

## Something Extra EP 101 – Ian Watkins

**[00:01:29] Lisa Nichols:** I am thrilled to have Ian Watkins on the show today. Ian is Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer at Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals. Ian, thank you so much for being on the show today. I'm so excited about our conversation. You and I met a few years ago, when we got involved in the Independence Center with Dancing with the St. Louis Stars.

**[00:01:53] Ian Watkins:** Lisa, first of all, thanks for inviting me to be with you. I'm excited about the opportunity to share some of my thoughts. Yes, the Independence Center, Dancing with the St. Louis Stars is an amazing event. We are so grateful to you, and particularly to Ally for being a star on that evening, it was fantastic. I've enjoyed getting to know you and Ally better since that time.

**[00:02:16] Nichols:** Very good. Well, I am so excited for our listeners to hear your story. I just know that your insights and wisdom is going to help them, Ian. Let's just jump in. I know a little bit of your story, but the listeners may not. You didn't grow up in the United States. Where'd you grow up?

**[00:02:30] Watkins:** No, I'm originally from England. I grew up in a small market town called Furnham in Surrey. That's about 35 miles southwest of London. It's a very historic old town. There's proof of settlement there that goes all the way back to the Stone Age, and every evolution since that time, to the town that it is today.

**[00:02:50] Nichols:** I know and you and I have talked a lot about your mom. I know that you grew up with a single mom. I think you were the youngest of four, right? You were the baby, but your mom was just an amazing person. I know that that was hard and difficult on her, but you said she had this determination and resilience to keep the family together. Tell me a little bit about that. I know that you really loved school.

[laughter]

**[00:03:19] Watkins:** Yes. Let me unpack some of that and we'll take it in order. I'm the youngest of four, two brothers and a sister. There was four years between each of us as we were growing up. My parents separated shortly after I was born. Very unusual in England at that period of time, during the '60s and early '70s, for a single mother to be raising four kids on her own.

She had a certain determination that the family was going to stay together no matter what. She did everything to make sure that that happened. She was a young teenager during the second World War in England, in an area that was heavily bombed, and went through the period of rationing, and austerity that came after that period of time. She was a tough cookie. There was no two ways about it, and you didn't mess with her. It was as simple as that. Yes, she was very determined, as I said, very influential in shaping my life and my upbringing through that period of time.

**[00:04:17] Nichols:** You really didn't like school. Ian, I was teasing when I said you loved school. You didn't really like school, but at some juncture you had a defining moment. You had a pivotal moment to say, "I probably need to focus on my education." When did that happen, and what was the precipice for that?

**[00:04:35] Watkins:** My kids are going to hear this, so I'm sure I'm going to get it in the neck as well. I didn't enjoy school. I was, I guess, a below average student, largely because my interests were elsewhere. I played every sport I possibly could, it kept me out of the classroom. I'm pretty sure at that time, if ADD was a diagnosis, I would have been diagnosed with ADD. I did what I needed to get through school. We were a very poor family. There wasn't a lot of money going on, so the prospect of me going onto university was zero.

My brothers and sisters did not go into university before me, so I went on to work. That's when it really dawned on me that I needed more and I needed to be a little bit more focused about learning and growing my capabilities, and was fortunate enough with my first employer, that they were willing to support me and help me as I went back to school to do my undergrad work. I focused on business and finance, and later went on to do a diploma in human resource management. Then had the opportunity to do an MBA.

As I got deeper into the experience, and this thing started to unlock, probably as I became a bit more mature, to be quite honest, I found a real passion for learning. My MBA, I absolutely adored the experience of that education, of working in those cohorts, really to feel something for

me. I was a late blossomer as far as education was concerned, but I'm very grateful I learned the lesson when I did learn the lesson.

**[00:06:06] Nichols:** You got to where you really enjoyed the learning, you enjoyed the growth. Let me just say it out there, the HR function is such an important part of any organization, because you are the one that is setting the culture, that you're the one that's developing the people. I know for what you're doing today, because I know Mallinckrodt is all about innovation, you've got to be planting that love of learning in your people, to continue to grow. You are the CHRO for Mallinckrodt. For those who don't know Mallinckrodt, Ian, if you could just take us back? I think it was three brothers from Germany that founded Mallinckrodt. Can you tell just a tiny little bit of the history?

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**00:06:51] Watkins:** Mallinckrodt's a really fascinating company, and I've been with the organization now for eight years. You're right, it was brothers that came across from Germany. They settled here in St. Louis. In fact, we have a manufacturing facility downtown right on the river. That is the original Mallinckrodt site. We have more than 150 years of history as an organization, and 150 years here in St. Louis.

It's a company that was founded in chemistry, has had many evolutions, as we've evolved. We've played a role in refrigeration. We've played a role in photography. We've played a role in many drugs, which are used today for things like pain management, other disease management. We've been heavily involved in diagnostics with imaging products that have helped diagnose cancers and other diseases, and have grown to the company that we are today, which is a combination of a generics company, a hospital products company, and an auto-immune and rare disease company. It's a fascinating organization and I'm very proud to be part of the management organization there.

**[00:07:55] Nichols:** Well, we're glad to have you here. Ian, I think I read something where the first time that you became a CHRO, you were only 38 years old. Is that right?

**[00:08:06] Watkins:** It is. I started as a project manager in an engineering company, and very quickly realized that's not what I wanted to be, and made the move across into training, and then into what was then personnel management, and human resource management. I'm a firm believer that there are moments in time that define people's careers. For me, one of those moments was accepting an offer to join what was then Bausch + Lomb, the ophthalmic company. I was working in telecommunications at the time and was given an offer to move

across into healthcare. I didn't realize at that moment how pivotal that decision was going to be in shaping my career.

A couple of things happened. The first thing was, is that I moved into an industry that I'm really passionate about, and that's healthcare. I've been in healthcare ever since that move. That's more than 30 years now. One of the things that Bausch + Lomb did for me was giving me the opportunity to rapidly grow, not only in human resources, but as a business leader as well.

I went from being HR manager for the UK subsidiary, to being appointed as CHRO for a Fortune 500 company in 10 years. At the age of 38, I was appointed and my family moved back to the United States. We've been here once before, but we moved back to the United States at that time to take on the role. It was a very rapid rise and an exciting rise, but also a challenging one, as I found out once I moved into the role.

**[00:09:38] Nichols:** I just love your vulnerability and your authenticity, because you said what you found was, you really weren't prepared for it. Once you got there, you're like, "Oh my goodness. I'm not sure that I was ready for this." What was that experience like? Obviously, you fixed that, because now you're the CHRO for Mallinckrodt, so you've continued on that vein. Tell me about that experience.

**[00:10:03] Watkins:** I think there were many facets to it. I think as a young professional rising in a company, had had the opportunity to take on a couple of international assignments. I had two very influential sponsors in the organization that were really managing my career well. Then some things happened that forced some decisions in the company that put me squarely in the spotlight, and that's when I was appointed to the role.

Of course, when you're growing that quickly, at least for me, things moved very, very quickly. You're in and out of roles in two or three years. You're constantly taking on something new. I found out, when I reflected on the experience afterwards, is what was probably lacking at that time was a period of consolidation in a position. Really, being accountable for the decisions you've made and the actions you had taken.

When I came into this role at 38, I talk a little bit about blind ambition. Of course, my career was to be first chair in the company. That's what I wanted to do, but I wasn't ready. I didn't know what I didn't know. When you're thrust into the spotlight of senior management in a public

company, working with boards for the first time, and responsibility and accountability that goes with that, it was overwhelming.

For the first time in my career, I think I was facing a situation where I recognized I wasn't performing at a standard that I wanted to be performing at, or indeed needed to be performing at. That was disorienting, very challenging.

**[00:11:31] Nichols:** Well, obviously, you figured out what those gaps were. I know you say now, your leadership style, you are a servant leader. You love coaching, you love mentoring people. How can I serve you, my team? How can I lift my team? When I lift my team, that lifts the whole entire organization. What would you say or maybe you didn't even know what your leadership style was then. What was your leadership style then and has it changed? Obviously, I know you're a servant leader now but what was it then?

**[00:12:00] Watkins:** I don't even know, Lisa, if I could say that I had a leadership style that it evolved there. I've always taken a position of high engagement with my teams, trying to bring a strategic vision and direction, but if I'm honest, at that time, I was probably more textbook and less authentic as a leader. That was part of the challenge, it was how do you manage a very complex situation when there isn't a chapter in the textbook that tells you how to deal with that very specific issue at that period of time. The key thing that I learned was that I assumed that I had the answer when really I didn't.

I assumed that you automatically get positional authority and followership that I hadn't earned. Those were the key lessons for me. It was after I left that role that I really reflected on-- I can remember the conversation very clearly with a friend. They asked me what did I learn through that experience, and that's when it really dawned on me that I just wasn't ready. It happened too quickly. Fortunately for me, I learned from it and my career grew as a result of it. I've met people who have been through that experience where it has completely undermined their career progression. For me, I was fortunate that I learned from it, adapted, adjusted and was able to move on.

**[00:13:18] Nichols:** Very good. Well, I want to dig more into that because I know that you have a management tool that you have used throughout the years and I know that that's going to really help our listeners, but we need to take a quick break, and then we'll be back with Ian Watkins.

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**AD:** Let's face it, the future is mobile. There's a good chance that you are listening to this show right now on your phone. Have you explored how you can move your business mobile, too? Our mobile apps team at Technology Partners makes it their mission to move our clients into the hands of their employees and customers and change their business processes to meet the demands of their users. Let's work together and build a dynamic mobile app for your team. Go to [tpi.co/mobileapps](http://tpi.co/mobileapps) and get the conversation started about how we can help you get your new application off the ground.

**Nichols:** Ian, I want to dig into this management tool that you came up with years ago and you still use it today. It's a very simple but thought-provoking framework. You and I have talked about, as leaders, we need to plan this time to step back sometimes and ask ourselves the tough questions. Can you tell our listeners about this framework that you've used over the years and you continue to use today?

**[00:14:36] Watkins:** I really do believe and have subscribed to the value of servant leadership. To be an effective servant leader, you have to have a pretty healthy degree of humility. To have a healthy degree of humility, you have to know who you are, and be comfortable with who you are as an individual and as a leader. Many years ago, I went through an exercise to answer five very simple questions. Those questions are, "Where have you been? Where are you now? Where are you going? How you're going to get there, and how will you know you've arrived?" At the time, I never really appreciated just how powerful those five questions were going to be for me.

Since that time, I have consistently adapted and adjusted those five questions into so many different situations that I've faced, either as a leader of an organization in evaluating a strategy, in problem-solving, in defining how I want to move forward. As a coach, I've often asked coaches and the mentorees that I've worked with, to take themselves through that same exercise.

It's far from rocket science but what it has done for me is, get me to really think about who I am, and challenging me on whether I'm comfortable with who I am. Do I really understand myself and if I can be true to myself, then I can be authentic in my leadership style. That's the basic premise. For me, it works and I think for others, it's worked. It's derived from a self-managed learning tool. That's kind of where it's come from, Lisa.

**[00:16:04] Nichols:** I love that. Well, Ian, I've read so much about CHROs and like I said, I do believe the CHRO is sitting kind of at the heart of the organization, because a lot of times. They're the ones that are really putting the programs and the things in place to drive the culture, and policies, and that sort of thing to drive culture. I've read a lot about what is top of mind for a CHRO, 2020 and beyond. Everything from attracting and retaining talent, to improving the employee experience, all kinds of things, but what would you say?

**[00:16:38] Watkins:** As I think about my priorities at this moment in time, we've been redefining the company over a number of years now. Cultural definition, organizational capability, depth of talent, have been a central part of our discussion for a number of years now, and I've been driving that on behalf of Mallinckrodt. Of course, we're currently in the middle of an enforced social experiment, thanks to COVID. That, I think, is starting to create a new discussion for CHROs which is about the future of work, and the role of technology in that future work and how we're going to run companies in this environment.

What the lockdown, thanks to COVID, has done, is it's proven to many organizations, including my own, that we're a lot more capable than we thought we were of operating remotely, of leveraging technology in an effective way, of continuing to stay true to the focus, the higher purpose, and the priorities of an organization, but just work differently. I'm fully expecting and I have teams now working on how will we work as an organization for the rest of 2020, but then, more importantly, '21, '22, '23, '25.

I firmly believe that the model that we've operated in, up until now, will not be the way that we operate in the future. For technology, ways of team engagement, ways of connecting people to the organization, ways of simplifying how work gets done, allowing people faster access to more information, more data, better decision-making. These are all part of the solution that I'm thinking about.

**[00:18:19] Nichols:** You guys, pharma, healthcare costs, all of this is top of mind for a lot of people right now. I know that Mallinckrodt made a pledge, they call it the Pledge to America. Create the best possible healthcare, the lowest possible cost, for the greatest number of people. I know that one of the ways that you guys are doing that is through innovation. First of all, I just want to say thank you for how you're showing up with COVID, because I know you have a drug that helps people breathe better. It's not necessarily a vaccine, but how is innovation playing a role in reducing the cost of drugs, and making it more affordable?

**[00:19:04] Watkins:** Lisa, thanks, first of all, for calling out the role that we're playing with COVID. We do have a pulmonary drug, which is in-use in the intensive care suites for patients that are having respiratory challenges, and our teams are focused on that. We're very proud to be playing our part in helping to solve this problem. With respect to pharmaceuticals in the industry, the first thing is we need to understand that pharmaceuticals is a very small part of the overall cost of health but probably the leading edge in many areas in terms of innovation.

Mallinckrodt is a very small part of that and we have made our pledge and we think about that in a number of different ways. We think about access, we think about new drugs, new technology, we think about pricing. We're trying to play a part in all these areas, but our focus at this moment in time is in really two areas. First of which is the development of drugs in our portfolio, and making sure we are developing innovative and effective drugs that we can safely bring to market and we're focused on doing that.

The second thing is about improving the delivery of the drugs that we already have in market. We have a number of things going on in that, which will make use of our products easier for patients that need them. One of the things that is characteristic of patients with receiving Mallinckrodt drugs is that they tend to be very sick individuals. They are either cancer patients, they are suffering from some autoimmune or rare disease condition. These are patients that are running out of other options for treatment. We're very focused on that.

The pricing piece, we're doing our bit to try and control the cost of drugs, and making sure that patients that needs our drugs can get access to them, and that's really the focus that we have.

**[00:20:46] Nichols:** Well, yes and we've talked a lot already about leadership, and vulnerability, and authenticity, and servant leadership, but this is something extra. Can you talk about a time, anecdotally maybe. a leadership misstep? Is there anything else anecdotally that might help our listeners as they're kind of thinking about their career ascent?

**[00:21:08] Watkins:** Yes, one thing that our company believes in very strongly is true diversity of our workforce, so that our workforce reflects the patients that use our drugs. One thing that I do believe, this may not necessarily be a misstep, but I think a point which is important for people. As we are dealing with many social challenges at this moment in time, one of the things that I've realized is the importance of being informed and educated, and being bold enough to go out and have discussions with people that really do know.

I've been sitting down in my organization and asking people to educate me about what it means to be black in America today, what it means to be gay or lesbian in America today, what it means to be transgender, because I don't have those life experiences. I can certainly think of situations in the past when I was younger, more naive, more ambitious perhaps, then I had a right to be at that period of time, when I haven't taken the time to be properly informed and educated. I do really believe that with education, you change minds. With training, you change behavior, and we need to change minds at this moment in time. That's what I've tried to do and I certainly made that mistake of not doing it in the past.

**[00:22:24] Nichols:** Sure. Oh, that is such wonderful advice. To engage and to learn and know that you don't have all the answers. We may think we have all the answers, but we really don't because we don't know. We don't have that life experience, so really to take the time to engage in those conversations is really critical, I believe. I think that is wonderful advice. I want to give you the opportunity to tell our listeners about something that you're really passionate about, and if they are passionate too, or if that's something that they say, "Hey, I want to get involved." How would they get involved?

**[00:22:59] Watkins:** Lisa, you and I met through the Independence Center and our major fundraiser, which is Dancing with the St. Louis Stars. I'm now just ending my first year as president of the board of directors for the Independence Center. I've become increasingly passionate about removing the stigma associated with mental health because of our own family connections to mental illness, and my youngest son suffers. The Independence Center is a fantastic organization. It's part of the Clubhouse International network. They literally are all over the world, so wherever your listeners are, please do look at Clubhouse International and the Clubhouse model.

One in five adults suffers with mental illness in the United States. The statistics are common all around the world. Finally, the conversation is opening up about mental illness and its impact on those that suffer, and families, and caregivers. The Independence Center, we have a mission to improve the quality of lives of adults suffering with persistent mental illness. COVID has put a lot of pressure on us as an organization, because it's put a lot of pressure on people that suffer with mental illness. I would ask you, if you are in the St. Louis area or if your listeners anywhere, be inquisitive. If you're not informed and educated around mental illness, do some research.

It's simple, internet, half an hour, and you're going to have your minds open to the physical, emotional, and financial cost of mental illness. There are things that we can do to change that

and the first thing is we got to start the conversation and talk about the subject. That's my shout out. If you're in St. Louis, please go to and support the Independence Center. Economically, we're struggling at this moment in time because of the pressures that have been created by COVID. We are absolutely dedicated to our members, and we'll do everything that's right for them, but we need more people, educated, aware, and willing to stand up for those that suffer with mental illness.

**[00:24:58] Nichols:** They are doing amazing work. Everything from skill-building, to finance, and budgeting skills, to giving people the dignity of employment. When things start opening up, if you have not visited the Independence Center, I would highly encourage it. It's down in the Cortex area, down where the CIC is. Go down, ask for Abby Berger. She'll give you the VIP tour. Just go and check it out, and see what they're doing. We definitely could use the support. Ian, thank you so much. Thank you for making the time. This has just been so much fun for me. I know that this is going to really help our listeners. Thank you for giving up your time and your talent today.

**[00:25:42] Watkins:** Lisa, it's been a pleasure. Again, thank you for inviting.