



## For Cloud Professionals, part of the On Cloud Podcast

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**Title:** Cintas' cloud journey highlights flexibility and teamwork as keys to success

**Description:** Moving to cloud requires a paradigm shift in development and operations practices, but it also requires a culture shift in how IT teams are organized and managed. In this episode, David Linthicum and guests, Cintas's Barbara Johnson and Deloitte's Julie Pettit, discuss how Cintas and Deloitte have effectively leveraged teamwork to help Cintas make that paradigm and culture shift. They also underscore how flexibility is critical to overcoming some of the many difficult challenges on Cintas's cloud journey. Finally, Julie reveals how having someone to guide them on the journey has helped Cintas deal with the many challenges and surprises that have cropped up along the way.

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**Operator:**

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**David Linthicum:**

Hey, guys. Welcome back to the On Cloud Podcast, your one place to find out how to make cloud computing work for your enterprise. This is an objective discussion with industry thought leaders who provide their own unique perspective around the pragmatic use of cloud-based technology. Today on the show we have Julie Pettit and Barbara Johnson. And Julie Pettit is the director of HR, IS, and payroll operations at Cintas Corporation, leading the industry in providing highly-specialized products and services, over a million customers that range from independent auto repair shops to large hotels, and you guys know them out there – see their trucks everywhere. And Barbara Johnson is a senior manager in Deloitte's human capital AMS practice and is based in Detroit, Michigan. So, Julie, I'm going to go to you first. So, tell me what I left out. What's a typical day in the life of Julie Pettit?

**Julie Pettit:**

Hi, thanks. Yeah, a typical life. My responsibility includes the HRAS team, which is brand new to Cintas within the last three years. As we've migrated to cloud solutions, we established an internal team. And then I support all of our payroll operations as well. So, we pay all of our about 38,000 employee

partners – we call our employees partners – each week. So, my team ensures that our systems are stable, scalable, and that we can get all our partners paid each week on Fridays. So, that's my week.

**David Linthicum:**

So, Cintas I guess is in the uniform business? Tell me what industries they're in specifically. And I guess they're serving the hospitality industry, but it sounds like other service industries as well.

**Julie Pettit:**

Absolutely, yes. We're mostly known for our uniform rental. We also deliver the mats that you see at entryways. We do everything from a small mom and pop auto repair to high-end casinos, hotel, schools. In addition to our uniform rental and our facility services, which includes the mats that you most often see, we also have first aid and safety, where we deliver training and PPE, which has been critical this last ten months. And we also have a fire division who works on fire extinguishers, fire suppression systems, alarms, and monitoring systems, exit lights. So, we really can be that one-stop shop for our customers and help them get ready for their workday so they can service their customers.

**David Linthicum:**

Wow, and 42,000 employees and partners in North America. That's very impressive. So, Barb, I'm going to you. What's a typical day in the life of Barbara Johnson?

**Barbara Johnson:**

Yeah, a typical day. So, my role is to kind of lead and grow our SAP SuccessFactors AMS practice, which involves supporting a number of clients just like Julie in Cintas. But as it relates to our clients and the support we provide, certainly we want to help make sure, as Julie said, her people can get paid every week. So, our team is around the globe. We have people outside the US as well as in the US supporting AMS, but providing support to the systems, but then also one of my key roles is making sure that I'm kind of bringing the best of Deloitte to Julie. So, if she has an issue or we're overcoming an issue that may not specifically be system-related or AMS-related, we can get Julie lined up with other resources within Deloitte and thought leaders, even other clients to kind of help her overcome those challenges.

**David Linthicum:**

Yeah, it's a great thing in working with Deloitte is we always have people around with some experience that's going to bring light on problems that are typically resolved through experience. And so, having access to all of that is certainly helpful – helpful to me, that's for sure, as I'm out there trying to solve issues using cloud computing. So, let's move on to our topics, and there's this notion out there called One Team Mindset, and ultimately people are looking to be successful with it; however, it really comes to interacting or partnering with other individuals and other organizations. And so, Julie, I'm going to go to you first. How are you successful in a One Team Mindset concept?

**Julie Pettit:**

Yeah, you know, Barb and I together have worked closely on aligning our teams. And what I've found is that teams are most successful in acting as a One Team is when you share beyond the needs of the person you're working directly with on what they need to do. So, I spend time sharing the Cintas story, the Cintas vision, my team's objectives, the mindset of our leaders when I work with teams like Deloitte. Giving them the background and the story helps them process and understand where we're coming from with our requests. So, I'm not just asking for support on an issue or to give me a report or to help me put in a new functionality or system, but explaining to them how we're going to use it, why we're using it, why it's important to us, maybe why I prioritized with it or didn't prioritize with something they might suggest. Just giving them that background and making them feel a part of the bigger picture brings the teams together.

**David Linthicum:**

So, Barbara, what's your perspective on this?

**Barbara Johnson:**

Oh, I think it's been invaluable, the approach that we have with Cintas, because certainly we need an AMS to focus on the day to day closure of tickets, but making sure our teams feel a part of the Cintas team. You know, Julie refers to them as partners, which is what Cintas calls their employees. Julie has been a part of our team meetings, just letting the team know, hey, this is what keeps me up at night, this is where I'm focused, this is what I'm thinking about for the future, and these are my challenges. And it's not just with me as a leader but the entire team we have in place supporting them. And I think it's helped really generate a lot of trust, and our team really understands what are Julie's goals, what are Cintas's goals, and how can we help them? So, they kind of broaden their perspective out of I need to close these tickets, I need to get these closed immediately, but really what else can we do for Cintas?

And I think that openness has also allowed our teams to realize there's this human element. Julie and I have talked a few things about what makes this partnership work, and I think it's realizing that people supporting systems and people – whether it's on the Cintas team or the Deloitte team they're humans. And while we want everything to go well, there are some times that we run into a challenge or roadblock. But there's this very open culture to then address the problem and not focus on finger-pointing but just, okay, we have this challenge; how are we going to work together to overcome it? And it's really made – it's just really made a great culture to be a part of.

**David Linthicum:**

Yeah, absolutely. The human factor thing I picked up in the last ten years is probably way more important than we originally thought it was, and that's coming from someone with a computer science degree, a cloud geek, technology geek, things like that. But ultimately I can't get anything done within an organization unless they're flexible, in other words, the ability to accept change, the ability to understand that organizations may have to change, technologies actually have to change, processes may have to change things like that. So, Julie, I'm going to go to you first. Why is flexibility so important as we're moving to new technologies such as cloud computing?

**Julie Pettit:**

Oh, yeah, hugely important, and we've definitely over the last three years being live on our first large install of a cloud system here at Cintas have learned a lot. And it's flexibility, having an open mind. Many of our team members have come from a traditional, on-premise IT support role, and it's a little bit

different in the cloud, right? You're a little less in control sometimes of changes coming in. You've got to roll with the punches sometimes. Sometimes it's okay to get partway through a change and let's release it and see how it does and then keep tweaking it. Change is faster, so the approach is just different.

And so, we've worked over the last three years, especially with our mindset from a Cintas perspective of being used to on-prem systems where maybe change was a little bit slower, you got it to 95, 100 percent complete before you rolled out. You didn't have other organizations like the cloud software providers influencing changes without you knowing – all good stuff, right? Patches coming in, continuous fixes, but it's just more – there's more change faster, which is what we were looking for, honestly. We wanted the flexibility. We wanted somebody else guiding us through what the new functionalities or industry trends should be for HR and payroll. So, we welcomed that. But it was an adjustment for the team for sure the concepts of how much testing do you do, how much do you not do, how much time do you put in root cause analysis when something changes, or if it didn't break anything do you just keep rolling and moving on? So, flexibility, open mindset for the team, understanding, right, what potential changes are coming your way, and open communication.

So, we've learned through the last three years that going back to that One Team Mindset, right, and flexibility, is being open to blur the lines with us and our vendors, having those extended teams, being flexible with who's doing what sometimes, and keep adjusting until we get the right model that works for everyone and ultimately that keeps our partners paid accurately, keeps our data safe in our new systems, and gets everybody paid every Friday. So, flexibility has been huge. It was a journey for us, but I'd say the team is well there, on their way, and now we're ready to continue enjoying that flexibility, right, and seeing what can come our way so that we can continue to leverage our investment in the cloud.

**David Linthicum:**

So, Barbara, driving flexibility when you're an insider, inside the enterprise is one set of challenges. You drive flexibility or basically the culture of flexibility from outside of the enterprise, in essence to a client. What are some of the challenges you face and how do you work around them?

**Barbara Johnson:**

Yeah, I mean, some of the challenges we face is really making sure we have the right team on the ground for whatever challenge Cintas is facing. So, I know sometimes we go into a project or engagement with a forecast of this is what it's going to take to support it, but it's kind of that continual review on almost a monthly basis of is this the right team? Do we need to bring in additional skill sets based on what's happening with issues, with roadmaps? And then just kind of a continual evolution of our process. We can get started up, but we go through phases with these clients, right, where we're working with them to stabilize. And then it's a focus on optimization and innovation, and so, our team has to be open to change in what we might've done six months ago, maybe something that we need to look at in terms of how we're supporting Cintas or what we're supporting Cintas on.

So, I know Julie and I spend a fair amount of time talking about who do we have on the team, what do we have coming on the team, do we need more on the team, right, so we can scale up. As Cintas has business-critical issues they need to deal with, we may need to scale up. And so, again, it goes back to that open dialogue, but I think on our team it's also the flexibility is a reminder that it's a continual training of people, too, to stay ahead of the curve. So, as the SaaS providers are coming out with new technology and new features and functionality, we want to stay ahead of where our clients are at so that we can adapt when they're ready to support them in the new features.

**David Linthicum:**

Yeah, one of the things I noticed at the start of the pandemic is everybody was braced for enterprises, traditional enterprises especially, having a lack of flexibility to move around new work models. And that typically wasn't the case. I'm sure there are some bumps here and there, but I was amazed at how much the Global 2,000 were able to adapt to the new needs of the pandemic and do so in a very flexible, quick, and speedy way, in essence adjusting to the need of the business. So, Julie, I'm going to go back to you. Things go wrong every once in a while. So, what were some of the unexpected challenges that you faced? And of course, what lessons did you learn from overcoming those challenges?

**Julie Pettit:**

Sure, yeah, the journey from the cloud, right, coming from a fully-outsourced, on-prem world, that expected challenge I would say for us was getting used to the schedules and the pace of change. Things coming at you with releases when you own multiple cloud software systems that come together to complete out your suite, to service your employee partners, and to maintain something as critical as payroll, just aligning those and being not always in control, like I said before, of what those schedules are. So, challenges – some of the challenges we have faced were that the systems – we can't tweak them and we didn't want to over-customize them to fit a Cintas need, so we had to adapt. You know, how do we post requisitions? How do we ensure that we've got all the right data and the consistency as we have the same job functions throughout North America and the US and Canada?

Those critical fields in a very flexible system that's user-friendly and easy for employees and our managers to use – how do we lock that down? Or not lock it down, but ensure data integrity and consistency? So, some of those challenges we met by just getting involved, ensuring that our team was taking advantage of the training and the certifications, that we understood the potential impacts, how change was going to be coming through. How did we balance the environments? Regression testing in this type of world became a huge, important aspect where we thought maybe with cloud there might be less testing when we first started out. So, it was a constant evolution of myself and the other leaders at Cintas over this space, redesigning the team, redefining the roles, figuring out what worked, and you know, being okay with adjusting for the next round.

So, we've been live for three years. For the first two and a half we did quarterly releases from our major vendor, and after each session we would hold discussions with our vendors like Deloitte, with our internal team, and see what we could do better next time. And it's – like Barb said it's less about finger-pointing and – you know, it's understanding why something happened, but just as a team wanting to grow from it. So, you know, adjusting to a pace of change that we weren't used to and a brand new system and internalizing the team – lots of challenges, but I would say many of our lessons learned ended up with a positive story.

**David Linthicum:**

Yeah, you've got to keep your mind open about how to solve these things then amicably. So, Barbara, I'm going to go to you. You know, you're looking in from the outside and seeing these things occur. So, what advice would you give not only Cintas – you gave Cintas advice – but other enterprises that are looking to move to cloud and when they find obstacles that they need to work around, such as people and processes that Julie just pointed out.

**Barbara Johnson:**

Yeah. I mean, I think one of the first things, which even goes I guess before they find the obstacles, but to really – one of the things with going to the cloud is just the whole focus early on the implementation and how you want to sustain the solution and how you want to support it, because it tends to be something that people think about later in the implementation process. But it does require the mind shift. So, I think that's to kind of prevent some of the challenges, or at least as many as possible. If people could think about right from the get-go is how you're going to support it because a traditional lift and shift from IT may not be optimal. But that's something to think about. But I think as you come into these challenges, I think if you can stay focused on what happened and the facts and not be so much why did you do that, why did that – but really work through where was the breakdown, how can we work together, how do we solve this, and how do we not have it occur again? Because issues will come up, surprises will come up, but the open communication and collaboration is really critical because there's always things happening on both sides of the equation.

And one of the early challenges that clients will see is even just the volume of work. You know, it's hard to predict exactly the ticket volume when you go live with a big new solution. And so being able to have very open discussions about how do we deal with the volume of work, how do we prioritize, where do we want to focus on – you know, it needs to be a very collaborative discussion because it's going to take both sides to agree on what activities to work on and which ones may need to be tabled or additional people brought in to support.

**David Linthicum:**

You know, Julie, one thing I see as I'm working with cloud clients is surprises, in other words just dealing with performance issues, security, things at a very technical, geeky level, but also some surprises at the human level and the process level as well. So, what are some of the surprises that you've encountered from the partnership and what did you learn from them?

**Julie Pettit:**

Sure. So, when you bring up the technical and the geeky side, I think going into cloud solutions we assumed that there were checkboxes you could click and everything was going to be easier. And Cintas made the decision – we set up our HRAS team under HR, right? What we have learned and were a little bit surprised – and there are still some of those techie elements where you do require a higher skill set of technical background to support. And for us that comes largely with our payroll portion of our environment, but it changes how we staff, how we train, and how we partner with organizations like Deloitte, right, to complement what makes sense internally for staff, for career progression, for our employees. Cintas has a great history of long-term partners like myself, who have been here for 22 years. That's not uncommon here. So, I like to – as I create roles and as I bring on new partners, I like to have a vision of what their potentials and opportunities would be to stay with us long term because we believe it's a great place to be and set your career. So, that was a little bit of a surprise for myself in what it would take to really run a cloud solution.

On more of the human and the interaction side the integration that comes with a lot of this and the details, right, again it's intuitive from the screens, right, the processes to get your job done, but there's a lot behind the scenes that needs to all line up. Somebody needs to understand it. And I think that's where Barb's and my teams have come together well, in putting the pieces together to ensure that for our employee partners that it runs smooth and things happen like they expect it to, without knowing all the details that happen behind the scenes.

**David Linthicum:**

So, Barbara, there's always a different perspective in terms of a valuable partnership at the end of the project than there is at the beginning of the project. What do you think was surprising that you discovered during the project that you didn't know at the beginning?

**Barbara Johnson:**

I think just the ability to get involved in the Cintas business because at the start of the engagement you focus more on getting the tickets resolved. But just getting the value of really seeing beyond the tickets and understanding what Cintas is trying to accomplish and the challenges Julie's trying to overcome and her team even down at the individual level, what they're trying to work through, I think has been a great surprise in terms of the value it brings to our ability to deliver at a higher level.

**David Linthicum:**

Yeah, and also the fact that as you work with clients, you become more empathetic to their challenges. And when you become more empathetic to their challenges, you're able to solve their problems much easier because you can kind of feel their problems. I'm learning that as I've been spending the last 20-some odd years in consulting, and certainly technology consulting, at the end of the day you just feel like part of the team and you want everybody to succeed. And that just gets to be a stronger emotion I think as you go through the project. So, Julie, this question is for you, and you alone. So, how has the partnership between Cintas and Deloitte really kind of inspired your ability to deliver more value moving forward? So, in other words, how are we working well together, and ultimately moving forward where do you see this relationship going? And you can be as candid as you want, by the way.

**Julie Pettit:**

Sure. Sure, I'll be honest. You know, when we started this relationship we had an agreed-upon goal that we would both be successful at the end of the initial contract if Cintas had internalized a lot of the work and the skill sets and the capacity. So, really it was a great partnership to enter into, that Deloitte recognized that our view of success was them helping us learn our new world since we hadn't played in this space before, and getting us to the point where we could run on our own if we wanted to. So, basically our first contract was to work that – you know, that contract out of existence or out of I guess you could say a job for Deloitte there.

What we learned along the way is Deloitte's willingness to continually meet us where we were at. So, as we got stronger and learned more in a certain area, we scaled back resources there. But like I just mentioned, too, we had some surprises that there was a lot more technical need than we thought that we would – were investing in with a cloud solution where it came to payroll and integrations and things I'm not so sure that we want to staff internally, definitely not before and not now, not sure if in the future. So, we evolved then and Deloitte has been flexible in adjusting the resources and the leadership team again to meet us where we're at and what we need and to align our visions. And we've taken each of those opportunities to change team members and as a positive view, right, learned a lot from each of the Deloitte team members that have joined us along this journey. And then we come to a point where we've achieved some of those milestone goals, we set the next step, and they aligned with us again to get us to the next set of goals that we have.

So, we've deepened our relationship in many ways. We've expanded in some areas. We've been able to successfully internalize some of the roles for Cintas where we've learned along the way. So, we just continue to balance, and Barb and I work closely with our management team on both sides. We constantly assess the staffing, the skill sets. We focus less on numbers of people or dollars and more about what are we trying to accomplish? What right mix of internal and external different skill sets will help us accomplish it in the best manner? And then just keep leaning on Deloitte, too, in times where we're not sure. Deloitte being as large as they are and having experience with multiple clients and multiple software systems brings me and my team huge value and input. And as we've deepened our relationship and we've built that trust and that One Team Mindset, it's very easy for us to rely on them for input and trust that input to help us define our future.

**David Linthicum:**

Well, this is a great story, and I think one of the things the listeners are going to pay most attention to, Julie, is that you actually went through the journey and you're willing to share your experiences, because as everybody – certainly post-pandemic and pre-pandemic and moving into cloud and trying to make the migration as quickly as they can, lots of decisions, lots of resources are being tossed at this problem right now. And your ability to think your way through it, respond, and work around the impediments to success and understand what the challenges are and learn from the challenges moving forward are going to be critical to success, with cloud or pretty much anything.

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**Operator:**

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