization that we were partnered with back in the early 2000s, that split apart. And as a result of that, we had to redefine who we were, and redefine our culture and redefine us, as not a partnership with this organization. And that's what led us to really focus on. Okay, who are we? What is our purpose? And how can we permeate that through the entire organization. And that thread was, again, the values that linked everybody together, that was the foundation to jump from people come here, because those values resonate with them. And they want to work in a place that actually live out those values. So it was a major organizational change, that prompted Houston Methodist to do this, you

know, 23 years ago.

### **18:22 - Tom**

And I always want to say when we're not perfect, right, we don't pretend to be perfect. We put in the effort, and we aspire that our effort will be there, but we're not perfect. So one of the things that we have going for us, we have such a solid foundation in regard to our culture, that after COVID, I say this all the time, we all look at the world different every person I know, looks at the world different. We don't look at it the same way, but different than where we started. So when we started getting feedback from our employees, we started asking about what's important to you, what's the employee value proposition? And some people have said, well, we're already good on engagement scores. Why do we want to mess with that, we listened to our folks, and we totally revamp what we're trying to do with the employee value proposition. Carole alluded to it earlier. How do we help people get more flexibility, be connected to our purpose, make connection? So what we do is we respond to that with things we put in the market for our employees and Carole can elaborate but we're looking at our benefits differently. We have a very heavy focus on things like career development. And its things that our people asked us and talk to us about that we understand. We're not fearful of making some changes, so we can continue to be so invested in our culture as we are today.

### **19:36 - Carole**

Yeah. And you know, what the value proposition before was, what are the things that people get from working in that environment that they value, right? Today, there's much more of an emotional hook. People don't want to know what they get in work. They want to know what they get to help in their life, right. As we said before this started, it's no longer work life balance. I don't know about

you.

**20:05 - Bo**

We've been talking about that for a year, year and a half, like at least a year. And you know, with work life balance, if you're trying to balance right, it's like being on a teeter totter. Any given day, if you're a little heavier over here than you are over here, something's out of whack. Right? And that's not good. How do you stay? I mean, think of the challenge it is just to stay balanced. Right? That's impossible.

**20:31 - Carole**

And to me, it's impossible. I said, get it out of our surveys, because it always scores low. Right? And thank you. To us, it's just like, it's how do you help me in my life, me as a whole person? Me as a mom and dad, you know, a caregiver of my parents? How do you help me in general? And one of the things that we, so it's more of, what do you give me for value? And how do I feel about it? You know, what, what's that? Are you meeting me where I am at? It's more human centric, right? And so, for instance, we took our benefits, and we now display our benefits according to life cycle, right? Are you just graduated from college, or you just recently married, or you recently had a child, and we take the benefits we offer and we put them in that, you know, degree of lifecycle so people can understand how we are trying to meet them where they are, right? And that instead of just a laundry list of what this organization gives you, right? So I like that. I'm gonna move more on it. But we do focus on five things. We focus on flexibility, connectedness, we focus on career development, holistic wellbeing, not just mental wellbeing, and sense of purpose, Tom?

**22:01 - Tom**

Well, whenever we do something, it's not just create a program that focuses on those five things, we communicate the whole value proposition. And then we integrate in the stuff that we have where it makes sense. And we develop new stuff to support what we already have. So it's a renewed focus. It will be multiple years before we develop this fully, but it will be a journey our people are included in, hearing their voice our leaders are and will continue to look at the feedback. And you know, we feel very positive about what we've done so far. But knowing we still have a way to go.

### **22:32 - Luke**

Well, you're doing great things. I love, love to hear that you're striking work life balance. Bo and I, we talked about this all the time, I think it's ridiculous, like, so we call it work life harmony, is what we like to call it because work life balance bothers me. I don't feel like I should have to make the choice to sacrifice my family for work. And I'm very proud of the work that I do. And I don't think that I should have to sacrifice work for the family either. You know, but why can't they be together? Why can't you know our values that we have, as a family carry on into work? And you work them together? When I started looking at it like that? I would say my whole life changed. It really did. You know, I have two small kids. And it's just when I thought about work life balance. I was like, well, I'm not going to do this. Because right now I'm with my son. Right? Well, what I do now is I spend more time with my son, but I might say "Hey, Daddy has to do XYZ for like five minutes." And I handle it, or you don't actually include him on a lot of stuff, he's three years old. It's kind of crazy to think about you know, so that really helped we do something; you can steal this if you want from what I'm hearing, you might actually probably already do something like this. But where I work at Phenom, we do self-reflection every year with our, with our leaders, right? So they send us a deck that we

have to fill in. It's what were you good at last year? What didn't go so well? What are you going to work on this coming year, etc., right? So you can kind of, you know, think of what that reflection would look like, there's just one rule to it. None of it can be about work. And those are some of the best conversations that we have with our leaders because we get a chance for once, even if it's 30 minutes a year, to realign on you know, what's going on with each of us and where we get that harmony, that river flowing in the right direction. So I don't hear a lot of companies doing this. I love, love that you're getting rid of the work life balance that way and I mean, if you look at you, you both came up as critical care nurses like those are crazy hours. You know, they're crazy, sometimes inconsistent hours, like to Bo's point on the seesaw. How do you balance that so futile?

#### **24:55 - Tom**

We did have a short haul over where we went from work life balance to work life integration to life. You know, for a few years when the text started coming out, right? You're on your cell phone, or it used to be BlackBerry when I started out (to date myself a little bit), but we evolved from that to life.

#### **25:12 - Bo**

That's right. I like that. I think that fits with work life harmony. It's just it's life, right? It is. I go to work, it's still my life. I go home, it's life. It's, I think you're on to something for sure.

#### **25:25 - Luke**

What I'm really curious about this, because I know a lot, I guarantee you a lot of listeners are in the situation, I'm about to present to you right now. But for those, for those folks that work in companies where they have values, they

might even be pretty good, right? But they're not doing anything with them. Really. They're not getting the people in the business result that they need? What are some areas where they can start getting quick wins? You know, things that might be easy, maybe big plans? And then in addition to that, what lessons have you learned that other folks could learn from as well to maybe watch out for, you know, XYZ, as they're building this out?

### **26:08 - Carole**

So you have to define what these values are? And how to play out these values. In other words, what are their behavioral expectations, I would expect so for example, if we see somebody that's walking the hallways, first of all, we have to be present. We can't be on our devices. That's an expectation, you know, devices down, eyes forward, so that you can greet and view the person that you're crossing. Second thing is, if they look confused, it's our responsibility to get in there looking at signs and trying to find where they are. We expect that someone will go up to them, one of our employees and say, "can I help you find something?" And it's okay, if we're late for meetings, or late for whatever to go to if we're walking somebody to their destination. When Tom first started, he wanted to test that theory out. Do you want to tell them what you did Tom, to test that theory?

### **27:19 - Tom**

Yeah, actually, I came down here for a benchmarking visit, because Methodist was known about their values. And my organization I was still with, we wanted to learn. So I had some logistics meet me on the other side of this bridge that connects the main hospital to a patch hotel, and we'll take it to where we're going to have discussions I'm benchmarking. So I was passing these people on the bridge, and everyone's making eye contact, they're smiling, they're saying

good morning, my God, this is a setup, they must have looked for people who are from out of town. And so what I did is I started going back to my room and crossing that bridge unannounced trying to see if that would still happen. Or they have a whole bunch of extra people there just to greet me, it was real. So it's real. And what you see is we have two days of orientation, one for the logistics, and one solely focused on our values and our culture. So you will see people leaving that session, and they're excited. You know, we have this thing, if you see something on the floor where our housekeepers missed, pick it up. But what really the difference is to follow up on the initial question is people will do what their leaders do. So if I'm saying it's important to pick something up, and I walked past it, I'm telling them, please, it's not that important, because he's not doing it. So when you greet people, when you follow our values, when you have your devices down, the leaders can make the big difference. Once you define the values, as Carole said, and you have the right values, not just one that you picked off a template online, because they're all the same, the words are usually the same. You have to pick the ones you want; you have to know what they mean. And leaders have to role model it. And then and only then can you effectively coach your people when they're not, you know, so those are key components.

### **28:59 - Bo**

I love it. Luke, I was thinking, I so quickly, I love this. I love this topic. And it took me right back to my army days, like you physically have to be paying attention. Because you may have to salute someone, or someone may be saluting you. And if you're walking around and you have a device in your hand, well you're just setting yourself up for a whole can of whoop \*\*\*, you know, because it's gonna be public right there on the spot because they're gonna call you out. What are you doing? Right, you're not paying attention. You're not showing your military



customs and courtesies? Right? That's what the military is about. Right? So I think that is fantastic. And the fact that you're accomplishing that is, yeah, big applause from me.

**29:44 - Carole**

I have to tell you, if you're not, if your heads not up and you're on device, someone's going to say to you "heads up", they're gonna walk right by you and say heads up. If you have to be on your device, because this is healthcare and we do emergencies, then you go to the side and you stand to the side. That's just one example.

**30:05 - Bo**

Yeah, for sure. That's bringing the behavior, like you're defining this is the expectation. This is what a behavior looks like, right? This is what this value looks like in real behavior. And if you want the culture that you're striving for, it's what you have to do. That's fantastic.

**30:26 - Luke**

I love the word intentional. This is an inspiring session that we have right now. And I just love to what results are you seeing from all this? Because it has to be amazing, like now that it's like, because what I'm getting is this is fully baked, you're intentional about it. All the employees are on board, it seems like I might go put in an application at Houston Methodist right now because it aligns with what I care about. What business results are you seeing from this? What I'm most curious about is did you have the staffing and labor issues during the pandemic, at look, everybody had staffing and labor issues. But I would think like, if something like maybe it wasn't as bad as it could have been, maybe.

### **31:14 - Carole**

It was pretty bad. So if you think about the time, you had a lot of people sick, they had COVID. So we had a lot of our own employees out. We were overwhelmed with COVID patients in the beginning, hundreds and hundreds of patients. And we had to open up, PACU's, you know, post Anesthesia Care Units and make them intensive care units, we it was almost like a MASH unit where you are creating units to take care of these patients. Because you're busting at the seams, that we had to go out to agency and use agencies to help us staff and take care of patients. And so that is something that this organization had very few of, because we want people to have ownership and alignment to our organization. We use very few contracts, contract labor in the past, especially for nursing. However, we had to hire hundreds of them to be able to staff 24/7 and the volume of patients. And quite frankly, our patient satisfaction Dept., our employee engagement, that when you don't have people that are aligned with your organization, so the first thing in our unparalleled is safety. Right, we had to make sure that our employees were safe working here, and that our patients were safe. So we had no choice but to use it. But what did we do after that fact, to realign, and to get us back. One of the things we did was we opened up our own internal float pool, we had to do it anyways, for COVID. When outpatient areas were shut down and you know, people were trying to find work, we developed a float pool of people that would float across the system of seven hospitals. And so we intentionally opened up our own internal agency internal float pool last year to have people that want that type of environment and will flow to at least three different hospitals. They get higher pay for doing that, and more flexible work, right to do that, to reduce agency usage. And so we are greatly reduced. And our goal is to get to zero nursing agency usage. We have about 130 nurses that have signed up. Last pay, they did about 7000 hours of work, supporting our hospitals, so we know it's working. So these are the

things you can't keep on doing what you were doing to solve the problems of today. You have to think differently in order to do that, and, and, you know, Texas, we're in a medical center with lots of tertiary care, medical institutions and a lot of competition for nurses, you know, and so, so you know, everybody's aware of that you can't keep on paying more and more and more money. There's just not enough money to go around now. But business successes, our retention is better. Our turnover is way down than it was last year. Um, we have a very robust bottom line beating budget, you know, much better than we thought we would. We have high physician engagement because we do measure that as well. And I would say, those are the key indicators from the people side of the business that we use. Tom, anything else?

### **35:25 - Tom**

I think the big roll up was our employee engagement, as well. And then we look at patients, we look at all types of data from staying interviews, exit interviews, but what Carole said sums that up, and I think one thing that set the tone for us throughout the dark days of COVID, is we agreed very shortly after it started, and everyone's trying to figure out what they're doing better than right, is we're gonna keep our people whole, you know, so we didn't know what to do with the outpatient areas, we sent everybody home, some of the competitors are reducing pay there, furloughing people, they're getting bounced, we didn't do any of that, we opted to keep our people whole as long as we fiscally could. And we made it throughout the whole pandemic. So not to say we didn't have higher than normal turnover, we lost people to agency that were in tears because they needed to go for the big check. They hated to leave here, but they had to do with short term for their family. And we're starting to get back to pre-pandemic state, like Carole said, everything is trending in the right direction. So those are the big metrics. You know, how quickly do we hire

someone? How long do you stay? How engaged are you? And those are amazing.

### **36:29 - Luke**

When the music stops, they're going to be grabbing your seats, right? Who do the musical chairs, right? Well, I really think they will, right? Because we talk about travel nursing all the time, you experience it even closer than we do, right. But I truly believe that is a phase during somebody's life where it fits their situation now, but that's not always going to be the case. And that's a finite period of time, like you think if I were going to be a travel nurse, like, you'd have to go Luke maybe 15 years ago, yeah, I'd be like, I'm gonna go get that check. But Luke, now that I'm in my 40s, no, I want to place with a good culture, I can, you know, have that work life harmony. So I think you're gonna win as the, as it starts to slow down a little bit.

### **37:16 - Tom**

Back in my nursing days, a long, long time ago, I was petrified to float to another unit in my hospital. So there's a lot of people who get comfortable where they are. And going to a different unit, it's hard for many people going to a different hospital, during a pandemic is very difficult. So one of the strategies that Carole talked about, is not that we have people that are traveling, but they're done and they want to come home or they want to come to Methodist, after maybe being here as a traveler, we created what Carole said with the internal agency, these people are less fearful about going to other hospitals. So that's what helped make our internal agency successful. You've worked at these hospitals that may not have good culture as a traveler, so you're much more willing to work for hours, we have to cover at least three different locations, because you know the culture and you have confidence in the culture. I couldn't agree more.

**38:08 - Bo**

Yep. What advice would you give to, to anyone listening or even other HR executives who may be listening, if they, if they believe exactly as you do that, the values-based culture and getting to that point of being able to produce the type of results that you have produced at Houston Methodist, but they just don't have the internal champions along with them. And they feel like they're kind of out on an island by themselves, right. But they know that's the route, like if we really want to succeed, this is the way we have to go. What are a few tips, if you will, or best practices that you would give them to help try to get the ball rolling, or at least get the conversation started? Obviously, it's not an overnight thing that you're going to do. It's gonna take time. What would you tell them?

**38:59 - Carole**

Take your CEO out to lunch. Have an honest conversation with him. Make sure your voice is heard in HR that you're sitting you know, at that the old adage, at the table. Make sure that you have that alignment with the business side of the organization. And, and have examples and rationale why you need to use this approach. And any smart CEO knows that. It's just where people get stuck is how, how do I do this, right? Go build, you know, stakeholder support. Go to your colleagues, you know, get the volume of support that you need to say we need to try something differently and this is what I think we can do. And then talk to people that have done this before and who outside the organization helped them, as well as who are the key people inside the organization that helped them. And it really does have to be driven from top down to get the buy in and role models. Because if your senior executives are not displaying every time that they're talking or in public or walking the hallways, they are not

demonstrating that, then people aren't going to believe that it truly is a priority.

#### **40:36 - Tom**

I think that's the number one question that came when I speak at a lot of different functions, organization conferences, and one of the most frequent questions is, how did you get a seat at the table? You know, so it's building the relationship, it's understanding the ROI, and not presenting it to a big group right off the bat. It's aligning around key stakeholders that can see the value. In a short story, when we first had our first planning, we were developing our first pathway unparalleled session, we had mixed results with the executive team. People saw the value, they thought it wasn't something new, the values are important, how am I going to cover all my people out of staffing, you know, to be able to do this. So one of our biggest executives, one of our highest-ranking executives, we invited that executive to our focus group testing for employees. So focus group testing is important because you want them to have a conversation, it validates are they having the right conversation with the structured questions you put forth. She was in that focus group testing, we didn't even make it back to the office, Carole's phone is ringing, this executive says, I get this, we need to do this. I was listening to my dietary team talking about the importance of our H cap scores. And she said, not only we need to do it, we need to do it now. She went to our CEO, and it totally accelerated, escalated our timeframe of getting it done. Because this person saw it was important, and they became the spokesperson along with us. So that's what helped make us successful.

#### **41:58 - Luke**

That's such great advice, too. Because I think that, you know, listeners, if you're

out there hearing this, Tom and Carole just gave you the blueprint for getting an executive buy in. And it seems just as easy as showing them the process. And you know, including them. And the answer was just so obvious that you got what you needed. Sounds like right away.

#### **42:20 - Carole**

So another example, because I know examples help people understand what works is, last year we had, and I think most healthcare organizations and organizations in general will tell you, the need for mental wellbeing support services was huge. We needed to set up a whole psychiatric wellbeing clinic, with psychologists and counselors just for our employees, and people, spouses and significant others on the medical plan. And it's full all the time. People needed to come out of the intense environment that they were in with lots of support. So we 100% increase tenfold, the mental wellbeing resources that we offer. And we also knew people had to have conversations about this. We also didn't want them to continue to dwell on the past but have hope for the future. Right? And okay, so let's focus on what's next, let's focus on what's inspiring us next. So when we went to go propose to our CEO of the system, what we wanted to do for these pathways, two unparalleled sessions in the fall, he looked right at us, and he said, "No, we can't wait to the fall. I want it now. I want you guys to do these special sessions now to bring people together and to get them talking. And then get them focused on a bright future." And I'll tell you, we scrambled to get that done in a couple of months' time period, because there's a lot of planning that goes into it. We did it. And those sessions were so incredibly powerful, very emotional for people, but just talking about that experience and validating what people went through and that they were not by themselves. And people would sit and hug people and hold their hands and say, okay, this is what we're going to go forward with. As a result of the experience we just had.

It was incredibly moving.

#### **44:42 - Luke**

It's amazing. I think Carole, you and Tom should write a book together. Bo knows somebody from his books, and he can hook that up. But I really mean that. You know, I think that it's special. What you're doing in the country, you not only have the organization but the community around you? Right? Because it's just not even your employees. It's the entire community that you serve, you get to see the benefit of everything. And, you know, I hope you just realize how special it is because it is not like this everywhere. This is one of my favorite conversations, look at Bo shaking his face like No, it's not like this. It's not through this conversation, I kind of want to work at Houston Methodist, now. I really do. Any other before we go, because I don't want to take up your whole afternoon. Any other parting words of wisdom for the listeners? The floor is yours, you can use it to tell people why they should join Houston Methodist, or whatever you want.

#### **45:51 - Carole**

If you're not passionate about what you do, find what you're passionate about. If you cannot connect to the organization that you're working for, in a way that gives you a sense that you have harmony in your life, I'll use your word and that it brings you joy. And yeah, it's hard. And yes, you can have bad days. But then you're missing out on so much. Right? Find that, find the work that you like to do, but the organization that supports you where you're at, and so that you can be successful in life. In general.

#### **46:38 - Tom**

I'll say from the HR side, don't be afraid to reach out. I mean, a lot of people say “don't



tell everyone your strategies”, we always tell people what we're doing because we never, you know, we're not put off from learning from anybody. So when we share to help other people understand what we've done, we oftentimes learn things from the people we're talking to. So don't be afraid to reach out for us; we look at as a mutually beneficial thing that we love to do. Because then we can take what we learned from those reaching out to us and help them alter what we're doing here.

**47:11 - Luke**

Absolutely love it. Absolutely. Bo, any closing thoughts?

**47:15 - Bo**

This has been fantastic. Absolutely fantastic. Thank you so much. I had no idea this is where we would go. But I mean, I could not be more happy that we had this conversation around culture and values and what it all means. And I think everybody listening will be able to take something from this episode for a very long time and use it in their own workplace.

**47:36 - Luke**

Yes, yeah, I agree. I'm fired up after this conversation. So that's great. You're always welcome back on and to share your knowledge and experience with us because this has been great. To our listeners, that's a wrap.

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Co-hosts Bo Brabo and Luke Carignan from The Bo & Luke Show bring you the latest insights and trends in the world of human resources. Whether you're looking to stay up to date on the latest news and legislation or gain valuable insights into building a better workplace, the podcast has something for everyone. So sit back, relax, and join Bo and Luke every week for

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