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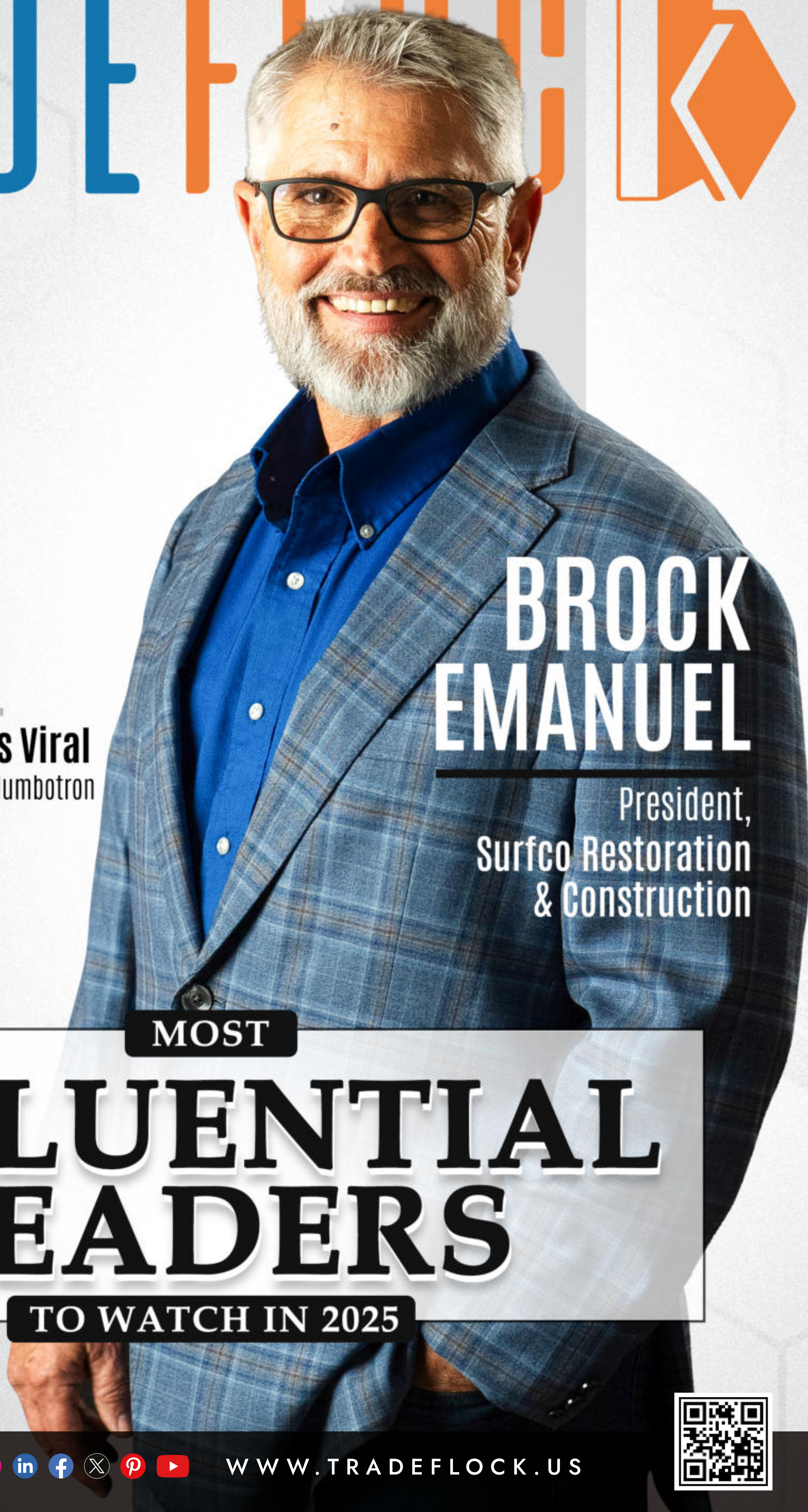
# TRADEFLOCK



Spotlight

## Digital Market Act

## Diversification 2.0

Story of the Month

## A Night of Music Turns Viral

A Corporate Crisis Ignited on the Jumbotron

# BROCK EMANUEL

President,
Surfco Restoration & Construction

MOST

# INFLUENTIAL LEADERS

TO WATCH IN 2025


## Editor Note

# A NEW ERA OF LEADERS WHO LEAD TO INFLUENCE

By definition, influence is the ability to affect the behavior of others in a particular direction, using tactics that involve, connect, and inspire. But as a new generation steps into the workforce—and into the markets they serve—leadership itself is evolving.

Today, leadership is no longer just about managing tasks or giving directions. It's about bringing people together around a shared goal, creating space for others to contribute, and helping teams move forward with clarity and confidence. It's a shift from control to connection, from authority to impact.

The leaders we admire today know how to build trust, promote their teams, navigate their organizations, and use their networks to make things happen. They don't rely on titles. Instead, they earn influence through action, consistency, and the way they show up for others.

In this issue, we spotlight the Most Influential Leaders to Watch in 2025. We spoke to them directly—about what leadership means to them, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to overcome them. Each story is different, but they all reflect the same truth: influence is earned, not assumed.

This edition offers a glimpse into what modern leadership truly looks like—honest, adaptable, and deeply human. We hope their journeys inspire you to lead with purpose and influence with integrity.

*Vipin Kumar*
Editor, Tradeflock
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# UPCOMING ISSUES

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

Best HR Leaders From USA 2025

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

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TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

# MOST INFLUENTIAL LEADERS TO WATCH IN 2025

| NAME | DESIGNATION | COMPANY |
|---|---|---|
| Alexis Corbett | Chief Operating Officer | Bank of Canada |
| Ashley Sherman | Senior VP of Global Sales | SoftServe |
| Brock Emanuel | President | Surfco Restoration & Construction |
| David Johnson | CEO | Gingerbread Homes |
| Derwish Rosalia | Founder & CEO | Upvance |
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| Yazan Mehyar | Regional Operations Director | WeStore |

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

## Bringing Calm After Every Storm

# BROCK EMANUEL

*President,*

**Surfco Restoration & Construction**

Before the first hammer swings, insurance claims are filed and blueprints are unfurled, there is a quiet & heavy moment when disaster has left its mark and hope feels impossibly distant. It's in that raw, uncertain space that Brock Emanuel has built his life's work. For nearly four decades, Brock has made a career out of walking into the aftermath—fire-ravaged homes, flood-soaked storefronts, shattered routines—and guiding people from ruin to renewal.

As President of Surfco Restoration & Construction, Brock isn't just in the business of fixing what's broken. He's in the business of second chances, earning a reputation across Arkansas and beyond as the calm after the storm. Raised in a family of builders, Brock learned early that every structure is a story and that real craftsmanship lies in restoring walls and windows, trust, dignity, and peace of mind.

From his first days in his family's construction shop to leading major restoration efforts after natural disasters across the country, Brock's journey has always been hands-on and heart-first. Years spent as a claims adjuster and restoration expert taught him that the true test of leadership isn't found in the easy wins, but in moments of crisis, when people need compassion as much as competence.

Today, Surfco's projects bear his unmistakable stamp: integrity, attention to detail, and a promise to stand by every client until the last nail is set. In this exclusive TradeFlock feature, Brock Emanuel opens up about the defining challenges of his career, the values that anchor Surfco, and the enduring belief that restoration is, above all, the work of hope.

### Q What inspired you to start Surfco Restoration, and what were the biggest challenges?

My inspiration came from a lifetime in the family business, working in my grandparents' warehouse, learning repairs, and building alongside my dad and other skilled contractors. Those early experiences shaped my passion for the craft and gave me the confidence to start my own business with my wife. The biggest challenge was learning how to bid projects properly and manage the financial side. We've kept Surfco a true family operation, with our son, daughter, and now our daughter-in-law contributing to our growth and success. It's been hard work, but building something together as a family has made it deeply rewarding.

### Q How did your early experiences shape your entrepreneurial mindset?

Working as a claims adjuster taught me the importance of precision in documenting jobs and put a spotlight on delivering great customer service. As a branch manager, I learned how to lead teams with diverse personalities, treating employees like family and building a respectful, supportive environment. I would say that both roles equally shaped my approach to leadership and customer care, laying the foundation for how I run my business today.





I believe that true impact is about more than just fixing what's broken, it's about being a steady hand when people are facing some of the hardest moments of their lives.

We've kept Surfco a true family operation, **with our son, daughter, and now our daughter-in-law** contributing to our growth and success.



> Be patient and stay adaptable because this industry changes fast. Don't react impulsively; instead, make thoughtful adjustments as you go. **Focus on building real relationships and always stay true to your core values.** That's the foundation for long-term success.

### Q What are your biggest challenges as President of Surfco, and how do you handle them?

We're entering an exciting phase of expanding into fields like healthcare, student housing, senior living, and industrial plants. Our new, state-of-the-art facility puts us right at the center of these growing markets. What excites me most is the chance to build something lasting and strengthen Surfco's reputation for quality and innovation as we grow. The future feels wide open, and we're just getting started.

### Q What advice would you give your younger self starting out?

*Be patient and stay adaptable because this industry changes fast. Don't react impulsively; instead, make thoughtful adjustments as you go. Focus on building real relationships and always stay true to your core values. That's the foundation for long-term success.*

### Q What's one goal you still have as a leader?

*I want to keep growing and mentoring others in the industry while upholding a strong reputation. I'm committed to building a legacy of integrity, service, and leadership every day.*

### Q How do you stay calm when chaos calls at 2 a.m.?

In our business, those late-night calls usually mean someone's facing one of their worst days perhaps a fire, flood, or disaster. I remind myself that what clients need most is patience and reassurance. By listening with empathy and keeping calm, I can guide them through the chaos and help restore their property and peace of mind.

### Q When did you first feel called to lead?

One defining moment came in the late '80s when I managed a team through a major fire at a five-story hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Organizing a swift response to help reopen during peak season taught me the power of leadership under pressure and gave me the confidence to take on even bigger challenges.

### Q How do you lead proactively in a reactive industry?

I focus on building strong relationships and planning ahead, so we're always ready for what's next. By preparing our team and refining our processes, we can respond quickly and confidently instead of just reacting to problems as they come.

### Q What does "impact" mean when your business is built on helping people at their most vulnerable?

I believe that true impact is about more than just fixing what's broken, it's about being a steady hand when people are facing some of the hardest moments of their lives. When disaster strikes, people aren't just looking for repairs; they're looking for reassurance, understanding, and a sense that things will be okay again. Our work is about restoring not only homes or businesses, but also the feeling of safety and normalcy that's often lost in a crisis. That's what makes what we do matter, helping people regain hope and stability when they need it most.

### Q What's the most misunderstood part of success in the restoration industry and what's your truth?

People often think success in this industry is about making fast money, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Real success takes time because it's built on hard work, patience, and integrity. It's about showing up every day, earning trust, delivering quality work, and sticking with it through the tough times. There are no shortcuts; true success is measured by the relationships you build and the reputation you earn along the way.

Editor's Pick

# Is Corporate Culture Broken?

## Why 3 in 5 U.S. Employees Feel Disconnected from Leadership

Employee engagement in the U.S has taken a dip to a record 10-year low, where there are only 31% of employees who feel engaged in the year 2024 compared to the 36% high in the year 2020, according to a report from Gallup. This decline is more acute among younger employees, especially Gen Z, who experience massive decreases in the role clarity, acknowledgement and connection to their company's goal.

### The Rise of the "Great Detachment"

The " Great Detachment" phenomenon emphasises this crisis, revealing a sense of disconnect between the employees and the leadership level. Many workers perceive a lack of purpose in their work, and only 30% of workers think that someone at work motivates their development. This disconnection not only impacts individual well-being but also spills over to the economy of the U.S. in lost productivity, estimated at $1.9 trillion every year.

### Bridging the Trust Gap Through Transparency

Nevertheless, other businesses are actively closing this trust distance by being transparent and involving two-way feedback processes. For example, Redfin CEO Glenn Kelman went for radical transparency and shared public blog posts about company challenges. This open attitude created client sympathy and loyalty, and the openness enhanced the company's reputation.

### Clear Communication and Co-Creation of Goals

Likewise, the organisations are understanding the need for clear communication and the participation of the employees. According to the surveys, 56% of the employees think that the senior leaders try to listen to the staff, down from 65% in 2023. To offset this, organisations are introducing frequent cheque-ins and working to co-create goals to make the employees feel listened to and appreciated.

### The Return-to-Office Mandate and Autonomy Concerns

Furthermore, the pressure to require workers to return to offices has exposed the trust problems. Although some leaders believe that face-to-face work increases productivity, many employees regard such mandates as a lack of trust in their autonomy. Experts encourage the creation of flexibility and appropriate communication on work expectations that can maintain the trust and engagement levels.

### Rebuilding Culture Through Trust and Inclusion

Finally, despite the challenges that corporate culture suffers, businesses that put transparency, active listening, and employee involvement in priority are in a better position to rebuild trust and increase engagement. An environment in which employees feel passion about their work and are recognised by leadership, organisations can actually succeed in today's fluid business environment.

SPOTLIGHT

# DMA: THE RULEBOOK BIG TECH CAN'T IGNORE


Big Tech often feels untouchable. In 2024, the European Union fired a shot that echoes across Silicon Valley. The Digital Market Act, a regulatory behemoth passed in 2022 and enforced from March 2024. At a first glance, it may seem like another piece of European bureaucracy. With a closer and deeper look, it's a bold, systemic attempt to rein in the world's most powerful tech companies, most of which happen to have a "Made in the USA" label.

From Apple to Google, Meta to Amazon, the tech titans of America are being forced to reckon with new rules that challenge how they operate in one of their most lucrative markets. So, what's really at stake here?

## The Law That Dares to Say "No"

The DMA targets platforms so dominant that they effectively control the digital market. To qualify, a company must have over 45 million monthly active users and over €7.5 billion in annual turnover within the EU. That narrows the field down to a handful of companies, and yes, nearly all are American.

As per a European Commission report, the DMA aims to make digital markets "fairer and more contestable." This translates to requiring platforms to open up their ecosystems, ban self-preferencing in search results, and ensure interoperability between messaging services. For example, WhatsApp might need to communicate with Signal or Telegram. Google won't be able to put its products at the top of a search page just because they belong to Google.

## U.S. Giants Are Already Feeling the Heat

Under the DMA, Apple has been compelled to allow third-party app stores and payment systems on iOS devices in the EU. This is a radical shift for a company that has famously kept its garden walled and profitable. According to Verge, Apple is also under continued investigation for potentially non-compliant practices in its App Store policies and advertising systems.

Then there's Meta. In March 2024, the company launched a "pay or consent" model in the EU. As per this model, users could either pay a subscription for ad-free Facebook and Instagram, or agree to have their data used for targeted ads. That didn't fly with regulators. The European Data Protection Board ruled it insufficient under the DMA, resulting in a fine of €200 million, as reported by The Verge.

Google, too, is facing scrutiny for bundling its services, from Chrome to Google Maps, in a way that might stifle competition. According to BBC News, the company is already being investigated for "self-preferencing" in its advertising ecosystem.

> Compliance with Laws like the DMA could Force Tech Firms to Reassess Product Offerings and Entire Business Models.
>
> McKinsey & Company 2023

## An Existential Threat or Just Growing Pains?

It's easy to view the DMA as a sledgehammer. But for tech companies that thrive on agility, it could also be a call to evolve. In a 2023 McKinsey & Company analysis, researchers noted that compliance with laws like the DMA "could force tech firms to reassess product offerings and entire business models." That might mean less data hoarding, more transparency in algorithms, and real user control over digital identities.

More dramatically, some experts see this as the beginning of the end for the "walled garden" approach. Think Apple's closed iOS system or Meta's vertically integrated ad network. These approaches have made billions but might no longer be legally sustainable in Europe.

## Transatlantic Tensions Are Rising

There's more to the DMA than platform tweaks. U.S. policymakers have raised concerns that the law unfairly targets American firms. In a 2024 J.P. Morgan briefing analysts called the DMA "a trade irritant in the making," noting that European firms like SAP or Spotify, though sizable, haven't been scrutinized under the same lens.


A Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) article also warned that the DMA could deepen trade tensions if perceived as a protectionist move disguised as consumer advocacy. The timing doesn't help: global tech supply chains are already fragile, and geopolitical tensions are at an all-time high.

## The Brussels Effect: Global Ripples from EU Regulation

Though the DMA only applies to the EU, its influence could stretch far beyond. This is what policy experts call the "Brussels Effect"—when companies adapt globally just to comply with EU rules, because building different systems for different regions is too expensive or inefficient. A 2024 Harvard Business Review article put it bluntly: "The DMA is Europe's attempt to export its regulatory philosophy to the world. And it might succeed." If Apple builds an interoperable App Store for Europe, why not just roll it out globally?

## What Happens Next?

For the U.S. tech giants, the path forward is clear but rocky. They must either comply, adapt their products, or risk massive fines, up to 10% of global turnover, or even 20% for repeat violations. To put that in context, for a company like Alphabet (Google's parent company), that could mean tens of billions of dollars.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

## Leading with Empathy. Executing with Excellence

# ALEXIS CORBETT

*Chief Operating Officer,*
**Bank of Canada**

Managing the operations of a central bank, overseeing everything from currency production to strategic planning and risk management, is like steering a vast, multifaceted vessel through turbulent economic waters. For Alexis Corbett, appointed Chief Operating Officer of the Bank of Canada in May 2024, navigating this complexity requires an acute blend of operational rigour, strategic foresight, and human-centric leadership. With Canada's economy still finding its feet post-pandemic, along with rising digital and cybersecurity threats, Alexis's role is pivotal in safeguarding the country's financial stability. Her stewardship has brought renewed agility and resilience to one of North America's most critical financial institutions.

### The Making of a Banking Leader

Born in Chilliwack, British Columbia, Alexis laid the groundwork for her future in finance and leadership through rigorous academic training. She earned a BA from the University of Western Ontario, followed by an MBA from the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa, graduating with honours. She also completed an advanced HR management programme at the University of Toronto's Rotman School and has held the Certified Human Resources Leader designation since 2001.

Her professional journey began at Canada Post Corporation, where over 15 years she took on increasingly senior roles, from corporate learning and development to recruitment strategy, and regional HR leadership. These formative experiences shaped her ability to drive organisational change and develop high-impact talent strategies.

> Don't be afraid to change roles to get a real depth and breadth of experience. This will help you develop and leverage networks, and allow you to put yourself in other people's shoes when you reach a more senior position.

### Transforming HR into Strategy

Alexis joined the Bank in 2011 as Director of Human Resources, laying the foundation for what would become a hallmark of her career: turning HR into a driver of excellence. Just three years later, she was promoted to Managing Director and Chief Human Resources Officer as HR became a standalone department in 2014.

Under her leadership, the Bank was recognised as one of Canada's Top 100 Employers, reflecting her impact on culture, engagement, and talent strategy. Alexis pioneered a sweeping modernisation of HR processes and upskilled her team with agile and lean methodologies. In 2018, her innovative leadership earned her the prestigious HR Leader of the Year award at Canada's HR awards .

Her accomplishments included redesigning performance management, embedding coaching and feedback across teams, and promoting employee-centric approaches to HR services. As she highlighted, collaboration and co-development with employees were vital in building effective yet simple HR systems.

### Operational Leadership- A New Chapter

In a major leadership update, Alexis transitioned to COO in May 2024, where she now oversees operations, strategic planning, risk management, corporate functions, and currency operations for the Bank. She also chairs the Canadian Financial Sector Resiliency Group, ensuring the operational robustness of Canada's key financial institutions.

In her first year, she led efforts to integrate digital transformation across homegrown Bank functions, championed enhanced risk protocols, and strengthened collaboration with domestic and global partners. Through her role on the Executive Council, Alexis has become an influential voice guiding critical decisions in retail payments, currency issuance, internal services, and human capital.

### Humanised Leadership in a Digital Era

Even at the apex of Canada's financial hierarchy, Alexis remains grounded in human-first values. She often emphasises simple, common-sense solutions and the importance of employee co-creation to design effective services. Her era-defining HR transformations, including lean project management and continuous feedback mechanisms, continue to shape not only internal operations but also serve as a model for other public institutions.

In her COO capacity, she brings these human-centric principles to strategic management, focusing on adaptability, clarity, collaboration, and resilience across the Bank's functions.

### Building a Resilient Financial Future

Looking forward, Alexis's vision is increasingly important as the Bank navigates global threats, from cyber risks to inflationary pressures, economic digitalisation, and disruptive payment channels. Under her guiding leadership, the Canadian Financial Sector Resiliency Group has implemented stronger operational frameworks and cross-sector cooperation

Her influence spans strategic investments in digital infrastructure, crisis management planning, and adopting global best practices in central banking operations. She is also shaping policies that will define Canada's banking resilience for decades to come.

### An Adaptable & Empowering Leadership

From a small-town upbringing in British Columbia to spearheading operations at the heart of Canada's central bank, Alexis Corbett's journey is a powerful example of adaptable leadership and human-centred governance. She has shown that resilience is built through systems, empowered people, strategic insight, and humility grounded in service.

As COO, Alexis balances a mosaic of responsibilities, from operations and digital transformation to risk governance and currency issuance, all while nurturing the institution's strongest asset: its people. In an era of economic uncertainty and rapid technological change, Alexis's leadership exemplifies how operational leadership, when coupled with human empathy and strategic clarity, can safeguard a nation's financial future.

TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

Leadership Lessons

# CARLOS GHOSN

Former CEO of **Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi**

Not many business leaders have had as drastically an influence on the automotive industry worldwide- and generated as much controversy- as Carlos Ghosn has. Having been born in Brazil to Lebanese parents and schooled in France, Ghosn was a multinational who could replicate the same concept in the corporate environment. Ghosn, the former CEO of Renault, Nissan, and subsequently Mitsubishi, spearheaded one of the most ambitious and complex automotive partnerships ever.

Hyped as Le Cost Killer and later hailed as the saviour of Japan's second-largest carmaker, Ghosn later had his name tarnished by scandal after his arrest in Japan and subsequent escape to Lebanon. Nevertheless, his experience as a leader is priceless it teaches about strategies and cross-cultural administration, the perils of power consolidation, and the risks of governmental breakdown.

## Turnaround Leadership Demands Risky Decisions

When Carlos Ghosn assumed leadership of a struggling Nissan in 1999, many sceptics believed that a foreign boss would transform a traditional Japanese company. He disproved them within two years.

Ghosn cut expenses and shut down unprofitable plants, dismissed tens of thousands of workers, and destroyed highly established keiretsu supplier systems. Under his leadership, Nissan regained profitability, raised margins dramatically, and posted the best sales ever.

**Lesson to Learn**

Successful turnaround leaders do not back down from hard choices. They do what is necessary, even unpopularly, to reinstate long-term value.

## Cross-Cultural Management As a Strategic Asset

Ghosn achieved success due to his aptitude for succeeding in different cultural settings, ranging from hierarchical Japan to labour-intensive France and entrepreneurialism in Brazil.

He focused on cultural intelligence as a key to leadership, multicultural team building, and national mindset bridging to facilitate easier work within the alliance. He demonstrated that technical skills and profound intercultural understanding are needed to lead in a globalised economy.

**Lesson to Learn**

In the global business environment, cross-cultural fluency is a competitive advantage. Leaders must appreciate cultural differences while agreeing on common objectives.

## Efficiency should be in Line with Innovation

Although Ghosn's reputation was initially founded on aggressive cost-cutting, he also made major strategic bets on innovation, especially with electric vehicles (EVs). His reign at Nissan saw the company introduce the LEAF, the first mass-produced electric vehicle in history, back when EVS were still in their infancy.

His game of balancing efficiency within operations and long-term innovation was central in ensuring the alliance remained pertinent in an evolving market.

**Lesson to Learn**

Operating lean is required, but ambitious leadership also needs big bets on the future.

## Alliances Thrive on Vision, Not Ownership

At its height, the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi Alliance was the largest automotive group in the world, now producing more than 10 million vehicles a year. However, as Ghosn engineered the financial and operating synergy, behind the scenes, cultural and governance mismatches started to brew.

The absence of a common system of governance between the French and Japanese organisations ultimately led to political strains and Ghosn's collapse.

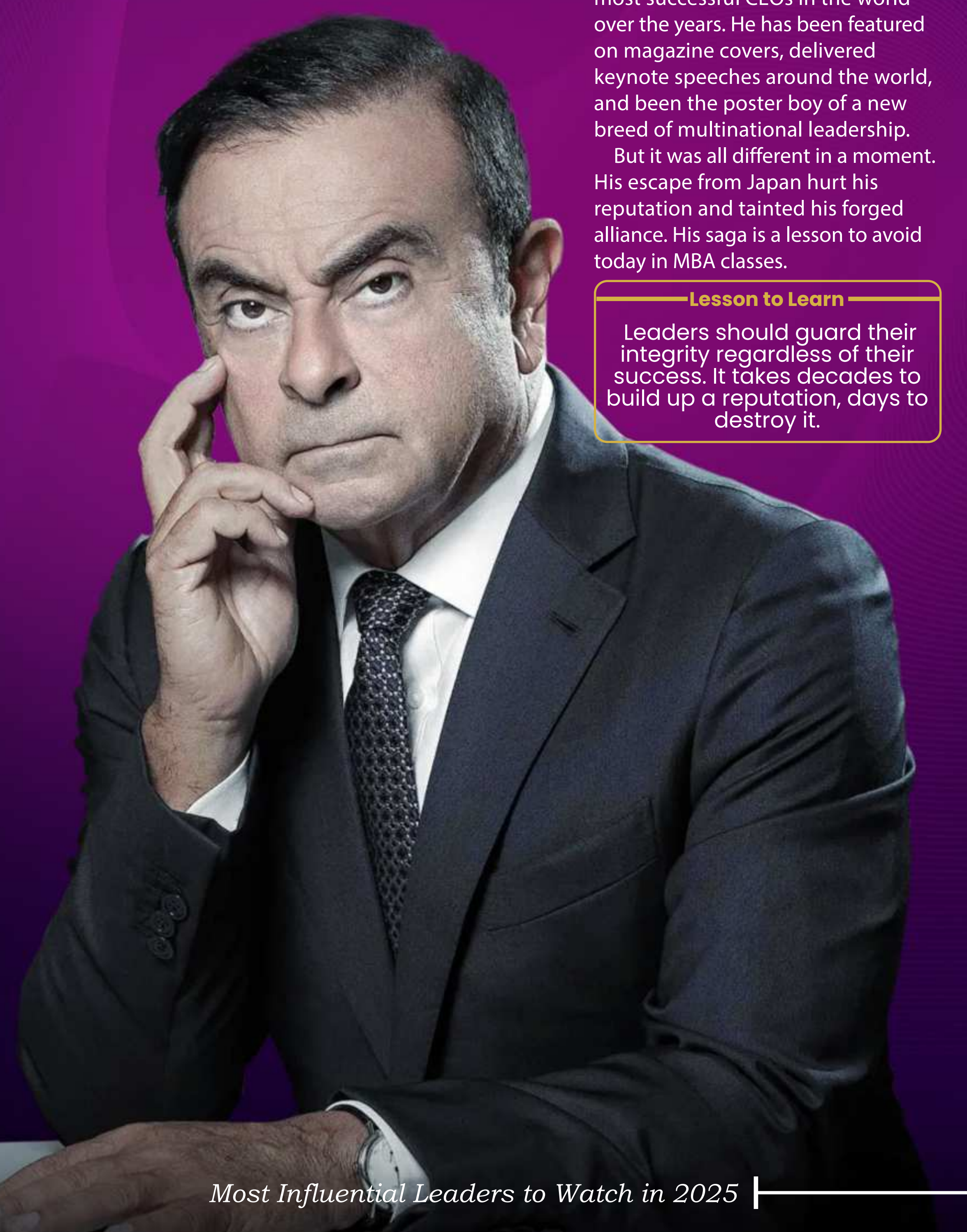
**Lesson to Learn**

Business partnerships should be based on transparency, mutual respect and a common vision- not only financial gain.

## Charisma has the power to create and destroy a Legacy

The leadership approach used by Ghosn was frequently outlined as charismatic, courageous, and dictatorial. He was recognised to inspire teams, command loyalty, and be accountability-driven. Nonetheless, his larger-than-life image attracted attention later on, especially when his salary and unquestioned power brought issues related to governance.

His 2018 arrest in Japan over purported financial malpractices and flight into Lebanon were among the most sensational falls in corporate history.



**Lesson to Learn**

Charisma encourages accountability, and the abuse of power destroys it. Institutional guardrails, checks, andhumility are part of sustainable leadership.

## The reputation of a leader is the most vulnerable property

Ghosn has been hailed as one of the most successful CEOs in the world over the years. He has been featured on magazine covers, delivered keynote speeches around the world, and been the poster boy of a new breed of multinational leadership.

But it was all different in a moment. His escape from Japan hurt his reputation and tainted his forged alliance. His saga is a lesson to avoid today in MBA classes.

**Lesson to Learn**

Leaders should guard their integrity regardless of their success. It takes decades to build up a reputation, days to destroy it.

## Strength in the Eye of the Storm

Even after his legal woes and controversial departure from Japan, Ghosn has sought to justify his legacy and explain his side of the story in interviews, speeches, and a memoir. Whether you view him as a visionary or a wanted man, there is no doubt that Ghosn is a strong, self-confident, and rebellious man.

We can still hear him speak up about leadership reforms, corporate accountability, and business agility, which speaks to the fact that he sought to impact the global business dialogue.

**Lesson to Learn**

Legacy is not just about success; it is also determined by how a leader reacts to failure.

## Leadership Blueprint by Carlos Ghosn: A Powerful and Mixed Heritage

The career of Carlos Ghosn is full of contradictions, brilliant strategy, and doubtful governance, international cooperation, and internal conflict, personal ambition and backlash. Nevertheless, his management still shapes the way executives perceive turnaround strategy, international expansion, and innovation.

## A Warning and an Inspiration

The leadership experience of Carlos Ghosn is complicated yet very instructive. He was a boundary pusher and empire builder and industry changer, but also a reminder that unchecked success can often be followed by ethical, cultural and systemic risk.

Finally, the story of Ghosn is not a tale of cars or companies. It is a leadership case study, which requires reading, interpretation, and consideration by every aspiring leader in the contemporary global business environment.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

Human-Centered Leader in a Hyper-Intelligent Age

# ASHLEY SHERMAN

*Senior VP of Global Sales,*
**SoftServe**

The best leaders today don't just drive results—they design environments where results can thrive. They build trust quickly, navigate complexity with clarity, and lead with both precision and heart. As technology accelerates and expectations shift, leadership has become less about control and more about connection.

At the forefront of this evolution is Ashley Sherman, Senior VP of Global Sales at SoftServe, who's not just navigating disruption but shaping what's coming next with foresight, humility, and intent.

Over the past two decades, she has guided some of the world's most recognizable organizations—Verizon, Microsoft, Amazon, Pegasystems, and Salesforce—through strategic change, emerging technologies, and cultural transformation. Her leadership blends enterprise discipline with a distinctly human approach, rooted in the belief that systems only succeed when people are empowered to lead within them.

Now serving as Senior Vice President of Global Sales at SoftServe, Ashley helps clients across sectors future-proof their businesses through intelligent ecosystems, AI integration, and customer-centric design.

TradeFlock spoke with Ashley Sherman to explore the leadership principles, pivotal moments, and bold thinking that have driven her rise to success.

### Q From Verizon to global tech firms and now SoftServe, what shaped your journey?

It's been a journey of transformation and impact. At Verizon, I learned the value of scale, strategy, and customer-driven innovation. Working with top global tech firms pushed me to lead across cultures and focus on outcomes beyond just systems. Joining SoftServe has been a pivotal step, where innovation, AI and human-centric design come together. What excites me is helping shape the future alongside clients, especially through programs that merge emerging tech with real-world results.

### Q What emerging trends are reshaping modern business that you are most excited about right now?

One of the most exciting—and often overlooked—trends across industries and organizations is the emergence of adaptive intelligence ecosystems. We're moving beyond standalone AI into integrated platforms that combine real-time data, predictive analytics, and generative tools. In modern organisations, this power of micro-personalization at scale creates engagement models that adapt in milliseconds. Sustainable business models are also gaining momentum, evolving sustainability into systems that restore, through closed-loop systems and purpose-led engagement. Digital twins are transforming product lifecycle management, cutting time-to-market and boosting margin visibility. On the enterprise front, low-code and composable stacks are shifting innovation to business users, while AI copilots are augmenting decision-making across functions. And with rising regulation, privacy-as-a-feature is becoming critical. Ultimately, I'm excited by tech that brings intelligence, speed, and humanity directly to the user.

### Q What key strategic lessons from Salesforce or Amazon guide your decisions today?

One lesson I carry forward is this: "*Scale without clarity is chaos—and innovation without customer empathy is noise.*" At Salesforce, I saw the impact of a true customer-360 mindset—every product and conversation focused on delivering connected, personalized experiences. That discipline around integration and platform thinking now shapes how we help clients unify digital ecosystems at SoftServe.

At Amazon, operational excellence and working backward from the customer weren't just principles—they were daily habits. Bold bets were always grounded in real-world needs. I still rely on tools like "***start with the press release***" or "***disagree and commit***" to keep teams aligned while moving fast.

Both companies instilled a bias for action balanced with systems thinking. That blend of urgency and structure is essential for building resilient, scalable strategies in dynamic markets.

### Q How do you spot and grow leadership within your team?

I look for leadership in how people show up—not in titles, but in ownership. Those who lean into ambiguity, take initiative, and lead quietly under pressure often stand out. I give rising talent stretch assignments that test their resilience and strategic thinking in real-world scenarios. Coaching is less about giving answers and more about asking the right questions. I watch for values like integrity, humility, and accountability—especially when things get tough. Once I see potential, I create visibility through high-impact opportunities. Paired with a culture of feedback and reflection, this approach helps shape leaders who are both sharp and grounded.

### Q What personal shift has most improved your leadership in recent years?

A key shift in my leadership has been moving from driving outcomes to creating the conditions that enable outcomes to emerge. Earlier, I focused on speed, clarity, and execution. Over time, I observed a significant impact in building trust-based environments where people can thrive. I began listening more—without rushing to solve—and replaced giving answers with asking catalytic questions. I let go of needing to be right and instead created space for others to be bold. This change has transformed my leadership. Today, it's about amplifying others' potential. The result is a more engaged, empowered team that moves forward with or without me in the room.

### Q What's something you haven't done yet in your career but hope to pursue one day?

One thing I haven't done yet—but deeply hope to—is create a space where innovation and humanity meet. I envision an interdisciplinary lab where technologists, humanists, and business leaders collaborate to co-create ethical, world-changing solutions. It wouldn't just be about launching new products, but about asking better questions: How do we design systems that heal rather than just scale? What does responsible innovation look like with humanity at the center? After years of leading at scale, I'm drawn to a place where bold ideas live beyond short-term ROI—a convergence of strategy, spirit, and science. It's not yet on my résumé, but it's in motion.

BIG TAKE

# What B-Schools Don't Teach About Leadership

**Anupma Ranjan,**
Vice President,
Talent Acquisition, **FactSet**

Business Schools often fail to impart the nuanced, human-centric dimension of leadership that defines success in the real world. Leadership, at its core, is not just about managing balance sheets or implementing strategic models; it's about understanding people, navigating conflict, and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. These are aspects rarely covered in lecture halls, but they are crucial for effective leadership in a world defined by complexity and rapid change.

Business Schools often neglect emotional intelligence, a vital skill for effective leadership. Leaders must manage their emotions, understand others' feelings, and use empathy and adaptability to inspire teams. Skills like reading non-verbal cues and connecting with diverse individuals are essential but cannot be taught solely through case studies. Without emotional intelligence, technically proficient leaders may struggle to foster strong team relationships.

Business Schools often overlook the complexities of ethical dilemmas, which require leaders to make challenging decisions affecting livelihoods, communities, and the environment. While textbooks address ethical frameworks, they fail to convey the emotional struggles and ambiguity involved in balancing competing interests.

Conflict resolution is also an unexplored area in Business Schools. While they focus on negotiation and collaboration, they often neglect interpersonal conflicts found in real-world scenarios. Effective leaders need the ability to transform disruptions into opportunities for growth, a skill gained through experience rather than theory.

Business schools often rely on predictable models, whereas real-world leadership involves navigating uncertain, complex challenges. Leadership training should emphasise embracing ambiguity, creative problem-solving, and taking calculated risks.

Additionally, the role of mentorship and networking is often reduced to a secondary priority in business schools. Real-world leadership is deeply intertwined with the ability to leverage relationships for mutual growth. Leaders must consistently act as mentors to their teams, helping individuals unlock their potential while navigating their own professional challenges.

Finally, the personal toll of leadership is an area business schools rarely address. Leading an organisation often involves immense pressure, long hours, and the burden of responsibility for others' well-being. Leaders must learn to balance their professional roles with their personal lives, maintaining their physical and mental health while managing the demands of their positions.

Leadership in the real world is not a skill that can be perfected within the confines of an academic institution. It is a dynamic, ever-evolving practice shaped by experience, trial and error, and the ability to learn from failure. Business schools have laid the foundation for understanding 'what' leadership entails, but it is time to focus on the 'how' and 'why' that truly define success in today's interconnected and fast-paced world.

Most Influential
LEADERS to WATCH
in 2025

## Disrupting Real Estate with Smart, Sustainable Solutions

# DAVID JOHNSON

*CEO,*
**Gingerbread Homes**

Modern-day homes have become increasingly standardized, with gray walls, flat roofs, and lifeless rooms. Now, it's easy to forget that living spaces were once filled with wonder, warmth, and a sense of story. What if our homes could spark imagination, encourage connection, and still be practical, sustainable, and affordable? What if a house felt less like a product and more like a personal expression? David Johnson, CEO of Gingerbread Homes, has turned it to reality and has changed the norms.

A visionary, an innovator in construction, and a storyteller, David believes homes should inspire joy and creativity while meeting real-world needs. Drawing from his upbringing on the Navajo Reservation and deep connections with indigenous communities across North America, David combines technology, sustainability, and a touch of magic. Through Gingerbread Homes, he reimagines housing by blending robotics and AI with whimsical designs that make small spaces feel expansive and alive. His work is more than building houses; it's about creating places where people can feel at home, regardless of their background or budget.

In this exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, David opens up about the philosophy that drives Gingerbread Homes, the innovations shaking up the housing industry, and the profound personal truths he's gathered along the way.

**Q You've led across vastly different industries, from engineering sales to healthcare registry management. How have these diverse experiences influenced your leadership DNA, especially in building a mission-driven startup?**

My background across industries has grounded me deeply in understanding the essentials, where different sectors intersect and where synergies lie. It taught me that if people don't have access to the basics—food, clothing, shelter- then lofty ideas and societal progress mean very little. Those core human needs are non-negotiable. And that's where I've chosen to focus my energy: creating real, viable housing solutions that help restore that foundation for people. That's what shapes my leadership today.

**Q Let's talk about your mission. What inspired the founding of Gingerbread Homes?**

It's all about a term thrown around far too casually: "affordable housing." That phrase has been diluted into clichés—cardboard boxes, shoebox flats. We're reimagining what affordable really means without sacrificing comfort or dignity. We're not offering the solution, but a viable one that combines better design, smarter materials, and human-centred thinking to meet millions' needs. The world needs homes, not just houses.

**Q With rising urban density and environmental pressure, how do your compact, vertically creative GB cottages redefine luxury and livability?**

I think we need to start appreciating the power of "little." It's not about building bigger, but building smarter. GB Cottages are compact, under 1,000 square feet, but they're fully defined spaces, nothing's left ambiguous. The bed folds out of the wall, the cupboards are built in, and even swings are integrated. It's not just space-saving; it's dignity-saving. First-time home buyers shouldn't need to worry about furnishing a home. We've done it for them, efficiently, beautifully, and purposefully.

> I think we need to start appreciating the power of "little." It's not about building bigger, but building smarter.

**Q What are the biggest systemic or cultural barriers in the U.S. and Canadian housing ecosystems today?**

There's a misconception that housing shortages are a third-world issue. They're not. Even in places like Lehi, Utah, my daughter and son-in-law, both highly educated and well-employed, took nine years to buy a 35-year-old fixer-upper. My other children are still waiting. That's not a flaw; it's a system failure. It all piles up with housing costs, outdated building methods, overregulated zoning, and land misuse. And it's affecting everyone, not just low-income families.

**Q What's your leadership mantra? What's the biggest lesson you've learned while building Gingerbread Homes?**

> **"If we build it, they will come.**

That quote from Field of Dreams stuck with me. Back in 1997, I built a modular show home on a Navajo reservation where 24,000 homes were needed. Over 2,500 people walked through that one home in two months. It taught me that people don't just want houses, they want homes that inspire. At GB, our target demographic surprisingly became children. They walk into our cottages and see swings, slides, and even pirate ships. If kids light up in our homes, we know we're doing something right. They remind us who we're really building for, families, not financiers.

**Q As a leader, how do you navigate setbacks while staying true to your vision of social impact?**

I've known failure. Millennial Homes, my earlier venture, didn't go as planned. But I learned a lot. And I didn't quit. Housing is too important to get discouraged. Unfortunately, many in the industry are stuck in a mindset of "whatever the market will bear," ignoring the shrinking middle class. The real innovation isn't just in smart materials or clever layouts. It's in breaking that mindset and putting people back at the centre of housing.

**Q If you could share one leadership principle with the next generation of social entrepreneurs, what would it be?**

Get back to basics. We've overcomplicated housing and turned it into an economic whip rather than a human necessity. We're building massive homes five feet apart from each other, ignoring the acres of empty land surrounding our cities. Housing must stop being a playground for speculation and start being a platform for community, stability, and growth. If we keep that at the core, the rest will follow.

Startup OF THE MONTH

# Scimplify

## Revolutionising Speciality Chemicals from Lab to Market

Scimplify is reinventing the sourcing, production, and delivery of speciality chemicals through special R&D competence, digital technology, and a worldwide, quality manufacturing network. Since its inception in mid-2023, the startup has become a full-stack, B2B player in the speciality chemicals industry, seeking to simplify all aspects of the product lifecycle.

### A Scale-driven Science-First Platform

Scimplify aims to simplify complex chemistry requirements for manufacturers in pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals, flavours & fragrances, and industrial chemicals. It uses its own digital platform and an audited ecosystem of over 200 partner manufacturing plants in India and globally.

ATOMS is Central to its operation, the digital backbone indexing 2,000+ speciality chemical products from over 5,000 factories across 10 countries, including India, China, Vietnam, Egypt, and Japan. This plug-and-play system allows clients to order ready-to-produce chemicals or collaborate on custom syntheses without needing their own production facilities.

### R&D capabilities: Your own Chemistry Department

Scimplify's R&D infrastructure features a team of 15+ qualified scientists led by seasoned experts like Dr. Ravi Ponniah, Dr. Javed Iqbal, and Dr. Prem Kumar, each with over 30 years in pharmaceuticals, organic synthesis, and biotech. This capability optimises processes, discovers new molecules, and ensures stable technology transfer to manufacturing partners.

The production system is designed to integrate novelty with scale-up to facilitate seamless transitions for clients from research to commercial products. Scimplify's value system emphasises innovation, integrity, excellence, and sustainability, highlighted by its commitment to environmentally friendly formulations and sustainable methods.

### High Rate of Growth and a Capital Momentum that is Impressive

Since its inception, Scimplify has gained considerable interest from investors with a total of $54 m raised in three funding rounds:

Seed Round (Dec 2023): $3.8M by 3one4 Capital and Beenext.

Series A (Jun 2024 Aug): $7M- 9.5M by Omnivore (Lead), Bertelsmann India Investments, 3one4 Capital, Beenext.

Series B (Mar 2025): $40M co-led by Accel and Bertelsmann India Investments, raising a total of $150M post-money.

The Series B round brought new investors such as UMI and renewed the support of previous ones, which is the confirmation of the success of the decision to grow and provide capabilities of the global scale by Scimplify.

### Global Reach: Servicing Hundreds of Clients Around the World

Currently, Scimplify boasts of over 600 customers in over 16 countries-including key markets like the U.S, Europe and Japan. Its model is a solution to one of the most significant gaps in the global supply chain, namely, specialty chemicals sourced and manufactured beyond concentrated suppliers such as China that meet compliance regulations such as U.S. FDA and GMP.

Vetting of manufacturers using third-party audits and sorting by capacity, chemistry and geography, and regulatory compliance, Scimplify provides transparency and confidence in a fractured ecosystem.






### Differentiation: Not Just a Market

Whereas most of the platforms are just a bridge between buyers and sellers, Scimplify is a full-stack partner. It provides specialised synthesis and process re-engineering to enhance cost-effectiveness and relevance to clients, which is crucial to subtle applications in pharma and crop sciences.

This qualifies Scimplify as a supplier and an innovation center, and the perfect solution to companies wishing to have custom solutions at a lower cost of having their own laboratories or production lines.

### A Timely Solution in a Shifting Supply Chain

The increase of Scimplify is also associated with the rising need in the world to diversify its sourcing sources out of China-based manufacturers. India has emerged as the second-largest exporter of agrochemicals and is expected to produce twice the amount of chemicals by 2027 through government and structure-based incentives.

With companies increasingly focused on greener, more sustainable chemical solutions, Scimplify's science-based approach and digital transparency can present a good fit with global ESG and regulatory agendas.

Salil Srivastava
C0-Founder

Sachin Santhosh
C0-Founder

### Electronic Control and Quality Testing

One of the pillars of Scimplify is transparency. Its in-house digital platform enables its customers to monitor all stages of the project lifecycle including lab trials to bulk production. It involves quality assurance by implementation of a three-step inspection process of raw materials to finished products.

Non-negotiable compliance: Our manufacturers are audited semi-annually to ensure the integrity of the process and global standards, so clients are assured of every shipment.

### Issues and the Future

Scimplify has to grapple with the common startup challenges despite its blistering development. Future steps include the expansion of regulatory footprints in new territories (such as U.S and Japan), the realization of uniform plant-level quality as well as the implementation of factory acquisitions.

Operational discipline and technical leadership will be necessary to scale R&D to meet the needs of many different customers and to keep audit standards high in hundreds of facilities.

### What Next: Expansion, M&A, New Capabilities

Scimplify intends to grow multifold with new money:

Geographic Expansion: Enter new markets with existing offices in Dubai, Indonesia, and future hubs in the U.S. and Japan.

M&A Strategy: Consider acquiring manufacturing facilities to gain scale and access to regulated markets.

R&D Strength: Fortify ATOMS, introduce novel chemistries, and develop sustaining product platforms in pharma, crop care, and flavours and fragrances.

### Conclusion: A Speciality Chemicals Game-Changer

Scimplify is quickly establishing a new norm in speciality chemicals with lab-level innovation, digital transparency, and flexible manufacturing all in the same place. With its R&D-based origins and expansion to operating internationally and attracting significant investments and customers, the company is a perfect example of India as a country that is increasingly becoming an important part of the global chemical value chain.

**At a Glance**

**Founded:** 2023
**Founders:** Salil Srivastava, Sachin Santhosh & Dheeraj Dhingra
**Headquarters:** Bengaluru, India
**Funding:** $54 million
**Key Investors:** Accel, Bertelsmann India Invement, Omnivore, 3one4 Capital and Beenext

In case it is able to implement its strategies, extending boundaries, introducing technology, and instilling sustainability, Scimplify is in a good position to become a long-term and trusted partner in the supply of specialty chemicals internationally in years to come.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

Shaping Leadership For The AI Age

# DERWISH ROSALIA

*Co-Founder & CEO,*
**Upvance**

The tools we once built to support us are now smart enough to replace us. In financial institutions, this shift is already here, rewriting job roles, expectations, and the very nature of decision-making. Amid the noise and uncertainty, some financial professionals scramble to keep pace. While others take a different route, they lead the way for others.

Among those leading with purpose and foresight is Derwish Rosalia, a seasoned auditor whose career spans PwC, Deloitte, BDO, and BMW Finance. In 2022, while working independently, he watched AI perform tasks he had spent years mastering and recognised it not as a threat, but as a turning point.

That realisation sparked the beginning of Upvance, his venture dedicated to helping financial professionals rethink their roles, embrace technology, and reclaim their time. His story is not just about adapting to change but transforming himself and businesses with it.





In this exclusive feature, Derwish shares how a quiet moment with technology reshaped his purpose and why the next chapter of financial professionals begins with reinvention.

### Q What inspired your shift from auditing to AI education, and how has it shaped your view of thriving in the AI era?

My shift began in late 2022, while freelancing as a financial professional. Out of curiosity, I started experimenting with ChatGPT and was stunned. It could handle core aspects of my work as an auditor and controller, sometimes more effectively than I could. But instead of feeling threatened, I felt a spark.

I realized this was more than just a tool. It was a turning point. Like electricity or the internet, AI is reshaping not just how we work, but what work means. That moment gave me a new mission: to help others lead through this change, not resist it.

Thriving in the AI era is not about doing the same things faster. It is about reimagining our roles entirely. AI handles repetitive tasks, allowing us to focus on creativity, strategy, and human connection.

### Q When training financial professionals, what's the biggest mindset shift you aim to create in them?

The most important shift is moving from optimisation to reinvention. Many financial professionals start by using AI to enhance their existing processes, aiming for a modest efficiency gain. But that mindset holds them back, and in some cases, makes them less relevant.

I encourage a complete reset. Instead of asking, *"How can AI help me do my job faster?"* the question becomes, *"What's the smartest way to reach our goals, now that AI exists?"*

That's a very different approach. It takes courage to question long-standing processes and design something better from the ground up. True leadership in this era starts by becoming an architect of change rather than just a user of new tools.

### Q What's one entrepreneurial challenge that truly tested you, and how did you come out of it stronger?

My biggest challenge has been transitioning from a successful freelancer to a true entrepreneur. As a financial consultant, I enjoyed stability, clear contracts, clear deliverables, and the freedom to focus on execution. But building my own AI training and consulting business changed everything. Suddenly, I was the strategist, the marketer, the salesperson, and the expert, all at once.

Initially, I saw marketing and sales as hurdles. I felt pressure to present myself and chase leads constantly. The turning point came when I shifted my focus. I stopped asking how to find the next client and started asking how to deliver so much value that clients would become advocates.

Today, growth comes through trust, results, and word of mouth. I've learned that real entrepreneurship isn't about selling yourself but making your clients succeed in measurable, lasting ways.

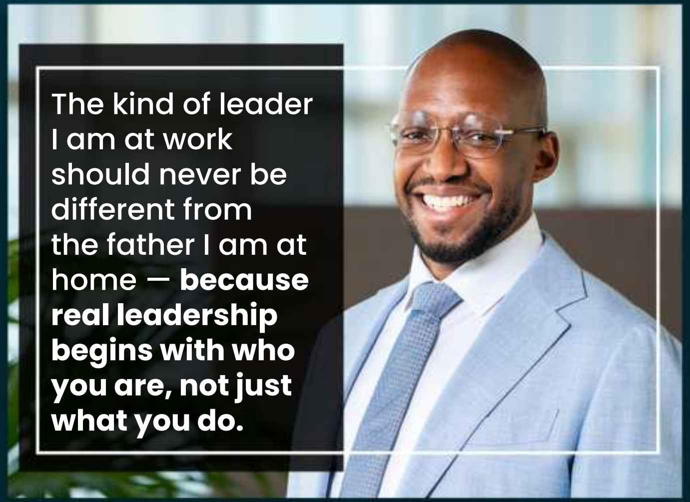
### Q You often speak about valuing time deeply. How do you personally guard your time and energy each day?

I treat time as life's only truly non-renewable asset. You can recover money, but never a lost moment. That belief shapes everything I do. I plan my week by first blocking time for what matters most — my family and my health. As a father of five, uninterrupted time with them is sacred. I also prioritise exercise, because health is an investment in presence and clarity.

Only once those pillars are in place do I schedule focused work sessions. I rely on early mornings for deep, undistracted thinking. I've also learned to protect my energy by saying no more often. Every yes carries a cost. I firmly believe that time management is about living in alignment with what I value most.

### Q What are some unexpected leadership lessons fatherhood has taught you that you now apply at Upvance?

Fatherhood has been the most unexpected but powerful leadership training I've had. It taught me the importance of radical clarity because with children, there's no space for vague direction. They force you to be direct, honest, and present. I apply the same principle at Upvance, especially with younger colleagues.




What surprised me most, though, is how fatherhood became a bridge to the next generation. My older sons are the same age as our junior colleagues. Through them, I understand how naturally this generation embraces AI — and how important it is to lead not with authority, but with empathy, curiosity, and shared purpose.

# JULY 17, 1945

## THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE BEGINS

On July 17, 1945, as the world exhaled from the wreckage of World War II, a new chapter quietly opened in a leafy suburb of Berlin called Potsdam. The guns had gone silent in Europe, but around a stately 18th-century palace, Cecilienhof, a different kind of battle was beginning: one of ideologies, borders, and the fate of millions.

That day, three of the most powerful men in the world—Winston Churchill, Harry S. Truman, and Joseph Stalin, met not as allies celebrating victory, but as architects of an uncertain future. What unfolded over the next few weeks would redraw maps, birth tensions that defined the Cold War, and seed unresolved questions that still echo across continents.

### What Really Happened on July 17, 1945

The Potsdam Conference, which ran from July 17 to August 2, 1945, was the third and final meeting between the "Big Three" Allied powers during World War II. It began just two months after Germany's surrender and days before the atomic bombs would level Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The opening day, July 17, was marked by a mix of diplomatic formality and underlying tension. The leaders arrived with competing visions for post-war Europe. Truman, just four months into his presidency after the sudden death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, was an untested figure in global affairs. Churchill was soon to be replaced mid-conference by Clement Attlee after the British general election. Stalin, riding high on Soviet victories in Eastern Europe, held all the leverage he needed, and he knew it.

While the formal agenda centered on the administration of defeated Germany, its demilitarisation, denazification, and reparations, the real conversations quickly turned to spheres of influence, the fate of Poland, the division of Germany, and the looming threat of Japan. A secret note, the Potsdam Declaration, was also finalised in the days that followed, giving Japan an ultimatum to surrender unconditionally or face "prompt and utter destruction."

Unbeknownst to Stalin, just one day before the conference opened, the United States had successfully tested the first atomic bomb in the New Mexico desert. This fact would soon redefine power dynamics, and how negotiations unfolded.

### The Road to Potsdam

The seeds of the Potsdam Conference were sown years earlier in wartime summits like Tehran (1943) and Yalta (February 1945). At Yalta, the leaders had agreed in principle on dividing Germany into four occupation zones and ensuring democratic elections in liberated countries. But by the time the Big Three met in Potsdam, those agreements were unraveling in practice.

The global context was changing rapidly, as Nazi Germany had fallen, but Japan still fought fiercely in the Pacific. The Soviet Red Army had occupied much of Eastern Europe, and Stalin was quietly setting up pro-communist regimes. On the other hand, the United States had changed leadership, with Truman bringing a far less conciliatory approach than Roosevelt. Additionally, Britain's empire was waning, and Churchill's hold on leadership was slipping, soon to be confirmed by his electoral defeat during the conference. In many ways, Potsdam was less about concluding World War II and more about defining the world that would emerge from its ashes.

### The Socio-Economic and Global Impact of the Potsdam Conference

The decisions made or not made at Potsdam had profound ripple effects:

**Germany's Fate and the Seeds of the Cold War**
Germany was divided into four occupation zones, leading directly to the formation of East and West Germany. Berlin, similarly divided, became ground zero for the Cold War. The lack of agreement on long-term governance fostered distrust, culminating in the Berlin Blockade (1948) and, eventually, the building of the Berlin Wall.

**The Nuclear Age Begins**
Just days after Potsdam ended, the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima (Aug 6) and Nagasaki (Aug 9). Truman had informed Stalin vaguely about "a new weapon," but the Soviets already had spies in the Manhattan Project and soon accelerated their nuclear program. The nuclear arms race began in earnest.

**Rise of Bipolar World Order**
Potsdam cemented the breakdown of the wartime alliance. What followed was a division of the world into U.S.-led capitalist democracies and Soviet-led communist states. Institutions like NATO (1949) and the Warsaw Pact (1955) were rooted in the mistrust that grew from Potsdam.

**Economic Shifts and Reconstruction**
The Allies initially agreed on extracting reparations, especially for the USSR, which had borne the brunt of Nazi aggression. However, the U.S. soon pivoted with the Marshall Plan (1948) to rebuild Europe, excluding the Soviet sphere, which further deepened the East-West divide.

**Japan's Fate**
The Potsdam Declaration demanded Japan's unconditional surrender, rejected at first, it set the stage for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, ended WWII completely and began U.S. occupation, democratic reform, and economic transformation.

### A Silent Shift That Shaped Generations

The conference at Potsdam wasn't loud like the battles that preceded it. There were no bombs dropped, no treaties signed with fanfare. But in quiet rooms with cigars, notes, and guarded smiles, the shape of the post-war world was decided—half cooperative, half confrontational. July 17, 1945, marked as the beginning of the conference and the birth of a new geopolitical era. The war may have ended in trenches and ruins, but the peace that followed was hammered out in words, and its echoes still define the world we live in today.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

Turning Complex Markets into Clear Financial Strategy

# JEFF HOFFMEISTER

*CFO,* **Shopify**

Managing the finances of a dynamic, cloud-based e-commerce powerhouse like Shopify is not a small feat. With more than 1.7 million merchants across 175 countries, the challenge lies in balancing hypergrowth ambitions with investor expectations, navigating global economic headwinds, and investing wisely in innovation, all while maintaining operational discipline. Since October 2022, Jeff Hoffmeister, Shopify's CFO, has been at the helm of this financial labyrinth, applying his extensive experience in technology investment banking and financial strategy to guide Shopify toward sustained growth and profitability.

## The Journey of an Auditor

Jeff's journey began in rigorous corridors of PricewaterhouseCoopers, where he honed his skills in audit, finance, and M&A, a formative start that built his meticulous attention to detail . Armed with a BSBA in Finance from Georgetown University and an MBA from the University of Virginia's Darden School, along with a CPA license, he had the academic credentials to match his early career's growing responsibilities.

I did auditing for only a couple years, but the fundamental understanding of accounting that it provided has been extremely valuable. It really helped me understand the nuances of the financial statements and the application of accounting principles, a knowledge base that I very frequently call upon for any financial statements topic that we are thinking through.

## Mastering Tech Finance at Morgan Stanley

For over two decades, Jeff excelled at Morgan Stanley, where he would rise to become Managing Director and Co-Head of Americas Tech Banking. He previously led Morgan Stanley's EMEA Tech Banking practice in Europe, a role that saw him steering high-profile transactions in major tech markets. His responsibilities spanned IPOs, follow-on offerings, debt and equity financings, convertible notes, and M&A, supporting numerous marquee tech companies, including Shopify during its own IPO.

## Steering Shopify's Financial Ship

sssssTobi Lütke, Shopify's founder/CEO, hailed Jeff's "more than 20 years of investment banking experience in the technology sector" and his "keen vision of the future of the industry" . Shopify itself emphasised the strategic value Jeff brings: guiding financial strategy to deliver greater value for merchants, partners, and investors.

## Financial Strategy Tailored for Cloud Commerce

Shopify's platform offers a suite of services, from subscription to payments, merchants services, fulfillment, and more. Jeff oversees a complex revenue structure encompassing recurring and non-recurring income streams. His challenge: forecasting accurately across global markets, managing cash flow across geographies, and sustaining investor confidence, all while guiding strategic capital allocation to fuel Shopify's growth.

## Behind the Numbers

Jeff has been praised for his calm, analytical leadership style. Trusted by the executive team, he aligns closely with strategic partners like Tobi Lütke and COO Kaz Nejatian. His background in investment banking ensures informed decision-making on growth investments, capital markets, and M&A activity. While broad public recognition or awards specifically for Jeff are limited, his leadership amid economic headwinds is a testament to his reputation as a stabilising, strategic force within Shopify's C-suite.

## A Trusted Guardian of Shopify's Mission

As finance chief of a globally trusted e-commerce platform, Jeff plays a crucial role in supporting Shopify's mission: making commerce better for everyone. Shopify's recent AI upgrades like AI Store Builder and post-purchase upsells, are part of a capital-intensive roadmap that Jeff must fund and monitor.

Under his watch, Shopify continues exploring financial options, such as convertible debt or equity offerings, as well as potential acquisitions, all while refining internal budgeting, forecasts, and investment strategies designed to boost merchant success.

"The harder I work the luckier I get. That saying resonates with me. Whether it is in Finance or elsewhere, I believe opportunities more frequently present themselves to people who are working hard and trying to deliver great service to their clients and colleagues."

## Growth, AI & Strategic Equity

Today, Shopify's stock sits around $114, having rebounded from highs and adjusted during economic uncertainty . Jeff's near-term goals include strengthening Shopify's balance sheet, maintaining liquidity and funding future innovation, optimizing capital structure, exploring financing options while managing dilution. While, he also focuses on supporting merchant-focused investment, ensuring funding for key initiatives like AI tools, payment infrastructure, and global expansion, along with reinforcing investor relations.

## Human Impact Behind the CFO Title

Despite the analytical nature of his role, Jeff remains grounded in Shopify's mission. Transitioning from deal-driven banking to an operating executive role indicates his appetite for direct impact. Colleagues describe him as steady, prepared, and deeply mission-aligned, a professional committed to long-term value creation.

## Leadership Through Transition

From PwC auditor to Morgan Stanley tech banker, and now Shopify's CFO, Jeff Hoffmeister brings a rare mix of financial rigor, strategic foresight, and turnaround capability. He remains a steady hand guiding Shopify through post-pandemic normalization, economic turbulence, and into its next growth chapter, balanced, ambitious, and relentlessly focused on making commerce better for everyone. In the fast-changing world of cloud commerce, Jeff Hoffmeister exemplifies how finance can be a catalyst for numbers, platform innovation, merchant empowerment, and long-term resilience.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

Leading With Clarity and Human Connection

# KATHRYN LANCIONI

*Founder and CEO,* **Presenting Perfection**

Owning any room starts long before you speak—it begins in how you choose to carry yourself. Kathryn Lancioni has spent her life mastering that silent moment, turning presence into influence. As a young journalist, she learned the magnetic pull of well-chosen words. Later, she helped PanAmSat make history in corporate communications, shaping investor narratives that culminated with ringing the NYSE bell.

Yet the real breakthrough came in 2006, when her passion for genuine connection led her to found Presenting Perfection. It wasn't just a coaching business but a laboratory for transformation. Kathryn took academic research from the classrooms of Rutgers, Seton Hall, and Columbia, merged it with battlefield experience in boardrooms, and built a methodology that has empowered thousands, from nervous teenagers to Fortune 500 CEOs, to step into their voice and stand firmly in it.

Today, Kathryn bridges the gap between theory and practice. She lectures and advises, always grounded in empathy, clarity, and truth. Her unique leadership, deeply rooted in empathy, clarity, and human connection, continues to redefine excellence in communication.

In an exclusive interview with TradeFlock, she reveals her challenges, definition of meaningful leadership, and the secret ingredient behind "**Presenting Perfection**", a must-have trait for every modern leader.

**Q You've been a professor, strategist, coach, and now CEO. How has your view of influence changed along the way?**

My definition of influence has evolved with each role. Early on, as a journalist and strategist, it was about visibility, shaping narratives and ensuring the message landed. As a professor, influence meant empowering students to find their voice. Coaching made it even more personal, shifting the focus to impact and helping others unlock their potential. Now, as a CEO, I see influence as a responsibility: it's not just about leading, but lifting others and creating a ripple effect that empowers people long after you've left the room.

**Q What's one lesson journalism taught you that still shapes your leadership?**

One lesson from journalism has always stayed with me: *listen before you lead*. In the newsroom, you can't rely on assumptions because every story begins with genuine curiosity and a willingness to dig deeper. That discipline of truly listening to what's said and unsaid taught me how to build trust and communicate purposefully. Now, as a CEO and leader, I carry that same mindset into every room. I start by listening, seeking to understand the full story behind every challenge and every person. As I've learned so far, influence isn't about volume but clarity, authenticity, and the courage to listen first and lead thoughtfully.



TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

“My biggest growth has come from my own imperfections: moments when I missed the mark, didn't have the answer, or doubted my voice.

**Q In a world full of digital noise, what does meaningful communication leadership look like today?**

Today, meaningful communication leadership means choosing intention over volume and connection over clout. It's not about being the loudest voice—it's about speaking with clarity, empathy, and purpose. True leaders listen, curate, and connect; they create space for diverse voices and lead authentically, even when uncomfortable. In this digital age, real influence extends far beyond just saying more. Today, it is more about saying what matters, building trust, and inspiring action through honest, purposeful communication.

**Q What do most leaders get wrong about personal branding, and how should they rethink it?**

Many leaders mistakenly equate personal branding with self-promotion, but it's actually about strategic self-awareness. Results matter, but so does visibility and if you don't shape your narrative, someone else will. Personal branding isn't just a headline or a bio; it's how you show up, respond under pressure, and the impression you leave behind. My advice is always to treat your brand as your reputation in action. Decide what you want to be known for, align your actions and communication with that vision, and be consistent. In today's world, a strong personal brand is about building trust and making a real impact.

**Q You coach others on "presenting perfection." As a leader, which imperfections have most shaped your own growth?**

I've learned that perfection isn't the goal—presence is. Despite the name, my work is about helping people show up authentically, not flawlessly. My biggest growth has come from my own imperfections: moments when I missed the mark, didn't have the answer, or doubted my voice. Early on, I thought I had to appear unshakable, but real connection happens in the cracks, not the gloss. Admitting mistakes, asking for help, and showing vulnerability have made me a stronger, more compassionate leader. Ultimately, our true power lies not in being perfect, but in being real and that's what I strive to embody and teach every day.

**Q What drives you more: building your legacy or enabling others to build theirs?**

What drives me most is enabling others to build their legacy. Titles or accolades don't measure my impact; rather, it's about helping people step into their voice and realize their potential. Watching someone move from hesitant to confident, or find the courage to lead authentically, fuels me daily. As Maya Angelou said, People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. If I can help someone feel empowered, seen, and heard, that becomes part of their legacy—and the most meaningful part of mine.

> I believe the most critical leadership traits will be **authenticity, adaptability, inclusive communication,** and **emotional resilience.**

**Q What was the moment in your career that redefined what leadership truly means to you?**

A defining shift came when I moved from shaping messages to becoming their voice. I had long worked behind the scenes—crafting strategy, building brands, guiding leaders. But stepping into teaching and coaching revealed something deeper: leadership isn't about control or perfection—it's about presence. That transition—from perfection to authenticity—changed everything. Today, I see leadership not as a title but as a daily practice built on clarity, courage, and vulnerability. A belief that drives every interaction nowadays is that "*Leadership isn't about having all the answers—it's about having the courage to be fully present when the questions get hard.*"





**Q How has emotional intelligence shaped the way you lead—and how has your EQ evolved with you?**

Early in my career, I believed success was about skill and execution. But over time, I learned that people rarely remember what you said—they remember how you made them feel. Emotional intelligence became my foundation. Whether I'm coaching an executive or mentoring a student, I've found that empathy, deep listening, and intuition often outweigh any strategy.

> Now, I lead with questions, **not answers.**
> I teach with curiosity, **not ego.**
> I coach with compassion, **not judgment.**

**Q What leadership traits will truly matter in a Gen Z-driven future of work?**

As Millennials and Gen Z reshape the workforce, leadership is being redefined. These generations crave meaning, transparency, and humanity—not hierarchy. In the next decade, the traits that will matter most are authenticity, adaptability, inclusive communication, and emotional resilience. They value leaders who are real, who admit when they don't know, and who listen deeply. Adaptability will be essential as change accelerates. Communication must move beyond clarity to connection—leaders must speak in ways people feel. And resilience must look like growth, not grit: acknowledging hardship and modeling how to move through it. These generations don't fear disruption —they've lived it. What they seek are leaders with the courage to ask, "*What's possible now?*" and the heart to bring others along.

**Q What's one transformation you've seen in someone you coached that still gives you goosebumps to this day?**

One story still gives me goosebumps. She was a brilliant woman in her 40s, thriving in a male-dominated field—on paper, the full package. But in meetings, she shrank. She second-guessed herself, calling herself a "guest" in rooms she belonged in. Like many high-achieving women, she'd internalized the message: *You're lucky to be here—don't take up too much space.*

Our work wasn't about fixing her—it was about freeing her. Through coaching, narrative work, and roleplay, she reclaimed her voice. The breakthrough? A summit speech. Afterwards, she called and said, *I didn't just deliver a great talk. I felt powerful.*

That moment reminds me: transformation doesn't begin with strategy—it begins when we stop waiting for permission and start owning our presence.

**Q You've guided so many—who has guided you? And what piece of advice from them still anchors you today?**

I've had mentors in many forms—*professors, colleagues, clients, even students*. One of the first was a college professor who pulled me aside and said, "You have a voice—use it." At the time, I didn't grasp its depth. But in rooms where I was the only woman, the youngest, or the one who didn't quite "**fit**," her words anchored me. Later, another mentor said, "*What you tolerate teaches people how to treat you.*" That reshaped my view of boundaries—not as walls, but as instructions.

Some of my greatest mentorship now comes from those I coach. They challenge, teach, and inspire me daily. The best advice I live by? Lead with integrity. Communicate with intention. And never underestimate the power of your presence. ◆

# A NIGHT OF MUSIC TURNS VIRAL

## A Corporate Crisis Ignited on the Jumbotron

On July 16, 2025, at the Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, Coldplay headlined the Music of the Spheres tour, captivating thousands of fans. The crowd danced to their anthems as sparkling lights complemented the band's energetic performance led by Chris Martin. A tradition during which the camera shines out onto the audience, the "Jumbotron Song" part of the show was interrupted by such a sudden twist. On the giant screen at the stadium, the married chief executive officer of tech unicorn Astronomer, Andy Byron, and the company's Chief People Officer, Kristin Cabot, were caught in an intimate embrace. This shot screen was the shortest-lived picture to cause a viral scandal, turning their lives and careers upside down.

### The Power Couple of Astronomers

Andy Byron, 50, has been the CEO of Astronomer since July 2023, leading the New York-based data orchestration company to a valuation of over a billion dollars. He is credited with a company milestone when the firm completed a Series D funding round of $93 million in May 2025. In 2024, Chief People Officer Kristin Cabot, 52, was hired in November; she has over twenty years of experience in talent management. Byron has high praise for her, calling her an exceptional person with enthusiasm for collaborative work environments. It's clear that the two share extraordinary chemistry at work, and there are hints of a deeper bond in the Jumbotron instance.

### A Kiss Cam Disaster

When the camera focused on Byron and Cabot, they were hugging and smiling, suggesting a relationship that extended beyond a professional one. People cheered, and everything changed when the duo saw themselves on the screen. Byron ducked, and Cabot pressed her face against his, both looking panicked. Chris Martin posted something quite humorous, such as, "Either they are cheating, or they are so shy," right before adding with a tinge of seriousness, "Hope we did not do something wrong." According to concertgoer Grace Springer, who posted the video on TikTok, it quickly went viral, earning over 20 million views and sparking wild speculation.

### The Constantly Evolving Investigation on the Internet

The Internet quickly identified who Byron and Cabot were, and their LinkedIn profiles became the subject of memes, such as the Coldplay-related Byron takes shots like, Lights did not guide Andy home. The reaction was intense. Married to Megan Kerrigan and father of two boys, Byron was scrutinized because his name was removed from his wife's Facebook profile before she deactivated it. Married to Andrew Cabot, who is the CEO of Privateer Rum, Cabot recently purchased a $2.2 million house with her in Rye, New Hampshire. She lost her wedding band in pictures from the concerts, further fueling rumors about the affair.

### Astronomer Corporate Fallout

On July 19, Astronomer placed their staff members Byron and Cabot on leave until a formal investigation of their behavior is completed, and states that it maintains a standard of work based on values and culture. In 2007, an online fake apology attributed to Byron was exposed by the company. On July 20, Astronomer confirmed that Byron had left the company and was temporarily replaced by co-founder Pete DeJoy. DeJoy acknowledged the unwanted attention on LinkedIn, where he pledged to uphold the company's mission. Questions arose about Cabot's future role, with critics arguing that her HR responsibilities also require equal accountability.

### Mixed Reactions to Social Media

It was the talk of social media, evoking empathy for the husbands and wives, and featuring a darkly humorous twist to the whole thing. A pun on one X post following a maxim expressed by Churchill by smirking, What is more painful: to learn that your spouse has been cheating or that he likes Coldplay. According to former Astronomer employees, the drama was amusing, and one of them told the New York Post that everybody is laughing their heads off. Grace Springer, the poster on TikTok, regretted: A part of me feels bad that I turned their lives upside down, but playing stupid games, you win stupid prizes.

### A Public Exposure Warning Story

The privacy policy of Gillette Stadium states that people may be recorded, which is a common feature of most concerts. However, the spirit of fun behind the kiss cam was not in harmony with the actual outcomes of a demonstration of indiscretions in full view of the world. The outcome also depicted the culture of sleuths on the internet, where reputations may be devastated in hours by a single moment. Coldplay did the opposite, posting a neutralistic Show 207, Boston on social media sites, but fans were there to post scandalous messages in the comments.

> "EITHER THEY ARE CHEATING, OR THEY ARE SO SHY. HOPE WE DID NOT DO SOMETHING WRONG.
>
> ~ **Grace Springer**, concertgoer who posted the video on TikTok


### A Long-Term Result of ColdplayGate

To Byron and Cabot, the Coldplay concert was supposed to be an escapist experience. Rather, it has proved an ominous harbinger of the dangers of going viral in an era of hyperconnectivity. The Astronomer, as he tries to find his footing after becoming the leader of the new Society, the saga, now a viral cautionary tale, is called by some a ColdplayGate. It highlights that there is no one in the stadium, regardless of the stadium lights, who will be outside the scrutinizing eyes of the internet.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

## Redefining Influence with Integrity and Intention.

# MASSIMO LUCIDI

*President,*
**International Reputation Institute**

Today's leaders are shaping the world in subtle but powerful ways. Some do it through technology, others through bold disruption. Many build businesses, movements, or influence at scale. But occasionally, you come across someone whose leadership feels deeply personal, rooted not in ambition alone, but in meaning.

Massimo Lucidi brings that kind of presence. He doesn't enter the room to be heard—he enters to listen, connect, and build something lasting. In a time when influence is often measured by algorithms and reach, Massimo's quiet power lies in the quality of relationships he fosters. His work bridges generations, cultures, and industries, with a consistency that speaks to conviction and care.

Over the years, his journey has moved through journalism, emotional design, international relations, and corporate communication. With Fondazione e-novation and the Italian Excellence Award, he has created platforms that celebrate values, heritage, and innovation with equal weight. What ties it all together is his unwavering belief in human potential, expressed not through grand gestures but thoughtful action.

We spoke with Massimo to understand the deeper story behind his work—his leadership philosophy, his path so far, and how he continues to inspire others by staying true to what matters.

### Q What brought together journalism, emotional design, and business in your journey?

It started with storytelling—writing always felt like second nature to me. Journalism gave it purpose, emotional design gave it depth, and business gave it structure.

Somewhere along the way, I realized, "emotions aren't just feelings, they're signals—we just need to know how to read them."

That's when it all clicked. Creativity became my bridge between these worlds—not just to express, but to connect, move, and sometimes even spark change.

### Q What challenge did no MBA or degree prepare you for—and how did you handle it?

Sometimes, the biggest decisions aren't made in boardrooms—but in moments of pure instinct. I'll never forget launching the first Premio Eccellenza Italiana in Washington. No degree had prepared me for that level of chaos, excitement, and sleepless nights. I wasn't following a plan—I was following a purpose. It was an action that perhaps an economics manual would have advised against, but I felt it was deeply right. In just a few weeks, we turned an idea into something the press called "Born Great." That's when I truly understood what leading with heart over logic means.

> EMOTIONS AREN'T JUST FEELINGS, THEY'RE SIGNALS WE JUST NEED TO KNOW HOW TO READ THEM.

### Q How do you turn your belief in quality relationships into action in high-stakes business?

In a world where companies can vanish overnight, I've learned to build relationships that outlast structures. "You have to show your face, always tell the truth," because the trust you've earned stays when the strategy shifts or the brand disappears. It's always about the individual, not just the company.

### Q What does 'ethical influence' mean to you today?

In a world obsessed with clicks and algorithms, I often ask myself—what anchors us? Coming from a Catholic background and working closely with AI, I believe in algorethics—where ethics guide technology, not the other way around. Ethics is not a detail—it's what keeps us human. Ethical influence means putting people before numbers and values before reach. It lets us not just rise or compete, but truly connect with others, with truth, and the world around us.

### Q What does 'Italianness' mean to you beyond borders and culture?

It's hard to define something that lives in your gestures, instincts, and way of seeing the world—but that's exactly what Italianness is to me. It isn't tied to borders or ancestry; it's a feeling, a rhythm. It's in how we speak with our hands, design with our hearts, and connect with others through emotion and beauty. Being Italian means belonging to a tradition of saints, poets, and explorers—people who are open-minded, value-driven, and deeply human. It's a mindset, not a passport. A way of living that blends creativity with care, excellence with empathy, and always with a deep respect for life, for people, and the world around us.

### Q How do you define success in today's fragmented world?

In a world that feels more disconnected than ever, I've seen success not as a personal milestone but as something shared. It starts close to home, with how we live our everyday lives and treat our families, friends, and communities.

> "We truly grow only together, and any lasting success is built from that spirit. Even when responsibilities grow, I believe in carrying the same sense of community forward because no one goes far alone."


# SPORTS MEDIA'S INFLUENCE

## Pressuring Teams from the Outside

Sports media is no longer merely a carrier of information with the introduction of the hyper-connected modern world; it is a force in itself, capable of influencing the decisions of the teams, and even their management, and even creating the narrative about the players and coaches in the popular mind. Be it 24-hour news and fan-driven media industries discourse on social media, investigative or pundit commentary, the impact of sports media on professional teams is powerful, inexorable and in most instances, too hard to resist.

### The History of Influence

In the past, sports reporters were historians and storytellers- they recorded history, rejoiced when things were going well and critiqued when things were not. However, the emergence of TV in the 20th century and, subsequently, the proliferation of digital platforms turned the role of the media into that of an industry stakeholder. Nowadays, journalists, analysts, bloggers and influencers no longer write about what is happening but speculate, analyse and even promote action.

Sports media has an enormous influence on discourse, with exclusive sports networks, podcasts, and live updates on platforms like X, Instagram, and YouTube. A rumour, a leaked quote, or even a purely speculative piece of analysis may provoke an outpouring of comment that quickly becomes pressure on teams to respond through a statement, a change of strategy, or even changes of personnel.

### Tactical Pressure and the Performance Scrutiny

Sports media significantly influences team performance perception. When a team struggles, it's not just management that notices; media outlets scrutinise every play, decision, and strategy.

Case Study:

Manchester United Management Pressure

For instance, Manchester United faced mounting pressure during Ole Gunnar Solskjær's tenure, criticised for being overly defensive and making tactical errors. Despite initial support from ownership, relentless media headlines and fan outrage, fueled by pundits like Gary Neville and Roy Keane, made his 2021 sacking inevitable.

Dallas Cowboys' Playoff Challenges

The Dallas Cowboys, often called America's Team, are closely monitored by NFL media. Head coach Mike McCarthy faces scrutiny after playoff appearances, as media narratives often paint the team as underachievers. This coverage prompts front offices to consider changes based on external perceptions rather than just internal assessments.



TRADEFLOCK
Journey of Leaders

### Player Discourses and Social Identity

Media also plays an important role in perception of players. Good publicity can make an athlete a superstar, which will earn him/her endorsements and sponsorships. On the other hand, bad publicity such as performance or attitude or off field publicity can ruin reputations in a single day.

Case study:

Ben Simmons and Mental Health Inquiry

Ben Simmons of the Brooklyn Nets was a main subject of media criticism after experiencing difficulties in performance and non-existent play in his last season with the Philadelphia 76ers. Strict media coverage and social media resulted in a massive discussion on athlete mental health, and both the team and the league had to get their heads out of the sand and mention the problem in a more visible way.

Captaincy of Virat Kohli

Indian cricket Virat Kohli as a captain had to bear a lot of media pressure following the early exit of India in the 2021 T20 World Cup. Although he is ranked as one of the best captains, in terms of statistics, media and fan accounts of his temper and decisions made led to his resignation as a leader in various formats.

### Transfer Pressure and Market Rumour

In leagues with transfer windows, sports media acts as an unofficial player in transfers. Even unverified rumours can disrupt dressing rooms and prompt club actions.

Case study:

Lionel Messi's exit from Barcelona.

In 2021, the media speculated daily about Messi's future and contract, criticising Barcelona's management and pressuring the club. Financial issues were decisive, but the surrounding media circus heightened scrutiny and amplified actions.

Cristiano Ronaldo's return to Manchester United.

His 2021 return was significantly influenced by media speculation linking him to Manchester City. The clamour from fans and legends like Sir Alex Ferguson, amplified by media coverage, reportedly sped up United's negotiations to re-sign the superstar.

### Accountability with the use of Investigative Journalism

Sports media serve a crucial watchdog role, uncovering scandals like financial fraud, doping, and institutional abuse through investigations.

Case study:

FIFA Corruption Scandal

In 2015, investigative reports from The Guardian and The New York Times, aided by U.S. and Swiss officials, revealed corruption within FIFA. Media exposure led to leadership changes and bidding reforms for events like the World Cup.

Gymnastics USA Sexual Abuse Scandal

The Indianapolis Star's investigations prompted a nationwide reckoning, resulting in convictions, policy changes, and protective measures. Ongoing media coverage kept institutional failures in the public eye, preventing them from being forgotten.

### The Two-Edged Sword

The media pressure, though not always bad, may be reckless and damaging as well. Click-based coverage, sensationalism, and misinformation may cause excessive pressure on teams and players.

Example: Naomi Osaka and Media boycotts

The tennis player Naomi Osaka left the 2021 French Open after claiming that press conferences and all the attention were hurting her mental health. By doing this, her actions revealed a bigger discussion about the role of media and the mental health it has on athletes.

### The New Normal Navigation

Teams in modern sports cannot rebel against media pressure, which influences fan emotions, brand value, and high-level decision-making. The media directly impacts sports organisations through player transfers, manager firings, crisis management, and cultural shifts.

While it can promote accountability and amplify unheard voices, media pressure must be applied responsibly. For teams, this pressure involves not just responding to headlines but also fostering a resilient culture, creating open communication plans, and building connections with fans and the media.

The influence of sports media will grow as the lines between media and fandom blur, making it essential for teams to recognise it as a crucial part of their strategic environment that cannot be ignored.

Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025


Matthew Stankewicz

Engineering the Future, Empowering the Present

# SIR SHEFIK MACAULEY

*Managing Director and Local Lead,*
**NASA Space Apps Yonkers**

While most minds toil at reshaping the wheel or reconfiguring conventional paths, media personality, philanthropist, and technology maven Sir Shefik Macauley (known mononymously as Shefik) propels his vision far beyond the launchpad, literally and figuratively. Shefik is an Emmy Award winner, for his work with NBC and Peacock, as Technical Production Manager for the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad (2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France). Known for transforming abstract blueprints into tangible milestones, Shefik is not just steering innovation; he is architecting new frameworks of thought. Before he was appointed Managing Director and Local Lead of NASA Space Apps Yonkers, Shefik had already carved a multifaceted career that spanned entertainment, technology, media, and community leadership. His journey is not a story of one orbit; it's a universe of deliberate shifts, intelligent risk, and societal impact.

## Seeing Solutions Differently

Long before he entered boardrooms and development labs, Shefik embraced an unorthodox view of problem-solving. Rather than forcing a square peg into a round hole, he realized it was geometrically easier to fit a round peg into a square one. This small shift in thinking represents the essence of his professional DNA: an ability to reverse-engineer complexity and bring logic to chaos. This mindset explains his diverse career trajectory and how he has consistently turned transitional moments into transformative opportunities.

## The Early Broadcast Years

After graduating in 1991 from Nolan Catholic High School (Fort Worth, Texas), and earning early honors such as "*Talented Tenth Honoree*" from Fannie M. Heath Cultural Club and Tarrant County Junior College, Shefik studied Mass Communication at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh. His blend of television broadcasting, media, communications, publishing, and performing arts shaped a unique and holistic approach to storytelling, presence, and message dissemination – skills that would later become vital in public relations and media production.

Shefik's professional debut came at Double XXposure, a New York-based public relations firm. There, Shefik spearheaded and aided in national publicity campaigns for iconic personalities and brands, such as Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee and 5-time Grammy Award winner Dionne Warwick; Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee and Grammy Award winner The Isley Brothers; Grammy Award nominee Nona Hendryx of Labelle; Urban Music Icon Award winner Dru Hill; multi-platinum recording artist Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew; and the celebrated sound of Motown Music Publishing. Shefik's meticulous attention to detail and natural aptitude for messaging laid a solid foundation in entertainment publicity.

## Founding His Own Ventures

In 1997, Shefik launched Knight Entities, extending his influence in media and entertainment. By 1999, he was recognized in the "*International Who's Who of Entrepreneurs*", thanks to his work with Tony Award winner Melba Moore and Levi Little of the group BLACKstreet. His collaboration with actors Herculeez & Big Tyme exemplified his ability to go beyond representation, offering training in artist development and etiquette — skills that reflected his deeply human approach to leadership.

## Adaptation in the Digital Age

With the dawn of the digital age, Shefik expanded into Internet media. While promoting events in New York City's most iconic nightclubs, he parlayed his network into casting opportunities, such as securing seat-fillers for the film "*Anger Management*" (2003). Recognizing the shifting media landscape, he self-taught computer programming and transitioned into tech, marking his entry into TIME magazine as a Technical Producer.

At TIME, Shefik built websites and shaped media history. He developed and launched a live blogging system during the 2008 U.S. Presidential election, capturing global attention as Barack Obama made history. His innovative system later powered red-carpet coverage and award shows for TIME, People, and Entertainment Weekly.

## Digital Architect Across Industries

Post-TIME, Shefik took his growing arsenal of skills to a roster of Fortune 500 companies and major media brands, including Condé Nast Digital, Columbia Law School, Viacom, IBM Interactive Experience, CNBC, Syfy, Merriam-Webster, and Merck. Whether building backend systems or consumer-facing websites, his work consistently blended technical precision with user-centric design.

His development work for campaigns involving brands like Buick, Coca-Cola Enterprises, and Chase Sapphire highlighted his dexterity in aligning creative vision with technical structure. As a Senior Software Developer at Ruder Finn, he developed digital experiences for clients like Amgen and Citibank, seamlessly blending corporate objectives with audience needs.

## An Award-Winning Media Visionary

Shefik is also the Executive Producer and Host of the nationally syndicated radio show "*Shefik presents Invocation*", which airs on over 20 terrestrial radio stations and frequencies with over 1 million monthly listeners. The show, celebrated with over 40 awards, brings together music, reflection, and insights from luminaries such as Dionne Warwick, Mary Wilson, and royalty from across Europe and the Middle East.

The show's unique approach, each episode focusing on a thematic concept and paired with curated music, positions Shefik as a rare bridge between old-world storytelling and modern digital engagement. Interviews are audio-broadcast, filmed, and distributed globally via a variety of platforms.

## Leading at NASA Space Apps Yonkers

Today, as the Managing Director and Local Lead of **NASA Space Apps Yonkers**, Shefik is channeling his expansive career into one of its most promising missions yet. NASA International Space Apps Challenge is a global hackathon presented by NASA, aimed at bringing together the brightest minds to tackle Earth and space science challenges.

Shefik's multifaceted background, spanning technology, media, education, and community advocacy, makes him uniquely suited for the role. He is not merely organizing events; he is cultivating ecosystems, mentoring future scientists, and enabling local talent to contribute to global innovation.

For NASA Space Apps Yonkers, Shefik is forming a substantial team through his company, All Knight Access, along with a collective of robust collaborators and supporters. NASA Space Apps is an innovation and public engagement program under NASA's Science Mission Directorate. NASA Space Apps aims to promote transparency, participation, and global collaboration as part of the Open Government Initiative by sharing openly available data supplied through NASA and its Space Agency Partners with the public. NASA Space Apps is composed of two programs: NASA International Space Apps Challenge and NASA Space Apps Collective.

## The Shefik Equation: Vision x Empathy = Impact

Sir Shefik Macauley's journey is not a linear ascent but a constellation of thoughtful pivots, cross-industry fluency, and purpose-driven innovation. Whether decoding backend algorithms or decoding human behavior, he operates from a foundational belief: solutions are not just technical; they are emotional, societal, and philosophical. Through it all, Shefik exemplifies that true leadership is about arriving at the destination, building new roads, inviting others to travel them, and lighting the way forward.

# Why Is Diversification Back On The Boardroom Agenda?

Amidst geopolitical tremors, tech disruption, and the climate crisis, one strategy has regained its rightful place on the boardroom table, 'diversification'. Once regarded merely as a risk management tool or investor portfolio concept, diversification has reemerged as a central driver of innovation, resilience, and long-term competitiveness. In today's boardrooms, the common is not - Are we diversified?. The question is - "Are we diversified enough, in the right ways, and for the future we don't yet see?"

## The Shifting Landscape

The 2020s have forced companies to face hard truths. Overreliance on single markets, supply chains, or product lines has exposed them to cascading risks. Whether semiconductor shortages paralysed automotive companies or geopolitical tensions disrupted energy access, the need for broader strategic moats has become undeniable. A 2024 report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) noted that over 60% of directors surveyed globally had increased focus on risk management through diversification in markets and business models, talent, and supply chains. That number rises even higher to 67% in emerging markets as companies prepare for increasingly volatile global dynamics.

## Not Grandfather's Diversification

Unlike the 1990s trend of unrelated conglomerates acquiring businesses outside their core, today's diversification is more intentional and data-informed. It's about synergy, sustainability and strategic alignment. Take Amazon, for instance. Its expansion from books to e-commerce, then to cloud computing (AWS), and now AI-driven services, wasn't diversification for diversification's sake. Each leap leveraged existing infrastructure or data capabilities. According to a 2023 McKinsey report, companies that diversify adjacent, entering industries closely related to their core strengths, outperform those that don't by 15–20% in total shareholder returns over a 10-year period.

## Diversification of Thought

Beyond what companies do, diversification is also about who makes the decisions. McKinsey's landmark "Diversity Wins" report in 2023 revealed that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on exclusive teams were 39% more likely to outperform on profitability than those in the bottom quartile. For ethnic diversity, the performance differential was similarly striking.

Instead of political correctness, it is about business sense. Diverse teams see more blind spots, challenge assumptions, and reflect increasingly global customer bases. As Harvard Business Review argued, companies with inclusive cultures are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, and six times more likely to be innovative and agile.

JP Morgan echoes this in its research, highlighting that minority-led investment firms consistently deliver alpha, not despite their differences but because of them. Their 2023 analysis of private equity returns showed minority managers outperforming the broader market by a measurable margin.

## Supply Chains and The Rise of Regional Diversification

In the pre-2020 era, globalization meant that the cheapest production location won. Today, 'just-in-time' transformed into 'just-in-case'. In 2023, The Economist reported that more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies had restructured or were actively reassessing their global supply chains. India, Vietnam, and Mexico have emerged as alternative production hubs, not to replace China entirely, but to diversify risk exposure. Apple's recent $2 billion investment to expand production in India is a prime example. It's not abandoning its Chinese base, but rather creating strategic flexibility, a principle now echoed across boardrooms worldwide.

## ESG: The New Diversification Imperative

Environmental, Social and Government (ESG) factors are no longer peripheral. They are fundamental. Companies that diversify into low-carbon technologies or socially responsible products are increasingly attracting investor interest. According to a Harvard Business School case study in 2024, ESG-driven diversification accounted for over $1.7 trillion in global capital flows over two years. Forward-looking boards are now viewing sustainability not as a cost center but as a growth engine, moving into renewable energy, circular economy models, and even carbon offset marketplaces. Unilever's venture into sustainable personal care and Nestlé's push into plant-based nutrition aren't trend-following, their strategic diversification designed to win over the future-conscious consumer.

## Human Capital and Organizational Design

As work becomes more digital and decentralized, boards are also focusing on workforce diversification, by geography, skills, and employment models. A study by BCG in 2024 showed that companies offering hybrid work, flexible contracts, and skills-first hiring approaches saw 22% higher retention rates. These organizations also experienced faster innovation cycles due to a more diverse and adaptable talent base. In this context, diversification isn't about adding more people, it's about integrating different types of people who can thrive in complex environments.

## What This Means for Boards

Boards now face a dual mandate: deliver shareholder value today while preparing for a radically uncertain tomorrow. When executed strategically, diversification addresses both. It spreads risk, unlocks new value pools, and ensures that organizations remain agile. But it requires clarity of vision, a culture of inclusion, and relentless execution. As BCG puts it: "Boards must become architects of resilience, not just stewards of stability." The resurgence of diversification on boardroom agendas is not a fad. It's a recalibration. In a world of rolling crises and exponential change, the ability to pivot across markets, technologies, people, and values may be the ultimate differentiator.

# Most Influential LEADERS to WATCH in 2025

## Leading Logistics with Purpose and Precision

# YAZAN MEHYAR

*Regional Operations Director,*
**WeStore**

Across the Gulf, logistics is quietly becoming one of the region's most defining forces.

What was once seen as a background function is now a critical pillar of growth, challenged by shifting borders, evolving infrastructure, and rising client expectations. The question is no longer how to move goods; it's how to do it with speed, precision, and full transparency in a region where second chances are rare. At the center of this transformation is Yazan Mehyar, whose journey is a well-structured approach rather than shortcuts.

Yazan Mehyar began his career on the frontlines, solving operational problems one shipment at a time. Today, as Regional Operations Director at WeStore, he leads logistics across Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar, designing systems that adapt locally, scale regionally, and keep clients in control. Whether navigating multi-modal freight into restricted oilfields or building fulfillment hubs for critical sectors, every decision reflects a core belief: clarity is the foundation of trust.

In this TradeFlock exclusive, Yazan shares the pivotal lessons behind his leadership journey and what it truly takes to scale logistics with purpose in the modern Middle East.

### Q What have you learned about leading logistics across multiple countries, and what's tested that learning the most?

What works in one market may not fit another. Kuwait, Dubai, and Qatar each have unique customs protocols, varying levels of infrastructure maturity, and distinct client expectations. We couldn't copy-paste anything. The real lesson was to build adaptable systems SOPs, warehouse models, freight logic, and manpower structures that flex locally but align regionally.

That approach was tested during one of our most challenging operations: a multimodal freight move into a restricted oilfield. Sea freight into Jebel Ali, overland into Kuwait, and final delivery all had to sync perfectly. A delay at sea disrupted customs, and overland routes had to shift mid-transit. We made it work by relying on systems built for pressure, with visibility, ownership, and agility at every level. That's how you grow fast without losing control.

### Q How do you stay agile while navigating complex logistics compliance?

In the GCC, compliance isn't static; it shifts by lane, mode, and month. Sea freight may require multiple clearances depending on the port and cargo. Air is fast but vulnerable to document inconsistencies. Overland moves bring customs nuances that change constantly.

We built freight-mode-specific compliance into our process: pre-cleared digital bundles for air, port staging and bonded storage for sea, and smart routing with synced manifests for land. What keeps us agile is embedding these rules upfront, not treating them as last-minute fixes. Our teams are trained by lane, not just by customer, so we stay precise, not reactive.

### Q How do you ensure technology enhances, not complicates, both operations and customer experience?

In this region, technology isn't just transforming logistics; it's making it possible. We operate in a fragmented environment with inconsistent infrastructure and fast-changing client needs. Without the right tech foundations, you can't scale or sustain performance.

**EFFECTIVE LOGISTICS TECH DOESN'T JUST IMPROVE EFFICIENCY; IT BUILDS CREDIBILITY. THAT'S THE FUTURE WE'RE BUILDING TOWARD.**

But we don't overbuild. We implement tools that make teams more efficient and clients better informed, not systems that slow us down. That's why we built a dedicated client dashboard that offers full control across warehousing, freight, and project logistics. Clients can track shipments in real-time, monitor SLA performance, trigger escalations, and manage exceptions without needing to chase anyone. It replaces back-and-forth emails with live interaction.

### Q What's the most underestimated trend shaping logistics in the GCC?

Client control. It's no longer just about faster delivery; clients want real-time visibility and the ability to make decisions within the logistics flow. They expect to monitor performance, flag issues, and adjust routes or timelines instantly, without going through layers.

We've built systems around that demand and trained our teams to operate as advisors, not just service providers. This shift is changing our role entirely from execution to partnership. Clients don't just want goods moved; they want to move with you.

### Q *What message do you hope your career sends to aspiring logistics professionals in the region?*

Logistics is no longer a back-office function. It's where operations, strategy, and leadership converge and one of the most critical sectors shaping regional growth. I hope my journey shows that you can build from the ground up, lead teams, expand into new markets, and still stay close to the floor.

### Q What's next for WeStore's growth in the region?

Saudi Arabia is our next strategic step. With the Kingdom accelerating investment in industrial zones and e-commerce infrastructure, the market is primed for a logistics partner that delivers end-to-end solutions. At our core, WeStore is built on strong freight and warehousing capabilities supported by the agility to scale across the supply chain. We're not testing a concept; we're replicating a proven model that already works across the GCC.

# Rethinking Risk

Analysis of the shift in investor mindset

In 2025, there is a significant change in the investment landscape. The priorities of investors are changing from the cut-throat growth mentality to a more sober disciplined approach. Anywhere, from sectors to firms, financial discipline, revised strategies of M&A and smarter capital management are the new powers of performance.

## Financial Discipline: Efficiency Over Expansion

The contemporary investors are interested in sustainable growth supported by an efficacious operation. According to Deloitte's 2024 M&A trends survey, CFOs are shifting capital for long-term value and focusing on structural cost management and connecting investments to strategic results. In a high-interest-rate setting, capital is no longer cheap; investors will not look for revenue growth anymore; they want returns based on efficiency and free cash flow.

This is a shift that speaks of a greater understanding of risk and resilience. Companies are being rated depending on their capacity to control cash flows, A lack of financial discipline has become an inadmissible hallmark of credibility in a shaky market.

## M&A Recalibration: From Scale to Strategic Fit

The former scorching M&A market has calmed down and grown up. The McKinsey's Global Private Markets Review 2025 reveals that private equity companies are moving away from leveraged and fast-growing deals to deals that will entail operational improvements and strategic fit. Investors now seek long-term value creation deals rather than quick returns.

This trend also finds an echo in the CEO Outlook Pulse of EY which reflects that the executives are taking more proactive approaches to M&A such as divesting from non-core assets and engaging the targeted acquisitions that strengthen their innovative capabilities and market positions. As integration and synergy realisation gain more focus, dealmakers are quitting quantity for quality.

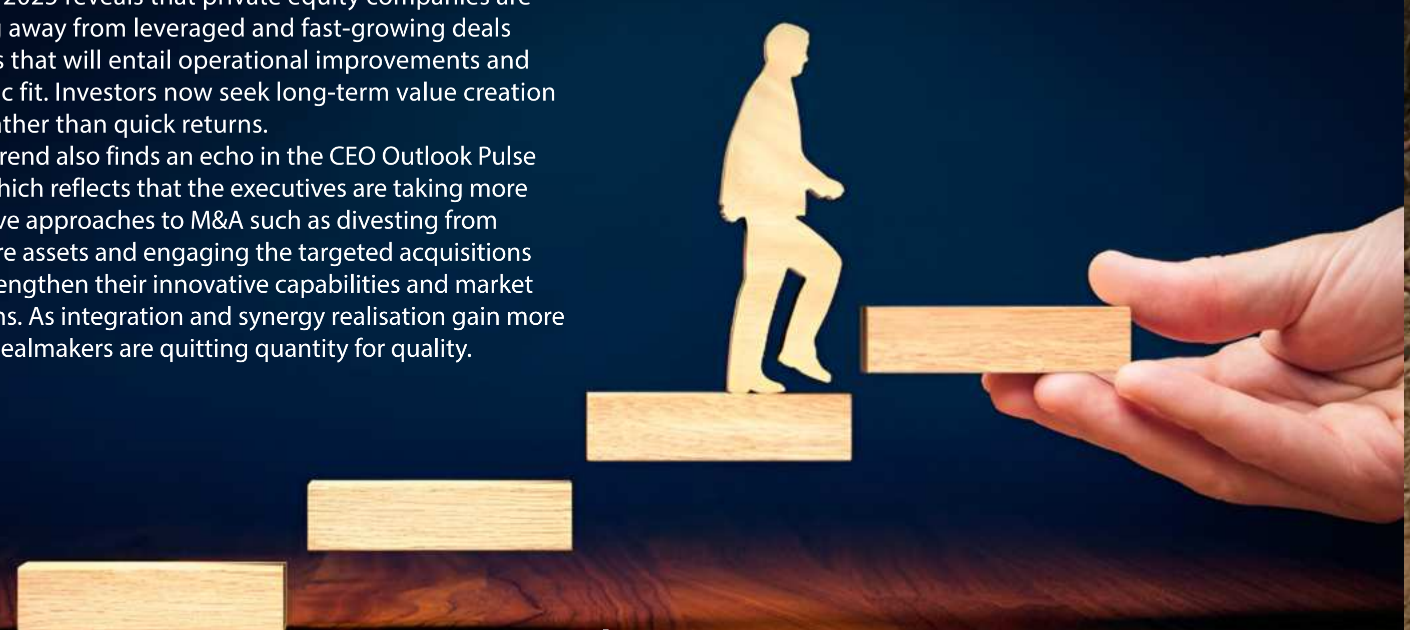
## Capital Deployment: Purposeful and Long-Term

Capital deployment too is the subject of recalibration of the investor mindset. Organisations are re-evaluating the way they use funds, with more emphasis on reinvestment in the core areas. What the Deloitte insights reveal on portfolio rebalancing is that there is active reallocation of capital from poor segments to high potential opportunities by firms.

The strategic change towards investing in scalable platforms and improved customer experience is indicated in EY's Wealth Management Outlook 2024, with digital transformation being the main course. At the same time, ICMAI insists on the importance of effective cost control, and real-time financial data for shaping investments strategies and not to disperse capitals here and there.

## A Mindset Reset

As the economic condition tightens, investors are getting more selective. The shift of assessing businesses based on discipline, strategic alignment and smart use of capital signifies the departure from the principles of business valuation. Those companies that will learn to respond to this new standard, rooted in resilience and long-term perspective, will be a defining elite of the next generation of market leaders. The time of free ambition has passed. In the present time accountability and strategic clarity go in front.




MERCEDES BENZ
G 63 AMG
430 KW/585 PS
POWER(KW)/ POWER(PS)
4.2 S
ACCELERATION 0-100KM/H
240 KM/H
TOP SPEED