



## Episode 8 – Procurement in the Healthcare Industry

**Michael McKenna, Head of Procurement, GenesisCare**  
**Stacie Berdan, International Careers Expert (Podcast Host)**

[Music]

### **Stacie Berdan:**

Welcome to the Global Careers podcast, sponsored by GW-CIBER! THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world about what it's like to work globally. If you love adventure and thrive on taking risks and operating outside your comfort zone, join us as we explore the ins and outs of pursuing an international career! My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, and I'll be your host! Our First Season dives into what it's like **Working Globally Through the Pandemic** – and the outlook for global careers in a post-COVID-19 world.

Today I have the pleasure of speaking with Michael McKenna – Head of Procurement for GenesisCare. Michael has a career of more than 25 years spanning academia, international development, pharmaceutical, and banking on a global scale. He spent the better part of five years living and working in Bangladesh and India and working with and managing teams for two decades throughout Europe and Asia. We are excited to have him with us to talk about global careers, and in particular, procurement, as well as starting a new role with a global company mid-pandemic.

Welcome Michael, it's a pleasure to have you.

### **Michael McKenna:**

It's a pleasure to be here, Stacie; it's good to catch up.

### **Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah... So, tell me – just dive right into it – what are you working on these days, what are you up to?

### **Michael McKenna:**

Well, I joined a new company back in November of last year. I joined GenesisCare as Head of Procurement in the US. A little background of GenesisCare – it's a global community-based integrated cancer-care network that treats more than half a million patients worldwide annually, and as the Head of Procurement I lead our efforts to manage the quality and quantity of our expenditures on goods and services to ensure that our patients receive the highest quality of medical care at a reasonable cost. And, as a global healthcare delivery organization GenesisCare purchases or leases everything – from specialty pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, to linear accelerator software, professional services, and real estate. So, it's a full basket of commodities, goods, and services.

### **Stacie Berdan:**

That's wonderful, especially being in healthcare right now. I imagine there must be a lot of challenges and starting a new job mid-pandemic is both exciting and a bit intimidating. And, as you mentioned, it's based in Australia, one that's not as old and as established as one of the other 100 year + old companies that you had worked with in the past. But is it more nimble? What is it like working for a smaller company actually based half-way around the world these days?



**Michael McKenna:**

Yeah, so, very much different than working for companies with 150-year categories. GenesisCare is about fifteen years old, and just landed in the US in the middle of 2020. So, yeah, it's chaotic, there's kind of, you know, digestion, integration of an acquisition at play and simultaneously we are trying to grow the business. So, rapid growth ambitions, and the same time it's a regulated enterprise, just all the others I've worked in before, so plenty to come up to speed on to make sure that we don't mess things up. As for the process of joining the company in the pandemic – the entire process was virtual, and six months in I have yet to meet any of my colleagues face to face. Honestly, I've been working across time zones in global companies my entire career, and I would say probably the last 5 to 7 years most of my working days (and nights for that matter) have been spent predominantly in virtual IT-mediated collaboration. Exactly what we are doing right now. So, in the end, it wasn't so different day to day, with the exception of reduced commuting and dry-cleaning costs and the on-boarding period – so that was a good thing. But, with all seriousness, I don't mean to suggest that I am a 100% virtual convert or cyber evangelist. There are certain misses in the form of chance encounters, interpersonal cues, and organizational dynamics that can only be picked up live. And also, as someone new to the point-of-care side of the healthcare business, there is no substitute for me getting to our clinical sights, which, I'm happy to report, will begin in exactly two weeks when I will be fully vaccinated.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Oh, that's fantastic, that sounds great. That's really interesting... I mean, besides though the virtual which we've all become pretty accustomed to in the last year plus, what else has changed? You've switched jobs mid-pandemic when there were obviously a lot of changes with the virtual workspace, but have you noticed anything else with respect to the switch in the last year, eighteen months?

**Michael McKenna:**

Well, as a procurement professional, the things that have been most striking have been really the market and supply chain disruptions. These have had material, financial, and operational impact across our business and all businesses. There've been shortages in the supply markets that have had a direct impact, but certainly within healthcare, for obvious reasons, have been felt especially acutely. So, for example, we've faced challenges with medical supplies, masks and disinfectants, but also rubber gloves owing to shortages upstream in the nitrile rubber supply where the market globally is affected and controlled by four players. So that has been a challenge to work through and hasn't only been medical supplies however... we've seen shortages in wood pulp supply which affects a range of paper products, we're consumers of those. There is a global semiconductor chip shortage that affects an array of technology goods from high-end retail markets down to the consumer. And for us, has increased the lead time to supply our recent hires with laptops. So, from a strategic procurement and business continuity standpoint the pandemic has provided only the latest case study on the importance of supply chain diversification and risk management.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Wow, that's really very interesting, because at the beginning of course we saw different things and I imagine, as the months went on, we saw an evolution of these various things. I've read about the chip and it's related to almost everything, right, from cars to dishwashers, to laptops for new employees. That still shows that the global supply chain is a bit fragile, is a bit fractured, we haven't gotten it quite right yet. Do you think things are improving in that space?

**Michael McKenna:**

Look, it's a constant balancing act and I don't know if we'll ever get it right. And I think there's a danger of, as they use in the military, always fighting the last war. And I think each new supply chain shock causes us to kind of evaluate what are the ways in which we missed and let's now kind of ensure our practices, our guardrails, our



controls, diversification strategies so that we don't get hit by the same shock again. But as we know history doesn't repeat itself so the next shock will be similar but entirely unique, right? So, I think, with each new challenge we kind of put through the learning into our memory bank so then we kind of figure out – OK, so how do we anticipate or prepare for these things that are around the corner which we have an idea what they might be but it could be anything, we don't know what. I think the biggest concern possibly going forward is from an overall cybersecurity perspective, so companies across the board are investing heavily into cybersecurity and ensuring that networks are safe and resilient to attack, which is something that is ongoing.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, I see that jobs in cybersecurity are some of the number one. I mean, they are all across the board, around the world, for all kinds of corporations, organizations, nonprofits, foundations, everybody. Everybody is interested in this. That's something that's interesting that we should've been able to predict but now there's just an overwhelming need for that.

**Michael McKenna:**

Absolutely.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Let's take a step back and go to... I mean. You've worked around the world, with stints in Bangladesh and India, overseeing teams in Europe – that's a lot to cover (in a book probably in there), but step back a moment and just describe to me what was the impact that your global experiences have had on you – both professionally and personally?

**Michael McKenna:**

Yeah, it's a great question. For me, the professional and personal impacts are basically the same, they are identical. You know, we recognize that other beings exist very early in our childhood development but we spend a lifetime understanding what that means, because everyone of us lives every moment of our lives inescapably at the center of our own universe, right? And, as thinking machines who have to make hundreds or thousands of decisions daily, you know, we manage our cognitive load by recognizing patterns and using rules to simplify our decision making. And clearly, we'd become overwhelmed if we didn't consciously or unconsciously develop and use those rules. And the problem is that sometimes these simplification strategies cause us to suppress or misread relevant information which leads to suboptimal or worse decisions that are taken. So, for me living and working abroad, you know, across geographies and cultures, it's almost like a form of cross-training for the mind, right? So, exposure to new perspectives, alternative values, different languages – they are all forms of exercise that strengthen our decision-making muscles and pull us, however briefly, out from our own self-centered points of view. So, for me it's really about kind of expanding the ways in which we approach and understand the world and knowing, being reminded that we don't have all the answers. And that at any initial approach to a problem we are coming out from just our own view, so at the extent that you can broaden and enrich that view you are going to be better served, both professionally and personally I found.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, that's interesting. And specifically, you are relating to people, right? So, you are clearly interested in people and the openness, and embracing different approaches... And those are some of the traits that have been identified as needed for working cross-culturally. So what are some of the other things? So, being open, independently kind of thinking about it and, you know seeing how it applies to you and broadening your own worldview... But what other skills and traits? So for our listeners – what are some of the other things specifically that they can do or they need in order to work globally?



**Michael McKenna:**

Students, young professionals – you’ve got to start with a field of inquiry – you get schooled in something, you are interested in something and you are going to embark on a career that is rooted in some domain, right? So, you need to have a solid grounding, technical expertise, whether that’s accounting or science or whatever may be relevant to the industry, cybersecurity for example, you name it, right, you need that fundamental grounding. But as important, perhaps more important in my experience, is that the technical expertise needs to be supported with the broader skills that make it possible for you to be agile inside an organization and across different organizations. It’s unlikely that many of us will any longer joining the workforce spend our entire career with a single organization; we’ll move across organizations. You know, you’ve read the literature, you’ve perhaps written some of the literature that says that we won’t have one but several careers. So, your career is a portfolio and you need to diversify that portfolio. So, you know you can be the most brilliant technical expert but if you can’t get your point across and communicate with stakeholders, you will be far less effective, right? There are always exceptions, I’ve had the experience of having to source some of this expertise, the singular experts, right where you’re going to pay them what it is they want, right? But there are only very few singular experts in esoteric and coincidentally market-relevant disciplines that will ever be lucky enough to command that price no matter what their personal skills are. So, you know, I’d say find an area that you like, go deep in it, and then supplement that with the skills that are required to get on in the world, you know, diplomatically and interpersonally as you can. So that’s negotiation, that’s, sort of, empathy, practicing listening skills and just understanding how to, importantly I think, agree, or disagree I should say, in a way that’s simultaneously agreeable, right? So, there’s no linear path through any business problem and, you know, as we’ve talked about before, many different perspectives that need to be considered. So knowing how to fight fairly and honestly and openly, without making it overly personal, is a really important skill in navigating large complex organizations.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Oh, I love that. So, you said a lot of wonderful things. That last point I want to really highlight. So, being able to disagree agreeably. So, knowing how to actually, I guess some people might say, pick your battles, learn how to negotiate... you don’t always have to be right, but you need to be able to stand up for yourself. So that’s one... That’s a really refined sense of communication skill as well, and diplomacy in a way – they are combined because being disagreeable has a range, right, it’s not always accepted. And so disagreeing is very different from the disagreeable. So, I think that’s a really great advice. You know, I don’t know if anyone has ever been bold enough to share that... And I think it’s really important and honest for young people/young professionals to realize that it’s not all fabulous, you CAN step up and use these types of skills to communicate your perspective, and it’s really important to do so as well. So...

**Michael McKenna:**

Absolutely... Just to pull up on that... I mean, without being overly Darwinian, but you know life is a struggle, conflict is unavoidable. And I think, you know, to the extent that we learn how to fight fairly, that we don’t shy away from conflict but rather find productive ways to approach that conflict, to live in that conflict, and to assert our perspectives and be heard, and recognize that our perspectives are not the only ones and not always going to be ultimately supported, and to come away resilient to those losses where our perspective is not the one that’s adopted... That is a valuable skill to have for survival in business and in life.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Most certainly. Certainly, there’s a lot of conflict now in our country and around the world like that, that I think we would all get along a lot better actually if we appreciate and respect the fact that ours is not always going to be the way adopted and that’s OK. We need to learn to adapt and live with it. But I think also, just figuring out how to deal with that on a global scale. That’s part of living and working and travelling internationally. Is there so much difference out there and, invariably, we are the ones – when we are outside our country, our comfort zones – we are



the ones that are actually the sole different; everybody else oftentimes is much more similar or alike, or similar backgrounds or language or cultures, what have you... So it's really important to apply that as well, I think, beyond US-based job market.

**Michael McKenna:**

Absolutely.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah... So, tell me, it's kind of a corny little question, but is there something you wish you could tell your younger self, beside that last piece of great advice? What else would you tell your younger self, and therefore the rest of the listeners?

**Michael McKenna:**

Yeah, I don't think they are unrelated. In fact, I think they are deeply related. And I think, you know, the one thing that I've learned most, and it's something we can say it now and our younger listeners will hear it and it will kind of resonate, make sense fundamentally... But I think, just the act of living in the world, being in the world – we have to come to grips with who we are, right, and we have to chart a course. And I think, you know, coming into the workforce as a younger person, one of the things that you struggle with is who you are, who you are expected to be, and how do you get along with people as you navigate along that journey, recognizing that you have wants and objectives and desires that don't necessarily align to other people's objectives nor possibly to the broader organization's objectives. So, I think, you know, given that, it's detrimental to be overly obsessed with being well liked by everyone, right? Because part of your success is – it's a tricky balance again – because part of your success is linked to being well liked enough. But there's difference between being 'liked' as in 'respected' and 'liked' as 'yeah, I want to spend time with this individual and hang out'; those are kind of two different things. So, it's impossible to be liked by everybody. And obsessing about what people think of you can be a real hindrance to making forward progress, to be true to your own objectives, right? It's kind of tied to your sense of self. So my advice is have confidence in who you are, your internal makeup, your interests, the things that get you excited and motivated, and know that the career that you are going to design for yourself will be your career and your career alone. And whole it's good to have role models and mentors and blueprints for career success, folks you listen to and rely for advice and counsel, the career that we have is done in each of our own unique ways. We are each the architect of our own journeys, so embrace that journey, have fun in the process. The other piece, I would say, is don't dwell on the end point or fixate on sort of the trappings of organizational hierarchy and things like title or salary to the exclusion of what's happening in the process. Enjoy that learning, that journey, and the contributions that you are going to make will be uniquely yours on that journey.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's wonderful advice. And it's so true. You look back, I look back now and if anyone would have told me 25 years ago that this is what I would be doing right now I would have laughed! I mean, fear of public speaking, don't really like to write that much... and here I am. Yeah, you chart your own course, you follow your won dreams, which is true to some extent... But I really like what you said – just having confidence in who you are, what you are all about... because there is only one you, one each of us and our own career path. So, that's terrific, terrific advice.

**Michael McKenna:**

And actually, Stacie, if I could just add on to that, it is also an important piece of advice to be open to the productive possibility of chance, right? The accidents that happen in our lives, that will happen inevitably that we can't control but that are sometimes wonderful. You know, not every... right, so that's a joke in procurement – all I ever talked about when I was 5 or 6 was buying things for big companies... Nobody, nobody in my generation in



procurement thought they would end up in procurement. You couldn't go to school to be in procurement, but you can now. So, I think, being open to chance and possibility is another key layer on to that being true to your ambition, to be open to the ways that you can get knocked off course. You may find something that's really wonderful.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, I love that! Open to chance, and I like to say – pay attention to the signs, you know, just kind of look around. If something continues to kind of knock at your door, or get in your way, may be there's a reason and you should take a second look and not be so driven down that path as you said, fixated on the title or what have you. Because there is so much beauty and abundance to be explored in the world that you never know where life is going to take you pay attention to some of those things. So that's great, I love that.

So, you've lived and worked around the world, and have had amazing, wonderful, fabulous stories, and this is really tough, but can you just share just one story with us – to kind of bring the global lifestyle to life for our listeners?

**Michael McKenna:**

Yeah, it's so hard, right? Because there is a scrapbook in the mind of all the impressions of all the events that have occurred to you as you lived and travelled abroad. It's hard to pick just one. One of the moments that stands out for me – it's a tiny moment, and there are several – but it's the first time I lived abroad for a length of time, it was in Bangladesh. And we had an apartment right across the waterway from the American Embassy (may be 500 yards across), and a monsoon would come and the embassy would disappear in the sheath of water that was falling from the sky. So, I had seen rain before in South Florida – you and I both have spent there – but there was never anything quite like it. And it's something that remains with me to these days, I can always kind of close my eyes and go back to the times sitting on the balcony just watching the rain. And that, along with the..., again, these are sounds and things that would not mean anything to anybody, but it is those small moments that stay with you the longest, and I think that's really the... it's one of the private joys of living abroad. So there are all the experiences that you can put on your resume, but at the end those kind of fade, and it's the smaller moments of the day-to-day life that stay with you.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, that's beautiful... I can picture it. I mean, the pouring rain you can't see through and the sound and the smells of the humid rain too coming through... That's a beautiful thing. And water itself, I mean just the ionic experience is just so soothing. So, that's a beautiful memory. Especially so many years later, that's the one that kind of comes to you, that clearly made an impression. Especially for somebody who did grow up in the hot and humid heavy rains of South Florida, which every now and then I long for myself when it's cold up here. But as we wrap up (this has been a wonderful, wonderful conversation – you've offered some wonderful pieces of advice), is there anything you would like to add?

**Michael McKenna:**

Yeah, it's a thing that's probably been throughout here, one I remind my kids of – don't be in a hurry to get some place, enjoy the journey, enjoy the ride, kind of soak it all in while it's happening to you.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Absolutely, great advice! You've had a great career just so far and I'm excited to hear the new things that are going on in GenesisCare as you continue there and hopefully eventually get into an office to see some of your new colleagues; hopefully we all get there soon. This has been a terrific conversation, Michael, I really appreciate you taking the time and being so thoughtful about the type of advice. None of this was typical at all, and that's what this



podcast is about – to try to offer different types of insight. You know, the resume tips, all that stuff – you can get that anywhere, but this is about real-life journeys, experiences that have helped people like you that have experienced a global career, and I think our listeners are going to love the session. So, thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

**Michael McKenna:**

Thank you, Stacie, it was a pleasure.

[Music]

**Stacie Berdan:**

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast “Working Globally Through the Pandemic” and the outlook for global careers in a post COVID-19 world. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!