

Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps

Episode 32

Linda Stevenson

Ed Gaudet: Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we learn about the people who are delivering patient care and protecting patient safety. I'm Ed Gaudet the host, and today I am joined by Linda Stevenson from the awesome awesome Medical Center Fisher-Titus. Thank you for joining us today.

Linda Stevenson: Thanks for having me.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and you've got a great background. I was looking into it a little bit before we got on here today. You were at Cerner. You were at Cerner, actually, during the time I was at Imprivata, so you probably know the Imprivata product pretty well.

Linda Stevenson: Oh, very well, yes, yes.

Ed Gaudet: And at Cleveland Clinic and a bunch of other bunch of other facilities as well.

Linda Stevenson: Healthcare my whole career. So great opportunities.

Ed Gaudet: A great background. So tell us about that journey. Why did you get into healthcare?



Linda Stevenson: It's funny, I had this, I don't know, a young age. I was in college, and for some reason, I knew I wanted to be in healthcare. I knew I didn't want to be a nurse, and, but I knew I could serve in a better way, and it just felt like such an altruistic place to be. So I ended up starting, my very first job in healthcare was as a biller, was at Metro Medical Center, as a biller, and did the day-to-day work. That's back when there was typewriters, and we typed claims, and we looked up Medicaid claims, and I just got into the nitty gritty. And from there, they found I was one of those people who liked to ask a lot of questions. So IT, here I go.

Ed Gaudet: Isn't that great? Like when we hire people, we, that's the first thing we look for. Are they curious?

Linda Stevenson: Yes.

Ed Gaudet: Do they ask a lot of questions?

Linda Stevenson: And some people are probably not loving the fact that ask so many questions, but hopefully, they appreciate it in the long run.

Ed Gaudet: I'm the same way, I always ask. I learned early on there was no such thing as a stupid question, only stupid answers.

Linda Stevenson: For sure, for sure. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Well, great. So take us through a little bit about your journey to Fisher-Titus.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah, I was, I've had a variety of roles, even though all of them were in IT. Went through the process of regulatory with HIPAA and privacy data security roles, really my passion from a professional is project management. So I have a PMP, and I manage a variety of things. Cleveland Clinic grabbed me to help roll out their epic with the Cleveland Clinic Regional Hospital, so I did a lot of that. All of that wide variety has prepared me easily for a CIO role. So that's when Doctor Burke reached out and said, hey, I've got an opening here, and we are a Cerner shop.



Linda Stevenson (cont'd): Had 11 years experience with Cerner at that point as both client and working for Cerner. So here I am, and I love being in the community hospital. That's really where my passion lies. I've worked at large organizations and small, and just being next to the community, seeing the patients right in the hallway is a great thing.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and I see recently you received your CIO designation.

Linda Stevenson: I did, I was very...

Ed Gaudet: Congratulations, yeah.

Linda Stevenson: Thank you. Thank you. A little nerve-wracking taking the test, but I got there, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: So you're pretty active in China. You'd be going out to the fall forum.

Linda Stevenson: I will be at the fall, and...

Ed Gaudet: We'll see you there.

Linda Stevenson: ... possible, especially involved with the League of Women or supporting women in STEM. And actually, I'm up for a board position right now, so fingers crossed I'll get, join them and help in a different way.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, that's terrific. That's terrific. And what do you think about the past 12 months, and you look at the next 12 months at your organization? What are your top three priorities?

Linda Stevenson: Yeah, we've got a couple of things. I think number one is patient engagement. Just seeing how we can use technology to give that patient more involved with their care, doing a lot on the digital front door, self-scheduling, self-submission of data. They're not used to that in the community hospitals, so really trying to push for that involvement.



Linda Stevenson (cont'd): Second thing is analytics, and we've done a ton of work on getting analytics in front of our leaders. The next phase of that is going to be bringing more to them, but also doing some better data literacy education. In healthcare, it's so fascinating, people have come from all walks of life. You have a nurse that's now a director or a respiratory therapist that's now a leader, and they don't have that education. So we have to help them understand how to use the data. So that's a big push for us this year.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and how about, and I also saw actually, recently, that you last year won most wired.

Linda Stevenson: We did.

Ed Gaudet: Congratulations.

Linda Stevenson: I was very proud of that. And it's funny because Fisher-Titus, you may not be aware, was one of the original most wired back in like '14, '15, '16, '17. They were the first Cerner smuggling hospital in the country. And unfortunately, over time, some of that infrastructure gets old and had to be really, we had to start from the ground up when I got here. So we rebuilt all of that, refreshed, automated, and here we are waiting for our second year of most wired again.

Ed Gaudet: That's great. And what were some of the changes you made on the infrastructure side?

Linda Stevenson: Well, we had to totally reinstall switches, a wireless structure. We had to reinstall and implement, again, our ... system and then the patient education systems in the rooms. All those had really gone by the wayside. All that's left was can watch a few channels, right?

Ed Gaudet: Yeah.

Linda Stevenson: So a lot of the ground up and then round up rebuild of our infrastructure for security as well.

Ed Gaudet: Really? Okay. Any advice, any learnings from the security journey?

Linda Stevenson: Oh, gosh. The way we approach it is kind of unique, I think. We don't have dedicated security professionals. Number one, it's hard to recruit out in a rural hospital area, so that's one of the challenges. But number two, the way I look at it is, it's all, locating my entire IT team, it's all our responsibility. So it's not just the firewall guy or the wireless guy, it's every single person needs to think about security for their piece of the pie, whether that's an application policy, writing, infrastructure, all of that needs to be considered. So we have a committee, and that committee comes together and manages it as a whole. And I love that approach, I think it's working really well for us.

Ed Gaudet: That's great. That's great. What are some of the things that keep you up at night as a CIO?

Linda Stevenson: Well, of course, cybersecurity. That goes without saying. I mean, that's kind of a given, right? I think the other thing is just the fact that I know there's technology out there that can help, whether it's productivity or better care. There's so much. So what keeps me up is the selection of the right tools for the right dollars, and making sure that we have the right things in place to do that. It's hard. We're limited funds, as you know, is bottom line is a 1% margin. And I really have to be careful about who's buying what and when.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. No, absolutely. And talk to us about, everyone's sort of a different stage of their AI journey. Where are you folks thinking about AI?

Linda Stevenson: We're a little cautious, only because I think it's really important to make sure there's policies and procedures in place so people understand it. We're starting to do some education on what it is, how to use it safely, what tools to use, get that policy in place. We're investigating a couple of options that are bring to both clinical and reg cycle. So those things are, so we do have Dax, the nuance Dax solution, help in the background with our physician productivity. So that when we embarked on a few years ago, but that's as far as we've gotten yet.



Ed Gaudet: And so a lot of work on the governance side, obviously. And then obviously, looking at the various tools. What are your thoughts on internally developed applications, and are you doing any work there? You know, you're small.

Linda Stevenson: We're doing our analytics internally. We're developing all our dashboards, all our databases, building our own data warehouse for the most part with feeds from many places. And that's probably the most we're starting to do a lot of power apps for some, not a lot of that yet because they're just learning. So I've gotten my team trained, and now we're starting to work on some of those small things. We don't do a lot of DevOps as a small organization. It's just it's hard to find those kind of resources here, but we're embarking a little in those areas.

Ed Gaudet: So you mentioned digital front or the front door in that, I noticed that tends to vary based on the health system or the hospital. How are you approaching that?

Linda Stevenson: So we have selected the Cerner consumer framework tool. And my goal, and now we don't have all the Cerner solutions that they sell. We have that which will incorporate some other ones. We use Experian for self-scheduling, we use spring for financials. So we'll be pulling all those into the digital front door. We have about 75% there with the tools we have, and it'll be ongoing in that tool.

Ed Gaudet: That's great. That's great. Excellent. So if you were not doing this I think I know the answer to this question, but if you were not doing your current job, what would you be doing? What are you most passionate about?

Linda Stevenson: Well, as you probably know, I have a real passion for yoga. I do you want to call it a master yoga teacher, and very experienced yoga teacher. I actually teach other yoga teachers how to be teachers. Yeah, that's, I've been a...

Ed Gaudet: Sensei of yoga.



Linda Stevenson: Well, and I like to think it makes me better at my day job because I have that ability to detach and move on to the yoga mindset in the evening, I come back refreshed and calm to my crazy day job. And I'm also a wellness coach, so I really have a passion for making sure that people are healthy, and in all ways, body, mind, and spirit.

Ed Gaudet: And how does that work into the culture with either your team or even extend it?

Linda Stevenson: Actually, because I do a class here once a month for anyone who wants to come to the organization. I lead our ..., we meet monthly Wellness Wednesdays we have. So I'll do a topic on sleep or a topic on breathing, or a topic on meditation, whatever it might be, and they really embrace it. And I get calls from all the departments, hey, can you come teach us the class? So it's fun.

Ed Gaudet: There's this book I read years ago. I think it's called The Five Rights to the Fountain of Youth. Does that sound familiar?

Linda Stevenson: No, I don't know that one.

Ed Gaudet: You should check it out. And literally, there were five yoga positions or actions or whatever you want to call them. And one of the first ones was just to stand and spin, believe it or not, and you work your way up to 21 repetitions. But I remember, like within like seconds, just my whole body was just sweating.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Yoga has a very interesting application of, obviously, mind, like you said, mind, body, spirit. And it really gets the, you're, obviously, your clients working in interesting ways that quickly that I just haven't experienced with other types of forms of working out or fitness.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah, I think that's the difference is it's not just a workout. It's much more about mind, body, and spirit. When you get into that classroom or do it online or whatever you do, people are intimidated by it. But I'll tell you what, once you get the right teacher in the room, it's like magic. You put that movement together with the fact that I have to focus on standing up and not falling over, and you can't think about anything else, which I think is the beauty of it all.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and a lot like you said, a lot has to do with the breathing and the connection of that breathing with the movement. And I remember I was trying to think about how I got introduced to that book and how I remembered I was working for a company, and I was working with this gentleman who was on one of the teams. This was back in the 90s, and he had he looked like he was in his 20s, and yet his experience and knowledge suggests that he was much older. So I asked him one day back then you could ask how old you were, asked him how old he was, and he told me it was like 45, and I went. What?

Linda Stevenson: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: There's no way you're 45. And he said, oh, no, I do this book I've read, and he introduced me to the book and that's how I got it.

Linda Stevenson: That's cool, that's cool. Yeah, I'll be 60 in February. I feel like I'm 20 and.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, my wish, my wife's birthday is in February 11th.

Linda Stevenson: February 10th.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, so you're the day before.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: That's terrific.



Linda Stevenson: Oh, yeah. So it keeps me young. And my son's a yoga teacher also. So that keeps us together, and we have a lot in common there too.

Ed Gaudet: That's terrific. Well, maybe we'll have a chance to do yoga at some point.

Linda Stevenson: That's right.

Ed Gaudet: That would be fun. If you could go back in time, and I love this question, and talk to your 20-year-old self, what would you tell her?

Linda Stevenson: Yeah, I think there's probably two things. And one would be, Don't take life so seriously. We work so hard and feel so pressured and life should be a little fun. Make work fun, I think that just serves everybody in your health in a better way. And then also be present, especially with what we do. My job is to plan ahead, so I'm already in my mind in 2024. So I'm totally missing 2023, right? But how can we be more present with our people or experiences or our friends or our family and just take a deep breath and take it all in? Because this is it, that moment will never come back again.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, it's so important to do that. I was just talking to someone yesterday about that being present and in the moment, but really not just saying those words, but actually going through the action of being present, which is really difficult to do, quite frankly.

Linda Stevenson: It is. Do you ever take a vacation? You're behind the camera the whole time, and you never really stop to just smell and look and be.

Ed Gaudet: I'm doing that next week, I'll be working on vacation.

Linda Stevenson: Oh, that's disappointing.

Ed Gaudet: I'll be taking a vacation, not there, unfortunately. Well, I'll try to find a couple of days. I'll try to find a couple of days. Okay, yeah. This is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, so I tend to ask this question. What's the riskiest thing that you've ever done?

Linda Stevenson: I would probably be my hike to Angels Landing.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, I've been there. That's great.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah, so for maybe those who are listening, who don't know, it's an amazing hike out in Zion.

Ed Gaudet: Zion.

Linda Stevenson: Zion National Park. And it's across this, like, spine between two mountains, I guess, if you want to call it that. But it's kind of scary. Yeah, but one step at a time kind of moment. But we got across and the view was worth every minute. It was.

Ed Gaudet: Isn't it beautiful?

Linda Stevenson: Did you go across?

Ed Gaudet: I didn't, I did not go across. No, I did not. I was not in any good shape to go across. But we did a lot of Zion. A friend of mine's daughter was, got married there. She had her wedding there, which is a great location to have. Wonderful, so wonderful.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: So we did quite a bit of hiking there and never made it to Bryce, although we drove by it. I really wanted to go to.

Linda Stevenson: Beautiful, but not as risky.



Ed Gaudet: Not as not as risky. That's right. Well, that's a good one. What are some of the hardest lessons you've learned in your career?

Linda Stevenson: The hardest lessons, I think, as a technology leader, I don't know if you call it a lesson, but it's very interesting to me that, I don't have a technology background. My college degree wasn't in technology, it was in management, which I felt very much like a fish out of water when I was first, early in my career, and then fell into technology. And while I got knee-deep as an analyst for many years, understanding the ins and outs of systems, I think what's made me a good leader was not the technology knowledge or the application knowledge, it's the people skills. And I think that it wasn't a hard, well, it was a hard lesson for me because I want to get things done, and so I had to really stop, and I think yoga has helped me with that, helped me step back and go, okay, how do I better connect with people to get accomplished what we need to accomplish?

Ed Gaudet: Well, to your point earlier, the more curious you are, the, you really don't need those hard technical skills as long as you know where to get the answers or how to ask the right questions.

Linda Stevenson: Exactly. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Which a lot of people tend to throw the technology in for technology's sake and don't understand the business in our industry, which is surprising to me because everyone's a patient or everyone knows a patient. And so, how do you work the culture to engage your IT folks to get a better understanding of the business?

Linda Stevenson: We try to do partnerships. I ask that all of my analysts and my leaders partner and round on those departments. So whether that's having a conversation on a regular basis with the nursing leader or shadowing someone in a department, I think that's, we got to experience and see what they're dealing with every day in order to help them make good decisions and make recommendations. We also hire a lot from internals.



Linda Stevenson (cont'd): A lot of my, half of my team, not for the tech side, but more the application side is actually from the department, so nurses, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, pharmacists, and that really helps. And I can teach you a system, I can't always teach you the real understanding of the nuts and bolts of a workflow.

Ed Gaudet: Yes. Well, what's nice about that too, is it's much more efficient to hire, I think, internally. But you also provide culturally this ability for people to see opportunity, and they know that it's not just words on a page. Actually, there is promotion within the organization. There is an ability to move into other areas laterally otherwise, which I think is really important, especially in healthcare.

Linda Stevenson: Yeah, absolutely.

Ed Gaudet: How about on the business side, how do you get the business to understand the nuances and complexities of technology, and especially around cybersecurity in particular?

Linda Stevenson: Well, you got to put it in their terms. Okay, that's the bottom line. I'm, my best friends are my finance people, right? I'm very close with my finance team, right? CFO, the director of finance.

Ed Gaudet: Exactly.

Linda Stevenson: Absolutely my buddies. But you got to put things in their terms. So tighter security actually, we had, we were blessed, and you'll find it strange, but we were blessed to have experienced a breach in 2020.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah?

Linda Stevenson: Yeah. And it was one that was not catastrophic, knock on wood, but it was enough that we were able to use that to say, this is what's possible. This is how it manifested, and this is what the ramifications are from a financial perspective.

Linda Stevenson (cont'd): So we put, finance people had to explain the financial part of it versus the potential impact for the compliance and legal team have to help them understand regulations and potentially breaching regulations. For the nursing team,.I have to say, if our pumps get breached, you can't treat patients. So the message is different no matter where you're at. Bottom line is you have to speak to their terms, which is, I think, why I'm good at my job because I don't talk tech.

Ed Gaudet: That's interesting. And so what were some of the learnings coming out of that that were positive? Were you able to during budgeting season? Was it easier to actually.

Linda Stevenson: Hundred percent.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah?

Linda Stevenson: We used to, and you know, never let a good crisis go to waste, right?

Ed Gaudet: That's right.

Linda Stevenson: We did that with COVID. We did it with our breach, and 100%, we, that was what we needed to go to the board to go to the capital and say, this is what we need for whether it was ongoing monitoring or SIM or CrowdStrike or any of those kind of things. So we took, very much managed that.

Ed Gaudet: And do you feel like people were much more of a mindset of risk management going forward?

Linda Stevenson: Yes.

Ed Gaudet: Than they were going into it?



Linda Stevenson: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. They really pay attention to cybersecurity now. We haven't talked about an orientation, we talked about it on, annually get we got participation to get systems like Metagate and Upguard to monitor vendor risk. So yes. And I'm also best friends with our legal compliance leader, our chief legal officer, we work a lot together.

Ed Gaudet: That's terrific. That's really great. What are some of your concerns going into the next year from an IT perspective? What are some of the things you're?

Linda Stevenson: Cutting cost.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah.

Linda Stevenson: Finding ways to cut costs. Do more with less, right? So we're trying to get really creative about looking at contracts, maybe some application rationalization or the things that that we're not really fully utilizing or not getting the ROI out of looking at services such as our Biomed support or help desk support, the different ways that we can handle that to save some money and still be really successful.

Ed Gaudet: So I see more and more organizations consolidating those risk management functions as an example, is that's something you're looking at possibly doing or?

Linda Stevenson: Not yet. There's not a lot of extra to consolidate for us. We're a small hospital. However, we have a consortium. We work closely with three other hospitals, okay, all community hospitals in our area. So that's where the CIOs get together and say, hey, do we have an opportunity here to share biomed resources or share health desk resources, things like that? So all good conversations that will be coming up.

Ed Gaudet: That's terrific. Any last parting thoughts, or comments, or suggestions, or advice for your peers?



Linda Stevenson: I guess just, get to know your business partners. Get close to the people in your organization and learn how to partner with them. Because I can install the best thing since sliced bread, but if they don't see the value and they don't take advantage of it, really, we're not making headway.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I love it. Well, thank you, Linda, for joining us today. This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. If you're on the front lines protecting patient safety, remember to stay vigilant because risk never sleeps.



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