

# Inspiring Women

## Episode 40: Bridget Duffy

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 this episode of Inspiring Women. I am so excited today to be speaking with Dr. Bridget Duffy. Dr. Duffy is the Chief Medical Officer for Vocera, which is a company focused on clinical workflows and communication. Prior to that, she founded and was the CEO of ExperiaHealth, which was a company that worked on clinical workflows and communication, which she then sold to Vocera.

Laurie McGraw:

Now, Dr. Duffy is an early pioneer in the creation of hospitalist medicine. She launched programs to accelerate the clinical discovery in the field of integrative and heart-brain medicine. She was the country's first chief experience officer, which was something in healthcare she did at Cleveland Clinic. She is very, very prominent. She has many awards, many publications. She is a sought-after speaker. She attended Medical School at the University of Minnesota. She's on several different boards, including co-founding the National Task Force for Humanity in healthcare. Dr. Duffy, I am so pleased to be speaking with you today.

Bridget Duffy:

Great to be here with you, Laurie.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, great. Let's get started in this conversation. So Bridget, you have done so much already in your career. You already said that, "I don't think I've made it," but I think you've really made it. Let's start with, what are you doing right now? What do you do at Vocera in your current profession?

Bridget Duffy:

Well, first, thank you for doing this and creating a community virtually for women. I think I didn't realize how much I needed it until the pandemic so just thank you for creating the connection.

Bridget Duffy:

What I'm focused on right now in my role at Vocera is that during this pandemic and early on, I just woke up every day with this almost panic and sense of urgency to do something more to protect my colleagues in the front lines and in particular, women. I think women have been hit disproportionately through this pandemic in the various roles that they've had, frontline in healthcare, frontline as mothers, chief medical officers of their homes, navigating their family's lives and communities. So I also have never seen in my career as a physician fear in the eyes of my colleagues, fear going into work that not only might they get sick, but also they could go home and infect their family. So I pulled together a little team at Vocera and we got together and we said, "What's our responsibility as a company and what could we do more of to protect the frontline healthcare workers?" So really quickly, we pulled together a group of 10 CEOs across the country.

Bridget Duffy:

I just picked up the phone and called a few colleagues and former friends from the Cleveland Clinic and where I'd worked previously and said, "What if we could get 10 influential CEOs together and define for the nation the standards of safety for people in healthcare today in the front lines? And could we have psychological and emotional safety be as important as physical safety?" So long story short, we worked very quickly. These 10 CEOs within two seconds said, "I'm in."

Bridget Duffy:

We drafted a declaration of safety, which landed around three pillars, a pillar around physical safety workplace violence, which existed before the pandemic but it is worse. A pillar around making psychological and emotional safety as important as physical safety. And third and most powerful was all of the CEOs said, "You cannot be safe unless you're free from racial injustice or bias." So we have a health justice pillar. So that's what I'm working on now.

Bridget Duffy:

Our dream is, the 10 have signed it, our dream is to have a hundred more CEOs sign it, and that we are in the White House having it formally signed with President Biden and that this group becomes trusted advisors to this administration to help us navigate our nation's healthcare system to get through this pandemic and thrive on the other side of it.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, that is really exciting. I want to talk a bit more about that. But you started that with a sense of urgency, and I agree with you, this pandemic has so many different things in terms of impact to humanity, in particular women, who have been impacted differently, more, communities of color, different, more in negative ways, and so taking urgent action and having the energy for it is incredible. So that's really wonderful. I love the safety pillar. I think that that is a really important one. And you're right, these issues certainly existed well before this pandemic, but they've really come to the forefront.

Laurie McGraw:

So as we talk about that, maybe Bridget, you can walk us through a little bit of how you got here because you're in the Chief Medical Officer role now, you were the country's first Chief Experience Officer in healthcare, you've founded companies, you've led companies, give us a little bit of the career journey so we understand sort of where you're coming from, where you are today.

Bridget Duffy:

Absolutely. Well, I think it was really influenced by my parents who always did work around giving voice to those that had no voice and looking out for those that had less. My father was in healthcare, but my path has really been non-traditional from the get-go.

Bridget Duffy:

When I finished medical school and then was finishing my residency in internal medicine at the University of Minnesota, at Abbott Northwestern, I read a paper written by a gentlemen, and the title was How to Build the Most Healing Hospital in America, and I just cold-called him. Little did I know that he was the inventor of the pacemaker, the founder of a little company called Medtronic. He answered the phone and we chatted and he had a dream to truly humanize the way care was delivered. He and I were on a 25 plus year journey until his death a couple of years ago at the age of 96. So I think that I have always not had really a tolerance for the status quo in healthcare and would witness the brokenness and the inequities with those that had less and that mentors gave me the courage to chart a path that others may not have taken. And I've always seemed to write my own job description and create my own title, which helps because I don't really fit in a nine to five job.

Bridget Duffy:

A reporter was doing an interview years ago on why some physicians had left medicine, and I said, "I don't feel like I've left. I've just moved to a different platform to try to make it better for those that are in the trenches."

Laurie McGraw:

Those non-traditional career moves that you've made... I mean, that's interesting that you have made them. It's, I think, even more interesting that you made them as a woman. I mean, entrepreneur is a word that's used to describe a bit of your career, but that's sort of like a today where. It is not the history of when you've done entrepreneurial things in your career. Was it different being a woman? Did you notice it as a difference or was it just the path that you followed?

Bridget Duffy:

Very much so. I think I left many times or pivoted because of pain in the current role or inability to excel or move up within the organization. In hindsight, I look back and I think I often spent two to three years too long in a position, and so it's almost like the pain of not being able to use all my gifts forced me to move in a different direction and sometimes not as willingly as I would have liked to. I think there's comfort in staying and not making change happen. So even though it maybe looks good on paper or to other women hearing this, it's not without pain and not without risks. But I think I always listen to my gut. My mentor, Earl Bakken, the founder Medtronics,

sent me a book early in my career, *Trust Your Gut*, when I've listened to my gut that's when I've had the ability and the power of sort of move to the next thing and then to find the people in the trenches that helped me succeed.

Laurie McGraw:

Having sort of discomfort in a current position, this is sort of familiar for many people in their careers in terms of not being fully satisfied in what they're currently doing, but when you made those decisions to move to the next thing that included risk taking, where there people alongside you that helped pull you? Did you have mentors that were the key people that gave you, whether it's courage or something else that made those moves? Give us a sense for that because I think that's really helpful for other women to sort of hear who are also grappling with those career pivot decisions.

Bridget Duffy:

I think what I did was I looked for people that inspired me or companies that inspired me and I actually cold-called them. I think I got this from my father who's probably as crazy as I, but I would read something that somebody wrote and say, "Oh my goodness, this person moves me," or "I love what that person's doing in this company," and then I would call them and say, "Tell me more about this. How did you make the move?" So I think I had people that inspired me to make the move.

Bridget Duffy:

I will say I had very few women that actually, early in my career, looked out or helped me. There were a few men. There were very few women in healthcare and boardrooms that I was in or leadership rooms I was often the only female, and that was frightening, but there were a couple of male mentors that looked out for me. One female mentor at Medtronic, Barbara Kind, who took a risk and created a team whose mission was to humanize the way we deliver medical technology, and so I think there were individual people that gave me the courage to take the risk. That's the power of what you're creating here with this community of women, which I'm just so happy to know of you.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, you're part of it now. I like this cold calling tactic that you used. That's not something that I think that people think of, necessarily. I also think quite frankly, a generalization, but I think women need to network more and you actually have to take action, and sounds like some of those actions that you took with those cold calls were really helpful. So that is terrific advice and I appreciate that.

Laurie McGraw:

I want to ask you about some things that I've heard you talk about, I've read in some of your articles, *Harvard Business Review* and others, humanity in health care, human-centered culture in healthcare, what are you talking about there? Why is that so important?

Bridget Duffy:

Well, before the pandemic, I witnessed, as many others like Chris [inaudible 00:11:16] and my colleague, Liz Boehm and Dr. Maples, who I work with on the Task Force for Humanity, is that I just witnessed myself and my colleagues becoming more and more exhausted and losing the joy for why we entered the profession. It wasn't about the brokenness of people. It was the brokenness of the system and antiquated technologies. And I watched what the electronic medical record did to my colleagues and to the sacred interaction that I would have with a patient. My reason for living and for being in this profession is to the suffering of others and when I found myself spending 10 hours of a 12-hour a day on a computer and doing other things versus looking into the eyes of my patient, I thought there's something wrong here. So this was recognized before the pandemic.

Bridget Duffy:

And the levels of cognitive overload that nurses suffer in the front lines, just from alarm fatigue, alerts, typing in the record, many of us across the country realized we had to do something different and to redesign a system that brought in technologies that eased the burden of being a doctor or a nurse versus added to it. But that major part of being able to improve the environment was around leadership and identifying and mentoring the next generation of leaders that believed in a human-centered approach, that everyone was treated equal on the team, that the housekeeper and food service were an equal and valued member of the team.

Bridget Duffy:

So my team and I, led by Liz Boehm, created a framework for human-centered leadership design that many institutions across the country are adopting today. But now with the pandemic, post-COVID PTSD is real. It will cripple our nation's healthcare workforce. We will have people leaving the field in droves if we don't do something now. So there's nothing good about the pandemic, but the only good thing here is that I hope it will catalyze our nation's leaders to move faster to fix the things that we knew were broken before the pandemic.

Laurie McGraw:

These problems are very large. And I also agree with you that the urgency created by the pandemic in terms of exposing how important these issues are, it's there, perhaps accelerating. Are you optimistic that we'll be able to make progress? If so, why are you optimistic?

Bridget Duffy:

I actually am. I mean, working with this CEO coalition and this group of leaders, which is quickly growing to create this viral community of leaders who care about this, as a couple of them said, there can be no competition on innovation around humanity. And to have Tommy [Maholivic 00:14:03] from Cleveland Clinic say, "I'm collaborating with institutions that were formerly competitors," that we're all working together to try to fix these things, that they all care about, as Rod Hochman at Providence said, "The soul of the provider matters and that emotional and psychological safety is important." That we're working to de-stigmatize the issues around cognitive overload and burnout and exhaustion and to do something about it. I don't think that would have happened without the pandemic. I think it would have been a slow slog to try to do this.

Bridget Duffy:

I mean, everything I've done in my career I felt like I had to get up every day and put on a Kevlar vest because of the arrows in my backside, talking about the patient experience before it mattered and before the government mandated we measure it and publicly report it and tie reimbursement to it. I think now leaders are having the courage to do things and do it faster. And then that will drive the government and payers around reimbursement and metrics around things that truly matter.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, that's encouraging to hear and I want you to be 100% correct in that optimism. I really, really do.

Laurie McGraw:

I want to turn a little bit more to being an entrepreneur. It's one thing to have great ideas and a lot of passion for what you're working on, which clearly comes through Bridget just hearing you talk about the work that you do, but the studies and statistics, they're not favorable for women as entrepreneurs for getting funding for successful companies. It's happening, but certainly not at the rates that we might want for gender equity. So I'm curious, just having been an entrepreneur, being an entrepreneur, having had companies funded and then obviously selling them as you have done, what did you see along the way? Were you the only woman in the room? Were you one of one or did you have barriers that you had to overcome? What has been your experience along the way?

Bridget Duffy:

Very much so, although I think it is changing but it's not changing fast enough and there are a few things I would have done differently had I known or had support from other female mentors.

Bridget Duffy:

I think healthcare and healthcare technology companies are still grossly underrepresented by women, and it often starts with the venture world where they're mostly men and little diversity in those organizations. However, now there are several that are being founded and led by women, so women venture-backed firms, so women finding women. So I think there are better ways to network to get access to the resources that you need.

Bridget Duffy:

I didn't get any coaching on how to aspire to key leadership roles in organizations nor coaching on how to seek board roles. And so I spoke at the Breaking into the Boardroom for Oxeon a couple of years ago in New York when we could meet in person, and seeking these roles and positions is a full-time job and it takes specific tools on how to create a board-worthy resume, how to be present on social media through your LinkedIn and other channels, and to actually reach out and target organizations that are seeking women to be on boards or in key leadership roles in organizations. I think I just thought recruiters would call me, and that's not how it works. You actually have to get coaching on how to put yourself out there and to reach out to others to try to advance in your career.

Bridget Duffy:

Second, I have never cared about titles. I've always drafted my own job description, created my own title. I think, unfortunately, the hierarchy of medicine is that my credentials sometimes give me a position of authority, whether it's founded or not. But I unfortunately think, often in HR, that women are held back by titles for just their payroll reasons, which don't make any sense, and that when people look for women in leadership roles, and companies are on board, the title actually matters. So I think that's universally broken in this country and that we have to have women on a quicker path. I see more male vice presidents in companies than I do female, few people of color or other diversity in these roles, so I still think we have a long way to go. States like California have mandated that any publicly traded board have women and people of diversity on the board. It's a shame that it came to that so we've got a long way to go, but I think there are things individual women can do to try to advocate on their own behalf. Those are things that I didn't know early in my career.

Laurie McGraw:

How do you do that now? Because I agree with you that advocating for yourself, particularly when you don't necessarily have a network, whether it's a mentor or a sponsor or whatever the term is, if you don't necessarily have that, advocating for yourself as a woman is important. So knowing your learned experience and where you are today, do you still advocate for yourself based on that learning? If so, how do you go about doing that?

Bridget Duffy:

I think you have to, especially as a young woman changing careers. It's antiquated things like going to the new job, they ask you what your salary was at the old place. Well, why is that relevant when you've grown from when you started there? So I think there are ways that you can catapult your career versus just staying on a plateau by having the courage to ask for things around the financial security that you need and deserve. I think there's ways to get coaching from... There's really cool women in various recruitment firms that will work with you to draft your resume in a way that shows your skillset versus putting down what you did in high school. I mean, there's ways to really build a resume that tells your story in a really, really powerful way. And to be thoughtful around your career path so that when it lands on paper it just shows the growth and the impact that you've had. You can never predict the path you're on. And as my father would say, if you want to make God laugh, tell her your three-year plan. But if you can, you can be smart about the roles you choose so that your resume tells a story.

Laurie McGraw:

It is purposeful. So I think that your comments there are very well said.

Laurie McGraw:

In terms of your experience, Bridget, over the years, some things that women think about, work-life balance... You do a lot of things, both your profession, you serve on boards, you are on speaking engagements, do you have work-life balance? Do you think it can be achieved?

Bridget Duffy:

Absolutely not. No. It's great. It's aspirational. I try. I mean, it's one thing to have knowledge and then it's one thing to turn it into action. So my books and my tapes on meditation, my morning, calm on my outlook calendar, so I try. I know it's important. The only thing you can control in your life is your calendar so I work closely with my executive partner to really focus on the calendar so that if I have space for the creative work, that drives the innovation that I bring to Vocera. If I don't have that, then I can't bring that innovative spirit.

Bridget Duffy:

When I took a walking tour in Ireland with David White, with John [O'Donnell 00:21:18], he was still alive, and he said something that has stuck with me forever as he had us walk through this sacred ground. He said, "Ask the question, what is it, your higher power? What is it that you most want me to do with my life?" And he said, "You can't find the answer to that unless you have stillness, solitude, a quiet and a connection to nature." So I think it's just carving out space to protect that if you can, but it certainly has been hard with the pandemic.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah. I really liked that quote. So you don't fully practice what you preach, but you're working on it is what I heard in those comments. Bridget, this has been a terrific conversation. I've really enjoyed it. As we close out here on Inspiring Women, any last advice you want to leave with listeners?

Bridget Duffy:

Well, one mentor coach of mine said to me, "Use your voice and speak up in the room," and one of my greatest fears in my life, next to snakes, is the fear of public speaking. I think, for women, your voice and your executive presence and the energy you bring to a room makes a difference in the impact you can have and the growth that you have, so my advice is figure out how to use your voice. Get coaching around public speaking if you have a fear of that, see somebody if you can get on beta blockers early in your career, but use your voice to do good in the world.

Laurie McGraw:

That is fantastic. This has been an excellent Inspiring Women conversation with Dr. Bridget Duffy. Dr. Duffy, thank you so much.

Bridget Duffy:

Thank you.

Laurie McGraw:

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