



## Episode #8

Long-Time Employees at Legacy

Host: Vicki Guinn

Guests: Curtis Ryan, Karina Gray

### **Vicki Guinn:**

This is Vicki Guinn with Legacy Health's Marketing and Communications Team. Welcome to Legacy Health 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 their jobs.

Some podcasts may cast a serious tone, and others may make you laugh. Please listen to learn, get inspired, be curious, and get to know the people who share a common goal: to be proud to be a part of a workforce that creates the best healthcare experience possible for our patients.

Today's episode focuses on our longtime employees. You've heard of the Great Resignation, which has legions of workers looking for the door since the pandemic. It had many people rethinking their lives and priorities.

I don't know if it happened at Legacy Health; but according to the 2019 Census Bureau, there are 22 million workers in the healthcare industry. We are one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors in the United States, accounting for 14% of all US workers.

The average length of employment is about five years. At Legacy Health, it's almost eight years. The longest-tenured group here at Legacy are the ones with 10-plus years. They comprise 32% of our workforce.

So today, I am honored to be with my two guests. Two ... Okay, you do the math. They are way past the average and combined, have ... Let's see, did I do this right? 80 years of service. Yes, you heard that. 80 years of service.

When Curtis Ryan, a nurse at the Legacy Oregon Burn Center, started working here right after Mount St. Helens blew in 1980. And Karina Gray, with our Nutrition Services at Meridian Park, when she started working, you could go see Prince in his rock film Purple Rain for \$2.50. I don't think you can get a bottle of water for \$2.50.

So I asked them to join me, and I'm so excited; I thanked them so much. I just had to get Curtis, because he told us, after almost 43 years, he's going to retire. I think you deserve it.

### **Curtis Ryan:**

Thank you.

**Vicki Guinn:**

So we're just going to have some fun, have a conversation. I'm going to throw some questions at you. Relax. You're just talking to your best friends.

**Karina Gray:**

I am.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And Melissa is here in the room with us. So Curtis, tell me about you. Whatever you want to share.

**Curtis Ryan:**

It was a dark and stormy night.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Yes. That's where he-

**Curtis Ryan:**

64 years ago.

**Vicki Guinn:**

That's a wide-open question.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Well, I'm a native Oregonian. I grew up in Madras, Oregon on a farm about two-and-a-half miles from Warm Springs. So that's my background, Central Oregon farm kid.

Came to Portland to go to college, was going to be a music teacher, and worked at Emanuel to work my way through music school. And my second year at Emanuel in 1981, I went into the Burn Unit to help out, and decided that was probably what I was going to end up doing: was trying to get back into the Burn Center and work there full-time as a nurse was my plan.

And the way I got into Emanuel, my girlfriend at the time, her dad worked in Biomed and she said, "You know, you should start looking at things other than nursing homes. Why don't you go check out Emanuel?"

I went over, and that's when Human Resources was down where Billing is now at Emanuel. And they said, "Well, we don't have a job for nurses' aides, but go talk to Mrs. Nelson up in Nursing Service. Maybe she has something we don't know about."

I went up and talked to her and she said, "Well, would you be willing to work as an orderly, too?"

I said, "Sure."

She goes, "Okay, you're hired."

And that's how I started at Emanuel Hospital. That was my interview.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Okay, orderly ... You got to tell us what an orderly is. That's something you don't hear.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Well, they're now considered Transportation. Patient Transportation is who the orderlies are now.

But when I started, there were orderlies for X-ray, Surgery, Nursing Service. Every department had an orderly. So at that time, what we did was we did all the patient lifts, we did morgue runs, we did casting in the ER, we did the male catheters on the floors. Anything that they needed help with, they would call us.

We had specific floors that we worked on, and they would call us for help; the nursing staff would. We were kind of a jack-of-all-trades, go-to person, nurses' aide, to go out and help on the units. That's what the orderlies did.

When they went to Patient Transportation, they kept two orderlies in Nursing Service. And since I had seniority then, that's why I stayed in Nursing Service. When I left, that was the end of the orderlies at Emanuel. They all went to Patient Transportation after that.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Okay. A few name changes over the year.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Just a few name changes. Yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And then shortly after you, Karina, when did you come to Legacy Meridian Park? And you've been here the whole time here?

**Karina Gray:**

I came in March of 1984. I put an application in Housekeeping and the kitchen. And the housekeeper manager had called me, and I had an interview.

The kitchen manager said she didn't have anything available. I really wanted to go to the kitchen, though. So on Mondays, I would call her. And then on Friday, I would show up and see if there was anything that changed. I did that for two weeks.

And by the third week on Monday, she said, "You're hired, just to get you out of my hair." And I just started in the Dish Room, and been here since then.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And what has kept you here all these years?

**Karina Gray:**

The people.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Say more about the people.

**Karina Gray:**

When I started working here, we were a family. We became a family, and we help each other and we do for each other. If we hear anybody in the hospital who needs help, we gather together and try to find out what it is that they need help with, and we do it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Karina, you told me you were a teenager.

**Karina Gray:**

I was 17.

**Vicki Guinn:**

To have a teenager come on board and stick with something, it was more than a summer job to you. You were looking long term.

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah. Well, three months after I started working here, I found out I was pregnant. So I stayed for the healthcare. And I couldn't think of any other place that I would want to go and feel loved and cared about.

**Vicki Guinn:**

So, Karina tell me: I remember when ... Because I have an elderly father. When I get to talking to him, "I remember when gas was 10 cents a gallon." Then he's starting into an interesting story. Tell me an "I remember when" about Meridian Park and your experience here.

**Karina Gray:**

I remember when I started working, I made \$3.65 an hour. You could look out the patient room windows and see cows out in the pasture.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Really?

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And so what was this like? I mean, farmland?

**Karina Gray:**

This was all farmland and there was cows out there. So we would open up the curtains, and the patients would be able to see the cows and ...

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, how funny.

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah, we were called the Country Hospital.

**Curtis Ryan:**

I remember when Sister Betty used to haunt Emanuel East. She was the head of the Nursing School at Emanuel for years.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You mean her ghost?

**Curtis Ryan:**

Yeah. She was mostly active while they were building the Courtyard Café. There were some housekeepers that wouldn't go to the third floor at Emanuel East, because they would hear doors opening and see lights turn on and off and ...

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, what was she like when she was alive?

**Curtis Ryan:**

She was a sister. So you take it from there.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You both been here for quite a long time. Have you had any major challenges? Have you had to overcome any challenges? There's been a lot of changes over the decades you were here, even in our country, in our community, in healthcare.

Karina, what's your challenge now? You're not that little 17-year-old anymore ... Or maybe you are.

**Karina Gray:**

I mean, I'm the stock clerk now. So my challenge every day is to go out and either take stock orders, or pick up the stock orders that are coming in, and try to make sure that I get them all done so that I don't have anything else to look at tomorrow, other than tomorrow's stock.

**Vicki Guinn:**

So what food has changed? What food do we say, "No, we can't serve that anymore. We discovered-"

**Karina Gray:**

Oreo cookies.

**Vicki Guinn:**

It's gone?

**Karina Gray:**

Uh-huh.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Why?

**Karina Gray:**

What's healthy about an Oreo cookie?

**Vicki Guinn:**

It doesn't count. It is healthy. Do you still serve Tang?

**Karina Gray:**

No.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, good. And Curtis; challenges over the years? What's-

**Curtis Ryan:**

Oh ...

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, gosh.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Lots of challenges, because of transition from three different types of organizations and-

**Vicki Guinn:**

That's right.

**Curtis Ryan:**

The ups and downs with nursing, where it's cyclical; trying to help the younger nurses understand that I've been there, done that. "Just tough it out and tighten your belt. It'll get better. Just ride the wave and you'll be okay."

My challenge now is over the next 357 days ... But nobody's counting ... Before I retire next January, is getting ready to orient slowly over about starting in April, my replacement, who we've already named.

I'll be helping her learn how to do the outreach portion. That's what I do now. For the last 14 years, I've been outreach; after doing 21 years at the bedside, at the night shift in the Burn Unit.

Getting her up to speed and training her on how to do outreach and introducing her to all the different folks that I know in the industries that we teach to. And at the national level, the American Burn Association, and getting people up to speed on what it is I do.

It's probably going to take about a year; took me a year when I took over this position to learn how to do it. So we're planning on it being a slow transition between now and next January, training the new person to do it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

That was really smart. When you told me that, that you were able to bring in someone and spend several months training that person to get them up to speed ... That's amazing.

**Curtis Ryan:**

And then I'm contemplating going supplemental for a year just to help out, just in case they need it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, you can't get away from us.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Yeah, I know, I can't get away from you. So I might do that just to be in the background, if they need somebody to come in and help out. That would be on a as-needed basis. Then after that year, then my nursing license will expire.

I plan on just spending time traveling around and being with my granddaughter and trying to find the world's biggest ball of twine on Route 66.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You're going to do more than that?

**Curtis Ryan:**

Yeah, probably.

**Vicki Guinn:**

I'm going to ask both of you: since you've been here so long, so many years, you've seen a lot of changes. And one of the things that we have at Legacy are Values in Action: treat all people with respect and compassion. I want you to comment on that. I'm putting you on the spot, and see what you think about what that means.

And then service is one: putting the needs of our patients and our families is making them feel like they're number one are important. What does that mean to you since you've been here? Or what experience or an example of that?

**Curtis Ryan:**

Well, in the Burn Center, we see such a myriad of cultures and everything else that come through. Our houseless population is going up.

I just tell people, "You treat every patient that comes through like they're your neighbor, that you've known them for a million years, you're good friends with them. And you treat them with respect. You just don't make judgments on people. Your judgment, you can do at home on your own time.

"But when you're at work; you have to treat somebody who you have total respect for, and somebody who you don't have total respect for; you have to treat them both exactly the same, because they're there needing your help. They need you to help them get through what they're going through. The same with the families. Sometimes when they're upset, you've got to realize they're upset because they're scared."

Being in the Burn Unit, it's a scary place. There's a lot of psychological and physical stuff that the patients go through. And we have people in place to do that with our SOAR volunteers and our aftercare programs. That's where you also put the needs of the patients and the family first. You have to be there. I tell new nursing students, "You have to be able to set and cry with your patients and your families. It's real, real important they understand that you just care just as much about them as they do. You have to put all your biases at the door. You have to leave those at the door, and treat everybody with complete and total respect."

**Vicki Guinn:**

Well said.

**Curtis Ryan:**

The same way you would want to be treated yourself.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Absolutely.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Yep.

**Vicki Guinn:**

What about you, Karina? If you don't look at the patients or see patients every day, even with your coworkers, your colleagues.

**Karina Gray:**

Well, one of the things that I do is, as I'm going in the hallways, because I'm up on all three floors taking stock orders to wherever they need to go.

I always end up finding people that have this look on their face that they're lost. So I find out where it is that they're wanting to go, and I help them get to where they need to get.

I know how hard it is to be in a new place and have whatever going on, and then be lost and get frustrated. So I try to make sure that I'm able to help the family members get where they need to go so that they don't feel that way.

And I always make sure that in the wintertime, I'm one of the people that spends the night here.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Really?

**Karina Gray:**

So that we are here to feed them in the morning if our cooks aren't able to get in.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Are you asked to spend the night? Do you offer to spend the night?

**Karina Gray:**



I offer.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You just know you need to be there.

**Karina Gray:**

I volunteer it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh my gosh.

**Karina Gray:**

I did it last year. I did it this year.

**Vicki Guinn:**

That's definitely service. I've been in healthcare my whole career too, on the administrative side. And I go every day. I go in, "What are we going to do today?" Challenges are good, and pain is good. I know I'm kind of weird.

**Curtis Ryan:**

There's been a few times when I've thought, "Yeah, it's just going to have to drag myself in there." But I love my job. I've always loved my job.

The folks at Emanuel; and I'll say it because that's where it started, was with Emanuel; have always treated me well. I've always felt like I was part of that family.

**Vicki Guinn:**

What's being treated well on a job? You've been here for a long time. And if we were hiring some new folks, that generation's is a different generation beneath us. What would you tell them?

**Curtis Ryan:**

I feel respected by my coworkers. Because at the Burn Center, Dr. Parsons, who started the whole thing with Dr. Beaker and Carolyn Wex; they always had the Burn Center as a team that was built horizontally, not vertically. Everybody has equal say. Everybody's part of a team. And that's always the way I felt working at Emanuel.

Everybody was part of a team. We always had each other's back. The respect was good. And quite frankly, I just say, we get paid pretty well. I've lived a good life because of Emanuel. I've been able to have things that I needed. Not everything I wanted, but things I needed, because they took good care of me.

**Vicki Guinn:**

I know you do a lot, Curtis. I've worked with you since I've been here. Is that part of what makes you want to stay with a company? That you're able to develop, you're able to grow, you're able to flex? Say more about that.

**Karina Gray:**

Well, that's part of it

**Vicki Guinn:**

Tell me what you feel like a team? What do you cook?

**Karina Gray:**

I've been a grill cook before.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Really?

**Karina Gray:**

I've trained on the patient tray line, cooking salmon or the scrambled eggs for their breakfast or ... Yeah, I've trained in different areas. Like I said, I did grill cook for a few years. When I left the Dish Room, I went as a cashier for 21 years. Then I went to the grill cook for a few years, then I went back to the kitchen and then I went to the storeroom.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You know every inch of this hospital, I bet.

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah, pretty much. Yeah. I'll [inaudible 00:18:21]

**Vicki Guinn:**

And you know all where the skeletons are buried.

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Okay. All right. You're not going to write a tell-all when you retire.

**Curtis Ryan:**

We might as well, because we know where all the skeletons are.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You're not going to be on Inside Edition or anything like that, telling the secrets of ...

But the thing about longtime employees, you have such institutional knowledge. You have the history. And something you said earlier, it's like you have to remind people, "We've tried that, done that," but not in a negative way.

**Karina Gray:**

Right.

**Vicki Guinn:**

It's more of experience.

**Curtis Ryan:**

And there's so many opportunities for growth. I mean, you can find something every day that's something new to learn. That's what's so neat about it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

I was going to ask you about that. How do you both continue to learn?

**Curtis Ryan:**

Well, with me, it's all the different groups I talk to. 'Cause I talk to hospitals, firefighters, EMS, electrical, gas employees, nursing schools, everything.

But when I'm out in the main industries like electrical and the natural gas companies and stuff, I'm talking to them, watching what they do, and learning what they do as a job. What are your codes? Why are they in place? Why are they there? What do they do to protect your employees?

And I share that information with the apprentices, so that they know that I've got a little bit of an idea of what they're doing, too, to make them feel like I-

**Vicki Guinn:**

So you ask.

**Curtis Ryan:**

I ask. I'll ask a lot of questions. Just recently I was asking why are they were doing certain things on one of the lineman things. And they explained it to me and told me about it.

I read a little bit of the history of the guy that founded their union. And we talk a lot about it. So there's always something I'm learning when I'm out in the field. About their community that they're in. I was in Drain, Oregon last night. A lot of people don't even know where Drain is at.

**Vicki Guinn:**

How many people live in Drain?

**Karina Gray:**

Drain?

**Curtis Ryan:**

Oh, maybe, I don't know. 800, 900? I don't know.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And where is Drain, Oregon?

**Curtis Ryan:**

South of Roseburg. And it's on the way to Reedsport.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And where is Reedsport?

**Curtis Ryan:**

It's on the coast. It's between Florence and [inaudible 00:20:20]

**Vicki Guinn:**

Okay. I was only born and raised in Oregon.

**Karina Gray:**

Oh, okay.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Right along the Umpqua River. It's up by Elkton.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, it sounds beautiful down there.

**Curtis Ryan:**

It is. It's beautiful. And they had people come from four or five different small communities. So I had about 25 people at the meeting last night, which was a huge amount for that small of a community, all EMS.

They talked to me about classes they teach, asking if we could help them out with things. I said, "Sure." And we had a good conversation afterwards, and I learned a lot about their community.

My wife and I looked it up. She was reading things about the towns we had gone through, and a little bit about their history and whatnot. So we get a feel for where we're at when we're out on the road doing stuff.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And then same thing, how do you learn? Sounds like you have learned everything when it comes to your area. You work in Nutrition Services? Yes?

**Karina Gray:**

Right. Well, when I became the stock clerk, I had a paper that I went up and took all the stock orders on paper. Then a few years ago, I was taught how to do it on a computer, on a WOW, and then push a WOW around.

Now, we are working with an iPad. I'm a dinosaur when it comes to the computer system. I didn't even know how to turn it on. They'd say, "Okay, turn it on."

And I'm like, "Okay, well, where's the button?"

**Vicki Guinn:**

I have to tell you, when I first bought my iPad, I was on the plane traveling somewhere, and they said, "Turn your electronics off." I didn't know how to turn it off. And then I rented an electric car. I didn't know how to turn it off, either.

So you humbled yourself and you asked somebody who's half your age, "Can you help me?"

**Curtis Ryan:**

I keep looking for a cell phone with a dial on it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh my gosh. The good old days, and that sound ... dialing phone.

Gosh, you guys are so fun to talk to. What do you do for fun? Now I know I'm going to tell your secret. Are there any little kids listening? I hope not. Because Curtis is Santa Claus.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Yes. In the winter I do Santa Claus and I do it to raise money for our kids' camps at the Burn Center.

**Vicki Guinn:**

That is so amazing.

**Curtis Ryan:**

I get to be Santa Claus and lie to little kids, 'cause they always ask me where the reindeer are. I tell them that there's no snow; I have a special thing with Alaska Airlines and they fly me down.

And the kids look at me and they go, "Oh, okay." And they totally believe me.

So I had fun. My wife does Mrs. Claus. We have fun doing it. And then the people that hire us, we have them write the check to the foundation, so the camps get the money. I have the fun, and the people donating get the tax write-off.

**Vicki Guinn:**

That's amazing.

**Curtis Ryan:**

And then during the rest of the year, if we have time off, we're in our motor home traveling. And I spent a lot of time with my granddaughter.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, you have one granddaughter?

**Curtis Ryan:**

I have one granddaughter.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Is she spoiled?

**Curtis Ryan:**

She's not spoiled at all.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Okay. Didn't think so.

**Curtis Ryan:**

No no no, not at all.

Melissa:

What is her age?

**Curtis Ryan:**

She's five.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, great age.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Yeah, I was Pop Pop. But she changed my name to Pops. She's starting to change the names around a little bit.

But that's what I do for fun. We travel in the motor home, and we spend a lot of time with our granddaughter. And then like you said, the Santa thing that we do for, and I [inaudible 00:23:46]

**Vicki Guinn:**

And his beard is real.

**Curtis Ryan:**

It is a real beard. I'm almost ZZ Top-ish, and I'm going to continue doing that even after I retire.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You are?

**Curtis Ryan:**

To raise money for the kids' camps. Yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

That is amazing that you do that for our community. And all the proceeds go back to the place you work, the Burn Center, to help the children's camps.

**Curtis Ryan:**

I always push that in the community. And we always acknowledge our partners in the electrical industry, because they're the ones that raise a lot of money for us. Just last week from IBEW, they gave us a check for \$75,000.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Wow.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Just a few months before that, we got a check from them for another \$75,000 for all of our programs. They do a lot for us.

So I'm always promoting our foundation, because I tell people, "Every penny you donate goes to what you donate it to. You don't have to worry about it going somewhere else." So I really like to promote our foundation and raising money for Legacy. Mostly because of the Burn Center for the kids' camps and our aftercare programs.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And Karina, I know you're not retiring soon ... Are you?

**Karina Gray:**

I don't really do anything for fun right now. But over 10 years ago, I used to teach line dancing.

**Vicki Guinn:**

You did?

**Vicki Guinn:**

What kind of line dancing?

**Karina Gray:**

Country.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Country?

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh my gosh.

**Karina Gray:**

I can show you the lectures if you want [inaudible 00:25:09] This is when I need some video.

**Vicki Guinn:**

So what was your song? You got a favorite song?

**Karina Gray:**

No, not really. I liked Cupid Shuffle. We used to do a line dance to Skinny Dippin'. There's a song called Skinny Dippin' and ...

**Vicki Guinn:**

You can tell us more.

**Karina Gray:**

But yeah, Boot Scootin', Watermelon Crawl.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, how fun. And how-

**Karina Gray:**

And a lot of exercise. It's fun.

**Vicki Guinn:**

I've tried to line dance. And I fail at it miserably, because anything after a four count, I'm done.

**Karina Gray:**

Oh.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Because some of those have a lot of counts to them. Yeah, I can do 1, 2, 3, 4, repeat.

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah, I did the easy ones because we were teaching at the Tualatin Senior Center over here.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Oh, okay. Okay. So you had the seniors up and moving and grooving.

**Karina Gray:**

Yep.

**Vicki Guinn:**

Keep them out of the hospital, right?

**Karina Gray:**

Yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

What do you say about a place that has had people here for a long time?

**Curtis Ryan:**



Well, that says it all. I mean, if you talk to a place where people leave before 10 years on a regular basis, you kind of wonder about the company a little bit.

But when you're here and you see people that have been here for 10, 20, 30 years or more, that says a lot about an organization when there's longevity. That tells you a lot about it.

**Vicki Guinn:**

And you both have been through corporate changes too.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Oh yeah.

**Karina Gray:**

Oh yeah.

**Vicki Guinn:**

So that still says a lot. You've rode that out, and you've been through HealthLink. I do remember that. And then it became Legacy. And before, when they were independent hospitals. And you stayed the course.

**Karina Gray:**

Yep.

**Curtis Ryan:**

Ride the wave.

**Vicki Guinn:**

We have many longtime employees at Legacy Health. Having employees who enjoy their job, and share the same mission to serve, is a big part of business success for companies like Legacy.

What is the call to action today? Well, to recognize these long-tenured staff. Keeping many of them engaged is a challenge. What does Curtis need to know, or what would Karina like to do differently? But it should be a good challenge that we embrace.

Long-term employees can bring value. They know where the skeletons are buried. And yes, they have mental file cabinets of institutional knowledge.

They have more than proven their commitment to the company. They understand the culture and terrain, and can navigate and maneuver within our organization to get things done.

They instill morale in newcomers, hope for our patients, or they serve as unofficial recruiters by encouraging people to work at Legacy. At the end of the day, they are ambassadors for the company.

If you're hearing this message, you've listened to the full episode to the end, and I thank you. We value you and your feedback. Please take a moment and drop us a message at [podcast@lhs.org](mailto:podcast@lhs.org). And tell us about your ideals for stories, or how we can better engage our people.

This is Vicki Guinn with the Legacy Health Engaging Our People Podcast. To Curtis and Karina, we thank you for your years of service. Be safe and be well.

