

Nate: Today I have a very special guest and my good friend, Gary Earl. Gary, thanks for joining me.

Gary: Nate. Thanks so much for having me. It's an honor, a privilege, and a true blessing to be here, so thanks for just hearing my voice.

Nate: Absolutely. I'm just going to read off something here. You react however you want. CEO, multiple physicians at three national health plans, including VP health and wellbeing, ambassador and VP health transformation, corporate VP of employee benefits at Caesars entertainment. You're an advisor for several companies trying to make big impacts on healthcare, co-creator and host of juicing with Gary. A disruptive force for good, a husband, father, grandfather. You're in elite physical shape. How in the world do you do it?

Gary: Well, first of all, they're just titles, right? I mean, honestly, we've all been privileged. I have been for almost 40 years to be in this business, so I've earned my way. Maybe just by time to those physicians, some of them I'd like to believe I actually got there by actually doing really good work. I think the most important thing you said Nate, is, you know, I have six grandchildren, hopefully to have more. I believe in impacting people. One person one mile at a time. My, this whole thing about endurance athletes and, you know, riding, running, everything is just to influence people. So I've been really blessed. I've just a farmer raised by a great granddad who actually showed me what health and wellbeing was in the fifties and sixties and here I am today trying to live it out. So you know, I'm privileged and honored to be here.

Nate: All right, so I'm going to do this a little bit differently than some of my other episodes because I feel like when you and I get together, we have to innovate in some way. I've got some thought provokers here, I'll throw one out and we can discuss. Does that sound good? Absolutely happy to do that. So in today's equation of success, is there a lack of courage?

Gary: I think if a, if there's, and this is not about me, but if there's one thing that I do believe in, I think there's a huge lack of courage in our industry. And, and by the way, Nate, you know, no offense to all the great innovators, disruptors and pip that are doing amazing things today. You know, our system was built almost 70 years ago when you looked back to the, the actual foundational elements. And because of that, it was created under a different environment.

Gary: What it takes today to be successful, to be innovative, disruptive, and, and not only successful but sustainable is it takes guts. You have to be willing to press out and say like, that's just not acceptable. Right. Someone said to me once, you know, the best way to a new invention or intervention is to throw a wrench into the current thinking. You have to have a lot of guts to throw that wrench. So I believe that we're, there's a lot of wrench stores and there's a lot of good people trying to do that. You know, the bigger question later in the interview maybe is, are they successful at that or not? But yeah, I mean, we have to be courageous. And I, you know, I'm not saying we don't have courage, but our industry makes a hell of a lot of money by not being courageous. We should be courageous because it's not about just us as people that are trying to gain, it's

about the community, the individual and the company's gaining together. Yeah. Hurl equation.

Nate: Yeah. And I've talked a lot about this as well, that a HR doesn't historically encourage. Certainly courage, certainly innovation, certainly change a good day for an HR person. Used to be that nothing happened. There was, there was a intrinsic sort of a carrot out there for not doing anything. Well, the world has changed, right? We've got CFOs who are extremely interested in the cost of healthcare. We've got all sorts of interest in what we do and so the role is changing. How do we get folks to to move forward and give them that confidence to, to make change.

Gary: You brought up a couple of terms that I think are really important for all. I don't think I agree with you. I don't think it's a just, I just think that our industry has created this environment and what we're trying to do is disrupt or change that environment. You know, back to your, the crux of the actual question. I think we're, we're what we should be doing and what the goal would be in what actually the outcomes are, is if we take and it come alongside. Okay. The next generation or this generation of leaders and help them understand that what they're doing is not, first of all, I think by the way we're on a conversation about employee benefits and you know, productivity and economics, things like that. Right? So, but what they can do is learn that it's no longer about just bring value to that person or maybe their job, right? But again, to the company and to the community, our, our industry is shifting to this vision and view of shared value. And I don't know that we even understand where they are yet, but I think that it takes guts to stand up. Cause honestly, Nate, you were there, right? You were a senior leader in a, a big job. I was too. You could easily just sort of lineup for your salary, your bonus, everything else by saying I'm just with the status quo, but the status quo is not acceptable.

Nate: So I want to connect this to the notion of community. Like you alluded to there, there's an acronym, s, d, O, h, which is the social determinants of health. The CDC says these are conditions and the places where people live, learn, work and play and how they affect a wide range of risks and outcomes and health. Talk to me a little bit about your thoughts around this right now.

Gary: Yeah, so that's actually really important. And whether you call it [inaudible] small or h or STO. I think this conversation that's actually emerging right now is really important. Let me tell you why. I mean forget about, you know, the stories that I could tell about what we did at Caesars and some of the work we did to actually improve social conditions and in order to actually improve the casino operation. Right. The point of it is that actually the World Health Organization and others since the 1950s have been trying to stress to the world that if you look at it, the majority of what influences health does not come from the individual condition. Meaning exercise, nutrition, genetics, who I am, it actually comes from social contexts where I live, participation, connection, right? And things like that. And by the way, it might built environment and I go on and on and on. So it plays in. So if I'm trying to run a company or a population, even in the community, so let's say I'm talking about community health, right? If I don't look at the context of the community, how can I possibly consider solving for those issues?

Nate: So are we heading to a place where companies are thinking about, you know, or, or taking the notion of employee health and throwing a wider net and looking at where they live, how they work, how they play, those sorts of things. And really getting into the community in a real way to make change. For example, I'm doing a study on where those factory workers live and seeing if they have access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Gary: So here's the way I respond to that. I think can, I'll try, right? Place Matters. So, so I have an employee, he or she works for my, you know, my company, right? And they'd come into my environment every day. They, they walk in with the same shoes on that they brought from home, whatever, whatever dirt, let's call it dirt for this conversation. They drag from that home into my environment. It comes with them. And by the way, whatever dirt they pick up at the workplace goes home. Let's say you have I think the example might be [inaudible] control environmental control, right? So you've got a boss who's actually a really bad guy and he does, or Gal and he doesn't, or she doesn't give them the opportunity to learn to become or expand to become better in their workplace, right?

Gary: So that employee is frustrated every day. They take that frustration back into the home environment. Let's say they go back to the home environment, not that specific person, but they have some other situation. They don't have a car, they don't have a grocery store, they don't have, they have broken playgrounds. They're trying to find access for the kids. They're just, you know, whatever it is, right? They're frustrated with that. They're going to bring that into the same environment. There is no longer a dual dimension of health. Like the individual on one side, the social on the other, it is a common dimension of health. Then we could say actually if we improve or pour into to make it better environment for people, they will pour back into us. I if you want to give an examples from what we did at Caesars.

Nate: Yeah, no, I'd love that. I think some of the stuff you guys did there, if people aren't familiar, would be fascinating to dive into because you really, in a town like that, you have some very interesting influences basically on an island in a desert while it is an island.

Gary: And that's a great way to frame it, I suppose. And what I would say is, you know, we, we, we looked at Las Vegas as an actual island environment, right? We knew we had a singular or you know, focused industry around it. But what we looked at was we looked at the individual, right? So over here on this one dimension I talked about, we are looking at, you know, who are they by age, by sex, by demographic, by genetic. It's easy, right? Even by blood draw, get all that. But the question is, let's do the blood draw of the community.

Gary: So what we found out, Nate was a, as an example, we had 18,000 employees that were living in Las Vegas, 58,000 employees, totally, but 18,000 in Las Vegas. And in the Las Vegas area, we realized that in the three largest zip code demographics, we had a substantial amount of employees living in. One happened to be what we called a zone five and zone five in Las Vegas. An area that was actually just a little bit north of the stratosphere. A lot of people go up there. It's great, right? They had 100,000 human beings. I had 8,000 employees in that community. Out of the 100,000 of which 38%

didn't have access to transportation. They were single parents. They had a lot of other social economical conditions that were actually influencing their health, right? So if you took that data, which we did, we take that data, we put it in our banks, we come up with solutions, right?

Gary: So if they can't it, oh, by the way, here's a big question. How many grocery stores that they have now, by the way, we're going back to 2001 2005 so let's not, you know, today's change back then, not one grocery store in the entire community for that population. Wow. How does that make sense? Well, guess what, what it said to me was I had a percentage of my population that needed food services. So what I did was, because we're a casino by the way, we're not like every other manufacturer, right? We had big giant onsite. Yeah, just food distribution centers for employee benefits and foods. We just sent food home and the CEO said, or CFO said, what's the cost? And the cost was, it's cheaper to send food home for all of my employees. Then to see it type two diabetic, not get the right food at home.

Nate: Right. And so this kind of transitions into a question I have in that context. Should we be viewing, and this might be a little bit controversial, but should we be viewing employees and their families as an asset?

Gary: Well, I personally believe just like by myself, and I believe you are anybody who's listening, right? We, I think we all see ourselves as assets, right? We don't, we don't just come to work to get a dollar, right? We come to work to make a contribution and we should get paid for that. So the way I look at human capital is look at, yeah, and it's just my view, by the way, if you take a human being and give them every opportunity to be well, and that's where the conversation maybe shifts the wellbeing, then guess what? I believe that person will do their best and they may never be what we define as successful, but they'll be successful in their eyes to being really impactful and important. And they will give back to themselves. They'll give back to the business and the, but you got to remember whatever happens between those two gives back to the community. If, if we neglect to consider community and everything we're talking about, we're missing the whole point. Businesses are one thing. People are one thing we end up at night in the community.

Nate: Yeah. Yeah. And, and you know, the question is, does that community influenced the company? Or does the company influence the community? How does that play out in the earning equation and the way folks live in that environment? What are your thoughts around that? I know you probably just told me, but what do you, what do you think about sort of this notion of, of influence on community or community influencing outwards?

Gary: I would say, first of all, what, what I am always concerned about is that, you know, oh yeah. Big companies like Walmart, right? Walmart is doing David Hoke and others are Dr. Osborne doing amazing things at Walmart. But wait, let's talk about Spartanburg, South Carolina. Let's take a look at a tiny community, right? Where, you know, we're talking to small community made up of 90% small business owners. Well, how's that relative? Of course it's relative. [inaudible], You and I mate, I bought a coffee shop, right? You and I invest in, we're going to buy a coffee shop, right? And we're like, okay,

we're going to sell coffee to the local community. Make money. Well guess what? We're probably gonna employ what, maybe eight, nine, 10 people, including our two spouses that are volunteering, right? Well guess what? Two of them one day they got the flu. That impacts my, that impacts my business, right?

Gary: It's all about their wellbeing. Did they have the flu? Was that hangover? Or actually do they have a chronic condition? So why are we not considering how health and wellbeing, I hate to say health, that wellbeing influences, again, individual [inaudible] company and community economics and outcomes. It does. I don't know if that even makes sense, but I'm telling you right now a small business. So what we did in what we did in Spartanburg through a organization called Wellville and Wellville's a nonprofit, a well known great organization. We actually are trying to establish a way in which to bring well being programs and products and services and solutions that you and I got to have a Tesla and at Caesar's to small businesses. You know why? Because we actually want to expand earnings. Oh, and by the way, we want the people that feel good about themselves. That's the equitable equation.

Nate: So I want to shift gears a little bit. No Pun intended there. We shift or get off the pot you've written or run nearly 25,000 miles in the past 15 years. Mainly to influence thinking and taking action. Talk to me about this mission and why you do this.

Gary: In 2003, when I was running Caesar's, doing the same job you did over at, over at Tesla, I just, he was frustrated. You know, I'm frustrated with the industry, frustrated and myself and all it all meant, by the way, I am as much a part of the problem as I am the solution. Right. And because of that I said to my wife, I just want to get out of bike and go across America. Actually, I was going to run. She said, how long? I said, apparently it can only run a marathon a day, so it'll take me 38 marathons and 47 days. She said, Nah, that's not gonna work. So I got on a bike and what I did was I wrote a hundred miles a day for 31 straight days. And We created this movement. It was never about raising money. We raised money, but it was never about that.

Gary: We just created a movement to try to advance and bring a conversation of helping casement education and engagement and then actionability to people. So yeah, a little bit crazy on that end. We've done it now twice. We did the last one in 2013. I'm thinking about doing a third in 2021. Yeah. If you want to ride with me, be happy to have you come. Yeah, it's a lot of work but that, but at the end of the day, and that's it, it's about the end of the day. Riding a hundred miles only gets you the advantage of like, everyone wants to hear your story. It's after that where you actually do the work. You work with children, communities, environments, churches, faith, you know, business, whatever. Yeah. And it's an amazing thing and I think

Nate: Life experiences like that, you can't put a price on it. I think that's the biggest lesson here for me in this whole employee experience transition that we're making. And, you know, I'll proudly take at least some credit is being one of the first people, if not the first person with employee experience in their title. Misconstrue that is just rebranding of HR employee experience, much broader and much more important than human resources. And so to me, going out in the world and having those types of experiences are just an amazing thing that every human should strive to do at some point. That doesn't mean

they have to ride 25,000 miles on a bike, but find something that gives you some perspective and an experience.

Gary: Well if that's a pause, I'll take it. What I love about what you just said, it's a term experience and also journey, right? Experiences what I get out of the moment or movement or whatever it is, right? The journey is actually the, you know, sort of the point a to point B or whatever or beyond, right? So, you know, if we're trying to actually influence and change the way people think about how to live or in your case Nate, cause you're trying to reach out to benefit leaders and others, how to actually get that experience down for our employees, we have to find the journey. What's relative to them.

Nate: Yeah. And this ties back to the very top of the conversation of having courage. It's not easy to do this work well. And I'll give you an example. When I was at Safeway, we had a lot of wonderful health promotion programs that we thought of sitting in our corporate office looking at claims, trying to decide what to roll out when you actually took the time to go to a store and talk to a meat cutter about why that store didn't have as high participation of as we'd like. Those sorts of things. You found out some really fascinating things, but you have to do that work. You have to get out into the community to your point. And it takes a lot of courage, doesn't it?

Gary: It not only takes courage, it takes energy. Here's the point, you have to be willing to walk into that community to learn about it, right?

Gary: So we sit in our little castles or places or homes and we have assumptions. It can't be assumption based. You have to go in. What gives you hope about the future of, you know, workplace benefits or just, you know, people's general health and wellbeing. Is it that we're in a technological age now? Does technology matter? What's, what's sort of the thing that gets you really excited about where the future could go? I think what's good what's got got me still in my sixth, sixth dimension, right? So 61 years old. What's got me excited and actually more engaged than ever is the emerging tech companies. Golly. I mean, no, fall to a insurance or to anybody else. I mean, holy cow, there is so much happening today that we know about and I don't know if you've ever seen the series. I've done juicing with Gary.

Gary: Not that it's about me. I mean, there are some amazing technologists that are crazily radically changing outcomes. I'm so excited about it. I W I wish, you know, I, I wish I was 40 years younger. Honestly. That's why I would say, so there's so many great companies coming up. Here's my, here's my concern. How do they integrate? Right. So you and I ran in employer operation and for the most part, I think a lot of people would be wondering as an employer, how do I figure this out? So I go to my consultant I learned from meeting people, whatever. How do we literally integrate those organizations so that they can share far more than data and information? They can actually I'm trying to look for the word. They can extrapolate the data in order to actually integrate the outcome. Right?

Gary: So it's algorithm based. I don't, I don't know how I do that. I think that's what we're, I'm fearful we're gonna Miss Right now, but at the same time, optimistic man where we're

fast. That's cool. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And I am a huge fan of juicing with Gary. I've watched them all. And if anybody has not watched them or not watched them all, I encourage them to do. So. It's really, really good content. And the energy you bring to life is an inspiration. Well, I appreciate that. I'm not a juicer, but I've learned to be one day and I enjoy that. But I, I think back to your last question and what you just said, honestly, I think that maybe the hope I can bring is there's so many smart people, Nate, that they're way before my age and they're not far behind yours with great ideas and how do we [inaudible] companies and communities and government and all others realize the solution is really within us, right?

Gary: I mean, it, it, that's [inaudible] easily said, but how do we together figuring out how to really be collaborative and cohesive in this? We'll all make money. And by the way, there's, you know, I've run nonprofits at building one, but it's not about that. It's making money by doing good, making money by doing good [inaudible] that's for everybody.

Nate: Gary, you truly are a disruptive force for good and an inspiration to me personally. Thank you for spending some time with me today.

Gary: You know, I will just say this one last comment. You know what, Nate, you've done amazing work. You're doing it as at work and your voice and what you from those of us that try to help. And that's, that's powerful. So thank you for allowing me this privilege. Peace.