

Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps

Episode 95

Heather Costa

Ed Gaudet: Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we learn about the people that are on the front lines delivering and protecting patient care. I'm Ed Gaudet, the host of our program, and today, I'm pleased to be joined by Heather Costa, the Director of Technology Resilience at the Mayo Clinic. Good day. Heather, how are you? Good to see you.

Heather Costa: I'm well. How are you? Good to see you. Good.

Ed Gaudet: I'm getting ready for the weekend. It's been a hot one here in Massachusetts. I can't wait to spend some time in the pool.

Heather Costa: Very nice. It's not been too bad here. No, not. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: That's good, that's good. There's weird weather patterns, of course, as everyone knows, we're experiencing a little bit of a heat wave with a lot of humidity, so it makes it difficult to sleep at night.

Heather Costa: Absolutely.

Ed Gaudet: Let's start off with a little bit about your current role in your organization.



Heather Costa: Absolutely. So, I'm the director of technology resilience, as you mentioned, for the Mayo Clinic. The Mayo Clinic has main locations in Rochester, Minnesota, Jacksonville, Florida, and Scottsdale and Phoenix, Arizona, with a number of hospitals up in the health systems up in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota area, I'm sure.

Ed Gaudet: Always adding new ones as it goes.

Heather Costa: There's always a lot going on.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, always a lot going on.

Heather Costa: Yeah. So we also have international presence in international too.

Ed Gaudet: Right. And so your role is pretty important. Tell us what it means to be the director of technology resilience.

Heather Costa: So, really, it's ensuring that we can effectively respond and recover when there's disruption. So really varied from the traditional disaster recovery approach, which is often an all-or-nothing sort of idea of a smoking hole in the ground and being able to simply failover to another location. We really look at technology resilience as being something that is much more comprehensive and agile. So, thinking in terms of being able to respond to any disruption, whether it's physical or cyber in nature, which is I'm sure with disaster recovery, typically it doesn't hold for cyber disruption, right? But also being something that's useful day to day, not just when the meteor strikes the data center. So, looking at things at a more asset level and being very precise with what we're doing and how we're doing it in a way that we can respond and recover effectively for any size, scale, scope of disruption.

Ed Gaudet: Okay, so things like measuring RTOs and RPOs and metrics of that, a.

Heather Costa: A lot of that. Yes, definitely understanding what our capabilities are compared to the needs of the business, our clinical practice and education, and research shields, which are all part of Mayo, and making sure that what we're doing and how we're doing it aligns with those needs. Understanding that the needs of the patients come first.

Ed Gaudet: Mhm. And I imagine there's opportunity for trade-offs as well as you think through the risk appetite and the resiliency requirements.

Heather Costa: Yes I think certainly everything is done in. We use a risk-based approach. When we think about what's mission critical. We're thinking about the things that would, first and foremost, would have any catastrophic impact to our patient. And then we have concentric circles out from there. As far as the way that we are responding to things, protecting things that first things first approach.

Ed Gaudet: I like that approach. So, how did you get into health care in it in particular?

Heather Costa: Well, it was an interesting journey. Probably not your typical journey into this war. I worked for PNC Bank for many years and got a call one day. I'd been doing some work for one of the senior VP's, and he was also involved in business continuity and he decided he needed to create a role for that because it was growing and the needs were growing. And I got a call asking if I would be interested in that role, and I recall my response being what is business continuity? And the answer I got was, I don't know, call trees and stuff. And so, for me, it was sure. Why not? I'd been in the role that I had been in for a few years and was sleepwalking through it from the standpoint of there wasn't anything new or exciting. It was the same kind of routine stuff every day. And I just, I dove headfirst into this world of business continuity. And after I figured out what it actually was and, you know, ran through the first BIA, which happened in the very first month that I was in the role, I learned what a BIA was and how to conduct it. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: What was that like? That must have been interesting.

Heather Costa: It was really cool. It clarified for me that I really loved this work. I think that was the start of it. So I laugh, and I talk about it. It took me 40 years to decide when I wanted to be when I grew up, and I think really it was that it was exciting to figure out. It leaned into a lot of my strengths around problem-solving and putting puzzles together, and those things that are really fascinating for me in a lot of ways. It's a way that allows you to be creative. This work requires creativity, it requires and harm, yet ability to read situations and be decisive, and make decisions on how to move forward effectively to get things underway, particularly when you're in the midst of a disruption. I found my way into what I think I was meant to do. It really fits with the person that I am and things that are part of the core of my being. I was working for PNC Bank, like I mentioned, for several years, and did the earn my Certified Business Continuity Professional certification through that process. And then I went back to school. I went back to school full-time as a solo parent. I had at the time my four children. I had two in diapers, one in high school and one in college, and went back to school full time while I was working full time and finished an undergraduate degree that I had started some 20 years prior. Um, but this time, it was focused in emergency management and homeland security with a minor in digital forensics. And I graduated on Mother's Day summa cum laude with a 4.0 because I don't do anything halfway lazy.

Ed Gaudet: What a great story. What a great journey.

Heather Costa: A week later, I got a call from the Cleveland Clinic and they asked if I would be interested in coming and joining their business continuity team or actually their disaster recovery team.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah.

Heather Costa: And at the time, they were trying to shift from disaster recovery into business continuity or business resilience. And after being in an individual contributor role there for a couple of years, I took over leadership of the team, and we built a fully integrated business resilience program, one of the first and only ones in health care at the Cleveland Clinic, which.

Ed Gaudet: Another marquee health system.

Heather Costa: The number two hospital.

Ed Gaudet: That's right.

Heather Costa: I often laugh and say, once you've done that, the number two hospital, the only other place to go.

Ed Gaudet: Gotta go to Mayo.

Heather Costa: One hospital. Yeah, here I am. I've been with Mayo now for a little over two years, and we are on a path, on a journey to incrementally move the needle on this work and really develop what can and should be the best technology resilience program in the world.

Ed Gaudet: So there's a lot of work going on with artificial intelligence at the mail. What have you started to incorporate that into your overall for your strategy and your governance plan for resiliency, or is it too early?

Heather Costa: So I don't know that I am in the same boat as a lot of people around AI. I know there's a lot of excitement around AI, and there's a lot of sort of rush to get it on board. I sit more in the camp of, I think it's critically important that we have a solid program and process in place first, and then we find the right tools to layer on top that are going to support that structure that's already in place. I think there's a lot of really exciting things that are happening in this space. I think that the technology, obviously not new, is growing and maturing, and we're seeing a lot more capability start to come out. I am just of the mind that we've got to do leadership first and technology last, which might sound odd coming from a technology person, but really, the core and the foundation of everything we're doing has to be the people and the process first before we layer any technology on top of it in order to do so effectively.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. No, that's I think you often hear that from folks that have been in the business for a long time. They recognize that it's not about the shiny new object; it is about the people first, the process that supports the business. And that connection with the business is so critical. If you don't have that, really don't have a full visibility of the impact, if you will, of the technology. So that's a really good way to think about it. And as you think about resiliency, how is it important? How important is it for you to form relationships across the table with folks like legal and audit and HR and compliance? Yeah. Any tips that you can give to listeners and how to do that effectively?

Heather Costa: I'm of the mind that this work, first and foremost, is relational. To your point, not just with our partners like audit and the risk space legal and those sorts of things, but also with our clinicians and our practitioners, the boots on the ground, the people that are doing the work. It doesn't matter what we recover unless it matters to the people who are on the front lines caring for our patients. And it doesn't matter what we can recover unless it fits our mission as an organization, which is that the needs of our patients come first. Everything that we do. I think I can tell you how I've done things. I can tell you how we did things in Cleveland. I can tell you how the team is doing things in Mayo. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what anybody does unless it fits your organization and the culture of the organization in which you're trying to implement it. I squarely live in the camp of increments, so I have a phrase called I say we talk about getting the nickels will get your quarters and quarters will get your dollars, or two nickels will get your first down. So it works whether you're a football fan or not. But the idea is that it starts with that incremental approach, and I think the relationship building starts that way to certainly active listening, doing a lot of active listening and making sure that as a team, our role is to be there to help facilitate the needs of the business to support our patient. We all have a very clear purpose and shared passion around that, and I think that's true across the board at Mayo, which is one of the things that makes that easier. So when you're centered in that purpose, as long as you have that shared purpose and you're all centered around that purpose, then it makes it a lot easier to build those relationships and always come back to that grounding force. So I think that's one piece of it. The other piece of it is to have a clear understanding of where you're trying to go. It's integrity is everything. So understanding where you're trying to get to and being very clear on that pathway and intentional and purposeful as you're heading in that direction and just being really transparent along the way.

Heather Costa (cont'd): I think all of those things are crucial to being able to develop those relationships that are necessary to do this work effectively.

Ed Gaudet: Great advice. I love that. Yeah, once you break that ring of trust, it takes a long time to rebuild it. Sometimes you never get back. So I love the integrity, focus on integrity and having an ethical compass is so critical these days because there's so much noise out there. There's so many possible distractions that could lead us down paths that we probably shouldn't take. But as you look out over the next 12 months, 24 months, what are your top three priorities?

Heather Costa: So I don't know that the priorities change month to month because we have a clear sort of blue sky strategy. As I do this work with my team, we do what I call blue sky strategy. One of the first things when I got here is we sat down and we had to understand where we were, but we also needed to understand where we needed where we wanted to go. And I used this approach that I call blue Sky strategy planning. And it's really just if this could be everything without any barriers, what would it be. Mhm. And being very clear on what that is the diamond platinum-encrusted technology resilience. This is what it would look like. And here's all the things that it would include. And then bucketing those things into high-level ideas around okay this is our strategy. This is the core of what we're doing. From my perspective, strategy doesn't include timelines. This is a desired end state. And then, from there we have our why. Now we're going to figure out the how. What changes I think in when you think about time blocking. Well, about 12 months, 24 months, 36 months. What changes is the how? Because the technology changes, the threat environment changes, the organization will change. But as long as you stay focused on the why, the central core idea that desired end state of where you're headed, then you're, and you're making sure that everything that you're doing is getting you closer to that desired end state. Even if you don't ever fully achieve it, then that the things that you're doing are not just checking boxes for the sake of checking boxes, but you're moving closer to that desired end state. And for me, that's more what we focus on, is being very clear on what we're trying to accomplish and achieve. We know exactly what our mission is as a team within the organization. We know very clearly what the mission of the organization is, and then we will take whatever winding path happens along that way to get as close to as close as we can to that desired end state.

Ed Gaudet: Now, I love that immutability of strategy that's not changing. So often you'll go into an organization, and every other month, there's something new, a new strategy, which that thrashing can often it does. It affects the culture in a negative way because the culture doesn't know what you should be doing today. And if I don't do this today, it's going to change anyway, so maybe I'll wait. So I love that Northstar approach to strategy. What keeps you up at night these days?

Heather Costa: I don't think it's anything different than keeping anyone else up.

Ed Gaudet: Especially for resiliency. Your title. Right?

Heather Costa: Yeah. I am, at heart, a cyber girl. After I was at the Cleveland Clinic for a couple of years, I went back and finished my master's degree in Homeland Security and Information Security and forensics. And I love that. I love that work. It's but it is harrowing sometimes to think about the things that that can happen. I find comfort in the resiliency work because, for me, it's one of the few areas in cyber where we get to be proactive. We get to be on the front end of things, and these are things that we can control. We can develop plans. We can have plans of action for when something goes wrong. And we definitely operate in the realm of when not if. I talk about that with my team a lot. Right? I am not. I am of the mind that something's always coming. We don't know what it is. If I had told you 4 or 5 years ago that we were going to have a pandemic, you might not have believed me to the proportion and scale that it happened, but obviously, it did. So we don't ever know what's coming at us. But if we work on same consequence planning, what we know is that things that disrupt us, the impacts of those things, are generally the same, regardless of the type of disruption. So if we focus on the same consequence planning, then we get to take control so that we don't have to be up at night. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: No, it's if we've learned anything through the pandemic and then change health and every other disruption and breach and ransomware attack that's happened over the last five years, decade or so, it's so important to obviously identify, detect, and protect. But what's even more important is the ability to respond and recover. And if we can't do that, all bets are off, right? Because you can't predict the next big thing if you could.

Ed Gaudet (cont'd): Obviously, we would all be talking about the fact that change health is everyone's clearing house, and people are going to have a real difficult time collecting, getting paid for the work. And so I think that was a wake-up call as well. But we've had this series of wake-up calls recently, which again point to the importance of resiliency and that mantra that it's not a matter of if it's a matter of when. So let's prepare to recover, I love that. What are you most personally or professionally proud of over the last couple of years? Wow. You've had you've had a lot. You've had a lot going on.

Heather Costa: So done a lot. Did you get your masters?

Ed Gaudet: How long ago?

Heather Costa: So my master's degree. I finished in 21.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, okay.

Heather Costa: So recently I. Yeah, I did that. That was my pandemic fun. In addition to building the resiliency program for the Cleveland Clinic, which started at the beginning of 2020, I went back to school in August of 2020 with a three and a five-year-old underfoot 24-seven, because all the schools were closed, and everything was closed, and they were sent home. But I had a plan before we knew the pandemic was coming. I had a plan to do the master's degree. I had applied and been accepted at Penn State into the program there, and that was the plan. So that's what I did, and that's super proud of that. Honestly, I take the most pride in the ability, like the teams that I've worked with both in Cleveland and Mayo. These are phenomenal teams. I have stood shoulder to shoulder with the best and the brightest, and I get to talk about the work that we've accomplished together and the things that we've done in a lot of different settings, and I love that we get to do that, not because it's about me, but I tell you what, these are just some really incredible people with just a passion for protecting our patients and making sure that we're able to provide care. Both organizations I have worked for the best of the best and just thrilled to be a small part of the puzzle.

Ed Gaudet: Nice. Yeah. No. When you work with a great team and with when you're surrounded with really smart people, it's so humbling, too, because you recognize you really don't know what you don't know.

Heather Costa: Yeah, I think that's true. Of course, that's long been a mantra of mine. I don't know what I don't know. And I think that the key to that is not being afraid to speak up and ask or say, I don't know, or I made a mistake or I'm unsure. And it's really important that we foster that inside of our organizations and inside of our teams. As a leader, I think it's critically important that not only do we tell our team members that, but we model it. And that gets back to the integrity, right? I'd rather tell you, I don't know than give you an answer.

Ed Gaudet: That's I tell my team that all the time. Don't make it up. It doesn't help anybody outside of your day job. What would you be doing? What are you most passionate about?

Heather Costa: Oh, wow, I have I've got four kids. That's actually 5I5, five, nine kids. Oh, no. My nephew is with me now, and so thrilled to include him in the group and my children. I have my oldest son, Christopher, is almost 28, and daughter Hayley is 24. And Nathaniel, my nephew, is 18. And then I have two young children. Catarina is nine. She'll be ten next month and Caleb is eight. I am so just.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, you've got a range. You've got a range, I.

Heather Costa: Do, I have a range and they're all just incredible people. And so I am living everybody's dream. I think that I have been blessed beyond all measure and reason. And I love this life. I love the job that I have, the career that I have. I love the people that I get to interact with. And I love being a mom.

Ed Gaudet: So awesome. No room for hobbies.

Heather Costa: That's hobbies are a funny thing I have. I love hobbies and I often have a lot of different hobbies that happen at once.

Ed Gaudet: Me too.

Heather Costa: So I sometimes do some painting and I move in and out of where my interests are and what I'm doing. So my home is filled with art, some of which I've done, some of which my I've done with my children, some of which they've done. My younger daughter, in particular, is very artistic and does a lot of artwork, so sometimes there's that. I read a lot of things. Often several books are in a rotation simultaneously.

Ed Gaudet: I subscribe to that. Yeah, multiple. Yeah, yeah.

Heather Costa: I might not be great at finishing them all. I'm saying very quickly, but and it's a host of things, anything from informational things I've got. I'm studying now for my system. So that's a book that's been sitting there. Probably not as far into that as I should be, but we'll put some focus on it. I have some fiction books, some informational books, all manner of things and topics. A lot of that.

Ed Gaudet: Do you read on the Kindle or do you you prefer the physical?

Heather Costa: I'm old school. Me too. I prefer a physical book that I can turn the pages on.

Ed Gaudet: I just ordered two today, I hope. Hopefully, my wife's not listening because she's. The books are having babies. What's happening? You're getting closed in by your library?

Heather Costa: Yeah, I think I just got four more books earlier this week, and the stack of to-be-read just continues to grow. But that's okay. There are worse things. Music is a big, big passion of mine. And we oh, there's always music in our home and our car.

Ed Gaudet: Let's talk about music. So you're on a desert island. You can bring five records with you. What would they be?

Heather Costa: Five. It's going to depend probably on when this happens. But right now the album that's on repeat is I listened to a lot of Christian rock or Christian, not rock, Christian contemporary, a lot of Christian contemporary and in that genre. So Terry and released her album Worth The. I think it's called Worth the Wait. I don't even know what it's called, but that's been on repeat for the last since it was released. So I often get into these cycles where I'm I've got 1 or 2 albums on repeat. There's a Tobymac's latest album had been on repeat for a long time. That's a good one. Gosh, I love R&B to this. Really not much music I don't love. There are a few things I'll do without, but yeah, it would probably be I'm going to date myself. It would probably be a mix tape.

Ed Gaudet: Just dated yourself. Yeah, I love mix tapes like I used to. Now I make Spotify playlists now it's my contemporary mix tape.

Heather Costa: And yeah, that's yeah, pretty much.

Ed Gaudet: If you could go back in time, what would you tell your 20-year-old self?

Heather Costa: Gosh, maybe just to have grace for yourself.

Ed Gaudet: We're so hard on ourselves, aren't we?

Heather Costa: We are, we are. I think that's been. And part of it is just the lesson that comes with maturity and growth and healing and all the things which I think is a journey. I don't know that there's any such thing as healed. I think we're always in the it's always an action that's happening and ongoing. It's just an ongoing journey. Yeah. I think just having Grace, oftentimes we are quick to have grace with others, but not with ourselves. And just knowing that it's all worth it. Like it's all.

Ed Gaudet: Going to work out.

Heather Costa: It is. And timing is everything and it's not always my timing. Seldom really matters. I'm of the mind that there are this. There is a process and a pathway. And sometimes we just want to get to. We want to get the blessing without the lesson. And you need them both.

Ed Gaudet: In other powers working on our behalf as well, if you believe in that, I.

Heather Costa: Do. Absolutely. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: So I have to ask you this question. This is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. What's the riskiest thing you've ever done?

Heather Costa: Heather. Thing I've ever done. I have four children.

Ed Gaudet: I was going to say your masters. You went through a master's and I did.

Heather Costa: That's pretty risky. I have, I've done skydiving, I oh you have.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, there you go. There check I.

Heather Costa: Have, I have I love a good roller coaster.

Ed Gaudet: Oh me, too.

Heather Costa: I think. Yeah. Anytime you decide to raise human beings. Yeah. I don't think there's anything, Richard. You never know.

Ed Gaudet: Swimming in risk. You're swearing it? Yeah, exactly. No matter what you do, there's always that roll of the dice.

Heather Costa: There is. I said with my oldest son, I had no idea what I'm like. At some point, I'm like, how am I going to do this? I have no idea how to do this. And I don't know what this there's no manuals, right? There's nothing. And at some point, I said, I will do the best that I can and pray that it comes out okay in the end. Um, and otherwise, it is my contribution to the economy, ensuring that the next generation of therapists is employed. So that's what I've done.



Ed Gaudet: Yeah. Amen.

Heather Costa: Yeah, that's what I've done.

Heather Costa: And I tell you what, they're all five of them are incredible human beings. And so I got.

Ed Gaudet: As good.

Heather Costa: Got all the time.

Ed Gaudet: Last question. What advice would you give to folks that are coming out of school that want to break into healthcare or into cyber or into some IT job?

Heather Costa: And I get that a lot people will ask me about this. They were pieces of it. And so I'll stay focused on that. Cyber is such a unique feel, right? It's very vast, and it has a lot of facets. And so that that is always the one thing that I tell people is really to explore it, explore all of the different facets of cyber. It's not all red teaming and blue teaming and purple teaming. It's not all. Mhm. And prevention. There's so many different aspects to it. I have a talk that I've delivered a few times that business resilience is cybersecurity. Because again, it's one of the few places where we get to be proactive. So really looking at here's what I enjoy or here's what's a strength for me or what I'm passionate about aligning your purpose to. The profession. And I think that's true whether it is cybersecurity or not. But in cybersecurity, there are a lot of different ways to be a critical part of the cybersecurity story in any organization and in any industry. So really explore what that looks like and then find where you're going to feel the best, where you're going to fit the best based on your skills and your purpose and your passions.

Ed Gaudet: Excellent. Excellent advice. Thank you. Heather. This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. Remember, if you're on the front lines protecting patient safety or delivering patient care to stay vigilant because risk never sleeps.



Censinet RiskOps™ Demo Request

Do you want to revolutionize the way your healthcare organization manages third-party and enterprise risk while also saving time, money, and increasing data security? It's time for RiskOps.

SCHEDULE DEMO

www.Censinet.com