

Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps

Episode 25

Wes Wright

Ed Gaudet: Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we discuss the people that are protecting patient care. I'm Ed Gaudet, the host of our program today, and I am pleased to be joined by my good friend and long-time colleague, Wes Wright. Wes, good day to you, sir.

Wes Wright: Good day to you as well, Ed. Thanks for having me.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, no, it's been a pleasure to catch up. How's your summer going?

Wes Wright: It's been a fantastic summer, as before we came on air, as we talked about. For the first time in a long time, I had my boys most of the summer. And you know, the podcast is Risk Never Sleeps, but I tell you, you get that 8 and 11-year-old to go to sleep, and your risk quotient goes way down, I'll tell you that. Maybe it doesn't sleep, but it goes way down.

Ed Gaudet: That is so true. Especially with boys, right? I mean, because, you know, when they're sleeping, usually they're sleeping, and I had three girls, and I was never sure if they were home or not. They're all much older now, so I'm sure if they're listening to this, don't hate me, kids. Always interesting, though, there's no book to be a parent, is there? There's no manual to be.

Wes Wright: No, there's not. You just, I mean, that is one of those situations where you just do what you think is best and cross your fingers that it's actually is what's best.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, I remember having a drink with my dad when I was a little older and a little more mature, and I could kind of deal with the issues with of ... Yeah, no, it was, that was actually, it was in college. I think I came home from college, and I had all these issues I wanted to work through with him, and typically, that got done at a bar. And so I kind of laid it on him, and he just kind of put his head in his hands and said, I was doing the best I could. I thought I was doing the best I could. And I thought to myself, okay, that's a legitimate, real answer, and, you know, I forgive you, and let's move on with our lives. And I hope my kids someday will hear this and say, okay, my dad was doing the best he could.

Wes Wright: And always and forever, no malicious intent in anything.

Ed Gaudet: No, benign intent, always assumed ... intent. Yeah. So, how did you get into healthcare? You've been in healthcare for a while. Take us through your career background before we get into the personal side.

Wes Wright: Yeah, it's been almost 30 years now, and I got into healthcare IT, like most folks do. I started out as a Korean cryptologic linguist in the Air Force, which, like I say, is the normal path. But from there, I got into an Air Force program called the Health Services Administration. There's actually quite a few of us out there. And while doing that, there's five primary areas that you can focus in, and one of them is IT. I didn't start out in IT, however, I was a logistics officer, did an internship, and then saw an IT guy at my hospital. I went to a Wichita, Kansas, little clinic in '94 or '95, they were installing a health record, electronic health record, one of the first ones, you know; DOD was one of the first ones to put that system-wide. And I was watching him do that, and I was fascinated by how these things could talk to each other, and that inspired me. The next job, luckily, I was in the Air Force at the point in time where you could choose your next job, and there was a CIO opening at a small community hospital, Air Force Hospital in Yokota Air Base in Japan. So, I got my start at a 25-bed community hospital in Japan, and it worked out beautifully for me at the time. And some people won't even know this, but we were running something called Novell at the time.

Ed Gaudet: We were running Banyan Vines.

Wes Wright: Banyan Vines on top of Novell, that's what we were doing. And the Air Force made the decision to switch from Novell to, at the time, Windows NT. And there was nobody in my shop, you know, a small hospital, about eight people. There's nobody in my shop that knew anything about that, so I took a week off and did all the CVTs for Windows NT, and that's really what my technical appetite more than anything. I kind of leaned more on the technical side on the CIO bench rather than the business side, frankly.

Ed Gaudet: And you were at Sutter, right? For a while.

Wes Wright: Yeah, I did. Moved all about in the Air Force, they're good at moving you every 2 or 3 years. So I did that and then got out, gosh, it's almost been, I've almost been out as long as I was. I got out in 2006, retired in 2006. So another three years, and it'll be 20 years since I've been out. And started work with Drex down at Scripps in San Diego, and then we moved to Seattle Children's, and he went off and did some stuff, and I stayed there for a bit and then Sutter, and then, for three years, and then Imprivata for the last five. And yeah, we'll see where we go from here.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, I know we share a lot of background. I spent time at Imprivata. I also spent time in the army military, so I thank you for your service.

Wes Wright: Reciprocating here.

Ed Gaudet: Thank you, sir, thank you. So, it's been a crazy couple of years for us living through the pandemic. What are you most proud of as you kind of reflect over the last couple of years?

Wes Wright: The work over the last couple of years, I think, is bringing the concept of digital identity as an integrated service line rather than just pieces and parts. I know that's just starting to catch on, but I never thought of, when I was out in the field, I never thought of identity as a service, I always thought of it as a group of tools you had to put together. So getting folks to think about that and the importance of that over the last several years, that's something I'm pretty proud of because we weren't thinking that way before.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah, well, and all you had was piece parts, right? You had paint, you had ..., you had Imprivata, and yeah, if you wanted capabilities, you had to sort of pick one or more of those solutions and pull them and cobble them together, and oftentimes, you didn't even integrate. So yeah, that's.

Wes Wright: Right, right.

Ed Gaudet: And what were some of the benefits that customers were finding through that approach?

Wes Wright: Well, just like in everything, when I was at Sutter, I used to preach this what I call the QS4 model, and that's quality supported by stability, speed, security, you know, stability, security, speed, all on the platform of simplicity. So, I mean, really, the more simple you can make things, which if you can run things as a service line rather than as individual pieces of parts, then you're making them more simple; the more simply you can run things well, the more stable they become, the more secure they become, the faster you can change them. So, to me, it's all about simplicity and standardization. Talk about reducing risk, the more you can standardize and simplify, the less risk you have.

Ed Gaudet: I always like to refer to this phrase I learned, actually a CTO out of industry, I forget his name now, but he coined it, and I always refer to it: Entropy requires no maintenance. And so the hardest part of things always is maintaining these systems for the near and long term.

Wes Wright: And well, and that's just eating our lunch too. I mean, from a health perspective, I know we get the question later, but I'm going to pull out my soapbox right now. I mean, we just can't keep adding applications to this finite resource of people to maintain these applications. I mean, we just consistently add and add and add and add, every once in a while, you might take something away. So my theme for this year and something I'm going to be talking, Drex and I and Bill Russell were talking the other day, my theme for the year is all about application rationalization.

Wes Wright (cont'd): In order for people to do their best work, we've got to take stuff off their plate, and the easiest way to do that, in my mind, is to, one of my places had 35,000 applications. You know, it could have been one application, ten different versions, but 35,000. How are you supposed to manage, reduce the risk on that? So that is a lever that affects so many things that, that's become my soapbox as of late, that and cyber meaningful use, which I'm sure we'll get to at some point.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, yes, my favorite topic. Absolutely, yeah. No, and it's interesting on the rationalization, I would almost take it one step further to say we almost need to rationalize our processes, like process rationalization, application legacy, support those processes, but take into consideration not only the technologies and the processes, but also those people that are behind it. And if we're going to transform the organization in a meaningful way, we've got to look at all of those things together, I think.

Wes Wright: You know, and you just called out something that IT folks are just incredibly guilty of, and that is not looking at the process that drove the selection of that application anyhow. If you're going to do application rationalization, that's actually where you stop, where you start. I'm sorry. You start over there, you find the application, and then just, oh, we only use this twice a year. Well, hell, go find out what process that supports first before you go, We don't need that.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and what other applications can we consolidate? Continually trying to get to that single pane of glass, although that's a little of an overused phrase, but still, so important if you can get there where you're limiting and reducing again, not only the hard investment you make, but all that soft investment that is made to support and maintain those things over the long term.

Wes Wright: Oh yeah. One of the places I work, I actually tried to get that on as a hospital goal, is application rationalization. You know, some percentage is this much. And so that's the kind of enterprise involvement you need in that. I didn't get it, and I didn't do application rationalization there.



Ed Gaudet: Yeah, well, and the other thing, I mean, because it's huge, right? It's multifaceted. It's also got a regulatory implication to it, too, because I was talking to someone this week about, they were complaining because they had to manage multiple instances of legacy EMRs because of discovery purposes, and they couldn't pull the data out, and just store it. They actually had to keep it in the container.

Wes Wright: Yeah, because they have to be able to present the data in the same manner that it was presented to the clinician at that time.

Ed Gaudet: Exactly.

Wes Wright: And it's just, it's a killer. It's a killer.

Ed Gaudet: As you're consolidating your organization or organizations together, now you've got to manage these multiple, right? Inpatient, outpatient. I mean, what a nightmare.

Wes Wright: Yeah, but, you know, you don't need four different ways to send a text message either.

Ed Gaudet: No, that's, that is true. That is true. Having built a texting system, yes, I agree with that.

Wes Wright: Yes, pick the low-hanging fruit. Leave the EHRs out for.

Ed Gaudet: That's right. That's right.

Wes Wright: Out for a bit.

Ed Gaudet: That's right. So when you're not working, you're not doing tech stuff and healthcare stuff, what are you passionate about?

Wes Wright: You know, I used to be a runner, my hips and knees, I got to nine, I got to nine marathons. And I just, one time I want to, maybe even if I have to walk it, I'm going to get that 10th, dammit. But I used to run a lot, but I've moved out kind of in the country and have some properties now, and it's amazing to me how much time it takes to maintain a couple of acres of property. So, you know, I hate to say it, but I've become a Health IT/lawn guy, frankly, with an occasional help, and occasional opportunity to watch a movie or something every now and then. But pretty boring life, right?

Ed Gaudet: What are you binge-watching? Any interesting movies or series?

Wes Wright: You know, when I was a kid, I grew up reading Asimov, and Apple has that new series out called Foundation, which is based on Asimov's books. So I've been watching that. They just released a new season, so it's kind of fun stuff to watch.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah. Are you a Neal Stephenson fan? Cryptonomicon or? That's great, I mean, coming out of cryptography, you should check that book out. It's, yeah, yeah. Oh, you may have, yeah, years ago.

Wes Wright: Yeah, back in the day.

Ed Gaudet: Back in the day, back in the day.

Wes Wright: Yeah, remember that was like almost 40 years ago.

Ed Gaudet: No, I know. Any other passions?

Wes Wright: I like to travel, we like to travel and see different places, and.

Ed Gaudet: What's the most interesting place you've been to?

Wes Wright: Wow. Interesting?

Ed Gaudet: For you. It could be anywhere in the world.

Wes Wright: Yeah, yeah, I've really enjoyed Italy. I've got some in-law relatives that own a bed and breakfast in northern Italy, and so that's been really fun to get to know the culture of Italy that, you know, from a family perspective. But from a pure gist, Wow, this is a fun city, Sydney is pretty cool. It's just, it is so cosmopolitan, so walkable, so pretty, people are all super nice. So Sydney and Italy, you know, I like the hardship places.

Ed Gaudet: Well, Italy is so different, too. Like, you get Florence, you get Venice, you get, you know, obviously.

Wes Wright: Yeah, we did that one based out of the north, but then, you know, we went to Sicily for a couple of nights, completely different from the North.

Ed Gaudet: Exactly.

Wes Wright: So on and so forth, so, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Did you go to Amalfi at all?

Wes Wright: Yeah, yeah, we did the Amalfi Coast. We rented a boat and took us all along the coast there, which was fairly economical. If there's 4 or 5 of you that want to go on a boat tour, I'd recommend just rent a boat. You're probably going to give it away for cheaper, and it's neater. It's more fun.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. No, it's so beautiful.

Wes Wright: Oh, and speaking of Sicily and movies, though, and binge-watching, there's one on Paramount, it's called The Offer. It's about the making of The Godfather. The producer, Al Ruddy, produced that series, so it's really interesting. If you're into Italy or The Godfather at all, it's a really cool series.

Ed Gaudet: I'm a huge Francis Ford Coppola fan, and Apocalypse Now, one of my favorite movies of all time. But similarly, there's The Heart of Darkness, which was, I think his wife actually made that film. It's a documentary of the Making of the Apocalypse Now movie.

Wes Wright: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah ...

Wes Wright: I'll take a look. I like Coppola, too, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, check it out, it's really interesting. And the stuff, like he was renting helicopters from the army, and then they had to call them back because it was an issue, they had to go. Oh man, the movie, yeah, it's like crazy, like nice, all this crazy stuff going on, but it's a good, yeah, Heart of Darkness, it's good.

Wes Wright: Heart of Darkness.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah. Which, again, that movie's after that Joseph Conrad book, Heart of Darkness. Okay, let's see. What else do I have here? You, well, we are running close to time, but I would be remiss if I didn't ask you this question because.

Wes Wright: What's that?

Ed Gaudet: This is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. What, Wes Wright, is the riskiest thing you've ever done in your life?

Wes Wright: You know, it was that juncture between, when I was a career cryptologic linguist and a health service administrator, seven years, almost eight years into the Air Force, and for some reason, I decided I was going to leave the Air Force and go get my master's degree, which doesn't sound that risky, except I didn't have a job, I had a wife, and I had a three-year-old kid.

Ed Gaudet: That's pretty rich.

Wes Wright: So I think that's probably, I still to this day don't know where I got the stones to make that decision, but that's probably the riskiest thing I've done from a lifetime perspective.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, so no bungee jumping, no swimming...

Wes Wright: Not for me, none of that. No bungee, no parachute, no, you know, 20 years in the Air Force, but I don't like being high unless I'm in an airplane.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, well, that's good. I'm glad you said that. This is a clean program, Wes.

Wes Wright: Right?

Ed Gaudet: I think we're both hippies at some point in our lifetime, maybe.

Wes Wright: Probably.

Ed Gaudet: Well, that's great. Hardest lesson in your career.

Wes Wright: You know, I'm dragging these up. I don't know where this came; back from the time when I was a logistics officer and deciding to become a healthcare IT, again, I was a logistics officer in a small clinic, and lost sight of some expiration dates on some stuff and could have really hurt some people. And that was a quite a life lesson for me at that point in time. And it just really associated the work that I'm doing in healthcare with the people. Which is, you know, as a logistics officer, you don't really, you don't see the patients, you don't interact with the patients, but really, that taught me that everything that's done in healthcare is super, super important, be it at the patient bedside or in the back office. So that was a good lesson to learn, and a hard way to learn it, but I'm glad I did at that early juncture.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, no, and it's so true, and what a great point to make on this program, because now more than ever, the professionals at the front line protecting the systems, basically delivering care are, truly make a difference in whether or not a patient gets the care they need to sustain life, right? So if a patient is hooked up to a medical device and it gets hacked and gets shut down, or if a actual clinic or hospital gets shut down due to ransomware, these are direct impacts to patients.

Wes Wright: Or something not even that obvious, you know, a piece of software that you meant to do a good thing interrupts a physician's train of thought and just causes this cognitive dissonance that doesn't have to be there. And that's where everything you do matters in that delivery of patient care. You may think this little pop-up message saying that lunch is ready or something like that is no big deal, but you've just taken the focus away from somebody who's delivering a patient. So that's the lesson I learned with that. You know, I had this little bitty vial that was sitting, it wasn't even refrigerated, yeah, it was sitting on the refrigerator, this innocuous thing, and it affected this many people. And these innocuous things that we're doing affect a lot of people down the road.

Ed Gaudet: No, that's a great lesson. One more question. You can go back in time and you go into your 20-year-old self. What would you tell the 20-year-old Wes Wright?

Wes Wright: You know, it'd be just keep plugging away. I didn't find my calling till late in life, frankly. And you know, at that time in my 20s, you get a lot of frustration about, you do have some friends, and my daughter, you know, she decided she wanted to do this when she was 12 years old so, you know, when she was 20, she took off, and I wasn't fortunate like that. So, and my dad said it a couple times to me. It's just, keep plugging away, you know, just keep doing the right thing and eventually something will break, and you'll find something. And it took a bit, but I did find something. So that's, I guess I'd give the same advice my dad gave me when I was 20, and that's just keep plugging away.

Ed Gaudet: That's great, that's terrific. Yeah, and it's funny, I ask that question to all guests and the answers are very similar in nature.

Wes Wright: Oh, really?



Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and I always thought like, well, they're going to say like buy Microsoft or, but it's not about that, and I think that's what's interesting about people. It's not always about those material things or money that everyone assumes that that's what everyone's after. So no, that's great. And any other last comments or thoughts?

Wes Wright: Oh, no. Just really appreciate you having me on, and it's fun discussion.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, no thanks, Wes. And thanks to our listeners, this is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. And if you're on the front lines protecting patient safety, stay vigilant because risk never sleeps.



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