

Executive Interview

2020

As of 2014, Vonage reported approximately 2.5 million subscriber lines, in conjunction with mobile application services

Vonage (legal name Vonage Holdings Corp.) is a publicly held business cloud communications provider.

Headquartered in Holmdel Township, New Jersey, the company was founded in 2001 as a provider of residential telecommunications services based on Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP).

Through a series of recent acquisitions, Vonage, previously a consumer-focused service provider, has expanded its presence in the business-to-business marketplace.



LAURA MCKAIL
*Senior Director of
Learning & Development
Vonage*



RACHEL COOKE
*COO and Podcast Host
Brandon Hall Group*



About Laura McKail

Laura McKail is the Senior Director of Learning & Development at Vonage, where she partners with business and HR leaders to strategically develop and execute a diverse portfolio of learning solutions that increase organizational effectiveness and agility, and leadership capabilities across the organization. Laura is passionate about connecting individuals to the organization, to their development, and in turn, creating an engaged workforce with employees who are inspired to do their best work.

Laura has a bachelor's degree in Psychology from UCLA. She is a certified coach for the Social Styles Assessment and the Hogan Assessment. Additionally, she is in the process of studying for her certification as a Life Coach. Laura has always had an interest in understanding what motivates employees, different work styles and how to help employees capitalize on their strengths. In her spare time, you can find Laura taking photos of nature, participating in fitness training or running with friends.

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst.

She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 15 years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.



Q **RACHEL**

Can you share a bit about your background and career journey, as well as what is exciting about your career and how you got started in the learning industry?

A **LAURA**

As the Senior Director of Learning & Development at Vonage, I partner with our HR leaders and the business to develop and execute a diverse portfolio of learning solutions aimed at increasing the organizational effectiveness and leadership capabilities across Vonage. I've always been passionate about connecting individuals to the organization and their developments. In turn, that has helped create an engaged workforce with employees who are inspired to do their own best work. That's been a common thread throughout my career journey. I have a bachelor's degree in psychology from UCLA, and I have certifications in delivering the Social Styles Assessment and the Hogan Tools. Right now, I'm in the process of studying for certification as a Life Coach, which I feel ties a lot of my passions, background and experience together. I have an interest in understanding what motivates employees, their different work styles and how to help employees capitalize on their strengths.

Q **RACHEL**

Can you describe the culture at Vonage?

A **LAURA**

At Vonage, we are known for being a disruptive innovator. It's part of our DNA and has been since the company was founded as a pioneer in the Voice-over-IP residential space back in 2001.

At Vonage, we are committed to being a diverse and inclusive organization. We respect people and embrace diversity. We celebrate hard work and have an innovative spirit that comes from our employees and our diverse population of employees from all backgrounds.

Vonage prides itself on being a destination place to work. We focus on employee growth and development, engagement and retaining the great employees that we have. I feel that's a thread throughout our culture.

Q **RACHEL**

Why is work-life balance so important to you?

LAURA

A I'm pretty much a self-proclaimed workaholic, and I've been known throughout my career for executing and delivering what I commit to. Not only do I put in the long hours at work, quite often, I rarely take a break. But I also volunteer for several different nonprofit organizations.

Although my husband and I don't have any children, we have parents that are over 85 years of age, which brings a different set of challenges for us. On top of all of that, I have a passion for exercise and fitness. Also, as I mentioned earlier, I'm currently pursuing my Life Coach certification. I have a full life; and like many other busy professionals, the struggle around work-life balance is real.

It started about six months ago. I was getting a little burned out. I was busy at work, I kept putting my own priorities on the back burner and I started to feel guilty for taking time for myself. I didn't want to go to the gym after work because I didn't want to miss out on time with my husband when he got home from work, and then I was too tired in the morning to my workout routine or anything active. So instead, I would log on to my computer earlier than usual and would start my workday. I then started to step away from seeing my friends and family, and was missing that sense of community. In my head, I knew that I could find the time here and there, but I was struggling with that feeling of guilt for doing some self-care and that's when I

reached out to a Life Coach. My Life Coach really helped me find ways to get my bounce back in life, without that guilty feeling. This experience is what sparked my interest in becoming a Life Coach.

RACHEL

Q Do you think that women have a harder time than men finding balance?

LAURA

A I feel like the work-life balance is hard for everybody, but I think there is a unique set of challenges for today's female leaders, and I can speak for myself. We want to advance in our careers, but we get pulled in so many directions. And especially with family obligations, I think there's that extra pull.

RACHEL

Q Do you think leaders will be able to find a better balance in their personal and professional lives?

LAURA

A Yes. I feel like leaders are starting to recognize that it's essential to blend personal and professional lives. It's not about balance but more of a blend of that personal and professional life. As an example, I live three hours away from Vonage's corporate office, so I have the flexibility to work remotely and make the trip into the office when I need that face time. Vonage's products and solutions allow me to have that connection to my colleagues, no matter where I work, and will enable me to be present in both my personal and professional lives without sacrificing the hours of that long commute and the back and forth. I feel like a lot of companies offer this flexibility, so I would encourage people not to be afraid to ask what the options are where they work.

RACHEL

Q What are some of the tips you have found to be successful in helping you find work-life balance?

LAURA

A I have a reminder to myself that I keep on my desk of seven tips that were helpful to me.



The first is developing self-awareness and self-reflection.

I think it's important to know yourself and how you're spending your time. What's important to you? Are you allocating your time on the things that are important to you and helping you gain clarity about your values and goals? I also think about when my most productive time is. For example, I'm a morning person and feel most energized in the morning. So, I always set my most important priorities as tasks earlier in the day because that's when I have my energy, which I learned through a bit of self-reflection.



The second tip is around prioritizing time.

I feel it's so important to establish priorities, both personal and professional. Put the important things first and ask yourself what is non-negotiable? Those are the absolute must-dos. What are the most critical commitments with family and with work? Put them on the calendar.



The third tip is around communicating boundaries.

I feel like it has been beneficial for me to be open with my team about the priorities and commitments I have and thinking about if there is something I can delegate to others.

(continued)

I've found that other team members are willing to help out if you let them know what's going on. So, share, be transparent, be authentic, be real and genuine.



The fourth tip is around structuring each day to meet all of the many obligations.

It is okay to say no to things that don't align with your priorities. I once heard someone say, "wherever you are a hundred percent there." When you're at work, be a hundred percent there; in a meeting, give your full attention to the person you're meeting with; and when you're home, be present. All you need to do is be present for the person that you're spending that time with, whether it's a work colleague or a family member. If you're at home and you find that a work commitment comes up, it goes back to communicating with your family. Carve out that little piece of time and then shift your focus. It's about transparency and open communication.



The fifth tip is around doing what you love.

I really feel that it's so important to have "me time" to focus on passions and hobbies, which is something that I stepped away from for a while when I was starting to get burned out. We are all so busy, being pulled in so many directions, and we need to deposit back into our emotional bank account — as I call it — to offset all of those

withdrawals that are happening all day. You need to refund yourself some of that, and we deserve it.



The sixth tip is around setting realistic and specific goals.

Then developing a plan for achieving them as well as being mindful of your choices and the tradeoffs.



The seventh step is to remember that no one is going to give you that work-life balance.

It's up to you to figure out how to make it work for you. Find your style, find your way and be true to yourself throughout the process.



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