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SELECT INTERVIEWS

ASHLEY RIDGEWAY-WASHINGTON, CHRISTUS HEALTH

DURELL VIEAU, LHOIST

CAROL KIBURZ, ACME BRICK

ASHLEY RIDGEWAY- WASHINGTON

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from, what is your background and education, and how did you end up in human resources?



I'm originally from Paducah, a tiny town in Western Kentucky. My mom was an educator and my dad was in construction. I grew up with my family nearby and spent most of my time at church.

Today, I know I am absolutely practicing my passion, but I stumbled into HR. Quite honestly, human resources was never on my radar...until it was. As a small child, I dreamed of being an artist. That career aspiration was short lived after I got my first and last mid-Sunday service spanking for drawing in the front page of a Baptist hymnal.

I will spare you the tragic details, but my mother observed me drawing a circle with green crayon in that sacred book and marched right out of the choir stand, grabbed me by the arm, and ushered me to the women's lounge, spanking my legs to the cadence of my misdeeds. After six or seven swift but firm swipes, she straightened our dresses and marched me right back into church. She was unbothered by my faint whimpering and tear streaked face. After all, it was time for the sermon and "I knew better."

As I walked back in the sanctuary that Sunday, the pastor had just started preaching about Deborah—a biblical heroine and the only female judge mentioned in the Bible. She was an advisor to kings and led her people out of slavery. Deborah's bravery and intellect made my heart sing. Years later the memory of that day is still crystal clear. For most of my life, that defining moment at the age of six acted as the compass for my career goals and aspirations. I was singularly focused on my self-manufactured passion. I wanted to pursue a law degree and ultimately become a judge. I leveraged work ethic, raw intellect, and a rural upbringing to earn a full scholarship to Florida A&M University. In 2003, I earned a B.S. in Agri-Business. As a single mother to a small child, I decided to enter the workforce for two years before finally enrolling in law school.

In 2006, when I stepped onto the campus of Florida A&M College of Law, I felt as if I was literally stepping into my destiny. Less than a year later my fool-proof life plan started crumbling. I was doing well in law school, but I hated it. More specifically, I loved the law. I hated the practice of it. The pretentious, adversarial, and frantic nature of the profession felt suffocating to me.

How could this be? I'd only ever wanted to be a judge. Despite the reservations I continued, partly because the chronic overachiever in me didn't know how to quit anything, but also because my parents had made considerable sacrifices to support me as a law student. Quite honestly, I didn't what else to do or be. This was my plan A, B and Z. So, I pushed on and finished top 20 in my class. I promptly studied for and passed the bar.

I practiced at a great firm, from an office on the fourteenth floor with a great view. I made great money. I also hated my job and felt wholly unfulfilled. A few years later, I got married and moved to Louisiana where I took a job as a legal auditor. I wasn't interested in taking the Louisiana bar and we wanted to expand our family. While in that role, I had the opportunity to do EEO compliance, employee grievances, and was asked to lead Title IV and employee policy initiatives. Honestly, it was the worst job I ever had. My manager was terrible! But it's where I learned the most. The experience taught me what not to do as a manager and that I liked the human capital segment of the business.

My family left Louisiana and returned home to Florida where I promptly opened my own law practice. Luckily, God takes care of fools and babies (pretty sure I was both). Through my practice, I started working with small businesses who needed need HR compliance support and infrastructure. An agreement to draft HR policies for the owner of my son's childcare facility in exchange for free weeks of childcare blossomed into a full time "thing" quite quickly.

That same year I turned 30 and decided that life was too short to continue pursuing a career I had imagined for myself at age six. I came to understand that I was passionate about developing and empowering people. I shut down my practice, earned a Master's in Human Resources, and took a chance on a job overhauling employee policies for a Catholic healthcare system that I had never heard of, across the country from the place I considered home. That leap of faith and my willingness to work hard, add value, and bet on myself has paid off in ways I could have never conceived. CHRISTUS Health gave me an opportunity to practice and develop my passion and I am so grateful for the work I've done here.

How would you describe the culture at CHRISTUS?

The culture at CHRISTUS is phenomenal. Everyone from the CEO to the front-line Associate understands that "we" are the culture. If we want the feeling in the building to match the messages on the wall, we must put those behaviors into practice. This not only includes how we treat our patients but extends to how we engage as Associates. When we speak about our core values—dignity, integrity, compassion, excellence, and stewardship—we speak from experience. I feel confident that Associates at every level of the organization are putting the core values into practice. Consistent practice of the right behaviors translates into positive engagement, healthy conflict resolution, a strong sense of team, and feelings of belonging and accountability to the mission. That is reflective in our retention and Associate engagement metrics. We aren't perfect, but we are intentional, and that makes all the difference.

How long have you worked at CHRISTUS?

On June 14th I will have been at Christus for five years.



What are you most proud of in the area of HR that other companies can learn from?

Most system leaders are in the top quartile in Associate engagement. I love a strong metric like the next HR strategist, but the numbers are not where I gain my sense of pride. When I see that over 70% of my leaders are in the top quartile for Associate engagement, and even more are approaching this milestone, it speaks to the priority we place on Associates. The metric speaks to substantial investment on the part of HR, Leaders, and Associates to work more human. Getting here has been a journey and we continue to push for even more engaged teams. This number translates into happy, fulfilled Associates who own their jobs. That is how we walk in the mission. That is how we translate our daily tasks into extending the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.

A close second would be hosting our first LEAP Learning Summit in April. We hosted more than 400 leaders and emerging leaders (in-person and virtually) for a phenomenal day of learning, leveraging primarily internal subject matter experts. We've never done anything like this, and it was great! The feedback was positive, and the innovative and cost-effective approach to knowledge sharing was unparalleled.

What are the current areas of strategic HR focus within CHRISTUS?

CHRISTUS has long been a diversity champion. I've been focused on ensuring that we continue to lead in that space. That means expanding our concept of how we "perform" in the D&I area beyond traditional immutable characteristics. We have engaged in partnership with the D&I department to champion diversity of thought. We've been working with leaders, challenging them to invite design thinking into their strategic planning initiatives, which includes inviting the dissenters and the out-of-the-box perspectives to the table. There is value in innovation, and innovation cannot come when there is a singular voice in the room.

Continuous improvement in the culture and engagement space is always on the strategic radar. We've been focused on offering support in the area of generational diversity. We continue to work through the dynamics of four generations in the workplace and how to equip managers to lead such a diverse group. We've found that people-centric strategic investment has the largest ROI. You can never lose when you invest in developing talent.

What are some of the larger trends in HR?

I see two things. First, **I think you will see HR continue to be more metric based—the numbers don't lie.** And now, with predictive analytics, we can forecast and see things much sooner. I think you will see that organizations that get it right from an HR strategy standpoint continue to integrate with predictive analytics and technology. As influencers of the culture and trusted advisors to leaders, strong metrics and data driven recommendations bolster creditability and arm HR with the appropriate business case for the recommendations we make.

Historically, HR has been regarded as a soft department. This stereotype means that the industry much demonstrate value add and clearly articulate the value proposition. We do that by understanding that the path to profitability is through people. Why are the people so integral? Because the only competitive advantage left in businesses are the people. Peter Drucker got it right and it hasn't changed. That's it.

The other thing that I think you'll continue to see is the consumerization of the workforce. Associates are not willing to work for organizations that lack a demonstrated commitment to culture, engagement, and social responsibility. Money isn't enough. The future of the global workforce is driven by impact, not paycheck. Not only will they not work for organizations that won't align, they won't spend their money with organizations who don't either. The gig economy is revolutionizing the way we do work, and healthcare has traditionally lagged in this space. The workforce is being redefined and organizations have figure out how to leverage gig workers to get things done.

How does CHRISTUS approach diversity in the workplace? How has it changed and what is your strategy?

I am not a diversity expert, but I think we had a phenomenal model in the sisters. I don't know if you're familiar with some of the stories of the sisters, but they were real pioneers as it relates to diversity and inclusion. The sisters of our founding congregations went into spaces in Texas where it was illegal to treat people of color and rendered care without regard to race, religion, or national origin because it was the right thing to do. Despite facing danger and persecution they stood on the side of right. We have a CEO who champions diversity. That is invaluable. We continue to invest in attracting and retaining diverse talent, health equity outcomes, and fostering a culture of inclusion in our organization. We keep it at the front of our thoughts and step beyond "box checking" into inclusive behaviors. I expect we will continue to grow in this space as continue to model the examples the sisters so beautifully set for us.

What leadership book would you recommend?

I love to read, so it's difficult to choose, but my favorites include:

Becoming by Michelle Obama

Daring Greatly and *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown

Reality Based Leadership by Cy Wakeman

Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office by Lois P. Frankel

The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz



DURELL VIEAU

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from, what is your background and education, and how did you end up in human resources?

I was born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin and come from a working-class family. I have two wonderful role models, my mom and dad. They instilled in me the importance of education, so at a very young age I knew I was college-bound. I went on to receive my Bachelor of Arts degree in Behavioral Science and Law from the University of Wisconsin. I discovered I enjoyed the legal aspect of the degree, leading me to pursue law school. I then graduated from Hamline University School of Law. Following law school, I was leaning towards a career in state or city government or potentially lobbying. I went on to receive a master's degree in public administration and management. My first internship was with the City of St. Louis Park, a first ring suburb of Minneapolis. It was a three-part rotation program with exposure to HR, Community Development, and Public Works.

The first rotation was in HR and I had the opportunity to sit at the table during negotiations with the police and fire unions. From that moment on, I knew that HR was my calling. I really enjoyed labor relations and the connection with my legal studies, as well as the human element, which involved strategy and collaboration. I continued within the labor relations field and worked for the State of Wisconsin. Eventually, I transitioned into a general HR management role in the private sector. The company I was with at the time opened a green field site in North Texas. It was a significant business transformation with a wonderful opportunity to lead all aspects of human resources to meet and exceed the business challenges. So, of course I took it!

How long have you worked at LHOIST?

I joined LHOIST about seven years ago. The HR organization was transforming and had recently implemented a business partner/specialist structure with more emphasis on the business partner role. Since that time, my role has expanded significantly, and I am now responsible for the Talent Management function, which includes talent acquisition, talent development, succession, and workforce planning, as well as training and learning, corporate communication, community outreach, and diversity and inclusion.

How would you describe the culture at LHOIST?

The culture at LHOIST is rooted in our values of Respect, Integrity, and Courage. These values are engrained in everything we do and embedded in our business strategy. LHOIST is a family-owned company headquartered in Belgium that has been in business for 129 years; this is reflected in the culture, a balance of rich history, and a forward-looking approach. As the global leader in the lime, dolime, and minerals markets, we are proud industrialists with a strong focus on our customers and the communities we serve.

What are you most proud of in the area of HR that other companies can learn from?

I am most proud of the commitment and investment in our employees. We often say, "Our people make it all happen," and at LHOIST we truly stand by those words. We strive to provide an environment of continuous learning and development from within at all levels. Many organizations say this, but at LHOIST these words are put into action. The LHOIST University, a collection of internal training courses, has a blend of both technical and leadership offerings to prepare employees for the future. Whether they want to develop in their current role or to pursue another opportunity within the organization, LHOIST makes a considerable investment in training and learning. This provides employees with a well-rounded curriculum that involves senior leadership. Two years ago, we implemented a mentorship program for successors of key roles in the organization. Not only did we have support from our senior leaders, our CEO of North America was a mentor working with two mentees. He was joined by the entire senior leadership team who served as mentors. This is not an off-the-shelf, check the box mentoring program, but rather one that is a true testament of LHOIST's commitment to develop leaders. Everyone, at all levels, is committed to investing in the future.

What a great way to lead by example for your CEO.

Absolutely, and it has really set the tone for what it takes to be a successful leader at LHOIST. At the same time, it has broken down silos, which have traditionally existed amongst the regions and business units. Communication has increased significantly, and all employees involved have greater visibility into different parts of the business that they may not have had otherwise. Participants have increased their leadership competencies while building a stronger professional network.



What are the current areas of strategic HR focus within LHOIST?


LHOIST is faced with the same challenges as many other organizations. We have an aging workforce and a considerable number of employees with knowledge and expertise who will be retiring over the next five to ten years. As such, succession and workforce planning are currently our two key priorities. It is critical, from a knowledge transfer perspective, that we have a solid understanding of the skillsets we will need in the future to ensure we are hiring individuals with the right profiles. **It is also vital that we have the right onboarding and training programs in place to support long-term success.**

What are some of the larger trends in HR?

I think one of the most exciting trends we are seeing, which will impact our workforce, is automation. One significant business challenge we are seeing across the US is a shortage of available talent, specifically truck drivers. This is a critical role at LHOIST, as it ensures our customers receive the product. One example of the impact of automation are self-driving trucks entering the market. Different types of automation lead to a broader talent pool that could potentially be qualified and interested in those types of positions. It will also lead to an improvement from a health and safety perspective.

How does LHOIST approach diversity in the workplace? How has it changed and what is your strategy?

LHOIST's approach to diversity in the workplace is directly tied to our core values—diversity and inclusion are a part of the business strategy. As an employer in the heavy manufacturing industry, the workforce has been male dominated. As study after study demonstrates, boards and organizations comprised of a balanced workforce are more productive and, ultimately, more profitable. At LHOIST, we have made a conscious business decision to put initiatives in place to attract and retain a more diverse workforce. We know a more diverse and inclusive workforce is more productive, engaged, and adaptable to changes in the market and in the economy. The question then becomes, "How do we change the talent landscape at LHOIST?" Again, it comes back to our values, specifically the value of courage. It takes courage to challenge the status quo and really make a difference.



Three years ago, we implemented the Women in Leadership at LHOIST program with the goal of increasing the number of women in leadership roles at all levels within LHOIST. Our strategy is a two-pronged approach. First, we must look internally. The program includes a two-day workshop aimed at developing women leaders, complimented with assessments and 360-degree feedback, focused development plans, and executive coaching. We are also looking at our policies and benefit offerings to ensure we are understanding and supporting women's needs and those of our workforce in general. Second, we are looking externally at our recruitment strategies to ensure we are sharing the LHOIST story with a broader audience. Our employee value proposition needs to be inclusive. It is important for women to see mining as a great industry that is financially stable and offers long-term career growth and opportunities.

How was the Women's Leadership Program received within your organization?

Overall, the program has been very well received. Of course, it is a generally accepted notion that women in leadership is critical. This is usually followed by: how is it different for women than what we are doing to develop men? It is so important to have a strong diversity and inclusion framework overall. The focus on women is just the starting point, and a logical place to start given that women earn 50% of college degrees and comprise over 40% of the global workforce and yet only comprise 12% of the workforce at LHOIST. For LHOIST to continue to be successful, it is critical to attract and retain the best available talent, and now we have a strategic plan to accomplish this goal.

What makes you effective in your current role?

As with any successful leader, I am extremely results-focused. The way I achieve those results is by surrounding myself with great people. I have a wonderful team that is highly focused on developing our employees. My role is to ensure we have the programs and initiatives in place to support the people strategy at LHOIST. Beyond being HR leaders, we are business leaders. This is accomplished by understanding the business and measuring the value of our programs. For example, **since the commencement of our mentorship program in 2016, 75% of the participants have been promoted.** The return on investment is significant and impacts the bottom line.

What can HR do to influence the company culture?

Lead by example. We need to understand the business, actively listen, and respond appropriately with effective solutions.

What is the most interesting thing about you that isn't on your LinkedIn Profile?

While pursuing my education, I had the opportunity to study in Sweden and Norway. This early exposure to different cultures and perspectives has provided me the unique opportunity to always have an open mind, be open to new ways of working, and, above all, actively listen.

What leadership book would you recommend?

Early in my career, *Good to Great* by Jim C. Collins made a resounding impact on me and is still my go-to when leading through change and large-scale business transformations. It sounds like an easy and straight forward mantra: right people, right position, right time. However, it is difficult and complex to put that mantra into practice. There is so much to be said for organizations and leaders that achieve results while leading through change. Hiring the right people is only the beginning. Developing talent and moving individuals to new roles at the right time is the challenge, or better said, the opportunity. More recently, I would recommend *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler.

As you advance in your career, these conversations become more and more strategic. You need to plan and prepare the point you want to convey while understanding where the other person may be coming from and their needs. If you really want to be influential and persuasive, it can't be a one-way conversation. It needs to be a two-way conversation in which both parties feel their voice is heard. Finally, I would recommend *Nice Girls don't get the Corner Office* by Lois Frankel. It's a very practical guide for women, providing advice in several areas. Most importantly, it is possible to be respectful and polite while simultaneously taking credit for your accomplishments and being an impactful and influential leader.



CAROL KIBURZ

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from, what is your background and education, and how did you end up in human resources?

I was raised in Houston and attended Texas A&M University (Gig'em Aggies!). My bachelor's degree was in computer science and my early career experience was in technology. I was running down that road for a while before I realized I wasn't as interested in technology. I met a leader at a client site who suggested a career in HR. At the same time, I had been doing HR system implementations and learning a lot about HR processes. A few years later this leader became the head of HR at Turner Construction and hired me in as the Corp Director of HR. I learned HR on the job. I had an amazing group of colleagues at Turner, plus a team of twelve. They were my mentors. I achieved my SPHR and SHRM-SCP credentials along the way. **"We are shining a spotlight on the fact that talent is truly our most important resource."** I feel like my technology background has been helpful to me as an HR leader. It allows me to quickly access what processes might be amenable to automation and what might not. It also allows me to work with technology vendors and ask the next level of questions. Some tech vendors are used to working with HR professionals that might not have that background, so they keep the information at a superficial level. My ability to probe and ask more detailed questions allows us to make better decisions.

How long have you worked at ACME Brick?

I have worked here for eight and a half months. I look forward to coming to work every day. ACME Brick has an amazing culture.

What makes you effective in your current role?

I think **what makes me most effective is that I started with an assessment to learn what the business really needed from HR rather than just coming in and deploying a bunch of HR 'stuff.'** From that assessment I was able to devise an HR strategy to support and drive business performance.

What can HR do to influence the company culture?

HR is doing several things to influence the company culture. I partnered with all senior leaders to help devise our 2019 strategy and put together a balanced scorecard with which we will measure ourselves. We are working to build talent acquisition, talent management, and talent development functions. We have deployed Human Resources Business Partners (HRBPs) who can leverage our ever-improving Centers of Excellence (COEs). **We are shining a spotlight on the fact that talent is truly our most important resource and we must hire, develop, reward, engage, and retain our talent to drive the greatest business performance.**

What are you most proud of in the area of HR that other companies can learn from?

I am very proud that we started with the business need, assessed what we truly needed from HR, and used that information to chart our roadmap. Annually, I will report our success in delivering our strategy and conduct another assessment to determine where HR needs to go in the following year.

How would you describe the culture at ACME Brick?

The culture here is wonderful. We are an ACME Brick family. We care about each other and look after each other. **Because of this we have amazing tenure: we routinely celebrate 20, 25, 30+ year service anniversaries.** People love working here and want to stay.

What are some current areas of strategic HR focus within ACME Brick?

I think our big area is becoming a strategic HR team. When I arrived, the HR team was mostly administrative. We are working to automate and outsource a lot of those manual processes. We are building talent acquisition, talent management, and talent development services. We are standing up a strategic HRBP model to better support the business.

What are some of the larger trends in HR?

One big trend is an increasing industry focus on talent management and development. I am so delighted that the leaders here have embraced our strategy of hiring, developing, engaging, and retaining the best talent. It will take us a year to put this in place, but I think it is something that the HR industry is reporting about and we are embracing.

What is the most interesting thing about you that isn't on your LinkedIn profile?

As a child I rode in rodeos. Barrel racing, western equitation, key hole, ride-a-buck—it was really fun. I joke with my colleagues that goat roping and barrel racing are skills that translate into the professional environment.

What leadership book would you recommend?

Right now, my favorite book to recommend is *Measure What Matters* by John Doerr. It is an amazing story of learning to measure what matters from the experiences of companies like Google, Amazon, Uber, and the Gates Foundation. These companies have changed the world, and they attribute part of their success to their OKRs (Objectives and Key Results). It is a journey—sometimes you are not measuring what matters, or you are not measuring it effectively, so you must learn to measure it differently. I heartily recommend it to all HR professionals because I think we need to be on the forefront of measuring those things that matter, whether they are in our department or across the company.



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