

**Description:** Join us as MRA's President and CEO, Susan Fronk, shares advice and insights to help you start the new year right!

**Key Takeaways:**

- You need to find a balance between personal customer care, face-to-face care versus an automated, lower cost, more repeatable option
- What elements of your business cycle can you speed up and automate, and which ones do you need to really personalize?
- Since there is a people shortage and not just a talent shortage, you have to be flexible and creative in finding skills that might transfer and that you could develop.
- 2023 comes with a lot of uncertainty in many areas. Make sure you have a plan, and have a plan B and C as backups.

**Transcript:**

*Transcripts are computer generated -- not 100% accurate word-for-word.*

00:00:00:03 - 00:00:23:04

Intro

Hello hello, everybody, and welcome to 30 minute THRIVE, your go-to podcast for anything and everything HR, powered by MRA - The Management Association. Looking to stay on top of the ever-changing world of HR? MRA has got you covered. We'll be the first to tell you what's hot and what's not. I'm your host, Sophie Boler, and we are so glad you're here. Now it's time to THRIVE.

00:00:26:10 - 00:00:57:02

Sophie Boler

Hello, everybody. Welcome and Happy 2023! We're so excited you're here and joining us today. And we're excited that Susan Fronk, MRA's president and CEO, is also joining us today. And she's going to be sharing some advice and insights to help you start off the new year right. So while researching for today's podcast, it really dawned on me just how much information and resources, research, and data is out there, but it's all kind of conflicting information at the same time.

00:00:57:17 - 00:01:04:08

Sophie Boler

So I guess my first question to you is really how and where do business leaders and HR professionals start?

00:01:04:21 - 00:01:30:20

Susan Fronk

At MRA I've always felt fortunate because we get to look into 4,000 companies a year in the Midwest—more than any media outlet, more than any newspaper article, more than any periodical I could pick up and read about or listen to or podcast. I'll believe our members, because that's real. That's what's happening now, and I get to hear the leaders of all of those companies talk about how they're planning for this year.

00:01:31:05 - 00:01:52:25

Susan Fronk

So I'm not an economist, I'm not an expert, but I am a great listener and I feel fortunate to hear from all of our members, and I can bring some of those insights to bear for our podcast today. For example, MRA is part of the Employer Associations of America, the EAA—not the Experimental Aircraft Association. That's a member too.

00:01:52:26 - 00:01:53:05

Susan Fronk

Don't get confused.

00:01:53:05 - 00:01:54:22

Sophie Boler

Don't get confused.

00:01:55:00 - 00:02:20:03

Susan Fronk

We do something very different. But those employer associations, or EAs, across the country represent tens of thousands of member companies. So we're all listening to our members about how those organizations are planning for 2023. And we did a business trends survey on a national basis this fall. And so I can bring some of those facts to the table that might help plan for the year ahead.

00:02:20:18 - 00:02:54:26

Susan Fronk

For example, the EAA Business Trends Survey was almost 1,200 respondents, 1,200 companies that talked to us about what their concerns were and how they viewed the year ahead. Not surprising, the top three concerns are pretty much the same as 2022, but the strategies that employers are using to deal with those have changed a bit. So let me tell you some of the data. Inflation is the number one concern of employers today and inflation drives wages.

00:02:54:26 - 00:03:26:19

Susan Fronk

So coupled with that is the HR reality of finding and keeping talent, which is the number two concern. Those are related. In the short term, meaning 1 year look ahead, 2023, 58 percent of respondents were saying inflation was the number one concern. Longer term, which we identified as a 5-year horizon, 51 percent were concerned. So still a majority of the respondents, but it is mitigating somewhat.

00:03:26:19 - 00:03:53:14

Susan Fronk

So inflation is believed by the leaders who responded to mitigate a bit, diminish a bit over the next few years, but still be a concern. And then number two, as I mentioned, talent acquisition in the short term, 58 percent. This year, it's still going to be a primary concern for most employers that responded and longer term, 50 percent. So not a lot of change.

00:03:53:14 - 00:04:30:02

Susan Fronk

There are still half of the respondents believe that finding and keeping people is going to be a problem over the next 5 years. Quite honestly, I agree with that and would underline that with an exclamation point at the end, because it isn't a talent problem, it's a people problem. There aren't enough skilled people to go around. That's not going to change in the next 5 years. Actually, with baby boomers retiring, people choosing to work differently, there is going to be a people shortage, which just exacerbates the talent shortage.

00:04:30:15 - 00:04:54:16

Susan Fronk

That's not going to change. Which then, number three, the concern is retention. So getting talent, yes. Finding what you need, yes. Wooing them to your organization, yes. But then the care and feeding of employees, the engagement, the culture development, the skills development, the way that you're going to bring them along in their career. All of that is critically important.

00:04:54:16 - 00:05:32:29

Susan Fronk

And in the short term, 48 percent—maybe less than I would have expected to see—but employers are feeling a bit better about turnover this year. That shows that maybe 2021 and 2022 coming out of the rodeo that was COVID, people changing for the sake of change, just wanting a different set of problems—maybe that has abated somewhat or, and/or probably, employers are understanding the kind of communications and the kind of culture and the kind of flexibility that employees are looking for.

00:05:32:29 - 00:05:48:12

Susan Fronk

So again, 48 percent in the short term, 45 percent in the long term—it's not too much difference between the short-term and long-term views on all three of those top three concerns of employers in this National Business Trends Survey.

00:05:48:16 - 00:06:25:14

Sophie Boler

Absolutely. And thank you for covering all of that. There's a lot of great data that you've just described, but I'd like to dive a little bit deeper into each of those top three concerns that you just described. So let's start with inflation and the economy—one of the most uncertain aspects of them all. We recently polled more than 100 participants in our Talent Report+ webinar and the results showed that 19.74 percent believe that there will be a recession in quarter one, 39 percent believe there will be a recession in quarter two, 14 percent believe there will be one in

quarter three.

00:06:25:14 - 00:06:41:18

Sophie Boler

Zero percent believe that we will end the year in quarter four with a recession. And that leaves about 26 percent believing that there just will not be a recession. So overall, maybe quarter two or maybe no recession at all seems to be their majority really.

00:06:41:18 - 00:06:45:01

Susan Fronk

What that tells me is that nobody knows.

00:06:45:03 - 00:06:45:22

Sophie Boler

Nobody knows.

00:06:46:22 - 00:07:10:19

Susan Fronk

And that doesn't mean we're not educating ourselves and reading as much and listening and learning and doing strategic planning. But who does know? And that'll lead to a point I'd like to make later in the podcast about how we prepare. But when people talk about the new normal, I talk about the "no normal": N-O.

00:07:10:29 - 00:07:30:19

Susan Fronk

And as leaders, we need to prepare for something we've never seen before. The fact that maybe Q2 is the most common response for a recession if there is one those are still very evenly spread, including no recession. So people really don't know, and that is uncertainty, wow.

00:07:31:10 - 00:07:58:24

Sophie Boler

And in November, MRAR actually hosted our Economic Outlook event with Dr. Chris Kuehl, an expert economist, so he was able to describe a little bit more on what we're seeing this year and we are on the verge of a downturn. But he would describe that it's depending on how the consumer handles their spendings and extra savings. They could spend their way out of it or they could really hold onto their savings to plan for what's coming for next year because they're worried.

00:07:59:21 - 00:08:17:19

Sophie Boler

So really, how realistic is a serious downturn? How bad will inflation be? Those are all the key questions people are really asking today. So, Susan, what are some of the current key economic takeaways you consider of value to business leaders for this upcoming year?

00:08:17:23 - 00:08:51:16

Susan Fronk

Sure. Again, I'm not an economic expert, but synthesizing and distilling the information that I hear from hundreds and thousands of member companies knits together a pretty strong quilt of

information. And that practical information underlines the fact that inflation drives wages, and especially in a year like 2022, where there was high turnover and people were leaving employment, moving to different employment, moving out of the workforce, deciding to do something completely different with their career,

00:08:51:27 - 00:09:16:29

Susan Fronk

companies were scrambling to try to A) for the right reasons, altruistic reasons keep their employees whole and help them keep up with inflation, where a loaf of bread or a tank of gas costs so much more than it did a year or two before, and second, stay in business ... One of the things that MRA has is a thousand people registered and enrolled in our roundtable groups.

00:09:17:07 - 00:09:42:23

Susan Fronk

So we have 70 roundtable groups and those are peer discussions that really dive in professionally facilitated with a specific topic. And the economy has been a specific topic that we've covered a number of times. Our CEO and CFO roundtables have talked about the fact that the business cycle has speeded up so much where inflation is concerned. So you know that old adage, I don't like, it do more with less.

00:09:43:24 - 00:10:10:20

Susan Fronk

We have to do things differently and we have to do things using technology and we have to determine where on that spectrum of personal customer care, face-to-face care versus an automated, lower cost, more repeatable option for whatever your customer service issue is probably service. And we have to decide for what segments of our business do we need to be on which part of that spectrum.



00:10:12:14 - 00:10:54:03

Susan Fronk

I was part of the bomb cyclone of December 2022, slept in a couple of airports, had six flights, made it home in time for Christmas. And that may be a bad example, but automation is good until it isn't. And you have to give customers options. So allowing customers to choose when I want to self-serve, when I want to download something from MRA's resource center and I don't need to talk to somebody versus when do I have a really thorny employee relations issue and I need to talk to somebody with a lot of years of experience and I want to take an hour and do that and come up with options on how to solve my problem.

00:10:54:14 - 00:11:22:26

Susan Fronk

Whatever your product or service is, whether you're making widgets or cars or a law firm or a marketing agency, what elements of your business cycle can you speed up and automate versus which ones do you need to really personalize, not leave that touch, make sure that your customers can choose to get out of being on hold for 7 hours while you wait in line. They just won't stand for it.

00:11:23:07 - 00:11:43:00

Susan Fronk

And we've seen automation in all aspects of our world, of course, that's nothing new, whether it's ordering fast food or how we build a car, but making it right for your business. What are you going to be known for? If it's customer intimacy like we are at MRA, you better not automate everything.

00:11:43:04 - 00:11:43:27

Sophie Boler

No robots here.

00:11:43:27 - 00:11:50:13

Susan Fronk

No robots here, not yet. Unless it's like to deliver our lunch. That I would like to do.

00:11:50:13 - 00:11:50:27

Sophie Boler

All right.

00:11:51:20 - 00:12:17:06

Susan Fronk

But Dr. Kuehl said a number of things. You know, if inflation drives wages, most of our CEO and CFO roundtables are talking about the fact that that will moderate this year, that last year they were doing double merits or they were doing more frequent merits, or they simply boosted people's wages because they knew what was happening in the employee's personal lives and they needed to make sure they kept pace.

00:12:17:19 - 00:12:43:14

Susan Fronk

So if it was 6 or 7 percent on average last year, this year they're looking at probably 3 or 4 percent. So moderating to what we would consider to be a more traditional curve. But I think employers need to be very tuned in and aware of the economic signals for their own industry

because it isn't that skills are somewhat transferable but not always transferable.

00:12:43:14 - 00:13:06:29

Susan Fronk

And so if you need a specific kind of engineer, you might need to do something very different for that engineer than you do for the rest of your team. And HR has always been hesitant to not be consistent, to treat you different than you. And I say the time has come when you need to be custom, you need to go small.

00:13:07:11 - 00:13:37:01

Susan Fronk

We need to know what Sophie wants and thinks is important versus what Sarah thinks and wants is important versus what Jeremy thinks and wants is important. So harder for human resources, but more effective if we're going to go small and customize. That's not going to happen in the blink. That's a trend I see happening. And it's not just with employee benefits, but with customer selection.

00:13:37:22 - 00:13:40:01

Susan Fronk

What do how customers want what you do?

00:13:40:15 - 00:14:05:21

Sophie Boler

And that's a great point to bring up and the EA survey actually showed that 93 percent will be replacing staff due to voluntary turnover, whereas 71 percent will be hiring due to newly created jobs. So if business is good and hiring is high, let's talk about talent and the workforce shortage. So not only is it hard to find people these days, but it's also hard to keep them.

00:14:06:07 - 00:14:13:13

Sophie Boler

So do you have any insights to share to our listeners today in finding and recruiting workers today?

00:14:13:24 - 00:14:41:09

Susan Fronk

Good question. It is a big question and I'm always inspired by our members because there's lots of creative, innovative things going out there. So there's dozens of different things we could talk about, but I would kind of group them into two big buckets. One I'll call human resources is actually sales and marketing, and the other is creativity and flexibility and skill utilization.

00:14:41:09 - 00:15:08:17

Susan Fronk

So some of you listening might know that my husband is a human resource director and so he's recruiting all the time. Let me give you a real anecdote. He's very creative and he's a great sourcer. He's led some employees to us as well. But one Sunday recently he said, "I've just got a few, I just got a few phone screens to do and I'll be done in time for the Packer game."

00:15:08:28 - 00:15:35:19

Susan Fronk

Great. So I hear him on the phone in the office. He steps out and he goes, "I think I've found our new great specialty, blah, blah." I said, "Wonderful." He didn't look happy. So what's the problem? He said, he has 12 interviews this week. This is someone who had gone on LinkedIn, checked 17 applications, applied to 17 jobs. Twenty-four hours later, had 12 interviews.

00:15:35:21 - 00:15:36:00

Sophie Boler

Oh.

00:15:36:10 - 00:15:43:10

Susan Fronk

But here's the difference. He said only two of those interviews were a human being who called and talked to me.

00:15:43:16 - 00:15:43:28

Sophie Boler

Really?

00:15:45:17 - 00:15:50:19

Susan Fronk

You can set yourself apart with the personal touch in an automated world.

00:15:50:28 - 00:15:51:06

Sophie Boler

Absolutely.

00:15:51:12 - 00:16:15:24

Susan Fronk

You might need to use technology to scale and to reach and to find. But then how you serve up, we call it at MRA warm bread. I got that from a human resource professional who worked here, and that's what they did at church. Somebody visited them, sign the visitor's book, and then a committee, a warm bread committee, was assigned to make that person feel welcome and invited back again.

00:16:16:10 - 00:16:35:19

Susan Fronk

So at MRA, we talk about warm bread. Once we find a candidate that we're interested in, who's going to email them? What photo are we going to send them? What link to a video that describes who we are? What little swag bag are we going to deliver into their house to say, "We want you here and this is where you belong"?

00:16:35:24 - 00:16:36:11

Sophie Boler

I love that.

00:16:36:20 - 00:16:47:02

Susan Fronk

Yeah. So all different kinds of warm bread. It doesn't have to be expensive. Once I took a picture of somebody and then Photoshopped the new candidate's head on there. I said, "Picture yourself here, at MRA."

00:16:47:05 - 00:16:48:01

Sophie Boler

I love that. That's creative.

00:16:48:01 - 00:16:50:11

Susan Fronk

He said yes. So it worked.

00:16:51:08 - 00:17:14:07

Susan Fronk

Mm. I've dropped little things off at people's house. You know, you have to be careful that you don't look like a stalker. If they're expecting you and they know you're going to drop something off, it really sets you apart. So human resources is in sales and marketing, and people like to know that they have attention, that they're going to be treated differently than a number.

00:17:14:26 - 00:17:38:13

Susan Fronk

And so back to the story at hand. My husband was successful out of 17 prospective applications and 12 interviews in getting this individual to join their team. It doesn't always happen.

Sometimes you're a competitive payer and somebody just outpaces you by many thousands of dollars. All right. But you're going to win more often than you lose.

00:17:39:01 - 00:17:39:27

Sophie Boler

And you're going to keep them too.

00:17:40:06 - 00:18:02:17

Susan Fronk

You are going to keep them, too. So sales and marketing, it's not just the interaction with the candidate, it's the supports that human resources have that tell that candidate or potential candidate who you are and how you operate and what your behavior is, as an organization. So I would say be a secret shopper.

00:18:02:29 - 00:18:31:10

Susan Fronk

Ask somebody on your team—because if you're close to it, you think what you have online is great, you think your application is great, you think your process is great—to have somebody who you trust kick the tires, go through that process, find out how long it takes to get back to that individual, see what is the look and feel and culture that is described by your company website, by your candidate experience page?

00:18:31:20 - 00:18:58:03

Susan Fronk



We really have to be in sales and marketing, and human resources I think gets that and they're embracing it, but it is a different skill set, or at least an add-on skill set. And so the second thing is flexibility and creativity. Since there is a people shortage and not just a talent shortage, you have to be flexible and creative in finding skills that might transfer and that you could develop.

00:18:58:19 – 00:18:59:03

Sophie Boler

Absolutely.

00:18:59:07 – 00:19:32:20

Susan Fronk

So I guess companies that say, Here's someone with a military background and they were in administration and database. All right. First of all, I love hiring veterans. But second of all, that's a rigorous skill set that you understand that person has the aptitude and the interest to learn what you need. Maybe you don't actually need that specific software package or background.

00:19:32:20 - 00:19:46:14

Susan Fronk

You could look 6 more months in natural that position, or you can have 6 months with someone who's leaning in, who's saying, "I can learn this. I learned that."

Sophie Boler

Exactly.

Susan Fronk

And they can be a great employee by the time you might find the perfect employee.

00:19:46:27 - 00:20:04:14

Sophie Boler

And we just had a podcast on nontraditional candidates and all of the great things they can bring to a company. So you just talked about skilled workers. So what about those younger, somewhat unskilled workers? How do you get them? What do you do with them?

00:20:05:01 - 00:20:39:14

Susan Fronk

What do you do with them? Well, they're our future. So I would say you do everything with them. You didn't quite ask the question this way, but something that I love to see and something that I've been told helped me in my career: All feedback is good, so all feedback is good. If you believe that you're working for a manager who not only wants the company to succeed, but wants you to succeed, then embrace that feedback.

00:20:39:21 - 00:21:11:03

Susan Fronk

Good or bad, constructive criticism or "atta girls" and "atta boys." Embrace that because it helps shape your development and what you're going to do next in your career. So if you have a coach, be the best player you can be. And that is to say, I would seek out feedback. I would go to someone—my boss, a different person, a colleague—and I would say, "I just gave that little presentation at the management meeting.

00:21:11:03 - 00:21:39:15

Susan Fronk

What could I have done better? How did you think it went over? How did the message land? What could I have, what could I have done differently?" If you're waiting for feedback, hopefully it's happening regularly, but asking for feedback and asking for development and asking for coaching and not just the applause. Younger workers, newer managers, that's really, really helpful.

00:21:39:29 - 00:22:00:17

Susan Fronk

Think about it. It changes the timber of the conversation. If you and I were a direct reporting relationship. You're my boss and I'm coming to you maybe doing a performance review. You're saying, "Okay, Susan, there's there's five things you do well, and there's a couple things I'd like you to improve upon." Right away I'm like, Whoa. Right? Even if it's internal.

00:22:01:14 - 00:22:22:24

Susan Fronk

But if you flip that and you're my boss and I come to you all the time and say, "Hey, Sophie, that presentation that I gave or that report that I made, what feedback do you have for me?" then I'm leaning toward you and you're leaning toward me, and I've asked for that feedback. It changes the whole conversation.

00:22:22:24 - 00:22:23:26

Sophie Boler

That's great advice.

00:22:23:26 - 00:22:26:26

Susan Fronk

Yeah, it's really kind of the number one thing.

00:22:27:00 - 00:22:28:16

Sophie Boler

That's great advice I can use too.

00:22:29:27 - 00:22:30:23

Susan Fronk

When you're my boss.

00:22:32:05 - 00:23:05:19

Sophie Boler

Companies are also utilizing the strengths of younger workers in areas like technology, including software programming, integration, drones even, in gaming, and younger workers are really taking the lead on social justice, social media platforms as well as public presentations, like you mentioned. And in fact, one of our most downloaded podcasts was talking about emerging leaders with Kate Walker and how to really help upskill them and prepare those new emerging leaders.

00:23:06:02 - 00:23:17:25

Sophie Boler

So I know you covered this a little bit, but do you have any other advice for upcoming and emerging leaders? And what did you yourself take advantage of when you were an emerging leader?

00:23:18:19 - 00:23:45:10

Susan Fronk

Yes, well, what we talked about with feedback. I really tried to be a great player, not a perfect player. You're going to make mistakes. I've made plenty, but always saying, "I want to be the best, help me be the best." Second, it's a phrase I've used before many times in management meetings and all staffs and things. The world is full of problem identifiers.

00:23:46:08 - 00:24:16:01

Susan Fronk

It's rare to have problem solvers, and as a young or emerging leader, you want to make sure you understand what's the problem to be solved. For example, if you're in human resources, you may think your goal is to write an employee handbook. That is a step toward the goal. To understand, you need to say, What does a handbook do for the company?

00:24:16:01 - 00:24:45:17

Susan Fronk

So what? Well, a handbook should improve communications, decrease turnover, increase employee engagement, allow the human resource department to be more efficient and spend

more time on employee relations things and culture instead of just answering questions. So you have to look beyond, especially as a new leader. But this goes for people of all ages, for all levels. Some people say, "Here's my list of things that I did."

00:24:45:17 - 00:25:18:00

Susan Fronk

So what? What did those things do? So that insight to say if I did this, if I wrote the best handbook and communicated it well and that was the best job you ever saw, what would you be experiencing? What would the company be experiencing? Positive and negative? What would make that the best handbook you ever saw? Now, that's a small example because it's a handbook, but it goes to, it goes to understanding the importance of the business and not just a task. Does that makes sense?

00:25:18:00 - 00:25:42:19

Sophie Boler

That makes sense. That's a good example. And we also have other great resources to address the talent concerns out there. For example, MRA's Talent Report, Monthly Talent Report, is just a monthly publication that really shares workforce information and innovations. We also have the Talent Report+ webinar series and we have linked both of those in the show notes.

00:25:42:23 - 00:25:54:28

Sophie Boler

So you can go check those out after this podcast. So we really talked about recruiting. Now let's focus on retention. What matters most to employees, on retention?

00:25:54:28 - 00:26:22:24

Susan Fronk

Sure. Harkening back to the National Business Trends Survey, again. The top three, no surprise, are number one: competitive pay: 86 percent. So that was important. I can't imagine it wasn't 100 percent because competitive pay, the table stakes. To me that's not unless you're going to be in the top 10 percent, unless you're going to be that company in your market that everybody knows pays more than everybody else.

00:26:23:08 - 00:26:53:08

Susan Fronk

It's just table stakes. You have to be competitive because it's a dissatisfier, or not a satisfier. Our competitive pay are just table stakes. If you don't pay competitively, people will leave. If you do pay competitively, that doesn't mean people will stay. It just is a ticket you have to punch. So spending time to make sure that you're competitive on pay, very important to most employees. Second is work-life balance.

00:26:53:08 - 00:27:29:05

Susan Fronk

Seventy-six percent of respondents said work-life balance and again, I don't know why it wouldn't be 100 percent. Well, I suppose some people don't want work-life balance, but I don't know who those people would be. But work-life balance. People just want, I think this translates sometimes in news outlets to work-life balance, meaning people want to work less. That could be true for some people, but work-life balance to me and how I see it played out in our hundreds and thousands of member companies is that employees want flexibility to do what's important outside of work.

00:27:29:15 - 00:28:04:27

Susan Fronk

Their work still needs to get done and maybe they have no problem working 40 or 50 hours a week, whatever their job requires, but they want to be able to provide childcare. They want to be able to attend a school recital. They know they have elder care issues. Life is very fast and very complicated, and the trust bridge that's built with employees to say, I understand you're going to give 100 percent to your job, but some flexibility in how you get that is what they're looking for today.

00:28:05:28 - 00:28:38:26

Susan Fronk

And that's tied to the third one, too, about flexibility and how people work. That doesn't mean just remote work. I look at it this way and how I've seen it borne out in our members. It depends on the position. Some positions can't be remote, some are performed better in a team environment and some employees, it's a privilege to work remote versus, you know, if that isn't a top performer or if they're a brand-new employee, maybe they need to work in the office, maybe they need to work with their colleagues to learn their business.

00:28:38:26 - 00:29:02:25

Susan Fronk

So I look at that as a wonderful conversation to have, preferably before somebody is hired, to say what are your expectations and what can this organization provide to you? But it doesn't stay static. This should be an organic, ever-changing conversation that an employee is having with their manager because life circumstances change.

00:29:03:28 - 00:29:21:26

Sophie Boler

And you have some, it depends on the person too. Because it was funny, I was having a conversation with my boss and she's, "Why are you emailing me at 10 p.m.? 11 p.m.?" But it's



sometimes people like working those hours. Maybe you don't work at 6 a.m., but maybe I'll be on my computer at midnight giving you what you need.

00:29:22:13 - 00:29:46:08

Susan Fronk

You know, you just busted me. I thought you were talking about me. But, what I'm very clear about with everybody I work with is that just because I choose to work that way doesn't mean you need to work that way. And I try to remember to hit delayed deliver to tomorrow morning at 8:00. But honestly, that takes an extra 5 seconds.

00:29:46:15 - 00:30:02:26

Susan Fronk

And so as long as I have this trusting, open communication with everybody who works with me, I say just because you get pinged at 10:00, don't respond. And even when they respond, I say, please don't respond. And I know that they really do understand that this can wait.

00:30:03:05 - 00:30:14:08

Sophie Boler

That's that's just something I've seen nowadays. People don't need to be working the typical 9 to 5 or 8 to 5. They work when they feel the most productive.

00:30:14:21 - 00:30:32:29

Susan Fronk

As long as the results are there. In fact, we have a great example of that. And I won't use her name because I didn't ask permission to. But we have a new manager here who's worked with the company for 23 years. She worked in the office for her first 6 months to learn the ropes. So this is 23 years ago.

00:30:33:26 - 00:30:48:07

Susan Fronk

She worked for 6 months, learned the operations of the business, became a high-performing employee. We knew she could be trusted, knew how to solve problems, was really great at her job. Then she became a remote employee for 20 years.

00:30:48:14 - 00:30:49:01

Sophie Boler

Really?

00:30:49:05 - 00:31:13:21

Susan Fronk

Yes. We've had remote workers for a long time, but they earned that privilege and they proved their stripes. So when it became time to promote someone from within, she threw her hat in the ring and said, "I've raised my children. I've needed that flexibility. Now I'm ready for a different stage of my career and I'd love to be considered as a manager."

00:31:14:14 - 00:31:15:10

Susan Fronk

That was so perfect.

00:31:15:22 - 00:31:17:28

Sophie Boler

She was prepared.

00:31:18:03 - 00:31:39:06

Susan Fronk

Yes, right. So that conversation should be ongoing and organic and as custom as it can be. If you're a manufacturer, there's a process, there's a workflow. People can't just decide to stay at home if they're needed for that kind of workflow. But to the extent it can be, I think that's going to be the way of the workforce.

00:31:39:24 - 00:31:47:24

Sophie Boler

Okay. And with that in mind, what are the best suggestions you have for employers to encourage a culture that is fully engaged?

00:31:47:28 - 00:32:33:00

Susan Fronk

Yes, well, there's a thousand things that we could talk about. I will end with one that is universal and specific. So not this big revelation, not this golden key of member of employee engagement, but universal. Email has become the bane of most people's existence. Getting through your

emails, figuring out why am I copied on this email, figuring out what action do I need to take because of this email, and also wishing several times a day, Why didn't this person just pick up the phone and call me?

00:32:33:00 - 00:33:01:04

Susan Fronk

So human beings for thousands of years have been relational. You see expressions, you break bread together, you grab a cup of coffee on a Zoom call, you maybe take a few moments for chitchat before you jump into the meat of the meeting. But I see employees—and not just young or new employees—I see employees of all career levels using email as a dodge.

00:33:01:29 - 00:33:28:11

Susan Fronk

They send an email because it gets it off their desk. It puts the monkey on your back, and I don't have to think about it until they respond. That isn't the way things work best. So pick up the phone, reduce the email clutter, copy people with specific requests. "Sophie, I need you to do this. Sarah, would you respond to this?"

00:33:30:05 - 00:34:09:26

Susan Fronk

John, please note the green highlights below, that's what I need you for." Help them move business along and everybody ... "A" players want to be surrounded by "A" players. So let's help everybody be the best they can be. And I think one way to do that is to make it personal and to not hide behind emails so that we're all trying to declutter our email inbox and get through the day as fast as possible and a personal conversation ... How many email strings have you got that have 10 things and people say, Read from the bottom up.

00:34:09:27 - 00:34:27:21

Susan Fronk

I will see below and I will read from the bottom because I like you and you asked me to. But far better would have been if you just picked up the phone or call a 15-minute meeting—I love 15-minute meetings—and say, “We’re going to knock this out, we’re going to solve this whole problem by having a conversation.”

00:34:27:27 - 00:34:34:04

Sophie Boler

And I’m sure you can do more that way than trying to read the email for 10 minutes and figure it out and respond.

00:34:34:04 - 00:34:39:28

Susan Fronk

Ten people reading the email for 10 minutes.

00:34:39:28 - 00:34:52:00

Sophie Boler

So that’s a good ending point. We’ve really talked about so much here today, and you shared some great ideas. Do you have any parting thoughts for our listeners today as they go on to this new year?

00:34:52:05 - 00:35:16:08

Susan Fronk

Well, most companies think 2023 is going to be a good year. Maybe not the breakneck year that 2022 was, but supply chains, computer chips are still a problem, but supply chains have moderated a little bit, the supply chain bottlenecks. There's still growth projected by the majority of companies. Companies are still hiring. The majority of companies are hiring.

00:35:16:18 - 00:35:43:09

Susan Fronk

So I think 2023 is going to be a really good year. Whether a recession comes, whether it doesn't come, whenever it comes: Companies would be well advised to have a plan B and every good leader I know does, because being agile in the face of changing economic conditions is what it's all about. No one, not even Dr. Kuehl, can project if there's a recession, how deep it's going to be, how long it will last, what industries it will affect.

00:35:43:25 - 00:36:07:19

Susan Fronk

So business leaders would be well advised to say, here's my plan, but here's my plan B, and even plan C if this doesn't happen. So agility in the face of changing conditions and rewarding people who are problem solvers and can flex and change—that's really what's going to be very important for business in 2023.

00:36:07:19 - 00:36:18:21

Sophie Boler

Well, thank you for all that advice and your leadership. There's a lot to think about this year, but

hopefully this helps set you up for success this year. And we're here for you too always.

00:36:18:21 - 00:36:19:09

Susan Fronk

24/7.

00:36:19:09 - 00:36:24:16

Sophie Boler

Always. So Happy New Year and thanks for joining us today. And thank you, Susan.

00:36:25:14 - 00:36:26:17

Susan Fronk

Thank you.

00:36:26:17 - 00:36:48:24

Outro

And that wraps up our content for this episode. Be sure to reference the show notes, where you can sign up to connect for more podcast updates. Check out other MRA episodes on your favorite podcast platform. And as always, make sure to follow MRA's 30 minute THRIVE so you don't miss out. Thanks for tuning in and we'll see you next Wednesday to carry on the HR conversation."