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***Hiring to Firing Podcast — Navigating Multigenerational Dynamics: Inspired by The Intern***

**Hosts: Tracey Diamond and Emily Schifter**

**Guests: Naomi Barnett and Elizabeth Stephens**

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**Tracey Diamond:**

Emily, in this episode of *Hiring to Firing*, we're going to be talking about the challenges of managing a multigenerational workforce. In your family, have you ever had any experiences with any family members that have any kind of issues with or stories about age differences?

**Emily Schifter:**

It's a great question. My mom went back to work and joined a tech startup part-time a few years ago and found herself in the situation where she was being managed or supervised by people who were a lot younger than her or in different generations than she was. She came home and was able to tell us all the cool slang and all the memes even that we were missing from her co-workers.

But at the same time, she was kind of the workplace mom and was able to give lots of advice and especially was able to give lots of coaching on in-person interactions to some of her teammates who were maybe a little bit less inclined to do that and would prefer to handle text. Her having that experience has also mirrored what I've seen my clients go through. I've had more and more clients talk to me about the challenges and the benefits of having such a wide variety of ages and generations in the workforce.

Listen in to this episode. We're going to have a really good conversation about some of the things that HR managers are dealing with and some good best practices for them to be thinking about in our new normal, where we've got the gamut of ages all together in the same workplace.

[INTRO]

**Tracey Diamond:**

Welcome to *Hiring to Firing*, the podcast. I'm Tracey Diamond, and I'm here with my partner, Emily Schifter. Together, we tackle all employment issues from *Hiring to Firing*.

**Emily Schifter:**

Today, we welcome Naomi Barnett and Elizabeth Stephens from REPAY, Realtime Electronic Payments. REPAY is a payment technology and processing provider that modernizes business and consumer payments across multiple verticals. The company's headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia with offices and employees throughout the US. We are so thrilled to have Naomi,

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REPAY's EVP of Human Resources, and Elizabeth, that's VP of Human Resources, here with us today.

Welcome, you guys. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourselves, REPAY, and your roles at the company?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Hi, Emily and Tracy. Thank you for having us. I'm Naomi Barnett. I'm REPAY's EVP of HR. I have been with the company for over six years. During that time, we've experienced tremendous growth within the company. REPAY is a fintech company that provides full service payment technology and processing provider for a variety of industries. Our employees are spread out in over 40 states throughout the United States.

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

Hi, Emily and Tracy. I'm Elizabeth Stephens. I'm REPAY's VP of HR, and I've been with the company for over two and a half years. I oversee HR operations, talent management, and talent acquisition.

**Tracey Diamond:**

It's really nice to meet both of you, and thank you so much for joining us today. Today's conversation is about multigenerational workforces. Today's workforce typically is made up of employees of various ages and stages of life. For the first time ever, in fact, employers may have employees from at least four different generations all working together at the same time. To give some nomenclature to it, we're talking Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, and baby boomers all together in the same workplace. All with different thoughts, ideas, and expectations about everything from culture to dress code, to remote working, to technology.

In fact, we had a podcast episode not long ago about *The Emoji Movie* and the use of emojis at work. We found from studying the issue that there's a huge generational difference in how emojis are viewed in the workplace with younger generations thinking of emojis as being something that's an important way of expressing yourself and older generations thinking it's unprofessional, so a great example of that.

Today, we thought it would be a good time for a discussion about managing these generational divides in the workplace. For today's topic, we chose *The Intern*, the 2015 movie starring Robert De Niro as a 70-year-old widower taking the chance to jump back into the workforce to become a senior intern at an online fashion site with Anne Hathaway, who plays his much younger boss and founder of the website. Let's listen to our first clip.

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[BEGIN CLIP]

**Cameron:**

Hey, I need you for two minutes uninterrupted. Remember a few weeks ago we talked about the senior intern program.

**Jules:**

No.

**Cameron:**

Really? We had, you know, a whole big conversation about it.

**Jules:**

We did? Okay. Remind me. Seniors in high school or college?

**Cameron:**

No, no, no, no. Seniors in life, older people.

**Jules:**

Hold on. What?

**Cameron:**

I told you I felt like we needed to do an outreach program. You definitely seem to be liking the idea, so I set it in motion. It's going to be great.

**Jules:**

Hold please. You're hiring senior citizen interns?

**Cameron:**

There's been a ton of research on this, and the results are actually incredible. I mean, imagine having an intern with a lifetime of experience, as opposed to somebody who spent the last four years of their life playing beer pong.

[END CLIP]

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**Emily Schifter:**

First, we want to focus on the comment in the clip about interns playing beer pong for four years when they were in college. In today's world, I think it's Gen Z who we tend to hear the most about. But I remember not that long ago when I joined the workforce, it was millennials like me who got the bad rep. Of course, sometimes, the younger generations are just as critical or vocal maybe on their opinions of the generations that preceded them. Obviously, this can create quite the tension in the workforce.

But as Anne Hathaway's character ultimately learns to see the light on in the movie, there's a lot of value to be had from taking advantage of the different abilities that members from each generation might bring to the table. We wanted to talk a little bit about some of the best practices for respecting the strengths and preferences of a variety of different generations in the workforce. I know REPAY has all of those generations represented across the board, so I know you two are well-versed in this topic.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Let's talk about some of the challenges of having a variety of generations in the workplace. Let's start with you, Naomi. Are there different expectations and requirements, especially as more baby boomers move toward retirement and younger generations move up the ladder? Does this create tensions between members of different generations as they interact with each other?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes, for sure. We definitely realize that each generation brings different perspectives to the workplace. I think it's dependent on where they're at in their careers and their personal lives. For example, baby boomers are known to have a traditional approach when it comes to things like loyalty. Throughout their career, they have only been at a few companies, whereas millennials and Gen Zs see that differently. They prioritize things more like work-life balance, flexibility, and really having an impact on their work. It's important that companies realize this difference.

Personally, I like to think of this more as a strength for a company. If you lean into these differences, you can really play off of each generation's strength and lean into what is important to them, depending on where they're at in their personal lives and careers.

**Tracey Diamond:**

What's a good example of that? That's really an interesting idea of playing to the strengths of each generation. Do you have any examples?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes. Like I said, millennials and Gen Zs, they tend to really thrive when they realize the work they're doing has purpose and impact. Making sure they understand that what they do every day impacts the big picture and what we're doing as a company and what we're trying to solve in our workplace can really help motivate them, whereas the older generation might find

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recognition in different ways more motivating. Just figuring out what works for – you can look at it generationally, but really the individual and what motivates them the best is the best approach, in my opinion.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Yes. I think it's so interesting when you have the older generation supervising the younger generation. The older generation may not realize that that's what's really motivating the younger generation and may – I've seen that sort of stereotype of, "Just get to work. Why are you asking so many questions? Why do you need to know the bigger picture? Can't you just get the job done," and then the younger generation being very frustrated by not being able to see the whole picture. I think training could be a really important component of that.

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes. You also see the younger generation managing the older generation which can be another challenge and training opportunity to make sure everybody understands the different perspective and why the setup is that way.

**Emily Schifter:**

This movie is a good example of that, right?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes, Exactly.

**Tracey Diamond:**

How about you, Elizabeth? Is there a danger of stereotyping or assuming people in a certain generation are all the same?

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

Absolutely. There is real danger in stereotyping people based on their generation. It's a trap that a lot of people fall into, and it can lead to discrimination, as well as missed opportunities on both sides. I actually have a personal story about this. Much earlier in my career, I was meeting with a hiring manager who was looking to fill a role and just casually mentioned that she didn't want to hire a millennial because, in her words, "they didn't work hard." It was a blanket statement and irony was that she didn't realize I'm a millennial. She continued to talk through what she needed and how she wanted someone who would work really long hours and just get things done.

At the end of the meeting, she told me she wanted to use my personality and work ethic as an example, which was kind of funny because she just told me she didn't want to hire me. At the end of this experience, I really learned personally that there is real danger in any kind of generational assumption. No generation holds a monopoly over certain work ethics or values.

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People are individuals. As Naomi was saying, each person brings their own unique experiences and their strengths to the table. If we allow those stereotypes to guide our decision-making, we really miss out on talented people, simply because we have these preconceived notions.

**Emily Schifter:**

Yes. It's an interesting point. To your point, Naomi, of using it as a strength, I would imagine, especially as employers are competing for talent and people are less and less loyal than having stereotypes and deciding I don't like this particular candidate because I think they're going to be a certain way could really hurt you in the workplace or in competing for talent, for sure.

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

They miss out on real talent opportunities.

**Tracey Diamond:**

I wonder how much unconscious bias comes into play where recruiters are doing that, making assumptions without even realizing it based on just how they're interacting with the folks. I guess what do you do to combat that? It's so hard when it's unconscious to begin with.

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

Unconscious bias training. I think that, as well as using examples like this. I actually use this example when I'm training my own team. They're all shocked and a little bit horrified by that, but I think it sticks in their minds. They're like, "Oh, I don't want to do this." That just helps make the next generation of workers more aware of what they're looking for.

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes. I know we do a few things on the front end. I believe our recruiters during the first interview don't use video. It's to combat all types of unconscious bias, including age and generational. But it helps us really get to know the person without making some unconscious bias.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Yes. That's a great idea, and it's the opposite of what we're starting to see with AI coming into the recruiting efforts. My daughter is actually looking for a job right now and just had her first AI-generated video interview. She didn't even actually interact with a person, and so I kind of wonder. What are they scrubbing out of interview before it gets to be seen by a human being? I think that on a broader note that'll be something that companies really have to watch out for that if they're using AI in their recruiting process that the AI itself isn't unintentionally showing a bias and taking away potential candidates based on their age.

**Naomi Barnett:**

Wow. That's interesting. That should be a topic for a next podcast for you all.

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**Emily Schifter:**

Noted. Well, I know you guys are familiar because you've got a lot of folks working remotely. I know you have some in-person as well. I'm curious if you've seen different impacts or different reactions by different generations pre and post-COVID and in this new normal of remote work, hybrid work, in-person work, depending on different generations.

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes, for sure. We have seen a variety of responses from our employees post-pandemic and as we initiate return to office and different initiatives. I do think it can be grouped into generations and really where people are at in their personal lives and careers. For example, as we've initiated return to office on a hybrid basis, a lot of our millennials, let's group it there, are at the age where in their personal lives they have either young children or families at home. They are really prioritizing the flexibility and ability to work remotely, so they can balance their personal responsibilities along with their work responsibilities, whereas some of the younger generation like Gen Z, they have really leaned into coming into an office.

It's interesting. I think a lot of them were in college and had their internships or early work experience totally remote. They graduated during the pandemic. Now that they have the ability to come into an office, they're leaning into that and really see the value of it. It's really dependent on where people are at in their careers and their personal lives in the reactions that we're seeing.

**Tracey Diamond:**

It's very interesting. Well, first of all, I think it would be helpful to put little definitions around this. But when we're talking Gen Z, my understanding is that that's in the 1997 to 2012 age range. I originally had heard that Gen Z really wants all remote, but I'm starting to hear that now that companies are going back to the office that they're actually liking it better being in the office. They're realizing they didn't really know what they were missing before. Now that they're back in, they're seeing that it's actually much more socialized and interesting, and it's a better use of their day to be interacting with people. Interesting that you're seeing that, too.

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes. I think there's an assumption that because Gen Z is into technology and utilizing it to be more efficient that they would prefer to work remotely using technology. But that's right. We're seeing the opposite and that they really are craving those in-person interactions. I think they see the value in learning from the older generations and the people who have been in the workplace for longer and are being the benefits that this could really benefit their career long term by being in front of people instead of remote, whereas people who've been in the workforce for longer feel more established and may not feel the benefit of that as much.

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**Tracey Diamond:**

What are you seeing in terms of post-COVID with – I know you said millennials really want to have that work-life balance and be able to be home at least part of the week. What about Generation X, which is the 1965 to 1980, and then the baby boomers or the 1946 to 1964? Are you seeing a breakdown there with who wants to come back to the office and who doesn't?

**Naomi Barnett:**

I think it's a little less prominent. They're maybe less noisy, as opposed to millennials and Gen Z, when it comes to this topic.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Or any topic, right?

**Naomi Barnett:**

I think they don't have as much of a problem coming in. Elizabeth, do you have a different perspective on that?

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

No, I agree. I think they actually prefer it to come in. Those were the [inaudible 00:15:26] that we were seeing come in [inaudible 00:15:28] or pushing for it. I think that's the group that really was comfortable, and most of their career was 100% in office. I think for them it's just more of what is normal, versus millennials who got very comfortable with working from home during the pandemic and, like Naomi said, being able to balance their families. Then same with Gen Z where they're learning that this can be a really good thing for their career.

**Emily Schifter:**

How do you balance that when you've got more and more millennials reaching those management positions who don't necessarily want to be in the office, but then they've got new hires on their team, and maybe there are superiors who do want to be in the office? Kind of a struggle for all employers, but what are your thoughts on how to balance that?

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

I think leaning into that, being able to impact and have change. I know from – what we did is we had our CEO talk to a lot of our leaders and talk to why this was important and how this would help them. Really give them that why and how they would have an impact by being able to be the examples. I think that was really, really meaningful.



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**Naomi Barnett:**

We take all of that into consideration when we make a companywide policy. As you said, we have four generations in our company, but we can't make different policies. There's times when we need to make companywide policies. It's really balancing all those perspectives but at the end of the day also realizing what is best for the company and achieving our goals with balancing all the priorities of the generations. You don't make everyone happy sometimes with these companywide policies. But as Elizabeth said, explaining the why and helping people understand why we're doing something we found has given us buy-in from those people.

**Emily Schifter:**

Hopefully when they spend time together, they see the benefit, which I think is a perfect segue to our next clip.

[BEGIN CLIP]

**Davis:**

I like that you do the throw pillow thing.

**Ben:**

I was married for a very long time.

**Davis:**

Whoa, is this your closet? Busy man about town. What's in all these drawers?

**Ben:**

Boxers, T-shirts, pocket squares, handkerchiefs.

**Davis:**

Okay. What's the deal with the handkerchief? That one I just don't get it all.

**Ben:**

Okay. It's essential. That your generation doesn't know that is criminal. The best reason to carry a handkerchief is to lend it. Ask Jason about this. Women cry, Davis. We carry it for them, one of the last vestiges of the chivalrous gent.

**Davis:**

Ah. Well, then it's different than –

**Ben:**

I know you want to hang, but I have to get some sleep, kid. I'm pooped.

**Davis:**

Good night, Ben. Thanks again. Will you wake me in the morning, or is that too much to ask? My parents always –

**Ben:**

Too much.

**Davis:**

Understood. I'll just set an alarm on my phone. I hope I can hear it. I'm such a deep sleeper.

**Ben:**

Oh, my God. I'll wake you.

**Davis:**

Thank you. Love you. Not kidding.

[END CLIP]

**Emily Schifter:**

This clip is a good example of members of different generations actually interacting well and learning from each other in the workplace. As you're pulling together your policies and having fix come back in the office, how can that kind of openness be translated into the workplace?

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

Yes. It starts with creating spaces for real collaboration, whether that be mentorship programs, cross-generational teams, or even informal opportunities like lunch and learns where people from different generations can share their experiences and their perspectives. I think when you foster an environment where employees are encouraged to learn from each other, it breaks down some of those stereotypes. Millennials and Gen Z can bring fresh ideas, while big boomers and Gen X offer experience and wisdom. They've tried it already. They see what works and what isn't going to work, and they can offer that wisdom.

When everyone feels like they're heard and they're respected, you unlock a much deeper level of collaboration and innovation. It's really about just creating a culture that values both what's new and what's tried and true, encouraging that curiosity and openness from everyone.

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**Tracey Diamond:**

Do you think that employers should address these generational gaps proactively or wait until issues arise?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Well, I tend to always think it's wise to address issues proactively instead of waiting to react just as a general rule of thumb thing. But I think it really starts with understanding. As we've mentioned, I think companies should focus on understanding individuals instead of the generational stereotypes. When we understand expectations, preferences, and strengths of an individual, you can then figure out how to address the gaps that may exist.

I personally think communication is one of the most important things in filling these gaps, so figuring out what type of communication, both style, method will get through to a person. I think leaders need to learn and realize that you are going to need to communicate differently to different people to get through to them. Sometimes, that takes trial and error and figuring out what works for the person. But I think that is the most important. At REPAY, we do give our manager training on how to do this and skills on how to learn it and learn your employees.

I also think it's important to have a diverse team of people that have different strengths and weaknesses. I mentioned this earlier, but having a team where the strengths and weaknesses can complement each other can really be a recipe for success.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Yes. It seems to me like maybe just knowing the stereotypes is a useful guide, but you certainly don't want to lean too far into the stereotypes because everybody's different. I can't imagine you're going to have policies drafted to the stereotypes because it's not going to always apply, and you'll lose people by doing it that way. But it does help to understand, "Oh. Well, that's maybe why this person's reacting this way because they're Gen X or a millennial or whatnot."

[BEGIN CLIP]

**Interviewer:**

There's going to be a couple of interviews today, Ben. We want to make sure that we both find the right fit. Business as usual is not really our motto, so we hope you have some fun here. This is the first time we're hiring senior interns, so some of our intern questions may not exactly fit your profile. But we're going to go for it anyway, okay?

**Ben:**

Fire away.

**Interviewer:**

Where'd you go to school?

**Ben:**

I went to Northwestern.

**Interviewer:**

Hey, my brother went to Northwestern.

**Ben:**

Probably not at the same time.

**Interviewer:**

Probably not. He graduated in 2009.

**Ben:**

Class of '65.

**Interviewer:**

Wow. What was your major? Do you remember?

[END CLIP]

**Emily Schifter:**

As we just heard in this clip, a potential pitfall. Can you think of any common pitfalls that employers should be aware of when they're thinking about generational differences or even in thinking about how they're going to approach the issue? We've talked a lot about how great it is to be proactive and open to it, but do you see any risks or things that you keep in mind?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes. As we've mentioned throughout today's conversation, one of the biggest mistakes a company can make is falling into the trap of stereotypes and making assumptions based on age. Not only can this impact your culture. But as we all know, this can lead to age discrimination. As HR leaders, we're very well aware of the law that protects people ages 40 and above. I've recently learned that some states have laws that protect people younger than that down to the age of 18.

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From a legal perspective, of course, it's important to make sure you're not discriminating, putting your company at risk. However, just as importantly, from a cultural perspective, leaders need to be aware of the differences when it comes to communication styles, goals, values of their employees. Without recognizing these differences, you risk miscommunication, friction, and motivating people.

**Tracey Diamond:**

What do you think about instead of thinking about your workforce in terms of their age, you think about it in terms of their life stage, people with young children versus employees with older children versus employees with no children, et cetera? Do you think that that has that same concerns about potential bias, or you think that could be useful or both?

**Naomi Barnett:**

I definitely think there's potential bias with grouping people together in any stereotype like that. There probably are similarities. With everybody who has young kids, there's similarity. However, creating a stereotype or a common theme around them is just not the way to look at it, in my opinion. To your point earlier, I do think grouping people together can help as a guide to give you an idea of why things are the way they are. Then look at them individually would probably be my approach.

**Tracey Diamond:**

That certainly makes sense.

**Emily Schifter:**

I love the idea of training on how do I reach this employee or this person and having managers be attuned to that because not only is that helpful, I mean, to your point from a business perspective of making sure that the job gets done well. But it also, I think, does a good job of side-stepping some of the potential concerns with we're targeting you because you're in a particular group. Or I'm assuming something about you because of the generation that you are or that I think you are. It's interesting to hear you say that you have training on that particular topic. Do you find that that comes naturally to managers? Or is that something that they walk away and say, "Wow, I'd never thought of that before."?

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

We do it based off of like motivators. Part of our training is around engagement and what motivates employees. We talked through a lot of different types of motivators, whether that be people who really like praise or they really want the spotlight or whatever it might be. How do we engage with those types of individuals? It's looking more like the individual. Do generations tend to sometimes fall within those motivators? Yes. Yes, they do. But the way we train managers is the more to look for those personality types and then manage to that type.

**Emily Schifter:**

Almost like a love language, except for –

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

[inaudible 00:25:31]. But I love that.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Which has its own issues.

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

That's just how we talk about love language.

**Tracey Diamond:**

It's a different topic, different podcast. Yes. Yes. I guess in terms of our final question, how do you ensure that each employee feels heard, no matter what their generation is, no matter – if they align to a stereotype or not, how do you treat each of your individual? Maybe the answer is you just treat your employees as individuals. But are there other things that we haven't spoken about yet that you think are important for employers to consider when managing a multigenerational workforce?

**Naomi Barnett:**

Yes. I think it starts with culture. I think when employees feel comfortable speaking with their managers and company leadership, you'll find that issues get addressed quicker, and employees are happier and more productive. Overall, it's just a better environment when there's that transparency and open door communication. At REPAY, we believe that this starts at the top. You'll see up to our CEO and executives, all have an open door approach. Our executives make an intentional effort to interact with all employees at all levels. This really helps open the lines of communication and help people feel more comfortable going to your leaders and talking about things that are going on.

Another example of something REPAY does to help this culture is during the pandemic, our CEO started these monthly coffee chats with the CEO, and they started as a way for our CEO to meet our new hires during their first month of starting here. Before the pandemic, he used to travel to our offices to meet everybody in person. However, that halted very quickly with the pandemic. We started doing them over video. While our CEO enjoys them, getting to meet our people, it quickly turned into a way for our new hires to learn our culture and the way that we communicate and how there's truly an open door policy starting at the top. That's been really good for our culture and helping our new hires understand it quickly when they're first starting.

As we've mentioned also, our team provides management and leadership training as well to our managers because our executives can do a lot. However, the managers are managing the day-

to-day, and we really need to cultivate that same culture down. Our trainings help give our managers the tools on how to do that and keep our culture consistent no matter who you're speaking to and the company. Ultimately, we try to create a culture of transparency, respect, and recognition.

**Elizabeth Stephens:**

Building on what Naomi said, really ensuring employees feel heard. Of course, it starts with culture and communication. But we also use tools like great places to work survey. We gather candid feedback, we take those insights really seriously, and we use them to drive improvement and implement changes that reflect what's important to our employees.

I also think, like Naomi said, that transparency from leadership is very important. We hold annual state of the firm calls. We have quarterly companywide calls. We have product demos for the company. We have quarterly business unit calls. It's really the idea is to keep everyone informed about changes, discuss new technology, share what's important. We also started hosting Q&A sessions for internal process changes. These really help employees who are maybe not so comfortable with change or with technology to ask questions. They can ask them anonymously, and they get answers directly from the source. That openness helps employees feel connected and included, especially during those times of change.

We try to offer the why kind decisions as well, so they feel like they are bought in. I personally think the why is important in general. I think a lot of people resonate when they understand. We try to emphasize recognition across all levels and making sure that our employees' contributions are acknowledged.

**Tracey Diamond:**

Well, it certainly sounds like you've really thought through these issues and have lots of interesting tools in place to address them. We want to thank you both, Naomi, Elizabeth, for joining us today on *Hiring to Firing*. It's really been a great conversation with a really fun movie. Thank you to our listeners for listening in. Please shoot us an email. Let us know what you think. If you have any topics you'd like us to address or any favorite movies or TV shows, send them our way. Don't forget to check out our blog, [HiringToFiring.Law](#). You can get our podcast wherever you get your podcast. Thanks so much.

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