
Hiring to Firing Podcast: Grit in the Workplace: A League of Their Own

Hosts: Tracey Diamond and Evan Gibbs

Guest: Fawn Collingwood

Tracey Diamond:

Welcome to *Hiring to Firing*, the Podcast. I'm Tracey Diamond, Labor and Employment Attorney at Troutman Pepper, and I'm here with my co-host, Evan Gibbs. Together we tackle all employment and HR issues from hiring to firing. We are joined in this episode by Fawn Collingwood, Vice President of Human Resources of United Safety. Thanks so much for joining us, Fawn.

Fawn Collingwood:

Thanks for having me.

Tracey Diamond:

Why don't we start by letting you tell us a bit about United Safety and about your background in HR.

Fawn Collingwood:

United Safety is a manufacturing company with a focus on constant innovation. We're committed to delivering the most innovative and reliable safety and survivability solutions that our customers can trust to protect life and property. We have our corporate offices in Exton, Pennsylvania with over 600 employees across the globe, including a very large presence in Australia. And I have been with United Safety since 2001 when we had only 60 employees working out of one location. During my time at United Safety, I've had several roles. I started as our administrative assistant, then moved into accounting and finance prior to stepping into HR 10 or 12 years ago.

Tracey Diamond:

Fawn and I have been working together for a long time now, and I should really say partnering together because it is a true partnership. And I do remember in particular when you moved into the new facility in Exton, how exciting it was because it's just such an innovative place. You see the forklifts running around on their own and really just a beautiful warehouse, and it's just been a very exciting company to watch grow. So, thanks so much for joining us today, Fawn.

Fawn Collingwood:

Absolutely. Thank you.

Evan Gibbs:

So I have to follow up on that. You said you see the forklifts driving themselves around. Are these autonomous forklifts?

Tracey Diamond:

They are. It's very cool.

Fawn Collingwood:

Yeah, they are.

Evan Gibbs:

Wow.

Fawn Collingwood:

We were trialing them. They haven't gotten them into full service yet, but they are pretty neat to see.

Evan Gibbs:

That's pretty wild. I'd love to see that sometime.

Tracey Diamond:

Today we're going to chat about one of my favorite movies of all time. I think I've said that before, but this is really one of my favorite movies of all time, and it's called *League of Their Own*. It's the 1992 hit movie. It was directed by Penny Marshall of Laverne and Shirley fame, and featured an all-star cast that included Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, Rosie O'Donnell, and Madonna among many others. For the few people on this planet who have not seen it, the movie takes place in 1943 when the Chicago Cubs owner creates the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League to keep fans in their seats during a shortage of male professional baseball players caused by World War II.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. And this is the younger version of Tom Hanks. I don't know what it is. Tom Hanks has been in so many World War II era films. I feel like he's like the face of that generation. I went back and watched the clips of this. Yeah, it was really good to see him in this role. It was a good movie.

Tracey Diamond:

Yeah. Even back then, you knew if Tom Hanks was in a movie, it was going to be a hit movie and a good movie.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. We should do a podcast just on Tom Hanks' films. Anyway, in real life, this was based on a true story, and so the league lasted about 12 years. It gave more than 500 women an opportunity to play professional baseball. It started out as sort of a sexist joke apparently, with the girls wearing short skirts, but it ultimately really became a popular sport here in America, known for the athleticism of the athletes. The attendance reached a peak of about a million fans in 1948. It may not sound like a lot today, but in 1948, that's quite a few people.

Tracey Diamond:

We thought this would be a great movie to jumpstart a discussion about grit in the workplace. Let's begin with the most famous clip of the movie, "There's no crying in baseball."

Jimmy:

Hey, Evelyn, can I ask you a question? You got a moment?

Evelyn:

Uh-huh.

Jimmy:

Which team do you play for?

Evelyn:

Well, I'm a Peach.

Jimmy:

Well, I was just wondering, because I couldn't figure out why you would throw home when we've got a two-run lead. You let the tying run get on second, and we lost the lead because of you. Now you start using your head.

Evelyn:

No.

Jimmy:

Are you crying? Are you crying? There's no crying. There's no crying in baseball.

Doris:

Why don't you leave her alone, Jimmy?

Jimmy:

Oh, you zip it, Doris. Rogers Hornsby was my manager and he called me a talking pile of pig. And that was when my parents drove all the way down from Michigan to see me play the game. And did I cry?

Evelyn:

No. No.

Jimmy:

Yeah, no. And you know why?

Evelyn:

No.

Jimmy:

Because there's no crying in baseball. There's no crying in baseball. No crying.

Umpire:

What's the matter, Jimmy?

Jimmy:

She's crying, sir.

Tracey Diamond:

Angela Duckworth, a psychologist, professor at University of Pennsylvania, and author of the popular book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, has described grit as "ferocious determination, the power to maintain your determination and motivation over long periods of time despite experiencing failure and adversity."

I think this is a little bit of a you know it when you see it, because I know of people including my daughter, frankly, who just are really gritty people. And Angela Duckworth has measured grit on a grit scale that she created and found that workers, I think this is not surprising, but that workers with high levels of grit are able to focus their passion and commitment towards long-term goals despite challenges and setbacks along the way. Fawn, in your work, you recruit, you hire, and manage many people. Do you see grit as an attribute that makes a good leader?

Fawn Collingwood:

I do. I think there will always be challenges in a workplace, and I think grit enables leaders and workers also, quite frankly, to overcome those challenges better, whether it's with a better attitude, whether they're doing it faster, or just with a more innovative mindset. And as a leader

particularly, exhibiting grit can play a more powerful role in the business success because employees often look to leaders and try and emulate that grit if they see it exhibited. So I think leaders really set the stage and I think it's a fantastic attribute for them.

Tracey Diamond:

What do you think makes someone, I like to say, gritty? Do you think it's a question of reframing the failures as a way to get around them or get over them? I'm curious to know what you both think in terms of what makes this personality trait.

Fawn Collingwood:

I do. I think that you can't really own your grit. You have to have an opportunity to face adversity to be able to know that you have that grit and to get it and harness it really. You could have a life without a lot of challenges, and maybe you have that innate grit, but you don't know how to use it and may never know that you have it if you don't have an opportunity to really persevere.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. And where it comes from, I don't know. I think some people, I know we've all met folks like this that for whatever reason, something in their background or childhood or something, they develop a chip on their shoulder, and it turns into grit over time. They face some kind of adversity, or something happened and it just made them a really gritty person to stick it out and push forward no matter what. I haven't read the book, but I'd be interested to know whether the research shows that people are grittier in certain parts of their life, if they're really gritty and determined at work, but then they're maybe not so much in aspects of their personal lives or something like that.

Tracey Diamond:

I think it has to do with how passionate you are about whatever is in front of you. And I think that grit and passions go a bit hand-in-hand. Layered onto this conversation is the idea of growth mindset, which is flexibility and understanding that you can develop skills if you put your mind to it, and that all challenges can be faced and overcome with flexibility, but also determination. So those kind of are in some ways opposite ends of that spectrum, but growth mindset and grit go together to show success. Do you think there's ever a time when grit can be seen as a negative attribute?

Fawn Collingwood:

I do. And it goes to what you were just saying with the opposite end of the spectrum there. I think that without balance, any asset can be a liability. And I think that grit can be negative. For example, in Tom Hank's character, when he was so full of grit that he forgot to treat people respectfully, and he lost his empathy in the situation, right? So he was doing it from that grit, but he lost sight of other important attributes that he should have had in that moment. And I think other examples are when someone, to your point Evan, about being passionate about a particular area, you can be so passionate in one area that you neglect another area of your life, so passionate about work that you end up looking back and realizing you lost your family, you don't have friends. So I think that every asset can be a liability in terms of attributes.

Tracey Diamond:

Yeah. I think that you could also lose your perspective. If you're so gritty and so determined, you may not be willing to face facts. There may be a challenge that you really frankly can't overcome and you put a lot of time and effort and money into it and keep hitting it up against that wall because you're just so determined to get over the wall.

Fawn Collingwood:

Yeah. Know when to change course or say no.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. And in the workplace, if an employee who is super gritty, if their interests for whatever reason become misaligned with the company's, then you can have real problems. I've seen this in a lot of the trade secret cases and non-compete cases I've worked in. You'll have, for example, a salesperson who leaves the company, and they've got a non-solicitation agreement or something like that, and they tell them, "Don't solicit those clients." But they are so determined that they're going to be successful, it's like, "Oh, I don't care." And they just don't worry about the consequences, and that can cause a lot of problems.

Tracey Diamond:

That's a really good example.

Fawn Collingwood:

That reminds me of your podcast on *The Office*, where you were talking about the guy who actually creates the code similar to they did in the movie because he wanted to make money and wasn't aligned with the business.

Evan Gibbs:

Yep, that's right.

Tracey Diamond:

How do you think someone gets grit? Is it something that's innate in certain individuals, or do you think it's something that you can train?

Fawn Collingwood:

You're kind of asking the old nature versus nurture question here. And I think that, as I have always thought when that question gets asked, it's a little bit of both, right? It comes from the challenges that you have to overcome but given the same set of circumstances and the same challenges, no two people are going to respond the same way and one may respond with grit and without. So that's the nature piece. And then, as I mentioned earlier, if you don't have the opportunity to face adversity often, you may not know that you can do hard things and may not know that you can be gritty.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. And I think that good leaders can, I don't know if necessarily it's grit, maybe I'm talking about something else, but good leaders can certainly motivate subordinates. Whether it's in a company or a nonprofit, whatever, a good leader can really motivate people to power through a lot of things. So I think at least some of the stuff that we would call grit, I think can be nurtured, so to speak, and can be brought out by leaders with the right skills.

Tracey Diamond:

I was thinking about this, because I think in certain teams, in particular sales, for example, teaching your team to be more gritty could be really important to the team's success. And I wonder how you can piece it out in terms of what are the attributes that make someone have more grit than others and then teach it so that your whole team has that sort of determination and passion to get the job done. It feels to me like it's something that can be trainable, even though I agree with you with the nature versus nurture, that ultimately there is some people that just have it more than others.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. And finding out what exactly it is that motivates people, I think, can be really difficult. Some people just, whatever it is, you're just not going to get them interested in it. That's just the nature of it sometimes. And try as you may, even a good leader just can't get people to engage and can't get them to use that to be grittier. I'm wondering if in sort of a team format, if there's any way that grit could be measured like in performance reviews, or is that... I don't know if that's even a metric that you can really measure, but I guess assuming that it is, is that something that should try to be included in performance reviews? Is that relevant to somebody's performance?

Fawn Collingwood:

To me, yes and no, right? I don't think you can directly measure grit in a performance review. I think that might be a little difficult. However, I do think grit should result in outcomes that could be measured. For example, an employee with grit may be the first to volunteer for projects that come along. And by jumping into those projects, maybe that employee learns additional skills that they can apply to their position to be more successful, or maybe those skills set them up to be more qualified for the next position. So I think that there is an indirect way to measure grit by the outcomes that it produces.

Evan Gibbs:

I think that measuring grit would be so inherently subjective that it could really bring out internal biases that the reviewers have. The things that they think are gritty that the person did, but that may ultimately not be measurable and it may not necessarily be relevant. So I think you're right about really the output and the maybe more traditional sort of metrics that we would use may be more helpful, I guess, to measure that. I think you could certainly mention this to employees, I think recognize it, but maybe not tie their raise to how gritty they're perceived.

Tracey Diamond:

I think that this is actually illustrated with one of the clips that we have, and I'd like to play that now.

Dottie Hinson:

She's really good.

Kit Keller:

She's really good.

Ernie:

She's your daughter?

Dave Hooch:

Yeah. Yeah. Her mom's dead. It's just the two of us. The coach of the American Legion Team said if she was a boy, he'd have took her to the state tournament. I said, "If she was a boy, I'd be in New York talking to the Yankees instead of living in this place."

Ernie:

All right, that's enough. You can bring her over here.

Dave Hooch:

Okay, Marla. Come here.

Coach:

Boys, hit the showers, sons. You can fall off.

Dottie Hinson:

You did good.

Dave Hooch:

Take off your hat, honey.

Ernie:

Oh, we'll let you know.

Marla:

Daddy...

Dave Hooch:

It's alright, honey.

Marla:

I'm sorry.

Ernie:

Come on. Let's go. We'll miss the train. Let's move, move, move.

Dottie Hinson:

What's the matter?

Ernie:

I can't use her.

Dottie Hinson:

She's great. Why not? What's the problem?

Ernie:

You know, General Omar Bradley?

Dottie Hinson:

Yeah.

Ernie:

Well, there's too strong a resemblance.

Dave Hooch:

It's all right, honey.

Kit Keller:

You mean you ain't taking her because she ain't pretty?

Ernie:

Well, look who just caught up. All right, come on. Let's go.

Tracey Diamond:

I wanted to use this clip because I think it's a good illustration of what you guys were just talking about in terms of what is it that we're measuring in terms of outcomes and where grit goes into play. In this clip, the fact that Marla was an amazing athlete wasn't important to the manager because she didn't have the other attributes he was looking for, beauty.

And whether that should have been looked for or not is another conversation, but I do see this as analogous to grit and employment generally. Do you have to be gritty in all areas of expected job performance, or is one area enough? Or is one area more important than others?

Fawn Collingwood:

It's an interesting way of looking at grit, comparing it to the beauty aspect there. I don't know how you could compartmentalize grit, right? To me, if you have grit, you're all in. And I do think it's important to look at all attributes that any employee has, not just their grit or lack of grit. And I think that it's really important to think about different roles. There's different roles for everybody. Some require grit and some don't. I don't think you have to have grit to be successful in every role. It's a little challenging for me to compare grit to beauty, really.

Tracey Diamond:

Well, I think what I was getting at there is the sort of alignment of interest that someone could be a superstar in one area, but it has to be aligned with the interests of the company ultimately in order for it to matter. And that kind of goes to what you said before, Fawn, about measuring outcomes and performance reviews rather than measuring innate behaviors. This clip is really particularly illustrative because there's mixed messages here and potentially the opportunity for implicit bias. Women in particular as illustrated by the clip sometimes face these mixed messages in the workplace. And even when it comes to grit, is a gritty employee looked at differently if the employee is female versus male? What do you guys think about that?

Evan Gibbs:

Well, I think to your first point, there's certainly grit in different areas, right? Like we were talking about earlier, people's focus and their interests may make them grittier at some things. For example, what I'm thinking of is an attorney. You may have an attorney who is not that great of a writer. They don't really enjoy writing briefs or letters or whatever. And so, they're not that gritty about it because they're just not that interested, just not passionate about it, right? But then, they could be really passionate about helping other lawyers, having those sort of soft skills like leading a team, helping direct work, mentoring other attorneys, things like that. And they could be really gritty in that respect and be really passionate about that.

And so, I think that it's really based on where the person's interests are. To, I guess, your second question, in my opinion, somebody doesn't necessarily have to be gritty in all areas. They may just be so-so. In the attorney example, they may be a fine writer, they're just not particularly gritty when it comes to that, right? They're not super passionate. But in these other areas, they may be great and it all can balance out.

Tracey Diamond:

Yeah. I wonder if someone who has more grit is less apt to accept constructive criticism. They think they're this great writer. They're very determined and passionate to get it right, but maybe don't want to hear negative feedback.

Fawn Collingwood:

That's interesting. I often find, not always because we're all individuals, but that a lot of times the people with the most grit are also the most self-critical because they generally hold themselves to a high standard. The constructive criticism, I don't know. It's just interesting to think about that in juxtaposition to being self-critical and accepting criticism from others. You got me thinking there, Tracey.

Tracey Diamond:

Yeah, it's interesting. And also criticism of their team, right? So if someone's super self-critical and determined to get it right and holds themselves up to a super high standard, are they also being unrealistic in the standards they're holding the rest of their team up to so that it becomes almost unachievable? That's, I think, a potential pitfall here.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah, for sure.

Tracey Diamond:

So getting back to my question though about gender dynamics. Do you think a super determined, passionate employee, someone who's more gritty, do you think there's gender dynamics at play here where that might be perceived negatively with women and more positively with men? Or do you think there's nothing there?

Fawn Collingwood:

I certainly think people of different genders have different experiences, and for me, grit would be no different, right? And particularly regarding women and grit, I think the answer really depends, as in most cases of implicit bias, depends on the circumstances and the people involved. But in general, I do think that all of those questions about grit and how they impact women specifically could be true.

Regarding the need to be twice as gritty, for some people that is definitely true. I actually once worked with someone who told me directly to my face that I would need to work twice as hard to be respected by him just because I was a woman. So after I got over my anger and disbelief that he literally just told me this proudly, I got down and got extra gritty just to prove to him that I deserved the respect, that I shouldn't have to try twice as hard to prove. So I definitely think it's out there, and as we do with all sorts of implicit biases and other discrimination, we work every day to fight against it.

Tracey Diamond:

It just shows right there Fawn is naturally more gritty.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah, that's right.

Tracey Diamond:

All right. Well, let's go on to our clip. In this clip, sisters, Dottie Hinson and Kit Keller are both playing for the Rockford Peaches. Kit resentfully plays and lives in her older sister's shadow until this scene when she finds out that she's been traded to the Racine Belles. Let's take a listen.

Kit Keller:

What, me?

Dottie Hinson:

What?

Kit Keller:

I've been traded to Racine.

Dottie Hinson:

You? I told them to trade me.

Kit Keller:

Oh, yeah. They'd really trade you, Miss Star, Miss Perfect. You knew exactly what was going to happen the whole time.

Dottie Hinson:

I didn't.

Teammate 1:

This will be better than the movies.

Teammate 2:

This I've got to see.

Dottie Hinson:

I'll quit. Okay? I'll quit. Is that what you want me to do?

Kit Keller:

Sure. And then everybody will blame me for you quitting.

Dottie Hinson:

What do you want me to do? I'll do it.

Kit Keller:

Stay away from me. Just leave me alone. That's what I want you to do.

Dottie Hinson:

Kit, listen to me. It was all a mistake. Okay? It was a big mistake.

Kit Keller:

I was just getting too good, wasn't I?

Dottie Hinson:

You're not listening.

Kit Keller:

I knew if I did too good you'd do something to push me down.

Dottie Hinson:

Hey, Kit. Blow it out your rear end. I'm so sick of being blamed for everything that's bothering you. I got you into this league.

Teammate 1:

She got her into the league.

Dottie Hinson:

I didn't even want to be here.

Kit Keller:

Then why are you still here?

Tracey Diamond:

We all know that there are folks out there that just don't take responsibility. They don't take accountability for their actions, a sort of anti-grit personality. What is the most effective way to manage that type of personality and put them on the path to success?

Fawn Collingwood:

That, to me, I find to be a very challenging personality to work with. But I think the most effective way to manage this type of personality through my experience is just having honest, direct, and very transparent communication. I think all employees have to be held accountable, and if somebody's having difficulty seeing or is refusing to acknowledge how their actions play into their outcome, sometimes you just have to sit them down and tell them straight. It takes, I think, a lot of practice to have those type of very direct conversations that are often uncomfortable. But for this type of personality, I think it's the most successful way to not give any outs of having them continue to not take accountability. That's what I find to be most successful.

Tracey Diamond:

We've been doing some interviewing with my practice group for a junior associate position, and a couple of candidates now have asked the same question, which is, "What character traits do you see in a successful associate at your firm?" Which I think is a really great question. And what I've said to them has been accountability, owning your work, not sitting and waiting for sort of the next piece of the project to come your way, but thinking through the strategies and developing the cases and openly communicating your ideas to the person that you're working with. And I do think that is very much a trait that makes someone successful in most professional careers. I think it's very analogous to other careers, not just as an attorney. What do you think about that?

Evan Gibbs:

Personally, I think that's a really great way to explain it. Something that's tied up in grit that we hadn't really mentioned is initiative. People, at least in my experience, that have grit, also have initiative. That's so important in any job, and it really, it's not that common of a trait. You often find people that just lack that initiative. Sometimes you can kind of coach that and bring that out, but not always in my experience.

Fawn Collingwood:

Yeah. And I agree with that, and I think it's also important, whatever workplace it is that you work to create an environment where people can be authentic and feel safe in owning all of their work, including their mistakes and their errors, right? Because if people do not have that safe space to be able to admit when they make mistakes, the company may be inadvertently helping people be less accountable.

Tracey Diamond:

Yeah. It's really interesting. Let's talk a little bit about recruiting. So I know your team does a lot of recruiting as part of your role at United Safety Fund. Is grit something that you look for when you're recruiting for new hires?

Fawn Collingwood:

I think it is. I think grit is really helpful in any role. I think it's something good to try and find. It's not always something that you can easily ask. You can't just come out and say, "Hey, do you have grit?" Right? But I think that if people have grit, and if you ask the right question, it becomes evident through their stories or their past work experiences that they do have the grit, right? If they're overcoming a very difficult project, a person with grit might be proudly and eagerly telling you about it, rather than someone who doesn't have grit who mentions it as a frustration point of why they might be leaving an organization, for example.

Tracey Diamond:

Sure. That makes a lot of sense. And I think active listening is so important when you're looking at candidates so that you could hear that, right? How did someone turn a failure into a positive versus just expressing it as a frustration point? I read somewhere that Angela Duckworth always asks the question, "Tell me the question I should ask you that's going to make me want to hire you." I think I would hate that question if someone asked me that question.

Evan Gibbs:

That's a hard one to think through. That's a double negative.

Tracey Diamond:

Right, right. It is an interesting question though, because it highlights what personal traits the candidate values, and whether they have a good understanding of the job they're applying for and what you're looking for in the candidates, so it turns the table on them. What's your favorite interview question, Fawn?

Fawn Collingwood:

I actually like that one, too. I might have to steal it. For all the reasons you said, I like it. One of my favorite interview questions is to ask the candidate what type of training their supervisor would say they could benefit from most. I'd like it because while it doesn't dig into grit, it does help you get insight into how self-aware they are, and also how open they are to continual learning, which is, to me, tied into the grit personality, right?

And it generally catches people off guard, similar to the other question would catch somebody off guard. So it's an opportunity to see how they handle reacting in a situation that they're not prepared for, which is always good. And generally, people will ask about somebody's weakness and they're prepared for that. But in asking about the training that someone else would say they could benefit from, I think they give you a real skills-based answer that really helps get insight in how it would apply to the role versus, "Oh, I'm so hardworking that I never leave" if you ask

somebody's weakness. I think you get a more genuine answer, and it catches people of all levels off guard.

Tracey Diamond:

It's a great question because it will get right to the source of what the candidate thinks is their weakness, where they need more training, right? And also, whether or not that weakness is something that you can work with. And if someone says they don't need any training, that tells you a lot about the person, too.

Fawn Collingwood:

Yeah.

Tracey Diamond:

Well, listen, this has been a really fun conversation about grit and also a little bit about authenticity. Maybe we should make that a subject matter of one of our future podcasts, Evan.

Evan Gibbs:

Yeah. I like it.

Tracey Diamond:

I appreciate everybody listening. Don't forget to tell us what you think, subscribe to our podcast, and also check out our blog, [HiringToFiring.Law](#). Thanks for listening, everybody.

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