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TRADEFLOCK

BEST

HR

LEADERS TO
WATCH IN USA 2025

STORY OF
THE MONTH
**FROM SILENCE
TO SLOGANS**
The Student
Uprising
in PoK

SPOTLIGHT

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
SAFETY AT SCALE**
WHAT COMPANIES
IN ESTONIA, PORTUGAL
& KENYA ARE TEACHING
THE WORLD

DENISE L. CLARK

Director of Human Resources
University of Maryland Medical System
(UM Charles Regional Medical Center)





Editor Note



THE NEW ARCHITECTURE OF HUMAN LEADERSHIP

Leadership today is not defined by titles or corner offices. It is defined by empathy, adaptability, and the ability to bring out the best in others. Across industries, a quiet shift is taking place that recognizes people not as resources to be managed, but as individuals whose ideas and experiences shape the collective strength of an organization.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are no longer initiatives that sit on the margins of business strategy; they are integral to its core. They are the foundation of resilience and creativity. Teams that bring different voices to the table see farther and move faster. Cultures that value belonging are the ones that innovate with purpose. And leaders who listen as much as they direct are the ones shaping workplaces where every person feels seen and valued.

As technology transforms how we work, these human dimensions have become even more vital. The most forward-looking organizations are not just investing in digital systems; they are investing in trust, transparency, and inclusion. This is the new language of sustainable success.

In this edition, Best HR Leaders to Watch in USA 2025, we spotlight professionals who embody this vision. They represent diverse industries, perspectives, and leadership styles, yet share a common purpose: building workplaces that reflect the full spectrum of human potential. Their journeys remind us that leadership is not about managing difference, but embracing it as the greatest strength of all.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Vipin Kumar in black ink.

Vipin Kumar
Editor, Tradeflock

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40 Under 40 USA 2025

Most Impactful CXOs of 2025

Most Strategic Marketing Leaders to Watch in 2025

Real Estate Titans of The USA 2025

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Angela Heyroth	Founder and Principal	Talent Centric Designs
Danielle Lynn Cichon	Principal Consultant and Owner	Danilynn HR
Denise L. Clark	Director of Human Resources	UMMS (UM Charles Regional Medical Center)
Gigi Garcia	Chief People Officer	Commonpoint
Katy Fink	VP - Chief Human Resources Officer	Stryker
Nelson Torres	Vice President People	David Weekly Homes
Shurawl Sibblies	EVP and Chief Human Resources Officer	Metlife
Susan Graye	Global Talent Attraction - Acquisition - Engagement Leader and Speaker	Susan Graye Executive Recruiters
Tiffany Dorsey	Regional Human Resources Director	Pulcra Chemicals, LLC
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Transforming Healthcare Through People-First HR

DENISE L. CLARK

 *Director of Human Resources,*
 **University of Maryland Medical System**
(UM Charles Regional Medical Center)

When hospitals face staffing challenges that affect every level of care, it takes more than policies to keep the organization running smoothly. It takes leadership that understands the human story behind every shift and every role. Denise L. Clark, MBA, SHRM-SCP, SPHR, has built her career around this philosophy. Over more than two decades in healthcare and human resources, she has earned a reputation not only as a strategic leader but also as a transformative force who creates workplaces where people and patients can thrive.

Her career in human resources began at MedStar Washington Hospital Center, one of the nation's busiest Level 1 trauma centers, where she served as an HR Generalist supporting a subset of nearly 1,000 employees across multiple departments. There, she gained comprehensive experience across all areas of HR—including recruitment, organizational development, employee and labor relations, engagement, and union collaboration. This early experience shaped her holistic understanding of people operations and laid the foundation for her future

leadership roles. At Holy Cross Health, she spent nearly a decade advancing HR operations and colleague relations, leading initiatives that enhanced engagement, retention, and workplace culture, and proving that HR can be a true driver of organizational transformation.

Today, as the Director of Human Resources at the University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center, Denise brings this experience to bear on one of healthcare's most demanding frontiers. Her leadership is characterized by a focus on employee resilience, an inclusive culture, and leveraging technology to anticipate challenges before they arise—all while keeping the human element at the forefront. Under her guidance, HR is not just a department; it's a strategic partner in patient-centered care and organizational growth.

In an exclusive interview with TradeFlock, Denise shares her journey, the lessons that have shaped her approach, and her vision for a future where healthcare leadership balances innovation, empathy, and tangible impact—a perspective that continues to inspire the next generation of HR leaders.



“
True innovation happens when flexibility, well-being, and leadership grow together, shaping a culture where people can thrive.”

Q How did your career journey lead you to your current role in healthcare HR?

I remember a moment early in my career that changed my perspective on leadership. A colleague confided that they felt unseen and undervalued. Listening, advocating, and helping them reconnect to purpose showed me that leadership is not about titles—it is about shaping experiences that truly matter. That insight has guided every step of my journey, from law firms to healthcare, reinforcing the importance of empathy, accountability, and human connection.

Over the years, I have navigated challenges, learned from setbacks, and had the privilege of working with diverse teams. Each interaction reminded me that while our experiences differ, our human needs are strikingly similar. A heartfelt conversation or a small act of advocacy can leave a lasting impact. These moments remain at the heart of meaningful leadership.

Joining Charles Regional Medical Centre as Director of HR feels both like a culmination and a new beginning. I see HR not just as a profession, but as a calling to support employees and patients alike. By fostering engagement,

inclusion, innovation, and collaboration, I aim to create an environment where people thrive, contribute, and make a meaningful impact. Looking forward, I am committed to mentoring future leaders, advancing equity in healthcare, and ensuring that every patient and caregiver experiences compassionate, human-centered care.

Q What has been your most significant HR or cultural challenge recently, and how did you address it?

Some days, you can feel fatigue in the air. In healthcare, the pace is relentless, and the stakes are high. Employee burnout and disengagement are pressing challenges. Addressing this requires both structural and emotional solutions. Structurally, I focus on clear communication so that employees understand the reasoning behind changes and have clarity on what needs to be done and how to do it. Culturally, listening is essential. Providing channels for feedback ensures staff feel heard and included in shaping solutions.

Pairing clarity with empathy builds trust and transforms disruption into opportunity. Teams begin to see themselves as partners in change rather than passive recipients. Retention adds another layer of complexity in a multigenerational workforce. Mentorship programs that connect seasoned employees with younger professionals break down silos and foster mutual respect. Tailored career pathways, recognition, and well-being initiatives help employees feel valued at every stage of their journey. Culture is not dictated—it is built through trust, inclusion, equity, and consistent follow-through, ultimately elevating patient care.

“

Learning agility is not just a skill but a mindset that keeps our teams resilient, innovative, and ready for healthcare's complexities.



Q Which HR innovations excite you most, and how are you using them?

I am energized by how flexibility, well-being, and leadership development now work together, rather than as separate initiatives. Embedding flexibility into how work gets done allows for creative scheduling, cross-generational mentorship, and career pathways that reflect different life stages. Treating well-being as a strategic imperative ensures it is woven into leadership expectations, workload design, and recognition practices. Leadership development is essential in today's complex healthcare environment. Programs that cultivate inclusive leadership, emotional intelligence, and coaching skills empower leaders to inspire teams, improve retention, and enhance performance.

Q How will AI and people analytics transform HR in healthcare, and what steps are you taking to prepare?

Imagine knowing which team members might be at risk of burning out before it happens. AI and people analytics are making this possible. Predictive tools help us anticipate staffing shortages, AI streamlines recruiting by matching skills and values, and real-time engagement data allows us to address burnout and retention proactively.

The real opportunity is balancing technology with humanity. We invest in digital tools while training leaders to interpret data with empathy, ensuring insights enhance rather than replace human connection. Dashboards now provide real-time visibility into engagement, turnover risks, and staffing trends, allowing us to design targeted retention strategies and flexible career pathways.

I envision a future where these innovations free HR from transactional tasks, enabling us to focus on developing leaders, supporting employees, and fostering a culture where people thrive. This balance between technology and empathy will define the organizations that succeed.

Q How do you mentor future HR leaders, especially women in healthcare?

When mentoring future HR leaders, I focus on three principles: access, advocacy, and authenticity. Access means opening doors by sharing networks, opportunities, and resources that may not be immediately visible. Advocacy goes beyond advice; it is about speaking up for emerging leaders, ensuring their contributions are recognized and their potential seen. Authenticity matters because leadership is strongest when people bring their whole selves to the forefront.

With women in particular, I help them navigate barriers such as balancing competing priorities or building confidence in spaces where they may be underrepresented. I share lessons from my own journey, model transparency, and encourage them to lead with empathy and strategy. My ultimate goal is to develop leaders who feel empowered to mentor the next generation.

Q How do you build learning agility across HR and organizational teams in today's fast-changing healthcare environment?

In healthcare, learning never stops. Every day brings new challenges and opportunities. Learning agility has become a core competency, and we cultivate it in three ways. First, we embed learning into the workflow through microlearning, cross-training, and knowledge sharing, enabling employees to build skills in real-time. Second, we foster a culture of curiosity and innovation, creating safe spaces to test ideas, learn from data, and adapt without fear of failure. Third, we invest in leadership development that strengthens adaptability, resilience, and inclusive decision-making across a multigenerational workforce. Treating learning agility as both a mindset and a practice helps teams remain resilient, innovative, and prepared for the complexities of healthcare.

Q What is one strategic step HR must take to strengthen talent resilience and a patient-centric culture?

Caregivers cannot pour from an empty cup. Workforce resilience is inextricably linked to the delivery of patient care. This means designing strategies that emphasize flexible staffing, continuous skill development, and proactive well-being programs to prevent burnout.

Leadership development is equally important. From front-line supervisors to senior executives, leaders must be equipped to build trust, foster inclusion and equity, and create environments where caregivers feel supported. When employees are resilient, engaged, and valued, the patient experience improves naturally. Strengthening talent resilience begins with treating the care of our people with the same urgency and purpose as caring for patients.

Q What advice from your mentors do you share and hope becomes part of your legacy?

One of the best leaders I have worked with showed me, through countless small actions, that every person matters. He was not in HR, but his example taught me that every decision must strike a balance between strategy and humanity. Data, policies, and compliance provide credibility, but empathy, fairness, and courage earn influence. This lesson reshaped my view of HR—not as an enforcer of rules, but as a trusted advisor who aligns organizational goals with the dignity and growth of its people.

The advice I carry forward, and hope becomes part of my legacy, is simple: Great HR is not about enforcing rules. It is about shaping futures. Lead with strategy, act with empathy, and build trust to leave a lasting influence. Balance carefully, and you lead with lasting impact. ♦

TRADEFLOCC

Turns



A Decade of Igniting BUSINESS LEGENDS



Editor's Pick

TRADEFLOCK™
JOURNEY OF LEADERS

DEI UNDER SIEGE

What's Really Happening to DEI in Corporate America?

In recent years, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have become integral to corporate America, aiming to foster inclusive workplaces and address systemic inequalities. However, a discernible shift suggests that some US companies are re-evaluating or scaling back these commitments, raising concerns about "DEI fatigue." Is corporate America losing interest in diversity initiatives, or are these changes indicative of a broader strategic realignment?

The Winds of Change

Several prominent corporations have recently altered their DEI strategies. Meta Platforms, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, disbanded its dedicated DEI team, moving towards "fair and consistent practices that mitigate bias for all, no matter your background." This shift included ending its "diverse slate approach" to hiring, which previously ensured a diverse pool of candidates for every open position.

Amazon, another tech giant, announced the cessation of certain DEI programs. In a memo to employees, a senior human resources executive mentioned "winding down outdated programs and materials," with a renewed focus on initiatives with "proven outcomes" to cultivate a more inclusive culture.

Similarly, McDonald's declared the retirement of specific diversity goals at senior leadership levels and paused programs encouraging suppliers to enhance diversity within their leadership ranks. The company also suspended participation in external surveys assessing workplace inclusion for LGBTQ+ employees.

Political Underpinnings

The political climate has significantly influenced these corporate decisions. Under President Donald Trump's administration, there has been a concerted effort to eliminate DEI programs, labelling them as "woke" practices. An executive order directed the Attorney General to abolish DEI policies in the private sector, prompting companies like BlackRock and Bank of America to retract their diversity commitments.



This political stance has emboldened conservative activists to pressure corporations into abandoning DEI initiatives. For instance, activist Robby Starbuck targeted companies such as Tractor Supply, John Deere, and Ford Motor Company, leading them to roll back their diversity programs.

A Strategic Reassessment or Retreat?

While some argue that these changes reflect a strategic reassessment to ensure compliance with new legal directives and to focus on effective diversity practices, others view them as a retreat from the commitment to fostering inclusive workplaces. The cessation of DEI programs raises questions about the future of corporate diversity efforts and the potential impact on workplace culture. ♦

Borderless by Design

How Estonia, Portugal, and Kenya Are Rewriting the Future of Work

Remote work, once seen as a temporary fix during the pandemic, has now become an integral part of business strategy worldwide. However, while Silicon Valley and London continue debating hybrid models, a new wave of innovators is emerging from unexpected corners of the globe, reshaping the rules. In Estonia, Portugal, and Kenya, companies are building complete economies centred on the concept of remote-first, not merely as a benefit but as a collective identity.

These countries demonstrate that digital infrastructure, adaptable policies, and cultural attitudes, rather than geographical location, define the modern work environment. Their approaches offer a blueprint for how small, agile nations can outperform their larger, more traditional economies that remain tied to physical office setups.

Estonia: The Digital Republic That Rewrote the Rules of Work

Estonia has been a digital pioneer. The most digital country on Earth is often labelled so because of a simple premise: if government services can be wholly online, so can work. Through its e-Residency initiative, Estonia has enabled over 100,000 international entrepreneurs to register and operate businesses in the country without setting foot in

the country, enjoying the privilege of doing business within the EU.

Remote-first startups like Pipedrive, Veriff, and Bolt are based in Estonia, with teams worldwide connected by a strong digital environment and no paper bureaucracy. KPMG (2025 Global Digital Economy Index) ranks Estonia in the top five for remote governance, thanks to its focus on digital identities, blockchain, and tax-free cross-border commerce, creating a seamless digital business landscape.

One of Estonia's key achievements is a psychological shift. Older, more traditional work styles have been transformed into a shared national privilege through the promotion of digital citizenship as both a legal requirement and an aspiration, making remote work a collective national asset.

Portugal: From Sun-Seeking Freelancers to Policy-Backed Remote Ecosystems

Portugal's transformation into a remote work hub is driven more by economic and lifestyle shifts than technology. Cities like Lisbon, Porto, and Madeira attract digital nomads due to the climate, affordability, and visa policies. The 2022 Digital Nomad Visa boosted remote work-related inflows by 40% by 2025. Coworking spaces host professionals from 60+ countries, fostering startup ecosystems.



Early adoption by firms like OutSystems and Feedzai, with supportive culture and leadership practices, contributed to Portugal's success. A 2024 McKinsey report shows Portuguese firms outperform EU productivity by 25%, thanks to clear communication and remote collaboration norms.

Portugal exemplifies a cultural export of remote work, blending tourism, technology, and immigration policies to turn flexibility into an economic strength.

Kenya: Africa's Digital Leapfrog and the Rise of the Remote Economy

Kenya has become an unexpected success story, showing how developing countries can lead the remote revolution. With a mobile-driven economy, a young, tech-savvy population, high-speed fibre networks, affordable data, and fintech innovations, remote work extends beyond cities. Companies

"Estonia has enabled over 100,000 international entrepreneurs to register and operate businesses in the country without setting foot in the country, enjoying the privilege of doing business within the EU."

like Andela and Wasoko, along with Nairobi's iHub and Nailab, foster local digital talent connecting to global markets.

A World Bank 2025 Digital Africa Report states Kenya's remote economy accounts for nearly 5% of GDP, surpassing manufacturing growth. Remote work also reduces economic migration, allowing skilled professionals to find jobs internationally while staying in Kenya.

Kenya's model demonstrates that digital work promotes inclusion, showing that even with infrastructural limits, mobile banking (M-Pesa), digital skills programs, and co-working hubs enable a thriving remote economy.

The Global Lessons from Three Remote-First Frontiers

Estonia, Portugal, and Kenya differ in terms of economic maturity, yet they share a key viewpoint: remote-

first is not just a work policy but an attitude embedded within the policy. They see technology as infrastructure, not just an accessory. Their governments and business communities collaborate on creating taxation systems, social entitlements, and cultural frameworks that support distributed labour forces.

The Global Future of Work 2025 survey published by Deloitte reveals that 71% of executives consider remote readiness as a measure of national competitiveness. These three countries have demonstrated that agility and intent can be more effective than economic size. They have turned geographical distance, once seen as a barrier, into a competitive advantage.

The Future Belongs to Borderless Builders

The emergence of remote-first countries signals a profound shift in how nations define their economic identity. For Estonia, the future lies in digital citizenship. For Portugal, productivity is increasingly driven by lifestyle. For Kenya, it is a democratised opportunity. All these countries have shown that it is possible to build powerful communities and resilient economies without physical borders.

The lessons from these nations are clear. As global firms confront talent shortages, environmental pressures, and digital fragmentation, the future of competitiveness will be found not in skyscrapers but in servers, not in office locations but in ecosystems.

A 21st-century economy will be characterised not only by the countries with the largest GDPs, but also by those able to connect talent, trust, and technology, wherever they are in the world. ♦



Building People-Centered
Workplaces with Purpose

ANGELA HEYROTH

 *Founder and Principal,*
 **Talent Centric Designs**

Most enterprises obsess over metrics, promotions, and talent pipelines — yet the secret to thriving businesses is how people experience work every day. Angela Heyroth has spent 25 years bringing that insight to life. At Charles Schwab, she transformed the intern program into a talent incubator that became a national benchmark. At DCP Midstream, she codified culture into living hallmarks that shaped the organization's heartbeat. Through these experiences, she discovered that when workplaces are designed around people, engagement, performance, and business results all rise together. Today, as founder of Talent Centric Designs, Angela partners with leaders to create environments where talent thrives and organizations excel. We spoke with her to explore the lessons, stories, and human truths behind her work.

Q What was the biggest unexpected moment in your career that made you rethink HR and led to Talent Centric Designs?

It hit me when I moved from Talent Acquisition into Organizational Development at a Fortune 500 company. Until then, I was focused on finding great people. However, while building what would later become a standout intern program, I realized the real challenge wasn't just attracting top talent, but helping them thrive once they joined.

That experience completely reshaped my perspective on HR. I stopped thinking of it as separate programs and began to see how everything connects — attraction, development, engagement, and performance. When those things align, people thrive, and the business does too.

That realization became the foundation of Talent Centric Designs. I wanted to help organizations design talent strategies that put people at the center and prove that when they thrive, results follow.

**When people thrive,
business results don't
compete with them — they
happen because of them.**

Q What was the toughest HR challenge you faced, and what did you learn?

One challenge that really stayed with me came while leading succession planning at a Fortune 500 company. On paper, everything looked solid: charts, names, data, but we were still hiring most leaders from outside. I remember sitting there thinking, "We don't have a succession plan, we have a spreadsheet."

So I changed it. Every identified successor got a growth plan, and we held quarterly check-ins to see real progress. Within months, internal promotions increased, engagement rose, and people began believing in their future within the company again.

That experience taught me that plans only matter when they come to fruition. Action turns frameworks into living systems, and that's what transforms HR from process into progress. It reminded me that intention and follow-through are what truly develop people — not documents.

Q What problem in HR inspired you to start your own company, and what gap are you addressing with Talent Centric Designs?

Throughout my corporate career, I was lucky to work in organizations that invested deeply in their people. I got to test ideas, build programs, and see real impact. However, when I began speaking with peers in smaller or mid-sized companies, I kept hearing the same story — they wanted to do more for their people but lacked access to the same resources.

That gap never sat right with me. People everywhere deserve to feel developed, supported, and connected to the mission. That's what inspired Talent Centric Designs. I wanted to apply what I had learned in large, resource-rich environments to more organizations that are ready to invest intentionally in their people. Because when we connect business goals with how we attract, grow, and retain talent, the results speak for themselves. And no matter the company size, the principle remains the same — people drive performance when they feel seen and supported.

Q Who or what inspires you most in your work, and how does that show up in what you do?

I'm constantly inspired by what happens when people are trusted to do what they do best. I often say that people rise to the highest level of trust we place in them. It's something I've seen in teams and at home.

My son is dyslexic, and for years, we focused on fixing what he struggled with: spelling, reading, the usual things. But when we shifted toward his strengths (empathy, persuasive speaking, creative problem-solving), everything changed. His confidence grew, and his performance followed.

That moment crystallized something I already believed: people don't grow when we fix their weaknesses; they grow when we amplify their strengths. It's the same in the workplace — design around strengths, and performance takes care of itself.

Q Outside of work, what do you love doing to relax, and how does it help you at your job?

I recharge through movement and curiosity. Travel, hiking, biking — they all help me reset and keep perspective. I listen to podcasts that challenge my thinking and stay connected with former colleagues whose insights often spark new ideas. Teaching graduate HR students keeps me sharp, too. Their curiosity reminds me that learning is a lifelong process.

And on weekends, you'll often find me poolside, officiating swim meets. The structure, clarity, and sense of community always remind me how people perform best when expectations are clear and support is strong. Whether it's in the pool, the classroom, or the boardroom, the pattern is the same—when people feel they belong, they give their best. ♦



**When people feel
supported and
connected to
something bigger,
that's when they
truly shine.**

Leadership Lessons

Donna Morris, Chief People Officer, Walmart

There are a few HR professionals who have reinvented the connection between people, purpose, and performance as profoundly as Donna Morris, Walmart's Chief People Officer (CPO). As the leader of the people strategy in a workforce of over 2.1 million employees worldwide, Morris operates at the intersection of technology, inclusion, and human potential. Her leadership at Adobe during the cultural transformation and at Walmart during HR modernisation exemplifies how empathy, innovation, and strategy can be scaled together. Morris has left a legacy not just in managing people but in creating human ecosystems that are agile, empowered, and future-focused.

Reimagining HR for a Digital, Distributed World

Donna Morris began working at Walmart in 2020 and faced a challenge she had never encountered before: managing during a global pandemic. Morris brought both compassion and precision to Walmart's people strategy during a time when their supply chains were stretched, and frontline workers were being celebrated as national heroes.

Her HR leadership transformed the role of technology in human engagement. Under her guidance, Walmart increased the use of digital learning platforms, strengthened employee welfare programmes, and revamped HR

systems to be more data-driven and people-centred. Yet, even amid digital transformation, Morris ensured that humanity remained at the heart of all policies.

Her core message is quite straightforward: technology should not replace connection but rather complement it. Through open communication and fostering trust via real-time feedback systems, she has bridged the gap between corporate strategy and employee sentiment.

LESSON TO LEARN

The future of HR is not solely automated, but distinctly human.

Championing Inclusion as a Business Imperative

Donna Morris's leadership philosophy extends well beyond typical diversity initiatives. For her, inclusion is not merely a programme but a key driver of performance. She has always linked membership to business success, arguing that the most innovative organisations are those where all voices are heard.

At Walmart, Morris has promoted gender balance, pay equity, and increased representation of female leaders. She has reinforced the idea that inclusion should be woven into every decision rather than treated as a superficial gesture. Through efforts to boost

underrepresented talent and provide inclusive leadership training, she has strengthened Walmart's reputation not just as a retailer but also as a responsible employer, shaping the future of fair working practices.

This approach stems from her belief that people strategy is inherently a business strategy. In her view, culture is not about slogans or events but about how employees feel day to day.

LESSON TO LEARN

Inclusion is not merely a box to tick; it is the heart of organisational resilience.

The Balance Between Agility and Empathy

One of Morris's key leadership traits is her ability to be both strategically agile and emotionally intelligent. She also demonstrated this by using Adobe and Walmart to show that HR can be a competitive advantage and that business change can be balanced with human flexibility.

When Adobe transitioned from offering perpetual software licences to a subscription-based model, Morris led one of the most successful

corporate transformations in technology history. She adapted workforce, talent, and leadership communication strategies to align with the company's new digital identity.

She has applied the same transparency and flexibility on a much larger scale at Walmart. Whether negotiating wage

restructuring, hybrid work arrangements, or employees' mental health, Morris makes decisions with a focus on sustainability and empathy. Her leadership reflects a deep realisation that, during times of change, employees need not only guidance but also trust and care.

LESSON TO LEARN

You cannot be agile without being empathetic; you cannot be inert without being agile.

Building the Workforce of the Future

Donna Morris's vision of a future-ready workforce emphasises lifelong learning and mobility. She champions Walmart's Live Better U, offering affordable

LESSON TO LEARN

Future-proof organisations invest in their staff just as much as they do in their revenue.

A Legacy of Human-Centred Innovation

The only difference between Donna Morris and other managers is that she believes in her ability to keep humanity's focus centre stage. Her work has expanded the meaning of HR by promoting psychological safety and mental health, and by championing corporate conscience beyond mere compliance and benefits.

Her career path demonstrates that leadership legacy is built not on titles or years of experience but on lasting change. The influence Morris has had at Walmart and worldwide shows that trust is the real currency of leadership and that an empowered workforce will always provide the strongest foundation for innovation.

With the lines between business strategy and people strategy now blurred, Donna Morris exemplifies that leadership is no longer about managing change but humanising it. ♦





A Strategist Prioritising Human Insights

DANIELLE LYNN CICHON

Principal Consultant and Owner Danilynn HR

Leadership coincides with personal drive, the kind that refuses to quit even when the odds feel impossible. Danielle Lynn Cichon developed that drive both in her personal and professional lives. Having lived with epilepsy, migraines, and a hormone disorder for over 25 years, some days were exhausting, frightening, and unpredictable, yet those experiences taught her patience, resilience, and how to tackle challenges through multiple plans of action.

She applied that mindset across industries and roles, from managing a team of 60 as General Manager at Bloomin' Brands to leading strategic operations and HR as CHRO for a national behavioral health provider, and directing change management for Nevada's largest ENT clinic. Today, as Principal Consultant and Owner of Danilynn HR, she helps organizations transform operations, develop people, and achieve sustainable growth.

In an exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, Danielle shares the lessons, mindset, and strategies that have shaped her journey and leadership philosophy.

Q What first inspired you to choose HR, and how has your view of the profession evolved?

My journey into HR started because of my own life experiences. I've had epilepsy, migraines, and

hormone issues for over 25 years. Some days were exhausting and scary, and dealing with medications, seizures, and cognitive challenges taught me patience and resilience. It also made me realize how workplaces often fail to support people when they need it the most.

After earning my MPH, I joined a large hospitality company. During a busy holiday season, I had a seizure and couldn't make it to work. Although my supervisor was aware of my condition, I was still fired for missing work. While the company HR department offered basic assistance, I had to take charge of this situation and fight back. Learning HR law, employment law and manage my own case was necessary in order to prove my case. That experience made me realize how valuable HR to a company and its ability to change lives. This situation sparked my passion for building systems that actually work for people, addressing problems within companies and ensuring HR compliance/ leadership was not viewed as secondary to a company's success.

Over time, I stopped thinking about HR as just one department or sliver of a company. It was necessary to view the company as a whole. Thus, it was imperative I became knowledgeable about finance, analytics, leadership, supply chain, HR, compensation, and more; all aspects and departments within a company. I approach problems the same way I approach my



“HR should not be viewed as a cost, but rather as a strategic partner that helps a company grow and thrive.”

health: There is rarely a perfect solution, but there are always multiple ways to tackle an issue. Organizational efficiency, strategic planning and operational excellence are the elements that I focus on when designing a plan of action that will improve a company, while improving employee morale and productivity. This mindset guides me in helping companies grow while keeping people at the center.

Q Which achievement in your HR journey makes you most proud, and can you share an initiative that transformed an organisation?

One moment that really stands out to me was redesigning a company's operations and training system. There were no clear supervisors, no consistent onboarding, and almost no guidance for employees. People didn't know who to turn to, and it created confusion and frustration.

I collaborated with the team to define leadership roles, develop clear job descriptions, and establish a digital training platform. Everyone had access, whether new or old, and mentoring programs encouraged people to advance. Seeing employees step into leadership confidently and take ownership of their work was incredibly rewarding. Productivity improved, customer satisfaction went up, and waste decreased. The aspect I remember most is how people felt more supported and confident in their roles. The impact was felt company wide and everyone felt heard, supported and encouraged. These actions led to a company rejuvenation, promoting employee engagement and improving morale.

Q What has been the toughest challenge in your career, and how did you overcome it?

The toughest challenges are often financial. Companies want fast results but often do not want to invest the time or resources necessary to address deep-seated problems. I've seen this in healthcare and corporate systems, where training, billing, or operational issues need both attention and money

to resolve. I learned the importance to meet leaders where they are. I show them small, structured steps that lead to measurable results while addressing the underlying problem. It requires patience, communication, and planning. While frustrating, those moments have taught me that leadership isn't about rushing outcomes in order to appease executive teams. It's about creating long term solutions that leave a lasting impact on the company by improving communication, innovation, growth and collaboration. Assuaging executive teams through distinct, creative solutions promoting innovative financial solutions while still providing the outcomes necessary to improve the company are what have made me successful.

Q Outside of titles and metrics, what human stories or "soul moments" remind you why you chose HR?

What sticks with me are the small human moments. Helping someone understand their rights, clarifying outdated policies, or mentoring an employee into a leadership role reminds me why I do this work. ♦



“

I try to meet every employee, watch how they work, and really listen. Understanding their strengths, challenges, and what motivates them helps me identify ways to enhance both their work and the company's performance. When someone tells me they finally trust HR or feel supported, it is what drives me. ”

Human Leadership in the Age of AI: Reclaiming Empathy, Intuition, and Creativity

I love AI, but it can never replace spiritual promptings that relate to the future. AI is backward-looking, whereas humans, through inspiration, can see into the future. Otherwise, how did Joseph interpret Pharaoh's dream and accurately predict 7 years of plenty followed by 7 years of famine?

AI doesn't run human corporations, humans do. AI can't show empathy or compassion. Today in Canada is Remembrance Day, a day of remembering those who fought and died for the freedoms we enjoy. How does AI feel about that? Fifty-five men from our small town gave their lives in World War I and World War II. AI can report on those men, but AI cannot report what motivated those 55 men to enlist freely.

Robots and AI, hands down, can do repetitive tasks more efficiently and effectively than humans can only dream of doing. Robots and AI have their place. What they are incapable of doing is creating random schemes that operate only at a human level. Yes, humans function at the highest of levels—levels AI were never programmed to achieve. Hence, AI simply is a reflection of the past and the synthesis of human feelings written by other humans. ♦



David Johnson,
CEO, Gingerbread Homes

“

“Lest we forget” is a heartfelt phrase used on Remembrance Day—I reverently use it now, lest we forget, Humans lead and are far superior to AI.



Champion of Human-Centered Culture

GIGI GARCIA

📁 Chief People Officer, 🏢 Commonpoint

Over the last decade, the expectations placed on workplaces have shifted dramatically. Employees now seek cultures that value wellbeing, authenticity, psychological safety, and a genuine sense of belonging. This shift did not emerge solely from policies. It came from leaders who understood early that human connection and honest representation would shape the future of work, and Gigi Garcia, now Chief People Officer at Commonpoint, has spent more than two decades bringing that belief to life.

Her journey began with nearly seventeen years at DDB, where she strengthened HR practices and advanced diversity long before these themes became central to corporate strategy. She went on to lead people functions at Accordant Media, VaynerMedia, and Coloredge, while building her own ventures, HR Solutionista and Rx Adam & Eve, to broaden her impact.

Today at Commonpoint, she brings all those experiences together, guiding a people strategy that blends empathy, equity, and organizational clarity. TradeFlock spoke with her to explore her journey, the challenges she has navigated, the lessons that shaped her, and the vision she is driving today.

Q How has the definition of Human Resources evolved over your career?

I began as a Director of Diversity when DEI wasn't a corporate priority—it was about fairness, belonging, and treating people with humanity. Back then, HR was mostly transactional, focused on compliance and policies, and often removed from the real experiences of employees. I realized that culture, personal stories, and psychological safety had a far greater impact on engagement than rules ever could. Watching industries like advertising demand authentic representation reinforced the importance of honesty and

inclusion at work. As technology, new generations, and conversations about wellbeing emerged, HR had to evolve into a visible, empathetic, and strategic partner. Today, HR blends data, equity, and human connection, and my work has always been about creating systems that help people feel genuinely seen, supported, and empowered.

Q What inspired your entrepreneurial venture with Rx Adam & Eve, and what problems were you solving?

Rx Adam & Eve grew from noticing how quietly people struggle with their wellbeing, confidence, and relationships, yet rarely feel safe discussing them. In my HR work, I saw how stress, burnout, and lack of self-care affected performance and personal lives. The idea became a reality when my husband joined as a partner—he shared the vision that wellness should be human, practical, and judgment-free. We wanted to break the stigma around personal and intimate wellness and offer products that were honest, reliable, and approachable. Beyond physical health, we focused on emotional and relational support, helping people feel confident and connected. It became a mission to normalize conversations, provide clarity, and create a space where well-being felt accessible, empowering, and authentic.

“When people feel seen, supported, and valued, they stay—and they help shape a thriving culture”

Q What are the biggest challenges you've seen in HR evolution, and how have you applied your learnings to attract, retain, and support talent?

HR has evolved from a compliance-focused function to a people-centered, strategic discipline, but this transformation brings complex challenges. Balancing empathy with efficiency, integrating technology without compromising human connection, and supporting mental health while meeting performance demands require careful attention. Early in my career, when DEI wasn't a mainstream priority, I realized that clarity, fairness, and intentional mentorship were essential to bridging gaps and fostering engagement. I applied those lessons by creating transparent career pathways, providing structured guidance, and implementing mentorship programs,

while fostering psychological safety and promoting open communication. Strengthening our employer brand through authentic storytelling attracted candidates aligned with our mission and reinforced culture.

I often remind myself: “When people feel seen, supported, and valued, they stay—and they help shape a thriving culture.” This philosophy guided every strategy, from talent acquisition to retention, ensuring HR remained both strategic and deeply human. By blending systems with empathy, I've learned that culture evolves not just through policies, but through the lived experiences of every employee.

Q Based on your experiences, what would you say is the key to a successful succession planning program?

I've always seen succession planning as preparing people, not just filling roles. Early in my career, unclear processes left employees unsure of their growth potential, which in turn affected their engagement and confidence. I realized that clarity—about skills, expectations, and opportunities—was essential, but it had to be paired with guidance and support. Mentorship, stretch assignments, and exposure to new challenges helped employees transform potential into readiness, while fairness and equity ensured that everyone had access to development opportunities. Open communication and ongoing feedback made growth tangible and actionable. Today, succession planning succeeds when it is intentional, dynamic, and rooted in trust, building leaders who are confident, capable, and aligned with the organization's mission, and creating a culture where people feel seen and supported.

Q If you weren't working in HR, what field do you think you would be in?

If I weren't in HR, I know my path would have led me to a career in counseling or wellness. My studies in clinical counseling, combined with my lifelong interest in supporting personal growth, would have drawn me to family and marriage counseling, where I would help individuals and couples navigate challenges, rebuild trust, and strengthen connections. At the same time, my love for movement, mindfulness, and healthy living would have led me to become a Pilates instructor, guiding people toward strength, balance, and confidence in their bodies and minds. Both paths, although different, share the same purpose: to help people feel supported, whole, and empowered. Even in HR, that thread remains, shaping how I listen, mentor, and create environments where people can thrive. ♦





Borderless / AI

Global Teams, Local Ground

Borderless AI was launched in 2022 and quickly became an ambitious project in the fields of Employer of Record (EOR) and universal HR. Recognising that the challenge of going global is characterised by complex compliance requirements, payroll difficulties, wasted time and money in setting up entities, and cash-flow issues during the process, the startup aimed to revolutionise how organisations recruit, remunerate, and manage international staff. Its motto is straightforward: global talent should be as easy to hire as internal employees, without the hassle of establishing an entity, dealing with foreign banking logistics, or facing administrative nightmares.

Engineering a Smarter Global HR Platform

The core of the Borderless AI product is an AI-driven platform designed to be fast, scalable, and compliant. The company proudly offers hiring opportunities in over

170 countries through its own legal entities, without relying on vendors. Everything can be managed through a single system: onboarding, contracting, payroll, and benefits. The platform has been built to eliminate traditional delays and cash flow issues, whether it's onboarding a new employee within days instead of weeks, or processing payroll in over 90 currencies. It also boasts no salary deposit requirements and positions itself as a cash flow solution for high-growth and international companies.

Intelligence Embedded in HR Workflows

Borderless AI extends beyond entity and payroll coverage. The company has integrated intelligent automation into its offerings. Its AI Agents feature allows it to generate contracts, offer compliance advice, and enable employee self-service via chat. For instance, an HR manager can request the system to draft a valid employment agreement with an employee in

Portugal, or a team member in Brazil can ask the platform about PTO regulations or local labour laws. This blend of automation and international HR expertise aims to free up HR departments and let them focus on strategic growth rather than paperwork.

Speed of Deployment as a Strategic Advantage

The timeliness of Borderless AI operations is a key differentiator for the company. Instead of taking months to establish a company in a new country, clients report that they can onboard within days. In most cases, payroll periods are under five days, which is significantly faster than industry standards. When scaling rapidly and hiring staff internationally, whether for remote engineering, field sales, or regional offices, the competitive advantage lies in the ability to make timely decisions. Borderless AI positions itself precisely at that intersection: where speed meets global compliance.

Value That Resonates with Enterprises

Real-life benefits: Customer testimonials highlight actual savings from avoiding local entity formation, faster hiring processes, simpler payroll management, and a more seamless global employment experience. The platform, rated 4.9 stars by users and praised for user experience, support, and accuracy, has gained traction among startups and medium-sized international companies. Internally, the company emphasises attributes such as 100% entity ownership, real-time payroll, multi-currency options, and local benefits choices, all designed to make international workers feel as manageable as local employees.

Navigating Challenges in Global Workforce Innovation

Although the vision of Borderless AI is very convincing, there are unavoidable obstacles along the way. Scaling across more than 170 jurisdictions requires keeping up with constantly changing labour regulations, tax systems, and benefit regimes. Managing data privacy, ensuring security when operating internationally, and providing a consistent user experience across different languages and cultural environments are complicated. Additionally, as automation influences HR

AT A GLANCE

Founded:
2022

Founders:
Willson Cross and
Sean Aggarwal

Headquarters:
Toronto, Ontario,
Canada

Funding:
\$32 million

processes, organisations will need to balance the human aspects of hiring, management, performance, and culture. The company must continue to build trust not only in its technology but also in service reliability across various legal and banking systems.

Expansion, AI Innovation & Platform Maturity

In the future, Borderless AI will continue to expand its AI functions, broaden its entity coverage and sharpen its platform to serve larger organisations with more

complex workforce footprints. Its generative AI-driven tools for contract writing and its compliance monitoring assistants are signs of a time when HR will become more responsible and less reactive. The next step could involve more integrations with payroll, ERP and talent management systems, more advanced self-service features, and even macro workforce planning across different geographies.

Strategic Workforce Agility for the C-Suite

Borderless AI can be a strategic tool for CFOs, CHROs, and growth leaders building global teams. Instead of dealing with high manual costs to establish entities, complex country-by-country payroll issues, and compliance risks, organisations can operate more swiftly, save working capital, and treat global employee practices as an extension of their domestic operations. As companies increasingly adopt remote hiring, transnational teams, and distributed work models, platforms such as Borderless AI are not only practical but are also transforming the way we work.

Borderless AI is creating a system that makes a global team feel local and a global scale seem local in a world where talent is no longer confined by borders and work is no longer tied to a specific location. ♦



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Elevating People Strategy and Culture at Stryker

KATY FINK

VP, Chief Human Resources Officer,
 Stryker

At Stryker, one of the world's leading medical technology companies, people and purpose are inseparable. Driving this alignment is Katy Fink, the company's Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), whose leadership has redefined how human capital strategy fuels innovation and growth. With more than two decades of experience spanning healthcare and manufacturing, Katy has positioned HR as a strategic force behind Stryker's global success, where talent, technology, and purpose come together to improve healthcare.

Building the Foundations of a Global People Strategy

Katy joined Stryker in 2013 as Vice President of Talent Management, introducing enterprise-wide frameworks for leadership development, succession planning, and capability building. These initiatives became the cornerstone of the company's talent mobility and leadership pipeline strategy. Within just two years, she was elevated to Vice President of HR for the MedSurg and Neurotechnology Group, where she successfully aligned HR with business transformation goals, bridging operational execution with human potential.

Her promotion to CHRO in 2016 marked a turning point for Stryker's people strategy. At a time of global expansion and market diversification, Katy focused on strengthening organisational agility, integrating shared HR services, and embedding data-driven decision-making into every aspect of talent management. Her approach ensured scalability without compromising the strong culture of inclusion and innovation that defines Stryker.

Culture as a Competitive Advantage

For Katy, culture is more than a project; it's the invisible architecture that powers innovation, engagement, and performance. Under her leadership, Stryker has consistently been recognised among Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For", underscoring the strength of its culture and employee experience.

She believes that the true measure of a great workplace lies in how people feel, not just how they perform. Her efforts to build trust-based, inclusive environments have made Stryker a benchmark for employee engagement in the healthcare industry. By empowering leaders to embody the company's values and ensuring that every employee feels a sense of purpose, she has made culture one of Stryker's most valuable assets.

Navigating Change with Empathy and Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic tested leadership across industries, and Stryker's global workforce was no exception. Katy led the organisation through this turbulent period by prioritising employee safety, mental well-being, and transparent communication. She introduced flexible work models, enhanced well-being initiatives, and strengthened digital collaboration tools, all while maintaining operational continuity and morale.

Her leadership through crisis reflected a defining principle: resilience is built on connection. By combining agility with empathy, Katy ensured that Stryker's people emerged from the disruption stronger and more united.

Championing Inclusion, Equity, and Belonging

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) form a central pillar of Katy's vision for Stryker's future. She has driven global DEI strategies that emphasise representation, opportunity, and respect, ensuring that diverse perspectives shape innovation. From inclusive hiring practices to leadership programmes for under-represented talent, her initiatives have deepened Stryker's commitment to equity across regions and roles.

For Katy, inclusion is more than a metric; it's a mindset. By cultivating a workplace that celebrates authenticity and fairness, she continues to embed DEI as a driver of performance, innovation, and sustainable growth.



Transforming HR Through Technology and Data

As Stryker embraces digital transformation, Katy has been at the forefront of modernising HR systems to enhance employee experience and business insight. She spearheaded the adoption of data-driven platforms for performance management, learning, and engagement – tools that enable leaders to make informed, transparent decisions.

Her forward-looking approach integrates analytics with empathy, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces human connection. Katy's emphasis on human-centred technology underscores her belief that the future of HR lies in blending digital precision with emotional intelligence.

Influence Beyond Stryker

Beyond her corporate role, Katy contributes her expertise to the broader community through board positions at Bronson Healthcare Group and The Upjohn Institute. Her insights into leadership, organisational change, and workforce development continue to influence HR best practices across industries.

Earlier in her career, she held pivotal roles at Cintas Corporation and Ethicon Endo-Surgery, a division of Johnson & Johnson, experiences that shaped her understanding of how people strategy drives business transformation.

A Leader Defined by Purpose and People

Katy's educational foundation mirrors her leadership balance of logic and empathy. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Kenyon College and a master's degree in human resource management from Rutgers University's School of Management and Labour Relations. This combination of analytical and human insight has guided her approach to leadership, where every decision begins with understanding people.

Her guiding conviction is clear: when employees believe in their work, they change outcomes, and when they feel empowered, they change industries. Under her stewardship, Stryker continues to lead not only in medical innovation but also in shaping what it means to be a purpose-driven workplace.

Today, Katy remains focused on preparing Stryker's global workforce for a digital, diverse, and connected future. Her leadership continues to embody a balance of vision and authenticity, proving that true transformation begins with people. ♦

November 12, 1930

The First Round Table Conference

The great struggle for Indian independence began on November 12, 1930, at the grand St. James's Palace in London. The First Round Table Conference, a gathering organised by the British government, was more than just a diplomatic event; it was an effort to redefine the constitutional relationship between Britain and its largest colony. It served as a political experiment amid the Civil Disobedience Movement and growing Indian nationalism, reflecting the imperial dilemma: how to maintain global rule while responding to the unstoppable demand for self-governance.

“The British government soon realised that without the Indian National Congress, no meaningful reforms could move forward”

Setting the Stage: Britain's Balancing Act

It is my conviction that the political situation in India was heating up by 1930. The Indian National Congress, led by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, was insisting on Purna Swaraj, full independence. The Salt March of the previous year had mobilised the masses, and British rule seemed increasingly unsatisfactory. However, the British government, led by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, attempted a compromise to grant India partial independence but maintain imperial control.

This tension led to the First Round Table Conference. It was meant to address constitutional reforms in line with the recommendations of the Simon Commission, which had excluded Indians, causing widespread protests. The conference was, on one hand, a gesture of inclusion by Britain; on the other, it stood as a test of good faith on India's part.

A Conference Without Its Core Voice

The conference on November 12, 1930, opened with King George V's grand speech at St. James's Palace, attended by 89 Indian representatives, including princes, landlords, minorities, and reformers. The Indian National Congress boycotted, protesting civil disobedience and oppression, which overshadowed the event. Without Congress, the main Indian nationalist body, the meeting risked

becoming merely practical talk rather than a reform effort. Despite this, the British government reiterated its commitment to constitutional progress.



The Participants: Voices from a Fragmented Nation

The conference, even without Congress, united diverse political players. Representatives from Indian princely states saw it as a

way to gain more autonomy within a federal system. Muslim leaders like Aga Khan and Muhammad Shafi pushed for separate electorates and minority protections, influencing later partition politics.

Dalit leader Dr B.R. Ambedkar used the forum to highlight social injustices faced by the Depressed Classes, arguing that social emancipation was vital for political reform. His statements were among the first international acknowledgements of caste discrimination as a barrier to democracy.

Participants included Sikhs,

Christians, Anglo-Indians, and business representatives, each with their own interests. The conference reflected India's societal diversity but also revealed challenges in reaching consensus.

The Core Debate: Dominion, Federation, or Control?

The debate centred on India's future governance. British officials proposed a federal model for British India and princely states united under one constitution, hoping to balance local autonomy and imperial control. Critics argued it aimed to weaken nationalist efforts and maintain British dominance through princely unions.

Many Indian delegates viewed federation as an opportunity, offering a vision of a united India under shared institutions, though with limitations. Yet, without Congress's involvement, it remained just a theory.

To keep progress, the British promised future inclusion of major political groups, including Congress, once law and order was restored, paving the way for other conferences.

Achievements and Limitations

The First Round Table Conference succeeded in accomplishing something unusual: it included Indian voices in official constitutional discussions on an equal footing with the British. The idea of India as an autonomous federation was addressed for the first time. The demand of the Depressed Classes by Ambedkar, the request for recognition by the princely states, and the call for mechanisms of protection by minority leaders all pushed constitutional reform in a broader direction.

However, the absence of the Congress Party made such discussions politically empty. By the end of the conference in January 1931, no binding resolutions were adopted. The British government was not serious about the reforms, and the mass movement toward independence in India did not decline.

Aftermath and Legacy

Following the collapse of the First Round Table Conference, the British aimed to negotiate directly with Congress. This led to the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931, which temporarily halted the Civil Disobedience Movement and allowed Congress to participate in the Second Round Table Conference later that year.

Although the initial conference did not produce immediate change, its symbolic importance was significant. It marked the first time the British officially recognised the need for Indian involvement in shaping their own governance. The discussions initiated at St. James's Palace laid the groundwork for the Government of India Act of 1935, the most substantial constitutional amendment before independence.

Mahatma Gandhi expressed his disappointment, stating, "On bended knees, I asked for bread and I have received stone instead".

A Beginning in Dialogue

The November 1930 First Round Table Conference was a political experiment within the empire. It did not bridge the gap between colonial objectives and nationalist aspirations, but it marked the beginning of a process that over the next 17 years would dismantle the very structure it was intended to support. In the elegant rooms of St. James Palace, not only were speeches and declarations made, but also the early signals of India's future as a democratic nation, one built through debate, inclusion, and the unwavering exercise of self-governance. ♦

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IF YOUR WORLD IS GETTING SMALL, SIMPLY MAKE IT BIGGER.



DELTA
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Building the Best Place to Work

NELSON TORRES

Vice President People,
 David Weekly Homes

In an industry facing notable talent shortages, post-pandemic changes, and economic challenges, leaders must address key issues in talent acquisition, retention, and skill development. They should prioritise aligning culture, systems, and leadership practices to establish meaningful career paths for employees and support the company's mission of "Building Dreams, Enhancing Lives."

Nelson Torres, an HR acquisition specialist, exemplifies a traditional approach to shaping the organization's human strategy by emphasising recruitment, development, and retention of talent, all while cultivating a culture that is regarded as a great place to work. With a focus on HR transformation, Nelson blends strategic planning with technical expertise and process enhancements. His career highlights a proven ability to modernise HR functions and align them seamlessly with core business objectives across diverse industries.

Journey of Talent Acquisition Hunt

He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration with a major in Management from the University of Houston, Texas, which he earned in 2004, and a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management. His coursework emphasised organisational behaviour, labour law, and strategic HR planning.

Torres has enhanced his formal education through continuous professional development, such as

executive leadership programs at the Centre for Creative Leadership and specialised certifications in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy.

His distinctive skills and professional strengths encompass strategic HR transformation, demonstrated by his proven history of leading large-scale HR changes that synchronise people, processes, and systems to deliver both business success and outstanding employee experiences.

Additionally, Torres excels in implementing enterprise HR technology solutions and re-engineering business processes to enhance operations for large employee bases. Beyond operational excellence, Nelson Torres is highly skilled in acquisition and change management, culture, and talent development. He has extensive experience in creating HR scorecards and performance metrics to evaluate and improve HR performance and efficiency, leveraging data to inform strategic initiatives.

His Journey of Excellence

Nelson Torres has developed a 20-year career in human resources, mainly within the homebuilding and construction sectors. His professional journey consistently emphasises talent strategy, employee engagement, and organisational growth. He started in HR leadership roles in early 2005, working part-time while pursuing graduate studies, gaining experience through internships with local real estate developers, and working at a staffing agency focusing on skilled trades. Additionally, he is a recognised speaker at the NAHB International Builders' Show HR Track and writes for Builder Magazine on workforce trends in residential construction.

Torres's work is firmly rooted in Texas homebuilding, aligning staffing strategies with the demands of a cyclical, labour-intensive industry. From 2005 to 2009, Nelson worked as an HR Generalist and Recruiter for D.R. Horton's Gulf Coast Division in Houston, TX. He handled recruitment, onboarding, and benefits while establishing campus hiring pipelines with the University of Houston and Texas State University. He rapidly developed expertise in workforce planning specifically for the construction sector.

From 2009 to 2014, he served as HR Manager at PulteGroup (formerly Centex Homes) in Dallas, TX, overseeing a staff of over 400. He launched a safety training program that cut OSHA-recordables by 22%, managed union relations and collective bargaining for skilled trades, and earned two promotions recognising his excellence in employee relations and compliance.

From 2014 to 2018, Torres served as Director of HR for Lennar Corporation's Southwest Division in Austin, TX, overseeing HR for over 600 employees across

His distinctive skills and professional strengths encompass strategic HR transformation, demonstrated by his proven history of leading large-scale HR changes that synchronise people, processes, and systems to deliver both business success and outstanding employee experiences."



Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. He supported a 40% increase in staff during a major expansion, launched regional apprenticeship programs in collaboration with trade schools, and ensured labor compliance during large-scale community development projects.

Since 2018, Torres has been the Vice President of People at David Weekley Homes in Houston, TX. He manages HR strategies for a top-10 private homebuilder in the U.S. with over 1,800 employees across 19 markets. He reduced voluntary turnover by 18% through predictive analytics and retention programs, introduced the "BuildWell" wellness initiative emphasising mental health and flexible work options, and oversees talent acquisition, leadership growth, DEI initiatives, and total rewards. He reports directly to the CEO and is part of the executive leadership team.

Making David Weekly Homes, Best Place to Work

Since joining David Weekley Homes in 2018 as Vice President of People, Nelson Torres has transformed the company's human capital strategy, contributing to its status as one of the top 10 U.S. private homebuilders. He cut voluntary turnover by 18% through data-driven retention models and personalised career paths, preserving institutional knowledge.

Torres launched "BuildWell," a holistic wellness program, which boosted employee engagement by 25% and reduced stress-related absenteeism. He shifted talent acquisition to a predictive, market-aligned pipeline, supporting growth across 19 cities while maintaining quality and culture.

His focus on leadership development increased internal promotions by 30%, strengthening teams and cutting external search costs. Torres integrated DEI into operations, achieving gender parity in field leadership and a 40% rise in supplier diversity, aligning practices with the company's vision. His strategic impact is reflected in multiple "Best Place to Work" recognitions.

Notable Achievements

Nelson Torres has garnered notable recognition for his innovative HR leadership in construction, including the 2023 Top 20 HR Leaders in Construction by HR Today Magazine for data-driven retention and wellness initiatives, and the 2021 NAHB HR Excellence Award for advancing DEI at David Weekley Homes, with 40% supplier diversity growth and gender parity in leadership.

A frequent speaker at the NAHB International Builders' Show from 2022 to 2024 on talent retention, he is also a regular contributor to Builder Magazine, where his 2023 article on predictive HR was nominated for an Editorial Excellence Award.🔹



Transforming People Strategy at a Global Scale

SHURAWL SIBBLIES

 *EVP and Chief Human Resources Officer,*
 **MetLife**

The insurance industry is unique in its own way, with established institutions, evolving consumer demands, and intense competition for talent. There is a particular paradox: how to be modern while remaining stable, and how to be innovative while gaining trust. As Shurawl Sibblies joined MetLife as Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer in Spring 2024, she found herself in a period of change, where business agility was not the only concern but also the people-focused transformation of culture and capability.

Catalysing Culture Amid Industry Disruption

MetLife operates in over 40 countries worldwide, providing insurance, employee benefits, and asset management services. As a result, Sibblies inherited an HR mandate that extended beyond recruiting and retention; it involved fostering a global culture of purpose, inclusion, and agility on a scale rarely managed by human-resources transformation. She was recruited by American Express, where she led talent, organisational, and leadership development strategies across various business units and regions. Her return to MetLife marked a full



circle, leveraging her previous experience within the company to champion a new HR agenda aligned with strategic growth objectives.

Elevating Talent as a Strategic Asset

As a new role, Sibblies emphasised that people are not cost centres but strategic assets. According to Michel Khalaf, CEO and President of MetLife, Sibblies will continue on their path to advance progress, fostering an inclusive culture rooted in a purpose that attracts, develops, engages, and retains world-class talent. The HR function at MetLife has evolved under her leadership: it is no longer talent acquisition but talent activation, ensuring employees understand how their roles connect to the company's strategic results, customer impact, and mission, which is to help people build more confident futures. Such alignment is vital in a sector where human relationships underpin long-term customer value.

Embedding Inclusion Through Data-Driven Strategy

Sibblies holds both an MBA in Finance and an MS in Predictive Analytics, giving her a unique blend of business and data intuition that is quite rare. She previously led workforce analytics, strategic planning, and HR business partnerships within U.S. business, global employee benefits, and investment teams during her role as HR partner at MetLife (2012-2019). She now applies this experience to her current strategy of using data to promote inclusion and engagement. She fosters responsibility in culture change by monitoring indicators such as mobility, performance, and mood, turning the concept of inclusion from a dream into a tangible reality.

Leading Hybrid Workforces and Global Mobility

The business environment has changed rapidly, and Sibblies is highly adaptable to these shifts. Her background in managing strategic partnerships with innovation teams and international markets at American Express, prior to joining MetLife, improved her skills in aligning different regions with a cohesive strategy. As CHRO at MetLife, she is spearheading initiatives to facilitate global mobility, flexible working arrangements, leadership development across regional centres, and cross-functional rotations, ensuring the organisation remains agile and future-focused.

From Compliance to Empowerment: Reframing HR's Role

The traditional HR within the financial services sector is usually a regulatory safeguard- controls, audits, and

compliance. Sibblies has redefined HR as a facilitator of business strategy. She develops structures based on ongoing coaching, rather than annual reviews, and career accelerators rather than career tracks, emphasising inclusive leadership over hierarchy. Her motto is: "It is people who are core to HR and lead the application of the company," as she stated when she was appointed. She aims to make human potential central to MetLife's growth- not only in risk mitigation but also by enhancing human potential.

Impact Through Engagement and Value Creation

Although some measurements of Sibblies's years of tenure at MetLife are still being realised, her track record demonstrates real action. Her previous roles enabled her to build high-performing teams worldwide, reorganise leadership pipelines, and implement talent strategies on a large scale. Since MetLife is committed to growing and innovating more rapidly in a digital-first world, all its operations and customer experiences depend on its HR approach. The connection between talent strategy and business execution is crucial for insurers operating in changing regulatory environments, shifting consumer expectations, and the impact of technological disruption.

Extending Influence Beyond MetLife's Walls

The leadership at MetLife focuses on community and development. The experience at the world's leading organisations shows that she is committed to nurturing people, not just those already in the workforce, but also future generations. She is investing in mobility, analytics-driven talent practices, and inclusive frameworks, all within an evolving HR discipline shaped by business realities.

Setting the HR Precedent for the Future of Work

Shurawl Sibblies comes to MetLife when HR is not a back-stage activity, but it is front-stage. Her leadership clarifies what game-changing HR looks like in an intricate global insurer, one that combines intent with operationality, data with compassion, and talent development with a business approach. As MetLife enters the next phase of its development, Sibblies's role becomes crucial: it is necessary to shape culture, enhance capability development, and transform human capital into a competitive advantage.

The takeaway is that in a digitally disruptive and hybrid workplace, the greatest ROI will come from how companies value their employees and with Sibblies leading in this area, MetLife is positioning itself at the forefront of change. ♦

The Birth of the AI-Designed Virus

A New Frontier in Synthetic Biology

The first known attempt at designing a viral genome using artificial intelligence emerged in a September 2025 study by an international team led by Stanford University and the Arc Institute, reporting the creation of the first fully artificial, AI-designed viral genome. The publication of this project in peer-reviewed form and its widespread coverage mark a significant breakthrough in synthesising the dissolution of the boundary between digital intelligence and biological life. A scientist states that AI is redefining what it means to be human and to be alive.

From Code to Cell: How Machines Learned to Design Life

The core of this discovery is a new AI system, named Evo, which

Stanford and the Arc Institute trained on millions of viral genomes. The model learned the language of viral genetics, including gene arrangement, regulatory logic, and host-interaction patterns, then generated entirely new viral genomes from scratch. One researcher explained: "Genome design involves the coordination of several interacting genes and regulatory factors, which adds complexity, and there are new constraints and failure modes that would not be present in simply designing a single protein."

As a test case, the team selected the bacteriophage PhiX174, a small virus that infects the bacterium E. coli. Out of hundreds of genomes created by the AI, 16 were confirmed to be functional in laboratory tests, and each included dozens to hundreds of mutations

**In the quiet hum
of the lab, a new
kind of genesis
occurred,
designed by
code, born
of biology,
weighted
with human
responsibility**

that had never been observed in nature. The AI-designed phages were found to be more effective than their natural counterparts, with some showing faster bacterial infection and increased efficiency in the lab.

Engineering Evolution: Why AI Is the New Biologist

It is not merely a technical achievement but a shift in paradigm. Unlike in the past, when researchers focused on sequencing genomes or modifying existing ones, this project shows that AI can design biological life. The models can create a single gene, whole pathways, and in this case, the entire genome of a very simple bacteriophage, said one of the lead researchers.

We are no longer just supplementing human research with machine assistance; AI has broken through the barrier into generative production. Put simply, the machine will become a co-author of biological life. This opens up new possibilities: synthetic viruses that can deliver therapies, targeted phage therapy against antibiotic-resistant bacteria, or even programmed organisms designed to address climate change.

Balancing Innovation and Risk in the Age of Living Algorithms

With Great power comes great responsibility. Biosecurity concerns arose from this innovation's dual-use nature. An expert said, "If someone discovers a new DNA sequence creating a virus killing E. coli, I'd be impressed. But what about applying this to non-benign bacteria-targeting phages?" The team took safeguards: the viruses used did not cause human diseases and only attacked harmless E. coli, under strict biosafety measures. Ethicists warn that we're entering uncharted waters; one described

**The genome
is no longer
just nature's
blueprint;
it's the AI's
canvas.
The art can
heal or harm**



it as a significant yet unsettling development. A preprint of 130 experts revealed that 76% were concerned about AI misuse in biology, and 74% sought new governance measures.

A Catalyst for Medicine, Climate and Beyond

Nevertheless, the possibilities are vast, despite the warnings. In healthcare, it can accelerate vaccine development by modelling viral evolution and predicting therapeutic responses. Engineered viral vectors can be utilised to enhance agricultural practices by enhancing crop resilience or improving soil-microbiome health. Synthetic phages could prove useful in environmental science for breaking down persistent pollutants or restoring ecosystems damaged by industrialisation. Industry reports suggest that AI-driven synthetic biology could become a

multi-billion-dollar industry, valued at over \$120 billion by the end of the decade.

As a technology commentator stated, it is the first time that AI has moved beyond reading DNA sequencing and writing its synthesis to designing it.

The Future of Creation: Redefining What It Means to Be Alive

In addition to the practical applications, this work prompts a largely philosophical reconsideration. When a machine can design, simulate, and create a functioning organism, is that organism equivalent to one that has evolved through natural selection? Is this the era of Darwin 2.0, as one scientist has called it?

What we are capable of doing is not the only challenge humanity faces; we also have to consider what we ought to do. Authorship, responsibility, and ethics are central questions concerning the emergence of algorithm-designed life. Who bears responsibility for a system that AI has designed and that continues to behave unpredictably?

A Turning Point in Human History

The design of the first functioning AI-designed viral genome on Earth is not just a scientific breakthrough but a paradigm shift at the boundary between biology and artificial intelligence. It heralds a future where algorithms can imagine, create, and implement living systems.

The outcome of this moment will be either a new era of medical miracles, environmental restoration, or something more sinister, depending on the governance, ethics, and foresight we apply in the lab and boardroom. Ultimately, the virus that is coded might not only be reinventing biology as we know it but also redefining what it means to be a creator of life itself. ♦



Connecting People, Purpose,
and Possibility

**SUSAN
GRAYE**

Global Talent Attraction - Acquisition
- Engagement Leader and Speaker,
 Susan Graye Executive Recruiters

Q Which milestones make you smile the most, and how did they shape your idea of talent magic?

The milestones that make me smile are always about people. I've had the joy of spotting great talent, building teams that truly click, and watching them set goals and reach them together. That's where the magic happens — and I've always believed in setting clear goals, measuring progress, and celebrating the wins that bring a team closer.

In my most recent role, our team built a global Center of Excellence and a Recruiting Resource Center. We took time to understand cultures, hiring laws, and what could be standardized. It wasn't just process work; it was learning how to celebrate differences while still working as one.

I also strongly believe in the power of data and analytics. The insight AI provides enables a more targeted and informed approach. We were among the first to adopt AI and even helped develop a corporate generational AI tool to capture meeting notes, improve communication, and strengthen strategy.

Another moment I cherish was creating a global talent value proposition. We spoke with employees worldwide in their own languages and at every level, from manufacturing workers to executives. AI helped us find patterns, but the heart of it came from real conversations — understanding why people stay and what they truly value.

Q What was a tough spot early in your career, and how did you push through it?

I love the song lyric, I get knocked down, but I get up again. It feels like my story, and I even have a pair of pink boxing gloves. I often joke that I may be small, but I am a fighter.

My dad had to start over when I was a senior in college, at a time when Michigan's economy was struggling. The local headline read, Will the last person in Michigan turn out the lights?

When I could not find a professional job, I packed up my little red sports car with a leaky roof and no air conditioning, and drove to Houston, determined to make my mark. I started with an employment agency that had no clients, no copier, and no fax machine. I made one hundred calls a day, built a technology practice from scratch, and eventually landed Hewlett-Packard as my first big client and, later, my employer. Those early years taught me the power of tenacity and hard work.

“ If I could share one piece of wisdom, it would be this. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and lend a hand to help others. And never stop learning. ”

Q What gaps in the U.S. talent landscape inspired you to start your own firm?

I realized that too many people treat candidates like products instead of people. They focus on filling positions rather than understanding what the individual wants, what they enjoy, and why they're making a change. Chemistry and connection matter just as much as skills.

My passion has always been the alignment of people strategy with business strategy. When people goals and business goals move in the same direction, performance, engagement, and culture all accelerate. That alignment is where real impact happens, and it's what inspires the work I do today.

Although I am currently involved in veteran initiatives — work I deeply value — my core focus is helping organizations build workplaces where people and business outcomes strengthen each other.

Q What was one major bump on your entrepreneurial journey, and what helped your Texas grit stay strong?

I have learned that life is like a mountain expedition. You never know what you will find on the climb, and once you reach the top, you are already dreaming of the next peak.

People are not machines, and life will always bring new challenges. Sickness, loss, change, and reinvention are part of every journey. The key is to see problems as opportunities and to celebrate success with every obstacle you overcome. My journey has not been an easy one. I lost my dad in a fatal accident and nearly lost my mom. Later, I lost my husband to cancer and spent six months caring for him in hospitals, watching the floodwaters of Hurricane Harvey from the window at MD Anderson. Today, I care for my mother, who has dementia, in hospice at home.

These experiences have taught me kindness, patience, and perspective. What we see on the outside often hides deep struggles within. Professionally, I never stop learning, networking, and finding ways to make a difference. I take pride in helping others succeed, and I love using technology to make that impact stronger.

Q As a talent leader, which future initiative excites you most?

I'm most excited about how AI will let us personalize the hiring journey for both managers and candidates. Just as in travel, where every trip can be customized, hiring experiences will soon be tailored to each person's needs.

Automation will also free people from repetitive tasks, allowing them to focus on creativity and innovation. I hope that the future of work feels like being a traveler, full of exploration and learning. I want people to move across roles, gain new experiences, and build careers that truly mean something. When work feels like a journey, people stay curious and engaged.



I dream that the future of work feels like a traveler's journey, full of learning, exploration, and new experiences.



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Why Your Data Is Lying to You (And How to Fix It)

BALAJI SIVAKUMAR, FOUNDER, STRATOGRID.AI

Leaders are taught to make decisions based on facts. But what happens when the facts themselves are flawed?

Every dashboard, spreadsheet, and quarterly report is a translation of reality, an interpretation built by people, processed by systems, and filtered by assumptions. Somewhere in that chain, truth gets edited. The result is data that looks precise but feels off—because it is. It's not lying maliciously; it's lying by omission.

The greatest illusion in modern leadership isn't ignorance, it's false clarity.

Numbers offer the comfort of precision but rarely the depth of understanding. When we confuse measurement for meaning, we start managing symptoms instead of systems, optics instead of outcomes.

The fix isn't more analytics, it's awareness.

Leaders must relearn how to see. That means questioning not just the numbers, but the narratives they reinforce. Where is this insight coming from? What realities were simplified or silenced to make it fit into a cell on a dashboard?

Real leadership today is less about commanding information and more about cultivating discernment, the ability to detect when the story the data tells no longer matches the world you sense.

It's the intuition to notice a rising tension before the engagement score dips, to catch the hesitation behind the numbers, to recognize when "everything's fine" means "we've stopped looking."

Truth in organizations lives in the spaces between metrics, in the conversations, the contradictions, the unfinished thoughts people don't enter into systems. When leaders create the conditions to connect those dots, data begins to serve awareness instead of replacing it.

In the end, your data doesn't need to be more accurate. It needs to be more alive, reflecting not just what your company measures, but what it feels.

The future of leadership belongs to those who can sense that difference, who treat awareness itself as the most reliable form of intelligence. ♦

When we confuse measurement for meaning, we start managing symptoms instead of systems, optics instead of outcomes."





THE STREAMING WAR IN SPORTS

How OTT Platforms Are Changing How Fans Watch the Game

Sports broadcasting is undergoing a seismic shift globally. Once dominated by television giants such as ESPN, Star Sports, and Sky Sports, it is now an arena occupied by streaming platforms worldwide. Whether it is Amazon Prime and JioCinema or Apple TV+ and DAZN, Over-The-Top (OTT) services are rewriting the rules of how we watch, engage with, and even define the sporting experience. The result is a new era characterised by digital,

personalised, borderless, yet also fragmented and highly competitive viewership.

From Living Room to Smartphone Stadiums

The traditional ritual of watching sports on cable TV is swiftly being replaced by a more flexible, on-demand experience. The modern fan no longer needs a television to watch their favourite team; all they need is a smartphone, tablet, or laptop. Media platforms such as JioCinema, which covers the Indian

Premier League (IPL), and Amazon's Thursday Night Football have turned mobile screens into virtual stadiums.

This shift is not only about convenience but also about control. Fans now have the ability to personalise their viewing experience by choosing camera angles, commentary languages, or even real-time statistics overlays. The passive viewer has become an active participant. To younger generations who grow up with TikTok and YouTube, this interactive element is instinctive and essential.

"The streaming revolution is not only changing where sports are watched but also how they are narrated. The use of AI for commentary, 4K streaming, AR replays, and predictive analytics is enhancing the way stories are told compared to traditional broadcasts."

The Globalisation of the Game

OTT services have dismantled geographic boundaries in a way that traditional TV and radio companies could never achieve. An Indian basketball fan can stream NBA League Pass without waiting for a local broadcaster to provide it. A Tokyo football enthusiast can watch the English Premier League via a DAZN subscription. Sporting events have become a widespread international phenomenon, and OTT has served as the great equaliser.

However, this globalisation comes with its own complexities. Rights deals have become more fragmented, and viewers now need different subscriptions for different regions. A fan who once relied on a single TV network now has to contend with three or four applications, a form of digital clutter reflecting content abundance but also challenging viewer loyalty.

Data: The New MVP

As long as content is king, data is the crown. OTT services not only broadcast sports; they also analyse each tap, pause, and rewind. These user data riches enable them to customise content, target ads, and predict viewing patterns.

For example, websites like ESPN+ and Hotstar use AI-based analytics to suggest highlights or upcoming games depending on user activity. Amazon X-Ray also incorporates real-time statistics and trivia into live sports, transforming passive viewing into an in-depth, data-driven experience.

Money, Monetisation, and Paywall Paradox

On the one hand, streaming democratises access, but on the other hand, it transforms economics. Subscriptions, pay-per-view events, and a level of ad-supported content have been redefining revenue sources. In the case of leagues and teams, OTT platforms now provide a direct connection with fans, no longer relying on cable networks and increasing profits.

However, the same monetisation strategies risk alienating fans. With each move to introduce paywalls, once communal sports are becoming exclusive. Fans now might subscribe to individual streams for cricket, football, and Formula 1, each hosted on its own streaming platform. The irony is stark: in a digital age abundant with options, access may be becoming narrower in the real sense of the word.

Tech-Driven Storytelling: The New Commentary Box

The streaming revolution is not only changing where sports are watched but also how they are narrated. The use of AI for commentary, 4K streaming, AR replays, and predictive analytics is enhancing the way stories are told compared to traditional broadcasts.

OTT services can offer various commentary options, behind-the-scenes footage, and documentaries to deepen emotional connection. The Netflix Drive to Survive series turned Formula 1 drivers into global

celebrities, rekindling interest in the sport among a generation that had never watched it. Other spin-offs of this kind, such as Full Swing (golf) and Break Point (tennis), indicate that the future of sports viewing is not limited to live action but is increasingly narrative-based.

The Future: Fragmented or Free?

Consolidation may become the next phase as the streaming war persists. Bundled products, alliances, and even mergers could emerge as platforms try to enhance the fan experience. Meanwhile, the rise of interactive technology, such as VR and Web3-based fan engagement tools, is set to make the line between viewer and participant even more blurred.

The OTT revolution in sports is unstoppable, despite challenges such as subscription fatigue, piracy threats, and market saturation in a competitive landscape. The screens are different, viewers have evolved, and even the concept of fandom is being redefined through pixels and code.

A Game Forever Changed

The streaming war in sports is not just about owning rights, but having the right owners. Traditional broadcasters may be left behind with nostalgia, but the future of broadcasting lies in OTT: agile, data-driven, and personalised. One thing is clear as this digital battle unfolds: the next great arena in sports is not a stadium or TV network. It's the cloud. ♦



Redefining Success Through People-First Vision

TIFFANY DORSEY

Regional HR Director | Pulcra Chemicals, LLC

Workplaces don't succeed on strategies and numbers alone. They thrive when people feel heard, supported, and inspired to grow and develop. Yet creating that balance between business goals and human needs is rarely simple. It takes leaders who can see both sides of the equation: the metrics that drive performance and the culture that sustains it.

That rare balance is what defines Tiffany Dorsey, Regional Human Resources Director of Pulcra Chemicals, LLC. With over two decades of experience in human resources and business management, she has led teams through union negotiations, developed policies and training programs, and conducted sensitive investigations that helped rebuild trust. Today, as Regional Human Resources Director – Americas and Global Organizational Development Manager at Pulcra Chemicals, she oversees HR operations across multiple countries and drives global initiatives in job harmonization, compensation, and HR technology. In this conversation, Tiffany reflects on her journey and the lessons that continue to shape her people-first approach to leadership.

Q What inspired your shift from operations to HR, and how has that mix shaped your leadership?

My move from operations to HR wasn't sudden; it grew out of realizing that my real impact came through people more than processes. In operations, I mastered efficiency and outcomes, but what always struck me was how culture and employee well-being drove those results. I naturally leaned into mentoring, problem-solving with teams, and building systems that boosted both productivity and morale. So when HR leadership

opened up, it felt like a natural step.

My operations lens helps me grasp the “why” of business needs while seeing the “how” from the employees’ side.

That dual perspective shaped me into a leader who balances business alignment with a true commitment to people, ensuring HR fuels both growth and culture.

Q What's been your toughest challenge in employee relations, and how did it become a growth opportunity?

Sustaining strong employee relations across industries has been both challenging and rewarding. Each sector has its own rhythm—some value innovation and agility, while others rely on structure and stability. Early in my career, I tried a “one-size-fits-all” model and quickly learned it left employees unheard and leaders frustrated. I shifted by creating adaptable frameworks rooted in core values but flexible to each context. For instance, feedback loops looked different in manufacturing than in sales, yet employees in both felt their voices counted. **The lesson: Employee relations thrive not through rigid policies, but through adaptability, listening, and strong relationships.** This approach built trust, raised engagement, and improved retention, transforming a challenge into long-term organizational growth.

Q Can you share a personal story of a challenging case where your combination of analysis and empathy led to a successful resolution?

One of the toughest cases I managed involved multiple claims of harassment and discrimination within a team.

“
That dual perspective shaped me into a leader who balances business alignment with a true commitment to people, ensuring HR fuels both growth and culture.
”

Employees were fearful, anxious about retaliation, and uncertain whether leadership would truly protect them. I knew this required more than process—it called for empathy, patience, and transparent communication alongside thorough analysis. Each interview was approached with compassion, allowing people to share openly while I carefully pieced together facts and patterns. Emotions ran high, but striking a balance between rigor and humanity uncovered the truth and ensured accountability. The organization strengthened its reporting systems, leaders became more proactive in fostering inclusion, and the team that had once been silenced began to feel empowered. For me, it reinforced that HR's role goes beyond compliance; it's about transforming painful situations into defining moments of integrity and cultural growth.

Q What creative training method have you used that transformed supervisor coaching?

Training often feels like compliance, but I've seen it become transformative when it's creative and engaging. One of the most impactful methods I introduced combined storytelling with gamification for supervisor coaching. Instead of static slides, supervisors entered interactive scenarios modeled on real workplace challenges. Through role-play, they "leveled up" by navigating tough conversations—from addressing performance gaps to coaching for growth or resolving conflict. The storytelling made situations relatable, while gamification kept them motivated. The results spoke volumes: supervisors retained their skills, felt more confident, and employee surveys showed that coaching quality, morale, and support had improved. It proved that reimagining training doesn't just build skills—it sparks growth and cultural transformation.

Q How do you recharge and maintain balance outside your HR role?

Balancing a demanding HR role across the Americas has taught me something vital: balance is not a luxury; it is fuel for leadership. I recharge

by spending time with family and friends, as well as immersing myself in creative outlets like painting and writing. Those experiences ground me and remind me that our real mission is helping people thrive in every part of life. After time away, I return to work with clarity, perspective, and renewed energy.



"Employee expectations are not challenges to overcome—they are opportunities to create workplaces where people feel seen, valued, and excited to belong."

I make it a priority to model that harmony for my teams, because when leaders live it, employees feel permission to do the same. A workforce that feels balanced is not only more resilient but also more inspired to innovate and grow.

Q What leadership lesson shaped how you guide others?

Early in my career, I believed that being accountable meant doing everything myself. I wanted to ensure every detail was perfect, but in trying to oversee everything, I stretched myself too thin. Worse, I unintentionally signaled to my team that I didn't trust them with bigger responsibilities.

The lesson hit me hard during a major project when I realized I simply could not do it all alone. Hearing my team's perspective was humbling—they felt underutilized and doubted I had confidence in their abilities. That feedback reshaped how I lead.

Today, I see delegation not as giving up control, but as empowering others. Trusting people with meaningful responsibilities creates space for leaders to focus on strategy while developing the next generation of talent. It's a lesson I share often with mentees: delegation isn't about lightening your load. It's about multiplying impact.

Q What overlooked qualities do you focus on when developing future leaders?

When it comes to succession planning, I see too much focus on technical skills and not enough on the qualities that sustain leadership over time. The

next generation of leaders needs more than a strong résumé—they need adaptability, empathy, and resilience.

I've watched high-potential employees grow when given opportunities to coach or mentor others, even if it pushed them outside their comfort zones. Those experiences sharpen their ability to listen, inspire trust, and lead through uncertainty.

My goal is not to replicate current executives, but to prepare leaders who can adapt, build relationships, and navigate change with confidence. Those are the leaders others genuinely want to follow.

Q How has technology made HR more human?

Technology has transformed HR, but what excites me most is its human impact. When we introduced digital onboarding and automated administrative workflows, our goal was not just speed—it was creating space for connection.

One new hire told me their first week felt seamless because they weren't overwhelmed by paperwork. Instead, they spent time shadowing leaders, building relationships, and immersing themselves in the culture. Technology, when used thoughtfully, does not replace HR's human touch but amplifies it.

The real value lies in the time it frees: time for managers to coach, for HR to listen, and for employees to feel seen. Technology is just a tool; the impact comes from how it lets us be more human in the moments that matter.

Q What shifts in employee expectations have surprised you, and how have you responded?

The biggest shift I've noticed is that flexibility is no longer a perk—it is an expectation. Employees want flexibility in where they work, how they learn, and how they define success. What surprised me is how this spans every industry, from manufacturing to professional services, reshaping the employee experience.

Adapting meant designing HR strategies that strike a balance between consistency and local nuance. In some regions, flexibility meant hybrid schedules. In others, it meant investing in professional development or mental health resources. By listening and tailoring programs, we met evolving expectations while staying aligned with business goals.

The result is not just higher retention. It is a workforce that feels valued and seen. Employee expectations are not challenges to overcome—they are opportunities to create workplaces people genuinely want to be part of. ♦



Trust Architects

Engineering Psychological Safety at Scale

Psychological safety, or the perception of being able to speak up without fear of punishment, is now one of the most important and elusive aspects of organisational culture. This is because teams now span continents, time zones, and cultures, requiring them to operate effectively in culturally diverse environments. The concept originated during Harvard professor Amy Edmondson's study on high-performing teams and has become a strategic requirement, not just a leadership buzzword. However, when a company goes global, can trust established in conference rooms and over coffee at informal gatherings be effectively built across digital boundaries and cultural borders?

The Fragile Core of High-Performance: Why Trust Is Not Optional

Diversity of thought thrives in global teams, but it can turn into a disaster without trust. Psychological safety is the invisible support that allows individuals from different backgrounds to share bold ideas, admit mistakes, and challenge stereotypes without fear. Research by Google (Project Aristotle) found that psychological safety was the most important factor that distinguished successful teams from dysfunctional ones, regardless of technical skills or experience.

The stakes are higher for international companies like IBM, Unilever, and Tata Consultancy Services. Team members

operate in environments where misunderstandings may occur not only across hierarchies but also across cultures. A well-meaning comment in London might be seen as an attack in Manila.

Engineering Empathy: The New Architecture of Global Trust

Trust has traditionally been built through repeated actions and shared experiences. Now, leaders intentionally build it using workflows, digital tools, and communication systems focused on psychological safety.

At Microsoft, global teams have open feedback windows and anonymous online meetings for issue reporting, later discussed in all-hands meetings, completing the

cycle of speaking up and listening. Similarly, Infosys created Voice Circles, digital trust pods where employees cross borders and raise issues with facilitators who handle them culturally.

A 2024 Gartner survey shows that organisations that embed psychological safety see 37 times more innovation and a 27% lower staff turnover. This suggests that systematising trust is achievable with leadership demonstrating vulnerability and responsibility.

Cultural Friction and the Trust Translation Problem

Scaling psychological safety is challenging because safety perceptions vary by culture. In hierarchical societies like Japan, South Korea, and India, speaking up may be seen as disrespectful, whereas in the West, confronting authority is encouraged.

This mismatch leads to a lack of congruency. Organisations should create inclusive systems that respect these differences rather than impose a single model.

For example, Deloitte's Asia-Pacific divisions use reverse mentorships, where juniors guide seniors on digital trends and sensitivities, promoting curiosity over resistance. DBS Bank Singapore includes psychological safety sprints in leadership training, encouraging diverse, anonymised feedback to normalise humility.

As an HR leader at DBS says, safety isn't about avoiding conflict but turning it into a productive force.

Technology as a Trust Multiplier or Divider

Technology in distributed teams can lead to either humanising or dehumanising communication. Remote working systems have become more accessible, collaborative, and transactional thanks to the explosion of

platforms like Slack, Zoom, and Teams. In-person communication relies heavily on micro-expressions and empathetic connections, which can often be misinterpreted.

In response, some companies are employing AI to detect emotional and engagement lapses within team communication. Startups such as Cultivate and Humu (founded by Google's Laszlo Bock) use behavioural analytics to identify when team members are being sidelined or when executives dominate conversations. These insights enable managers to intervene before disengagement sets in.

"A 2024 Gartner survey shows that organisations that embed psychological safety see 37 times more innovation and a 27% lower staff turnover. This suggests that systematising trust is achievable with leadership demonstrating vulnerability and responsibility."

However, an ethical question remains: how can trust be tracked without being broken? The answer lies in transparency - employees should understand how their data is used and see it as a form of empowerment, not spying.

Leading with Vulnerability: The Human Algorithm of Trust

No system, regardless of its complexity, can replace the need for genuine leadership. Psychological safety is fostered by leaders who actively demonstrate it themselves. They recognise

when they are unsure, apologise when they make mistakes, and sometimes choose not to speak, but instead listen with purpose, not with authority.

In international firms such as Accenture and Wipro, leadership training now explicitly tackles vulnerability literacy, the process of learning to manage feelings in high-stress, multicultural environments. This shift moves towards credibility-based leadership, where transparency and consistency are valued more than charismatic appeal, gaining greater respect than any vision statement could.

Fundamentally, psychological safety is not a luxury for high-performing teams; it is an essential infrastructure of modern work. With increasing globalisation and digital transformation, building trust is no longer merely an HR experiment but a vital business imperative.

The Future of Global Collaboration: Designing for Trust, Not Control

Trust will define the future of global collaboration, going beyond technology and geography. Psychological safety is no longer a niche idea limited to startup meetings or academic settings; it is increasingly becoming the foundational operating system of organisations worldwide.

Building trust at scale requires leaders to treat empathy as a fundamental element of organisational design, not just a fleeting emotion to be managed and improved. When individuals can freely share ideas, challenge assumptions safely, and risk failure without fear of consequences, innovation doesn't just persist- it flourishes.

Ultimately, it's not about whether you can engineer trust, but whether you can afford not to. ♦

LEAP OF FAITH

–By **Sambasivan G** (CFO at Tata Play Ltd)

Having been in corporate life for over 35 years, there is one thing that I have learnt. In order to survive you need to continuously reinvent yourself.

From manual accounting and auditing (when I started my articleship days in 1984) where tallying the trial balance was a great milestone for the company, to now, wherein you are deciding between Agentic AI and Intelligent automation, the world of finance has changed forever.

I have travelled this journey with the help of my curiosity and continuous learning appetite. That is for another day.

Today I like to talk about how you as a finance leader can decide on the projects/tasks wherein you can start using AI in a meaningful way.

There are certain preconditions through this process. Firstly, To ensure operational efficiency, start by simplifying and streamlining your processes. Establish automated controls and monitor internal audit findings to confirm there are no significant deviations. Centralize your data to create a single source of truth and embed this as part of your organizational culture. Finally, ensure your team is skilled and up to date with the latest technologies and their applications.

Having done all these (it could take anywhere between three to five years – it took me ten) to reach this stage when you can start working on implementing AI based solutions.

Identify the problem you are trying to solve; today there are 'n' number of AI toolkits that are available; You may need to reimagine your entire process keeping in mind these toolkits; At every stage of the process, you can think of the solution that can be implemented. For example, if you want to use Agentic AI, identify the set of segmented purchases (could be tail end values) that you would like to experiment on.

Then you can approach an expert (typically an outsourced agency) to develop a customised solution. It may take a few months as things are being done the first time. Before going live, please make sure that the UAT (user acceptance test) is as foolproof as possible.

Then you implement the solution in a limited way and look for glitches; once you are confident, you can expand the same to the larger population.

I can tell you that many a time, you may not be able to accurately calculate the ROI of such solutions; in such cases I use a mental concept called "LOF", which is leap of faith; in general, many innovative solutions require some bit of leap of faith before you actually start reaping the results; So far, the results have not disappointed and the solutions that I have been able to implement always delivered ROI beyond my expectations.



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**BEST HR
LEADERS**
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Empowering Organizations With Future-Ready Talent

YASMIN RAHMAN

VP, People & Culture, **Fresh Consulting**

The modern workplace is undergoing one of the most profound shifts in history. Technology and artificial intelligence are redefining how companies operate, yet the real transformation lies in how they cultivate human potential. Recent reports show that over 60% of HR professionals now place AI and automation at the heart of their strategy, while 77% of global companies are prioritizing reskilling and upskilling to prepare their workforce for an AI-driven future. These numbers underscore a clear reality: the future of work will be led by those who understand the value of human adaptability.

Amid this evolution of purpose and progress, leaders like Yasmin Rahman stand apart. With more than twenty-five years of international experience, she has helped leading institutions reimagine how growth and innovation stem from people. From advancing humanitarian impact at UNICEF to shaping governance and culture at Grameenphone and its IT subsidiary, to driving enterprise-wide

transformation at Accenture, Yasmin's journey reflects an exceptional blend of strategy, empathy, and execution.

As Vice President of People and Culture at Fresh Consulting, Yasmin leads where technology meets human experience. Her focus extends beyond traditional HR to integrating talent, culture, and innovation, enabling organizations to thrive in rapidly changing markets. Over the years, she has built robust people systems from the ground up, scaled teams across continents, and guided leaders in fostering inclusive, resilient cultures that fuel both business and individual growth.

A certified leadership trainer, speaker, and advocate for workforce development, Yasmin embodies the evolution of HR into a strategic catalyst for innovation. Her philosophy continues to inspire a new generation of leaders who see progress not only in productivity but in creating workplaces where people truly flourish.

In this exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, Yasmin shares her insights on purposeful leadership, inclusion, and preparing organizations for the future of work.



People are not resources to be managed but the core of every transformative idea.



Q You studied HR at Cornell University and Executive Education from Harvard Business School. How has that knowledge, mixed with your real-world experience, changed the way you manage talent in the fast-moving consulting world?

I hold an MBA from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka (2001), followed by Executive Education at Harvard Business School (2012) on *Driving Performance through Talent Management*, and a Master's from Cornell University's ILR School (2015). I've always believed that learning happens both inside and outside the classroom, and these experiences broadened my perspective and shaped my philosophy on leadership and talent.

I particularly valued the case study debates, exposure to global perspectives, and engagement with C-suite leaders—all of which sharpened my problem-solving mindset.

What stays with me most are not just the theories, but the mindset and tools to adapt, think critically, and lead with purpose.



In today's fast-changing environment, staying relevant means embracing uncertainty, defining what "good" looks like, and focusing on outcomes.

Q In consulting, where clients need to shift quickly, what's been one of the biggest challenges in aligning people's strategies with business goals—and how did you turn it into something positive?

In consulting, the HR role is inherently industry-agnostic. My approach begins with understanding the lay of the land—the business trajectory, its position on the curve, and the baseline. From there, I work with the C-suite and business leaders to co-create solutions around a shared vision, design participatory processes, and ensure alignment and buy-in for sustainable results.

I've worked across diverse situations—established corporations, divestitures, Global M&As, and transformation programs. Each context brings unique complexities, but the goal is constant: achieving impact through partnership and results. Being a strategic



partner to the business has always guided me. I'm most energized by transformation work—creating meaningful change rather than maintaining the status quo.

Q What's one unique idea you've tried that's really boosted how employees feel or stay with the company?

It's never one big idea—it's the sum of consistent, human-centered actions that make the difference. I deeply believe in empowerment and delegation—trusting people with ownership and giving them room to grow. My leadership philosophy is rooted in StrengthsFinder principles: build on people's strengths rather than fixate on their weaknesses.

Over the years, I've introduced initiatives that make workplaces more flexible, connected, and growth-oriented. These include flexible work arrangements, collaborations with universities to bridge academia and industry, and opportunities for employees to explore new ideas through innovation challenges and informal learning circles.

Connection is at the heart of engagement. I've launched mentorship programs that foster cross-level learning, created internal mobility platforms to support career growth, and developed forums that bring people together—formally and informally—to share experiences and build community.

Learning should be continuous and accessible, so I've also emphasized bite-sized, digital learning formats and curated learning journeys that fit into people's flow of work. My goal has always been to nurture curiosity and confidence while enabling everyone to bring their authentic selves to work. That's when innovation flourishes and culture becomes a true differentiator.

Q As a mentor, what's the most meaningful advice you've shared with someone trying to succeed in consulting—and how does it connect to your own journey balancing work and life?

Know your clients—their goals, challenges, and motivations. Listen actively and lead with empathy before offering solutions.

"In consulting, the ability to walk with your clients, NOT ahead of them, builds trust and long-term success."

Work-life balance has been a constant learning curve for me. Raising two children while leading demanding global roles taught me the importance of boundaries, prioritization, and time management. There are trade-offs, but communication and clarity around what's urgent versus what's important are key.

I've also learned to ask for help and lean on support systems, especially as my family moved

across continents. Those experiences strengthened our resilience and sense of gratitude. Taking time to recharge—through family, nature, or community work—keeps me grounded. Ultimately, fulfillment comes not from perfection, but from presence, empathy, and balance.

Q In the U.S. consulting and services world, where innovation and competition are huge, what skills or leadership gaps do you see growing? What practical, people-focused steps should companies take to fix them?

I believe this applies globally, not just in the U.S. The biggest leadership gap today isn't technical—it's human. As innovation accelerates, leaders are challenged to balance speed with empathy, and data with judgment. Many are skilled problem-solvers but still developing the ability to inspire, coach, and connect across diverse, hybrid teams.

To close this gap, organizations must invest in people-centered leadership—developing emotional intelligence, inclusive decision-making, and collaborative mindsets. Coaching, mentorship, and experiential learning—where leaders practice giving feedback, listening, and leading through ambiguity—create ripples across teams.

The organisations that will thrive are those that cultivate leaders who are not only strategic and innovative but also deeply human in their leadership. ♦



In consulting, the ability to walk with your clients, NOT ahead of them, builds trust and long-term success.

Leading with HEART

The New Code of Tech Leadership

Empathy is the most sought-after quality in tech leadership in the age of automation, AI, and distributed workforces, not coding skills. As the world becomes more diverse and hybrid work becomes the new normal, leading with heart is no longer optional but essential. It is a competitive necessity that influences involvement, retention, and innovation. All technology companies, large and small, are now embedding empathy at scale, training leaders on how to relate, listen, and care within systems optimised for speed.

Engineering Empathy into Leadership Design

Empathy is being redefined as a measurable leadership skill. A study of hundreds of teams conducted by Google's Project Aristotle found that the most effective teams all shared a single trait: psychological safety. This sense of being listened to and respected promotes collaboration more than ongoing performance pressure. Organisations such as Microsoft and Salesforce have started to include empathy training in executive development,

assign behavioural coaches to leaders, and provide data-driven tools to monitor emotional intelligence in real time.

From Soft Skill to Strategic Skill

Empathy is no longer a nice-to-have but a challenging performance measure. A Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report found that companies that foster empathy and trust in leadership practices outperformed their peers by 20-40% in innovation and employee engagement, respectively. Today, empathy is becoming a key differentiator for businesses rather than merely a moral value.

The Technology of Human Connection

Ironically, leadership is now being more humanised through technology itself. The signs of emotional exhaustion can be



Editor's Pick



identified with AI-powered analytics in HR, and digital coaching tools can be tailored to scale. However, as Harvard Business Review notes, it is not about automating empathy but enhancing human sensitivity: the technologies are not intended to replace empathy but to support it.

Leading with Heart, at Scale

Global companies are recognising that scaling empathy isn't about rehearsed compassion but about systems that foster listening and vulnerability. When leaders set an example, their teams follow suit. As multinational tech firms expand internationally, empathy has become the universal language for maintaining trust and performance. The leaders of the future will be those who can act with both intelligence and intuition because heart, not hierarchy, makes the difference. ♦



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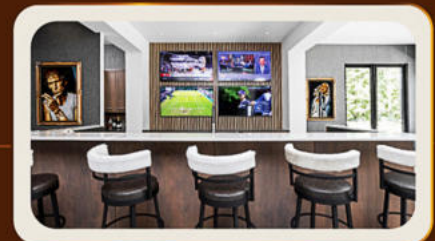
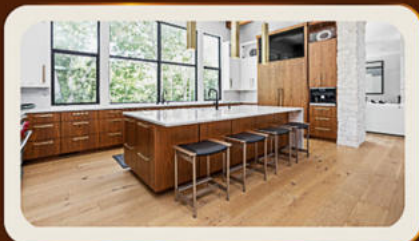
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