



Nancy Altobello Interview Transcript TotalPicture Radio from IACPR Conference

Welcome to TotalPicture Radio's exclusive coverage of the International Association for Corporate and Professional Recruitment Global Conference. The theme of this year's event *2010 and Beyond: Forging New Talent Paths*.

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Welcome to a special inside recruiting channel podcast on TotalPicture Radio. This is Peter Clayton reporting from the IACPR Global Conference 2010 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Joining us today is Nancy Altobello, vice chair of People Americas, Ernst & Young. Nancy oversees all people, HR, and workplace matters across the Americas. She works to foster a high performing and inclusive work culture where all people can achieve their potential. Ernst & Young is a recognized leader for excellence and diversity, inclusiveness, and workplace culture. Among other awards, Ernst & Young has been named to Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For, Training Magazine's Hall of Fame, Working Mother Magazine's top companies for working mothers, and The Diversity Inc top 50.

Nancy's keynote address here at the IACPR conference was titled *The New Diversity*, creating a global mindset. Traditionally, we have thought of diversity in terms of HR initiatives built around a company's hiring practices and focus on differences in race and gender. But today, diversity encompasses the whole human outlook; age, culture, personality, skills, training, education, and total life experience. Companies that understand this and have jettisoned the outdated management wisdom are using intercultural wisdom and competency to innovate and steer the organization to success in today's global environment.

Nancy, thank you very much for taking time to speak with us today on TotalPicture Radio. I really enjoyed your presentation on diversity and creating a global mindset around diversity, which I think is a really challenging topic for most executives today.

Nancy: Yes it is. Well, thank you and thank you for the words.

Peter: I just read the overview from the IACPR program of your presentation here today. Can you just give us a somewhat broad stroke overview of some of the concepts that you shared with the audience?

Nancy: Today, I talked about the business case for global mindset which requires a very inclusive mindset. So we talked about the business case, provided some research and demographics, defined what qualifications are necessary to really have a global mindset and then talked about how we developed those skills on our people.

Peter: One of the questions that came at the end of your session that I find very interesting because one of the other sessions here is all about global recruiting, you were talking about a lot of the challenges around expat assignments, wonderful experiences but oftentimes, the repatriation is really challenging and companies don't do a very good job of that.

Nancy: The statistics if you look across recent history, across many, many companies is the turnover rate of people once they repatriate to their home country is very, very high – much higher than employees who never went. We worked very hard obviously to battle that, because when somebody goes overseas on any kind of assignment first of all, we make sure we pick the right people who can really make a difference and who can benefit from the experience. So taking that investment, the cost investment, the time investment and making sure we leverage that on the way back in is critical to us.

We work pretty hard on making people accountable for it, talking with the people before they repatriate and then once they repatriate. One practice that we found was very, very helpful is when anybody goes overseas for an 18-month, 2-year, 3-year, or 4-year assignment that they maintain a counselor back home in their home office and that they talk with that counselor a couple of times a year, including one-time live. That has a huge impact on making sure they are getting the right experiences overseas, because if you have somebody checking in

and understanding what they're doing, the kind of experiences that will help them when they come back, but also someone who feels responsible for making sure that this person gets repatriated, gets the right opportunities, and can really take advantage of what they learned.

We also have worked pretty hard to educate those who are supervising them on yes, this person went overseas and has all these different experiences, but there are some experiences they miss by not being here. So things that our managers would learn by working on a US engagement around taxes, or any kind of technical matter, they may not get that same kind of exposure overseas, and you need to understand that some things compensate for others and we need to really invest in educating on the things that they miss the experience on so they don't fall behind.

Peter: How does diversity play into recruiting especially at a senior executive role?

Nancy: Diversity in terms of?

Peter: In terms of an organization really walking the talk and really having a diverse workforce?

Nancy: We actually focus on how diverse is our incoming group and we measure year to year, we measure against other benchmarks. We have specific recruiting initiatives to attract more diverse executives. We have lots of programs at the campus level, we actually have programs at the high school level so that we're doing the direct recruiting to our entry levels at the highest levels we can and have the most diverse outstanding workforce, but when you get to the executive levels, we actually work with certain firms and agencies who focus on it. We've got a lot of outreach through other organizations through the affinity groups and professional networks at diverse professionals are a part of.

We also rely a lot on our current executives to refer, and we particularly talk about how important it is to refer diverse executives and then we work very, very hard on recruiting and getting them into the organization and then helping them be successful.

Peter: Another topic that you touched on briefly is gender. I cover the Catalyst Awards every year and as you mentioned, it's kind of remarkable that we're still having that conversation.

Nancy: It is. We've made progress and when you look at all the outstanding women executives that are in place now, you feel really good about it and then when you look at the statistics, you realize that they are still rare. And while outstanding they are still rare, and we just need to keep pushing. Catalyst is an incredible organization and they do such great work around research and informing and pushing and getting leading CEOs to be part of this and to really get committed to do what we need to do to drive better gender representation in the board room in the C-suites.

Peter: I think of the challenges many organizations have today, as we all know with the economy, leadership development training programs over the last few years have really taken a real hit, and I think one thing that many company struggle with this how do you put an ROI around leadership development?

Nancy: We don't even try to put an ROI around it in terms of dollars. We are so dependent on people and having great people that the return on investment it's really just understood by everybody, then it's a matter of talking about why the programs that we're designing or executing on are the right ones for us and the right ones for our marketplace. So it's more about, is it the right one, not do we need it.

Peter: Nancy, this is the first time in history that there have been 4 generations in the workforce and I know there are so many different things that organizations such as yours who are big in consulting have to deal with the Gen-Yers and working with the Gen-Xers, and working with the baby boomers, so how do you approach that and how do you get a boomer to understand the mindset of a Gen-Yer?

Nancy: We have a lot of advantages to do that. First of all, our population is probably more younger proportionately than many other organizations because we do bring in 10,000 people a year and we're constantly replenishing our workforce and growing our workforce from the bottom up. So we bring in lots and lots people from campus every year which means, I think 60% of our workforce today are Gen-Y, so that's significant to us.

Our advantage is our people work together on teams. So you've got the baby boomers working with the Gen-Y, the Gen-X; they are together on teams at client sites sitting side by side, seeing what each contribute, and getting to know each other on a personal basis and I think that really helps to accelerate. People understanding what's the same and where they are different and how to compensate for that and how to work on it.

We also do a lot of listening to our younger people. We're out talking with our people all the time to try to identify what are the things that you might not know are troublesome to people and then going out and educating our partners about that.

Peter: You showed a video at the beginning of your presentation, with the group of interns out of Montreal that I thought was really indicative of how... and it was all about how do you try to build a global diverse team. Can you talk a little bit about that and some of your impressions in watching these videos that these interns were putting together.

Nancy: We asked our interns to put together three different videos that showed from their eyes and from their experience with us during their internship to bring live our three competitive advantages. Our three competitive advantages are that:

1. We're the most globally integrated professional service firm.
2. We have the leading people culture.
3. We have a very strong focus on entrepreneurship which we think is so critical.

We asked them to show it through their eyes and three different groups did it. We had a group from Houston, Richmond, and Montreal.

What was really interesting to me was (1) the professionalism. These videos were amazing. I don't think any of us could do videos that were that good, and then how they saw it was very mature and very similar to how the people who are 50 years old see it, but they're seeing it in just real terms and they're seeing it from what they're observing. So, what we're saying is what's being observed and felt by our younger people and we feel really proud of that.

Peter: Young people do not see age or experience necessarily as a qualification for leadership, right?

Nancy: I said that, didn't I?

Peter: Yes, you did.

Nancy: Yeah, and I think that's true. Our young people feel like they're bringing a lot to the table and they want to be heard and they want to be part of decision making. They want to understand what they're doing impacts the greater project. Because what they need to know that what they're doing is meaningful and has a place and simply giving somebody a task and say go off and do it and come back and I'll let you know if it's good or not, you're not going to get very good employee engagement doing that, but involving them, helping them to understand the big picture, helping them to understand where the judgment comes in and where experience is important, but where observations and different point of view are also critically important and how it all comes together, really drives our employee engagement.

Peter: One thing that you commented on from a question from the audience that I found really fascinating was the dissension that it often times occurs when a diverse team is put together. You said that diverse teams are either going to be wildly successful or fail, but that homogeneous teams that are not diverse are oftentimes just going to be average.

Nancy: I am quoting from somebody who has spent a lot more time researching this than I have, but it is research that's out there and it's very important research because it does show the power of diversity and it shows that if you can leverage and if you really can use the different talents from a group, your product is just going to be better.

Now one could say, yeah, but it's much easier to work on the homogeneous team. Two issues with that – I don't know many organizations that are comfortable with average and (2) the demographics are not going to allow you to be homogeneous for very long.

Diversity is here no matter how you define it, no matter how you look at it and those who can harness it and really get the talents to work together, their success is just going to be off the chart.

Peter: Can you share with us one or two takeaways for you from this conference?



Nancy: I wasn't at all of the sessions this morning, but I did sit through the talent management panel which I just thought was extraordinary and some of the observations around how companies are going about streamlining the different programs they're doing to really focus much more on talent management versus a lot of different things. So going back and really taking inventory of what are all the different things we're doing and are we streamline around the talent development and talent management is a takeaway for me.

Also, understanding from somebody else who is leading very young workforce, how you constantly need to be focused on, what's cool, what's new, and using the right words. I thought that observation succession planning sounds so old, talent development is new, it's the same concept but just keeping it fresh and keeping it new is really important.

Peter: Nancy, thank you very much for taking time to speak with us today on TotalPicture Radio. I really appreciate your time.

Nancy: Thank you, thanks for being here.

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