**Episode 1 – Human Resources**

**Steve Miranda, Senior Advisor at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors**

**Ms. Stacie Berdan, International Careers Expert (Podcast Host)**

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**Stacie Berdan:**

Welcome to the Global Careers podcast, sponsored by GW-CIBER! THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world about what it’s like to work globally. If you love adventure and thrive on taking risks and operating outside your comfort zone, join us as we explore the ins and outs of pursuing an international career! My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, and I’ll be your host! Our First Season dives into what it’s like **Working Globally Through the Pandemic** – and the outlook for global careers in a post-COVID-19 world.

The coronavirus pandemic has made adaptability the new normal as we all figure out new ways of working. But one field in particular has had the spotlight on it from the very beginning: Human Resources. As organizations transitioned to a remote workforce model almost overnight, the need to keep employees engaged, committed, and inspired elevated the importance of HR professionals within their organizations as never before.

Steve Miranda is a global HR executive with almost 40 years of experience in the corporate, non-profit, education and public sectors. He has lived and worked in Hong Kong with responsibility throughout the region, and most recently has witnessed firsthand the effects of the pandemic on the workplace at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

Steve believes in the power of great HR and says that now is a terrific time to be in the field because the value of HR is more apparent than ever. He observes how HR practitioners have had to rethink what and how they communicate with employees on a greater scale than ever before. He shares his perspective on how telework allows for a more accessible global workforce, which requires workers to be much more culturally savvy. Why does he see technology and diversity playing the most critical roles for all workers in the future? Have a listen as Steve takes us into a world where he reimagines what HR can contribute to the new complex global workplace post COVID-19 – and offers sound advice for the global workforce of the future.

Hi and welcome, Steve! It is always a pleasure to have a conversation with you about any and all things global – and particularly today about international careers and working globally through the pandemic.

**Steve Miranda:**

Thanks, Stacie. It’s always a delight to catch up with you and talk about a subject very near and dear to my heart.

**Stacie Berdan:**

One of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the many professional opportunities that are out there. You have had quite the career working across many industries and for many top-notch organizations over the course of almost 40 years. Tell us about it.

**Steve Miranda:**

Sure, you know Stacie, I have been incredibly fortunate to work at some terrific organizations. These include Bell Laboratories, Lucent Technologies, the Society for Human Resource Management, Cornell University, and, most recently, my role at the Federal Reserve Board of Governors. During my career, I sometimes refer to myself as what I call a split personality professional, and that is because my graduate degree is actually Computer Science and I spent the first part of my career doing large-scale software development for Bell Labs. I then took a rotation into a strategy and marketing development job, and then from that role I moved over to human resources, where I found that I really enjoy the function. And I’ve been in human resources for about the last 25 years. Moving from Lucent Technologies to the Society for Human Resource Management, to Cornell University, and now to the Fed.

Most recently, at the Fed, I’ve sort of come back home again because my portfolio consists of both human resources function as well as what I call technology application - so this would be the HRIS system, financial systems, etc. And, you know, as I look back on that, I’ve had the benefit of some great experiences across for-profit corporations, a major non-profit, an Ivy League school, and now a well-respected federal agency in the public sector.

**Stacie Berdan:**

What an amazing career! You certainly have worked for some outstanding organizations. And it’s evident that you enjoy your work in HR. What is it that you like the most about it? And what advice do you have for students considering a career in HR?

**Steve Miranda:**

I’m not going to go with the standard book answer on this. I’m going to go with a more spiritual or a more aspirational description of HR because I think at its core, the HR function is a dream enabler. It helps individuals achieve their dreams, it helps organizations achieve their dreams, and what I love the most about it is that it’s simultaneously extremely simple and incredible complex. It’s simple from the perspective that it’s all about motivation and enablement of individuals and organizations. It’s complex because what you soon find out as you travel around the world and work with different peoples and cultures, is that what motivates people, is what motivates people. And what that means is that it’s exceptionally complicated to understanding exactly what the best processes or systems or approaches to put in place are. You know, I’ll give you a couple of examples of how you need to be especially clever in thinking about an HR career. One would be a situation where we found ourselves in some pretty, you know, challenging financial situation, and the word came down from top to go ahead and cut back on almost all of our training. Well, my training and development team went to the business leaders and they came up with a proposal that says “hey, how about if you don’t cut our training budget at all, but the only thing we focus on in training for this year is how to handle cost reductions or what are better ways to go ahead and put in place cost mitigation strategies?” Needless to say, there was a little bit of pushback initially, but we put that sort of program in place and we ended up paying back dividends to the organizations many times over. So, there’s an example of what I call HR being extremely simple by putting in place a simple program, but also being extremely complicated in trying to understand exactly what the business was facing and how to go ahead and deal with it.

**Stacie Berdan:**

You have painted a very clear picture of HR, and I am pretty sure that I can hear a collective murmur of approval and clapping from HR professionals around the world! But every organization does not place the same value on HR, so how do you deal with that challenge?

**Steve Miranda:**

Yeah, I know, you’re absolutely right. I think the biggest challenge comes from the function itself. In many organizations, HR is considered one of the lesser contributors to the output or the productivity of the organization. I’ve been fortunate enough to work in organizations where that’s not been the case. And when I talk to leaders who are frustrated about the role HR has, what I chat with them about is… well it’s almost certain that the organization leader has never experienced great HR. You know, think about it like great food or great book or watching a great ballet. You need to show them that what they have experienced so far falls very short on what the profession is capable of delivering.

You know, great HR is a function of two things. Number one is a function of the individual practicing it, their experience, their wisdom, their professionalism, their attitude. But it also is a function of the organizations’ appreciation of how profoundly it can impact their performance. So the biggest challenge an HR professional usually faces is the ability to get the organization to look about the function as an investment as opposed to an expense.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That’s super smart and it seems as though the field really requires problem solvers, including globally, especially during this pandemic. What are some of the trends that you’re seeing today that students need to be aware of?

**Steve Miranda:**

Sure, and Stacie you’ve hit it right on the head that the pandemic has impacted the HR profession and industry in two words - and those two words would be “A lot!”

To put a little bit more muscle on that bone, I’ll get a little bit more specific. So, there are lots of models out there that break down the HR function into, what I call, subjects matter domains. For the sake of today’s podcast, let’s just talk about five domains, you know: strategic HR planning; talent acquisition, development, and retention; total rewards (what’s also called comp & benefits); employer-labor relations; and then (the last) risk management and liability. Every one of those five functions and domain areas has been profoundly impacted. As an example, in strategic HR planning – you know, what are the components of our new social contract between employer and employee, how has the pandemic impacted that and our obligation to our employees. Around the talent acquisition, development, and retention - the pandemic has caused us to think about the ubiquity of telework. How can I better leverage my global talent pools? Do I have to have people in my geographic areas anymore?

The second part of the talent acquisition, development, and retention is, you know, what new tools are needed to help glue our organizations together. Is Zoom everything that we need? How is this Microsoft Teams going to work? What about Skype, some of the older technologies? How do we bring it all together?

Total rewards has also been impacted. You know, does the portfolio of our current benefits need to be adjusted to accommodate new employee demands? What about additional child care, what about the work-at-home individual who is teleworking and has an elderly person they are also taking care of? How can we do all these benefits and still fit within the required cost envelope that we are constrained by?

Employer-labor relations – right, this goes far beyond just the workplace itself. What is our role in ensuring public transportation is up to snuff and people feel safe coming into work? What about workplace safety – are we going to install screens or plastic shields between office spaces, what about air purification systems, etc.?

And then, lastly and the most challenging is, you know, how do we manage the overall risk and liability around what COVID has done to the workplace? You know, what will return to the old normal, where it will be just like the good old days, and what will become the permanent new normal, where organizations have to pivot and accommodate to new ways and forms of doing business and work. These are just all fascinating areas, all five of them, and front and center in every one of these areas, is the HR function. So it’s just a great time to be an HR professional right now.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That’s quite a significant impact! And I have to admit that I haven’t really thought about how all of those areas fall within the HR domain, but of course they do, and it’s even more interesting as we think about HR on a global scale, isn’t it? Let’s take the discussion into the changes that have already taken place. What are some of these new work practices that you envision continuing post pandemic?

**Steve Miranda:**

Yeah, I think almost for certain what COVID, corona virus, has done has simply accelerated the trends that were already in motion for the past several years. You know, as an example, many organizations were very hesitant to embrace telework because they, you know, felt it would negatively impact teamwork, organizational culture… But they’ve been confronted by, what they call in mathematics, an existence proof, that when knitted together with the right tools and led by educated supervisors and leaders, telework can be as effective and sometimes even more effective than on-premise collaboration, and it has incredible collateral benefits - you can look more broadly for your talent pool; you can lower your expenses by decreasing the amount of office space… So, number one, I think telework is going to be a new wave of the future.

The other thing that I think will also be profoundly impacted will be the range of where organizations seek out their talent. You know, geographic proximity is no longer going to be an issue; and if you think about the internet as a time and space distorter, we, I think, will see many organizations diversifying their workforce to not only be in multiple states within the United States, but in multiple geographies around the world. Many companies have already done this, certainly the Fortune 200 companies do this extensively, but I think we are going to start to see that practice percolate downwards into smaller companies as they look to gain talent from around the world and source it in a way that will be seamlessly connected though all these technologies and tools.

**Stacie Berdan:**

So, what you are saying is that we are seeing the future of the global workforce evolving right now, and much more quickly due to the pandemic – which means that global job seekers need to have certain skills, beyond their technical know-how, in order to succeed. I get that. But you know, as someone who has worked around the world for years, it can be difficult – and different from the past. What do you think – what skills do you believe are essential to working across cultures today?

**Steve Miranda:**

I think you’re absolutely right. Some of the, what I would call, ancillary skills – what is required to be successful globally today vs, say, 25 years ago, have definitely changed. But I think, I refer to them as the core 5 (or the big 5) skills that I absolutely believe any global practitioner needs to have, and in no particular order. Those skills are:

* Patience – Americans place a high value on speed and you need to understand the timing and the pace with which other cultures operate.
* The second is listening - you absolutely have to be willing to go ahead and understand why things are done in particular ways in certain countries.
* The third is Flexibility – again, Western cultures often place a premium on being right, where, I think, a lot of cultures around the world place more of a premium on being effective. So, how flexible are you in order to get what you need to get done, done.
* The fourth is humility – you know, the truth is there’s lots of smart, hard-working people in the world and most of them don’t come from your native culture. That’s just the reality of the way math plays out. So, being humble in how you approach a problem or a challenge, and understanding that there is value in the local practice, in the regional practice.
* And I would say, the fifth, and probably the most important skill that global practitioners need to sharpen and develop is curiosity. And it all comes down into how you say a particular sentence. Those who say “well, why do they do it this way?” are frankly doomed to failure; versus those who use the exact same words but say ‘huh, why do they do it this way?”, which implies their curiosity and willingness to understand, will almost certainly be more successful in their global careers.

It all has to do, Stacie, with the listening into which we speak. Global cultures around the world at each other and they want to see individuals who practice patience, listening, flexibility, humility, and, again, most of all – curiosity.

**Stacie Berdan:**

So true, so true, and a great set of skills too. And, similar to the results of the research that I conducted with successful global workers over the past decade. And I really like it when the data is confirmed! So what about organizations, companies, corporations – what do they need to succeed in this new global marketplace?

**Steve Miranda:**

An organizational leader needs to be asking him or herself a very simple question, and that question is: Is the quality of my workforce on Dec 31 (let’s just pick the end of the year) better than it was on Jan 1. And what has to be considered as the current skill set of the workforce, how do we have skills that apply to our current portfolio of jobs and responsibilities? What the future skill set will be if we’re moving into new geographies and new marketplaces? Do we have the skills and talent required to step into those roles? If our workforce is diversifying across multiple geographies, do we have managers that are trained in how to go ahead and knit together these virtual teams? What are the cost points of what is known as labor arbitrage – how do I get the most effective output at the lowest and cheapest cost point? And how do we go ahead and manage the risk? I think one of the things we’ve seen from the breaking of the global supply chains is that we had very efficient global supply chains around the world, but they were very brittle.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yes, and speaking of global supply chains, let’s talk about globalization. You have been a champion of globalization for as long as we’ve known each other. But there are critics – and their voices have gotten louder during the pandemic. What’s your take on globalization post-pandemic?

**Steve Miranda:**

The pandemic pointed out definitely several weaknesses in the way the global economy has been operating. We mentioned earlier the brittleness of our supply chains. Countries and organizations will need to find ways to fix all of these issues. Do I believe globalization is dead? Absolutely not. However, we also have to find a way to manage what is increasingly being seen to be the unfairness of globalization. That is further bifurcation of the world’s population into haves and have-nots, and I think that’s one of the reasons you see the concept of ESG (or Environment, Society & Governance) taking on so much new importance around the world today.

**Stacie Berdan:**

You have pointed out that today’s environment provides a lot of opportunity for students looking for jobs, and ways to see so many paths opening – paths filled with all sorts of new problems to be solved as part of an enhanced global economy. What specific opportunities and/or obstacles do you see students encountering if they decide to pursue a global career post-Pandemic?

**Steve Miranda:**

Yeah, there are certainly going to be lots of opportunities as the health and safety concerns around COVID start to be addressed. There are also going to be, you know, multiple obstacles that they’re going to have to deal with. Some of those that come to the top of my mind are, you know, health and safety. The other challenging aspect that people who are interested in global careers will have to deal with is that companies have radically cut back on expat packages. It’s much more local or local plus that is going to become the new normal. So students need to become familiar with, you know, simple things such as what are the tax consequences of me going on a Singapore payroll, or me spending two years in China, or me thinking about spending the next 10 years of my life in Europe but still wanting to retain my citizenship for you fill in the country, whether be the United States, Canada, Britain, etc. My advice to students would be sign up for the adventure and the experience. You’ll figure out those details.

**Stacie Berdan:**

I agree wholeheartedly with you. There are challenges but they are not insurmountable, are they, no. Yet the personal and professional growth that one experiences through living and working internationally is tremendous. And these things will take time. Today’s students may not be launching right into a global career, in fact they have been thrown into a bit of a disarray with the rise of virtual learning, the decline of in-person classes and internships, cancelled study abroad – all of which have disheartened so many. Many people advise resilience, of course. But what other advice do you have for students today?

**Steve Miranda:**

The future of work will center around two major things. Number one – diversity, and number two – technology. So, I would encourage students to really start to understand aspects of cultural dimensions. I mentioned technology, there is no support function, business function, organizational function in the world that has not been and will not continue to be disrupted by technology. And so, getting the skills where you become very comfortable with technology, but also anticipating how technology will change the way that we do work, and the way that organizations do work, is absolutely right at the top of the list of what students need to understand.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Such clear guidance, Steve, thank you so much. You have reminded me yet again how much I enjoy talking with you! Is there a piece of advice you wish you had been given sometime, somewhere along your career?

**Steve Miranda:**

Make the big decisions before you have to and then think about whether you need to take the next job not just from the perspective of the next job but the job you want to do after that.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Before we wrap up, is there anything else you’d like to add, something else you’d like to share?

**Steve Miranda:**

Understand what your information diet is and take steps to make sure that you’re getting multiple perspectives on what it is you’re consuming.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yes! Thank you, Steve. I really, really appreciate the time that you’ve taken to share your experiences with our listeners. It’s been such a treat for me to catch up with you. Thanks again.

**Steve Miranda:**

You are very welcome, Stacie.

[Music]

**Stacie Berdan:**

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast “Working Globally Through the Pandemic” – the outlook for global careers in a post COVID-19 world. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!