

# Inspiring Women

## Episode 25: Diane Adams

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Laurie McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership and over the years I've come to learn one thing: women need women. And not just any women, but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at [inspiringwomen.show](http://inspiringwomen.show) or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening and I hope you will be inspired.

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to another episode of Inspiring Women. I am so excited to be speaking with Diane Adams this morning, and Diane has devoted her career to building and studying the role of culture in a company's success. And she's an expert at this. She is today, the Chief Culture and Talent Officer for Sprinklr. She has worked at many large important companies growing their talent, working on their culture.

Laurie McGraw:

She's had that same similar position at McGraw-Hill Education. She was the Global Resources Manager for Qlik. She was one of the original people at Cisco, where she worked for John Chambers and grew that company from the first 4,500 employees to over 70,000 globally. She was the Chief Human Resources Officer at Allscripts when they were at 500 million and then brought that company to \$1.4 billion. And Diane is an author. She is a speaker, she is extremely accomplished. Diane, I am so pleased to be talking to you today.

Diane Adams:

Thank you for that introduction, Laurie. Well, I am thrilled to be here. You and I had the ... And I think of it as a privilege, to work together when we were at Allscripts for more than three years. So, thank you for including me and I'm very much looking forward to the discussion.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, you are an inspiring woman to me, Diane. And again, I'm really excited to talk to you. So, let's just talk about sort of the career trajectory. You've been leading companies, leading growth in the area of human capital. And you really focus on culture as a key aspect of that. So, let's just start with what you're doing right now and a little bit about your career history.

Diane Adams:

Sure, would love to. So, I think ... I started my career actually, Laurie, in finance, believe it or not. You don't have a lot of people-

Laurie McGraw:

What? I didn't know that.

Diane Adams:

You know what? And most people don't. Right? Because it's not your typical career progression. But I will tell you, Laurie, it served me so well. Right? College, that was finance by love, believe it or not. And I started my career that way. But my real love is making a difference in people's lives. And so, once I'd spent time in finance, I just thought, "You know what? This is going to serve me well."

Diane Adams:

I learned so much about business, but I decided to make a developmental move, if you will, when I was in a technology company so I could get exposure to human resources. And from there, I just realized that my career goals and my life mission, Laurie, were just totally aligned. My mission in life is to inspire and enable people to live extraordinary lives, personally and professionally. So, as much as I appreciate the fact that I get paid to do what I do, it's just my love. So, very fortunate that way.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, culture at an organization is so intertwined now. It's not just professional development. And so, I want to talk a bit about that, Diane. Because across the many companies that you have helped grow, you've hired so many people. You've grown workforces by the thousands, tens of thousands. And today, what we're seeing in the workforce is many different generations. Millennial, Baby Boomer, Gen XYZ, pick your flavor. So maybe give us some perspective on the differences between the generations, how you think about them in terms of what they want, what they need, and what's been changing over the past couple of years.

Diane Adams:

Great questions. So, thank you for that. And maybe just for a second, Laurie, I'll talk about culture and how I see it. I do think in a company, there's the what. There's the results we got. I think about the culture as the how. And how do we come together? How do we work? How do we live? How do we learn? How do we play? So it's the how. And one of the best definitions I ever heard was culture is what we do when no one is looking. And to that point, when you ask me the different generations, how do we come together so we thrive. And when I look at some of the differences, I think the first thing that comes to mind for me, and I'll start ... we've got the Baby Boomers and, and obviously, maybe not obviously, I fit into that category if you will.

Diane Adams:

And then I think about the younger generations. The first thing that comes to mind for me, that I just love when you think about the Millennials or the Gen X and the Y and Z is what, what they do is they show up much more fully than them. You know, you often get when you think about the Millennials or the Gen X, Y, Z, you get all of them. So the first thing that comes to mind for me in particularly how it plays out in the workplace is how much we can learn from them, Laurie, because there's so much to be said for that.

Diane Adams:

Like if you look at Baby Boomers and some of the norms around how Baby Boomers progressed in their own careers. And when I think about diversity and inclusion, or at Sprinklr we call it culture of belonging, I think the way you truly create that culture of belonging, where everybody feels embraced for who they are and what matters to them is, it means you're creating a culture where you want every single person to be valued for that. And it also means every one of us has to lean into every person to understand them. Because diversity and inclusion, culture of belonging is so much more than race and gender, et cetera.

Laurie McGraw:

And in this year of the pandemic, I think what you do in your own personal life, your social interactions, that has now been brought into the workplace like never before. We're all on the Zoom meetings, we're all seeing each other's homes, those kinds of things. But do you see generational differences in terms of career progression, whether it's because of a particular generation or because of the specific sort of time wherein we're all forced to be a little bit more in each other's personal lives than we perhaps were before the pandemic.

Diane Adams:

Yeah. Here's how I think about it. And as you talked about culture, my goal is that I would love to see every organization create cultures where people thrive personally and professionally. And when you talk about this past year, I'm just going to give you an example, Laurie. One of the things that we did internally, because one of the questions is how do people come together? How do you create that sense of unity when we're all working from home?

Diane Adams:

And we held what we call heartbeat calls, every leader holds them with their direct report across the organization. What that means is you're seeing into everyone's home every single day. And what I loved about it is as much as creating a culture of belonging was a focus for us, it accelerated that in just a huge way, because everyone, no matter what generation, got much more comfortable sharing who they are.

Diane Adams:

So there were lots of fun things, right? Like you could be on a heartbeat call. And this would be the day that was dedicated to a particular person. And a view into their crib, I think is what they called it. But so fun, right? Like whether it's their family and they met everybody, whether it's their dog, whatever it was, whatever was important to them.

Diane Adams:

And I think what that did was for everybody, like I said, no matter what generation, it accelerated people getting really comfortable that I am bringing my whole self to work now and personal and professional, like I said, that's our goal. And we can talk about that in a second why that specifically is so important to me, but with all the hard of COVID, one of the most beautiful is that on the other side of this people are going to be much more comfortable to show up. Well, they already are, and it'll just get better and better to show up as they are, with the personal professional. But here's who I am, strengths, here's who I am and here's who I'm not, is how I think about it.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, it's the type of thing that seems very, very related to culture. And perhaps this being more in each other's awareness of your personal life. I think what you're saying is that it has been in some ways helpful to force focus on culture. So I want to move a little bit to your views on culture. You spend a lot of time thinking about it, talking about it, speaking about it and writing about it. Your book, *It Takes More Than Casual Fridays and Free Coffee: Building a Business Culture That Works For Everyone*. You wrote this pre-pandemic. I thought it was an excellent book with a lot of focus. I want to talk a bit about that, but first Diane, why did you write this book?

Diane Adams:

What I've realized Laurie is, we've had a lot of learnings in our life and for me I'm always asking myself, how can I make an even bigger difference? And I think the way for me to do that is share lots of learnings, mine, as well as others that were willing to contribute to the book. Because what I want is other organizations to learn from all the experiences along the way. And in order to accelerate other companies, other organizations, creating this culture where people do thrive personally and professionally. That was my why.

Diane Adams:

And I think the other thing, Lori, and you know this because we had the opportunity to work together for years and this is what we strove to create together at Allscripts was, when I was at Cisco and very fortunate to work with John Chambers, Rick Justice, also worked closely with him, and a number of other leaders, who just totally allowed me to be me.

Diane Adams:

And I'll give you an example. I live in North Carolina, as you know, and my family had moved to Silicon Valley and we went there for a couple of years and my dad was diagnosed with prostate cancer. And I asked if I could move back to North Carolina because I wanted to be closer to family. And the answer was "Yes, you know what? You get results. We're going to give you total flexibility."

Diane Adams:

And then Danielle was diagnosed with type one diabetes and you've been a huge champion for that cause. And there are other life moments that we have, right? Those that are beautiful to celebrate. And then those that are hard. And that was huge for me because I got flexibility and to live my life in order to have a phenomenal career and in order to live my life with no regrets personally.

Diane Adams:

And I think about, and I love that you're doing this podcast, Laurie, *Inspiring Women*, because I think it's one of the hardest things that women face. How do you manage it all? How do you balance it all? For me many years ago, way ahead of the times I was given flexibility in a role that's not usually given that kind of flexibility, to live my life fully. So that's a huge reason. I wrote the book and what I'm passionate around for women and everyone. And I think, you spoke about the pandemic. This is another one of the beautiful things that comes out of this, that people

will have much more flexibility. We've given people permission to have flexibility, to make everything work for their lives personally and professionally.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, you're one of the few people who talk about the pandemic and are able to look at the positive side of things and that is incredible, Diane. First of all, you've had some experiences of where an organization that you're working for is using those difficult times in your family life and giving you flexibility as an important thing that builds culture for as a person working there, I'm sure trust and pride in the company that you're working for.

Laurie McGraw:

You've said culture is everything when it's right. And I think you're talking about some things of what culture looks like when it's right for women who are in organizations who are looking to develop their careers. What about when it's not right? What about when the culture is wrong and what can women do to help shape and change those things so that they can continue to grow their careers?

Diane Adams:

Such a great question Laurie, so what can we do as women? And I think one of my first things I think about is we often say, we shouldn't be the ones that are educating others in order to create a culture that's more inclusive for women and beyond. And you know what the answer is? We shouldn't. However, I do believe, and based on my own experiences, it makes such a difference. And let me just give you based on my experiences.

Diane Adams:

There are a couple of things that come to mind. One is having a male sponsor or champion, it makes such a difference. And being fortunate to benefit from men sponsors and champions, and I believe you have been as well, it does make a difference. So doing that, I would think about that. And very intentionally as a woman, think about those in your world, men and women, that are your sponsors.

Diane Adams:

The second thing is around the education. I get this question a lot, Laurie, and this is around ... let's say you're in the room. And there are things said that, gosh, aren't reinforcing a culture for women, a culture where women are going to thrive. How do I handle it? I do believe the how is really important. And I often share, I can be in the room or I watch others in the room. And depending on the situation, depending on the seriousness of it, there are things often that ... you can use humor just to put it on the table. Depending on the world you live in, your colleagues, having conversations with others, if there's a dynamic that's going on, that's not one that is fostering inclusivity and everyone having the same seat at the table.

Diane Adams:

So those champions as well. And then there were times where I just take it out of the room, right? Because it just needs to be a more focused, serious conversation. So I think the short

answer for me is, educating is really important. And I try to be very, very thoughtful about the how.

Diane Adams:

When I was little Laurie, my mother, I mean, eight years old, I remember this so vividly. She was teaching me, how do you influence to get the right outcome, the best outcome? And to be very thoughtful about that versus just responding without thought. And it makes a huge difference.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, Diane, the thing you're also talking about are a lot of personal experiences learning from growing up, learning from things in your family, and then how that fuels your outlook and how you think about building culture. So you are very involved in so many causes, whether it's JDRF or Make a Wish or American Heart. How did those personal experiences shape your outlook? You've had, you've mentioned a few difficult ones. What is fueling that positivity in difficult circumstances?

Diane Adams:

There are a lot of things. I think I'll start with, or maybe one example that I would share, Laurie is with Danielle with type one diabetes, and she was four when she was diagnosed. And you have a choice, we all have a choice how we show up. We can embrace the hard, and then we can also make it better for everyone, right? Or, we can stay in our own worlds and it can just continue to be harder.

Diane Adams:

That's one example. You also know my son, the year of COVID was the hardest ever in my family's life. And as you know, I have two daughters, my son left this earth to go soar with the angels. And what I've learned, whether it was through Danielle, whether it's through Jordan, some of the struggles that he had with addiction, that you know what? If you go back, our life mission to help others to live their best lives, and in both of those examples to show up and help others, whatever they're struggling with.

Diane Adams:

And I gave you the two examples, whether it's addiction, whether it's type one diabetes. And in my case, right now, helping others through grief, right? Because it's what you're dealing with. It really all goes back to, I believe, we're here on this earth to make the biggest difference we can for other people and helping them to live their best life. So thank you for asking me, because there are a lot of experiences there that have shaped the choice that you make to choose positivity, choose joy and make the biggest difference, which is why I was so excited to see you were doing this podcast, Laurie. Cause you're perfect to do this.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, Diane, first of all, thank you for sharing that. Those are difficult and hard things. And the tragedy that comes with that, I'm choking up a little bit. I have to be honest. And I'm just so sorry about that. But your approach to taking what is an incredible heartbreak and putting it towards

being focused on giving back and providing something of importance and help to others just continues to impress me. It is why I consider you such an inspiring woman.

Laurie McGraw:

I think Diane, I just want to close out on that. You are incredible in terms of what you do. I think your focus on culture for an organization, the importance of that, to help people develop and build really great companies, is incredible. As we close out here Diane, what would be some last advice you might give to women who are thinking about their professional development and aspiring career?

Diane Adams:

Thank you. I want for women just like how I've seen you live Laurie, how I strive to live. I want all women to show up and feel totally confident and comfortable being them. And I'll just share with you. I've always been passionate around it. As I had had shared with you before, when Jordan left this earth, the last song he texted my two daughters, Chris and Danielle, and me was "Be As You Are" by Mike Posner. And I love those words. So my advice is, show up 100% authentic to who you are, and you really are going to live your best life.

Laurie McGraw:

Diane show up 100%, be as you are. Those are great words to close out on. This has been an inspiring woman conversation with Diane Adams and Diane, thank you so much.

Diane Adams:

Thank you. It's an honor. Thanks for asking me, Laurie.

Laurie McGraw:

This has been an episode of Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. Please subscribe, rate, and review. We are produced by Kate Cruise at Executive Podcast Solutions. More episodes can be found on [inspiringwomen.show](http://inspiringwomen.show). I am Laurie McGraw and thank you for listening.