
VOL 09 • ISSUE 13 • JUNE 2025
TRADEFLOCK
ALICE MASSEY
Chief Strategy & Operating Officer,
POP Recovery Systems
USA's Most
Influential COOs 2025
SPOTLIGHT
BIG TECH'S RACE FOR ROBOTIC SUPREMACY
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WHAT GLOBAL OPERATIONS LEADERS ARE PRIORITIZING IN 2025 AND BEYOND?
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Editor Note

LEADING BEYOND CHANGE: THE NEW ERA OF OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The role of Chief Operating Officer has never been more dynamic or critical than it is today. In 2025, the COO's responsibilities extend far beyond traditional operational oversight, encompassing agility, innovation, and proactive management amid constant disruptions. This edition, "USA's Most Influential COOs 2025," highlights operational leaders who are adeptly steering their organizations through complex challenges and strategic shifts.

COOs are navigating significant trade disruptions, digital transformations, and workforce pressures. With tariffs and global trade strategies evolving rapidly, operational excellence demands more than reactive adjustments; it requires visionary reinvention. COOs highlighted here are not only digitizing their operations but proactively leveraging advanced tools like digital twins and scenario planning to enhance supplier resilience and ecosystem adaptability.

Yet technology alone isn't enough. Talent retention remains an enduring challenge, reinforcing the critical need for cross-functional collaboration, shared data access, and workforce empowerment. This balancing act of addressing immediate pressures while maintaining a forward-looking perspective distinguishes today's most influential COOs.

This special edition captures the strategic vision and decisive actions of COOs who set benchmarks in operational innovation, team alignment, and sustainable growth. Their stories provide insights and inspiration for business leaders aiming for operational excellence in an age defined by digital disruption and global uncertainty.

Join us as we explore how the best operational minds are reshaping their enterprises, driving productivity, and preparing their organizations for lasting success. These COOs are not just managing change—they are leading it.

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UPCOMING ISSUES

Most Influential Leaders to Watch in 2025

Most Empowering Women Leaders to Watch in 2025

Most Visionary Global CEOs in 2025

Visionary Global Corporate Leaders to watch in 2025

Most Innovative Global COOs 2025

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JOURNEY OF LEADERS

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JOURNEY OF LEADERS

USA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL COOs 2025

NAME	DESIGNATION	COMPANY
Alice Massey	Chief Strategy & Operating Officer	POP Recovery Systems
David Zambrana	President & Chief Operating Officer	Jackson Health System
Dillon Emanuel	VP Operations	Surfco Restoration & Construction
Frank St. John	Chief Operating Officer	Lockheed Martin
John Waldron	President and COO	Goldman Sachs
Karen Burke	Chief Operating Officer	YWCA, USA
Karen L. Hanlon	Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer	Highmark Health
Laura Sherman	COO	Dealer Merchant Services
Raghu Krishnaiah	Chief Operating Officer	University of Phoenix
Sheila Antrum	Senior Vice President & Chief Operating Officer	UCSF Health

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Transforming Complexity Into Coordinated Care

ALICE MASSEY

Chief Strategy & Operating Officer, **POP Recovery Systems**

The role of the Chief Operating Officer has rapidly evolved—no longer confined to operational oversight, today's COOs are hybrid leaders. They borrow tech foresight from CTOs, strategic insight from CEOs, and people-centric thinking from CHROs. Leading this new era of operational leadership is Alice Massey, Chief Strategy & Operating Officer at POP Recovery Systems.

With over 15 years in healthcare IT and enterprise systems, Alice is transforming how recovery happens. At POP, she's pioneering a Recovery-as-a-Service platform that integrates mental health, nutrition, and concierge wellness-logistical post-op planning, cutting hospital readmissions and setting new standards in post-surgical care using the human touch as well as AI predictive analytics.

Alice's career is marked by game-changing milestones. At Capital One, she was honored as an **"Uncompromising Operator"** for aligning resiliency frameworks with enterprise architecture—a move that impacted systems company-wide. She led critical metadata overhauls, drove cross-functional process reforms, and played a central role in the high-impact **"Get to Platinum"** initiative. Earlier, she saved $1M in a nationwide telecom migration at Bowlmor AMF and $5M in asset management at Performance Food Group.

In an exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, Alice reflects on the strategies that shaped her journey, the challenges she's conquered, and why operational excellence is ultimately about empowering people.

Q What does being an "Uncompromising Operator" mean to you, and where does that mindset come from?

I've always believed that *"excellence isn't just a goal—it's a responsibility."* Being an Uncompromising Operator means I don't trade integrity for convenience. In healthcare, cutting corners isn't just risky—it's reckless.

That mindset came from years inside complex hospital systems, where I saw what happens when execution falters—patients suffer, data is exposed, and trust erodes. At POP Recovery Systems, I lead with structure, purpose, and zero tolerance for shortcuts because in this field, how we deliver matters just as much as what we deliver.

Q What's your strategy when everything feels like it's on fire?

When everything's on fire, I don't rush—I assess. *I rely on data, not drama, to guide decisions.* That mindset comes from years in healthcare IT, where reacting without clarity causes more harm than good.

I zoom out, separate signals from noise, and focus on what moves the needle first. Then, I rely on the right people, listen deeply, and build a structure where chaos exists. Mastering a crisis isn't about doing more—it's about doing what matters, with calm, precision, and purpose.

Q What's the toughest strategy-to-execution gap you've closed—and how?

The toughest gap I've closed looked like a compliance issue, but it was really a culture problem.

> "The real breakthrough wasn't just operational; it was shifting the execution model from compliance enforcement to collaborative enablement."

We were chasing 100% software certification across the enterprise—a goal that had failed for years. So I flipped the approach: brought engineers and architects into the strategy early, listened closely, and uncovered deep-rooted blockers no one had truly addressed.

By co-creating the solution, we didn't just fix a process—we changed the way execution worked. That's what made it 100% possible for the first time.

Q How did you align stakeholders with conflicting priorities during 'Get to Platinum'?

I've learned that alignment doesn't start with answers—it starts with who's in the room. For 'Get to Platinum,' I brought IT, risk, and business leaders together and shifted the conversation from gut feel to facts.

The real shift happened when we moved the conversation from opinion to evidence. By defining clear, risk-based criteria and co-building the standards, we turned resistance into ownership. I led the rollout across architecture and governance, and because people shaped the path, they walked it with conviction.

Q How do you build resilience without slowing innovation?

I've never believed resilience and innovation are at odds. When done right, resilience doesn't slow innovation—it builds the confidence to scale it.

The key is weaving it into the innovation lifecycle from the start, not bolting it on later. I design risk-tiered governance that lets teams move fast on low-risk features, while reinforcing what truly matters. Some things need a fortress, others just need a seatbelt.

By automating controls in CI/CD, aligning engineering with business continuity, and avoiding overengineering, I build systems that are fast, stable, and ready for the unexpected. That's how resilience becomes a growth engine, not a brake.

Q What's the most meaningful compliment you've received—and why?

It wasn't a spotlight moment—it was trust in action. Being chosen to lead the 'Get to Platinum' rollout in Enterprise Architecture meant more than a title. It meant someone saw how I turned complexity into clarity.

We delivered major changes with zero rollbacks, in a system where rollbacks were the norm. But the compliment that stayed with me was this: ***"You made it simple."*** That meant everything—because real mastery lies in clarity, not complexity.

That mindset guides me daily: de-risk the unknown, test rigorously, and make the hard parts feel effortless—for everyone.

Q What legacy are you building at POP Recovery Systems?

I'm building a legacy where recovery is designed, not left to chance. *"Recovery shouldn't be improvised—it should be intentional."*

At POP Recovery Systems, I've embedded that belief into our Recovery-as-a-Service model, fusing clinical operations, IT resiliency, and patient engagement into one unified system. After years across hospital admin, rehab, outpatient care, and healthcare IT—from Bon Secours to Anthem—I saw a common thread: when systems lack structure, people get lost.

Now, I'm closing those gaps—making recovery coordinated, compassionate, and scalable. Because real healing demands more than treatment, it needs continuity, clarity, and lasting care.

Q What's the most important leadership lesson you've learned in your career so far?

I've learned that leadership often starts where no one's looking. As an admin assistant in HR, I focused on doing every task—no matter how small—with care, consistency, and what I call *"Keeping Things Simple."* That mindset quietly set me apart.

> **"Never underestimate the value of the tasks you're doing today—they could be the foundation of something extraordinary."**

While many followed the traditional path of school, then work, mine went in reverse. I gained hands-on experience first, then earned my MS and MBA to sharpen what I'd already lived. Years of consulting taught me how organizations rise or fall, and roles in cloud tech, enterprise risk, and data challenged me to think big and lead purposefully.

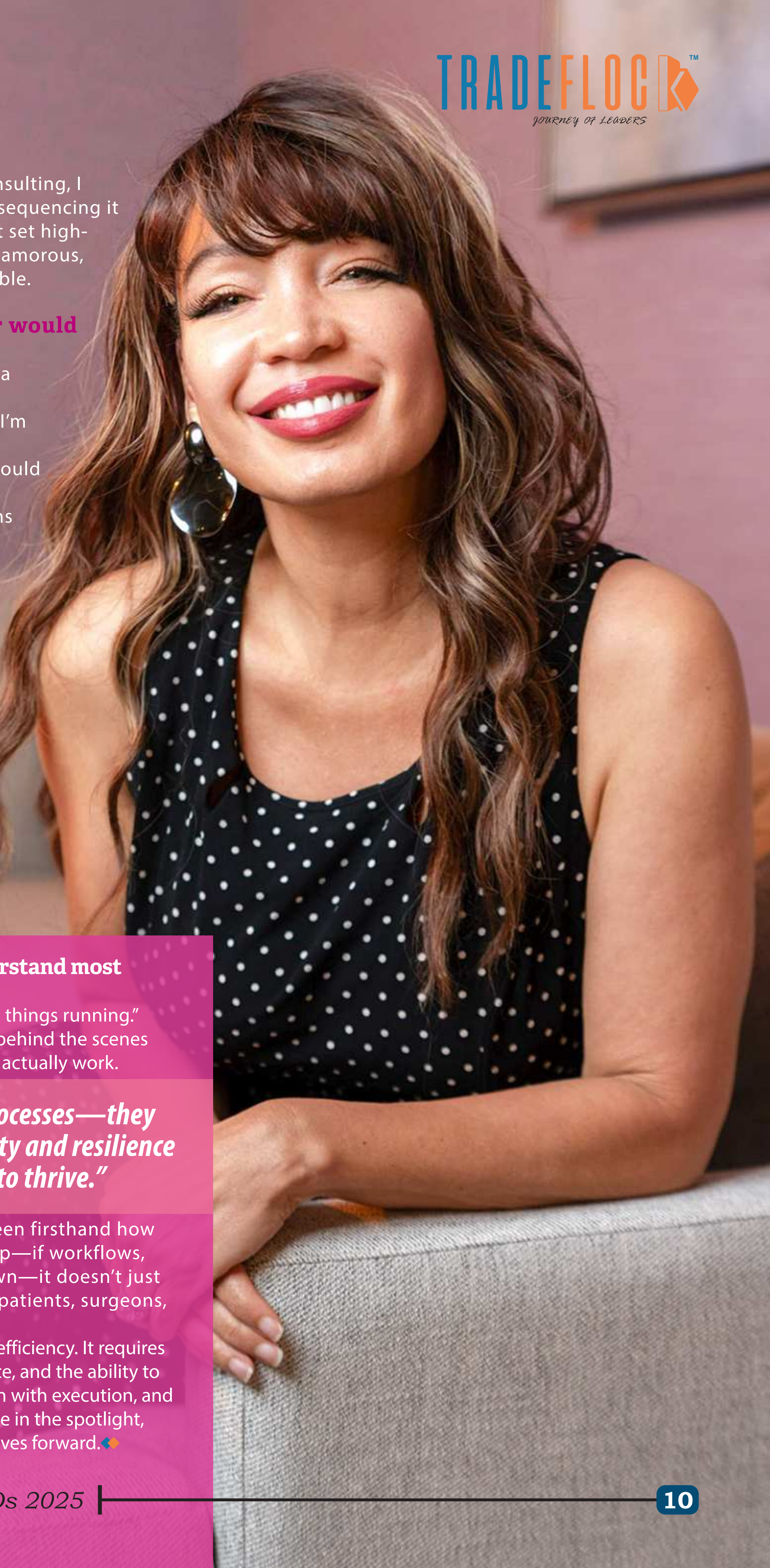
When I was asked to lead POP Recovery Systems, I realized I hadn't just prepared for the role—I'd been living it all along.

Q In your opinion, what's the least visible but most impactful work you do as a COO?

Some of the most powerful work I do as a COO never appears in a headline. It lives in the space between ideas and outcomes, where execution quietly determines success.

At POP Recovery Systems, I've helped build the operational backbone—HIPAA compliance, standardized clinical workflows, SOPs, and enterprise-level systems that make scaling possible. I bridge strategy with real-world execution, often behind the scenes: aligning departments, templating operations, leading seamless hospital rollouts while ensuring innovation and transformation is at the helm of all we do.

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders



Coming from hospital IT and consulting, I know that defining the real work, sequencing it right, and getting it done are what set high-performing teams apart. It's not glamorous, but it makes everything else possible.

Q If not ops, what career would you love—and why?

Honestly? I think I would've made a great lawyer. People have told me that for years—and I can see why. I'm wired for structure, precision, and advocating for what's right. Law would have allowed me to serve people through representation. Operations allow me to serve them through transformation.

That sense of fairness is at the core of how I work. I don't cut corners, I follow through, and I care deeply about doing things the right way—especially when the outcome matters. That's what pulled me toward healthcare and why I love what we do at POP Recovery Systems: building systems that lift burdens so clinicians can focus on care.

In the end, law and ops aren't so different. Both demand clarity, discipline, and a drive to improve the lives of others.

Q What do people misunderstand most about being a COO?

People often think a COO just "keeps things running." But the truth is, we're the architects behind the scenes—turning strategy into systems that actually work.

> ***"COOs don't just manage processes—they build cultures of accountability and resilience that allow great ideas to thrive."***

At POP Recovery Systems, I've seen firsthand how critical this role is. If operations slip—if workflows, tech, or communication break down—it doesn't just affect teams internally. It impacts patients, surgeons, and hospital partners directly.

The COO role demands more than efficiency. It requires strategic agility, emotional intelligence, and the ability to lead from the middle—aligning vision with execution, and people with purpose. We might not be in the spotlight, but we always ensure the mission moves forward.

Editor's Pick

SMALL IS THE NEW SMART

Microfactories and the Future of Decentralized Manufacturing

In the age of disruption, future factories are not sprawling across the cities' edges, they might fit inside the local warehouses. Welcome to the era of microfactories, compact, agile, and tech-powered production hubs that are redefining how, where, and when we manufacture.

Unlike traditional mega-facilities that rely on economies of scale and global supply chains, microfactories are designed for hyper-efficiency, flexibility, and localization. With footprints as small as 5,000 square feet, these lean operations are equipped with 3D printers, CNC machines, robotics arms, and AI-driven systems that can pivot from one product to another with minimal downtime.

As per a BCG report, manufacturers are increasingly embracing distributed production networks to boost resilience after pandemic-induced shocks exposed the fragility of global supply chains. Microfactories, positioned closer to end consumers, reduce logistics costs, shorten lead times, and enable rapid customization, an edge in today's personalization-driven economy.

Take Arrival, the UK-based EV startup, for example. It's not building mega plants—instead, it's rolling out microfactories across North America and Europe. Each one is capable of building 10,000 vehicles a year, operates with 200 people, and costs a fraction of a traditional auto plant. Arrival's model represents a new kind of manufacturing that is modular, replicable, and refreshingly localized.

Why Now?

According to McKinsey, digital transformation in manufacturing has reached an inflection point, with Industry 4.0 tools - like edge computing, AI, and digital twins, making it feasible to control complex production remotely and intelligently. Microfactories can be monitored and optimized in real time, producing high-value, low-volume products like electronics, EV components, and even medical devices with precision.

In a Harvard Business Review article, the author pointed out that decentralized production is a strategic cost decision. It allows firms to de-risk operations, reduce dependency on geopolitically sensitive regions and tap into local talent pools.

India's microfactory moment? While still emerging, India's push for self-reliance (Aatmanirbhar Bharat) and the rapid rise of electric mobility could spark a microfactory boom. Companies like Ather Energy and Ola Electric are already exploring compact, modular production formats for scaling across states.

What's Next?

Expect to see cloud-connected networks of microfactories, where production can shift dynamically based on demand, resource availability, or geopolitical factors. Think Uber for manufacturing, where design meets local production on demand. In a world demanding speed, sustainability, and responsiveness, microfactories aren't just a trend. They're a transformation rooms that

SPOTLIGHT

The Evolving COO Agenda

What **Global Operations Leaders** Are Prioritizing in 2025 and Beyond?

In the whirlwind of global disruptions, talent reshuffling, tech acceleration, and mounting sustainability pressures, the role of the Chief Operating Officer (COO) is undergoing a renaissance. Once relegated to behind-the-scenes execution, the modern COO is now a strategic architect, sculpting the future operating model. So, what exactly are COOs prioritizing as we move through 2025 and into an increasingly complex business landscape?

The COO's New Command Center

The buzzword of the decade 'digital twins' has matured into a serious COO priority. A digital twin is a virtual replica of a physical system, process, or product that allows companies to simulate scenarios and optimize performance in real-time.

According to McKinsey & Company, companies that have deployed digital twins report up to 10% cost savings in operations and 15% faster decision-making. COOs across industries, especially in manufacturing, logistics, and energ are adopting digital twins to predict downtime, test process changes, and run simulations without interrupting real-world operations.

For example, Rolls-Royce uses digital twins to monitor its jet engines mid-flight, enabling predictive maintenance. Similarly, Unilever implemented digital twins across over 300 factories and reported a 40% improvement in forecasting accuracy, reducing waste and downtime.

"Digital twins are no longer a futuristic experiment. They're becoming operational GPS systems for COOs," notes a 2024 BCG report.

By 2026, Gartner projects that over 50% of industrial enterprises will be using digital twins, and COOs will be their primary stewards, leveraging them to orchestrate resilience, cost-efficiency, and agility in operations.

Designing Human-Centric Operating Models

While CEOs talk about where work happens, COOs are focusing on how it works. The shift to hybrid models is more than just a real estate conversation, it's a full-scale redesign of organizational workflows, team dynamics, and productivity KPIs.

A Harvard Business Review study from 2024 found that 68% of COOs now view hybrid workplace management as a "top-three" priority, as they aim to balance flexibility with operational control. The challenge? Avoiding what BCG calls "the hybrid trap"—a state of fragmented workflows and blurred accountability.

COOs are deploying AI-driven workforce management platforms, implementing smart scheduling systems, and redesigning in-office vs. remote workflows to support hybrid productivity. Some firms are even using sentiment analysis tools to monitor employee engagement in dispersed environments.

One standout case is Siemens, where the COO led a project to re-engineer team operations with hybrid as the default. The result: a 25% increase in team productivity and improved cross-functional collaboration.

> "Hybrid work is no longer about where people sit. It's about building operating systems that drive performance, inclusion, and energy"
> —**Tsedal Neeley**, Harvard Business School

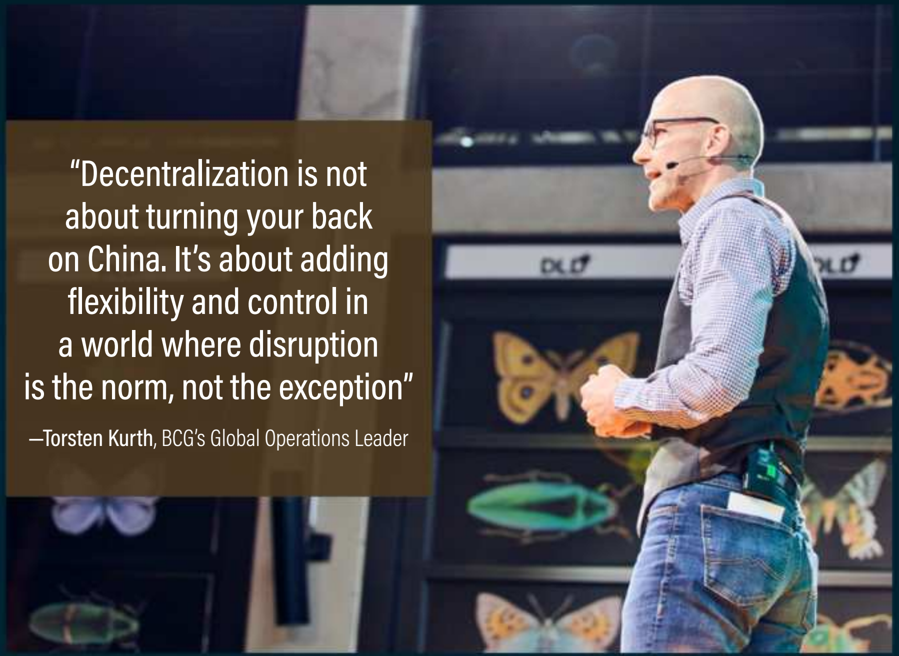
The Rise of Risk-Resilient Supply Chains

If the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict taught COOs anything, vendor concentration is dangerous. Over-reliance on a few suppliers—especially in Asia—crippled production across industries. Now, in 2025, vendor decentralization is a strategic imperative.

According to a 2024 J.P. Morgan global trade resilience report, 78% of COOs surveyed actively diversify supplier bases, with many adopting a "China-plus-two" strategy—shifting parts of their supply chain to Vietnam, India, and Eastern Europe.

Apple, for instance, has accelerated its efforts to move key manufacturing hubs to India and Vietnam. Meanwhile, automotive COOs now insist on multi-sourcing critical components like semiconductors and EV batteries to reduce lead-time dependencies.

The World Economic Forum's 2023 supply chain report found that businesses with diversified vendor networks recovered 30% faster from major supply shocks.



> "Decentralization is not about turning your back on China. It's about adding flexibility and control in a world where disruption is the norm, not the exception"
> —**Torsten Kurth**, BCG's Global Operations Leader

The COO Goes Green

Today's COOs are not just accountable for cost and quality—they're being asked to decarbonize operations. The biggest challenge? Scope 3 emissions include everything from supply chain logistics to product use and disposal.

A McKinsey survey from late 2023 showed that 61% of COOs are now directly responsible for achieving sustainability targets, especially in consumer goods, logistics, and manufacturing.

Leading organizations like IKEA and Maersk are embedding carbon accounting into procurement and logistics systems, while COOs in fashion and retail are pressuring suppliers to adhere to circular economy models.

One innovation? Carbon digital twins—virtual models that simulate the carbon impact of operational changes before they happen.

> "Sustainability is the new currency of operational excellence. COOs are rethinking every node of the supply chain with a green lens."
> —**Anna Koivuniemi**, McKinsey Partner

The COO as the Orchestrator of Resilience

In the past, COOs were execution specialists. In 2025 and beyond, they're becoming architects of adaptability. Whether it's embedding digital twins, redesigning hybrid work, decentralizing vendors, or driving sustainability, today's COOs are building operational engines that are resilient, intelligent, and deeply human-centric.

In an era where agility is the ultimate competitive edge, the COO's playbook is being rewritten, not in ink, but in code, climate metrics, and customer insight.

USA's Most
Influential
COOs
2025

Crafting Legacy of Patient-Centric Care

DR. DAVID ZAMBRANAN

President and Chief Operating Officer,
Jackson Health System

In the heart of Miami's largest hospital, where every second counts and every decision can save a life, a young nurse once walked the halls, quietly, attentively, learning how to care and how to lead. That nurse was Dr. David Zambrana. Decades later, with a stethoscope replaced by strategy and scrubs by a suit, he now leads the very health system where his journey began. As President and Chief Operating Officer of Jackson Health System, Dr. Zambrana brings the heart of a caregiver and the mind of a visionary to one of Florida's most vital healthcare networks. His story is about rising through the ranks and transforming the very system that shaped him.

Humble Beginning and a Passion for Care

Born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, to Cuban immigrant parents, David's early life was imbued with the value of hard work and preservance. His journey into healthcare began at Jackson Memorial Hospital, where he served as a nurse in critical care units, including cardiac surgery intensive care, trauma, and pediatric intensive care. These formative experiences at the bedside instilled in him a profound understanding of patient needs and the intricacies of hospital operations.

Recognizing the importance of blending clinical expertise with administrative acumen, David pursued higher education vigorously. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Miami, followed by a Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix. His academic pursuits culminated in a Doctorate of Nursing Practice and a Ph.D. in Nursing/Healthcare Systems, equipping him with a unique blend of clinical insight and strategic leadership capabilities.

Ascending the Leadership Ladder

David's transition from clinical roles to executive leadership was marked by a series of strategic positions that showcased his ability to drive organizational excellence. At the University of Miami Hospital, he served as Chief Nursing Officer, then Chief Operating Officer, and eventually ascended to Chief Executive Officer. His tenure was characterized by initiatives that enhanced patient care quality, streamlined operations, and fostered a culture of continuous improvement

In April 2016, Zambrana returned to Jackson Health System as the CEO of Jackson Memorial Hospital. His leadership was instrumental in implementing innovative technologies and optimizing workflows, leading to significant improvements in key performance metrics and patient satisfaction.

Navigating Challenges and Driving Innovation

As COO, David faced the formidable task of steering Jackson Health System through the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Under his guidance, the health system developed and implemented a comprehensive COVID-19 response protocol, ensuring standardized communication, education, and preventive measures across the organization.

In the face of financial constraints, David championed adopting an "as-a-service" model for essential care technology. This strategic move allowed Jackson Health System to stabilize cash flow and redirect capital investments towards revenue-generating equipment, such as MRI and CT scanners, thereby enhancing financial sustainability and patient care capabilities.

Moreover, David oversaw the implementation of a parts procurement technology system that resulted in significant cost savings. By streamlining the procurement process and enhancing equipment maintenance efficiency, the health system saved approximately $1 million, demonstrating his commitment to operational excellence.

Recognitions and Community Engagement

David's leadership and contributions have been recognized both within and beyond the healthcare community. He has been featured in the South Florida Business Journal's "Power Leaders in Health Care," highlighting his impact on the region's dynamic healthcare landscape.

Beyond his administrative roles, Zambrana is an active American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) member, where he finds a community of peers and mentors. He emphasizes the importance of such networks for professional growth and supports others in joining and benefiting from these affiliations.

His commitment to community engagement is further exemplified by his involvement with the Jackson Health Foundation's Golden Angels Society, the foundation's premier giving society. Through this platform, Zambrana contributes to fundraising efforts that support the health system's mission of providing world-class care to all, regardless of financial means.

> "David envisions a healthcare system that continues to adapt and evolve in response to changing needs."

A Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, David envisions a healthcare system that continues to adapt and evolve in response to changing needs. He acknowledges that "the only thing consistent will be change" and emphasizes the importance of taking calculated risks to ensure growth and betterment for the community.

Under his leadership, Jackson Health System is poised to embark on ambitious projects, including developing a new, state-of-the-art emergency department at Jackson Memorial Hospital, set to become the largest in the country. Such initiatives reflect David's relentless commitment to innovation, excellence, and community service.

Dr. David Zambrana's journey from a dedicated nurse to a visionary healthcare executive is a testament to the power of perseverance, continuous learning, and compassionate leadership. His story serves as an inspiration to healthcare professionals and administrators alike, illustrating how a deep understanding of patient care, combined with strategic acumen, can drive transformative change in the healthcare industry.

Leadership Lessons

SHERYL SANDBERG

Former COO of Meta

Sheryl Sandberg is known as a leader who has made a big difference. Sheryl Sandberg served as COO of Meta for 14 years, turning the company into a major tech company by increasing its presence in advertising, operations worldwide, and handling major crises.

She was able to explain the company's goals, care about and promote women in top positions, and manage challenging situations without giving up. Thus, we see that inclusive leadership based on values can have a big impact on companies and society as a whole.

Scaling with Purpose

When Sandberg joined Facebook, it was a startup with huge growth potential, but it lacked organisation. She was tasked with steering Facebook towards profitability and revolutionising its revenue structure by designing its advertising platform, turning it into a digital advertising giant.

Under Sandberg's leadership as COO, Facebook's revenue skyrocketed from $272 million in 2008 to over $1.17 billion by 2021, an astonishing feat. Furthermore, her vision drove the development of scalable systems focused on value-creating mechanisms and enabling sustainable growth.

lesson to learn

Meaningful innovation at scale demands operational leadership and a structure that facilitates effortless growth for all.

Alongside Transparency During Difficult Times

Sandberg's leadership period is marked by the Cambridge Analytica scandal and Meta's focus on misinformation. The reputation risks that Sandberg had to handle were immense.

With these challenges, she came out to defend the company, as Meta was responsible for facing the consequences. During this, she positioned Meta's leadership as accountable and responsive, willing to change. To Sandberg, this was proof that crisis management was more than just messaging; it was about following through on the commitment to accountability.

lesson to learn

In moments of crisis, clear ownership and accountability are required.

Empowering Women in the Workplace

Perhaps Sandberg's most transformative contribution beyond business was her dedication to a global movement for women's leadership. Her 2013 bestseller "Lean In" was not merely a book but a movement, encouraging millions of women to pursue leadership and redefine gender roles within their workplaces.

She created LeanIn.Org to develop a strong foundation of support via mentorship, leadership training and community. At Meta, she fought for more inclusive hiring, mentorship, and promotion systems with intent to shift the culture of tech companies toward shifting their culture toward gender equity.

lesson to learn

Inclusive leadership is never peripheral; it is a competitive advantage. Leaders who empower others expand the potential of their organisation.

Creating a Culture of Feedback

This form of feedback was taken to heart by Sandberg. As she made known at Meta, Sandberg was a proponent of a "radical candour" mentality that valued direct, honest communications and equal footing when receiving them. She believed leaders' learning came from the honest feedback they garnered from others and invited the opportunity for the same.

By using vulnerability to model these qualities, Sandberg was able to provide a level of psychological safety in environments where risk was often high. Feedback was not something to take personally; it was a tool for leadership.

lesson to learn

Feedback drives high-performing teams forward, and leadership is building environments that support truth-telling, empathy, and positive action!

Personal Resilience as Leadership Strength

In 2015, Sandberg experienced a personal tragedy when her husband, Dave Goldberg, unexpectedly died. She returned to Meta with a different perspective on grief, empathy, and resilience in the workplace. She ultimately wrote the book Option B, highlighting how to build resilience when faced with adversity.

She brought those experiences into conversations about personal resilience, leading the way for greater mental health awareness, flexible workplace policies, and more empathetic leaders across workforces.

lesson to learn

Vulnerability is not a weakness; it is a strength. Leaders who share their humanity can build trust and lead as their authentic selves.

Balancing Vision with Execution

Sandberg was the execution engine while Mark Zuckerberg was the face of vision and product innovation. She took nebulous big ideas and operationalised them into actionable strategies, building teams to manage requirements, systems to operationalise strategy, and processes to develop every aspect of Meta's rapid scaling.

Her work ethic, data-driven leadership style, and functional cross-functional leadership approach allowed Meta to operate globally while remaining operationally flexible.

This fact proved that partnering with visionary founders in technology settings takes a strong second-in-command.

lesson to learn

Execution is where vision becomes impact. Behind every visionary founder is an operations leader who plans and executes performance.

The Leadership Legacy of Sheryl Sandberg

Sheryl Sandberg did not just lead; she scaled, transformed, and inspired those around her. Six principles define her legacy at Meta and beyond:

1. Mastery of Practice - Sandberg envisioned creating sustainable growth.
2. Leadership by Design - Sandberg expanded leadership by deliberately amplifying those with a voice.
3. Transparency with Resilience - Sandberg led with transparency and resilience through challenging times.
4. Radical Feedback Agility - Sandberg cultivated a culture where teams constantly spoke up and improved.
5. Strength in Compassion - Sandberg demonstrated that personal pain can yield professional wisdom.
6. Leading by Providing a Seat at the Table - Sandberg created space for others.

A Leadership Blueprint for a Better Future

Sandberg's lessons extend beyond Silicon Valley. In a world undergoing transformation, volatility, and the awakening of social consciousness, Sandberg's leadership lessons provide a timeless blueprint for balanced, ethical, and results-oriented leadership.

As organisations and companies clarify their purpose and identify future leaders, Sandberg's legacy reminds us that leadership is not so much about control as it is about capacity: providing capacity to others, sustaining capacity, and leading with values.

USA's Most

Influential COOs 2025

The Unsung Architects of Business

DILLON EMANUEL

VP Operations,

Surfco Restoration & Construction

Every business faces its share of chaos, but not everyone is built to find clarity in the middle of it. That's where Dillon Emanuel stands out. As VP of Operations at Surfco Restoration & Construction, his days rarely go as planned, and that's exactly where he thrives. When others see confusion, he spots the next step. When a crisis hits—a burst pipe, a major storm, or a critical deadline—he doesn't just manage the process; he leads with empathy, quick thinking, and a focus that calms the entire team.

Dillon didn't get here overnight. His story began with hands-on roles in some of the most demanding corners of construction and restoration. From coordinating complex disaster responses to rolling up his sleeves alongside his crew, he learned early that trust is built one promise—and one tough day—at a time.

Now at Surfco, he channels every lesson learned into building systems that work for people, not just on paper. He's open to new tools like AI, but never loses sight of the human element that holds a team together.

> "Leadership isn't about always having the answer—it's about being willing to face the unknown, together,"

In his interview with TradeFlock, Dillon shares the moments that shaped him, the toughest challenges he's faced, and his vision for Surfco's next chapter, which shows that real leadership is as much about heart as it is about strategy.

Q What has defined your professional journey, and which milestones are your proudest achievements?

> As Vince Lombardi said,
> **"The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary."**

That's been the story of my journey. I grew up in this industry—I got my IICRC certification at 13 while my friends were on Xbox, and by 16, I was running crews (family business perks). Surfco started out in a converted meat locker, and now we're a team of 50+. Earning the IICRC Triple Master Restorer was a proud personal milestone—right up there with meeting some amazing people who somehow still answer my calls. But honestly, building this company alongside my family (and the fact that we still like each other) has been the most rewarding part of my career. Not everyone can say they've scaled a business and survived family group texts at the same time.

Q What's the toughest part of scaling Surfco, and how do you keep things on track?

The real challenge is scaling quickly without letting things slip into chaos. We've tackled this by building solid systems, bringing in smart people (they're not hard to find), and letting data guide us. And honestly, coffee keeps us sane.

Q What leadership lessons have you carried as you advance in your career?

I've worked my way up from being the shop guy to tech, and eventually into leadership, so I've literally done the dirty work—and I wouldn't trade that experience for anything. It taught me that as much as you want to do everything yourself, you simply can't. The real lesson is learning to trust your team and delegate, even when it feels uncomfortable. When things inevitably go sideways, I've found it's far better to skip the blame game, focus on fixing the problem, and then move on. Life's too short to dwell on mistakes. Oh, and a bonus I've picked up along the way: always bring energy drinks to the jobsite—they're a surprisingly effective morale booster.

Q How do you see AI and automation shaping the future of your industry?

AI and automation are already changing the game, and I'm all for it if it means less time buried in paperwork and more time focusing on what matters. If a robot can help estimate, schedule, or pull together job notes from 40 different sites, I say bring it on. But the heart of this business will always be people. No matter how advanced technology gets, robots aren't about to crawl through attics or squeeze into crawl spaces for restoration work. At the end of the day, our industry runs on human skill, grit, and trust—AI just helps us do it better.

Q Where do you see Surfco headed in the long run? Any big plans for growth or new services?

I've always believed that growth is a journey, not a finish line—and we're just getting started. The long-term vision for Surfco is all about expanding into new markets and continually adding services that make life easier for our clients. I like to think of it as our own "**Restoration Avengers**" initiative: bringing together top talent and all the right specialities under one roof to deliver a seamless experience. That's the story I'll tell my one-year-old when he's old enough to ask what Dad does for a living. It's about building something bigger, more versatile, and always client-focused, while never losing the sense of teamwork and fun that got us here.

> AI and automation are already changing the game, and I'm all for it if it means less time buried in paperwork and more time focusing on what matters

Q What's your top advice for up-and-coming operations leaders in construction?

Take your work seriously, but never take yourself too seriously. Stay curious, show up early, stay late, and listen more than you speak. My dad always told me, "*Working will when wishing won't*"—and it's true. In this business, nothing worthwhile comes easy. Don't avoid the tough jobs; get your hands dirty and earn your stripes. And don't let ego get in the way when you start moving up. Stay humble, uplift your team, and remember that mistakes are part of the journey. Don't let them keep you up at night—learn from them, laugh them off, and keep moving forward. In the end, it all comes full circle.

TRADEFLOCK
JOURNEY OF LEADERS

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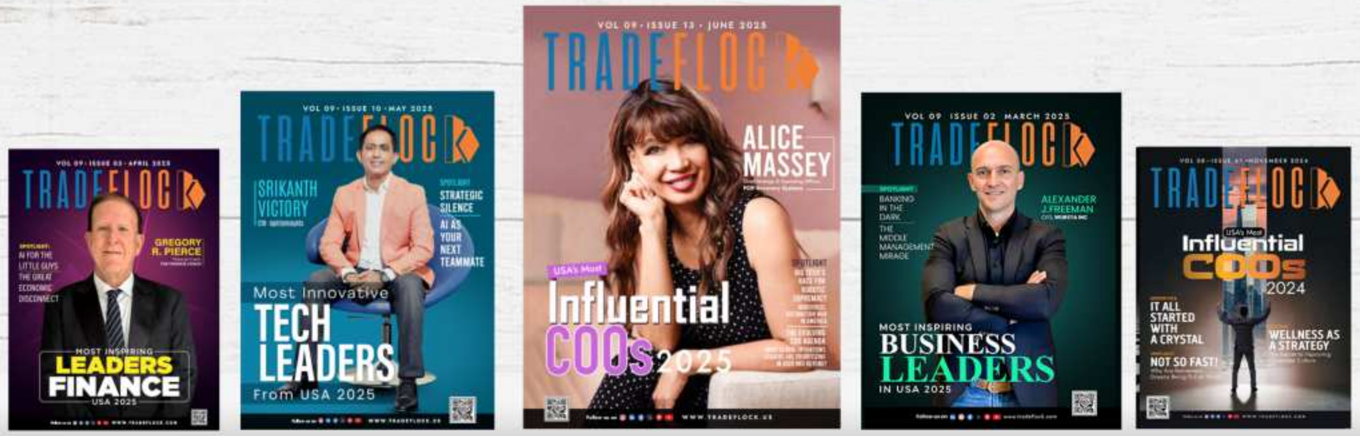

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USA's Most **Influential COOs** 2025

Commanding Through Complexity

FRANK ST. JOHN

President and Chief Operating Officer,
Jackson Health System

In recent years, the defense industry has faced some of its most pressing challenges in decades. From global supply chain disruptions sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic, to mounting geopolitical tensions driving surging demand for precision defense systems, to the rapid evolution of cyber warfare and digital transformation, companies in this space have had to adapt swiftly or risk falling behind. Lockheed Martin, the world's largest defense contractor, stood at the center of this storm. Navigating these complexities required more than engineering excellence; it demanded operational clarity, strategic foresight, and a relentless commitment to mission readiness, and Frank St. John has that blend. He stepped into the role of Lockheed Martin's Chief Operating Officer in June 2020, at the height of the global pandemic and amidst a defense landscape in flux. With over 35 years at Lockheed Martin, St. John brought both institutional depth and modern agility to the company's evolving mission.

Responsible for over $65 billion in annual revenue, St. John now oversees the strategic, operational, and financial performance of all business areas. His role includes spearheading Lockheed's Global Business Development & Strategy and the company's sweeping Enterprise Business & Digital Transformation efforts. Through these initiatives, he leads Lockheed Martin through one of the most transformative chapters in its history, modernizing its systems, optimizing global supply lines, and reimagining operational effectiveness in a world where the threats are faster, more fragmented, and increasingly digital.

The Root of an Engineer: Bringing Precision to Performance

A son of Orlando, Florida, Frank St. John began his career at Lockheed with a high-school internship. He stayed on, eventually earning a BS and MS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Central Florida. Those early days helped forge his strategic mindset: rigorous, systems-based, yet grounded in practical engineering.

Rise Through Missiles & Fire Control

St. John's leadership in Missiles & Fire Control (MFC) cemented his reputation. He served as vice president of Tactical Missiles, general manager at the Orlando site, and executive vice president and deputy of Programs—all before heading the entire MFC division.

Under his watch, MFC delivered on-time, high-quality missile systems, reinforcing Lockheed's credibility within the U.S. military and allies. He championed internal collaboration under the "One LM" ethos, fusing tactical precision with enterprise-wide coordination.

Leadership at Rotary & Mission Systems

In January 2019, St. John became executive vice president of Rotary and Mission Systems (RMS), a $16 billion business with 34,000 employees in helicopters, cyber solutions, radar, undersea warfare, missile defense, and logistical systems.

He unified over 1,000 programs under a single strategy, maintaining sharp customer focus across the Armed Forces and Missile Defense Agency. He drove cross-domain harmonization, a technical, operational architectural pivot across RMS product lines.

Sounding a Global C-Suite Rhythm

As COO since June 2020, St. John's remit covers the entire enterprise: Operations, Global Business Development, Strategy, and Digital Transformation. Alongside CEO James Taiclet, he co-heads a workforce of 114,000, steering Lockheed's pandemic response, workplace flexibility initiatives, and culture optimization push under the banner of 1LMX, aimed at integrating digital tools across operations.

His mission? Merge mission readiness with modern agility, enhance employee retention during the global transition to hybrid work, and ensure efficient service to national security customers.

Responding to National Pressure: Managing Crisis and Culture

Under St. John's leadership, Lockheed has actively responded to several challenges. He oversaw protocols and supply lines to keep production lines moving, even during global disruption. He also supported enterprise unity in an era of marked rivalry, ensuring on-time delivery across missile and cyber platforms. Furthermore, as an internal spokesman for culture optimization, he championed teamwork, diversity, and collaborative innovation.

Recognitions and Industry Acknowledgement

In April 2021, St. John received the William J. Perry Award from the National Defense Industrial Association for his exceptional contributions to precision strike systems and advocacy for integrated warfare strategies. The award reflects his dedication to innovation across systems like JASSM, HELLFIRE, PATRIOT, and other missile architectures, cementing his role as a military-industrial visionary.

> **"Under his watch, MFC delivered on-time, high-quality missile systems, reinforcing Lockheed's credibility within the U.S. military and allies."**

Shaping Tomorrow's Defense Landscape

In an era of shifting geopolitical realities, from missile defenses to hypersonics and cyber, Lockheed's mission grows more complex. However, the company is well-positioned to lead with St. John's expert weaving of strategy, operational insight, and cultural leadership. And while he's no CEO, his guidance shapes the strategic runners on the global defense track.

A Steady Hand in a Complex World

After 35 years at Lockheed Martin, starting as a high school intern, Frank St. John now embodies operational mastery. His journey from engineering to enterprise leadership shows the power of combining technical brilliance with empathetic management. In him, Lockheed doesn't just have a COO—it has a conductor for its largest, most intricate performance yet.

Startup OF THE MONTH

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

Safe Superintelligence Inc.

Leading the Way in Safe AI Development

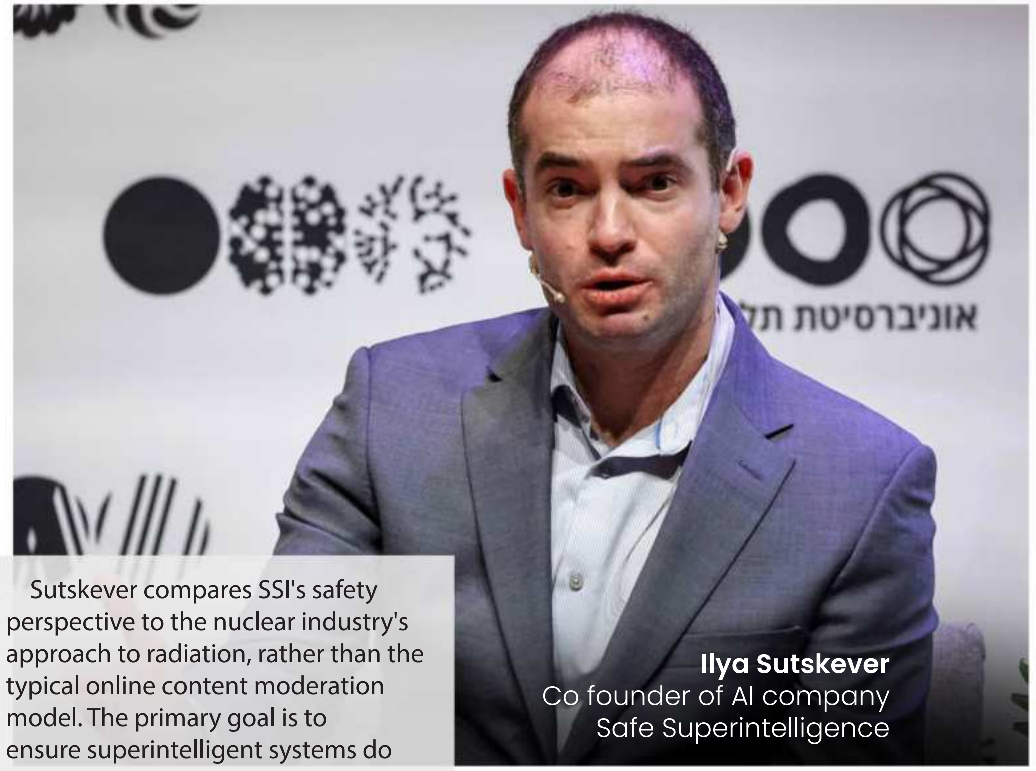
In June 2024, Ilya Sutskever, Daniel Gross, and Daniel Levy founded Safe Superintelligence Inc. (SSI), which quickly became noticeable in AI. SSI, based in Palo Alto, California, and Tel Aviv, Israel, has one clear goal: to build a superintelligence that is smarter than humans and still focuses on safety. This paper describes the history behind SSI, its mission, where it gets its funding, and what its role in AI safety could be.

Founding Vision: A Safety-First Stand in a High-Stakes Industry

A group of renowned experts in AI started Safe Superintelligence Inc. With his prior achievements like AlexNet in 2012 and ChatGPT, Ilya Sutskever is recognised as a leading scientist for moulding key developments in AI. Sutskever left OpenAI in May 2024 after voting to terminate the CEO, Sam Altman, because he felt that the company's focus was moving from prioritising safety to making profits. Daniel Gross, Apple's former head of AI and co-founder of Cue and Daniel Levy, who was at OpenAI and invests in AI, are also joining him. Because of its team's experience, SSI is well placed to compete for the development of advanced AI technologies.

A Mission Beyond Profit

SSI's mission is to create a safe superintelligence. Unlike other AI firms focused on profit, SSI prioritises AI safety. The company combines safety and capability by promoting swift growth in AI while keeping safety measures ahead. This approach allows SSI to focus on long-term research and development without the pressure of short-term profits.


Ilya Sutskever
Co founder of AI company Safe Superintelligence

Sutskever compares SSI's safety perspective to the nuclear industry's approach to radiation, rather than the typical online content moderation model. The primary goal is to ensure superintelligent systems do not endanger humanity, whether accidentally or due to differing values. By thoroughly testing its software, publicising its processes, and valuing expert opinions, SSI earns user trust more than its competitors and maintains honesty in its results.

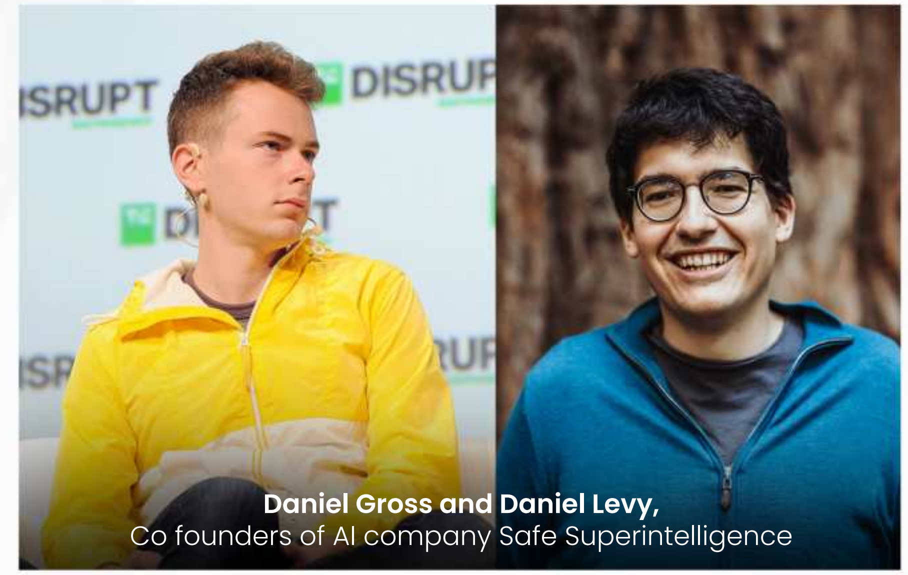
Sky-High Valuations: Betting Big on a Safer AI Future

Although SSI is still a young company with only about 20 staff, investors are very interested. In the same month, September 2022, the company attracted $1 billion at a $5 billion valuation from leading venture capital firms such as Andreessen Horowitz, Sequoia Capital, DST Global, SV Angel and NFDG, an investment group formed by Daniel Gross and Nat Friedman. In March 2025, SSI's value reached $30 billion after Greenoaks Capital led a funding round, and it grew to $32 billion within the next month after the company raised an extra $2 billion. Some financial backers behind SSI, including Alphabet and Nvidia, rely on Sutskever's achievements and clear mission, even though SSI lacks income and a physical product. Most funds are put into getting powerful equipment and inviting world-class engineers and researchers.

Innovative Development Approach

SSI approaches things differently by avoiding the industry trend of releasing generative AI products quickly. OpenAI and Anthropic offer consumer models now, but SSI plans to spend a long time researching and developing before launching its superintelligence. According to this strategy, AI systems should be safe, and alignment is recognised as a main concern. Sutskever sees a link between AI and natural processes, suggesting that imitating how humans instantly make decisions can boost AI.

At the 2024 NeurIPS event, Sutskever emphasised the role of AI agents that can perform higher-level reasoning instead of big language models. As per this vision, SSI looks to change how models are scaled, focusing on structure so new solutions can develop rather than putting effort into only larger models. The organisation hopes to lead the way in AI safety and capability by having a select group of leading researchers from Palo Alto and Tel Aviv.


Daniel Gross and Daniel Levy,
Co founders of AI company Safe Superintelligence

Competing in a Crowded Field

It operates alongside many companies in the AI industry. Experts believe that ensuring superintelligence is safe presents significant challenges, especially since AI struggles with common-sense questions. OpenAI earns substantial resources, while Anthropic focuses on building secure AI for companies. With only one product in development compared to established portfolios, SSI has a distinct approach that raises doubts about its timelines and novelty. Analyst Chirag Mehta noted that predicting SSI's future is difficult; its success will depend on attracting exceptional talent and forming important alliances.

SSI's existence highlights ongoing challenges within AI regarding the balance between safety and profitability. Sutskever's departure from OpenAI and other safety-focused researchers like Jan Leike's move to Anthropic illustrate the growing divide between those wanting rapid product deployment and those prioritising safety. SSI's mission critiques OpenAI's recent direction, claiming it is reverting to its initial values of safety-focused AI research.

Challenging the Industry's Priorities

If SSI's goal of safe superintelligence is met, it could greatly change how artificial intelligence is developed. The company tries to drive the industry to accept stricter safety measures by prioritising safety and alignment. Because it has a large budget and an influential group of founders, and as it recruits staff in Palo Alto and Tel Aviv, investors are closely watching this company. Yet, not having a flat pathway for the project and the difficulty in achieving the goal of superintelligence mean there are risks. Since SSI is fighting against OpenAI, Anthropic and Google DeepMind, its success depends on showing significant progress in AI safety and technology.

A Risky Path, but One Worth Watching

Safe Superintelligence Inc. emphasises the importance of ensuring safety and alignment before developing any superintelligent system. Because SSI has a clear purpose, effective operations, and ample resources, it is ready to make valuable improvements to AI safety. As it advances, those involved in the technology and ethics fields will monitor the company's work.

At a Glance

Founded: 19 June 2024
Founders: Ilya Sutskever, Daniel Gross, and Daniel Levy
Headquarters: Palo Alto, California & Tel Aviv, Israel
Funding: $2 billion
Key Investors: Lightspeed Venture Partners, Andreessen Horowitz, DST Global, Greenoaks Capital Partners, Alphabet, NVIDIA

USA's Most
Influential COOs 2025

The COO Rewriting Wall Street's Playbook

JOHN WALDRON

COO,
Goldman Sachs

When the heartbeat of Wall Street slows, global markets shift beneath the waves, and a giant like Goldman Sachs steers through uncharted waters. In moments like these, what matters isn't the strength of the ship, it's the captain's skill and the navigator's steadiness. At Goldman Sachs, that navigator is John Waldron, whose rise from English major to President and COO has charted a course of transformation, resilience, and renewal.

A Foundation Built on Curiosity and Connection

Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Waldron was surrounded by the rhythms of finance early on—his father worked at Smith Barney. However, John's ambitions initially veered away from spreadsheets and earnings calls. He enrolled at Middlebury College in Vermont, pursuing an English degree and dreaming of becoming a writer. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1992, a testament to his intellect and drive.

But Wall Street soon came calling. His early career began at Bear Stearns, a firm known for its aggressive, high-octane culture. There, Waldron met David Solomon, a relationship that would evolve into one of the most significant professional partnerships in his life. Even in those early days, Waldron stood out—not just for his analytical sharpness, but for his ability to communicate, build trust, and navigate interpersonal dynamics with nuance.

From Banker to Builder at Goldman Sachs

In 2000, Solomon recruited Waldron to join Goldman Sachs. Just a year later, Waldron was named partner, an extraordinary rise by any measure. His trajectory from that point was marked by strategic leadership roles across the firm's core investment banking functions. He led Goldman's Media & Entertainment Group during a pivotal time for that sector, before transitioning to co-head the Leveraged Finance division, where he played a vital role in some of the most complex deals of the mid-2000s.

As Waldron's experience deepened, he moved to London to serve as Global Co-Head of the Financial Sponsors Group from 2007 to 2009. These roles exposed him to U.S. and international markets, sharpening his global outlook. He later returned to New York to lead Goldman's Investment Banking Services and Client Coverage team, positioning him at the heart of the firm's client strategy. His ability to nurture relationships—from private equity giants to media moguls—earned him a reputation as a "peacemaking banker," someone who could connect dots, calm tensions, and move teams forward.

Redefining Investment Banking Leadership

In 2014, Waldron was elevated to co-heading Goldman's Investment Banking Division alongside Solomon and Richard Gnodde. At the time, the division faced mounting pressure to innovate and evolve. Under their leadership, the team improved internal collaboration, aligned its focus with long-term client interests, and secured more global mandates. His leadership style—calm, clear-headed, and consistently respectful—helped re-anchor a part of the business that had become fragmented by competition.

Peers recall his ability to create consensus in tough situations, push forward through bureaucratic inertia, and, most importantly, listen. Waldron remains remarkably grounded for someone operating at the highest levels of high finance. His quiet authority and no-nonsense diplomacy became critical assets, especially as the firm was gearing up for broader transformation.

> **His ability to nurture relationships, from private equity giants to media moguls, earned him a reputation as a "peacemaking banker", someone who could connect dots, calm tensions, and move teams forwatrd.**

Becoming the COO: A New Era for Goldman

In October 2018, Goldman Sachs underwent a major leadership transition. David Solomon was CEO, and Waldron was named President and Chief Operating Officer. His responsibilities expanded dramatically, spanning everything from enterprise risk to day-to-day operations, global talent, and cultural transformation. He became chair of the Reputational Risk Committee and co-chair of the Enterprise Risk Committee, signalling his central role in ensuring the firm's long-term stability and strategic integrity.

When banks were grappling with how to retain top talent, especially among younger employees, Waldron pushed for smarter workflows and healthier cultures. He advocated for automation that reduced grunt work and championed flexible, respectful work arrangements. His goal wasn't just to make Goldman efficient but to make it sustainable for the people inside it.

Facing Industry Headwinds and Resetting the Compass

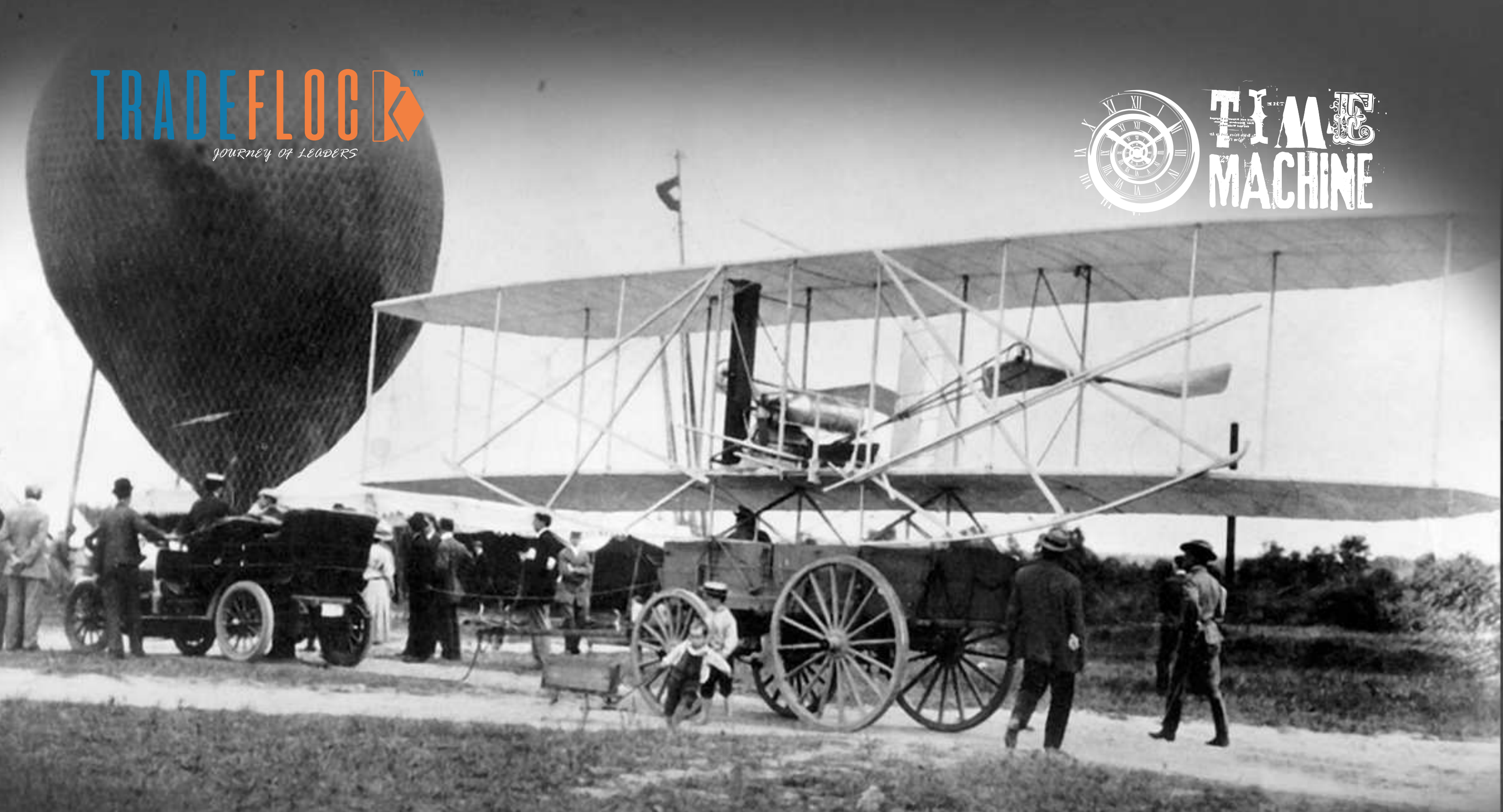
Waldron's tenure hasn't been without turbulence. Goldman's push into consumer banking through Marcus ultimately faltered, losing billions and prompting a major retreat. Meanwhile, the fallout from the 1MDB scandal led to record fines and a reputational hit for the firm. In addition to internal cultural shifts, scrutiny over executive compensation, and the broader pressures of a volatile global economy, Waldron was clearly navigating stormy waters.

But Waldron played a central role in the bank's strategic realignment. He helped refocus Goldman on its historical strengths: investment banking, markets, and asset management. The firm saw a remarkable rebound in profitability in 2024, with operating income jumping by nearly 70% and its stock gaining over 30% in value. Investors took note—and so did the board.

The Quiet Power of Steady Leadership

John Waldron has carved a different path in an industry that often rewards noise and speed. His journey from a book-loving student to one of the most influential figures in global finance is a story of patience, pragmatism, and purpose. He is helping Goldman Sachs navigate the tides and quietly shaping what leadership in the financial world looks like in the 21st century.

As Wall Street evolves, it's not just the boldest vision that matters, but the steadiest hands that can bring that vision to life. Goldman Sachs has both in John Waldron.



JUNE 10, 1908

AMERICA'S FIRST FLYING CLUB LAUNCHES WITH THE AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

June 10, 1908, marked the formation of the United States' first flying club, and as a result, aviation made great strides in America. Emerging just five years after the Wright brothers' first powered flight, the society was a direct response to the growing fascination with aviation sweeping worldwide in the early 20th century.

The Aeronautical Society of New York served as a movement, surpassing the definition of a club. It united scientists, inventors, engineers, and adventurers, turning aviation into a carefully planned and researched profession. When most doubted aviation's ability, this organisation helped develop civil and military air travel in the U.S., paved the way for new technologies, and created a teamwork atmosphere in aviation.

The Rise of Hope

The city where the Aeronautical Society of New York was created embodied innovation and ambition. Because New York is a leading finance, science, and culture centre, it was the best place for the city's first aerospace facility.

Glenn H. Curtiss and other aviators held a groundbreaking flight demonstration in Hammondsport, New York, on June 9, 1908, and the Aero Club of America was formally launched the next day. Orville and Wilbur Wright's big breakthrough led to the creation of the Wright brothers ' company, but it also showed a desire for more people to share and examine their ideas.

Unlike people who kept inventions private, the society emphasised the importance of group work, trying out new ideas and sharing knowledge. Inventors, industry leaders and enthusiasts from many parts of America were interested in it. The society aimed to boost aeronautics, encourage people to learn about flight and help create and test flying machines.

Creating an Aviation Infrastructure

A big challenge for early fliers was the lack of airports or landing strips. In 1908, there were no air strips, no maps for landings, no policies, and no commonly used safety rules for flying. The Aeronautical Society was established to deal with these problems.

The club started designing gliders and planes, held events open to the public, and developed rules for beginner aviators. These activities drew people's attention and encouraged new groups of engineers and pilots to contribute to the growth of American aviation.

In 1909, the society acquired land in Mineola, Long Island, and started the nation's first private airfield, years ahead of the first airports. This place allowed the growing aviation community to launch early planes and evaluate changes in aerodynamic control, flight control surfaces, and engines.

Raising awareness of Aeronautics as a Science

The society was strongly dedicated to improving aviation science. Lectures, exhibitions, and publications were organised to gather important figures in engineering, mathematics, and physics.

Important people in American aviation, such as Charles Manly and Alexander Graham Bell, were among the early members, while Samuel Langley of the Smithsonian led early projects at the organisation.

Regular meetings and publishing reports allowed the society to spread details of the latest progress in aviation from Europe, especially France, thanks to pioneers like Louis Blériot and the Voisin brothers. The Aeronautical Society followed the developments in dirigible and balloon technology, understanding their uses in business and for defence.

Giving wings to an Aviation Culture

Most importantly, the society aimed to grow a culture of flight, rather than only being about machines. It made aviation known to a wider group of people than had been true before. Large groups of people and reporters often came to see the early planes and gliders at demonstrations.

The Aeronautical Society organised an early public aeroplane display in New York in 1908. At a time when few Americans had witnessed aeroplanes, these shows created excitement and curiosity among young people and those interested in science and engineering.

The air travel industry made it clear that planes could provide a way of travel besides just entertaining spectators. Those early experiments led to the creation of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, which preceded NASA.

Preparing the Setting for an Industry

The Aeronautical Society of New York may not be well known now, but it greatly impacted America's aviation industry. The society made it easier for people to collaborate and invent, which led to the initial path of aircraft design, aviation learning, and flight rules.

They also led changes in the U.S. military's flying branch, invented key innovations for commercial airlines, and helped build aeronautical programmes at the best universities. This was a key factor in setting up the Aero Club of America, which was made the official school for licencing pilots and supporters of air races in the United States.

By the time the 1920s arrived, aviation started turning into an industry, reducing the significance of that society. So, the 1900s and 1910s achievements guided the creation of aviation clubs, flight schools and aeronautical societies everywhere.

Legacy is a game where you soar.

June 10, 1908, is important because it saw the Aeronautical Society of New York introduce a change to America's love for flying. For the first time, the country acted seriously in developing aviation as a science, an engineering field, and a service for the people.

Community, learning, and the encouragement of new ideas have made aviation meaningfully part of everyday life. From humble beginnings on Long Island to venturing to the Moon, the ideas established by the society continue to shape the world's aviation goals.

USA's Most
Influential
COOs
2025

Building Systems with a Soul, Strategy with a Heart

KAREN BURKE

COO, YWCA USA

In tribal courtrooms, women's shelters, and town hall meetings, Karen Burke lived by policies, beyond just reading them. Before corner offices or conference calls, she was listening to survivors of violence, helping families navigate broken systems, and asking a question many forget to, 'What does justice feel like for you?' Today, as Chief Operating Officer of YWCA USA, she carries that same question into boardrooms and strategy sessions, proving that operational leadership is not about spreadsheets, it's about stories, systems, and staying human in the process.

Building Community Before Business: Roots in Public Service

Karen's journey didn't begin in grand boardrooms or corporate towers—it began in the chambers of the Lummi Nation Tribal Court. As Director of the Court and founding head of its Child Support Program, she spearheaded one of America's first tribal child support initiatives. She launched pioneering programs like the Lummi Drug Court and Juvenile Justice Project. In doing so, Karen demonstrated a fierce commitment to systems that uplift marginalized voices.

From those early days, her path reflected both boldness and empathy; she resolved disputes with cultural awareness, empowered families with dignity, and created legal pathways where none existed. It was a foundation built not just on advocacy but on genuine understanding.

Expanding Impact: Building Safe Futures in Whatcom County

Transitioning from tribal justice to broader social services, Karen served as Executive Director of Domestic Violence and sexual assault services in Whatcom County, Washington. For over a decade, she strengthened organizational capacity through nonprofit mergers, expanded access to survivor housing, and broadened service offerings, making safety an actionable right rather than a distant aspiration.

Her tenure at Whatcom County deepened her understanding of operations, fundraising, and strategic partnerships. These skills would later become pivotal as she stepped into executive leadership roles, first at a local YWCA and then on a national scale.

Nurturing Organizational Resilience: Leadership at YWCA Bellingham

As CEO of YWCA Bellingham from 2020 to 2023, Karen fused her community-first mindset with executive rigor. Under her guidance, the association flourished, organizational structures strengthened, sustainability improved, and program impact reached new heights.

She balanced fiscal responsibility with mission integrity, demonstrating that nonprofit growth depends on fundraising and aligning heart with strategy. Her leadership here was a proving ground, preparing her for a transformative role at the national level.

Joining the National Stage: COO of YWCA USA

In early 2023, YWCA USA welcomed Karen Burke as its Chief Operating Officer. She entered a complex ecosystem: a peak body supporting nearly 200 local YWCAs, and a national advocate against racism, gender-based violence, and economic inequality.

Karen took on a constellation of responsibilities, from organizational excellence and operational oversight to strategic alignment across advocacy, program delivery, and impact measurement. Her first year saw improved cohesion between headquarters and local associations, sharper resource allocation, and renewed focus on community-driven solutions.

> She balanced fiscal responsibility with mission integrity, demonstrating that nonprofit growth depends on fundraising and aligning heart with strategy.

Leadership Philosophy: Listening, Learning, Leading

A throughline in Karen's career is her gift for listening—whether to legal complexities, survivors' stories, or frontline staff. She believes systemic problems cannot be solved with one-size-fits-all solutions. They require cultural sensitivity, adaptive management, and humility.

Her leadership model is relational rather than transactional, rooted in trust and co-creation. Under her influence, YWCA USA has begun bridging national strategy with local realities, ensuring that bold campaigns and policy proposals are informed by lived experience.

Beyond YWCA: Entrepreneur, Educator, Advocate

Karen's influence extends far beyond nonprofit walls. She holds a Bachelor's Degree from Western Washington University and further executive training at the University of Washington—credentials that underlie her operational excellence.

Earlier in her career, she founded K Colette, a Maine-based artisan retailer, taught middle schoolers, coached swimming, and served on the Cape Elizabeth School Board. She was also named a 2022 Fellow and Partner in Harvard's Advanced Leadership Initiative, joining global peers working on social innovation through systems change.

Today, she resides on a farm in Whatcom County adorned by farmland, animals, and rich community bonds. This is an everyday sanctuary for someone who works on society's toughest challenges.

Stepping Into the Future: Systems Change from the Inside

Karen sharpens YWCA's strategic edge in her current role by strengthening operations, technology infrastructure, shared governance, and local support. She is positioning the organization for national-scale campaigns on reproductive rights, economic justice, and anti-racism while preserving the integrity of staff and survivor-centered advocacy.

Under her stewardship, YWCA USA evolved from a heritage nonprofit into a modern force for justice, powered by vision and operational excellence.

A Legacy Defined by Purpose and Precision

Karen Burke's story defies simple labels. She is a justice innovator who became an operational architect, a survivor advocate who became a systems strategist, and a local leader who now navigates a national mission.

At YWCA USA, she brings an essential truth: that transformative impact requires more than passion; it demands structures, systems, and steadfast execution. She reminds us that you can care deeply and deliver precisely. In her hands, operations aren't dry logistics—they're lifelines for social change.

USA's Most

Influential COOs 2025

The Calm, Calculated Force Behind Highmark Health's Big Leap

KAREN L. HANLON

Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer,
Highmark Health

In the loud, fast-moving world of healthcare, where headlines often scream of breakthroughs, billion-dollar mergers, or political fallout, it's easy to overlook the steady engines that keep it all running. These are not always the disruptors in Silicon Valley or the figureheads in Washington. Sometimes, the most powerful force is someone who prefers to stay behind the scenes, head down, building brick by brick. Karen Hanlon is one such figure.

She doesn't speak in sweeping declarations. She doesn't chase attention. But over the last two decades, she has quietly reshaped the business of health and care, fusing operational excellence with financial grit to reimagine what a health organization can look like. Today, as the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Highmark Health, Hanlon is not just running an enterprise; she's actively redesigning how healthcare functions for millions.

Grounded Beginnings, Lasting Impact

Hanlon didn't begin her career with grand healthcare ambitions. She started where many strong leaders do, in numbers. After earning her degree from Grove City College, she began her professional life at KPMG Peat Marwick. Public accounting isn't known for glamour, but for Hanlon, it was an early masterclass in structure, discipline, and precision.

In 1997, she joined Highmark Inc., then a traditional health insurance organization, with little hint that it would evolve into the multi-entity ecosystem it is today. At the time, healthcare was still siloed—payers paid, providers treated, and patients navigated a confusing maze. Over the next two decades, Hanlon would become part of the small leadership circle responsible for changing that script.

The Financial Turnaround Few Saw Coming

For years, Hanlon climbed the financial ladder at Highmark. But it was in 2013 that her leadership was tested. Highmark Health had just acquired Allegheny Health Network (AHN), a hospital system teetering on financial collapse. Many questioned the move. The risks were obvious: a failing provider arm and an insurer navigating post-Affordable Care Act uncertainties. However, Highmark saw a different future where payer and provider were not separate but unified.

Hanlon, by then CFO, rolled up her sleeves. Over five years, she steered AHN through one of the most complex financial recoveries in the industry. Under her guidance, the network went from the brink of bankruptcy to executing a public, tax-exempt $1 billion bond offering in 2018. It allowed the system to expand into 13 hospitals across Western Pennsylvania and New York, build multi-speciality medical pavilions, and, most importantly, stabilize its service model.

Becoming the COO: Steering the Machine

In 2018, Hanlon was appointed Chief Operating Officer of Highmark Health, an enterprise with nearly $27 billion in revenue that serves more than 6 million health plan members and thousands of patients across hospital systems.

She took the reins when healthcare delivery needed a fresh blueprint. Instead of layering new solutions onto an outdated system, Hanlon helped architect what would become the "Living Health" model, a unified system that integrates coverage, care, and technology.

This model, under Hanlon's operational leadership, has transformed how Highmark engages with individuals. From mobile apps that simplify plan navigation to community partnerships that address health disparities, Hanlon has led from the middle, where logistics, coordination, and accountability reside.

Operations in the Edge of Chaos

If the pandemic taught healthcare anything, operations aren't background noise, they're the main stage. Supply chain disruption, workforce burnout, and digital fragmentation, all demanded new solutions. Hanlon didn't blink.

Under her leadership, Highmark Health not only adapted but strengthened its position. She orchestrated collaboration across entities like enGen (a tech subsidiary), Highmark Wholecare, and the Highmark-Penn State Health partnership to ensure care continuity and service innovation during one of the most unstable times in modern healthcare.

> "WHAT'S DISTINCT ABOUT HANLON IS THAT SHE NEVER ROMANTICIZES LEADERSHIP. SHE DOESN'T CHASE BUZZWORDS. SHE BUILDS FRAMEWORKS."

What's distinct about Hanlon is that she never romanticizes leadership. She doesn't chase buzzwords. She builds frameworks. When speaking publicly, whether about payor-provider alignment or scalable health economics, she's often unflashy, but always crystal clear.

A Voice for Women, Without Applause-Seeking

Hanlon may be reserved, but she's never silent when it comes to equity. As executive sponsor of Highmark's supplier diversity and women's initiatives, she's made it her mission to ensure more women, and women of color, rise through operational and financial tracks, not just soft-skill functions. She knows healthcare's workforce is majority female, yet its C-suites still aren't. She's pushing to change that, one promotion, one hiring pipeline at a time.

Board Seats, But No Complacency

Alongside her COO role, Hanlon holds positions on the boards of Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Penn State Health, Federated Hermes Inc., and more. She chairs the boards of both enGen and Highmark Wholecare. Her influence touches strategy and governance, guiding how major institutions spend, scale, and evolve.

And yet, those who work with her describe her not as domineering but as deeply collaborative. She is a listener first, a decision-maker when needed, and a steady hand, not a celebrity executive.

Quiet Power, Loud Results

Her story isn't one of viral success or dramatic turning points. It's the story of long-haul leadership. Of showing up year after year, idea after idea, problem after problem, with consistency, clarity, and calm. And in a field as turbulent as healthcare, that might just be the most radical kind of leadership there is.

Story of the Month

LOS ANGELES UNREST

Immigration Raids Spark Waves of Protest and Federal Clash

At first glance, it was a typical Friday morning in Los Angeles. Food trucks fired up their rills near Boyle Heights, construction workers lined up for cafecito in East LA, and warehouse staff clocked in for early shifts in the Fashion District. But by 9.00 a.m. on 6 June 2025, that everyday rhythm was shattered. Vans with dark-tinted windows rolled up silently. Agents in tactical gear stormed workplaces, rounding up undocumented workers, some still in aprons, some in steel-toed boots, many with fear written across their faces. Mothers couldn't finish their phone calls. Co-workers stared in disbelief as friends were taken.

By nightfall, the city that had always worn its diversity proudly had erupted in defiance. What began as mourning turned into momentum, as people from every corner of LA gathered to protest immigration raids and protect the dignity of the people behind the headlines. In this moment, the streets became living expressions of fear, solidarity, resistance, and hope.

ICE Raids Ignite the City

On the morning of Friday 6 June, co-ordinated ICE operations swept through LA's Fashion District, a clothing warehouse in Westlake, and a Home Depot site, resulting in 44 arrests related to immigration status. One prominent detainee included the president of the hospital workers' union, David Huerta, arrested and injured during the enforcement action .

Community groups such as CHILRA and Unión del Barrio rallied immediately, organising marches and vigils outside the Roybal Federal building and detention centers. Hundreds of protesters defied the LAPD's declaration of an "unlawful assembly", remaining for hours amid clouds of tear gas, flash-bangs and the crack of non-lethal munitions .

From Peaceful Protest to Volatility

Initial vigils soon morphed into confrontation. In Westlake and Paramount, confrontations escalated as protesters hurled concrete, bottles, scooters and even fireworks, while law enforcement deployed tear gas, pepper spray, stun grenades and flash-bang grenades. CBS News recorded evidence of vandalism, fires in dumpsters, shattered windows at LAPD headquarters, and graffiti across federal buildings. Reports also surfaced of incendiary devices thrown at police horses, revealing how quickly tensions spiralled.

By Sunday, official data pointed to more than 400 arrests in the downtown core alone, with similar unrest in Paramount, Compton, and other surrounding suburbs, echoing a citywide ripple effect.

Militarisation and Legal Defiance

In the wake of property damage to government facilities and reported threats to federal agents, President Trump authorised an unprecedented deployment under Title 10: approximately 4,000 National Guard troops and 700 U.S. Marines were dispatched—despite opposition from Governor Newsom and Mayor Bass.

Newsom denounced the move as a "serious breach of state sovereignty" and sued the federal government, accusing it of overreach and needless escalation. Officials imposed overnight curfews in downtown LA and declared a local emergency, placing further strain on already tense streets.

Who is on the Streets and Why

The core of the protests are immigrant communities and labour unions, many of whom have witnessed frequent workplace and home raids in recent years. CHIRLA and Unión del Barrio have been instrumental in organisation and leadership, offering legal and logistical support to vulnerable members.

In Paramount, largely Latino and working-class, demonstrators carried Mexican flags next to burning vehicles, a stark visual of anger and identity. One protester yelled through a megaphone: "ICE out of Paramount… You are not welcome here".

Their demands are simple yet bold: an immediate halt to large-scale ICE enforcement, transparency, due-process safeguards, and humane treatment of families and individuals. And as one activist said, "No human being is illegal," capturing the heart of a moral plea .

Despite the heavy deployment, most city analysts say the vast majority of LA remains calm. The confrontations are contained to targeted zones, yet the consequences resonate far beyond, shaping national debate.

Polarised Politics and Legal Crossfire

President Trump has defended the federal presence as safeguarding federal installations and guards, warning on Truth Social that if local forces "can't do their jobs… we will solve the problem". Opponents view this as authoritarian brinkmanship. Governor Newsom and Mayor Bass say it violates state rights and inflames tensions. Californian legal moves are pending, and national watchfulness is growing. Over 30 cities, from New York to San Antonio, have reported protests inspired by LA's unrest .

The Human Face of Mobilisation

This is not simply an escalation of policy or a political spectacle, it's a deeply personal confrontation. The immigrant seamstress in the Fashion District who no longer shows up at work out of fear; the union leader injured during arrest; the journalist hit on camera and the communities that line up behind them, chanting chants of dignity.

These protests have reawakened Los Angeles, the city that previously rose during the Rodney King riots, to the power of collective voice. They are less about riot and more about resistance; less about disorder and more about demanding due process, respect and humanity.

As curfews continue and rhetoric intensifies, one human truth remains clear: every tear-gas cloud hides a story. And the unfolding saga of LA's June 2025 protests promises to leave indelible marks on law, on society, and on the people at its heart.

Oscar De La Hoya,
Boxing Legend and Mexican-American Icon

> "Growing up in LA… immigrants are our friends, neighbours… their sacrifices gave me opportunities I'll never take for granted."

BIG TAKE

RISK Taking Ain't GAMBLING

Tony Vincent Arattukulam
Chairman, **Aratt Developers**

Risk taking is always driven by choices and decisions made by individuals. One must not mistake risk taking with gambling. Differentiating between gambling and risk taking is important because the former is a chance that you take whereas the latter is an assessment. If you have assessed the situation before and you always decide to proceed with the risk.

Risk-taking involves in-depth analysis, planning, and an understanding of the potential outcomes from the choices that are made. Successful and seasoned risk-takers typically do not dive into the unknown blindly, but instead, they weigh the potential benefits and the possible downsides. They also prepare contingency plans accordingly and remain adaptable to changing circumstances while combating the weight of risks.

Being specific to the real estate industry, the key areas involving significant risks are property, industry or market, financial, legal or regulatory.

Market risk

being the most common, is based on factors like economic downturn, oversupply of properties, or a shift in demographic trends. To manage market risk, investors should conduct complete market research before making any investment decisions. Market analysis with a feasibility study, consisting of well researched current and projected trends, demographics, vacancies, and absorption rates of the target market are important.

Financial risk

occurs when there is a down turn in the real estate market. Real estate player generally takes a risk that he would be able to sell off 60 % of his stock within half the period of his completion of work. When he is not able to achieve the sale, he is stressed because he has to use his own funds or generate private funds or depend on construction finance. To mitigate financial risk, an initial financial and projection analysis is important.

Legal Risk

known as regulatory risk, refers to the changes in the laws and regulations that may influence and affect the real estate market or specific property. Tax laws, building regulations and codes, environmental regulations, area-zone law are some of the factors that impact property owners and the real estate market largely.

Most important risk that a real estate player has to take is in assessing the original title of mother deed of the property. The best of titles can be the worst of the titles. By this I mean, titles that seem to be very clear may be tailored ones. In depth study of the flow of title, local enquiries, checking up in local courts if any legal issues exist, which do not reflect in EC are most important.

Negligence and its impact on risks:

Negligence in risk-taking arises from a failure to recognize or properly assess the risks involved when decisions are made. Negligence can also arise from having a culture that looks at short-term results without considering long-term consequences of the risks taken. Risk can be judged as intelligent or negligent only when one can strike the right balance keeping in mind the potential consequences or the setbacks that will follow.

Staying informed, diverse investments, contingency plans and seeking timely professional advice are key strategies to navigating through the risks that are involved in real estate industry.

USA's Most
Influential
COOs
2025

Rewriting the Rules of Dealership Operations

LAURA SHERMAN

COO,
Dealer Merchant Services

In the early 2000s, while most dealership finance departments were still shuffling paper ledgers and feeding fax machines, Laura Sherman was already thinking ahead—envisioning how smart systems and lean processes could reshape automotive operations. Two decades later, she's leading that very transformation as Chief Operating Officer at Dealer Merchant Services, a company quietly revolutionizing how dealerships approach payment processing in a digital-first era.

With over 30 years of hands-on experience across nearly every facet of the automotive world—finance, sales, digital, and operations—Laura brings uncommon depth. From her controller days at Van Tuyl Auto Group to sales leadership at DFW Audi and John Roberts BMW, she's lived the dealership life inside out. Her time at Local Search Group added a data-driven edge, sharpening her grasp on SEO, digital strategy, and customer behavior—key ingredients in her operational playbook today.

At Dealer Merchant Services, Laura isn't just fixing inefficiencies—she's dismantling outdated systems that silently drain dealership profits. By eliminating the hidden costs tied to reward points, cashback, and miles, she's helping rooftops across the country reclaim lost revenue and simplify how they transact.

A Midland High School graduate, Laura pairs small-town tenacity with big-picture vision. As COO, she's not just running operations—she's reimagining what great operations look like in an industry that rarely sits still.

In this special edition of USA's Most Influential COOs 2025, TradeFlock caught up with Laura Sherman to discuss her approach to operational excellence, the roadblocks she's breaking down, and what's next for dealership innovation in America.

Q What's the biggest myth about dealership operations?

I talk to dealers across the country every single day, and one fear keeps popping up—they think giving customers a true payment choice will hurt their CSI scores. It won't. In fact, "if you're upfront and transparent, and work with the right partner, you can recapture up to 75% of your credit card processing costs."

Another big myth is that all processors are the same. They're not. This isn't just a finance decision—it affects every department. And if your provider doesn't understand how dealerships actually work, it's a recipe for chaos. That's why expertise matters more than ever.

Q What's one big operational challenge you're facing right now?

One of our biggest challenges today is hiring people who truly align with our mission. We specifically look for those with retail automotive experience because they understand our clients and the complexity of the industry. That narrows the talent pool, but it's worth it—we're in the service business, and it's critical that our team shares our values and delivers a level of service that's second to none.

We've been guiding dealers through the rollout of compliant credit card surcharging—something 97% of our clients are implementing for the first time. It's a complex process that touches every department, but we approached it methodically, and it's been a game-changer in helping them reduce costs without compromising customer satisfaction.

Q How do you future-proof dealership operations in a changing industry?

I've always believed that if you really pay attention, your customers will show you exactly where the industry's headed. That's why "Text and Email-to-Pay aren't just the future—they're the now."

We saw the shift early—some OEMs are now requiring these tools, but we've been offering them for years. Future-proofing, to me, is about meeting customers where they are, before they even expect it. If you can do that consistently, you're not just ready for the future—you're shaping it.

Q How does your creative side influence the way you develop future leaders?

Tapping into my creative side—whether I'm painting with acrylics or writing poetry—gives me a unique perspective on leadership. It helps me approach mentorship with empathy, curiosity, and imagination. I don't just focus on passing down knowledge; I encourage our top leaders to think outside the box, embrace different viewpoints, and nurture the same qualities in their teams. Through regular coaching and training, we're not just building future leaders—we're inspiring original thinkers who can lead with both heart and vision.

THE FASTEST WAY TO EARN RESPECT IS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE THAT LEAVES NO ROOM FOR DOUBT.

Q Where would you head for a long, mind-clearing drive—and what would you drive?

There's something therapeutic about the hum of the engine and the quiet of tree-lined roads. I'd hop into my Land Rover Defender and head toward a peaceful lakeside—just me, the open road, and the calm. Nothing resets the mind like a drive that feels like freedom.

Q What's been your toughest challenge as a woman leader—and how did you handle it?

Walking into rooms where I was the only woman, the hardest part was being taken seriously. But I've spent my life in automotive—and now in payments—so I made it a point to know the business inside and out.

"The fastest way to earn respect is through knowledge that leaves no room for doubt."

That's how I turned every challenge into a chance to prove I belonged.

FROM THE GROUND

CHANGING SPORTS VIEWERSHIP IN YOUTH

Why Gen Z and Gen Alpha Are Tuning Out Live Sports

Nowadays, live sports, which used to be a common cultural event supported by everybody, are experiencing decreased interest from the youngest generations, particularly Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Although online networks and apps allow people around the globe to watch sports highlights and follow athletes, the usual practice of watching live sports is rapidly declining.

There are numerous reasons, each giving an interesting insight into the problem. As the shift occurs, critical questions about modern sports' future in the new entertainment world arise.

Many people no longer enjoy live broadcasts.

It is quite noticeable that young people are watching fewer live games now. Research by Morning Consult found that 24% of Gen Z sports fans went to live games each week, much less than the 50% of Millennials who did the same. The number is smaller for Gen Alpha because this group mainly watches YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and game highlights, not full-length broadcasts.

Even though they say they love sports, their ways of interacting with them have transformed. Because most sports content posted online is short and focused on moments, viewers watch fewer games when they air live.

Too Much Length and Predictability in the Regular Season

For leagues like the NBA, MLB, and NHL, younger viewers often describe the regular season as "too long" or "meaningless". Many games have low stakes, which lowers our desire to stay tuned as the match develops. While traditional baseball fans continue to watch, others, especially younger ones, prefer getting the main highlights of a game in a short video rather than spending two to three hours on the match.

For example, play-in tournaments and mid-season cups in the NBA help solve this issue by making the games more intense and exciting.

The Increase in Stealing TV Shows

Illegal streaming is another big factor affecting the number of official broadcasters. Muso's 2023 report suggests that more than 90 billion times per year, people worldwide illegally watch sports content, and most of those watching are young.

Games are now costly and hard to find legally because of intricate rules, high subscription prices, blackouts and different rights on each platform.

Since young people are used to getting information for free online, they are less willing to deal with obstacles and poorly designed websites and instead opt for illegal streaming.

People are tired of streaming and struggling with platforms.

Watching sports legally often becomes a frustrating experience for most users. Video services from big companies often face criticism for the following.

- Slow or late cable channels
- Having to watch too many commercials
- The experience of using the website is not very user-friendly.
- Clipping, sharing or communicating with others during the games is impossible.

Meanwhile, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok make it possible to enjoy sports sections that are convenient and interactive and chosen using algorithms. Modern social media is more flexible and modern than the old traditional forms of sports media.

According to Gen Z content creators, watching an instant TikTok breakdown is much simpler than listening to a long post-game analysis.

Athletes today are important influencers in the sports world.

While fewer people are watching live games, the number of fans for various athletes is increasing. Instagram, X and YouTube have made sports stars into digital influencers, bringing their fans closer to them.

People from Gen Z relate more to LeBron James or Virat Kohli as individuals than sports teams or leagues. Many athletes build a larger digital audience when directly interacting with their fans than with the teams they play for.

Thus, it shows that young sports fans care more about belonging to a community than

A new opportunity is using interactivity and gaming for entertainment.

Because of this shift, broadcasters and sporting leagues are trying out interactive, gaming-like and social experiences for viewers. Examples include:

- **Amazon offers additional broadcasts that display stats for the players.**
- **ESPN's sports broadcasts use augmented reality**
- **Viewing streams with popular Twitch broadcasters**
- **Betting and fantasy sports can now be combined with online sports events through real-time betting.**

They try to turn casual watching into more involved involvement, combining gaming, social platforms and sports in one place.

At the same time, these services will fail if they do not have a simple and convenient design. Young people expect technology to be easy, and they won't keep using things that are hard to use.

The Process of Sports Consumption Development

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are not rejecting sports, they have simply started to watch, exchange and experience them differently. With short highlights, clips by athletes and different ways to watch, changes in sports media are happening fast.

To move ahead, leagues and broadcasters should focus on popular digital formats, ease the process to watch sports and try new storytelling techniques. The way people watch sports over the internet will not be just one big screen, but many little personalised screens, requiring interactivity, fast updates and personal choice.

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

USA's Most
Influential COOs 2025

Designing Tomorrow's Healthcare, Today

RAGHU KRISHNAIAH

COO, **University of Phoenix**

Institutions can't rely on traditional classroom models when adult learners juggle careers, family, and education. They demand adaptive, data-driven pathways that meet real-world needs. Amid this shifting landscape, Raghu Krishnaiah, COO at the University of Phoenix, has emerged as a visionary leader, driving operational excellence, modernizing delivery, and reshaping how skills, analytics, and empathy come together in today's education.

From Engineering Foundations to Strategic Vision

Raghu's journey began at MIT, where he earned a Bachelor's and Master's in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. He then received an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

> "The COO needs to talk about the power and benefits that you can get from becoming data savvy and be an advocate for data literacy."

His engineering rigor and business acumen laid the groundwork for a career that bridges product innovation, analytics, and user-focused strategy.

Early Career & Global Operations

Before entering higher education, Raghu held strategic leadership roles across various industries—including finance, consulting, and business services—where he honed his skills in P&L management, technology adoption, and large-scale operations.

At Kaplan Higher Education Group, he served as Senior Vice President, upgrading systems and processes to support working adult learners better. Later, as COO of Western Governors University, he led efforts that measurably improved student outcomes and increased operational efficiency.

Elevating University of Phoenix: Strategy, Analytics & Skills

Appointment as Chief Operating Officer in 2023 placed Raghu in charge of a vast operational framework: academic delivery, enrollment systems, financial aid, corporate and tribal partnerships, technology, campus operations, career services, and product innovation. He also managed analytics operations and regional expansion, blending innovation with scale.

His leadership is steeped in data monetization and analytics: Raghu introduced real-time analytics tools that help drive faster and more accurate decision-making. He champions adaptive learning platforms, data literacy, and skill-based curricula tailored to learner and employer needs .

Tackling Real-World Challenges in Education

In 2022, Raghu joined Clemson University's "Leadership in the Age of Personalization" Summit to discuss strategies for addressing skill gaps and talent mobility. He emphasized the integration of skill-building and degree completion, encouraging institutions to prioritize both learning and market readiness.

He's also spotlighted adaptive learning as a tool for inclusive growth, advocating for upskilling paths that support diverse learners during economic uncertainty.

On the AI and Future of Work panel in May 2025, Raghu shared how generative AI can reshape workforce outcomes, arguing that AI is not a replacement, but an amplifier for career success and institutional agility.

Further, at the 2023 OnCon conference, he led discussions on "Creating an Agile Workforce," emphasizing skills-based strategies for cross-functional teams. This focus extends beyond product squads to overall institutional agility.

Recognition & Thought Leadership

Raghu has become a consistent voice on data literacy and higher education innovation. He served on the "Balancing Act" podcast to discuss how COOs must champion data literacy inside institutions. As a keynote speaker at the Association for Talent Development (Utah ATD), he urged linking talent strategies to institutional outcomes through skill-based transformation.

He continues to shape the national conversation through participation in events like PHX East Valley's forum on artificial intelligence and labor, highlighting skills pipelines as economic drivers .

What the Future Holds

As higher education adapts to AI, remote work, and lifelong learning expectations, Raghu Krishnaiah stands at the intersection of these transformations, guiding the University of Phoenix from a legacy institution to a future-forward learning ecosystem. His next chapter is anchored in capability-based learning, continuous upskilling, and metrics-driven agility.

> "We're nearly to the point where more workers are leaving the workforce than entering, and I estimate we'll be like that for the next 10 to 15 years… That results in labor shortages."

Why It Matters

In an increasingly skills-centric world, Raghu Krishnaiah demonstrates how the modern COO can become an architect of transformation—balancing operational excellence with learner empowerment. For any executive leader in a changing landscape, his example shows that success requires more than strategy—it demands impact—with both precision and purpose.

SPOTLIGHT

Big Tech's Race for ROBOTIC SUPREMACY

Warehouse Automation War in America

The American logistics industry is experiencing a seismic shift, driven by warehouse automation. With the exponential rise in e-commerce, same-day delivery expectations, and persistent labour shortages, companies are accelerating their investments in robotics, AI, and autonomous systems. Giants like Amazon, Walmart, FedEx, UPS, and Target are locked in a high-stakes battle to dominate the future of fulfilment.

Explosive Market Growth

The U.S. warehouse automation market, valued at $5.78 billion in 2024, is projected to reach $16.6 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.2%. Globally, the market is expected to surpass $70 billion by the end of the decade.

A 2023 report by McKinsey revealed that warehouses deploying automation can increase throughput by 25–40%, cut operating costs by 20–30%, and reduce order errors by up to 80%. Despite a slight slowdown in early 2024 due to inflation and inventory overcapacity, analysts predict that investment in warehouse technology will increase by 15% annually through 2028.

Amazon: Vanguard of Fulfilment Robotics

Amazon is unique with over 750,000 robot units operating in more than 300 fulfilment centres around the world. Since the acquisition of Kiva Systems in 2012 for $775 million, Amazon has realized estimated savings of $22 million per warehouse in operational spending.

The robot Vulcan, which was launched by Amazon in 2024, has tactile sensors that can interact with about 75% of the company's stock-keeping units. The Spokane fulfillment centre has recorded a 28% increase in pick-and-pack speed and a 43% reduction in workplace injuries due to Vulcan, according to company data.

To increase efficiency, Amazon with Agility Robotics deployed Digit, a bipedal robot, in three pilot warehouses, focusing on repetitive movements of totes. Due to its massive annual logistics spend ($80 billion and above), Amazon attaches a very critical importance to automation for profit maintenance.

Walmart: Symbotic Strategy in Full Swing

Walmart has set aside over $5 billion for automation projects in the next four years. Walmart wants to modernize and reconfigure 42 of its 47 regional distribution centres by 2026 with Symbotic.

Symbotic's robot technology handles over 100 cases an hour with a 99.5% success rate. These solutions increase replenishment by 60% and reduce warehouse labor costs by 20–25%. Currently, Walmart has installed more than 1,000 Symbots in five states and is aiming to double this figure by the end of 2025.

Walmart expects to save $1.5 billion a year in logistics costs once all its facilities are automated.

FedEx and UPS: Automation to Stay Competitive

In the last two years, FedEx has invested over $2 billion in automation and improving its digital infrastructure. Besides, the company has introduced the Roxo delivery robot with the help of AI-powered vision systems that have reduced sorting times by 34%.

FedEx has enhanced performance and accuracy at hubs such as the Memphis SuperHub, which handles 1.5 million packages daily, through the use of warehouse drones and autonomous mobile robots (AMRs).

UPS has partnered with Locus Robotics to allow the operation of more than 25 AMRs in its warehouses, each of which can complete over 300 item picks per hour. UPS reports that the implementation of robotics has cut walking time for staff by 50% and increased fulfilment efficiency by 30%.

UPS's use of automated guided vehicles (AGVs) and digital twin platforms has led to a reduction in operational costs of between 8 and 12 percent per facility.

Target's Micro-Fulfilment Revolution

Target has committed over $100 million to develop Micro-Fulfilment Centres (MFCs) within its urban stores. Partnering with Dematic and Attabotics, it has opened 15 automated MFCs that can process up to 1,000 orders daily with a 98.7% accuracy rate.

These systems have reduced order processing times from 3 hours to under 45 minutes, enabling more efficient same-day delivery and click-and-collect services. Target aims to have 30% of all U.S. metro-area online orders fulfilled via MFCs by 2027.

Key Tech Trends and Their Numbers

» Autonomous Mobile Robots (AMRs) are expected to exceed 1.2 million deployments globally by 2030, up from 400,000 in 2024.

» AI and predictive analytics have led to a 32% reduction in stockouts and 20% inventory turnover improvement, according to Deloitte.

» Digital twins, now used by UPS and Amazon, reduce design and layout costs by 15% and increase space utilisation by 20%.

» Robotics-as-a-Service (RaaS) models are growing at a CAGR of 23.4%, enabling smaller players to adopt robotics without heavy upfront investment.

The Future of Warehousing: Towards Full Autonomy

The next frontier is full-AI fulfilment. Amazon's Project Sparrow aims for warehouses capable of handling 90% of inventory types autonomously. Walmart's trials with full AI-coordination between robotics and transport logistics promise to shave up to 6 hours per fulfilment cycle.

Startups like Covariant, which raised $222 million in 2023, are developing AI-powered robotic arms that learn from experience, enabling more nuanced handling of irregular items. RightHand Robotics claims its AI arms can now manage 1,200 picks per hour with 99% accuracy. ◆

USA's **Most**
Influential
COOs
2025

Designing Tomorrow's Healthcare, Today

SHEILA ANTRUM

VP & COO,
UCSF Health

In 2020, as hospitals worldwide faced a once-in-a-century pandemic, the stakes for healthcare operations rose overnight. At UCSF Health, one of America's top academic medical centers, Sheila Antrum was steering through unprecedented logistical and operational challenges—managing surge capacities, ensuring staff safety, stabilizing patient throughput, and safeguarding quality amid chaos.

At a time when healthcare systems buckled under pressure, Antrum led UCSF's Capacity Management Center to deliver agile, coordinated care across the system's hospitals. Her leadership was critical in managing beds or ventilators and ensuring the health system's soul, its people and patients, remained prioritized even in crisis.

Today, as Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of UCSF Health, Sheila Antrum is redefining what modern healthcare operations should look like: strategic, deeply human, and built for resilience.

From Nursing to Health Systems Leadership

Antrum's career began at the bedside, where she practiced as a registered nurse after earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Hampton University. She credits her nursing background with grounding her decisions in empathy and practical understanding, which still informs her executive work today.

Her desire to influence systems led her to pursue a Master's in Health Services Administration at the University of Michigan's School of Public Health, one of the most respected programs in the country. This blend of clinical empathy and administrative acumen positioned her to lead not just individuals, but entire organizations.

Strengthening Ambulatory Services at UC San Diego

In 2003, Antrum joined UC San Diego Medical Center as Chief of Ambulatory Operations, where she oversaw outpatient services and helped expand the reach and efficiency of ambulatory care. Her leadership was instrumental in optimizing clinical workflows and strengthening patient access, laying the groundwork for what would later become core pillars of her operational strategy.

Nursing, Strategy, and System Alignment

In 2007, Antrum joined UCSF Health as Chief Nursing and Patient Care Services Officer for UCSF Medical Center and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco. Over the next eight years, she modernized nursing practices, introduced standardized care protocols, and helped integrate pediatric and adult patient services under a unified care framework.

After a brief return to this role from 2019 to 2020, she transitioned to broader executive leadership in 2015 as President of Adult Services, overseeing clinical integration, inpatient capacity, and operational streamlining across UCSF's adult hospitals.

> **One of her most impactful initiatives has been leading UCSF's Capacity Management Center, which allows real-time, data-driven decision-making to ensure patients are routed to the right care at the right time.**

Building Systems That Serve People

As Chief Operating Officer, Antrum oversees nearly every non-physician aspect of the UCSF Health system, including adult inpatient and outpatient services, perioperative care, pharmaceutical services, nursing and patient care, facilities, supply chain, and major capital projects and women's and speciality services.

One of her most impactful initiatives has been leading UCSF's Capacity Management Center, which allows real-time, data-driven decision-making to ensure patients are routed to the right care at the right time. During COVID-19, this infrastructure became central to UCSF's crisis response, enabling scalable care delivery during case surges while maintaining continuity for non-COVID patients.

Tackling Challenges Head-On

Antrum has addressed key systemic challenges with foresight and agility, from nationwide workforce shortages to escalating patient acuity and complex hospital finances. Through operational redesign and investment in workforce resilience, she has helped mitigate the effects of clinical burnout. By establishing safety protocols, optimizing resources, and maintaining team morale, Antrum helped UCSF remain operationally strong during the pandemic's worst phases. Her commitment to culturally competent care and community-based solutions has helped bridge gaps between UCSF's academic strengths and real-world healthcare needs.

Awards, Thought Leadership & Professional Standing

Antrum's leadership was pivotal to UCSF Health being consistently ranked among U.S. News & World Report's Best Hospitals in multiple specialties. She's been a voice for health equity, women in leadership, and operational excellence at forums such as Modern Healthcare and Becker's Hospital Review. As a former clinical scholar and executive fellow, she combines academic rigor with real-world performance.

Listening First, Leading Forward

What sets Antrum apart is her deep-rooted belief that the best systems are those built from the ground up—with input from the nurses, technicians, patients, and frontline workers who use them daily. Her approach is relational, not just operational, emphasizing collaboration, humility, and inclusive problem-solving.

She sees operations not as a back-end function, but as a catalyst for mission delivery. Whether overseeing billion-dollar budgets or implementing a new patient transport system, her focus remains: "How do we serve better, and more equitably?"

Building Sustainable, Human-Centered Health Systems

Sheila Antrum is already there as healthcare shifts toward value-based care, digital transformation, and integrated delivery models. She is fortifying UCSF's infrastructure for the future, investing in AI-enabled decision tools, improving interoperability, and ensuring every new initiative is designed with equity and sustainability in mind.

In a world where healthcare systems are increasingly judged by efficiency and equity, Antrum's leadership offers a bold blueprint: operational excellence grounded in compassion and community.

Editor's Pick

Right People, Right Tasks, Right Time

The Human Upside of Centralization

As the real estate industry recalibrates for a post-pandemic world and economic volatility, centralization is becoming the backbone of smarter, scalable, and more human-centric property management strategies.

More Than Just Cost-Saving

Traditionally, multifamily operations functioned like isolated islands. Each property had its own leasing agents, maintenance crew, and administrative support. While this worked in the past, it's proving inefficient and costly in today's fast-evolving real estate landscape.

According to McKinsey & Company, real estate firms that adopted centralized models reduced operating costs by up to 25% and improved service levels across their portfolios. Centralization reduces headcount or overhead and reallocates resources more strategically. Think centralized leasing hubs that handle multiple properties remotely or regional maintenance teams dispatched based on real-time demand.

A 2023 report from JP Morgan Real Estate noted that over 70% of property management firms in the U.S. are now actively investing in centralization technologies or models. The shift is driven by tighter margins, labor shortages, and higher resident expectations.

Tech Is the Bridge, Not the Destination

Digital tools are the great enablers of centralization, but they're not the whole story. Tools like property management software (AppFolio, Yardi, RealPage), AI chatbots for leasing, and remote monitoring systems are foundational, but centralization also demands a mindset shift: from managing properties to managing platforms.

Harvard Business Review emphasized in a 2023 feature that organizations leading in centralization success "reengineer workflows, not just digitize them." This means designing operations from scratch to be centralized, not just adding tech to traditional processes.

As a result, leasing agents are no longer bound to one property. Virtual tours, e-signatures, and automated application systems allow them to manage tenant interactions from anywhere.

People-Centric, Not People-Reduced

BCG's 2024 report on "The Future of Work in Real Estate" suggests that centralization allows companies to repurpose human capital, enabling employees to focus on higher-value, more engaging tasks. Instead of staffing 10 leasing offices with underused personnel, one high-performing centralized team can manage leasing for a dozen properties, freeing up others for community-building roles, resident events, or strategic planning.

Employees benefit from broader career paths, while residents enjoy faster, more consistent service. It's a win-win.

Greystar and Centralization at Scale

Greystar, one of the world's largest multifamily operators, has pioneered centralized leasing, maintenance, and resident support across its U.S. portfolio. In 2023, it rolled out a unified platform to connect leasing professionals with prospects across multiple regions, resulting in a 30% increase in lead conversion and a 40% drop in vacancy times (source: Greystar Corporate Reports).

Their success hinges on tech, training, and change management. Greystar invested heavily in reskilling its staff and fostering a culture of agility, a strategy others are quickly emulating.

Smarter, Leaner, More Responsive

As interest rates fluctuate and construction costs stay high, operators can no longer rely on rent increases for profitability. Centralization offers a sustainable path forward. It reduces duplicative costs, leverages technology for smarter decision-making, and most importantly, meets the evolving needs of modern renters.

According to a McKinsey survey in early 2024, 68% of residents now expect digital-first services (like online rent payments, digital work orders, virtual leasing), and over 80% say responsiveness is more important than amenities.

In this environment, multifamily operators have a clear mandate: Operate smarter, not bigger. Centralization is not about doing less; it's about doing more with greater precision and empathy.

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