

charter workplace summit '24

the new leadership playbook

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When people thrive, our society is better off and our organizations are more successful. Charter gathered over 1,000 people in-person and virtually on Oct. 8 with the goal of together exploring a new playbook for leadership in alignment with that approach.

This document is a manifestation of that playbook, drawing on the insights and practices of the top executives, researchers, and thought leaders who spoke during the Charter Workplace Summit, in addition to attendees who contributed ideas online throughout the day. It covers the most pressing talent-related issues of the moment—from generative AI and flexible work to navigating politics and societal issues.

One thematic through line is that people issues are strategic business issues, and to be successful, leaders need to do more than pay lip service to that. “The real primary responsibility of leadership is to create an environment where all people can really thrive,” reflected Summit co-chair Edith Cooper, co-founder of Medley and board director of Amazon and PepsiCo. “Not some people—not a subset of the subset—but a broader community because that's when excellence happens.”

“Leaders have to put themselves into a situation where they and their teams are being challenged and rethinking things, taking big bets, but pivoting really fast,” added Katy George, Summit co-chair and Microsoft’s corporate vice president of HR strategy, analytics, and workforce planning.

Among the other notable voices from the day-long Summit are Paul Griggs, speaking in one of his first public on-the-record appearances as the new US head of PwC, Carnegie Hall director Clive Gillinson, who joined the Summit just hours before the opening of the new Carnegie season, and ABC’s Sara Haines, who the day of the Summit interviewed vice president Kamala Harris on “The View.”

We encourage you to share this playbook with your colleagues and look forward to hearing how you put the ideas into action as you write your own leadership playbook for the year ahead. Does this document prompt any ideas or do you have a story to share about something you learned at the Summit? Let us know at hi@charterworks.com.

Interested in partnership or sponsorship opportunities? Reach out to us at partner@charterworks.com.

“

Leaders have to put themselves into a situation where they and their teams are being challenged and rethinking things, taking big bets, but pivoting really fast,”



KATY GEORGE

Corporate vice president for HR strategy, analytics, and workforce planning, Microsoft
Co-chair, Charter Workplace Summit



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Charter Pro helps leaders navigate one of the most complex, uncharted, and consequential challenges they face: winning the future of work, including the successful deployment of artificial intelligence, flexible work, and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Charter Pro equips you with the research, tools, and advice necessary to stay ahead on critical workplace issues. With a membership, you'll get unlimited access to:

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01

Leadership and the Emerging Talent Landscape



Paul Griggs assumed the role of the top executive of PwC US this spring, having previously served as vice chair of US markets and co-led the firm's My+ people strategy for its 75,000 employees. Griggs is on the front lines of some of the most consequential questions facing leaders with the deployment of generative AI: What are the enduring human skills? How do you shift to a skills-based organization, anticipate future talent needs, and train workers at scale to meet them —no matter where they are in their career journey? And, somewhat existentially, how will the value and shape of knowledge work shift in the coming years? In conversation with Charter editor-in-chief Kevin Delaney, Griggs shared how his colleagues and PwC's clients are tackling these questions.

What we've learned so far:

- **Organizations are pulling back on short-term cost-cutting in favor of a longer-term outlook.** “Companies have shifted from cutting costs just to survive to realizing that they have to invest to transform their businesses, to grow in a more challenging marketplace,” said Griggs. “Companies now spend money on their own transformations, appreciating that you're not going to cut your way to success.”
- **As AI transforms knowledge work, relationship-building skills will remain critical.** “You'll never be able to replace the empathy required to do business,” Griggs noted. “Business is still conducted and will always be conducted person to person... Depth of relationship, and applying that knowledge gained and accelerated through technology, is only going to be more important in the future.”

Tactics and practices:

- **Treat any savings that come from AI as an investment in transformation.** Griggs noted that he counsels clients to take any productivity savings from AI not as bottom-line financial savings in their accounts, but as time and money to reinvest in “more innovation, learning, more turning the flywheel, generating momentum.”

- **Teach a learning mindset as a skill.** “The willingness to pour yourself into the continuous learning process of advancing technologies will also be an enduring skill,” Griggs noted. Virtual attendee [Caitlin Harper](#), founder of the organizational-change consultancy Commcoterie, agreed, writing in the Summit chat, “The number-one skill my clients are talking about right now is the skill to learn—to research, to self-teach, to skillshare, etc.”
- **Take a “clean sheet of paper” approach to experimenting with AI.** Griggs suggested that organizations should use a two-part strategy to fully capture the gains that come from using AI. One part is simply giving workers AI tools to do their jobs, a tactic that will likely yield incremental benefits. At the same time, “you also need to create the clean sheet of paper to completely reimagine, front to back, the way that you drive your business forward,” he said. At PwC, for example, “We have pilots running in elements of our business where we have pulled partners, resources, technologists aside and said, ‘Your job for the next 12 to 24 months is to remap the business in its entirety. How would we deliver in a completely different way, leveraging technology and innovation?’”

Choice quote:

“

Change can be quite enabling for a business when combined with the ingenuity and skill and willpower of a people.”



PAUL GRIGGS
US senior partner, PwC

Additional reading:

- PwC's recent [Workforce Radar report](#), which highlights how organizations are currently thinking about reducing costs.
- Our [interview](#) with [Ellyn Shook](#), Accenture's former chief leadership and human resources officer, about why organizations should evaluate job candidates for "learning agility."
- "[Being a good learner at work is more important as AI arrives—here's what can improve learning agility](#)," our [interview](#) with [Gabriella Rosen Kellerman](#), chief innovation officer at [BetterUp](#).

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Every CHRO has the opportunity to reimagine the HR function in the age of AI

The CHRO role has grown in scope and influence over the past few years and is now driving key C-suite priorities like upskilling efforts and transitioning the business through hybrid and remote work

- Chief Human Resource Officer and Chief People Officer are now two of the top 10 fastest growing C-suite roles on LinkedIn (2023 vs 2022).

The job description of the CHRO has had to be rewritten just to keep up – with LinkedIn data finding the ability to influence and move quickly through change is now more core to the job:

- People management and influencing at all levels are both ~10x more likely to be required in CHRO job posts this year vs last
- Building trusted, interpersonal relationships is ~8x more likely to be required in CHRO job posts this year vs last
- Being able to easily adapt is ~4x more likely to be required in CHRO job posts this year vs last

Despite a bigger seat at the table, most HR teams today are feeling uncertain – with many unsure about what big shifts like the influence of new AI technology means for the future. According to LinkedIn data:

- 73% of HR professionals globally say they feel overwhelmed by changes at work
- Their #1 concern when it comes to changes at work?
Understanding and integrating artificial intelligence into daily tasks

This uncertainty presents an opportunity for CHROs to step up and set a new vision - a vision anchored not in what's left for HR teams to do in the age of AI, but in what's finally possible for HR teams to do in the age of AI.

And what's possible is much more than the function has ever been able to fully realize. With 68% of skills for all jobs predicted to change by 2030, your job is changing on you even if you don't change jobs.



[See LinkedIn's State of the C-Suite and Executives Report to read more about the changing role of executives.](#)



Watch this space as we continue the conversation at our annual Talent Connect Show on October 29th and 30th.

HR isn't going away, but HR jobs of old will start to disappear - replaced by newly imagined roles that allow CHROs and their teams to bring more of their unique skills and expertise to bear.

LinkedIn is dedicated to co-creating a future of work that unlocks the potential of people. We were thrilled to contribute to the Charter Workplace Summit to empower HR leaders to develop a new leadership playbook.

02

How Hybrid and Flexible Work Can Unlock Performance, Innovation, Connection, and Wellbeing



What are the leading-edge practices for flexible work that maximizes performance, innovation, connection, and wellness? Brian Elliott, cofounder of Slack's Future Forum, Laura Watt, executive vice president for human resources at Diageo North America, and Prithwiraj Choudhury, professor at Harvard Business School and Charter 30 honoree, shared the latest insights from research and the field that you can apply to your own teams and organizations.

Flexible work practices, when properly deployed, offer striking advantages for organizations and their employees, including higher engagement, productivity, retention, and mental health. But many businesses still struggle to unlock those advantages, amid anxiety about whether they're losing ground on performance and engagement. In this session, top experts on flexible work—from both research and business operations—shared the secrets of successful flexible configurations and potential tweaks to your organization's approach drawn from the latest research.

What we've learned so far:

- **"We are firmly in the world of hybrid,"** said Choudhury, citing data from Stanford's Nicholas Bloom and colleagues showing that 28% of workdays took place at home as of mid last year.
- **The success of an organization's hybrid-work policy depends on how well managers have been trained to support it.** "I've seen great hybrid, I've seen good hybrid, I've seen terrible hybrid," said Choudhury. "The real question is, what are the management practices we develop to support hybrid?"
- **Flexibility works best when the specifics are decided at the team level, versus a single arrangement company-wide.** At Diageo, leaders rolled out "a set of guidelines" for employees' working arrangements rather than a top-down policy, Watt said. "The second we have a policy, we need to manage it, we need to police it, we need to have consequences to it. And that sets up the wrong dynamic for the HR function." Watt also noted that her company's global status made a more adaptable approach that much more important: "We knew that what would be right for one country would not be for the other."

Tactics and practices:

- **Give teams a say over where they meet, in addition to when.**
Discussions about how often teams should gather tend to default to assuming they'll do so at the office. But as Choudhury pointed out, "the office is only one of the locations you could meet," and other locations may be more in line with team needs. For example, "A sales team could meet on the outskirts of a sales conference. You could meet at a client site for a professional services company." Watt noted that while Diageo's guidelines urge employees to work away from home 40% of the time, "we didn't say in the office...That could be connecting with stakeholders, clients, agencies, customers."
- **Use current employees as evangelists for your flexibility policies.** Watt cited a recruiter at Diageo who took the company's six-month gender-neutral parental leave three months after joining. That recruiter "has now been with us for years, and not only does that individual talk about our policies, he can actually give us his lived experience: 'I joined, I took six months, this is how it changed my life.'"
- **Make your family leave policies as inclusive as possible.** At Diageo, which extends its paid parental leave to its global unionized front-line workforce, "there was this big debate" about whether to wait until leave was on the negotiating table, Watt recalled. The company, which recently revamped its leave policy to be gender-neutral, ultimately expanded leave access proactively, in keeping with its leaders' belief that supporting all families is a recruitment and retention tool as well as a social good. "I'm not a better parent than you because I'm non-unionized," Watt said. She added, "Let's change the dynamic of women having babies to parents having families."

Choice quote:

“

We want to be able to trust our employees. And we want them to trust us, in terms of how we operate and that we treat each other like adults in the conversation.”



LAURA WATT
EVP HR, Diageo North America

Additional reading:

- [“How people leaders can respond to Amazon's return-to-office memo,”](#) Elliott’s Charter column on Amazon CEO Andy Jassy’s recent mandate.
- [“What Allstate and Zillow learned about in-person time when work is flexible,”](#) Charter case studies authored by Elliott on the companies’ approaches to gathering, offsites, and office design.
- Our [tools for creating team-level agreements](#) around working arrangements.
- Our [FAQ](#) on how organizations can equip their managers to lead hybrid teams.
- Choudhury’s [profile](#) as a Charter 30 honoree.
- [“A strategy for strengthening relationships during in-person time,”](#) our briefing on Choudhury’s research.

► WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.

03

How Humans and AI Can Best Work Together



What is AI really capable of now in terms of business use cases and what should we expect over the next two or three years? Manuela Veloso, head of AI research at JPMorganChase and a renowned AI and robotics researcher and professor emerita at Carnegie Mellon, discussed the significance of technologies such as “agents” and how to integrate the capabilities of humans and AI. Veloso, a Charter 30 honoree whose team “dominates the AI research landscape within the banking sector,” according to Evident, also shared her views on what human skills are enduring as AI further penetrates the workplace.

What we’ve learned so far:

- **We should think about AI as a journey, said Veloso.** She said when business people work with technologists, they often focus on the hardest cases that are impossible for current AI systems to solve, rather than focusing on what it can actually do now. She cited the example of using AI to answer emails: “Oh, these emails have millions of attachments and ask millions of things.’ They make it sound as if it’s impossible for a machine to do...The fact is that 90% of the emails are like, ‘What’s the status of this thing?’ Trivial,” she said. By focusing on the tasks AI can’t do, people are missing out on the opportunity to start benefiting from AI today.
- **The skills of AI and humans can complement each other.** Veloso recounted how when she first joined JPMorgan Chase, she had a limited knowledge of the financial industry and thought that AI could do much of the work performed at the company. After a couple of years there, however, she saw just how knowledgeable employees are about their domain, and that humans have skills AI can’t replicate to the same extent, such as creativity and the ability to learn from very few examples. “I started understanding that this is not about machines substituting for humans, but it’s...about having AI assist these humans.”
- **The future of work will involve AI agents.** Unlike current chatbots, agents will be able to analyze information, plan actions, and execute them, said Veloso. “The future will be, in fact, an AI system that is able to read the email, classify it, get the information, decide on the actions I need to answer the email, get information from here, call this person...and actually send the email.” Veloso also

envisioning a world where AI agents interact with one another and together do things like schedule meetings for people based on their preferences. “We are going to have to master how we interact with those creatures, because they will be there,” said Veloso.

Tactics and practices:

- **Be humble and recognize when AI can help you.** Veloso told the story of when she was at Carnegie Mellon University and her team built a collaborative robot, which kept getting stuck because it would constantly encounter things it couldn’t do, such as press elevator buttons. Eventually, she asked, “Why doesn’t this thing ask for help from humans?” A symbiotic relationship between humans and AI involves a combination that plays to each of their strengths. Veloso’s advice: “Be humble and realize the tasks that you really can ask AI to do, and [for] the other ones, do it yourself.”
- **Focus on developing your uniquely human skills.** Veloso emphasized that humans outperform AI in abstraction, generalization, and innovation. “We do not need to see 10 spoons to know what’s a spoon.” Humans’ ability to learn from very few examples and adapt to new situations is a critical, complementary skill for working with AI.

Choice quote:

“

AI is a science of limitations.”



DR. MANUELA M. VELOSO

Head of AI research, JPMorganChase
Herbert A. Simon University professor emerita, Carnegie Mellon University

Additional reading:

- Charter's [playbook](#), "AI in the workplace: How companies and workers are getting it right."
- "[AI: Lessons from the Frontier](#)," our AI strategy briefing for HR leaders.
- Our [guide](#) to getting the most out of combining humans and AI.
- "[Why this economist thinks you should take a 'wait-and-see' approach to AI](#)," our interview with MIT economist [Daron Acemoglu](#) (who just won the [Nobel Prize](#) in economics) about the risks of companies adopting AI too fast.
- Veloso's [profile](#) as a Charter 30 honoree.

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Is your company ready for neurodivergent Gen Z?

More and more companies have embraced the idea of neurodiversity in recent years. They understand that learning differences, ADHD, and autism are common, and that neurodivergence isn't a weakness. Lately, however, some companies have pulled back on disability, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts — at the very worst time.

The future of work is quickly changing as Gen Z becomes the largest generation in the workforce. This generation has different expectations of employers, especially around neurodiversity and inclusion. Companies that welcome and support them will be in a much better position to attract and retain talent.

Gen Z already makes up a significant part of the workforce. And by 2030, it will account for 30% of all workers. Research shows that 51% of Gen Z reports having learning differences or ADHD, compared to 38% of Millennials. They view their differences as part of who they are, and they expect reasonable accommodations and resources from employers.

This generation is also more likely to request workplace accommodations (42% of Gen Z compared to 27% of Millennials, 21% of Gen X, and 13% of Baby Boomers).

An inclusive and accessible workplace will be especially attractive to Gen Z. Companies with supportive policies will be better equipped to compete now and in the future.

At Understood, we've built an inclusive workplace, providing flexible spaces, work schedules, and headphones, and allowing employees to adjust lighting and sound. And much more.

Here are five ways your company can become more inclusive and better able to compete for talent.

1. Embrace flexibility.

Support diverse ways of processing information, interacting with environments, and achieving results by focusing on outcomes, not methods. Enhance accessibility with small adjustments like noise-canceling headphones, flexible lighting, multiple information formats (video, text, audio), and flexible workspaces and schedules. A flexible workplace benefits everyone, not just people with differences.

2. Remove barriers to participation.

Welcome differences and remove participation barriers by offering accommodations proactively (e.g., wheelchair ramps, quiet spaces, captions on videoconferences). Ensure that both physical and digital spaces are accessible to all.

3. Encourage employees to seek support.

Encourage employees to ask for the support they need, even without disclosing a disability. Provide self-service resources like transcribing software. Train managers for proactive conversations, and share the accommodation request process widely.

4. Share your commitment to disability inclusion.

Foster an open environment for discussing differences. Encourage leaders to share personal challenges, and consider forming an employee resource group (ERG) for those with differences and disabilities.

5. Promote ongoing conversations about differences.

Create a climate where employees feel comfortable talking about differences. Have a company leader or manager open up about their own challenges. You can also start an employee resource group (ERG) for employees with differences and disabilities.

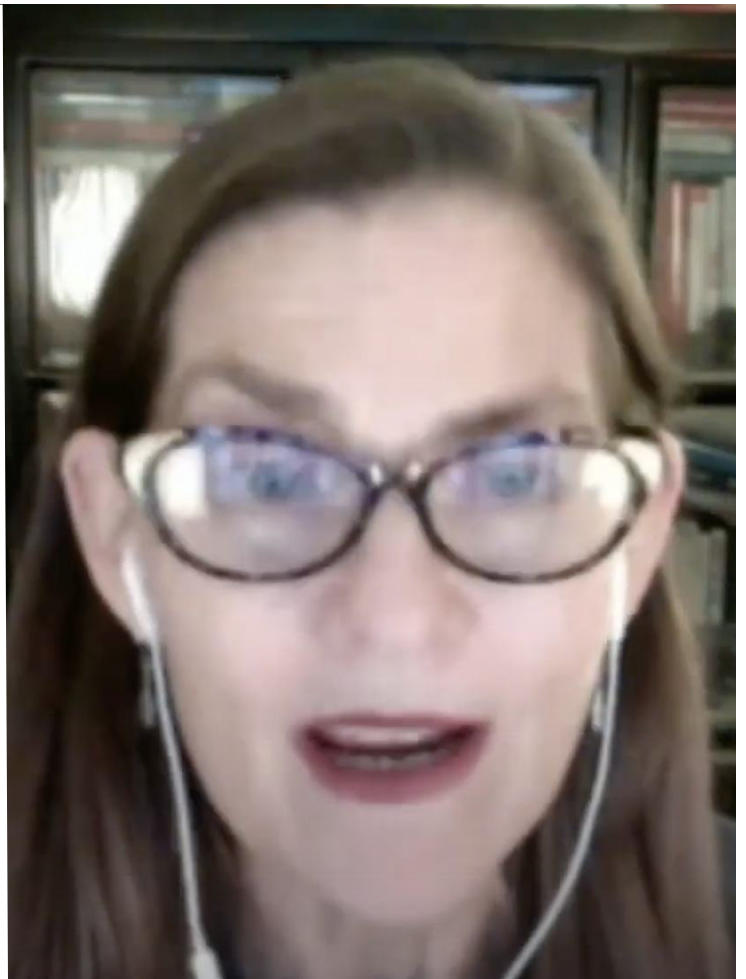
Prepare for the workplace of tomorrow by starting today.

For more workplace resources, visit [u.org/workplace](https://www.understood.org/workplace)

To sign up for a tour of Understood's accessible offices in New York City, visit [u.org/officetours](https://www.understood.org/officetours)

04

How Individuals and Organizations Can Make Work Better



Virtual attendees saw a conversation with journalist Brigid Schulte, director of the New America Foundation's Better Life Lab and author of the new book Over Work, about "the change agents who are driven by dreams of a different way of working and living, and acting to make them real."

What we've learned so far:

- **Burnout and struggling to thrive at work are more than an individual problem.** In response to a question about what individuals can do to make work better, Schulte said the first thing she tells people is "to be aware of these larger forces, to understand the water that we're swimming in... We have these stories that hard work pays off, and it really hasn't been for a lot of people for a long time."
- **The need to perform busyness is detrimental to workers' mental health.** "If you're in an organization that values the input of sitting in a chair or physically being online... If you value long work hours, the input rather than the output, that's a lot of what drives stress and burnout," Schulte said.

Tactics and practices:

- **Visualize your calendar like an art gallery, with white spaces between important events, rather than building your day so that one commitment runs into the next, Schulte advised.** "Choose one really important thing; spend time and energy on that. Don't be in a meeting and then answering emails, so you're sort of half paying attention to everything." Instead, "have white space before to prepare, be in that moment that you've spent time preparing for, and then have white space afterwards" to process or complete any follow-up.
- **"Ask, listen, and act" was Schulte's advice for managers looking for ways to improve the work experience for their teams.** "So many work redesigns or experiments come from the top down. 'We know best and we're going to force you to dance to our tune.' And those never work," she said. Rather, the most impactful changes come from going right to the source. "Ask people: What are your pain points? What do you think would work best?... Really ask people, listen to what they say, incorporate co-design with them."

Choice quote:

“

I love a hot bath, so I'm not saying that that's not something to do, but that doesn't get to the root of what's really driving work stress or burnout. What I want people and organizations in particular to understand is that it's a systems problem.”



BRIGID SCHULTE
Author & journalist

Additional reading:

- [Over Work: Transforming the Daily Grind in the Quest for a Better Life.](#)
- Schulte's book [Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has The Time.](#)
- “[How you should respond to the deepening child-care crisis,](#)” our 2022 interview with Schulte about how employers can support workers' care responsibilities.

► WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.

05

Leading from the Inside Out



What are the psychological, emotional, and human attributes that allow top executives to succeed? McKinsey senior partner Kurt Strovink discussed with Microsoft's Katy George specific takeaways from research and consulting projects with over 500 executives about the practices of those who excel at leading their organizations through change. They were joined as well by Clive Gillinson, executive and artistic director of Carnegie Hall, to discuss lessons from the highest levels of leadership and practical takeaways from the new book Strovink co-authored, The Journey of Leadership: How CEOs Learn to Lead from the Inside Out.

What we've learned so far:

- **Effective leadership requires constant self-reflection.** In the conversations he had with CEOs for The Journey of Leadership, Strovink said, one theme that emerged was the importance of introspection in helping executives navigate the emotional challenges of their roles, including the need to understand the limits of their own knowledge and the need to assume responsibility for things that were partly out of their hands. "So many of the things people were struggling with externally traced to things they were working on internally," he said. "You have to learn to lead yourself before you can lead others at the best level possible."
- **Senior leaders should think of themselves as "chief calibration officers."** As a leadership style focused on listening and empowering others increasingly replaces the model of the executive who leads through top-down mandates, leaders must still "set the context for collective action" rather than leading by consensus, suggested Strovink. "Some of the most senior folks in organizations... have to decide, how fast do we need to move, and to what extent? And that question of how fast and to what extent isn't really delegatable."

Tactics and practices:

- **Approach leadership like an orchestra conductor.** Successful conductors, noted Gillinson, are the ones who believe “that the only way is to see your team as a resource. How do you use that resource in the best possible way, so that your skill base is the combination of all of you?”
- **Use the “four Ws” framework to create a sense of purpose.** Leaders have a responsibility to make sure all workers understand their organization’s who, why, what, and when, Strovink said, noting that many have a detrimental tendency to focus on the more logistics-oriented questions at the expense of the more foundational ones. “There are a lot of leaders who power past the first two w’s to focus on the last two, what we should be doing and when we should be doing it. And they underinvest in why we’re here and who we are,” he said.
- **Ask the right questions.** Gillinson shared that early in his tenure at Carnegie Hall, a common question in meetings was, “What’s best for Carnegie Hall?” That’s the wrong framing, he argued; instead, his team should be asking, “How does Carnegie Hall serve people through music?” “If we answer that question, we will ultimately do what is best for Carnegie Hall,” he said, adding that part of a leader’s role is to create a culture that puts such a question front and center as a guiding principle. “If you first ask the right question, you will define a completely different path.”
- **Part of counseling your CEO is helping them find their unique voice.** “Does the CEO have a story and a purpose?” Strovink said. He advised people leaders to play an active role in shaping that story, highlighting and synthesizing patterns in the way their CEO communicates. “[Listen] to the way they think and the way they speak... make sure you’re dialed into making something authentic that they can communicate.” Ideally, he said, the end result is a 10-second soundbite the CEO can use to connect their personal story to the organization’s purpose.

Choice quote:

“

Leadership starts to happen when you're responsible for that which you can't fully control.”



KURT STROVINK

Senior partner and head of global CEO services, McKinsey

Additional reading:

- [“How CEOs and CHROs can set up their relationship for success,”](#) our interview with [Jack Altman](#) and [Cara Allamano](#), the former CEO and chief people officer of Lattice, about about what CPOs and CEOs should prioritize in their working relationship.
- [“How Steve Jobs communicated purpose,”](#) our book briefing on [Make Something Wonderful](#) by the Steve Jobs Archive.
- [The Journey of Leadership: How CEOs Learn to Lead from the Inside Out.](#)

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Reimagine the workforce ecosystem to be age-inclusive

By 2040, the population of Americans aged 65 or older will rise to 80 million from 54 million today.

As people live longer, healthier lives, they're working longer-because they want to or need to. **Over the next decade, those 65 and older will make up the fastest-growing segment of the US workforce.**

With five generations working side-by-side now "the new normal," AARP sees opportunities in a **reimagined workforce ecosystem**, one that we can create and invest in.

As highlighted in [an AARP report](#), "the growing diversity of age, experience, ability, and needs of the workforce call businesses to **think and act differently to unlock human, financial, emotional, and social capital**: creating productive, meaningful, and dynamic work and careers, made accessible for all who want or need to work."

The business benefits are clear. Among the most successful businesses are those with expressed commitments to building multi-generational, inclusive workforce practices such as members of [AARP's Living Learning and Earning Longer Collaborative](#) and [Employer Pledge Programs](#).

To build a thriving, age-inclusive workforce, leaders must **understand the major trends shaping the future of work and redesign practices, policies, and programs** accordingly.

Learn more today by reading:

- [Five Megatrends Shaping the Future of Work](#)
- [Building a Competitive Future for All: The Business Case for Healthy Longevity](#)

06

Lean In's 10th Anniversary: Assessing Progress and Learnings in Women's Leadership



*What does a decade of data tell us about the state of women in the workplace, and where do we go from here? Caroline Fairchild, editor-in-chief of *Lean In*, and Workplace Summit co-chair Edith Cooper, cofounder of Medley and board director at Amazon and PepsiCo, dissected the findings from *Lean In* and McKinsey's 10th annual *Women in the Workplace* study. Together they unpacked critical trends, including the rise of women in c-suite positions, the decline in company commitment to diversity, and the urgent need for more robust career development programs, especially for women of color.*

What we've learned so far:

- **Women have made meaningful gains in leadership...** Fairchild cited the finding from the *Lean In* and McKinsey report that 29% of c-level roles are currently held by women, a significantly higher share than a decade ago, when 17% of c-level executives were women.
- **...but that progress remains fragile.** The report attributed much of the increase to organizations adding new roles at the top to expand the c-suite, a trend that can't be sustained over the long term. Further down in the corporate hierarchy, women are still promoted into manager roles less frequently than their male peers, and women of color even less so.
- **Organizations shouldn't put the onus on women to change in order to achieve parity in leadership.** Rather, "it's about changing the systems in place that are supporting" women, Fairchild said—including managers, who have an outsized impact on employees' experience.

Tactics and practices:

- **Equip managers to support the advancement of the women on their teams.** "Giving managers the tools to effectively manage and learn how to manage is actually one of the most commercial and economically impactful things you can do," said Cooper. As attendee Jahnvi Brenner, CEO of the leadership coaching firm The Vivid Leader, commented in the online chat during the session,

“Make sure the managers have time and skills to be the ‘manager,’ versus just producing the work of the team,” and make clear expectations around how they use their time: “What's the split between managing and delivering the output of the team?”

- **Counteract worries about the backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives by reframing the conversation.** In her work with Medley, Cooper said, she often hears concerns from partner organizations “around choice of words and people really stretching their brains to figure out, what do we call it? Because people don’t want to talk about diversity.” Her reply: “‘Excellence. Let’s just focus on excellence.’ Because if you don’t have excellent people, you don’t have a company that’s going to be relevant over time.”
- **Stay consistent, no matter the economic climate.** Commitment to DEI “can’t be an up market, down market phenomenon where we’re all reactive to an event that really strikes a chord and then we move on,” Cooper said. Instead of a reactive approach in which external events dictate internal action, “recognize that excellence is only going to occur if you create environments where everyone can really thrive,” and chart a steady course to achieve that environment. Attendee Caitlin Harper highlighted the disconnect that often happens when consistency isn’t prioritized: “What leaders say and what they end up deciding to do is not connected,” she said. “When I tackle major change management initiatives, it’s actually not the employees that are the biggest challenge... It’s the leaders themselves.”
- **Be open about the challenges ahead.** The Lean In and McKinsey research found that “if you are transparent with employees about how hard this work is, you get better results,” Fairchild said, a finding echoed in other research about rhetoric around diversity.

Choice quote:

“

We can't keep recycling the same things. We know sponsorship and mentorship are important. What does it look like? Let's get smart.”



EDITH COOPER

Co-founder of Medley, board director of PepsiCo and Amazon
Co-chair, Charter Workplace Summit

Additional reading:

- The 2024 [Women in the Workplace](#) report.
- “[3 ways to accelerate the advancement of women at work](#),” Fairchild’s Charter op-ed about how to enlist leaders, managers, and employees in working toward gender equity.
- “[The urgent need for more men to sponsor women](#),” a 2023 Charter column by Sam Saperstein, head of JPMorgan Chase’s Women on the Move initiative.
- Our [book briefing](#) on [Career and Family](#) by Nobel Prize-winning economist Claudia Goldin, whose research focuses on the gender-wage gap.
- “[How organizations can improve worker buy-in on diversity efforts](#),” our interview with NYU professor Lisa Leslie about her research on leaders’ diversity-related rhetoric.

► [WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.](#)

07

How to Navigate Politics and Societal Issues in the Workplace in an Election Year



Many leaders are struggling with the best approach to engage around political and societal issues that impact the workplace. Richard Edelman, CEO of the Edelman global communications firm, and Charter's Kevin Delaney discussed best practices for organizations around issues such as the contentious election season and pushback against DEI initiatives. What are the responsibilities of companies? What are workers looking for? What should you be doing now with the election approaching? What have leaders learned from how they approached the war in Gaza?

What we've learned so far:

- **Workers trust their employers more than other institutions, including government, media, and businesses in general, according to data from the Edelman Trust Institute.** But that trust is not uniform across all demographics: Blue-collar workers' level of trust in their employers is 32 percentage points lower than those of desk-based workers, reflecting a wider trust gap between higher- and lower-income workers.
- **Staying firm on DEI is key to trust.** "The idea that companies would back off of diversity, equity, inclusion or sustainability... is simply self-destructive," Edelman said. "If you care about your employees, you care about those issues," he argued, citing Edelman data that employees who believe their employer stands up for DEI and sustainability are far more likely to say they want to stay at their organization and to promote their organization to others. "And when people deliver on DEI promises, there's a doubling of trust in the employee base," he said.

Tactics and practices:

- **Act swiftly when weighing in on high-stakes issues.** "Your time is short" when news breaks, Edelman said. "It's not, 'We can take 24 [hours] and see how that plays.' Otherwise, it's already in the spin cycle that you don't care." Edelman pointed to the example of Claudine Gay, former president of Harvard University, as a cautionary tale: After the attacks of October 7, her delay in issuing Harvard's institutional response meant the university "was playing from behind and she was always trying to catch up," he said.

- **Speak out on social and political issues only if those issues affect your business and your people.** Edelman shared a simple framework for deciding when to speak out about political and societal issues: “Does it have something to do with your business?” If the answer is yes, whether that’s the supply chain, hiring, sourcing, or employee experience, “all these things are within your control and therefore within your responsibility.”
- **For issues affecting employees, focus on internal communication.** When issues do directly affect employees, he encouraged leaders to speak to their workforce to offer support and resources, rather than making broad, public statements. For example, with reproductive rights, “you should make sure that you are expressing to your employees your views and hopefully your commitment to making sure women have access to abortion if they need it... [but] talk to your people, don’t become a public advocate.”

Choice quote:

“

The workplace is the one safe place people feel they can actually talk about politics. They can't do it across the fence anymore with the neighbors...So tell people to vote. That's the most important thing. Give them time off to vote. Give them [candidate] fact sheets.”



RICHARD EDELMAN
CEO of the Edelman global communications firm

Additional reading:

- [“Election stress and civic empowerment,”](#) our guide to civic engagement initiatives that can reduce workers’ election stress levels while maintaining political neutrality.
- [“How to approach societal issues,”](#) a Charter case study on Microsoft’s strategy for civic responsibility, including employee engagement initiatives and policies around weighing in on political issues.
- [“What to do when protests come to your workplace,”](#) a guide for addressing worker protests at work.
- [The 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report: Trust at Work and Special Report: Brands and Politics.](#)
- [The Civic Alliance’s toolkits](#) for civic engagement in the workplace, a resource shared in the Summit chat by attendee [Liba Rubenstein](#), director of the Aspen Business Roundtable on Organized Labor.

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08

Release Your 'Hungry Ghosts' — How You and Your Team Can Go From Burnout to Inspiration



High performance can be sustainable with the right management approach. Daisy Auger-Domínguez, author of the new book Burnt Out to Lit Up and former Vice Media chief people officer, shared research and leadership practices that move teams from relentless overwork to cultures of creativity, high performance, and inspiration.

What we've learned so far:

- **Fun is an essential tool for keeping burnout at bay.** Auger-Domínguez urged attendees to “find the humor in the hamster wheel,” noting that intentionally summoning a sense of fun can turn an energy-sapping task into an exercise in creativity. She recalled a time when she was working to source candidates for a role that the organization wasn’t sure it actually wanted to fill. “The team is getting frustrated,” she said, “and I’m like, ‘Okay, everybody just pause.... Let’s just try and see if we find some really great exciting people in this role. Let’s have some fun with this. Let’s actually meet some people that we’ve never met before.’” With that mindset shift, she explained, what had previously felt like pointless drudgery was transformed into something that felt new and exciting.

Tactics and practices:

- **Embrace a beginner’s mindset as a way to reclaim a sense of optimism and wonder.** “Remember when you first got your first job or your first promotion, that sense of energy and excitement? That sense that everything was possible, until you got all stressed out and nothing was possible at all?” Auger-Domínguez asked. “That energy, that beginner’s mind, is what allows us to be curious to think about things.” Thinking like a beginner, she explained, can mean trying to see things as if for the first time, stepping outside of the layers of context that can lead to inertia and asking, “How do we do that differently?”
- **Create a “happy folder”** to collect praise, nice messages, and other artifacts that help you feel appreciated or spark joy, and revisit it when you need to be reminded of your sense of purpose. Auger-Domínguez said of her own folder: “It’s that place that I go to on those days where I feel like I can’t do anything right.”

Choice quote:

“

We have to work, we have to grind—it's called labor for a reason. It is what it is. But how do we find joy in those moments?”



DAISY AUGER-DOMÍNGUEZ
Chief people officer, author

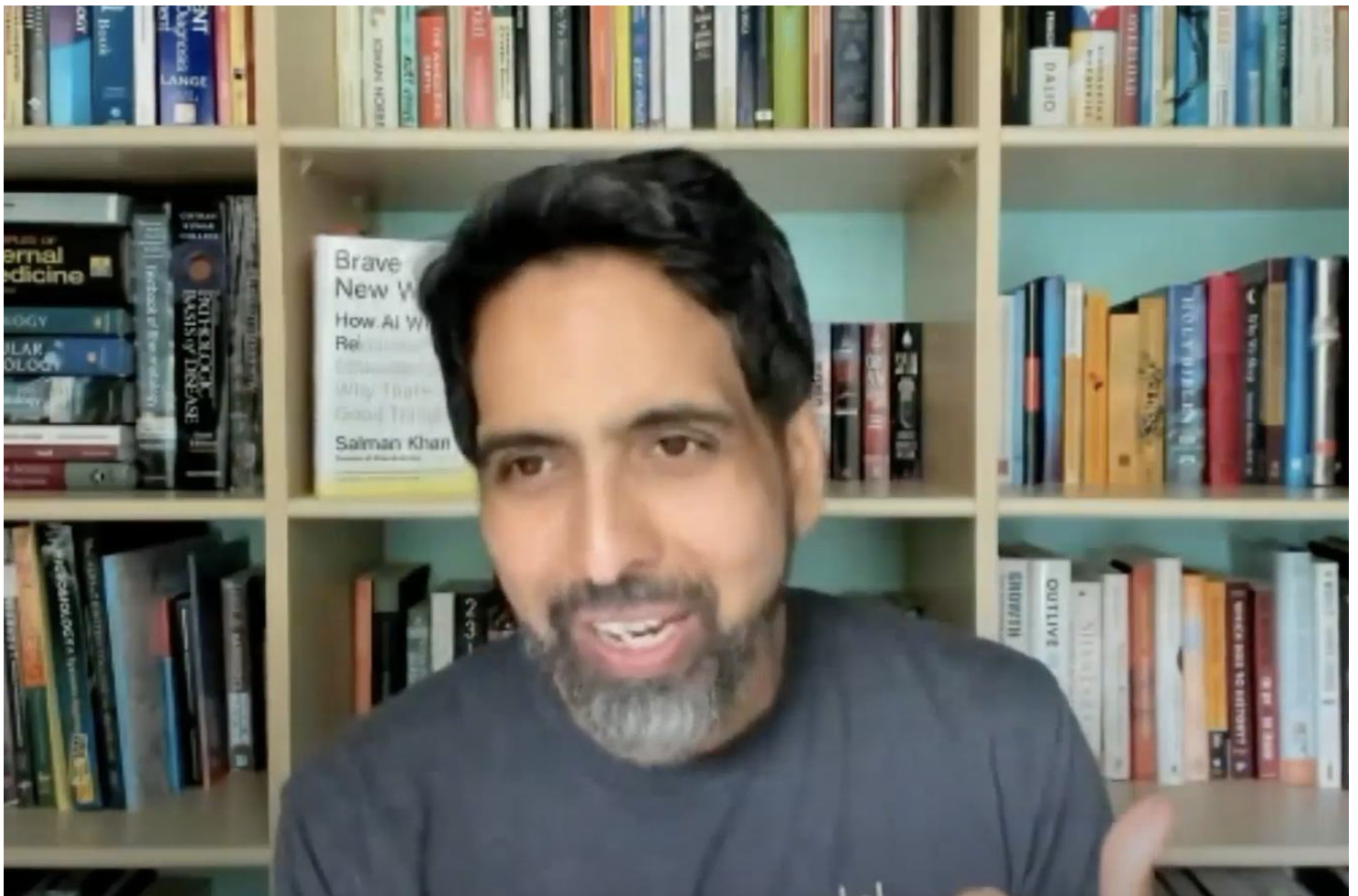
Additional reading:

- [Burnt Out to Lit Up](#) and our [summary](#) of key takeaways from the book.
- “[The role of the right questions and embracing discomfort in getting the return to office right](#),” our 2022 interview with Auger-Domínguez about how to build inclusive RTO plans.
- “[Why burnout occurs and how to remedy it](#),” our briefing on The Burnout Challenge by psychologists Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter.

► [WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.](#)

09

AI and the Future of Jobs, Skills, and Education



Virtual attendees saw a conversation with Sal Khan, CEO of Khan Academy, about AI and the future of jobs, skills, and education.

What we've learned so far:

- **AI could improve organizational communication and alignment.** Khan said that although his company isn't doing this yet, he thinks AI could improve information flow across an organization. He explained that high-level strategies and policies aren't always communicated well by direct managers at his company, and he envisioned how AI might help: "Part of me thinks, 'Wow, if an AI just observed me for a little bit, it could probably do 80% of this stuff and really drive alignment.' Or it could even say, 'Hey, the product management team and the engineering team are interpreting what you mean by 'portability' slightly differently, Sal. Which do you mean, this or that?'" And I say, 'Oh, I mean this,' and then it can message."
- **AI may make it easier to assess people on traditionally hard-to-measure skills.** Khan explained that the traits that make great salespeople and managers are often described as "intangibles," but AI is going to help organizations measure those qualities. "If you really care about someone's salesmanship...you could probably have someone go through AI simulations now and glean a lot more than you could do currently just looking at someone's resume and doing five rounds of interviews."

Tactics and practices:

- **Encourage AI experimentation and sharing across teams.** Khan said he tells his employees to take time out of their week to use genAI tools and share stories with one another about what worked and didn't work. "It doesn't have to be a stick. It should be more of a carrot of highlighting the people who are doing really cool stuff."

- **Adopt an entrepreneurial mindset to get the most out of AI.** GenAI allows everyone to do a little bit of everything, so the workers who are willing to experiment and take initiative are the people organizations should seek out. Khan gave the example of a marketer in a big organization who has an idea but can't move forward without a designer and engineer. He described how this might change with AI, saying: "You're just going to have to be able to create it yourself, and you will be able to use generative AI like, 'I have a marketing idea. Let me create some mocks really fast.' Maybe eventually you'll hand it over to design and they can refine it, but let me just do it."

Choice quote:

“

I would never, ever want to do something like have an AI monitor everything that someone's doing on their screen. I actually think it's okay if you have five minutes between meetings and you go look up some celebrity gossip. Everyone needs downtime."



SAL KHAN
Founder and CEO, Khan Academy

Additional reading:

- An excerpt of our [interview](#) with Khan.
- “[How to use AI to break down organizational silos](#),” our guide to under-the-radar AI use cases for larger organizations.
- “[The AI skills non-technical workers need](#),” our guide to identifying those skills in your organization and identifying them in job candidates.

► [WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.](#)

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Admin Can Weigh You Down, We're Here to Help

According to a survey by Justworks and The Harris Poll, 62% of surveyed entrepreneurs say they would be more likely to start their own business if they could outsource admin work.

Between paying employees on time, juggling compliance, onboarding new hires, and so much more, being a small business owner can feel like an uphill battle. 35% of small business owners admitted that they struggle with the administrative aspects of running a business and 24% did not have enough time to focus on the core of their business (such as the product or service they provide, growing the business, etc.).

While small business owners likely get better at managing these with time and experience, most feel that having better tools could supercharge their impact. Whether you're thinking of taking your business international, wrapping your head around the exact cost of offering benefits, or considering data visualization to answer key questions about your growing HR responsibilities – Justworks' mission is to help entrepreneurs and small businesses grow with confidence. With Justworks, small businesses get access to benefits, payroll software, HR tools, compliance support, and 24/7 customer service, all through one easy-to-navigate platform.

10

Pivoting From What's Left to What's Possible for Humans in the Age of AI



Recent findings from Microsoft and LinkedIn show 75% of global knowledge workers have already used AI at work. While the AI excitement is real, leaders today are now being asked hard questions about measuring the ROI and productivity gains from their AI investments. LinkedIn chief economic opportunity officer Aneesh Raman provided a unique glimpse into what the world's largest professional network is seeing play out when it comes to AI at work, and shared expert perspective on how grounding AI strategy in a pro-human point of view is key to business transformation.

What we've learned so far:

- **The number 70 is the key to understanding current workforce trends.** Raman cited LinkedIn data indicating that by 2030, nearly 70% of skills required for jobs will have changed. And about 70% of this year's fastest-growing roles on LinkedIn in the US didn't exist 20 years ago. "So think about that number 70," said Raman, "because in about five years, definitely 10, all of us in this room will be in a new job, either because the job we're in now is going to change at a fundamental level or [because] we are going to be surrounded by the emergence of all these new jobs as they start to come."
- **We're moving toward a relationship economy.** Raman explained that for millennia, we lived in a goods economy, centered on humans' physical abilities. Then we transitioned to a knowledge economy, centered on humans' cognitive abilities. Now, he argued, we're entering a relationship economy, where our social abilities will matter more than ever. "The most in-demand skill on LinkedIn across all jobs is not coding, it's communication," he said.
- **AI is going to change the role of managers.** Raman explained that managers have traditionally been taught to manage work, not people, and he argued that future managers should be more like sports coaches. "They don't teach you how to dribble the ball. They teach you how to bring your best energy. They teach you how to, as a team, come together and set a vision for yourselves. That's what managing is going to have to become."

Tactics and practices:

- **“Stop saying AI and start using AI.”** Raman pointed to the gap between the share of workers who are using AI and the share who say they’ve received training on how to use AI. “Leaders are lagging in this moment,” he argued, partly because they aren’t even using the technology. “You’ve got to just start using these tools. Familiarize yourself with these tools. Start to think about how they can benefit your workforces.”
- **Adopt a skills-first and learning-led approach to jobs.** Raman emphasized that we should think of jobs as sets of tasks, not titles, and those tasks will be performed by people, AI, or a combination of the two. “The only way to map that is with a skills-first mindset, and the only way to keep your workforce at pace with change is to be learning-led.”

Choice quote:

“

Human ideas are the new code. Human energy is the new data center.”



ANEESH RAMAN

Chief economic opportunity officer, LinkedIn

Additional reading:

- Charter’s [two articles](#) featuring Aneesh Raman.
- “[Why workers should focus on ‘durable skills’ over ‘perishable skills,’](#)” our [interview](#) with Workera CEO Kian Katanforoosh the skills to prioritize to keep up with the rapid pace of change.
- Our [three-part series](#) on [skills-based organizations](#).

► WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.

11

Lessons From the Field: Building a Culture of AI Experimentation and New 'Aha!' Ways to Use AI



Two experts on AI applications at work and everyday life walked through how to build a culture of AI experimentation and some 'aha!' ways that AI can unlock solutions to our biggest work problems. Helen Lee Kupp and Nichole Sterling of Women Defining AI, which equips women to adopt AI in impactful ways, discussed their biggest lessons from the field, and tangible approaches for leaders to empower workers to apply AI to their specific jobs.

What we've learned so far:

- **AI can be a useful way to gather different perspectives.** Sterling explained that we often don't consider as many perspectives as we would like to when making a decision, because we have a limited amount of time and number of people we can ask. LLMs can simulate different perspectives, and just as importantly, point out perspectives you might have failed to consider. Sterling illustrated this by asking ChatGPT to consider the impact of a parental leave policy on employees of all levels of the organization.
- **Use AI to practice difficult conversations.** Sterling played a conversation she had with ChatGPT's Advanced Voice Mode, where the AI pretended to be an angry customer and she pretended to be a customer support agent. She then asked the tool to identify two areas for improvement on how she handled the situation. Sterling said this type of use case is also helpful for practicing salary negotiations.
- **Use AI to help process mountains of information.** Kupp's tool of choice for demonstrating AI's ability to make information easily digestible was NotebookLM, a product from Google. She uploaded an academic article into the app, which turned the paper into a podcast featuring two AI hosts. Rather than read an esoteric article, you can listen to two (fairly) natural-sounding AI hosts have a casual conversation about it.
- **Use AI to build simple apps. Sterling showed a video of herself using Claude to build a total compensation simulator.** She asked it to build it, and it wrote all of the necessary code. Sterling explained that she has previously been the only HR person at a company: "This idea that I can now build for myself without asking for engineering resources... and be solving for my own problems, that's huge."

- **Move beyond individual use cases.** Kupp showed an automated workflow she built on Make.com that turns articles into different pieces of content, such as an X post or an internal company message. The workflow started with a link to an article in a Google Sheet. It then used Perplexity to summarize the article and an OpenAI model to create the social post and internal message. “The real power,” said Kupp, is in “starting to string together these use cases and creat[ing] these larger systems where you can automate...the repetitiveness of the work.”

Choice quote:

“

We don't need real formal R&D labs going on right now. We need to put these tools into people's hands and let them start solving their own problems.”



NICHOLE STERLING
Co-founder, Women Defining AI

Additional reading:

- [“Five ‘aha’ ways AI can unlock solutions to our biggest work problems,”](#) a Charter column by Kupp and Sterling.
- [“Five ways to build a culture of AI experimentation,”](#) a Charter column by Kupp and [Christina Janzer](#), SVP of research and analytics at Slack.
- Our [article](#) on how to address the AI adoption gender gap.
- Our [two roundups](#) of different ways [companies](#) are using genAI.
- Our [case study](#) on Cisco’s AI hackathon.

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12

The View from the Boardroom: People Strategy is Business Strategy



Public company board members Edith Cooper, cofounder of Medley and board director at Amazon and Pepsico; Grace Zuncic, chief people and impact officer at Cotopaxi and board director at King Arthur Baking Company; and Lauren Tyler, board director at Guardian Life and Cencora and former global head of human resources for JPMorgan Chase Asset & Wealth Management, shared specific insights into how people strategy is business strategy. That included covering how HR leaders can more effectively interact with their board member colleagues and non-HR executives can better tackle the strategic people issues on the top of boards' agendas.

What we've learned so far:

- **“HR is paramount. It touches every single thing” that a board covers, Tyler said.** “If we don't have the talent, we don't have a business. If we don't have succession planning, we don't have the business,” she added, noting that succession planning is one of the most important things for a board to get right.
- **Networking and patience are critical to finding the right board seat.** Zuncic, who was approached about her current seat on the King Arthur Baking Company board because of a connection she'd made years earlier, shared a piece of advice she received: “It doesn't have to be now. It just needs to be the right thing and it will come. And in time it did come.” Tyler, who also received her first board invitations via her network, underscored the importance of waiting for a fit. “You will get calls and you have to say no, because if the culture is not right, it will not be a great experience,” she said. “You don't just hop on and off boards. You make a commitment to the company... so you make that decision very, very carefully.”

Tactics and practices:

- **When considering joining a board, ask three questions to make sure it's the right fit,** Tyler advised: What are you going to get out of the experience? What skills and expertise will they get from you? And what's the board culture like? Tyler recalled her own experience in deciding to join the board of Cencora, a drug wholesaler: "My family has owned pharmacies for generations. And so to be on a pharmaceutical distribution company [board] was fantastic for me. I understood that business." Zuncic similarly urged attendees to find "a place where you can really contribute and add value, versus just being on a board for the sake of being on a board."
- **Ask fellow board members for feedback.** In her first year as a board director, Zuncic noted, she often asked others for guidance on how she should show up to meetings, including whether she was asking the right number of questions. Tyler also emphasized the importance of both learning from and offering guidance to other board members, noting that most boards have regular peer evaluations to ensure that exchange of information is taking place: "We write about and talk about each other, and the lead director will call and say, 'What do you think you're learning? And is so-and-so helpful?'"
- **Senior leaders should embrace transparency when interacting with their boards.** "Your board members want the best for you and for the entire company," Tyler said. "Just say it like it is. We need to hear it."

Choice quote:

“

You have a duty of care to the organization that you're serving. It gives you the opportunity to flex that muscle a bit. And I think that serves you well in really every dimension of your life.”



GRACE ZUNCIC
Chief people and impact officer, Cotopaxi

Additional reading:

- A readout of [Charter and Agenda's recent survey](#) of board members about their most urgent priorities.
- Our [interview](#) with Cooper about what boards are focused on right now.
- “[The CHRO's guide to getting a board seat](#),” our roundup of advice for people leaders from current board members and researchers.

► WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.

13

The Women’s Sports
Leadership Advantage



Photos by Lipofskyphoto.com

Some 94% of women in the c-suite have played sports, and female athletes can have an advantage in the boardroom thanks to their focus and ease with competition. We're now finally seeing some recognition of this amid a broader embrace of women's professional sports. Sarah Jones Simmer, COO of the National Women's Soccer League, former CEO of Found, and former COO of Bumble, and Amy Scheer, senior vice president of the new PWHL women's hockey league and a former executive for the National Football League and several pro teams, discussed with Sara Haines, co-host of ABC's "The View" and a former college athlete, how the ascendance of women's sports is impacting leadership and the workplace.

What we've learned so far:

- **Many key leadership traits, such as teamwork, resilience, and strategic thinking, can be honed through sports.** "I always love to hire athletes because you have a competitiveness, and you have to problem solve when you're an athlete," said Scheer. "No athlete is undefeated," a fact that helps them develop the communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills to put themselves in a winning position.

Tactics and practices:

- **Create organizations where workers pass to their teammates.** When workers lack role clarity, they collaborate like four-year-olds playing soccer, Simmer joked. "Everyone is on the ball at the same time, and then what's happening over here? Nothing," she explained. But to "grow and scale a business, you can't possibly have everyone on the same calls or in the same meetings or on the same projects at all times." A leader's job, then, is to define roles and responsibilities so that all workers feel confident "passing the ball," creating a balanced group that includes a goalkeeper, defenders, and strikers.
- **Give workers autonomy over their own career paths.** Simmer pointed out that the NWSL's recent decision to eliminate the player draft has empowered young players in the league. "It means they

control their destiny in terms of where they want to live and being able to advocate for their own worth,” she explained, adding that the policy is also good for teams and the league overall: “It enables us to play on a global stage and get the best possible talent,” allowing them to build better teams, drive viewership, increase media deals, and raise the capital necessary to continue building the business.

Choice quote:

“

I make sure everyone on my team knows it's a sign of strength to ask questions and ask for help.”



AMY SCHEER

Senior vice president, business operations, PWHL (Professional Women's Hockey League)

Additional reading:

- “[Sports captains as models for what managers should be doing now](#),” our interview with [Sam Walker](#), a longtime sports journalist and the author of [The Captain Class](#), on lessons managers and leaders can learn from the most successful sports captains.
- “[A Nike compensation chief on how to get a raise and make pay fairer](#),” our book briefing on [Fair Pay](#), a guide to equitable compensation by [David Buckmaster](#).
- “[What happens lower down when companies have more women leaders](#),” our interview with [Priyanka Dwivedi](#), an assistant professor of management at Texas A&M University’s Mays Business School who studies women in leadership.
- “[Defining women’s leadership, and how businesses benefit from it](#),” our book briefing on [When Women Lead](#) by [Julia Boorstin](#).

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14

Unlocking Constructive Communications in an Anxious, Polarized Work Climate



Town hall open-mic sessions and other traditional ways that teams discuss important or challenging workplace or societal issues generally don't work as well as they once did. Social media is partly responsible, having normalized aggressive and extreme rhetoric in other settings. What's the alternative? Attendees heard from Deb Roy, an MIT professor who heads the MIT Center for Constructive Communication and a related nonprofit Cortico, to understand how their approach to tech-enhanced dialogue and listening are being applied in workplaces. Roy previously was chief media scientist at Twitter and published landmark research on the spread of false news online.

What we've learned so far:

- **The toxic communication patterns of social media have influenced how we talk in the workplace, argued Roy.** “Because of the incentives of [social media] platforms, the loudest voices, often the most extreme opinions that tend to be the most emotionally provocative, dominate. And these same patterns are now spilling into our in-person meeting places like town halls,” he said. “The loudest voices take over.”

Tactics and practices:

- **To build trust, start small.** “Rather than putting everyone into a large space and just expecting them to connect constructively, start with small groups in quiet spaces,” said Roy, noting that small groups help to “self-regulate how people behave.” In those more intimate settings, facilitators can use prompts carefully to elicit stories and personal experiences, which help foster interpersonal connection, rather than opinions, which can exacerbate existing divides. “When you have all these elements come together, people will share authentically.”
- **Look for patterns from small-group conversations to share more widely.** Roy shared a demo of Cortico, an AI-powered platform that records small-group conversations to help facilitators identify overarching themes and conversational highlights. Cortico's own

team used the platform during an organization-wide project to define its values. In small groups, facilitators asked, “What is a value that we exercise in our work right now that means the most to you? Share a time you felt like our work at Cortico was aligned with your values. Share a time when it felt like it could be more aligned.” By analyzing the content of those conversations, the platform identified themes that allowed Cortico’s leaders to draft a final set of organizational values.

Choice quote:

“

Hearing the humanity in others is necessary for democracy to function, for schools to function, for workplaces to function.”



DEB ROY

Director & principal investigator, the MIT Center for Constructive Communication.
Co-founder and CEO, Cortico

Additional reading:

- [“What people need for productive political conversations at work,”](#) a guide for the 2024 election season.
- [“How to communicate in tense situations,”](#) our interview with Roy.
- [“5 principles for navigating conflict over the Israel-Hamas war,”](#) our guide to shaping company-wide communication and supporting employees through interpersonal and group conflict.

► [WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.](#)

15

What's Ahead From Top Journalists Who Cover Work



*Attendees heard from the reporters and editors whose agenda-setting stories you read to understand where work is headed. Emma Goldberg, features writer at *The New York Times*, and Chip Cutter, who covers work for *The Wall Street Journal*, joined Charter editor-in-chief Kevin Delaney to discuss the issues they're following and think should be on leaders' radars.*

What we've learned so far:

- **A rapid pace of change is putting pressure on workers.** Cutter and Goldberg cited a number of challenges that are causing strain within organizations and teams. In particular, organizations are “not done cutting,” said Cutter, amid ongoing economic uncertainty. He predicted that the focus on efficiency will continue to shape battles over hiring, talent management, and AI adoption. Goldberg pointed to ongoing debates over flexible work, an area where “the only constant for workers has been change. Everyone's seen their companies shift RTO policies several times,” both in terms of the number of required on-site days per week and the enforcement of those policies.
- **Managers' mistrust of remote work is a persistent problem.** In response to a question from attendee Emeka Kanu, founder and CEO of the benefits platform Ani, about the biggest disconnect between leaders and workers, Cutter pointed to “the idea among leaders that their employees are slacking off, that they're not working if they're at home.” Goldberg agreed, adding: “When you look at every study that's been done on the effects of remote and hybrid work on productivity, the results are all over the map...It really comes down to what the management policies look like when workers come back into the office. Do they understand why they're coming in?”

Tactics and practices:

- **Bayer is an experiment in reorganizing team structures that's worth watching.** Cutter shared insights from his recent reporting on the pharmaceutical company's recent shakeup: Bayer cut the number of manager jobs and instead is asking workers to pick their own team every 90 days. The hypothesis, Cutter said, is that "if peers were evaluating each other and workers were deciding what needed to be done every 90 days, companies would go a lot faster."
- **Address workers' economic concerns around an office return.** Goldberg encouraged organizations to take particular care to address the economic realities of return-to-office policies. "Workers really crave openness in conversation with their managers on inflationary pressures and economic pressures," said Goldberg, whether that means talking about the cost of their commute or paying for lunch at the office. She recommended approaching the RTO process with transparency and clarity in general: "When workers come back into the office, do they understand why they're coming in? Are there intentional opportunities to collaborate or find mentorship?"
- **Proactively address workers' AI fears.** Acknowledging widespread fears that generative AI will make certain jobs obsolete, Goldberg pointed out IBM's effort to retrain workers whose jobs are most likely to be affected by AI. The effect is "making sure that people feel like there are pathways ahead of them," she said.

Choice quote:

“

The only constant for workers has been change.”



EMMA GOLDBERG
Features writer, The New York Times

Additional reading:

- Goldberg's recent coverage of Amazon's RTO mandate.
- Cutter's coverage of Bayer's management experiment.
- “Addressing employee concerns about AI at work,” our interview with BCG partner and managing director Julia Dhar about how to close the gap between executives' and workers' optimism around AI.

► WATCH A RECORDING OF THE FULL SESSION HERE.

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The consequences are real: despair over workplace challenges leads to increased PTO and sick days, declined mental and physical health, declined productivity and performance, and increased employee turnover or “quiet quitting.” And that’s not all: Charter’s “Eight Ways Workplaces Can Prevent Burnout in 2024” highlights that co-workers who try to help their peers often experience their own burnout as a result.

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