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TRADEFLOCK

STORY
OF THE MONTH

THE
EPSTEIN
FILES

VAISHALI DEV

CEO & President,
Microteq Engineering, Inc

X

SPOTLIGHT

Leading in the Era of
Fragile Customer Loyalty

Tech Dilemma:
Not Every Tool is
Meant for You

MOST IMPACTFUL

CXOS

OF 2025





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Editor Note



THE NEW STANDARD FOR CXOs

Impact in leadership has taken on a sharper meaning in 2025. Across industries, the role of the CXO has expanded beyond growth and efficiency into stewardship, resilience, and long term value creation. Volatile markets, regulatory pressure, rapid advances in artificial intelligence, and heightened stakeholder expectations have reshaped what effective leadership looks like at the top.

Recent global studies consistently show that organisations performing strongest this year are led by executives who prioritise clarity over speed and systems over silos. Research points to a clear shift. High performing CXOs are investing in operational resilience, ethical AI adoption, and workforce stability as core business strategies rather than peripheral concerns. Decision making is increasingly informed by scenario planning, real time data, and cross functional alignment, reflecting a move away from instinct driven leadership toward disciplined judgment.

The leaders recognised in this edition demonstrate impact through outcomes that endure. They are navigating cost pressures while continuing to invest in innovation. They are strengthening governance while enabling agility. They understand that technology adoption without trust creates fragility, and that culture remains a measurable driver of performance. Studies on executive effectiveness

in 2024 and early 2025 underline this reality. Organisations with transparent leadership communication and clear accountability structures are outperforming peers on profitability, retention, and long term valuation.

What distinguishes these CXOs is their ability to translate complexity into direction. They operate at the intersection of strategy, people, and risk, making decisions that balance near term demands with future readiness. Their leadership reflects an understanding that impact today is defined less by visibility and more by measurable progress.

Most Impactful CXOs of 2025 recognises leaders whose influence is grounded in research, reflected in results, and aligned with the evolving responsibilities of executive leadership in a rapidly changing global environment.

Vipin Kumar
Editor, Tradeflock

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USA 2025

Most Strategic
Marketing Leaders
to Watch in 2025

Real Estate Titans
of The USA 2025

Most Iconic
Women Leaders
in USA 2026

USA's Most
Influential COOs
2026

TRADEFLOCK

JOURNEY OF LEADERS

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MOST IMPACTFUL
CXOs OF 2025

NAME	DESIGNATION	COMPANY
Charmaine England	Chief Growth Officer	Kenvue
Daniella Voysey Olson	Chief Marketing Officer	Moon Valley Nurseries
Diana Marshall	EVP & Chief Experience Officer	Sam's Club
Elizabeth Chrane	Chief People Officer	OneDigital
Joseph Frankie III	CEO	JFIII Associates LLC
Laura Jordan Bambach	Founder & Chief Creative Officer	Uncharted
Ome Ogbru, PharmD	CEO & Founder	AINGENS
Rahul Ramkumar	Chief Product Officer	Rocket.new
Vaishali Dev	CEO & President	Microteq Engineering, Inc
Vishwanath Madhugiri	Chief Strategy Officer	SAAZ Micro Inc.

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Empowering Teams to Outperform Expectations

VAISHALI DEV

CEO & President, Microteq Engineering, Inc

Some careers unfold predictably while others are shaped by the defining moments that quietly reveal what a person is willing to stand for. Leaders who thrive in complex environments often carry a deep understanding that progress rarely emerges from comfort or silence; it emerges when someone chooses conviction over convenience and steps into responsibility long before titles or authority demand it. This truth shaped the worldview of Vaishali Dev, CEO and President of Microteq Engineering, Inc., whose journey reflects a rare combination of technical fluency, emotional steadiness, and the resilience required in sectors where precision decides outcomes.

Long years before she stepped into advanced manufacturing and mission-critical engineering, Vaishali was cultivating a multidimensional foundation that would eventually influence every leadership decision she made. Her academic grounding in Medical Technology from the University of Houston, paired with hands-on experience across budgeting, internal audits, sales, general ledger operations, and inspection, offered her a unique vantage point into how organizations function beneath the surface. Every role sharpened her instinct for detail, strengthened her understanding of people under pressure, and deepened her ability to interpret systems with both analytical discipline and human awareness.

This layered experience became the backbone

of her leadership when she took charge of Microteq Engineering nearly two decades ago. Under her direction, the company evolved from a precision-focused machining and assembly firm into a trusted partner for defense, aerospace, semiconductor, medical, energy, oil, and technology industries. Microteq earned its reputation by taking on projects marked by complexity, tight tolerances, and high stakes, while fostering an engineering culture that encourages professionals to explore unfamiliar roles, stretch their capabilities, and pursue excellence without fear of failure.

Her influence extends far beyond the world of engineering. Spark Media reflects her commitment to education and cultural awareness, amplifying stories that inspire understanding and encourage dialogue across global perspectives. Viva Global Events showcases her ability to transform imagination into immersive experiences, bringing creativity to life through moments that leave lasting impressions. Across all her ventures, she remains anchored in a philosophy built on empowerment, enlightenment, and the belief that people grow when given both responsibility and room to rise.

TradeFlock engaged with Vaishali Dev to reflect on her journey, her defining challenges, her leadership philosophy, and the evolving path she continues to shape across multiple industries.



Q Looking back at your 20+ years in mechanical engineering and manufacturing, what's a quiet milestone that still makes you smile, and why does it feel more special than the big awards?

Looking back at more than two decades in mechanical engineering and manufacturing, there is one moment that still brings a quiet smile to my face. It was not a grand award or an industry spotlight. It happened during a routine customer interaction, when someone said, "You were the only company able to manufacture this part, and on time."

That simple line captured the spirit of Microteq more than any plaque ever could. It reminded me that our strength has always been in taking on the jobs others label as impossible, staying patient with complexity, and delivering with the discipline, skill, and integrity our customers rely on.

Moments like these have shaped my belief that real success is never about the trophies on the wall. It lives in the trust we build through consistency and character. Even today, this memory fuels us at Microteq Engineering, where we continue to honor our promise of Outstanding. Outthinking. Outperforming.

Q As a woman leading in male-dominated fields, you've faced entrepreneurial headwinds that could sink most ships. What was your toughest storm in this journey, and how did you get through it?

My toughest storm as a woman leading in male-dominated environments did not come from competitors or external challenges. It came from inside my own company. Early in my journey, I

"I learned that progress begins the moment you give your voice more power than your fear."

learned that a few employees believed they did not need to follow fundamental safety practices like protective glasses or steel-toe shoes simply because the company was headed by a woman.

At first, I leaned into training, conversations, and awareness. I truly believed that once people understood the importance of safety, they would naturally commit to it. When that wasn't enough, I stepped onto the shop floor myself, observing quietly, reinforcing rules personally, and showing that accountability was not optional. Eventually, I had to take corrective action to protect both our standards and our people.

It was uncomfortable, but it taught me something I carry with me even today. Leadership requires calm strength, even when the environment feels unsettled. Respect is not demanded. It is earned through fairness, unwavering standards, and the courage to stay steady when others test the boundaries.

Q With Microteq tackling cutting-edge assembly in medical and defence, what's the one project right now that's got you buzzing like a kid with a new gadget, and why does it fire you up?

At Microteq Engineering, we are currently diving deep into an advanced defense assembly project that has all the qualities that challenge and energize us. Its complexity pushes our engineering instincts, and its precision requirements demand complete focus. These are the kinds of projects that stretch our capabilities and remind us why we are trusted in critical sectors.

What makes this particular project so inspiring is the purpose behind it. Knowing that our work contributes to systems that help



“The day I stopped asking for respect and started upholding my standards was the day I became a leader.”

safeguard the nation gives every detail more meaning. From design interpretation to final inspection, every step requires accuracy, discipline, and a commitment to reliability.

Projects like this reaffirm why Microteq exists. We are at our best when the stakes are high, the margins are narrow, and the expectations require nothing short of excellence.

Q Who's the unexpected mentor in your life that taught you to blend heart with horsepower in leadership, and how do you pass that spark to your team?

One of the most impactful mentors in my life was a quiet, steady supervisor I had early in my career. He was not the loudest voice in the room, nor was he someone who relied on authority to lead. Instead, he showed me that leadership begins with understanding people and recognizing their humanity, even when the environment revolves around speed, precision, and results.

He taught me that people do not simply build parts. They build trust, loyalty, and the culture of the company. That wisdom has stayed with me throughout my leadership journey. Today at Microteq Engineering, I try to carry that lesson forward by listening deeply, valuing my team's ideas, and honoring their commitment. When people feel seen, they give more than effort. They give their best. And that is how we continue to lead with strength shaped by empathy.

Q How do you hit the "pause" button in San Antonio, and what recharges your CEO's batteries the most?

San Antonio is a spirited city, full of energy and movement, but I have learned the importance

of finding my quiet space within it. Giving back through charity work has become one of the most meaningful ways I recharge. There is something profoundly grounding about seeing the impact of kindness and realizing that leadership is also about serving beyond the boardroom.

Another form of renewal for me comes from writing my book. It allows me to step away from the pace of operations and reconnect with my thoughts, creativity, and experiences. It becomes a space where clarity returns and new ideas take shape. Both of these practices remind me that leadership requires more than strategy. It requires reflection, compassion, and room to breathe.

Q As a trailblazing mom and entrepreneur, what's one life lesson from beyond the boardroom that's quietly guided your biggest business pivots?

One of the most important lessons I have learned as a mother and entrepreneur is that silence is not always the graceful choice. I used to believe staying quiet kept the peace, but over time, I realized that silence can allow small problems to become larger obstacles and meaningful opportunities to pass unnoticed.

Speaking up, asking questions, and facing issues directly have guided many of my most important decisions at Microteq Engineering. Whether it is managing team dynamics or understanding customer needs, clarity has always moved us further than hesitation ever could. This lesson continues to guide both my leadership and my life. Growth rarely happens in quiet corners. It happens in moments of courage, honesty, and open communication. ♦



TRADEFLOC

Turns


A Decade of Igniting
BUSINESS LEGENDS

THE RISE OF RISK AS A CORE LEADERSHIP FUNCTION

Risk was once treated as a technical concern, delegated to compliance teams, legal departments, or specialists tasked with keeping organizations within acceptable boundaries. Leadership, meanwhile, focused on growth, strategy, and execution, assuming that risk could be identified, quantified, and contained elsewhere. That separation is no longer holding, and its collapse is reshaping what leadership itself is expected to do.

The nature of risk has changed faster than organizational structures. Strategic decisions now carry reputational, technological, geopolitical, and ethical consequences that unfold simultaneously rather than sequentially. In 2025, more than 70% of executives report that the most material risks facing their organizations originate outside traditional financial or operational categories, while nearly 60% say those risks emerge faster than internal systems can fully assess them. Under such conditions, risk cannot be managed as a downstream function; it must be interpreted, prioritized, and owned at the leadership level.

In the decade ahead, leadership will be defined less by the ability to eliminate risk and more by the ability to decide which risks are worth carrying, and why.

What distinguishes effective leaders today is not risk avoidance, but risk literacy. Impact increasingly depends on the ability to recognize which uncertainties demand intervention and which require tolerance. Organizations that integrate risk discussion into core decision-making processes show markedly stronger resilience, with internal studies indicating up to 25% faster recovery from disruptions compared to peers that treat risk as a reporting exercise. Leadership influence is now measured by how clearly risk trade-offs are articulated before decisions are made, rather than how cleanly issues are explained afterward.

This shift also changes how accountability is perceived. Employees and stakeholders expect leaders to acknowledge uncertainty openly rather than project false certainty. Trust has become closely tied to how leaders navigate risk in real time, especially when outcomes are unclear. Nearly half of employees surveyed say confidence in leadership increases when risks are discussed transparently rather than minimized, even if the path forward remains complex.

In this sense, risk has become a core leadership function because it shapes judgment itself. The leaders who matter most are no longer those who promise safety, but those who demonstrate discernment. ♦

LEADING IN THE ERA OF FRAGILE CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Loyalty is discussed constantly in business circles as if it were a stable asset, yet what feels different in 2025 is how situational customer loyalty has become. Recent industry data shows that deep, trust-based loyalty now sits below 30% globally, reflecting a steady decline as customers place greater weight on recent interactions than on long histories of brand familiarity. Loyalty, once quietly accumulated over time, now behaves more like a condition that is repeatedly reassessed, even as many leadership teams continue to plan as if older assumptions still hold.

Not long ago, loyalty relied heavily on familiarity and friction. Customers stayed because brands were known,

choice was limited, and leaving required effort that few were eager to invest. That friction kept relationships intact even when experiences were unremarkable. Over time, this resistance faded as options multiplied, information became instantly accessible, and comparison turned effortless through digital tools. Customers did not become disloyal in intent; they simply became less attached by default because staying stopped was no longer the easiest option. When moving on felt simpler than remaining, loyalty loosened quietly.

Most organizations responded in predictable ways as loyalty began to feel less secure. Loyalty programs expanded, digital engagement intensified, and

investment accelerated. By 2025, more than 90% of companies worldwide will operate a loyalty program, and nearly 80% of consumers will report being enrolled in at least one. Members of loyalty programs continue to generate 12 to 18% more revenue than non-members, reinforcing why these systems remain central to retention strategies. Yet emotional attachment continues to thin, exposing a growing gap between participation and commitment.

What the Data Is Really Pointing To

Customer behavior helps explain this contradiction. Tolerance has narrowed sharply, with recent studies showing that many customers

reconsider their relationships with brands after just one or two negative experiences. This shift is driven less by rising expectations than by constant access to alternatives. When service slows, communication feels impersonal, or processes introduce friction, customers rarely escalate concerns. They disengage and move on.

Technology was widely expected to stabilize this fragility. Personalization tools improved, data sets deepened, and artificial intelligence entered customer service and loyalty platforms, promising greater relevance and efficiency. Nearly half of large enterprises now plan to expand AI-driven loyalty capabilities by 2026. Customer response remains mixed. Speed is valued, but many customers report little added benefit when automation replaces judgment or empathy. Efficiency without understanding has proven insufficient to rebuild trust.

The economics of loyalty remain compelling despite these challenges. Even modest improvements in retention still deliver disproportionate gains in profitability, as loyal customers spend more and stay longer. Across industries, average retention rates hover around 75%, yet annual churn remains high. Loyalty remains a growth driver, but only when experience aligns closely with evolving expectations.

What Leadership Must Adjust Now

This shift places leadership in an uncomfortable position. Loyalty can no longer be treated as something earned once and protected through programs or messaging alone. It must be sustained quietly through everyday interaction, without assuming goodwill will carry forward automatically.

- **Deep emotional loyalty has fallen below 30% globally.**
- **90% of companies operate formal loyalty programs.**
- **Loyalty members generate 12-18% higher revenue.**
- **Average customer retention sits near 75%, with churn rising.**
- **Nearly 50% of enterprises plan to expand AI-driven loyalty by 2026.**



Personalization remains important, though not in the way it is often marketed. Customers are not seeking to be impressed by data or complex systems. They value relevance that reduces effort, avoids repetition, and respects time. The most effective personalization often goes unnoticed, while its absence is felt immediately.

Values continue to influence choice, particularly at early stages, but values alone do not sustain loyalty. Experience determines whether alignment deepens or fades. Design, clarity, and usability shape perception early, and first impressions tend to settle quickly.

Some organizations are responding by reframing loyalty as participation rather than accumulation. Experiential rewards, tiered access, and community-driven engagement are gaining traction because they foster involvement rather than transaction. Loyalty lasts longer when customers feel included rather than managed.

Inconsistency undermines these efforts most often. Loyalty rarely collapses after a single failure; it erodes through repetition, delayed responses, unclear ownership, and unresolved friction. Leading in the era of fragile customer loyalty requires attentiveness over persuasion. Customers are looking for consistency between the promise and the experience. Loyalty remains fragile, but for leaders willing to understand its new conditions, it remains within reach. ♦



The Solution to Growth Paradox in Consumer Health

CHARMAINE ENGLAND

Chief Growth Officer,
Kenvue



A complex issue in the consumer health industry is that it has placed some of the most personal aspects of human life into the hands of brands. As a growth strategy, these brands have tended to focus on short-term volume, varied portfolios, and diminished brand significance. Advances in science and evolving consumer needs have made it challenging for many organisations to balance scale, credibility, innovation, speed, and purpose.

Charmaine England entered this landscape with a firm belief that sustainable development in consumer health must start with clarity of purpose, disciplined brand building, and a deep understanding of human needs. She has served as the Chief Growth Officer at Kenvue and has helped redefine how growth is pursued in a category where trust is essential.

Seeing Growth Beyond Expansion

Charmaine England's growth strategy has always been more than just expanding; it's about sustainable development and creating lasting value. At the start of her leadership, she realised that consumer health brands do not grow simply by entering new markets or launching new products. Instead, they expand as they become relevant, trustworthy, and emotionally appealing over time.

She recognised a real opportunity, in an industry full of claims and novelties, to shift focus, develop core brands, and align portfolios with genuine consumer needs, ensuring that growth plans are rooted in long-term value rather than short-lived peaks.

Where Brand Purpose Meets Commercial Discipline

The ability to align purpose and performance is one of Charmaine's key strengths. In consumer health, brand purpose cannot be abstract but must translate into daily decisions that enhance life. She has been a vocal advocate for the view that purposeful brands perform better when purpose is operationalised rather than merely communicated. This means that consumer insight becomes integral to strategy, and scientific credibility underpins every pledge, ensuring teams are accountable for making an impact as well as delivering results. Under her leadership, growth was disciplined, driven by consistently doing the right things.

Putting the Consumer at the Centre of Growth

The growth philosophy that Charmaine practices is very human. She recognises that

behind each purchase, there is a person seeking reassurance, relief, or confidence. Whether dealing with routine health issues or long-term health concerns, she has made consumer empathy a key part of her strategic approach. She develops growth strategies that are more intuitive than invasive by investing in deep consumer insights, behaviours, anxieties, and aspirations. This focus ensures that brands do not just sell solutions, but are trusted because of their relevance and reliability.

Leading Through Portfolio Complexity

Controlling the development of numerous iconic brands is not an easy task. Charmaine also clarified this complex situation by making decisive choices. Rather than spreading resources too thin, she focused on where she could achieve meaningful and sustainable victories for her brands. This required tough decisions on what to accelerate, what to develop, and what to discard.

Her managerial approach demonstrated that strategic focus is not limiting but a multiplier. Through the coordination of investment and long-term brand strength, she achieved growth that was both resilient and scalable.

Innovation With Responsibility at Its Core

Consumer health innovation carries a special responsibility. Charmaine has been a passionate advocate for innovation rooted in science, safety, and consumer trust. She challenged teams to work not only more quickly but also more intelligently, by implementing new offerings that addressed real issues and enhanced everyday health experiences. This balanced approach protected brand equity while maintaining organisational competitiveness in a dynamic market environment. For her, innovation was not about creating something new, but about delivering something meaningful.

Building Growth Through Collaboration

The leadership style Charmaine adopts is collaborative. She recognised that scale growth is never due to a single function or leader. The marketing, R&D, supply chain, and commercial teams must remain aligned.

She promoted cross-functional teamwork and shared responsibility, which helps prevent silos that hinder growth. This alignment has enabled faster decision-making, prioritising, and execution, putting strategy into action across the organisation.

Adapting to a Shifting Global Landscape

Global disruptions, changing regulations, and more empowered consumers have transformed the consumer health sector. It is Charmaine's impressive adaptability that has defined her leadership through this volatility. Uncertainty was not a threat to her, but a challenge to fundamental strategic principles. Her focus on remaining steady even when external circumstances shifted, to uphold consumer trust, brand integrity, and long-term vision, ensured her growth strategies remained consistent despite volatile external conditions. This ability to lead through transformation strengthened both internal and external confidence and credibility.

Culture as the Engine of Sustainable Growth

Charmaine understands that the success of growth strategies depends on having the right culture. She has taken steps to foster an environment where curiosity, accountability, and learning are encouraged. Teams are empowered to question assumptions, experiment, and develop continuously. This culture of ownership ensures that growth is not driven solely from the top but achieved through shared commitment. She has made growth a collective responsibility rather than just a core mandate.

A Legacy of Trusted Growth

The brand narrative crafted by Charmaine England highlights considered leadership in a high-stakes business. She has helped shift the balance of purpose, performance, and trust into a more resilient model for consumer health organisations by redefining growth. Her influence is reflected not only in commercial results but also in how growth-related decisions are made focused on discipline, empathy, and long-term vision. In a world where health brands must earn daily trust, her approach reminds us that the most effective growth comes from treating people well. ♦

Leadership Lessons

HOW SEAN ELLIS REDEFINED STARTUP LEADERSHIP

In the world of business, few people have had the same impact as Sean Ellis, Dropbox's first marketer. In most cases, founders are celebrated for building a single, iconic company, not Ellis, though. Sean's influence lies in the system he created and the discipline he argued for. Best known as the man who coined the term "growth hacking" in 2010, Ellis changed the way startups think about experimentation, scalability and other metrics. His work with companies such as Dropbox, LogMeIn, Eventbrite, and Lookout contributed directly to their early growth trajectories, while his later role as co-author of Hacking Growth turned tactical experimentation into a structured leadership framework.

Leaving Dropbox Once the Product Became Fit for the Market

Sean Ellis first joined Dropbox in 2008 as Head of Growth, when the company was still struggling to retain its user base. Under Sean Ellis' leadership, Dropbox launched several marketing campaigns, the most notable being its referral program, which rewarded both referrers and referees with additional cloud storage. According to sources, Dropbox grew from 100,000 users to 400,000, a 60% increase in 15 months.

Crucially, Ellis chose to leave Dropbox voluntarily once product-market fit was clear and a repeatable growth engine was in place, rather than staying on indefinitely.

Lesson to Learn Effective leaders design systems that outlast them. Ellis demonstrated that leadership is not about personal indispensability, but about building scalable growth mechanisms and knowing when to step aside once the organisation can sustain momentum.



Coining the Term "Growth Hacking"

In 2010, Ellis coined the term "growth hacker" not as a marketing concept, but as a practical solution to a leadership bottleneck. While transitioning out of interim growth roles, he struggled to find replacements who combined marketing intuition with engineering and data skills. The term was coined to describe a new role focused entirely on system-wide growth, rather than on a function.

The phrase gained rapid traction, shaping hiring strategies across startups globally and redefining how early-stage companies structured growth teams.

Lesson to Learn Language shapes organisational behaviour. By naming a new discipline, Ellis enabled companies to recruit differently, think differently, and align incentives around measurable growth outcomes rather than vanity metrics.

Applying Data-Driven Growth at LogMeIn and Eventbrite

Before joining Dropbox, Ellis leveraged his expertise at LogMeIn, where he helped scale the business to millions of users in a matter of months, contributing to its eventual 2009 IPO. He later advised Eventbrite to devise a similar, experiment-led framework for their 2018 IPO, using simple experiments, data, retention metrics, and conversion optimisation.

In each case, Ellis demonstrated how a well-designed, practical experimental framework can deliver more value than a large brand can spend.

Lesson to Learn Growth leadership is transferable when grounded in principles, not tactics. Ellis's success across multiple companies shows that leaders who rely on structured experimentation can adapt across industries and business models.

Founding GrowthHackers to Institutionalize Learning

In 2014, Ellis founded GrowthHackers, a global community that provided a platform for sharing real-world, practical, and results-driven growth experiments, case studies, and frameworks. The platform grew into one of the largest professional communities dedicated to growth, hosting conferences, content, and peer learning initiatives.

Rather than monetising aggressively, GrowthHackers focused on credibility and practitioner-led insights, reinforcing Ellis' emphasis on substance over hype.

Lesson to Learn Sustainable leadership invests in ecosystems, not just outcomes. By building GrowthHackers, Ellis shifted from individual contributor to field builder, ensuring that knowledge scaled beyond personal consulting engagements.

Codifying Growth into a Repeatable Framework Through Hacking Growth

Ellis's most valuable contribution came in the form of Hacking Growth, a 2017 book co-authored

with Morgan Brown. The book basically formalized growth into a structured process comprising north-star metrics, rapid experimentation and cross-functional alignment. It became a bestseller and is widely used in startups, enterprises and even in colleges.

The framework moved growth from intuition-driven decision-making to evidence-based leadership, particularly in product-led organisations.

Lesson to Learn Leadership maturity lies in codification. By turning tacit knowledge into a repeatable system, Ellis enabled companies to scale growth without relying on individual brilliance.

Revolutionizing Success, One Business At a Time!

Sean Ellis' leadership legacy is defined less by public visibility and more by operational impact. Through real-world execution at high-growth startups, the creation of new organisational language, and the institutionalisation of experimentation, Ellis reshaped how modern companies approach growth. His career underscores a critical leadership truth: in environments defined by uncertainty, disciplined experimentation beats instinct, and systems outperform heroes. For business leaders navigating scale, Ellis' journey offers a blueprint grounded in data, clarity, and long-term thinking. ♦



*Turning Commodity Marketing
into Emotional Connection*

DANIELLA VOYSEY OLSON

**Chief Marketing Officer,
Moon Valley Nurseries**

The landscaping and nursery sector faces a clear marketing challenge: many brands sell similar products, communicate similarly, and mainly compete on price and availability. Outdoor solutions, trees, and plants are often viewed as commodities rather than experiences.

As a result, marketing tends to focus on advertising, stock levels, and seasonal urgency rather than on storytelling, brand loyalty, or relationship-building. Daniella Voysey Olson entered this market and shifted that narrative. She proved that even in a product-focused industry, emotion, identity, and significance can be powerful drivers of growth.

Seeing What Others Overlooked

As early as possible, Daniella realised that visibility was not the only opportunity in nursery and outdoor living marketing; differentiation was also important. Customers do not simply purchase trees; they invest in the shade for their children, the aesthetics of their houses, and permanence in a frenetic world.

She provided the category with a new strategic perspective by redefining plants and landscaping as lifestyle choices rather than mere transactions. Her strategy shifted the dialogue to focus on what we sell and why it matters.



Building a Brand That Feels Alive

As the Chief Marketing Officer of Moon Valley Nurseries, Daniella developed a brand image that is vibrant, self-assured, and personable. Instead of relying solely on functional messaging, she leaned towards storytelling that conveyed aspiration, pride in ownership, and long-term value. In this, visual identity, tone of voice, and customer touchpoints were aligned to ensure channel consistency.

The result was a brand that did not appear merely as a retailer but as a trusted guide to the world of outdoor living, one that customers could instantly recognise and relate to on a personal level.

Daniella proved that even in a product-focused industry, emotion, identity, and significance can be powerful drivers of growth.

Customer-Centricity as a Strategic Discipline

The foundation of Daniella's business philosophy is based on the customer, not as a demographic, but as a decision-maker with evolving needs. She advocated a deep understanding of behaviour, tastes, and passions, ensuring strategies were grounded in knowledge rather than guesswork.

This involved engaging with customers at points of need, whether online, face-to-face, or through community presence. She developed a personal, relevant, and timely marketing strategy by prioritising relevance over reaching a large audience.

Blending Performance with Purpose

Marketing today demands both creativity and responsibility, and Daniella consistently achieved this balance. As she built brand equity, she also ensured campaigns delivered measurable results. The tools she used to focus creativity included data, analytics, and performance metrics, not constraints.

This blend of science and art helped marketing earn credibility at the senior management level, transforming it into a driver of growth rather than just a support function. Under her direction, marketing became a disciplined engine powering both short-term and long-term success.

Leading Through Change and Complexity

The retail landscape and consumer behaviour have changed significantly due to digital acceleration, evolving expectations, and financial instability. These shifts have been

managed transparently and flexibly under Daniella's leadership. Instead of chasing every trend, she focused on what aligns with the brand's core values and promises to customers.

Her ability to simplify complex issues, make bold decisions, and help teams navigate ambiguity enhanced both internal and external stability. For her, leadership meant establishing stability while also fostering innovation.

Culture as the Foundation of Brand

Daniella recognises that wonderful brands start from within. She dedicated herself to building a marketing culture of teamwork, curiosity, and responsibility. She encouraged her teams to think creatively, try new things, and learn rapidly- all while respecting the brand's core values. By empowering her team and nurturing a sense of shared ownership, she helped maintain a consistent brand voice as the organisation expanded. This internal harmony naturally shone through to the outside world, earning customer trust.

Reframing Growth in a Traditional Industry

Daniella has shown that even in a conservative and busy industry, brand-driven growth is possible. She challenged the notion that marketing should only be transactional or seasonal in these settings. Instead, she demonstrated that true, long-term growth comes from building trust, staying consistent, and making emotional connections. Her fresh approach to how we communicate value has helped increase both market share and brand awareness.

A Brand Story Still Growing

The story of Daniella Voysey Olson is an insightful shift in direction. She did not intervene for the sake of it; instead, she built on what already existed and viewed it from a new perspective. Her leadership demonstrates that the true power of marketing lies in shaping perception, fostering belief, and creating meaning.

Her legacy, in an industry driven by both literal and symbolic growth, serves as a reminder that the most successful brands are cultivated like flourishing trees deeply rooted with a strong sense of purpose. ♦

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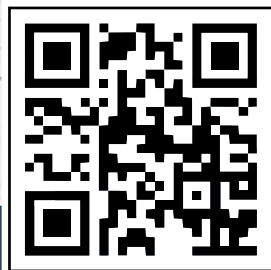
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Solving the Experience Deficit in Membership Retail

DIANA MARSHALL

EVP & Chief Experience Officer, Sam's Club

Convenience has long been seen as ticking boxes in the membership retail world- faster checkouts, bigger inventories, and lower prices. But what is often missed is the warm feeling of being recognised, appreciated, and reassured, which truly encourages customers to come back. Diana Marshall saw this gap and thoughtfully stepped in to create a more welcoming experience.

As the Executive Vice-President and Chief Experience Officer at Sam's Club, she broadened the scope by emphasising that convenience alone might boost transactions, but true loyalty comes from genuine care. Her inspiring efforts helped steer the industry towards prioritising the long-term wellbeing of members, illustrating how thoughtfully designed experiences can create a lasting, positive impact for both members and the business.

Experience Is an Organisational Capability, Not a Marketing Slogan

The first discovery made by Diana was that experience cannot be proclaimed, but must be engineered. She views members' experience as organisational muscle that needs training- a discipline that must be coordinated across functions, experimented with, and relentlessly refined through frontline feedback.

Under her leadership, merchandising, operations, technology, and HR no longer work merely in unison but instead operate based on shared values of simplicity and relevance. The moral she instils in teams is clear: experience design requires systems and governance rather than just creative campaigns.

Technology That Serves People, Not the Other Way Round

Automation has the power to speed up service, but it can also remove warmth when poorly implemented. Diana has always argued in favour of technology that supports staff and anticipates member needs rather than replacing human judgement. This includes mobile tools to empower on-the-floor staff, predictive replenishment to avoid inventory shortages, and checkout systems, among other options, that respect members' time.

With Diana's guidance, technology acts as a facilitator of care. This human-centred approach



makes interactions predictable and humane, providing measurable efficiencies without compromising the brand's personality.

Associates as the Real Experience Architects

For Diana, the stores are as valuable as the people within them. She invested in judgement, empathy, and local responsibility training and empowerment programmes. Instead of scripting behaviours, she focuses on developing capabilities such as problem solving, personal initiative, and confidence to make small decisions that delight members.

This approach will turn the associates into brand ambassadors who can create a comforting shopping experience. The culture and capability are the most sustainable drivers of customer experience, as demonstrated by Diana as a leader.

Membership as Identity, Not Just a Discount Card

Diana transformed membership from merely a transaction into an identity. Her approach heightened the emotional value of membership through carefully selected, exclusive services and time-saving solutions that are relevant to members' everyday lives. It aims to make belonging feel useful and unique, so renewal becomes a natural choice rather than a calculated decision. By linking benefits to actual needs, she turned price sensitivity into behavioural loyalty driven by preference.

Aligning Internal Culture with External Promises

The integrity of experience relies on internal alignment. Diana aimed to embed member priorities into leadership debates, hiring decisions, and performance measures. She ensured that external commitments such as convenience, quality, and trust were reflected in internal norms and rewards.

This alignment reduced conflict between leadership's desires and what associates on the floor delivered. To her, culture is operational infrastructure; if the organisation's behaviour patterns do not reflect the brand promise, not even marketing can persuade members otherwise.

Making Complexity Simple Without Losing Local Nuance

A national membership business involves balancing supply chains, local preferences, and

peak demand. Diana's philosophy is to streamline decision-making processes so that teams focus on member impact rather than internal convenience. This entails clear trade-off principles and governance that enable swift action without sacrificing accountability. She also balances scale and sensitivity by delegating decisions to regional teams to better address local member needs.

Sustainability and Ethics as Member Experience

Contemporary members are demanding that companies make responsible decisions easier. Diana also integrated sustainability into daily experience design, creating clear, effortless paths for members to choose more responsible products and services. By illustrating provenance, waste reduction, and ethical sourcing as benefits accessible to members rather than just marketing slogans, she turned corporate commitments into concrete and achievable advantages.

Measuring What Matters: Beyond Transactions

Old-fashioned retail dashboards value sales and pace. In extending the measurement horizon, Diana considered member sentiment, quality of repeat visits, and associate confidence in issue resolution. These softer signals reveal any gaps in the experience that would otherwise be overlooked by purely financial measures, and provide incentives to build long-term relationships. Her insistence on such a broader dashboard helped teams to invest in those results that build on previous achievements rather than just immediate victories.

A Legacy of Practical Empathy

The brand narrative of Diana Marshall lacks elements of dramatic reinvention but instead focuses on disciplined uplift. She has shown how her cautious design, considerate technology, and culture of empowerment can transform convenience into care by redefining a commodity category.

What has been created is a membership experience that is thoughtful, reliable, and respectful of members' time and values. In a retail environment obsessed with speed, her work serves as a reminder to leaders that endurance is a form of empathy and its scale. The impact she leaves is subtle yet profound: growing by ensuring members feel genuinely cared for is a growth path that is sustainable. ♦



How Cursor Became One of the Fastest-Growing AI Developer Tools

Software development has emerged as one of the first and most economically meaningful cases of generative AI. According to GitHub's 2023 Developer Survey, over 70 per cent of developers reported using or expecting to use AI as a coding assistant. Against this backdrop, AnySphere has strategically positioned itself as one of the most closely watched AI startups. This is because of their 'Cursor' tool, an AI-native code editor that integrates Large Language Models (LLMs) directly into the development workflow, enabling developers to leverage Generative AI to write code. In just a few years, AnySphere has moved rapidly from a research-driven experiment to a widely adopted developer platform, attracting both enterprise usage and significant venture capital interest.

Founding and Company Background

AnySphere was founded in 2022 by Michael Truell, Sualeh Asif, Arvid Lunnemark, and Aman Sanger, all of whom had backgrounds in computer science and AI research, with experience at institutions such as MIT and companies



including OpenAI. The company is headquartered in San Francisco, California, and was founded on the premise that existing code editors were not designed for large language models and that incremental AI plug-ins would not be sufficient to unlock their full potential.

According to Crunchbase, the company operates under the legal entity AnySphere Inc., with Cursor as its flagship product.

The Product: Cursor as an AI-Native Code Editor

Initially, AnySphere aimed to develop a model to help developers lighten their workload. The result was Cursor. It is built as a fork of Visual Studio Code, meaning it started as Visual Studio Code and was later branched into a proprietary version. Visual Studio Code is one of the most widely used code editors globally. This allowed

AnySphere to leverage a familiar user interface while integrating AI capabilities. Unlike other extensions you'll see online, Cursor integrates AI into its core, which allows it to generate code, refactor and debug on the fly.

Adoption Metrics and Usage Scale of Cursor

Given the software's use cases, it's no surprise that Cursor is the top choice for many developers. As a result, by early 2024, Cursor had more than a million users, a figure confirmed by multiple independent reports on AI adoption. This growth stems from the organic developer community rather than from commercial sales pipelines, indicating that people are choosing Cursor for the product, not for marketing or publicity.

Cursor's usage intensity is notable. Developers reportedly rely on the tool for core coding tasks rather than auxiliary assistance, differentiating it from autocomplete-style tools, allowing coders to personalize the process and make the code much more precise and up to the mark. This aligns with broader industry data showing that AI-assisted coding can reduce task completion time by up to 55 per cent, according to controlled studies conducted by GitHub.

Revenue Model and Commercial Traction

Cursor's revenue model is similar to that of other Gen-AI models, such as ChatGPT and Gemini. It's called the Freemium SaaS model. Meaning it's free up to a few searches, but if you want to

do it in large volumes, you'll need to pay a subscription fee.

While there are no publicly available figures for AnySphere's revenue, reports from The Information and TechCrunch suggest the company has generated meaningful recurring revenue in its first year, driven primarily by individual developers and small teams opting for paid plans.

Given that AnySphere's revenue model is similar to that of other generative AI platforms with more than a

in a Series C funding round, which valued the company at a whopping \$9.9 billion. It was followed by the Series D round in November 2025, which raised \$2.3 billion and valued the company at \$29.3 billion.

The speed and scale of this funding reflect investor conviction that AI-native developer environments represent a foundational layer of future software production. Moreover, it also shows that the 'Cursor' is a strong product with a promising future.

"AnySphere has moved rapidly from a research-driven experiment to a widely adopted developer platform, attracting both enterprise usage and significant venture capital interest."



million users, its revenue is likely comparable. However, more information will be made public as additional funding rounds are completed

Funding, Valuation, and Investor Confidence

AnySphere raised an \$8 million seed round in 2023 led by Andreessen Horowitz, one of Silicon Valley's most influential venture capital firms. This was followed by a \$60 million Series A round in 2024, also led by Andreessen Horowitz, valuing the company at approximately \$400 million, according to multiple reports. In 2025, the company raised \$900 million

The Future of Coding is Now in the Present!

AnySphere's rise illustrates how AI adoption accelerates when products are built around workflows rather than features. Through Cursor, the company has demonstrated that developer tools can evolve from passive editors into active collaborators, supported by measurable adoption, strong investor backing, and sustained engagement. In an industry where productivity gains translate directly into economic value, AnySphere has positioned itself not merely as an AI model maker but as a key infrastructure provider in the AI-driven future of software development. ♦



Striving to Do it All

ELIZABETH CHRANE

Chief People Officer, OneDigital

Every employee in a corporate organisation suffers from a phase where they experience a sense of disconnect. Such circumstances steadily erode the foundation from the roots, and for that, any organisation needs a solid foundation, strengthened by its unique strategic vision. In such situations, the Role of Chief People Officer becomes the core strength of any organisation. Elizabeth Chrane, Chief People Officer, OneDigital, with her presence of belonging, human resilience, culturing lived performance, maintaining post-trauma connection with the employees and authenticity in leadership, is creating a drastic impact on OneDigital. She is moulding the constraint and making the organisation stronger and more efficient from the genesis.

A Multi-Tasker Leading the Dynamic Corporate Culture

A sports and travel enthusiast, Elizabeth has completed her education from high school and later graduated from Wake Forest University of North Carolina. She was highly motivated by her English teacher, who never pushed her back amid an infinite clash of opinions. It was her mother's willingness to operate a small hand business along with single-handedly managing the house which instilled the unique leadership style in her since childhood and paved her interest in several directions. Her journey from marketing to management has been a rollercoaster ride, driven by a compassionate heart and her unique abilities. She chose people over chaos. Her 360-degree

awareness, ability of pattern recognition in chaos, and emotional bandwidth make her hyperpresent multitasker.

Entered with creative control, campaigning and branding and bearable ROI in marketing made her move to the world of people and culture due to inclination towards human impact, lives legacies and her immeasurable belongings with the human made her switch from marketing to human resource, making a fork in the road in her early 2000s. She didn't choose management but she chose responsibility for the human layer beneath the strategy.

This decision defines her as she says this is the decision that defines her,

"I could've stayed in marketing and been brilliant, but I chose to be useful."

Pre-One Digital Journey

Before anchoring at OneDigital, Chrane logged nearly two decades in high-pressure industries where people are the strategy. Her previous role revolved around finance and healthcare. In



I could've stayed in marketing and been brilliant, but I chose to be useful.



financial services, her early gigs were likely in marketing, communication, navigating regulations, client trust and rapid market shifts. These roles emphasised her ability of clear communication amid economic turbulence that later helped in bridging policy to pain in HR.

In the healthcare services era, sharpened her skills for hyper-personalised solutions such as wellness amid rising premiums, following heading to benefits, compliance, and employee programs.

These roles weren't glamorous starts; they were apprenticeships in empathy + execution. By her late 20s/early 30s, she was already multitasking across teams, budgets, and crises—prepping for the "do it all" philosophy she'd later own.

"I accidentally found myself in HR" after years in marketing—a pivot born from seeing how culture trumps campaigns every time.

Proficiency of 17 Years in One Digital Solution

Her another phase of journey initiated in the year 2008, from Marketing maven to culture architect. She joined One Digital as a 125th employee startup in Atlanta's insurance/HR consulting scene. She didn't chase the C-suite; it chased her.

From 2008 to 2015, she led as the head of the marketing, leading branding, communication and growth campaigns for a scrappy firm, building visibility from zero to national player. In 2016, she has moved her pedestal as Executive Vice President of culture and corporate development, driving

M&A integrations, talent strategies, and "static culture" antidotes and building teams from 3 to 45, becoming the first woman in C-suite.

Presently as a Chief People Officer in One Digital, she is serving empathy, compassion along with her previous unique skill on the table. She oversees HR, benefits, DEIB, and engagement for 3,500+ teammates. She has been a Post-pandemic hero as she looks up to financial wellness, mental health pushes. Her journey of 15 years has been a full circle, from a profound marketer to hitting the right bush of a human resource professional, she has been there like a hero.

Blending with Dedication and Wisdom: Spotlight on Excellence

Chrane's honors underscore her blend of heart and hustle—recognized by peers, media, and industry bodies for redefining "culture as strategy."

In the year 2022, she received a notable honour from Atlanta Business Chronicle, as the Women in Business award. Cut to 2023, she was featured in the Inc.5,000 culture builders for emphasising her warning against static culture traps. In the consecutive year nominated for innovative benefits redesign e.g., cost-sharing amid premium hikes.

In the year of 2024, she is awarded for DEI Champion, for boosting diverse leadership and "listening-first" DEIB strategies. Presented at Atlanta summit; tied to 20% rise in underrepresented hires. Additionally, she is also ranked under top 100 HR professionals for thought leadership on "multitasking resilience" and podcast insights such as HR Works episode on imposter syndrome.

In 2025, she was awarded the Excellence in Employee Engagement Award, which she has won for her financial literacy programs, resulting in a 35% reduction in employee stress, as reported in internal surveys. New as of Q3 2025: Highlights her "usefulness over ambition" ethos.

These aren't trophies for her shelf, they're fuel for the team. As she shared in a 2025 LinkedIn post: "Recognition? It's a mirror: What we've built together, reflected."

From bridging acquisition anxieties to fostering spaces where doubts become dialogue., Elizabeth has demonstrated her leadership style through her instilled compassion, empathy, and emotional intelligence.

From bridging acquisition anxieties to fostering spaces where doubts become dialogue., Elizabeth has proved her leadership style with her instilled compassion, empathy and emotional intelligence. ♦

29 DECEMBER, 1845



Texas Born From Diplomacy, Conflict, and Expansion

The United States of America, the world's most powerful country and home to the largest companies, has a rich history dating back to the last ice age. In every country, there is one state that embodies the country's spirit in all honesty. When it comes to the US, Texas is that state. On December 29, 1845, Texas officially entered the United States as the 28th state, marking one of the most consequential territorial expansions in American history. Unlike most states, Texas joined the Union not from a federal territory but as a former independent republic, a status it had held for nearly a decade. Its annexation

reshaped U.S. politics, intensified sectional tensions over slavery, and directly contributed to the outbreak of the Mexican-American War.

From Mexican Province to an Independent Republic

To understand the story of Texas's annexation, it is essential to learn about its history prior to the US. Before the notion of America existed, Texas was part of Spanish Mexico for 300 years, from 1519, and later of the Mexican Republic after Mexico's independence in 1821. In subsequent years, the Mexican Republic encouraged Americans to enter Texas and establish

settlements, resulting in rapid growth in the Anglo-American population. By the 1830s, Texas already had a substantial number of Anglo-American people and tension rose over governance, language, religion and, most importantly, slavery, which Mexico had abolished in 1829.

These tensions culminated in the Texas Revolution (1835–1836). After key events such as the Battle of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto, Texas declared independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836. Mexico never formally recognized this independence, a fact that would later complicate annexation efforts.

The Republic of Texas and Early Annexation Efforts

Following its independence from Mexico, Texas existed as the Republic of Texas, an independent entity. However, because a substantial number of Anglo-Americans lived there, they sought annexation by the United States almost immediately. Still, it didn't go well as Washington was divisive. It might be a little hard to believe, but the main problem was slavery. Texas was a slave state, and its annexation meant that the balance between non-slavery and slavery states would become uneven.

In 1844, an annexation treaty negotiated by President John Tyler failed in the U.S. Senate, falling short of the required two-thirds majority. Opposition came from Northern lawmakers concerned about the expansion of slavery and from those wary of provoking war with Mexico.

The Joint Resolution and Political Turning Point

The political landscape shifted following the 1844 U.S. presidential election, in which James K. Polk, a strong proponent of territorial expansion and Manifest Destiny, defeated Henry Clay. Polk's victory was widely interpreted as public support for annexation.

Instead of pursuing a treaty, Congress used a joint resolution, which required only a simple majority in both the House and Senate. On March 1, 1845, President John Tyler signed the joint resolution offering annexation to Texas. Texas voters approved the proposal in October 1845, and a state constitution was drafted shortly thereafter.



“Some folks look at me and see a certain swagger, which in Texas is called 'walking.’”

George W. Bush

Official Admission as the 28th State of the US

On December 29, 1845, President James K. Polk signed the resolution admitting Texas into the Union as the 28th state. Texas retained unique provisions, including control over its public lands and the ability to divide into up to

five states with congressional approval, a clause embedded in the annexation agreement.

At the time of admission, Texas had an estimated population of approximately 150,000 residents, including enslaved people, free Black residents, Native Americans, and settlers of Mexican and European descent.

The Immediate Consequences

Texas's admission had immediate geopolitical consequences. Mexico viewed annexation as an act of aggression, as it still considered Texas a rebellious province. Border disputes, particularly over whether Texas extended to the Rio Grande or the Nueces River, escalated tensions.

In April 1846, just months after statehood, fighting broke out between U.S. and Mexican forces, leading to the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). The war resulted in the U.S. acquiring more than 500,000 square miles of territory, including present-day California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah.

And Then They Lived Happy Ever After

Texas' admission to the United States in 1845 was not a simple administrative act but the culmination of revolution, diplomacy, and ideological conflict. As the only state to enter the Union after existing as a sovereign republic, Texas reshaped American expansion, foreign policy, and internal politics. Its path to statehood stands as a defining episode in the broader story of U.S. territorial expansion and national identity. ♦



Leading with Purpose and Precision

JOSEPH FRANKIE III

CEO, JFIII Associates LLC

In the harsh truth of the corporate world, being overqualified can sometimes feel like a disadvantage—a lesson Joseph Frankie III learned early in his transition from military precision to business strategy. Today, as CEO of JFIII Associates LLC, he channels decades of leadership across some of the most complex military and corporate operations into guiding organizations through transformation and growth. From commanding 3,000 specialists in global airborne logistics to reshaping aviation maintenance processes in South Korea, Frankie's career is dotted with milestones recognized by top military honors and strategic awards. Beyond accolades, his work now empowers clients to innovate, streamline operations, and scale impact. During an exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, he shared insights that redefine leadership in a modern, fast-paced world.

Q Can you walk us through your overall journey, from joining the military to becoming a senior executive, and highlight some of your biggest milestones?

I joined the Army just a month after graduating from high school. Four years at the Academy and then thirty years on active duty worldwide immersed me completely in military life. During that time, the focus was always on developing



others. Every subordinate under my leadership had a path to follow: the next assignment, promotion, or specialized school. My job was to help them achieve it.

This meant reviewing their experiences, identifying what they lacked, and creating growth opportunities. If someone needed communications experience, I ensured they handled equipment inventories, maintained readiness, and oversaw operations so that it would reflect on their record. Advising people became second nature—understanding their passions, helping them structure their paths, and preparing them to compete effectively for the next level.

The same principles apply at all levels. Early in my career, I coached lieutenants; later, as a colonel, I guided colonels and lieutenant colonels. When I transitioned to the private sector, I realized that few people had mentors to guide them in this way. The skills I honed in the military—coaching, mentoring, and assisting others—naturally became my strengths in executive search.

In that space, I saw a common challenge: many executives do not know how to market themselves. I often liken it to fishing. People want to catch trout, but they fish with steak. The fish, of course, prefer worms. The lesson is clear: success

requires using the right approach to align with the opportunity. Today, tools like LinkedIn can make these qualities visible, yet most executives underutilize them. Understanding this gap has guided much of my work.

Q Transitioning from the military to the corporate world can be challenging. What obstacles did you face, and how did you navigate them?

Transitioning to the private sector proved to be a much larger challenge than I expected. After thirty-four years in the military, I assumed my education and experience would carry me through. I quickly discovered that civilian corporate culture operated very differently.

During interviews, I was often told, “You are the best we have seen,” yet I was not hired. One moment, I learned that I was overqualified for the positions I sought. My experience surpassed even that of the CEOs of some companies. They respected my skills but had no role for someone at my level for a mid-level position. That experience taught me a crucial lesson: corporate opportunities are often about timing, fit, and relationships rather than credentials alone.

Following this insight, I began seeking roles where my broad, multifunctional talents could contribute meaningfully from the ground up. Being part of a startup or early-stage company allowed me to fully integrate into the culture and influence outcomes, rather than compete against established hierarchies in rigid corporate structures. It reinforced the importance of adaptability, observation, and understanding the unseen rules of a new environment.

Q What are some of the most important lessons from your military and executive experiences, and how do you apply them today as CEO of JFIII Associates?

One consistent lesson is that relationships remain the most powerful pathway to opportunities. Beyond that, effective personal branding is critical. Many executives reach the top and find their network has plateaued—they must compete without the advantage of established connections. That is where tools like LinkedIn become indispensable.

I often work with clients over the years to build visibility, credibility, and alignment between their skills and market demand. The goal is to position them accurately, ensuring that when someone

searches for their expertise, they are seen in the right light. Many executives over 40 face a wake-up call: recruiters stop calling, and opportunities require more self-marketing than ever. The ability to articulate both intellectual and emotional capability becomes essential.

The analogy of fishing applies here, too—executives often “fish” with what they prefer, not what the market demands. Aligning skills and presentation to the right audience makes the difference between being overlooked and being noticed.

Q How do you see generational differences shaping leadership today, and what advice would you give to the next generation of business leaders?

Listening has been the cornerstone of every success I have had, both in the military and private sector. Projects fail less because of technical gaps and more because communication and trust break down. Developing the skill to truly listen—especially for younger generations accustomed to screens, short messages, and constant multitasking—is critical.

Interpersonal skills remain invaluable. Nonverbal cues, timing, and human interaction cannot be fully replicated by digital communication. Leaders who understand this can resolve conflicts, build trust, and inspire teams effectively. My advice to emerging leaders is to invest in observation, patience, and listening—skills that cannot be automated or rushed, yet define the most successful careers.

Q What does success mean to you, and how has that definition evolved over time?

Success changes as life progresses. Early on, it meant building skills, securing roles, and providing for family—essentially, being competent and competitive. Around the age of forty, life resembles halftime in football: it's a moment to assess strategy. Should one continue the same path or shift focus toward significance?

At this stage, I prioritize impact over volume. I choose clients who are ready to work and invest energy where it can create the most value. Helping others achieve their goals brings personal fulfillment. Maintaining health, staying active in multiple ventures, and mentoring rising leaders define significance. Success is no longer about the positions I hold, but about the influence and value I create for others. ♦

THE EPSTEIN FILES

Why the Epstein Files continue to rattle institutions and raise questions for American power

There are many different types of people in the world. Some collect art, some house, while most are in a constant pursuit of reputation-building. Jeffrey Epstein, on the other hand, collected 'papers' such as invoices, flight logs, emails, court filings, and photos. These 'papers' have been the slow, stubborn, but inevitable flashlight revealing how the ultra-wealthy and powerful sects of American society were hiding what they do in plain sight.

The Archive That Keeps Coming Up!

What people call the "Epstein Files" is not a single dossier but an amalgamation of thousands of documents and materials produced over years of litigation, grand-jury work, civil discovery, and, most recently, targeted releases and journalistic reports. This means that the files comprise documents collected over the years from various sources. These also include findings and documents that were sealed by the court or archived by media houses at one point in time. Major media organisations and courts have gradually made many of those materials public; others remain tightly redacted or withheld by prosecutors. The sheer scale of documents means new details surface



periodically, creating fresh headlines and fresh political fallout.

From Lawsuit to Litigation: The Timeline of These 'Files'

The Epstein files did not explode into the public domain; better yet, they seeped out over time. Early disclosures came in the form of suits filed by survivors, particularly during the litigation connected to Ghislaine Maxwell, a British Socialist and a convicted child sex offender. Hereafter, the court ordered the unsealing of

long-sealed discovery material in 2023 and 2024, revealing many names that had been circulated privately for years.

After that, Journalistic investigations followed. Top American news outlets like Bloomberg and The New York Times obtained emails, schedules and records through independent sourcing during 2024-2025. As public pressure mounted, lawmakers made efforts to declassify the files. In 2025, the Trump administration pushed the Department of Justice to release additional Epstein-related material. However,

once the DOJ complied, heavy redactions and reports that many files were missing only deepened public mistrust.

Most Consequential Documents and What They Show!

As mentioned earlier, the 'Epstien Files' are an amalgamation of various documents revealing different aspects of the files.

First are unsealed court filings and testimony. These include detailed victim declarations and grand-jury material describing abuse patterns, recruitment practices, and the role of intermediaries, particularly Ghislaine Maxwell. These documents formed the backbone of Maxwell's 2021 criminal trial and remain the most legally consequential part of the record.

Second are emails and estate documents. Reporting in 2025 uncovered tens of thousands of Epstein emails that read, on their face, like the correspondence of a well-connected financier: dinner invitations, introductions, philanthropic conversations. Journalists have repeatedly emphasised that correspondence alone does not establish criminal conduct. What it establishes is reach.

Third are flight logs and visitor records, disclosed earlier through civil litigation. These logs identify prominent individuals who flew on Epstein's planes or visited his properties. Courts and responsible newsrooms have consistently warned against equating presence with guilt, a caution that matters precisely because the names involved are so powerful.

Names, Nuances & Paper Trail Limits

This is where discomfort sets in. To see names that are so much ingrained in the ethos of America really tells you that no matter what, the general public never knows the full picture.

Several high-profile American figures appear in the Epstein files in varying degrees. For Instance, former President Bill Clinton is documented in flight logs and civil filings as having

"The system failed these girls at every level. It failed to protect them, it failed to investigate properly, and it failed to hold powerful people accountable for far too long."

Julie K. Brown
Investigative Journalist

flown on Epstein's aircraft multiple times. However, Clinton has acknowledged knowing Epstein socially and denies any knowledge of abuse. As a result, no criminal charges have been brought against Clinton, but it's still too early to draw any hard conclusions.

Another name that few people expected was Donald J. Trump. He appears in Epstein's contact records and was photographed socialising with him in the 1990s. Trump famously told New York Magazine in 2002 that Epstein liked women "on the younger side." Trump does not appear in flight logs, no survivor has accused him, and no criminal findings link him to Epstein. However, one instance that garners attention is when

Epstein allegedly introduced a 14-year-old girl to Trump, and asked him, in respect to the girl, "this is a good one, right?", to which Trump replied with a chuckle, according to the files.

In the cultural sphere of the US, figures such as Mick Jagger, Michael Jackson, and Diana Ross surface in address books or social references, illustrating Epstein's access to celebrity circles; none are accused in Epstein-related court filings. Internationally, Prince Andrew (Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor) stands apart, having settled a civil case without admitting wrongdoing.

Not only that, but Epstein was also in bed with businessmen like Bill Gates and Les Wexner. In several photos of Epstein's parties, Bill Gates is clearly seen with his arm around girls' waist. Wexner, however, occupies a very different position; Epstein's wealth, residence, and legitimacy flowed directly from Wexner, who granted him power of attorney and extraordinary financial control. That being said, Wexner has not been charged of any felony, as of yet.

Why The 'Files' Still Matter?

The Epstein files are not a single revelation. They are excavations that never quite end. They remind us that power rarely needs to conspire; it can simply delay, diffuse, and deflect.

For American institutions, the files are less about proving guilt than confronting failure — failure to ask hard questions early, failure to act decisively, and failure to place victims above reputations.

The documents are there. What remains unresolved is how we choose to use them. ♦



Steering Creativity Beyond Convention

LAURA JORDAN BAMBACH

Founder & Chief Creative Officer, **Uncharted**

It was the mid-1990s in Sydney when a young fine arts student stumbled into a world few others even knew existed, HTML coding. As the internet began to stretch its wings across the globe, Laura Jordan Bambach found herself captivated not just by art, but by the vast creative possibilities the digital world offered. A lecturer handed her the basics of web coding and suggested, “You might enjoy this.” She did more than enjoy it as she used it to rewrite the rules of what creativity could look like in a digital age. That moment of serendipity launched a career that has since helped redefine the boundaries between technology, advertising, design, and activism.

Today, Laura Jordan Bambach stands among the most respected creative leaders in the global advertising industry. As the Founder and Chief Creative Officer of Uncharted, a creative agency launched in April 2024 with long-time collaborators Hattie Matthews and Fern Miller, Laura continues to blaze new trails. Uncharted isn’t just another agency, it’s a bold, purpose-led venture that applies data, technology, and culture to solve real-world business and societal problems through creativity.

From Cyberfeminism to Digital Leadership

Born and raised in Australia, Laura’s roots in creativity came through fine arts. But her early passion evolved in a uniquely digital direction during her university days, when she began merging art with coding. It was also during this period that she became deeply engaged in the

cyberfeminist movement, a cultural and political initiative that challenged the male-dominated tech space. She was an editor and creative director at Geekgirl, the first cyberfeminist magazine, where she created interactive web experiences and games at a time when such things were cutting-edge.

After sharpening her skills in Sydney, she moved to London where her creative and technical abilities quickly earned her positions at several respected agencies including Lateral, Deepend, and ID Media. By the early 2000s, she had become Head of Art at Glue London, where she played a key role in advancing digital storytelling in advertising.

Leading from the Front: Dare, LBi, Mr. President

Laura’s creative leadership grew exponentially when she joined LBi in 2008 as Joint Executive Creative Director. There, she helped integrate digital capabilities with brand storytelling, bringing in a more human, interactive approach to campaigns.

She later became Creative Director and Partner at Dare, and in 2013, co-founded the independent agency Mr. President. It was here that Laura’s philosophy of “making things that matter” fully flourished. Under her creative leadership, the agency earned multiple accolades, including Agency of the Year by The Drum and International Small Agency of the Year by AdAge. At Mr. President, she led innovative campaigns that merged design with social impact, giving the agency a reputation for smart, brave, and forward-thinking work.

Grey London and Global Influence

In 2020, Laura took on the role of President and Chief Creative Officer at Grey London, one of WPP’s top creative agencies. She also served on Grey’s Global Creative Council and chaired the EMEA Creative Council, bringing her inclusive and transformative leadership style to a wider platform.

At Grey, Laura made it a priority to build not just campaigns, but cultures. She emphasized empathy, curiosity, and collaboration, values she believes are essential to creative excellence. Under her leadership, Grey London strengthened its creative credentials, gaining recognition in major industry rankings and awards.

Uncharted: A New Chapter in Creative Leadership

By 2024, Laura was ready to reimagine the agency model again. With Hattie Matthews and Fern Miller, two of the industry’s sharpest minds, she launched Uncharted, an agency designed to challenge conventions and bring radical creativity to the forefront. From day one, Uncharted has stood out for its commitment to inclusive design, progressive business practices, and future-facing creative tech.



For Laura, Uncharted isn’t just a business, it’s a creative ecosystem meant to nurture talent, especially those who often go overlooked in traditional agency hierarchies. It continues her long-standing mission to reshape the industry through inclusion, purpose, and experimentation.

Championing Change: SheSays, CANNT, and More

Beyond agencies, Laura’s impact on the industry is deeply social. She is the co-founder of SheSays, a global network that helps women in advertising and design grow through mentorship and events. With over 90,000 members in 55 cities worldwide, SheSays is one of the most significant platforms for women in the creative industries.

She also founded CANNT Festival, an alternative to Cannes Lions that celebrates creatives who may not get to attend the glitzy global event, and OKO, a mentoring app for young talent. Laura co-founded The Great British Diversity Experiment, a groundbreaking project aimed at proving the commercial benefits of diversity in creative teams.

Recognition and Awards

Over the years, Laura has earned numerous honors across creativity, effectiveness, and leadership. She has received awards from D&AD, One Show, Cannes Lions, Effies, Clios, LIAAS, Campaign BIG, Creative Circle, British Arrows, and Caples, reflecting her creative excellence across both craft and commercial performance.

She was runner-up in Campaign’s Agency Leader of the Year in 2021, named Individual of the Year at the DADI Awards, and featured in Debrett’s 500 list of Britain’s most influential people for two consecutive years. In 2018, she received the Alumni Award for Art and Culture from the University of New South Wales, and an Honorary Doctorate from Norwich University of the Arts for her services to design and gender equity.

A Different Kind of Creative

Laura Jordan Bambach’s journey from coding in Sydney to founding some of the UK’s most progressive creative platforms reveals a professional arc defined by innovation, purpose, and heart. As she continues to shape Uncharted and inspire creatives globally, Laura Jordan Bambach proves that the most powerful journeys are those that lift others as they move forward. ♦



UFC's ULTIMATE 2026 White House Showdown

Few sports leagues or organisations have had the impact UFC has had in the last 25 years. From being an underappreciated, somewhat underground sport, UFC has brought MMA to the mainstream through years of work and dedication. Today, UFC is a multi-billion-dollar business with fighters from around the world, broadcasting to more than 170 countries and reaching an estimated viewership of over 900 million.

Over the last three decades, UFC has talked, debated, and pleaded with athletic commissions across the US to legitimise the sport and bring it to the mainstream. Today, UFC is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world and the fastest-growing in the US. So much so that UFC's last 50 events have been housefull with millions

of pay-per-view buys. Yet, by 2020, the UFC's ambition grew beyond US states and some foreign locations and in doing so, they planned something serious, something that would change how the world perceives the sport. According to reports, UFC is hosting an event at the White House, the residence of the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump.

The UFC's Long March Into the Mainstream

The idea of a White House-adjacent UFC event cannot be understood without revisiting how far the organisation has come. In the late 1990s, the UFC was banned in multiple U.S. states, labelled "human cockfighting" by political leaders, and struggling for survival. By contrast, by 2016, the company had been

acquired by Endeavour in a \$4 billion deal, one of the largest sports acquisitions in history.

By 2023, UFC events were regularly generating over \$10 million in live gate revenue for marquee cards, while top pay-per-view events exceeded 700,000 buys, placing the promotion alongside boxing's biggest nights. What once operated in defiance of regulators now worked closely with athletic commissions, broadcasters, and governments. This right here is what made the notion of UFC White House even possible.

Politics, Power, and MMA's Normalization

MMA or UFC's relationship with political powers has evolved slowly but steadily over the years. For the past half a decade or so, UFC has hosted its events in various

countries, including places where state and sport intersect heavily. Take Abu Dhabi as an example: during the COVID-19 pandemic, UFC arranged an entire island with the help of the crown, called 'Fight Island'. This was arranged solely by the State of the UAE, not UFC.

In the United States of America, UFC has maintained close relationships with politicians. This is not to politicise the sport, but to normalize its presence within America's civic and institutional fabric. In doing so, UFC started staging events in Washington, D.C., and even honored military service members during fight nights.

By the mid-2020s, the UFC was no longer just entertainment; it had become a cultural hot pot and an economic powerhouse.

How does The White House Enter the Conversation?

Many members of Congress and politicians have been associated with the UFC in the past. The most prominent of those is Donald Trump, who just happens to be the POTUS right now. Once Donald J. Trump took office, speculation about a UFC-linked White House event gained momentum after public comments, interviews, and social media discourse among UFC executives and political figures, in which the idea was floated as a symbolic exhibition rather than a traditional pay-per-view card.

Potential Fights on the Card

There have been many speculations as to the fighters who will feature on the card.



"The company had been acquired by Endeavour in a \$4 billion deal, one of the largest sports acquisitions in history."

One matchup that keeps coming up is Jon Jones vs. Alex Pereira, USA vs. Brazil. This fight is more of a legacy fight for Jon Jones, who is arguably the greatest fighter in the sport's history. For Alex, it is more emotional. For him, it's about telling the world that a kid from the slums of Brazil can make it to the top of the world.

Another name frequently discussed is Conor McGregor, the promotion's biggest commercial draw and a central figure in its global expansion, making him a natural anchor for a high-visibility showcase bout.

From a values-driven perspective, fighters such as Max Holloway or Israel Adesanya align with the tone an event like this would require, combining technical mastery with professionalism. A women's bout featuring Zhang Weili would further reflect the UFC's evolution into a globally inclusive sport.

As per Donald Trump, the

card will feature a whopping 9 title fights. This is a lot, given that UFC has 11 divisions across male and female weight classes.

Whether it Happens or Not, the Moment Matters

Whether a UFC White House event happens or not, it speaks volumes about the creators of UFC that the public at least finds it plausible enough to discuss it now. However, if we take UFC president Dana White and POTUS Donald Trump at their word, the fight card will definitely happen.

From outlawed spectacle to global powerhouse, the UFC's journey reflects a broader truth about modern culture: legitimacy is not static; it is earned, contested, and renegotiated over time. And if the world's most famous octagon has taught anything, it is that boundaries, once thought immovable, rarely are. ♦



Leading from Lived Experience

OME OGBRU, PHARM D

CEO & Founder, AINGENS

In highly regulated industries, experience is rarely measured by years alone, but by how often leaders are forced to make decisions without perfect information, under pressure, and with real consequences attached. In life sciences, those moments arrive early and often, shaping not only judgment but also an enduring awareness of where systems strain, slow, or quietly fail the people working within them.

Dr. Ogbru has spent more than two decades inside those systems, moving across academia, clinical practice, and senior medical affairs leadership roles at organizations such as Biogen, AstraZeneca, Baxter, and Bristol Myers Squibb. His work has placed him at the intersection of scientific rigor, regulatory complexity, and operational reality, leading global medical information teams and supporting major therapy launches across neuroscience, oncology, and rare diseases. Alongside this, his experience as a medical writer and consultant added another dimension, reinforcing the gap between how science is generated and how it is ultimately communicated.

Those accumulated experiences now inform his perspective as Founder and CEO of AINGENS. TradeFlock spoke with Dr. Ogbru to examine how lived experience shapes leadership decisions in an era of accelerating change.

Q What experiences most shaped your journey to founding AINGENS?

Some experiences stay with you because they quietly change how you see your work. Creating a PharmD internship program at my alma mater, the University of the Pacific, was one such moment. Building something from scratch required designing a structure, aligning healthcare professionals around a shared vision, and demonstrating that students could add real value to patient care, which reshaped how I thought about contribution and ownership early in my career.

That way of thinking carried forward into clinical practice and later into roles as a Medical Science Liaison and medical information leader, where the impact of credible scientific information became unmistakable. Seeing how evidence improves outcomes and how misinformation erodes trust revealed both the responsibility and the untapped potential within scientific teams. Over time, it became clear that talent was rarely the limitation, while systems and processes often were. AINGENS grew from that realization, built to help scientific expertise advance further, faster, and more efficiently.

Q Which moments best reflect the impact you have created across your career?

Impact has rarely arrived as a single defining moment, but rather as a series of signals that the work was reaching beyond its original scope. As a pharmacy student, I wrote a review article on drug-resistant tuberculosis that was distributed globally, which reinforced how rigorously science can influence care far from where it begins. Academic recognition followed through an award-winning publication, while clinical practice anchored those achievements in real patient outcomes and education.

Industry roles expanded to influence further outcomes, particularly as a Medical Science Liaison, when evidence-based engagement contributed to formulary decisions and earned formal recognition. Over time, these experiences formed a consistent thread centered on translating science into decisions that matter. Launching AINGENS and our first solution, MACg, represents the most complete expression of that journey, bringing together academic experience, clinical practice insight, and operational leadership into a platform designed to scale impact across organizations.

Q What guiding principles shaped how you built AINGENS?

Working closely with scientific teams over many years leaves little room for theory about what helps and what hinders. I had seen too many tools promise transformation while quietly adding friction, which made it clear that usefulness had to come before sophistication. Building AINGENS and MACg meant committing to technology that supports teams without demanding their attention, allowing them to focus on meaningful scientific work.

Respecting the realities of scientific content creation was equally important, since



ideation, literature review, writing, citations, collaboration, and presentation are closely interconnected. Improving one step in isolation rarely changes outcomes, so the MACg platform had to support the full workflow while remaining reliable, secure, and flexible across teams. That perspective ultimately distilled into a simple belief that guided every decision:

“The solution should work for the team, and solve real challenges.”

Q How do you see AI reshaping scientific content and trust in the years ahead?

AI will change expectations not through novelty, but through results. As organizations move beyond experimentation, adoption will focus on measurable impact, shifting attention away from workforce reduction and toward enabling work that was previously limited by time and resources. Confidence in AI-supported scientific content will grow as teams see quality improve rather than diminish.

At the same time, the stakes are rising. Misinformation and disinformation remain the most serious threats to scientific credibility, amplified by speed and scale. The same technologies that can spread misleading content can also reinforce trust when applied responsibly. Through MACg, AINGENS enables organizations to generate accurate, evidence-based scientific information efficiently, while future solutions will help identify misleading narratives and ensure credible insights reach the right audiences.

Q What legacy are you working toward through AINGENS?

Legacy becomes clearer when viewed through impact rather than visibility. AINGENS aims to set a meaningful benchmark for AI-driven scientific content generation while extending access beyond large institutions with extensive resources. Shaping how scientific information is created, interpreted, and shared is as important as the technology itself.

Equally central is building a company that creates opportunities for those connected to it, whether team members, partners, or users who rely on these tools to unlock new possibilities. Early recognition and the launch of MACg represent the beginning of a longer journey, focused on contributing to a more efficient, productive, impactful, and technology-enabled future for scientific communication. ♦

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FROM ADMINISTRATION TO STRATEGIC CATALYST

How Modern HR Drives Growth, Innovation, and Human Potential

TU YIQIAN, VP of Human Resources, LEILI MARINEBIO

In today's business landscape, shaped by digitalisation and globalisation, the core of Human Resources has evolved from traditional administrative control into a strategic engine that drives business growth. Its primary focus is now on enabling team development and empowering business objectives. The essence of HR is no longer confined to 'management' but lies in becoming a deep strategic partner to the business, a true ally. This involves shaping the environment through systems, data, and culture, understanding human dynamics, and unlocking organisational potential. Leaders, in turn, ignite the passion of individuals and teams through daily interactions.

This means HR must move beyond executing processes and policies to deeply embed itself within the business value chain and participate in strategic dialogues from the planning stage. Our focus extends beyond talent allocation and personnel management to shaping a sustainable organisational ecosystem. By leveraging data to understand employee needs and designing flexible incentive systems, by fostering culture and empowering leadership to align individual growth with organisational goals, and by creating psychologically safe environments, we unleash employee creativity and foster a sense of belonging.



True human-centric governance is not merely about stacking benefits, but about systematically building a sense of meaning, enabling employees to grow through challenges, feel respected through collaboration, and see their value through contribution. When HR can transform human potential into organisational innovation and customer value, it ceases to be a cost centre and becomes a catalyst for the enterprise's second growth curve. This is the genuine resilience that modern HR builds for companies in a volatile market." ♦



Fueling Innovation Through First Principles

RAHUL RAMKUMAR

Chief Product Officer, Rocket.new



In the early days of India's e-commerce boom, a young product manager found himself zipping through the crowded streets of Bengaluru, helmet on, his heart racing, as he learned Kannada to better understand his delivery partners. He was chasing meaning, not metrics. Those days at Flipkart, building logistics from scratch with a four-member team and a mountain of ambition, were less about packages and more about possibilities. That journey, grounded in customer obsession, curiosity, and clarity, set the tone for everything Rahul Ramkumar would later do. From shaping how millions shop online to redefining fulfillment tech and AI-led retail experiences, his story is not of titles, but of transformation. Today, as Chief Product Officer at Rocket.new, Rahul continues to merge technology with empathy, scaling innovation through code and culture, proving that great products are built in life, not in labs.

Stay close to your customers and the problem you're solving. Don't chase trends, chase understanding.

How did your early retail experiences shape your approach to building products at scale, and what inspired your move into AI and fulfilment tech?

Back in 2010, I was among the first product managers at Flipkart, long before it became the e-commerce giant it is today. We had immense demand but limited logistics infrastructure, and relying on external aggregators compromised the customer experience. That's when Flipkart took a bold step to build its own logistics ecosystem from scratch, an unprecedented move that demanded first-principles thinking. With just four of us, we created end-to-end logistics systems, including routing and planning, and even introduced cash-on-delivery within months. I interviewed hundreds of customers and delivery partners, learned to ride a motorcycle, and picked up Kannada to understand the ground reality. That experience shaped my belief in the importance of customer focus, curiosity, clarity, and first-principles problem-solving.

What's one milestone in your 13-year product journey that truly transformed how you bridged retail challenges with technology?

One major milestone came in 2020 at Walmart, when we decided to merge two major apps, one for groceries (the "Orange app") and another for the broader marketplace (the "Blue app"), into a single seamless experience. What seemed like a simple tech task soon became a massive organizational transformation. Both apps were loved and top-ranked, yet customers faced friction. After all, no one needs two checkout counters in a physical store, so why do we need them online? The merger had failed five times before, but after a year of relentless effort, thousands of Zoom calls, and collaboration from over 2,000 people, we launched the unified Walmart app in mid-2021. Despite resistance, it became one of the world's top retail apps, a true testament to teamwork and perseverance.

Among all the products you've built or overseen, which one feels closest to your heart, and why?

That would be Walmart's Search. We built it from the ground up, breaking everything down to first principles and rebuilding it as an AI-native system. It was one of the most challenging yet rewarding projects I've led.

Walmart Search is now the second most-used retail search engine in the world and what made it special was not only the scale, but the

team that built it. We had a group of incredibly talented, humble, and curious people who genuinely enjoyed solving hard problems together. Their passion made even the most complex challenges feel easy and fun. We didn't just meet our goals, we surpassed them, and in record time.

Outside of product launches and boardrooms, what keeps you inspired and helps fuel your creativity at Rocket.new?

I've always been passionate about sports, especially cricket. I can watch a five-day Test match from start to finish, even if my favourite team isn't playing. The sport teaches you patience, discipline, perseverance, and teamwork, qualities that are surprisingly relevant to building great products. Cricket, like life, reminds you that it's a team sport. Individuals may shine, but it's the collective that wins.

Beyond that, my biggest source of energy comes from my wife and two kids. Spending time with them grounds me. Their curiosity, laughter, and sheer joy in the simplest things constantly remind me that life doesn't have to be complicated. That perspective helps me approach innovation with both simplicity and purpose.

If you could give one piece of advice to aspiring product leaders who want to build truly impactful technology, what would it be?

Stay close to your customers and the problem you're solving. Don't chase trends, chase understanding. The best products are not born from boardroom discussions but from real-world empathy and curiosity. Build from first principles, always. And remember: no matter how advanced the technology, it's still about people at the end of the day.

What excites you most about your work at Rocket.new and the future of AI in product development?

What excites me most is the pace of change and the opportunity to reimagine how products are conceived and delivered. At Rocket.new, we're not just building AI tools; we're creating systems that think and learn alongside humans. That's where the magic happens, when AI becomes an enabler of creativity, not a replacement for it.

The future of product development lies in blending empathy with intelligence, gaining a deep understanding of human needs, and leveraging technology to amplify that understanding. For me, that's the most exciting frontier to build on. ♦



TECH DILEMMA

Not Every Tool Is Meant for You

We have all heard the proverb that a bad workman blames his tools, yet the more closely one examines how work actually unfolds today, the less complete that saying feels. There are situations where a tool is genuinely ill-suited to the task at hand, and placing responsibility entirely on the individual using it ignores the role that design and context play in shaping outcomes. There is another dimension that often goes unspoken: in many cases, the difficulty begins earlier, when a tool is selected without sufficient consideration of whether it

aligns with the nature of the work or the person doing it. While this dilemma is not new, it has become more urgent as tools have become inseparable from professional survival.

Work today rarely exists apart from technology. Tools influence how priorities are set, how productivity is assessed, and how decisions are justified. Software platforms structure workflows, dashboards frame judgment, and systems define what progress looks like long before outcomes are evaluated. In many roles, tools no longer quietly assist; they actively shape how work is

done, making tool selection feel both unavoidable and consequential. This dependence has also made it harder to pause and ask whether a particular tool truly aligns with how someone thinks, works, or leads.

Complicating matters further is the assumption that access to more tools naturally leads to better performance. Most tools arrive with built-in assumptions about speed, visibility, and scale, rewarding certain behaviors while discouraging others. Some prioritize constant updates, others emphasize automation, and many favor measurable

activity over clarity. When these assumptions go unexamined, professionals often adapt their working style to suit the tool rather than choosing tools that support how they work best, quietly reversing the relationship between technology and expertise.

Why Tool Choice Feels Harder Than Ever

The modern workplace offers no shortage of options. For nearly every function, dozens of platforms promise efficiency, insight, and growth, creating an environment where abundance is mistaken for flexibility. By 2025, research indicates that the average professional relies on more than nine core digital tools each day, nearly double the number used a decade earlier. While this expansion offers choice, it often leads to fatigue, as tool decisions are made quickly and based on popularity or visibility rather than suitability.

Adoption pressure plays a significant role. Tools are frequently introduced because peers use them, competitors appear to have adopted them, or leadership associates their use with progress. Over time, professionals find themselves navigating systems that neither align with one another nor reflect their natural working rhythms. Instead of

reducing friction, tools begin to create it, fragmenting attention and slowing judgment in ways that are difficult to articulate but easy to feel.

There is also a cultural undercurrent worth noting. Many organizations equate tool adoption with competence, assuming familiarity with the latest platforms signals adaptability. In such environments, questioning whether a tool is appropriate can feel like resistance rather than discernment. The cost of this mismatch rarely appears all at once, but shows up gradually through declining focus, weaker decisions, and rising cognitive load.

Choosing Tools With Intent, Not Anxiety

The challenge, then, is not learning new tools, but choosing them with intent rather than anxiety. Effective selection begins with understanding the nature of the work itself. Some roles demand depth and reflection, while others depend on speed and coordination. A tool designed for constant visibility can undermine thoughtful work, just as a rigid system can slow environments that rely on judgment.

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping this balance. When tools are imposed without dialogue, they signal control. When they are



There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all

— Peter F. Drucker

selected with input and room for adaptation, they reinforce trust. Studies conducted in 2025 show that teams with greater autonomy in tool choice report higher satisfaction and stronger performance outcomes than those operating under standardized systems.

It is also important to recognize that tools are not neutral. They shape behavior, influence priorities, and quietly redefine what success looks like. Choosing a tool is therefore not only a technical decision, but a cultural one. Not every tool is meant for every person or organization, and acknowledging this reflects maturity rather than limitation. In an environment crowded with solutions, clarity about what does not fit can be as valuable as enthusiasm for what does. ♦

Area of Impact - What the Data Indicates.

Daily Tool Usage - Professionals rely on 9+ digital tools on average.

Focus and Productivity - Over 60% report reduced focus due to tool overload.

Decision Strain - Nearly 50% say tools complicate judgment.

Autonomy Outcomes - Teams with tool choice autonomy show stronger performance.

Tool longevity - Approximately 40% of tools are abandoned within 18 months.



Leading Strategy Beyond Uncertainty

VISHWANATH MADHUGIRI

Chief Strategy Officer,
SAAZ Micro Inc.

Leadership, in some careers, emerges quietly through repetition rather than proclamation. Over time, patterns form, judgment sharpens, and responsibility deepens. Vishwanath Madhugiri's journey reflects that arc. Across research institutions, global enterprises, policy forums, and boardrooms spanning three continents, his work has consistently focused on building what lasts. As Chief Strategy Officer at SAAZ Micro Inc., a leading global designer and manufacturer of infrared imaging sensors, camera systems, and electronics for space, defence, and scientific missions, he collaborates closely with NASA, ISRO, and other international space agencies. Earlier roles at Infosys, Lycamobile Group, and the University of Birmingham, U.K., reveal a CXO path embellished by ecosystem thinking and long-horizon decision-making. During an exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, he discussed his journey, the challenges along the way, and what lies ahead.



Q How did your journey evolve to board-level leadership, and what changed your view most?

I began in hands-on business and innovation leadership, where success was measured by execution: selling and building products and solutions, scaling teams, entering new markets, and solving customer and operational issues. Very early on, I realised that strategy only becomes real when teams are aligned, incentives are clear, and execution is disciplined.

As my career progressed into enterprise-wide, cross-functional roles at the intersection of technology, transformation, and growth, the nature of decisions began to change. Optimising for a single product, function, or quarter no longer made sense. I had to think in terms of portfolios, trade-offs, and long-term consequences, while constantly balancing innovation with risk, speed with resilience, and ambition with governance. Leadership slowly shifted from driving outcomes to asking better questions and creating the conditions for others to succeed.

The transition to board-level strategy marked the most consequential shift. You are removed from day-to-day execution, yet deeply accountable for outcomes. The role becomes one of stewardship: shaping purpose, ensuring ethical and financial integrity, overseeing leadership succession, and helping management navigate uncertainty. That evolution from leader as driver to leader as steward, mentor, and accelerator reshaped how I approach leadership today.

Q In what ways did academia, industry, and government shape your decisions?

Working across global academia, industry, and government fundamentally reshaped my view on high-stakes decisions and seeded the idea of interdisciplinary innovation. This innovation emerges at the intersection of technologies and disciplines. Each of the above operates on a differentiated logic of value, time, and accountability, and moving seamlessly between them trained me to hold multiple truths at once. Academia taught intellectual rigor and

patience. Decisions there are driven by evidence, peer scrutiny, and longer horizons, which foster comfort with uncertainty and extract signal from noise. That grounding instilled the habit of questioning what we truly know, what we assume, and which evidence challenges our view.

Industry introduced urgency and accountability. Decisions carry immediate consequences for customers, employees, and capital, often with incomplete information. From this environment, I learned to balance analysis with action, aiming for decisions that are good enough, fast enough, and reversible when possible. It also reinforced a hard truth: even strong strategies fail if they are not in sync with how people actually behave.

The government revealed a third dimension. Public trust, equity, regulation, and decadal societal outcomes remain paramount at all times. Exposure to this context raised questions about who is affected, who bears the risk, and how decisions would be viewed over time. Together, these experiences birthed a holistic approach that co-opted creative and diverse points of view, minimizing the risk of premature, half-baked solutions.

Q What did trade and investment exposure change about your global thinking?

Experience in trade and investment, particularly at the intersection of business and national policy priorities, reshaped how I think about building global technology businesses. It became apparent that success is not driven by technology alone, but by geopolitics, regulation, talent flows, trust, and national strategic intent and priorities.

This exposure also changed how I evaluate scale. Market size alone proved insufficient. Attention shifted to where talent is being nurtured, where capital is patient, and where governments actively support innovation ecosystems. Over time, this reinforced the importance of designing early for regulatory and geopolitical diversity, aligning innovation with overarching societal outcomes, building credibility with speed, and thinking in holistic ecosystem terms rather than as siloed enterprises.

Q Which initiative tested your strategic instincts the most?

The initiatives that tested my strategic instincts most involved committing to long-horizon innovation partnerships and deep-technology bets without immediate commercial payoff. At

Infosys, this meant co-creating global research partnerships with leading universities, research labs, and companies across the UK, the US, Europe, and India, without clear quarterly revenue targets or simple ROI models.

The trade-off was explicit: short-term performance pressure versus strategic capability building. Choosing to invest in blue-sky research, top-notch talent, intellectual property, and reimagined customer solutions reflected a belief that future competitiveness would be shaped years before returns became visible.

At SAAZ, we have doubled down on deep-tech research into and commercialization of advanced infrared sensors, detectors, LiDAR, and space electronics, where development cycles are long, technical risk is high, blue-sky thinking is the norm, and entry barriers are high. Thriving under such exacting conditions reinforces the belief that real strategy boils down to unshakeable commitment and calculated bets under constraints.

Q What did the space sector teach you about leadership?

Telecom and IT services reward speed, scale, and adaptability, allowing room for iteration and recovery. Even in semiconductors, where precision is non-negotiable, improvement remains possible. Space is unique and unforgivable.

Here, decisions are irreversible. Once a system is launched, there are no second chances. A small oversight or an unchallenged assumption can invalidate years of persistent work. Leadership means accountability and respect for the laws of physics, where rigor, honesty, and the courage to face uncomfortable truths early matter more than hierarchy or narrative.

Q Which imaging capabilities excite you most going forward?

The maturation of advanced neuromorphic-imaging sensors for next-generation space and terrestrial applications is particularly exciting. Monitoring Earth's health 24/7, tracking space debris, deep space optical communication, early fire detection, securing national borders, and interplanetary travel will increasingly depend on sensing precision and real-time intelligence.

Q How do you stay grounded outside work?

By being grateful, curious, having a sense of purpose and mentoring budding young entrepreneurs and technologists globally. ♦



THE NEW DEFINITION OF EXECUTIVE IMPACT

Executive impact has traditionally been inferred from visibility and scale, as reflected in the size of budgets controlled, teams managed, and markets entered. Influence was assumed to flow downward through the hierarchy, and effectiveness was often equated with the extent to which an executive's decisions were felt across the organization. That model still shapes many boardroom conversations, yet it increasingly fails to explain why outcomes diverge so sharply between leaders operating under similar structural authority.

What has changed is not the importance of leadership, but the context in which its effects are experienced. Large organizations now operate through layered, cross-functional systems in which execution depends less on instruction and more on alignment. More than 65% of enterprise initiatives currently span multiple functions, and internal studies show that most execution failures stem from unclear ownership and conflicting priorities rather than a lack of direction. In such environments, authority alone no longer guarantees movement, and executive impact becomes less about issuing decisions and more about shaping the conditions under which decisions hold.

Employee data reinforces this shift. Nearly 58% of professionals report that leaders closest to the work influence outcomes more than senior executives, not because senior leaders lack authority, but because distance dilutes clarity.

Impact is increasingly judged by whether executive involvement reduces ambiguity or adds to it. Teams led by executives who selectively intervene and consistently clarify trade-offs outperform peers by nearly 20% in execution reliability, even when resources and talent are comparable.

Trust has emerged as a central, if less visible, dimension of impact. Organizations with high executive trust scores experience 30–35% lower voluntary attrition, suggesting that leadership influence extends beyond strategy into continuity and stability. Employees observe not only what decisions are made, but how consistently they are made, how openly constraints are acknowledged, and whether actions align with stated priorities over time.

Restraint now plays a role that would once have been misread as disengagement. Nearly half of senior leaders acknowledge that over-intervention slows progress more often than it accelerates it, particularly in knowledge-heavy work. Executive impact increasingly comes from enabling momentum rather than directing every turn.

The emerging definition of executive impact is quieter, more distributed, and more difficult to measure through traditional proxies. It resides in judgment, coherence, and trust, shaping outcomes indirectly rather than commanding them outright. As authority diffuses and complexity grows, the executives who matter most may be those whose influence is felt most clearly when they choose not to be visible at all. ♦



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