The CEO Forum

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THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE

TOP DOZEN CEOS TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP



CULTURE
Anton Vincent
President
MARS WRIGLEY NORTH AMERICA



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
Jenifer Robertson
President
AT&T CONSUMER



FINANCIAL SERVICES
Brian Moynihan
Chair of the Board & CEO
BANK OF AMERICA



WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION
Steve Bandrowczak
CEO
XEROX



HEALTHCARE
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President & CEO
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Drew Brees
Super Bowl MVP & Restauranteur



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Linda Rendle
CEO & Chair of the Board
THE CLOROX COMPANY



STRATEGY
Ron Shaich
Founding CEO
PANERA BREAD



CHALLENGER BRANDS
Esi Seng
CEO
TATE'S BAKE SHOP



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SHRM



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
Eric J. Bertrand
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SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING
Frank Vella
CEO
CONSTANT CONTACT

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The CEO Forum Team

Robert Reiss
CEO, Founder and Publisher
203.894.9400
robert@theceoforumgroup.com

Gina Leone
Associate Publisher
gina@theceoforumgroup.com

Bill Peters
Managing Director
203.536.1455
bill@theceoforumgroup.com

Kenneth D. Brown, Esq.
VP Strategic Partnerships
& Senior Advisor
203.249.4490
kenn@theceoforumgroup.com

Genia Edelman
Producer
gg@theceoforumgroup.com

Courtney Weissman
Director of Marketing
courtney@theceoforumgroup.com

Allison Burke
Deputy Editor
203.313.9496
allison@theceoforumgroup.com

John Iannuzzi
Chief Radio Engineer
203.522.8801
john@theceoforumgroup.com

Shila Anderson
Director of Finance
203.240.9229
shila@theceoforumgroup.com

Emily Dardis
Creative Director
emily@theceoforumgroup.com

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theceoforumgroup.com

For our first CEO Forum magazine back in 2009, we set the model of being the one publication by CEOs for CEOs with 100% CEO content.



This would enable our readership of the top CEOs in America to hear unfiltered ideas on strategy, culture, innovation, healthcare, customer experience, digital, purpose and leadership. In this—our special annual issue—we have deeply analyzed the leadership practices and selected the dozen top leaders who we can learn from. My sense is that in your hands, you hold what will be the seminal publication of CEO leadership content globally in 2024. My hope is that you will join us in our mission to disseminate CEO wisdom to elevate business, the economy and society.

All twelve are recipients of Transformative CEO Awards, which comes from our initial pool of over 1,500. I define a Transformative CEO as someone who "creates new value that invigorates a company, reinvents an industry or reboots society." I hope this provides you insights to be a Transformative CEO as well. Enjoy this magazine and my hope is it spurs creativity in your leadership practices.

If you know of any exceptional CEOs, please feel free to share them with me directly and perhaps they will make our next leadership edition in 2025.



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THE CEO FORUM GROUP TEAM HIGHLIGHT

Meet Bill Peters

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Bill is the Managing Director of The CEO Forum Group. He is an expert at creating partnerships between companies to further their business development. The CEO Forum Group is both a CEO connection company and a media company that includes radio, TV, print media, and digital content. Our mission is to broadly disseminate CEO wisdom for the purpose of elevating business, the economy and society. Prior to joining The CEO Forum Group, Bill spent 35+ years in the Home Furnishings Industry serving as a CEO for two different companies. Bill has also served on multiple industry and non-profit organization boards. Bill is a certified EMT and a member of the National Ski Patrol. Bill and his wife Vicki are celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary this year, and they are blessed with terrific sons and family.



Goodwill's unique leadership model delivers essential services to over 2 million Americans

By: Steve Preston, President & CEO of Goodwill Industries International

Despite a persistently tight labor market and low unemployment rates, many Americans remain unemployed, underemployed, or earning low wages. At the same time, there are millions of well-paying, unfilled jobs, many because employers report that they are unable to find people with the skills to fill those roles. In other cases, candidates are screened out because employers require degrees or certifications that are often not necessary for the job. As a result, people with significant untapped potential are missing opportunities for a better future while employers are unable to reach their own market potential due to talent shortages.

This issue makes Goodwill's mission more urgent than ever.

Goodwill is much more than a thrift store. It's the nation's largest nonprofit workforce developer; the leader in the secondhand retail marketplace; a major player in sustainability; and a social enterprise assisting millions of individuals who face challenges in life.

What does it mean to be the largest nonprofit workforce developer in North America? It means that 154 individual local Goodwill organizations assist people through a variety of job training and placement programs, and other community-based services to develop pathways out of poverty through the Power of Work. In 2022, Goodwill helped place more than 129,000 people into employment and assisted more than

2.1 million people in building skills, accessing resources, and advancing their careers.

Every day, I am inspired by the individuals I encounter who have transformed their lives when given a chance: single moms experiencing homelessness, justice-impacted youth from marginalized communities, older workers who find themselves with no job prospects, and people whose abilities are grossly underestimated by society.

Our founder had a brilliant vision that has stood the test of time. Appalled by the conditions faced by destitute immigrants in Boston in 1902, Reverend Edgar J. Helms began collecting used household goods and clothing to give to the poor. He then realized that he could create jobs by training people to mend, repair, and resell them. Dr. Helms believed if we provide people with the tools to reach their full potential through learning and the power of work, they will not just survive but thrive.

For more than 120 years, local Goodwill organizations across North America have carried out that legacy of helping people develop their potential, find jobs, support their families, and feel the satisfaction that comes from working in fulfilling employment. Today, Goodwill sells donated items in more than 3,300 retail stores in the U.S., Canada, and other international markets, as well as various online marketplaces. The revenue generated by our donors and shoppers creates jobs, educational opportunities, job training, and job placement programs to help people earn paychecks and build their careers.

In addition, our support is primarily in person, which is so critical for people who may not have had access to training opportunities in the past or are facing other challenges. Our career centers are open for all to explore the programs that best suit their talents. Goodwill has been embedded in the communities we serve for more than a century. Today, 83.4% of households in the U.S. are located within a 10-mile radius of a Goodwill store.

In addition, by working with nonprofits like Goodwill, employers can tap into a much deeper candidate pool by gaining access to many people who are overlooked but are well-trained and motivated. Most employers don't realize that great pools of talent can be found in places they have never looked.

Goodwill is also an environmental pioneer and social innovator, leading the way in the reuse economy. Last year, we diverted more than four billion tons from landfills. And we are partnering with innovative enterprises to find new ways to use materials that can't be sold through remanufacturing and recycling. Our partnership with Dell, for instance, has diverted more than 620 million pounds of computer and electronics equipment from area landfills into recycling.

We are proud to partner with leading companies and foundations across industries. Since 2017, more than 1.8 million individuals received training through our partnership with Google—the Goodwill Digital Career Accelerator®—which helps equip job seekers and career advancers with the skills needed to succeed in the digital economy. The Goodwill Clean Tech Accelerator®, a new venture with Accenture and General Motors, is training technicians for well-paid, in-demand green jobs in solar and storage, electric vehicle charging, and heat pump installation and maintenance.

Leading companies like Bank of America, Comcast, United Healthcare, and Lowe's work with us to provide needed access to resources and skills training. More than a third of U.S. Goodwill organizations have used financial support from the Walmart Foundation to provide services to women, military veterans, and their families, and individuals working in retail and related industries.

By working with Goodwill, these organizations are investing in a future where innovation drives social benefits, empowering individuals and communities to overcome barriers and reach their full potential. Join us.



Steve Preston has served as President and CEO of Goodwill Industries International (GII) for the last five years. Prior to joining GII, Preston headed two federal agencies, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Small Business Administration (SBA); led successful turnarounds as the CEO of two private corporations, Oakleaf Global Holdings and Livingston International; and served as the CFO of two Fortune 500 companies, Waste Management and ServiceMaster.

Goodwill is the largest nonprofit workforce development network in the country. It works to enhance the quality of life of individuals and families by strengthening communities, building bridges to opportunity, and helping people in need reach their potential through learning and the power of work.



Doing business the right way

Anton Vincent—President of Mars Wrigley North America and Global Ice Cream—shares the company's core value system and how it's applied to how they do business with partners and for their consumers.

President, Mars Wrigley North America & Global Ice Cream



The CEO Forum Group has selected Anton Vincent, President, Mars Wrigley North America, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Culture. This is bestowed for implementing the Five Principles driving a culture of intention and holistic outcomes where bringing to life the values drive a special balance of fun and results and, ultimately, freedom.

Robert Reiss: Let's start with a snapshot of some of your brands.

Anton Vincent: I'll start off with some of the ones that I think most of the global public would know about, ones like M&M'S®, SNICKERS®, and TWIX®. We also have gum brands like ORBIT® and EXTRA®, and our fruity brands such as STARBURST® and SKITTLES®. And I'll give you a couple that people may not know about like Ethel M® Chocolates, our craft chocolate brand which is very unique, and Bounty®, which we have primarily in the U.K. We have a wonderful collection of brands for all tastes and for all occasions, and we're very proud about not only what they are, but what we stand for.

You even have KIND where Daniel Lubetzky, the founder, is a true passionate visionary.

Yes, we have KIND® as well. We acquired KIND back in 2017, and it's a beautiful brand. Daniel Lubetzky did an incredible job in building it around ingredients that we know, can pronounce, and can see and so the whole authenticity around what their brand is about, wrapped around the value system of kindness, is pretty powerful.

And you head up Global Ice Cream. I will admit I absolutely love the M&M'S® Chocolate Ice Cream Cookie Sandwiches. I tell my kids it's like an opera dessert of three winners—music, singing, and acting. Completely satiating.

Glad you enjoy it! That is a very interesting business for us. Many people may not know that we've been in the ice cream business for over 35 years. It's a simple concept—we had built these great brands that we've had for many, many decades and then the concept presented itself of how do we allow those brands to travel into other treat categories? That frozen space was very interesting for us. It was a bit of a project, a bit of a test period, for a good chunk of a couple of decades; and now it is a global platform. We've set a bold ambition to build a $1 billion Global Ice Cream business by 2030.

> "We very much have global expectations, the global platform, and part of my remit and part of my job is to make sure that we do it at scale in the right way, much like we try to do everything at Mars."

Which are your biggest markets for Ice Cream?

Our biggest market is the United States, followed by Europe. But I can tell you, China will soon become our largest market. We very much have global expectations, the global platform, and part of my remit and part of my job is to make sure that we do it at scale in the right way, much like we try to do everything at Mars.

When you talk about doing it the right way...you're one of the world's largest, most iconic consumer brands with a huge portfolio. How do you focus on innovation and how do you maintain and know what you need to keep to have consistency?



I appreciate the question because I always start off with innovation. We're making sure we have an incredible core—I often tell people, "I've never seen a business that had great innovators, but didn't have a strong core." It starts at understanding what works for you that's currently in the market place and then having a very keen understanding around consumer preferences, needs, and tastes and how they're changing, and then try to essentially innovate out that core in very smart and very defensible ways. That's really how we think about it at Mars. We want to be able to go in and invest behind the concept, invest behind the product, and make sure that you're enjoying it not only today but 100 years from now as well. So we're very focused in terms of how we decide to innovate our core, and how do we make sure that that is a sustainable business over the long arc of time.

When you talked about your core, you have a uniqueness of the Mars' Five Principles I'd like to hear more about. One of them, actually I don't understand, which is "mutuality."

Well it's interesting, this whole concept around our Five Principles has been around for generations.

The first of the Principles is quality because at the end of the day, we are manufacturers. We create a variety of things, but at least in the confection space, we create treats and snacks and are very focused on making sure that we produce the highest quality. The mutuality principle is all about mutual benefit. So that may be the one that—if you ask any Mars Associate, "Which one of those principles really talk about and articulate what we think we're about?"—it is about mutuality and mutuality for us. We don't enter into any conversation, into any relationship, or into any partnership unless it's good for us and good for our partners. So that whole sense of mutuality that we win together is fundamental to what we think about how we do business with ourselves internally, but also as importantly with our customers and partners externally.

> "We want to be able to go in and invest behind the concept, invest behind the product, and make sure that you're enjoying it not only today but 100 years from now as well."

How does mutuality work in real life?

I'll stay here in the confections business. A lot of times that we are doing business or forging partnerships with people, we may actually have an opportunity to have "advantage" or leverage in a relationship. But we always make sure that anytime we enter into a partnership, we want it to be good for both parties. We see ourselves as people who want to be around 100 years from now, so we're always looking to make sure those relationships are long-term.

We know we want to make sure that those terms on our side and on our partner's side are equitable, and we want to make sure that we're enforcing that as well. In many cases, we can have leverage because of our size, because of our global nature. It's important for us to make sure that their business model is working because it supports us and what we're trying to do, so it's just very important for us.

At the end of the day, that sense of mutuality, a sense of partnership, a sense of loyalty, is fundamental in terms of how we build relationships and hopefully how we execute those relationships over the arc of time.

> "We always make sure that anytime we enter into a partnership, we want it to be good for both parties."

How about "freedom?"

I've always thought about the principles as an equation. I would say those first four are fundamental values just in terms of how we operate with each other—we have Quality, Responsibility, Mutuality, and Efficiency. Then there is Freedom. If we do those first four right, we buy ourselves the opportunity to have freedom. As a family business, you have to understand when Frank C. Mars founded this company more than 110 years ago, he was like any other entrepreneur. It really goes back to our entrepreneurial roots.

We always wanted to run the business financially so we can put ourselves in a position to have freedom—freedom of choice, freedom of strategy, freedom of how and where we want to operate. So I always think about those first four principles as our core value system. When we do those things right, we earn ourselves freedom to operate in a way that's consistent with our value system.

Yes, I love that. It's almost like the first four are inputs and the fifth is an output?

It's the outcome, absolutely.





It sounds like all of these feed into your culture.

Absolutely. I think our culture is one of intention and one of holistic outcomes. We need to have a great economic model, but that economic model is put in place to have very broad holistic outcomes, which is very important to us.

Let's shift to your personal leadership philosophy.

I believe that leadership has to produce outcomes. Some of those outcomes are economic, clearly as a business leader, but the majority of those outcomes are how we impact people and how we impact people's lives. That's where I tend to focus. When I look back on my life after I am through with my leadership journey, I'd like to think that I elevated this place, I created opportunities for others, and I put the company on a trajectory that we can all be proud of and that is consistent with our value system. I try to make sure all those elements are part of how I lead every day in the short-term, but I always look into it as a long-term in terms of impact and legacy.

So what do you want your legacy to be?

At the core of it, like any leader or any CEO, I need to be able to advance the economic interests of the company that I have the opportunity to lead. That's first and foremost. I think the important and the end part of that is the way that I led—did I leave it better than I found it? I hope that answer would be a resounding yes. Did I create a pipeline of leaders to come behind me to accelerate and push into the future? I hope that's a resounding yes. And then, I think lastly, this is a simple one—did the people have a good time when I was a leader?

Because we spend so much time at work and at times we're talking about very serious things and the decisions that we make impacts people's lives. I'd like to think that people had fun doing their work and executing the things that we all agree that we should do to advance both the company, its associates and, then eventually, its consumers.

What are your thoughts on community and the role Mars plays?

Our vision is simple. The world we want tomorrow is how we do business today. That's very fundamental to us, so that talks to the short-term vision of making sure what we do is towards a long-term view of tomorrow. Because we're large and we're global, we actually have the opportunity to impact communities all around the world. My part of that is North America and that includes communities where we have plants, where we have sales offices, where we have footprint in general. But if you set and multiply that globally across all of our businesses from confection, to pet, to food, the diagnostics, it's pretty massive in terms of the reaches that we can touch and impact and to elevate people's lives and people's understanding around how to move with freedom and intentionality in the world. As business leaders, it's important for us to always have that at the end of our outcomes. Economics is foundational, but impact is the goal.

Finally, talk about a transformative moment you had and what you learned about success.

President, Mars Wrigley North America & Global Ice Cream

I had two transformative moments in my life that I'd like to share. The first one was one of my very first jobs, and you will appreciate this because this was October 19, 1987. I was a 22-year-old kid, just coming out of training at Fidelity Investments, the largest mutual fund company in the world at the time. It was my first day on the phones, on the floor if you would, and I am talking to people who have literally lost their life savings on paper asking me what I could do to help them. At the time, I was not licensed to give advice, but I was licensed to transact and to try to find other ways to get them through a very difficult and emotional situation. I learned at a very early age the care it takes to give people advice, the care it takes to get people counsel and to think short-term and long-term. And then to walk both myself as an individual, and also clients through very tough situations.

"The world we want tomorrow is how we do business today. That's very fundamental to us, so that talks to the short-term vision of making sure what we do is towards a long-term view of tomorrow."

The second time was at General Mills. I was working on our M&A team when we purchased the Pillsbury Company, which was a transformative investment for General Mills. It gave us a legitimate direct international business that got us into food service and essentially doubled the footprint of the company. To be at the helm of taking a company from its current construct to our future construct was just an awesome experience for me, where I learned so much and I had an opportunity to work with CEOs, maybe some of the ones you know, to really take a company in a very different direction. At that time in my career as an emerging leader, I would say this really set me on a path in terms of what I wanted to do and I think I saw great leadership and practice right in front of me.



Anton Vincent *serves as President, Mars Wrigley North America & Global Ice Cream. Since joining Mars in 2019, Anton has successfully led the acceleration of value creation of one of the world's largest, most iconic consumer brand portfolios. He leads the cross-segment Regional Presidents Council and is the principal Mars leadership voice for industry and regulatory matters in the US.*

Prior to joining Mars, Anton was the CEO of Greencore, PLC, USA, a leading co-pack and co-man company. He spent 20 years at General Mills building award winning brands and leading three divisions to record financial performance, helped execute the $10B acquisition of the Pillsbury Company and served on the board of 301 Inc., General Mills' early-stage venture fund.

A native of Jackson, Mississippi, Anton holds a BBA in Finance from Sam Houston State University and an MBA in Marketing from the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University, where he currently serves on the Dean's Council. He is also an independent board director for International Paper (IP:NYSE), a $22B Fortune 100 company.

MARS WRIGLEY



Delivering on confidence, resilience, and empathy

AT&T Consumer President Jenifer Robertson identifies the characteristics needed in a leader and recounts how she has embodied those qualities throughout her career and personal life.

Interviewed October 17, 2023

Robert Reiss: Describe AT&T Consumer.

Jenifer Robertson: AT&T Consumer serves residential customers across multiple products, to include fixed broadband into the home and wireless services. We aim to be the best connectivity provider, keeping customers connected with what matters most to them at home and on the go.

You've been with AT&T for over two decades, but 2022 I believe was the most profitable year for AT&T Mobility. What really drove that success?

2022 proved to be the most profitable year for AT&T Mobility on record and was the result of momentum built over two years. In 2020, we re-centered ourselves around the customer, focusing on their needs and what we could do to solve pain points for them. At the time, it was very clear through customer research that our customer base felt we didn't appreciate or value them because new customers got better deals than they did. So, we led the industry by launching "Best Deals for Everyone," which has been emulated to an extent across the wireless industry. While others complicate and caveat the concept, we've kept it very simple and consistent.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Jenifer Robertson, President, AT&T Consumer, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Customer Experience. This is bestowed for getting the whole team out in front of customers to hear customers first hand, listen deeply to understand and anticipate needs. It is all built from the platform of treating existing customers like new, and all of this is tied together through Robertson's leadership model of being a connector.

Starting with the fundamental belief that we should treat existing customers the same as new customers, we've built a multi-year platform to drive subscriber growth and the average revenue per subscriber. In turn, we've also led the industry in share of wireless service revenue growth. With the top line growing, we also made transformational moves with respect to how we run the operations, how we handle our distribution channels, and how we more effectively serve customers. The success we've seen is a combination of the positive impacts of putting the customer at the center of everything we do.

> "It was very clear through customer research that our customer base felt we didn't appreciate or value them because new customers got better deals than they did. So, we led the industry by launching 'Best Deals for Everyone.'"

Two questions on that. How specifically do you hear from the customers to know what they really want, and then how do you engage and implement what you heard?

We ground ourselves in customer feedback data—daily, weekly, and monthly—gathered from surveying tools and other forms of extensive customer research. All this information informs our products and offers.

Based on my experience across all consumer-facing channels—retail, call centers, and field technicians—there's no replacement for what you learn sitting with a frontline employee who serves the customer and observing their exchange. It becomes very clear where and how we should simplify our products and processes.

Frontline observation data has a different feel and a higher sense of urgency when you're standing right there with the employee and/or with the customer hearing the experience firsthand. It becomes personal, and I've found the best way to scale this feeling is to require teams across the business to engage with our frontline employees in this manner.

You speak a lot about the importance of being a connector. What's your mindset?

Connecting people is the core of what we do at AT&T, and I personally find building connections between others to be one of the most gratifying contributions I can make. Let's get candid, I'm not the doer much anymore. I have to be an enabler.

> "Frontline observation data has a different feel and a higher sense of urgency when you're standing right there with the employee and/or with the customer hearing the experience firsthand."

Connecting is about empathy—being able to understand the position and emotions of another person then using that understanding to help them shape their mindset or the situation to their benefit. Sometimes it's about connecting two people with different experiences to solve a tough business problem. Sometimes it's connecting a talented individual with opportunities and networks that enable greater professional accomplishment than they thought possible for themselves. Other times it's connecting people to broader context so they can better understand "the why" of a situation and work through their own change management cycle. The most rewarding moments I have are when a person reaches out years later to tell me about their career success sparked by a conversation we had or when the Rocky Mountain team I led woke me up in the middle of the night celebrating their "market of the year" award 6 months after I'd left. They wanted to include me because I had helped them see the possibilities and path to winning that they had considered unachievable. That's pretty special.

Connecting people doesn't just improve performance or solve pain points, it also sparks innovation and collaboration. So, I look for ways to accelerate and scale bringing new opportunities to market by connecting people with different points of view across the business to ideate on a common topic. Often those topics span the customer, our employees and technology.

I once read that someone could only have 80 real relationships at one time. How specifically do you connect with your team to build relationships and drive meaningful outcomes?

I find a combination of one-on-one discussions along with small group events to be one of the best ways to build more holistic relationships with people. I'm confident this opinion is skewed by the fact that I am more introverted by nature. That said, there are numerous studies that prove it's easier to trust and respect the perspective of another person you've taken the time to get to know on a deeper level. Trust is critical when tough decisions must be made, especially when speed is of priority.

As an example, we regularly review capital allocation decisions and adjust funding based on business needs and changing external factors. I think we can all agree there are few ways in business to strike a nerve quicker than reprioritizing funding. But I've found that putting in the hard work ahead of time in small groups, and with people I've worked to build relationships and trust with over time, lends itself to more constructive debate and enterprise-minded outcomes versus arm wrestling matches sparked by individual agendas or siloed team priorities.



More importantly, once the debate and decision has occurred, you must have the trust and interpersonal accountability for all to walk out of the meeting room committed to enabling the decision.

"I find a combination of one-on-one discussions along with small group events to be one of the best ways to build more holistic relationships with people."

Scaling these relationships is key and, as you point out, one person can only manage so much. Connecting dots (pun intended), this is why it's so important to be a connector. The relationships I invest my own time building must evolve, but the impact of those relationships scales if I ensure they're transitioned to others —in customer service we refer to this as a "warm transfer" —who can keep progress moving while I focus attention elsewhere. Meaningful outcomes then become less dependent on me being personally involved all the time and more dependent on the network effect of those relationships.

This ties into the concept you call "humanizing leadership."

Absolutely! I fundamentally believe in leadership, and in life, that we must embrace the fact that we are all human; therefore, we are all imperfect. I often invite people to build their list of imperfect people with the ask that they put my name at the very top, then I remind them that their name is on

that list somewhere as well. This approach sets the foundation for a leader to realize their job is to have the confidence to set the vision, inspire and engage the team to do their part to deliver on that vision, and be the first one willing to take a risk, fail, and demonstrate the courage to get back up and try another approach. From there it's about removing obstacles the team faces along the way and standing at the finish line to be the first one to high five and recognize the team's accomplishments.

It's an incredibly empowering moment when you accept that you as a leader cannot bring all the knowledge or skills to the table on your own. I'm not suggesting that a leader is allowed to abdicate responsibility. Rather, I believe this leadership approach builds more collaborative and high-performing teams with a culture of taking risks and continuously improving…even beyond the original goal they set.

> "Resilience relates to humble confidence and a willingness to 'lean forward.'"

What do you believe are the characteristics of a true leader?

I frame leadership in three pillars: humble confidence, resilience, and empathy.

Humble confidence shows up in two ways. First, a leader needs the confidence to inspire, set the vision,



"I fundamentally believe in leadership, and in life, that we must embrace the fact that we are all human; therefore, we are all imperfect."

and establish bold goals. Humility shows up when they take risks knowing they won't all work out, but having the confidence that comes with planning, preparation, and the ability to pick themselves back up in front of others to try again. Second, a leader must have the confidence and self-awareness of the skills they bring to the table. Then, the humility to acknowledge their gaps so they can attract the best talent needed to deliver on the mission.

Resilience relates to humble confidence and a willingness to "learn forward." When a leader sets out a course for the team, unexpected factors will always come into play. Resilience is having the ability to stay confident in the end goal, adjust to adversities of all types, and lean on inner strength and resourcefulness to solve problems quickly. I stumbled across the following quote that I haven't been able to source but have certainly used for inspiration —"A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking, because her trust is not on the branch but on her own wings." I'd offer this trait is critical for the leader to model because high-performing teams must collectively demonstrate it as well.

"Set bold stretch goals, break those goals down into doable milestones, pause for rest when needed, celebrate along the way, plan for worst case scenarios, divvy up the weight of responsibility, and do the journey with people who inspire you, people you trust."

We've already touched on empathy with building connections, but I'll lean in again here. Empathy is a critical leadership trait because it's how a leader connects with others. I learned long ago from a



trusted mentor that a leader must win both hearts and minds if they want to inspire followership. From my experience that statement has held true across every experience and team I've been a part of or had the privilege to lead. And I'll add, you can't win a heart if you don't have the empathy to understand others' hearts.

There's a personal story you've told me, Jenifer, about a family vacation that I think also gives some important insights into your perspective on leadership.

Oh my, yes! In the summer of 2023 my oldest child graduated from high school and earned a family trip to celebrate. His choice was an aggressive hike —the express version of the Tour du Mont Blanc across France, Switzerland and northern Italy. To be clear I was lobbying for a beach trip, but I experienced the humbling moment of getting out-voted by kids. Off we went with near-zero training and preparation that equated to a long trip to our local sporting goods store. Ultimately, we trekked 61 miles across six days and climbed a total of 21,000 feet and, much to the chagrin of my "supportive" family



members who apparently had a side bet that I'd need mountain rescue, I did not find myself in need of first responders.

I expected family fun and bonding moments. I expected beautiful scenery but still found myself in awe of my surroundings every day. What I didn't expect was to have moments of such business and leadership clarity hit me during the silent stretches along the way.

But there I was in my own thoughts logging the fact that while we had committed to a bold end goal, we thoroughly enjoyed the process of the daily climb. We paused for breaks, turned back to recognize how far we'd traveled and then faced forward to assess how much farther we still needed to go. These moments were critical to staying motivated on the longest day with 12 total miles hiked—8 of those miles on an incline. That was also the day I realized sometimes I just have to grind it out. Keep my head down and put one foot in front of the other while simply focusing on the sound of the gravel beneath my feet and power through. I had to laugh when I realized that the downhill sections were tougher than uphill… wow the parallels to a product or business lifecycle! We packed only the gear we could carry and divided the weight amongst ourselves to plan for a host of scenarios without overloading any one pack. And we organically changed pairings throughout the days as we needed silence or support or entertainment for that part of the journey.

> "Connectivity will become more and more converged—creating seamless connections for customers no matter where they are."

At the end of the trip there it was—proof that hiking the Mont Blanc used the same leadership skills required in business—set bold stretch goals, break those goals down into doable milestones, pause for rest when needed, celebrate along the way, plan for worst case scenarios, divvy up the weight of responsibility, and do the journey with people who inspire you, people you trust.

Sounds like you might have a book in you!

It's crossed my mind.

Finally, what does the future hold for AT&T and connectivity?

Connectivity will become more and more converged—creating seamless connections for customers no matter where they are. This means expansion of fiber and 5G wireless networks with increased use cases across all customer segments.

Data demand will continue to increase and customers will have high expectations for both the reliability and speed of their connections. As customers live more connected lives, things like having seamless coverage inside and outside of the home, the applications they use to manage their connections and usage and the ability to monitor the health and safety of those connections will become increasingly important.

Creating the level of network infrastructure needed to deliver these customer experiences requires continued investment, which also means continuous focus on cost efficiencies. Technology enables exciting new ways for us to not only meet customer experience demands but do so in more efficient ways.

"In the past few years, we've used AI and machine learning to help us optimize our dispatches for install and repairs as we send technicians into customers' homes—this innovation led to better, more consistent customer experiences, higher engagement from our frontline technician teams and significant cost savings."

Take AI as an example. In the past few years, we've used AI and machine learning to help us optimize our dispatches for install and repairs as we send technicians into customers' homes—this innovation led to better, more consistent customer experiences, higher engagement from our frontline technician teams and significant cost savings.

Generative AI will allow us to expand on those efficiencies.

What customers will expect and need with the future of connectivity is incredibly exciting. And no one is better positioned to deliver on those needs than AT&T.



Jenifer Robertson *leads the team responsible for AT&T's Wireless and Consumer Wireline businesses that delivers $80B+ in annual revenue and serves 120M customers. Her team is committed to growing AT&T consumer relationships with customer-centric strategies that span marketing, product development and realization, distribution, and e-commerce.*

Over her 23-year career at AT&T, Jenifer has served in a variety of leadership roles across customer-facing operations, including becoming the first Chief Customer Officer at AT&T from 2020 to 2021, the first female President of Field Operations from 2018 to 2020 and Senior Vice President of Technology Strategy from 2016 to 2018. Additionally, Jenifer has held leadership roles in Corporate Strategy, Sales and Distribution, and Customer Care.

Jenifer earned her bachelor's degree in English and Computer Applications from the University of Notre Dame and holds a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of the Incarnate Word.

AT&T



Bridging the Generation Gap: Embracing Diverse Perspectives

By: Lynelle Lynch

The Second Annual Beauty Changes Lives Industry Leader Roundtable brought together 70 leaders from the beauty, barbering, and wellness sectors to tackle the topic of generational differences in our workforce, acknowledging the pressing need to bridge this gap for the industry's future in a world shaped by social media and diverse values.

The program opened with a presentation by topic expert Anne Smart from Generation6, who provided insights into the different generations in the workplace. Participants were then divided into groups, Icons (established CEOs and business owners) and Trailblazers (up-and-coming professionals), for separate, facilitated roundtable discussions.

This approach allowed for a generation-specific exploration of the topic with the goals of:

- Recognizing beauty-industry-specific generational challenges related to priorities, perceptions, and expectations
- Identifying strategies to attract, retain, and empower talent across different generations
- Developing actionable guidelines to help bridge the gap and create a more inclusive, forward-thinking industry

The Roundtable discussions yielded several key themes.

Theme 1: Empathy and Communication Skills

Misunderstandings and differing communication styles between generations often lead to frustration. Icons seek respect for their experience and established processes, viewing themselves as mentors. In contrast, Trailblazers demand a reason behind traditions and favor efficiency and flexibility in communication, reflecting their upbringing in a digital, fast-paced world.

Theme 2: Work Ethic, Values, Work-Life Balance, and Identity

Differing views on loyalty and work-life balance mark another area of contention. Icons equate loyalty with longevity and a strong workplace presence, while Trailblazers associate it with job performance and efficiency, valuing flexibility, and personal time.

Theme 3: Technology and Workplace Dynamics

Technology's role in the workplace is a divisive issue. Icons often feel marginalized by new technologies, whereas Trailblazers see them as tools for enhancing productivity and innovation.

Theme 4: Historical Perspective and Respect for Tradition

Icons emphasize the importance of history and tradition, viewing them as foundational to the industry's integrity. Trailblazers, however, often question the relevance of traditional methods in a rapidly evolving environment.

Theme 5: Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity is important to both groups and encompasses not only demographic diversity but also a diversity of ideas and representation in decision-making.

Theme 6: Wellness

The importance of wellness and mental health has come to the forefront, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. It's acknowledged that younger professionals may lack the emotional maturity to cope with stressors and require additional guidance.

Next steps include follow-up meetings, industry presentations, and a white paper highlighting the findings.



Lynelle Lynch is intimately involved in beauty and wellness as the owner of Running Y Ranch Resort—a destination spa, fitness, and golf resort, CEO of the Bellus Academy group of leading beauty and wellness career schools, and President & Founding Member of Beauty Changes Lives—a non-profit to empower beauty and wellness professionals through scholarships, mentorship, and advanced education.





Listening to customers in order to do right by them

Brian Moynihan—Chair of the Board and CEO of Bank of America—shares the company's outlook on the future of financial services, on doing right by customers to build a stronger company, and on how to build a pipeline of talent.

Robert Reiss: What's your take on how financial services will change over the next decade and what role will Bank of America play in that future?

Brian Moynihan: One of the ways Bank of America drives Responsible Growth is through a focus on our customers and clients—and that means that our products and services must evolve in line with our customers' unique financial needs. A strong example of this effort is our more than $30 billion investment over the past decade on new technology and digital capabilities.

In 2023, we had a record 57 million verified digital users. We also had a record 21.5 million active Zelle® users who sent and received a record 1.25 billion transactions worth a record $373billion; customers are now sending two times more through Zelle than writing checks.

In addition, Erica®, our virtual financial assistant, also continues to attract increased customer engagement. It has proven to be a critical channel to help us deliver important information to customers and address their questions and concerns in real-time. Erica now has 18.5 million active users, and handled roughly 637 million client interactions, which brings the total number of client interactions to 1.9 billion since it launched.

The case for continued development of our digital platforms is simple: customers tell us they clearly appreciate the value and convenience they provide—so we will continue to expand their capabilities.

Talk about purpose from your perspective as CEO.

Our purpose is to help make financial lives better. We always want to be a catalyst, planner, and advisor in order to help people do so. And to do that, you have to be able to serve both existing customers and prospects with people who reflect them. That's why we work hard to be a great place to work with a diverse team of employees, because at the end of the day we're a talent company. That is core to who our customers are and core to how we help communities be successful, while producing returns for our shareholders.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Brian Moynihan, Chair of the Board & CEO, Bank of America, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Financial Services. This is bestowed for BOA's model of integrating both profit and purpose and their over 200,000 teammates delivering customer centric service through their responsive growth model. And, importantly, this is in an environment of gender equity and parity.

> "You have to make sure everything you do responds to what our customers and clients need and ask for—that's how we fulfill our purpose."

It also means you do the right thing: how you structure your products, how you structure your services, and how you charge for your services. We do great things for our clients and their financial lives, and we are compensated for that.

So you think about how your products work, from mass-market consumers up through wealthy individuals and families, from small businesses to the largest multinationals and investors around the world. You have to make sure everything you do responds to what our customers and clients need and ask for—that's how we fulfill our purpose.



How does this purpose manifest itself in how BOA delivers in the marketplace?

Bank of America makes our purpose come to life by leveraging all the knowledge and expertise of our teammates and delivering in a way that is completely customer-focused. It's part of our "Responsible Growth" focus. We do some things that other companies don't, things that are very bespoke and solutions-oriented. But frankly, we get a cost savings from that because it lowers the amount of customer churn.

We're always looking at what's good for the customer, and we balance that by also looking at what's good for the company, and what's good for our teammates. You have to look at all sides at once. And that's what we do, every day.

With over 200,000 employees, what is your thinking on building talent?

You have to build and develop a great pipeline from within and make some strategic hires from outside. But importantly, you have to manage the process so that slates for hiring and promotions are diverse—including women and people of color, for instance. That's how we've reached the levels we are today, and we will continue to build on that progress.

> "We're always looking at what's good for the customer, and we balance that by also looking at what's good for the company, and what's good for our teammates."

We will stay the course on the way we hire, as it is an engine that perpetuates itself. We have a pipeline that represents many different schools with diverse skills. On an annual basis, more than 2,000 new hires join us from these colleges. We then have specialized programs for women in STEM and technology programming or women in investment banking and

financial advisory. Overall, it starts with who you recruit and how you recruit, and there's tremendous opportunity out there to continue the journey toward gender parity in our business.

I believe that gender equity and parity drive opportunity for all. Having a diverse workforce not only ensures that we can attract the best talent and ideas, but more importantly, it helps us serve our clients and communities well. This work is part of how we run our company, and we advance this through a number of specialized programs that create greater connections and opportunities across our organization. It's not only a business imperative; it's part of being a great place to work.

"Having a diverse workforce not only ensures that we can attract the best talent and ideas...It helps us serve our clients and communities well."

What people or concepts helped shape your leadership philosophy, and how have you used this to advance your enterprise?

In addition to making financial lives better, Bank of America seeks to help societies prosper by serving as an interface between the economy, capital markets, and people.

One concept core to how the Management Team and I lead our company to do that work is delivering on the "genius of the 'and.'" This is a concept first coined by Jim Collins in his 1996 book, Built to Last. For Bank of America, it means we must deliver on profits "and" purpose. To do both, you have to be able to do what's in the best interest of your clients, your teammates, your shareholders, and your communities. And doing both will result in better value. We've produced high returns on tangible common equity for the last several years and delivered record purpose at the same time. And so that's what we try to do every day. It's a great idea—and you can't do just one: you have to do both.



Brian Moynihan *is CEO and Chair of the Board of Bank of America, leading more than 210,000 employees. Moynihan participates in several organizations that focus on economic and market trends, including the World Economic Forum's International Business Council Stakeholder Capitalism Metrics Initiative (chair), the Financial Services Forum, the Bank Policy Institute, the Business Roundtable, The Clearing House Association (chair), the American Heart Association CEO Roundtable (co-chair), the Steering Committee of the Council for Inclusive Capitalism (co-chair), and the Business Council. He also is chair of the Sustainable Markets Initiative, which was founded by His Majesty King Charles III in his former role of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. He serves as chair of the company's Global Diversity and Inclusion Council and is a member of the advisory council for the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture. He is also a member of the Brown University Corporation's Board of Fellows and the Watson Institute Board of Governors (chair), the Catalyst Board of Directors, the Council on Competitiveness Board (chair) and the Appeal of Conscience Board of works with public officials, businesses and civic leaders at the local level through his participation on the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council, the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership (chair) and the Partnership for Rhode Island.*

BANK OF AMERICA



Becoming more flexible

Steve Bandrowczak—CEO, Xerox—shares how the company, the industry, and the world has needed to reinvent and transform to continually meet the needs of the workplace and of clients.

Robert Reiss: From your perspective as CEO talk about the original Xerox concept and core competencies, and how the company has changed through the years.

Steve Bandrowczak: For more than 100 years, Xerox has continually redefined the workplace experience by providing innovative technology that drives productivity for our clients.

To meet the needs of today's workforce, Xerox has repositioned the company to better address the productivity challenges associated with a hybrid workplace and distributed workforce. Our IT and Digital Services provide clients the services and solutions needed to navigate their ongoing digital transformation and address their specific needs. As we continue our Reinvention, we're staying ahead of tech trends and client demands to remain at the cutting edge of workforce development.

When you became CEO in 2022, the world was fast transforming from workforce structure to the role of data; where did you see Xerox fitting into the new world?

When I took over as CEO in 2022, I understood that we were amid tremendous change in how businesses and employees work. We had to embrace those macro trends and simplify everything we did.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Steve Bandrowczak, CEO, Xerox, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Workforce Transformation. This is bestowed for their breakthrough model in advancing productivity throughout the hybrid workforce.

Our Reinvention does exactly that—building on our solid core business with IT and Digital Services to drive client and partner success. Technological change today is as slow as it will ever be, and our role is to ensure our clients and partners are ready for that change.

> "Technological change today is as slow as it will ever be."

From a data perspective, Xerox has been automating manual, repetitive tasks with robotic process automation internally since 2016, so we are no stranger to the role data plays in businesses. The company is leveraging this expertise to create AI-powered solutions that enhance productivity, improve decision making, and drive innovation across various industries to empower our clients and partners.

Talk about how Xerox has already been reinvented over the past few years.

Over the past five years, we've seen COVID-19 drastically change how we work, and in response, client needs have shifted. At Xerox, we've evolved with the needs of our clients by narrowing our focus to be strategically centered on improving productivity across the hybrid workplace.

We are already a few steps into our Reinvention journey. Earlier this year, we announced a new operating model and organizational structure to align our resources to best support the hybrid workforce and our client needs. We're simplifying our core products and increasing investment in our partner-enabled go-to-market model that supports client preferences and allows Xerox to put greater focus on developing and deploying Digital Services capabilities. We're creating a greater organizational focus on our emerging Digital Services and IT services capabilities to accelerate revenue diversification. Most importantly, we're continuing



our legacy of innovation and delivering client-centric and digitally-driven technology solutions that meet the needs of today's workforce.

How do you envision the workforce changing, and what will Xerox's role be in driving the new workforce transformation?

With the rapid advancement of emerging technologies, the workforce will naturally continue to evolve to keep up. For example, artificial intelligence has the opportunity to transform how businesses function by driving innovation across various industries, automating routine tasks, and

"We've evolved with the needs of our clients by narrowing our focus to be strategically centered on improving productivity across the hybrid workplace."

transforming how we build and design products. Its important companies recognize their role in choosing how to employ tools like AI that provide value to the workforce. As a result, companies will need more customized and flexible workplace solutions, and Xerox is well-positioned to bridge the gap between traditional and new workflow processes.

How might Xerox's role potentially impact the society of the future?

In today's rapidly changing world, the need for companies to act as responsible citizens has never been greater and it continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. I am proud to lead an organization that understands the significance of this work and embraces it wholeheartedly.

"Artificial intelligence has the opportunity to transform how businesses function by driving innovation across various industries, automating routine tasks, and transforming how we build and design products."

At Xerox, we recognize that our actions have an impact on people's lives and the planet. We turn investments in innovation into technology and services that help our clients be more productive, profitable and sustainable. We do this with the same core values our founder established decades ago, conducting business in an environmentally and socially conscious manner to help our clients, empower our people, and protect our planet.

You have a globally distributed workforce, how do you align your team around your vision so they can implement this monumental change?



When you lead a large team and you're implementing change, everybody is looking at you for guidance and to show the way forward. Our culture is filled with resilient people willing to do the hard work needed—it's my role to unite the team around a common goal, communicate that goal effectively, and make sure everyone comes away with the understanding of how we reach it together.

Xerox has an unbelievable brand that is trusted around the world and that trust comes from how our people help our clients each and every day.

Steve, how would you sum up your leadership philosophy?

Throughout my career, I've learned that people want to follow leaders who set a vision. They want to work for a company that's exciting and drives energy. My approach to leadership is to bring energy and help people succeed—from our employees to our clients and partners. Every day I set out with the goal of creating a work environment where everyone feels welcome, energized, and empowered to do their best and feel their best about the work we are doing.

"Throughout my career, I've learned that people want to follow leaders who set a vision... Every day I set out with the goal of creating a work environment where everyone feels welcome, energized, and empowered to do their best and feel their best about the work we are doing."

What do CEOs need to know about generative AI and how it will impact the world and their enterprises?

Generative AI can change how we interact with the world around us, both in and out of the workplace. Our responsibility as leaders is to decide how and when to employ such AI tools, keeping its capabilities and our stakeholders in mind. AI is powerful and is already changing industries and driving innovation—here at Xerox we're even using it to improve our client offerings, call centers and service providers.

It is important to remember that we're entering a new technology era. While it may feel like the entire technological landscape is changing, this is the next phase in a long line of innovation going back to the industrial revolution. We're going to see it continue to be adopted in everyday lives and become more prevalent. Our job is to make sure it's used in the right way to drive the betterment of humanity.

What was a transformative moment—perhaps a failure you had in business—what did it teach you?

I was the CIO at other companies before becoming the CEO at Xerox. As a CIO, you learn about driving



technology, change, processes, and new outcomes. You gain insight across all functions, and you can see how technologies drive new business paradigms. Pivoting from the CIO role to the CEO role during an intense period of technological change has certainly been a transformative experience.

As a CIO, you have to be able to set and align the company vision in partnership with the rest of the executive team—and I've leaned heavily on this experience to guide my efforts as a CEO to drive transformation across my company.

> "Pivoting from the CIO role to the CEO role during an intense period of technological change has certainly been a transformative experience."

Talk about your upbringing lessons that have stuck with you.

My path to CEO of Xerox has been anything but traditional. I grew up in South Ozone Park in Queens and had to enter the workforce at 16. I worked a variety of jobs, from clamming on the bay to working at a deli to doing heavy construction on the Long Island Railroad to make enough money to fill my car with gas.

Those jobs influenced the leadership style I have today, mainly being fearless and gaining the confidence that I could overcome anything. My story is a testament to the variety of ways leaders emerge and are shaped throughout their lives. While my path differs from many other CEOs, growing up in that environment taught me how to build community, appreciate the work I do and mentor other up-and-coming entrepreneurs and leaders.



Steve Bandrowczak *was named Chief Executive Officer of Xerox Holdings Corporation effective August 2022. An accomplished technology executive across a range of industries, Steve has a proven track record of leveraging digital platforms to transform global operations, drive market share and increase profitability.*

Steve joined Xerox in 2018 as president and chief operations officer. Prior to joining Xerox, Steve served as chief operating officer and chief information officer at Alight Solutions, where he was responsible for the application portfolio and technical infrastructure of the organization. Throughout his career, Steve also held senior leadership positions at various multi-billion-dollar global companies, including Avaya, Nortel, Lenovo, DHL and Avnet.

Steve holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science from Long Island University, New York and a Master of Science degree from Columbia University, New York.



Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Healthcare: Better, Smarter, Faster

By: Michael J. Alkire, President and CEO of Premier, Inc.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a hot topic, with ChatGPT garnering the majority of buzz for its human-like ability to respond to questions. But there's much more to AI than ChatGPT and nowhere is that more evident than in healthcare, where the pace of change leaves providers little choice but to augment their intelligence with machines to deliver better outcomes.

Providers are operating in an overloaded environment. Today, a new scientific study or research article is released every 26 seconds. If a clinician read and retained two of these articles every night, at the end of a year, they'd still be about 1,000 years behind current evidence!

AI has transformative potential, including the ability to sift and parse through mountains of data, build predictive models, improve diagnosis and treatment of diseases, optimize care delivery, streamline tasks and workflows, and more.

Complementing the expertise of providers, researchers and other stakeholders, here are three ways AI is revolutionizing the U.S. healthcare industry:

Driving Higher Quality Care

Of the many use cases for AI in healthcare, the biggest drivers center around empowering providers to care for patients. AI-powered clinical decision support (CDS) tools can aid in developing accurate, appropriate and actionable diagnostic or treatment recommendations—enabling providers to deliver optimal patient care and better outcomes. CDS can also help reduce clinician burnout, enhance the clinician experience and increase productivity.

CDS tools, such as PINC AI™ Stanson, deliver real-time alerts (e.g., avoid brain imaging in uncomplicated syncope*) and relevant analytics to guide and influence physician decisions, improve patient outcomes, reduce waste and safely lower healthcare costs. One study concludes that CDS utilization saved ≈$1K per patient encounter and yielded better outcomes including shorter lengths of stay, a lower probability of 30-day readmissions and a lower probability of complications.

PINC AI™ Stanson relies on machine learning (ML) to embed alerts in electronic medical records and integrate them into routine workflows, so providers receive alerts for the right patient at the point of care. Driven by evidence-based, clinician-designed logic, alerts are only triggered if the patient meets a specific profile and only provide recommendations that are relevant to the clinician who has final decision-making authority.

Advancing Research and Discovery

AI can transform clinical trials, supporting innovation in recruitment and operations to ensure all populations have access to breakthrough medical technology. Real-world data (RWD) coupled with ML and natural language processing (NLP) can help providers enhance clinical trial design, feasibility and execution; compress timelines; and improve life cycle management.

Traditionally, clinical trial sites were selected solely based on experience and relationships with Principal Investigators and/or at the site level. RWD and AI solutions are changing that by estimating eligible patient population volumes with a new level of granularity and efficiency previously unattainable when screening sites to match trial protocols.

AI also enables clinical trial staff to rapidly, accurately and, at-scale, screen for potential patients instead of manual identification of patients who meet complex inclusion/exclusion (I/E) criteria. For example, the PINC AI™ Applied Sciences team and their partners utilized NLP to identify patients with incidental pulmonary modules to flag for intervention before potential lung cancer progression, with roughly 152,000 patients caught early.

Building Resilient Healthcare Supply Chains

Longitudinal visibility across the supply chain, where providers can see demand signals, point-of-use information and supplier resiliency metrics, is vital to accurately manage forecasting and predict supply shortages that can compromise quality patient care.

Predictive models driven by enterprise resource planning and organization-specific data, combined with ML, can help provide this much-needed longitudinal visibility. For example, the PINC AI™ Supply Disruption Manager utilizes AI algorithms and provider data to generate predictions of future demand and identify potential shortages for specific medical products with over 90 percent accuracy.

Armed with these insights, suppliers can anticipate increased demand for planning production, managing inventory and preventing shortages. Providers receive real-time notifications when purchased products are at risk of shortages. The integrated predictive system recommends clinically approved equivalent products—saving staff precious time and minimizing supply chain disruptions for steady supply and patient care continuity.

Infinite Possibilities

AI is poised to transform the healthcare landscape in profound ways, with the promise of greatly improving the quality of patient care, enhancing medical research and mitigating supply shortages. And while AI has a bright future, the creation and utilization of AI tools must be thoughtful and transparent to ensure maximum benefits and minimal risk. The future of healthcare is augmented intelligence, and its potential is boundless.

**Each year, there are over 1 million emergency room visits in the U.S. for syncope and presyncope events. There can be frequent unnecessary use of specific types of brain imaging that gets ordered absent of clinical factors that would require those images. PINC AI ™ Stanson leverages AI capabilities to detect whether or not those criteria backed by the American College of Radiology and American College of Cardiology are met before unnecessary radiation exposure or wasteful imaging use is completed.*



Michael J. Alkire is the President and CEO of Premier Inc., a leading healthcare improvement company, uniting an alliance of more than 4,350 U.S. hospitals and health systems and approximately 300,000 other providers to transform healthcare.

PREMIER



Learning from others to transform an organization

President & CEO of Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) Dr. Jeffrey R. Balser shares his experience in building culture, supporting breakthrough practices, and communicating openly across a large organization.

President & CEO, Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Interviewed January 9, 2024

Robert Reiss: Talk about Vanderbilt University Medical Center, as you have been CEO since 2009.

Jeffrey R. Balser, M.D., Ph.D.: I'd love to do that; and truth be told, talking about the Medical Center is a pleasure. I was a medical student here in the early 1980s and finished our M.D.-Ph.D. program. As I was leaving to go to Johns Hopkins to do residency training, I remember having a strong visceral feeling that the culture here was really special, and I knew I'd miss it. And I actually did miss it. It's one of the reasons that I found a way to come back in 1998 and—particularly as I moved into the CEO role in 2009—it was clear to me that the place cared deeply about whether its new leader would preserve that culture.

I can tell you lots of stories, but one that I'd like to share is a big strategy meeting I led in the early 2000s when I was Chief Research Officer, with a bunch of very senior investigators, who you might imagine as kind of "grumpy professors." I asked them to rank the things about Vanderbilt they valued most. I was struck that our culture—specifically our collaborative atmosphere—ranked equivalent to publishing in high-powered journals like Science and Nature, which I thought was really interesting, and I was pretty sure would not have been the answer at other places I'd been.

The challenge has been that we've grown, and like all big academic medical centers over the last 15 years, we've tripled and maybe even quadrupled in size. Maintaining that kind of atmosphere while growing rapidly, across multiple campuses, is a real challenge. And the other reason it's a challenge is that, like many professions, healthcare has guilds. There's the white coats, and then there's the blue suits. The white coats have a very different orientation where the patient is at the center, and everybody should be focused on everything the patient needs. The blue suits are raised differently. The blue suits, or the executives, who may or may not be physicians, care deeply about the patients, but at the same time, their orientation is around the sustainability of the whole enterprise—particularly its economic sustainability.

> "In GoalFest, we put the clinical leaders and the health system leaders—the white coats and the blue suits—all in a big room together, and we discuss the medical center's incentive goals, things like: 'How many surgeries are we thinking we should be doing this year?' Or 'How long should it take to get an appointment?'"

And so that's a culture clash, and I found early in my tenure that it was really important to call it out. I've experienced it my whole career, where the hospital executives and the physician leaders were talking past each other. And when those fights continue, it dribbles down throughout the organization, and pretty much everybody's just in conflict.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Jeffrey R. Balser, M.D., Ph.D., President & CEO, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Healthcare. This is bestowed for Balser's model of building an exceptional culture with breakthrough initiatives such as: GoalFest galvanizing white coats and blue suits; their own TV show of crisp, professionally produced CEO videos on one topic; and an engineering focus to solve problems.



So, how then do you align people?

We've built a number of programs over the years to try to improve the way people work together and ultimately how they feel about one another across all these different constituencies. One that I really like to speak about is called GoalFest. In GoalFest, we put the clinical leaders and the health system leaders—the white coats and the blue suits—all in a big room together, and we discuss the medical center's incentive goals, things like: "How many surgeries are we thinking we should be doing this year?" Or "How long should it take to get an appointment?" These are discrete operational goals and are assigned to all of our leaders in different ways as part of their compensation. What we do is gather all of us into a room together to talk about why we are, or more often why we are not, hitting them.

Fifteen years ago, that was a bloodbath because we were all pretty sure it was the other person not paying attention, and it was everybody else's fault. What we learned over time was how to structure those discussions in a way that it was about all of us, and people began to realize that it's almost never because of a single individual. It's almost always a complicated problem that requires engagement from lots of people.

Something else important happens when people start to meet that way—they actually get to know each other. For instance, the president of the hospital gets to know the chair of surgery as a person; they realize their kids are playing together at school. They become familiar, and when people really know each other, they give each other more grace when they're managing conflict. We've been really deliberate about having people who might be viewed on different sides of, shall we say "historic peer groups," in coordination together, working on problems together to build that different culture around solving problems. It's really worked well for us.

Great practice. Considering you have 40,000 associates, how do you engage all of them?

One practice is leadership assemblies. We actually already had a practice 15 years ago, when I became head of the medical center, of having these assemblies. They were on a stage, and the people who could attend were manager-level and above in the medical center. The assemblies were held three or four times a year. I would talk about our plans, some of the things that were challenging us; and then we would recognize people by giving awards. This was also a culture development opportunity, because we have a credo at the medical center around behavior, and we would nominate people to win Credo awards. It was very popular with folks.

"When people really know each other, they give each other more grace when they're managing conflict."

During COVID, we realized that we couldn't all get together in auditoriums, so we decided to turn it into a two-hour, highly orchestrated TV show. We hired a top producer who used to be a nationally syndicated television news anchor. We had "professional help," so to speak. That also played into our hands because the medical center is really getting big, and we're on several campuses with over 200 outpatient locations. We were really missing a lot of people who we wanted to hear this content and participate. Now, our TV show has my talk, one from our deputy CEO, and other senior leaders also participate and become more familiar to everyone at VUMC. We have videos honoring our Credo award winners and other kinds of visually appealing content about our successes that make people proud. And it makes the place feel more aware of what I'm thinking and what our top leaders are thinking. In terms of culture management, with every one of those leadership assemblies, we are hammering away on aspects of culture, such as: What kind of behaviors are appropriate? What kinds of behaviors do we want to encourage? What about care for the team members? How are we assuring their needs are met so they can care for patients? Those are the kinds of things that we really work on in leadership assemblies.

COVID certainly had the silver lining of innovation. Any other practices that emerged from the pandemic?

Yes. I think most CEOs would argue that trying to communicate with 40 or 100 or 200,000 people is really hard. I used to try to do it in writing every so often, but I was pretty sure a lot of people weren't reading my letters. So I began to work with the same TV producer to write four to five-minute CEO videos that are crisp, short, and focus on a single topic. I always heavily edit these and often write the script myself so that it really fits into that brief time period and feels like my voice.

The other thing the producer has trained me to do is to speak into a teleprompter in a way that it doesn't look like I'm speaking into a teleprompter, which I've learned is an art form. It takes a lot of work, and I'm by no means a "one-take wonder," but after three years I can usually get it done now in two or three takes. I do these about once a month during the months when we don't have a leadership assembly. Also, for example, if we're going to be doing some slowing down in hiring because revenues are down for whatever reason, I'll talk to the whole medical center about that directly and say, "Here's our situation, here's what we're doing, and here's why."

It was enormously helpful during COVID because people were scared, and I was able to reassure our workforce that we weren't doing layoffs and were going to keep everybody employed. I found I could help suppress anxiety across the workforce through direct and authentic communication. And, frankly, it's pretty time efficient as a way for a CEO to

communicate. When people realize that the videos are short and they can watch them in four or five minutes, we get thousands of people watching. I've really grown to like it, and I find the more I do it, the better I get at it. It's like anything you practice.

And from all of these breakthrough practices, what have you learned personally as a CEO?

Culture is job one, and everything else is manageable, including a pandemic. If culture is strong, it builds resilience to withstand just about any assault that you're delivered. You'll never regret investing in culture.

"What I have found is engineering is one way to develop a facility with problem solving."

Let's discuss your background because, of about 50 healthcare enterprise CEOs I know, you are the only one who is professionally an engineer. How have you used that training?

Yes, I went to engineering school before medical school, which is more common now but was less common before 2000. What I have found is engineering is one way to develop a facility with problem solving, because in engineering school, the professors used to tell us not to memorize things. We could bring whatever books we wanted to the test; they teased that we could even bring our mothers if we wanted. We just needed to figure out how to solve the problems they threw at us. That kind of mentality frames how I think about the work at VUMC. It's not about avoiding or minimizing problems, it's about constantly finding and solving problems. It structures my emotions around managing the operations of this city-size enterprise.



Has engineering helped with any other breakthroughs?

The fact that I'm an engineer by training—and many of my management team members are physician engineers and Ph.D. engineers who are leading the place—has helped us really get our heads around this growing area of health information technology. I learned, when I was a medical student and an intern, that the real substantive aspect of healthcare is getting quality information, and delivering great care is very much about structuring that information so that it's useful for us to make decisions. In my mind, that's really what we do in healthcare: use our people skills and other data sources to understand the patient's situation, and then structure the information so we can deliver great care.

And so, the growth and expansion and the increasing sophistication of information technology has been something that the medical center hasn't just consumed, but has actually participated in developing. Our first Chief Information Officer, Dr. Bill Stead, who was a pioneer in the field, came here in the early 1990s. Vanderbilt had its own fully implemented electronic health record by 1995, which was about 15 years before most major medical centers.

When I was Chief Research Officer, before I got this job, I worked with Bill to grow our research program around health IT. Today, our Department of Biomedical Informatics has over 100 faculty, the size of a pediatrics department at many centers, and it's surrounded by a health IT staff of over 1,000 data scientists. We work to not just utilize health information technology, but to structure it, innovate on it, and do creative and imaginative things with it that streamline health systems operations, such as advising our doctors.

Maybe you want some additional information about this drug or that test? We are able to use the data to inform doctors and nurses about what they might want to consider, because the pool of information that we're all struggling with in order to decide what to do on a minute-to-minute basis is overwhelming, and people need to be prompted with options. Their education can help them siphon through and prioritize options, but having to recall everything de novo in healthcare is just becoming impossible—well beyond the limits of human cognitive ability. Wiser and wiser informatics support is really what I think a lot of healthcare technology needs to do for us, and that's where Vanderbilt has really led.

President George W. Bush came to Nashville in 2004 and announced the nation's health IT initiative at Vanderbilt Medical Center because we had already accomplished much in this area. The nation's Precision Medicine Initiative, which is called "All of Us," announced by President Barack Obama in 2015 to sequence a million Americans and marry those sequences to their health information—the NIH Data and Research Support Center for that project is based at VUMC.



I understand something remarkable started at VUMC...that you have the largest DNA bank in the country. Tell me about that and why it's so transformative.

The nation's leading academic medical centers really are places where extraordinary things happen, as we are places where advances in science and innovation in healthcare are both front of mind, all the time. A very special project at VUMC is called BioVU (pronounced "bio-view"), where we have been collecting DNA from patients with informed consent for over 20 years. What we have learned since human DNA was first sequenced decades ago is that it's not so valuable for solving the mysteries of health and disease unless it's married to a person's health information over a significant period of time. Leveraging VUMC's longstanding information technology expertise, we are among a few global institutions that have connected DNA to electronic health records over many years. To ensure patients are protected, we strip the health information of anything identifying a person— names, locations, jobs, and birthdays.

BioVU is now one of the largest health information DNA banks in the world with over 320,000 samples linked to deidentified health records that average ten years in length. One of the challenges with DNA is getting the entire genome sequenced—the DNA tests we are experiencing as patients and consumers only sample a small percentage of the genome, less than 1/1000th. Doing the whole genome is extremely expensive—for a bank the size of BioVU the cost is well into nine figures. So, a few years ago, we launched Nashville BioSciences—we call it NashBio for short. It's a VUMC company that has been

working closely with pharma and biotech to show how a massive DNA bank like ours can help discover new drugs for conditions like Parkinson's disease and cancer, and also develop molecular diagnostics that detect diseases earlier.

> "Be open to feeling again like you're a freshman in college if you're really going to do something transformative."

We just publicly announced at the JP Morgan Healthcare Conference in San Francisco that nine global companies—including the genome sequencing leader Illumina and major pharma companies like Amgen and Bayer—are joining with us to sequence the whole genome of every BioVU DNA sample in an effort called the Alliance for Genomic Discovery. It will make BioVU one of the most significant discovery resources in the world, changing what is possible in health and medicine.

A feature of this that I love to point out is that this could only be done through the distinctive set of assets in a leading academic medical center. It takes research teams spanning disciplines ranging from genetics to informatics to clinical trials, working hand in glove with a large-scale health care delivery system that is instrumented for discovery and innovation. It speaks to the special role places like VUMC play in our nation's very complex healthcare ecosystem. I think the right metaphor is to view us as the nation's aircraft carriers in the never-ending battle to conquer human disease.

Let's talk about an impactful experience you had. You get a call from Vanderbilt University that they want to separate the healthcare organization. You end up going through the whole process. You do roadshows to generate $1.2 billion in debt, and since then, you've grown from $2 billion to over $7 billion. What advice do you have for CEOs when they want to truly transform an organization?

I would say a couple of things. One is be open to feeling again like you're a freshman in college if you're really going to do something transformative,



at least what I experienced. I didn't know enough law, and I didn't know enough business finance to do this on my own. And so, VUMC's CFO, Cecelia Moore, who did this with me, was one of my most important mentors. A lot of humility is critical to success.

When you're trying to do something where it's not right in the middle of your wheelhouse, you really need to say, "Look, I'm learning again here. I'm smart enough to assimilate all this, but I really need to understand how it all works, what's most important." I often would say to my wife, "Gosh, I feel like I'm doing an MBA and a law degree through this whole process because I'm having to understand things I've never seen. And that's part of the fun, actually." If people really know you want to learn from them, they're much more giving in terms of what they'll teach you. And it was one of the most valuable learning experiences of my entire career. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

"If people really know you want to learn from them, they're much more giving in terms of what they'll teach you."

Finally, on the personal side, who were people you learned from, and how have you applied that as a CEO?

My father-in-law was quite a funny guy, and he had this knack for trying to do home repairs, much to my mother-in-law's chagrin. He loved the glue gun, and he loved caulking. And my father-in-law would always say to me, "Jeff, when you own a house, you caulk till you die." And I actually think managing the operations of a complicated enterprise are a little bit like caulking till you die, because you can look anywhere and there's something broken all the time. What you do as CEO is you just keep looking for things, and you keep poking and prodding all the time. You never stop. You develop the people around you, hopefully, to repair what's broken, because complicated systems are always broken. I think my engineering background has helped me to be at peace with that.



***Jeffrey R. Balser, M.D., Ph.D.**, as Chief Executive Officer since 2009, led the growth of VUMC to include four regional campuses and hundreds of outpatient facilities with over 3 million visits, growing revenues from $2–7 billion.*

The highest-ranked adult and children's hospitals in the Southeast, VUMC houses the nation's fifth largest transplant center and the Mid-South's largest NCI-designated comprehensive cancer center. The School of Medicine is ranked #5 (US News and World Report), up from 15th in 2009. The nation's academic leader in health information technology and precision medicine, VUMC hosts the Data and Research Support Center for NIH's "All of Us" program, gathering DNA and health information from one million Americans.

In 2016, he led VUMC's $1.2B public debt issuance and historic restructuring with Vanderbilt University to become an independent 501C3 corporation. He is a National Academy of Medicine governing councilor, and a director on the Boards of VUMC, CVS Health, and Tulane University.

VANDERBILT HEALTH



Top Financial Service Leaders Drive Success Through Culture and Innovation

By: Robert Reiss

Back in 1994 when I read the book "Build to Last" by James Collins, it opened my eyes that the truly greatest companies had a two elements: the core of a consistent great culture and the ability to reinvent itself while keeping—and strengthening—its core. So in 2024 I researched and uncovered in financial services, an industry driving much of our economy, four companies who exemplified these traits: John Hancock, Marsh, Cognizant, Voya. After sitting down with these leaders on March 18, 2024, I found that great success all boiled down to four principles: redefine your industry; lead purposely by starting with yourself; build the right team; and utilize technology to reinvent.

And while these concepts were from companies with expertise in financial services, I believe all four principles have deep relevancy for most all companies regardless of industry.

Redefine your industry

Redefining an industry means transforming the strategy by looking through a different lens. A dramatic insurance reframing came from a 162 year old company John Hancock who postulated that the insurer and the client actually have the exact same goal ... a long life. Yet, this concept is incredibly hard to create and implement.

Brooks Tingle, President & CEO of John Hancock explains their model to transform the company and the industry, "We engage customers to help them live longer, healthier, better lives. When launching John Hancock Vitality, we set out to transition from a passive claims payor to a dynamic and engaged active risk manager, providing our customers with education, support, incentives, and rewards for the everyday things they do to be healthy—from exercising to buying fresh produce to getting preventative screenings."

Lead purposefully by starting with yourself

Corporations have gone through four phases: 1. In the 1930s Alfred Sloan created the concept of the corporation with General Motors 2. In the 1950s Peter Drucker codified management 3. In the 1980s Japan brought in quality and teams 4. In the early 2000s enterprises linked purpose with profit.

After hearing from Heather Lavallee, CEO, of Voya Financial, I am seriously considering the fifth phase of the corporation will be advancing from company purpose to integrating individual purpose. Purpose-led companies are driven by a shared understanding that what the company does matters to the world. Voya's purpose is "To fight for everyone's opportunity for a better financial future." It's part of the organization's DNA and the reason why its customers choose Voya, why people join the company, and it motivates everyone across the organization to fulfill its mission every day.

Lavallee explains the concept, "Designed to help each one of us better understand, articulate and live our own personal purpose, across Voya our people participate in personal purpose workshops that empower them to directly connect their work to our shared purpose and customer passion." And Heather isn't just leading an organization focused on purpose, she has her own personal purpose which she shares – and lives by – with her team, "To use my power and influence to help others to unlock their own inner superpowers."

Build the right team

After personally interviewing over 1,000 CEOs I can affirm that the single theme I hear the most is along the lines of, "culture eats strategy for breakfast". Building an exceptional culture is easier said than done. And arguably the first important step is hiring the right people. Michelle Sartain, President of Marsh, US and Canada, shares two fundamental — yet profound — questions that will quickly uncover someone's true character and if they'll fit in your culture. "Steeped in our culture is this idea of "The Greater Good." At the heart of that idea is ensuring we are making the right decision for our clients, as they are at the center of everything we do.

As such, I always ask in interviews, 'What have you learned in the last six months?' It's about this idea of being constantly curious and a continuous learner. At Marsh, we deal with clients in all different industries. If you don't have a curiosity about what they do, you're never going to be able to understand their needs and what industry dynamics are impacting them today and in the future. The second question I ask is, 'Describe a difficult situation where you had to make a decision on what to do or not do and what was the process you used to make that decision?' What I'm really trying to get to here, of course, is an understanding of the process someone uses to determine the right course of action."

Utilize technology to reinvent

At the core of innovation is technology. In fact a CEO of a top 10 global bank recently told me that their data actually had more value than their entire banking business. Sarat Varanasi in his role as North America Insurance Leader for Cognizant, overseeing 32,000 staff and 50 million participants, explained the historical relationship of how technology drives innovation in insurance, "The fundamentals of risk management in insurance have remained the same for hundreds of years. But there are occasional leaps in technology that we call S curves that enable reinvention, like the introduction of mainframes in the 50s, Internet in the 2000s, and iPhones in 2007. We believe GenAI is one of these generational opportunities. For example, we're currently helping a client tackle the industry problem of 'Not in Good Order' in claims using GenAI. We are significantly improving agent and customer experiences, while simultaneously lowering costs."

And so, in summary when I am asked what the similarities are of the future great companies – regardless of industry – I sense it will be a combination of: redefining your industry, driving change through purpose and starting with yourself, building the right team, and utilizing technology to reinvent. The recipe for the visionary companies will be blending these four ingredients with your company's core identity.



Succeeding through learning

Drew Brees, Super Bowl MVP and restaurateur, shares his motivation from his days on the field and with his career and business ventures moving forward.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Drew Brees, Super Bowl MVP and restaurateur for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Entrepreneurship. This is bestowed for his significant leadership experience and philosophies including being a lifelong learner which transferred from sports to important endeavors in the restaurant business.

This interview took place November 16, 2023 and was part of our "Stadium to Boardroom" national radio show where we interview athletes who have then become successful business people. My co-host Len Green has the comprehensive background of being: a CEO of an accounting firm, a best-selling author on entrepreneurship, a top professor at Babson College, a renowned investor, and a sports enthusiast who has about 150 race courses.

Robert Reiss: How would you define leadership?

Drew Brees: I think leadership is the ability to motivate and inspire, and people can do that in a lot of different ways. We've all been around those very vocal leaders, and there's something about them. There's a personality. There's an energy. There's positivity that people gravitate toward. There are also leaders who are very quiet. I had teammates who I probably only heard say just a few words in our careers together, and yet, they motivated and inspired me every day by their work ethic. You see their leadership by the way that they approach their craft, by the way that they would practice, and by their dedication to the team. They don't need to say anything; their actions speak loudly enough. Leadership, simply put, is the ability to get the best out of those around you. And so, how you do that needs to match your personality. It needs to be authentic. When people see that you care and have their best interest at heart as well as the team's, that goes a long way.

Drew, there are so many athletes who start restaurants or do other things but just put their name on it. They don't get involved, and statistically…when we did work at Babson College…we find that almost 70% of them fail. Now you, you're successful. What are you doing differently in that area?

You must do things that you are passionate about—things where you can set the same types of goals and standards that you did when you were an athlete. It's the same type of preparation, the same type of team building, the same type of goal setting, and the same type of approach that you had week in and week out with your athletic career. You want to apply that to whatever you're doing in that next chapter of life.

"Leadership, simply put, is the ability to get the best out of those around you."

And it just happens for me that I found a great place in franchising with a lot of these restaurant businesses. First and foremost, I started off as a customer with every business that I'm involved in. My journey and franchising started when I was a college kid at Purdue University back in 1997, and I would order Jimmy John's sandwiches to the dorm three days a week. Sometimes at 3:00 in the morning, I would order a number nine with no cheese and hot peppers, and 15 minutes later, I'd have some dude rolling up on a bicycle and hand me a fresh Jimmy John's sandwich. As I'm taking a bite of that sandwich, I'd think, "Man, it is so consistent; it is so good." Each and every time, I knew exactly what I was getting. I called, and he was there in 15 minutes—it was the most amazing thing ever.

And so, I get drafted by the San Diego Chargers in 2001. I come out to San Diego, and there's no Jimmy John's. I go to New Orleans five years later; there's no Jimmy John's. The only time I could get Jimmy



John's is when I was going back to Purdue University. So finally in 2011, ten years after college, I'm literally sitting and taking a bite of a number nine at the State Street location of Jimmy John's at Purdue University, and I said, "That's it, I have to get Jimmy John's down to New Orleans. I am done only being able to get it when I come up to the Midwest." So I call up a buddy of mine who had been working at Jimmy John's while he was a walk-on at Purdue. He ends up becoming VP of Operations for Jimmy John's corporate. I call my friend, Carl, and I ask, "What do I need to do to bring Jimmy John's down to New Orleans?" And he said, "We just opened up a territory—are you serious?" I answered yes, and that's how I became a Jimmy John's franchisee. Selfishly, I wanted a Jimmy John's sandwich three times a week down in New Orleans, but I also felt it was a great opportunity to bring a great brand down to New Orleans.

There was a time we would employ 30 people a day at our first Jimmy John's location in New Orleans. Today we are now with 25 locations throughout the Southeast; it's been a great business. It had its ups and down at times, but in the beginning years, I would try to involve myself at every aspect of the business. Along with our operating partners, I would sit in on meetings with our managers, I would go out and try to select new sites, and I would negotiate leases with landlords. I was doing all kinds of things because I wanted to understand the business, I wanted to learn to business, and I wanted to know what it took for it to be successful. At the end of the day, that's really what gave me a passion for franchising, and it put me on this path to continue to identify other brands that were also very authentic. These are brands that I really love and want to be involved with, and want to help grow—that's the origin of the story around my foray into franchising.

"First and foremost, I started off as a customer with every business that I'm involved in."

So, after Jimmy John's, what was next?

I'd always wanted to create my own sports bar concept. So here I am in New Orleans around 2015, and we'd always stay the night before games. We'd be in downtown New Orleans and would drive up Purdue Street. As I'm on that drive, I'd pass this sports bar called "Walk On's Sports Bistreaux," and I thought, "Wow, that place looks pretty cool!" I needed to check that place out because I wanted to create my own sports bar concept and maybe get some ideas. So, I remember walking in and thinking, "Golly, I love it. I love the design, I love the way they put up the TVs, I love the way they set up the bar, and they have a little private area to get the pop-a-shot. And everybody's so friendly—I love the culture." I thought to myself, if I were to create a sports bar concept, it would be exactly like this.

Instead of trying to create my own, I thought, "Why don't I just see what these guys are all about?" I started to research Walk On's. I get the chance to

meet and know Brandon Landry, who is one of the co-founders of the brand, and to feel his passion and dedication to something that he and his college best friend had created back when they were walk-ons on the LSU basketball team from 1997–2001. Ironically, that is the exact same time that I was at Purdue University. They drew their sports bar concept on the back of a napkin when they were coming back from a game in Tennessee, and here they were now, in the very early stages of building a brand which had a couple of corporate locations.

Brandon's vision and goal for this was to turn it into a massive franchise concept and really change the game. You can call it a full-service sports bar restaurant, bringing a taste of Louisiana to the rest of the world. And I thought, "You know what? You are doing it right. I believe in you." I've learned so much from Brandon along the way.

Brandon is one of those people throughout the other franchise businesses that I'm involved in—Everbowl, Stretch Zone, Small Sliders, and quite a few others. I've been able to develop a great group of mentors, friends, and experienced people in the business, one from which I have a chance to glean information on a daily basis that continue to help push me to be better, to be a lifelong learner, and to be really successful in this business.

What do sports teach you about decision-making?

I think that's one of the great things about sports, and this is why every kid should play sports. I believe every kid should play multiple sports. The more competitive situations you can be in, the more that prepares you for those similar types of situations in life—whether it's in the business world or just everyday life. Honestly, it's basic decision-making.

I ask young quarterbacks all the time, "How should you evaluate yourself as a quarterback?" The quarterback is that one position where sometimes the best decision you make on a play actually shows up as a negative on the stat sheet. So, think about this for a second. If you're in the pocket, and all of a sudden the pocket breaks down, and you've got rushers collapsing in on you…maybe the route hasn't quite developed yet. If you all of a sudden take a risk and turn that ball loose, and it gets intercepted or something like that…that's bad. If you take a sack, that's a seven- to ten-yard loss, which is bad. Maybe there's a way to buy some time, find a completion, or throw the ball away? Sometimes the best play you can make is to throw the ball away, live to play another day—which is also true in business—and on the stat page it lowers your quarterback rating. That's why I say: don't measure yourself on stats; measure yourself on decision-making.

> "I was doing all kinds of things because I wanted to understand the business, I wanted to learn to business, and I wanted to know what it took for it to be successful. At the end of the day, that's really what gave me a passion for franchising, and it put me on this path to continue to identify other brands that were also very authentic."

Think about it. Get back to the line of scrimmage and put yourself into a third manageable situation which increases your chances of getting a first down, which increases your chance of going to get points, which increases your chance to win in the game. It's all an ODS game—you're just an ODS maker throughout the course of the game. So, the best decision you made shows up as a negative on the stat sheet? By throwing the ball away, that hurts your quarterback rating. Don't measure yourself by statistics. Don't measure yourself by the perception. Measure yourself on your decision-making, because if you make the right decision on every play, you are putting yourself and

"I've been able to develop a great group of mentors, friends, and experienced people in the business, one from which I have a chance to glean information on a daily basis that continue to help push me to be better, to be a lifelong learner, and to be really successful in this business."

your team in the best position to win. Think about that for life. Not everything is going to work out just the way that you want, but you need to gauge yourself instead on the result and gauge yourself on making the best decision under duress, under stress, and ask yourself, "Did I stay true to my core, morals, values, mission, vision, and value structure?" If I stayed true to those, then I should be happy with the decision that I made. And in most cases, and certainly in the end, that's going to end up being the right thing.

What is your mindset like in jumping from one area in anything in life to the next area, like going from college to pro?

Yes. My goal—and I think this was just the competitive mentality when I was coming out of college—was that I want to get drafted as high as possible. It didn't matter where I was going, what system I was going into, or who the coach was. It was just the competitive mentality that I needed to get drafted as high as possible, because the higher you are drafted, that's where your value is. As teams passed me up in the first round, I was frustrated, especially thinking I had a good interview with them. But at the end of the day, I fall to the second round, and I go to the place that was the best fit for me. And that was the San Diego Chargers. I had a chance to play behind Doug Flutie. I got drafted right alongside one of the greatest players of all time, LaDainian Tomlinson. I had a chance to play with some of the great leaders and players of all time, like Junior Seau and Rodney Harrison, as well as so many others. I had a chance to play for one of the greatest coaches of all time, Marty Schottenheimer, who helped mold me in so many different ways as a quarterback and as a leader.

So, I'm thankful that I fell to the second round. At the time, I'm thinking my value is all about where I get drafted in the first round. But in reality, the most important thing was that I ended up in the right system, with the right coach, with the right structure in place, and with the right type of mentors that were going to help develop me into the best player that I could possibly be. And that's exactly what I was able to find in San Diego with the Chargers.

I would encourage anybody who's transitioning—whether it's sports or something else—when you are going to the next level, it's all about being in the right place where that environment will help get the best out of you and help you develop the traits that you need to accomplish what you want to accomplish later on in life. That's the other thing that I find interesting about this. We live in this world and this mindset where you want what you want and you want it now. It's instant gratification. At the end of the day, the reality is that you need to develop traits and attributes before you can get to that point.

And, so, it's okay to have your goal and your vision on; but you're going to have many stepping stones, and you're going to get knocked off those stones at times in order to get to where you want to go. Think about the skills, the traits, and the attributes that you want to develop and embrace the job opportunities and the roles that are going to help you develop those skill sets to get to that eventual point. Be the best that you can be where you are at that moment. It may not be where you want to be eventually, but be the best at where you are. Be a role player at times in order to eventually get to the point where you are and where you want to be—you've paid your dues, and you've developed all the skill sets to get there.



What's the role of confidence in success?

I embraced challenges. I embraced being in situations where it took a little while to get here, but I tried to embrace being uncomfortable at times. I had one of my mentors tell me one time, "You have to learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable," which is putting yourself in situations where it's not a strength or what you're used to doing, yet you are fighting through it. It's being able to jump into the fire and figure it out. Part of the growth and maturation process is having to fight and struggle a little bit.

You see it with kids; they don't want to put themselves in positions where they're not good at something. They'll try to remove themselves from those situations pretty quickly, and I think one of the key elements of childhood development and personal growth is that you get into challenging situations or intentionally put yourself into challenging situations to struggle and work through. That's how you develop confidence, that's how you develop a skill set, and that's how you develop also the mentality that, no matter what the situation is, we'll find a way to navigate through this and develop.

I think there is a skill to being in pressure situations and being able to just calm everything down. I equate it to if you're a golfer, and you have to step up and make a three-foot putt that's really meaningful. How do you calm everything down and laser focus in where you need to get that ball? You just kind of have this routine, this rhythm. I always found that this is very applicable to the quarterback position. When the pressure elevates, anybody in a position of leadership has to find a way to bring it back down so that you can think clearly and make good decisions.

Talk about how sports can transcend society, like coming to the New Orleans Saints shortly after the city was decimated by Hurricane Katrina.

You see it all the time, and it is why sports has always been so important to our society. Think about what sports meant to our society through COVID. People were stuck at home, and the future of society was uncertain after going through the pandemic. Sports has always been something people could rally around, something they yearn to do together, because it's such a social thing. Sports has the ability to lift spirits, it has the ability to give people hope, and that's exactly what sports did for the City of New Orleans—and really the entire Gulf Coast region post-Katrina.

I signed with the New Orleans Saints six months after Katrina, and I remember my first visit in New Orleans, driving around and basically seeing 90% of the city completely devastated, completely destroyed. It looked like a bomb had gone off; it looked like a war zone. I remember seeing it on television six months prior when I was at the San Diego Chargers. You have no sense of just really how bad it was. You look at it and say that it really looks terrible, but to see it in person and then to begin to hear the stories and meet the people who had gone through it is something so much more.

As a team, we knew that this was so much bigger than just football—that each and every time we stepped on the field, we carried a great responsibility. It was



a pressure, but it was a great responsibility that we represented the entire city of New Orleans and the entire Gulf Coast region and that we wanted to represent them the absolute best way that we could. We also understood with Katrina, that Monday mornings after a Saints win, those people woke up with a little extra pep in their step when it came back to rebuilding their homes and rebuilding their lives. We knew we played a big part.

And, also, we were at a point as a team where the Saints had not had a lot of years of success leading up to that. There had been a lot of dysfunction, and there had been a lot of struggle. I think the team and all of us also needed the feeling that we had people that were behind us. And so all of a sudden, it became this interwoven kind of feeling of "We've got the best fan base in the world. We've got the most loyal fan base in the world." Our fan base doesn't have enough money to rebuild their homes and their lives, but they're finding ways to make it to the Saints' games to support our team. That was really the start of the kind of journey to the Super Bowl, which was really a partnership with the fans and the city.

Many times, we ask people to define success. Very often they say a part of success is actually giving back to charity and making a difference. Do you believe in that also?

I do, absolutely. I think success is continuing to be a lifelong learner, continuing to think about personal growth, continuing to think about how you can take all that has been poured into you from coaches, teachers, and mentors, and be able to pass that on to the next generation. At the end of the day, we all have a role in making this society as great as it can possibly be. And we all have to ask ourselves where we identify.

It's one of the hardest things when transitioning from professional sports. The way I equate it is, so many guys and gals have dedicated their early life to being the very best athlete that they possibly can be, and then all of a sudden, when that's over, at times it may

feel like our identity was wrapped up in that sport or what we were playing. That's why I think a lot of people—when they are done—it's almost as if, "What do I do now?" I'm this highly skilled, highly trained athlete. It's actually similar to what somebody might say about the military; there's a skill set, and how does that translate to society?

At the end of the day, there's so many skills in and around leadership and teamwork that this society needs. And so, you need to find areas where you can take those skills that you've learned and be able to apply them and help each other, help lift others up. In speaking about identity, I've been a Christian since I was 17 years old, and so my identity is wrapped up in Christ. My identity is wrapped up in being the best person that I can be in helping to influence others in a really positive way, helping to lift them up, and helping to equip them to be the future leaders of this great country in this world.

"I had one of my mentors tell me one time, 'You have to learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable.'"

You just said you became a Christian at 17 years old. What happened there?

Up until that point, I had gone to church a little bit. My parents divorced when I was seven years old, and both got remarried. During high school, I was a multi-sport athlete, and my world was wrapped up in and around my athletic career, and that's where I was setting all my goals towards. I wanted to be a college athlete. My junior year, I ended up tearing my ACL in the playoffs on my high school football team. The team was a perennial powerhouse, Westlake High School in Austin, Texas, and we were on our way to winning a state championship, which we had never won before. There's no doubt it was probably the best team we've ever had, and all of a sudden, I go down with an ACL injury. We lost the following week, and as I'm sitting in a pew at the First Baptist Church of Austin, Texas a couple of weeks later, with a big brace on my knee, I'm thinking to myself, "Is my football career over? Is my sports career over? Now I can't play basketball. I can't play baseball. This is my junior year. This is when you get recruited." I felt like all my dreams were just being ripped away from me.

Normally when I'd go to church, my younger brother and I would be messing around and not really listening, but for whatever reason, this particular Sunday was different. And I think maybe it was because I had a little bit of my athletic career flashing before my eyes. But nonetheless, I remember sitting there listening to our pastor talking about God looking for a few good men to lead his kingdom, and I just felt like he was speaking to me. I felt like God just reached in my heart and said, "You're one of those people." From that moment on, I realized that it wasn't about sports, and it wasn't about my own personal or selfish aspirations. It was about wrapping my identity up and that God, no matter what happened, had me. It was a renewed mind set. It helped me get through the next eight months of rehabilitation and also wondering if I would ever have an athletic career again.

And then, coming out that next season, we went to the state championship, I went on to have a successful baseball year, I went on to university, and the rest is history. But my base of faith has always remained very strong.

That was really inspirational, Drew. What advice do you have on goal setting?

I think at times we set this massive goal, and if we fall short of that goal, it's as though it was a failure or it was a disappointment. Maybe, there were no benchmarks that we established for ourselves in order to get to that ultimate one. It's very important to not get overwhelmed, to set these short-term goals and wins or opportunities, because that develops confidence, and it develops a belief system that when I set my mind to something, I'll accomplish it.

I'll give you an example. So, with some of these injuries,—whether it was my high school knee injury or, more specifically, my dislocated right shoulder injury that I had when I left the San Diego Chargers and went to the New Orleans Saints—I was told by some doctors that I would never play football again. But the minute that I had surgery and I began the rehab process, the doctor looked at me and said, "You're not going to play football for eight months, you're not going to be actually back on the field throwing football for eight months." I said okay to the doctor, but that's not very encouraging! It's a long road and if that is the only thing I am thinking about, then each day gets kind of monotonous. So I ask, "What's the first objective here?" And he says, "Well, the first objective is to get full range of motion." I wanted to know the time frame, and the doctor told me about six weeks, and immediately I thought, "Okay, I'm going to beat that." Each and every day, I have more of this short-term goal and mindset. I'm not even thinking about getting on the field in eight months; I'm more focused on how do I beat what he just said my benchmark was? And so, four and a half weeks later, I had full range of motion. My next question for the doctor was, "Okay, so what's next?" And every time he gave me a goal, in my mind I was going to beat it.

You just keep setting these short-term goals and objectives for yourself, and each time you win or accomplish that, all of a sudden, that becomes this boost of confidence, of energy … I'm one step closer. Short-term goals and small wins help you get to the big wins. And before I knew it, it was four months later, and I was actually starting to learn how to throw again. And then before I knew it, I was back on the field…and where'd the eight months go?

This mindset translates to football and scoring in the red zone. When you're sitting at your own ten-yard line, you're not thinking about scoring right now—you're thinking about how you get the first first down? How do I get the first completion? And before you know, it's first down. Then you're hitting your



head on the goalpost. It's that kind of the mindset of don't overwhelm yourself by just locking in on this mountain in the distance. Just think about those short steps, those short wins, small wins, and short-term goals that you can set right in front of you.

Your thoughts on work-life balance?

There's only 24 hours in the day. I wish there was more because I feel as though I've got so much to accomplish, so much work to do. But at the end of the day, I think the way that I approach that is God has equipped us all with unique talents, abilities, and skills. As far as working hard and striving for something, He has absolutely made us that way, and that is the way that we are wired. At the same time, I think what I always tried to do during my career, and even now, is you just establish non-negotiables for yourself throughout the course of the day. So non-negotiable for me in the morning is I'm going to get up, I'm going to read my Bible, I'm going to have a cup of coffee—caffeine and Jesus is what I call it. That's the way I'm going to start every day, and I have to in order to wire my mind and get ready for the day. And then at the end of the day, I'm going to make sure I'm there to put my kids to bed, read them a book, have

a moment to say a prayer with them, and have a moment just to reflect on the day. Twice a week, my wife and I are going to go for a walk together. Once a week or a couple of times a week, we're going to have family dinner.

So you create some of these non-negotiable moments where the rest of the week, the rest of life, it can get crazy. The rest of life, you can be working your tail off, you can be locked in, focused, whatever. But you know that there are these couple of moments where you are going to get that faith time, that family time, whatever your priorities are. And those are the things that fill your bucket. Those are the things that rejuvenate you. Those are the things that allow you to be the very best at your job, your craft, and your profession. So no excuses for working hard or burning the midnight oil and striving for something, but at the same time, make sure that you've got those non-negotiables in your life that just keep you set and keep you sane.

Final question. You mentioned the importance of being a lifelong learner. Specifically how do you do that?

I probably learn more from podcasts than I do from just about anything. You find a topic or you find a person that you really want to learn from, and there's tons of content out there about it. And I think the way that you can pair that with certain things that you love to do, too. I love to ride my bike, so usually twice a week, I'm jumping on my bike and going for an hour and a half bike ride. Whereas, normally I would just be riding my bike, now I'm throwing in a podcast. So think about it. I just got three hours a week worth of information, worth of content, worth of education on a topic as I'm getting exercise, as I'm riding my bike, as I'm doing something I enjoy doing. Call it multitasking…call it whatever you want, but at the end of the day, we have access to all this information.

And, so, whatever that is, find those people, find those topics that you want to learn about, and then set goals towards that. Then map out a course for how you're going to put in the necessary amount of time in order to feel like you've gotten some sort of level of education around it.



***Drew Brees**—an Austin, TX native and graduate of Westlake High School, and famously NFL Super Bowl XLIV MVP—always excelled in football, basketball, and baseball. Leading his team to a perfect 16-0 record and the 5A Texas State Championship in 1996, he earned the state's 5A Offensive Player of the Year honor.*

At Purdue University on a football scholarship, Brees earned a bachelor's degree in Industrial Management from the Krannert School of Management. A two-time Heisman finalist, he led the Boilermakers to a Big Ten Championship and Rose Bowl appearance in 2000, winning the Maxwell Award and multiple other accolades.

In the NFL, Brees spent five years with the San Diego Chargers before joining the New Orleans Saints in 2006, where he earned numerous honors, including the 2006 Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year and 2008 and 2011 NFL Offensive Player of the Year awards, and became a Super Bowl XLIV Champion. Brees became a devoted fan of Walk-On's Southern food upon arriving in New Orleans, leading him to become an owner in 2015. He and his wife Brittany have four children, and he brings his trademark dedication and excellence from the field to the restaurant.

WALK-ON'S
SPORTS BISTREAUX



A Case Study in Digital Transformation

How GAX is using Blockchain to Democratize Blue-Chip Art and Investments

By: Professor Dr. Christoph Meinel

Digital technologies are ongoing to change our world in its all spheres: how we work, how we live, how we communicate, how we shop, and how we entertain.

The invention of the Internet, WWW, social media, Blockchain, and AI—which all came along with ever new types of smart devices—all happened within my lifespan. So our good old world was disrupted and will continue to be disrupted in the next decades, hopefully becoming a better world.

> "Digital technologies are disrupting the $65 billion-a-year world of the fine arts and art investments."

Digital transformation is democratizing the arts and education so people from all around the world can easily access the latest knowledge. AI and the LLMs (Large Language Models) synthesized from artificial neuronal networks, which have undergone intensive deep learning techniques, are making our lives easier in unforeseen ways—enabling us to hand over mindless and even intelligent work from humans to machines.

And now for the first time, digital technologies are disrupting the $65 billion-a-year world of the fine arts and art investments. With Blockchain technology by means of NFTs (non-fungible token), digital identifiers that are recorded on a Blockchain, ownership, and authenticity can be certified, and people can now trade any kind of value assets in a secure way without a bank or a third party.



Professor Dr. Christoph Meinel presenting global art eXchange (GAX)

Using this technology, the traditional elitist art market can finally be democratized, which is shown by a startup called GAX—global art eXchange. GAX converts blue-chip art work into a liquid asset. GAX calls these digital assets' security tokens "ArtBits." For physical blue-chip art works—such as Picasso, Monet, Basquiat, or others—NFTs are created on the Blockchain, which are then fractionalized creating F-NFTs. GAX fractionalizes each artwork into one million ArtBits. If GAX would have sold the Picasso which recently sold for $140 million to one single wealthy party, one ArtBit from this great Picasso would have cost $140.

With GAX, anyone can purchase ArtBits and become a piecewise owner of a Picasso. GAX offers the true democratization of blue-chip art. ArtBits can be purchased, sold, traded, or collected using the Alternative Trading System with the involvement of a Special Purpose Broker Dealer as custodian. Although not the same, the handling of ArtBits shows similarities with stock market activities.

> "With GAX, anyone can purchase ArtBits and become a piecewise owner of a Picasso. GAX offers the true democratization of blue-chip art."

GAX allows people like you and me to invest in blue-chip art works—one of the most durable and best appreciating assets against economic downturns and against inflation or economic meltdowns. Art has outperformed the S&P 500 for the past 25 years.

Dr. Christoph Meinel is Founding President of the German University of Digital Science3, Former Head and CEO of the Hasso Plattner Institute in Potsdam Germany, and Professor for Internet Technologies and Systems.



Delivering on purpose

Linda Rendle—CEO and Chair of the Board at The Clorox Company—shares how the company takes its purpose personally on every level and how that impacts their customers' lives. She believes that their mission to create a better world where people can be well and thrive drives employees' passion for their work.

CEO and Chair of the Board, The Clorox Company

Interviewed July 12, 2023

Robert Reiss: Let's start with the heritage and brands at Clorox and how they are connected today.

Linda Rendle: The Clorox Company was founded in 1913. From setting the standard for home safety and cleaning, to Burt's Bee's natural body care, to inspiring a love for flavor with Hidden Valley Ranch, we've made a difference in millions of people's everyday lives for more than a century. People are at the center of everything we do. And that's why we believe that doing business consistent with our values is core to our purpose, critical to building leading brands, and important to how we drive growth.

As you said, a core driver of the business for you is the concept of purpose. Explain.

I think purpose is a very straightforward concept. It's about "why you exist." For us, it's very clear why we exist. We want to create a better world where people can be well and thrive. And we do that through our brands. We do that through our community involvement. We do that through creating value for all of our stakeholders. When you're grounded in purpose, you're grounded in your "why." You connect value creation for the business to creating value for people, which is the thing that makes the work that we do really meaningful. It's meaningful for the people who create our products in our manufacturing facilities, for the people who market them, and for the people who do all of the work across the company to ensure that we develop and deliver great brands.

Purpose is something that is a very hard skill, not something soft. It's not something that is negotiable to us because it is how we create brands that people love. We view it as something foundational for our strategy, for our policies, and for our values. And each one of us is committed to championing that world where people can be well and thrive every single day. That's the first thing you're going to hear people say when they talk about the company—that their work is connected to our purpose and that they know what it takes to deliver on that purpose.

> "For us, it's very clear why we exist. We want to create a better world where people can be well and thrive."

Purpose is the foundation of how we talk to our people, and it resides at all levels of the organization. It's the first thing that we talk about when we talk about our strategy. As we talk about our values or as we talk about our priorities for a particular year, they all stem from that purpose. So, to me, purpose is not a soft concept, and it's not negotiable. It's why people get out of bed in the morning to do the work they do.

How did purpose come into play during challenging times?

Nothing was more profound than when we were going through the pandemic. Obviously, we are a company that has a lot of cleaning products. During the pandemic, our people knew they were doing



The CEO Forum Group has selected Linda Rendle, CEO and Chair of the Board, Clorox, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Purpose. This is bestowed for Rendle's important global leadership in advancing Clorox's purpose of creating a better world where people can thrive as the non-negotiable fiber that runs through all strategies and operations at Clorox.

something that was bigger than themselves—they were keeping people in the world safe. They were keeping their families safe. Purpose was what helped our people, and that's how they went through an extraordinarily difficult time. We try and connect everybody's priorities back to it.

That purpose can also be related to their families and how we create great programs for people to thrive in their own individual lives. We want to make sure that we have policies and programs in place to keep all of our thousands of teammates from around the world thriving as well. I think if you walk into any one of our facilities, people are able to articulate that. They're able to put it into words that are meaningful for them, and it's why they show up every single day.

How do you as CEO view purpose at Clorox?

Purpose is important to me as an individual because our products are in nine out of 10 U.S. households and in millions of households around the world. When you walk into a home, you're going to most likely find a product that's very personal in somebody's everyday life. Ultimately, I'm accountable for that. So we owe them an experience with our brands that is meaningful and helps them to take better care of their kids, to keep themselves safe, or to have a great natural skincare experience.





I have the honor to run a company that has that type of impact on people's lives. That is a personal thing that I take very seriously.

On a personal note for me, you know creating gender parity is a core imperative. As a Fortune 500 woman CEO, talk about Clorox. What needs to be done to create more opportunities for women executives in business?

> "During the pandemic, our people knew they were doing something that was bigger than themselves—they were keeping people in the world safe. They were keeping their families safe. Purpose was what helped our people."

Pay equity is incredibly important. We want to build a team that reflects the consumers that we serve. And we've been deeply committed to and have achieved pay equity for the last three years. Equal work should receive equal pay. We went through an extensive study where we leveraged data to ensure that any place there could be pay equity, we deal with it, and we achieve that every year. This is something that we talk to our team about, that we report externally, and

we hold ourselves accountable to. It is foundational to the work that we do to create that culture and ensure that we have equity across the organization.

Over 40% of our positions are filled by women. What we're really proud of is the fact that our board and our executive team have met gender parity. I've been in this position for just three years, so of course this is the work of many people who have been committed to diversity, equity and inclusion for many, many years at the company. And that's what it takes…it takes deep, long-term commitment; it takes commitment with how we recruit and how we retain talent, and then how we ensure that we create an inclusive culture where people can do their best work regardless of who they are. Most importantly, we want to create an environment where everyone can thrive.

"For us, it's very clear why we exist. We want to create a better world where people can be well and thrive…Purpose is not a soft concept, and it's not negotiable. It's why people get out of bed in the morning."

What's your vision for the future of Clorox?

Our vision is to deliver exceptional products that earn people's enduring loyalty and helps them be well and thrive every single day. We remain committed to driving purpose-driven growth—what we call our IGNITE strategy—and I am confident in the choices we are making and the execution we are delivering. I could not be more optimistic about our future. We have navigated through many cycles in our 110-year history, and we'll continue to innovate and deliver sustainable value for ourselves, our stakeholders, and the consumers we serve.



Linda Rendle *is Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the Board of The Clorox Company.*

During 20 years with the company, Rendle has held numerous senior leadership roles. Prior to being named CEO in 2020, she served as president, overseeing all the company's businesses as well as corporate and business development, corporate strategy, marketing, sales, product supply, research and development, and IT. Before joining Clorox, Rendle worked for The Procter & Gamble Company, where she held several sales leadership positions.

Rendle is on the board of directors of Visa Inc. and is chair of the board of the Consumer Brands Association. She also serves on the advisory board of Generation Thrive, a first-of-its-kind nonprofit hub created by the Warriors Community Foundation and Kaiser Permanente to help nonprofit organizations and schools in the San Francisco Bay Area through education and wellness programming.

Rendle holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Harvard University.

The Clorox Company



The Secret Behind My Success as a CEO

By: Leonard Green, CEO of The Green Group

It was Lois Green, my wife and partner, who was the real CEO behind my successes.

At our first encounter, she gave me a real indication of the special gifts she possessed.

I had just started a new college, and on one Friday night, I called a few girls to ask them out for a date on Saturday and, to my dismay, all of them turned me down. When I was sharing the story with a friend on Monday morning, a young lady sitting in back of me—who I didn't know and had overheard our conversation—burst out, "Serves you right for calling someone on Friday night for a date on Saturday!" Her feistiness that day intrigued me and led me to ask her out on a date soon after. We went out, and I found she was so easy to talk to. Before I knew it, I fell in love with her and said to myself, "What am I waiting for...She's the one!"

Lois' secret to solving problems

Lois' special gift of brilliance classified her as a Mensa. She could have chosen to pursue any area if she had the money, time, and ability to do so. However, we started a family soon after getting married; and Lois dedicated her life as a wife, mother, and advisor to me and her family. She had the incredible ability to think outside the box and loved putting little clues together to solve a challenge. I'm sure the fact that she did about ten crossword puzzles a day trained her mind to always look for a different answer.

Lois' secret to solving problems

I would often share problems or challenges with her and tell her what my possible solutions were. She would then almost always ask me very broad questions that encompassed a lot of my vast business experiences and got me thinking outside the box. This typically resulted in my coming up with greater and more improved solutions than I had originally thought.

She had the unique ability to not only patiently listen to people but understand them and appreciate how we are all different. Lois was a very caring person and a solid supporter of her family, religion, and the many charities she supported and was involved with.

Leading the horse to water

Lois was great at guiding me down the right path.

To be successful, every CEO should have someone they can relate to or can ask questions of and receive honest feedback. Every successful entrepreneur should surround themselves with a Board or group of colleagues that challenges them and are not just "yes people."

Lois' decision making as a CEO in the horse business

When we started in the horse business, I was a novice. My idea of the easiest way to learn the business was to claim a horse and then hire a trainer to run the operation.

Lois said to me, "You can't make any money that way because you're buying damaged goods. A horse runs in a Claiming Race because it is not good enough to run in an Allowance or Stake Race. Why aren't we in the breeding business? It is a science; you breed for speed and distance."

The science of breeding goes back to the original horse, their bloodlines, and a combination of other things. Lois read scores of books on the horse breeding business. The first year that we started breeding horses we bred two champions. Can you imagine? Lois' expertise, improving the odds of prodigy, and management gave us a tremendous advantage in our breeding business. And since that first year, we have bred over 20 Graded Stakes winners.

She also factored in the probabilities. If a horse didn't run well, and the trainer said, "You know what, I'm not sure what the problem is...shins, air or something else. Let's send it to a vet clinic or put it on a farm." Ninety eight percent of the owners would have agreed with the vet or trainer, but not Lois. She would say, "No, tell me what you think the problem is." When the vet told her that she probably wouldn't understand it, Lois would say, "I probably know more about it than you do, so let's work together to come up with a solution." When Lois made decisions, she balanced all aspects: facts and expertise.

Turning ambiguity into fact

Lois was an avid reader. She would read four or five books at the same time, all on different subjects. She could also read and understand tax laws and case studies.

Can you imagine taking someone who never took a business course up to my Harvard Business Class where they have to analyze very complicated business problems? Lois did just that when I went to the Harvard OPM Program. Everyone knew Lois was helping me, and when it came time for graduation day, the dean announced "Lois Green." That is exactly what the diploma says.

She was profoundly brilliant

Lois had a favorite saying when she heard someone say, "We have a problem." Her response would be, "There are no problems in the world, only challenges."

Lois Green was the love of my life and my partner in life. I was truly blessed to have her as my CEO, and I attribute the majority of my successes to her. May she rest in peace.

About Len Green

Len Green has deep experience across the continuum of entrepreneurship as he is: Founder and Chairman of the Green Group accounting firm; a top-rated professor of entrepreneurship at Babson College; author of best-selling book, The Entrepreneur's Playbook; a sports enthusiast, including owning about 150 race horses; and a co-host of the nationally syndicated radio show Stadium to Boardroom.





Creating value through meaningful transformation

Ron Shaich—Founding CEO of Panera Bread—shares his interesting professional history of how Panera Bread began and many transformational insights from his book, "Know What Matters."



The CEO Forum Group has selected Ron Shaich, Founding CEO, Panera Bread, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Strategy. This is bestowed for his extraordinary vision and initiative in bringing one of the most successful enterprises of our time through strategies outlined in Know What Matters.

Robert Reiss: Your stock has performed in an extraordinary way, maybe 104 times. So, if you invested $10,000 over a 20-year period, you would have made over a million dollars. What are the secrets of leadership that drive extraordinary success?

Ron Shaich: The reality is that throughout Corporate America, we spend a lot of time reacting and responding to the wrong things to our competitors, to what else is going on out there. And we don't have a future-oriented view of where we need to be with precision. And, often, the view we have isn't right. And then there is the dirty little secret of most companies, which is they don't get done what they say they're going to get done. That's why I named my book "Know What Matters."

"Increasingly, our public markets have become pervasively short term. That gives a powerful opportunity to contrarians like me, leading companies who are thinking long term."

You have to deliver and it's all about the long term. I was a CEO for 37 years and a public company CEO for 27 years. Over the last 20 years, we delivered a 25% annual return to our shareholders. When you take it over these 20 years, it's two times Starbucks, four times Chipotle, and I was just told we beat Warren Buffett and Berkshire Hathaway. In my new role, I continue to think long term throughout the entire process. Still, increasingly, our public markets have become pervasively short term. That gives a powerful opportunity to contrarians like me, leading companies who are thinking long term, really spending the time and energy to figure out what's going to matter, telling themselves the truth and then actually getting it done.

I think all CEOs can learn from the four transformations you went through which, Ron, are really like the ultimate doctorate in strategy. Walk through those.

I started with a 400 square foot cookie store in Downtown Boston. First major transformation after we took over, we were in the cookie store, and I had 50,000 people a day going by. Nobody bought cookies before noon. I put in French baked goods. I very quickly realized that the company I was dealing with, a company called Au Bon Pain (three stores at the time) up in Boston, had some operational challenges, but represented, for lots of different reasons, a powerful opportunity to build the kind of company I wanted to work in. In 1981, I ended up merging my one cookie store with the three Au Bon Pains. A gentleman named Louis Kane, who's now deceased, was running Au Bon Pain and he became my partner of two decades. In many ways, he was one of my most beloved friends and colleagues. So Lou and I merged our businesses which created a company called Au Bon Pain Co. Inc. in 1981 and that was the company that I sold in 2017 for $7.5 billion—a company that had multiple transformations.

"Public companies need to feed the growth monster. The real value of your company, the value of your stock, is not rooted in your earnings per share. It's rooted in the multiple the market applies to it, which is simply a representation of how they perceive future growth."

The first transformation that occurred was a realization that in Au Bon Pain, which was a croissant bread shop in Boston, was that the action wasn't in selling the bread or croissant. It was listening to the customer and hearing that customer say to us, "My God, I want that piece of bread, but I don't want you to slice it like a piece of bread. Slice it from top to bottom." And then they pull out a bag from Stop & Shop and, literally, they put Boursin and roast beef on that bread. And again, you didn't have to have a Harvard MBA to say, "Wow, what's going on with these consumers? What do they really want?" And what they really wanted was the sandwich, and they wanted it on this wonderful bread and croissant. And we decided we were going to become a bakery cafe, and move away from what we were, which was simply a bakery.

It was a powerful transformation. A business that was on the edge of going under very quickly moved into a category that every mall developer wanted. Au Bon Pain took off. The byproduct of that was we went public in 1991. Lots of people took a shot at us, and we won.

The second major transformation occurred two years after the IPO, and it occurred as our growth started to flatten out in Au Bon Pain. And, Robert, as I think your listeners know, public companies need to feed the growth monster. The real value of your company, the value of your stock, is not rooted in your earnings per share. It's rooted in the multiple the market applies to it, which is simply a representation of how they perceive future growth. It was very clear to me our growth in Au Bon Pain was slowing down.



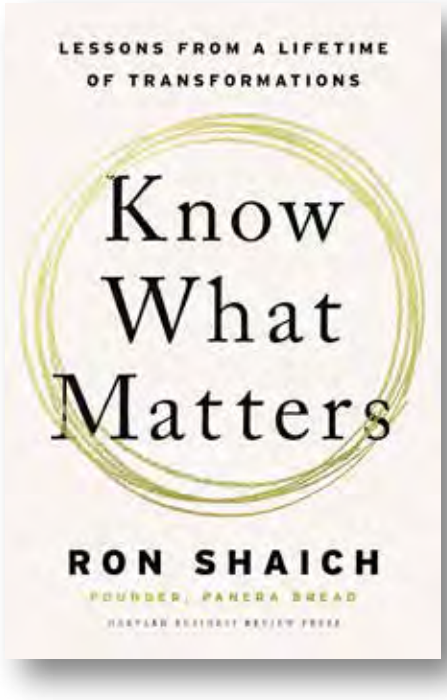
I started searching around the country to try to understand what was going on and, ultimately, learning where it starts. Empathy is where it starts. It became pretty clear to me and a couple of my team members, one who is now my partner, Dwight Jewson, who at the time was my strategic consultant, that after two years, there was a powerful emerging niche in food service. And I'll describe it this way.

> "I came back, and I wrote a document, a vision, for how I would compete with Panera if I wasn't part of Panera."

At that point, the only choices were fine dining and fast food. And we could just see and feel as if it had already occurred in multiple categories. Coffee vultures in Maxwell House had morphed into Peet's. Coke and Pepsi had morphed into Snapple. And at Waldo's, you saw it in beer. Anheuser-Busch and Miller had morphed into Sam Adams. We saw the same thing happening in restaurants. A drive for specialness by a niche of the consumer.

We began to imagine specialty food, and we began to imagine if we gave people real food environments that engaged them, served by people that actually cared, we could change the currency from fast food, which was a lot of food for not a lot of money. We could sell people a higher sense of themselves for just a bit more money and this was a powerful understanding which took two years to play out. That ideology, that understanding, became the ideology that underpinned what is now called fast casual, which is a $100 billion segment today, expected to top $300 billion in 2032. From that came Panera, Starbucks, Chipotle later, but a different paradigm and that paradigm allowed us to take one of our four divisions, Panera, and transform that into the poster child for fast casual. So, that's the second major transformation.

Third, let's fast forward to 1999. I've got four divisions in a public company, with professional managers running every one of them—Au Bon Pain. Au Bon Pain International, a big manufacturing business, selling into the clubs, and then I had Panera. I was down at my house in the Caribbean, and I was honestly depressed. I was talking to a friend and I was saying, "This business we bought, St. Louis Bread Company, which we converted into Panera Bread and turned into this fast-casual concept, this is now 100 stores, but it has the potential to be a nationally dominant brand." And I'll tell you something, for every hundred people that say that no one ever makes it, it's really tough. It's tougher than climbing Mount Everest, frankly. And I said, "This has the potential, but I'm really bummed because we're going to screw it up. We don't have the capital." More importantly, we have professional managers who don't know what growth really is or what's going to hit them. I said, "We're going to blow it." My friend looked at me and said, "Ron, what would you do if Panera was the name of the company? If Panera owned all those other divisions, not the other way around?" I said, "Wow.





What I would do is monetize every other asset, take that capital, put it against developing Panera Bread," and then I'd go down there myself, take the very best people I had and help make this thing happen.

> "I realized the time to be judging your life is not in the ninth inning with two outs. It's way earlier in the game—the third inning, the fifth inning. "

And, Robert, I'm the kind of person where I start to think about things and then I say, if it makes sense, I'm going to go do it. I made the decision to do it. It led to the worst year and a half of my life. You know, all these decisions, in retrospect, look antiseptic, they look easy. It was horrible. I sold my first son, Au Bon Pain. And people who I loved left. The knives came out and there was a ton of palace intrigue and everybody was fighting. And any given day you could have convinced me not to do the deal. If you really want to know the truth, it was that hard to get through to them, but I kept going—and again, it's part of the precept of this book, focusing on the long-term future, what it is I was trying to create. And that's what kept me going through that time period. And, in the end, 1999, we completed the sale of all of our other divisions. We renamed the public company to Panera from what had been Au Bon Pain Co. Inc. That represented our third transformation.

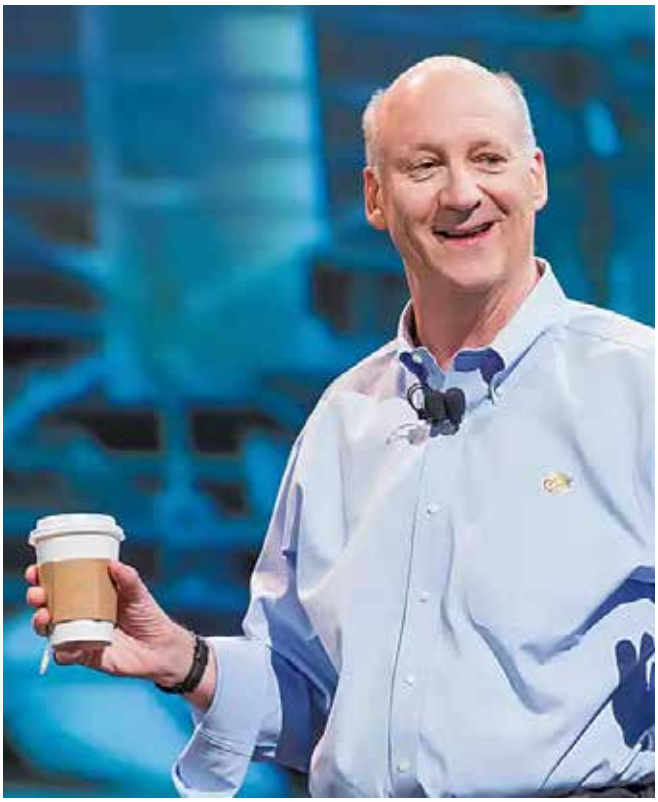
We took off and started focusing on running Panera well, making smart bets as we call it. This is something we also talk about in the book and living into this vision of the future we had created. By 2009, we had over 1,200 stores, maybe a bit more. I was starting to feel a longing. I felt like I had learned so much in running these companies about how you run any organization, about how you think long term. And our body politic was becoming more and more polarized. And I wanted to take what I had learned and apply it more broadly to civic society. And it led

me to make the choice. I had some discussions with the Obama administration. I couldn't do it because of my commitment to Panera. I made the decision to jump off a high diving board and just find out what it would feel like if I wasn't at Panera and see if I could pursue some of these things. And in 2009–2010, as the decade ended, I stepped down as CEO.

I immediately started something called Panera Cares, which were these pay it forward cafes of shared responsibility, where we had no set prices. And we ended up opening five of them across the country. I ended up helping form a group called No Labels, which is trying to reduce the hyper-partisanship in America. But I also was still doing, as a large shareholder, all the M&A and some of the customer work for Panera. And again, learning is where the action occurs for a CEO.

I came back, and I wrote a document, a vision, for how I would compete with Panera if I wasn't part of Panera. Bill Moreton, my very dear friend who took over as CEO, my long-time CFO and COO, looked at me and said, "Wow, this makes a lot of sense." I essentially was calling for digital access, which wasn't being used in the restaurant industry, but to speed service. I was calling for a redo of the production systems to keep up with the volume and to produce accuracy. I was calling for loyalty. I was calling for a redefinition of how Panera competed around things like craveable wellness and clean food. And frankly, I was calling for omnichannel. And Bill said, "Would you go work on this digital capability?" And I said, "Sure."

A year later, this executive chairman was having the time of his life working 80 hours a week on the product. I didn't have any of the ceremonial duties of CEO, and that was great. And we were building this prototype. Along the way, Bill came to me and said he had a personal issue and couldn't travel. And one thing led to another, and basically Bill and I swapped positions. He became executive vice chair. I came back as CEO, and all I did was put this vision into place, and it led to the largest transformation, I think, of any large public restaurant company of our size. And we redid the whole thing—the whole customer experience, the whole go-to market strategy, the whole production systems along the way. I spent a couple hundred million on this and I had activists who wanted a nickel, who wanted to short it, basically to cut the expenses.



They wanted us to take on more debt. We went through that process. I had all those things that happen in transformation where people leave because bonuses are down, the pain is there. Nothing is proven until it's done, Robert. So, I had to go through that process. By 2016–2017, it had taken off. Comps were up, EBITDA was up strongly. And, reading the book, we had serious discussions with Starbucks. They tried to acquire us along the way. Ultimately, a company called JAB fell in love with Panera and bought the company in the largest U.S. restaurant deal ever done amongst the highest multiples.

And those are the four transformations. But every one of them, to me, running a large company or a small company, you need to be figuring out where you need to be tomorrow. I don't mean literally tomorrow. I mean, 3 years…5, 7, and 10…and getting that right and then building everything around it is the key to it.

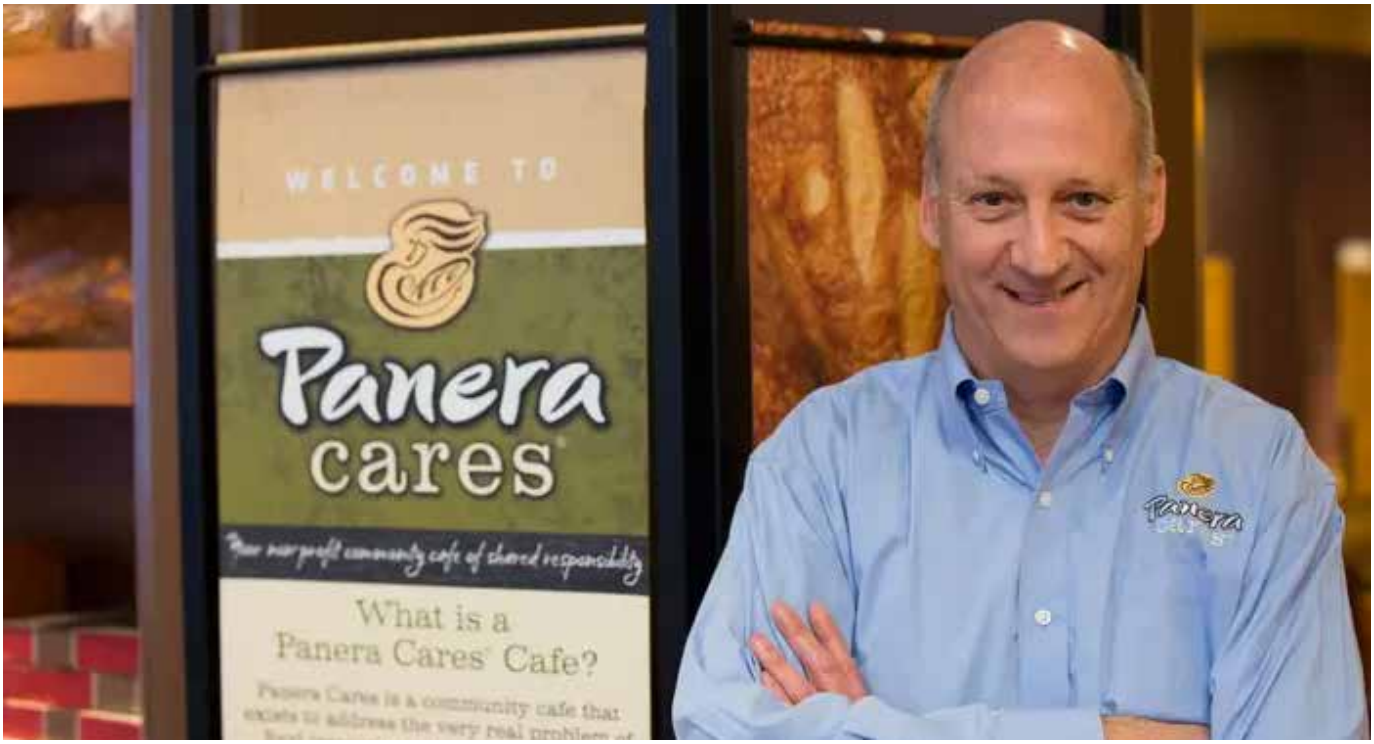
> "Running a large company or a small company, you need to be figuring out where you need to be tomorrow."

I tell a story in the book, and I encourage your listeners to read the book. I talk about my parents' death. When I watched them die it became clear to me, there is a judgment day. That judgment day—you have to figure it out for yourself—whether it's up there or down here. But I can tell you that if you have chronic illness, you're going to have a judgment day here. And I watched them both go through it, and I realized the time to be judging your life is not in the ninth inning with two outs. It's way earlier in the game—the third inning, the fifth inning. The time to worry about a heart attack is not in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. And it led to a process I call future back, where I sit down every year and again, I take many of the lessons from my own life, the business, and vice versa.

One thing that I loved in your book was your concept called premortem.

Well, if you're going to plan ahead, you better know where you want to go. So, if you get in a car and you press the accelerator and you don't have your hands on the wheel, you don't know where you're going, you just spin. Too many organizations are in a reactive mode.

I believe powerfully in a concept that I call premortem or future back, which came from my personal life. I would sit down each year and ask myself, where do I want to be in terms of the core relationships of my life, my relationship with my health, my body, my



relationship with my family, my spouse, my kids? Where do I want to be in terms of my relationship with my work and what I'm doing and my organization and my own relationship to being there. And then fourth, my own relationship with my own God.

And I'd go through that process every year and I'd say, "This is where I want to be in five years." And then I say, "What do I have to do this year to get there? What do I have to do each quarter? What are the projects I have to do?" And then I would hold myself accountable and my God, this worked. I'd get about 80% of it done every year. And I ultimately said, "Let's do that in business." And it became the core principle I operated from.

> "I believe powerfully in a concept that I call premortem or future back."

I literally spend weeks every year trying to figure out what's going to matter in three years, in five and seven for our company. I take the team through it. They'd have to own it. And then we would say, these are the things that are so important that if we don't get them done, I should get fired.

I have a friend who's a type 1 diabetic. His goal in life is to stay alive as long as you and me. But he can't make it happen any more than any of us can make happiness. It's a byproduct, right? So, what does he do? He focuses on insulin control. If he keeps his blood sugar, his glucose, between 80 and 180, if that's his end, his byproduct coming out the other end will be health. What that means is diet and exercise.

Business is the same thing. Though we may want value creation, and we delivered it, I never focused on it. I focused on the end of being a better competitive alternative. Why are they going to choose your experience or your product or your business over the alternatives they have? Everything else is secondary to that. If you understand that, you can win, and when you win at that, that's when value creation occurs.



***Ron Shaich** is the founder and former Chairman and CEO of Panera Bread and of Au Bon Pain and is the current Chairman and lead investor in Cava, Tatte, Life Alive, and Level99. Shaich makes his investments through Act III Holdings, a $1 billion+ evergreen investment vehicle. In Shaich's last two decades as CEO, Panera generated annualized shareholder returns of 25 percent and was the best performing stock in the restaurant industry. Shaich is often credited with defining the $300 billion+ fast casual segment and is known for continually disrupting industry paradigms to find new ways to build companies of value and with values.*

Shaich has twice been recognized as an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year, was selected as the 2018 Restaurant Leader of the Year, and was presented the prestigious Nation's Restaurant News Pioneer Award as one of the most significant contributors in the history of the restaurant industry, joining the ranks of Colonel Harland Sanders, Ray Kroc, Norman Brinker, and J. Willard Marriott.

Ron received his B.A. in Political Science and Government and a D.H.L. (Honorary) from Clark University and his M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

Panera BREAD®



Ten Lessons from a CEO

By: Jessica Cole, President & CEO of Becker's Healthcare

When I joined Becker's Healthcare, I was a young intern from the University of Iowa. I knew one thing and one thing really well: work hard, be coachable, and contribute as much as possible. The founder took on a chance on me, and I was promoted early on in my career. I was tasked with leading and growing a company few had ever heard of. We were in a brand-building, door-knocking, scrappy-roll-up-the-sleeves, and embrace-grit-everywhere phase. I've had the time of my life building a great team, brand, and company into a well-known, successful, and respected multimedia and events platform—specialized in the healthcare industry.

Over the last 15 years in my role as CEO, I've gained the below insights. In no specific order, here are some of my leadership philosophies from my own personal leadership playbook that I work to live out every day:



Work hard and be nice to people. That's a large framed print in my office. If someone commits to that and actually commits with discipline each and every day, I think that's far more than half of the battle of being a great leader.

I believe you have to **be who you are while also striving to be great** and expecting a lot from yourself. Read, triple down on your strengths, learn something new every day—all while being your true authentic self and committing to learning, being coachable, and growing.

Simplify the goals, simplify them again, and then simplify them again. How else can everyone know what the most important thing is for the company, for their department, and their role?

Have clarity on **what a "great day" looks like.** Help your team understand how someone strings together five "great days" in a row to make a great week...then month and quarter. This is how you have fun while growing and achieving many small wins along the way.

Be grateful every day—thank people and truly mean it. And the more you give, the easier it is to be grateful.

How can you teach yourself and others to **fall in love with the daily grind**? At an event years ago, Lou Holtz once said that we don't have to grind; we get to. That always stuck with me.

Treat your team, clients and everyone crazily well. Be positive. Be consistent. Be an energy giver. Make people around you better because you were there.

Leaders must understand the Expectancy Theory—that which you focus on expands. The more we focus on problems, the more problems we're likely to find. How can you constantly look at what's going well, and then continue to add Legos to the small creation you have going on? Leaders need to remember that great successes are built on small victories.

When a person learns to **emphasize improvement over perfection**, progress accelerates dramatically and the culture of winning continues to build from within. Who doesn't want to stay with a bunch of other winners? Being impeccable is not the goalpost; it's a commitment to getting better always and aiming for excellence. This culture can breed more leaders, success, passion, and downright fun.

Finally, **smile and move**. Have passion with what you do. Look to contribute, learn, and connect. Don't shy away from hard work. If you're a great role model, your team will learn from you. Be simple, clear, and consistent. Celebrate the wins and build a culture of winners and folks that fall in love with always improving.

Even though I'm no longer a 24-year-old newly appointed CEO, these 10 lessons are just as important to me today as they were then. I am just as hungry to grow, help others grow, and embody my leadership values and lessons daily. I'm thankful for the incredible leaders I've learned from throughout my journey, and strongly believe great leaders contribute not only to the growth of their companies, but to the growth of others, their communities and themselves.



As President and CEO of Becker's Healthcare, Jessica Cole oversees the company's strategic growth as a multimedia ecosystem. With a commitment to excellence and continual improvement, she has led numerous product launches that promote the education, connection and participation of hundreds of thousands of healthcare leaders nationwide. She serves on the boards of Lurie Children's Hospital Foundation, Junior Achievement Chicago, Young Presidents Organization, and other non-profit organizations.

BECKER'S HEALTHCARE



Believing in the art of possible

Tate's Bake Shop CEO Esi Seng reveals her secret recipe to leadership: raising the bar, perfecting what works, and focusing on the magic. She shares how her life experiences have shaped her leadership mentality, including being her "real" self with every person she encounters.

Robert Reiss: Tate's is in the highly competitive cookie space. As CEO, what do you see as your key differentiators?

Esi Seng: Tate's Bake Shop was founded in 1980 out of a storefront in Southampton, New York. Over 40 years later, Tate's now has a national following and is one of the fastest-growing cookie brands in the U.S.—beloved for its simple and high-quality ingredients that can be found in anyone's kitchen.

Tate's has continuously exercised its innovative spirit, extending beyond traditional cookies and expanding our portfolio to include innovative products like Tiny Tate's and Cookie Bark, that meet the needs and interests of consumers while remaining rooted in and guided by "The Bake Shop Way," which is our collective commitment to heritage, uncompromising excellence, and bake-craft. At Tate's, we continue to raise the bar for ourselves and the baking community with award-winning cookies and desserts that delight. Tate's is proud to make products that bring indulgence to the everyday.

So, Esi, I have a personal story. Recently I wanted to have my mom and brother over for dinner. And to my 89-year-old mom, everything is a party. The challenge is, my brother Michael is gluten-free. So I got your cookies—ginger, which is my mom's favorite flavor—and also chocolate chip. Michael was so excited! He kept raving that Tate's are the best cookie in the world, and he's right! I couldn't tell it was gluten-free, unlike so many other gluten-free cookies. They are the absolute best, and the minis are so festive! Tate's were the whole hit and talk of our dinner. So, what's the key to a great gluten-free cookie?

I love that you bring that up because we believe in the power of cookies, and we believe that regardless of your dietary restrictions, you deserve a quality, craft-baked cookie, that maximizes taste. We have a gluten-free line that's extremely delicious and does really well with both gluten-free and non-gluten-free



The CEO Forum Group has selected Esi Seng, CEO, Tate's Bake Shop, as the recipient of the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the Challenger Brands category. Seng has led the company to become one of the most beloved baked goods products through quality, innovation and a powerful culture.

consumers. We use rice flour instead of wheat flour but are still able to maintain that thin-and-crispy texture that Tate's cookies are known for and are proud to receive so much praise and thanks from people who have celiac or are gluten-free for making such a delicious cookie.

"At Tate's, we continue to raise the bar for ourselves and the baking community with award-winning cookies and desserts that delight."

What's the history of Tate's?

The Tate's story started with Kathleen King, who founded the company when she was just 11 years old selling cookies at her dad's farm in Southampton, NY. Her thin-and-crispy cookies became a huge hit, she opened a bake shop, and was a huge success, only to be deceived and defrauded by dubious partners. She had to restart all over again. What is remarkable and inspiring about Kathleen is that while many would have found it impossible to overcome this setback, Kathleen leveraged the power of her community, was resilient, and rebuilt a new company from scratch that became even more successful and then was able to sell it many years later to Mondelēz. Throughout her time, she wasn't thinking about the next best thing or the next innovation—it was all about perfecting that

one thing: the chocolate chip cookie. For us, we take that quality standard and mindset to heart with "The Bake Shop Way," as mentioned above.

What are all of Tate's products and how do you fit into the Mondelēz family?

Tate's offers eight different varieties of our core crispy cookie line including our bestseller, Chocolate Chip, plus Walnut Chocolate Chip, Oatmeal Raisin, Double Chocolate Chip, Lemon, Coconut Crisp, and the two newest additions to the core line, Salted Caramel Chocolate Chip and Snickerdoodle. Our gluten-free varieties include Chocolate Chip, Ginger Zinger, and Lemon.

Tate's also offers our bite-sized Tiny Tate's cookies in chocolate chip and snickerdoodle flavors, as well as milk and dark chocolate versions of our indulgent cookie bark. We also have a variety of limited-edition seasonal flavors that we release throughout the year, mint chocolate chip is the next one for summer and we're excited for people to try it.

> "We are very careful about not jumping on fads, but rather focusing on releasing new products that meet our customers where they are at."

How do you fit into the Mondelēz family?

The acquisition, which occurred four years before I joined Tate's, has been effective for our growth and expansion while still allowing the brand to grow organically (our sales have more than doubled since the acquisition). Mondelēz gives us the best of the best while keeping us the best of the small. They knew that the reason they wanted to bring Tate's into their portfolio because we have something special, and so they do a very good job of letting us be very independent.

Practically speaking, we leverage Mondelēz's scale and distribution while keeping the magic of small in our day-to-day. Tate's is incremental to their portfolio and growing—we're indulgent cookies for adults and highly complementary to the Mondelēz brands. We focus on keeping Tate's brand DNA strong and they help make sure that the DNA is distributed widely. It's a very symbiotic relationship.

So with your product line, how do you look at innovation?

When we look at innovation, we take things that we know are important to our consumer base. The first question we ask about innovation is, what could make Tate's even better? We are very careful about not jumping on fads, but rather focusing on releasing new products that meet our customers where they are at. One of the things that we recently just launched that we're very excited about is our new Tiny Tate's. We know that people love our chocolate chip cookies and we developed a snackable "tiny" version. We take something simple, the art of eating a cookie, to the next level. That's what Kathleen wanted to do when she founded the brand, and that's what we continue to do.

Let's talk about your background from a leadership standpoint. You led Tom's of Maine, which was organic, and even the first recyclable toothpaste.

That's exactly right.

What's the difference then, Esi, between being in a very corporate environment and being in more of an entrepreneurial environment, even though you may be owned by a major corporation?

I love that question because we're seeing that more and more. We're seeing multinationals growing by acquiring smaller companies to increase their portfolio, the incrementality of their portfolio, and the productivity of their portfolio. Leading both Tom's of Maine and now Tate's, I've been able to learn



how to maneuver the small of the company with the big of the corporations. I often say to my team that we need to, "maximize the heart and optimize the muscle." What I mean by that is that obviously when a company, a big company, acquires a small company, that growth equation often translates to synergies, or how much you can grow it.

For me, the synergy comes down to one simple thing: the leader's ability to really harness the power of the small company's DNA to truly understand what makes it magical, and then bring in the best of the parent company at the right time. The reason that Tate's was so interesting to Mondelēz was because of this pure quality that's almost impossible to replicate. It's very complementary to the portfolio of the big company.

For us, it's being able to understand, what is this quality obsession? How do we make sure that as we bring people in, we continue to harness that quality obsession in every innovation? Take that, nurture its power, but then leverage the big companies' distribution opportunities. That's the equation that makes it grow.

Oftentimes, what we find is that CEOs or leaders come in, and with acquisitions, we jump right to integration and economies of scale. What I would say to these companies is, "We're going to get to that. Let's uncover and focus on what makes the magic at the small companies, really dig into the cultural magic so that you can preserve it and nurture that opportunity."

And is there ever a mistake you learned from with building the culture?

Absolutely. In these situations where you're straddling a small company and a big company, understanding the motivation of small companies and why people are there is extremely important. I did not this at first

when I started at Tom's, an amazing company started by Tom Chappell, who believed that "doing business means doing good" and serving its community. I came in saying, "We have this amazing opportunity to increase our distribution, to make it huge, to make Tom's available at every Walmart there is." And while that was a very interesting aspect for the corporate people in the room, the people who'd been at Tom's for a long time didn't see themselves and their success as being part of a story where their distribution was everywhere.

I had to get to know the team and understand their motivations. They weren't motivated by mass distribution but by making the product available to everyone. That was a huge motivator to them specifically and helped them, buy it into the story and vision for the brand's growth. Being able to straddle those two worlds, you have to take even more caution and listen even more carefully to your constituents.

"Uncover and focus on what makes the magic at the small companies, really dig into the cultural magic so that you can preserve it and nurture that opportunity."

And we're talking about the whole concept of leadership. We talked about culture a little bit, too. But you did something you told me called "reclaiming yourself." Talk about that.

I've had the immense pleasure of working across the globe in my career. And when I came back to the States, I realized that for the longest time, I was wavering as to who it is that I was. I'll be very specific in a minute, but I had the opportunity to reclaim myself. The backstory is that I'm an immigrant from Nicaragua. My father is of Chinese descent, so I often call myself Chicaraguan. That sense of identity was really elusive for a while. Growing up in America I



never felt 100% American for one reason or the other. When I went to work in Europe, my teammates at work were very easily telling me that I was "so American" even though I didn't feel it. When I went to Asia, people commented on my Hispanic heritage and said, "Oh, you're not Asian, you're Hispanic." And then, interestingly enough, when I went to Latin America, people just commented, "You look so Asian, you could never be Hispanic."

There was always this illusion as to who I was or wasn't. When I came back to the United States after a very wonderful expat experience that spanned over eight years, I came back to become the CEO of Tom's of Maine, and there was a town hall where I was to introduce myself to the team.

At that moment in time, I realized that instead of introducing myself as a Nicaraguan or as a Chicaraguan, I said, "Hello, my name is Esi Seng. I'm a Nicaraguan immigrant, and I'm so excited to be the new CEO of Tom's of Maine." In the process of reclaiming who I am, I decided that I wasn't going to say Nicaraguan, that I wasn't going to lead with my

Chinese descent, but that I was going to really speak to the fact that I'm an immigrant because ultimately that is really what defines me.

That's the descriptor that I think best suits me in all my endeavors. And nobody could say you are not or you are an immigrant, that is up to me. That ability to reclaim who I am well into my 40s, just gave me tremendous confidence with fuel for the future.

There's a parallel here because, like you, as an individual who reclaimed yourself, many organizations are trying to reclaim their true culture and their true values of who they are. What is the key?

I believe strongly in the power of real, and let me talk a little bit about that. Back in 1999, this term was coined, which is the psychological safety net, and it was the way by which a culture needed to happen in an organization so its employees and teams felt safe to be able to challenge one another and to be able to come up with creative solutions. That was coined over 20 years ago, and what I challenge is that leadership didn't really change in the last 20 years.

> "What I've seen is by pushing to be your real self every time with everyone in your company, that's when you get to the psychological safety net. That's when people can rely on you being real, and they can bring their true selves to work."

In fact, we didn't see a significant change in leadership until the last couple of years. It took a global pandemic and major cultural and societal challenges around the world, for leadership to take this seismic shift. And now what we're seeing is leaders that are human. Leaders were called during this time in the last couple of years to be able to answer really tough human questions about race, about parenting at home while doing work. We had to call our leaders to feel safe. All of that really comes down to that power of real and how transformative it is, and breaking down what real is. I can tell you what it's not. A lot of the words that we're seeing now, for instance, the word du jour is vulnerability, being vulnerable. For me, vulnerable is a moment in time. It's that one time in the meeting where a leader was emotional, that one story that highlighted humanity. But it takes courage and it takes dedication to be your real self at all times, regardless of the audience.

What I've seen is by pushing to be your real self every time with everyone in your company, that's when you get to the psychological safety net. That's when people can rely on you being real, and they can bring their true selves to work. They can challenge you. What you see is then people being really earnest and saying, "I don't know if I love that idea. I might have a better idea." That is when you start seeing real solutions.



"From my view, what separates a growing brand versus a stale brand is the brutal prioritization of adding value to consumers' lives."

And it sounds like real is at the core of your culture at Tate's. And I know you're really proud of the amazing culture that you have there.

It might have to do something with the real butter and real sugar that we use, but real is at the core of who we are. And I think a lot of small companies could probably feel the same way that we do.

We don't have time for politics. We don't have time for agendas. Being able to have our CFO challenge our VP of operations, it's part of how we need to get the business done and how we need to get the job done. We don't have a hierarchical way of providing feedback.

At many corporations, it goes from the lowest person to the highest person in the room. The last person is always the CEO. We don't follow those rules because it's so important to make people feel like they have a real seat at the table.

I want to ask you, when you look at different cultures, obviously you've led marketing and led businesses in Brazil, Malaysia, the United States, all around the world. You're taking what are known as main brands, but expanding them significantly. What lessons can CEOs learn about our global economy, our local economies and marketing and successful brand expansion?

It's been such an amazing opportunity to do so, Robert, to go around the world and manage different brands. From my view, what separates a growing brand versus a stale brand is the brutal prioritization of adding value to consumers' lives. What I mean by that is that 99% of all consumer-packaged goods companies will tell you that they have the consumer or customer at the heart of their company. And that's probably true because we know that they spend millions of dollars and hours on consumer research, on market research, on focus groups. I'm asking us to really think about what is missing or what value can we add to our consumers' lives? Adding comfort, adding joy, inserting fun, whatever adjective you want, to their lives is different. And cookies are a perfect example of that.

When you go into the sea of deliciousness that is the cookie aisle at your favorite grocery store, Tate's stands out. And that's because we've been able to add something to consumers' lives. Chocolate chip cookies are no longer for kids, and what we saw was that adults were eating more cookies, but not at the rate that we're seeing now. Tate's helped propel that because in a world that was very chaotic, we were seeing that adults were snacking a little bit more to indulge a little bit more. What Tate's brought to the table was this idea of really making the experience all about bliss.

When you bite into one of our cookies, the real butter and this excellent chocolate fills your brain, but we leaned in even more. We made sure that the packaging was a joyful experience. It's like opening



up a present. The materials that we use allow the aroma to come in really quickly so you can smell it. All those things make a moment of joy in your crazy day. I just happen to be lucky enough to work in the cookie world, but you can apply this to any category, any function. What we're seeing now is that we need to think beyond meeting consumer needs and going through and thinking about adding to their lives.

Esi, you have had a career in CPG, both globally and locally. How would you define your business philosophy?

As an immigrant and now CEO, I am a staunch believer in the art of the possible. When we landed in the US, the idea of "Don't focus on the hurdle, obsess on the dream" is something my parents instilled in me. It is the center of my personal and business philosophy, which boils down to, "start with a yes."

My global experience is an example of this. When posed with the opportunity of moving my family thousands of miles for my job, of course, there was a lot of trepidation. There were so many reasons to say no, however, we decided to start with yes, knowing that we could always come back to the US.

> "As an immigrant and now CEO, I am a staunch believer in the art of the possible."

We moved to Switzerland and we absolutely loved it. Next thing we knew, we moved to Malaysia. Absolutely loved it. Moved to Brazil and so forth. Had we said no to the opportunity, had we not really thought about maybe just going with it for a little bit, knowing that you can always course correct, we would never have had these amazing experiences. Obviously, that's a personal example, but you can apply that to so many things in your life, so many innovations, so many challenges, that just seem impossible today that you have to just say, "Let's try. Let's say yes before we say no." I do that every day at Tate's.



Esi Seng *is the CEO of Tate's Bakeshop, the iconic cookie brand that disrupted the category and continues to be one of the fastest growing cookies in the aisle. Previously Esi served as General Manager for Tom's of Maine. Under her leadership, Tom's of Maine developed the first-of-its-kind recyclable tube toothpaste, recognized as one of The Best Inventions of 2020 by TIME Magazine. Esi Seng is a proven, inspirational global leader with more than two decades of accelerating business growth and building high-performing CPG businesses and teams across the globe. Seng is a firm believer in setting a vision and empowering her people to incorporate that vision into their personal purpose. She holds the philosophy that great leaders give their teams something to strive for, not just something to do, and she is known for her ability to create space where people feel empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. A Nicaraguan-Chinese Immigrant, a proponent of DE&I, and passionate about community-building, she is currently on the board of the United Way of Greater Portland. She earned an M.B.A. from NYU's Stern School of Business, participated in The Tuck School of Business' Global Leadership Program at Dartmouth and received her Bachelor's Degree from Boston University.*


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Transforming The Customer Experience Into The "Human Experience"

By: Robert Reiss

In 1999, Joseph Pine II wrote the book, *The Experience Economy*, which explained the transfer from customer service to customer experience. Since then practically most enterprises have embraced what is broadly referred to as CX.

Today—driven by the two forces of societal change and generative AI—we are about to move into CX 2.0. To understand what the new model might look like I selected four visionary leaders who each have reinvented their industry: (Non-profit) Jo Ann Jenkins, CEO, AARP where she leads the largest non-partisan non-profit with the world's most widely distributed magazine with over 38 million readers; (Health) Ishan Patel, CEO, Audien Hearing, who really is the Steve Jobs of hearing by creating the first affordable hearing aid which in a few quick years has moved from his garage to being the world's top selling affordable hearing aid with 500,000+ customers nationwide ; (Technology) Steve Bandrowczak, CEO, Xerox the iconic company who has transformed itself to be the leader in workforce transformation through advanced utilization of data; (Media) Michael Fabiano, CEO, ESG News Corp. & recent Head Americas, The Associated Press where Fabiano is known for pioneering AI in media. We gathered together on March 27, 2024 at The Harvard Club for an in depth conversation.

What emerged were three core ideas:

1. Human Centered: Customer experience will be replaced with the higher concept we called, The Human Experience.

2. AI to AI Conversation: Companies are designing products for humans to interface with artificial intelligence —companies need to consider a simultaneous future where and business AI deals with one's personalized AI assistant.

3. Crowds Generate Better Ideas: The role of people gathering to brainstorm is still the most powerful element and like a dam breaking on innovation.

The Human Experience

The next major shift in Customer Service will occur where humans have their own digital assistant. This exists today but will become exponentially more sophisticated over time.

As a backdrop to today's environment Bandrowczak explained, "Technological change today is as slow as it will ever be and ensuring your clients are ready for that change is paramount. As the consumer and enterprise worlds collide, the expectation is that solutions support the consumer experience while providing enterprise-level services that make them more productive."

> "Technological change today is as slow as it will ever be and ensuring your clients are ready for that change is paramount."

The concept of the digital assistant is explained by Fabiano, "I envision a world where we all have a customized personal digital assistant that knows our preferences, follows us on multiple devices and rooms, prompts us for actions, and endeavors to make our lives easier."

One's assistant will understand their preferences, likes and dislikes, so their whole human interest can be covered; it will also anticipate potential needs in any transaction. For example, when purchasing a refrigerator or travelling, the digital assistant will communicate with other digital assistants and create the exact right solution, removing all friction and saving time. Jenkins shares the need to incorporate this new world into everyone's everyday life, "As AI and other new

technologies take hold, we will have to find new ways to deliver value and evolve our customer experience. I believe we have a responsibility to help everyone, including older adults and underserved populations, navigate the explosion of digital technology and successfully incorporate it into their day-to-day lives."

The power will come from machine learning so that true essence will be unleashed. The irony is that the machine intervention will actually fully elevate the experience from customer to human. Over time there may be an emotional attachment for some to their assistant. This will create ethical and moral questions as digital assistants start to manage areas of our lives and some become attached.

Patel sums up the human experience concept and how it relates to organizations embracing this new world, "The shift from customer experience to human experience forces entrepreneurs and innovators to have a purpose beyond just profit. It demands that we understand consumers' shifting behaviors, their needs and how AI is revolutionizing CX."

The Mistake to Avoid: Design for Humans & AI

Many organizations will jump headfirst into trying to determine what humans want in an AI interaction; unfortunately most will make the mistake of designing this solely for the human. Instead the journey in any transaction or relationship will need to be designed both for the human and the machine.

"We have a responsibility to help everyone, including older adults and underserved populations, navigate the explosion of digital technology and successfully incorporate it into their day-to-day lives."

Bandrowczak explained the next step, which will in most cases be the right partnership, "Most companies understand the need for seamless human and AI interaction; however, many recognize they need a partner to help them adjust to this new way of working." Fabiano reinforced, "Product developers will need to take a bold leap and design for the future of machine to machine transactions, where humans are driving the outcomes but digital environments are accomplishing substantial underlying communications."

Part of this means as system engineers design the user journey and determine say the 6 entry points to their companies service



The Human Experience: Robert Reiss CEO The CEO Forum Group, Jo Ann Jenkins CEO AARP, Ishan Patel CEO Audien, Steve Bandrowczak CEO Xerox, Michael Fabiano CEO ESG News Corp

model they will have to add several additional journey entry points for AI and digital assistants—AI to AI solving problems.

Patel outlines AI's central role in this new model. "AI makes it easier for companies to constantly receive customer feedback and use their feedback to develop even better products that have a profound human impact and further enhances the human experience."

A deeper element is that everything will be based on the underlying data. A significant question will emerge as to who owns the data as it flows between two disparate systems, the users and the corporation —and in our discussion we did not come to any clear conclusions other than "data is the new oil".

"Society as a whole must have the access and resources needed to take advantage of the opportunities that new technologies offer."

It's All About the Dialogue

The reason these breakthrough ideas emerged is because the five of us talked for over two hours and shared a common human experience—enjoying dinner with non-stop free flowing brainstorming on the menu; and that is the magic we all encountered, thoughts shared engender deeper thoughts.

What was also interesting is out of curiosity I wanted to see how generative AI would handle this discussion and we utilized several tools to record the three hour dinner discussion. We found that AI created 46 pages of notes and the almost 20,000 words was too much for AI to decipher. The net/net is that this article was just written and edited by good old human brainpower.

The conversation was summed up by Jenkins as for the global role and balance of how we use these technologies, "Society as a whole must have the access and resources needed to take advantage of the opportunities that new technologies offer. We need to step up our efforts to ensure that new technologies such as AI are fair, reliable and accurate; transparent; hold providers accountable; and are equitably distributed and accessible, so everyone enjoys the benefits."





Defining human capital

SHRM President & CEO Johnny C. Taylor, Jr. states all leaders are HR professionals in their own way. This is why he says all CEOs need to invest in their people and their cultures.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., President & CEO, SHRM, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Human Capital. This is bestowed for SHRM's leadership of elevating the human resource discipline to become the trusted partner with CEOs in building the cultures and enterprise of the future. This is built on the new model he has put forth to business: AI + HI = ROI.

Robert Reiss: SHRM is the world's largest association of workplace leaders with nearly 340,000 members, now celebrating its 75th anniversary. Tell us about SHRM from your perspective as CEO.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr.: SHRM is the trusted authority on all things work, serving CEOs, CHROs, Politicos and HR professionals. The best way to think of us is that we are to HR professionals what the American Bar Association would be to lawyers or the American Medical Association would be to physicians. We are the world's largest HR association, and we represent HR professionals all over the globe—actually in 180 countries.

What was your thinking about SHRM strategy when you became CEO in 2017?

The general thought was we should become larger. But, to me, that was naïve. I knew CEOs needed to recognize our value as we were in a unique position to elevate the entire human resource profession and put forth a new way of thinking about human capital.

How are you thinking about AI in the workplace?

What made sense to me was a new equation: AI + HI = ROI. While AI is the boogeyman, it's actually the way to maximize human intelligence. Now we knew there would be huge resistance because humans fear AI, but AI will make us better as humans. So, AI plus HI will make the new ROI. Machines won't replace humans, just like ChatGPT will not make human intelligence non-essential but, in fact, will fuel the new value equation.

When you look at the HR function, it's changed significantly. Years ago, it was more of handling benefits; now it's significantly more strategic. What would you say the HR role is today, and how would you see it changing over the next five years?

We are in the middle of such a period of flux right now, so I love the conversations and the questions around the future of work and of the HR profession. But frankly, as you've pointed out, in the past, HR was very much personnel-driven—payroll, benefits, some legal compliance over time as we evolved to an environment of more laws and regulations regarding employment—but now it's a very different profession.

"What made sense to me was a new equation: AI + HI = ROI. While AI is the boogeyman, it's actually the way to maximize human intelligence."

It's been driven by any number of issues but mostly the demographic reality that in a knowledge-based economy where, particularly in America, we haven't had enough children to replenish the workforce, and we're trying to find ways in a knowledge-based economy to be competitive. In fact, more than to survive but to thrive, HR is mainly focused on three things now and in the foreseeable future.

Number one is we have to be people experts. And it's a hard thing to do because people morph, they change. Every generation has its own unique characteristics and how they show up to work. Their relationship with work changes constantly, and therefore, more



and more leaders are looking for HR professionals and executives who actually understand how the human being works, how they think, and how they process and engage or not.

Secondly, we are increasingly having to be business executives. It's not enough to be a human expert, but you need to be a business expert. And I'm not just talking about understanding the 10-K or the 10-Q of this or that doc and reading a P&L, but actually understanding how the organization makes or doesn't make money. And the only way that you can build a successful human capital strategy is you must build it properly before you can build a business strategy.

And then finally, HR experts are driven around culture. In culture, for a long time for CEOs like myself and the folks listening today, culture was a soft skill. It wasn't exactly something that you're focused on—you buy a few foosball machines and give some perks away, and you have a good culture. That's no longer the way employees and applicants are looking at employers. They want you to be able to articulate, "What does it mean to really work here? How do things get done?" HR executives have to be facilitators, drivers, and nurturers to keep us honest about what our cultures are.

In short, the new expectation of the HR executive of the future is to be human experts, understanding how human beings operate and work. Secondly, business experts, more than just the cost of employees but broadly understanding the business. And finally, keepers of the culture.

Let's talk about the connection between CEOs and HR because the CHROs really have the largest P&L of the entire organization, the people. So how should CEOs look at HR?

The best way to think about this is, just as we think about financial capital, you have to think about human capital in an organization. And so, CEOs

"The new expectation of the HR executive of the future is to be human experts, understanding how human beings operate and work. Secondly, business experts, more than just the cost of employees but broadly understanding the business. And finally, keepers of the culture."

have always been largely dependent upon their CFOs. You have your lawyers, you have your marketers, you have all of that good stuff, but your CFO was the person who really helped guide you through building the organization and responding to the financial ups and downs of businesses.

Well now, especially in a knowledge-based economy, human capital is as important. In fact, as you pointed out, in most organizations, the single largest operating expense items are your wages and salaries. It's your people, the benefits, and everything related to that. For CEOs now and more and more, this is the true way that we think about it—human capital and financial capital.

How does that translate into increasing the new relationship between the CEO and CHRO?

You can't see it as just the compliance people or just the back office administrative people. You've got to see this as a driver, a differentiator. We know in this knowledge-based economy, the CEOs who find the right people and retain those people, and to the extent that you can make those people feel engaged at work, the company will benefit. And that's why it's now a strategic function and not just a back-office function. Over the last 10 to 15 years, we've seen this evolution. And then we had the pandemic, which thrust all of this onto the stage.

I want to ask, talking about the pandemic, you wrote this great book in the Fall of 2021, Reset, which outlines the whole future of work.

Remember Friday, March 13, 2020? That's when essentially everything started over. I, as CEO, got a call from my CHRO saying, "The President of the United States is on the screen saying all of us need to go home for 21 days." And that was the edict, and we all thought if we hunkered down for 21 days, no more than 30, we could essentially come back.

And so, I started writing a book. The working title of it was "The Great Pause" because I thought, "Let me chronicle what's going to happen for these 21 or 30 days when I'm not on an airplane, I'm not getting up in the morning, taking my kids to school and rushing off to an office. Everything's going to pause for a minute. And I want to know what this was so I can talk about it with my grandchildren and their grandchildren."

Well, as you know, about day 60, 90, 180, it became clear this was not going to be a pause. It was a reset moment. You pushed the button on the back of everything, and we were going to rethink how we operated going forward. One of the key areas during that six month or so period, people literally changed their idea of work, their relationship with work, where they were going to work, for whom they were going to work, for how long they were going to work—all of these questions. Most people had the opportunity to sit still in their homes. We still had some people working in offices because we didn't shut the whole world down. But a significant number of employees were now sitting at home and rethinking their relationship with work, and that was the premise of Reset.

Out of that, we came out saying, "Employees don't want to work the way they used to, period." That's the biggest takeaway. This idea that we were talking about pre-pandemic: coming to the office every day,

Monday through Friday, 9:00 to 5:00. People were talking about flexibility, which actually had real seeds in 2019. People were saying, "I need to find more balance in my life, and I want more career development." They abandoned the idea of job security. We saw technology take an enhanced view of perspective in people's lives because, for the first time, we knew that technology is what allowed us to continue to be productive even though we were now working from home. We all Zoomed in or met via Google Meet, and that's when everything changed.

So Reset was very much about capturing what was going to be different when we did eventually return to the workplace. And we're seeing that now with hybrid work, and I want to talk a little bit about that. All of this work from home, work from office, work from anywhere, hybrid, and this tension that has come out of the post-pandemic environment, it's simply that people have decided that they're going to have a different way that they think about work and CEOs are having to respond to it.

From all of your research, writing, thinking, and discussions, what really are the best practices on human capital for CEOs?

I love this question, Robert, because it is so simple for me. The obvious answer, one of the "aha" moments that we gained while writing the book Reset and asking employees across the globe, across different industries, different countries, nationalities, et cetera, was talk to us about culture. Actually, the employees said to us, "You need to start talking more about culture, the once formally soft word, we want to talk about it."

And what I realized was many of us CEOs were out trying to define the perfect culture. We went so far as to say this is a good culture and this is a bad culture. The biggest secret—the "aha" moment for me—is that there's no such thing as a good or a bad culture, except of course those that are illegal, immoral, or unethical. Take those things off the table. But other than that, what we thought a lot in pre-2020 was we all had to be like some other company. We would identify that company with a great culture. If it were Apple, if it were Microsoft, if it were Amazon, whatever it was, there was an ideal culture that we should all aspire to emulate. And the fact of the matter is that was wrong.

Just as diverse as the people that we hire, so too should be our companies' cultures. Top of the list for CEOs is get a lot of cultural clarity. So sitting down with your team, this concept of saying who are we, what does it mean to work here? Not who do we aspire to be, not who are our competitors and how our employer brand matches up with theirs but what does it mean to work here? And, then, be honest with people when you're recruiting them that this is who we are. It may be the right place to work for you because you're technically good and you're culturally aligned with us, or it may not.

"The biggest secret—
the 'aha' moment for me—
is that there's no such thing
as a good or a bad culture."

And what we have found is that in this war for talent that we've experienced for the last three or four years, employers were busy courting prospects and applicants and telling people, "This is who we are." Essentially, we'll be whatever you say you want us to be and trying to find the perfect words to make themselves successful in the middle of this war for talent to attract talent.

And, it didn't work because it doesn't take someone who leaves a job very long to come into your operation and learn that it's different from what you told me it was going to be. And the biggest "aha" is culture is going to be the key to you keeping the people. Even if you're lucky enough to attract them, but you trick them into it, there's nothing worse than having



someone come there and realize that what you sold is not what they experienced.

With everything you've been through, what is your biggest regret?

Wow. There are so many of them, right? And I think that's true of all leaders. But the biggest regret would be that before I went into an HR role, my first Fortune 500 CHRO role, I'd never had any P&L or operating experience. It is really, really hard to get yourself in the mind of no matter how smart or talented you are, to be a successful HR executive and advise other senior executives up to CEO and even board members, you have to have a full appreciation for how things actually work from a P&L and operational standpoint. And I would have never said that in the past. I'm a lawyer by training, and I spent a significant amount of time as a general counsel.

And the idea that you've got to go to a less important title to get your operating experience is something you typically aren't willing to do. But I lateraled over from a very senior legal executive role into this very senior HR role but I never really had the experience of the P&L and/or operations of a company. I was always doling out advice and counsel, and I don't think I was ready or as effective. I figured it out, but it was suboptimal. And it's only now, having been a CEO for 14 years in three different businesses that I have a full appreciation for how much more effective I could have been had I had a stint in an operating role.

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr.

"Demographically, America is graying at once."

You have a unique vantage point as CEO of SHRM. What do you see the workforce like in a decade?

First of all, demographically, America is graying. We know from the declining birth rate. People are going to work for a lot longer period of time. We're going to live longer, and people want to work longer.

We know from the Bureau of Labor Statistics data right now that people 55 and older will fill more than half of the jobs of the U.S. economy for the rest of this decade. And we know that the fastest growing segment of the U.S. workforce are people 75 and older. So we're going to be older, and therefore grayer. That's number one.

The second thing, and most important, or at least equally important to that major shift is that we're going to have to be far more technology savvy, and therefore, there's a huge capacity building and skills building requirement.



Over times past, you could get a bachelor's degree, maybe a graduate degree, and it would do you good for two, maybe three decades of the workforce. And then you'd retire. But given the amount of change that we are seeing, just think about what we've seen in generative AI overnight. The stuff that you studied in school five years ago is significantly less relevant than it was 10 years ago. You could actually last without upscaling too much during your 30 year or so career. That's done.

> "There's all sorts of data that will tell you that over 60% of the jobs that exist today won't exist five years from now."

So the future of work is very much going to be about constantly upscaling, rescaling, and lifelong learning, and employers are going to have to invest in it. It's not going to be just your job as an employee to get yourself up to speed. We as CEOs are going to have to invest because that workforce will essentially get stale. They will no longer be as useful for you in just five years.

There's all sorts of data that will tell you that over 60% of the jobs that exist today won't exist five years from now, or will be so meaningfully reconstituted that you're going to have to rescale everyone, and that now is going to become the norm and it's not something we've experienced over the decades. So you have to be smarter and be a lifelong learner.

Any CEO who wants to learn more about the CHRO's mindset, what's the website they should go to for SHRM?

It's www.shrm.org, and there is tons of information there. And it's really important to know that it's not just for HR professionals. All of us in our own way are HR professionals.



Johnny C. Taylor, Jr. *has been a force for good for over 20 years, during which time he has held numerous roles as a lawyer, a human resources executive and CEO in both the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors.*

He has held senior and chief executive roles at major organizations, and most recently left his mark on Thurgood Marshall College Fund, where he served as President and CEO. Sought after for his diverse experience and rich perspective, Mr. Taylor is a regular fixture in congressional hearings, while educating a broader audience through his nationally best-selling book, and his USA Today column, "Ask HR."

He sits on numerous boards, holds advisory roles, and in every endeavor, Mr. Taylor emerges as a dynamic force, providing a visionary roadmap for leaders and organizations navigating the complexities of the evolving global workforce.

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Tech, Talent & Transformation: The Hallmarks of the New Multi-Dimensional COO

By: Francesca Luthi, Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer of Assurant

There is no question that traditional roles in the C-suite have been redefined and become more multi-faceted. The mandate has expanded to include driving value for diverse stakeholder groups with a renewed emphasis on critical leadership skills, such as resilience and empathy, which are required to realize sustainable change and growth. The COO is no exception.

Traditionally defined as the leader who oversees operational and administrative functions for the company, the COO's role is transforming into a more dynamic role with the potential to drive even broader influence and impact. Today's COO now plays a central role in driving business growth by leveraging the technology and talent across the organization, which encompasses everything from defining digital transformation strategies to delivering superior customer and employee experiences.

The Great Convergence: Tech and Talent

Given the speed with which technology—particularly GenAI—has taken center stage across all aspects of a company's operations, today's COO has had to learn, adapt, and execute at an accelerated pace. And the expectations are higher than ever to meet growth and expense targets, while delivering best-in-class experiences. Technology investments must be supported by internal change and enablement to realize the intended value and benefits.

How often do we fall into the trap where we think "technology deployed; problem solved?" Not so fast. Technology is an enabler and alone will not drive value. The real opportunity lies in aligning tech and talent to augment capabilities to win. The challenge comes in the alignment itself. While technology, particularly AI, is promising, for employees it also can be frightening.

For many employees, the mere mention of "GenAI" or "automation" is equivalent to saying, "your job's being eliminated." Yes, restructuring is real; requirements evolve, and roles must, as well. But today's COO needs to think about AI as a catalyst for enablement, not elimination, of employees. AI offers the opportunity to create new jobs and new roles and different career directions for employees. It's a gamechanger and COO's need to view AI, robotics, and other deployed technologies as a catalyst to elevate roles or to create new and different skillsets within the organization.

So, the focus for the future COO is to find ways to not just leverage tech alone, but rather bring together tech and talent to drive superior outcomes for clients and employees.

Bridging EX and CX: So Long Shoemaker's Children

For years, companies have singularly focused on optimizing or improving the customer experience—introducing new technologies and tools to deliver on that goal. But doing so inadvertently added complexity for employees through multiple interfaces and processes that added hurdles and increased work friction.

What has seemed to elude many is the yield that an outstanding employee experience can have on the customer experience. Creating an end-to-end strategy that integrates employee and customer experiences will drive even greater success. According to a 2023 NTT report, while 97% of CEOs state they've got a CX strategy, not all have an EX strategy. We must stop thinking of our employees as the proverbial "shoemaker's children," and start thinking of them as our first-line customers.

Outstanding customer service starts with creating a positive and supportive environment for those who deliver that service. As COO's, we must don our CHRO hats and realize that engaging employees is almost more important than training. Employees today live in a "show me" state-of-mind. Don't promise it—prove it. Create that experience, don't just talk about it. Show me you care about me as much as you do our customers, and I'm in.

Part of the success in bridging the employee and customer experiences comes from employees seeing the benefits of AI and feeling empowered to act and advocate for the customer. The COO needs to create an environment where employees feel they are freed from the manual, repetitive, and multi-step tasks, and can make suggestions or changes based on what they know. AI, if deployed properly, should enable customer service or contact center employees to empathize with customers, problem solve, and provide an even greater experience.

The New Multi-Dimensional COO: An Amalgamated Path to Drive Growth

Driving digital transformation, cultural engagement, and improved employee and customer experiences—together with operational excellence and growth deliverables—are now the newly conflated responsibilities of today's multi-dimensional COO. And while that doesn't mean the CTO, CHRO, and COO roles should be amalgamized into one, what it does mean is that the COO role is continuing to evolve, but remaining critical to the orchestration of tech, talent, and transformation to drive growth.



Francesca Luthi is Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer of Assurant, as well as a member of the Company's Management Committee. In this role, she manages the Company's global operations, including Assurant's centers of excellence for data analytics, digital and AI transformation, and customer experience. To further maximize business value and connect the customer and employee experience, she also oversees Assurant's human resources, communications, global sourcing, and corporate real estate teams functions, and enables the company's Sustainability & DEI strategies.



Making a company and team stronger with technology

Eric J. Bertrand—CEO of Mod Op—shares his perspective on the challenges companies and CEOs are facing and how Mod Op is working to grow against those challenges.

Robert Reiss: Mod Op has a different type of model, really at the intersection of digital and creativity. Explain how it was developed.

Eric Bertrand: Mod Op is a formation of two companies that came together in 2017. The first is a company out of New York named Eyeball, which was founded in the early '90s, and the second is a company called Modus Operandi, which was formed in 2010. Eyeball's underpinnings were more from the creative world—brand design, development, strategy and production—and Modus Operandi really came from the digital side of the world. And so, the two companies met and felt it would be a synergistic relationship, and we formed Mod Op back in 2017. The marriage of creative and technology was where we started, and that has continued to be the underpinning of the company.

Often the hardest thing is culture, especially when you go through M&A.

It is the culture and, in certain cases, you're dealing with groups that are highly creative. We've acquired several creative agencies, and so the cultures are very strong and unique. What we've done is that we've tried to allow people to come together as one Mod Op, but have tried to keep some of the local ethos, because often these are offices from various geographies. We have nine offices across the United States, we have one office in Panama City, Panama and one in Toronto. We will be adding another office, as you mentioned, in the next month, in Western Canada, and we've been able to keep what I call the local esprit de corps of the offices, yet bring them into the one Mod Op framework. In order to do that, we have a strategic business unit structure—a corporate structure—where there are shared services provided to what we call SBUs (Strategic Business Units) and those strategic business units are in the different areas that we focus on—creative, technology, AI consulting or digital transformation, data consulting, digital media and PR.

> "Measuring is going to be the most important aspect of marketing and advertising, just being able to measure, understand your ROI, understand where your dollars are being spent, ensure that that you can actually verify the measurement that you're getting."

As we acquire companies, the individual employees that would fall under one of those SBUs will work under that SBU, but that office will still maintain and have its own esprit de corps from, let's say, Philadelphia or Dallas or Los Angeles—wherever they might be located.

As an example, I've known of dPrism as experts in sophisticated AI and data, and you just acquired them.

The dPrism acquisition was very interesting for us, because they are a digital transformation and data consultancy more than they are a marketing or



The CEO Forum Group has selected Eric J. Bertrand, CEO, Mod Op, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Digital Transformation. This is bestowed for Bertrand's noteworthy vision and Mod Op's exemplary execution in helping enterprises accelerate growth through data.



advertising agency, and that was a little different from most agencies we've acquired in the past. They're dealing with C-level folks at companies and they're giving advanced consulting on digital transformation and data, ensuring that those companies have the right processes and overarching strategy in place. Mod Op is then able to implement most of what those companies will need in the future from the outcome of dPrism's—what now is called Mod Op Strategic Consulting—review.

How should CEOs think about bridging technology and creativity?

First thing is strategy. This may sound obvious, but you should not automate strategy. And from that comes innovation, and that's the people part. Now regarding production and execution, technology and creativity can dovetail. Today, what we're seeing is significant change in the way creativity is rolled out from a production perspective.

"Our turnover at the senior and mid-level has been zero over the last four years."

From a production perspective, CEOs can take a creative deliverable and, using brand guidelines which are input into a system, create the outputs that are necessary for the dissemination of that creative. Historically you would have a designer that would take that initial creative and they would make a version which is for the web or for out of home, etc. It would take them a couple of hours to develop that particular deliverable. Today, you take that brand guideline, you put it into a piece of software, let's say AI/ML-driven, and you can create those various outputs in literally seconds. I've seen systems that can create 100 deliverables in about four seconds!

Sounds good. But you get 100 deliverables; what are best practices to manage all of this?

Well, that's an important aspect. You want to make sure that the goal then is to take those deliverables and put them out into various marketing initiatives, get the data as to how those are performing, and then re-evaluate the initial creative and strategy that you had to begin with. What that will allow you to do is, instead of having one big idea with one big strategic creative implementation, you can have maybe 10, which you can test an infinite number of times—

versus maybe an A/B test where it'd be less—and make sure you understand which ones are working best, where you put them back into your strategy and develop even further strategic creative that will be on point for the exact demo that you are targeting.

As to the CMO's role, about two decades ago CMOs started to manage technology budgets. The reason is they do one thing, which is know how to measure everything, and that's core, and get ROI correct.

Yes, 100%. Measuring is going to be the most important aspect of marketing and advertising, just being able to measure, understand your ROI, understand where your dollars are being spent, ensure that that you can actually verify the measurement that you're getting. Sometimes vendors like to be, let's say, a little bit positive about the results and maybe you just need to make sure that those are verified and that they're accurate.

ROI is where we start. We've worked with a lot of our clients where return on investment is important, but you must understand what the goal is first. In many cases, if you're talking about brand awareness, you're launching a campaign that is focused on brand uplift. Other times, it will be tied specifically to sales, whether retail or e-commerce.

It's really about the company's objectives and then us being able to measure what the outcome of a particular spend is, because the company wants to put their budgets into execution that will be the most effective for what their goals are as a company. We work with our clients to try to understand what those business goals are, and then we go back and consider where they should be looking, where they should be making investments, and then try to measure those to ensure that the ROI is there. It really starts with ROI.

So regarding data, what should CEOs know?

The velocity of technology in the last several years has increased, and the amount of data that's available through various systems and outlets is tremendous. The first thing CEOs should do is to consider data and find what your true sources of data are, making sure that you have everything connected, everything from one true source and being able to understand how those systems and data interact with each other.

"People really want to be part of something."

Here's the challenge many large organizations are facing. They have many divisions and they've probably grown through acquisition over the years, so what you find is that many of them have systems and data that don't speak to each other. But at this point, many things are changing, as an example cookie deprecation, so you really need to focus on first-party data. It's really important that organizations look at this from a holistic view. They're looking at it from a governance and a compliance perspective. They're trying to find data sources and evolving to one true source of data. It's an area that people are really focused on and need to be focused on as AI and ML continue to grow in the organizations.

Talk about your leadership philosophy and what exactly are the most important elements.

I am definitely not a micromanager. I think surrounding myself with really strong leaders and strong people is paramount, and that's what we've done. Our team is the strongest it's ever been. We have a great C-level group of folks and great SBU leads. Also, in this day and age it's really hard to get longevity in an employee base and our senior folks have been with the company for very long periods of time, ranging from five years to 25 years. Our turnover at the senior and mid-level has been zero over the last four years.

"As a process, we test many advanced technologies first internally for governance and compliance, so everything is seamless when it gets to our clients."

For a company of your size and scope having no turnover is significant. What's the secret?

It's really just fundamentals and consistently doing them right. We work well as a team. We have processes and cadences in place, and it really comes down to communication. I have weekly catch-ups with all of my direct reports and all the heads of the SBUs. I also have consistent check-ins to make sure there aren't any blockers or other issues. People really want to be part of something, they want to be communicated with and to be part of a team, and that's what we've done. I can't really explain it much more than that, but in my opinion, we've had great success with being able to keep the right people in the right spots and being able to have a management team that, I think, is going to be very successful going forward.

As we're growing, we're not perfect, but we're still growing. We just recently created a people position, a Chief People Officer, and that person is designated to specifically focus on growing programs for the employee base, ensuring that we have that middle level of management engaged and growing, and ensuring that they are staying with the company for long periods of time. It's not really easy to do in this environment, but that's one of our goals.



Any special practices at Mod Op that CEOs might learn from?

We have an AI Council, with 30-plus folks. We have an innovation committee, a measurement committee, valuation standards, compliance, security, education, and change management committees. And as a process, we test many advanced technologies first internally for governance and compliance, so everything is seamless when it gets to our clients.

Technology is going to be a big part of the way that we grow at Mod Op. It also allows us to scale more aggressively, more quickly, as we are acquisitive. We acquired one company per quarter in 2023 and our goal is to do the same this year.

"On generative AI, my biggest advice today would be to start with compliance and governance. It's not a sexy area, but it's super-important. CEOs need to understand there are likely folks in their organization using AI today and the CEOs and their teams might not be aware of what's going on."

Finally, with the rush to generative AI, what advice you have to CEOs about AI?

On generative AI, my biggest advice today would be to start with compliance and governance. It's not a sexy area, but it's super-important. CEOs need to understand there are likely folks in their organization using AI today and the CEOs and their teams might not be aware of what's going on. From a governance and compliance perspective it's important to understand what is being utilized, make sure that it is okay to be utilized in the organization, and then build a program around it.



Eric J. Bertrand *is the Chief Executive Officer of Mod Op. Eric's focus at Mod Op has been on developing digital strategy and transformation, leading M & A, rationalizing operations, developing financial systems as well as launching the digital advertising group. Prior to Mod Op, Eric served as the CEO of several companies in the marketing/advertising industry. In 2006, he founded and managed Lincoln Road Advisors, a strategic advisory firm focused on investments in various companies. Prior to Lincoln Road, Eric was a General Partner with Palisade Capital Management, where he jointly managed a private equity fund and venture capital funds, with total investments of $280 million. Eric began his private equity career with Aetna's Private Equity Group.*

Eric holds an MBA in Finance and Entrepreneurial Studies from New York University. He graduated from Bryant University with a BS in Business Administration concentrating on Finance and Applied Actuarial Mathematics. Eric is currently a board member of Mod Op, and US Vision as well as charities Unite For Sight and the Alive Inside Foundation. Prior to these Board roles, he has served on 27 other boards, encompassing both private and public companies.

mod op



Using tools to bolster your business

Constant Contact CEO Frank Vella speaks to the needs of the small business and the changing landscape of marketing.



The CEO Forum Group has selected Frank Vella, CEO, Constant Contact, for the Transformative CEO Award in Leadership in the category of Small Business Marketing. This is bestowed for Vella's vision in elevating the company to be the leader in helping small businesses and entrepreneurs compete with larger enterprises though Constant Contact tools and expert guidance.

Robert Reiss: Talk about what Constant Contact was and what it is today.

Frank Vella: I love that question. I talk about this with our staff a lot, and I try to intersect two worlds. We want to be everything we were—everything that customers know and love about us. And what is that? We are a company focused on the success of the small business, which was true from our founders in 1995. Constant Contact was founded "to help the small business market and compete against their larger rivals." And at our core, that is exactly who we are today. And what's changed since then? Well, everything else.

"Constant Contact was founded 'to help the small business market and compete against their larger rivals.' And at our core, that is exactly who we are today. And what's changed since then? Well, everything else."

I'll draw an analogy to a car. You might have had a car, let's say a Volvo, in 1995, and you might have the same model Volvo in 2024. The only thing that's the same is the logo on the front. Everything else has changed. That analogy also applies to Constant Contact.

What's available to a small business in terms of being an effective marketer is so dramatically different and much more complex, and we've had to double down on being a great software company that innovates and uses everything available to us—from Artificial Intelligence to great human support, both ends of the spectrum—to enable our customers to be great marketers. So, everything about our product, our delivery, and our user experience has changed to be the most intuitive, modern, and relevant that it can be.

What things specifically have you changed?

Our core business market is small business owners with anywhere from one to 20 employees; of course, we have some large clients, and we scale tremendously. But the number of things you had in your toolkit as a small business marketer even 10 years ago was somewhat limited—usually a website and an email. There was also still a lot of physical marketing, whether that's billboards or direct mail. Today, in order to compete, not only is there much more available to you, but you have to use it to compete. There used to be a big gap between what a large company could leverage in a marketing toolkit and what a small business could. They were very different.

Today, technology makes what's available to a small business almost equal to what a large company has. What's the difference? People and budget. Our goal is to do with software for the small business what a large company does with a marketing team.

So what's changed? What has innovation brought to us? Well, on the elements the customers see at the forefront, it is things like an intuitive platform. We learn from what you've done and what has been successful for you through all the data we can harness and what your customers clicked on and opened and responded to—all to make you a better and more effective marketer. And we do things like help you with content.

"Our goal is to do with software for the small business what a large company does with a marketing team."

Our customers often don't have time to write great content. It's a stumbling block. To help them overcome that obstacle, we use technology to say, "Prompt us. Tell us what you really want to say." For instance, maybe there's a real estate agent who wants to host an open house next Sunday. We'll create that message, and we'll pull the images and website and colors into it so the agent doesn't have to think and invest as much time. That's the technology on the front end, and on the back end, what people don't see is deliverability. You can create an email, but if it doesn't get delivered—like if it gets stripped out through a spam filter—then it's worth nothing.

We focus on two things: deliverability and engagement. We need to make sure that your email gets to its intended recipient. So, we've developed technology to make sure your subject line is one that won't get stripped out by a spam filter, that your content has no bad links in it, or that some bad actor didn't put a link in an image that creates havoc for your customers. The backend technology that you don't see revolves around what we call deliverability—getting it to its intended audience—and then engagement, getting it opened and responded to. There's a lot of automation and technology involved, but we are the best in the world at accomplishing those objectives. Then, of course, there's security, and I don't need to say much more about that. It needs to be secure.

Let's shift to your culture. Some years back, I interviewed Gail Goodman, who, of course, built Constant Contact. She was brilliant. Your background is more corporate: GE Capital, Xerox, Microsoft. You have all of these interesting values like "Think Big, Go Bigger." Explain what your whole philosophy is on building the culture.

Yes. There's a lot. I'll start with culture and company values. You never want them to just be the words on a poster in the hallways of your building. And these value statements that you mentioned, they tie in a lot of things that are personal to us as a company. You mentioned Gail and our heritage. I would say, post-Gail, our company has taken a few turns that might have diluted or gotten us distracted from our core. I've viewed my job as getting us back to those core philosophies as a company and what is culture, and that is a set of people that live in this company getting us back to what made us great.

One of the things I love about this company the most is that everybody understands our impact on the small business. We know we are mission-critical to a small business's efforts. One of our core values is, "Customers, our constant." It's a nice play on words, but it's not just a word on a slide. We know in our hearts that's what we're here for, and every employee lives that.

In terms of innovation, we're an engineering company at heart. We have about 100 great engineers who have great ideas. I want to reignite our historical innovative culture and encourage them to "think big and go bigger". We are here to build it. You know our customers; you talk to our customers. If you think it, let's build it—or at least test it— market it, and see how it goes. Change something—like it or don't like it—it happens. And I want to drive a culture that says, "Adapt and act for impact." We acknowledge that change happens, so let's be a part of it, embrace it, champion it, and act for impact. Then, that gets back to the first value about our customers.

It's also really important for us to look like our customer base, which is a diverse set of employees across the globe that look and feel and understand how our customers compare to them. With diversity, we have a value called "you belong here." Whoever you are, in any respect, you belong here—just like our customers belong here.



And then, because I love what our original culture was, we have a flat organization. I really want our people to "keep it real and do it right."

You mentioned GE Capital. One of the core things I learned in my years at GE Capital was that results are important. What you do is important, but how you do it is just as important. The memory or taste you leave—whether in a customer's mouth or imagination or sentiment—is as important or more important than what you've done. And I had the pleasure of working for Meg Whitman for a little bit and she would say, "Run to the fire, don't run away from the fire." If there's a customer issue, run to it and feel empowered to embrace it.

I wanted to put that in our philosophy in our culture to keep it real, do it right, and instill that how you do it matters. They're not just words for us. It's the message we bring to all of our company meetings and our leadership meetings in the discussions we have.

I love that, and I remember when I interviewed Meg Whitman, she told me, "Robert, the key is to not have more than three objectives. If you do, you're going to fail." And an interesting thing about that is I heard that more people come to you through organic search and through paid search.

We call it organic earned because our reputation, our history, the good work we do, and the word-of-mouth references, they are earned. Paid traffic is core to how we market, but our earned business is an important part of how we acquire customers, and that comes through word of mouth and knowing who we are. We have a trusted brand that's rooted in our desire to have our customers succeed, and so thank you for that. We really appreciate the "earned."

Ok. Real-time questions Frank. What advice can you give on subject lines?

Behind the scenes, it's much more complex than it used to be. What you really want to do is use a platform that is leveraging technology so that as you're typing your subject line, it suggests helpful options that express what you're trying to say in a different way. That's where technology helps you.

Because we send nearly billions of emails in a year, we are learning every day what is getting stripped out of spam filters, what is getting opened, and what

is getting responded to; and we incorporate that into our tool. You have to know less and think less to be successful. The overarching message is, if you're a small business, use technology to do what is not core to you—whether that is digital marketing, or another area of your business. It allows you to focus on your day job and what you do best. Email marketing and social marketing and the science behind segmenting your audience is really something that's come a long way within the tool from what was available before.

"Because we send nearly billions of emails in a year, we are learning every day what is getting stripped out of spam filters, what is getting opened, and what is getting responded to; and we incorporate that into our tool."

Here's something you probably know better than anyone. What are the good days and bad days to email?

The answer is that it depends—on your goals, your customers, the other channels you are using to market, the content you are sharing. But anecdotally, we've noticed that Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. ET is the peak of our peaks every week, and we protect our systems and our throughput at that time. What that means is that's the time that most of our customers hit send on their campaigns.

But, let me tell you a little bit about innovation and technology and what that's done. I wake up in the morning and thumb through the books I read, and I have trained myself to not look at email the minute I wake up. It's good for the psyche, and it's good for your mental health. So, I get on my Peloton bike, and I do my exercise; then, I look at my email, which is usually about 6:30 in the morning. And you know what? The technology knows it.

I give you that story to say that what data has helped us to do, what great innovation and great science and great tools do, is say, "Robert, we understand your customers." You want to send this campaign, and you want it to get there by Tuesday, and we're going to ratchet the sends based on what we know about your audience—some of them might get it at 3:00 a.m., and some at 5:00 a.m., and some at 6:00 a.m. All of this is in our tools at Constant Contact, which are all automated.

How about marketing campaigns?

Fundamentally, we see a campaign as a series of things that happen that drive a desired outcome, and it will help you pick between text messages, social posts, email, or all of the above with reminders, with time sends and segmentations that help you do different things.



For instance, we know that: Frank responds to a 10% off sale, but Robert responds to a new product announcement because he wants to be the first one to get it. The technology starts to learn which audience is going to be more receptive to which message in which subject line, while a different audience is more responsive to something different. Once again, I come back to using all the tools at your disposal to be successful, and small businesses understand that.

What's your final piece of advice to small business owners about what they should do to grow their business?

Being a small business owner is hard, and I think what everybody in the economy missed through all of 2023 was that the small business is resilient. All these reports of going into a recession, and then while things are stronger in the economy, that was all off the back of the small business. Small businesses know how to run lean, they are very resilient, and they tell us when we survey small businesses, what their biggest stumbling blocks are. You might think it's getting funding or investment, but it's not. They run off reasonably low funding that they can get themselves, but their biggest challenge is marketing.

You get into a small business because you are doing something you're passionate about. But, things that you're not passionate about still have to get done in order for you to succeed, and often, marketing is one of those things for small businesses. So, my advice is use the tools and technologies that enable you to get done the things that are not core to your business in an efficient way.

I'll just use computers in the Cloud as an example. Previously, if you started the business, you used to have brick and mortar. You used to have to buy computers and point-of-sale technology. Today, you can start a business with Cloud technologies and remote working people and video, and you have so much more at your disposal. Marketing is exactly like that. Tools like Constant Contact are there to make you successful whether you're a good marketer or not.



Frank Vella *is the CEO of Constant Contact, a digital marketing and automation platform that has helped millions of small businesses and nonprofits globally. Constant Contact makes digital marketing easy and effective for small businesses and nonprofits around the world. Whether just starting out, or managing complex multi-channel campaigns, SMBs benefit from its powerful SaaS platform that delivers a simplified marketing experience with less time spent and better results.*

Frank's previous successes are rooted in a passion for building culture and customer-centric businesses. He has built effective teams at tech firms of varying sizes around the globe including Microsoft, GE Capital, Virtustream and BlueJeans, among others. Frank has led companies through growth, transformation and market expansion with a persistent focus on innovation, people and customer journey.

Frank is a proud Canadian expat, splitting his time between Boston, MA and New York, NY. In his free time, he enjoys mentoring young entrepreneurs and traveling with his family.

Constant Contact



In Memory of David Bigelow, Bigelow Tea Leader And Tea Industry Icon

By: Cindi Bigelow, President & CEO of Bigelow Tea

David Campbell Bigelow was an extraordinary leader who led our company, and the tea industry overall, with the highest level of integrity and an unwavering spirit of determination.

And this is how the story began...

The son of David E. Bigelow and Ruth C. Bigelow, my father, David, was born in 1926 at Manhattan Hospital in NYC. After several years in New York, the family moved to Wilton, Connecticut. He was able to attend Avon Old Farms on a scholarship for his high school years, which was a place where he developed fond memories and his leadership skills. After attending Yale University for one year, he went to serve as a translator in the U.S. Army during WWII. Returning from war, he went back to Yale, graduating with the class of 1948. He worked in the film industry for a few years, but with the

help of his new wife, Eunice, he came back into the family business in 1959, The Bigelow Tea Company.

My grandmother, Ruth, started The Bigelow Tea Company in 1945. Prior to that, she was an interior decorator however, during the depression, she lost all her clients and my grandfather lost his job in publishing. Fortunately for us, Ruth was a true entrepreneur, reinventing herself by creating "Constant Comment" tea after hearing about an old colonial recipe using orange, sweet spice with black tea. She sent her new tea to a group of ladies having a party in New York, and they raved about it. It truly was the source of constant comments, and that's how our family business began. From experimenting in the kitchen, she created the first true specialty tea in the USA!



My father, however, was the man behind where this company is today. He took over in 1960, the year I was born. We had limited distribution of a single product and it was David that expanded and revolutionized the industry when he created a full line extension. He expanded our line to include Earl Grey, Lemon Lift, Cinnamon Stick, and so many more. Under his leadership, we took our new line of teas out of gift shops and into grocery stores. The category of Specialty Tea was established and was now available to the masses.

It was about the same time that he and my mother came back from a visit to the University of Arizona where they were serving Bigelow tea. He saw our teas completely unprotected in baskets. Realizing this had to change, he reached out to an Italian machine company to create a one-of-a-kind machine that could put each bag in an individual foil pouch. He knew that foil could protect our ingredients from degrading from exposure to light, air, and moisture. This invention now meant we could sell Bigelow tea into the food service channels safely. Our business took off.

Over the next several years my father expanded our offerings to include herbal teas. Ten years later, we introduced a line of flavored green teas. It was around the same time significant health benefits were being published around the world in terms of the value of green tea. As consumers were reading and hearing from their doctors that green tea should be part of their diet, tea drinkers turned to our company as we were the only company that offered a green tea on the shelf. Once again, our business grew dramatically.

My father was a true pioneer—tenacious, creative, and passionate about tea. He was able to put together ideas and concepts that were completely revolutionary to the tea category. Today, Specialty Tea accounts for almost 70% of all tea sold in the U.S., with commodity (large size black tea boxes) representing only 30%. When he started, commodity tea was close to 100% of all tea sold. Looking at shelves today in stores around the country I smile, wondering if anyone knew how our whole story began. It began because my grandmother had an idea creating Constant Comment, but it was my father that built out the concept to include flavored black teas, herbal teas and flavored green teas.

He was a humble man, who would take no credit for all that he did, but all of us at Bigelow today reap the benefits of his never-ending drive. We realize how fortunate we are to be the number one specialty tea company in our country. Tea is all we do; it is in our blood. And we continue to follow his lead, never compromising to do the right thing every day for the consumer, our employees, and our local community.

My father was my mentor for my entire life, both personally and professionally. He never wavered from the traits I admired the most. He was a humble, grateful and kind man. He leaves a big hole for my family, our extended family at Bigelow Tea and far beyond, but we will continue forward with the lessons he taught us all: Think about others before yourself. Yes, David Campbell Bigelow left a very special mark on this world, and I am so proud to be his daughter.



The Transformative CEO Summit
March 21, 2024

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION: INNOVATION, HUMAN CAPITAL & GROWTH

AGENDA

Part A: 11–11:30 a.m. ET

WELCOME & OPENING SPEAKERS
Opening presentations set the stage for our CEO problem-solving work groups.



"The Three Imperatives of the Human Side of Business Transformation"

Joe Hart

CEO, Dale Carnegie Training



"Women Leadership"

Ida Liu

Head of Citi Private Bank, Citi Bank



"How Generative AI will Change Society and Business"

Gary J. Shapiro

Producer, Consumer Electronics Show
President & CEO, Consumer Technology Association



"Leadership: Building a Great Culture During Crisis and Growth"

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo

Vice Chairman, Royal Caribbean Group
Former CEO, Celebrity Cruises



"Lessons from Running Blockbuster and 7-11 and Driving Change in America through Education"

James Keyes

Former CEO, Blockbuster & 7-11

Part B: 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. ET

WORKGROUPS
We break out into six different CEO workgroups to address critical topics.

Workgroup 1—Business Transformation

Workgroup leader (facilitator):

Dan Heffernan
Chief Growth Officer, Dale Carnegie

Workgroup participants:

Ida Liu, Head of Citi Private Bank, Citi Bank

Jim Rowley, CEO, Crunch Fitness

Judith Curr, President & Publisher, HarperOne Group (HarperCollins)

Workgroup 2—The Future of Innovation in Telecom

Workgroup leader (facilitator):

Michael Weening
President & CEO, Calix

Workgroup participants:

Gary Shapiro, President & CEO, Consumer Technology Association

Jenifer Robertson, President, AT&T Consumer

Kate Johnson, CEO, Lumen Tech

Workgroup 3—The People Side of Strategy

Workgroup leader (facilitator):

Jessica Skon
CEO, BTS

Workgroup participants:

Steve Jones, CEO, Allied Universal

Joseph Cacchione, M.D., CEO, Jefferson

Brittany Castillo, CEO, Ashbritt

Mike Alkire, CEO, Premier, Inc.

Workgroup 4—Building an Exceptional Culture

Workgroup leader (facilitator):

Dr. David Rock
Co-Founder & CEO, NeuroLeadership Institute

Workgroup participants:

Bills Burns, CEO, Zebra Technologies

Jamie Singleton, President, Signet Jewelers

Pete November, CEO, Ochsner Health

Workgroup 5—The Role of Character and Reputation in Driving Global Success

Workgroup leader (facilitator):

Kip Morse
President & CEO, International Association of Better Business Bureaus

Workgroup participants:

Alex Bombeck, CEO, North Highland

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo, Vice Chairman, Royal Caribbean

Charles Gibb, CEO, Fever-Tree N.A.

Jesse Stockwell, Co-Founder & Managing Partner, Optima Tax Relief

Workgroup 6—Developing Strategic Agility

Workgroup leader (facilitator):

Laura B. Cardinal, Ph.D.
Endowed Chair and Director, SmartState Center for Innovation + Commercialization, SC Innovates

Workgroup participants:

Jim Keyes, Former CEO, Blockbuster and 7-Eleven

Julie Caperton, Head, Wells Fargo, Private Bank

Joe Hart, CEO, Dale Carnegie



KEYNOTES



Joe Hart | CEO, Dale Carnegie Training

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Thank you, Robert. It's great to be with you today. And also, thank you, Robert, for the great work that you are doing with CEO Forum providing valuable insights for us, a connection for us. Right now, when I think about the state of the world and the opportunity for leadership, I don't think it's ever been greater and, frankly, the importance of effectiveness in leadership from the CEO standpoint, really is a critical priority again, maybe more than ever before. We look at all the changes in the world, we look at AI and emerging technologies and how our teams leverage these things so we can transform our businesses.

So much of this comes down to our leadership and as the CEO of Dale Carnegie, we have 200 operations in 86 countries for 112 years this year, and working with amazing CEOs from all over the world and really hearing what they're concerned about and what they see as the opportunities. Ultimately, the two things that they talk about more than anything right now are people and AI. How do we maximize it because I think all of us in this meeting know that there are companies today that are thriving that may not be around in three, five, seven years. And there are other companies that we've never heard of that will be dominant, and it all comes down to leadership, it comes down to people, it comes down to how we leverage technology. And part of what I want to share today are the three business imperatives, the three things that if we synthesize everything down, are key to transformation.

The first thing is culture. And we as CEOs, we lead the culture. We drive it. We look at what are the values of the organization and are we really modeling these and ensuring that the organization lives by these values. A person I think who has done that phenomenally is a friend of mine, former CEO of Boeing and Ford, Alan Mulally. He took over Ford in 2006 at a time when this company was on its way to bankruptcy. He focused on things like transparency, getting people to work together, appreciation, respect, listening—he basically said these are the components of our culture. And he turned that business from a loss of $17 billion into a profit of $12 million.

One action I suggest as CEOs is in the next 24 hours, think about one person on your team who you haven't appreciated as well as you would have liked to and give them honest and sincere appreciation. See what happens.

The second thing is communication. There's a great quote by George Bernard Shaw which is, "The illusion of communication is that it has occurred." We think, "Well, I've said this," or "I sent the email about this," therefore, I have communicated. But effective communication really is two-way. Am I listening? Am I communicating in a way that my audience understands? Am I speaking in terms of their interests? We need to be in sync. So, one action, if we want to be influential is to truly maximize the influence and inspire and motivate our teams and examine how you communicate, and see if there's one way that you could communicate or listen more effectively or intently. And, then also, what's the one thing that you would do to be more successful.

The third critical element in this business transformation is, of course, our people and investing in our people. Dale Carnegie conducted global research around AI and change management asking 3,600 people, with 60% CEOs and leaders, about the skills that businesses need to succeed in the years ahead. They said the critical skills are creativity, communication, and critical thinking.

So, one action I would encourage you to consider is survey your team members and ask if they have the skills and training they need to be successful and, if not, what are the things they need to be able to face the challenges to thrive and succeed and be resilient, agile and bold?

If we do those three things, we will set ourselves, and our organizations, up for success. And again, this is one of the most exciting times to be a leader. Think about the opportunity that you and I have as CEOs to lead organizations. When we think about that responsibility and the actions we can take, we really will determine whether or not our organizations are those that will or will not thrive in the years ahead. And I know that we will do the things we need to be successful.

So, Robert, thank you so much for this opportunity, and I look forward to being on the panel and also to talking with the other great CEOs in this meeting today.





Ida Liu | Global Head, Citi Private Bank

WOMEN LEADERSHIP

Hello, everyone, and thank you so much for having me today, Robert, and The CEO Forum. I'm Ida Liu, and I'm the global head of Citi Private Bank. It's an absolute pleasure to be here today with all of you, and it's especially special for me given some of the wonderful conversations that I've had with Robert and The CEO Forum in the past. I know that this organization and this summit today is going to provide a lot of really interesting perspectives for all of us to continue to grow, expand and learn as leaders and future leaders.

One of the very interesting things from my vantage point is that I face what we call a double ceiling. On the one hand, we've got the glass ceiling, and on the other hand, we have the bamboo ceiling. And, in many cases, we've already started to chip away at that glass ceiling. We've really cracked it in many ways, particularly here at Citi with the first female CEO of a global financial organization in Jane Fraser at the helm of and running our organization.

We also have great representation at Citi with 50% of our board members being women, and as the first global organization to put out our gender pay gap numbers because we believe that what gets measured gets done. And over the last five years, we have reached pay equity as well. There has been a lot of progress on the women and the glass ceiling side. However, when I look at the bamboo ceiling side—and I happen to lead and co-head the Asian Heritage Affinity Network in addition to my job as the global head of Citi's Private Bank—and this is not unique to Citi, I think we have a long way to go in terms of cracking the bamboo ceiling. I say that because today, only 3% of the Fortune 500 CEOs are of Asian descent and only a small, small fraction are of East Asian descent.

There are a lot of things that are happening in the undercurrents that we have to be aware of and some of those are the values that we were brought up with in the Asian community—to keep our heads down, to be humble, to be modest, to not tout our accomplishments, to work hard—and those are wonderful things to aspire to but the exact opposite of what gets you ahead in corporate America. I've had to learn along the way the importance of communication, of advocating for yourself, as you are your own best cheerleader and you can't assume that your managers or bosses know what you want. You have to make it clear. You also have to tout your accomplishments. You have to make sure that your contributions are known, and don't expect that people are going to know everything that you're doing and the wonderful contributions that you're making.

I learned early on in my career as I pivoted from investment banking to fashion and then back into wealth management private banking and people always ask me how I made so many transitions throughout my career. We also have to be willing to take risks to push ourselves out of the comfort zone, to build really strong networks. You're never too young to start networking and all of the career transitions that I made have been because of the strong networks and communities and contacts that I formed along the way throughout the years. For me it's thinking outside the box a bit, recognizing and spotting interesting opportunities and bringing those together here at private banking at Citi, with the fashion industry, with wealth management, and with how I got my career started here in private banking. So thinking outside of the box, spotting opportunities, not being afraid to take risks, stepping outside of your comfort zone are things that I think are incredibly important as leaders.

And the last thing is that it is very important for us today, especially as female leaders, to really lean into what I call DQ. So many of us in this industry already have a lot of IQ, a lot of EQ because we're in the client-facing business, but DQ is the decency quotient, and that is the way that we show up for one another and the way that we partner well with each other, support each other, provide support to one another. I think that's ever so important in today's world and it's a strength that many female leaders have and that is our ability to relate well to others, to really lean in because we do so many things so well. Many of us are multitasking, many of us are wearing multiple hats as a caregiver, educator and as a leader of our businesses and our organizations. Really leaning into that DQ side of it, making sure that we're checking in on our teams on a regular basis, so that we really understand and relate and our teams feel supported. I think that's one of the biggest and most important traits of successful leaders—to be able to do that because after all, we are only as good as our people.

I am thrilled to be here with all of you today. I'm really looking forward to the session throughout the day. Thank you to The CEO Forum, and to you, Robert. I'm looking forward to a very engaging set of discussions today.



KEYNOTES



Gary Shapiro | CEO, Consumer Technology Association and CES

HOW GENERATIVE AI WILL CHANGE SOCIETY AND BUSINESS

Thank you, Robert, and thank you for what you've done for executives. The CEO Forum magazine has made a difference to me reading the perspectives of other CEOs, and I've learned so much from it, it's really valuable. And we go back a long way and have had a lot of discussions on important issues. I am Gary Shapiro, CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, which is a non-profit trade association with over 1,300 American corporate members, actually almost every major company focused on tech and innovation. Also, we own and produce CES, which is the world's largest innovation event, held each January in Las Vegas, and that's where we have almost 140,000 people from around the world, 40% of them from outside the U.S. who are executive-level people, focusing on innovation as well so they are able to do business with each other, or report or invest on it.

I spent my career focusing on innovation, and there are some innovations that have come along and changed our world fundamentally. I was there for the internet and helped shape the internet in terms of the laws and governance and public policy. I was there for high definition television and so many others but let me tell you something, artificial intelligence—especially generative AI—is already really changing the world. I talked with countless leaders, CIOs and others, and it's already shaping business operations. It's making people more efficient, the people who used to spend weeks , or even months, writing a report, it's being done now in a few hours and it's freeing them up for other things. It also provides better analytics, insights and data and you could do that one of two ways. You could do it inside the company with a walled garden, if you will, and keep your information private or you can use one of the open systems and basically share, or try to share, your information and keep it.

We use generative AI for CES 2024, which is where we got the initial concept behind our brand campaign. But the reality is we paired them with human desires to refine and adapt. It was all over CES support. People were talking about customer support and how it's making a difference there. You could get better answers for customers and manage the workload. It makes people more productive but there are certain challenges and risks that are associated.

Looking broadly, gen AI is also a secret weapon against inflation, as it boosts productivity. And I predict right here, right now for your audience only, that it is going to be talked about in boosting productivity and helping fight inflation because it's not only high interest rates, but you could change the productivity of each work or revenue per work.

Looking ahead with generative AI, it's just like the early days of the internet or the early days of the cloud computing resolution. There's excitement, there's investment, but it's not a "one size fits all" approach and that's special when you're dealing with governments because there's a lot of bills. What's been great about the United States government is they never stop the new technology, but there's always pressure to by naysayers. So my advice to CEOs is to embrace the opportunity, think about how gen AI can help your specific business and always focus on innovation and be ready to pivot to going to sell a different direction because of gen AI.

Thank you, Robert. I really appreciate this opportunity to work with you and I'm excited to be able to join the summit. I look forward to seeing you there.





Lisa Lutoff-Perlo | Vice Chair, Royal Caribbean & Former CEO, Celebrity Cruises

BUILDING A GREAT CULTURE DURING CRISIS AND GROWTH

Hello, Robert. As always, it's such a pleasure to be with you. And I just love how you bring CEOs together so that we can share everything we've learned and share all of our wisdom and just have a wonderful time. So, as always, it's a pleasure to be here today talk about my topic of leading through culture—creating a culture through crisis and growth.

One of the things that's really important to CEOs is to be able to lead through crisis. You really have to already have built a really strong culture. One of the things as CEO of Celebrity leading 20,000 people all over the world, it was really important that I built a culture of mutual respect and mutual trust and mutual caring. My philosophy was if I could do that with all of these amazing men and women all over the world who leave their homes and their families and come to deliver these wonderful experiences for our guests, if they knew that I genuinely care about them and the sacrifice they were making and how hard they were working and what a wonderful contribution they made to Celebrity, then I would get that same genuine caring back. I've always believed that the discretionary effort you get from people when you create an environment of mutual caring is priceless.

I was building that culture over the many years I was with Celebrity. I was in operations with Celebrity for 15 years, nine of them as president and CEO and six years leading the operation. It was a lot of energy that was put into not only myself, but also all of the other leaders that I surrounded myself with and all of the leaders that they surrounded themselves with. I really believe in building what I call a trickle down culture, because it can start at the top...but it clearly can't end at the top and it has to go all the way through the organization and permeate every interaction that we all have with each other.

The thing that was so wonderful about that is when crisis struck, and we all know what that crisis was—it was COVID—we shut down for 15 months and I realized how important that culture was, because we needed to get everybody through that time. And as a leader, I learned that you need to pivot and flex your style and be agile, depending on what your team needs at any given time. During COVID they needed empathy, they needed compassion, they needed hope, they needed confidence. So I really dialed up and strengthened those muscles over that time and dialed down that hard driving, high performing CEO that I had been all the way up until that time.

The other thing I learned during that time is that, believe it or not, during the crisis that we were going through, we were also experiencing tremendous growth. We had just brought out Celebrity Edge, Celebrity Apex was already built, Celebrity Beyond was being built. So, imagine going through that crisis and also going through a time of tremendous growth. But what I learned as we came out of that is we were ready because the culture was strong going into COVID. I made sure that the team and I kept the culture strong during COVID so that when we came out of it, the comeback was way better than the setback and our brand was stronger than ever. And that, I think, was testament to all that we had done for so many years. It was really one of the things that I'm proudest of in all the time that I spent in our company, which is 39 years.

I'm really looking forward to the rest of the summit today. And, as always, I'm honored that you invited me to participate.



KEYNOTES



James W. Keyes | Former CEO, Blockbuster & 7-Eleven

LESSONS FROM RUNNING BLOCKBUSTER AND 7-ELEVEN, AND DRIVING CHANGE IN AMERICA THROUGH EDUCATION

Thank you, Robert. It's great to be with you and The CEO Forum. I appreciate the opportunity because what I'm trying to do is condense 30 or 40 years of learning from my two opportunities to lead Fortune 500 companies and if I had to go back and share with my younger executive self what I would do, I can condense it down to three critically important things.

Number one, change. Change is everything. Change is the essence of all commerce. Someone had a need at some point and someone filled that need. And still today, that's what it's all about. It's being able to respond to change. Now, sometimes that change is negative, sometimes it's positive. We have to be able to respond to any kind of change and it's not really the change that matters, that's irrelevant. It's our response to change, that's everything. That's why I've coined the expression of CEO to mean Change Equals Opportunity. That's really the role of the chief executive, to embrace change and to be able to react in a positive and meaningful manner to that change, whatever it is.

So, what happens? What's the biggest obstacle to change? Let's face it. Individuals don't like change, corporations don't like change, inertia sets in, we get stuck, we get stale. Well, the problem with change is that our native human instinct, fear, kicks in and that same mentality, that inadequacy, creeps into corporations as well. It creeps into society at large, we have fear dominating the news. Much of our politics is dominated by fear, someone's going to take something from you or do something to you. And, what's the antidote to fear? Well, the antidote to fear is knowledge and that's what builds confidence. Preparation equals confidence. Prepare to win.

The third element that I share with you of the three is embracing change, having confidence to do something about that change and then having the clarity of communications both inbound communications (listening) or outbound communications (speaking or communicating effectively). The ability to take very complex things and break them into simple terms is a very important lesson in communications and clarity. I think it was Da Vinci who said, "True elegance is in being able to take the most complex matter and break it into simple terms" ... it's so true.

So those are the three things: change, confidence and clarity. These are the three secrets to success to dealing with any crisis, any corporation, even as an individual, anything personally in your life that happens, and then, even on a larger scale with society at large. So, what's the best way to handle that? Through knowledge, through education!

I've written a book called Education is Freedom. And the idea is to be able to counter the narrative that's out there right now that basically says, I don't know if college is as important anymore. Well, let me tell you, going all the way back to 7-Eleven and Blockbuster, in my experience with trying to hire hundreds of thousands of people. We had a supply and demand problem and I believe that all of corporate America has a supply and demand problem. We are the demand for an educated workforce. Now, the supply, we all know, it's challenged, public school systems. We've got post-secondary education challenges with a lot of things in the entire process of our education system. It should be improved; it must be improved.

But leaving this up to state and local governments is going to take a very long time. If we represent the demand for an educated workforce as corporate America, then perhaps we should also step up and invest, because the technology is there today to do for education what we've already done for retail, for automobiles, for space. You think about the possibilities, endless possibilities, of transforming our education process through technology. Well, it'll take many years for that to happen organically, but if we see ourselves as the demand for an educated workforce and we see it as an investment, not a philanthropic contribution, then we too can invest in those technologies that will accelerate the transformation of our education system. CEOs can do what we do in any other case of a supply and demand problem, put resources against it and ensure the future supply of an educated workforce for corporate America.

It is essential both for us as individuals and for us as corporate citizens and for society at large to have not only an educated workforce, but an educated populace to sustain democracy going forward. I hope everyone will rise to the occasion. That is my suggestion for corporate America and for America at large. Thank you for the opportunity to share that message today. And Robert, I really look forward to participating in the panel.



SUMMARIES



Dr. David Rock | CEO, NeuroLeadership

We had Bill Burns, the CEO of Zebra Technologies, Jamie Singleton, President of Signet, and Pete November, CEO, Ochsner Healthcare. Three quite different industries: technology, jewelry retail, and healthcare -- really quite different, yet amazing how similar the themes were.

Overall, there was this real importance of culture as something that's a real differentiator in driving performance, which we all agreed upon immensely. We started with how each industry is changing and how do you picture your organization and culture changing to meet that. There was a lot of emphasis on empowering the front lines, and empowerment with new technologies and approaches. The front line is going to have to be that much more empowered, which means the front line manager will need to be given different skills and develop those in different ways. We also talked about the importance of clarity for all employees, and the theme of creating clarity came up in many different ways.

The second question was what have you done successfully to drive culture change so far? So, we were looking at the wins, and one of the big themes was creating psychological safety. We define psychological safety as not just about being kind and empathetic, but actually creating the conditions for people to argue well, so that everyone is friends at the end of the day, and also making sure the best ideas rise to the top. This is intentional; it's something we've been studying and building for quite some time, partnering with Amy Edmondson, one of the researchers in that space, and it came up quite distinctively as an important skillset, particularly for people managers to have.

Our research shows it's very intentional, and it doesn't just happen on its own. Some of the things people have done to successfully drive change is appreciation so people know their work is valued. Another big one is purpose -- bringing people back up to purpose so they can really connect to the 'why'. We talked about some of the brain processes involved in that. And, then ultimately, a big one was just caring, really caring for employees so they feel like they are cared for in a big way.

And, then, the third question was what's been the biggest challenge in creating culture? We talked a little bit about the challenge of simplifying and we talked a little bit about the brain science. When you do create something simple, just how sticky that is, but also how much it gets shared and how much it changes behavior. We talked about the Microsoft case with their three priorities being create clarity, generate energy, and deliver success, and just how sticky that became for them. We talked about priorities, habits and systems. Probably one of the biggest challenges that we identified is that many of the CEOs were involved in acquisitions. How you get a culture that's really thinking one way, working one way -- how do you change that? Maybe from a top-down culture to a much more egalitarian culture.

The real challenge of changing that and, at the end of the day, one of the messages that rang through was, "Let's start with the science. Let's start with human biology. Let's start with a real understanding of the science of human change and how that works." And one of the biggest things to remember is, people ultimately change because they believe everyone is changing. And, so, creating movements as opposed to training initiatives and thinking in terms of creating this overarching movement -- those are some of the big things.

Thanks so much, Bill, Jamie and Pete, for a great conversation and to others for contributing in the chat as well.



SUMMARIES



Jessica Skon | CEO, The BTS Group

We had a wonderful panel with Mike Alkire, CEO, Premier, Dr. Joe Cacchione, CEO, Jefferson, Brittany Castello, CEO, AshBritt, and Steve Jones, CEO, Allied Universal. We basically covered two questions. One which is, what's working well in their companies in terms of driving change? And the other one is what are some areas of adversity they've been facing and what were some insights from that?

On the first category of what's working well, there are three major takeaways. One of them was, if you want to change something, you need to run the play. Just like sports teams, the military, any high performing organization, people need time to practice and run the play over and over again. What's super interesting about that is it's consistent with what James Keyes was saying in his keynote—that preparation equals confidence.

A second insight which came up in terms of the amount of acquisitions these CEOs were doing is, in some cases, you lose the family feeling, and one of the takeaways from that was just the power of a new, fresh, common branding and getting everybody on the same systems which can actually go a really long way.

The third insight was even when we have moments of deep reflection over weeks or months, and we think we finalized the plan, the ability and the confidence to let it go the next day because things have changed is an important attribute for us as CEOs.

Now, in terms of the adversity side, I think there were two main points and then there was an extra one which was a question from one of the people listening. On the adversity side, there was a story which I think many of us related to, and obviously we know strategy is only as good as being executed. But specifically, on adopting technology and new software, there is a tendency for us to get excited by the shiny objective.

At the end of the day, the realization was the amount of change and implementation work is enormous to actually shift the ways of working to drive a high adoption rate, and the CEO was comparing the amount of focus and attention to driving adoption of the new software with that of fully integrating big companies. We can't underestimate how much ways of working change to actually get the lift from the technology. The second one was when we're shifting operating models or new ways of working. Just the reminder that going back to clarity of intent and clarity of purpose, and making sure the storyline is customer back is extraordinarily important.

And, then, an interesting question from one of the people listening had to do with the new generation. How are we shifting our comms approach? Are we going more to TikTok-style or using Slack or WhatsApp? But the interesting part here was the answer. Across the board, all four panelists talked about picking up the phone, talking to people, bringing people back to the office, having face to face conversations, and the sense of the loss of creativity that's happening from too much time on Zoom.

So, panelists, I hope I did well, and those were the main points.





Michael Weening | President & CEO, Calix

On the panel I hosted, we had Jenifer Robertson, President of AT&T Consumer; Kate Johnson, President and CEO of Lumen; and Gary Shapiro, CEO of Consumer Technology Association and producer of CES.

My takeaway: corporate culture drives innovation, company values, and the customer experience. In an industry as fast-paced as telecommunications, these relationships are key drivers of transformation.

Consider AT&T, which is grappling with increased customer demand for speed, reliability, secure connections, and new products.

"We are centering ourselves around the customer," Robertson said. "And we fundamentally believe that the sum of the parts is greater than the individual pieces. That comes with delivering a better experience and better products for customers." AT&T's transformation requires today's leadership skills. "Showing up where we're listening, empathizing, and making it clear that we're here to serve you have been some of the leadership traits and cultural changes we've had to do," she said. Humanizing leadership requires "humble confidence," she added. "The leader has to have the confidence to set the vision, to clear the roadblocks to get out in front of the team take risks —and fail — and show that vulnerability and that humility." Robertson said another important leadership trait is empathy, which she defined as the ability to connect with others and be present for your team while rallying them to the mission and showing gratitude.

Building a Customer-Obsessed Organization

Johnson echoed the importance of a customer focus at Lumen, a global communications services provider that connects people, data, and apps. "Eighteen months ago, we started on this journey of trying to change our culture to be more customer-obsessed and spending time with our customers," she explained. "We said, 'we want to get close to you. We want to understand your business outcomes. And we want to build our roadmap of our capabilities, whether it's network-as-a-service or connectivity solutions, or our security solutions, and make sure that we design them to be consumed by you in the context of those business outcomes.'"

Johnson noted that, to ensure the culture transformation actually stuck, they needed to create a "feedback loop" with customers — listening to their input and then course-correcting along the way. "We were able to do a couple of spins with some of our biggest customers and launched a few sets of capabilities that have been well received in the market," she said.

She agreed with Robertson that business transformation must accompany culture transformation and new skill sets. At Lumen, they are teaching leaders to:

Have tough conversations, be good listeners, and take feedback.
Be resilient and learn from mistakes.
Understand the values of customers, teammates, and partners.
Be the brand customers trust by consistently providing an excellent experience.

"You can't just change a company and say, okay, here's where we're going — let's go take the hill," she said. "You have to give the team the skills to take the hill."

Constant Technological Change

As the head of the CTA, which represents over 1,300 consumer technology companies and owns and produces CES (Consumer Electronics Show), Shapiro has a broad perspective on the incredible pace of technological advances that are driving business transformation.

"It's not just about 5G and work towards 6G, new ways of doing things, and Generative AI. We're also shifting to quantum computing in a few years, which will change as much as Generative AI has," he said.

But he also realizes that the human component cannot get lost amid rapid technological innovation. That's why the CTA developed a mission statement codifying the organization's values. As Shapiro describes it: "We take risks. We're nice to each other. We're a good place to work. We focus on individuals, but we have this great mission of making the world better through technology, and we're promoting innovation as the number one thing we do."

(continued on next page)



SUMMARIES

Recommended Reading: Brené Brown

I thoroughly enjoyed the conversation with these esteemed leaders. For Summit attendees looking to put the principles we discussed into practice, Johnson recommended the work of author Brené Brown, who partnered with Lumen to help their teams lead with courage, vulnerability, and transparency. Brown is an incredible author who has contributed much to the business world, especially by promoting empathy and mental health.



Dan Heffernan | Chief Growth Officer, Dale Carnegie Training

I had three fantastic panelists. They were very engaged and energetic and shared a lot of great information and collaboration between them: Ida Liu, the head of private banking for Citi; Jim Rowley, the CEO of Crunch Fitness; and Judith Curr, who is the president of Harper Publishing.

The questions we asked were, first of all, tell us about a transformation you're going through, and a little bit about the type of organization you need to create to be successful in that. And then, three to five years ahead, what is the transformation you're seeing and how are you going to navigate that? We started with three very different industries: publishing, private banking and fitness, basically a franchise fitness business. Despite the very three different businesses, there were some similarities about how they're looking ahead, but differences in terms of their challenges.

Starting with Citi, their biggest challenge is they're going through the biggest restructuring in the company's history. Ida is part of leading that, and that's obviously a very significant challenge. In Jim's case, they're growing so quickly. They want to continue to add more gyms every week, and, so, there's that growth. In the case of Judith, it's really a question of "How do we create new books, tell new stories for more diverse storytellers that resonate with more communities." So, three different industries, three totally different challenges. But then we got into the type of culture that they want to create and their types of needs. They have to be able to succeed as well as the road ahead so that's where we started to see some real similarities. Jim talked a lot about accountability and how there has to be pure acceptance.

In order to have people want to be accountable, in order to have psychological safety, there has to be a pure humility and acceptance of everyone, no matter where they start, no matter who they are, and to embrace that diversity. Similarly, Ida shared her pride in publishing actual diversity statistics and how they are breaking glass ceilings and bamboo ceilings and what that means to the business and how they're leaning into that difference, and it's really helping them to grow their leadership and create a great a culture.

Looking ahead, they all deal with AI. Publishing was a much bigger challenge with AI than others and they all looked at viewing the new generation differently. They care more about purpose. That's purpose in investing, that's purpose in what they do. As Jim said, "Sitting is the new smoking!"



Dr. Laura Cardinal | The Strategic Management Society

We talked about strategic agility and this was very interesting. I have to thank Julie Caperton, Head of Wells Fargo Private Bank; Joe Hart, CEO, Dale Carnegie; and Jim Keyes, former CEO of Blockbuster and 7-Eleven. What was very interesting, if I were going to boil down some, there was so much rich information and key building blocks.

First, we talked about that you still have to have a framework and your pillars for strategy, and you need to understand what the drivers are. When we get into this world of agility by being agile, it doesn't mean strategy goes out the window.

However, we're not so locked into these plans that we still look at metrics, but we talked about the biggest obstacle to agility which we agreed was fear. We spent a lot of time talking about how do we overcome fear? We have to have knowledge and then clear communication. We have to provide knowledge. We have to help people be in learning environments. It's not kumbaya like, "Oh, it's wonderful. You can be afraid. Go jump in the deep end." It's that we're actually going to be in these deep ends and we have to have a culture that allows us to be nimble and change. At the



same time, to help people overcome their fear, we still want metrics and we still want accountability, because there are going to be people that are going to be obstacles. You don't want people thinking you're measuring them with all these performance metrics and they don't know what they mean, and they're being held and ranked based on them.

And, so, we felt that we needed agile people and agile operations, and we need a culture that embraces this. We need continuous education, because fear is our greatest obstacle with the amount of change that we're faced with. And there is a great need for agility in our work environment today, and in the world environment.



Kip Morse | CEO, The Better Business Bureau

I had the pleasure of talking with four great leaders about how they successfully use character and reputation to drive success: Charles Gibb, CEO, Fever-Tree North America; Lisa Lutoff-Perlo, Vice-Chair, Royal Caribbean Group; Jesse Stockwell, Managing Partner, Optima Tax Relief; and Alex Bombeck, CEO, North Highland.

To sum it up, we talked about it taking a long time to build culture within an organization. Everybody is always watching, and so you have to be consistent. Character is what builds that culture, and then culture is what builds that brand, and then the brand then is what holds you accountable on a daily basis. Challenges around that are usually associated with change, lack of clear communications and clarity of the communications. There is a need to make complex things simpler for everybody involved. The importance of ruthless prioritization was one of the big topics we had, and to have it based on the values that you expect. And if you do that, then you're putting your energy into success.

Leadership values transcending everything was a constant theme. The younger generations expect it, and those are the types of organizations that they want to be involved with. There is an importance with remembering that people run a business and to put them at the center and be clear with the expectations. This idea of an annual review and waiting 12 months to have a conversation is just a thing of the past. You need to be bold and brave to have those conversations when they happen.

And we agreed upon the importance of trust building and trusting relationships and seeking counsel. Having individuals both within the organization as well as outside the organization that you can go to and you know they're going to hold you accountable, or you can run ideas by them and they'll give you good, strong feedback. It was an awesome time to be able to talk with individuals about character and culture.



Robert Reiss | Founder & CEO, The CEO Forum Group

Thank you all. I want to thank everyone. I want to thank all of our CEO attendees, and I saw at the peak we were over 400. I also want to thank all of our workgroup leaders as well as our research partner.

The whole idea here was to give you the knowledge and impetus so you can drive your business transformation forward. As discussed, within a month, we will email all of you and you will be able to get all the insights from this. I want to keep our promises and let you out on time. So, thank you all very much and I look forward to seeing you at our next Transformative CEO Summit on June 20, 2024.



ARTICLE



Jessica Skon | CEO, The BTS Group

THE PEOPLE SIDE OF IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

Change has changed. We have been saying this for several years now. And then COVID happened. While a global pandemic caused a number of seismic shifts in how we work, what customers need and what is required of leaders, mostly it meant that we can no longer deny that change has changed. Product lifecycles are shorter. Technology-fueled disruptions are much more frequent. The socio-economic environment continually creates upheaval. Boards and shareholders have less patience.

"While a global pandemic caused a number of seismic shifts in how we work, what customers need and what is required of leaders, mostly it meant that we can no longer deny that change has changed."

All of this requires new ways of working. Individuals at all levels need new mindsets and behaviors that enable them to accept this new reality. The organizations that are outpacing the market, being disruptors/not being disrupted, innovating, and bringing products to market faster are doing a few distinct things differently to enable their people to work differently, think differently and role-model constant evolution.

Through our research and experience, we see change in four simple and dynamic parts:

1. **Set outcomes.** Change can take on many forms. Outcomes have to be clear but not so clear that you never act. Take time upfront to crystallize the outcomes of the transformation—be it a change in strategy, a business or operating model, a technology-driven change, or a culture transformation. Be sure to connect the dots between purpose, where you have been, where you are and what is possible. A common mistake is to limit the thinking to only a few people. We know that "authorship is ownership." Engaging as many people as possible, while it may feel slow, will yield months in speed of adoption. Another powerful mechanism is to simulate, or scenario plan with leadership teams. Model out the strategic alternatives to surface priorities grounded in both the market realities and the company's financial position.
2. **Create change leaders.** The reality today is that every leader is a change leader, responsible for engaging their organization in enacting the change. This requires stepping into a "change owner" mindset and committing to refine priorities, shift direction, and communicate transparently as the transformation unfolds. To get the why, what, and how, leaders need to experience how their business will operate in the transformed state and what is expected of them. They need to have time to run the plays, to prepare for and practice these new moves. The most powerful way to do this is through high fidelity simulations where leaders and their teams experience the desired future state, try it out, make mistakes, learn, and build the confidence to go first.

"To get the why, what, and how, leaders need to experience how their business will operate in the transformed state and what is expected of them."



3. **Embed pivotal shifts.** There are mindsets and daily structures or organizational moves that, if changed, will have a disproportionate impact on achieving change. The key is to find and shift them. With mindset shifts, the only way new behaviors become instinctual is if there is a change in each leader's mindset. This requires identifying current mental models and offering new ones that support the desired state. Then you need to help leaders and their teams experience operating in the new mindset and address specific obstacles and blockers to change.

> "With mindset shifts, the only way new behaviors become instinctual is if there is a change in each leader's mindset."

The "structural" changes associated with transformation often stop at organizational change and redefinition of workstreams. However, we have found that other, less obvious changes can have even greater impact in cementing desired shifts. The key is to engage leaders in identifying those critical processes, practices, or norms that are anchored in the old ways of working that need to evolve to realize a changed culture and improved business results.

4. **Sustain ways of working.** Change is a social activity. People change when they feel supported and enabled by their peers and the organization. While changing engrained habits doesn't happen overnight, it can happen quickly if people are properly supported. One of our favorite high-leverage ways to sustain new ways of working is through "behavior sprints," where groups of leaders focus on adopting a small set of behaviors at the same time. This concentrates the organization on a few new practices and actions. The group effort delivers greater support and accelerates learning. These sprints often use coaching to increase accountability for change and improve the support system among peer leaders.

The bottom line is being a change leader is a core expectation for all leaders. CEOs down to the frontline need to reflect on the type of culture that will nurture this new normal, and the daily moves required to reinforce the courage to keep trying new ways of working, or risk falling back to the old corporate habits that create fear and cement people's inability to change.



Partly Cloudy with Bursts of Innovation

Executives expect mix of disruption and opportunity over next 36 months

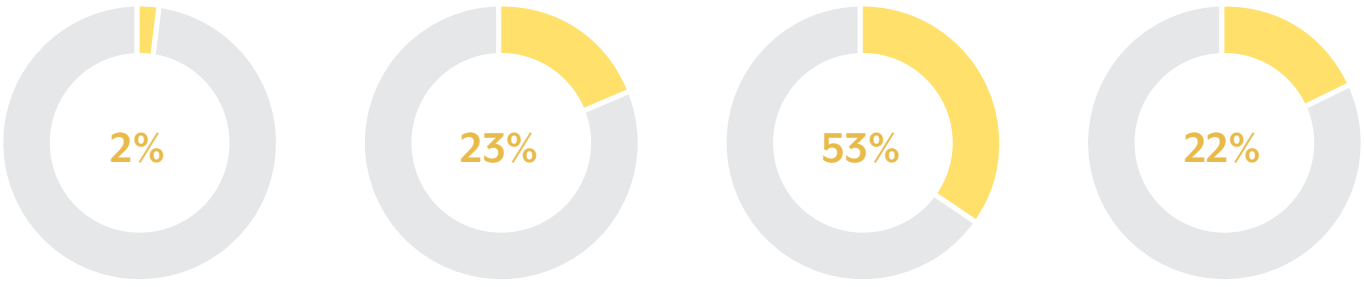
By: Sarat Varanasi & Craig Weber

Social commentators have long observed that the only thing that is truly permanent is change. Our updates to that axiom are that the pace of change increases with every era, and every era is shorter than the preceding one. It would be hard to argue that cultural shifts and new consumer preferences and behaviors—either driven or supported by extraordinary technology changes—are not pouring out of the change spigot more rapidly. We all experience these dynamics daily.

Torrents of change produce plenty of upside potential for companies that can harness the energy. But these benefits are interspersed with plenty of queasiness for humans who find themselves navigating toward an uncertain future.

Several hundred executives we surveyed at The CEO Forum Group's March 2024 Transformative CEO Summit seem to agree. With the current focus on AI, we asked about AI and GenAI's potential societal impact over the next 24 to 36 months. An amazing 53 percent said they expect Major Disruption in that period, while another 22 percent expect Mega Disruption. We're not sure precisely how we should define Mega Disruption... and we wrote the question! But it connotes life-changing uncertainty, a set of "unknown unknowns" that make planning difficult. Adrenaline junkies might enjoy this scenario, but most of us would opt for certainty.

Which of the following describes the likely societal impact of AI and GenAI over the next 24 to 36 months?

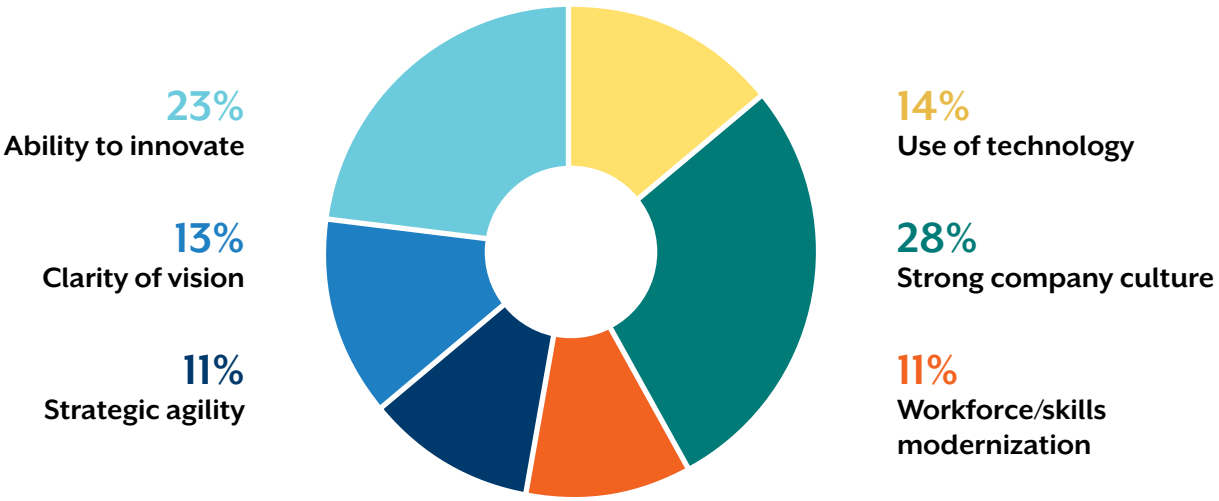


Source: Cognizant/CEO Forum Group Research, n=213

If 75 percent of our respondents are right, and rapid, unplanned changes to the status quo are likely, how should companies respond? A sensible approach might be to focus on broad organizational capabilities, rather than trying to solve for problems that are not yet defined. We asked respondents to identify the one thing most likely to drive success, and the top two responses were "strong company culture" (28 percent) and "ability to innovate" (23 percent). Despite the high interest in AI and related technologies, few of our surveyed leaders selected "use of technology" and "workforce/skills modernization" as success drivers.

Does this suggest that technology will not have a pivotal role in companies' success? Of course not. But most leaders believe that technology and people skills are best utilized in service of a clear vision and strategy. Anchoring all efforts to vision and strategy ensures that difficult and disparate technology decisions align to broader long-term goals and move the business forward.

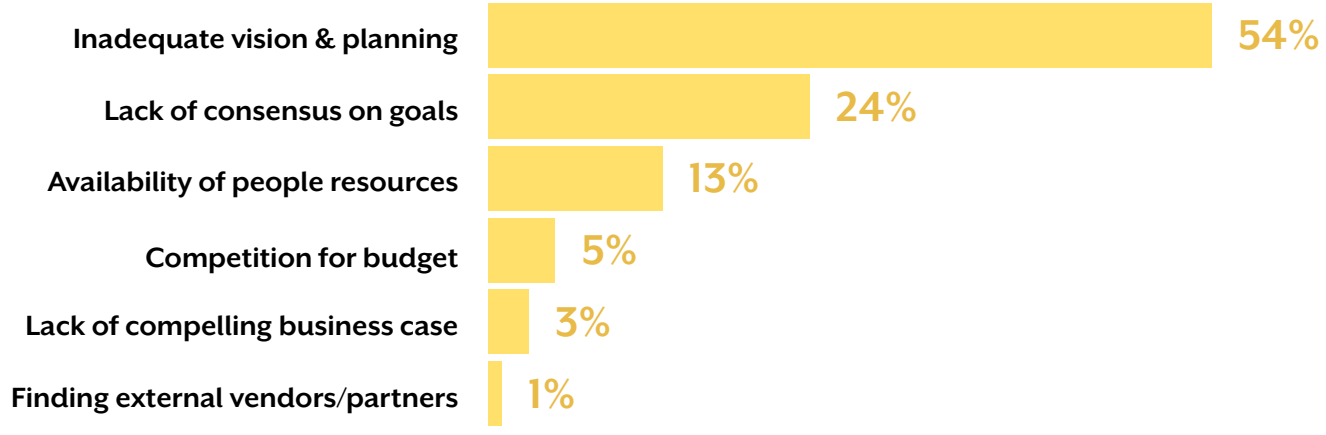
Pick the one thing most likely to drive successful companies over the next three years.



Source: Cognizant/CEO Forum Group Research, n=213

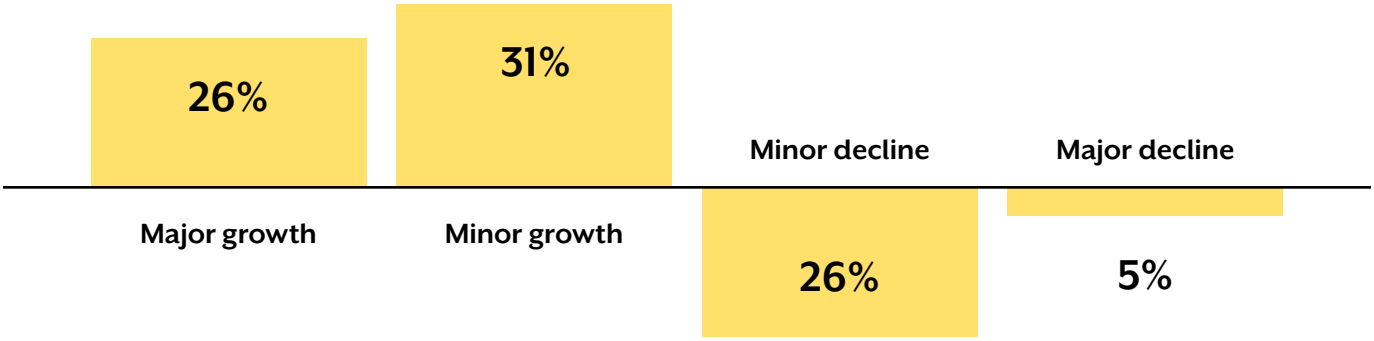
In the current environment, characterized by economic and political uncertainty and potentially game-changing technology shifts, we thought it would be useful to check in on the state of transformation. These large-scale programs have been prevalent in every industry for decades, with varying degrees of success. The response feels like a continuation of the response to the previous question. A dominant 54 percent of respondents noted that "inadequate vision and planning" is the factor most likely to cause transformation programs to fail, followed by lack of consensus on goals (24 percent), and availability of people resources (13 percent). Budgets, lack of a compelling business case, and external partners were far down the list of concerns.

In your experience, which factor is most likely to derail a transformation program?



Source: Cognizant/CEO Forum Group Research, n=213

What impact will GenAI have on total employment in your industry over the next 24 to 36 months?



Source: Cognizant/CEO Forum Group Research, n=213

A final question about the impact of GenAI on total industry employment produced a mildly surprising response.

Allow us to put this result in context. Cognizant's work with clients on GenAI across a dozen or more industry segments is varied. Through extensive use case testing, we've found that among tasks of similar complexity, certain ones benefit greatly from application of GenAI. Others—as they say—not so much. For example, summarizing a call transcript is handled surprisingly well, while performing routine math calculations is not. Academics call this the "Technological Frontier" and expect it to advance and evolve through constant, industry-level learning and training of the GenAI models.

That state of constant learning also happens at a company level. Most firms are either engaging outside experts or loading up on AI talent to help things along. This may explain why our survey respondents were surprisingly bullish on GenAI's impact on total employment in their industries. Despite the temptation to view GenAI as a next-generation cost-cutting tool, 26 percent of our respondents said they expect "major growth" of total employment due to GenAI and 31 percent said they expect "minor growth."

Taken together, these results confirm what we're all feeling. There is optimism for GenAI to usher in new, more effective business models, where a thoughtful blend of human expertise and machine facilitation delivers better experiences and better results. There is also a sense of uncertainty and perhaps even some dread attached to GenAI, based on unknowns like the timeline for GenAI's impact, how AI can be deployed ethically, and how aggressively regulators will address emerging issues. These are the issues of our era, and they will surely be the focus of future Transformative CEO Summits.

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Sarat Varanasi *leads the Insurance Business Unit at Cognizant, one of the world's leading professional services companies. He is passionate about helping clients transform their business and operations through process optimization, AI, and digital technologies.*



Craig Weber *is Cognizant's head of insurance strategy. As a long-time management consultant and industry analyst, he brings clients technology perspectives that balance practicality with innovation.*



Driving Transformations: Principles for a Strong Company Culture

By: Michael Weening, President & CEO of Calix

As a leader, I appreciate the opportunity to learn from CEOs who are successfully leading transformations of their own.

Recently, I had the honor of hosting a CEO Forum panel with esteemed transformation CEOs, including Jenifer Robertson of AT&T Consumer, Kate Johnson of Lumen, and Gary Shapiro of the Consumer Technology Association. As we shared insights, a consensus emerged: a strong culture focuses on customers to fuel innovation and meaningful change within organizations.

Customer-Centricity: The Heart of Culture Transformation

Both Robertson and Johnson emphasized the pivotal role of customer-centricity in their respective companies' culture transformations. At AT&T, Robertson highlighted the imperative of centering efforts around the customer, recognizing that a collective approach yields superior results. She emphasized the need for leadership traits such as humble confidence and empathy, essential for fostering a culture of service and innovation.

Similarly, Johnson recounted Lumen's journey toward becoming more customer-obsessed, where understanding clients' business outcomes is paramount. By engaging in a continuous feedback loop with customers, Lumen ensured that their cultural transformation aligned with evolving market needs. Both leaders underscored the symbiotic relationship between culture and customer satisfaction, reinforcing the notion that a culture rooted in empathy and responsiveness drives sustainable growth.

Navigating Technological Advancements While Preserving Humanity

In technological innovation, Shapiro provided valuable insights. As the head of the Consumer Technology Association, he sees quantum computing as the next driver of dramatic increases in the speed, efficiency, and accuracy of technology. At the same time, he acknowledged it is both an "exciting and scary" time in business, given the rapid advancements in tech. In some cases, technology is moving faster than our existing infrastructure and systems can support (think of the way electric cars are pushing the transportation system in a way it's not currently designed for).

Accordingly, Shapiro emphasized the need to balance tech advancements with human values. "We're at an inflection point in history where there's so much in technology that will make a difference to solve fundamental problems," said Shapiro. "Whether it's using self-driving cars to avoid 43,000 Americans dying in auto accidents yearly, or telehealth cutting the cost of health care. People want their kids and grandkids to inherit a better world."

Culture Is in Constant Flux

Reflecting on my own experiences at Calix, we advocate for a dynamic approach to culture. We go so far as to state that culture is not fixed—it changes based on how each employee chooses to show up daily with their colleagues, as well as our customers and partners.

Culture evolves as business transformations advance. That's why we work to ensure our teams understand that they are accountable for evolving our culture every day.

Principles for Cultivating a Strong Culture

The Calix culture has three guiding principles:

1. **Know Your Purpose:** Align individual and organizational purposes to create a shared sense of mission. By understanding how their work contributes to broader objectives, employees find meaning and motivation in their roles.

2. **Embrace a "Better, Better, Never Best" Mindset:** Cultivate a culture of learning and collaboration, where feedback is welcomed, and innovation is embraced. Continuous improvement drives resilience and adaptability, essential qualities in navigating today's dynamic business landscape.

3. **Everyone is Accountable for Culture:** Create a sense of ownership among all employees, empowering them to actively shape the culture through their actions and contributions. Encourage open communication and constructive feedback, fostering a culture of accountability and collaboration.

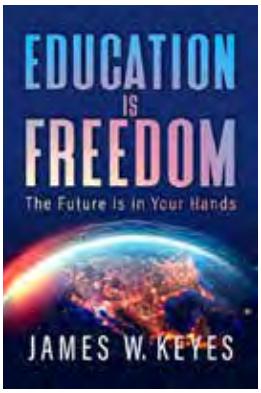
Driving transformational change requires more than strategic vision—it demands a commitment to continual learning. For example, to drive her company's transformation, Kate Johnson shared that Lumen partnered with professor Brené Brown to help her team "dare to lead" with brave work, tough conversations, and whole hearts.

Change is a constant in business and life. To navigate change, we must meet it head-on. Let us remember that culture is not a destination but a continuous evolution—a living organism shaped by the collective efforts of every individual. That is the mindset to create a company that inspires, innovates, and endures.



CEO LIBRARY

"One of my favorite quotes on learning is from Julia Child, 'You'll never know everything about anything, especially something you love.' My love has been learning about business models and success, where I have read over 1,000 business books; following are three of those which I believe can be of great value to today's top CEO."

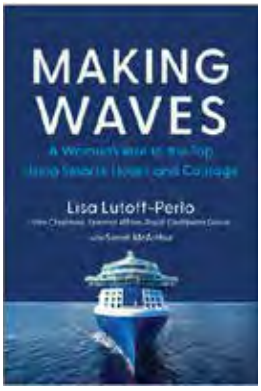


Education is Freedom: The Future is in Your Hands

By: James W. Keyes

Education is Freedom is where humanity goes to school

Education is Freedom is a self-help guide for humanity that allows us to individually and collectively understand the roadmap to freedom. *Education is Freedom* provides the "what," "why," and "how" of learning. It outlines the importance of education for all mankind, the power of education to change our world, and the wisdom to unlock our personal freedom while preserving our democracy. Education is the one common denominator that separates those who are free from those who are trapped in their own reality. Whatever challenges or adversity you face in life, embracing a learning mentality will empower you and set you free.



Making Waves: A Woman's Rise to the Top Using Smarts, Heart, and Courage

By: Lisa Lutoff-Perlo

A shining testament to the value of being an authentic leader and never sacrificing your integrity

In *Making Waves*, Lutoff-Perlo walks readers through her triumphs, hardships, and learning moments. She breaks down her unique leadership style as the first woman to take the helm as President & CEO of one of the Royal Caribbean Group's brands that catapulted Celebrity Cruises to heights no one thought possible, simply by caring deeply for people and putting others first. She used her superpowers to set herself apart from other leaders—leaving guests and employees in awe of her authenticity and kindness. Insights from this read include: to have integrity, to pay it forward, and to make waves, wherever and whoever they are.



The Yellow Cake Principle: Your Recipe for Influence & Success

By: Roger Grannis

If you want to have your cake and eat it too, start with this recipe for success.

The Yellow Cake Principle will show you how. Served up with actionable ideas and a generous dash of humor, The Yellow Cake Principle provides the ingredients you need to connect, influence, and persuade others. Whether seeking a promotion, approval for a project, financing for a start-up, we are all in sales. In The Yellow Cake Principle, Roger Grannis distills more than thirty years as a top-producing salesperson and communications expert into easy-to-implement takeaways you can put into practice today.

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