

The Wayne RESA Roundtable Podcast S2.E3: Inclusion in Action: Randy Lewis' Approach to Meaningful Employment

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SPEAKERS

Randy Lewis, Beth Santer

Beth Santer 00:00

Beth, welcome to the Wayne RESA roundtable podcast, where we explore ideas, stories and innovations that make a difference in education and our communities. I'm Beth Santer, one of the Wayne RESA facilitators that will be taking us through today's conversation. Today, we're honored to welcome Randy Lewis, a national leader and pioneer in the inclusive employment movement. Randy is best known for his groundbreaking work at Walgreens, where he led the company's initiative to hire 1000s of people with disabilities, demonstrating that inclusion isn't just the right thing to do, it's also good for business. His leadership has inspired organizations across the world to rethink what's possible when we remove barriers and create workplaces that value every individual's potential. Randy's story is both deeply personal and profoundly transformative, blending compassion business acumen. Randy's story is deeply personal and profoundly transformative. Blending compassion business acumen and a relentless belief in the human capability. He's also written a book called No Goodness Without Greatness, I've read that book, that details his journey. Randy, thank you for joining us today. We're excited to talk to you about your journey, the lessons learned along the way, and how we can play a part in creating a truly inclusive community and workplace. Welcome, Randy.

Randy Lewis 01:36

Well, thank you it's great to be together again.

Beth Santer 01:38

Yes, absolutely. So Randy, for those of you who may not be familiar with your story, can you share what inspired you to make inclusive employment such a personal and professional mission?

Randy Lewis 01:51

Well, it really kind of starts at home, most things do when we... that's the world we live in. We have three children, two girls and a boy, all different, all unique. Our middle son, middle child, Austin, we noticed he was kind of slow to talk. You know, the kids, they're his older sister she started talking about three. Austin got to three, and still wasn't talking. So what we... and everybody, was nagging us, the family members, you know, well you gotta get him tested for something. And we thought, hey, boys are

they're just, you know, they're usually little late. So it was a lot of conflict. And finally, we just got tired of their keeping at it to tell us and whining about it. So we said, Okay, let's go see a doctor so we can get them off our back. So we took him to the doctor, and they did all kinds of tests on him, and a week later, they called us in for the results. I remember walking in and my wife Kay were going in, now we can get over with this. And so he started reading the different tests they did, and essentially they said we couldn't get a good read on any of this. And we're trying to say, gee whiz, that wasn't what we thought and we were kind of put on our heels. And I remember asking the doctor said, "but will it get better?" And he took off his glasses and said "he might get worse."

Beth Santer 03:41

Hm..

Randy Lewis 03:43

Which is where the bottom fell out. And they called it back then pervasive delay, which really, at that time, was kind of code for for Autism. And the number of people, and the incidence of that at the time was one in 100,000. And we were walking back to the car, "what are we going to do?" So we started to take action. There was an early childhood program in our school so that he could go in at three and gave him over to the teachers, and they were fantastic. And then I was lay... I'd lay in bed at night saying, what are we going to do? Gee Whiz. We had we talked about before our children were born, what was, what would be the worst thing that could happen? And we talked about the worst thing would probably be autism, because we'd seen that TV show takes place in in Boston, and the child has one of the characters has autism. It's really frightening the way they had him do, and what that was our biggest fear. And I got to visit that early childhood program. And when my wife and I Kay, Kay and I went to see it, we came out of there after seeing those other children, we thought, gee whiz, we have no problem. And that's where it started. What it took to focus so much after Austin, but it made me realize there's a whole bunch of people out there, and there's going to be a whole lot of parents out there, like me and and Kay, who are laying in bed at night, going, what are we going to do?

Beth Santer 05:45

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 05:46

So the idea got into my mind, saying, gee whiz, if I'm a person of means and has a good job, if I'm laying in my bed at night, what about those people, other people other people at Walgreens, 200,000 of us, I'm sure they have the same problems we do, and what are they going to do? And who's going to do something about it? So I immediately, I pulled kind of our senior team together and said, Let's do... I told him a story, and I said, "Let's do something. I don't know how we can do it, but maybe contact your schools, contact your organizations and maybe they can, they can help us out." And what we did initially is, because we didn't know anything about disabilities, we just contracted with some agencies who would bring a group of people in and they we give them ancillary work, what would... non mission critical like a custodial or tagging merchandise, and they would have their own boss and but, but they would be on site. And people the community, thought we were great. They were giving us awards. All kinds of been a great corporate citizen and all this. And I remember they would tell, well, we were getting all these awards and all this recognition and being a great citizen and stuff like that. But one time, I was visiting one of our centers in Dallas, and this woman came up and she started talking about that enclave. That's what that's called, an enclave. And she was in had this picture of the group, and she was in it. I had no idea who, who this woman was. I didn't know if she was our employee, or she was with the group, or whatever. And she must have seen my confusion, because she said, "Oh, I'm not, I'm not one of them. I'm their supervisor." And I didn't hear any word after the word them. I realized they they weren't our employees, they weren't doing the same work, and they weren't us, and I thought,

we've got to do better than this. And so from there, we said, gee whiz, there's got to be some people, these men and women have been out here on site for maybe some places a year or two, certainly knowing how they're how they've worked, certainly some will can be successful doing real work. So why don't we, why don't we pick some people that we think will be successful, and then go to our workforce and say who would be a voluntary coach, peer coach. And we thought, well, maybe two people working together with that one person while they do their work. So it's not just they're going to be a coach, it's going to be a working interview so to speak, to give them to teach them how to do that. And it worked out very well. We learned a lot in that process. We learned that every person is different. We learned that our way of managing, my way or the highway, typically, supervisors can manage some time that they had to get to know the person. Matter of fact, we call our we... our technology for making people successful was called ATM, no ATP. So we learned that this, the secret was ATP, ask the person the problem instead of assuming, hey, you've got to pick it up. We had to go ask questions. What is the issue? And then help, let them help that person be successful. And it was rewarding for the person, and it was rewarding for the coach.

Beth Santer 10:20

That's fantastic, Randy, one of the things that you mentioned, I want to just jump off of a few things you said, is you talked about a working interview, and that caught my ear, because one of the ways that I first became aware of you is I actually heard you speak about, I don't know, maybe a little over a decade ago, and I was supervising a post high school program, and we obviously wanted to have our students exit school with jobs, and so we were very focused on inclusive employment, and many companies had an HR policy that if you didn't have a high school diploma, you wouldn't even be considered for the job. So I'm curious, did Walgreens have that policy that had to be changed? And tell us a little bit more about the working interview. What's the time frame that they had for that working interview, and did that go through your typical HR processes? Did they have to be changed? Dig in a little bit more to that.

Randy Lewis 11:24

Okay, well, ask me about hiding a project later, okay?

Beth Santer 11:29

Okay.

Randy Lewis 11:31

Well, one thing about when we did the initiative, if we were going to hire, one rule that we made was it was going to be same jobs, same pay, side by side, meaning completely integrated. So they had to perform as well or better, and that was very important to us, because it's easy. People will always give a typically give a person an easier job because they have compassion for them and whatever.

Beth Santer 12:03

Yeah,

Randy Lewis 12:04

The problem with that, it doesn't change anybody's mind about that person. They're still not capable. So what we wanted to do is take that off the table for one and prove to the World, when we were successful, that people can perform if given the chance in the right environment, that it's not going to cost more. That was an absolute impetus. So but we knew that in the typical interviewing cycle is a resume, credentials and charm, which is the interview. Once you get past that, that's what we, that's what it is. But a lot of people would have difficulty with that. With my son, if they came in, and if he came in, if he did have the resume to even get an interview, one of the questions would always, we

always use is, so why would you like to work here? Well, my son would say, I don't know. I've never worked here before. How would I answer that question? And then they'd be off the list. So we knew that they wouldn't get through the traditional way. And, oh, by the way, anybody's job description really doesn't describe their job. There's got to be some other way. So we try to, we created an additional door, so if somebody applied, they had their choice to go through the traditional way of interview and credentials, or if needed a different way. And we call that the working interview. And it really consisted of two parts. We knew, first of all, we didn't have access to this, this community. The agencies know that some of the governmental agencies, they had all of that. So we found a partner who had access to people with disabilities, and we asked them to come in to understand our jobs and the skills needed. And then we would say every quarter, this next quarter, we're going to we want five candidates that are very likely to be successful. So what you've got, you've got three months to find five people and screen them based on the requirements of the job that you think they'll be successful. That's the first piece. The second piece was, you need to bring them in and give them training about working, because a lot of people have not had experience working. How do you ask for help those kind of things and be in the building? And we did that for that was about three weeks half time to pick up those skills. And they were in the they got to walk through the environment, see what it looks like, the noise, the smells, everything else. And if they were successful, and we know that they could get to the job, because that was they were doing it on site, then we would put them through a nine week internship, paid not less level than a full time employee. But this was their work. They would do and demonstrate that with the coaches and when they were successful, if they did it in less than nine weeks, we hired them. Or if they took nine weeks and they thought they'd be successful, we hired them. Now, the good thing about that was our supervisors were very... a lot of anxiety about working with a person with a disability, and especially if the standards were going to be the same because...

Beth Santer 16:09

Right.

Randy Lewis 16:09

the way he thinks or not. But having that working interview, we told them this person is a qualified candidate. Matter of fact, they've demonstrated some of the skills they know we can get here. So our expectation is this person will be successful. And then we had to work with the managers to help them get over their angst about it. And we had... and we ended up having a 90% success rate in those who went through the system.

Beth Santer 16:48

So that's a that's incredible. So when you say 90% success rate, did you... do, you mean where they secured a job for a time period, or did you do... did you look at, were they able to not just obtain the job, but maintain the job over time?

Randy Lewis 17:11

The 90% referred to that the transition time.

Beth Santer 17:16

okay, from the working interview to hired. Okay,

Randy Lewis 17:18

Yeah, once they got there. Our lack... it's very rare that we have somebody fail after they've been through that process. That's the exception that, yeah, there's people have that have ultimately not been successful, but essentially our retention, they have twice the retention of our typically able employees,

and they have essentially no absenteeism. So there's all the and they perform as well or better. We've taken all the data about that.

Beth Santer 17:56

Did you have employees that were worried about safety?

Randy Lewis 18:04

That's not just employees. Employers. Always worried about that. That's probably one of the biggest things I hear when somebody we talk about employing people, and especially if it's a factory or anything else we have things that can electric you to you can fall, you can be pinched. We we got a lot of ways we can get killed in our centers too. We found that people with disabilities work a lot safer. And we really kind of kept trying to figure out why that was, and we realized it was pretty straightforward. The reason people with disabilities work safer so when you have lift injuries and everything else is because they follow the rules, and we ended up most of our safety coaches are people with disabilities.

Beth Santer 19:00

Wow, wow. that's pretty impressive, Randy.

Randy Lewis 19:04

And so everybody else who's doing this finds the same thing.

Beth Santer 19:10

Okay, so one of the reasons why I'm a Randy Lewis fan is that you took this initiative to solve a problem with workplaces not being inclusive enough, or inclusive at all. And there's many leaders that probably would want to be more inclusive as well, just like you did, but maybe they struggle with where to start. So what's the first step you would recommend for an organization that's trying to build a more inclusive employment practice?

Randy Lewis 19:41

Well, I mean, that's a... if you're going across... everybody wants to do about a big company initiative, I think you got to find the executive who's willing to give this a try.

Beth Santer 19:54

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 19:54

Because it doesn't work without a champion. When we approach things organizationally and hiring people, business typically turns if they have a HR department, they'll go to HR and say, you do this. I have never found that to be successful. If it's going to be an operation, the head of that operation needs to buy in and to be actually an advocate. That's one of the things we... we've done this a lot of places and other companies have done it, and we used to get together with about 10 of us every year and talk about the problems. And that was always the problem is not, where are the failing points? Why aren't people they try it and doesn't work? It's typically because they don't have a champion in the operation that's driving this and empowering people to do this and letting everybody know this is important to us as an operation, not as because we're being nice. This is, this is good to do. There's failure there, because sometimes they delegate to HR or somebody else, and it kind of loses its strength. That's one. And the other failure is being able to get enough candidates and getting a partner that would help us, those the two biggest parts. Once you have a champion and you have a way to access that group, then everything else starts to fall into place.

Beth Santer 21:34

Yeah. so really good points. Randy. I know when I went to see you speak over a decade ago, one of my aha moments was you talked about the importance of the summer job, and how all of us learned so many skills from those summer jobs, and because Michigan can have students that receive supports and services through the schools until age 26 you were challenging when you have eight years after high school and post high school having more of those summer job opportunities. So why don't you tell us a little bit more about what is the value of that summer job?

Randy Lewis 22:16

It's very important. When I heard about it first, the best program, how do you do this? Was when I went up to Canada, and I met a group up there, and they had a great program. But I'm gonna, I'm gonna get back to, back to this. I need to start from the very beginning. See we do have in the transition program everywhere, like you say, they can stay in until so many years. What typically happens they, the team from the school goes out and begs employers, can we come out and bring some students and with their coach to learn the job. Now, two things happen, it may they may they will. Lots of things happen, and that's sort of easy, because the coaches are there, but there's probably one coach or two coach for like, maybe 10 kids I've seen in some places, so there's not really a lot of one on one coaching is sort of this. They're just trying to do as good... what good is they can best, but they're not expected to perform. In the expectation of the company that lets them come in is we're just doing something good. It's not about being... how do we make this person successful? That's and that's probably the biggest problem now, when it comes to summertime jobs, it's not everybody's out of school, and that system kind of goes away. Everybody goes to on summer vacation, so those resources are gone. So how do we get summertime jobs that are meant to develop the skills for permanent employment, and that means eventually the expectation do the same job as well as a person without a disability.

Beth Santer 24:25

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 24:26

And the program that I found that I thought was best, and was very unique, was in Canada. And the way they did it is they went out to employers, and first of all, this is really important, because most of these kids are not going to go to New York and be bankers or whatever. Their life is mostly in line, it stays in the community. So we need to get them jobs within the community. So they go out to... the way their program worked, they hired some college kids to be coaches for each person in the program, let's say. And they would go out to an employer and say, "Do you hire summertime job... people for summertime jobs?" And they said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what. We'll put a college student on that job with a student with a disability that we think can learn from that job, and between the two of them, they will perform as well or better than your typical summer hire." Would you do that? And they would say "yes," and it says, "now, here you will pay, and we want you to pay what you would pay a summertime job, person to the student with a disability, and we will pay... the organization will pay for the college student who is the peer coach." And so the expec(tation)... and we would say, "How many hours a week would you give them?" Will the minimum they use is five hours a day, up to 20, depending on how many coaches there are, how many students, whatever. So that is essentially the program. They start at 16, and they finish when transition is over. So you said in Michigan, it goes till 26?

Beth Santer 26:27

Yes.

Randy Lewis 26:28

Wow, that's 10 years. So imagine a student having 10 years of credentials and doing well, and what it changes in the community about the expectation. Exposes all those employers in the community where these folks will eventually end up. That's what it does for both. It gives them the skills they get to demonstrate it, and it changes people's mind in the community where they're going to live about that, because most people go out transitional... there's too many students that go to the basement of their home.

Beth Santer 26:30

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Randy Lewis 26:55

So that, I think that's an excellent program.

Beth Santer 27:17

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Randy, so you've spoken about how inclusion isn't a charity, it's smart business. Can you talk about the business outcomes that came from this approach, from your experience?

Randy Lewis 27:36

Well, we one of the things that when we started out, we wanted to, we wanted the World to know. We said, when we're successful, we're going to open our doors to the World and they'll come. And that was important, because if you're going to do something like this, it's inspirational work.

Beth Santer 27:57

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 27:59

And people, some people say, Well, you know, that's that fluffy stuff. No giving meaning to the thing is, what makes it successful. I made the announcement at a meeting of all the store managers. There were 20, 10,000 people there, and I made and when I announced that we were going to do this, I told them that we're going to open up even to our competitors, and that's what gave it power. Everybody wants to be part of something bigger than themselves...

Beth Santer 28:37

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 28:37

and we had to let the world know that we're committed and we're going to go forward. And the project became no longer Randy Lewis's, it became the whole companies, even the people working in the stores, the people who work in all the different places. This was theirs, not mine, and we had to do that. And with first time, we've said that we would open our doors because, you know, we never let anybody come into our sights, probably because we thought we were better than them, or we didn't, or we... how bad we are. We didn't ever do that. So that was the first for us, and we let people come in, and we let them give all the questions and everything else like this, and we show them the results. The results are, people with disabilities perform as well or better. Like I said, No, absenteeism, retention, twice as good. Safety. They work safer. All the things, that drives the business, how we make the money, they perform as well or better. And what was incredible about it, they made it better for everybody. In that first building, one out of. Three employees of 600 300... so we had 200 of 600 employees that has grown to that building's bigger, so it's about 1000 but still 1/3 so you're talking about more money, more than more than that, it's like. So we have 300 people in there, and we ended up hiring two 200,000

something, no, it's no, we've ended up hiring about two or 3000 across all the centers, because they came and saw it.

Beth Santer 30:38

That's amazing. Randy, I love how you talk about how this idea you had really transformed not just your workforce, but really the climate and culture of the workplace and who people are.

Randy Lewis 30:55

That's... and that's what amazes people when they come visit. We... when they do visit, we have what we call the Las Vegas room. They've done, they've done a tour of the building. They've had people come up and talk to them, which is very rare if you're in a in a business situation, you have a visitor through who comes up and starts talking to you. That's part of their experience. And they talk about their jobs and all that kind of stuff. But then when you come... they come back into the Las Vegas room is you can ask any question you want.

Beth Santer 31:28

Love it.

Randy Lewis 31:29

And what you ask here stays here.

Beth Santer 31:31

Yep.

Randy Lewis 31:31

And so they'll ask us, how do you fire a person with a disability, or what's a good day look like? What's been the best thing about...all the kind of questions and listening to the managers talk about how they are changed and how it's made it better for everybody. Like, for example, every like our somebody said, how much do the accommodations cost? And they said, okay, about \$25 at most. That's probably the average, and we've learned that anything we did for a person with a disability helps everybody else too.

Beth Santer 32:08

Right.

Randy Lewis 32:09

Made the job easier, made the job quicker, and everything else like that. And changing those managers by learning how to get to people, the place has become more human. Not only more efficient, it's become more human. And we know that because we've tested, we've surveyed about engagement, and in that first building, it exceeded the highest level in the industry, across all engagement measurements. Wow, wow. That's what they see. And I remember Rick Keyes, who is CEO of Meijer. Yeah. I remember his visit, and he was sitting there listening to... he brought a team up there, and they were talking about it, and afterwards, he says, I would do this for the culture that it is. I want my my management to talk about my company like your management talks about your company.

Beth Santer 33:21

That's pretty powerful. So you had told me to remind you about hiding a project, so I'm bringing it back up. Here's your opportunity. What's hiding a project?

Randy Lewis 33:33

Well, see anybody... any executive, long enough, if you're going to be successful, you got to learn to hide things, more than once in a while. So you and really we call it our... and this is how it works. You remember in Harry Potter, the cloak of invisibility?

Beth Santer 33:53

Yeah, yeah,

Randy Lewis 33:54

That's what you do, if you're going to do something, if you worry about somebody who's going to get into you about it, and you don't want to be really hiding it, but what you do is say, we like to try this disabilities thing, and we like to do a pilot. As soon as you call the thing a pilot, everybody goes, oh, okay, because they have these rules, and you worry about, oh, we can't do that. We've never done that before. Oh, it's a pilot. Then it becomes invisible, and you can try different things. And that's what we did.

Beth Santer 34:31

That's a great way to look at it.

Randy Lewis 34:34

We don't have all the answers when you start. You get to learn as we go. You know, we had, it's kind of like when somebody bring up a question and we didn't know the answers. Well, we'll deal with it when it happens. For example, if you start trying to solve problems that are not problems yet, for example, all right, for us, how are we going to get a deaf person if there's a deaf person in a bathroom, or if it's a deaf custodian, how do we clean the bathrooms, the washrooms? And we spent a lot of time like that. Well, if it's a deaf person in there, what we could do is, because it can't hear, assuming the deafness is spectrum too. We learned that too. Everything's a spectrum.

Beth Santer 35:30

Yep,

Randy Lewis 35:32

So somebody suggested rolling a ball, a tennis ball, in. If there was somebody there, they could roll it out. I don't know how long that came up, but we've learned that. So if it was like a woman going to a man's and I asked people at the distribution center, what did they do? And they said, Well, if it's a men's room and I'm a woman, I'll ask one of the other guys just to go in and see if anybody's in there, and vice versa. So, but it's not really been a problem.

Beth Santer 36:05

I love how every answer you have something that really requires that out of the box thinking, which is is pretty inspirational, especially coming from somebody from business and outside of education. So your work, I mean, it's clear your work is not just driven by leadership, but it's also driven by love and personal experience. So how has this changed you as a human and as a parent?

Randy Lewis 36:35

Wow. Well, here's the thing. My son, Austin, has changed the family. He... although he has a lot of challenges, he's verbal now, He started speaking at 10. And by the way, if you ever met him, you'll think he's making up for lost time.

Beth Santer 37:04

laughs

Randy Lewis 37:06

But if, if he see... if I get angry, he will call me on it, or he'll shut down. If I say something inappropriate, he will tell me that's violent. He if I ask him to help me, he will always help me. If you ask him to do something, he'll always do something, whatever he says he will do something, he always does it. He's... by seeing his humanity I've improved mine. Last year, I went to Australia for a conference, and one of the paper, the Melbourne paper had a columnist, and he called me to interview me in anticipation of this event is going to happen. And he's... we go through how we did it, and all the things you and I are talking about, and then in the end, he said, what does Austin think about it, all this great work you've done and launched, helped launched all this.

Beth Santer 38:26

Great question.

Randy Lewis 38:27

He's he's not even aware about it. Didn't care about it at all. And he said, Well, what does he think about his autism? He said, I said he doesn't like it. He doesn't like to be referred to that way. He does not, he does not see himself as disabled. And he doesn't like it. And a matter of fact, and I thought, I said he thinks he's perfect. And I paused a second, and I realized, and I said, and he is,

Beth Santer 39:08

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 39:10

and that's the difference,

Beth Santer 39:15

yeah, that's fantastic. Very powerful.

Randy Lewis 39:18

So two days ago, this is an amazing thing. Austin reads the paper a lot. That's one of the things. He has no friends, no peer friends, so he and he works. He's been working for 10 years at a Meijer distribution center, 10 years of perfect attendance, by the way. And he gets home and he reads his paper and it troubles him. And so one of the things, and this was just like three days ago, he says, I, I hurt for all those people that don't have. And then he says, I'm compassionate. Whoa, again, yeah, where did that come from? That's all, yeah, he is perfect.

Beth Santer 40:15

Yeah, he is. And he keeps surprising you.

Randy Lewis 40:18

That's for sure.

Beth Santer 40:20

Yeah. So, I mean, as you look back on your career, what are you the most proud of when it comes to your legacy of inclusive hiring and beyond that?

Randy Lewis 40:34

Obviously, this is the best thing by far I've ever done in my life, just in the trying it would have been, had it failed. It was, it was, wasn't a for sure thing, and that's what makes it beautiful. And knowing in that

and it changed the culture. Everybody will talk about that. They're, they're... if you work with a person with a disability, and you know that bit.

Beth Santer 41:08

yeah.

Randy Lewis 41:09

It changes you in ways that you never expect to make us better.

Beth Santer 41:15

100%. So I that... that made me think of something I've heard you say that has always been my takeaway when I hear you say it, but I don't want to misquote you. It was what you said to your employees, or maybe it was your managers when they were maybe questioning you about this program, and you said, if we don't do this right, we are training the World that it can't be done.

Randy Lewis 41:47

Right.

Beth Santer 41:47

Did I get that right?

Randy Lewis 41:49

Yeah, you did. Okay, I'll tell you the story goes up to it. Because that was the big anxiety when we started, is we're going to have same, same expectations, and we had this process. But managers were if they could, most people never worked with a person with disabilities, so their big fear, they they felt sorry for those folks, but they didn't know if they would be successful. And we told them that, oh, by the way, most of the we're going to go deep in, deep into the pool, the people who would never have a chance for a job, we're going to try to get, we're going to try to get them through the system too. So all these people that have come through the what we call the transitional work group that nine week they we have a reason to believe that they're going to be successful, but not all of them will, and we're going to have to fire some people if they cannot perform. But here's the deal, you are completely empowered to make them successful. And if it's not within your authority to do a certain thing that you think you need to do to make that happen, kick it up to your boss. And if that's they can't get it there the next boss up. And if it gets all the way to me, it gets to me. You're empowered to do that. That's your number one job, to make all of your people that you're responsible for to be successful. And here's what we're going to do, and here's why. Because if we can't do it, we're going to tell the world it cannot be done.

Beth Santer 43:44

Yeah.

Randy Lewis 43:47

And so I think it did two things. They knew they had the back, they had an they had a candidate had reason to be successful because of the the front end work we did. And he's empowered, she is empowered to use all therein creativity and heart to make this person work and oh, by the way, we're doing something that has never been done before.

Beth Santer 44:14

Right. Well, one of the things that... is I find impressive about this program. And I hesitate to even say it's a program, because it's, it's so much bigger than that, is the sustainability piece. I mean, I again, I

don't want to get my facts wrong, but I believe you put this program into place in 2007 I think you retired around 2011 2012 and this, this is still happening today, is Isn't that right?

Randy Lewis 44:46

Exactly. It's grown, and despite changes main and management through the process. That's... the most time with these kind of initiatives. What goes wrong is management change and they don't.... they're not invested in it, and it loses its power and it fades away. And I've noticed that over years. We've been at it now almost 20 years, some companies start and it goes well, and business changes and well, well, that just fades away, or they're not expected to perform the same.

Beth Santer 45:20

It really speaks to the systems that you put into place, because you have to have really strong systems so that somebody new can pick it up and continue that. So that's definitely a credit to you.

Randy Lewis 45:38

What do you mean by system?

Beth Santer 45:41

The process.

Randy Lewis 45:42

Oh. I think what, what keeps it going Beth that it works is one, but it's all the people in there. They're been... they would say they have been made better. I hear that over and over, a better husband, a better father, a better leader, a better person. They sustain it not any trick, but the work. It works. But if you go on the website, noglog.com. No goodness without greatness.com. There's a video on there, you've seen it.

Beth Santer 46:28

Yep.

Randy Lewis 46:29

And that's what the experience when other people come in, they hear those things, how they talk about what it is to work here, and how important it is. That's what makes it work. We provided not just efficiency in good systems, we provided a meaning. And that's a... that's the incredible combination.

Beth Santer 46:56

It sure is. And when you provide that meaning, it's not going to go away. It's something that stays within people, which is fantastic. So for your final question, what are your hopes for the future of inclusive employment, and what are, or what continues to be, the challenges? Why aren't there more stories like yours?

Randy Lewis 47:23

I don't think... I think fear, it's ultimately been down on the list, something from fear or... in the risk is associated with this, and I think the it's the lingering prejudice that people can't perform as well, and why take the risk?

Beth Santer 47:52

Right.

Randy Lewis 47:54

And it's in finding those people that have the authority and the opportunity to fire in the desire. That's what a champion is. And so my time when somebody approaches me is try to find who can be the champion. Because if there's not a champion with the authority, and all the things I said, it won't work. And in the change of regime is always a risk.

Beth Santer 48:29

Yeah,

Randy Lewis 48:30

But I think, I think that's it.

Beth Santer 48:36

Well, Randy, you've always been not just my champion, but champions to all of our educators that are working in our schools and are have all the same hopes and dreams of our kids that don't receive diplomas are able to exit with jobs, and having a more inclusive employment situation definitely makes that dream become more of a reality. So I want to thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your powerful but also inspirational message about inclusion and leadership and the value every individual brings to the workplace. Your work has truly shown us what's possible when compassion meets action, and how true change happens when we see ability first. To our listeners, we hope today's conversation inspires you to think differently about inclusion in your own schools, workplaces and communities. As Randy reminded us, inclusive employment isn't just about opportunity, it's about dignity, belonging and unlocking the potential that exists in everyone. Thank you so much for tuning in to the Wayne RESA roundtable podcast and Randy, thank you thank you thank you so much for joining us.

Randy Lewis 49:47

Thank you.