

LAURA BICKLE

Thriving on Change

By **Symone C. Skrzycki**

Laura Bickle is passionate about helping people bring their “best selves” to the workplace and beyond. How does she do it? With compassion, a grasp of complex issues and an emphasis on adapting.

“I think it’s the challenge of it (change) that I enjoy,” Bickle declares. Her career spans 28 years at Eli Lilly and Company, where she’s VP of HR for Business Units and Lilly USA. “Delivering change takes planning and appreciation of multiple perspectives. It takes a lot of influence, commitment and tenacity. It’s always challenging.”

Bickle leads a team that provides HR support to Lilly’s therapeutic businesses: diabetes, oncology and immunology/pain.

“We have to ensure we meet the needs of customers and that patients in the U.S. have access to our medicines,” she stresses. “It’s important work and critical for patients and people suffering with these conditions.”

When Bickle joined Lilly, she was a recent college graduate and utilized her computer science degree in an information technology position. In 2001, she entered the human resources realm, concentrating on compensation and benefits, which she considers her “first love.” From there, her HR career took off.

Highlights include working in total rewards (compensation, benefits, employee health and well-being, and global security), serving as the HR director for operations in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and playing a leadership role in both the acquisition of Novartis Animal Health (2014), as well as the ultimate divestiture of Elanco, Lilly’s



animal health business, in 2018.

As the pandemic hit earlier this year, she rose to the task of navigating change by heading up efforts surrounding Lilly’s COVID response for its U.S. commercial business.

“Should people work from home? What are our guidelines? All of those kinds of things,” Bickle shares. “But also our business considerations: Will our U.S. call centers for patients be able to stay operational? If our vendors have to work from home, do they have computers? Do they have the right technology to meet with our customers once we all work remotely?”

“It was very challenging and definitely took a great team to help us work through these things. And things that we put in place for short-term solutions – now that this is looking like it will be a little longer term, we’re revisiting (those issues). It’s been a year of learning and change for sure.”

Along with adjusting, Bickle’s leadership approach emphasizes mentoring.

“Hopefully I’m known as a pretty approachable and authentic person, which has put me in a position to be serving as a constant mentor and coach in the organization,” she reflects. “I’m a formal mentor to several individuals at Lilly, but I also try to build a mentoring and sponsoring approach into how I operate as a leader ... make sure people (who do great work) are seen. Invest in my team’s development to make sure that everyone – including myself – is as effective as possible.”

As for her take on what’s coming next in the HR world?

“I feel like now and moving forward, our value is in delivering people intervention that aligns with business goals, including enabling highly capable, diverse leaders and workforce for the future.”