



Episode #5: Safety & Security at Legacy

Host: Vicki Guinn

Guests: Luke Heckathorn, Daniel Nguyen, Gina Meli

Vicki Guinn:

This is Vicki Guinn with Legacy Health's Marketing and Communications Team, and I want to welcome you to our new podcast, Engaging Our People. There are over 14,000 of you who make this an exceptional place to work. We intend to introduce you to some of your peers through stories about themselves and about the jobs that they do, so please listen to learn, get inspired, get curious, and get to know the people who share a common goal to create the best healthcare experience possible for our patients and to be proud to be part of this workforce. This episode features our Legacy safety and security staff. So while we're sleeping or caring for patients or sitting in a virtual meeting, this team of trained employees is protecting us, our patients, and our visitors. Their job is ensure our facilities and property are safe and secure 24/7. So I'm going to interview several guests. I'm going to start off with the Director of Safety and Security, Luke Heckathorn. He's going to help us kind of, well, we're going to learn a little bit more about him today, and then we'll hear from a couple of his officers. So Luke, thank you for joining us today. Can you tell me about you? How did you get to this role and what was your first day like at Legacy?

Luke Heckathorn:

Okay, thank you for having me. Like Vicki said, my name is Luke Heckathorn. I've been with Safety and Security since February of 2005, so next February will be my 18th anniversary with Legacy Health.

Vicki Guinn:

Wow.

Luke Heckathorn:

Prior to working for Legacy, I spent six years working on an ambulance. So my original path was going to be emergency medicine either on an ambulance or hopefully with the fire department. I decided to do something different, kind of a change of pace for myself, so I looked at Legacy Health. I had a friend that worked here at the time, and applied for both an ER job and a safety and security job just on the off chance that one of them would pick me up. I just happened to interview with the safety and security team first and got hired on. I started off as an on-call security officer, so just working when needed and still worked on the ambulance part time, and then slowly transitioned through the ranks of the security department. I've worked as an field

training officer, an FTO. I've worked as an alternate lead, a lead, then a supervisor, then a manager, and then last August I was actually promoted to an interim director role and then got the director position.

Vicki Guinn:

Okay. Luke didn't tell you, he also helps with community outreach because I had him speak to a group of young men from a local middle school. And out of the five or six speakers, they listened to Luke. They were excited, his booming voice, and they were excited about the tools that he wears, he had on that day. And so speaking of tools, I know security has changed a lot since 2005. I know our communities have changed a lot. I know the demands on you and your staff have changed so much. So I'm just going to fast forward a little bit.

Luke Heckathorn:

Sure.

Vicki Guinn:

Okay. I know we got the Birdie's at some of our campuses. I have one, I love it. But what the challenges we're facing just being in Portland Metro these days, what are some changes that have happened since you started? Yeah, and tools.

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah, a lot of changes have happened. We're definitely starting to leverage some technologies that we're trying to increase the safety of the environment. So that's a big thing that I like to champion, is leveraging what's out in the world that can help us make our environment safer. We've also put different tools and are exploring different tools for the team. So when I first started at Legacy, you wore a black polo and some black pants and you were issued a set of handcuffs and some pepper spray, and that was it.

As we move forward, our environment became definitely a little bit more challenging. The type of violence we're seeing is definitely much more extreme. Healthcare used to be off limits for some of the violence that we would face, and now it's not, there's no differences between a healthcare environment or like a retail environment or a business environment. It's kind of all the same now. So we've put body Armor on our team. We've had a couple incidences that have taken place that warranted that tool being given to the team to protect themselves. We still issue OC spray. We are currently reviewing the use of taser, so we'll see where that lands. But some of the big ones are leveraging our CCTV.

Vicki Guinn:

And the CCTV-

Luke Heckathorn:

Closed circuit television. So the cameras throughout the hospital.

Vicki Guinn:

We have cameras. Okay.

Luke Heckathorn:

We've increased our access control stuff, so a lot of the lot more badge readers on units, elevators, trying to control some of the movement of people, which is helpful. We recently instituted body-worn cameras on the security team, so that allows us to put cameras where we've never had them before. And it also records audio, which is also beneficial. A lot of the claims made against the security team is around things they say and or do. So now having that camera on that person in real time can tell us what was said and what was done. So that tool's been super helpful as well.

Vicki Guinn:

So how much does your vest weigh now?

Luke Heckathorn:

Oh geez. So my vest being, cause I'm a bigger guy, weighs a little bit more than most of the other folks' vest, but on average they're about an additional 30 pounds worth of about 20, 30 pounds worth of equipment that the security officers have to carry, run with, all that stuff.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh my gosh.

Luke Heckathorn:

They also run pretty warm. So we all look forward to the winter months to kind of have a little bit cooler weather outside. So you don't run so hot in that equipment.

Vicki Guinn:

So much more than the days of the polo.

Luke Heckathorn:

Yes.

Vicki Guinn:

One thing, I just want to break down some perceptions, which I like to do. You cover the whole system. Of course, certain areas are more challenging than others, but would you agree that all of the areas in our system are seeing...

Luke Heckathorn:

Oh, absolutely. There's an increase in violence in all of our locations. Healthcare is one of the most dangerous jobs from an OSHA standpoint when it comes to work-related injuries, specifically around violence in the workplace. So technically an ER nurse is considered the most dangerous job in healthcare.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh I didn't know that.

Luke Heckathorn:

It's also one of the most dangerous jobs in our country. It actually is more dangerous than firefighters, law enforcement and the military just because of the environment that they face in working with the people that they're working with, plus the lack of certain controls. A police officer's job is inherently dangerous, but they also have a lot of tools and training and backup and all that stuff that they can fall on to help keep their environment as safe as possible. Where in healthcare, we're still trying to catch up to some of that stuff. Body-worn cameras for a long time have been seen as a cops tool. Our partner is now seeing it more as not just a healthcare security tool, but as a healthcare tool. Having a nurse's interaction caught on body-worn camera could be just as valuable as having a security officer's interaction caught.

Vicki Guinn:

Yeah. Thank goodness for the metal detectors. I was a little shocked, but now I understand why. It's that time.

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah. So since we've instituted the metal detector, we've recovered over 50 firearms in the month of October. We recovered-

Vicki Guinn:

Tell me the weirdest weapon.

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah the weirdest one. Geez. We've pulled, I think the weirdest ones are, they're little aluminum key chains that look like cat's faces, but their ears are like sharp and at a point. So they're as self-defense, but we've actually had a lot of those come through the metal detector. So yeah, if you would've asked me this 15 years ago, if we would have any of these things, I would've said, no way. It's not really necessary.

Vicki Guinn:

You would've laughed.

Luke Heckathorn:

I would've laughed. Yeah.

Vicki Guinn: Yeah.

Okay.

Luke Heckathorn:

It's changing, definitely a changing environment.

Vicki Guinn:

So there's... Let's see, how do I ask this question? Probably security reflects a police officer and some of the different people that you have to deal with or approach, and some of those people are for marginalized people, communities of color, or how do you stop bias insecurity? I mean, I'm going to bring it up because I work in media. There was an incident where a woman of color was handcuffed and it was witnessed by several staff and a little frightening for them, and it made the local newspaper. So what are we doing in that area or what have we done?

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah. I think it's a challenging thing for our department for sure. It's one of the things that historically I think in law enforcement and in the security world is that it's traditionally a white male dominated job. So one of the things that we work with our teams on is one, everybody's a patient first, regardless of why they're here. So we get into the mindset is that everybody's at the hospital for a reason. Everybody's a potential customer in the future. Everybody will need healthcare at some point in their life. The other thing that we're looking at doing is trying to diversify our team as much as possible. Trying to have our teams reflect the communities that they work in, I think is important. And it's a goal that we're trying to move forward on. This last couple years have been really tough in the sense that our application pool's not real deep.

So we're trying to reach out to our community partners specific to those hospitals and try to tap the resources that are close to us. That situation was very tough for us, and it was very tough for the security officers as well. I think the staff responded in a way that was important to them, and I recognize that, and I even can sympathize with how kind of the optics of that situation looked, especially during that timeframe. The security officers have a very tough job, and that's to maintain a safe environment and sometimes maintaining that safe environment doesn't look awesome to everyone that's witnessing what's happening. And that security team member was founded as an unfounded complaint or concern. They actually went out of their way to make sure that that person was as comfortable as possible during that situation. But it was very challenging for them because they felt like they were trying their best. And to have their own teams kind of turn on them, the people that we serve, was very tough for them personally to kind of have that whole situation kind of play out.

Vicki Guinn:

But you use it for training as well, and-

Luke Heckathorn:

Absolutely. Policy-

Vicki Guinn:

...enhancement and police changes, right.

Luke Heckathorn:

Policy changes. We review incidents and we make appropriate changes based on certain situations. I think if we always thought we did it right, we would be doing a disservice to ourself. So we are constantly open to reevaluating how we do business and making those

changes to help make our jobs easier for us and better for the people that we serve. These are communities we work at in small cities, essentially. I grew up in a very small town. I grew up in a town of less than 2000 people.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh, smaller than Legacy.

Luke Heckathorn:

Smaller than Legacy, smaller than Emanuel. We have probably between three and 7,000 people here every day. So they're really small towns. So we have to approach it from that mindset as we're working in little tiny communities that it just happened to be within the boundaries of a business.

Vicki Guinn:

Well, I say we're a microcosm of the community. What's out there is in here.

Luke Heckathorn:

Absolutely.

Vicki Guinn:

So couple things. I know one thing that you're proud of since working here. So you met your wife.

Luke Heckathorn:

I did.

Vicki Guinn:

And what else has kept you at Legacy for the last... I was trying to do the math. How long have you been here?

Luke Heckathorn:

18 years.

Vicki Guinn:

18 years?

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah.

Vicki Guinn:

What has kept you here for 18 years.

Luke Heckathorn:

I love the people that I work with besides meeting my wife here. That is a great thing.

Vicki Guinn:

And he is smiling.

Luke Heckathorn:

I am, but I love the people that I work with. Even though Legacy has grown exponentially over the last 10 years, it still feels very family. I think the identifier would be Mom and Poppish, right? It's a Mom and Pop shop. I walk in, I know most of the people who I see, if somebody makes eye contact, it's good morning or good evening, or "How are you doing?" Or just "Hi." It doesn't feel corporate. It still feels very kind of at home for me. So that's really what keeps me at Legacy is that it's comforting. It's home to me. I've grown up here. I've been here since I was 25 years old, 42 now.

And I think Legacy is a leader in healthcare in the area. When I was looking at going to an ER somewhere, I only applied at Legacy. One of the joys of working on an ambulance is I got to experience all of the hospital systems as I drove around and delivered and picked up patients.

And I didn't apply at any other sites other than Legacy. And I think it was just a testament to the people, the people I interacted with. And that has just continued throughout my career. Doesn't mean that it hasn't had its frustrations, and we've had our ups and downs, but it's still, in my opinion, the pinnacle of healthcare in our area.

Vicki Guinn:

What's the worst day? And this can be when you were an officer.

Luke Heckathorn:

Sure. I think the worst day is where, you know, could probably say anything when someone passes away, especially if it's a young person. Those are always tough days. The worst day is where I think you give it your all and the only kind of feedback you get is negative. It's really challenging when you put a lot of effort into making an environment better, and sometimes that's kind of missed or unappreciated. From a security officer standpoint that was very tough, where you tried really, really hard and then you just got that negative feedback. That was tough.

Vicki Guinn:

And so your hope is...

Luke Heckathorn:

Our hope to make our environment as safe as possible, appreciate everybody for the work that they're doing, knowing that it's very, very challenging. That's kind of my goal. The security team really tries very, very hard. And when something bad happens to one of our staff members or a patient, is that they see that as a personal failure, and that can be very, very tough for them.

Vicki Guinn:

The first thing you'll notice is it's superhero that way.

Luke Heckathorn:

It looks like a 12 year old boy's room. Yes.

Vicki Guinn:

Yeah. It looks like a 12 year old boy's room. So look, tell us about these superheroes that are on your wall.

Luke Heckathorn:

So I'm a big Marvel, Star Wars nerd. I always have been, ever since I was a little kid. So now that nerdism is popular, it's super cool for me. I can kind of showcase my love for all things comic book. A lot of superheroes start off with a significant struggle in their life, and they overcome these struggles to better their communities. I started off living in a rural environment from a family that didn't have a ton of money, and so we had a lot of just personal struggles, and I always kind of lean towards superheroes. Spider-Man being my favorite, he was a young kid as well. And to overcome some of those struggles and drive forward and then try to put yourself in a position to better your community was important to me. So I just reflected a lot with them. I started volunteering on a fire department at 16.

Vicki Guinn:

And What city was that?

Luke Heckathorn:

Vernonia, in Oregon.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh my. That is a small town.

Luke Heckathorn:

It's a small town.

Vicki Guinn:

What is your superpower?

Luke Heckathorn:

Oh, man. If you ask my parents and my wife, it's probably the gift of talking. That's probably my superpower. I'm actually really, I pride myself in not being shy. I don't get embarrassed easily. So that's kind of my superpower. Again, starting off as a young kid, I was actually really, really shy. I didn't order my own food at a fast food store until I was-

Vicki Guinn:

No not you.

Luke Heckathorn:

14. Yeah.

Vicki Guinn:

What?

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah. It was my freshman year of high school where I finally started to come out of my skin a little bit, being a really shy, timid person. I started realize that the most important person that I need to worry about was myself. And without caring about myself and respecting myself, I was bottled myself up. And once I realized that the only person that you really have to care about is you, then I really started to come out of my shell a little bit. And now people would probably prefer that I'd go back in just a little. But yeah so-

Vicki Guinn:

Once you're out, you're out.

Luke Heckathorn:

Once you're out, you're out. Yeah. But yeah, that'd be my superpower. Probably the gift of the Gift of Gab.

Vicki Guinn:

Gift of Gab.

Luke Heckathorn:

Yeah.

Vicki Guinn:

Alright. After Luke, I spoke with two safety and security staff. Daniel Nguyen is a safety and security officer who works the nice shift at Legacy Emanuel. He has been here for five years. So I asked Gina this, how many steps do you take a day?

Dan Nguyen:

It kind of ranges. It's anywhere from maybe 10 to 12, sometimes 14,000. The most I've logged in one night was 22,000, which was I think 11 to 12 miles.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh my gosh. And what happened that night?

Dan Nguyen:

It was a really busy night. It was in the middle of summer. It was like my first or second summer here. We were short staffed and we're just running all over the place working at night. We typically walk a little bit less, and maybe Gina does, or the folks who work the day shift, because this part of the hospital is closed, the most of South Wing is closed. So we're generally centered around the ER at night. But during the day, you're kind of walking everywhere. But I think for me, we probably average on nights, maybe 10 to 12,000 typically, which is about four to five miles.

Vicki Guinn:

So you're doing four to five miles. I know that vest is heavy with all your tools in it. So you're not getting off work running into 24 hour fitness

Dan Nguyen:

Sometimes, no. I get my workout here. I go home and I go to bed, especially working the night shift.

Vicki Guinn:

Is there anything that scares you?

Dan Nguyen:

Working here?

Vicki Guinn:

Yeah.

Dan Nguyen:

Yeah, unfortunately, and I know you've heard about it, you've probably seen them. We've had some pretty close incidents here with, especially when it comes to gang violence, to weapons, things like that. But I really am proud of the folks that I work with in security, and the folks in the ER too, the ED staff, they do a really good job. They always try to help us out when they can. We have a really good working relationship with Portland Police. I know that relationship hasn't been perfect in the past, and I know they're going through their own things right now, but we rely on them for a lot of things, especially at night here. We have a pretty good relationship with them, and if we need them, they're here. So I think some things do scare me. This job is, there are some inherent dangers, and I do have a couple permanent injuries from this job, but I work with really good folks, really good nurses in the ER. They will do anything for us.

Vicki Guinn:

That's wonderful, but permanent injuries?

Dan Nguyen:

The night shift is fantastic. We love them. So supportive of us. They will advocate for us when we're afraid to advocate for our ourselves.

Vicki Guinn:

Mm-hmm. Well, again, you're taking care of facilities, you're taking care of us, you're taking care of the ED. And I wonder on nights like this where it's stormy and rainy, even a full moon, do you have this feeling when it might be a busy night?

Dan Nguyen:

I bet you tonight's going to be a busy night. I'll tell you that much. Yeah. A lot of indicators, you can predict how things go. It's a Friday night, it's a weekend, it's cold outside. It's probably going to be a busy night. And like we've mentioned earlier, like you said, that unfortunately more often than not, ERs are just constantly busy throughout the whole city. It's not a Legacy specific problem. It's not an Emanuel specific problem. It's Providence, Kaiser, OHSU. They all experience the same things, unfortunately. And it kind of goes to show you how the state of the healthcare system nowadays.

Vicki Guinn:

We're probably other than 7-Eleven, the only other place that's 24/7.

Dan Nguyen:

That's right. At least in this part of town. Yeah.

Vicki Guinn:

A couple characteristics you need to do this job. You seem very calm.

Dan Nguyen:

I try to be.

Vicki Guinn:

What makes a good safety and security officer?

Dan Nguyen:

I think one of the biggest things is having empathy, being able to empathize with folks. The thing is, we work with a population that are generally less fortunate than we are, and you may not be able to extrapolate that to every Legacy facility. But where we are in North Portland, we see a lot of folks who are just less fortunate than others. And I think being able to empathize with them and while maintaining the needs of the hospital and the ER, but also juggling that with just basic decency to folks, I think that's really important. Having a sense of calm is also important.

It's very, very easy. And I've experienced this myself. You know, get flustered in a difficult situation that it can devolve very fast. If you get flustered, the patient may read upon that, they

may take cue of that, and now they're in control of the situation because we can always do better. We could have an incident that goes flawlessly or at what we may take us flawlessly, but there's always something to learn from it. And the last couple years have been pretty difficult. We've been working through a lot of policies change. Sometimes it's a weekly thing.

Vicki Guinn:

Covid has-

Dan Nguyen:

Covid has affected a lot of things. Patient visitation, operating hours things like that.

Vicki Guinn:

And they're probably not really happy about-

Dan Nguyen:

Oh gosh, yeah. Yeah they-

Vicki Guinn:

Patient visitation.

Dan Nguyen:

The patient visitation was a really difficult one at first because having a loved one and in the hospital, it's a scary thing. And I totally understand that. So you have folks, and especially because I worked the night shift, we have folks coming in, two 3:00 AM their loved one is brought into the hospital and they're trying to visit. But at the beginning of Covid, we weren't 100% sure who can visit, what time is visiting, things like that. And so we're trying to relay the message that, I'm sorry, you can't visit your loved one right now. Can you come back at 8:00 in the morning. To them-

Vicki Guinn:

That's a hard message.

Dan Nguyen:

It is. I would be upset too. So I would never fault them for being upset given the circumstances. But again, we've worked through that, and we've tweaked our policies. As you know now the policy is two visitors at a time, things like that. So we're always working through things. There's always things to learn. We're constantly reviewing policies and procedure, just seeing what can we change to do better? Because a policy that was created maybe five years ago may not be applicable now, or things have changed. And I'm sure you've seen how fast things can change here at the hospital procedure.

Vicki Guinn:

Just over the last two years. Yeah, there's been so many changes. I've just been here seven years in the last two years. I mean, we're just working in a different city.

Dan Nguyen:

Yeah. The city has changed so much since I began here.

Vicki Guinn:

It changed so much.

Dan Nguyen:

And it's just constantly having to be able to adapt to it.

Vicki Guinn:

One thing you said, and I appreciate you bringing this up. You talked about you acknowledge and you're aware that there's quite a bit of diversity in people who come to our hospital by nature of it being in the city and trauma center, et cetera, and marginalized communities. I've had to do stories around homeless people in our ER. You mention empathy, you must have a lot of empathy because we all have our stereotypes and unconscious bias.

Dan Nguyen:

Absolutely.

Vicki Guinn:

How do you do that when-

Dan Nguyen:

It's really difficult, but you have to remember that in the end, these are people just like you and me. Some of them are down on their luck.

Vicki Guinn:

And tonight you might get people want to get out the rain. And there's nothing-

Dan Nguyen:

Absolutely. I'm sure we will. And very, I think the hardest thing for me is to come in to the hospital and learning that the hospital can't solve all of the world's problems in one night. And we have an amazing ER staff. We have great social workers down there. We have nurses who care. We have physicians and providers who care, and it's really great the work that they do. But the unfortunate reality is that we can't solve everybody's problems in one night. We can't solve addiction in one night. We can't solve homelessness in one night.

Vicki Guinn:

Do you ever drive patrol in the vehicle around the campus?

Dan Nguyen:

Yeah.

Vicki Guinn:

Tell me what you see at night.

Dan Nguyen:

At night. Lots of coyotes, lots of raccoons.

Vicki Guinn:

Are you serious?

Dan Nguyen:

Yeah.

Vicki Guinn:

Coyotes are around here?

Dan Nguyen:

Yes. Lots of coyotes.

Vicki Guinn:

No.

Dan Nguyen:

I'm dead serious. There's a three-legged coyote that runs around here at night.

Vicki Guinn:

He came from my neighborhood. I've seen a three-legged coyote.

Dan Nguyen:

Yeah, I bet you have. So they wander pretty far distances interestingly, they just go through the city and they'll come from up North Portland and Peninsula Park, things like that. And they'll work their way down and they'll just work their way back up. Isn't that wild?

Vicki Guinn:

That is wild. Well, you look like a superhero. So I'm going to ask you, who's your superhero?

Dan Nguyen:

Gosh, my favorite-

Vicki Guinn:

And what's your superpower maybe?

Dan Nguyen:

My superpower? Oh my gosh, you're putting me on the spot here. Superpower-

Vicki Guinn:

Or one you'd like to have.

Dan Nguyen:

Well, my favorite superhero ever is definitely Captain America, is his background story. Fantastic. His values and beliefs, the things that he stands up for, I really, really agree with. He's by far my favorite superhero. My superpower though, my real life superpower is being able to empathize.

Vicki Guinn:

Yeah. That's a good one.

Dan Nguyen:

Yeah, I think that goes a long way. We're all people, we all make mistakes along the way, but we should always try to help those that are less fortunate than we are. I think we should all be thankful for what we do have. And I try to be thankful every single day. But being able to empathize and help folks out, especially in my role, in my capacity. The thing is, we work well with our social workers to get them shelter vouchers, to get them a taxi ride home, to get them out of the rain, out of the cold. And if that means letting them stay in the lobby until morning, until buses start running, I'm okay with that. It is nothing to me because I put myself in their shoes. And I would hope that someone would do the same for me.

Vicki Guinn:

Gina Meli came to Legacy Health 15 years ago, and she has experienced a lot of changes in our society that have impacted her work. She was recently promoted to a security trainer position. Tell me about what you have on now.

Gina Meli:

Oh, goodness. Well, being a lead, I carry sometimes up to two phones. So I have my personal as a backup. I carry the site phone. We carry trauma shears. I have an Axon body camera that's on. We carry a pouch with backup supplies. I've got a flashlight, multi-tool, pepper spray, safety glasses. My radio. Golly, I'm running out of real estate is the problem. Pens, highlighter, things I need when I'm out in the field, a permanent pen and regular pens. And that doesn't even include the fact that there's two layers of Kevlar in here. We have the standard layer and then we have trauma plates that also go to the front of us, which help around protecting the heart.

Vicki Guinn:

I probably will say this long. It's not bulletproof, is it? It is bulletproof?

Gina Meli:

Yes. It carries up to a certain caliber of stoppage.

Vicki Guinn:

So what has kept you here for 15 years?

Gina Meli:

Oh gosh. First it starts with our team. Again, even someone like our director, Luke, I've worked with him for 15 years. I started on the floor with Luke working day shift at Emanuel. That camaraderie you build with everybody regardless of watching them grow through their ranks and things like that. But that camaraderie you build with everybody and that teamwork, I started feeling that from the Emanuel staff when I started at that campus. The relationships tend to grow.

The supports there, everybody kind of goes through everything and has to come back to center and they all do it together. I didn't quite know how to take that when I started in this industry because you'd see something very severe happen in a trauma bay, and you'd see the staff come out upset because maybe someone didn't make it. But within, I'm not going to put a time on it, but within a certain amount of time, smiles were regrowing or hugs were happening and they were... And at first, I took heart to that in a bad way and thought, how are these people doing that? And one of my very close friends who was a charge nurse at the time at Emanuel in the ED said, if we don't, we lose ourselves.

If we don't reset and be ready to walk into the next patient's room, who could have better news coming to them or be ready to reset with each other so when the next code comes in, we try again. And that's when it dawned on me that she had a point, I had not had to work in this industry yet. I'd done security, but I had never been on the hospital aspect.

So hearing that from people and seeing the camaraderie between them and the fact that it's like, okay, we got this person back, or unfortunately we didn't with this one, that's what's kept me here. Being part of a team that I haven't felt is going to let me down. Someone's always going to be there to have your back. You may be alone for that second, but knowing that radio calls out or knowing that someone else is witnessed that you're in trouble, or the staff even coming to help you while they're getting dispatch on the phone saying, "Hey, get more people down here. This officer's in danger, or there's a problem." We've built something that I've never seen in my other careers of security.

Vicki Guinn:

I want to ask this. I'm guessing security is not traditionally a female role, a gender, female gender role. We see more and more of it, and I'm just judging by visually what I see here. And probably when you started-

Gina Meli:

Population density for us was much less back then.

Vicki Guinn:

It was much less. And so how was that? Any...

Gina Meli:

Well, we-

Vicki Guinn:

And you're short too, Gina.

Gina Meli:

I am. I'm five foot something. So the population of ladies to men, back in 15 years ago, it was down a little bit. We're seeing a population, a growth of their gender being hired. And I don't think that's for lack of trying. I think it's for lack of applicants. I think part of that's just-

Vicki Guinn:

Is there a perception that they think is too strenuous or too-

Gina Meli:

You know, I don't know. Being that I've been in security since 2005, which is just a couple years shy of coming on with Legacy, I don't know what it is. I don't know if people see it and maybe fear what we do or they hear through the grapevine what it is we have to do and go, Nope, I don't want any part of that. There's some that are just, they step right up to the plate and say, "Yeah, I'm cool with this." And I think part of that's knowing that it's no different than a police department. This isn't about how strong you are.

Vicki Guinn:

So give me a message-

Gina Meli:

You have to be mental strong.

Vicki Guinn:

Give me a message to, let's say other females who are considering this job or haven't thought about this career in security, what would you tell them?

Gina Meli:

Well, we need more. And the perception that the women get over the men out in the field, not all the time, but sometimes is that softer approach. The patient that could be highly agitated might be less likely to lash out or become physical again, might be, if they saw a female approaching. Doesn't mean the male's not going to be there if they happen to be the other officer's backup or whatever the case may be.

But the biggest thing for me, and it's what I trained as an FTO, it's what I train as a lead now when I train in new people, and it's what I'll continue to train in my next role, is that this isn't

just about the gender. This is about we are officers first, period, point blank. We are officers first. And if every officer goes to that same call, it could be the same person that's been in five or six times that day on your shift through the emergency department. Not every time you talk to that person, the situation's going to be the same. They're going to maybe come in a little more intoxicated or a little more sober. Their behaviors could change in all those visits that they're having. It's being prepared to restart from scratch how you're approaching them as if it's the first time you're seeing them, even though it may be the fifth or sixth time that day.

Vicki Guinn:

That was a brief introduction to the world of our safety and security staff at Legacy Health. And I hope you learned a little about the people who work 24/7 to keep our people, our patients, and our visitors safe. A couple shared their superpower, but what I learned is that they all share the same superpower and that is empathy. They care about their job, they care about keeping us safe. They care about helping our visitors and our patients who are in need. So remember, if you need to reach one of these staff, call them at 503-413-7911. If you're hearing this message, you've listened to the episode to the end, and I thank you. We value your feedback. Take a moment, leave us a rating or drop a message at podcast@lhs.org and tell us about your ideals for stories or what are you curious about at Legacy Health and how can we engage our people? This is Vicki Guinn. Be safe and if you see something, say something, stay alert and call your security if help is needed.