



THE TOP 100 **INNOVATORS**
and *Entrepreneurs*

Celebrating
our 15th
Year of
Publishing

Featuring

ANDREW BERNETT

Owner and Founder
Bee Well Therapeutics

-Story on Page 28





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Entrepreneurs
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The team at *The Top 100 Magazine* is honored to work with some of the most brilliant, accomplished, and respected thought leaders across the globe.

Thanks to the collaborative efforts of our account directors, writers, production staff, and artists—along with the participation of the outstanding individuals featured in this edition—we are proud to present what we believe to be one of our most remarkable publications yet.

I have no doubt that our readers will be inspired by these incredible stories and will recognize the resilience, commitment, and sacrifices these professionals have made in their pursuit of excellence.

It is my genuine hope that each of these extraordinary individuals continues to thrive, and it is my privilege to introduce *The Top 100 Innovators & Entrepreneurs Magazine*.

Joseph Nunziato
CEO, Redwood Media

THE TOP 100 INNOVATORS and *Entrepreneurs*

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**THE TRAILBLAZERS. THE LEADERS.
THE CHANGE-MAKERS. THE DREAMERS.**

We bring the stories of extraordinary people to the world.

RICH LIGHT

From Blue-Collar Beginnings to Car Care Titan



Rich Light, founder and CEO of Gloss It, has carved an indelible mark in the car care industry. With over 30 years of dedication and extensive experience in automotive appearance and surface technology, Rich has elevated his brand to global prominence, achieving over \$50 million in sales in the car detailing business. His journey is a quintessential success story, marked by his relentless drive, hustle, and determination.

This is the story of a man who turned down a lucrative offer from Steve Wynn, defied the naysayers like Grant Cardone, who doubted Gloss It's potential, and rescued a critical demonstration for Peterbilt at an international truck convention. These pivotal moments highlight his evolution from a blue-collar Boston kid into a car care pioneer who built an empire and conquered Las Vegas.

With over three decades in the automotive business, generating eight figures in gross revenue, Rich has mastered the art of scaling and doubling sales in the automotive service industry. Now, after transforming his

company into an empire, he's sharing his expertise and helping others create their own success stories.

Early Beginnings: From Neighborhood Detailer to Business Owner

The history of Gloss It begins with Rich's father, an avid car collector who built an auto parts store into a 70-location franchise. As a child, Rich was tasked with maintaining his father's diverse collection of cars, from exotics to classics. "At a very young age, my dad put me to work maintaining his cars, which I took great pride in. My pride must have shown through my work because the word spread quickly and before I knew it, I had everyone in the neighborhood bringing me their cars to be detailed," Rich recalls.

By the age of seven, Rich was already running a car detailing business in his neighborhood. This early entrepreneurial spirit set the stage for the official launch of Granite Auto Grooming in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1990. Five years later, Rich moved his business to Las Vegas, Nevada, rebranding it as Gloss It

“ What I’m teaching at Gloss It University can work for any industry, not just car detailing. It’s about giving back and empowering others to reach their full potential, using the lessons I’ve learned throughout my journey. ”

Design & Detail Studio. His reputation for excellence quickly grew, earning him the moniker “the Boston kid that invades Vegas.” It was during this time that Rich began working for car dealerships, private individuals, car collectors, and wealthy celebrities.

Building an Empire

In Las Vegas, Rich’s hustle caught the attention of prominent figures, including Steve Wynn. His journey is marked by pivotal moments and bold decisions that shaped his career and the success of Gloss It.

The Steve Wynn Encounter

One day in the early 2000s, Mark Shore, the president of Treasure Island, drove a brand-new Ferrari 360 Stradale into Rich’s shop. Impressed by Rich’s work on his Ferrari, Shore introduced Rich to Steve Wynn. “Steve said, ‘Mark speaks very highly of you. My wife and I want you to work on all our cars. I’m going to give you all the keys and you’re going to be in charge of my personal fleet at my Shadow Creek property,’” Rich recounts.

At just 27 years old, operating out of a modest shopping center, Rich was entrusted with Wynn’s entire fleet. Wynn was so impressed that he offered Rich a lucrative position managing his transportation department, complete with stock options. However, Rich turned it down, saying, “Mr. Wynn, I really respect you and this opportunity, but I can’t do it. I have my own business; I don’t want to work for somebody else.” This bold decision underscored Rich’s commitment to his vision. Although it meant severing ties with Wynn’s fleet, it solidified Rich’s resolve to build his own empire.

The Peterbilt Challenge

Another defining moment came in the late 1990s when Rich received an urgent call from the Rolls Royce dealership about a truck company’s predicament at the Bellagio’s International Truck Show. “I met the executives at Bellagio, and we go to the ballroom. It was dark. They pulled back the curtains on the stage, and I saw four Peterbilt black semis that looked like somebody had taken steel wool to them, destroyed the paint—and the show was the next day,” Rich describes. The executives needed the trucks detailed by 8:00 AM the

following morning. Rich and his team worked through the night, using Gloss It products he was developing. By morning, the trucks looked brand new. The Peterbilt president was so impressed that he hired Rich to teach his team in his Texas factory for two years.

Reflecting on this pivotal event, Rich recalls, “I called my father. He said, ‘Son, let me tell you the difference between the people who make the biggest money and the littlest. You are now getting paid for what you know, not what you do. Your value has escalated, and people are willing to pay for your expertise.’”

The Grant Cardone Experience

Rich’s journey is also marked by his encounters with industry titans. In 2019, he attended one of Grant Cardone’s business mastermind events, seeking advice on scaling his business. “My wife and I were in a private Q&A session with about 50 other attendees, and most people were fawning over him, telling him how fantastic he was,” Rich recalls. I asked him, “You talk about how you were stuck at the \$2-\$3M a year while building your business. Who did you have to become to scale to \$100 million?” Cardone asked Rich what his business was. When Rich told him, Cardone dismissively replied, “Sell it. It’s not scalable,” and turned off his mic. However, this interaction led to a chance meeting with direct marketing legend Frank Kern, who had witnessed the encounter. “Frank said, ‘You got 20 minutes? Let’s chat.’ We sat outside, smoked cigars, and talked. He said he wanted to bring me on as a client and help me with direct marketing, lead generation, advertising,” Rich recounts. Frank brought along Wayne Helena and two other marketing and branding mavericks. This partnership propelled Gloss It to new heights.

Gloss It: A Global Leader

Today, Gloss It stands as a global leader in surface technology as the manufacturer of Evo Ceramic Quartz Coating and other cutting-edge car care products. The company is divided into three divisions: Gloss It Design and Detail Studio, Gloss It Products, and Gloss It University. Based in Las Vegas, Nevada, Gloss It manufactures ceramic coatings, detailing equipment, and a full line of car care products ranging from cleaners, protectants, and conditioners to polishes, waxes, and sealants.



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I want to see everyone succeed and win, and it's incredibly rewarding to see how my guidance has helped so many people transform their businesses and lives.

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Gloss It University: Helping Car Care Entrepreneurs Soar to Unimaginable Heights

Gloss It University has become a cornerstone of Rich's empire, drawing over 2,500 people globally from countries like Australia, Bermuda, Britain, and Germany. The University offers a comprehensive course focused on detailing fundamentals and live training that saves time and increases productivity. Participants in the program often see a revenue increase of 15-20% almost immediately.

The University offers two primary programs: *All Access Virtual Training* and *Live Bootcamp*. The *All-Access Virtual Training* provides everything needed to gain a competitive advantage and dominate the market. The *Live Bootcamp*, held twice a month at Gloss It's Las Vegas facility, is a hands-on training class where Rich personally coaches committed individuals. "The training is done within 1 to 3 days depending on the course, and all who attend leave with an in-depth know-how and enriched knowledge of how to start or move their detailing business forward to the next level," Rich explains.

Influencing the Industry

Rich's influence extends beyond his business. He is a notable automotive influencer, real estate investor, coach, mentor, and

teacher. He's appeared on shows like *Counting Cars*, *Jay Leno's Garage*, and *Corvette Nation*, worked with the owners of *Pawn Stars*, and shared his stories on VinWiki, the number one car story channel.

The Future of Gloss It

Looking ahead, Rich remains committed to innovation and education. "Our mission is to provide a superior line of car care products and to educate through videos, articles, discussion forums, and detail classes," he says. Gloss It continues to expand its product line and educational programs, ensuring that it remains at the forefront of the automotive appearance industry.

Rich Light's journey from a blue-collar Boston kid to a car care titan is a testament to the power of determination, innovation, and strategic relationships. His story is one of resilience and vision, showing how a relentless drive to succeed can transform a neighborhood car detailing business into a global leader in automotive surface technology. As Rich Light continues to influence and shape the car care industry, his legacy as a pioneer and mentor will undoubtedly inspire future generations of entrepreneurs.





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I'm taking Gloss It national through franchises, with Gloss It facilities co-owned by us across the country. We'll be opening locations in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Austin, Texas, in Q4.

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Rich's innovative approach and unwavering dedication have earned him a clientele list that reads like a who's who of the automotive world and reflects the immense trust and respect he has garnered over the years.

One of the defining features of Rich's success is his ability to build and nurture relationships. His father's wisdom about the importance of relationships has been a guiding principle throughout his career. Rich has strategically connected with influential figures and industry leaders, paving the way for opportunities that have solidified his standing in the car care industry. His knack for understanding the needs of his clients and exceeding their expectations has been instrumental in his ascent to the top.

Rich's story is also one of resilience and vision. He has faced numerous challenges and made bold decisions that have shaped his path. From turning down lucrative offers to betting on his own abilities, Rich has consistently chosen to forge his own path, a testament to his entrepreneurial spirit and confidence in his vision.

As Rich's vision and perseverance pushed him over the last three decades, his biggest obstacle was not to overcome the forces outside of him, but the things within him, and identify who he had to become to take Gloss It to the next level. "It's not about time or the destination. It's about not quitting and pursuing your dreams. There is no finish line. Never quit," he shares.

As we delve into this Q&A session with Rich, we gain insights into the mindset and strategies that have propelled him to the forefront of the industry. His experiences offer valuable lessons for aspiring entrepreneurs and seasoned professionals alike.

Join us as Rich shares the secrets behind his extraordinary success and the principles that continue to drive Gloss It forward.

Q & A

Rich, your clients include casinos, celebrities, auto dealerships, business luminaries, and professional athletes. To what do you attribute your extraordinary success?

The number one thing I learned from my father is that relationships are everything. It's about finding the right people to surround yourself with—those who have the skills and success you aspire to achieve. When I was building my business in Vegas, connecting with casino owners and other successful individuals like Stephen Cloobek, Mark Shore, Steve Wynn, the Becker family, and Dan Towbin of Bentley & Rolls Royce and Ferrari of Las Vegas was crucial. These relationships helped me build credibility as an expert in my field, and they trusted me to customize their cars and bring their visions to life. My reputation grew from there. I always say, 'Every car has a story and every customer has a story. That's what makes Gloss It different.'

While you were leading a thriving group of Gloss It companies, you chose to make time to mentor, teach, and start Gloss It University. Why?

There are a lot of talented people in our industry, but I realized the one thing they often lacked was a solid understanding of marketing and sales—how to build a business in automotive detailing, coatings, or wrap design. Many struggle because they don't realize that marketing drives sales. My years of hustle could only take me so far, and I knew I needed to build a bigger audience and scale my business. To do that, I had to develop new habits and skills and surround myself with people who had expertise I didn't possess.

I wanted to share my knowledge to help others achieve the same success. So, I'm providing them with a blueprint of what took me 30 years to build, showing them how they can achieve it in just a few years. What I'm teaching at Gloss It University can work for any industry, not just car detailing. It's about giving back and empowering others to reach their full potential, using the lessons I've learned throughout my journey.

Can you share a few success stories from graduates of your training and Gloss It University?

There are so many, it's difficult to choose just one. One couple, Saul and Sandra Rico, have owned Xtreme Auto Glass and Window Tint in Addison, IL, for 13 years. They were struggling to push it to the next level. Sandra was apprehensive about our training classes because they'd done a variety of others

from other companies, with no results. Five months after completing our two-day training, they'd increased revenue by 30%, over \$220,000.

Another couple from a small town in Texas came to me; they were cleaning cars for used car lots for around \$200-\$300 per car. They didn't know how to position themselves as experts, which is key to attracting clients from major cities. They went through my training and even supported us at a SEMA convention. Now, they're getting \$2,000-\$3,000 per car and have a thriving business!

I have countless success stories like these. I want to see everyone succeed and win, and it's incredibly rewarding to see how my guidance has helped so many people transform their businesses and lives.

What is one piece of advice you'd give to aspiring entrepreneurs or business owners who want to scale their businesses as you've done?

There are three fundamental elements you need to start your journey. First and foremost is your mindset. Your mindset will drive your vision and keep you motivated. Second, you need to identify and develop the skill sets that will help you build a successful business. Third, you must create and maintain the right habits, both in yourself and your team, to achieve your goals. These three things are key.

It's important to understand that success is a process. Learning from your failures is crucial. The reason I was able to become successful at this level is because I never quit. There is no finish line. It's about embracing discomfort and learning to love the process of being uncomfortable. It's not about getting knocked down; it's about getting back up every time. Surrounding yourself with the right people, maintaining focus, and having grit are essential. There are no shortcuts. If it were easy, everybody would be doing it. Being an entrepreneur is about having a vision and relentlessly pursuing it.

What's next on the horizon for the Gloss It empire?

I'm taking Gloss It national through franchises, with Gloss It facilities co-owned by us across the country. We'll be opening locations in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Austin, Texas, in Q4. My two-year goal is to launch 10 facilities nationwide with students who we believe are ready for this. We'd take a 20% ownership stake and implement comprehensive advertising, direct marketing, and lead generation programs to support these franchises. Stay tuned!

FRED MONTGOMERY

MENTOR & ADVISOR



Championing Mentorship with NEL 2.0

Mentorship has the power to transform lives, businesses, and communities, and few understand this better than Fred Montgomery. With an illustrious career spanning executive leadership in tax, accounting, and legal operations for a major corporation, as well as leadership roles in over a dozen professional, civic, and charitable organizations, Fred has spent decades cultivating expertise and connections that now fuel his greatest passion—empowering entrepreneurs in disadvantaged communities through mentorship.

For the last two years, Fred has dedicated himself to NEL 2.0, an initiative designed to amplify the impact of its forerunner, the Neighborhood Entrepreneurship Lab. His mission? To inspire businesspeople to become mentors for under-resourced entrepreneurs, to improve access to capital, and to let the expanded reach of mentorship serve as a catalyst for economic growth.

The Birth of NEL 2.0: A Bold Evolution

The Neighborhood Entrepreneurship Lab (NEL) was the brainchild of Bob Crawford, a successful entrepreneur and luminary in the Chicago business community. He envisioned a program that brought together entrepreneurs from the South and West Sides of Chicago, private-sector mentors

from major financial institutions, and philanthropic backing to foster business success. He partnered with the Chicago Community Trust to support the program financially, and he chose Allies for Community Business in East Garfield Park to manage the program. In just six years, over 120 entrepreneurs participated, with an eye-opening success rate—98% of businesses survived, generating or maintaining 1,000 jobs and creating immediate benefits as well as generational wealth for the owners.

Recognizing the need to take this initiative to another level, Bob challenged Fred to increase the impact of NEL. He stressed the importance of promoting capitalism with the spiritual element of helping our neighbors. With this in mind, in 2023 Fred began to develop NEL 2.0. After thoroughly exploring government and nonprofit programs and resources in Chicago, he developed a framework based on recruiting a team of volunteers from the private sector, selecting high potential entrepreneurs and forming two novel ways for them to access capital.

The NEL 2.0 Difference: Beyond Traditional Mentorship

NEL 2.0 isn't just a rebranded NEL—it's an enhanced, dynamic approach to mentorship and entrepreneurial

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NEL 2.0 is more than a mentorship program—it’s proof that with the right coaching, contacts and capital, entrepreneurs from historically disadvantaged communities can build businesses that thrive, create jobs, and revitalize their neighborhoods.



acceleration. While NEL focused on 15 member cohorts in structured 10-week programs and is growing this model, Fred saw an opportunity to provide more targeted, timely support, especially for carefully selected small business owners who have great potential.

Key differentiators of NEL 2.0 include:

- **Smaller, Flexible Guidance** – Instead of large groups, the focus of NEL 2.0 is one-on-one mentorship, allowing for deeper, more personalized guidance.
- **On-Demand Expertise** – Entrepreneurs can connect with industry experts when they need them, whether for marketing, finance, HR, or IT guidance, without waiting for a scheduled program.
- **Diverse, High-Impact Mentors** – NEL 2.0 is assembling a powerhouse team of mentors, including a retired president of a \$70 million manufacturing corporation, a top advertising agency executive turned entrepreneur, a real estate developer and a software entrepreneur.
- **Private-Sector Funding Solutions** – Two unique funding models—a Bridge Fund and a Catalytic Capital Fund—provide quick access to capital. One is somewhat similar to a line of credit. The other is pre-seed funding for a business that is too risky for a traditional loan or venture capital.

Sunshine Enterprises, a renowned business service organization in Woodlawn, is working with Fred to bring NEL 2.0 to life. Sunshine offers a broad spectrum of training

for individuals who want to learn business skills, from side hustles to early stage companies. It wants to extend its reach and can see that offering tailored, industry-specific guidance and easy access to capital can accelerate success in a way that traditional programs cannot.

A Legacy of Education and Civic Engagement have led to Mentorship and Economic Empowerment

Fred Montgomery’s journey, —from corporate executive to mentor to catalyst for economic growth—is a testament to the power of experience and leadership in fostering community growth. With Swarthmore College, Stanford University, and DePaul Law School among his alma maters, he held leadership positions in the Civic Federation, Taxpayers Federation, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, Tax Executives Institute and First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest. And, as co-captain of his college football and wrestling teams, he nurtured the kind of competitive spirit which is at the heart of capitalism.

NEL 2.0 is more than a mentorship program—it’s proof that with the right coaching, contacts and capital, entrepreneurs from historically disadvantaged communities can build businesses that thrive, create jobs, and revitalize their neighborhoods. As NEL 2.0 expands, Fred’s invitation is clear: if you have the expertise, experience, and willingness to guide an entrepreneur toward success, now is the time to get involved.

We spoke with Fred to learn more about his mission for NEL 2.0.

(continued on page 12)



My career in the corporate world was professionally challenging and rewarding, but I was basically in the back office, not interacting with and helping customers. The goal was simply to make money for the company. With all of society's ills and the misfortunes of individuals, I wanted to "give back" in some way.

For me, NEL opened the door, and the more I looked inside, the more I could see that individualized training and access to capital were keys to entrepreneurial success and societal change.

NEL 2.0 takes a unique approach by providing entrepreneurs with full mentoring teams rather than just individual mentors. What inspired this model, and how does it benefit entrepreneurs?

After mentoring several people, I could see that high performers needed more than a structured program for a limited period of time. Our focus is on acceleration, not incubation. We work with entrepreneurs who have already been in business for a few years, most with revenue, and are ready to scale. Matching them with a team of mentors from educational, civic, and religious organizations across Chicago is becoming a reality. Corporate retirees would also be a good source for a team so I would like to find HR executives to drive this area of recruiting.

What sets us apart is that our mentors come from the private sector—not government agencies or nonprofits. These are real-world businesspeople and professionals who understand the pace, complexities, and challenges of successful companies.

By pairing entrepreneurs from the South and West Sides with a network of subject matter experts—in finance, real estate, advertising, retailing, wholesaling and more—we strive to ensure they receive targeted support tailored to their business needs as they grow and evolve.

The beauty of this model is its fluidity—as an entrepreneur's needs change, so does their mentorship team. One mentor might step in to help navigate the bidding process, another might focus on a marketing strategy, and when it's time to secure a physical storefront, a real estate expert takes the lead. This dynamic approach keeps momentum strong and ensures that entrepreneurs have the right expertise at the right time to keep moving the ball forward.

“What sets us apart is that our mentors come from the private sector—not government agencies or nonprofits. These are real-world businesspeople and professionals who understand the pace, complexities, and challenges of successful companies.”

You've had an extraordinary career spanning business leadership, community engagement, and education. Instead of retiring, you chose to invest your time mentoring young entrepreneurs in Chicago. What inspired this transition, and how did it lead to your leadership role in NEL 2.0?

I have deep roots in Chicago—I grew up in Marquette Park and Morgan Park and know how those neighborhoods have changed—so when Bob Crawford asked me to volunteer for NEL, I was immediately drawn to its unique concept. I jumped in as a mentor, and it didn't take long to see that helping entrepreneurs was a much more positive approach to improving a community than hiring more police or social workers. A year later, Bob Crawford came to me and said, “Fred, we've proved this concept works. How can we expand it?” This question set everything in motion.

Access to capital is a major hurdle for entrepreneurs in under-resourced communities. You're introducing two innovative solutions—a Bridge Fund and Catalytic Capital Fund—to address this critical need. Can you share how these funds will work and why they're so important?

We're extremely excited about these funds! Both will be privately funded, and philanthropic donors are initially curious, then enthusiastic with this new approach. The reality is that business moves fast, but too often, entrepreneurs get stuck waiting for capital. Government and nonprofit programs typically have long, tedious processes for approving loans or they require businesses to spend money first and then seek reimbursement. Many small businesses barely have enough cash flow to operate so these delays will limit their growth at critical moments.

We designed these funds to be responsive and agile, ensuring entrepreneurs can act on opportunities immediately and keep their momentum going.

The Bridge Fund: If an entrepreneur has applied for a bank loan or a state program but won't receive the funds for 45-90 days, this fund bridges that gap, allowing them to begin a project right away. Or, if a business has an unexpected expense but steady cash flow from revenue, the fund can bridge the gap. The fund can provide \$5,000 to \$15,000 (possibly more) quickly based on the recommendation of their mentor, not on a formal application and decision process.

The Catalytic Capital Fund: This is structured to prepare entrepreneurs for long-term success through either a patient loan or a grant. A patient loan is interest-free for a few years and then paid off at a low rate over a reasonable period of time. A grant is to provide pre-seed funding for a very promising business. The goal of the funds is to help entrepreneurs develop the financial strength so that they can either secure a bank loan based on their own credit or be attractive to venture capital. We want to bridge the gap between early-stage survival and full-scale financial independence.

How has the NEL team of mentors helped entrepreneurs overcome challenges and achieve growth? Can you share some success stories and a "lesson learned?"

A Natural Juice Business: A woman began selling her fresh fruit and vegetable juices at farmers markets, later expanding to online sales and then wholesale distribution to a grocery store chain. Along the way, she faced significant obstacles related to government licenses and funding, but with support from mentors, she secured the food licenses and capital needed to keep going. Her journey has been recognized, including a five-minute interview on ABC TV. Now she wants to buy and renovate a store for retail sales and production, so a real estate mentor joined the team to guide her through architect and contractor proposals, zoning and finance.

A Childproof Electrical Outlet Protector: A mother invented a unique childproof electrical outlet cover with a hinge. She successfully obtained a patent, found a manufacturer and a packager, and even secured a purchase order from Walmart. However, she lacked the capital to begin production. Through pitch competitions, which I helped her prepare for, she won two competitions that provided the capital she needed. Within five months and the advice of a production expert, her product was on Walmart's website. Now, we're bringing in a marketing mentor to help scale her brand.

A Janitorial and Cleaning Business: A couple in their late 20s started a cleaning business and got a boost by helping store owners clean up after the unrest on Chicago's West Side following the George Floyd incident. Their reputation grew quickly, leading to commercial contracts. Today, they employ 10 people, including ex-offenders. Despite incurring the increased cost of treating independent contractors as employees, with our guidance they successfully bid on new and larger accounts.

A Preschool Daycare Center: A woman operated a preschool on the first floor of a two flat in Englewood for 25 years. She's an exceptional educator. The first time we met, she showed me pictures sent by the parents of former students after they graduated from high school or college. She had strong connections in the public school system and wanted to open an afterschool STEM program for 1st-3rd graders. However, she struggled with accounting and financial management. Over 18 months, we helped her work with an accountant to provide a P&L, balance sheet, budget, and forecast. Despite her dedication, she was unable to learn the skills and this limited her ability to grow. Her story underscores a crucial lesson: financial management is key to scaling a business.

While not every journey leads to growth, NEL 2.0 wants to provide the resources and mentorship to help entrepreneurs maximize their potential.

The Call to Mentorship: Why Professionals Should Get Involved

Once a person sees an aspiring entrepreneur with a dream and the drive to succeed, it is easy to get hooked. They are hard-working, focused, common-sense individuals who just need the right guidance and resources make their business sustainable. It is very rewarding to be a part of the "family and friends" they don't have and to watch them succeed.

One of the best ways to get involved, besides contacting me, is to volunteer at a business service organization like Sunshine and coach a pitch competition, attend a workshop, or shadow an experienced mentor. Being a mentor is not about having all the answers—it's about listening, asking the right questions, sharing experiences, and providing strategic insights. The most rewarding part of mentorship is seeing an entrepreneur take a dream and turn it into a successful business.

Meet

Bernice Glenn Kissinger

Leading the Charge: Uniting Global Innovators to Deliver Cutting-Edge Tech to U.S. Warfighters and Allied Forces



Co-Founder & Chief Strategy Officer

As global threats from adversaries continue to mount, the need for innovative defense technology solutions has never been more urgent. Civilian innovators and entrepreneurs, both in the U.S. and allied nations, are playing an increasingly critical role in ensuring the technological edge in modern warfare. From across the U.S., the U.K., Japan, Australia, Korea, Canada, and NATO nations, some of the brightest civilian minds in technology are answering the call for “innovative arms” to keep the peace and protect democracy.

At the center of these efforts is Bernice Glenn Kissinger, a key architect of a new method to integrate new defense technology in the Indo-Pacific and in Ukraine. As the co-founder and chief strategy officer of both Pacific Impact Zone (PIZ) and Armetus, Bernice is a leader in rapid defense contracting, tech scouting, and engaging innovators from allied nations. Inspired by the success of networking in the commercial world—where companies like Google revolutionized industries—Bernice is applying similar strategies to build the fastest and most flexible contracting programs across the U.S. and partner nations.

With 40 years of international experience in both business and government—and a rich legacy of military service—her mission is clear: to deliver cutting-edge technologies swiftly into the hands of U.S. and allied defense forces as quickly as possible.

“We’re organizing world-class innovators of private-sector technology enterprises across the U.S., Japan, Australia, Canada, U.K., Korea, and NATO nations into teams to solve the hardest tech problems with warfighters using rapid contracting to accelerate the U.S. government’s adoption of technologies at scale,” Bernice explains.

In the past decade, Bernice has interacted with over 20,000 companies, helping more than

5,000 successfully transition their innovations to meet defense needs in areas ranging from electronic warfare and semiconductors to aerospace and logistics. “By clearing barriers for innovators across regions, we grow economies, strengthen resilience, and enhance deterrence together,” she says. Bernice’s qualifications and her ability to unify governments and commercial innovators as well-oiled machines comes not only from her experience as an internationally respected industry leader, but from a lifetime of lessons, wisdom, and personal perspective gained from her cross-cultural, military heritage.

Bringing Together Governments and Innovative Tech Companies in a Single, Urgent Mission: To Keep the Peace

The daughter of a West Point paratrooper veteran of three wars (WWII, Korea, and Vietnam) and a Japanese-American mother trapped in Japan through WWII, Bernice’s family legacy of service continues with her son, a West Point graduate who served in Afghanistan before studying to become a U.S. Army doctor. The stories of her parents instilled in Bernice a desire to build military and economic ties between the U.S., Japan, and other allies as a major deterrence to war. “This has been my mission in life,” she says.

Through 40 years, Bernice’s career has spanned global engagements, from leading innovation teams at Motorola in Japan and Toyota in the U.S. to working with economic development and disaster resilience agencies in Hawaii, Kentucky, and Korea. She has supported numerous defense-related organizations, including U.S. Naval Surface Warfare Centers, the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Research & Engineering, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Her work has extended to collaborating with governments from Japan, Australia, and Korea, as well as venture capital funds, research centers, and accelerators.

A respected thought leader, her insights have appeared in *Defense News*, *Japan Times*, *Asia Pacific Strategic Policy Institute*, and *Space News*, and she has spoken at key industry conferences like IEEE, AFCEA, and the U.S.-Japan Technology Forum.

Today, Bernice’s work carries ever-heightening urgency as she leads a global coalition of innovators shaping the future of defense technology in the Indo-Pacific. Through PIZ, Armetus—and beyond—she’s ensuring that the U.S. and its allies remain equipped to address evolving security threats while simultaneously bolstering economic resilience.

Armetus is a vital player in bridging U.S. defense needs with allied nations, especially in Japan and Australia. Armetus works with U.S., Japanese, and Australian technology companies that have already



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My parents’ stories instilled in me a desire to build military and economic ties between the U.S., Japan, and other allies, as a major deterrence to war. This has been my mission in life. In Japanese, it is called “ikigai.”

found commercial success and are ready for dual-use applications in critical areas like AI, autonomous systems, communications, and critical materials.

Pacific Impact Zone serves as a critical hub for U.S. small businesses and new tech companies looking to enter the defense sector. PIZ was chosen by the U.S. Department of Defense’s Defense Innovation Unit to be an onramp hub, using rapid contracting methods to accelerate tech transitions. Through PIZ, Bernice is empowering smaller enterprises to break into defense markets.



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My goal is to strengthen geopolitical allies into a much more highly coordinated and integrated technology and economic supply chain needed to defend democracy and to pursue international human rights.

Bernice's efforts extend to J Star X Companies in Japan and Ukrainian defense manufacturers, where she's orchestrating joint ventures with Ukrainian companies and establishing manufacturing in the Eastern Union and the U.S. to address critical regional security needs. "These collaborations are crucial for rapidly scaling up defense capabilities, especially in the face of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine," she says.

In this very special interview, we delve into the life and work of Bernice Glenn Kissinger, her vision for leveraging technology to deter global adversaries while fostering international collaboration—and how her upbringing shaped her mission to strengthen the ties between the U.S. and its allies.

A Conversation with Bernice Glenn Kissinger

You grew up in a multicultural family, hearing your parents' stories and lessons from "both sides" of WWII. Will tell us a bit about your backstory, and how their experiences influenced you, personally and professionally, and your work now with allied nations?

Both of my parents' lives were greatly impacted by World War II, with my dad, not only having the experience of being a warfighter (he was a paratroop battalion commander, a test and evaluation innovator in the use of paratroops in gliders and planes, and a U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel from age 27) and seeing the horrible cost in lives, but also being in the rebuilding effort to strengthen Japan and Korea after both wars so he imparted to me the cost of war in tragedies, the technology and tactics that make a difference, and the resilience of people during war. My mom was the daughter of a Buddhist Bishop, and she was born in Hawaii. Her lesson through the war imparted to me was that U.S. needed to be vigilant with its allies in military and economic deterrence was paramount to survival to avoid another World War. She was a Japanese American in Japan during the war with her family spread out between U.S. internment camps, a reporter embedded with the Japanese imperial army in Southeast Asia, and she and her sisters being sheltered within a Buddhist all-women's high school and university from the brutality of officials. My parents' stories instilled in me a desire to build military and economic ties between the U.S., Japan, and other allies as a major deterrence to war. This has been my mission in life (in Japanese, it is called "ikigai"). I've pursued it in peacetime through my role supporting U.S. and Japan direct investment

“ Innovation and sustained investment are the two intertwined capabilities of civilian technologists and entrepreneurs that governments need to power defense-tech leadership. ”

in operations with Motorola in Japan and Toyota and its 36 related companies in the U.S.; in my work with a nonprofit leading U.S.-Japan technology collaboration for defense and humanitarian assistance missions, the Pacific International Center for High Technology Research, and my co-founding of two companies: one focused on supporting U.S. warfighters with U.S. technology and the other focused on developing defense and humanitarian assistance supply chains across our allied nations.

While you're leading the helm of Armatus and PIZ, you're also working with J Star X Companies in Japan and Ukrainian Defense Manufacturers. Tell us briefly about your role.

My role with those companies in Japan and supporting the Ukrainian Defense Manufacturers is to help them ruggedize or customize their solutions for U.S. warfighters and allies, and to help expedite them through the U.S. procurement processes so that their solutions reach the right warfighter at the right time and right place.

You also played a role in the first U.S. Japan Defense Tech Event held with the Cambridge Innovation Center in Tokyo last June. Will you share your involvement with this pivotal event?

I'm very proud of having been a co-designer of that event and the Armatus team who executed it with great sensitivity and precision. We developed the program with our PICHTER and Cambridge Innovation Center partners and our collective network spanning U.S. and Japan defense and economic government leaders, industry from the U.S., Japan, Australia, UK, and Canada, the emergent Japan dual-use technology companies, and new Japan programs coordinating their Joint Command with allies.

Why are civilian innovators and entrepreneurs so critical to helping the U.S. and its allies meet the challenges of their adversaries?

Innovation and sustained investment are the two intertwined capabilities of civilian technologists and entrepreneurs that governments need to power defense-tech leadership. Without a commercial market and structure, production of these very expensive solutions is impossible to sustain. Oftentimes, even those government agencies, whose mission it is to connect industry with government fail to also connect with the nonprofits and the aggregators of small businesses government cannot do it alone at scale, and with the reach across industry this required. Without including those nonprofits and aggregators, government

continues to fail to go beyond a small group of companies that they tap repeatedly, which limits solutions for the warfighter and seriously inhibits the solutions themselves.

You've already engaged thousands of private-sector innovators in contracts. Can you share a few general examples of companies that you've helped to adjust their dual-use products to defense tech?

We are assisting highest-quality drone manufacturers in Japan to team with U.S. and Ukrainian drone designers to address defense tech. We also are assisting Japan wearables companies to help in the detection of toxic chemical and biological agents. And we are discovering data sharing cloud platforms for allied nations' use.

What types of tech companies do you see as valuable candidates for dual-use partnerships? How can they benefit from an economic standpoint?

Some of the most valuable current candidates are companies who have a commercially available solution or a technology at the readiness levels of 7-9 in areas such as: data sharing in GPS-denied environments; chemical biological nuclear and radiological detection sensors; wound self-care and transport systems; mobile and small-unit energy and communications systems; mobile advance manufacturing capabilities (additive/subtractive manufacturing, 3D printing)

Defense tech is a hot market right now for venture capitalists. Are you working with many VCs with companies in their portfolios?

Yes, we are working with VCs in Japan and NATO (capital is their superpower) and are starting to work with mission-driven VCs in the U.S.

With your myriad roles and responsibilities, what drives you, Bernice?

What drives me is that we have highly instructive lessons learned from WWII and Ukraine - we know that allied nations including the U.S. can deter war-provoking actions of China, Russian, North Korea and Iran and economic-warfare from the BRICS alliance. If their provocations result in war, we can and will defeat them, but my hope is that we can deter them because the cost to both sides is immeasurable and tragic. My goal is to strengthen geopolitical allies into a much more highly coordinated and integrated technology and economic supply chain needed to defend democracy and to pursue international human rights.



JAMES JARAMILLO

President & Owner
Managing Partner/General Contractor



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Our extensive network across the country empowers us to structure varied capital stacks, providing flexibility in project financing.

CONTACT

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LI: James Jaramillo

James Jaramillo, a name synonymous with success and leadership in the commercial real estate and construction sectors, is the embodiment of the three E's: entrepreneurship, experience, and excellence. His journey into entrepreneurship began shortly after earning a BA in finance from UNLV, when he took ownership, operation, and development of four self-serve car washes and a laundromat. This early venture laid the groundwork for his future success.

His entrepreneurial spirit led him to expand his credentials, obtaining licensure as a real estate broker and general contractor. These achievements provided him with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between real estate and construction, making him perfectly suited for his dual roles with Cobra Investment and General Construction.

Cobra Investment Company, established in 1998 and headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is a privately held firm specializing in commercial real estate brokerage and development. The company offers a comprehensive suite of services tailored to meet the diverse needs of clients, focusing on commercial investment properties, site acquisitions, and property development. Under James's leadership, Cobra has cultivated a robust network of investors, lenders, brokers, and real estate professionals, positioning the company as a trusted partner for local and international clients.

Simultaneously, James oversees the operations of the Jerry Miller Group, a construction firm founded in 2014. Under his guidance, the Jerry Miller Group has emerged as a premier general contractor, specializing in residential and commercial projects ranging from warehouses to subdivisions and retail spaces. James and his team are dedicated to delivering excellence in every project they undertake, with a current focus on industrial subdivisions, warehouse projects, and property acquisitions.

We spoke with James to delve into his insights and experiences in the commercial real estate and construction industries.

James, what inspired you to start Cobra Investment?

My grandfather, who was an entrepreneur/developer, initially sparked my interest in the industry. However, my time in Las Vegas during college and the mentorships and partnerships I cultivated there, played a significant role in shaping my path. Studying real estate further ignited my passion, leading me to obtain my broker's license right after college, at around 22-23 years old. Armed with this experience, I returned to New Mexico and laid the foundation for Cobra Investment.

What makes Cobra Investment Company and The Jerry Miller Group unique?

Cobra Investment and The Jerry Miller Group operate synergistically. Cobra Investment spearheads acquisitions, while The Jerry Miller Group handles construction. This integrated approach enables us to streamline operations



By leveraging my expertise as a general contractor, we've been able to execute building projects at a significantly lower cost, minimizing overhead expenses.



by eliminating the need for an external general contractor. With a diverse skill set encompassing both building and acquisition, Cobra can adapt swiftly to market fluctuations, ensuring continuous progress and growth.

Our strength lies in the breadth of our relationships, both locally in New Mexico and nationally. Having been immersed in the dynamic environment of Las Vegas during my college years, the exposure to its rapid growth profoundly influenced my perspective. Bringing this insight back to New Mexico has enabled us to envision and execute diverse projects with a unique perspective. Our extensive network across the country empowers us to structure varied capital stacks, providing flexibility in project financing. As an investor-developer, we prioritize collaboration with select clients, initially rooted in Albuquerque but now expanding to cater to out-of-state and international clients, further broadening our portfolio and reach.

You've been a trusted leader in the commercial real estate industry and general contracting for over two decades. How does this dual perspective benefit your clients and investors?

By learning the ins and outs of construction firsthand, I recognized its critical role in real estate endeavors. I understand the importance of having control over this variable. By leveraging my expertise as a general contractor, we've been able to execute building projects at a significantly lower cost, minimizing overhead expenses. Understanding construction percentages, material costs, and labor costs has become even more crucial in navigating today's market dynamics, particularly with inflationary pressures. With this knowledge, coupled with a dedicated team and strategic partnerships, we can optimize

project economics while delivering quality outcomes that yield returns for our investors.

Furthermore, wearing the hats of developer, broker, and contractor affords us the agility to pivot swiftly when needed. Whether it's repurposing a building or expediting tenant improvements, this multifaceted approach has been instrumental in our success. It allows us to adapt to changing market conditions and ensure that our clients and investors benefit from our comprehensive understanding and proactive approach.

Currently, your primary focus is on industrial warehouse development to meet the growing demand from traditional to industrial use for these properties. Why are they so popular among these users? Can you share some of the current projects you're working on?

Industrial warehouse development has become a focal point nationwide due to its increasing demand and limited availability. The scarcity of suitable properties, coupled with the inability of existing buildings to meet modern standards and user requirements, has fueled this trend. There is a huge demand for industrial construction because of their versatility, offering ample space for var storage, and workspace, all at a lower rental cost. Currently, we're actively involved in four industrial subdivisions and have 60,000 square feet in the pipeline. Additionally, in response to the evolving market dynamics during COVID-19, we've acquired additional industrial-zoned properties and are in the process of subdividing them. Our spec industrial projects are experiencing rapid leasing, with a mere 2% vacancy rate in Albuquerque. Collaborating with partners across several states, including Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and the Midwest, we continuously seek strategic alliances that enhance the value we bring to the table.





BRANDON SOJKA

CEO & FOUNDER



Brandon Sojka, CEO and founder of NutraShure Distribution, LLC, is a name synonymous with innovation in the dietary supplement industry. For over two decades, he has shaped the landscape of health and wellness, earning recognition as an authority in research and development, company strategy, and revenue growth. From founding MYOKEM, the 2014 *Stack3d Brand of the Year*, to achieving a staggering 1600% three-year year-over-year growth with NutraShure, Brandon's career is a testament to ingenuity and vision.

At NutraShure, headquartered in Port Jefferson, NY, Brandon leads the charge in bringing cutting-edge, clinically researched nutraceutical ingredients to other brands and companies to use in their products. Since its inception in 2021, the company has become a trusted B2B partner for brands creating dietary supplements, functional foods, and beverages. Collaborating with top researchers and leveraging patent-protected formulations, NutraShure ensures that its ingredients meet the highest standards of quality and efficacy.

The company's groundbreaking product, BIOMEnd™, launched on May 1, 2024, is already making waves in the industry. As the first patented, tasteless butyrate formulated as L-Lysine Butyrate, BIOMEnd™ supports gut balance, healthy colon function, and immune health. "BIOMEnd has already changed people's lives, even in its infancy," Brandon shared. The excitement is palpable as consumers and brands alike embrace its potential, with many brands already incorporating it into their products.

For Brandon, innovation isn't just a goal—it's a way of life. With an MBA, CSCS certification, and a career steeped in achievements, he continues to push boundaries, ensuring that NutraShure not only enhances human performance, but also transforms lives with every breakthrough.

In an exclusive Q&A, Brandon shared the inspiration behind NutraShure, the unique approach that sets the company apart, and his plans to shape the future of human health.

Brandon, what inspired you to start the company?

With 21 years of experience in the dietary supplement industry and a successful background running my own finished goods brand, I discovered my true passion lies in developing innovative formulations. I saw an opportunity to make a broader impact—not just through a single brand, but across the entire industry. This inspired me to start NutraShure and transition to the B2B side, where we supply novel ingredients to other brands for their finished products.

My goal has always been to create a positive influence on the dietary supplement space while advancing optimal human health with patented, cutting-edge ingredients. One belief that drives me is the idea that aging doesn't have to be a foregone conclusion—it can be addressed like a disease. Too many people spend the last 10–15 years of their lives in poor health. At NutraShure, our mission is to extend the health span—the number of years people live in good health—so they can enjoy longer, healthier lives. BIOMEnd™, which I co-invented, embodies this mission. It's a groundbreaking ingredient designed to support gut health, colon function, and immune health, and it's already changing lives. NutraShure is dedicated to bringing more of these transformative innovations to the industry.

What makes NutraShure unique?

Throughout my career, I've done extensive consulting on product formulations for various brands, and as a result, NutraShure has become recognized as an innovator in the dietary supplement space. What sets us apart is our approach to ingredient development. While many companies focus on improving existing ingredients—such as enhancing bioavailability, absorption, or increasing the active components in botanical extracts—we take it a step further. At NutraShure, we actually create entirely new ingredients.

A prime example of this is BIOMEnd™, a groundbreaking formulation of L-Lysine Butyrate with a unique composition that distinguishes it from anything else on the market. And we're not stopping there. We're actively developing other novel compounds, pioneering the methods to create them, and crafting the actual compounds themselves.

Our commitment to innovation means we're not just refining what already exists—we're forging new paths in ingredient development. By creating entirely new compounds, NutraShure is advancing human health in ways that go beyond incremental improvements, delivering transformative solutions for optimal well-being.

There is a lot of excitement around your groundbreaking gut health innovation—BIOMEnd™. What makes it so special, and what are its benefits?

BIOMEnd™ is truly a game-changer in gut health. While butyrate, a short-chain fatty acid produced by healthy gut bacteria, has long been recognized for its numerous health benefits, it has remained underutilized in supplements due to its unpleasant taste and odor. That's where BIOMEnd™ stands out. Formulated as L-Lysine Butyrate, it's the world's first tasteless butyrate, making it suitable for a wide range of applications, from gummies to ready-to-mix powders.

This innovation addresses one of the fastest-growing categories in dietary supplements—gut health—and gives brands a unique opportunity to differentiate themselves in a market saturated with “me too” products. Unlike traditional butyrate supplements, which are limited to pills or gel caps, BIOMEnd™ opens the door to new delivery forms, including candies, food items, and even beverages—we're currently working on making it stable in ready-to-drink formats.

What's even more impressive is its efficacy. In a recent comparison study, BIOMEnd™ not only outperformed other commercially available options in bioavailability—delivering more butyrate into the bloodstream—but also provided quicker results. Most people notice positive effects on their gut health within days or a few weeks, compared to months with traditional fiber supplements.

BIOMEnd™ is more than an innovation; it's a revolution in gut health, offering brands and consumers a tasteless, versatile, and highly effective solution that's changing lives.

What are some of the brands that are already using BIOMEnd™ in their products?

The excitement around BIOMEnd™ is palpable, with several rapidly growing brands already incorporating it into their offerings. HTLT features it in their product, *GLP Max*. Beneve uses it in *Xcelerate G3*. Silver Fern's product is *PostBiotic+*, and Zenos Health has launched *GutZen*.

Additionally, we're collaborating on a product development launch with a multibillion-dollar Fortune 500 CPG company, further underscoring the wide-ranging interest and trust in BIOMEnd™. This innovation is quickly becoming a go-to ingredient for brands looking to elevate their formulations and stand out in the competitive gut health market.



NutraShure has been extraordinarily successful in just its first few years. What is your vision for the company going forward?

My vision for NutraShure is deeply rooted in the principles of Japanese philosophy, particularly Kaizen and Ikigai. Kaizen, which represents continuous improvement, is a value I apply to every aspect of my life and business. Ikigai, or one's purpose, is equally important. For me, nutrition and ingredient innovation are my Ikigai—they're what I'm passionate about, what I excel at, and what the world truly needs.

Through NutraShure, I aim to create innovative ingredients that have a tangible, positive impact on society. We're delivering something entirely new that our competitors haven't achieved, and the feedback we've received has been incredibly inspiring—people have already told us that our innovations have changed their lives.

Looking ahead, my goal is to continue driving transformative advancements in the dietary supplement space while also expanding our reach. Beyond NutraShure, I aspire to establish a foundation that amplifies our ability to make a positive difference in the world, extending our impact beyond what the company can accomplish on its own.



LAWRENCE F. ARCHAMBAULT

Founder/President

It's this commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices and stories that makes Grey Willow truly one of a kind.

For Lawrence F. Archambault, music is more than a profession—it's the heartbeat of his family's story, echoing through generations, from his great-grandfather to his son.

Nestled in the heart of Standing Rock Sioux Nation in North Dakota, Grey Willow Music Studio LLC embodies a legacy of passion, carrying forward an enduring history in music with pride and purpose. At the helm of this 100% Native American-owned and operated enterprise is Lawrence, serving as its visionary founder and president.

Lawrence's inspiring career began long before his 1995 entrance into the event production industry. As a young adult, he played alongside his father in local bands before graduating from the Musicians Institute of Technology in Hollywood, California. Now, following the traditions established by his ancestors, he mentors his own son, Xavier, the studio's chief engineer.

Founded in 2017, Grey Willow Music Studio LLC serves Native American communities, offering ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement) and pre-post production services to major players in

the entertainment industry, including Disney, Marvel Studios, and Skywalker Sound. Their reputation extends far beyond the Sioux Nation, however, having earned accolades such as the 2024 *Juno Award for Best Traditional Indigenous Artist of the Year* for their work on Joel Wood's, *SING. PRAY. LOVE*. Additionally, they landed a *Sports Emmy Award* for their contributions to the ESPN/E60 documentary, *Sacred Dog*.

Under Lawrence's leadership, Grey Willow has evolved into more than just a studio—it's a bridge between tradition and innovation, amplifying Indigenous voices on some of the world's largest stages. We spoke with Lawrence to learn about his journey and how Grey Willow is redefining the landscape of Indigenous artistry.

Lawrence, what inspired you to start Grey Willow Music Studio?

About eight years ago, when I moved back to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, I noticed something was missing—there were no musicians and the schools didn't teach music anymore. When I grew up there, musicians were everywhere. You'd hear someone playing on



every corner, and I knew them all. I wanted to bring that back. We started small, as a music shop and music school, teaching young kids the basics. We'd hand them instruments to try—drums, guitars, you name it—and they loved it.

Now, it's amazing to see how it's grown and to see the main schools on Standing Rock have reinstated their music programs. We've got kids playing guitars and singing in their basements and bedrooms, but I wanted to take it further, so we built our state-of-the-art recording studio.

Music has always been in my blood. I've been playing since I can remember, in bands with my dad since I was 10. I'm 53 now, and this goes back generations—my dad, his dad, my great-grandfather, and beyond were all musicians and my dad always had a studio at home. It's hard to explain unless you're a musician, but it's something you have to do. When you're not creating music, it feels like you can't breathe. That's the passion we're passing on here at Grey Willow.

What makes Grey Willow Music Studio unique?

We specialize in ADR work for movies, including the Lakota dubs of *The Avengers* films available on Disney+. Those translations were done in our studio, where my son and I, as well as my Sundance brothers; Ray Taken Alive, Dallas Nelson, and my younger brother, Cyril Archambault, our PR director, worked with first language elders as well as the Lakota Language Reclamation Project.

What truly sets us apart, however, is that we're a "by Native Americans, for Native Americans" enterprise. Our focus on Native American artistry makes us stand out in an industry where that representation is often missing. It's this commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices and stories that makes Grey Willow truly one of a kind.

You've worked with award-winning music legends and some of the most well-known filmmaking companies. Is there one project that was particularly memorable for you?

The Avengers project with Disney+ and Marvel Studios stands out the most because it was deeply personal to me. We created the Lakota dub in Hunkpapa Lakota, the language spoken by Sitting Bull. It's fading as fewer people speak it, and it's rarely taught anymore, but through our nation and people, we're making a strong effort to bring it back. In fact, the elders, the original first-language speakers, transcribed the scripts alongside us. Watching them work and translate words they haven't spoken in years was incredible. They laughed,



shared stories, and had so much fun bringing the language to life. We also worked with 32 voice actors from local and other reservations, as well as the original cast of actors. The thing that really got me though, is when movie was released and the elders in a Pine Ridge Reservation retirement saw it and said, "That's our language on TV!" and they were just so amazed by the work that we did. That really hit home—it was a stamp of approval that we did it right. Now, to preserve their stories, we record and translate elders' interviews so that others can enjoy them.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

What I enjoy most is the creative process—not just on the engineering side, but also working with the artists, especially my eldest son and our chief engineer, Xavier. Now I know what my father felt when I worked with him all those years. As a musician, it's incredible to watch how everything comes together, like pieces of a puzzle forming something magical. That magic never gets old. Music is our passion, our love, and it's something that continues to inspire us every day. The most rewarding part, though, is knowing that one day I'll pass this legacy on to Xavier, allowing him to carry it forward and keep the music alive for generations to come.

Kathryn Dixon

MSW, LMSW, LCSW

Founder & Owner



Kathryn Dixon, MSW, LMSW, LCSW, has devoted over three decades to social work, advocating for social justice and community safety. A trailblazer in forensic social work, she is a second-generation social worker, recognized in *Who's Who in Medicine and Healthcare*, *Who's Who in America*, and as a recipient of the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award. Kathryn's passion for social work began early, inspired by her adoptive mother, whose professional journals sparked her thirst for knowledge. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work with a minor in justice studies from the University of New Hampshire and later completed her master's in social work, focusing on social policy and administration, at Fordham University. Her career spans roles in county and state government, nonprofit and for-profit sectors in New Jersey and New York.

In 2007, Kathryn founded Interstate F.A.C.T.S., LLC, providing expert services for court-involved individuals and families. Life can change in a moment and social workers are here to help. As an adjunct professor, she helps prepare and supervises graduate students for future forensic social work. She is currently at Seton Hall Law School's Center for Social Justice. Kathryn has also served in leadership positions with the National Association of Social Workers, including as former NJ Vice President and is presently serving as a representative to the NASW Delegate Assembly. Her advocacy extends beyond her profession. Kathryn was appointed to serve on the NJ Governor's Anti-Bullying Task Force.

Kathryn is a thought leader, authoring articles and guesting on podcasts like *The Suffering Podcast: The Suffering of Secrets*, episode 200, discussing resilience, self-care, and navigating the myriad of life's social challenges. She also serves as a mental health consultant for the [MobileTraumaUnit.org](https://www.MobileTraumaUnit.org), supporting law enforcement and first responders with mental preparedness and support.

We spoke with Kathryn about the *Care & Safety Initiative* and her groundbreaking work.

Kathryn, you're very familiar with dangerous situations and crises, both personally and as a social worker helping people navigate trauma throughout your career. Do you think this planted the seed for the Care & Safety Initiative (CSI)?

Absolutely. My first job in 1988 was in child protective services, visiting dangerous neighborhoods in NYC during the AIDS crisis and crack cocaine epidemic. I faced threats like being chased by dogs and shot at, which were terrifying but also eye-opening. After major events like Columbine and 9/11, I began rethinking how we approach trauma care. The increasing frequency of violent incidents, coupled with the rise of cybercrimes, highlighted the need for practical, accessible solutions, which ultimately led to developing CSI.

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Our mission is to prepare as many people as possible to handle crises effectively and enhance safety.

CSI program teaches organizations and employees life-saving skills for responding to workplace attacks and natural disasters, empowering them to protect themselves until professional help arrives.

What inspired you to launch the Care & Safety Initiative (CSI)?

The growing number of violent incidents motivated the creation of CSI. A longtime friend and colleague, Mark—an EMT and fire captain—shared my frustration about the lack of effective solutions. We knew people needed skills to respond to dangerous situations before help arrives. As violence escalated in workplaces, schools, and public spaces, Kathryn and a team of colleagues launched the *Care & Safety Initiative* (CSI). This program teaches organizations and employees life-saving skills for responding to workplace attacks and natural disasters, empowering them to protect themselves until professional help arrives. The initiative focuses on practical, actionable tactics tailored to each organization's environment. With seed funding from [GLSEN.org](https://www.glsen.org), we created a program for nonprofits, offering it at a low cost. The response from participants during the launch in 2024 provided the confirmation of the program's need and high demand. We ask for-profit organizations to pay a full fee so each team of ten finances the essential gear for the non-profits paying a minimal stipend.

Your CSI programs are unique in teaching the practical application of critical tactics designed specifically for each organization's environment. Can you give us an overview of what participants learn?

In a crisis, instinctual reactions like fight, flight, or freeze may not be the best choices. CSI shifts participants from reacting emotionally to responding intentionally. We teach them how to assess situations, make informed decisions, and prioritize safety. The program includes practical skills like escape tactics, securing safe areas, and performing lifesaving bleeding control, all aimed at keeping people calm and effective in emergencies.

The CSI Program includes key components tailored to each group. Can you explain them?

We work with each group to identify high-risk areas and potential threats. We emphasize awareness, helping participants understand their environment and recognize



early warning signs. We also cover de-escalation techniques, nonviolent self-defense, and how to handle injuries. Recognizing the emotional impact of traumatic events, we provide guidance on psychological well-being and post-incident resilience. Our emergency response plans are tailored to each organization's unique needs, equipping participants with the tools to stay calm and minimize harm.

With interest in the Care & Safety Initiative rapidly growing across the country, will you be expanding it further?

Yes, we're expanding rapidly as current events continue to unfold. One goal is to offer the program as a semester-long course in colleges and to develop a continuing education component for social workers, emergency responders, teachers, lawyers, public figures, C-suite professionals and their families, who regularly face high-risk situations. Our mission is to prepare as many people as possible to handle crises effectively and enhance safety.

Kathryn Dixon's unwavering dedication to social justice and safety is transforming the social work field and fostering resilience and preparing communities through the Care & Safety Initiative.

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Joe PIZZURRO

FOUNDER & CEO

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For me, it's all about helping people find a better way. That's why I recently earned my life coach certification—it's my next big goal. I want to go beyond teaching people how to invest in real estate and help them transform their lives as a whole.



BREAKCHAIN
CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

Joe Pizzurro has always had a knack for breaking boundaries, whether in his personal or professional life. From a 15-year career managing projects for Fortune 500 companies to completing a grueling 70.3-mile Ironman Triathlon, Joe has never been one to shy away from a challenge. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, he pivoted from IT and project management to real estate—a decision that led to the creation of BreakChain Capital Investments, a private firm specializing in acquiring and revitalizing commercial properties in Texas.

In just a few short years, BreakChain Capital has amassed a portfolio of over 4,000 multifamily and self-storage units, totaling more than \$100 million in assets under management. Operating with a vertically integrated approach, the company oversees acquisitions, manages renovations through its in-house firm, BreakChain Capex Solutions, and increases profitability with strategic capital improvements. The goal? To deliver exceptional value for investors by turning underperforming properties into high-yield assets.

Joe's innovation doesn't stop there. As the creator of XCHAIN Protocol, a cryptocurrency built on the Polygon Network, he's pioneering digital solutions that bridge blockchain technology with real estate. Adding to his impressive résumé, Joe recently co-launched *The Real Estate Players Podcast*, a rapidly growing show that features industry heavyweights sharing insights into their success. Whether you're an investor, broker, or lender, the podcast offers valuable lessons each week, attracting a dedicated audience eager to learn from the best.

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“ I want to go beyond teaching people how to invest in real estate and help them transform their lives as a whole. ”

A graduate of the University of North Texas and member of Sigma Nu fraternity, Joe then went on to receive an MBA from Aspen University and an executive certificate in Blockchain Technology from MIT. His professional achievements are matched only by his personal passions. He's hiked Yosemite's Sentinel Dome and raised a beautiful daughter who is currently a cheerleader at Texas State University.

We spoke with Joe to learn more about his company, its growth, and his innovative cryptocurrency, XCHAIN Protocol.

Joe, what inspired you to start the company?

In 2020, I took a step back and thought about my future. With potentially another 20 years in the corporate world ahead of me, I started asking myself some important questions: How could I stop being dependent on a single paycheck? How could I accelerate my retirement? How could I create multiple streams of income? While I had a good experience in the corporate world, I didn't love it—it felt like I was chained to my paycheck, working just to get by.

That realization drove me to explore real estate investing. I began by investing in deals where others were running the show, and eventually, I transitioned into managing my own investments. That progression allowed me to leave the corporate world entirely and replace my salary with passive income. I named the company “BreakChain” because it reflects my journey of breaking free from the constraints of a corporate paycheck and building a life of financial independence. It's a constant reminder of why I started this journey and what I aim to help others achieve.

What makes your investment approach unique?

Our investment approach stands out because of its diversification across two asset classes: self-storage and apartments. Many real estate investment firms specialize in just one, but we strategically balance both to maximize returns and mitigate risks.

Self-storage assets are great for generating consistent cash flow, though they typically don't appreciate as much in value. On the other hand, apartments offer significant appreciation potential, but they require more maintenance, which can reduce cash flow. By combining these two asset types, we leverage their strengths to create a more stable and profitable portfolio.

This diversification is especially valuable when market conditions aren't favorable for one asset class. Instead of sitting on the sidelines waiting for things to improve, we can pivot our focus to the better-performing class. This flexibility allows us to continue generating returns and seizing opportunities, regardless of market fluctuations.

You've experienced extraordinary growth and success despite the market headwinds. To what do you attribute this?

A significant part of our success came from being confident and proactive during a time when many others were hesitant. While some investors were sitting out during those challenging years, I saw opportunities to buy properties at a lower cost basis. Another factor was our diversified approach across two asset classes—self-storage and apartments. This strategy allowed us to grow more rapidly than if we had focused on just one.

Tell us about your innovative cryptocurrency, XCHAIN Protocol. Where did the idea of merging real estate with blockchain come from?

One of the fundamental problems with cryptocurrencies today is that they're often not backed by any tangible assets. This lack of intrinsic value creates volatility—prices skyrocket as excitement builds, but a single large investor can sell off their holdings, causing the value to crash, leaving others with significant losses. I started thinking about how we could create a cryptocurrency with real, underlying value. Using the analogy of the U.S. dollar once being backed by gold, where you could exchange your cash for gold or silver at the bank, I envisioned a way to merge real estate with blockchain technology.

Suppose you have \$100,000 in equity in your home. Instead of selling the property or doing a cash-out refinance to access liquidity, you could convert that equity into digital tokens. These tokens, backed by your real estate, could then be sold on an exchange to generate immediate funds—all without selling or refinancing your property. This is the foundation of XCHAIN Protocol: a cryptocurrency backed by real estate assets. By tokenizing real estate and tying it directly to the blockchain, we create a cryptocurrency with intrinsic value.

We're currently developing XCHAIN Protocol and anticipate launching it in 2026. It's an exciting step forward in blending blockchain innovation with tangible, real-world applications.

What's on the horizon for you and for BCI?

For me, it's all about helping people find a better way. That's why I recently earned my life coach certification—it's my next big goal. I want to go beyond teaching people how to invest in real estate and help them transform their lives as a whole. There are so many people out there asking themselves, “Is there a different way?”

We're also preparing to launch an exciting new initiative: the FlexFund. This fund will allow investors to invest in both of our asset classes as part of a diversified portfolio, rather than tying their investment to a single property. This approach reduces risk, offers greater diversification, and provides better protection for our investors' capital.



Some of the greatest innovations are born not in boardrooms, but in the quiet struggles of everyday life. For Andrew Barnett, solving problems under pressure was second nature. As a chemist and CBRN commissioned officer in the U.S. Army, he spent nine years in various positions, tasked with protecting military forces from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats—or treating them in the aftermath of exposure. His role demanded precision, innovation, and a relentless drive to safeguard lives. When he transitioned to the civilian world in 2020, he carried that same mindset into the corporate sector, working at General Electric, where he honed his expertise in business operations, supply chain management, and customer service.

Yet, Andrew's biggest challenge—and most personal mission—came from within his own home. His wife, a board-certified dermatologist, struggled with severe eczema. Despite her medical expertise and access to the best treatments available, she faced a frustrating reality—there simply wasn't a product that could keep healing creams in place long enough to work effectively. Nights were spent tossing and turning, hands wrapped in cotton gloves that absorbed every bit of the soothing ointments she applied—leaving her skin just as dry and irritated as before.

Andrew saw an opportunity to apply his chemistry background and problem-solving skills in a new way. He began experimenting and, in 2023, launched Bee Well Therapeutics, introducing a revolutionary beeswax-treated fabric that forms a breathable yet minimally absorptive barrier. Unlike cotton, this innovation ensures that creams, ointments, and prescriptions stay on the skin, maximizing their effectiveness. Just one year later, Bee Well Therapeutics, based in Ormond Beach, Florida, is making waves in medicine. The FDA-registered, dermatologist-recommended topical delivery systems help thousands manage eczema, psoriasis, and other skin conditions. Designed for both adults and infants, Bee Well's products provide targeted relief for dry, cracked skin anywhere on the body. Consumer response has been overwhelming. Grateful customers share stories of finally finding relief after years of failed treatments. Healthcare providers—including dermatologists, podiatrists, and other medical professionals—are taking notice, integrating Bee Well's innovative materials into their patient care plans.

Undoubtedly, Andrew Barnett turned a personal challenge into a groundbreaking solution with Bee Well Therapeutics, but what inspired the use of beeswax? What sets Bee Well's products apart? And what's next for the company? In this Q&A, Andrew shares the story behind his innovation, the science that makes his products unique, and the exciting developments on the horizon.

ANDREW BERNETT

OWNER AND FOUNDER

"Our goal is simple—we want to help as many people as possible find relief and healing. That's what drives us forward."



Andrew, what inspired you to use beeswax in your products?

It all started with my experience working with jet engines. We used wax at the tips of our tools to hold bolts in place so they wouldn't fall into an open engine. Because of that, I always had wax in my garage. One night, my wife was burning a candle, and as I played with the wax, I noticed how soft it made my skin. That got me thinking—if I applied wax to gloves, could it help keep moisture on the skin? I decided to experiment, and it worked.

Over the next eight months, I developed the Bee Well Therapeutics material using cosmetic-grade beeswax, which is purified to remove allergens, pollen, and impurities while retaining all the beneficial fats the skin craves. The result is a breathable, reusable fabric that nourishes the skin while forming a protective barrier to keep creams and ointments in place. That's what makes it so effective—it's not just a barrier; it's part of the healing process.

You started with gloves, but now Bee Well Therapeutics offers a full range of products. Can you tell us about some of them?

Absolutely. We've expanded our product line to include a variety of sizes for both adults and children, from baby mittens to extra-large men's gloves. We also offer socks and sleeves, which are perfect for arms and legs, providing targeted moisture and protection. For infants with eczema, which often affects the entire body, we developed fully occlusive onesies to help keep their skin hydrated and protected. Additionally, we have hats designed to moisturize and treat chronic skin conditions or dryness on the scalp. And this is just the beginning—I'm constantly working on new innovations to help more people find relief.

Your beeswax-based solution is a major innovation, but what else sets your products apart from others on the market?

The beeswax solution is a key factor, but the real game-changer is the breathability of our materials. Until now, the only options available for keeping moisture on the skin were plastic wraps or wet wraps, where you soak cotton in water, apply it to the skin, and then layer a dry garment over it. The problem with those methods is that they can trap heat, prevent proper air circulation, and lead to potential side effects. What makes our products so unique is that they allow the skin to breathe while still creating an effective barrier. This lets the body naturally exchange gases, reducing the risk of irritation or other side effects that can come from suffocating the skin with plastic or non-breathable wraps. Another major benefit is reusability. Our materials can be used about 90 times before needing to be replaced, which is unheard of in the market. They're also washable, making them both practical and sustainable. While we recommend wearing them at night to prevent excess soiling, they can be worn throughout the day with no limitations on activities.

You've received incredible feedback from consumers. Can you share some of the most memorable stories?

The response has been amazing. One woman with multiple autoimmune conditions, including scleroderma, reached out after trying our gloves. She told me, "You helped my cuticles be soft with my scleroderma. Thank you so much!" That was huge. Then there was a mother who messaged me saying, "Oh my God, my baby's hands are amazing now! Before, she was up all night from dry skin. Thank you!" And then there's my grandma. She was visiting and mentioned how dry her elbows were. I told her, "I've got you,



Grandma." I applied her moisturizer, put my sleeves on her arms, and the next morning, she said, "My crepey skin is almost gone!" I hadn't even heard the term "crepey skin" before, but that's when I realized my products go far beyond just eczema or psoriasis—they work for nearly any skin condition by deeply hydrating and enhancing the absorption of treatments. That realization has been one of the coolest parts of this journey. Knowing that I've been able to help people who have struggled for years is incredibly rewarding.

You're always developing new products for consumers and healthcare providers. What exciting innovations are on the horizon?

We have several exciting developments in the works. One of the biggest projects is a bra system designed for women undergoing radiation treatment for breast cancer, providing gentle, breathable coverage that helps protect and hydrate the skin. We're also developing a neck gaiter for individuals receiving radiation treatment for thyroid cancer. Another innovation we're working on is an adhesive patch designed for areas that can't easily be wrapped, like the back, allowing targeted treatment without the need for bulky coverings. Beyond new products, we're continuing to expand our reach in the medical community. We're in discussions with more dermatologists, podiatrists, and other healthcare professionals to integrate our products into their patient care plans. Our goal is simple—we want to help as many people as possible find relief and healing. That's what drives us forward.

KEESHA Jean-Baptiste

Founder & Principal Consultant



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We align business and people strategies by identifying functional gaps and surface opportunities within HR, focusing on what makes that leader uniquely positioned to drive change.

Keesha Jean-Baptiste is a dynamic and driving force behind The People + Culture Method, a consulting firm she founded in 2023 to strengthen and elevate HR's impact on organizational strategy. As a distinguished chief people officer, Keesha has spent 20 years at the forefront of HR transformation, crafting and implementing strategic visions for some of the world's most renowned companies. Her career in HR was preceded by nearly a decade in marketing.

Through The People + Culture Method, Keesha brings her expansive expertise to CHROs, CPOs, and CTOs, offering a suite of services that includes one-on-one executive coaching using the PAUSE framework, strategic HR consulting, a cutting-edge 360 feedback and development methodology, and teaching a Compassionate Leadership Certification Program.

Keesha's mastery lies in executive coaching, strategic HR visioning, and leading transformative cultural change. Armed with a BS in mass communications and an MA in integrated marketing communications, alongside certifications in Compassionate Leadership and Shift Positive 360 Coaching, she is both a strategic architect and a profoundly insightful guide.

An influential thought leader, Keesha's insights have been featured in multiple articles in *ADWEEK*, and she has captivated listeners as a guest on the *Fearless* podcast. Wanting to know more about her company and the evolving landscape of HR, we spoke with Keesha and it was an honor to explore the transformative power of her people-first leadership.

Keesha, what inspired you to start The People + Culture Method?

My inspiration came from both personal and professional experiences. On a personal level, when my daughter reached 8th grade, I wanted to be a more present and available parent during her high school years, and I wanted more time with my elementary-aged son. I needed a change that would allow me to have flexibility to do so. Professionally, I have always been encouraged by others to start my own consulting and coaching business. Although HR is a multidisciplinary function—one that deals with the same core challenges across industries, but with varying scale, complexity and priorities—I wanted to expand my industry experience beyond advertising before I started a company. I've been fortunate to have worked in publishing and most recently, retail and luxury goods.

My time at Richemont International was especially insightful. There, I gained a deeper understanding of how HR operates within a complex matrix structure, and I saw firsthand the tremendous impact it can have when effectively aligned with business goals, talent strategies, and employee need. That experience fueled me to start The People + Culture Method, which has a specific focus on the CPO/CHRO and the HR function as a whole.

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What would you say makes your coaching methods unique?

What sets me apart is my firsthand experience in up markets, down markets, social turmoil, and restructures—and I've driven change in every scenario. I understand both the joy of being in that role and the challenges of being overextended with limited resources and inadequate support. CHROs, CPOs, and CTOs—especially in mid-sized companies—are silently suffering and are often the least developed executives in terms of resources and investment in their growth or career ambitions. I'd venture to guess that many CEOs or company presidents are not aware their CPO is at risk or exhausted from over functioning. Meanwhile, people issues and people strategy are among the top priorities of every company today.

My executive coaching framework is the PAUSE method—Purpose, Alignment, Uniqueness, Self-compassion, and Execution. It's a unique approach I developed based on my observations of HR leaders who often feel lonely, isolated and fatigued. As a result, many do not have enough bandwidth to think through today's workplace challenges and develop a future-focused people strategy. Put simply, they need to be rejuvenated and well-nourished. Through one-on-one coaching and team workshops, I guide clients to reflect on work through questions like, "What is my purpose?" and "Why am I in this role?" We align business and people strategies by identifying functional gaps and surface opportunities within HR, focusing on what makes that leader uniquely positioned to drive change. Self-compassion is an essential step, emphasizing self-care and vulnerability in a safe, non-judgmental environment. As a result of using my T-shaped competency model, we recraft their role based on the requirements for the next generation of CPOs.



I also use the Shift Positive 360 approach, a solution-oriented feedback method that I got certified in after experiencing its transformative impact first-hand. It shifts the focus to strengths, asking questions like, "When Jane is at her best, what is she doing?" This method builds an ally system around the leader, providing transparency and a tangible commitment to the CPOs success.

Lastly, compassionate leadership is at the heart of my coaching philosophy. In today's climate of geopolitical tensions and polarizing dialogue, compassion is essential—not as agreement on belief systems, but as acknowledgment of others' struggles and a commitment to alleviate avoidable suffering in the workplace.

What do you envision for the future of HR?

I see HR as having a dual role—being both an advocate for employees and a strategic partner for the business. When we frame it this way, we can create an operating structure that bridges the gap between these two critical areas. On the employee side, well-being in the workplace is crucial. This includes engagement, the employee experience, equity, benefits, and fostering a caring culture. I envision this role being led by a director of well-being and belonging within the HR structure.

On the business partnership side, it's about the EVP, talent, workforce planning, and leveraging analytics to drive decisions. The HR business partner serves as a vital link, aligning essential skills, leadership development, and succession planning with the evolving needs of the business.

The next big leap for CPOs is to deliver on an insatiable EVP, overcome the HR "value traps" and reduce the risks that impede a business from making strategic bets.



FRANCISCO CÁCERES MESÍAS

Commercial Director & Co-Founder



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Francisco Cáceres Mesías is a driving force in the health and wellness industry, where his passion for business development has fueled the growth of brands across continents. As the commercial director and co-founder of Cunsa International, he leads the company's mission to provide high-quality, private label vitamins, minerals, and sports nutrition products to a global market.

In 2016, Francisco was selected as an Endeavor High Impact Entrepreneur. His academic background in industrial civil engineering from the Catholic University of Chile, along with the strategic knowledge acquired in the ECLA program at Columbia University, have equipped him with the necessary tools to drive innovation and create global partnerships. In addition, his 18 years of experience, complemented by his bold leadership and strategic vision, have made a lasting impact on the nutrition sector worldwide. His leadership has driven Cunsa's growth in the competitive dietary supplement and sports nutrition markets and, with a focus on expanding the company's global footprint, his efforts have resulted in a presence in over 18 countries across three continents, with plans to expand to all five.

Cunsa, founded in 2007 and based in Florida, utilizes a unique 360° approach that provides clients with end-to-end services, from manufacturing and product registration to marketing and long-term business development. Their "Just in Time" production system ensures rapid market responsiveness and low minimum order quantities. Cunsa's recent recognition with the *President's E Award*, presented by the U.S. Department of Commerce for its contribution to U.S. exports and job creation, is a testament to Francisco's expert guidance.

Francisco Cáceres Mesías has built an impressive career as a business development leader and entrepreneur, transforming the health and wellness industry on a global scale. He has taken Cunsa International from a small start-up in Chile to an international powerhouse, offering private label vitamins, minerals, and sports nutrition products to retailers around the world. His passion for innovation, coupled with his ability to adapt to the complexities of different markets, has been key to Cunsa's continued expansion.

In this Q&A, Francisco shares the inspiration behind starting Cunsa, what sets the company apart, and the keys to his entrepreneurial success.

What inspired you to start Cunsa?

I have always been passionate about health and wellness, and 21 years ago I founded Nutraline in Chile as a nutritional supplement and vitamin distribution company, offering mainly private label solutions for retailers. A few years later, I founded All Nutrition, which has since become the largest specialist retailer in Chile with over 40 stores. In 2015, I founded Tervispharma in order to implement a similar business model in the

world of medical devices and pharmaceuticals. Over time, we saw the potential not only to distribute products, but also to offer marketing support, strategic development, and training in order to help companies create private label brands, and that is when we launched Cunsa International with our first manufacturing facility in Florida USA.

This entire entrepreneurial journey started with only \$3,000 and we have never injected external capital, but with hard work and a clear vision, Cunsa has grown exponentially. In 2015, we moved our headquarters, lab and manufacturing facility to Miami. Three years ago, I moved my family; Monica, Clemente, Camila, and Renato, to work more closely with our international team as commercial director, focusing on developing private label products for retailers around the world. Today we are 270 employees in Chile, 15 in international commercial area, and 300 in our manufacturing plant, with offices in Chile, Mexico, Peru and the USA. We expect to open our corporate office in Asia soon.

One of the biggest challenges we help our customers overcome is the complex regulations on nutritional supplements in different countries. We adapt U.S. formulas, labels, and brands to meet international standards. We currently have a presence in more than 15,000 retail outlets and our plans are to continue expanding in South America, North America and new markets in Asia and the Middle East.

What makes Cunsa unique?

Cunsa's uniqueness lies in our comprehensive 360-degree solution for our clients. We don't just handle manufacturing; we partner with our clients from start to finish. We design and create labels, provide technical dossiers for product registration in various countries, and work with our customers long-term to grow their business through tailored commercial and marketing support.

A big part of what sets us apart is our proactive approach to staying ahead of industry trends. Our team regularly attends trade shows to scout for new ingredients and innovations. We advise our customers in countries like Singapore, Costa Rica, Peru, and Colombia on what products to introduce next, helping them remain competitive. We're essentially an extended category management team, using our knowledge of diverse markets and distribution channels to guide our clients to success. We also offer hands-on support in regions like Peru and Mexico, where our pharmaceutical experts train customers on how to effectively market and sell their products in stores. Our deep understanding of local markets helps us provide valuable guidance on product placement and sales strategies.

One of our key strengths is our ability to adapt formulas to meet each country's regulatory requirements. For instance, we manufacture private label products for big drugstores in the US, Mexico, and other countries. Since they can't export their US formulas due to differing regulations, we help them adapt their brands, products, and formulas to local standards. This level of customization and market knowledge is what makes Cunsa stand out.



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One of the biggest challenges we help our customers overcome is the complex regulations on nutritional supplements in different countries. We adapt U.S. formulas, labels, and brands to meet international standards.

To what do you attribute your success as an entrepreneur and business leader?

I believe that having an entrepreneurial spirit is essential. You have to believe you can build something significant. But beyond that, success is all about having the right team and partners who share your vision. I didn't build this business alone. I have two partners in the U.S. (Plubins Brothers) and two in Chile (Esposito Brothers), each with different strengths. We complement each other—whether it's finance, strategy, or business development. Ultimately, I attribute my success to having the right mindset, a clear vision, and great partners. You can dream big, but it's the right team that turns that dream into reality.



JOE DUDEK

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: HELP FOR KIDS
NATIONAL PRESIDENT-ELECT: THE NATIONAL EXCHANGE CLUB

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Joe Dudek's career story is a powerful testament to what happens when passion meets purpose. A seasoned executive with over 15 years of experience leading a \$40M global division in corporate media, Joe's talent for steering organizations to new heights is unmatched. He drove a staggering 265% growth, nearly tripled sales, and transformed business outcomes. But while his professional achievements were noteworthy, it was his desire to create a lasting impact that led him to redirect his skills toward an even greater cause.

Today, as the executive director of Help for Kids - The Exchange Club Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse in Stamford, Connecticut, and the national president-elect of the National Exchange Club, Joe brings the same strategic prowess to the nonprofit realm, where he's on a mission to change lives. Under his visionary leadership, Help for Kids has soared—growing from a \$500K organization to a \$3M powerhouse, expanding its staff from 4 to 15, and securing a transformative \$2.4M grant from the State of Connecticut. Joe's ability to chart a bold path forward has positioned Help for Kids as a community leader, championing the fight against child abuse through comprehensive education and outreach.

Founded in 1989, Help for Kids is more than a nonprofit—it's a lifeline. With a relentless focus on breaking the cycle of child abuse and neglect, the organization offers home-based interventions for at-risk families, bringing hope and resilience to countless children across Fairfield County and beyond.

As the national president-elect of the National Exchange Club—a 113-year-old service organization with 15,000 members and 600 clubs nationwide—Joe's mission is clear: to build stronger communities by supporting veterans, first responders, local governments, and schools, while empowering families to create brighter futures. With a Fordham University background in marketing, finance, and economics, Joe is already driving these vital efforts forward, ensuring that the voice of every child and community resonates across the nation.

Joe recently shared his insights on the journey from corporate media to nonprofit leadership, his approach to growing organizations, and the family legacy that inspires his commitment to community service.

Joe, what compelled you to leave a successful career in the corporate world to lead nonprofits?

I felt it was where I was truly meant to be. I spent 15-20 years at Cox Media as the VP general manager, overseeing my own division. In 2015, I joined the board of Help for Kids, and by 2017, when Cox sold off its media division, I had the opportunity to step into a more hands-on role. I was already serving as president of

the board and had just helped secure a \$2.4 million, three-year grant from the State of Connecticut to expand our programming. The board asked me to become the executive director, and I embraced the chance to make a bigger impact. That same year, I was elected to the National Exchange Club's board of directors.

I even turned down a job offer after leaving Cox because I felt this shift was leading me to use my talents to benefit the community and the world in a greater way. I wanted to leverage my skills and media connections to raise visibility and engagement for these organizations, helping people understand how vital it is to support their communities. It's all about connection—whether it's parents connecting with their children through our programs or communities coming together. That's what makes life meaningful, and that's what I want to inspire.

Tell us about Help for Kids. What types of programs do you provide?

Help for Kids provides direct in-home services aimed at preventing child abuse and supporting families across the U.S. A cornerstone of these efforts is the Healthy Families America (HFA) program, which was introduced to expand and strengthen the Center's impact. HFA is a pre- and post-natal support program designed to help pregnant women manage stress, anxiety, and trauma, while educating them on caring for their newborn. The program offers continued support for three to five years after the child's birth, focusing on reducing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that can lead to serious health issues, such as heart disease and cancer, later in life. By addressing these challenges early on, the goal is to ensure children have a healthier and happier future. Launching HFA was a strategic move to secure federal and state funding, which has been instrumental in growing the organization's reach and impact.

As national president-elect, you're a third-generation member of the National Exchange Club. Will you share a bit about this legacy and your role?

I've been a proud member of the National Exchange Club for 21 years and became involved on the national level in 2017, and serving as a foundation trustee from 2022 to 2023 before being elected national president-elect. My role is to connect with members across the country, support them in delivering impactful programs in their communities, and oversee the board that guides the organization's strategy, vision, and planning. Community service has always been a part of my life—my father was a dedicated member, and now my two daughters are continuing that legacy as well. Giving back and serving others is truly a family tradition.



Lastly, Joe, how does your experience in corporate media play a role in your success in helping to grow these nonprofit organizations?

I leverage my corporate media experience to increase visibility and engagement for Help for Kids and the National Exchange Club, using many of the same strategies that proved successful at Cox Media. Most nonprofits still rely heavily on traditional methods, so I focus on bringing in fresh marketing and PR approaches to broaden reach and enhance support. For example, I purchased and wrapped a Tesla Cybertruck as a mobile billboard—something common in corporate but rarely seen in nonprofits. This innovative tactic, along with a consistent media plan, has helped turn Help for Kids from a small \$500K organization into a \$3M nonprofit with a much stronger presence and reach.

THE EXCHANGE CLUB CENTER



Kathy Lenox

President & Owner



“ Our product stands out because of its unique formulation and the special molecule that leaves your hands feeling silky smooth for hours.

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Kathy Lenox, president and owner of Microbe Solutions, LLC, has been at the forefront of innovation since 2016, when she first encountered Common Sense Technology. With over 30 years of management experience under her belt, Kathy's passion for public health ignited her mission to bring advanced antimicrobial solutions to the world. By 2017, she had founded Microbe Solutions, a Bayville, NJ-based company dedicated to delivering products that revolutionize hygiene and disease control.

Kathy's journey has been nothing short of remarkable. Starting with a modest 10x10 home office, she grew her company to a 2,000-square-foot facility where she now oversees sales, manufacturing, and accounting operations. Her proudest achievement? Building a small, but stellar team and gaining the capability to bottle Microbe Solutions' innovative products in-house. Kathy shares, "I really enjoy seeing everybody on our team excited about what they do. They're all so talented, passionate, and creative, and go above and beyond because they love us and love what we do. We have so much fun together that it makes it fun to go to work." Moreover, under her leadership, the company has flourished, even making appearances on *World's Greatest!* and the *Kathy Ireland* television shows.

In the wake of the pandemic, Microbe Solutions' offerings have become essential for daily life. Available on Amazon.com, Walmart.com, and their own website, www.smartcommonsense.com, their products continue to set new standards for hygiene. With a focus on eco-friendly and sustainable ingredients, Kathy ensures that Microbe Solutions isn't just protecting people, but also caring for the planet.

We spoke with Kathy to learn more about Microbe Solutions, how it distinguishes itself in the market, and why they have become a go-to solution for public health.

Kathy, what led you to start Microbe Solutions and bring this unique product to market?

My VP formulated this product years ago and introduced it to me. After using it for about a year, I became a firm believer in its benefits that I knew had to get out to the public. In 2017, we launched Microbe Solutions with the goal of sharing this game-changing product with everyone. There's truly nothing else like it on the market. It gives you a sense of confidence to live your life freely, knowing you're protected.

When we first started, we sold around 10,000 bottles in our first year. Now, we're selling hundreds of thousands. We began using a third-party bottling facility to produce our products. But when COVID hit in March 2020, the plant shut down and we ran out of products. We weren't going to let someone else dictate our future, especially when people needed our products more than ever. We invested in a bottling machine, moved into a 2,000-square-foot space, and now produce hundreds of bottles daily to keep up with demand. The company continues to grow rapidly, and I'm excited for what's next.

What sets your products apart from others on the market?

Our product stands out because of its unique formulation and the special molecule that leaves your hands feeling silky smooth for hours. People always tell us, "It's so silky smooth—I love it!"

Unlike traditional hand sanitizers that are only effective when wet, our formula acts like an invisible glove, creating a protective shield so you can go about your day with confidence, knowing you're still protected without needing to reapply. Moreover, it also remains on surfaces for long periods of time. For example, if you disinfect a sink, let it dry, and then coat it with our product, you'll see that water just runs down the drain, preventing mold and mildew from forming.

One of the most remarkable aspects of our formula is the microscopic spikes that attract and kill germs, stopping them from spreading. It's an amazing product that offers protection in a way that other sanitizers simply can't.

Can you share a few impactful stories from customers whose lives were changed by your products?

Absolutely! Many people struggle with allergies or sensitive skin, especially when it comes to hand sanitizers. One memorable story comes from a woman in California whose daughter was required to use hand sanitizer at school. Unfortunately, her daughter was allergic to the typical products, which led to constant rashes and infections. When she discovered our hand sanitizer, it completely changed the situation—no more rashes, no more infections. Her daughter can now use it safely every day.



Another story involves a mother whose child also had severe skin reactions to regular hand sanitizers. She was thrilled to find our product, and it's made a huge difference for her family. It's moments like these that remind us why we do what we do—knowing our products can genuinely improve people's lives and provide solutions where others fall short.

In addition to your popular hand sanitizer, what other products have gained traction, and how do they work?

One of our standout products is our wound care solution, which is truly remarkable. It contains no alcohol and helps heal cuts much faster. I remember a fishing trip in Key West where one of the mates accidentally got a rusty double hook caught in his hand. He was panicking, worried about how he could keep working. He pulled out the hook was bleeding, I applied our hand sanitizer, and it immediately stopped the bleeding, disinfected the wound, and he was able to keep working without any issues.

Another product that's quickly gaining popularity is our surface protection solution. Honestly, every school, sports team, office, and retail space should be using it. Germs and viruses are everywhere, especially in high-traffic environments. Imagine an office meeting: if someone sneezes, instead of the germs spreading to people, our surface protection works by attracting the germs to the treated surfaces, like walls and tables. The germs are drawn to microscopic spikes in the formula, which kill them on contact. This product is incredibly effective for businesses looking to protect their employees or for teams and families who want to ensure a clean, safe environment.

We also offer a DIY disinfectant protection program, which includes a fogger that's safe for pets, plants, and people. It's a great option for anyone wanting to protect their space from harmful germs.



DARCY ELLIS

TRANSFORMING FITNESS, ONE PUNCH AT A TIME

Darcy Ellis, founder and CEO of Hitfit, is redefining what it means to step into the ring. A former professional boxer and the son of five-time Australian World Champion, Lester Ellis, Darcy grew up immersed in the sport's discipline, resilience, and transformative power. But he had a vision far beyond the traditional confines of boxing: to make its life-changing benefits accessible to everyone.

Founded in 2019, Hitfit proudly bears the tagline “The Boxing Gym for Everyone.” With three thriving locations across Victoria, Australia, including the record-breaking Hitfit Melton—crowned one of the biggest boutique gyms in Australia and recognized with a *Business Excellence Award*—Darcy is on a mission to shatter stereotypes. Boxing, he believes, isn't just for seasoned athletes or gym enthusiasts; it's for everyday people of all ages, skills, and fitness levels.

Darcy's innovative approach has garnered national attention, with Hitfit featured on TV and endorsed by world-class ambassadors. The success of his second location, one of the fastest-growing in the country, is a testament to his ability to connect with individuals seeking more than just exercise—they're seeking empowerment.

Under Darcy's leadership, Hitfit is punching its way into uncharted territory through strategic franchising. This initiative not only broadens the reach of Hitfit's welcoming ethos, but also provides aspiring entrepreneurs with the tools and support to build their dream businesses. By expanding the brand, Darcy ensures that more people across Australia can

channel their inner fighter, break through personal barriers, and thrive.

We spoke with Darcy to learn more about his inspiration, unique business model, and the incredible franchise opportunities he offers.

Darcy, what inspired you to start Hitfit?

I was inspired by my dad, a five-time world champion, whose journey from humble beginnings to becoming a champion shaped my appreciation for boxing's transformative power. Growing up surrounded by the sport, I saw firsthand how it could change lives—not just physically but mentally and emotionally. That experience sparked my lifelong passion for boxing. When it came to creating Hitfit, I realized that many gym owners focus on things like having the best equipment or the most stylish facilities. While those things matter, I believe the true value of a gym lies in the relationships it fosters. People don't stick with gyms because of fancy equipment—they stick around because of the connections they build with coaches and fellow members. That's why we've designed Hitfit



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to prioritize people over everything else. We invest in our coaches and ensure they're building meaningful relationships with our members. When people feel cared for, when they know they're part of a supportive community, they're more likely to stay consistent. And consistency leads to results. At Hitfit, we're not just about workouts; we're about creating a space where people feel accountable, supported, and empowered. That's the real heart of our model—helping people transform their lives through connection and boxing.

What makes Hitfit unique?

What truly sets Hitfit apart is our ability to cater to everyone in the family, from young children to older adults. We're one of the few gyms offering services for all ages—our youngest member is just 3 years old, and our oldest is an inspiring 91-year-old who was even featured on national TV. Not many gyms can boast that kind of inclusivity, and it's something we're incredibly proud of. Another key aspect that makes Hitfit unique is our team of coaches. Many of them have competitive boxing experience, but what's even more special is that most started as members of the Hitfit community. They've experienced firsthand the transformative impact of our programs and now dedicate themselves to helping others achieve their goals—whether that's improving fitness through boxing-inspired workouts or training to step into the ring as a boxer.

This deep connection between our staff and members creates an unparalleled sense of authenticity and community. Our coaches are living proof of how Hitfit can positively transform lives. They're not just instructors; they're walking testimonials of what's possible within our supportive environment. That combination of inclusivity, experienced coaching, and a genuine sense of belonging is what makes Hitfit truly one-of-a-kind.

Your franchise model is also unique—and true to your mission to be a positive change in the community. How is it different from other franchises?

Our franchise model stands out in several key ways. First, we've designed it to have a low startup cost and a simple setup. Essentially, all you need is an open floor space and boxing bags, which keeps the build-out and initial investment very lean. This streamlined approach makes it easier for franchisees to get up and running. Second, our focus is exclusively on boxing. Unlike other gyms that offer a wide variety of classes—like boxing, Pilates, or boot camps—we stay true to what we do best. This singular focus simplifies operations while delivering exceptional value to our members.

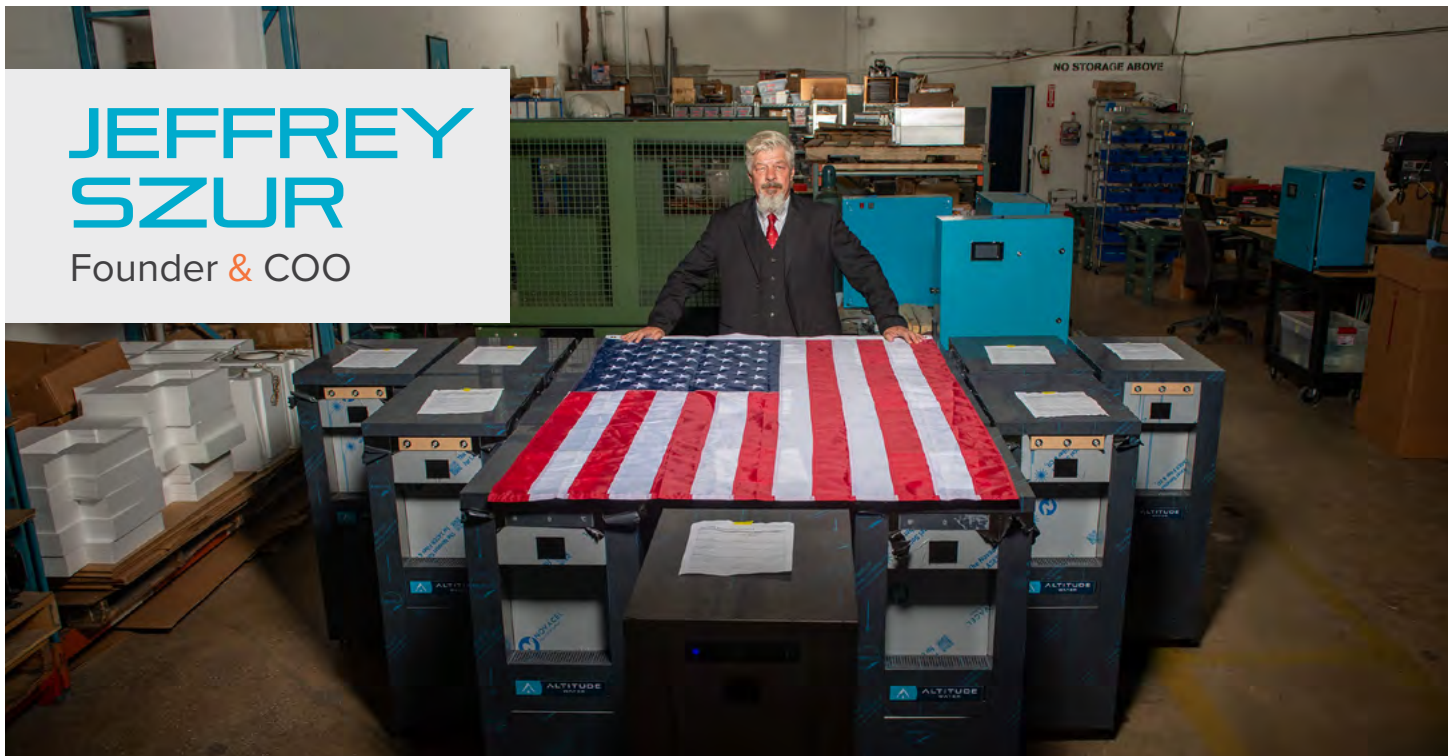
Another unique aspect is our ability to serve both adults and kids, which allows us to build a much larger membership base than typical boutique gyms. While standard gyms often struggle to surpass 500 or 600 members, our Hitfit location in Melton has 1,100 members—and it's still growing. This dual focus not only fosters a more inclusive community but also creates a significant revenue advantage for franchisees. Ultimately, our model is both affordable to start and highly profitable to operate. Franchisees can often achieve three to four times the income of a standard boutique gym, making Hitfit not just a fitness business, but a truly rewarding opportunity for those passionate about boxing and community impact.

What do you enjoy most about your work? What drives you?

For us, it's not about being the biggest—it's about being the most impactful. We're team boxing before we're team business. What drives me is the potential to inspire people to embrace boxing and transform their lives, whether they join a Hitfit gym or another boxing community. In the next 5–10 years, we'll measure success not by the size of our company, but by the difference we've made. How many lives did we change? How much did we contribute to boxing's rise as a go-to exercise for all ages and abilities? If someone discovers the transformative power of boxing because of our efforts, that's a win in my book.

JEFFREY SZUR

Founder & COO



Jeffrey Szur, founder and COO of Altitude Water, has been on a nearly two-decade-long mission to tackle one of the world's most pressing issues: water scarcity. In a world where over 4 billion people face water shortages, Jeffrey has brought forth a solution that extracts water from thin air. His company, headquartered in Lauderdale Lakes, FL, is redefining water access through its line of Atmospheric Water Generators (AWGs) and its innovative Disaster Relief Trailer, offering life-saving hydration in crisis situations worldwide.

Jeffrey's career is a testament to purpose-driven innovation. Since 2008, he has immersed himself in the AWG sector, pioneering technology that transforms humidity into pure, potable water. In 2009, he created the first ozone purification machine in Trinidad—a breakthrough he would later bring stateside, laying the foundation for Altitude Water. Each machine, equipped with Jeffrey's patented ozone purification system, ensures every drop of water remains as pure as it is accessible.

Altitude Water's technology is versatile, providing solutions for households, commercial spaces, military-grade applications, and NGOs operating in remote areas. Its Disaster Relief Trailer has proven indispensable in disaster zones, delivering clean water to hurricane-stricken regions like Maui and Hurricane Helene's impact zones. Jeffrey's efforts also extend to Africa, where he is collaborating with nonprofits to establish Water Hubs in villages, such as the Maka project in Cameroon. Supported by major donors like the L'Oréal Women's Sustainability Fund, these hubs are designed not only to provide water, but also to empower communities by teaching them to manage their resources sustainably.

Jeffrey granted us an exclusive interview where he shares memorable stories that highlight the life-changing impact of clean, accessible water.

Jeffrey, what inspired you to create Altitude Water?

Seventeen years ago, after I sold my restaurants and my father sold his oil interests, we started asking ourselves, 'What's next?' Clean water stood out as an urgent, universal need. Growing up, water was something we never questioned—we drank straight from the garden hose. But then we started seeing the consequences of the old belief that 'dilution is the solution to pollution' as harmful chemicals were increasingly dumped into our water sources. Today, 99% of our water comes from groundwater, which often contains PFAS chemicals, toxins, and pharmaceuticals. Even with filtration, some contaminants remain. Then came bottled water, which seemed like a solution until we realized plastic breaks down over time and introduces other health and environmental risks.

We thought, 'Let's go back to nature and start with the purest source of water—the air.' In 2007, we discovered Atmospheric Water Generators (AWGs) and were fascinated by their technology, using reverse osmosis and UV light. But after a few years of distributing them, we noticed quality control issues in the machines and biofilm in the machines. That's when we decided to improve the design ourselves, ultimately discovering a patent for ozone-based purification.

After years of perfecting the technology and selling globally, in 2018, we launched Altitude Water and our American-made AWG product line. Using ozone, a natural purifier even more effective than chlorine, we've developed a way to keep water exceptionally pure and accessible. Our philosophy is to go 'back to nature,' where things are done right. By mirroring nature's approach, we've created a sustainable solution to access clean, safe drinking water directly from the air.



What makes Altitude Water unique?

Altitude Water stands out for its commitment to water purity, innovative process, and versatile adaptability. Our machines extract moisture directly from the atmosphere using a condensation process that transforms pure water vapor into liquid, effectively bypassing contaminants often found in groundwater. This process mirrors the natural water cycle, where water is purified through evaporation, resulting in exceptionally clean, oxygen-rich, great-tasting water.

Our Atmospheric Water Generators (AWGs) are designed to operate on various power sources, including electricity, generators, and renewable energy, making them adaptable to any location—from homes to remote villages. They are particularly ideal for disaster relief and military applications, providing a dependable water supply without the cost or logistics of bottled water transportation. We offer a range of models tailored to meet different needs, from individual homes and agricultural use to large-scale community support, with outputs ranging from 7 to 380 gallons daily. For instance, our T12 model, which produces 7-15 gallons per day, is perfect for families, offering peace of mind with a safe, reliable drinking water source, even in emergencies, natural disasters, or during boil orders.

Additionally, our Mobile Disaster Relief Trailers produce 200-350 gallons of clean water per day, powered by solar energy. Equipped with a 60 kW battery, StarLink, and cellular service, these trailers provide essential services and connectivity during crises, delivering everything needed to support affected communities. We now offer ozone purification and add minerals to water treated with RO filtration for large scale disaster applications or someone's boat or RV.

You've received glowing feedback from people about your AWGs, including Amy Grant. Can you share a special story that's stayed with you?

I've had many memorable experiences with our AWGs, but one story in particular stands out. It involves Amy Grant and her family's farm in Franklin, TN. She initially purchased our T12 model to address sulfur issues in their water. Later, she donated the farm to a nonprofit that runs summer camps for underserved kids. Just a month before camp was set to begin, Amy realized they'd need about a gallon of water per day for 300-400 kids, far beyond the T12's 7-12 gallon daily output. As luck would have it, one of our larger units became unexpectedly available, and we managed to get it to her just in time. She now has a Water Hub with our AWGs and our purification box taking the sulfur out of her well water.

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her
meno

Tracy Lube is on a mission to change the conversation around perimenopause. A military veteran with a career spanning wartime service, high school teaching, and over a decade of corporate leadership, Tracy has spent her life solving complex challenges. But in 2023, she faced her most formidable challenge yet—perimenopause. The symptoms were relentless, nearly derailing her career and personal life. Yet, instead of surrendering, she immersed herself in thousands of hours of research on the endocrine, neurological, cardiovascular, and hormonal systems. Tracy was able to uncover critical connections that have not been fully addressed. And she took action. The result? HerMenoSM—a game-changing platform designed to guide women through perimenopause and beyond.

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Currently, 15 million women in the U.S. are navigating perimenopause, with another 10 million expected to enter this phase in the next five years. While menopause has been discussed in general terms, the lack of dedicated research, guidance, and support for perimenopause leaves millions suffering in silence. Many experience brain fog, anxiety, depression, and exhaustion, while severe health risks like heart disease, stroke, depression, and dementia remain overlooked. Traditional resources, including books by so-called experts, focus almost exclusively on common OB-GYN symptoms, failing to address the full scope of hormonal shifts and their impact on long-term health.

HerMenoSM is not just another health platform—it's a comprehensive, proactive guide designed specifically for women to navigate perimenopause. Instead of merely reacting to symptoms, HerMenoSM empowers women to take control of their future health with confidence and foresight, offering:

- 1. Vital Knowledge:** An online resource clarifying hormone interactions, long-term health risks, and practical lifestyle changes.
- 2. Roadmap:** A structured plan outlining what to expect before and during perimenopause, empowering women to manage their transition with clarity.
- 3. Fitness and Nutrition:** Meal plans and strength training programs tailored for perimenopausal and postmenopausal women, enhancing energy and vitality.
- 4. Community Connection:** A supportive network where women can share experiences, find encouragement, and celebrate milestones together.
- 5. GPT Menopause Database:** An AI-driven, on-demand resource providing reliable answers to menopause-related questions—available now for free.
- 6. HerMenoSM App:** A forthcoming all-in-one mobile application designed to further simplify and support women's perimenopause journey.

With HerMenoSM, Tracy Lube is doing what no one else has—offering a structured, science-backed approach that connects the dots between perimenopause symptoms and long-term health. The program helps women transition not just through perimenopause, but into a thriving, healthier future. It's a roadmap for navigating a phase of life that has too often been ignored, misunderstood, or dismissed.

Tracy's background speaks to her dedication and ability to execute. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in marketing, an AA in aerospace maintenance engineering, and an AA in visual communications. She is a Six Sigma Master Black Belt and business consultant (Villanova University, IAP College). Beyond her extensive corporate leadership, she has also made her mark as an author with *Mocktail Magic: Unleash 50 Spectacular Non-Alcoholic Wonders* (available on Amazon), a book that will be featured on HerMenoSM as part of its specialized nutrition resources.

The launch of HerMenoSM marks a turning point for women navigating perimenopause and beyond. No longer do they have to suffer in silence or sift through fragmented advice. With HerMenoSM, they gain knowledge, community, and the tools to take control of their health.

We spoke with Tracy to explore perimenopause and how, through HerMenoSM, it's no longer an overlooked chapter in women's lives, but a transformative phase they can navigate with knowledge, confidence, and vitality.

Tracy, what personal and professional experiences led you to create HerMenoSM?

HerMenoSM was born from both personal struggle and professional insight. After enduring perimenopause for 13 years, I realized how little meaningful support existed. At 49, it became painfully clear how many women felt isolated and unprepared for this transition. At the same time, my career in employee benefits exposed me to the gaps in workplace health initiatives. Employers often overlook perimenopause, yet addressing it proactively, like any other preventive healthcare measure, will help reduce long-term health risks and create a more inclusive, productive work environment.

How did your personal experience with perimenopause shape the creation of HerMenoSM?

My journey began at 37 with mild symptoms, but by 49, I knew something was seriously wrong. As a senior VP thriving on 80-hour workweeks, I suddenly found myself exhausted, unfocused, and struggling with depression, thyroid issues, anxiety, high cholesterol, and low iron. My doctor's basic tests always came back "normal," yet my health was spiraling. No one connected the dots—each symptom was treated separately, but they were all interconnected. Frustrated by this broken system, it drove me to create a platform to give women the knowledge, tools, and support they need to navigate perimenopause with confidence and control.

What sets HerMenoSM apart from other perimenopause resources?

HerMenoSM is a comprehensive, all-in-one platform that goes beyond basic information. It provides a structured roadmap, guiding women through essential screenings, advanced bloodwork beyond standard panels, and personalized nutrition and fitness strategies. Unlike other resources, HerMenoSM empowers women with the knowledge, confidence, and support they need to take control of their health and advocate for themselves throughout the perimenopause journey.

Lastly, Tracy, what exciting new projects are in development for HerMenoSM?

We will be launching a groundbreaking HerMenoSM app in early 2026. Unlike generic health apps, it tracks symptoms, integrates fitness and nutrition, and syncs with platforms like WHOOP and Apple Health to eliminate duplicate entries. The "MyDay" feature will provide a personalized daily plan, including tailored meal and fitness recommendations. It will also offer real-time insights, such as identifying nutritional gaps and suggesting targeted foods to optimize health and well-being.



DAVE FORMAN

PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

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In 1992, Dave Forman was a sales rep searching for his true calling when a simple radio ad changed his trajectory. Two weeks after enrolling in a bartending school, Dave had a certification in hand and a vision in mind. Spotting a glaring gap in Arizona's hospitality scene, he founded Pour Masters, the state's very first professional bartending service.

From its modest beginnings in Phoenix, Pour Masters exploded onto the scene, experiencing an astonishing 1,700% growth in its first year. What started as a one-man operation quickly transformed into Arizona's go-to source for private, public, and corporate bar services. Over the past 33 years, Dave has built a thriving empire, one cocktail at a time, with Pour Masters now handling 100-200 events per month and boasting an impressive social media presence.

What sets Pour Masters apart is their commitment to professionalism and safety. Every bartender is insured and treated as an employee, ensuring accountability and consistency. Their elite mixologists craft bespoke beverages and mocktails, turning ordinary events into unforgettable experiences.

For clients in search of Instagram-worthy flair, the Pour Masters Elite division delivers visually stunning bar moments tailored for a social media-driven world. Pour Masters is a contractor for the Arizona Liquor Board, which allows them to

serve festivals and fundraisers all over Arizona. In addition, the launch of Simply Servers in 2003 meets catering support needs of private parties and general assistance for caterers and event planners.

In a candid Q&A, Dave shared insights into his journey, the secrets behind his company's success, and the moments that make it all worthwhile.

Dave, what is it that makes Pour Masters so unique?

First, we were the very first bar service in Arizona, setting the standard for others to follow. Second, we have clients who've been with us for over 30 years—a testament to the trust and quality we've maintained. Third, we're highly systematic in our approach. Our clients always know exactly what they're getting, and even after three decades, we continue to refine and improve our services to deliver the best experience. But, what really sets us apart is the value we place on real relationships. I believe in old-school connections—shaking hands and building genuine rapport.

We also take Arizona's strict alcohol laws very seriously. Your safety and enjoyment are our priorities, whether you're hosting at home or at a larger venue. We follow the laws to the letter because we care about protecting you and ensuring everyone has a great time.

The buzz is growing about your Pour Masters Elite. What's making it all the rage across social media?

In today's world, everyone wants an Instagram-worthy experience, and that's where *Pour Masters Elite* comes in. Our elite bartenders aren't just servers—they're mixologists who craft visually stunning, next-level drinks. From smoking glasses to using high-end serving utensils and donning stylish leather vests, they bring a flair that elevates any event.

Some clients are happy with a classic, service-oriented bartender pouring beer, wine, or vodka club soda tonics—and we excel at that too. But, for those looking to make their event stand out on social media, Pour Masters Elite creates visually captivating bar moments that are as entertaining as they are photogenic. It's about turning a good event into an unforgettable one, and giving guests the kind of lifestyle content they love to share online.

To what do you attribute Pour Masters' popularity and success?

It comes down to our philosophy: life is meant to be fun. As a business owner, I've always believed in living around work, not working around life. I genuinely enjoy connecting with people. I could meet someone in an elevator and have coffee with them later. That openness and authenticity have built trust over the years.

People know we take the bartending aspect seriously, but they also know we're here to create an atmosphere where everyone can have fun and enjoy life. I believe in doing the right thing—always. That includes giving back to our community. We regularly donate alcohol, labor, and full bar setups for charity events and fundraisers, expecting nothing in return. It's not about money for us; it's about happiness. And that mindset has served us well.

Is there a particularly memorable event that Pour Masters has done that has stayed with you?

We've done so many incredible events over the years, but a few really stand out. One was a party for a pro baseball pitcher who had graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated* multiple times and racked up countless awards—definitely a pinch-me moment. Then there was Usher's Super Bowl party, held in an airplane hangar, which was an unforgettable experience. We've also been part of golf tournaments with Alice Cooper, events where guests included legends like Bon Jovi and Oprah Winfrey. We have worked events with Princess Ann, President George Bush and vice-president Dan Quayle. One of the highlights was the 1st Super Bowl in Arizona for the Pittsburgh Steelers'. Those moments remind me why I love what I do—bringing people together, no matter who they are, to create unforgettable memories.

After 33 years in the industry, what do you enjoy most about your work?

What I love most is how the industry has evolved and being able to share those changes while enjoying events with



It comes down to our philosophy: life is meant to be fun. As a business owner, I've always believed in living around work, not working around life.

people I genuinely like. It's always a fun, social experience. At our office, we host monthly parties open to the public with free food, drinks, and entertainment. And since 1992, we've thrown our iconic annual *Cool Off in Style Party* for industry professionals, drawing 400-500 guests.

We always go all out with unique themes like glow-in-the-dark golf, a Jimmy Buffett-inspired hunt for the last "shaker of salt," Alice in Wonderland, and futuristic parties where guests enter with barcode tattoos. It's all about creating memorable, one-of-a-kind experiences. For me, life is about enjoying people, building real connections, and living fully. They say nutrition, exercise, and being social are keys to longevity, and I've embraced that philosophy. Not everyone gets into the bubble, but those who do are dear friends I cherish. You only get one life, so enjoy it. Surround yourself with great people, help them out, and spread happiness. That's what keeps me loving what I do, even after 33 years.

POUR MASTERS
BAR SERVICE



Meet JANET M. STOVALL, CDE

Janet Stovall, founder and principal of Pragmatic Diversity, is transforming the way businesses approach diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). A self-proclaimed “diversity pragmatist,” Janet helps organizations go beyond lofty ideals to implement real, measurable strategies that dismantle systemic inequity and link diversity to tangible business outcomes. Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Pragmatic Diversity ensures DEI becomes indispensable, sustainable, and impactful, even during times of economic downturn or social resistance.

Janet’s expertise is built on decades of driving cultural change in large, complex organizations. One of the few Black C-level speechwriters in the Fortune 100, she is accustomed to breaking barriers and challenging norms. Her three TED talks, viewed by millions, challenge businesses to rethink traditional DEI approaches and take accountability for building inclusive, equitable workplaces. Janet doesn’t shy away from difficult conversations—she leans into them unapologetically with clarity and a bit of humor.

An award-winning speechwriter, author, and global speaker, Janet has earned numerous accolades, including multiple *Cicero Speechwriting Awards* and recognition as a 2024 *Outstanding DEIB Voice*. Her book, *The Conscious Communicator: The Fine Art of Not Saying Stupid Sh*t*, is a practical guide for leaders navigating the complexities of inclusive communication. With equally impressive academic credentials, she holds an M.A. in professional studies in integrated marketing communications from Georgetown University, a B.A. in English from Davidson College, and graduate certificates in DEI from Cornell and Yale.

At the core of Janet’s work is pragmatism. Janet believes subjective DEI Issues can be addressed through objective, results-driven frameworks. She works with leaders and teams to design actionable strategies that link DEI initiatives to measurable business metrics, and equipping organizations with tools to make the case for diversity, and unlock its full value.

Janet’s firm, Pragmatic Diversity, founded in 2017, specializes in helping companies navigate systemic inequities through solutions grounded in accountability. “We focus on real problems, real numbers, and real consequences,” Janet says, ensuring DEI remains a core business priority, not a temporary trend.

We spoke with Janet to learn more about diversity pragmatism and how it’s helping business grow.

Janet, you’re a ‘diversity pragmatist’ known for your groundbreaking approach to DEI, heralded by business leaders everywhere. What does it mean to be a diversity pragmatist?

When people discuss DEI, it’s often superficial and subjective, lacking actionable depth. As a diversity pragmatist, I focus on making the subjective objective. I believe diversity isn’t a

problem to solve; diversity solves problems. Inclusion isn’t feeling valued; inclusion is being able to deliver value. And equity isn’t fair people; equity is fair systems.

I don’t believe in diversity as just “the right thing to do,” but I challenge the conventional business case for DEI, which suggests diversity automatically equals success—it doesn’t. I champion the *impact case*, demonstrating diversity’s potential to deliver business-level profit and value by connecting it directly to measurable outcomes and goals.

Companies exist for two primary reasons: to make money or save money. They operate on clear expectations and deliverables. This practical, results-oriented environment allows diversity to thrive—not as a moral imperative, but as a strategic asset. And it uniquely positions the business world to dismantle systemic inequity. It’s time to shift the conversation away from abstract ideals to understand, measure and leverage diversity’s tangible value. When we enable its objective impact, we unlock the true potential of diversity in the workplace.

Your TED presentations have garnered millions of views, and you’ve helped some of the world’s most well-known companies realize the measurable value of DEI. What makes your approach so unique—and effective?

We say we value diversity, but what does that really mean? My approach starts with a simple question: *What are you solving for?* Often, the response is something like, “better culture.” But why? Corporate America isn’t about “the right thing to do.”

Companies often use vague terms like “belonging” or “feeling valued”—concepts you can’t measure or define. “Better” culture is an inclusive culture where people can contribute fully, allowing diversity to positively impact business goals. I design and deliver consulting engagements, operational models, training, and communication programs that make such cultures possible. I focus on defining and measuring inclusion to move from “bodies in the building” to “brains in the business.” I also speak extensively on this topic in keynotes.

Think about inclusion as a continuum: at an exclusive company targeting a specific demographic, it looks nothing like it does at an organization embracing global social justice. The key is defining and communicating what inclusion looks like for your organization, then making people accountable for behavior that allows everyone to deliver value. Inclusion is the actionable part of DEI. Without it, diversity initiatives are a waste of time and money, and equity is impossible.

I focus on building resilient inclusion—or what I call *Inclusilience™*—behaviors that sustain diversity by connecting it to business outcomes. When inclusion is definable and accountable it unlocks diversity’s potential to deliver tangible, measurable results.



Can you share an example of how one of your clients benefitted from your work with them?

The African American employee resource group (ERG) of a large pharmaceutical company approached me to conduct a workshop focused on increasing its relevance. How, they wondered, might they better contribute to the company's bottom line?

The company's drug treats a disease that disproportionately affects Black women, a group this ERG was uniquely positioned to understand. Using a proprietary model, I helped them outline actionable strategies that leveraged their diversity to address this gap. My guidance was clear: *Identify ways to connect with this demographic, implement those strategies, and measure the impact.*

The results were remarkable. Using the model, the ERG developed viable initiatives that engaged this underserved market, significantly expanding the company's reach, and generating significant new revenue. By tying its inherent diversity directly to measurable business outcomes, the group became a critical driver of success.

This case shows how diversity can be a bottom-line business asset. When companies connect diversity to real outcomes, they unlock its potential to drive impact, innovation, and profit.



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Bret Griffin, the innovative founder and CEO of the GryphClaw suite of companies, is a serial entrepreneur on a mission to create successful careers for others while making a positive impact on society. With a diverse portfolio of businesses under his belt, including GryphClaw Customs, Phoenix Integrated Security, and Eagle Staffing Solutions, he is a driving force in business development and team building.

Over his remarkable 23-year career, Bret has left an indelible mark on various industries. He has not only founded, but also successfully led ten operating companies within a seven-year period. These include a property holding company with substantial assets, a staffing agency, a security company, an inspection company, and the renowned GryphClaw Customs.

Bret's commitment to his mission, "Doing Business Differently," is more than just a slogan; it's a guiding philosophy that prioritizes value creation for customers, partners, and employees alike. His diverse range of companies, all located in the Detroit area, Michigan, exemplify this mission.

Under Bret's leadership, GryphClaw Customs has redefined

the future of vehicle upfit and accessorizing. This cutting-edge company specializes in delivering innovative and customized solutions that cater to a wide spectrum of vehicle needs and preferences. Bret also leads Phoenix Integrated Security, an industry-renowned company recognized for its state-of-the-art integrated security systems and services. With a fleet of 35 patrol cars and a dedicated staff of 150 trained security officers, the company ensures a secure environment for all. Lastly, Bret and his team at Eagle Staffing Solutions connect exceptional talent with organizations in need. Their commitment to fostering growth and prosperity for both job seekers and employers has resulted in the employment of over 200 people.

Despite these notable successes, Bret's journey isn't just defined by his impressive business acumen; it also reflects his dedication to service and sacrifice. Having served in the U.S. Navy for four years, completing two tours, Bret brings the same unwavering commitment to excellence to his entrepreneurial endeavors. Among his many achievements, Bret's tenure as CEO at Precision Vehicle Logistics earned the company the prestigious *Supplier of the Year Award* in 2021, a testament to his leadership and dedication. Beyond accolades, his true

legacy lies in his unwavering support for others, from hourly employees to executive-level professionals, propelling them to excel in their careers.

We spoke with Bret to learn more about his background, his motivation, and his knack for creating thriving businesses.

Bret, can you tell us about your background and your entrepreneurial journey?

My early life was tough. My mom became a parent at just 14, and we struggled to make ends meet. In school, I faced academic challenges, but I excelled in sports and thought I had a shot at earning college football scholarships. A car accident just before my senior year dashed those hopes, leaving me with a fractured upper vertebra and ending my football dreams. I enlisted in the Navy and did two tours, but when I returned from the last one, my son didn't recognize me. Having grown up without a father figure until I was eight, I couldn't bear to let my son go through a similar experience, so I made the choice to leave the military. However, during my last six months of military service, I was overseeing construction crews in dry dock, a role that would play a major part in my future endeavors.

In 2000, I joined the CN Railroad, specifically Autoport Limited, a vehicle by rail shipping company. I transformed it from a small operation with just three employees into an industry giant with 2,000 employees and 18 terminals, gaining significant attention along the way. Following that, I received a recruitment offer from Voith, the world's largest paper manufacturer. They also operated a vehicle shipping division, which was hemorrhaging \$7 million annually before I arrived. In my first year, I managed to turn the division around, generating a remarkable \$45 million in net income. However, Voith eventually decided to exit the car-shipping business, prompting my departure.

In 2014, I embarked on my entrepreneurial journey by co-founding Precision Vehicle Logistics. The company has since achieved substantial growth and opportunity. My guiding principle throughout my journey has remained unwavering: prioritize the customer above all else. Whenever supply chains fell short of this standard, I took it upon myself to establish new ventures to rectify the situation.

For instance, in response to challenges with software suppliers and snow removal companies, I took matters into my own hands and founded a software agency in the UK and ventured into the snow removal services sector. I continued to cultivate an environment where like-minded individuals thrived, emphasizing the importance of doing right by people. Each venture I've undertaken has grown into a thriving entity, a testament to my enduring philosophy: plant the seeds, and watch them grow into towering trees.

Your most recent venture is GryphClaw Customs. What inspired you to start it, and what makes it unique.

As a passionate car enthusiast, I delved into a business specializing in high-volume vehicle customization. Our mission is to create unique vehicles that perfectly match each owner's distinct style. We're all about ensuring that every car we produce is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece, far removed from



"My guiding principle throughout my journey has remained unwavering: prioritize the customer above all else."

the standard models you find at regular dealerships or from the major manufacturers. Our dedication lies in giving each vehicle a personal touch that mirrors the owner's personality and desires.

You see teambuilding as the key to a successful business. Why is this important, and can you share some of your efforts in this regard?

Building a business isn't a solo endeavor; it relies on collaboration. Some entrepreneurs and leaders mistakenly believe they're the sole driving force, but I hold a different perspective. Success hinges on the collective effort of every individual within the team. It doesn't matter what role each person plays; everyone contributes to achieving the common goal. I recognize my limitations as just one person, and it's evident that an individual can only accomplish so much alone. However, when a cohesive team works together, united in purpose, we have the power to achieve remarkable feats and move mountains.

Mari & Lenny Jensen

A Dynamic Duo at the Helm of Healthcare Innovation

Meet Leonard “Lenny” Jensen and Marianne “Mari” Jensen, the powerhouse couple redefining senior healthcare and hospice care across the Northwest. With three thriving companies—FireNote, Keystone Health, and Keystone Hospice—the Jensen’s are transforming the industry with a unique blend of clinical expertise and human capital strategy.

Lenny Jensen, MSN, FNP-C, brings over 20 years of experience in healthcare, combining his deep clinical knowledge with a visionary approach to product development and technology. A former officer in the Army Nurse Corps for 16 years, Lenny honed his skills and earning a reputation as a leader in patient care. Looking to spend more family time and beyond military service Mari and Lenny co-founded Serenity Hospice in Portland, Oregon as their first venture into entrepreneurship. After acquisition and with a shared commitment to serving others, they moved to Boise, Idaho and started Keystone Health, Keystone hospice, Keystone Center for Geriatrics most recently, FireNote—a revolutionary electronic medical record (EMR) system.

FireNote, their latest endeavor, is a game-changer for hospice and palliative care teams. This state-of-the-art, hospice-specific EMR system is designed to optimize

care coordination, improve documentation efficiency, and streamline billing processes. Featuring advanced tools like prognostic alerts and integrated care plans, FireNote empowers healthcare providers to deliver personalized, timely care while enhancing operational outcomes.

While Lenny leads on the clinical and technological front, Mari, COO of FireNote and a co-founder of Keystone Health and Keystone Hospice, is the strategic force behind their success. With a focus on human capital, Mari serves as the owner, vice president, and director of human resources for both Keystone entities, ensuring that each organization is fueled by a team as dedicated as they are talented. Her efforts in shaping a supportive and resilient workforce have been instrumental in building the high-quality care that their companies are known for. It’s no surprise that Keystone Hospice recently received the Veterans of Foreign Wars *Veteran Employer Recognition Award*—an accolade that underscores their dedication to both veteran patient and veteran employee well-being.

Keystone Health stands as a comprehensive healthcare organization, delivering home-based primary care and palliative services, while Keystone Hospice focuses on

“ Although our services have expanded significantly, veterans remain a core focus of what we do. We’ve built the most advanced veteran care program in the country. ”

compassionate, end-of-life care, prioritizing patient dignity and family support through an interdisciplinary team approach. Together, the Jensens are creating a future where advanced technology meets human compassion, making a profound difference in the lives of seniors and families navigating complex healthcare needs.

Lenny and Mari’s journey is more than a story of entrepreneurial success; it’s a testament to their unwavering mission to revolutionize healthcare, one patient, one provider, and one breakthrough at a time. In this Q&A, they share the inspiration behind their ventures and how their groundbreaking hospice-specific EMR system, FireNote, is revolutionizing patient care across the country.

What sparked your decision, as a couple, to launch not just one, but multiple innovative healthcare companies together?

Mari: In our early years of marriage, Lenny was in his undergraduate program under the Army’s Green to Gold Scholarship and had the opportunity to work as a hospice nurse. Afterwards, he transitioned back to active duty, where he began running nursing teams in a Med-Surg unit. Meanwhile, I was working in insurance. We had a newborn, so after his long shifts, he’d take over caring for our daughter while I worked. One day, I noticed he seemed unfulfilled and asked, “When was the last time you felt truly happy?” He paused and said, “When I was a hospice nurse.” That conversation changed everything. That very night, we came up with the name for our company. We were just 28 years old, but we knew we had to pursue it.

Keystone companies are transforming the way care is delivered to the Medicare population. Can you tell us more about your approach?

Lenny: Our initial focus was on hospice care. While serving in the Army, I witnessed firsthand how ill-equipped civilian hospices were when it came to understanding the needs

of veterans. That experience fueled my desire to create a hospice specifically tailored to veterans’ needs. Although our services have expanded significantly, veterans remain a core focus of what we do. We’ve built the most advanced veteran care program in the country.

From there, we expanded into home-based primary care because we noticed that not every patient needed hospice, but still required ongoing medical support. We started offering house calls, which evolved into our geriatric clinics, ensuring a seamless care continuum between home visits and clinic services.

You took innovation a step further with your hospice-specific EMR system, FireNote, which is revolutionizing patient care and enhancing the workflow for nurses and clinicians. What makes it so unique?

Lenny: The software we created connects seamlessly across various systems. Prior to Firenote, we operated on three different electronic health records that didn’t communicate well. We got frustrated with trying to piece together information for our patients, so we developed FireNote to bridge that gap and ensure smooth continuity of care. We launched it in February 2020, just before COVID hit. By the end of that year, we were the only hospice in our region able to handle COVID patients because FireNote enabled us to manage the increased volume effectively. Now, hospices across the country are using the software we built, and it’s truly transformed how nurses provide care—they’re spending more time with patients and less time staring at screens.

Mari: Before FireNote, our nurses were spending up to four hours a day just documenting a single new patient. With FireNote, they can now document that same visit in 35 minutes. It’s given them back their time and improved their quality of life, allowing them to focus on what they’re trained to do—being clinical and critical thinkers instead of being bogged down by data entry.



ANDREW HADDAD



Andrew Haddad is no stranger to redefining industry standards. A powerhouse of achievement, Andrew is the founder of five distinct companies, all seamlessly connected by his guiding mantra: “Empowering people in a world of possibility.” With over 20 years in the real estate industry, he has navigated nearly half a billion dollars in transactions, coached thousands of individuals, and has consistently been a top producer in Sarasota and Manatee Counties since 2005. His Amazon best-selling book, *10 Days to a Contract*, speaks to his proven methodology and impact.

At the helm of his diverse business empire is Haddad & Company LLC, the parent company anchoring his multi-industry ventures. His reach extends across the globe through First Agent Hub, where Andrew leads educational programs, training, and coaching for real estate teams nationwide. Through tailored instruction, First Agent Hub empowers real estate professionals to unlock their fullest potential and achieve sustainable success. On the home front, Andrew heads the Suncoast Group of Compass, where his extensive community network and formidable work ethic drive a thriving real estate business. Since 2014, he’s been the real estate expert on the local TV series, *Suncoast for Sale*, on ABC7, showcasing his unmatched knowledge and service to the region.

Beyond U.S. borders, Andrew’s commitment to creating opportunity shines through Costa Sol Ventures Limitada in Costa Rica. Partnering with local governments, he’s pioneering affordable housing projects that bring hope to the country’s poorest communities. Through strategic partnerships, he also launched Future Contributions, Inc., an international consulting firm offering strategic courses in business development, providing clients with a competitive edge to dominate their markets.

A dedicated lifelong learner, Andrew holds a master’s degree in human services and psychology, a bachelor’s in business, and is a Master Certified Negotiation Expert® (MCNE), broker associate, licensed real estate instructor, master practitioner and certified trainer in Neurolinguistics, board certified by the Association of Integrative Psychology, and Certified IPEC® Business Coach. Among other accolades, Andrew is KW *Icon Award* winner and formerly a co-owner of a Keller Williams Realty franchise. Currently, he is working towards his Ph.D. in psychology and counseling at Regent University, further enhancing his ability to empower others to reach their full potential.

“ I coach real estate agents and aspiring entrepreneurs, and what sets my approach apart is that I focus on the 95% of the unconscious mind, where real transformation takes place.



COMPASS



“ Helping others discover their purpose and thrive in their careers and lives is what truly drives me. That’s my happy place.

Andrew Haddad is a trailblazer, paving the way for others to achieve their fullest potential. In this insightful Q&A, he reveals how his unique coaching methods empower individuals to unlock their personal and professional growth.

Andrew, what inspired you to start Haddad & Company?

I have a deep-rooted belief that I was put on this earth for a purpose, and it’s my responsibility to use all my God-given talents to contribute to the greater good. That inspired Haddad & Company LLC, which has since grown into five interconnected companies. My journey began in real estate, guiding buyers and sellers through some of the most pivotal transactions of their lives. I discovered a passion for teaching and mentoring others early in my career. That’s when I realized I wanted to do more than just sell homes—I wanted to empower others to succeed. This core passion led me to pursue multiple certifications and ultimately blend my skills as a speaker, coach, and trainer. Helping others discover their purpose and thrive in their careers and lives is what truly drives me. That’s my happy place.

What makes your coaching and development approach unique?

I coach real estate agents and aspiring entrepreneurs, and what sets my approach apart is that I focus on the 95% of the unconscious mind, where real transformation takes place. Research shows that 95% of what we think, feel, and do happens at an nonconscious level. With over 60,000 thoughts per day—most of them repeats from the day before—many people are operating on autopilot, stuck in their old patterns. Traditional coaching tends to be surface level: “Do this. Do that.” But I go deeper. I coach the *person*. When the person changes, their actions change, and that’s when we see breakthrough results. It’s not about making minor tweaks; it’s about creating a new mindset that drives powerful, lasting transformation.

Can you share an example of how you helped an agent using your unique method?

I was coaching a seasoned agent and joined him on a listing appointment for an \$800,000 property to observe his approach. Unfortunately, his rapport and communication with the client were lacking, and they ended up asking



him to leave. We returned to the office and I provided coaching and feedback, focusing on shifting his mindset and approach. I encouraged him to reach back out and schedule a follow-up meeting for the next day. He did, but this time he connected with the client on a deeper level, rebuilding trust and ultimately securing the \$800,000 listing. He went on to sell the property, earning a \$24,000 commission. The transformation was remarkable—he went from losing the client’s confidence to closing the deal, simply by showing up as a more empowered version of himself.

Do you have a motto that guides you?

One of my guiding mantras comes from Nelson Mandela: “As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.” It’s a reminder to show up as your authentic self, because your courage can inspire others to do the same. Another is: “Your life grows to the extent you do.” These beliefs drive everything I do, whether in business or in life, pushing me—and those I coach—to continually strive for greatness.

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FUTURE
CONTRIBUTIONS
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



DR. ASHLEY PENDRICK



“ What I enjoy most is knowing that I’m not only elevating the role of pharmacists but also directly impacting patient health outcomes. ”

Dr. Ashley Pendrick is more than a doctor; she’s a visionary on a mission to transform healthcare delivery. As the founder of Prosper Rx Consulting, she’s driving a new era of physician-pharmacist collaboration, building bridges that empower primary care and emergency medicine providers across the United States. Since establishing Prosper Rx Consulting in 2020, Dr. Pendrick has helped practices streamline operations, enhance patient outcomes, and even increase revenues by up to \$400,000—all through her signature embedded pharmacist model.

Dr. Pendrick’s approach centers on collaborative practice agreements that allow primary care physicians to integrate pharmacist-led services, ultimately reducing physician overwhelm and improving disease management. A board-certified geriatric specialist and diabetes prevention educator, she’s dedicated to making healthcare proactive, personalized, and sustainable. Her achievements are rooted in a rich career, from her early days developing certified education for healthcare professionals to her experience in holistic diabetes care as a consulting pharmacist. Her induction into Phi Lambda Sigma and the National Pharmacy Leadership Society speaks to her profound impact on pharmacy leadership.

Prosper Rx Consulting is a direct reflection of Dr. Pendrick’s commitment to healthcare innovation. For practices ready to expand clinical services and achieve quality metric goals, her consultancy offers a seamless, scalable path forward. Imagine the possibilities: reduced hospitalizations, improved patient satisfaction, and a clinical team equipped to tackle chronic disease with cutting-edge pharmacist expertise. Dr. Pendrick’s work is more than consulting; it’s a movement designed to elevate healthcare standards and empower prescribers to truly thrive.

We spoke with Dr. Pendrick to learn more about Prosper Rx Consulting, how it works, and how both physicians and patients benefit.

Q: Dr. Pendrick, what inspired you to start Prosper Rx Consulting?

My inspiration came from recognizing, after completing my Doctor of Pharmacy training, that pharmacists are not being utilized to their full potential. I saw the incredible value that pharmacists could bring directly to clinical practices and

patients, and I wanted to make that connection a reality. Initially, the focus was on integrating pharmacists' clinical expertise into healthcare settings where it could make a tangible difference. Over time, our vision expanded: we're building partnerships between physicians and pharmacists to enhance patient outcomes while also driving measurable financial returns for primary care practices and beyond. I firmly believe that every physician—not just in primary care—should have a pharmacist as a partner. We're still growing, and it's exciting to have the capacity to scale and support family practices and primary care physicians nationwide in embedding pharmacists into their care teams.

Q: What makes Prosper Rx unique?

What sets Prosper Rx and myself apart is our deep understanding of the challenges clinical practices face in adopting new services, particularly when it comes to integrating pharmacists into their teams. We specialize in streamlining this process—handling the complexities of legislation, billing, and collaborative practices so physicians can focus on patient care. Our expertise enables practices to boost their revenue by \$100,000 to \$400,000 through the strategic placement of a pharmacist. We provide guidance on navigating state-specific protocols and collaborative practice agreements to create a seamless, productive physician-pharmacist partnership that drives both practice success and improved patient outcomes.

Q: How are physicians and patients benefiting from integrating pharmacists through Prosper Rx?

Integrating pharmacists through Prosper Rx brings tremendous benefits to both physicians and patients. For practices, it enhances chronic disease management, optimizes safe and effective medication use, and improves patient education, leading to greater efficiency and reduced clinician overwhelm. Financially, practices see a substantial return on investment, often yielding a 4:1 to 5:1 revenue increase. Patients, in turn, gain easier access to care within their provider's office, leading to fewer hospitalizations, better medication adherence, and a deeper understanding of their treatment plans. The pharmacist's expertise also minimizes medication risks by proactively addressing contraindications and drug interactions. This collaboration ensures that physicians and pharmacists work seamlessly together to improve overall patient health and safety.

Q: How does Prosper Rx Consulting work?

Prosper Rx Consulting provides staffing and consulting services to help physicians seamlessly integrate clinical pharmacists into their practices. Our primary service is matching practices with pharmacist experts who align with their specific goals, whether it's



chronic disease management, medication adjustments, or improved patient outcomes. We assist with every step, from placement to the creation of collaborative practice agreements and protocols tailored to the needs of each practice. This ensures both the pharmacist and physician are clear on objectives, such as targeted disease outcomes and medication management roles.

Physicians can choose between hiring a full-time pharmacist, where we charge a one-time flat fee based on a percentage of the pharmacist's salary with a 30-day guarantee, or accessing a consulting pharmacist for flexible, ongoing support. Our consulting option offers physicians one hour of clinical support per month via phone or text, which can be set up for an individual provider or a group rate. This support extends beyond primary care to include family and emergency medicine, giving prescribers easy access to expert advice whenever clinical questions arise.

Q: Lastly, Dr. Pendrick, what do you enjoy most about your work?

What I enjoy most is knowing that I'm not only elevating the role of pharmacists but also directly impacting patient health outcomes. By enhancing access to pharmacists and supporting their clinical skills, we're helping to reduce hospitalizations and slow the progression of conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease—often preventing complications that can be life-altering. It's rewarding to know we're easing the strain on primary care providers, empowering them to navigate complex medication regimens more effectively. With the ability to bill for pharmacist services, physicians gain a valuable partner who strengthens their practice, supports their team, and ultimately leads to better patient care and outcomes.

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TAYLOR NICKERSON

Owner, Creative Director,
and Senior Editor

“ I’m passionate about building a community that helps creatives navigate these shifting landscapes in new and non-traditional ways; finding innovative and supporting paths forward together as my company continues to grow. ”

Taylor Nickerson, the owner, creative director, and senior editor of Taylor Nickerson A/V, LLC, has made his mark in the world of film marketing through his unique approach to visual storytelling. With over 11 years of industry experience, Taylor’s journey began at Giaronomo Productions before transitioning into roles at Ammo Creative and Statement Advertising, eventually leading him to establish his own boutique agency in December 2022.

Located in Los Angeles, Taylor Nickerson A/V, LLC is a post-production agency specializing in creating and distributing promotional marketing content for the film, television, sports, and music industries. From gripping trailers and TV spots to digital campaigns and behind-the-scenes content, the company’s offerings cover a wide spectrum of creative services tailored to captivate audiences. Whether it’s a six-second digital bumper or a twenty-minute first look, Taylor brings his passion for visual storytelling to every project.

Taylor’s expertise spans multiple genres, but his strengths shine particularly in drama, sci-fi, westerns, documentaries, action, and horror. His career trajectory—rising from an unpaid intern to a senior editor and producer—stands as a testament to his relentless drive, dedication, and commitment to perfecting his craft. Along the way, he has built a reputation

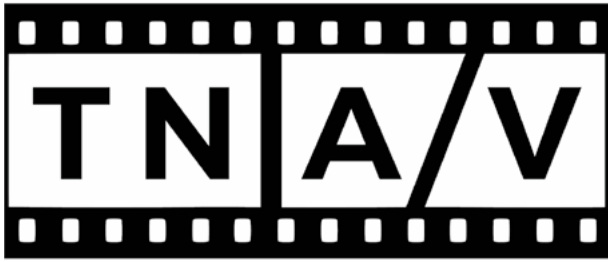
for forming strong, collaborative relationships with clients and partners, which he attributes to his company’s continued growth and success.

In 2024, Taylor’s talent and vision were recognized at the prestigious *Golden Trailer Awards*, where he received the coveted *Golden Fleece* for his work on *The Kill Room*. With a B.A. in English literature and film studies from the University of Pittsburgh, and a CORE credential from Harvard Business School, Taylor blends creativity with business acumen, offering clients an unparalleled level of expertise.

At Taylor Nickerson A/V, every project is more than just a promotional piece—it’s an experience, crafted with precision, passion, and a deep understanding of what makes an audience connect. In this Q&A, Taylor discusses his inspiration for launching the company, what sets his work apart, and some of the standout projects that have shaped his journey.

Q: Taylor, what motivated you to take the leap and start your own post-production company?

I’ve always had an entrepreneurial spirit and thrive on the rush of setting a goal and pushing myself to exceed



expectations. Throughout my career I've been lucky to have mentors and colleagues who guided me through countless challenges, instilling in me the confidence to tackle whatever comes my way. That drive to push the envelope has always been a part of me and is something I carry into my work every day.

Before launching Taylor Nickerson A/V I had the privilege of working with major industry players like Disney, Warner Brothers, Universal, Sony, Netflix, Paramount, and 20th Century Fox; those experiences inspired me to build something of my own. When I started, I only had a handful of clients but over the last two years, I've been able to exponentially grow that network by forming partnerships with former studio executives, producers, and independent filmmakers.

One of my core goals is to offer lower budget productions and independent filmmakers high-quality marketing campaigns at accessible costs. It's my way of 'paying it forward' for all the support I received early in my career, knowing firsthand the value of opportunity.

Q: How does your approach set your company apart from others in the industry?

Clients get the best of both worlds— A-level agency creative paired with the personal touch of a boutique firm. I'm directly involved in every project end to end; driving the creative process, collaborating closely with clients to develop strategies that engage and resonate with audiences. That hands-on approach is what keeps me motivated—the thrill of working with talented people to create art that's meaningful and impactful.

Q: Can you share a project that has been particularly meaningful for you?

One of the most rewarding projects I've worked on was with documentary filmmaker Ashley Avis on her film, *Wild Beauty: Mustang Spirit of the West*. I initially collaborated with her on a trailer while I was at a previous company, and when I started my own firm, she wanted to continue working together. She was doing a major Oscar push for the film while also putting



together presentations to advocate for change at the congressional level. Working on that film felt like more than just a campaign about the mistreatment of wild horses and land health in the American West—it was an opportunity to create content that could inspire social change. It's one thing to take a project from script to screen, but it's something else entirely when that work becomes a catalyst for real world action.

Q: What's the most fulfilling aspect of your work?

I've always had a deep love for movies and the art of filmmaking, so being able to do something that's such an intrinsic part of who I am every day is incredibly rewarding. Filmmakers have poured years of their lives into these projects and being able to help them bring their vision to life to connect with mass audiences is a privilege that I don't take lightly. With the film industry in a constant state of change, I'm passionate about building a community that helps creatives navigate these shifting landscapes in new and non-traditional ways; finding innovative and supporting paths forward together as my company continues to grow.

DYLAN WALKER

CEO & Founder

Dylan Walker, CEO and founder of Walker Advisory, LLC, is a seasoned accounting professional who has built a stellar reputation in the financial world. Drawing on a wealth of expertise gained from prestigious roles within Big 4 firms and regional accounting companies, Dylan excels in guiding both billion-dollar corporations and agile small businesses through the complexities of financial management. His areas of specialization include fractional CFO services, advanced tax planning for high-net-worth individuals, and comprehensive bookkeeping solutions.

Dylan's greatest professional accomplishment speaks volumes about his drive and expertise. In just 17 months, he grew an accounting firm from \$0 to \$1.7 million in revenue, demonstrating not only his strategic acumen, but also his ability to deliver results that matter. His impressive track record is further backed by his academic achievements—he holds both a master's and a bachelor's in accounting, and he is a certified CPA.

Founded in 2023 and headquartered in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, Walker Advisory has quickly established itself as a modern, forward-thinking accounting firm. Offering subscription-based services, the firm provides everything from bookkeeping and tax planning to controller and CFO advisory solutions. What sets Walker Advisory apart is its commitment to immersing itself in clients' business processes, delivering actionable insights that drive profitability and growth. From startups to mid-sized companies with \$50 million in revenue, Walker Advisory has successfully served hundreds of clients across the country.

Dylan's leadership is defined by his commitment to excellence and his deep understanding of the financial needs of diverse businesses. His ability to navigate complex financial landscapes, coupled with his hands-on approach, has solidified Walker Advisory as a trusted partner for companies looking to elevate their financial strategies.

We spoke with Dylan to delve into the story behind Walker Advisory, explore the inspiration that led him to start the company, and discover how it's setting new standards as a leader in the financial advisory sector.

Dylan, what inspired you to start Walker Advisory?

My biggest inspiration has always been my family. I was raised by a single mother after my father passed away from cancer when I was just 10. That experience shaped my determination to use my skills to provide for my family and give my children

the opportunities I didn't have growing up. Beyond that, I also run a nonprofit foundation that raises funds to support single-parent households. This mission is close to my heart because I understand the challenges they face.

Before founding Walker Advisory, I had the privilege of working at Big 4 accounting firms and managing smaller, regional firms. But I realized that my true vision was to use my expertise to help other families and business owners build generational wealth, just as I am doing for my own family. I see so many hardworking people striving to give their families a better life, and I wanted to create a way for us all to do it together—supporting each other and building a thriving community. That's why I started Walker Advisory: to help families and businesses grow, succeed, and secure a prosperous future for themselves and their communities.

The financial service market is a saturated and competitive one. How does Walker Advisory distinguish itself? How is it unique?

What sets us apart is our subscription-based model and hands-on approach. This allows us to offer consistent, ongoing services to our clients rather than just transactional, once-a-year support. While many firms handle accounting and tax compliance, we focus on building long-term relationships through regular monthly meetings and quarterly tax planning calls. This proactive approach lets us dive deeper into our clients' businesses, providing valuable insights that help guide their decision-making.

We don't see ourselves as just a compliance firm—we aim to be a trusted advisor throughout the entire lifespan of the business, supporting our clients as they grow and navigate challenges. Another key difference is our flat-fee pricing. Instead of charging by the hour, we offer a clear, predictable fee structure, so clients always know what to expect. This transparency, combined with our focus on personalized advisory, is what truly makes Walker Advisory unique.

Can you tell us more about your subscription model and how it works?

Our subscription model is designed to offer tailored, consistent support based on the needs of our clients, whether they're larger companies with complex requirements or smaller businesses looking for reliable guidance. For our bigger clients, we provide customized services that address the specific challenges of their industry, working closely with them to determine the best approach.



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LI: Dylan Walker, CPA

For small business clients—typically those with \$500,000 to \$2.5 million in revenue—we recognize that a single owner often wears many hats, and accounting or bookkeeping can be overwhelming. We step in to manage those aspects or review their bookkeeping monthly, taking a proactive role beyond just categorizing transactions.

Every month, we provide a Financial Highlight Dashboard that outlines key metrics, showing how the business is performing. For example, it might highlight a 10% increase in revenue, a 5% reduction in expenses, or the impact of a new initiative, like raising fees, on overall income. Clients can track and compare this data month-to-month and against their budget, which we also help create and review.

During our monthly meetings, we go over the financial dashboard, assess key metrics, and discuss the budget, giving clients a clear picture of their profitability and areas for adjustment. This hands-on approach helps them understand where they might need to cut costs or invest more, enabling them to focus on what they do best while continuing to grow their business. Our goal is to provide actionable insights that drive success, all within a transparent, flat-fee structure so clients always know what to expect.

Can you share a story of a client who benefited from your assistance?

One of our clients was a kitchen designer who had built a profitable business but ran into trouble when he expanded too quickly. The rapid growth led to a decline in quality because he had to hire more staff without sufficient time to properly train them. What had been a thriving, profitable business suddenly turned into one that was losing money.

We stepped in to conduct a thorough analysis of his operations and quickly identified the main issue: the lack of time to properly train his growing team, along with other inefficiencies. Our recommendation was to downsize and focus on taking on only the most profitable projects. We also advised him to adopt a more formula-driven approach for any future expansion, ensuring he could grow at a sustainable pace without sacrificing quality.

Following our advice, he streamlined his business, reducing revenue from \$2.1 million to \$1.4 million. However, by focusing on high-margin projects and efficient operations, we were able to boost his profitability by over \$200,000. It's a great example of how the right strategy can turn things around, even if it means scaling back to set the stage for sustainable growth.



You're also committed to helping families through your nonprofit, the Scott T. Walker Foundation. Can you tell us more about this?

I founded the Scott T. Walker Foundation in 2021 in honor of my father, who was an incredibly faithful and selfless man. He always put family and others above himself, and I strive to carry on that legacy. My father passed away from cancer at just 42, leaving a profound impact on our family. I was 10 at the time, and my brother was 8, so we were raised by our single mother. His passing inspired us to create a way to keep his spirit of selflessness alive.

Our mission at the foundation is to support single-parent households, helping them navigate the financial challenges they face. We assist a few families each year with essential needs like rent, car payments, school supplies, and more. While we're proud of what we've accomplished, our vision is to expand so that we can make a difference for even more families. Ultimately, it's about continuing my father's legacy by extending the same kindness and support he always showed to others.



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Our purpose is to demonstrate that work can enrich life, enabling individuals to pursue their passions, find joy in their endeavors, and reclaim the time to do what truly matters to them.

”

Meet **JACKIE MORCK**

Co-Founder & COO

In today's fast-paced world, time is the ultimate commodity. Every professional understands the constant struggle to balance work commitments with personal aspirations. But what if there was a solution that not only liberated precious hours, but also empowered individuals to seize control of their lives? Meet Ocean, the game-changer in the realm of AI-powered virtual assistants.

Jackie Morck, Ocean's co-founder and COO, understands today's cultural landscape—a contemporary blend of work-life balance that starkly contrasts with the outdated norms of the past decade. And, with a background spanning product development, brand strategy, and user experience, she's giving people something that's not often attainable—time.

At Ocean, Jackie's vision transcends mere task management. It's about reshaping the way we perceive time and productivity. “Almost all professionals undervalue their own time,” Jackie asserts. By leveraging Ocean's sophisticated algorithms, individuals can accurately assess the true value of their time and make informed decisions about task delegation. It's not just about reclaiming hours; it's about reclaiming control over one's life.

Jackie's track record speaks volumes about her proficiency. She's spearheaded the turnaround of numerous startups, catalyzing unprecedented growth and revenue surges. From transforming substantial losses into six-figure gains to doubling revenues within months, Jackie's strategic acumen is unparalleled. Yet, her focus extends beyond financial metrics. She's a staunch advocate for nurturing company cultures grounded in teamwork, empathy, and integrity, empowering employees to chart their own paths to success.

Prior to her role at Ocean, Jackie was the visionary behind Carrot, an innovative platform revolutionizing cannabis retail. Under her guidance, Carrot accelerated profitability by optimizing operations and enhancing customer engagement—a testament to Jackie's multidimensional expertise.

Jackie's educational background—a fusion of cognitive psychology and environmental design—underscores her holistic approach to problem-solving. It's this unique perspective that fuels her passion for reshaping the way individuals engage with the world. Further, as the president of the Nevada Technology Association and an advisory board member for Tech Impact, Jackie remains at the forefront of industry advocacy, driving meaningful change at both regional and national levels.

In this Q&A, we delve into Jackie's insights and expertise to discover firsthand how AI-powered virtual assistants are reshaping the way professionals conduct business.

Jackie, can you tell us what inspired you to start Ocean at this point in your career?

The inspiration behind Ocean stems from a profound belief in the transformative power of embracing the journey itself, rather than fixating solely on outcomes. As an entrepreneur, I've come to realize that true fulfillment comes from a deep love for the craft—the daily interactions, tasks, and goals that drive us forward. It's about having agency over every aspect of our work and lives. Yet, this holistic perspective is often overlooked in entrepreneurial narratives.

Having witnessed firsthand the struggles of small business owners and the personal toll it can have, I recognized a glaring gap in the conversation surrounding entrepreneurship—a lack of emphasis on building both successful businesses *and* fulfilling lives. Through years of experience in tech and architecture, I've seen myriad business configurations, none of which truly embodied this balance.

Embarking on a personal mission to redefine the intersection of work and life, I saw an opportunity to lead the shift towards a more universal approach. Ocean isn't just about creating a product; it's about enabling others to explore self-discovery and fulfillment. We're at the forefront of a movement aimed at empowering individuals to create businesses that align with their passions and values, ultimately fostering healthier, happier lives.

Just how Ocean came to be is an interesting story. You left Carrot, another thriving company you had started, because you were so excited by the idea of it, is that right?

Absolutely. The genesis of Ocean intertwines with a broader societal shift, particularly accelerated by the upheavals of the COVID era. There's been a palpable awakening—a collective questioning of our pursuits and priorities, driven by a deeper quest for fulfillment and happiness. It's akin to a modern-day Renaissance. My journey, alongside my fiancé and Ocean co-founder, Ro, mirrors this transformative period. As entrepreneurs, we found ourselves pondering how to craft lives infused with joy and purpose. When Ro identified a compelling business opportunity aligned with our personal aspirations, he took the leap and left his current venture to pursue it. His vision resonated deeply with me, and I eagerly joined him, leaving behind my own thriving venture to co-found Ocean.

Ocean is harnessing cutting-edge technology and AI to help business owners and entrepreneurs thrive and live the life they envisioned. What makes your model so unique?

At Ocean, we recognize that successful business operations require innovation across three crucial components—operations, technology, and culture. Our approach revolutionizes each of these areas in a distinct manner, setting us apart in the industry.



“ At Ocean, we recognize that successful business operations require innovation across three crucial components—operations, technology, and culture. Our approach revolutionizes each of these areas in a distinct manner, setting us apart in the industry.

In operations, we've pioneered the use of AI-powered virtual assistants capable of learning from video instructions and generating their own training guides. This transformative technology not only streamlines onboarding processes but also positions businesses at the forefront of operational efficiency and adaptability.

When it comes to technology, we leverage the latest AI advancements to empower our clients to optimize their time effectively. Through self-learning assistants, our model transcends traditional outsourcing by providing a dynamic and self-sufficient workforce that evolves alongside your business.

However, our innovation doesn't stop there. We're equally committed to revolutionizing the cultural landscape of work. Unlike traditional outsourcing models that often impose rigid structures and constraints on workers, our mission at Ocean extends to our crew members' well-being. We prioritize flexibility, offering fully remote work options and benefits like unlimited PTO. By focusing on the happiness and autonomy of our crew, we're reshaping the outsourcing industry from within.

Ultimately, Ocean embodies more than just a suite of services—it represents freedom and fulfillment. Our purpose is to demonstrate that work can enrich life, enabling individuals to pursue their passions, find joy in their endeavors, and reclaim the time to do what truly matters to them.

Lastly, Jackie, what do you enjoy most about your work?

What excites me the most is the creative freedom to apply and expand upon the diverse knowledge and experiences I've accumulated throughout my career. From my background in social work to architecture, I've gained insights into how people interact with both physical and digital environments. Being able to leverage this multidimensional understanding within Ocean is incredibly fulfilling. It's rare to have the opportunity to seamlessly integrate such diverse expertise, and I find immense joy in being able to do so every day.



ED VARGAS

PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

In the ever-evolving landscape of leadership, impact, and social change, few names resonate as powerfully as Ed Vargas. As president and founder of Vargas and Associates LLC, he has dedicated his career to fostering meaningful collaborations that unite corporate groups, nonprofits, and government agencies to drive lasting societal change. Now, he's taking that mission to an even broader stage with his new TV series, *Champions of Change*, premiering March 2025, on expandi TV. This groundbreaking coaching series is designed to equip leaders, entrepreneurs, and advocates with real-world strategies, expert insights, and hands-on coaching to transform organizations and communities.

A Life Defined by Purpose

Ed's journey is extraordinary. While in high school, he was offered a full scholarship to play football at Saint Mary's College, but a knee injury that required surgery led to a pulmonary embolism. Facing 36 harrowing hours in the hospital, he made a pact with himself: If he survived, he would dedicate his life to three goals—becoming a senior executive by age 30, working in international business, and paying it forward for the rest of his life.

After getting his B.S.C. and J.D. from Santa Clara University, Ed achieved his first goal. He became vp of sales and marketing at his second packaging company, steering the business through a recession, increasing profitability and expanding its operations. He met his second goal when he was recruited to be an editor, publisher, and conference director for an international B2B publishing group. His third goal—giving back—is his life's mission. At AT&T he helped start the HACEMOS ERG's High Tech Day, STEM workshops for high school students. HACEMOS has awarded over \$4.5 million in scholarships. He has led nonprofits and is a mentor at the Miller Center for Social Entrepreneurship and mentors young professionals at Conectado.com. Ed has been a tireless advocate for underserved communities.

A Catalyst for Social Impact

Founded in 2024 in the San Francisco Bay Area, Vargas and Associates LLC is the embodiment of Ed's commitment to meaningful, strategic collaboration. The firm specializes in forging partnerships between corporate employee groups, nonprofits, community leaders, and government agencies to amplify social impact.

One of his most notable achievements is his role in initiating a \$42 million senior farmworker affordable housing project. He created the presentation to the City of Half Moon Bay for the nonprofit, Ayudando Latinos a Soñar. The ENA with the City has Mercy Housing of CA as the developer to secure tax credits and Serna Funds, ensuring that the rent remains affordable for farmworkers earning \$25,000 annually. This model is replicable and scalable, a testament to Ed's belief in sharing best practices to maximize community impact.

In 2024, Ed expanded his reach as president of the DIVINA WORLD Foundation, launching the inaugural Unity, Advocacy, and Impact Summit during Native American Heritage Month. By bringing together corporate groups, nonprofit leaders, and San Jose City government agencies, he created a platform to exchange knowledge, resources, and strategies to drive systemic change.

The Power of Ikigai

During a B2B conference he created in Tokyo, Ed's journey with Ikigai—the Japanese philosophy of finding one's purpose—began. This profound concept forms the foundation of his coaching series. "I've been practicing aspects of Ikigai for years, but I can only reach so many people in person," Ed explains. "This series allows me to scale that impact, helping individuals discover their *WHY*, achieve balance, and contribute to what the world truly needs."

Keynote Speaker and Thought Leader

Ed is a sought-after speaker, delivering compelling, actionable insights that inspire audiences to take tangible steps toward social and organizational change. Infused with personal anecdotes, leadership strategies, and even his love for music—he plays guitar and sings in cover bands—Ed's presentations are as engaging as they are enlightening. "I believe that music is a superpower that transcends cultures, languages, and generations to connect people on a deeper level."

Through his consultancy, speaking engagements, and now *Champions of Change*, Ed is on a mission to become a TEDx speaker, further amplifying his impact. His ability to share innovative strategies, and foster collaboration makes him an undeniable force for good in today's world.

The Future of Vargas and Associates

Now more than ever, America is facing polarization on key issues. Ed believes that leadership and communication skills are essential to bridging divides and creating positive change. His core belief is credibility builds trust, trust builds strong, lasting relationships and if you give respect, you get respect. Whether he's consulting on social responsibility initiatives, leading summits, or mentoring the next generation of leaders, Ed is unwavering in his commitment to making a difference.

As he partners with Camille Garick, founder of expandi TV, to launch his coaching channel, Ed's vision for *Champions of Change* is clear: "Go beyond successful silos by sharing best practices with corporate employee groups, nonprofits,



community leaders and government agencies to share knowledge, resources to scale up greater positive impact. That's my mission—to be the catalyst for change, to empower others to take action, and to show that when we work together, the possibilities are limitless."

For those looking to be part of the movement, *Champions of Change* offers more than just inspiration—it offers a roadmap to action. Whether through his series, keynotes, or consultancy, Ed Vargas is leading the charge toward a more collaborative, impactful future—one where everyone has the tools to make a meaningful difference.



Vargas and Associates LLC

EMPOWERING SOCIAL INNOVATION

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expandi TV: <https://expandi.tv/authors/author-ed-vargas>

LESLEY NORTHROP

PhD, FACMG | Founder



Lesley Northrop, PhD, is a pioneering force in women's healthcare diagnostics. As the founder of LDGI, LLC, she has dedicated her career to shaping the future of women's healthcare with transformative diagnostic solutions. With over two decades of experience in clinical diagnostic operations, Dr. Northrop has guided companies from ideation to commercialization, achieving regulatory compliance and delivering market-changing innovations.

Dr. Northrop's reputation as a thought leader, strategist, and agile innovator is backed by a remarkable early history of groundbreaking achievements. She was the first to characterize the reproductive cycle of endangered species such as the Giant and Red Pandas and to establish a neuroendocrine memory system in rats to model human brain degenerative disorders. Dr. Northrop also redefined reproductive infertility technology through comprehensive embryo genomic signature assessments, developed a third-generation ovarian cancer diagnostic test, and built a biomarker discovery platform to identify unique multi-omic targets for women's health conditions, including Endometriosis.

As the former chief diagnostic officer at Everly Health, and previously as the chief scientific officer at Aspira Women's Health and SVP of Clinical Genomics at Celmatix, Dr. Northrop has proven her ability to turn complex research into practical, life-changing applications. At LDGI, founded in 2016 and headquartered in New York, NY, she continues to set the bar for excellence in laboratory diagnostics and genomics innovation.

Dr. Northrop's accolades include a \$1 million BIRD grant and groundbreaking publications in top journals, such as the *Journal of Clinical Cancer* and *Molecular Human Reproduction*. Her scientific contributions extend to authoring a chapter on the reproduction of the Red Panda in *The Forgotten Panda: The Biology and Conservation of the Red Panda*. Certified as a fellow of the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics, Dr. Northrop's expertise and leadership have secured licenses for ten net-new clinically regulated laboratories.

LDGI's deep industry knowledge and strategic approach have made it a trusted partner for healthcare providers and investment firms seeking to advance diagnostic capabilities in an ever-evolving genomic landscape. Dr. Northrop's work not only pushes the boundaries of science, but lights the way for the next generation of diagnostic breakthroughs. Her newest endeavor, the *Diagnostic Guru* podcast, highlights the complicated career journeys of women in science, elevating their successes, and normalizing the good, the bad, and the ugly along the way.

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I'm a bit of a chameleon—I have a natural ability to adapt to different environments and teams, which allows me to bridge functional gaps and bring diverse groups into alignment.

“What I enjoy most is being part of a strong team that’s aligned and working together toward a common goal. Innovation is incredibly rewarding, but it’s the collaboration and shared sense of purpose that make it truly fulfilling.”

We spoke with Lesley to learn more about her background and the intricacies of LDGI.

Lesley, you took a rather unique path to the genetics field. Can you share a bit about your background?

My career began in reproductive genetics, where I focused on species survival and addressing infertility in endangered animals. I mapped the ovulatory cycle of the giant panda and red panda, during my time as a research scientist at the San Diego Zoo, played a key role in the first successful giant panda birth in the U.S. I also collaborated with China’s breeding program and worked with other species like Red Pandas and tigers. In 2006, after reading *The Baby Business*, I became intrigued by IVF and the human genome was sequenced. I wanted to start to apply this new diagnostic technology to embryo ploidy status, which led me to pursue a postdoc in fertility. There, I helped pioneer techniques to screen all chromosomes for genetic disorders, such as Down Syndrome and Cystic Fibrosis. That transformative work ultimately steered me into the field of clinical diagnostics and genetics, where I continue to focus on advancing reproductive health.

What inspired you to start LDGI?

While working at a startup that was closing, I found myself helping to sell off different components of the business. During that process, several people asked if I could assist them in developing their own diagnostic tests and bringing them to market. I hadn’t considered starting my own business before, but I realized that my unique expertise was highly sought after—companies didn’t necessarily need a full-time hire but valued having someone like me on-call. That’s when I launched LDGI. Since then, it’s been a rewarding journey. Some clients come to me for one-time projects, while others continue to partner with LDGI as they grow, relying on my guidance across various stages of their business.

What services do you provide?

I work with startups and biotech companies looking to bring diagnostic tests to market. They typically bring me in when they have a new product or at ideation and need guidance on how to get it commercialized. I support them

through every stage—from ideation and development to full clinical validation and commercialization. My services span multiple areas: I help design and develop the test, navigate regulatory requirements to ensure compliance, build out laboratory operations, and manage projects to keep them on track. I also assist with commercialization strategies, serving as an advisor and expert voice to present their tests to clinicians and clients, lending credibility. Additionally, financial firms hire me to conduct scientific due diligence on companies they’re considering investing in, evaluating the ROI of new technologies and their potential impact on healthcare.

What makes you unique?

I’m a bit of a chameleon—I have a natural ability to adapt to different environments and teams, which allows me to bridge functional gaps and bring diverse groups into alignment. My scientific background shapes my approach; I’m always thinking in terms of hypotheses and experiments, carefully analyzing each step. I’ve translated that mindset into the business world, ensuring that every strategy and decision is thoroughly vetted so that everyone is on the same page and moving toward a common goal.

Can you share an example of a company you helped?

One example is Biotia, a genomics company using AI to identify infectious diseases. When I first connected with them, they were just starting out. I helped set up their lab, establish proper validation protocols, and navigate the complex process of obtaining approvals from New York State and the FDA. During COVID, they successfully secured THE first FDA-EUA for COVID-19 variant detection software. It’s been rewarding to see their progress, and I continue to support them as an advisor whenever needed.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

What I enjoy most is being part of a strong team that’s aligned and working together toward a common goal. Innovation is incredibly rewarding, but it’s the collaboration and shared sense of purpose that make it truly fulfilling. Seeing a dedicated team come together to achieve something impactful is what makes all the hard work worthwhile.



C O N T A C T

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LI: Lesley Northrop, PhD, FACMG

Adrienne Tichy

Founder & CEO



For Adrienne Tichy, the fight against addiction is deeply personal. With 16 years on the front lines of addiction recovery and three decades of experience in critical illness recovery, Adrienne's journey has been one of resilience, compassion, and groundbreaking innovation. Her first recovery residence, The Lodge at Delray Beach, established in 2008, became a beacon of hope for countless individuals seeking sustained sobriety. Known as a "champion for the marginalized," Adrienne transformed the recovery landscape, blending high-touch care with high-impact results.

Today, Adrienne's vision extends beyond brick-and-mortar facilities through her revolutionary program, Recovery Comes Home. This Delray Beach-based initiative redefines addiction treatment by delivering personalized, home-based recovery solutions for high-achieving professionals. Combining low-tech platforms like Zoom with high-touch support—including direct access to Adrienne herself—this trauma-informed, holistic approach focuses on restoring not just the individual, but the family unit. It's a lifeline for those seeking privacy, flexibility, and shame-free healing.

As a certified Recovery Coach Academy (RCP) practitioner and FARR-certified professional, Adrienne blends her expertise with her lived experience. A sought-after advocate and speaker, she challenges the status quo, addressing addiction's evolving face in high-stakes environments.

We spoke with Adrienne to learn more about her groundbreaking approach to addiction recovery and the passion that drives her mission.

Adrienne, you feel strongly that addiction is not just an individual problem but a community issue. Can you share your perspective on this?

As a society, we're reaching for more ways to escape because we're struggling to cope. Since COVID, we've seen a 40% increase in alcoholism, addiction, suicide, and mental health issues. Gambling addiction has also skyrocketed. Yet, despite these alarming trends, people still pass judgment on those struggling with addiction, viewing it as an individual failure rather than recognizing it as a community issue.

The face of addiction is not what many imagine—it's not the person living on the streets or the heroin user in an alley. That outdated stereotype has been irrelevant for a long time. Addiction is subtle, insidious, and doesn't look like what we think. It's doctors, lawyers, and professionals in suits. Addiction does not discriminate. It's everywhere, and until we shift our collective mindset and stop the stigma, we'll continue to overlook the true scope of the problem.

Changing the way society views addiction is crucial, not just for those struggling but for the health of our communities as a whole. This is not an individual fight; it's a collective one.

What inspired you to start Recovery Comes Home?

I knew there had to be a better way than the endless cycle of detox, treatment, going home, relapsing, and starting over. Tragically, we've lost far too many people to this revolving door. For me, this isn't just a job—it's a calling. When I opened The Lodge at Delray Beach in 2008, my goal was to revolutionize recovery. By 2015, we had expanded to 10 recovery homes and built a rock-solid reputation for compassionate, effective care. But, one statistic haunted me: 80% of people who graduate from addiction treatment go back home, and most relapse without ongoing support. This is especially true for high-performing professionals, executives, first responders, athletes, and coaches. These individuals face immense challenges in balancing recovery with demanding careers, often returning home with a lingering question: "Now what?"

That's why I created Recovery Comes Home. It's designed to meet them where they are, literally and figuratively. We provide personalized, hands-on support to ensure they don't have to navigate this alone. Whether it's a first responder, a C-suite executive, or a coach, we hold their hand and say, "We'll do this with you." Recovery Comes Home is about bridging the gap between treatment and real life, empowering individuals to heal while maintaining their professional and personal responsibilities.

What makes Recovery Comes Home unique?

Recovery Comes Home stands out because of its highly personalized and holistic approach, meeting individuals exactly where they are—physically and emotionally—and staying with them for a year or more. The program begins with a two-hour assessment to understand each person's circumstances and goals, leading to a customized recovery plan guided by the Recovery COMPASS framework. This framework addresses seven key areas: circumstances, occupation, mentoring, physical health, aspiration, social connections, and spirituality.

What sets us apart is not just the individual support we provide, but also the focus on family healing. Our tagline says it all: "Connecting families impacted by addiction as they heal together." Families are included in biweekly meetings, and both clients and their families have unlimited phone and email access to us. Addiction doesn't have regular hours, and neither do we. Teaching families how to communicate effectively is a cornerstone of our program, reinforced by The Lodge family Zoom meetings held on the last Saturday of every month.



Our tagline says it all:
“Connecting families impacted by
addiction as they heal together.”

Our approach includes daily group meditation, weekly one-on-one calls, and biweekly team meetings with doctors, therapists, and families to ensure progress. Each month focuses on a different aspect of recovery, starting with occupation and finances, followed by mentoring and service—critical for healing by helping others. Physical health, aspirations, and social and spiritual connections are also key components, helping individuals align their lives with personal passions and values. After six months, we reassess, refine goals, and repeat the process for continued growth.

Another unique feature is our in-home breathalyzer system with facial recognition. We text clients with a 45-minute window to complete the test. If results show zero, they're on the right track. If not, we have a different conversation. This accountability, combined with comprehensive support, ensures our clients have the tools they need to succeed.

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DONALD "DJ" HART



Founder & Director

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I became committed to educating doctors, nursing home operators, and healthcare providers on how we could reduce rehospitalizations caused by adverse drug reactions.



CONTACT: www.telospgx.com | dj@telospgx.com
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Donald “DJ” Hart isn’t just transforming healthcare—he’s redefining its very foundation. With over two decades in the healthcare and post-acute sectors, DJ saw a glaring gap in personalized medicine and had the vision, strategy, and tenacity to fill it. In 2023, he founded Telos PGX, a cutting-edge pharmacogenomics (PGX) company based in Addison, Texas, dedicated to optimizing drug therapy through genetic insights. But DJ didn’t just build a company—he built a movement.

Thirteen months after launching Telos PGX, DJ successfully scaled, sold, and secured—divesting the company to Principle Health Systems while retaining leadership as director of pharmacogenetics. For most, an acquisition signals an exit, but for DJ, it marked a launchpad. Principle Health Systems didn’t just acquire a business; they aligned with a visionary leader whose mission was already shaping the future of patient care. “Being able to envision it, grow it, sell it, and still lead it at a national scale is an incredible honor,” DJ shares. “This wasn’t just a business deal—it was the perfect fusion of values, innovation, and impact.”

PGX—the study of how genetics influence drug response—is revolutionizing healthcare through precision medicine, and Telos PGX is at the forefront. By leveraging advanced genetic testing, the company helps healthcare providers match the right drug to the right patient at the right dose, reducing adverse reactions and optimizing treatment outcomes.

But DJ’s proudest accomplishment isn’t just scientific—it’s people-driven. “I’ve built a culture of leaders who push for excellence,” he says. “Without them, none of this would have been possible.” And now, with Principle Health Systems as the jet fuel, Telos PGX is set to expand nationwide, bringing its game-changing solutions to facilities across the country.

From startup to scale-up, DJ Hart isn’t just making waves—he’s shaping the future of healthcare through innovation in PGX. We sat down with him to discuss how Telos PGX and Principle Health Systems are transforming patient care with cutting-edge testing.

DJ, can you tell us what inspired you to start Telos PGX?

I saw a critical gap in post-acute long-term care, particularly in nursing homes where patients lacked access to modern testing. While you and I could afford it, this underserved community was being left behind. I built Telos PGX to change that. Helping

others has always been in my DNA—my father started an outreach ministry for the homeless in Dallas, and I grew up immersed in service and impact. My career in healthcare sales fueled this passion, but as an employee, my ability to effect change was limited. In 2018, I took a leap into entrepreneurship, acquiring various healthcare entities. Some ventures failed, others thrived, but each lesson sharpened my vision.

I spent eight years in Houston working with podiatrists before shifting to the post-acute sector in Dallas-Fort Worth. There, I discovered a deep connection to serving the elderly and in 2019 I saw the transformative potential of pharmacogenetics. The outdated model of “Take this medication and see how you feel” was no longer acceptable. PGX guides providers toward targeted, effective treatments. I became committed to educating doctors, nursing home operators, and healthcare providers on how we could reduce rehospitalizations caused by adverse drug reactions. Telos PGX was founded with one mission: to revolutionize patient care through genetic-driven medication management—a mission that continues to drive me today.

What makes Telos PGX unique?

PGX is a rapidly evolving field, revolutionizing how medications are prescribed. Traditionally, medicine follows a trial-and-error approach: “Take this pill and let me know how it works.” But with over 2 million adverse drug reactions (ADRs) annually in the U.S., leading to 100,000 deaths, this approach is outdated and risky.

We’ve also unlocked access to personalized medicine for an entire demographic that was previously underserved. The reality is, a drug that works for one person may not work for another, yet traditional medicine often takes a one-size-fits-all approach. Telos PGX is changing that. When PGX testing is integrated into healthcare systems, we ensure that medications are tailored to each individual, making treatments safer and more effective.

What sets Telos PGX apart—and the key to our success—is our proprietary Telos PGX program, developed through direct partnerships with nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Unlike any other lab in the nation, we don’t just provide PGX testing—we embed ourselves within these facilities, working with payors & alongside healthcare teams to improve patient outcomes in real time. This hands-on approach is what truly differentiates us. No other lab can offer this PGX program, which is why it caught the attention of Principle Health. They saw the tangible impact we were making in healthcare and wanted to bring this innovation under their umbrella.

Now you’re leading Telos PGX as Principle Health Systems’ director of pharmacogenetics. Why was it important to you to stay on?

I didn’t need to sell the company, but my vision was always to scale Telos nationally and impact as many lives as possible. Principle Health Systems provided the opportunity to take that vision further, offering the resources to grow exponentially



“ When PGX testing is integrated into healthcare systems, we ensure that medications are tailored to each individual, making treatments safer and more effective.

while maintaining the mission that started it all. Our cultures and goals aligned seamlessly. They saw the value in what we built and wanted me to continue leading Telos within their organization. Retaining an equitable stake in PHS allows me to drive each of our visions forward, expanding Telos PGX in ways that wouldn’t have been possible alone.

Our time on this earth is finite. What matters most is the impact we make, the people we help, and the legacy we leave behind. Staying on means I get to keep doing what I love—changing lives through pharmacogenetics and advancing healthcare for the better.

What do you enjoy most about your work? Or what continues to drive you?

The relentless pursuit of improving people’s lives. What drives me is seeing real results—the tangible impact on patients’ health and the positive changes we help create. It’s the continued success stories, the breakthroughs, and knowing that persistence and determination are making a real difference in healthcare.

Leslie Wootton & Paul Kirschbaum



Leslie Wootton, Co-Founder & Partner



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Leslie Wootton and Paul Kirschbaum are not just hospitality veterans—they are industry innovators. With nearly two decades of experience each, their careers have been defined by their commitment to excellence, passion for service, and an unrelenting drive to elevate the industry they love. Today, as partners and co-founders of 1033 Consulting, they are transforming the hospitality landscape, helping operators grow their businesses and thrive in a world that's constantly evolving.

Leslie Wootton's career began in Austin, TX, where he quickly made his mark by being involved in over 60 restaurant openings and hiring thousands of staff, managing teams of over 400 employees for new stores. His journey through operations, organizational development, training, and human resources has taken him across the globe, from Yellowstone to Disney, from Dallas to London. His expertise in team-building and operational efficiency has made him a sought-after leader in the industry.

Paul Kirschbaum's story begins in Northern Spain, where he started as a young apprentice before earning his bachelor's from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY, and a diploma in restaurant management from Le Cordon Bleu in Adelaide, Australia. His experience spans roles as a private chef, executive chef, restaurant manager, and eventually a director of food and beverage. His consulting expertise is vast, from menu optimization and technology implementation to leadership training and cost control, visiting over 200 restaurants a year.

In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, Leslie and Paul saw an opportunity. Eager to stay connected to the industry, they launched a podcast discussing hot-button topics like ghost kitchens, staffing challenges, and navigating local regulations. What started as a conversation soon became something much larger. A well-funded startup became their first client, and from there, 1033 Consulting was born. Their company, based in Virginia and Texas, expanded quickly, providing critical insights to restaurants and hotels, specializing in operational assessments and business growth strategies.

In just three short years, 1033 Consulting's growth has been nothing shy of meteoric. After landing their first client in 2021, they steadily gained momentum, with significant growth by 2023, when sales more than doubled the previous two years combined. By the end of Q2 2024, they had already matched the prior year's success, with new client opportunities lining up for an even bigger 2025.

Known for helping operators scale sustainably, 1033 Consulting has established itself as a dynamic force in the consulting world. They have become known for helping operators scale from one or two locations to five or more, building the HR and operational infrastructure to ensure sustainable growth.

Partnering with the City of Danville, VA, and collaborating with the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging, and Travel Association (VRLTA), they are now creating a hospitality and culinary center aimed at supporting local entrepreneurs and students. As Danville prepares for a tourism boom with the construction of a new Caesar's casino, Leslie and Paul are at the forefront, guiding local business owners to success.

In a candid Q&A session, Leslie and Paul discuss their journey in the hospitality industry, the unique approach they bring to their clients, and what drives their passion for helping businesses succeed.

What inspired you to start the company?

Leslie: In 2007, I hired Paul to work at a golf course steakhouse in San Antonio. Together, we designed the building, created the menu, and built a team to run the place. Like many restaurants, though, we struggled and eventually went our separate ways. Fast forward to the pandemic—we reconnected and asked ourselves, “What can we do to help these restaurants survive?” With our combined experience, we launched 1033 Consulting to support businesses through those tough times.

Paul: Back in our 20s, we made every possible mistake. That's what drove us to want to help small businesses avoid the same pitfalls. Often, it's the little things that owners may not know, and we realized we could bring in fresh ideas and insights that could make a big difference—helping them grow, be more efficient, and, ultimately, more profitable.

What makes 1033 Consulting unique?

Leslie: Our core philosophy is putting people first, and then figuring out how that can translate into ROI. Hospitality is all about people. Any technology or operational improvements we suggest are really just tools to help elevate the team. We believe that when an owner-operator is truly engaged with their staff, that staff, in turn, will be motivated to engage with guests, creating a better experience for everyone. We don't offer cookie-cutter solutions. When we meet with a client, we truly listen—to who they are, what they're aiming for, and what challenges they're facing. From there, we create a tailored plan. Whether that means designing an employee handbook, having Paul revamp their menu, or being on-site for eight weeks helping open a new location, we only provide solutions after we fully understand the business.



Paul Kirschbaum, Co-Founder & Partner

Paul: We don't just tell people what to do—we show them how to do it. Success comes from collaboration, so we try to be a mirror for our clients, encouraging them to ask questions and engage with us deeply. That way, we can pinpoint their real needs. Often, the issue they think they have isn't the real problem. For example, a client might come to us thinking their menu needs attention, but after digging deeper, we find out it's really their staffing that needs help and direction. It's all about asking the right questions to uncover the best path forward.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Paul: What drives me most is helping people. The hospitality industry is changing rapidly, and I enjoy helping operators realize that it's not just about the bottom line, but about taking care of their people. When you invest in your team, success usually follows.

Leslie: What I enjoy most is really getting to know our clients, listening to their stories, and helping them navigate the ever-evolving hospitality landscape. It's incredibly rewarding to help them build a culture that not only inspires their staff, but also creates long-term success for their business.



BRIAN MUENCH

PRESIDENT

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Our strong customer relationships, problem-solving approach, and decades of expertise also contribute to our reputation as a trusted packaging partner.

Brian Muench has established himself as a dynamic entrepreneur with a passion for packaging, product development, and business growth. As a triplet, he was raised in a competitive and fast-paced environment that instilled resilience, adaptability, and an entrepreneurial mindset. These qualities have played a crucial role in shaping his career, where he has successfully led multiple ventures within the packaging industry while also embarking on new entrepreneurial pursuits.

Triple M Packaging: Carrying Forward a Family Legacy

As the owner of Triple M Packaging, Brian leads a company originally founded by his father in 1984. Triple M Packaging operates as a manufacturers' representative company specializing in providing high-quality, cost-effective packaging solutions. The company has become a trusted intermediary between packaging manufacturers and businesses requiring top-tier packaging materials, particularly in the food service sector.

Based in Delray Beach, FL, Triple M Packaging has cemented its reputation in the custom manufacture of foodservice packaging, primarily serving supermarket chains. Now in its second generation of family leadership, the company benefits from the extensive expertise of its president, Brian Muench, who brings decades of industry experience.

Under Brian's leadership, the company has expanded its reach, refined its service offerings, and maintained its core values of integrity, reliability, and customer satisfaction.

Pure Packaging: Custom Solutions for the Food Industry

Building on his extensive industry knowledge, Brian co-founded Pure Packaging in 2016 alongside partners Dan Guill and Erik Rofe. The company specializes in custom food service packaging, catering to supermarkets, food processors, and restaurants. Focused on product development and sales, Pure Packaging collaborates with clients to create innovative packaging solutions that enhance product appeal, functionality, and sustainability. The company is known for its quick turnaround in prototyping and delivering custom-finished products, a testament to its innovative approach and problem-solving mentality.

Brian's leadership and strategic insight have fueled Pure Packaging's growth, helping the company stay ahead of industry trends. His ability to optimize supply chains and develop strong partnerships has positioned Pure Packaging as a key player in the food service packaging market, ensuring that it continues to offer cutting-edge solutions tailored to the evolving needs of customers.

Balancing Business and Family

Beyond his entrepreneurial achievements, Brian is a devoted father to three children—Nora, born in 2019, and twin boys, Henry and George, born in 2021. Juggling his thriving business ventures with the responsibilities of fatherhood, he values time spent with his family and draws inspiration from the challenges and rewards of both entrepreneurship and parenthood.

With a clear vision for the future, Brian remains committed to expanding his businesses, embracing innovation, and making a lasting impact in the packaging industry. His journey exemplifies the power of entrepreneurship, adaptability, and dedication, positioning him as a leader whose influence will endure for generations to come.

Brian, what inspired you to follow in your father's footsteps and take over Triple M Packaging?

My deep appreciation for the packaging industry stems from my father's influence and the foundational values instilled in him from a young age. He recognized the importance of maintaining and expanding the family business while integrating modern strategies to keep it competitive in today's market.

What sets Triple M Packaging apart from other companies in the industry?

Triple M Packaging's ability to provide custom solutions with an unmatched speed of prototyping and delivery distinguishes it from competitors. Our strong customer relationships, problem-solving approach, and decades of expertise also contribute to our reputation as a trusted packaging partner.

What led you to co-found Pure Packaging?

Recognizing a gap in the market for innovative food service packaging solutions, my partners and I launched Pure Packaging to offer specialized, high-performance products tailored to supermarkets, food processors, and restaurants. The company's focus on sustainability and product development has been a driving force behind its success.

How do you balance being an entrepreneur and a father?

I prioritize my family and embrace the challenge of balancing fatherhood with business leadership. I believe that the discipline and problem-solving skills I have developed in my professional life translate well into parenting, allowing me to be present for my children while growing the businesses.

What's next for you and your companies?

I remain focused on continuing to expand Triple M Packaging and Pure Packaging. I'm always on the lookout for new opportunities to innovate, strengthen industry relationships, and create impactful solutions that meet evolving market demands.





CRISTOBAL CHAO

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Cristobal Chao, founder of Torii Studio, is redefining the digital product landscape by blending creativity and technical precision. A former Googler, software engineer, and UX specialist, Cristobal is passionate about building products that resonate deeply with users. “At Torii Studio, we don’t just create digital experiences; we craft products with soul,” he says.

From Google to Boutique Brilliance

Cristobal’s career began at Google, where he spent over six years as a front-end developer. There, he honed his expertise in scalable tools, user-friendly applications, and solid code bases. Before Google, he worked at Hattery Labs—a startup innovation lab, where he led engineering efforts until its acquisition by Google. These experiences shaped his vision for Torii Studio, which he founded in 2020 in New York.

“For me, Torii Studio closes the circle—working with startups, scaling innovations at Google, and now using that knowledge to help businesses of all sizes achieve their goals,” Cristobal reflects.

Crafting Products That Transform Businesses:

Torii Studio is a boutique innovation studio specializing in exceptional front-end experiences, scalable design systems, and intuitive user interfaces. Despite being a small studio, it has helped clients generate over \$300 million in revenue in just a few years. What makes Torii unique is its commitment to delivering “the total package.” As Cristobal explains, “You can have a site that looks great on the outside, but if the code is a mess, it won’t last long. At Torii, we ensure that our websites and apps are stunning from the outside and rock solid on the inside.”

The studio’s expertise spans startups to Fortune 500 companies, creating solutions that combine technical excellence with creative problem-solving. Whether it’s crafting interactive user interfaces, developing scalable design systems, or integrating AI-driven tools, Torii empowers businesses to accelerate innovation and achieve remarkable results.

Transformative Impact and Industry Recognition

Under Cristobal’s leadership, Torii Studio has driven digital transformation for its partners, enabling startups to scale, achieve successful acquisitions, or secure funding rounds. Some of its groundbreaking tools, like Torii Style and Storiiblocks, have enhanced team efficiency by bridging the gap between design and development workflows. The studio’s commitment to excellence has earned accolades, including *Top Software Development Agency* and *Top Creative and Design Agency* by Clutch, as well as *Best Innovation*, *Best UX*, and *Best UI* awards from CSS.

Passion for Transformation

What Cristobal loves most is witnessing transformation—both for his clients and within his team. “Seeing a partner’s outdated user interface evolve into something modern and engaging is incredibly rewarding. Internally, the challenge of bringing innovative ideas to life with cutting-edge technology pushes our limits and makes us proud of the results.”

For Cristobal Chao, Torii Studio is more than a business—it’s a way to give back. “I’ve taken all the lessons I learned at Google and beyond to help startups and mid-sized companies succeed. It’s about creating meaningful products that stand the test of time—beautiful on the outside and strong at the core.”

DERRICK CLARK

Business Development Manager

Derrick Clark, business development manager at DEAN Services, is a ten-year veteran in the oil and gas sector, where he drives innovation, growth, and strategic partnerships.

At DEAN Services, founded in 1992, Derrick's primary mission is to boost the company's revenue and expand its business footprint. DEAN Services offers a wide range of midstream construction, maintenance, and environmental services, with a specialized focus on pipeline and facility services. Their clients, including industry giants from the upstream, midstream, and downstream sectors of the oil and gas industry, rely on their team's adaptability and customer-driven approach to solve complex problems in real-time. And Derrick is at the heart of these partnerships, ensuring the company's continued success.

As a business development leader, Derrick is committed to finding new opportunities while maintaining strong relationships with existing clients. He's not just about increasing sales; his goal is to create sustained opportunities for both DEAN Services and its partners. His experience in entrepreneurship—having started his own oil field service company at the age of 28—gives him an edge in understanding the intricacies of running a business. Derrick and his business partner launched their first company with minimal financial backing and in just 14 months, were able to achieve their first goal of reaching seven figures in revenue. That drive and knowledge are exactly what attracted DEAN Services to bring Derrick on board.

"When Anthony from DEAN first approached me to consult, I was grateful for the opportunity. I knew I had some understanding of the business side beyond just sales and targets. Having the experience from starting my own company has really allowed me to appreciate the complexities of running and growing a business. It's been a valuable learning experience, and I'm continually grateful for the chance to deepen my business understanding."

Derrick's ability to navigate both the operational and sales aspects of the oil and gas sector makes him a valuable asset to DEAN Services. His extensive network is another key strength. "I've got a lot of connections in the industry," Derrick explains. "If I'm not the guy to help, I probably know someone who can, or I will at least make an effort to connect them to the right person." This resourcefulness



DEAN Services offers a wide range of midstream construction, maintenance, and environmental services, with a specialized focus on pipeline and facility services.

and willingness to help and figure things out—hallmarks of his entrepreneurial spirit—make him indispensable in an industry that is fast-paced and constantly evolving.

In addition to his role at DEAN, Derrick serves as a board member for the Permian Basin Association of Pipeliners and was previously awarded the prestigious title of *Outside Sales Representative of the Year* by Blueline Rental, a nationwide company. His accolades speak to his dedication and success within the industry.

Ultimately, Derrick thrives in the challenging, fast-moving world of oil and gas. "Nothing ever goes as planned," he says. "That's what makes it interesting. I love the challenges that come with it. Every day is an opportunity to find a solution, to figure out how to make it work."

Meet Dr. Irfan Atcha



CEO, Founder, and Lead Surgeon



His dedication to changing lives “one smile and one patient at a time” has established **New Teeth Chicago** as not just a dental center, but a life-changing institution where patients reclaim their smiles, self-esteem, and, ultimately, their lives.

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Dr. Irfan Atcha, a name synonymous with transformative dental care, stands at the forefront of implant dentistry in Chicago as the CEO, founder, and lead surgeon of New Teeth Chicago Dental Implant Center. With over 25 years of expertise, Dr. Atcha has become one of the most celebrated implant dentists in the U.S., revolutionizing patient experiences and outcomes with his meticulous approach to dental implants, restorations, and cosmetic procedures. His reputation extends beyond the city, attracting patients nationwide who seek the kind of life-changing solutions only his specialized care can provide.

New Teeth Chicago, founded in 2011, is no ordinary dental office. Dr. Atcha and his team focus on patients dealing with missing, broken, or deteriorated teeth who need more than just routine dental care—they need hope. The center has earned its stellar reputation by delivering full-mouth transformations that restore not only function and aesthetics, but also the confidence and quality of life that patients often thought they had lost forever. Each case is an opportunity for Dr. Atcha to bring his innovative, clinically proven techniques to the table, offering patients the possibility of a new beginning, often when they have been told elsewhere that their needs are too complex or costly.

Dr. Atcha’s passion lies in the personal connections he forms with his patients. He sees beyond the procedures and diagnoses, taking time to understand their unique stories and aspirations. This compassionate approach, combined with his technical prowess, fosters a genuine bond of trust, as patients know that they are receiving not just skilled care, but a dedicated partnership in their journey to recovery. Dr. Atcha delights in hearing stories of patients whose lives have transformed—better jobs, newfound social connections, even marriages—all made possible by the confidence that a restored smile brings.

New Teeth Chicago invests heavily in cutting-edge advancements to provide the best possible outcomes. This commitment to excellence has earned them not only a loyal patient base, but also a stream of referrals from those whose lives they have touched. With a name that resonates throughout the community, New Teeth Chicago has become a beacon of trust and hope for those seeking a permanent solution to dental issues.

In a world where medical interactions often feel impersonal, Dr. Atcha and his team strive to make every patient feel valued, approaching each case as though treating a family member. For many, the journey begins with doubt and ends with Dr. Atcha’s reassuring words, “We can do this. We’ve done this.” Upon walking through the center’s doors, most patients already feel a sense of confidence, having witnessed countless testimonials on social media from others who once faced the same challenges.

Dr. Atcha understands the deep impact that dental health has on one’s life, particularly for those who struggle daily with the pain, embarrassment, and limitations of missing or damaged teeth. His dedication to changing lives “one smile and one patient at a time” has established New Teeth Chicago as not just a dental center, but a life-changing institution where patients reclaim their smiles, self-esteem, and, ultimately, their lives.

MICHAEL RYER

Michael Ryer, president and CEO of Amigos Internacionales, exemplifies leadership and compassion in a world where humanitarian efforts are often fleeting. With over four decades of ministerial experience, he has been at the helm of Amigos Internacionales since 2009, guiding its mission to empower and uplift underprivileged communities across the globe. His unwavering commitment to “feeding the hungries” goes beyond basic provision, focusing on sustainable community projects that restore dignity and foster self-reliance.

Amigos Internacionales, founded in 1967, has been a force for good for 57 years. Michael’s leadership has propelled the organization to new heights, expanding its reach across 25 countries, feeding 21,000 children daily in third-world nations, and providing 7.5 million meals annually to those in need. Michael’s vision for change is as vast as it is personal. He regularly travels to Uganda and Tanzania, bringing potential donors on “vision trips” to see the work firsthand, meet the children, and experience the impact Amigos has on the ground.

For Michael, the work is deeply personal. “I enjoy seeing the look on the children’s faces when they see me drive up,” he shares. “It’s knowing that you’re making a difference in the world, just doing what God tells us to do.” At 65, in what many would consider the years of retirement, Michael sees his role as an opportunity to enlarge the footprint of Amigos and the impact of its donors, ensuring lasting change.

Under Michael’s leadership, Amigos Internacionales operates with a seven-point initiative, designed to create sustainable communities in northern Uganda, where South Sudanese refugees flood in seeking sanctuary. The process begins with a simple invitation from the villagers, who offer land to Amigos. “We own the land, and we’re not going anywhere,” Michael emphasizes, signaling a long-term commitment to the region.

The transformation begins with drilling a deep, disease-free water well. Villages previously ravaged by diseases like typhoid and hepatitis from contaminated water now have access to clean water. Next, Amigos builds churches, not just as places of worship but as social hubs for the community. Schools follow, starting with preschools and expanding to secondary education. Community gardens are established, with tractors provided to replace weeks of manual labor with efficient plowing. South African Boer goats are introduced to enhance local meat production.

Amigos also offers life skills classes, teaching soap-making, sewing, and water well pump maintenance. Women who have endured unimaginable hardships, including sexual assault, find new opportunities with the skills they acquire. “We’re not just talking about changing Uganda today,” says Michael, “we’re talking about changing Uganda for generations.”



President & CEO

With 25 mission points identified in villages throughout northern Uganda, Amigos is committed to transforming each one. Michael’s leadership and passion have turned a nonprofit into a global movement, affecting lives and reshaping futures.

Michael Ryer’s mission is clear: to leave the world with the biggest footprint possible. His work with Amigos Internacionales continues to change lives—not just for today, but for generations to come.

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OLIVIER ATTIA

Managing Director

Olivier Attia is a pioneering entrepreneur who played a key role in bringing optical barcode scanning technology to market, a groundbreaking advancement that transformed e-commerce and social interactions. This disruptive technology enabled mobile devices to scan barcodes, setting a new standard for consumer engagement. Under his leadership, Scanbuy was named *Breakout Company of the Year* by *Fortune* magazine in 2005. The company revolutionized the industry by licensing its cutting-edge solutions to handset manufacturers and mobile carriers, establishing itself as a global leader.

Olivier's consulting career began with leading firms, including PricewaterhouseCoopers in the U.S., where he developed deep expertise in addressing complex business challenges. His experience with large organizations, combined with his entrepreneurial success, gives him a unique perspective on the needs of today's innovators and entrepreneurs. At Gershon Consulting, Olivier channels this dual expertise to empower visionary leaders, helping them turn bold ideas into thriving businesses in the U.S.

Since its inception, Gershon Consulting has helped over 250 companies successfully launch and expand their businesses in the U.S., delivering remarkable returns on investment. As a U.S.-based sales powerhouse, Gershon Consulting specializes in crafting tailored strategies that balance quick wins with sustainable, long-term growth. The firm's approach goes beyond traditional consulting, acting as an experienced sales engine that ensures clients achieve measurable outcomes and seize the right opportunities in the competitive U.S. market.

For Olivier, consulting is like cooking—a passion he takes seriously, both professionally and personally. A graduate of the French Culinary Institute, he believes the right ingredients, combined with creativity and care, create unforgettable experiences. "Anyone can make a tomato-mozzarella salad, but there's a difference between fast food and a Michelin-star experience," he explains. At Gershon Consulting, Olivier applies this philosophy to his work, crafting strategies as unique and impactful as a finely prepared dish. For him, it's not just about entering the market—it's about making a lasting impression, one story at a time.



At Gershon Consulting, Olivier channels this dual expertise to empower visionary leaders, helping them turn bold ideas into thriving businesses in the U.S.

Teena PICCIONE

N.C. Department of Information Technology
Secretary and State Chief Information Officer

Teena Piccione's journey from a small-town upbringing to the forefront of global tech transformation is a testament to resilience, innovation, and a deep commitment to empowering others. With over 25 years in the tech industry, Teena currently serves as secretary of the N.C. Department of Information Technology and North Carolina's state chief information officer. Prior to assuming this role in January, she served as a senior director at Google, where she revolutionized the Core division, blending operational excellence with bold, forward-thinking strategies.

Teena has not only shattered glass ceilings, but paved roads for others to follow. Her mission is clear: to create a legacy that empowers future leaders, particularly women in tech, by removing the barriers she once faced.

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My goal is to create a lasting legacy that empowers others with a smoother start and a longer runway than I had, by clearing the roadblocks I once faced.

Early in her career, Teena was often met with skepticism. As one of the few women in the room, she had to work harder, think smarter, and adapt faster to prove her worth. This determination was forged during her youth, where she honed her mechanical skills in her father's shop, dismantling and rebuilding cars—an experience that taught her to solve problems differently and never back down from a challenge.

Teena's approach to leadership is grounded in empathy and collaboration. As a former advisory council member for Vation Ventures, a former board member for Cloud Girls, and a mentor to students and professionals, Teena is relentless in her efforts to nurture talent. She works with universities such as Campbell and NC State, judging innovation competitions, mentoring engineering teams, and helping mid-career professionals level up through



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initiatives like TechLX. Her work with Cloud Girls reflects her passion for philanthropy. Under her leadership, the organization has provided certifications, funded initiatives like Brown Girls Who Code, and supported Dress for Success, equipping women with tools to thrive in their careers. At Google, she extended this mission to middle schools, teaching coding and showcasing the creative fun of technology.

Teena credits her parents, who never had the opportunity to attend college, for instilling in her a relentless work ethic and a drive to succeed against the odds. “As a girl, you’ll always have to be one second smarter, one second faster, and think differently than everyone else,” her father told her—a mantra that has guided her career.

Today, Teena is a model of inspiration, guiding the next generation to see opportunities where others see challenges. Her story proves that with grit, vision, and a commitment to uplifting others, the future of tech is brighter than ever before.



JOSHUA WALDEN

Broker

“I’ve done it, I’m doing it, and you can too,” he often tells his clients, embodying the spirit of mentorship and empowerment.

Joshua Walden is more than a real estate broker; he is a multifaceted entrepreneur and seasoned investor whose expertise has been reshaping the Pacific Northwest real estate market since 2018. As a full-time professional agent at NextHome Prolific in Seattle, Washington, Joshua brings unparalleled knowledge, integrity, and a deep commitment to his clients, helping them navigate the complexities of buying, selling, and investing in real estate.

Joshua’s journey in real estate is rooted in firsthand experience. Unlike many brokers, his foundation is built on years of personal investment. Having successfully completed over 13 fix-and-flip rehab projects—with the 14th underway—and managing three rental properties, he understands every facet of the industry. From renting by the room to operating Airbnb/short/mid-term furnished rentals, and long term rentals Joshua has touched nearly every base in the single-family and multifamily arenas. His ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice is what sets him apart, empowering clients with insights few brokers can offer.



Specializing in residential single-family homes across Greater Seattle, Pierce, and Kitsap Counties, Joshua’s achievements speak volumes. With over \$30 million in real estate transactions and helping investors and clients generate over a million dollars in profit, his track record is as impressive as his dedication to excellence. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, he was honored with the 2023 *Premier Sales Award* from NextHome Brokerage, a testament to his unwavering commitment to his craft.

What makes Joshua a standout in the competitive world of real estate is not just his technical expertise, but also his unique perspective. As a millennial broker, he brings a keen understanding of modern market dynamics, particularly the intricate economics of supply and demand. This forward-thinking approach, combined with his personal journey as a homeowner and landlord, equips him to serve both first-time buyers and seasoned investors with equal finesse.

The secret to Joshua’s success lies in his deep faith and the strong foundation laid by his parents, who instilled in him the values of hard work, gratitude, and risk-taking. Growing up in a household of small business owners who managed rental properties, Joshua learned early on the importance of resilience and determination. These principles have guided his path, allowing him to excel not only as a broker but also as an entrepreneur with a clear vision.

At the heart of Joshua’s work is a passion for helping others achieve their dreams. Whether it’s finding the perfect home, flipping a property, or inspiring clients to invest, his goal is to show people that success in real estate is attainable for anyone. “I’ve done it, I’m doing it, and you can too,” he often tells his clients, embodying the spirit of mentorship and empowerment.

Joshua’s affiliation with NextHome Prolific further underscores his commitment to excellence. The brokerage, known for its concierge-style service and philanthropic ethos, aligns perfectly with his values. Together, they are creating a lifestyle brand that transcends real estate, connecting individuals and communities through education and service.

From his nearly 14 years of service in the Air Force Reserve to earning degrees in music and exercise science from Seattle University, Joshua’s diverse background enriches his approach to real estate. His love for delayed gratification—the hallmark of real estate success—drives him to deliver unparalleled results, proving that hard work and intentionality always pay off.

CARMELO MARSALA

President & Founder

As the visionary behind Spray-Net, Carmelo Marsala has taken a fresh approach to home improvement, leveraging his deep expertise in coatings technology to create a smarter, more durable alternative to traditional paint. In doing so, he's transforming an industry that's long been stuck in outdated methods.

The genesis of Spray-Net began with a simple but powerful realization. As a college student painting franchisee, Carmelo quickly identified a flaw in the industry: conventional paints were designed to be a one-size-fits-all product, optimized for ease of application, not longevity. "Traditional paints are made for bulk sales to contractors or DIYers. They're only meant to change color, and not specifically tailored for certain exterior surfaces," he shares. That insight sparked years of research, resulting in Spray-Net's proprietary, surface-specific coatings and patented, weather-adjustable application processes.

Since its founding in 2010, Spray-Net has transformed over 30,000 homes with its smarter, faster, and more cost-effective approach. Unlike conventional paints, which often chip and peel, Spray-Net delivers a like-new, durable finish on-site—a process breakthrough so significant, Carmelo received five patents for paint application processes and chemistry.

"Our slogan is 'Custom Chemistry for Smarter Painting' because every surface requires a unique approach," Carmelo highlights. But innovation doesn't stop at chemistry. Spray-Net's patented weather-adjustment process fine-tunes dry time based on real-time conditions, a factor often overlooked. "Everyone thinks about prep, but lasting results come from controlling prep, chemistry, and dry time—and we've mastered all three," he says. This allows Spray-Net to confidently offer an industry-leading 15-year warranty.



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Our slogan is 'Custom Chemistry for Smarter Painting' because every surface requires a unique approach.

Beyond providing homeowners with a cost-effective way to modernize their properties, Spray-Net is also empowering entrepreneurs. "We're not providing a commoditized service—we're giving people a unique business model resulting in industry-leading margins," Carmelo says. "Franchisees can be in business for themselves without starting from scratch. We're creating value for homeowners, our franchise partners, and building an amazing team as a result." Spray-Net franchises span over 120 territories across North America.

The company's latest innovation, Liqua Roof, is its most groundbreaking yet. "Liqua Roof started as a roof color change product, but became so much more—virtually eliminating granule loss while enhancing wind and impact resistance," Carmelo explains. "It meets a critical need in today's roofing market, offering homeowners a true alternative to replacement for a fraction of the cost, time and mess."

Spray-Net's impact has been widely recognized. The company has been named a *Top Global Franchise* by *Entrepreneur* magazine and was honored as the *Global Emerging Franchise of the Year* by the International Franchise Association. They have been featured in *Forbes*, *Coatings World*, *Franchise Times*, HGTV, and even Netflix, proving they're not just another painting company—they're a game-changer.

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Dr. Drewry Brown Jr.

Founder



Perspective Consulting L.L.C

“If I can help even one leader see the importance of connecting with their employees, I feel like I’m doing justice to that leader and their organization.”

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Dr. Drewry Brown Jr., a retired Lieutenant Colonel and 26-year Army veteran, brings a wealth of leadership experience to his role as the founder of Perspective Consulting L.L.C. His extensive background as a logistician, combined with advanced academic achievements—including a master’s in logistics management and a Ph.D. in business administration with a concentration in organizational leadership—has equipped him with the expertise to tackle complex challenges faced by leaders in both the public and private sectors.

Founded in 2022 and based in Maryland, Perspective Consulting L.L.C. specializes in business analytics, strategy, and project management, offering expert guidance to federal, state, and commercial organizations. What sets Dr. Brown apart is his unique approach to leadership development, informed by decades of hands-on experience in operational and strategic environments. Perspective Consulting’s services are tailored to fit the distinct needs of each client, ranging from logistics and organizational management to training and staff development. Their offerings, such as customized webinars, advisory sessions, and “Done-For-You” projects, reflect the company’s commitment to delivering solutions that are as flexible as they are effective.

For Dr. Brown, the mission behind Perspective Consulting goes deeper than merely offering advice. His vision is to bridge the gap between leadership and the workforce, a gap he has seen time and again throughout his career. “In my experience, there’s always been a disconnect between leadership and what’s going on with their employees,” he notes. He believes this divide can be detrimental to organizational success and is determined to help leaders recognize the profound impact their behavior and communication have on employee engagement and productivity.

Dr. Brown’s philosophy is simple but powerful: leadership is not just about making decisions; it’s about fostering an environment where employees feel valued and empowered to share their ideas. “Six times out of ten, employees are hesitant to speak up in meetings unless they’re specifically asked. That hesitation leads to missed opportunities—fresh ideas, innovative solutions—that could propel the organization forward,” he explains. Through his work with Perspective Consulting, Dr. Brown aims to change that narrative, one leader at a time.

Leaders, in Dr. Brown’s view, often assume their appreciation for employees is implied, but he emphasizes the need for explicit communication. Employees need to hear that they’re valued, and when they do, it has a transformative effect on the organization. “When leaders encourage employees to contribute their thoughts, it energizes the entire team. Engaged employees are more motivated and loyal, and that energy becomes infectious. It’s a game-changer.”

Drawing from his military background and academic expertise, Dr. Brown is on a mission to help organizations unlock their full potential by addressing this fundamental leadership challenge. “If I can help even one leader see the importance of connecting with their employees, I feel like I’m doing justice to that leader and their organization,” he says. With Perspective Consulting, Dr. Drewry Brown Jr. is not just advising on logistics or operations—he’s equipping leaders with the tools to reshape their organizational culture and ultimately, their bottom line.

NIKKI SULLIVAN

FOUNDER AND CEO

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When I sit with these women and witness their transformation right in front of me, I know I'm exactly where I'm meant to be. This work is not just what I do. It's who I am.

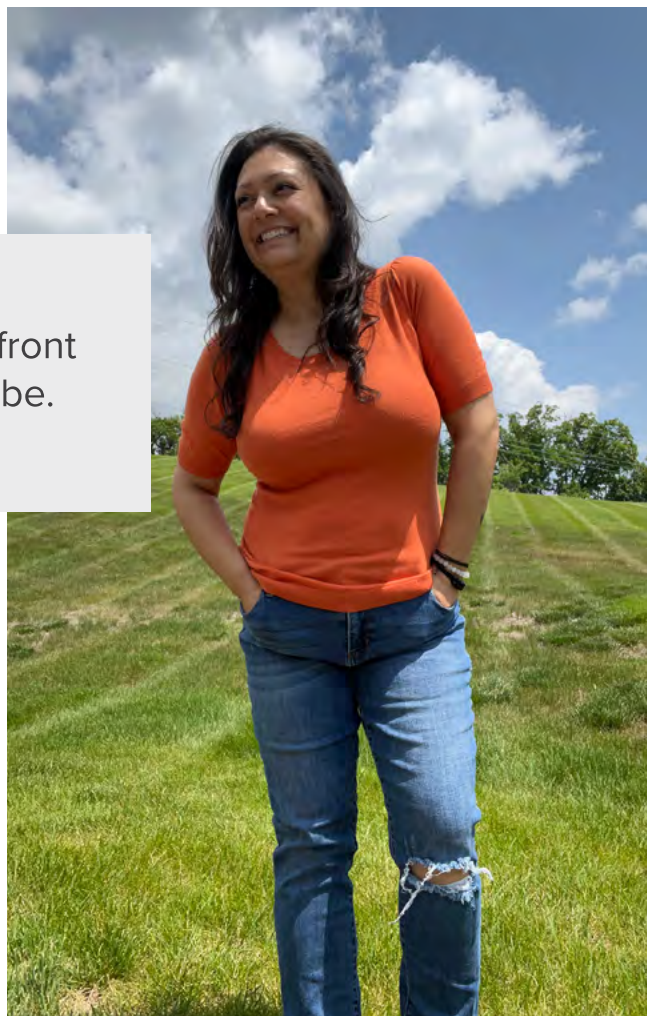
Nikki Sullivan knows what it's like to feel lost, stuck, and disconnected from life. For years, she went through the motions, holding everything together on the outside while feeling completely broken on the inside. She didn't have the words to explain what was wrong, only the deep, unshakable feeling that something had to change.

That breaking point led her on a journey of self-discovery, one that would ultimately become the foundation of her life's work. Through meditation, alternative healing, and mindset shifts, she began peeling back the layers of fear, self-doubt, and emotional exhaustion that had kept her stuck for so long. It wasn't easy, and it wasn't instant. But little by little, she found her way back to herself. And once she did, she knew she wanted to help other women do the same.

Now, as the founder of Nikki Sullivan Wellness, she creates spaces for women to reconnect with themselves, release what's been holding them back, and step into the life they were meant to live. Whether through intimate women's retreats, transformational coaching, or speaking on a broader level, Nikki's work is rooted in real experience, not just theory. Everything she teaches is something she's personally lived, tested, and integrated into her own healing.

Based in Kansas City, MO, Nikki leads women throughout the Midwest and nationwide to deep emotional healing with a blend of meditation, restorative yoga, energy work, and mindset transformation. She offers half-day and full-day retreats, weekend immersions, and an in-depth seven-week online coaching program designed to help women reclaim their joy, confidence, and sense of purpose. She also partners with yoga studios and speaks at events, reaching women across the country who are ready to break free from stress, overwhelm, and self-doubt.

What makes Nikki different isn't just her certifications as a meditation and restorative yoga teacher, life purpose coach, and anxiety relief practitioner, it's her story. She's been where so many women are now, feeling lost, numb, and unsure if there was



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NIKKI SULLIVAN

even a way forward. That's why she pours her heart into every retreat, every session, and every connection she makes. She understands the fear of change, the weight of uncertainty, and the courage it takes to start again.

More than anything, Nikki believes in the power of healing in community. She takes immense pride in supporting and collaborating with other female healers, creating a ripple effect that extends far beyond her own work. The women who join her retreats and programs don't just leave with tools, they leave with a renewed sense of self, inner peace, and the confidence to step into the life they deserve.

"When I sit with these women and witness their transformation right in front of me, I know I'm exactly where I'm meant to be," Nikki shares. "This work is not just what I do. It's who I am."

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JOSH CHANDLER

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

With more than 28 years of experience in construction and millwork and a passion for technology, Josh Chandler is CEO of Chandler Cabinets, Inc., one of the most innovative companies in the industry, setting the trends—and a high bar—for all others in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex area since 1976. Combining artistry that reaches back generations and into the future with the best technology to bring their clients' visions to life, Josh and his expert team of designers, planners, and construction professionals specialize in creating exceptional cabinets and environments for a wide range of projects. While primarily focused on residential customers, Chandler Cabinets also serves commercial and public-sector clients. Whether an individual customizing their own home or an award-winning builder, Josh and his team are driven by their commitment to building the perfect cabinets that fit their unique tastes and to providing a seamless, enjoyable experience from start to finish. "As a family-owned company, we are committed to upholding our most cherished values in every task we take on," says Josh.

Originally founded by his late father, Buster Chandler, the company started out modestly with only six employees. Today, Chandler Cabinets has grown into a state-of-the-art facility, employing more than 320 BBA professionals

and expanding to serve Austin, TX, and Tampa, FL. Thanks to an award-winning customer service department and a team of expert installers, planners, advanced CAD designers, and certified crafters, every order is turned into a masterpiece. "We're a large company, but we have a small-company perspective and approach, working closely with each of our clients to ensure their satisfaction," Josh says. The same holds true for the Chandler Cabinet team. Josh and his brother, Coby, carry forward their father's legacy, treating their staff as family—many of whom have been with them for more than two decades—and they recognize their talent, commitment, and loyalty with annual awards.

Interestingly, Josh initially had no interest in following his father's footsteps into construction. Instead, he began college as a pre-med student but decided after his freshman year that he wanted to take a different path, after working summers at his father's factory. He left college and dove into architecture and drafting. He fell in love with it, and then realized that he could help the business if he brought his CAD skills into it. "My dad was drawing designs by hand, and I'd watch him, thinking, 'There's got to be a better way.' So I brought all this new technology into the company and opened up new opportunities to scale the business, and that's what we've continued to do ever since."

Josh officially joined the company in 1997 as a draftsman and installation manager, and then moved into business development as a chief designer within his first few years. In 2014, he assumed the position of CEO, and he and Coby, as COO, purchased the company two years later. "I'm an innovator. I have the visions, and my brother makes them happen, so we make a great team," explains Josh.

While the company has grown and evolved over its four decades, the visions and dreams of its customers remain the company's number one priority, and first-class customer service continues to be exemplified by its staff. "We understand that families have different needs and tastes in cabinetry, so we are committed to designing and building the perfect cabinets for each of them and making the entire process comfortable and stress-free by personally guaranteeing the superiority of our products," Josh says.

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COLBY WELLINGTON

Founder & CEO

“ I’ve put in the time, and I’m building a team of talented engineers who share my determination to support our warfighters.

Colby Wellington, founder and CEO of New Era Technologies, isn’t just shaping the future of radar engineering—he’s redefining how technology can protect those who serve. With nearly 12 years of expertise in radar systems, Hardware-in-the-Loop (HWIL) simulation, and data analysis, Colby has forged a career marked by precision, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to supporting our nation’s warfighters.

Founded in 2019 in Huntsville, Alabama, New Era Technologies specializes in model-based system engineering (MBSE), radar engineering, and a suite of defense-related technologies including cybersecurity, IT, and software engineering. Under Colby’s leadership, the company is driven by a singular mission: to ensure the safety of the warfighter by equipping them with cutting-edge technology that provides an overwhelming advantage in the field.

The inspiration behind New Era Technologies is deeply personal for Colby. While he did not serve in the armed forces, he was profoundly impacted by the sacrifices of family members and friends who served and possibly died in service to the nation. “I don’t want to send the warfighter into a fair fight,” he says. “I want to send them into a fight where they have the overwhelming advantage. I want to bring our warfighters home.”

This philosophy drives the company’s pursuit of groundbreaking unmanned technologies designed to minimize human risk in combat zones. However, Colby’s vision isn’t just about machines; it’s about ensuring that, when warfighters must enter the battlefield, they do so with the best tools, the highest probability of success, and the greatest chance of returning to their families safely.

What sets Colby and New Era Technologies apart is their deeply rooted expertise and dedication. Colby has spent over a decade becoming a subject matter expert in radar systems, earning a master’s degree and nearing completion of his PhD. “This has become my craft,” he says. “I’ve put in the time, and I’m building a team of talented engineers who share my determination to support our warfighters.”

Unlike many other companies, New Era Technologies wasn’t born from insider connections or an inherited network. It grew from Colby’s relentless drive, his willingness to learn from mentors, and his ability to bring together like-minded professionals. Every member of the team is united by a shared commitment to excellence and a passion for innovation.



The company’s contributions to the Department of Defense span the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. From cybersecurity to verification, validation and accreditation (VV&A), New Era Technologies ensures that every system they deliver meets the highest standards of performance and reliability.

For Colby, success is measured not by accolades, but by impact. “I may not ever meet these warfighters,” he reflects, “but knowing that something I’ve developed helped bring these brave men and women home—that’s everything.”

With a vision that extends beyond the battlefield, Colby Wellington and New Era Technologies are not just advancing defense technology—they’re safeguarding the future of those who defend our freedom. Through innovation, expertise, and heart, they are truly ushering in a new era.

Jacob Gorenkoff

FOUNDER & CEO

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Jacob Gorenkoff is revolutionizing the ability of mission-driven organizations to influence public policy in Canada. As the founder and CEO of Homeward Public Affairs, Jacob's forward-thinking approach has positioned him as one of Canada's most influential public affairs strategists, empowering nonprofits, charities, and social enterprises to drive systemic change that is making their communities stronger, more inclusive, and more sustainable.

Jacob's drive to improve society's fabric began long before Homeward Public Affairs was born. With a robust background in the nonprofit sector, he served as the policy and advocacy lead for the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, where he spearheaded nationwide affordable housing initiatives, directly influencing policy changes that have increased access to housing for thousands of vulnerable Canadians.

In January 2024, he founded Homeward Public Affairs to bridge a critical gap in the public affairs arena: providing advocacy, strategy, communications, and policy support specifically for mission-driven organizations. His approach is built on a deep understanding of the complexities nonprofits face—both in resources and in communicating their objectives to governments that often operate on a different wavelength.

"Mission-driven organizations and government operate in different worlds," Jacob explains. "Nonprofits largely focus on direct human impact, while governments see things through a broader social and economic lens. My role is to translate their passion and purpose into terms that resonate with policymakers, ensuring their message doesn't get lost in translation."

Homeward works closely with clients to distill their mission, vision, and values into clear, compelling narratives that cut through the noise and align with government priorities. This is part of what makes Homeward Public Affairs unique. While most public affairs firms cater to corporate agendas, Homeward Public Affairs is a trailblazer in empowering nonprofits, charities, and social enterprises—elevating them from passive advocates to powerful agents of change.

From developing public policy that propels transformative change to creating custom-tailored government relations strategies for their clients, Homeward Public Affairs is redefining what it means to provide effective public affairs services. "We strive to be more than just consultants," Jacob notes. "We're architects of innovation, we're builders of bold ideas, and we're advocates for a brighter future." This ethos drives everything they do, from helping organizations navigate political risk to establishing them as recognized thought leaders in their fields.

A recent success saw Jacob help a group struggling to communicate their initiative's value to a conservative provincial government. Shifting focus from social benefits to economic advantages and cost savings, Jacob aligned their message with the government's priorities, securing the support they needed and showcasing his deep understanding of both nonprofit and governmental ecosystems.

Looking ahead, Jacob envisions Homeward Public Affairs becoming a global force, expanding its innovative approach to support mission-driven organizations across the world — one policy, one partnership, and one purpose-driven project at a time.

Maria Forero

Advisor & Partner

Whether stepping in as an interim chief business officer or acting as a strategic advisor, she is deeply embedded in the growth of the companies she backs.



Maria Forero has never been one to follow the beaten path. From a small village in Spain to the financial epicenters of London and New York, and now to the innovation hub of Miami, her career has been a masterclass in reinvention. A scientist by training, an investor by choice, and a visionary by nature, Maria has spent more than 25 years shaping the future of healthcare through strategic investment and leadership. As a founding partner of MF7 Ventures and a key advisor at Accelmed Partners, she is bringing game-changing technologies to market—while also embracing her most rewarding role yet: motherhood.

Maria's story begins in the labs of London, where she pursued a degree in human genetics, driven by a passion to push the boundaries of medicine. But early on, she realized that scientific breakthroughs took years—sometimes decades—to translate into real-world impact. Frustrated by the slow pace, she pivoted to enter the world of finance. With a stint at PwC as a CPA and later as a VP of healthcare investment banking at Morgan Stanley in London, Maria gained an insider's view of the pharmaceutical and biotech industries, helping companies secure funding and scale their innovations.

But the moment that truly defined her mission came with personal tragedy. When an infant in her family succumbed to meningococcal meningitis—a disease that could have been prevented with a vaccine—Maria made a promise. She left banking to join a biotech company working on meningococcal vaccines, which was later acquired by Novartis. Over the next decade, she took on leadership roles, including head of sales and marketing for Sandoz Latin America and CEO/GM of Novartis Vaccines & Diagnostics in Spain and Portugal. She operated in 63 countries, launching life-saving vaccines and building new divisions from the ground up.

However, Maria was not done charting new territory. In 2014, she took another leap—this time, on her own terms. With her own savings, she founded MF7 Ventures, a healthcare-focused seed fund that invests in

digital therapeutics, women's health, and precision medicine. Unlike traditional VCs, Maria doesn't just write checks; she rolls up her sleeves. Whether stepping in as an interim chief business officer or acting as a strategic advisor, she is deeply embedded in the growth of the companies she backs. Among her early bets? Click Therapeutics—one of the first to prove that digital therapeutics could be a powerful new frontier in medicine.

In 2022, Maria joined Accelmed Partners, a \$400 million private equity fund focused on commercial-stage MedTech companies, further solidifying her role as a transformative force in the healthcare investment landscape. Yet, for all of her professional achievements, Maria's proudest moment came outside the boardroom. While building her fund, she also built her family—adopting a little boy and embracing the journey of motherhood with the same determination that fueled her career.

Knowing that a life of adventure and growth does not come without setbacks—both big and small—nor without sacrifices, missteps, and moments of deep introspection, Maria has embraced all of her experiences as opportunities to transcend challenges, extract key insights, and cultivate the self-awareness, consciousness, and intuition that guide her next steps on the journey of life.

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Whitney Perkins Witt, PhD, MPH

Founder, President & CEO



Whitney Perkins Witt, PhD, MPH is an internationally recognized expert in health innovation, technology, and entrepreneurship, with over three decades of experience transforming healthcare delivery and outcomes. Her groundbreaking work in population health, health equity, and strategic leadership has redefined the field, setting new standards for both policy and practice.

As president and CEO of the Health Equity Consulting (HEC) Group, based in Philadelphia, Dr. Witt has spearheaded systemic change by building powerful partnerships across academia, private industry, government agencies, and non-profits. She is known for her ability to break down silos and drive collaboration to develop scalable solutions for healthcare's most complex issues. "My mission is to unite healthcare, social services, business, and government to create transformative, data-driven solutions that improve population health and reform systems like Medicaid," says Dr. Witt. "Through strategic collaboration, we can achieve equitable health outcomes and meaningful change."

Dr. Witt's expertise extends to academia, where she served as the inaugural dean of Lehigh University's College of Health. There, she established the first U.S. educational programs focused on population health and health innovation. She also built a state-of-the-art research infrastructure, launching initiatives like the Health Data Warehouse and an artificial intelligence and data visualization laboratory. Dr. Witt secured over \$5 million in funding within a short period, demonstrating her proficiency in resource mobilization and establishing herself as a key figure in academic health entrepreneurship.

Prior to joining Lehigh, Dr. Witt was director of the Center for Maternal and Child Health Research at IBM Watson Health, where she led multimillion-dollar research projects for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Her leadership on technical assistance programs supported Medicaid and CHIP agencies in value-based care and payment reform, helping states design and implement strategies that improved maternal and child health outcomes.

During her tenure at IBM, Dr. Witt also led the development of award-winning healthcare solutions using advanced data analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to tackle critical health issues worldwide. Her contributions earned her several prestigious IBM accolades, including the *Watson Health Cognitive Competition Award*, the *IBM Solutions Lab Services Award*, and the *IBM Appreciation for Expertise Award*. She is also an IBM Certified Practitioner of Cognitive Solutions.

"Innovation is essential to advancing health equity and addressing the social determinants of health," Dr. Witt emphasizes. "By integrating community-driven solutions with technology and policy reform, we can reduce costs, improve outcomes, and build equitable care systems that serve everyone."

Dr. Witt's leadership and entrepreneurial vision continue to redefine healthcare. A preeminent figure in health innovation, her legacy is built on transforming challenges into opportunities and advancing health equity through technology, collaboration, and a deep commitment to social justice. Her approach has the power to transform millions of lives across generations, making equitable care a reality for all.



The Health Equity
Consulting (HEC) Group
www.healthequityconsult.com

James Hillard

COO & Owner

James Hillard, chief operating officer and owner of Town N Country Animal Hospital, brings an eclectic blend of skills and experiences to the heart of veterinary care in Tampa, FL. His journey from electronics engineering to financial consulting with a Big 4 firm laid a solid foundation in business acumen and client service, underscoring his analytical prowess. With a BBA in finance, a BBA in financial planning, and a suite of certifications from FINRA Series 7 and 66 to a GROL License from the FCC, James cultivated a wide-ranging skill set that now drives the operations of Town N Country Animal Hospital, founded in 2023 alongside his wife, Kristen—a dedicated veterinarian with a deep connection to animals and the local community.

James's shift into veterinary practice wasn't just about business; it was about a calling he found through his wife's passion for animal care and his own growing relationships with the pet community. "For me, being a veterinary practice owner is so much more than just treating animals," he reflects. His goal is to offer personalized care that emphasizes genuine connections with both pets and their owners, giving each patient the time and attention they deserve.

At Town N Country Animal Hospital, that ethos permeates every corner of the clinic. From routine checkups to emergency surgeries, the clinic provides a comprehensive range of services, including specialized expertise in surgery and dermatology. "We are deeply passionate about these areas," James shares. "It's incredibly fulfilling to help patients with complex needs, whether it's a surgical procedure or skin condition." The clinic's approach to patient care is backed by evidence-based medicine, ensuring that every pet receives top-tier treatment.

Client education is at the forefront of Town N Country's mission. James and Kristen believe that informed pet owners are empowered to make the best decisions for their pets' health. "We take pride in helping pet owners understand all aspects of their pet's care," James notes. He and the team actively foster an environment where clients feel welcomed and valued, an aspect often overlooked at larger clinics. Every employee at Town N Country is not only highly skilled, but also genuinely excited to connect with each pet that walks through the doors, creating a warm and supportive atmosphere.

The clinic's commitment to the community is equally profound. Town N Country collaborates with local animal rescues, providing resources and expertise to help rescued animals receive the care they need. It's a partnership that underscores the clinic's broader mission to give back and make a tangible difference within the community.

For James, every day at the clinic reaffirms the impact he and his team are making in the lives of both animals and their families. "It's incredibly rewarding to see the difference we can make," he says, with a sense of fulfillment that only deepens as the clinic continues to grow. Town N Country Animal Hospital isn't just a clinic; it's a community cornerstone where pet health and well-being are handled with the utmost care, compassion, and expertise.



“ We take pride in helping pet owners understand all aspects of their pet's care.



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JILL BRUNO

SDR Leader



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I love that I get to change lives. Seeing someone light up when they land a job, knowing I played a part in their journey—it's priceless.

LHH

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LI: Jill Bruno - LHH

In the high-stakes world of sales, where grit meets strategy and resilience defines success, Jill Bruno stands out as a powerhouse of leadership, motivation, and impact. As an SDR leader at LHH, a global talent advisory firm under The Adecco Group, she doesn't just train teams—she transforms them, equipping them with the mindset, skills, and strategic vision to thrive in today's rapidly shifting market.

Jill's leadership is defined by her relentless pursuit of excellence. Her role encompasses training, motivating, and coaching her team to adopt best practices that align with both industry standards and LHH's strategic initiatives. In an era of layoffs and market challenges, she focuses on hiring not just for the present, but for the future—selecting candidates who can grow, evolve, and lead in the long term.

In addition to hiring top talent, Jill's initiatives encompass outbound strategies that proactively identify the ideal customer base for LHH's services. What sets this initiative apart? It's evolving into a full-cycle sales model where her team isn't just generating leads—they're closing deals.

Jill's professional arsenal is stacked with expertise in leadership, sales, prospecting, and pipeline development—all critical in driving revenue and business growth. But at her core, Jill's success is driven by something deeper: her *why*. Losing her father, her biggest champion, to cancer was a defining moment. “I know he's watching me. On the tough days, I think about making him proud.” She also draws inspiration from her four-year-old daughter, determined to show her what relentless ambition looks like. “I want her to know that her mom worked hard and never settled.”

Jill's journey has been one of persistence. Earning her managerial title was no small feat—she navigated nine different managers in a single year, each time resetting expectations, proving her value, and fighting for her well-earned promotion. That fight, that unyielding drive, is what distinguishes her from a sea of other managers. “Sales is a mental game,” she explains. “There are good days and bad days. You have to push through, fight for what you want, and seek out mentors who challenge you to grow.”

But Jill's career isn't just about personal victories—it's about elevating others. One of her proudest moments came when she led a team that achieved 10 promotions in a single year. The ability to see her team thrive, grow, and step into leadership roles is what fuels her passion. “I love that I get to change lives. Seeing someone light up when they land a job, knowing I played a part in their journey—it's priceless.”

With a degree in multidisciplinary studies—focusing on entrepreneurship, advertising, and communication—Jill has masterfully blended creativity with strategy. She doesn't just train sales professionals; she mentors them into industry leaders. Her career is a testament to what's possible when resilience, leadership, and passion collide. And if there's one thing Jill Bruno knows, it's that the fight is always worth it.

Landon Cheben

Life Insurance: The Tool You Didn't Know You Needed

From an early age, Landon Cheben recognized the transformative power of continuous learning. This conviction led him through West Point, 11 years of active-duty service, including eight in the Army's elite 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), and onward as a real estate investor, airline pilot, and father. Each role reinforced his belief in fully understanding every available resource to solve problems and optimize outcomes.

One resource he finds particularly misunderstood is life insurance. As Will Rogers famously stated, "It's not what people don't know that gets them in trouble; it's what they think they know that just ain't so." For many, life insurance serves merely to cover final expenses or provide for loved ones after death. However, this narrow view overlooks its most powerful features: building generational wealth, optimizing taxes, and ensuring financial security during retirement or a health crisis.

Today, Landon is part of Insuring Impact, a team of financial educators dedicated to shedding light on the full potential of life insurance. Their approach centers on a simple framework called the OPM cycle—Management, Protection, and Optimization:



Insuring Impact aims to help individuals look beyond the conventional "death benefit" mindset.

1. **Management:** Establish a solid financial foundation, including emergency reserves and cash-value life insurance for accessible, compounding funds.
2. **Protection:** Safeguard that foundation with living benefits that can cover everyday expenses if someone is sidelined by chronic illness or injury—so hard-earned savings remain intact.
3. **Optimization:** Leverage wealth-building strategies to grow assets over time, mitigate risks, and capitalize on tax efficiencies.

Insuring Impact aims to help individuals look beyond the conventional "death benefit" mindset. Drawing on his background in Special Operations, where every tool's full capability must be understood, Landon emphasizes the many ways life insurance can protect against market downturns, supplement retirement income, and offer a financial safety net when life takes an unexpected turn.

Each plan is tailored using modern FINTECH tools, ensuring it aligns with an individual's unique goals and situation. Landon believes the real advantage comes from *knowing* how a financial vehicle works, rather than simply being *told* what to buy. The payoff, he insists, is a profound sense of empowerment: when people discover life insurance can be a cornerstone of a resilient financial strategy, they often realize there is far more to it than they ever imagined.

By encouraging others to explore beyond what they think they know, Landon hopes to inspire a mindset of lifelong learning. Whether someone is focused on real estate, entrepreneurship, or preparing for retirement, understanding the full scope of life insurance can open new possibilities for building and protecting a financial legacy. To connect with Landon or Insuring Impact to learn more, see the information below.

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Dr. Bill Clark, PhD

PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER



Dr. Bill Clark, PhD, president and founder of Natprologix, LLC, has spent over 25 years at the intersection of science and entrepreneurship, shaping the future of the dietary supplement industry. Through Natprologix, he offers expert consulting services that drive innovation, ensuring that companies not only meet regulatory standards, but thrive in a competitive market. From concept to clinical validation, Dr. Bill's team guides clients through every stage of development, delivering products backed by science and poised for market success.

Dr. Bill's entrepreneurial spirit took root at an early age. Whether it was his paper route or roadside stands, he was always chasing opportunities. Before turning to the natural products industry, he managed restaurants and even played a role in launching Pizza Hut's delivery service. His scientific curiosity, however, led him down a different path. Earning his MSc and PhD in organic chemistry from University of California Santa Cruz, Dr. Bill's career shifted when he entered the world of dietary supplements—a world he would transform.

His first major venture came when he raised \$200,000 in capital for a friend's dietary supplement company, utilizing his scientific expertise to help bring innovative supplements to market. That was just the beginning. Over the years, Dr. Bill has been instrumental in launching dozens of products, including his work with NSF International to establish the Dietary Supplement Certification Program, a move that raised the bar for quality and safety in the industry. One of his landmark achievements was the conception, formulation, and launch of Centrum Herbals, which generated over \$225 million in its first year.

But Dr. Bill's influence doesn't stop with product innovation. As a key subject matter expert for Sanofi's M&A group, he evaluated potential acquisitions, helping the company make strategic moves that would shape its future. His entrepreneurial vision also led him to create two successful brands: HALO Leaf of Life and Natrience, both recognized for their cutting-edge dietary supplements.

Spirituality and divine synchronicity have always been paramount to Dr. Bill, and they play an important role in who he is today. In 2000, after an enigmatic experience, his intuitive side was ignited, and he began to explore it further. Over the years Dr. Bill has learned that science and spirituality are not independent of each other. Today, he embraces both, sharing his journey through two video podcasts: *The Bioactive Nexus*, which focuses on his professional work, and *Beyond Limits – Where Spirit Meets Science*, which highlights his personal brand and spiritual growth.

Dr. Bill's philosophy is simple yet powerful: "When your mind is liberated from all limitations, with love and passion in your heart, you can create a world that seems impossible to others." This belief drives him to inspire others to embrace the impossible and push boundaries, whether through groundbreaking science or spiritual growth.

Looking ahead, Dr. Bill is preparing to launch a new venture that promises to revolutionize the dietary supplement industry. Leveraging AI technology, NutriSelect.ai will take personalized nutrition to the next level, offering consumers a truly customized experience. Additionally, he is working on four upcoming books that exemplify his profound journey towards spiritual truth and enlightenment.

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Jason Safford

Founder & Chief Performance Coach



I wear different hats—transformation coach, crisis coach, performance coach—depending on what each client needs.



Jason Safford is not just a coach—he's a force of transformation. With over 30 years of experience as an entrepreneur, fitness expert, and business leader, Jason has empowered thousands of executives, teams, and businesses to unlock their potential and achieve unparalleled success.

As the founder and chief performance coach of Exceptional Results Now! and Win Your Day Now, Jason is revolutionizing how leaders approach success—blending health, resilience, and strategic vision into a holistic formula for personal and professional excellence.

Jason's coaching philosophy is rooted in a profound truth: success in one area of life often comes at the expense of others. He has made it his mission to help leaders achieve balance while thriving in every aspect of their lives. "Financial success doesn't mean much if it comes at the cost of your health or relationships," Jason explains. This belief informs his comprehensive approach to leadership optimization, resilience building, and operational strategy, ensuring clients excel not only in business but in life.

As a nationally recognized speaker and author of three impactful books, including *Think Green: The Future is Awesome*, *Sun, Sand, & Salt*, and *Winning with Exceptionalism*, Jason has built a legacy of delivering actionable insights with passion and precision. His credentials span from NYU to Cornell and include certifications in areas such as corrective exercise, brain fitness, and transformation coaching—expertise he brings to every coaching session, whether working with Fortune 500 executives or professional athletes.

Exceptional Results Now!, founded in 2020 and headquartered

in Wilmington, Delaware, with an additional location in NYC, has become a trusted partner for executives and organizations striving for greatness. ERN specializes in three core areas:

Leadership Optimization and Team Alignment: Empowering leaders to refine their leadership style, foster trust, and align teams with the company's vision to enhance collaboration and performance.

Resilience Building: Helping leaders develop the mental, physical, and emotional fortitude necessary to navigate high-pressure challenges and sustain peak performance.

Strategic Growth and Efficiency: Guiding organizations to accelerate growth, streamline operations, and secure long-term success.

Jason's influence extends beyond the boardroom. As the architect of New York City's GREEN JOBS program, he trained and placed thousands of displaced workers into higher-wage opportunities, turning crisis into opportunity. During the pandemic, he worked with executive teams to pivot seamlessly into remote management. Additionally, his leadership in green development projects has reduced carbon emissions by over one million tons, proving his vision extends to environmental impact.

Jason's ability to lead from a place of crisis sets him apart. "I wear different hats—transformation coach, crisis coach, performance coach—depending on what each client needs," he says. His transformative model guides clients to visualize who they want to be on the other side of obstacles, equipping them to overcome challenges one step at a time.

Aaron Streeton

Managing Partner & Founder



Aaron Streeton, the managing partner and founder of Tengu Consulting, has carved a distinguished career in operations consulting, amassing over 20 years of expertise in targeted operating models including culture change, process optimization, and systems of work. His unique ability to implement holistic, sustainable solutions has helped transform businesses across industries and around the globe, driving over \$1 billion in improvements.

Aaron's journey in operations consulting has been nothing short of extraordinary. Prior to founding Tengu Consulting in 2024, he held the position of chief delivery officer at Proudfoot, where he led global operations and drove transformative change around the globe. One of his noticeable achievements, prior to joining Proudfoot, came during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he spearheaded a global transformation initiative, spending six months in China in 2021 to guide two major sites in Shanghai and Nanjing through the implementation of the integrated operating models.

Beyond these global accomplishments, Aaron's ethos centers around a commitment to client success. "I wanted to create a family-oriented consultancy where the client's interests come first," he says. This belief laid the foundation for Tengu Consulting, headquartered in Calgary, Alberta.

Aaron emphasizes the importance of cultivating a supportive, client-first culture both within his company and for his clients. "We're not here to impose solutions; we're here to build a partnership that helps clients achieve their long-term goals."

Tengu Consulting specializes in designing and implementing Targeted Operating Models—customized systems that help organizations align their operations with strategic objectives. Aaron's approach differs from many consultancies that offer short-term fixes. "A lot of firms jump in to solve problems but it's their solution not the clients. For us, it's about building a relationship working shoulder-to-shoulder to get it right." His team focuses on creating sustainable change by addressing not only operational efficiency, but also organizational culture. "What's your true culture, and how does the operating model fit together? It's not about quick fixes; it's about deliberate, intentional change."

Aaron's leadership style is reflected in his dedication to mentoring the next generation of consultants. He instills a philosophy that puts client success above all else, fostering an ego-free environment within Tengu Consulting. "There are a lot of big personalities in consulting who say 'look what I did' what they don't get is that it is about the client. For me, true consultancy is about making sure the client is successful—when they succeed, I succeed."

Education has played a pivotal role in shaping Aaron's career. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree with honors from Queen's University, a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt from Villanova University, and a certification in executive coaching from Royal Roads University. These qualifications, paired with his vast global experience, equip him to offer unparalleled insights into transforming businesses.

At Tengu Consulting, Aaron and his team continue to prioritize a "Client – Community – Consultancy" model, ensuring every business they work with feels supported, valued, and ready to achieve what they once thought was impossible. Whether it's reducing timelines from five years to one or helping organizations realize their full potential, Aaron Streeton remains committed to leaving a lasting, positive impact on every client he serves.

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ANDREA CARTER

Founder
& CEO



Andrea Carter is a visionary leader revolutionizing workplace culture through neuroscience-driven strategies. With over 18 years of experience in neuroscience-based learning and development, she has emerged as a thought leader, strategically addressing workplace challenges. As the CEO and founder of Andrea Carter Consulting, Andrea leverages her groundbreaking *Belonging First Methodology* to partner with leaders in cultivating environments where employees thrive—driving engagement, innovation, and performance through the power of belonging.

Andrea's proprietary *Belonging First Methodology* identifies five indicators of belonging: comfort, connection, contribution, psychological safety, and well-being. This approach goes beyond traditional diversity metrics by leveraging a neuroscience lens to analyze and measure gaps in organizational culture. By focusing on the interplay of multiple identities—such as gender, race, and function—her methodology reveals not just where organizations are falling short but how they can take actionable steps to foster belonging and inclusion.

Under Andrea's leadership, Andrea Carter Consulting has become a globally recognized powerhouse. Based in Toronto, the firm's influence spans industries and continents, transforming the experiences of over 100,000 employees across eight sectors. Through cutting-edge tools like the *Belonging in the Workplace* instrument, Andrea's team helps organizations create equitable talent pipelines, enhance leadership effectiveness, and empower employees at all levels. The result? Thriving workplaces that are both inclusive and high performing.

Andrea's academic foundation—a master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology with a focus on corporate social justice—pairs seamlessly with her certifications in advanced statistical analysis, Indigenous relations, and neuroscience. Her career highlights include serving as an adjunct professor at Adler University,

authoring the largest Canadian mining industry *Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Study*, and receiving seven awards in 2024 alone for her groundbreaking research and business impact.

Andrea's work is not only innovative, but deeply impactful. Her *Belonging First Methodology* has been a game-changer, offering a fresh perspective on workplace challenges such as systemic inefficiencies, career growth, and collaboration. By measuring belonging through neuroscience and translating insights into practical solutions, Andrea has set a new standard for cultural transformation.

Further, her leadership and contributions have been recognized globally, with accolades such as the *Global Innovation Award* and the *Top Strategic Advisor of the Year to Watch*. Yet, for Andrea, the real reward lies in the ability to inspire change and create spaces where people feel valued, connected, and safe to be themselves.

As Andrea Carter Consulting continues to thrive, Andrea remains steadfast in her mission: to illuminate the transformative power of belonging in the workplace. By aligning data-driven strategies with human-centric solutions, she is not just redefining workplace culture—she's building a legacy of inclusion, equity, and innovation that resonates across the globe.

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PAUL ZYLA



“Success is about crafting solutions that fit each client’s unique needs—then working together to bring those solutions to life.”



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Paul Zyla, CEO and senior technology consultant at Purlin Horizons, brings over 37 years of experience in technology, including 25 years in executive leadership. A strategic and visionary leader, Paul is dedicated to transforming technology from a back-office function into a business enabler, driving growth, efficiency, and innovation.

At Purlin Horizons, Paul delivers fractional CIO/CTO services to banks, credit unions, and investment firms, ensuring IT investments align with organizational goals while addressing key challenges such as regulatory compliance, system modernization, and cybersecurity. “My work is about untangling challenges and uncovering opportunities to drive measurable results,” Paul explains. By leveraging modern technology, he helps businesses achieve financial success, enhance operational efficiency, and scale for growth.

Paul’s expertise lies in simplifying complex technology, integrating consumer-driven innovations, and implementing solutions tailored to financial institutions with revenues from \$1M to \$20M and assets ranging from \$250M to \$1.5B. Whether optimizing digital banking, leading system integrations, or automating workflows, his approach ensures organizations thrive in a digital-first world.

Unlike firms that dilute focus across multiple areas, Purlin Horizons specializes in technology and cybersecurity, turning IT from a cost center into a growth driver. “We bridge the gap between business and technology, ensuring seamless integration with our clients’ culture and objectives,” Paul says. His collaborative approach helps clients streamline workflows, modernize IT infrastructure, and strengthen cybersecurity.

Paul’s faith and family values are the foundation of his work, guiding his commitment to integrity, excellence, and lifelong learning. “Success is about crafting solutions that fit each client’s unique needs—then working together to bring those solutions to life,” he shares.

Beyond Consulting: Thought Leadership & Community Building

Paul is a recognized thought leader who actively educates and engages business leaders on the power of fractional technology leadership:

YouTube Channel: “The Fractional Smart Shift”: A hub for thought leadership and education on fractional consulting and business transformation.

LinkedIn Newsletter: “The Smart Shift News”: A weekly publication designed to inform CEOs, COOs, CIOs, and board members on how fractional IT leadership drives innovation, scalability, and operational efficiency.

Fractional Technology Cohort Group: A monthly roundtable where fractional leaders share strategies, insights, and success stories.

Podcasts on fractional leadership and digital transformation: Discussing agile solutions for financial institutions navigating modern IT challenges.

Published Articles for *The National CIO Review*: Contributing expert insights on digital transformation, technology strategy, and fractional leadership.

Paul also hosts podcasts like *Fractional Technology Leadership*, *The Agile Solution for Modern Businesses* and *Client-Centric Problem Solving: A Lifeline for Small to Mid-Size Financial Institutions*, where he shares insights on how fractional leadership provides flexible, expert solutions for businesses navigating digital transformation.

For Paul, success means empowering businesses to see technology as a competitive advantage. “My goal is to ensure businesses aren’t just surviving—but thriving—with the right tools, strategies, and vision in place.”

With Paul Zyla at the helm, Purlin Horizons is more than a consultancy—it’s a trusted partner, helping businesses turn challenges into opportunities and opportunities into success.

Sanjay Sathe

FOUNDER & CEO

When Sanjay Sathe launched SucceedSmart in 2020, he brought with him three decades of experience, having spent 15 years as a candidate and another 15 years as a buyer in the executive search industry. His insights into the inefficiencies of traditional recruitment solutions fueled his vision to disrupt the industry, which he saw as “clubby,” outdated, and resistant to innovation. With SucceedSmart, Sanjay aims to redefine how companies source top leadership talent, introducing efficiency, inclusivity, and advanced technology to a sector worth over \$22 billion globally.

Under Sanjay’s leadership, SucceedSmart has become a groundbreaking force in modernizing the search for director to C-level executives. Located in Los Altos, California, the company operates with a mission to blend AI precision with human insight to deliver diverse, future-ready, visionary leaders for the modern workforce. Using a blend of proprietary AI, patented technology, and empathy and expertise from expert talent advisors, SucceedSmart reduces executive hiring times from the typical 24-26 weeks to just 4-6 weeks, while cutting costs by up to 70%.

The platform’s AI-led, accomplishments-based matching system is at the core of its transformative approach. Rather than relying solely on traditional resumes, networks, and evaluating candidates based on skills, SucceedSmart’s technology matches candidates with companies based on specific achievements, ensuring the most qualified fit for each role. This innovative approach saves time and ensures a higher degree of accuracy in placing candidates, benefiting companies looking to secure talent for complex and critical roles.

SucceedSmart’s proactive pipelining capability is another standout innovation. Talent pipelining enables companies to build diverse candidate pipelines for both immediate and future needs, creating a more inclusive recruitment process. By tapping into broader networks and prioritizing transparency, SucceedSmart helps organizations cultivate leadership diversity and ensures a steady flow of qualified candidates ready to step into critical positions as they become available.

Sanjay’s journey to revolutionizing executive search is rooted in his history of innovation. As the founder



of RiseSmart, he redefined the \$3 billion outplacement industry by leveraging personal insights and experience. RiseSmart rapidly became the fastest-growing outplacement firm globally and was acquired by Randstad in 2015 for \$100 million. Later, Sanjay founded GenomeSmart, a pioneering AI-based genetic risk assessment platform that was acquired by Konica Minolta Precision Medicine in 2020, now serving over 700 hospitals.

SucceedSmart has quickly gained industry recognition, winning 15 prestigious awards in 2024 alone. Highlights include multiple HR tech awards from Lighthouse Research & Advisory for advancements in AI and diversity, as well as the *Globe® Award for Achievement in Human Resources*. Additionally, SucceedSmart was honored in the *TiE50 Awards*, further cementing its place as an innovator in executive recruiting technology.

With an MBA from the Asian Institute of Management and further credentials from The Wharton School, Sanjay’s career is defined by a relentless drive to challenge norms and improve industries in need of change. As a member of the Forbes Human Resources Council, he continues to influence industry standards and advocate for innovative solutions in talent acquisition.



SucceedSmart

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Jawad Arshad

MD, FACEP

CEO & Co-Founder

Jawad Arshad, CEO and co-founder of WoW Health Solutions, is transforming health care by making it more accessible, affordable, and transparent. With over 20 years of clinical and administrative experience, he has dedicated himself to tackling one of America's most pressing challenges—rising healthcare costs, which are driven by the lack of transparency because no one knows the true cost of any episode of care.

With a background as an emergency physician, a director of emergency services at Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital, and a clinic owner, Jawad has seen firsthand the financial and logistical struggles patients face in accessing care. His experience as both a provider and an employer purchasing healthcare benefits shaped his mission: to create a better way.

WoW Health Solutions, founded in 2017 and based in Detroit, Michigan, offers a groundbreaking insurance-alternative platform. The company connects individuals and employers to healthcare providers in a direct-pay model, allowing consumers to bypass traditional insurance red tape. Instead of navigating cumbersome claims and uncertain costs, members enjoy price transparency and direct payments to providers, reducing clerical burdens and increasing efficiency.

Jawad's inspiration to start the company came from a simple realization: healthcare insurance often fails the people it's supposed to protect. While running his clinic, he saw how employees, despite paying high premiums, still struggled with out-of-pocket expenses and deductibles so high that they couldn't afford to use their insurance when they needed it most. "If you can't afford to use something, what's the point of having it?" he asked. His solution was to rethink healthcare benefits in a way that makes sense for everyday consumers.

WoW Health Solutions operates under a membership model rather than traditional insurance, with plans starting at just \$30 per month. It provides individuals and employers with control over their healthcare, offering telehealth services at zero cost and a complete continuum of outpatient care—including doctor visits, labs, imaging, and procedures—with full cost transparency. Instead of waiting weeks to receive a surprise bill, members know exactly what they are paying at the time of service.

Jawad compares his approach to car maintenance: "We don't bill oil changes to auto insurance because they are routine expenses we can plan for—healthcare should be the same way." With WoW Health, members can manage routine healthcare costs directly, preventing financial surprises and making informed decisions about their care. Employers, too, benefit by offering an affordable healthcare supplement that improves employee retention and recruitment.

WoW Health is more than just a telehealth platform—it's a hybrid system that connects members to doctors virtually and in-person, guiding them through the entire continuum of care. Whether it's a prescription today, a check-up next month, or a mammogram later in the year, the platform simplifies access to necessary services with a single login.

Jawad Arshad and WoW Health Solutions are changing the way people think about healthcare—bringing transparency, affordability, and control back to consumers while easing the administrative burden on providers. With a model that empowers individuals and businesses alike, WoW Health is paving the way for a smarter, more sustainable future in healthcare.



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Jim Apodaca

President & Founder

“ In Jim Apodaca, the consulting world has found not just a strategist, but a trailblazer redefining what it means to help organizations thrive.

In a world brimming with consultants, Jim Apodaca, president and founder of Apodaca Consulting, stands apart as a thought leader, strategist, and change agent. Armed with over 20 years of experience spanning fintech, healthcare, eCommerce, manufacturing, and government, Jim has mastered the art of guiding executive teams and organizations through transformative change, creating greater alignment and focus. His secret? A unique blend of OKRs (objectives and key results), agile transformation, AI, and a deep understanding on how to make organizational change smooth, effective, and lasting.

Founded in 2020 and headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, Apodaca Consulting is more than a solutions provider—it's a partner in evolution. Jim's approach isn't just about implementing frameworks; it's about reshaping the DNA of organizations. By identifying process gaps and highlighting their impact on growth and delivery, Jim and his team don't just fix problems—they future-proof businesses.

What sets Jim apart is his holistic perspective. “When I help a client implement OKRs or Scrum, I'm not just focused on the framework,” he says. “I'm looking at the organization as a whole—at the processes, the roles, and the structures that might be holding them back.” This deep dive often uncovers limitations that might otherwise go unnoticed, enabling companies to operate at peak efficiency.

Jim's journey to consultancy wasn't a conventional one. The first in his family to graduate from college, he earned his degree in information systems from the University of New Mexico and stacked his résumé over 20 years working with Fortune 100 organizations and growth stage start-ups. After two decades in the corporate world, building dreams for others, Jim took the bold leap of leaving a secure job to pursue his own vision.

That vision has paid off. Under his leadership, Apodaca Consulting has delivered strategic initiatives for projects ranging from \$2 million to \$10 million, transforming startups and enterprise organizations alike. While he works with multinational clients, Jim remains particularly passionate about startups. “I come from a startup background,” he shares. “I know how challenging it can be to scale without the right tools and strategies in place.”



At the heart of Jim's philosophy is empathy. Implementing OKRs and Scrum isn't just about better workflows; it's about understanding how these changes impact employees and their roles. “We're heavy on the change management side,” Jim explains. “We don't just roll out a framework; we consider how it affects the entire company and its people.”

Jim's ability to integrate strategy, execution, and change management has earned him a reputation as a true partner to his clients. His affinity for reinvention extends to his own life and career, as evidenced by his remarkable achievements: leaving the corporate grind, starting his consultancy, and continually refining his personal and professional brand.

With year-over-year growth driving Apodaca Consulting forward, Jim is proving that success isn't just about solving problems—it's about creating opportunities for sustainable transformation. His work is a testament to the power of vision, resilience, and a willingness to challenge the status quo.

In Jim Apodaca, the consulting world has found not just a strategist, but a trailblazer redefining what it means to help organizations thrive.



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MATTHEW RISING

Co-Founder & Managing Partner



EMERGENT

Matt and Kevin attribute their success to what they call “principled entrepreneurship,” grounded in their belief that we live lives of meaning when we use our gifts to benefit others.

Matthew Rising co-founded Emergent Strategic Partners to bring together two worlds. The company scales sustainable innovation by building partnerships between the world’s most exciting emerging businesses and the largest corporations. Emerging businesses benefit from the scale of large corporations, while corporations benefit from emerging businesses’ most valuable innovations.

Driving Matt’s work is his mission to meet the needs of the time. His vision is to create cycles of mutual benefit for his partners, for Emergent, and for the broader world. To achieve that, he and his co-founder, Kevin Vilkin, take great care getting to know the leaders of startups and corporations. They understand the challenges and opportunities specific to each. That gives them the unique ability to bring them together in distinctive partnerships.

Emergent has proven its model many times. It built a partnership between a sustainable home improvement finance company and a national contractor. The contractor’s sales grew by 20%, while the finance company realized \$100 million in new revenue. In another Emergent partnership, Matt and Kevin brought together a fintech company and a Fortune 500 restaurant group. The restaurant’s 100,000 employees were given new financial wellness tools, while the fintech gained an enormous new customer base. These are just two of many examples that share the same ambition, scope, and scale.

Matt and Kevin attribute their success to what they call “principled entrepreneurship,” grounded in their belief that we live lives of meaning when we use our gifts to benefit others. Their goal is always to become a preferred partner of everyone they work with. To do so, they hold fast to a strong code of values—including continual transformation, self-actualization, humility, openness, and integrity—and they partner with those who share the same ethic.

Before Emergent, Matt co-founded Swell Energy, the first company to provide residential energy storage at scale. Swell pioneered a new model for home energy management: the aggregation of home energy users into “virtual power plants.” Matt exited the business following a controlling investment by Ares’s Climate Infrastructure Fund.

Earlier in his career, Matt worked in food policy for the White House Domestic Policy Council, in corporate finance for renewable energy, and as a corporate attorney.

Matt was a scholarship football player at Duke University and served as associate editor of the *Journal of Environmental Law and Policy* at UCLA School of Law.

Matt says, “When emerging businesses and large corporations partner, they win, and the world wins with them. That is why Kevin and I named our company Emergent: when the right partners come together in the right way, extraordinary value emerges, and the whole is far greater than the sum of the parts.”

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KEVIN VILKIN

Founding Partner

Kevin Vilkin, founding partner of Emergent Strategic Partners, is a serial entrepreneur and philanthropist whose career has been defined by a singular mission: unlocking human potential and leveraging it to drive meaningful change. Since starting his first business at 21, Kevin has been propelled by a deep passion for supporting talented individuals who dedicate themselves to causes greater than their own. Featured on *Forbes 30 Under 30*, he exemplifies a rare combination of ambition and a profound commitment to service.

Emergent Strategic Partners, headquartered in Austin, Aspen, and Los Angeles, reflects Kevin's vision of merging innovation with purpose. Alongside his co-founder and partner, Matthew Rising, Kevin has built a firm that specializes in creating transformative partnerships. The company connects emerging businesses with large corporations and family offices, fostering collaborations that drive efficiency, sustainability, and growth. Emergent partners have generated over \$2.2 billion in revenue.

Kevin's leadership at Emergent is fueled by decades of experience as a senior partner with investment firms, where he developed a robust track record of fostering innovation and driving value in both financial and environmental terms. At Emergent, Kevin leads a team of professionals dedicated to identifying and supporting businesses that align profitability with purpose. His hands-on approach ensures that these companies not only achieve growth, but also deliver measurable progress in combating climate change and advancing sustainability.

Beyond his entrepreneurial endeavors, Kevin has extended his influence through roles on influential boards and councils. As a member of the Global Leadership Council for Conservation International, he works to expand energy access for underserved populations while championing initiatives to combat climate change. In his board role at Beyond Conflict, he supports the use of technology to prevent violence and promote peace and reconciliation around the world. Kevin's dedication to public service is equally evident in his work as a member of the Leadership Council at Business Executives for National Security (BENS), where he collaborates with senior leaders to strengthen the nation's critical infrastructure.



ESP

ESP connects emerging businesses with large corporations and family offices, fostering collaborations that drive efficiency, sustainability, and growth.

At Emergent, Kevin and Matthew have established a unique approach to building partnerships. They take exceptional care in understanding the goals and challenges of every partner—be it a Fortune 500 company, a family office, or an emerging business. By convening these stakeholders around shared opportunities, Emergent creates partnerships that not only grow revenue and returns, but also address some of the planet's most pressing challenges.



Amanda Cosme-Reddie

FOUNDER/CEO



In a world that constantly demands innovation and authenticity, Amanda Cosme-Reddie, the founder and chief executive officer of TAKE Brand Consulting and The Multifaceted Executive, is a Latina leader who champions both. With over 15 years of experience spanning telecommunications, real estate, and the technology sector, Amanda has cultivated a unique approach that merges strategic branding, business development, and community-focused transformation. Her path reflects not only a personal dedication to elevating women and underrepresented groups in leadership, but also a broader mission to empower brands and individuals to make meaningful connections through values-based branding.

Inspired by her daughters, Tiana and Khloe, Amanda launched TAKE Brand Consulting in 2022 followed by The Multifaceted Executive in 2025. Based in Phoenix, Arizona, her businesses are dedicated to helping leaders and organizations craft strategies that go beyond standard branding, aligning them with core values to create authentic connections and foster sustainable growth. TAKE Brand Consulting is distinguished by its innovative approach to client needs: Amanda and her team not only tailor services, but also uncover strategic insights clients might overlook, creating transformative opportunities for growth and differentiation. The Multifaceted Executive is a member-based publishing platform inviting executives from all walks of life to share their unique stories, ideas, and insights that inspire action.

Amanda's brand of leadership—servant and inclusive—is most clearly embodied in her public speaking engagements, such as the *Serving Inclusive Leadership™ Series* and *TAKe Community Workshop Series*, among others, that have earned her an impressive 93 Net Promoter Score (NPS) and positioned her as a sought-after public speaker in Fortune 1000 circles. Her expertise and advocacy earned her the 2024 *Latinas to Watch Award* from the Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA), recognizing her ongoing contributions to empowering Latino students and professionals. In January 2025, Amanda was promoted to EVP of operations for ALPFA Phoenix. With her entrepreneurial and philanthropic efforts, Amanda remains deeply invested in the growth of underrepresented communities in the C-suite, sharing insights and strategies that pave the way for others to ascend to executive positions in top-tier organizations.

Amanda's influence extends into thought leadership, with publications like *Mentorship: A Game Changer for Women*, published by the University of Phoenix, and her feature in *KNOW Digital Magazine's 25 Coaches and Masterminds to KNOW and Support*, and as a guest speaker on the *Inclusive Leadership Podcast*, hosted by DEI Profinder, and the *Empoderate Show*, hosted by Chicanos Por La Causa. Through innovative storytelling, strategic relationship-building, and an unwavering commitment to equity, Amanda Cosme-Reddie has crafted a legacy of impact that continues to resonate with leaders and brands seeking to make a meaningful difference in their respective industries.

DR. Ayelet Schafir-Hirshfeld, PHD

President

Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld is a clinical psychologist and a Lacanian psychoanalyst, a traumatologist, and president of DiversItUS® Psychotherapy & Psychoanalysis Inc., who, surprisingly, is also the founder of tech and healthcare startup companies. Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld drives innovation in mental healthcare and is an advisor of multiple organizations. This unique blend of disciplines forms the backbone of Dr. Hirshfeld's innovative work at DiversItUS® Psychotherapy & Psychoanalysis Inc., a Los-Gatos, California-based practice she founded in 2009. For over 15 years, Ayelet has been transforming lives through a multidisciplinary approach that combines cutting-edge technology with deep psychological insight, particularly in the realm of trauma. She is also the founder & CEO of YourAIPsychoanalyst Inc., a software company specializing in digital mental health solutions, designing a domain specific mental health advisement model & an Agentic AI Powered Agent to render Psychoanalysis autonomously.

Growing up in Israel, Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld was immersed in a culture where trauma is often a shared experience. She served in the Israeli Defense Forces and is the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. These experiences not only honed her resilience, but also gave her firsthand understanding of the profound impact of trauma and intergenerational transmission of trauma on the human psyche. These early experiences became the foundation & the backbone of her clinical focus, which encompasses trauma, traumatic stress reactions, critical incident stress, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatization, vicarious traumatization, and a wide spectrum of associated conditions, including anxiety, depression, dissociative disorders, and adjustment difficulties.

Her credentials are as impressive as her life story. Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld earned a BA from the University of Tel-Aviv, Israel (TAU), and a PhD from the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP/ AIU). She has completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford's Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) and training as a Lacanian psychoanalyst at the Lacan School of Psychoanalysis (LSP). She further holds certifications in Child Inclusive Mediation and Counseling (CIMC) and EMDR therapy. Her expertise has been recognized globally, with honors such as the *Exceptional Licensed Clinical Psychologist Award* from WorldWide Leaders in Healthcare and recognition as a *Leading Physician* by The Leading Physicians of the World.

What sets Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld apart is her ability to integrate her vast clinical expertise with her passion for technology. A self-described lover of startups, she has served as the founder of tech and mental healthcare companies and as an advisory board member for others. This dual focus allows her to craft innovative, AI-driven frameworks designed to facilitate deeper psychological discovery. "Most clinicians are not tech-savvy, and most tech founders don't have a background in psychoanalysis or psychology," Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld explains. "Bringing these two worlds together creates a niche that is incredibly rare and, I believe, impactful."

In her private practice, Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld offers a comprehensive range of services, from Lacanian psychoanalysis and Individual



psychotherapy to executive organizational consulting. Her work with clients is deeply personal, centered on listening intently to uncover the unconscious, while her tech-driven initiatives extend these insights into scalable solutions.

Dr Ayelet Hirshfeld's unique approach is further enriched by her ongoing education. She completed a Healthcare Executive Programme (HEP) at the Global Business School for Health (GBSH) at University College London (UCL) in the UK, as well as an Artificial intelligence driven leadership program at Stanford University, ensuring her skills remain at the forefront of both her fields.

Her practice also serves as a hub for education. Dr. Hirshfeld has extensively researched the field of trauma, critical incident stress, PTSD & secondary traumatization at SF VA Medical Center. She has taught weekly Lacanian seminars for clinicians at her clinic and various organizations, where she delves into the theories and practices of Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis. "I'm deeply invested in advancing the field of trauma informed mental healthcare," she says. "It's about bringing together assessment, research, and practice in a way that pushes the boundaries of what's possible."

For Dr. Ayelet Hirshfeld, the fusion of psychology, psychoanalysis and technology is more than a professional venture—it's a calling. "I love the person-to-person interaction of clinical work," she reflects, "and I love startups and technology. Integrating these areas allows me to craft something truly unique: a bridge between the human mind and the digital world, enabling healing and innovation to coexist."

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TRIPP RUSS

Managing Partner & Founder



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We created 90Ten as a vehicle for brokers to become more involved as principals. We want to help them capitalize on their market intelligence by creating investment opportunities for them.



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Tripp Russ, managing partner and founder of 90Ten, is reshaping the commercial real estate landscape by creating a platform that empowers brokers to become more involved as principals. With almost a decade of experience in the industry and seven years as a broker, Tripp has seen firsthand how brokers hold the most valuable market information, yet often lack the strategic partnerships needed to capitalize on that intel. This realization led him to create 90Ten, a real estate private equity firm that bridges that gap, allowing brokers to transition from transactional roles into investment partners.

Tripp's journey began with humble origins as a broker, representing best-in-class retail and restaurant brands such as Equinox and Sweetgreen across the country. He cut his teeth walking down iconic streets like South Congress in Austin and Knox Street in Dallas, connecting with building owners and discovering untapped opportunities. "I realized early on that brokers have the best information in the marketplace, but they don't have the right partner," Tripp reflects. "We created 90Ten as a vehicle for brokers to become more involved as principals. We want to help them capitalize on their market intelligence by creating investment opportunities for them."

90Ten's unique model brings brokers into the fold as co-GPs (general partners) and LPs (limited partners), allowing them to not only earn their fees and commissions, but also participate in the deals they help create. "They're doing the same amount of work as they typically would with any other investor, but they're making more money with us, and we believe they deserve that," says Tripp. This innovative approach has resonated with hundreds of brokerage partners who appreciate the collaborative model. "To be where we are today, a little over 18 months in, is pretty wild."

Founded in 2023 and based in Dallas and Tampa-St. Pete, 90Ten is disrupting the traditional, siloed nature of commercial real estate by fostering a collaborative investment platform. In a field where brokers are often undervalued by investors, Tripp and his team are changing the game. "We're changing the relationship between investors and brokers. Brokers add so much value to these deals, but no one is really allowing them to participate at the level they should. We want to prioritize the broker and let them invest."

Before launching 90Ten, Tripp was a founding partner of RUE Realty in Dallas, where he expanded the company's consulting business with major brands like Equinox, Sweetgreen, Mendocino Farms, and Vuori. Prior to that, he served as vice president of brokerage at The Retail Connection (TRC), becoming the youngest VP in the company's history and its highest-producing rookie broker.

Beyond real estate, Tripp has also founded businesses in both the tech and hospitality industries. His Dallas restaurant, Written by The Seasons, was named *Best New Restaurant* by *Eater* magazine and is currently being reviewed for the *Michelin Guide*.

Tripp's philosophy centers on personal growth and learning. "I always want to be the least talented guy in the room because that means everyone around me is making me better," he says. "The most fulfilling part of this journey is learning from my partners and teammates every day."

Vanessa HARDIMAN

FOUNDER

In today's fast-paced business world, where companies struggle to solve complex problems, Vanessa Hardiman steps in as a master strategist. As the founder of Business Strategies & Solutions, LLC, she doesn't just offer advice—she delivers transformation.

With over 20 years of experience at industry giants like UPS, General Motors, and Sheraton Hotels, Vanessa has witnessed firsthand how businesses overspend on unnecessary tools and services while overlooking simple, effective solutions that drive real success. "A lot of businesses waste money and allocate resources to things they don't need," she explains. "Nobody's being honest with them and saying, 'Hey, you need a low-cost virtual assistant, AI tools to automate routine tasks, and other efficiencies so you can focus on revenue-generating activities.'" And that is exactly what she provides—clear, cost-effective solutions that businesses can implement immediately.

A Vision for Smarter Business

Founded in 2017 and based in Atlanta, GA, Business Strategies & Solutions, LLC, specializes in virtual assistant services, program implementation, digital marketing, and social media management. Vanessa partners with CEOs, business owners, and entrepreneurs, helping them streamline operations, improve communication, and lead high-performing teams. From mentoring to operational restructuring, she equips leaders with the tools they need to develop a younger workforce, manage teams effectively, and build sustainable success.

Her expertise has attracted major clients, including Popeyes, Agape, NCBW, United Way, and more—organizations that trust her to cut through the noise and implement innovative, cost-efficient strategies. Whether tackling AP/AR, credit and collections, funding strategies, or brand partnerships, Vanessa ensures that businesses operate with clarity, efficiency, and confidence.

Developing Future Leaders with Boss Kidz Inc.

Beyond consulting, Vanessa is passionate about shaping the next generation of business leaders through Boss Kidz Inc. Recognizing that young professionals often lack essential soft skills and business acumen, she founded the program to train college students in real-world leadership, communication, and problem-solving.

Through mentorship, hands-on training, and exposure to real business scenarios, Boss Kidz Inc. prepares young professionals to step into leadership roles with confidence and competence.



Recognized Excellence

Vanessa's impact has not gone unnoticed. She has received prestigious accolades, including the UPS *President's Cup Award*, *Horizon Award*, and *Community Involvement Award*, as well as the National Association of 100 *Black Women President's Award*. Her insights have been featured in *IssueWire*, *Entrepreneurship*, *Voyage ATL*, and *Shoutout Atlanta*, and she has contributed to notable publications such as *What Is a Mother* and *The Extra Mile*.

A Results-Driven Approach to Success

What sets Vanessa apart is her straightforward, results-driven approach. "I'm very approachable and relatable," she says. Whether she's advising executives, guiding startups, or empowering students, Vanessa Hardiman is reshaping how businesses and individuals achieve success—one strategic solution at a time.



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KARA Fairhurst

OWNER

Kara Fairhurst has always held that genuine care begins with understanding, and true impact comes from hands-on dedication. As the owner of Senior Helpers of Bolingbrook and Southwest Suburbs, she combines her passion for senior care with a relentless commitment to operational excellence. For Kara, leading a successful elderly care at home business isn't just about meeting standards; it's about surpassing them to create an environment where seniors can thrive with dignity and comfort.

Born in Turkey and raised across continents, Kara's journey into caregiving began early. At 17, she moved to England to work as an au pair for four children while attending college, a time when she also took on a caregiver role in a memory care facility. This

experience sparked a profound connection to elder care. Later, Kara spent a decade at McDonald's, honing skills in operations and training—a foundation that would become invaluable as she transitioned to business ownership. "You need passion for care, but an operations background is essential to run an outstanding business," Kara reflects.

After moving to the United States to raise her family, Kara encountered a deeply personal challenge: finding quality care for her ailing grandmother. This experience ignited a calling that led her to establish Senior Helpers of Bolingbrook and Southwest Suburbs in 2022.

Since its inception, Kara's franchise has made its mark in non-medical home care services, distinguished by her active involvement in everything from daily operations and marketing to client relationships. "Clients are often surprised when I hand them my card, and it says I'm the owner," she says. "The feedback I get is that they can feel my genuine passion."

Senior Helpers of Bolingbrook and Southwest Suburbs' mission is simple yet powerful: to help seniors age safely at home, offering peace of mind to their families. With an innovative approach to training and technology, the company utilizes a comprehensive Life Profile Assessment, covering 144 touch points of a senior's well-being, including critical areas like medication management and hydration.

What sets Kara's franchise apart is its flexible, personalized care. Unlike many providers, Senior Helpers of Bolingbrook and Southwest Suburbs has no strict minimum hour requirements, allowing families to begin with as little as an hour of daily care. The franchise also offers specialized programs such as Senior Gems, focused on Alzheimer's and dementia care, and a dedicated Parkinson's disease program. "The investment we make in training and technology to enrich seniors' lives truly sets us apart," Kara explains.

For Kara, caregiving isn't just a profession — it's a calling. "When an adult child thanks me for caring for their mom or dad, I know I'm on the right path," she reflects. As she continues to lead the business Kara's journey is a testament to the power of compassion, dedication, and expertise.



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VIKAS SHARMA

CEO and Founder

In a world where threats are evolving as quickly as the technology around us, Vikas Sharma stands as a formidable force in both physical and digital security. As the CEO and founder of EliteDefenders Innovations LLC and Imperium Protection Group, Vikas brings a wealth of experience and innovation to the field of protective services, setting new standards by utilizing the latest technology for protecting their clients. An active law enforcement agent, Vikas has spent years cultivating an unparalleled skill set, earning him a reputation as a leading expert in advanced technologies and protection.

Vikas's career is a masterclass in versatility and expertise.

Licensed for armed and unarmed security services in Arizona and California, he is a federal and state certified law enforcement instructor in firearms, active shooter response, and emergency tactical driving. His technical prowess adds an extra layer of credibility to his impressive resume, which is fortified by over two decades of experience in law enforcement and technology. Yet, his background extends far beyond conventional security—Vikas has spent over 20 years advancing the fields of transportation technology, robotics, and self-driving vehicles, cementing his position as a pioneer in merging technology with physical protection.

EliteDefenders Innovations LLC, founded in early 2024, reflects Vikas's visionary approach of using Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity to close the gap between physical and digital protection of high-risk clients. With operations in Arizona and Alaska, the company specializes in delivering elite-level executive protection, sophisticated cybersecurity solutions, and comprehensive risk management strategies for a diverse clientele. EliteDefenders is not just a security firm; it is a fusion of cutting-edge defense mechanisms and proactive digital safety strategies. The team's expertise spans high-threat protection for dignitaries, politicians, celebrities, and high-net-worth individuals, as well as risk mitigation for corporations and organizations. Their clients include some of the largest corporations in a variety of sectors, where EliteDefenders' team diffused hostile situations with precision and tact.

Vikas's forward-thinking mindset led to the invention of the *CryptX Ring*, a revolutionary wearable cybersecurity product that serves as an "Iron Dome" for their high-net-worth clients. Leveraging Department of Defense technology, the CryptX Ring safeguards individuals crossing international borders by thwarting cyberattacks aimed at personal data acquisition. This pioneering creation exemplifies Vikas's ability to anticipate and counter emerging threats in an increasingly digital world.

Imperium Protection Group, headquartered in California, shares the same dedication to holistic security as EliteDefenders. Vikas's approach with Imperium focuses on safety concerns that are unique to California, recognizing that true security requires addressing a person's entire threat profile. The firm's services encompass background analyses, identifying and rectifying data leaks, and providing continuous threat monitoring to protect clients from a wide range of vulnerabilities.

Vikas's academic credentials are equally impressive. He holds an MS in engineering from Penn State, where he achieved the fastest completion in the program's history, and a management certification from Yale University. His multifaceted expertise, combined with his status as a peace officer by CA POST, underscores his comprehensive grasp of technology, security, and protection.

Through EliteDefenders and Imperium Protection Group, Vikas Sharma is not merely responding to threats—he's reimagining what it means to be safe with ever expanding and vulnerable digital footprint. His relentless commitment to excellence and his groundbreaking innovations have made him a trusted protector of high-profile clients and their assets.

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JULIE FAUPEL

Founder/CEO

“ We leverage technology to foster connections that go beyond the transaction, building relationships rooted in shared values and aspirations.

Julie Faupel, founder and CEO of REALM, has redefined what it means to be a leader in the luxury real estate industry. Recognized as a 2023 *Newsmaker* by *RIS Media* and included on the 2023 *Luxury Women to Watch* list by *Luxury Daily*, Julie has become a visionary force in bridging the gap between top-performing real estate professionals and their clientele. Her approach? Innovation, community-building, and a steadfast commitment to collaboration.

Before founding REALM in 2020, Julie had already established herself as a trailblazer. As cofounder of the largest independent real estate company in the Teton Region, her team consistently ranked among the top 100 in the U.S., according to *The Wall Street Journal/Real Trends*. Her 20-year career in the luxury space, beginning in operations at 5-star luxury hotels, gave her unparalleled insights into consumer psychology and the evolving definition of luxury.

REALM, a global community and marketplace for elite real estate advisors, represents cumulative transaction volume of \$400 billion and climbing. The platform, lauded as 2022's *Luxury Technology of the Year* by *Inman Media*, eliminates traditional industry silos by creating a brand-agnostic, geography-agnostic network. It's a space where excellence is the only requirement. Julie describes it as "Match-making for real estate professionals," connecting top producers with others at the pinnacle of their profession while fostering meaningful, resource-efficient collaboration.

"What makes REALM special is that it's not about competition—it's about collaboration," Julie explains. "We leverage technology to foster connections that go beyond the transaction, building relationships rooted in shared values and aspirations."

This emphasis on community reflects Julie's deeply ingrained values as a member of the Young Presidents' Organization, where she serves as Global One Chapter chair. Her leadership has earned accolades, including YPO International's 2023 *Regional Membership Award* for diversity and the Global One Chapter's *Best of the Best Award, Pacific Region*.

Julie attributes her success to her ability to see the bigger picture in real estate. "When people think about real estate, they often focus on luxury and opulence. But behind that is years of hard work—building a sphere of influence, innovating marketing strategies, and cultivating trust. That's what I strive to honor in my work, ensuring that colleagues and clients alike feel proud to work with me."

REALM's proprietary technology goes beyond mere transactions, creating lifestyle profiles that match clients with properties and advisors based on shared preferences. This innovative approach underscores Julie's belief that lifestyle, not just location, sells properties. By connecting top professionals in meaningful ways, REALM creates opportunities for collaboration that elevate the industry as a whole.

Julie's contributions have not gone unnoticed. From being a frequent media expert interviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, and *The New York Times*, to earning awards for innovation and leadership, her impact is undeniable. As the luxury industry continues to evolve, Julie Faupel is ensuring that REALM and its members stay ahead of the curve, championing a future built on collaboration, innovation, and excellence.

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Kevan White

Founder & CEO

Kevan White is no ordinary tech entrepreneur. As the founder and CEO of 8823 Technologies LLC, a company at the cutting edge of AI, machine learning, and cybersecurity solutions, Kevan is on a mission to build technology that solves real-world problems while upholding values of honor, integrity, and service.

A decorated U.S. Air Force Special Operations Forces (SOF) veteran, Kevan's career has spanned nearly every discipline within the intelligence cycle. From airborne language analyst to senior data scientist, he has honed his expertise across multidisciplinary intelligence roles at both the SOF and national levels. Since 2015, Kevan has supported elite operations, including Air Force Special Operations Command, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, and Joint Special Operations Command, where his leadership and technical skills delivered measurable results in high-stakes environments.

Kevan's technical prowess is matched by a deep commitment to innovation. His greatest achievements include developing and deploying Python packages, creating AI-powered assessment tools, and collaborating with defense leaders to implement scalable technology solutions. Now, through 8823 Technologies, Kevan is extending that expertise to empower businesses, startups, and defense organizations alike.

A Legacy of Honor and Innovation

Founded in 2023 and headquartered in North Carolina, 8823 Technologies LLC embodies the values instilled in Kevan by his late father, whose badge number with the California Highway Patrol—8823—inspired the company's name. "My dad lived by honor, integrity, and service," Kevan shares. "I wanted to create a company that not only reflected those principles, but also contributed to innovation in data science and technology."

8823 Technologies is more than a business—it's a partner for anyone needing tech solutions. Whether it's helping a startup navigate AI integration, designing custom tools, or developing scalable software for defense applications, Kevan ensures every client's unique needs are met with precision and care. His expertise spans natural language processing, computer vision, and cybersecurity, offering end-to-end solutions that are ethical, scalable, and tailored to drive growth.

Transformative Solutions for the Future

Kevan's dual focus on cutting-edge technology and ethical AI implementation makes 8823 Technologies unique. "Our solutions are designed not just to work today, but to grow with your company," he explains. By



maintaining compliance with industry standards and emphasizing scalability, 8823 Technologies delivers tools that evolve alongside client needs.

For organizations in the defense sector, Kevan's ability to merge technical and strategic insights sets him apart. His work is grounded in years of consulting and contracting, creating AI-driven data analysis systems and cybersecurity solutions that protect critical systems. His approach integrates seamlessly with existing infrastructures while empowering teams to maximize the value of new technologies.

Building a Future with Vision

Kevan's passion for innovation is matched by a desire to help others. "Anyone who needs tech assistance—whether it's starting a company, figuring out their career path, or building a new tech suite—I want to be the one they turn to," he says.

Code of Honor. Vision for the Future.

That's the foundation of 8823 Technologies—and it's the legacy Kevan is determined to continue.



Dr. Raymond Goodrich

CSO, VP of R&D, and Co-Founder



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Instead of targeting a handful of antigens, we're addressing all the antigens associated with the tumor, which makes it much harder for the cancer to develop resistance.



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Dr. Raymond Goodrich has spent more than 37 years at the forefront of medical research, innovating in fields as critical as transfusion, transplantation medicine, and pathogen reduction technologies. Now, as chief science officer, vice president of R&D, and co-founder of PhotonPharma, Inc., Ray is channeling his deep expertise into one of medicine's most pressing challenges: cancer.

PhotonPharma, founded in 2018 and headquartered in Fort Collins, Colorado, is redefining the landscape of immuno-oncology. The company's groundbreaking platform stimulates a patient's immune system to identify and destroy cancer cells. Unlike traditional CAR T-cell therapies that require extensive external manipulation of immune cells, PhotonPharma takes a revolutionary approach—removing the patient's tumor cells, treating them to inactivate replication, and reintroducing them to trigger an immune response within the body. This process is simpler, less costly, and offers broader antigen targeting, significantly reducing the chance for tumors to evade detection.

“PhotonPharma's technology is unique because we're working with the tumor's own antigens,” Ray explains. “Instead of targeting a handful of antigens, we're addressing *all* the antigens associated with the tumor, which makes it much harder for the cancer to develop resistance.”

Ray's illustrious career is marked by pioneering achievements, including the invention of Mirasol PRT, Innocell, and SolaVAX technology platforms. A co-founder of four biotech startups—CryoPharm Corporation, Navigant Biotechnologies, PhotonPharma, and Solaris Vaccines—he has also held key academic and industry positions, including serving as professor in the Department of Microbiology, Immunology, and Pathology at Colorado State University (CSU) and as executive director of CSU's Infectious Disease Research Center. His expertise in microbiology, immunology, and biophysical chemistry, combined with his leadership in startup environments, has garnered numerous accolades, including the CSU *Ventures Award for Innovative Excellence* and an honorary *Order of Military Medical Merit (O2M3) Award*. Holding a BS in chemistry from Ohio State University and a PhD from the California Institute of Technology, Ray has also been recognized as an adjunct professor of chemistry at Ohio State University.

For Ray, collaboration is at the heart of his success. “A lot of people have been involved in the work that I've done over the years and what we've been able to achieve,” he shares. “These are big problems that we're attacking. I've learned the importance of collaborating, cooperating, and bringing together diverse talents to address these challenges.”

PhotonPharma's journey is entering an exciting new chapter with FDA-cleared patient trials launching in January at City of Hope in Duarte, California. The initial focus is on advanced ovarian cancer, marking a significant step toward transforming cancer therapy.

As the world eagerly watches these developments, Ray remains steadfast in his mission: advancing technologies that not only save lives, but also redefine what's possible in medicine. His work exemplifies the power of innovation, teamwork, and unwavering dedication to solving some of the toughest problems in healthcare.

GARRETT WILKES

Owner and Founder

Garrett Wilkes, owner and founder of Suits & Scars, is a consultant redefining second chances for professionals whose careers have been derailed due to loss of license, lawsuits, scandals and other professionally traumatic events. With a specialization in business and international law, Garrett's career is as impressive as it is inspiring. From being recognized as a *Top 40 Under 40 Attorney* by *News Weekly* to speaking at Veterans for Financial Freedom and being featured on CNN, he has always been a standout in his field. Yet, it was his personal journey of resilience that shaped the mission behind Suits & Scars.

In 2018, Garrett voluntarily surrendered his law license to focus on personal matters, only to discover how little support exists for professionals navigating life after such a setback. "I was a very successful attorney," he recalls. "But when I stepped away, I had no one to help me rebuild. It was horrific. That's why I started Suits & Scars." Based in Arizona, Suits & Scars is a specialized consultancy firm that helps professionals rebuild their careers and reputations, and is more specifically, dedicated to helping high-end professionals—doctors, dentists, lawyers, and other licensed professionals—reintegrate into their industries or pivot to new careers after facing license loss, legal, professional, or personal challenges.

Suits & Scars provides a full-spectrum approach to career and reputation rehabilitation. Unlike firms that focus solely on online reputation cleanup, Garrett's team tackles everything: resume restructuring, both online and en vivo reputation and image rehabilitation, career strategizing, and interview coaching. "When a dentist can't practice for two years, we help them see they weren't just running a dental office—they were running a business," Garrett explains. "We rework everything, from the inside out, to highlight their management expertise, teaching them to own their past in a positive way. Their past is not a disability; it's a capability."

Garrett's process includes personalized strategies, license reinstatement support and career coaching. Clients are taught how to reframe their experiences so that any perceived failures become assets. One such example is a lawyer whose license was suspended for three years. Suits & Scars helped him secure a position with a major law firm on a paralegal-to-attorney track. Another client, a therapist who lost her license, was guided to rebuild her career as a published author.



"Suits & Scars is the only consultancy of its kind," Garrett emphasizes. "We help people not just survive, but thrive. Our success rate is 100%, and every client emerges stronger, more prepared, and more confident."

Garrett's work is deeply personal. "I've been in my clients' shoes," he shares. "I know the fear and uncertainty they feel. My goal is to serve them now and help them emerge from the next 90 days transformed. We are helping individuals by turning tragedies into triumphs!"

With a relentless dedication to his clients and a unique approach to career rehabilitation, Garrett Wilkes is proving that even the deepest scars can become the foundation for remarkable success. Suits & Scars isn't just a business; it's a lifeline for those determined to reclaim their professional lives and redefine their futures.



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MELISA CUNNINGHAM

Founder & Principal Consultant



When Melisa Cunningham founded Emplify Consulting, LLC in 2024, she brought more than just decades of HR experience to the table—she brought a transformative vision for the future of employee experience. With over 25 years in HR operations, including leadership roles at ServiceNow and General Electric, Melisa is no stranger to navigating complex challenges. Now, as the founder and principal consultant of Texas-based Emplify Consulting, she channels her expertise to deliver tailored strategies that amplify the HR impact for organizations worldwide.

Emplify Consulting's mission is clear: to redefine the employee experience through innovative and operationally sound HR strategies. Leveraging a foundation of 30+ years of hands-on expertise, the firm addresses key issues such as employee engagement, process optimization, and strategic integration of HR technologies like ServiceNow. Melisa's unique approach combines operational mindset with strategic foresight, offering solutions that go beyond software implementation to create a cohesive, scalable roadmap for HR success.

"What sets Emplify apart is our ability to strategically guide companies in how to use ServiceNow effectively," Melisa explains. "While many firms focus on software implementation, we dive deeper—helping businesses build a roadmap, connect their operations with the platform, and truly maximize its potential. This isn't just theory; I've been in the trenches, and I know what works because I've lived it."

The results speak for themselves. Emplify Consulting has quickly expanded its reach, establishing partnerships around the globe, including a foothold in Dubai. The company prides itself on becoming an extension of each client's team, ensuring a collaborative approach that delivers lasting results. "We don't just consult from the outside," Melisa emphasizes. "We dig in on the ground, solve problems together, and see the impact firsthand. That's what makes our work so rewarding."

For Melisa, the gratification comes from the exponential impact her expertise can have across multiple organizations. "Leading HR operations within one company is rewarding, but being able to apply that same knowledge to improve employee experiences for many organizations is what drives me," she says.



Emplify's tailored engagements ensure that no two strategies are alike. From small adjustments to large-scale overhauls, the firm is committed to creating bespoke solutions that align with each client's unique needs and goals. Whether optimizing processes or addressing employee engagement challenges, Melisa and her team excel at turning complex issues into streamlined, effective outcomes.

Recognized with *Marquis Who's Who* honors for her consulting expertise, Melisa embodies a people-first leadership style that resonates with clients and teams alike. Her ability to mentor, coach, and engage ensures that her solutions aren't just practical but also deeply impactful.

As Emplify Consulting continues to grow and bring like-minded professionals together, its influence is poised to reshape HR operations for businesses around the world. With Melisa Cunningham at the helm, the future of employee experience looks brighter than ever.

CHRIS STARKEY

CO-FOUNDER

Chris Starkey's entrepreneurial journey reads like a masterclass in grit, creativity, and boundless ambition. As the co-founder of Imprint Events Group, Chris has transformed a rotary phone and an AOL account into a \$35 million enterprise with locations in Denver, Vail, Las Vegas, and Orlando. His story, however, is more than a tale of financial success—it's a testament to the power of vision, resilience, and community-centered leadership.



Before becoming a powerhouse in the event industry, Chris found his footing on the stage. A performer and world-touring entertainer, he honed his craft at Disney before transitioning behind the scenes as a producer. But it was in 2000 that his entrepreneurial spirit took flight. Starting from scratch, Chris built his one-man entertainment company into a national leader of corporate events, digital and virtual meetings, and brand-integrated experiences called Imprint Events Group. Chris's greatest gift is finding the "who's" along the way. Partnering with co-founder, Nicole Marsh, CEO Adriane Hodder, Alon Mor, and countless others, the company has orchestrated 30,000 events for clients like Molson Coors, Walmart, Pepsi-Cola, and RE/MAX International. Yes, the company has received countless awards, but Chris's proudest achievement is how many livelihoods he and his partners have been accountable for.

What sets Imprint Group apart is its "blue ocean strategy"—delivering not just events, but immersive, brand-centric experiences. "We don't just check boxes. We craft moments that resonate," Chris explains. By aligning their team's culture with their clients' brand identity, Imprint ensures seamless partnerships that transcend traditional event planning. "We're dream-makers, not order-takers," Chris adds, describing their ability to turn visions into "wow-did-that-just-happen" moments.

For Chris, success isn't just about numbers—it's about people. His high-energy, charismatic approach has made him a sought-after business coach and speaker, where he shares the formula behind his meteoric rise. "I always say, I'm not

the smartest person in the room, but I surround myself with people who fill the gaps. They make me look good and any kind of success I have had is all due to those people who have chosen Imprint as a destination of employment," he admits with humility. It's this collaborative mindset, paired with a relentless sense of urgency, that has fueled his and Imprint's extraordinary success.

Chris's leadership philosophy centers on lifting others up. Whether mentoring emerging leaders, philanthropic efforts in the special needs community, or speaking around the country, his passion for community shines through. "True success comes from empowering those around you," he says. This ethos extends to Imprint's commitment to investing in its people—a team that Chris proudly describes as "experts, trust-building partners, and creators of what's next."

Through it all, Chris's story serves as an inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs. From his start as an entertainer to his role as a leader in the event industry, he has proven that success is not about credentials, but about showing up, dreaming big, and building a team that shares your vision. As Chris puts it, "We are only as good as the five people we surround ourselves with. I am surrounded by the best 60+ people in the biz."

With Chris Starkey, and his partners leading the way, Imprint Events Group continues to redefine what it means to create experiences that go beyond the expected—proving that when passion meets purpose, the results are nothing short of extraordinary.

Lauren Jannelli

Founder & CEO



“ I wanted to take these treatments to the masses. Most medical spas are prohibitively expensive, and I knew I could create a system that delivers the same, if not better, results for a fraction of the cost.

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Lauren Jannelli, founder and CEO of Firm Lab, is a powerhouse in the beauty and wellness industry. With over 21 years of experience, she's not only a spa veteran, but also a trailblazer, merging innovation with accessibility in a multibillion-dollar market.

Lauren's journey began as a national esthetics educator for a French skincare company, traveling the country to train spas and speak at regional seminars. Her expertise and passion laid the foundation for Firm Lab, an emerging brand that is redefining non-invasive beauty treatments.

Lauren's career reached new heights when she opened Le Spa in 2011. Her hands-on experience as an owner gave her a deep understanding of what clients desire: effective, non-invasive treatments that deliver results. At Le Spa, Lauren began crafting the innovative technologies and treatments that now define Firm Lab. Her commitment to affordability and cutting-edge solutions makes Firm Lab stand out in the crowded world of medical spas.

Founded in 2023 and headquartered in Warren, NJ, Firm Lab offers treatments and products for skin rejuvenation, fat reduction, body contouring, and more—all at accessible prices. “I wanted to take these treatments to the masses,” Lauren shares. “Most medical spas are prohibitively expensive, and I knew I could create a system that delivers the same, if not better, results for a fraction of the cost.”

Firm Lab is unique in its approach. Using proprietary equipment and techniques, the brand offers treatments like a non-invasive facelift that tightens skin to the fascia layer, lasting up to six months with no downtime or pain. Their fat-reduction technology eliminates up to 30% of fat in targeted areas—results that rival high-end medical spas, but remain within reach for the average consumer.

Lauren's vision extends beyond her own location. She's actively building a franchise model designed to empower aspiring entrepreneurs in the beauty industry. “A typical medical spa might spend \$200,000 on a single piece of equipment,” she explains. “At Firm Lab, we provide an entire system—including all of our exclusive treatments and equipment—for a fraction of that cost. Plus, I personally train franchisees for free, making it easier for them to succeed without being buried in debt.” This franchise model is Lauren's answer to a growing demand for high-tech, affordable beauty solutions. She has meticulously developed a comprehensive system that blends affordability with efficacy, ensuring franchisees can replicate the Firm Lab experience with ease.

For Lauren, her work goes beyond technology and business. “The most rewarding part of my career has always been forming connections with people,” she says. “Our clients aren't just customers—they're our friends. We create a warm, welcoming environment where people feel cared for, and that's been my approach from day one.”

With Firm Lab, Lauren Jannelli is revolutionizing the spa industry, combining her passion for skincare with an entrepreneurial spirit. As she sets her sights on franchising the brand, she's paving the way for a new era of accessible beauty solutions—offering not only treatments but also opportunities for others to thrive in the industry she loves.

DR. CHE JORDAN, President

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The disease doesn't have a day off, so I don't either. I was put on this planet to serve people.

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Since its founding in 1973 by the determined Elbertzena Fontinote, Ebony House Inc. has been a beacon of hope in Arizona, serving those struggling with substance abuse and behavioral health challenges. With only \$500 in hand, Fontinote, a recovering alcoholic herself, established a legacy that would impact countless lives. Today, as Ebony House continues its mission, the organization remains a vital pillar in the community, providing life-saving behavioral health services to people of all races and backgrounds. Though Fontinote passed away in December 2023, her spirit lives on in the mission-driven leadership of Dr. Che Jordan.

Dr. Jordan, who took the helm as president in December 2022, arrived at a pivotal moment. At a time when facilities were shuttering across Arizona, Dr. Jordan not only kept the doors of Ebony House open, but also maintained over 90% client satisfaction rate. His leadership is driven by what he calls “servant leadership.” As Dr. Jordan puts it, “The disease doesn't have a day off, so I don't either. I was put on this planet to serve people.”

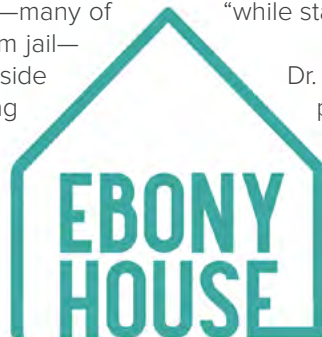
With a compassionate and hands-on approach, Dr. Jordan's connection with the people Ebony House serves is evident. From the moment, clients walk through the door—many of them homeless, hungry, or recently released from jail—Dr. Jordan greets them with a hug and walks beside them every step of the way. Whether it is sharing meals, playing basketball, or participating in group therapy sessions, he ensures that every individual feels supported. He has even made sure that clients leave Ebony House equipped not only with sobriety, but also with suits to wear as they re-enter the workforce, instilling confidence as they transition to a new life.

Under Dr. Jordan's leadership, Ebony House has seen tremendous growth and development. He has expanded the organization's residential and supported housing services, offering more clients the opportunity to graduate from the program and transition into stable housing. Notably, he is looking to open an emergency home specifically for military veterans and individuals living with HIV, providing them with rent-free housing for 30-90 days.

Ebony House's services remain as vital today as they were 50 years ago, offering therapeutic and evidence-based programming for individuals, children, and families facing substance abuse, behavioral challenges, HIV/AIDS, and more. The organization's commitment to client-centered, outcome-driven care continues to set it apart, earning accolades, including being named one of the *Best Businesses in America* and *Global Recognition Award* 2024.

Chairman of the board, Dr. Gene Blue, who has been with Ebony House for 45 years, speaks highly of Dr. Jordan's vision and leadership. He notes that, much like Fontinote, Dr. Jordan's dedication to saving lives is unwavering. “Che has propelled the organization to new heights,” says Dr. Blue, “while staying true to the mission set forth by our founder.”

Dr. Jordan's impact is undeniable. He has increased partnerships with local and government organizations, enhancing substance use services and expanding mental health resources. His commitment to reducing homelessness among people with mental health challenges has not only strengthened Ebony House's reach but has ensured that more individuals have access to the care they need.



ANTHONY WALLER & ZACH MAISUS



Anthony Waller | CEO, Co-Founder



Zach Maisus | Co-Founder and COO



**ATHLETE TO
ATHLETE**

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In the heart of Los Angeles, co-founders Anthony Waller and Zach Maisus are building a game-changing platform designed to uplift and inspire the next generation of athletes. Founded in 2023, Athlete To Athlete is a mentorship platform that bridges the gap between youth and collegiate athletes, fostering connections that are as vital as the lessons they impart. Through 1-on-1 virtual mentorship sessions, this innovative platform pairs up-and-coming youth athletes with current Division I competitors, creating a unique bond between mentor and mentee—a blend of coach, older sibling, and role model.

For Anthony and Zach, the vision of Athlete To Athlete was driven by their own experience as athletes. “Zach and I were lifting partners and friends at UCLA,” Anthony recalls. “We saw an opportunity to solve a problem that no one else was focused on: the mental side of sports that so many young athletes struggle with. A2A is not just about training, it is about creating a relationship where our mentors can inspire their mentees to become better athletes and better people.»

The company is already creating ripples, working with over 5,000 athletes nationwide. Its success lies in the relatability of its mentors. The close age and experience gap between the college athletes and their mentees fosters a genuine understanding of the challenges young athletes face—building trust, empathy, and authentic relationships that go beyond athletic skill-building.

As CEO, Anthony’s role encompasses steering the company’s organizational growth, sales strategies, and investor relations. With the experience of a walk-on Division I football player at UCLA, he’s no stranger to hard work. But more than that, Anthony finds pride in the team’s collective drive and their ability to create a “living organism” out of their company—a growing, thriving ecosystem with a unified vision. “We had no professional experience coming into this,” Anthony admits. “We have been able to build an organization from the ground up, where our lack of work experience and lifetime of domain expertise has given us the creative freedom to create something truly unique and positive for our customers.”

Zach, the company’s COO, has acted as the company’s “jack-of-all-trades,” constantly adapting to whatever the company needs at any given moment. From customer success to software development, he’s been at the center of it all. After pausing his education at UCLA, Zach dove headfirst into Athlete To Athlete. “When I met Anthony, we shared a drive and intensity that helped us push through challenges,” he shares. “Now, I’m focused on leading our team and staying calm amidst the storm of startup life.”

The platform’s meteoric rise can be attributed to its founders’ relentless ambition and commitment to the athletes they serve. As Zach puts it, “When we started, we didn’t know exactly what we were building. Anthony and I made an effort to talk with all of our customers, and within six months we learned the best way we could help young athletes was through a mentorship program.”

At its core, Athlete To Athlete isn’t just a mentorship platform; it’s a movement redefining what it means to support the growth of young athletes. Anthony and Zach are not only providing mentorship, but also passing down invaluable life lessons that extend beyond the playing field. As they continue to expand their network, the duo remains committed to building champions—on and off the field.

Adrian Todorov

CEO, Chief Architect, CFO,
and Founder

“We’re building more than a company; we’re creating a movement.”

In the heart of Montreal, Canada, Adrian Todorov is leading a paradigm shift in the cloud storage industry. As the CEO, chief architect, CFO, and founder of MultiCloud Decentralized Applications, Inc., Adrian combines technical prowess with visionary leadership to disrupt a sector dominated by Big Tech. A valedictorian in computer science and former AWS Cloud Architect, Adrian’s journey from developer to founder reflects a career defined by innovation and an unrelenting drive to democratize cloud storage.

Adrian’s story begins with a firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by businesses reliant on traditional cloud providers. “While working at AWS, I saw companies spending upwards of \$1 million a month on cloud services,” he recalls. “These costs stifled smaller players and created insurmountable barriers to entry. I wanted to offer businesses a cost-effective alternative—one that doesn’t nickel-and-dime users.”

This mission gave rise to Cloud Libertas, the flagship product of MultiCloud Decentralized Applications. Built on decentralized infrastructure, Cloud Libertas slashes storage costs by up to 75% compared to legacy providers like AWS, Azure, and Google Cloud Platform. By eliminating data transfer fees and offering a groundbreaking “Cloud Break-Glass” feature to prevent vendor lock-in, Cloud Libertas empowers businesses to take back control of their data. The platform’s compatibility with existing APIs and seamless migration tools ensure that innovation is accessible, not intimidating.

Under Adrian’s leadership, MultiCloud has emerged as a trailblazer in the decentralized Web 3.0 ecosystem. The company’s solutions span more than just storage; they also develop decentralized applications (DApps) that enhance privacy, security, and operational resilience. Adrian’s technical expertise has been pivotal in forging partnerships with major organizations like Bell, Telus, and the RCMP, addressing critical challenges in data protection and cybersecurity.

Adrian’s career is a masterclass in scaling technologies to meet unprecedented demands. Among his greatest professional achievements, he engineered an 8,000% improvement in application scaling for a SaaS platform servicing over 5



million users per minute. He also reduced deployment times by 28,000% for supply chain software and cut infrastructure costs for machine learning pipelines by 70% using Kubernetes and GitOps practices. These accomplishments are not just benchmarks of technical skill—they are testaments to his ability to marry efficiency with impact.

Founded in 2022, MultiCloud operates at the intersection of innovation and purpose. The company’s commitment to delivering secure, scalable, and cost-effective solutions has already begun to reshape the digital economy. As Adrian Todorov looks to the future, his vision extends beyond technological advancement to fostering a more equitable cloud industry.

“We’re building more than a company; we’re creating a movement,” Adrian asserts. With a mission to level the playing field for data-driven businesses and digital content platforms, MultiCloud Decentralized Applications is poised to redefine what’s possible in the cloud—and Adrian Todorov is the architect of this bold new era.



Sid Zerbo's career is a tapestry woven with experience, innovation, and a deep commitment to making a global impact. As the president of Royal System in Montreal, Quebec, Sid brings over 30 years of expertise in engineering, project management, and business development across Canada and the U.S. to the forefront of electrical integration and automation. But his mission extends beyond these borders, embracing his roots in Africa to create collaborative pathways that uplift communities and industries alike.

At Royal System, Sid spearheads projects focused on harnessing the power of clean energy through hydro-electric integration and industrial process automation. His approach is more than technical precision; it's about envisioning how these solutions can transform industries and lives. "Using innovation and creativity to find solutions to problems is what drives me," Sid shares. This relentless pursuit of progress is reflected in his efforts to foster international trade and entrepreneurship between Canada, the U.S., and Africa—promoting computer sciences, telecommunications, solar, and electrification solutions for building electrical and industrial plants and nurturing startups to fuel local economies.

Sid's belief in the power of collaboration is evident not just in his business, but in his philanthropic endeavors. As co-founder of STIM-CS, he helped establish a platform to aid global efforts during the COVID-19 crisis, leveraging his expertise with McGill University to support the development of ventilators for countries in need. His dedication to service has earned him numerous accolades, including the *Knight of the Order of Merit* in Burkina Faso and recognition as one of the *Top 100 Canadian Professionals* in 2020.



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Tim Chipperfield doesn't just work in artificial intelligence—he reshapes it. As the senior engineering manager of AI at Thinkific and co-founder of Orgmatch, he has spent nearly a decade at the forefront of innovation, turning abstract concepts into real-world solutions. Whether leading teams, developing strategies, or shaping AI-powered platforms, Tim thrives in ambiguity, finding clarity where others see complexity.

At Thinkific, a learning management platform, Tim leads the AI engineering department, driving the development of cutting-edge infrastructure and transformative user experiences. His vision and thought leadership helped craft the company's first AI strategy, setting the foundation for an intelligent, scalable learning experience for students and a powerful set of tools for educators.

Tim's work at Orgmatch has been equally impactful. At Orgmatch, he built the AI platform and matching algorithm that revolutionized ESG funding partnerships—sifting through thousands of prospects in seconds. Seeing firsthand the "wow" moments from customers during user testing reinforced his belief in AI's power to solve real-world problems.

A uniquely well-rounded leader, Tim's background extends beyond tech. Before AI, he worked in politics and international development, leading reforestation projects in Mozambique, researching environmental standards in Germany and Bangladesh, and advising political campaigns. With a master's in development management and fluency in multiple languages, he blends technical expertise with a global perspective, ensuring AI serves both innovation and people.



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In the ever-evolving world of biotech, where innovation meets the urgent need for real-world impact, **Diana Morales** stands as a force to be reckoned with. As the CEO and founder of DM Consulting, LLC, Diana is among the rare 1% of female leaders in the biotech industry, bringing 25 years of expertise in sales, business development, commercial strategy, and operations to the forefront of rare disease startups.

DM Consulting, with locations in Boston, MA, and Hartford, CT, acts as the bridge between breakthrough science and market success, ensuring these startups not only develop life-changing therapies, but also build cohesive, growth-driven teams. Through DM Consulting, Diana helps biotech startups navigate Series A to Series C funding, offering market analysis, sales strategies, and operational optimization to guarantee long-term success.

“Since the biotech cell and gene therapy space is still in its infancy, many emerging companies are laser-focused on the science—often at the expense of strategic business development,” Diana shares. “That’s where I step in.”

With an impressive track record—including leadership roles at OrganaBio, Mass Biologics, Invetech, Thermo Fisher, and GE—Diana has played a pivotal role in advancing cGMP starting materials for cell-based therapies, developing biologics and driving operational excellence.



Reflecting her influence in the industry, Diana has been recognized by Women We Admire as *National Top Leader of 2024*, *Top 50 Leaders in CT*, and *Top 50 Leaders in MA*, as well as *The Most Influential Women Leader in Business to Look for in 2025* by Insight Success.



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For over four decades, **Rob De La Espriella** has dedicated his career to fortifying national security, safeguarding our nation’s critical infrastructure, and elevating industry standards. As a Navy nuclear submarine officer, decorated Nuclear Regulatory Commission inspector, and nuclear site quality and security manager, Rob has navigated the world’s most high-stakes environments. His industry-leading expertise in root cause analysis (RCA) stems from his participation on a *Deming Prize* winning team and decades leading audits, assessments, and RCAs across commercial nuclear plants, the nuclear weapons complex, and the Department of Defense—establishing him as a complex problem-solving thought leader in modern high-tech environments, with insights published in *Forbes* and peer-reviewed publications.

Recognizing that regulated industries still rely on outdated 1920s-1970s RCA tools that were never designed for today’s complexities, Rob pioneered BlueDragon, the world’s most advanced RCA system. By fusing critical thinking, systems theory, behavioral analysis, lean concepts, and high-reliability principles, BlueDragon transforms how organizations tackle costly, recurring human and organizational performance failures.

Now implemented at some of the most technically challenging sites—including national laboratories, the nuclear weapons complex, DOD installations, and global enterprises like Westinghouse Electric—BlueDragon sets new standards for complex problem-solving. With its virtual, scalable, AI-enhanced platform, what once took months now takes days. The future of problem-solving isn’t just faster—it’s smarter, and Rob De La Espriella is leading the charge.



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Beatriz Landin's story is one of resilience, innovation, and boundless determination. As the CEO and founder of The Wander Pillow, she has transformed a lifetime of ingenuity into a groundbreaking product poised to revolutionize travel comfort.

Originally from Mexico, Beatriz's journey is nothing short of remarkable. A single mother who left everything behind to pursue a better life in the United States,

she rebuilt her world from the ground up while raising three daughters. Her career path was defined by excellence, serving as CFO for a Charter School in El Paso, Texas, and as finance director for the City of Antony, New Mexico. Her work in education even led to research collaborations with Harvard University on the role of technology in online teaching.

In 2023, Beatriz brought her lifelong passion for invention to life with The Wander Pillow, a product that's as ingenious as it is practical. As the world's only neck pillow with a utility patent pending, it offers a seamless travel solution for comfort and convenience. With high-quality foam, a washable design, and an attached blanket that zips neatly back into the pillow, this innovation eliminates the hassle of juggling multiple items during travel.

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With plans to expand her product line to include options for kids and licensed collaborations with iconic brands, Beatriz's vision knows no limits. As a proud Latina and entrepreneur, she is proving that determination and creativity can take you anywhere—just like The Wander Pillow.



For over 30 years, **Dr. Srinivasa K. Rao** has been a trailblazer at the nexus of science, public health, and entrepreneurship, leveraging his expertise to craft groundbreaking nutrition solutions that resonate across the globe. As founder and president of NEB LLC, Dr. Rao is on a mission to revolutionize health and nutrition education through creative, science-driven strategies. A prolific biomedical scientist and a passionate advocate for wellness, he's presented and organized over 150 health and nutrition seminars, sharing his insights with diverse audiences worldwide.

From developing products to combat malnutrition to serving as chairman of the research committee at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, Dr. Rao's impact has been transformative. He previously served as a consultant on COVID-19 and healthcare disparities, lending his expertise to complex global challenges. Now, with NEB LLC, he's pioneering initiatives like "CRISPR City," a cutting-edge educational platform promoting genetic technology, and spearheading ventures that make healthy living more accessible—whether through vending machines stocked with nutritious options or courses that demystify DNA science.

With a Ph.D. from the University of Paris and over 100 peer-reviewed publications, Dr. Rao stands as a beacon of knowledge and innovation. But his work doesn't stop at science—he's also an accomplished author of fiction and non-fiction, using his creative talents to inspire and educate. Through NEB LLC's expansive reach, Dr. Rao is building a healthier, more sustainable future, one innovative solution at a time.

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For **Christopher Adams**, driving efficiency isn't just a job—it's a calling. As the founder of Absolute Value Online Solutions and a senior operational excellence specialist at Indiana University Health, he stands at the intersection of lean transformation, leadership development, and digital entrepreneurship. With 20 years of experience in manufacturing and healthcare, he has built a career on optimizing processes, reducing waste, and pioneering innovative business solutions.

Christopher's expertise spans operations leadership, quality management, data analysis, organic business performance growth, continuous improvement, change management, Six Sigma, digital marketing, and blockchain technology. His true differentiator is his ability to identify inefficiencies and design lean transformation strategies. "Not too many lean professionals have led a full-scale transformation within an organization," he notes. "I've done it twice."

At Sullair Corporation, he spearheaded a lean transformation that led to its advance from ACE Bronze to Silver. During the pandemic, he played a key role in designing one of Indiana's first COVID-19 vaccine clinics, and his work at IU Health led to a 50% reduction in chemotherapy appointment time lag. At C&D Technologies, his improvements led to the reduction of millions of dollars in scrap waste.



In efforts to fulfill the core mission of Absolute Value Online Solutions, he is leveraging his expertise in lean process improvement to help businesses develop effective lean deployment strategies and individuals monetize their skills, talents and passions through digital entrepreneurship. Based in West Lafayette, IN, Absolute Value Online Solutions offers coaching, mentorship, and digital resources designed to empower success

in the digital era. Christopher also shares his insights in his book, *The Pursuit of Excellence: The Story of a Lean Process Improvement Professional*.



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With over 25 years in the personal insurance industry, **Shirley Marquis**, senior director and practice leader of individual insurance at Lussier, embodies a rare blend of visionary strategy and hands-on leadership. A builder at heart, Shirley has an intuitive knack for identifying strengths, assembling dynamic teams, and creating environments where people thrive.

At Lussier, a Québec-based leader in insurance and employee benefits consulting since 1915, Shirley's mission is transformative: to expand the insurance division and integrate financial services in collaboration with group and P&C branches. Driven by a deep commitment to advancing financial well-being, Shirley combines her entrepreneurial mindset with rigorous adherence to compliance, seamlessly balancing innovation with structure.

Her career journey includes roles as vice president at a brokerage network and as an associate and owner of a wealth management branch. Shirley's expertise spans branding, growth, recruitment, and change management—a discipline she defines as the intersection of processes, IT, and people. Her unique ability to connect with individuals quickly dissolves resistance to change, fostering confidence and collaboration.

An MBA graduate with a financial planning certificate and a BAA in finance and international management, Shirley also holds board member certification from Laval University. Her leadership isn't just strategic; it's transformative—guiding Lussier toward innovation while staying rooted in its century-long legacy.



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At just 30 years old, **Amir Bazli** has already built an impressive entrepreneurial legacy. As the founder and CEO of Mobile Holding Properties and Million Mile Motors, Amir has consistently demonstrated a remarkable talent for identifying overlooked niches in fragmented industries and transforming them into thriving ventures. Now, with two successful businesses to his name, he's setting his sights on a new frontier—the medical industry.

Amir's entrepreneurial journey began in 2016 when he founded Million Mile Motors as a college student. What started as a way to fund his education quickly evolved into a high-volume used car dealership. Today, it boasts over 1,000 cars across two locations and is projected to reach \$50 million in sales this year. But Amir wasn't content with just one successful venture. Driven by a desire to amplify and scale his impact, he transitioned to real estate, launching Mobile Holding Properties in 2021. Currently, MHP owns 25 properties with over 800 units, with a collective valuation exceeding \$30 million.

Amir credits his achievements to an unrelenting work ethic and a fearless approach to calculated risk-taking. "You can only achieve the limiting goals you set for yourself. I set goals beyond what I am capable of accomplishing and reverse engineer them," he says. His latest venture—a roll-up strategy to acquire and consolidate medical practices—highlights his knack for recognizing untapped opportunities. With many doctors retiring without succession plans, Amir is strategically positioned to address a critical market need.

From cars to real estate to healthcare, Amir Bazli exemplifies how vision, grit, and unconventional strategies can reshape industries and create extraordinary value.



DD Fritch, founder and president of Hearts Connected, LLC, has dedicated her life to reshaping the landscape of pediatric mental health. With over three decades as a pediatric nurse and leader at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, she witnessed firsthand the transformative power of child life specialists on children and their families. Inspired by this impact, she launched Hearts Connected in 2020 to extend these vital services beyond hospital walls and into communities across the U.S. and Canada.

Hearts Connected is a nurse-led innovation that provides a lifeline for children, teens and families to support mental wellness and to assist in navigating the emotional challenges of difficult situations, such as medical diagnosis and procedures, life transitions, and grief and loss. The organization specializes in therapeutic play and interventions that equip children with coping mechanisms to integrate into their daily lives, empowering them to manage their emotional well-being and minimizing the long-term effects of medical trauma or other life's challenges.

Under DD's leadership, Hearts Connected is not just a service—it's a movement to normalize mental wellness and break the stigma surrounding mental health. By making these resources accessible and affordable, DD is transforming how parents support their children, how kids build resilience, and how communities address mental health.

Driven by her passion to bring families "a resource they didn't know they needed," DD Fritch is changing lives—one child, one family, one conversation at a time. Hearts Connected is paving the way for healthier, more empowered futures for children everywhere.



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Sabra Tomb's career trajectory reads like a story of transformation and versatility. As the founder of (R)evolution Wellness Consulting and the director of training programs and strategic business development at UD School of Law, Sabra has mastered the art of weaving together diverse expertise to drive impact and innovation. Her journey began with a deep-rooted passion for natural health, which led her to own a natural health store in her twenties and earn a doctorate in natural health.

When the market shifted, Sabra pivoted, earning a biology degree and securing a STEM internship with the Air Force Research Laboratory. There, she spent nearly a decade navigating both legal and non-legal roles including earning a law degree and transitioning to an attorney role at the lab's headquarters. During this time, Sabra co-developed an intellectual property training program that bridged the Air Force Research Laboratory and UD School of Law—a testament to her visionary approach.

Now, at UD Law, Sabra oversees the Government Contracting and Procurement Master in the Study of Law and Certificate Program, driving strategic initiatives that generate significant revenue for the institution. In tandem, her (R)evolution Wellness Consulting merges her business acumen with her wellness expertise, offering continuing education and workshops for the legal community. With her motto, "Treat your body like a client," Sabra empowers attorneys to prioritize their health, tackling the high rates of anxiety and burnout that plague the profession. Through her unique blend of wellness and strategic thinking, Sabra Tomb is revolutionizing the way the legal community approaches well-being and professional growth.



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Rocky Batzel, inventor and CEO of SnapSlide, has transformed pharmaceutical packaging with a groundbreaking innovation born from empathy and ingenuity.

While in medical school, Rocky witnessed his grandmother struggle with a traditional child-resistant cap, sparking an idea to redesign a product that millions rely on daily. His creation, SnapSlide Rx, replaces the outdated "push-and-twist" design with a patented sliding mechanism that allows for effortless, one-handed operation. This revolutionary solution not only enhances safety, but also empowers individuals with limited dexterity or upper limb difference to access their medications with ease. Through SnapSlide, Rocky has redefined what it means to make everyday products smarter, safer, and more inclusive.

Founded in 2017 in Scranton, PA, SnapSlide embodies Rocky's mission to advance engineering and create adaptive solutions for millions. His groundbreaking product has already earned several accolades, including the prestigious 2024 *IoPP AmeriStar Award*, and is poised to transform an industry that has seen little change in over 50 years. Consumers can expect SnapSlide Rx to hit pharmacies in early-2025, with a full rollout across the country by mid-2025.

Rocky's vision extends beyond packaging—he's driven by a deep commitment to making everyday life easier for those who need it most. Under his leadership, SnapSlide is not just a company; it's a catalyst for change, proving that thoughtful design can turn small challenges into monumental triumphs.



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Felicia Shanken, the dynamic founder and CEO of Philadelphia Women's Network Connection, LLC (PWNC), has redefined what it means to empower women entrepreneurs. A women's strategist and success builder with a remarkable 25-year career in the medical field, Felicia has transformed her vision into a thriving platform that uplifts women in business.

Founded in 2019 and based in Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania, PWNC equips women entrepreneurs with the strategies, tools, and networks they need to build sustainable businesses. Offering leadership development, equity and inclusion training, and specialized resources, Felicia's organization fosters economic growth while creating meaningful impact in communities.

Felicia's journey began with a singular belief: "Together, women are a force to be reckoned with." Leaving a secure government role to launch PWNC right before the pandemic, Felicia took a leap of faith—and it paid off. PWNC went global in its first year, proving that women's empowerment knows no bounds.

Felicia's accolades are as inspiring as her mission. Recognized as one of the *Top 50 Most Influential Women in Business* by *VIP Global Magazine* and featured in *Fun Times* magazine's *Philadelphia Who's Who Black Women of Influence*, she has earned much acclaim for her transformative work. In 2024, Felicia was named *Alignable's Local Businessperson of the Year* and celebrated with the *Premier Dream Chasers Award*, among other honors.

Through mentorship, workshops, and collaboration, Felicia continues to build a sisterhood that propels women toward success.



MK Elite Tutoring

Sadiq, CEO of Sadiq and MK Elite Tutoring, has led his company to the forefront of education since 2019. With nearly a decade of experience, Sadiq holds a doctorate (ABD) in leadership, management certifications in PMI and UX/UI, and is a Springboard-certified data analyst. He's also nationally recognized as a pro basketball referee, a basketball coach, and a record-setting educator and community serviceman.

MK Elite Tutoring, based in Nashville, TN, is an EdTech company that revolutionizes test preparation with AI-powered solutions that outperform traditional providers like Princeton Review. Sadiq adds, "MKET also offers DEI-focused certifications with outcomes better than Coursera, Udemy, and Stanford." Dedicated to providing results-driven services, MK Elite Tutoring has served over 100 satisfied clients and numerous delighted institutions, democratizing education for blue-collar families.

Sadiq's drive for excellence extends beyond education & DEI, in music. As a rapper known as Sadiq, he's garnered over 10,000 organic streams across multiple countries through his energy-filled beats and honest lyrics, with zero costs to inspire indie artists.



"I'm a winner. I'm obsessed with winning, and as an educator and a former public servant, I'm obsessed with helping others win," Sadiq states, reflecting on his pursuits. His career path has also included roles

as an athletic director, curriculum specialist, and learning development government specialist. Lastly, Sadiq is a devout father first and loyal friend second.

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For decades, Madison's Lumber Reporter has been the go-to source for the forestry industry's most accurate, timely, and relevant lumber market insights. Recently, under the leadership of **Keta Kosman**, the company has done more than report the numbers—it has revolutionized the way professionals access and use critical industry data.

Keta, who worked her way up through the publishing world since 1990, joined Madison's in 2003 and became its third owner in 2008. She wasted no time catapulting the company into the future, leaving antiquated platforms and overpriced competition in the dust. In 2018, she replaced the company's traditional PDF newsletter with a sophisticated online dashboard—the most comprehensive North American wood product price data available today. Industry professionals, frustrated by outdated resources and insufficient information elsewhere, took notice. Madison's subscriber base has doubled in just the past three years as customers fled from larger competitors in search of better data and better service.

What makes Madison's Lumber Reporter truly unique? It's the only North American lumber market data provider based in Canada, offering an extensive and deeply connected network built on decades of sawmill industry relationships. Keta, as owner, is personally involved with every client, event, and major industry conversation. Her passion for delivering precise data, expert analysis, and real-time market updates has made Madison's the trusted choice for forestry and construction professionals across North America.

In an industry where timing is everything, Madison's Lumber Reporter isn't just keeping up—it's setting the pace.



MADISON'S
Lumber Reporter

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Some entrepreneurs build businesses. **Claudine Langlois** builds movements. The powerhouse behind six wellness-focused companies and the creator of the *Seekers* documentary series, Claudine's work is not just about growth—it's about impact. Every venture she launches is infused with purpose, guided by a steadfast commitment to humanity and humility. Claudine's journey hasn't been easy. A brain tumor, a brutal assault, three near-death experiences, and a broken neck could have shattered her. Instead, they fueled her mission. "I don't want anyone to suffer as I have," she says. That conviction has driven the organic rise of her brands, now touching lives across Canada, the U.S., and beyond.

From Doshayoga and REVIBE, which blend retreats, training, and humanitarian impact, to Anathafest, a transformational festival drawing thousands since 2019, Claudine's ventures are more than businesses—they're sanctuaries for growth. In March, she's launching Yoniva, a line of all-natural feminine products, expanding her mission to holistic wellness. Through My Coaching Universe, she mentors entrepreneurs in business and finance, while her Extreme Self-Love Shop offers tools to deepen self-awareness and connection. And then there's *Seekers*, a comedic yet deeply educational documentary series, proving that wisdom and humor can go hand in hand. With a community of over 55,000, an internationally recognized brand, and a festival that has thrived for six years without government grants, Claudine Langlois is proof that when purpose leads, success follows. Her story is not just one of resilience—it's a blueprint for transformation.



YONIVA

ANATHA

REVIBE



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Dr. Rita Lewé Kwigoua is redefining the landscape of real estate investing with her innovative approach to stress-free property management. As the owner and founder of K-Lerta LLC, a Consulting firm located in Philadelphia, PA, she blends her expertise in property market analysis, automation, and managerial strategies to help landlords maximize profitability while minimizing stress.

With years of experience as a licensed Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) in both retail and hospital settings, Dr. Lewé Kwigoua brings a meticulous, solution-oriented mindset to every venture. Her passion for empowering others is evident in her consulting firm, which specializes in automating rental property management. K-Lerta Consulting handles everything—from furnishing properties to filling vacancies, managing leases, and ensuring seamless guest experiences. Dr. Lewé Kwigoua's unique focus on short-term rentals for traveling nurses, business professionals, and frequent travelers makes her services particularly valuable in today's dynamic market.

“Our goal is to give property owners true leverage,” Dr. Lewé Kwigoua explains. “We manage every detail, from securing guests to cleaning and communication. Owners receive their monthly rent on time without lifting a finger.” Dr. Lewé Kwigoua's impact extends beyond real estate. Through her book “Without Hope There Is No Future,” she inspires audiences with her insights on resilience and success. Through K-Lerta Consulting, she aims to help real estate investors transform their properties into automated, passive income sources—allowing them to enjoy the rewards of ownership without the hassle.

In an industry often fraught with challenges, Dr. Rita Lewé Kwigoua is a beacon of innovation, offering landlords a stress-free path to success.



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Jennifer Mackovjak, co-founder and partner at 221B Partners, is a formidable figure in the field of risk management and investigations. With 30 years of experience spanning both public and private sectors, Jennifer has shaped a career dedicated to protecting and advancing her clients' interests. From rising to senior detective investigator at the New York County District Attorney's Office to serving as a senior vice president at a leading Chicago security and investigations consultancy, her path reflects a steadfast commitment to justice and excellence.

A Certified Fraud Examiner and licensed private investigator in Illinois, Jennifer blends hands-on investigative skills with deep industry insight. One of her most impactful achievements came through her work supporting the Innocence Project, where she helped overturn the wrongful conviction of Frank Sterling, who spent 18 years imprisoned for a murder he did not commit. This drive to uncover truth and mitigate risk now fuels her work at 221B Partners, the boutique consultancy she co-founded in 2020.

Headquartered in Chicago, 221B Partners is known for its personalized, in-depth approach, far from a “cookie-cutter” model. With expertise in public records, open-source intelligence, dark web discovery, and strategic interviews, the team delivers actionable intelligence tailored to each client's unique goals and concerns. From conducting due diligence on leadership teams for attorneys and private equity to gathering intelligence on workplace threats, 221B embodies a client-centric approach—delving beyond the obvious to ensure clients are truly informed and safeguarded in an increasingly complex world.

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In 2024, **Brandy G. Robinson** leveraged her expertise as an inventor, lawyer, and regulatory affairs executive to create Zebra MedNex, a groundbreaking healthcare platform. Its mission is to transform patient case management with advanced tools that improve communication, collaboration, and safety.

Zebra MedNex provides a low-cost, no-contract SaaS solution that combines patient case management with modern features. It offers secure messaging, adverse event reporting, video conferencing, and AI-analyzed medical research, safety reports, and clinical trial data. This platform enhances care by connecting doctors, enterprises, and patients, with a focus on patient drug safety.

The inspiration for Zebra MedNex stems from Brandy's own health journey. After developing a rare brain tumor, prolactinoma, linked to a medication she was prescribed, she discovered crucial research about the drug's side effects had been behind a paywall. "Doctors often don't have convenient access to the research they need while treating patients or maybe they're too busy to perform research," Robinson explains. "Zebra MedNex bridges that gap by giving both the patient and healthcare professionals real-time access to critical information such as drug safety information and adverse reporting tools, enabling better treatment decisions."

Zebra MedNex's virtual model enables it to serve healthcare providers and patients worldwide. Its focus on patient safety has established it as a leader in SaaS healthcare innovation, driven by Brandy's expertise in compliance, regulatory affairs, and technology.



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For **David Robertson**, innovation isn't just about keeping up—it's about staying ahead. Currently director of enterprise architecture at Exeter Finance, he has spent 25 years shaping software engineering, automation, and recently AI-driven solutions that eliminate inefficiencies and unlock new possibilities. Whether designing systems for space missions, law enforcement, or finance, he thrives on transforming complex challenges into streamlined solutions.

Automation has been at the core of his work since the beginning. "I've always looked for ways to add value through automation, using technology to eliminate mundane tasks so people can focus on what they do best," he says. Having witnessed multiple technological evolutions, he continues to adapt, always discovering new ways to create impact. His current focus? Generative AI.

David is exploring agentic AI to automate workplace tasks, business operations, financial transactions, and data processing. "AI isn't just about making work faster—it's about unlocking entirely new opportunities that didn't exist a few years ago," he explains. By integrating AI-driven automation, he's pushing the boundaries of how businesses operate, scale, and innovate.

Beyond his work in enterprise architecture, David is also an author and the founder of the publisher, Tomorrow's Tales. Of the three books he released in 2024, two were assisted by generative AI.

With a career built on innovation and a relentless drive to push the boundaries of automation and AI, David Robertson is not just shaping the future of technology—he's building the roadmap for what comes next.

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Lakshmi Natarajan, founder and CEO of Excelador is a powerhouse executive with over two decades of experience delivering transformative results for Fortune 500 giants such as Accenture and high-growth startups. With leadership expertise spanning marketing, consulting, sales, and strategy across industries as diverse as technology, pharmaceuticals, and hospitality, Lakshmi brings an unmatched breadth of experience to every challenge she tackles.

In 2020, Lakshmi founded Excelador to provide management consulting and advisory services to clients, leveraging her dual perspective as a corporate leader and entrepreneur. Her client roster includes global corporations such as Oracle, J&J, and tech startups by helping them navigate complex transformations—all while driving customer focused growth.

Lakshmi's leadership is rooted in empathy, inclusivity, and a people-centric approach. "I care about empowering others to deliver results as a collaborative team," she shares. This mindset fuels her ability to connect businesses with diverse customers and build high-performing teams.

A visionary leader, Lakshmi has traveled to over 60 countries, unifying teams and catalyzing sustainable growth. Her thought leadership, results-driven strategies, and global insight have earned her features in *Forbes*, *Medium*, various podcasts, and global conferences.

Also serving as change management lead at ForeOptics, board member for the India-US Chamber of Commerce, and founder of Travel Plus Them™, Lakshmi continues to inspire transformative change. As an Indian-American immigrant who came to the U.S. as a child, she embodies resilience and determination, blending her global insights with a steadfast commitment to making a difference. Lakshmi Natarajan is more than a leader—she's a catalyst for growth, inclusivity, and lasting impact.



Anju Singh's journey is a story of transformation, resilience, and determination. Born in India as the daughter of an Army officer, Anju's childhood exposed her to diverse cultures and languages, a background that would later prove invaluable. Trained as an ophthalmologist in India, she arrived in the U.S. with high hopes, earning a Ph.D. and a master's degree in health administration. But reality hit hard—her qualifications didn't translate into job opportunities. Faced with mounting obstacles, Anju was *forced* to carve a path forward.

In 2013, she founded Aanchal Apparel and Accessories, the first authentic Indian boutique on Pennsylvania's East Shore. With no prior training in business or fashion, Anju transformed necessity into passion, bringing her unique cultural understanding to clients in search of Indian outfits for special occasions. Whether guiding Americans through cultural nuances or perfecting a wedding gown's fit, her boutique became a bridge between worlds.

While entrepreneurship wasn't her dream, Anju embraced it with unmatched tenacity. Running her business is just one of her four jobs, which include teaching at a community college and tutoring. "I didn't want to be an entrepreneur—I had no choice," she says. "But now, I love it. I'm in control of my destiny."

Through sheer grit, Anju overcame the plight many immigrants face: skilled, educated, and yet sidelined. Today, she not only sustains herself, but also empowers others with cultural confidence, proving that when life hands you lemons, you can create something extraordinary.



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Dr. Angie Holzer, CEO and founder of WikiCharities, is redefining the nonprofit sector by making information more accessible, transparent, and research-driven. With a doctorate in organizational leadership and learning from Aspen University—where she earned the *Dissertation of the Year Award* for her research on human trafficking—Angie is dedicated to driving meaningful change.

WikiCharities is the world's largest open-access global database of nonprofits, allowing users to search for charities by name, topic, or location. By improving visibility and trust, the platform helps communities—especially those affected by human trafficking—connect with life-changing resources. It also equips nonprofits, funders, and policymakers with reliable data to make informed, data-driven decisions that strengthen the entire nonprofit ecosystem.

Beyond a directory, Angie launched the *Journal of Nonprofit Innovation* to bridge the gap between research and real-world nonprofit efforts. This open-access journal provides a space for scholars and practitioners to share insights, best practices, and solutions. “There’s no paywall,” Angie emphasizes, ensuring nonprofits everywhere can access knowledge that strengthens their impact.

Her work is hands-on and deeply personal. From supporting women farmers in Tanzania with research-backed solutions for food insecurity to collaborating directly with nonprofits to understand their challenges, Angie is committed to fostering collaboration at every level.

Through WikiCharities and its journal, Angie Holzer is more than an innovator—she is building a global ecosystem of trust, connection, and impact in the nonprofit world.



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Growing up in Hawaii, **Dr. Natalie Phillips** was surrounded by love and support, but often felt disconnected from the world. This early experience has shaped her life's work, with “connection” now at the heart of everything she does. Dr. Phillips discovered her passion for audiology and moved to Colorado 15 years ago. After providing patient care for 25 years in other practices, in 2021, she opened the Audiology Center of Northern Colorado and in 2025, she launched a non-profit organization, ACNC Cares.

As an owner and provider, Dr. Phillips handles daily operational and administrative tasks and oversees marketing efforts while continuing to diagnose and treat patients. Her practice offers comprehensive care, addressing hearing loss, balance issues, tinnitus, sound sensitivity, brain injuries and more for patients of all ages. The center prides itself on being the opposite of corporate healthcare, prioritizing personal connections and individualized care.

Beyond her role as an audiologist, Dr. Phillips is also a connection coach, helping clients refine their brand identity, enhance their social media presence, and connect with audiences at events. As an author, she co-wrote, *ACT Now! A Simple Guide to Take Action on Your Greatest Goals and Dreams*, published in 2020, guiding individuals toward achieving their dreams. A side-by-side workbook was released in January 2025 followed by her audiobook later this year.

Dr. Phillips' true calling is clear—whether through helping patients hear or coaching others toward their goals, connection remains the cornerstone of her life's work. She is dedicated to bridge gaps, foster relationships, and help others realize their full potential.

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After spending the first 9 years of his career in the shopping center development business, **Alec Paddock** decided to take the entrepreneurial leap of starting his own real estate development company. As the managing partner and co-founder of Amplify Development Company, Alec focuses on the acquisition, entitlement, and development of quality mixed-use multifamily and student housing projects across California and the West Coast. Alec is dedicated to cultivating lasting and meaningful relationships across the real estate development spectrum with a focus on adding value to the communities where Amplify develops their projects.

A native of Louisville, CO., Alec relocated to Los Angeles, where he graduated with his bachelor's degree from USC's Marshall School of Business. He then spent the first 9 years of his career receiving a full cycle education in the shopping center development industry with CenterCal Properties, where he was fortunate enough to work on a

number of amazing projects. Alec's dream had always been to start and run his own real estate development company, so when the opportunity arose to team up with his close friend and former USC classmate, Mark Yaghoobi, and his brother, Patrick, he accepted. The partners put together their first project just steps from the USC Memorial Coliseum and USC Campus and Amplify Development Company was officially born.

Amplify's growth was notably aided by the respected architect and fellow USC Alum, Joe Antunovich, whose Chicago-based Antunovich and Associates architecture firm put together the initial design work that helped to get the first Amplify project at USC off of the ground. Amplify was also able to establish a critical long-term relationship and partnership with Core Spaces, out of Chicago, one of the most respected and active multifamily and student housing developers in the nation.



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Aurica Bintintan, founder, CEO, and CFO of Active Senior Home Care, discovered the transformative power of alkaline water and ASEA Redox while leading her company for the past 18 years. But her journey into wellness began much earlier. At 77, Aurica attributes her vibrant health to the lifestyle changes she made 15 years ago, starting with a simple shift: alkaline water. "It changed my life," she says, and she's been an enthusiastic advocate ever since, sharing the benefits with women over 50 who want to improve their health.

As a health and wellness expert specializing in hydration and nutrition, Aurica knows that true wellness begins at the cellular level. She explains that alkaline water is superior because it's easily absorbed, delivering deep hydration, while ASEA Redox supports the body's natural ability to heal itself. Aurica's mission is to educate and mentor others, guiding them toward better health by adopting these self-care practices.

With a master's in economics and a career that spans management, accounting, and even economic analysis, Aurica has always been a champion of holistic well-being. She is also a published author of *Empowerment for Single*

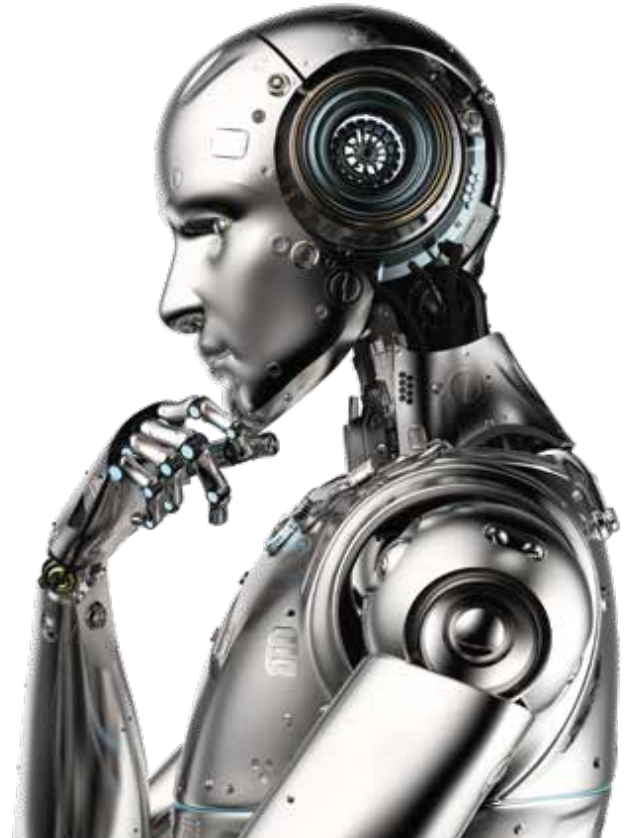
Women: Health, Wealth, and Community, where she shares her insights on achieving balance in life. Through her advocacy and expertise, Aurica continues to inspire others to embrace hydration, nutrition, and self-care.

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