

Jon Bernstein:

Welcome to PNC C-Speak: The Language of Executives. I'm Jon Bernstein, Regional President of PNC Bank in New England, alongside my co-host, Carolyn Jones, Market President and Publisher of the Boston Business Journal.

Carolyn Jones:

Thanks, Jon. It's great to be with you on PNC C-Speak. Each podcast features local executives talking about relevant and timely business topics. This knowledge sharing platform showcases leaders with forward-thinking approaches that disrupt the status quo and cause us to think differently. Our guest today is Diane Hessian, the CEO of Salient Ventures. Diane, welcome.

Diane Hessian:

Thank you, Carolyn. Good to see you. Hi, Jon.

Jon Bernstein:

Diane, welcome. Great to have you here today. We're excited to learn more about you and your journey and how it all informs how you lead and live your life. Can we start by learning a bit more about you and Salient Ventures, the company that you currently lead?

Diane Hessian:

Sure. I'm glad to be here. Salient Ventures is an angel investment firm, so we are dedicated to supporting very early stage companies that have a lot of promise. These are basically companies that are solving big problems with innovative solutions and great teams. We only have about 25 investments but even if we don't invest, we try to be really helpful to entrepreneurs. I know when I was starting out and raising money, investors would say, no, to me and then they'd say, well, we really liked you but this just isn't for us. And I would push and say, what do you mean? You didn't like slide four in my deck or whatever. And I knew that there was something that didn't resonate for them, but not everybody really told me the truth. So sometimes, we help with money, but other times, we're just trying to give really honest advice and support.

Carolyn Jones:

And with your background, that's really, really valuable. Your career has been so fascinating and so varied really, but you're also the founder and chair of C Space, which was formally originally called Communispace. That company is amazing because it was really the first company, I think, that leveraged social media to help companies learn more and get insights about their customers. So can you tell a little bit about that story, how that came to be? And it was just ultimately a success that you sold off to a much larger company.

Diane Hessian:

Yeah, I could do the whole rest of the hour on Communispace story and all of its drama, but in essence, we founded Communispace in 2000, on the assumption that the internet, which was a new thing then was going to change everything about how people worked and had conversations. And I guess the company really had four stages. So stage one was from about 2000 to 2003. It was just hard. I mean, we struggled. We had two near death experiences, meaning almost running out of cash. We had a massive case of employee fraud. We dealt with 9/11 and a very tough economy, and it was frustrating and at

times, scary. By 2003, we had figured out who we were. We had pivoted into the market research space, so leveraging the power of the web to help major brands engage with their consumers to get insight and inspiration.

And we built these online communities that you could think of as giving clients a focus group on steroids, we used to say, this always on group of consumers who would serve as a continual source of advice for a particular company. And in phase two, we figured that out and we just started to crank. I mean, we were better and faster and cheaper than any other way that brands had to really understand their consumers, and clients loved us. So we were a rocket ship at that time. We were doubling in size every year for several years. We worked with about 400 major brands all over the world. We eventually moved from Watertown to Downtown Boston. We grew to about 700 employees, and it was very exciting, still challenging because when you're growing fast, people be running into my office going, this is the crazy train. This place is insane.

And we need more people, we need more people, we need, et cetera. Phase three, we, in 2011, sold the company to Omnicom, which is a large advertising holding company. And we sold for one reason, which is that our clients who were big brands like Disney and Craft and Microsoft and Coca-Cola, you get the idea, really wanted us to be global. And we were in a few countries but our competitors were starting to say to clients, hey, I know you love Communispace. They're really great. We might not even be as good as they are but we are in every country and they're very American. So by selling to Omnicom, it was transformational. We were in 93 countries and it was huge for us and it was fun to be part of a large company. We bought a company in London, we bought a company in China.

We did a lot of interesting partnerships and had more resources at our disposal. And then in phase four, I decided to leave and go find some new adventures. And so I appointed somebody from my leadership team, named Charles Trevail, to take the company to a new place. And Charles changed the name of the company to C Space and pivoted it to more of an agency model rather than a tech model. And the company is still now headquartered in Boston. It's led by Jessica DeVlieger. I'm the chairman, but there's not really a board. It just means that I am there to help and support if I'm needed. So that's the journey. Overall, I think Communispace, C Space was a story of hiring incredible talent and leveraging the power of the internet and finding some fantastic investors and ultimately building this client obsessed culture that allowed people to do their best work and deciding that we could really make a dent in the universe.

Jon Bernstein:

Amazing story. Diane, would you please go back, and help us understand the entrepreneurial spark that compelled you to start Communispace back in 2000? And how has that spirit, the entrepreneurial spirit been a central theme in your career?

Diane Hessian:

Yeah, so when I first started out, I'm going to date myself, but entrepreneurship just wasn't a thing. I mean, I took an entrepreneurship class in my second year at Harvard Business School. There were like 17 people in it and there were 800 people in our class. I mean, it just wasn't a thing. People went to large corporations. And I did that. I went to General Foods, which was a large consumer package goods company, but I loved Boston and I wanted to come back, and I found a job in a small company that was in the training and development business. We did management and leadership and sales and customer service training for corporations. And I loved that job. I loved building, I loved the idea that I came in, I was employee number 50, and all of a sudden, we had 100 people and then we had 150 and all that.

It was so vibrant and exciting to be in more of a startup kind of culture. So I loved that to begin with. It's funny, Jon, because I'm 18 years in. I mean, I stayed for 18 years and the reason I stayed is we were growing so fast that every year, I had a new job. And 18 years in, I wanted to be the CEO. And my boss, who's a guy named John Humphrey, who was probably the best mentor I ever had, had signaled that he was thinking about retiring and maybe becoming chairman, and I had a performance review with him. He told me what a great job I had done and I took a deep breath and I said, John, I'm not trying to kick you out, but if you ever decide that you do want to leave, I think I would be a great next CEO.

And he looked at me and said, Diane, someday, you're going to be a great CEO, but right now, you're a work-in-progress. And I was heartbroken. I was absolutely heartbroken. I didn't put my hands on my hips and stomp out of the company, but that's when I started thinking to myself, I had an idea, which is that if I really wanted to lead a company, one way to do it was to build my own. So the motivation, for me, in starting C Space was never just I had a good idea. It was that I wanted to lead. And I wanted to lead something big. I didn't want to lead a company of three people. So in order to lead something big, I had to build something that would be an enterprise that was really successful.

And so my motivation was never, I love the idea. It was, I want the company to be bigger because I want more people to leave and more hallways to walk. We had hallways and all of that in those days. People came to work. But I've always loved being part of the startup community in Boston and beyond because it is joyous to hang with people who have big dreams and to watch some of them start from scratch and turn into huge companies like Flywire and Wayfair and Klaviyo and companies where I literally remember the day they started. And it's just very exciting to be a part of that. So I love the community.

Carolyn Jones:

Wow, you must have a million great stories. The next question really is kind of a takeoff on that, talking about the startup space. So strong leaders like yourself, obviously, are often defined by how they lead and inform when faced with big obstacles or big issues. And you've given some examples of that. And creating a startup, as you well know, presents many of those opportunities, lots of obstacles, lots of issues. You've created companies, you advise and coach so many startups. So I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about how you process and stay positive and focused for your team in situations like that and how you coach some of those startups to do the same.

Diane Hessian:

Yeah. I know what you mean. I mean, in the beginning when I've built companies, the biggest question I would always get asked is, Diane, you could do anything. You could work on Wall Street or you could have some sexy job in a well-known Boston company or whatever. Why would you take this kind of risk with all, as you say it, Carolyn, of all the obstacles and challenges? And it's funny, I grew up outside of Philadelphia on the wrong side of the tracks, and I think those formative years really influenced me because I did not have a lot growing up, but I had a super happy childhood. And so I've never worried about risk. I mean, I just asked myself, what's the worst thing that could happen? And my worst case scenario is that I would be back in Norristown, Pennsylvania and I'd be a barista, which is a lot better than the worst case scenario, a lot better than the lives of many people, even in our country.

And I always thought that I could totally do that because I was happy when I lived there. And so I do say that a lot to entrepreneurs. I was on the phone this morning with two entrepreneurs who happened to be people who worked for me in another phase, and they're starting this company and I could just see how tired they are and how worn down they feel. And I said to them, remember, what's the worst thing that happens? Your worst case scenario is you'll get a job. So go for it. And it always helped me as a leader at C Space and also at Startup Institute after that, when people were really worried, I would say

to them, look, I'm worried about the following 18 things, so don't worry because I'm worrying for you. It was just easier for me. And I think in general, it also just always helped to be open. I mean, everyone always knew our numbers, how much cash we had, what was going on. And it was great because then I was never alone when I was in the process of facing all those obstacles.

Jon Bernstein:

You recently wrote a groundbreaking book, *Our Common Ground: Insights from Four Years of Listening to American Voters*, reviewers have called it a must-read insight into the minds of American voters. Can you talk a little bit about the book and the inspiration behind it?

Diane Hessian:

Sure. Well, you already know that I came from the market research field, so I'll give you a little bit longer version of this. I'll go backwards. But after C Space, I took a job as CEO of Startup Institute, which ran boot camps to help people get jobs in tech. It was so much fun. Started in Boston by Katie Rae and Reid Sturdivant and others. And I was brought in to turn it into a business and I agreed to do that for a couple of years, had an absolutely great time. Right now, there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people in the Boston tech community who are thriving and who got a big lift from our programs. I'm sitting there though, and one day, my office phone rings and it was a friend from my Communispace days in the market research field.

He was high up in the Clinton campaign and he just called, he said, I just want to pick your brain on some more creative ways to understand voters. And long story short, by the end of that call, I had agreed to take on a new venture and quit my job and go help him. I gave my Startup Institute board 60 days notice, and I did, for the Clinton campaign at the time, I did a research project to help understand undecided voters in swing states. And I used all the same methods that I had used and created at Communispace. And it was fascinating because I was sitting in my bubble in Boston and realizing that the country was filled with Americans who had these fascinating life stories and perspectives.

And I loved it so much that after the election, instead of doing what I was guided to do, which was go back and take another CEO job, I decided that I wanted to set up my life so that I could have a chunk of time to really begin to understand voters on a much more systematic basis and doing it on my own, independent of any campaign. So in 2016, I recruited a panel of Americans from every state, from all points along the political spectrum, every age, every ethnicity and so on. And every week, I would give them a project, I would ask them questions, I'd do Mad Libs with them, I'd show them videos and have them respond or whatever.

And the result was a whole series of articles that I had been writing about what was really going on. But I stuck with those 500 people for four years and spoke with them every week. And I decided, during COVID, that it would be worthwhile to just pull it all into a book about what I had been doing and what I learned and what I thought it meant. And in particular, about how, believe it or not, there is just much, much more common ground in our country than you would think, and that in many instances, we just have incredibly inaccurate perceptions of, quote-unquote, the other side. And the book has done really well and is filled with stories of regular Americans and some crazy Americans. And almost every day, I get a note from somebody who says the book's changed their perspective. So it's been really gratifying to do that and to take my passion for market research and listening to consumers and purveying that into a whole other realm.

Carolyn Jones:

I mean, it's so incredibly timely in the environment that we're in. I think it should be required high school reading or college reading, seriously. I mean, with what's happening in the world of the voter these days, it's amazing. And just to those people, 500 people for four years every week, that's incredible, so.

Diane Hessian:

Yeah, I know. People always say to me, Diane, how could you listen to those people who disagree with you or whatever? But it's just, I think it's my passion to try to understand people who are different from me. And what I was trying to do was to not be preachy, but just to write a book of hope that asks people to take a deep breath and change the way they have conversations with their neighbors. So hopefully, it will matter.

Carolyn Jones:

Yeah, we all need that right now, for sure. So Diane, your career, as we said, has been so varied and the book is even more varying. And your courage, your creativity, your success, it really is impressive, I mean, just the stories you tell about being in a job, saying, okay, 60 days, I'm going to go do this thing. And this podcast has often been described and we like to think of it from the tidbits of, and great gems that we've gotten from the folks we've talked to has been described as a masterclass in leadership. And so since this particular class features you as our teacher, what advice do you have for our listeners, whether those are folks who are up and coming leaders or perhaps folks already in the C-suite? What kind of advice would you share?

Diane Hessian:

Oh my gosh, I could talk about that topic forever too. I guess the great thing now about feeling more mature and having led a lot of organizations is I've always tried to get better and better. I guess a few things stand out for me. Number one, I think leadership starts with really knowing yourself and your own way of thinking and feeling. And in my early days, I would say, ooh, I love Carolyn Jones. I want to be like her. And then I'd watch the person and I'd do everything they did, but I wasn't that person. And so it wasn't as authentic or whatever. I remember one day, very early in my career, I was working for a company in Harvard Square, and I had been there... It was a consulting firm, and I had been there for about two years. It wasn't a huge consulting firm, it was only about 100 people.

One night, I'm there, it's 10 o'clock at night, I'm still working, and I go to get another cup of coffee, and the CEO is walking down the hallway and I thought, I'm going to get a lot of brownie points here. He is going to see how late I'm working. And I walked by him and I said, hi, Bob. And he looked at me and he said, hi, and he kept walking. And I thought, oh my gosh, he doesn't know my name. And I took that in the back of my head. I thought to myself, if I'm ever in that guy's shoes, if I'm ever in a leadership position, I'm going to remember their name because it's not a contest, remembering people's names, what does that mean? It's, if the leader knows your name, it means that you matter.

Later on, this became my obsession. When I said Communispace had 700 people, I mean, literally. We get all these new employees every week, I'd have lunch with them, and I knew everyone's name. And it became this cult thing. If you would say to people, what was it like working for Diane? They wouldn't tell you how brilliant I was, my great strategy or anything like that. They'd go, do you know she knew everyone's name? But for me, that mattered for me. The moral of the story is not, go remember everybody's name. The moral of the story is, if you really care about your people, you need to lead in a way that kind of demonstrates that care. And for me, that ended up mattering tremendously. In general, in terms of leadership, I did learn, early on, that I'm very much a people person. And so I learned that I

got the biggest payoff for my company from spending as much time as possible with customers, partners, employees.

And so I learned that I had to fill in the other gaps with great talent. I needed inside people who would make sure that the wheels were still running, et cetera. And I guess the other thing I learned is I thought I had two qualities that were incompatible with each other. One is, as I've said, I care a lot about people, I hug when they do a good job. I know people's names. I know their family situations. On the other hand, I also have a very high bar for performance. And figuring out how to have both of those things exist made a huge difference for me as a leader. I decided that if I really loved an individual employee, that I would demonstrate that by pushing that person hard and by being honest with them, sometimes brutally honest, and by helping them to achieve things that they never thought possible.

So that worked for me. I mean, I remember when I was leaving Communispace, I had one employee come into my office and she is sobbing, oh my God, I'm going to miss you so much, the company's not going to be the same, da, da, da. And I remember looking at her and saying, this is weird, because a week ago, you were sitting in my office sobbing, telling me that nothing is ever good enough for me. And what I realized is that, you can do both. You can have a high bar and really, really push people and then applaud as you watch them develop. I'll give you one more. I give this to people all the time, no matter what size the company is. I learned that there's all this literature saying, when you make decisions, you really need to listen to everybody and involve them in all of your decisions.

And of course, based on how much I love market research, that was a natural thing for me. But I learned that people don't always want to help you make the decisions. Sometimes they do, sometimes they just want you to tell them the answer. And so I created this decision-making framework that really worked for me. So there are three ways to make decisions. One is consensus. And consensus is, I don't know what we're going to do, I want to hear from everybody, and then let's sit in this room until we come up with a decision that we all agree with. So that's one. The second level is input. So it's, okay, everybody, I'm going to make the decision, but I don't know what I'm going to do yet, and your input is really important. So let's sit around and talk about this, and then I'll get back to you.

And the last level is an announcement, which is like, hi, everybody. We got to move fast. I don't have time to hear from everyone. I'm making a judgment call. We're taking the hill, and it's non-negotiable. You're allowed to ask questions but this is where we're going and we need to do it quickly. And I was always surprised how much people appreciated announcements from time to time. And obviously, you do that when you need to move fast, or I did it sometimes when the answer was so obvious to me that I just didn't want to be so disingenuous and say, gee, let me get all of your input and then do what I wanted to do anyway.

Jon Bernstein:

It's authentic leadership, is what you're showing, when you have the conviction and the vision, it's time to move, and also, it's time to find out when you need to learn and listen. It's a great balance.

Diane Hessian:

Yeah. That's what I found anyway, knowing when to listen and when to just say, okay, everybody, line up, line up and follow me. And look, you make lots of mistakes as a leader. I made many mistakes. I said the wrong things to people. I made hiring mistakes. I made bad judgment calls and everything but I think you just have to... You're always hardest on yourself. And so I just walked around with a big broom, and when I made mistakes, I just tried to clean up my mess.

Carolyn Jones:

That's great.

Jon Bernstein:

You also sit on several corporate boards. Some of these companies you sit on the boards of are really large companies. How does being a serial entrepreneur and an entrepreneur at heart and a successful startup executive blend with that work?

Diane Hessian:

I'm on four corporate boards, and these days, the boards take up most of my time. So the boards are Panera Brands, which includes Panera, Einstein Bagels, and Caribou Coffee. My second one is Eastern Bank. The third company is Brightcove, which is also headquartered in Boston, which is the most trusted name in the video streaming technology space. And I'm the chairman of that board. And then a company called Sago, which was formerly Schlesinger Group, which is a very large market research firm. So as you can tell, one of the things I love is these are four completely different companies with very different issues and very different challenges. And even the boards themselves have very different cultures. But I love doing that work. I'm in the arena, I'm helping companies transform, and yet I sleep at night because the day-to-day operations aren't on my shoulders.

Carolyn Jones:

Got to give an interesting perspective, all those different kinds of brands in so many different places and sort of national and local. So that's cool.

Diane Hessian:

Yeah. I mean, I even do that with nonprofits. I was a trustee at Tufts for 10 years, and I just became emeritus. And I'm on the Trustee Advisory Board of Beth Israel Deaconess. And one of the things I love is just, it's like the reason I originally got involved with Beth Israel Deaconess is, I said to Kevin Tabb, who now runs Beth Israel Lahey Health, I said, one of the reasons I'm really interested in this is I have no idea how a hospital runs. I mean, the first thing I did was I sat down with the chief financial officer and said, okay, tell me this, the doctors are employees of a different org? It's a constant learning process and I love that. So yeah, the board stuff is great for me.

Carolyn Jones:

It really enhances everything you do too. And it's great to not be in the industry sometimes because actually, you bring a lot of benefit to the board too, I think. Diane, I couldn't not ask this question, women in the startup and tech world, and really women in business still are, I guess, I don't know if minority is the right word, but particularly in the startup and the tech world, there are still a lot fewer women. And you certainly have been, were and continue to be a pioneer in that space, even though the numbers are growing. So just as a woman in that space, any particular advice or just thoughts you might share on this topic?

Diane Hessian:

Sure. Well, when I was just starting out at Communispace, it seemed like there were three women CEOs in tech. It was Gail Goodman, who was doing Constant Contact, and it was Sheila Marcelo, who was building Care.com, and it was me. And we would see each other all the time. I mean, we'd be on panels

together, we could do each other's elevator speeches. And it also gave us an opportunity to just sit quietly in a room at times and confide in each other.

And so I will always have a special place in my heart for those two women, because I feel like we grew up as startup leaders together. So look, it really helps to have women friends so that we can mentor each other. Having said that, many of my most valuable advisors, over the year, have been men. And we need to remember that it's very therapeutic to sit in a bar and to talk about those male VCs who won't fund us, and those people who won't hire us, and those boards that won't let us join them, and the guys who don't listen to us in meetings, or the classic story, like, we have an idea and nobody listens, and then some guy, five minutes later, says the same thing, and it's like, oh.

I mean, it's great and therapeutic to sit in a room and tell those stories, but I have found that the majority of men, certainly in Boston, have our backs. They want us to succeed, and they're totally up for being great cheerleaders and supporters if we let them. So I've sat down with men in Boston who shall remain nameless and say, here's my situation, you were in that meeting, what did I do wrong? And they tell me what I did wrong. I had one man in Boston, I was sitting, this is, 20, 30 years ago, I'm sitting in some meeting and I'm talking, and we're not on video now, but he's rolling his hand, like, come on, come on, come on, while I'm talking.

Like, come on, come on, come on, come on, finish, finish, finish. I thought that was so rude. But I didn't just take it to the bar with my girlfriends. I called him afterwards and I said, what was that? And he said, Diane, net it out. Three clear points. And what I realized is a lot of women do that in the boardroom. We just go on and on and on. And what he taught me to do was to just say what I thought upfront. We're talking about A or B, instead of saying, well, there's A and there's all of these things that I like about A, and then there's B, and all of these things I like about B. I learned to say I think we should do B, and there are three reasons, baba, baba, baba.

And that was a breakthrough for me in terms of my effectiveness as a leader. So I know the men get a lot of criticism just right now, I'm in a good mood, I want to give the men a shout-out-

Carolyn Jones:

Shout out to them.

Diane Hesan:

... lots and lots of support, including venture investors who are men. That's my advice to women, don't just hang with your incredibly talented girlfriends. Branch out a little, and I think women are doing a good job of.

Carolyn Jones:

That's great advice.

Jon Bernstein:

And Diane, it also sounds like you've figured out how to create mentors throughout your career, how to turn challenges into mentors is a real skill, could you walk through that a little bit? Because you've had a whole list of great mentors, it sounds like.

Diane Hesan:

Yeah. Look, the world is so crazy right now. I mean, if I said to you, Jon, will you be my mentor? Maybe you'd say, yes, but you can't possibly... You're a very senior executive at PNC still, you cannot, in this age of insanity and artificial intelligence and sophisticated financial models that you deal with and everything, you can't possibly help me with all of my issues. And so what I learned is it would be better to have a network of mentors, and rather than to have one person that I was leaning on to help me every single time there was an issue. I could have lots and lots of people, maybe even a hundred, who I could reach out to once or twice a year and say, I've got a question about X, Y, Z, and to have that person really there to help me.

And I learned how to find those people and ask them very specific questions and get back to them and say, Carolyn, you know when you told me to do blah, blah, blah, well, I did it and here's what happens. And I'm really grateful. And then what Carolyn would say is, anytime, call me if there's another way that I can be helpful to you. I learned that people didn't want me to say, can I pick your brain? It's like, no, you can't pick my brain if you have a specific question to ask me. So over the years, I figured out how to do that. And hopefully, there are lots of people out there that feel like I've been able to do that for them in return.

Jon Bernstein:

I'm certain there are.

Diane Hessian:

Yeah. But I mean, having that network, find a hundred mentors. I used to laugh and say, there are at least 50 men in the city of Boston who believe they are singularly responsible for my success, and I am okay with that, because I'm grateful, I'm grateful to... I had so many people help me along the journey. And when you have that network, you don't have to do it by yourself.

Jon Bernstein:

Yeah. That's awesome. We like to close with some rapid fire questions. So off the top of your head, are you ready?

Diane Hessian:

Yeah.

Jon Bernstein:

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Diane Hessian:

All right. I'm not going to give you a totally rapid fire answer on this because I think this is important. I never knew. I never knew what I wanted to be, and honestly, I still don't know. I don't know what I'm going to do next. I just figure something will show up. I had a younger brother, who when he was two years old, had one of these black plastic doctor kits that he'd played with all the time. He decided he wanted to be a surgeon when he was two, and he ended up being good in science and he went to medical school and everything for him was this one goal. And he has done that for his entire life, and I hated him for that because I thought most people were like he was.

Most people are actually not like that. They're like me. They just don't know. And there's huge benefit to that because when someone comes to you and says, have you ever thought about doing something

totally different like X? My brother would say, don't bother me. I'm laser-focused on my career. I would say, ooh, that sounds interesting. And so as a result, I do have this varied career with lots of different experiences, and it's because I never really knew what I wanted to be when I grew up.

Jon Bernstein:

What's your favorite food?

Diane Hesan:

A Regina Pizza with artichokes and peppers. Oh, I'm hungry now.

Jon Bernstein:

What are you currently reading and or watching?

Diane Hesan:

Well, just like the rest of the world, I just finished watching White Lotus. I was late, and now we're watching season five of Formula 1: Drive to Survive.

Carolyn Jones:

Everyone loves that.

Diane Hesan:

Which is great. It's really fun. So you can tell TV is my guilty pleasure. For reading, I've been reading a lot of fiction lately. I just finished The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers, which is absolute... It's very long but it's absolutely beautiful.

Jon Bernstein:

Who's a Boston leader or organization that we should watch?

Diane Hesan:

Well, I talked to you about some of the companies that I love. One person to watch, for all of us, especially for your listeners, is watch Yvonne Hao, who is our new Secretary of Economic Development for Massachusetts. I've spent a bunch of time talking to Maura Healey about how important the business community is. I really believe that a vibrant economy in Massachusetts is absolutely critical to addressing a lot of our other problems. If we are growing and there are lots of jobs for people and companies are doing well and all of that, it makes a very, very big difference for all of the other problems that we have and what we can afford to do and all of that. And I think Yvonne is phenomenal and smart and super capable, so we need to root for her and really help her.

Carolyn Jones:

Yeah, great choice.

Jon Bernstein:

What's your favorite spot in the city?

Diane Hesan:

Well, I love to walk and I've walked everywhere, so the best place to walk in Boston is the Harborwalk, no matter what time of year, in fact, when it's... Oh, is that where you're sitting?

Carolyn Jones:

Yeah.

Diane Hesan:

I mean, even when it's freezing cold and the wind is blowing off the water, it's just an... It's just absolutely beautiful. And I used to live in the North End now I live in the South End, but sometimes I'll still try to go out to the Harborwalk, just like old times and see the beautiful water in all of the scenery.

Jon Bernstein:

And what makes you laugh?

Diane Hesan:

Oh, a lot of things make me laugh. I guess mostly my grandchildren, who are Bennett and Harper, who are ages four and one, and they're also really good at laughing at me.

Jon Bernstein:

And finally, what's a wish you have for Boston?

Diane Hesan:

Well, just at the risk of being predictable, I mean, I guess my wish is that we become the hub for innovation in the world, that people come to Boston and stay here because we are constantly reinventing ourselves and solving the world's biggest problems and thus they can thrive here. That's my wish.

Jon Bernstein:

That's a great wish. And that wraps up another episode. Thank you so much for joining us, Diane, and for sharing your insights.

Diane Hesan:

My pleasure.

Jon Bernstein:

I'm Jon Bernstein.

Carolyn Jones:

And I'm Carolyn Jones. And this is PNC C-Speak: The Language of Executives. Our guest today was Diane Hesan, the CEO of Salient Ventures. Diane, thanks so much.

Diane Hesan:

This transcript was exported on Mar 29, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Great to be here.

Jon Bernstein:

You can find C-Speak at bizjournals.com/boston or in any of your favorite podcast platforms. Until next time.