KORN FERRY

SPECIAL: I NEED A JOB!

ISSUE 75

Briefings

THE VOICE OF LEADERSHIP



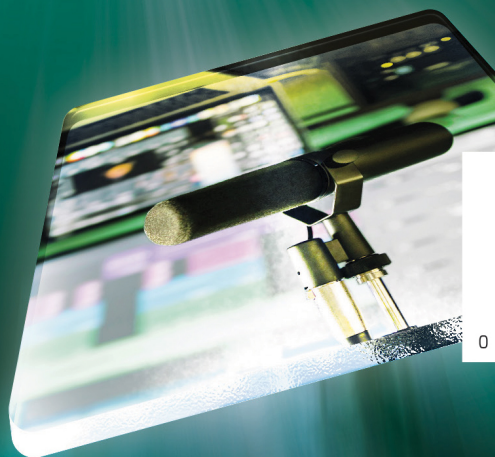




INFLUENCED!

HOW COMPANIES NOW SWAY CLIENT AND CUSTOMER DECISIONS







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RING THE
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PIC GAMES

COVER STORY

Influenced!

Firms are shifting how they sway clients and customer decisions. Is it working?

32





When Technology Hits a Wall

Why haven't battery power, aircraft speed, or weather forecasting improved more? And what is the toll on the business world and people's blood pressure?

42

The AI Messenger

The CEO of a new unit of a Japanese data giant lands in Silicon Valley in hopes of showing firms that AI "playtime" is over—now. Meet Bratin Saha.

50

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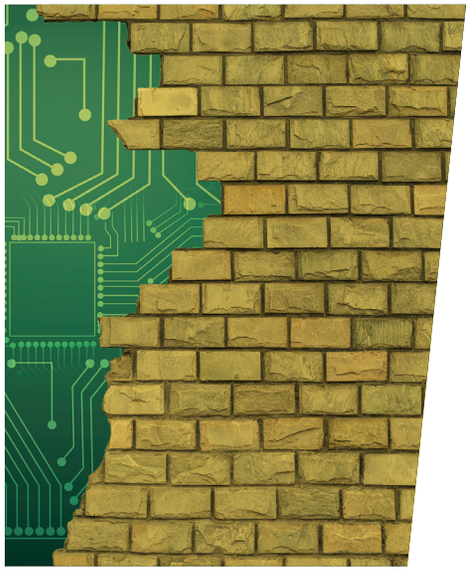
Illustration by **TIM AMES**



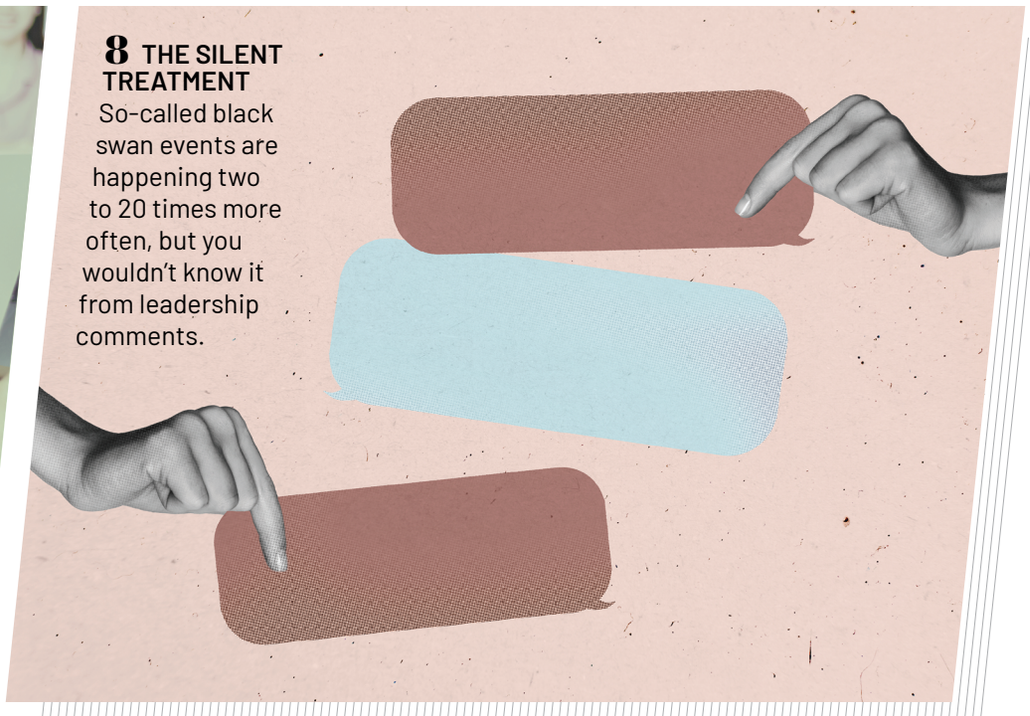
I Need a Job!

Be noticed. Land the interview. Get hired. The best career advice from Korn Ferry CEO Gary Burnison's latest book.

24







8 THE SILENT TREATMENT
So-called black swan events are happening two to 20 times more often, but you wouldn't know it from leadership comments.

BRIEFLY ON...

10 THE ONE AI HOLDOUT: YOU? There's one big group that doesn't seem quite as enthusiastic about AI: the employees expected to use it.

11 CFOs: A NEW THREAT TO CEO JOB SECURITY? One-quarter of CEOs feel the CFO may take over their job.

13 EVERYONE WANTS IN ON THE BEAUTY BUSINESS Retailers are jockeying for a bigger piece of the beauty market, and the prize is profits.

HISTORY LESSON

15 YELLOW CORP: TOO BIG TO FAIL? A 99-year-old freight firm was a fixture in the trucking industry—until it wasn't.

DOWNTIME

57 GRANDMA'S GOT GAME
Leaders are turning to age-old hobbies to wind down.

PLUS:
VISIT • READ, LISTEN, WATCH • ENDGAME
(STARTS ON PAGE 60)

VOICES

16 SIMON CONSTABLE
Global Economy
The similarities and differences between today's energy crisis and the one in the 1970s.

18 MIKE DISTEFANO
Hiring
Technology has greatly improved many aspects of recruiting, but it can't predict who'll actually succeed.

20 LIZ BENTLEY
Leadership
Why are leadership blind spots so difficult to fix?

CLICK **Leadership News, Every Week** *KornFerry.com/Insights*



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **GARY BURNISON**

What Really Matters in a Job Interview

Let's face it—nobody hires a résumé. They hire people.

And people are complex.

"I just froze." And so went an interview as described to me recently by one of my son's friends.

Everything was such a blur. He couldn't remember a single question—only his spinning head and sinking confidence. He wondered, had the interviewer even glanced at his résumé? Was he just one of many—or truly being given a fair shot?

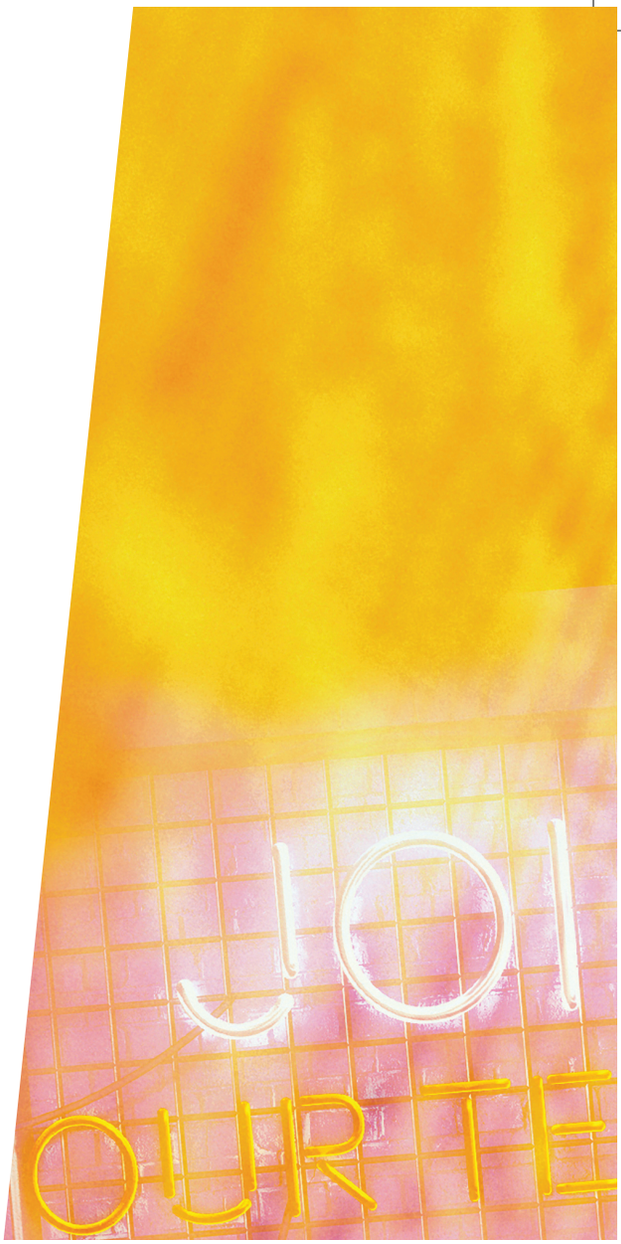
When the agonizing 45 minutes were finally up, he left—sweating, disheveled, dazed, and confused. "Completely shook."

I could empathize, but also just had to ask him—what about the interviewer?

Perhaps the interviewer had spoken with a dozen candidates that week. Or maybe there were back-to-back meetings. Distracted. Busy. Or maybe they were simply having a bad day.

The fact is, even on our best days, interviews are a mixed bag. We rarely know what we're walking into. Just like life, they're complicated.

And, as the saying goes, we are not where we used to be, but not quite where we want to be.



Zigy Kaluzny, Carol Yepes/Moment, Boevtree/Getty Images

WHAT INTERVIEWERS WANT...

Whenever I interview people, there are specific qualities I'm looking for—the **4Hs**.

HUNGER. It's what wakes us up before the alarm clock—not just to get a job, but to make an impact.

HUSTLE. It quashes pedigree every time.

HEART. It's where inspiration lives—where passion meets compassion.

HUMILITY. It is the grace that whispers, "It's not about you."

Even when we have a handle on what interviewers are looking for, there are still unknowns. The interview intangibles.

WHAT CANDIDATES CAN DO...

Chance absolutely favors the prepared mind.

For every interview—whether on screen, in person, or even when sharing a video—we must be prepared to be a storyteller and



deliver a message about:

- **WHO** we are
- **WHAT** we've done
- **WHY** we want to work there
- And always **have questions** for the interviewer at the ready.

The most common thing I hear when people come to me for interview advice is—what will they ask, what will the questions be?

My advice? The questions don't really matter—it's our preparation that really counts.

We can't control the interviewer or the questions, but we can always pivot to our preparation. No matter the question, it's always our Who, What, and Why.

This is not reading lines off a teleprompter or memorizing a script. For every question asked, though, we can always find a way to weave our story into virtually any answer.

Keep in mind, it's not just the interviewer who is evaluating us. We are also evaluating them. This is a two-way street—and it needs to be a fit for everyone.

The fact is, even on our best days interviews are a mixed bag. We rarely know what we're walking into.

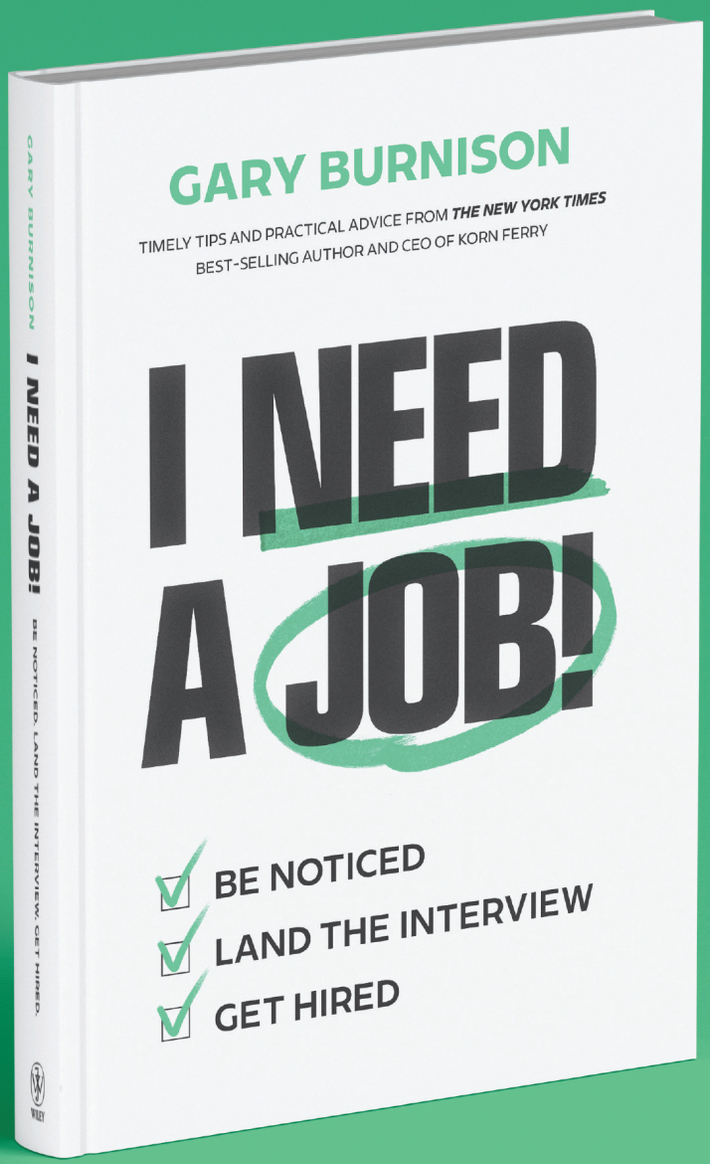
As one executive shared with me just the other day: "The pitch may need to change, but who I am does not."

And that's what really matters.

For more career advice, read Gary Burnison's latest book, **I Need a Job!**

LEARN WHAT REALLY GETS YOU THE JOB

FROM AI AND ASSESSMENTS TO NETWORKING AND INTERVIEWING,
HIRING HAS CHANGED – AND SO CAN YOU.



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BRIEFLY ON...

LEADERSHIP

"So many difficult occurrences have become normalized."



Moor Studio/Getty Images

Briefly On...
Insights on different business sectors.
8

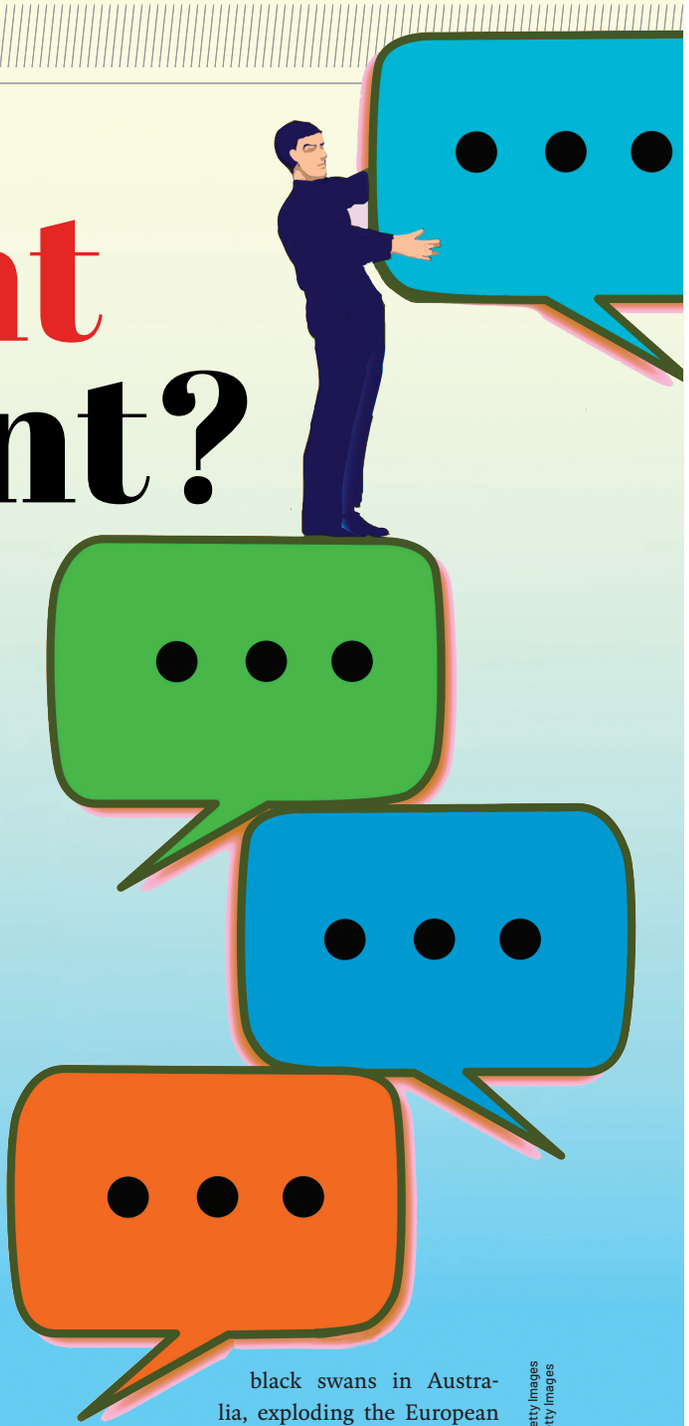
History Lesson
Learning from the missteps of our predecessors.
15

Voices
Insiders on today's top management issues.
16

LEADERSHIP

The Silent Treatment?

So-called black swan events are happening two to 20 times more often, but you wouldn't know it from leadership comments. **By Arianne Cohen**



You remember those solemn emails from company officials, reminding everyone to remain resilient and take care of each other in these unprecedented times, that appeared almost daily during some periods of the pandemic. These days, the disruptions are almost as common, from new wars to $5-a-gallon gas to huge staffing changes caused by AI. And yet, where are the calming emails from leadership?

To be sure, experts say corporate leaders are responding behind closed doors as each disruption percolates. They will shift business strategy when new tariffs are announced and change staffing when AI tools become more accessible. But few are apparently making public statements or being internally transparent with their workers. "Most leaders are coping—but few are actually leading," says Andrew Healey, principal at Prospice Consulting in Newcastle, Australia. Publicly, firms are greeting many events with the same response: a shrug.

To be sure, some of this makes sense. Surprising events have always existed. In the aughts, academic Nassim Taleb popularized the term "black-swan event" to refer to rare and unpredictable happenings. (The term comes from the 1600s discovery of black swans in Australia, exploding the European belief that all swans were white.)

These impactful events were typically treated as shocking outliers that required an emergency response. But this year, leaders say they have become so consistent that they are more akin to "gray swan" events: They're not entirely unpredictable, but still consequential—and no longer commented on by the brass, who try to carry on as if everything is normal.

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Konamochan, Abbasy Kautsar, Suesse/iStock/Getty Images

For example, major weather disasters happened on average every 82 days in the 1980s, compared to every 19 days over the last 10 years, according to government data. Similarly, roughly nine major data breaches are reported daily in the US, a count that didn't even exist in the early aughts. And yet, reactions are tempered. "So many difficult and terrible occurrences have become so normalized," says Karen Huang, senior director for search assessment at Korn Ferry. "Leaders can't possibly comment on all of them." Research suggests that even when leaders want to comment, they frequently don't know what to say or do: A Korn Ferry survey of CEOs and directors found that 63 percent of global leaders said they face heightened business risks, yet only 11 percent feel fully confident in managing them.

Some of the silence follows years of previously strong responses, via both company messaging and logistical changes, which backfired. The tariff announcements of last year are one of the last major events to which many leaders reacted publicly. Firms spent millions on yanking foreign operations, only for some to discover that they may not have needed to. Now, many leaders stay mum.

Still, experts say great risk lies in the silence. When little is said publicly, different messaging tends to leak out to different audiences: one message goes to the board and another goes to employees, while customers get inexplicable silence, potentially leading them to assume that the leader is in self-preservation mode. "The danger is fragmentation," says Julian Baldwin, a former healthcare executive who now leads Cohere Leadership Group.

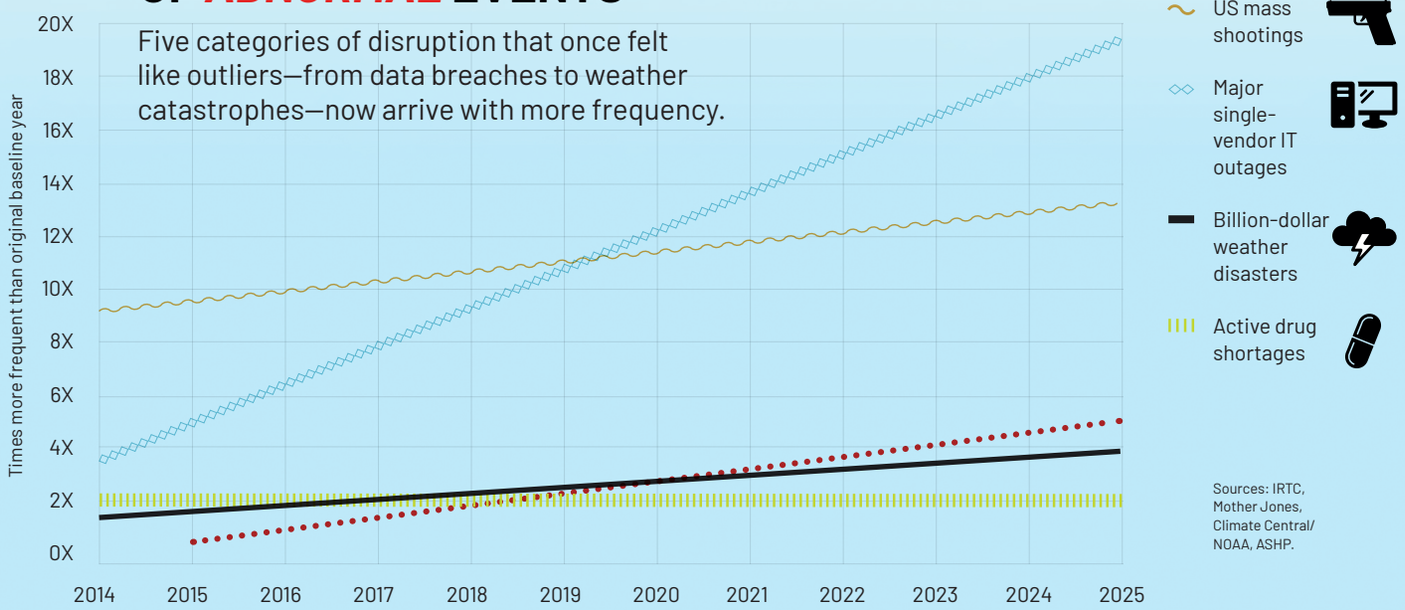
Experts advise firm leaders to handle ongoing disruptive events with a steady, measured approach, rather than responding to each as an individual crisis. Any response should be part of a broader long-term strategy. For the leader, "it should be part of an ongoing conversation over a long period of time," says Jeff Constable, coleader of the Global Financial Officers practice at Korn Ferry. The key messaging is a sense of control, achieved by highlighting that there is continuity in the firm's efforts to adapt to upheaval, says Lorenz Graf-Vlachy, a chaired professor of strategic management and leadership at FAU Erlangen-Nüremberg. As a rule of thumb, look for opportunities in every event—and highlight them to stakeholders. The messaging is that yes, the underlying change is challenging, but there is an opportunity in it too. "Find the potential gain in the change, and frame it as an opportunity to get employees to adapt and not remain rigid," he says.

THE TAKEAWAY

Leaders need to take a measured, but not silent, approach to disruptions.

THE ACCELERATION OF *ABNORMAL* EVENTS

Five categories of disruption that once felt like outliers—from data breaches to weather catastrophes—now arrive with more frequency.



Sources: IRTC, Mother Jones, Climate Central/ NOAA, ASHP.

TECHNOLOGY

The One AI Holdout: You?

IT MAY BE A HUGE BUDGET line, but companies can't seem to get enough of AI and all that it offers. In short order, they are weaving the technology into everything from customer service and software development to marketing and human resources. For leaders, AI has clearly become a competitive necessity. But there's just one group that doesn't seem quite as enthusiastic about AI: the employees expected to use it.

Resistance to AI in the workplace appears to be growing. In some cases, that resistance may be showing up as subtle acts of sabotage. A recent survey found that 29 percent of employees—including 44 percent of Gen Z workers—admitted to pushing back against workplace AI efforts, whether by refusing to use AI tools or by entering sensitive company information into public AI systems in violation of company policy. Employee excitement for AI also remains low, with only 16 percent of workers strongly agreeing in one poll that the AI tools

THE TAKEAWAY

Leaders can't overstress how much AI can be a partner for human work and not replace most of it.



Hamzaturkkol/Getty Images

were actually useful in their day-to-day work.

The biggest issue is that too many workers feel that, far from helping them, the technology will ultimately replace them. "Organizations that don't communicate the impact of AI on workers are asking employees to take a leap of faith," says Bryan Ackermann, head of AI strategy and transformation for Korn Ferry. Indeed, as Tamilla Triantoro, a professor at Quinnipiac University who studies AI in the workplace, puts it, "People don't operate well under uncertainty, especially uncertainty that affects their economic well-being." Based on what they hear leaders say, many see AI as their major workplace competitor.

To some degree, company leaders only have themselves to blame. According to a press account, one call-center worker helped integrate AI into his workplace only to be fired; in describing that experience, he said, "I was literally digging my own grave." At the same time, companies continue to ramp up spending on the technology. One recent study projects that global corporate spending on AI solutions will reach $632 billion by 2028. The gap between company enthusiasm and employee anxiety may help explain why some workers remain reluctant to embrace the technology.

Experts say organizations can address the problem by focusing as much on the human side of AI adoption as on the technology itself. Triantoro argues that companies should be transparent about how productivity gains from AI will be used and should identify where people still bring unique value. "At this time, for many tasks, human-AI collaboration works better than AI alone or a human alone," she says. Employees, she adds, can have valuable input in the decision-making around "where automation is important, where human work is important, and where a combination of both would be best."

Leaders should also pay closer attention to employees' emotional reactions to AI, Triantoro says, because anxiety and distrust can undermine adoption efforts. "It's always up to us to decide how we organize our workplaces," she says. "With this technology, organizations should think carefully about how to integrate it for the long term, instead of chasing every shiny AI object simply because it's new."

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LEADERSHIP BY PETER LAURIA

CFOs: A New Threat to CEO Job Security?



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. Activist investors. Relentless board pressure for growth. And now, the CFO.

For CEOs already anxious about their job security, the list of threats now includes an entirely new concern: the C-suite executive most responsible for having their back. In a recent survey of CEOs at companies with between $100 million and $5 billion in revenue, one-quarter

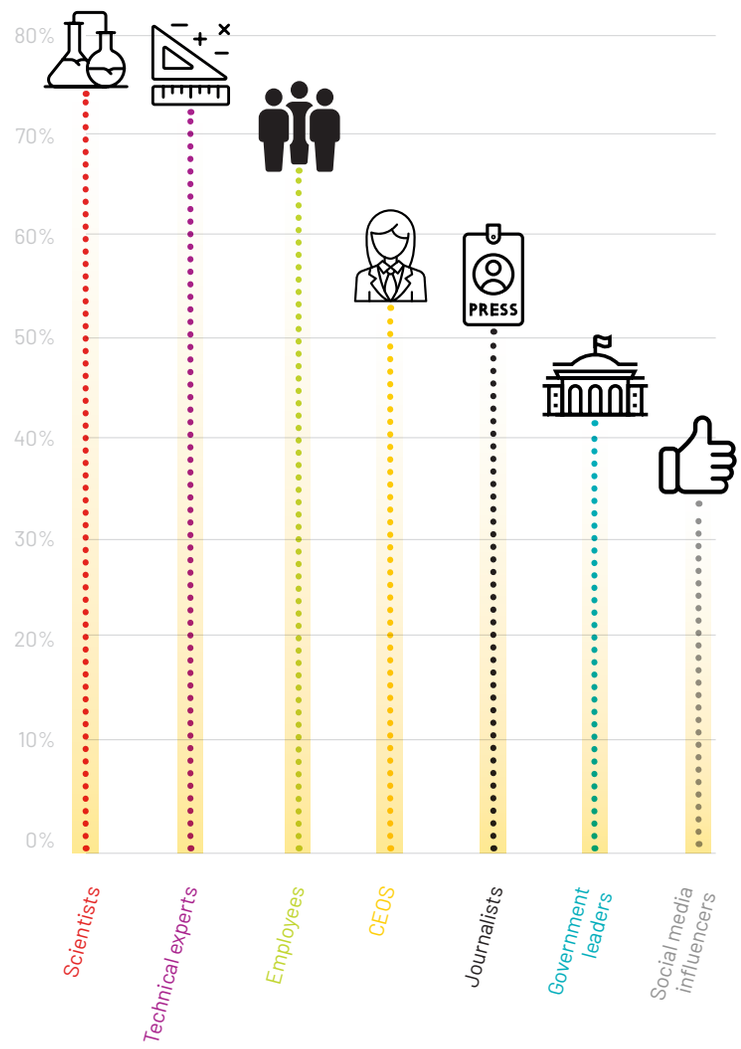
THE TAKEAWAY

Misalignment between the CEO and CFO could erode trust and impact performance.

DATA

THE TRUST FACTOR

Experts say trust remains a critical factor for firms and their leaders to succeed. But it is difficult to achieve.



identified their own CFO as the greatest threat to their job security, the highest among any C-suite position, even outpacing the often second-in-command COO. "It underscores the insecurity many CEOs feel," says David Larcker, director of the Corporate Governance Research Initiative at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

CEOs are already under pressure from a host of areas, including trigger-happy boards pulling the plug on underperforming leaders. CEO turnover accelerated in the last two years, hitting a record high in 2025, before starting to slow this year.

As a result of the turmoil, CFOs have gained more influence in the boardroom, says Kim Van Der Zon, vice chair of global board and CEO services at Korn Ferry. "Financial matters are at the top of the agenda for most boards," she says. Indeed, the CFO is an essential partner to the CEO—the person responsible for protecting blind spots, translating strategy into financial reality, and maintaining credibility with the board. And now, many are starting to get uncomfortably close to directors. It's no coincidence that, according to the survey, the three biggest concerns for CEOs are, in order, meeting growth targets, managing costs, and meeting the expectations of the board, all of which are crafted primarily by the CEO and CFO.

Patrick Walsh, a senior client partner in the Board and CEO Services practice at Korn Ferry, says, boards must be sure the CEO and CFO are aligned. When they are not, disagreement can quickly move beyond the management team and into the boardroom, says Walsh. CFOs have direct influence over capital allocation, strategy, and the company's growth agenda, as well as their own channels to directors, audit committees, investors, and lenders. "The CEO and CFO have to move in lockstep," says Walsh. "There can't be any noise in that relationship." Jeff Constable, coleader of the Global Financial Officers practice at Korn Ferry, agrees, adding that misalignment could ultimately divide the C-suite and push the board into "camps." Instances of CFOs undermining CEOs in audit committee meetings or cozying up to an activist investor have happened, after all.

To be sure, the concern may be more in the CEO's mind than anywhere else. Last year, CFO-to-CEO

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promotions accounted for about 10 percent of all CEO appointments. For his part, Larcker says that disagreements between CEOs and CFOs are a sign of healthy governance and attributes some of the perceived threat to recency bias. He also notes that aside from the COO, the CFO would be the next logical successor to the CEO among the C-suite positions in the survey. "I don't think CEOs are looking over their shoulders at their CFOs and thinking 'That guy wants to replace me,'" says Larcker. "I think it says more about how complicated the CEO role has become."

RETAIL BY ARIANNE COHEN

Everyone Wants In On the Beauty Business

SAMPLES! MINI-SIZE options—so adorable! Emerging brands! Screens that tell you what to buy! If your last foray into buying face wash felt more like being at a carnival than in a beauty aisle, you're not alone.

Retailers are jockeying for a bigger piece of the beauty market, and the prize is profits: Global beauty spending is up 10 percent year-over-year, according to NielsenIQ, at a time when other categories—like home



iprogressman/iStock/Getty Images

furnishings, apparel, and gardening supplies—are flat or dipping. Retailers are focused on making beauty feel more experiential, even in busy big-box stores, says Hana Selvog, vice president of sales at sales and marketing agency The Barcode Group. "They're positioning themselves as beauty destinations."

To those not in the retail industry, there is a lesson here: Follow the money. Beauty has always been a dependable seller. This year, shoppers are treating it as an affordable indulgence, or as Elizabeth Lafontaine, director of research at foot-traffic analyst Placer.ai, describes it, "a lower-cost upgrade against a backdrop of economic uncertainty." But e-commerce is expanding six times faster than in-store beauty sales are, and the TikTok Shop alone now accounts for roughly 10 percent of all beauty e-commerce. Stores are leaning on the draw of new products that shoppers want to see and hold before purchasing. Stores are particularly keen to reintroduce shoppers to products they wouldn't necessarily stumble on while scrolling, says Jenna Young, head of creative for Korn Ferry's Culture, Change, and Communications practice. "It's a reason to get people in the store."

THE TAKEAWAY

Experts say smart firms keep a laser-like focus on consumer or client needs.

That is, of course, the second lesson leaders can take from the beauty buzz: Know thy customer. The beauty shopper is unusually mobile, Selvog notes, hopping between big-box stores, social-media shops, pharmacies, and specialty retailers—sometimes all in the same week. Which means retailers are fighting for a higher share of customers they're already sharing. However, consumers tend to be more loyal to retailers than to brands—an opening that brick-and-mortar stores are eager to exploit. Beauty aisles also attract Gen Z, a demographic that might not otherwise show up in person, giving stores the opportunity to build that loyalty.

In beauty retail, firms have found a way to stay ahead of customer interest—at least for now. Even mass merchandisers are jumping into this once-exclusive sector. "They're moving fast to bolster their beauty departments, fueled by some impressive market data," says Michael Sjolie, CEO of spray-tan company Sjolie Sunless. At least one big-box retailer is staffing the section with trained beauty experts, who receive samples of products and are trained in selling items like eyeliner. The reasoning is simple, says Craig Rowley, a senior client partner at Korn Ferry: "It's a business driven by product knowledge—customers just don't buy products they don't understand."

WHAT'S ON THE NEXT BOARD AGENDA

1

INTERIM CEO PAY

Median pay for interim CEOs is up sharply, creating compensation challenges for boards.

2

QUARTERLY REPORTING

The SEC officially proposed reducing reporting to twice annually. Now, will boards follow?

3

GRAYING LEADERS

CEOs are 10 years older than they were in 2000, raising succession concerns for boards.

HISTORY LESSON

BY GLENN RIFKIN

Yellow Corp: Too Big to Fail?

The 99-year-old freight firm was a fixture in the trucking industry—until it wasn't.

IN 2023, WHEN YELLOW Corporation, the nation's third-largest so-called "less-than-truckload" freight company, went out of business, the industry was shaken. Words like "epic failure" were used, and for good reason: The company, with iconic trucking brands like YRC Freight, Holland, and Reddaway, had been traversing America's highways for 99 years, and its demise cost 30,000 jobs and shut down its fleet of more than 12,000 trucks.

Yellow, formerly known as YRC Worldwide, was considered a fixture in the trucking industry, one that seemed, for much of its existence, too big to fail. Founded in 1924 in Oklahoma City, Yellow became a notable success in part due to its innovative use of technology, according to American Global Logistics, a research firm monitoring the trucking industry. It pioneered the use of satellite tracking and real-time data analysis.

But in the early 2000s, Yellow, whose customers included Walmart and Home Depot, struggled in the new world of e-commerce and faced stiff competition from companies like Amazon and FedEx. Rising fuel costs and a nationwide shortage of drivers added to its woes, as did the subsequent losses of its lower costs and vast freight capacity.

The less-than-truckload market is focused on the transportation of freight that requires only part of a trailer; it hauls cargo for multiple customers on a single truck. Through growth and acquisition, Yellow, then located in Overland Park, Kansas, peaked at nearly $10 billion in revenue in 2006, behind only FedEx and Old Dominion. But trouble loomed right after the global financial crisis in 2008, and the company, facing heavy debt, narrowly avoided bankruptcy.

Trouble continued as the company remained locked in a long-term and contentious battle with the Teamsters union. In 2020, during COVID-19, it received a $700 million national-security loan—which a congressional oversight committee said was improperly issued because Yellow's survival was not "critical to maintaining national security." Finally, the end came when it filed for Chapter 11.

The lesson here? Experts say Yellow's demise was a warning to all corporations—not just freight companies—to keep control of supply-chain management and avoid incurring potentially disastrous debt while chasing major acquisitions. "One core takeaway is that 21st-century companies need flexibility," wrote Benjamin Gordon, a leading advisor and investor to supply-chain companies, in a 2023 report on Yellow's demise. "Firms that lack adaptability will simply be unable to compete with more nimble competitors."



Orlin Wagner/AP Photo

‘Some believe the situation is déjà vu.’ A Tale of Two Oil Crises



In recent decades, most people have expected energy to be both reasonably priced and plentiful. Not so in 1973, when the Arab member states of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) imposed an embargo on oil sales to the US and other developed countries. Soon after, Americans faced gasoline shortages and rising inflation that would continue through 1980. Thankfully, shortages and high prices didn’t return for decades—not until earlier this year, when the US and Israel went to war against Iran.

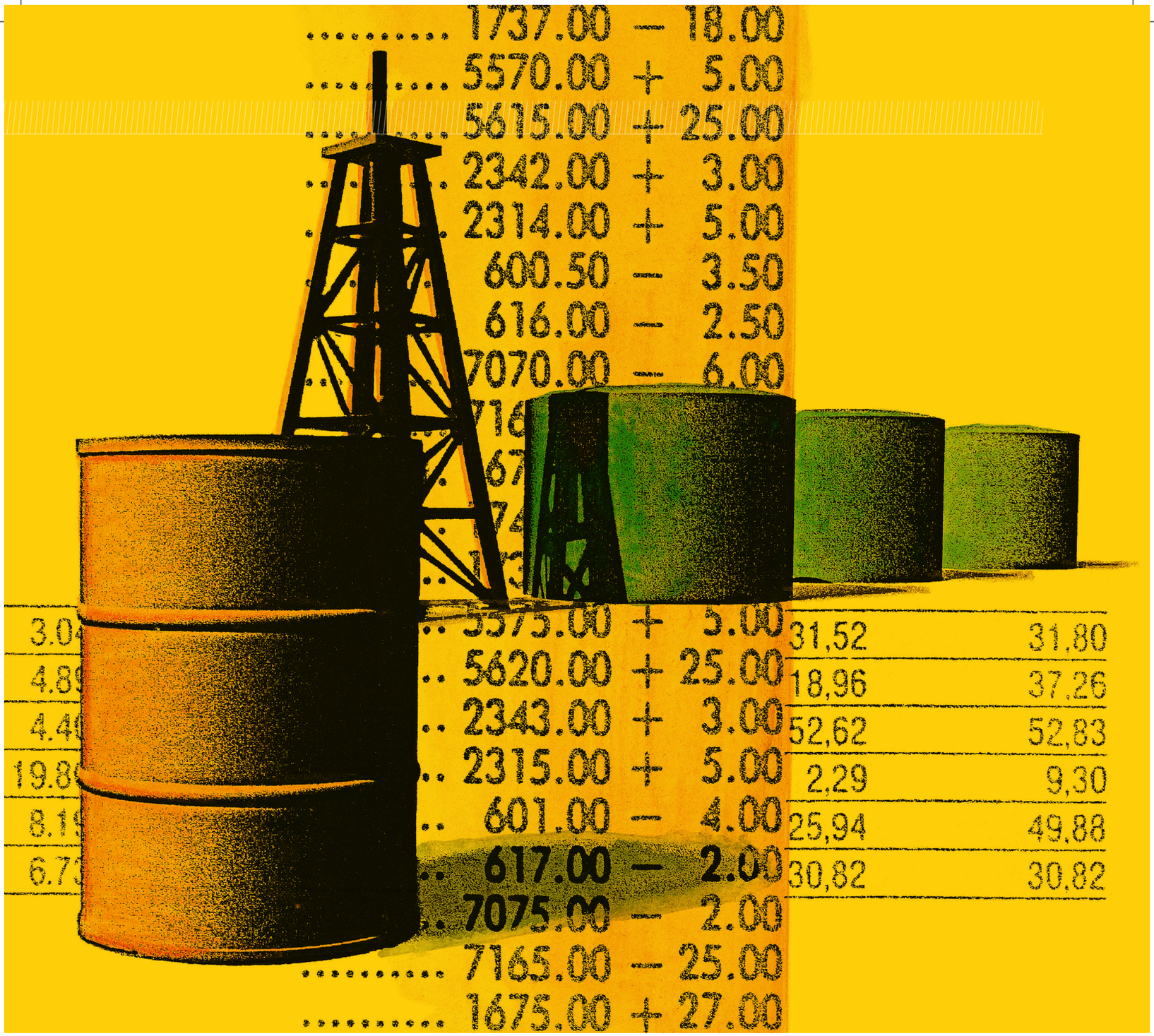
By disrupting oil supplies in the Middle East, the war has sent prices higher, just as we saw in the 1970s. Some observers believe the current situation is like déjà vu. But while these two crises are similar, there are distinct differences between them, says Jay Hatfield, CEO of Infrastructure Capital Advisors. “There’s been a whole bunch of incorrect conclusions,” he says.

First difference: The closure of the Strait of Hormuz this year has prevented 20 percent of global oil production from being shipped. Compare that with the Middle East’s 37 percent share of global oil production in 1973.

Because the recent disruption represents a smaller portion of oil output, prices haven’t jumped as much. Between July 1973 and early 1980, prices surged from $3.56 a barrel to $39.50, according to Federal Reserve data. A comparable increase today would put the current price of a barrel at more than $700, Hatfield says. Instead, the cost of light sweet crude oil has approximately doubled, from $67 per barrel earlier this year to a high of $113 in the spring.

Second difference: In 1973, the US was a net importer of oil, which made the country more vulnerable to the Arab blockade. Since then, the nation has emphasized the importance of energy security, says Rob Thummel, a senior portfolio manager at Tortoise Capital. Over the past decade or so, new ways of oil drilling have been developed. Having new technology and massive oil deposits means the US has the capability to pump more, he says. Ultimately, that output surge has led to the US becoming a net exporter of oil plus related products, and it is now energy self-sufficient. “Shale oil has a competitive advantage,” Thummel says. “It has uncovered a significant amount of oil and natural gas that really reduces the risk of us running out of fuel.”

Portrait by ROB DOBI



Simon Fell/Getty Images

And the US government is taking a different approach to the problem than it did in the 1970s. Back then, the country lacked an understanding of inflation. When the government instituted price controls to try to stymie inflation, it exacerbated it instead, driving it up to 14 percent by 1980. But price controls usually lead to shortages. That's because when the price cap is lower than the market price, producers tend to ratchet down or completely halt their output, experts say. So far this year, we haven't seen gasoline shortages because the US has relied on the market to set competitive prices. "Supply-and-demand response in the market is critical," Hatfield says. Still, inflation in the US isn't at a comfortable level.

There is some good news, however. In the spring, the United Arab Emirates, one of the Middle East's leading oil producers, decided to leave OPEC, thereby freeing it to pump more oil. (It was the second member nation to quit the group, having been preceded by Qatar in 2019.) "Once the war is over and supplies are back to prewar levels, we're going to see much lower prices of oil as a result of this decision," says Bernard Haykel, professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University.

Constable, a former TV anchor at The Wall Street Journal, is a fellow at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise.

‘AI can’t predict who will succeed.’ Recruiters and Agents: Copilots, Not Competitors



Imagine you’re going away for a month and trying to figure out who can watch your house. Not just someone who knows where the spare key is, but someone who’ll water your plants, make sure you didn’t leave any rotting food in the fridge, and call if something goes wrong. You’d turn to someone you’ve known for years, not to the neighbor down the street who claims to have a green thumb.

That’s how the best retained-search professionals operate in an era of agentic AI, when the depth of relationships matters more than ever before.

For years, experienced recruiters have weathered one disruption after another—internal-talent team dynamics, the onslaught of LinkedIn, company HR teams using keywords to treat talent like a search result, and now AI. Each wave has prompted the same question: Do recruiters still matter? And each time, the answer has been yes—but the reasoning has evolved. Today, the value of recruiters comes down to something simple but high stakes: Organizations can’t afford to hire the wrong person.

AI has greatly improved many aspects of recruiting, with algorithms that can scan and surface qualified candidates at speeds no human can match. These tools help HR to accelerate preparation and to cull long lists of potential candidates and skill sets. But they can’t predict who’ll actually succeed.

Résumés disproportionately reflect opportunity, storytelling ability, and historical context—not future suitability. Korn Ferry research consistently shows that past performance, without an additional assessment of potential and learning agility, is a poor predictor of success in larger or more complex roles. These capabilities—operating under pressure, leading through ambiguity, fitting within a company’s culture—are harder to see, even by the most skilled internal HR teams. That gap is where mismatched

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**



AI has greatly improved many aspects of recruiting.

hires happen. I'm fond of saying, "You get hired for what you know, and fired for who you are."

Consider a controller who arrives at a financial firm with stellar credentials, excellent references, and a history of transforming the function. Yet the culture, team dynamics, and pace of business at the firm don't fit how she works. Within a year she's gone, and the organization is back at square one.

We see this all the time. Culture fit and potential are the two most important predictors of whether someone sticks around, earns promotions, and grows with a business. They're also the two things AI is least equipped to evaluate. A machine can identify who looks like the person who held the role before, but it can't tell you who will excel in the role as it's evolving. But retained search thrives in such cases. Recruiters have trusted networks cultivated through repeated interactions and candid conversations, allowing them to really understand who will watch your home and who'll just say they will.

The most effective retained search today uses data to validate what experience already suspects, and human judgement to interpret what the data can't fully explain. Korn Ferry has analyzed more than 100 million assessments to understand what greatness looks like across four dimensions: competencies, experiences, traits, and drivers. Of those dimensions, our data shows that agility captures the traits most relevant to a world in constant flux. Organizations that hire for agility dramatically outperform their competition. But that data, and the ability to gauge a candidate's agility, still requires interpretation by humans. That's why we're not surprised that as AI has become more embedded in search, we've seen retained search grow instead of shrink.

As agentic AI's role continues to expand, the best outcomes won't come from choosing between data and instinct. They'll come from combining both. It's a case of recruiters and agents being copilots, not competitors. AI can accelerate some parts of search.

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Distefano is Korn Ferry's CEO of Professional Search & Interim and is a member of the firm's Global Operating Committee.

Jonathan Knowles/Getty Images

‘You’re choosing not to see them.’ The Truth Behind Blind Spots



You have blind spots. Everyone does. The problem isn’t that they exist. It’s that you’re choosing not to see them—while everyone else does.

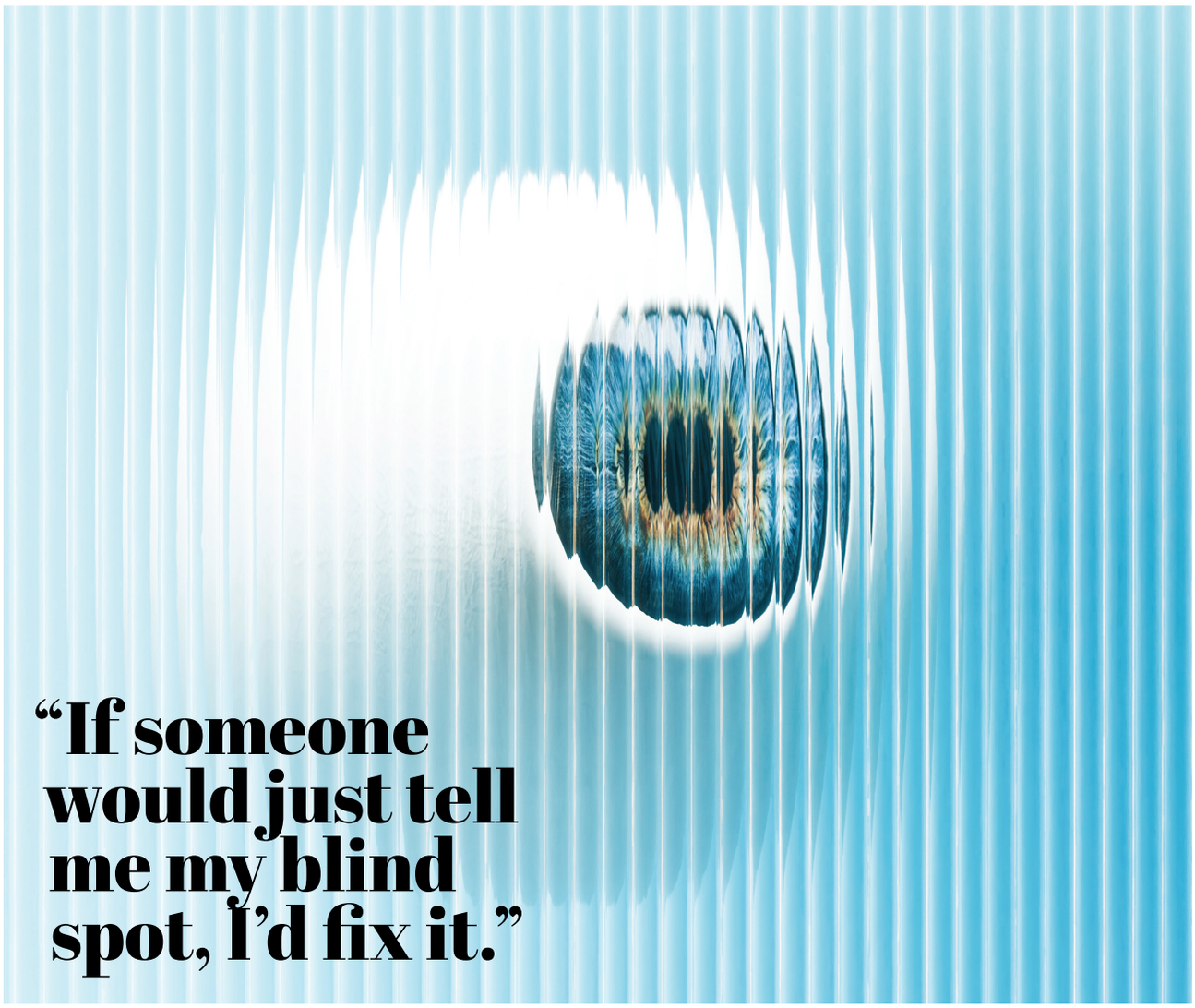
Here’s the myth many leaders subscribe to: “If someone would just tell me my blind spot, I’d fix it.” However, people *have* been telling you—throughout your career. Your spouse. A former boss. That colleague you dismissed as difficult. The feedback was never the problem—your willingness to receive it was. We don’t ignore blind spots because we can’t see them. We ignore them because seeing them feels like confirming our worst fear: that we are, in some fundamental way, not good enough. So we look away. We reframe. We construct a narrative where the flaw doesn’t exist. And for a while, that works. Until it doesn’t.

The moment you stop seeing a weakness, it becomes a liability your entire organization has to absorb. Blind spots don’t stay contained—they grow. They get embedded in your decisions, your culture, your talent strategy. Consider the leader who plays favorites, gravitating toward the person who mirrors their own style, excusing their underperformance, championing them beyond their merit. The rest of the team notices immediately. Trust drops. High performers disengage or leave. And the leader stays convinced the problem is everyone else.

There’s a personal cost too. The cruel irony of a blind spot is that the very thing you’re trying to avoid, in order to protect your confidence, is quietly eroding it instead. Deep down, past the rationalizations, you know you’re part of the problem. That defensiveness that flares a little too fast when certain topics arise? That’s your blind spot, signaling that it’s time to get honest. Ignoring it doesn’t make you stronger. It keeps you stuck, and it gets worse.

So how do you address it? First, understand that there is almost certainly more than one blind spot. The signals have been present throughout your career—in exit interviews, in stalled relationships, in feedback you filed away and forgot. A 360-degree feedback review helps reveal blind spots because a pattern confirmed by multiple voices is much harder to dismiss than feedback from a single leader. A skilled executive

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**



“If someone would just tell me my blind spot, I’d fix it.”

coach, grounded in trust, helps you translate that feedback, lower your defenses, and actually hear it. Then they help you understand how it shows up, and why you have been avoiding it. Start there. Once you can see the blind spot, the work becomes clear.

Start by seeing the truth. And lean into the discomfort, instead of away from it. Like an athlete who knows that discomfort signals growth, use it as data, not a threat. Then unpack the why, because every blind spot has a payoff, a way it has been protecting you from something. Find it—and ask yourself honestly why you’ve been so unwilling to look.

From there, get accountable: This blind spot is yours, not a shared burden, not someone else’s fault. Own it fully. That means rewriting your inner script and stopping the habit of confusing rationalization with truth. The stories you’ve been telling yourself may feel protective, but they are also what keep you stuck. Then take action. Insight without behavioral change is simply self-awareness without purpose. Finally, pressure-test your progress. Ask yourself honestly, “Am I still doing it?” and keep going until the answer, confirmed by the people around you, is no. And remember: You are not the best judge of your own growth—others are.

The biggest obstacles to your effectiveness as a leader are rarely market conditions, competitive dynamics, or difficult people. They are almost always your blind spots. That is good news. You cannot control the market, but you can control this. Most leaders just don’t. Let your commitment to leading well be greater than your resistance to seeing clearly. Because what you refuse to see does not disappear. It compounds.

Bentley is the founder and CEO of Liz Bentley Associates, a consulting firm focused on empowering leaders and their teams.

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BE NOTICED / LAND THE INTERVIEW / GET HIRED

I Need a

Excerpts from the latest book by Korn Ferry CEO Gary Burnison



Luminola/Getty Images



Job!

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When it comes to looking for a new job, many professionals just don't know the best way to go about it. It's not enough to get a résumé into someone's hands—or, these days, simply upload it into a company's applicant tracking system (ATS).

Not only that, but as many as 70 percent of positions are now being filled by internal candidates or someone who has been referred. That's why you must have a plan.

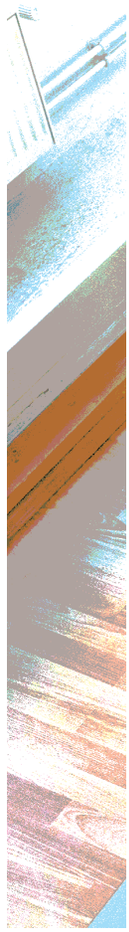
Ironically, when we were younger, we intuitively knew how things worked. I was reminded of this when I took my family to an ice cream shop many years ago. Sitting at a table in the corner was a kid filling out an application. Did that take me back to my high school days!

Back then, you'd go to the place you wanted to work and ask if they were hiring. If the manager or owner wasn't busy, you'd get an interview on the spot. And if your buddies worked there, they'd put in a good word for you. In fact, you probably found out about the job from a friend

who provided a warm introduction to the manager for you.

But as time went on and our careers progressed, we got the idea that technology would do all the work for us. Today, we might even convince ourselves that all we need is an online presence and AI will somehow find us.

The truth is landing your next job, and especially advancing your career, takes a lot of purposeful thought and action. It starts with a shift in mindset—as well as evolving your skill set.



HOW CAN I GET NOTICED?

WHAT DOES IT REALLY TAKE TO LAND THE JOB I WANT?

WHERE CAN I FIND MY NEXT JOB?

Know Yourself

Before you focus outward, it's important to first look inward. That's how you move onward. In other words, you need to be introspective—to know yourself. No wonder Socrates called self-knowledge "the beginning of wisdom."

Self-knowledge—your strengths and accomplishments, your blind spots and weaknesses, what motivates you, the type of environment in which you thrive—will provide clarity in your job search. You'll see whether an opportunity is a good fit for your skillset, your personality, and your passion and sense of purpose.

The more you understand yourself, the better you'll be able to put your skills and experiences into perspective—including explaining to your next employer what you'll bring to that job.

Assess for Success

As you look to land your next job, you should expect to be assessed. In fact, assessments permeate the hiring environment—and at every stage of the process.

Most people, however, don't like being assessed. It makes them feel vulnerable. Relax! Assessments are not tests; they're about learning who you are, how you work, what motivates you, and the kinds of roles and environments that best suit you.

So instead of viewing assessments as a process of elimination—think of them as a process of enlightenment! It's all about you and your perspective. The more you know about yourself, the more you can learn and grow.



Willie B Thomas/Digital Vision

ACCEPT THE FEEDBACK AND IMPROVE WITH TIME. THAT'S WHAT TURNS ASSESS INTO SUCCESS.

Putting Your I in AI

The moment you upload your résumé to a potential employer you're entering the AI world.

Without question, virtually every company these days is using AI to find talent. Given the hundreds and sometimes thousands of applications frequently received for each job posting, companies use AI-powered ATS to automate parts of the process. ATS platforms help companies streamline recruiting and hiring—using analytics to identify and evaluate the best talent.

Candidates also have access to AI-powered software and apps—from résumé builders to cover-letter generators, interview coaching software, and more. You tap the power of AI to execute your own smart strategy—identifying the best opportunities, showcasing your background and your expertise, elevating your profile, and amplifying the story you tell your prospective employer.

While AI can help you, you are in control of where you go. Indeed, that's how you put your I in AI.

EXCERPT **I NEED A JOB**

IF YOU APPLY FOR ANY AND EVERY JOB YOU SEE, YOU'LL END UP BECOMING INVISIBLE.

ALL THOSE RÉSUMÉS SENT TO ONE COMPANY WILL BE FLAGGED (AND NOT IN A GOOD WAY). AND AS FOR THAT ONE OPPORTUNITY YOU REALLY WERE QUALIFIED FOR—IT WILL FALL INTO THE JOB SEARCH ABYSS.

Targeting Your Next Opportunity

To get a job you need a plan.

The more effort you put into targeting, the better you will be able to market yourself and not waste time on opportunities that aren't a fit for you—or where you aren't a fit for the organization. Your confidence will increase because now you're focusing on what you want and the contribution you want to make.

Instead of starting off on a random search, you need to be systematic. For most job candidates today, targeting begins with identifying the companies they want to work for:



- **Size of Organization:** Small, medium, or large firms.
- **Types of Industries:** What interests you?
- **Environment/Culture:** What suits you best—fast-paced, collaborative, casual, structured, etc.?
- **Your Workscape:** Do you want to work remotely, hybrid, or in person?

Now it's time for the next phase—the specific roles and responsibilities you want to pursue. Depending on your expertise, level of experience, and personal preference, your job search can be narrow or broad.


Anna Stills/iStock/Getty Images

If you are looking to transfer your skills and experiences to a similar role at a different company, you will have a sharper focus. Conversely, if you want to expand your career and heighten your role—maybe even in an adjacent field—you will use a broader lens. You'll need to define your skills, achievements, and experiences in a way that makes them relevant to your desired role.

Wherever your job search takes you, think about your most recent jobs and the accomplishments that you've achieved. This is what you have to offer to the companies you're targeting.

Networking in the New World of Work

Of all the areas and aspects of looking for a job—this cannot be emphasized enough. Without networking it will be difficult at best, and impossible at worst, to land the job.

Ask anyone you know how they landed their job, and the majority will tell you that they knew someone, who knew someone. This isn't to say they weren't qualified. Rather, they networked to get noticed.

SOMEONE WE KNOW KNOWS SOMEBODY WHO KNOWS SOMEONE, WHO KNOWS SOMEONE … WHO KNOWS US!

Networking shouldn't begin when you're looking for a job. The care and nurturing of your network is imperative—and ongoing. That's why the golden rule about networking is: It's not about you! Ideally, networking is grounded in what you can do for others.

As you build and nurture your network, you are building relationships with people who will validate you. These are people who know you from working and interacting with you. When they attest to your skills, your accomplishments, and your contributions as a team member or team leader, their words carry weight.

Not only is validation good for you, but it's also valuable for the company that wants to hire you. Just as you want someone in your target company to vouch for you, the company is glad to get an insider's recommendation about you. When someone speaks for you, the hiring manager has greater confidence in your abilities and your fit with the culture.

The Interview: Prep Time

Preparation is everything—and practice, as they say, makes perfect.

As you prepare for the interview, you need to know the story you are going to tell—as well as who you are going to tell it to. With this holistic approach, you will greatly increase your chances of forging a connection with a prospective employer.

Here are some tips for making the most of your interview prep.

Know Who You Are Going to Meet

As soon as you receive notice of the interview, the first question you should reflect on is: *Who will I be meeting?* The answer is far more than a name and a title. You'll want to research the person, starting with their LinkedIn profile.

Your job is to look for connection points—you share an alma mater or you both worked for the same company several years ago. Those are the type of commonalities to mention as you sit down for the interview.

Do Your Homework

Learn all you can—the leadership team, current successes and challenges, customers, and even history. If possible, get some firsthand experience with the company's products and services. Buy them, try them, talk to people who use them. The greater your knowledge about the company, the better you'll be able to provide context when discussing your skills and experiences.

Have Great Examples of Your Accomplishments

At some point during your interview, you're going to be asked to talk more about your accomplishments. The interviewer is listening for specifics to determine how well you would match the demands of the job and how well you would communicate with colleagues and customers. Ideally, your examples will address four key areas: challenges/opportunities you've faced, the actions you took, the results achieved, and the lessons learned. As you prepare, record yourself—then listen, watch, critique, adapt, and learn.

The Interviewer Isn't the Only One with Questions

Along with preparing what you're going to say, you'll want to think about what you should ask the interviewer. Your questions should be smart and strategic, probing the job responsibilities or how the department functions. The questions you ask also show the interviewer how you think.

BY INTERJECTING QUESTIONS INTO THE INTERVIEW, YOU'LL TURN A ONE-WAY QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION INTO A CONVERSATION.

The Interview: Go Time

The day of the interview has arrived. But here's the thing—the interview isn't really about you. Instead, it's really all about the hiring manager, other team members, and every other person you meet.

It's a shift in thinking, but one that could help boost your confidence and make you feel more comfortable during the conversation—whether on screen or in person.

I compare this dynamic to being a guest in someone's home for the first time. To show respect and make a connection with your hosts, you follow the protocol. You are relaxed and smiling. You are patient and attentive. The conversation flows with the give-and-take of people getting to know each other.

In your interview, you also follow a visitor's protocol. You smile and make eye contact. As you listen carefully to the questions, you pay attention to their pace and tempo as you read the interviewer's tone and body language. You want to be in sync so the exchange will feel much more relaxed.

An interview normally follows a certain flow: opening, middle, and close:

The Opening: An Instant Connection

As your interview gets underway, an initial period is typically devoted to establishing rapport, often by engaging in small talk. The homework you did to research your interviewer's background really pays off here. If you found a commonality, mention it.

The Mid-Stage: A Taste of Your Contribution

This is the main event. You and the interviewer engage in a conversation in which you learn about each other. You need to stand out in the interviewer's mind as they get a taste of what it would be like to have you on their team and in their organization. The best way is to show the hiring manager how you would add value to the organization. The manager has specific goals that must be achieved. Your objective in the interview is to show exactly how you can help achieve them.

The Interview Close

As the discussion winds down, the interviewer will probably start summarizing or could volunteer some information about next steps (for example, meeting with other team members).

At this point, it's very important to restate—quickly and concisely—your enthusiasm for the job and why you think you're a good fit for the organization.

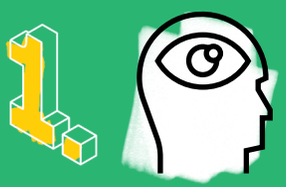
Finally, remember that an interview is a two-way street. It's a conversation! And, like any conversation, there should be a give-and-take—with information flowing in both directions.

The Process Never Ends

Congratulations! The hard work paid off. Take the time to celebrate and appreciate what you've accomplished and the opportunity ahead.

But remember, the process never ends. You're always looking for the next opportunity.

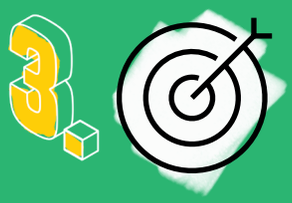
IF YOU TAKE AWAY NOTHING ELSE ... THIS IS IT.



1. **Know yourself.** Who you are, what motivates you, what you've done—and all that you bring to your next job.



2. **Have a plan.** A random job search won't get you where you want to go. Be systematic.



3. **Target your efforts.** Invest energy in the companies where you will fit—and the roles that suit you best.



4. **Network, network, network.** Build relationships—establishing goodwill for the day you need help.



5. **Find a warm introduction.** What helps you get noticed and land the job is having someone who will vouch for you and validate you.



6. **Interview like a guest.** Think of yourself as a guest getting to know your host—and you'll do great.

Kadirkaba/Digital Vision Vectors/Getty Images


Social Media

THE PROBLEM

Not all firms have caught up with how clients and customers are making purchase decisions.

WHY IT MATTERS

Competitors can steal business with savvy influencing efforts.

THE SOLUTION

Use podcasts, conferences, and even earnings calls to indirectly sway business.

INFLUENCED!

Companies are shifting how they sway client and customer decisions. Is it working?

By *Russell Pearlman*

Illustrations by *Tim Ames*

INFLUENCED!



It's part of Lisa Nichols's weekly work schedule. Each Tuesday, she sits down in her home office, turns on her high-definition camera, adjusts her studio-quality microphone, and begins recording her podcast, *Something Extra*. Nichols often uses the hour-long show to highlight someone who has endured a tough situation and succeeded, or brings on a like-minded person who also believes in living—and leading—with purpose. Right before Memorial Day this year she had a former National Hockey League player on to explain the power of "failing forward." The week before, she invited a business coach for a conversation about building a legacy. And earlier in 2026 she welcomed an Army veteran turned financial advisor to talk about humility and resilience.

At first glance, these matters don't have much to do with Nichols's actual job as CEO of Technology Partners, a St. Louis-based firm placing IT specialists in organizations around the country for temporary assignments. Indeed, technology only rarely features as a main topic. But Nichols sees the podcast, which she started right after the pandemic, as an essential tool to influence people to hire Technology Partners. Sometimes the guests are current clients, sometimes they're former clients, and sometimes they're people she'd love to have as clients. The conversations, Nichols says, don't need to be a hard sell about staffing issues or tech problems. They just need to help convince listeners that they can trust her and, by extension, her firm. "It's all about the guests telling their stories, and in so doing, getting to know who I am," she says.

Executives and organizations have plenty on their plates right now. There's geopolitical turmoil that has thrown global commerce for a loop. The growth prospects for many industries are cloudy at best. Then there's that whole AI thing—trying to figure out what it'll do to an organization is a massive time sink. Two decades ago, customers, investors, employees, suppliers, and everyone else would consider leaders spending time on a podcast, writing blogs on LinkedIn, publishing a magazine, hosting a webinar, or organizing a golf tournament a waste of time, if not a dereliction of duty. Want to win a customer's business? Buy a TV advertisement or start cold calling.

But increasingly, organizations are baking these no-sell events into their daily routines as essential channels to influence customers. In doing so, they are recognizing that both clients and customers, whether they're making multimillion-dollar decisions or picking up a T-shirt, have changed—and keep changing—how they make purchase decisions. In today's world, for example, most buyers no longer want to be sold to. They want to be educated—aka influenced—by someone they trust. A lot of these influencing attempts, like Nichols's podcast, highlight a business leader, but many others highlight a customer solving a problem. A firm might partner with a YouTube creator, having the telegenic video maker talk about an issue the firm solves (mentioning the partner in the video, of



"IF YOU'RE STILL CLINGING TO MARKETING STRATEGIES FROM YEARS AGO, YOU'RE NOT JUST BEHIND—YOU'RE INVISIBLE."

course). It's also why many organizations are spending more on conferences whose audience is their own employees. Get the employees engaged, or so the thinking goes, and you'll get them to get customers more engaged.

There's no one source tracking all these thought-leadership, market-influencing, and branded-content efforts. But looking at data from a variety of sources, it's clear that companies are spending no less than $90 billion a year on influencing. The stakes in the influencing business are high, as just one ill-received blog post or poor-quality video could make a laughingstock out of a company or leader. Nevertheless, in a world where customers—both business and retail—can get information from anywhere, these influencing efforts are seen as one of the most effective ways to build trust between a buyer and a seller. "Modern audiences do not merely tolerate expert-led content, they actively seek it out," says Agata Krowinska, a lecturer at Edinburgh Napier University who studies the phenomenon.

A HISTORY OF HAWKING

Influencing has been an important component of business as long as there've been multiple sellers hawking the same goods. Even in medieval times, a blacksmith had to convince customers that the arms and armor he was making were better than his rival's. Interestingly, celebrity endorsements are centuries old, too. In 1765, potter Josiah Wedgwood crafted a set of cream-colored earthenware for Queen Charlotte, who was so pleased with the result that she gave permission to the craftsman to call himself "Potter to Her Majesty" and call future sets he sold to others "Queen's Ware." Fast-forward, and the emergence of mass media turned influencing, which had been mostly done through word



of mouth or newspaper advertisements, into a major industry unto itself. National magazines, radio, and television allowed firms to create distinct personas to forge emotional connections with consumers. Technological advances also let businesses expand their face-to-face influencing. CEOs could rally a sales force of hundreds at a corporate retreat, or travel across the country to woo new clients in person. While the mediums might have varied, the onus was on the influencer to "sell" a product or service.

These days, influencing has become considerably tougher. For one thing, there's a lot more competition for a person's attention. In 2000, the average American was exposed to roughly 3,000 brand impressions each day. Today, thanks to streaming services, blogs, podcasts, internet banner ads, and social media, we're exposed to an estimated 10,000 daily. That's a problem for anyone trying to make an impact, since research shows that humans actively notice fewer than 100 of those daily marketing salvos. Even if more ads and events are registered, they're not necessary for many consumers to learn about a product's specs and pricing— that's what the internet is for.

Business clients have changed, too. Most of them can no longer be won over by a brochure over a two-martini lunch and a round of golf. "If you're still clinging to marketing strategies from years ago, you're not just behind—you're invisible," Christopher Tompkins, CEO of The Go! Agency, has written. The fragmentation and saturation challenges haven't changed the fact that people—whether they are customers or clients—*want* to listen. "Employees, investors, customers, regulators, and partners all expect direct access to leadership," says Maxim Atanassov, managing partner of Future Ventures, a consultancy helping small and midsize businesses grow. Indeed, more than anything else, experts say, these stakeholders are looking to be convinced that their suppliers, brands,

"IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GUESTS TELLING THEIR STORIES, AND IN SO DOING, GETTING TO KNOW WHO I AM."

and employers are trustworthy and authentic in a world where precious little seems to be either.

GETTING CREATIVE

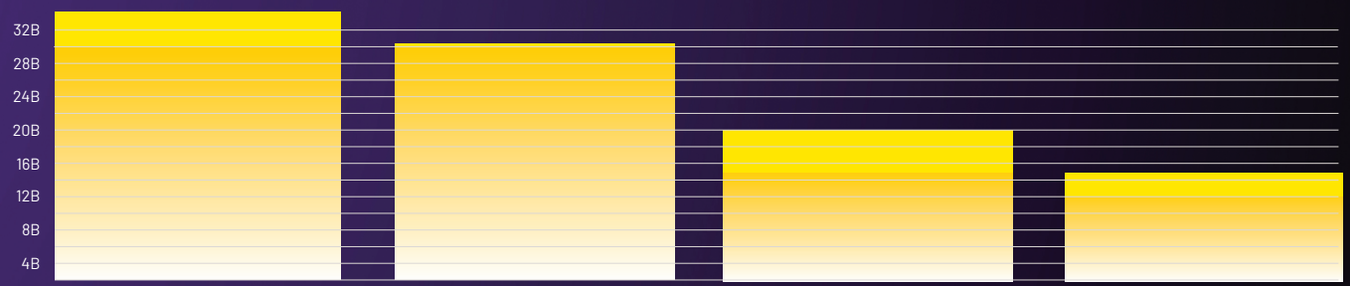
That desire to win over stakeholders has led to a burst of creativity among business leaders and organizations. So-called B2B leaders in tech and manufacturing are moving away from traditional, overly scripted sales presentations at major trade shows or in-house corporate events. Instead, they hand the stage over to independent creators who have built credibility through rigorous, unbiased testing. Other organizations have created advisory boards made up of their own customers, letting clients network with one another to share stories. Organizations leverage their most influential existing customers, giving them early access to new products, chats with executives, and posh events. In return, the customers produce videos or chats about their experiences with their own networks.

Perhaps the biggest effort to influence people has been companies moving into streaming video. Multiple companies have routed their marketing dollars away from traditional advertisements and into short, slickly produced YouTube and TikTok videos showing clients using their products. The payment processing firm Square, for instance, has dozens of videos featuring mostly young entrepreneurs discussing how they solved common business challenges, like turning a side hustle into a full-time business, opening a store, or handling expenses. Square has also produced a collection called "Small Businesses Doing Cool Sh*t". Other companies, instead of producing videos themselves, collaborate with well-established YouTube or TikTok creators. For its part, Pfizer hired Kimberly Hilton, a chemistry professor known to her more than 1.5 million TikTok followers as "Chemical Kim," to translate complex science into digestible short-form videos. Instead of pushing Pfizer's products, the videos focus on explaining facts and dispelling myths. "Pfizer reached out to me and said, 'We don't want you to advertise Pfizer. We just want to support science education,'" says Hilton, who has also served as a keynote speaker at some Pfizer events.

Attempts at influencing are showing up on platforms

THE INFLUENCING ECONOMY

By some estimates, organizations are spending more than $90 billion annually to come across as trustworthy and authentic.



INFLUENCER MARKETING
YouTube and TikTok videos, brand ambassadorships, and golf tournament sponsorships.
$30+ BILLION

SPONSORED RESEARCH
Funding university labs and other outside groups to investigate a topic.
$30 BILLION

CORPORATE CONTENT
Blogs, TED Talks, webinars, podcasts, and firm-sponsored presentations.
$15-20 BILLION

BUSINESS-LEADERSHIP BOOKS
Messaging that says, "I'm successful so you can trust me."
$12-15 BILLION

even as routine as quarterly earnings calls. Instead of just talking about its revenues and expenses, one tech firm turned its quarterly conference call into a filmed live podcast. The CEO, dressed in all black, interviewed two of his firm's top clients. Other CEOs have, on earnings day, posted a selfiestyle video on TikTok or written a LinkedIn article translating the results for employees and customers. "Firms are looking for more ways to enhance the authenticity and interactivity of calls," says Joe Griesedieck, Korn Ferry's managing director of board and CEO services.

SWAYING DECISIONS, BUT TAKING RISKS

There's enough research on all these efforts to give organizations confidence that influencing attempts can work. For one, influencers hold impressive sway over younger people. Indeed, 54 percent of Gen-Z consumers say they have purchased products promoted by social-media influencers, compared to only 21 percent who say they've been influenced by traditional advertisements, according to a 2025 study from the *International Journal on Science and Technology*. Atanassov, the consultant, devised an influencing strategy for a Calgary-based oil company to help raise about $3



SHIFTING TRUST: WHICH INFLUENCERS WORK? – *A TIMELINE*

Getting a recommendation from a trusted figure is a strategy businesses have used for centuries. But over the last 100 years, the trusted figure has changed multiple times.

(1920s-1930s)



FICTIONAL AND NON-FICTIONAL ARCHETYPES

Celebrities were few and far between, so businesses invented spokespeople like Betty Crocker.

(1940s-1950s)



HOLLYWOOD STARS

Bob Hope, Lucille Ball, and Ronald Reagan—they all had brand deals. Actors and actresses became the nation's premier influencers.

CSA-Images, Msan10, Denis Novikov, Alexeyk Yaramenko, Ferhat Tekdemir/Getty Images



"MODERN AUDIENCES DO NOT MERELY TOLERATE EXPERT-LED CONTENT, THEY ACTIVELY SEEK IT OUT."

million to expand its business: The CEO starred in a series of YouTube videos and penned LinkedIn posts geared toward communicating the company's strategy and perspective. In the end, the firm met its funding goal in just two weeks. "It was just a matter of collecting checks," Atanassov says.

The challenge, experts say, is that all these creative influencing attempts can go wrong in a hurry. The most common mistakes happen when a company makes its case with jargon and overt sales pitches. The moment you cross the line and start trying to put corporate marketing through an influencer's network, you have failed, says Tim Hughes, coauthor of *Social Selling: Techniques to Influence Buyers and Changemakers*. That influencer can be the CEO, too. This spring, a bank CEO tried to win over skeptical stakeholders by saying that AI would allow his organization to replace "lower-value human capital," aka 15 percent of the firm's workforce. The remark sparked a backlash inside and outside the firm, forcing an apology from the CEO.

Coming off as inauthentic may be the biggest hazard.





(1980s-2000s)



ATHLETES
Top sports stars like Michael Jordan not only pitched products but helped design them.

(2000s)



MOMMY BLOGGERS
As internet access proliferated, parents began sharing unfiltered stories about raising kids, household management, and consumer products.

(2010s)



MICROINFLUENCERS
Having 10 million YouTube subscribers was great, but organizations found they could build trust by targeting smaller, highly specialized audiences.

(2020s)



BRAINY/NERDY SUBJECT -MATTER EXPERTS
Data scientists. Industrial engineers. Salespeople. Who needs celebrities when businesses can train in-house talent to be influencers?



“SCIENTISTS WILL QUICKLY VET WHO IS LEGIT AND WHO IS NOT.”

Experts say many organizations put the priority on maximizing how many people see the message rather than the quality of the message or value of the messenger. An influencer could have millions of followers, but if they can’t explain a complex subject well, they’re counterproductive. It can be a particular problem for firms trying to influence highly trained academics or researchers, says Shane Hanlon, who runs C&EN BrandLab, a marketing agency. “Scientists will quickly vet who’s legit and who’s not,” he says. The result: broken trust.

That’s why Nichols, in her podcasts, tries to position herself as a secondary focus. Yes, she’s the host, but she says she gains more credibility elevating other people’s successes than touting her own or her company’s. “I hope I can help elevate other people’s personal brands,” she says, in turn solidifying her firm’s professional relationship with them. “What goes around comes around.”

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"THE STATEMENT BREATHES VIVID LIFE INTO MUSIC IN A WAY THAT I'VE NOT HEARD FROM A POWER AMPLIFIER."

ROBERT HARLEY, *THE ABSOLUTE SOUND*, ISSUE 371

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THE PROBLEM

Technologies from batteries to weather forecasting stop improving at some point.

WHY IT MATTERS

The costs and frustrations to businesses and people are enormous.

THE SOLUTION

AI may be able to help, if it doesn't hit a tech wall.

Why haven't battery power, aircraft speed, or weather forecasting improved more? And what is the toll on the business world and people's blood pressure?

BY PETER LAURIA

WHEN TECHNOLOGY HITS A WALL



grebeshkov/maxim; Zhengshun Tang/Getty Images

What was supposed to be a dream vacation was turning into a nightmare. The electric vehicle had nearly lost its charge on the way to the airport, then the flight was delayed by a fast-moving storm that materialized without warning. Unless the plane suddenly became capable of supersonic speeds, the delay was going to cost the vacationers a day of their trip.

In ways maybe not quite as dramatic, we've all dealt with similar frustrations: a battery that doesn't last, an unexpected weather event that isn't in anyone's forecast, or travel that doesn't move at our preferred

pace. “Everyone would love to have a faster plane,” says Babak Parviz, a distinguished scientist and engineer who has led major AI efforts in eyewear, surgery, aeronautics, and other areas. So, too, would people love a longer-lasting battery and an accurate forecast.

The problem, however, is that for these and other technologies, the period of exponential growth in innovation appears to have plateaued. Instead of massive breakthroughs, advances now tend to be measured in tiny steps. Or, as Bryan Ackermann, head of AI strategy and transformation at Korn Ferry, puts it, “There are constraints in all of these areas that need to be worked through before the next plateau can be reached.”

For the business world, the constraints go far beyond planes that can’t go faster or laptops dying in the middle of a Zoom call. The cost of global economic losses from natural disasters—which weather forecasters often can’t warn about in time—were estimated at just under $225 billion last year. Meanwhile, according to the Federal Aviation Administration, delays caused by planes flying at slower speeds to manage fuel or air-traffic congestion cost the airline industry $24 billion annually. As for those frustrating battery failures, studies show they’re costing workers up to 50 minutes of productivity per shift, or the equivalent of $1 million in lost profit for a midsize company.

All of these plateaus matter as we face the advancement of AI, a once-in-a-generation technology. Will it hit a knowledge wall someday, and if so, what will that cost? Before that happens, though, AI may offer a glimmer of hope—and find the critical breakthrough other technologies are facing. It could, for example, help meteorologists detect natural disasters sooner, or uncover new fuel sources to make air travel faster. “AI gives researchers a new way that we never had before to solve these problems,” says Parviz. Here’s where things stand with today’s tech bottlenecks.



grebeshkovmaxim Zhengshun Tang/Getty Images



Sergey Proskurin/Getty Images

01 BATTERY LIFE

THE PLATEAU:
Battery life tops out at around 20 hours, depending on usage.

LENGTH OF PLATEAU:
Incremental gains of 3 percent to 5 percent for about a decade.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE:
New materials that create greater energy density at lower costs.

The evolution of the lithium-ion battery serves as a perfect analogy for the challenge of extending battery life. Lithium-ion technology was first developed for use in batteries in the 1970s but wasn't commercialized until 20 years later. From there, innovation happened rapidly, with the optimization of the technology for smartphones, drones, electric vehicles, and pretty much every other smart device. "The first wave of lithium-ion development produced massive advances in energy density, rechargeability, and cost reduction," says Shirley Meng, a professor of molecular engineering at the University of Chicago and director of the Energy Storage Research Alliance.

To be sure, lithium-ion batteries got lighter, smaller, and more powerful in parallel. Today's smartphone batteries can last 20 hours or more, depending on usage, versus just five hours in the 1990s. But the pace of improvement hasn't kept up with society's voracious computing needs. The smaller devices get, and the more computing power they require to run AI and other applications, the more difficult it is to engineer enough power to meet demand. "There's a thermodynamic limit to how much energy batteries can draw," says Meng.

It's not that researchers aren't trying; indeed, extending battery life is one of the most studied topics in modern engineering. Third Derivative, a subsidiary of global-energy-transition nonprofit Rocky Mountain Institute, is currently helping fund more than two dozen start-ups working on the issue, says Chetan Krishna, head of research and diligence at the firm. Alternatives such as sodium-ion, solid-state, and lithium-sulfur batteries show tremendous promise, but moving them out of the laboratory and into the market is still a challenge. "All next-generation chemistries have one issue or another to overcome," says Krishna.

Lithium-sulfur batteries can store much more energy than lithium-ion batteries, for instance, but they degrade much faster (within about 300 to 500 cycles, versus more than 1,000). Solid-state batteries are prohibitively expensive, costing about five to 10 times as much to manufacture as lithium-ion batteries, and they are harder to configure to fit into devices.

"We're one breakthrough away from taking the dominant tech for batteries to the next level."

AI comes into play by helping researchers identify new chemistries, accelerate lab testing, and improve manufacturing processes to lower costs for scaling and commercialization. The hope is that AI can not only assist in making the next breakthrough, but also in getting current ones to market faster. "We're not at the physical limit with batteries yet," says Krishna. "We're one breakthrough away from taking the dominant tech for batteries to the next level."

02 WEATHER FORECASTING

THE PLATEAU:
Ten-day forecasts are still only 50 percent accurate.

LENGTH OF PLATEAU:
Over 20 years.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE:
Better data and AI models to run more simulations and forecast outcomes.

The meteorologist was gesticulating wildly in front of a weather map, where Doppler radar showed a massive snowstorm would hit the city the next morning. He urged viewers not to pay attention to their weather apps, which at the time showed just a 30 percent chance of snow. Instead, he put the chances at more than 80 percent, even predicting the storm's exact time of arrival. Of course, neither he nor the app was right—no snow fell at all.

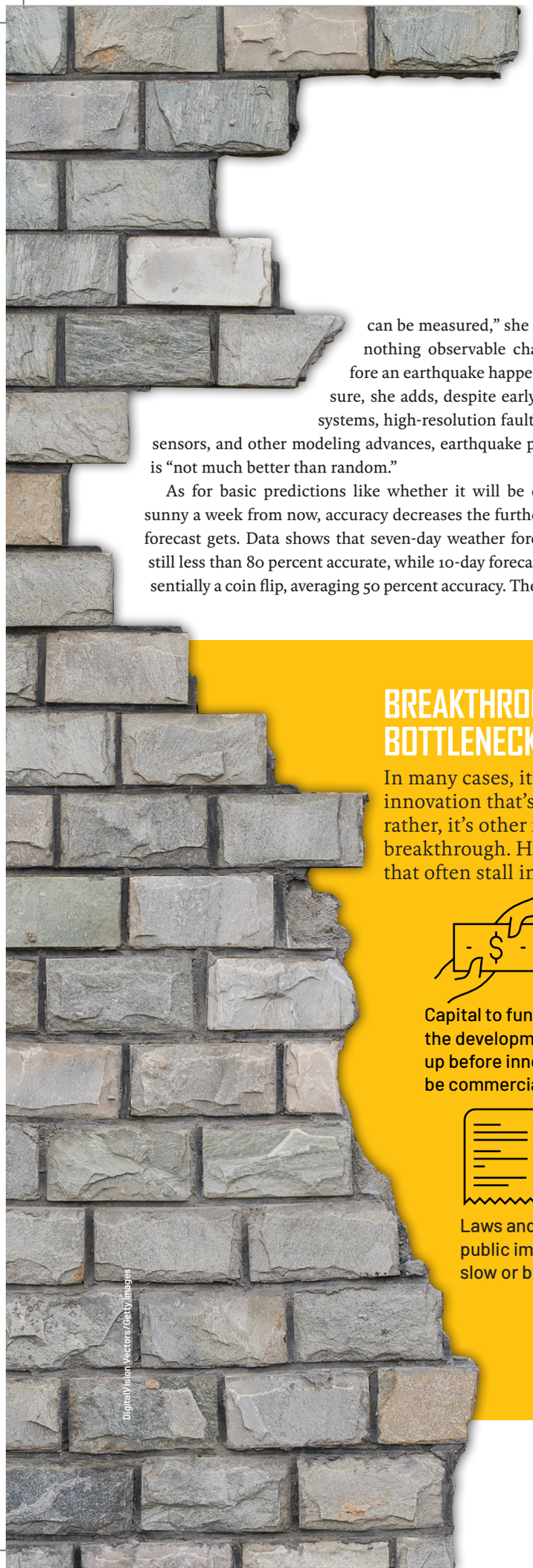
To the chagrin of anyone who has ever cancelled plans or hoped for a day off from school, inaccurate weather forecasts still happen with stunning regularity. "Meteorologists use a lot of different models to make their forecasts," says Tom Weber, author of *Cloud Warriors: Deadly Storms, Climate Chaos—and the Pioneers Creating a Revolution in Weather Forecasting*. "But it's not a perfect science."

Data shows that 7-day weather forecasts are still less than 80 percent accurate.

The prediction of weather events and natural disasters isn't perfect, but it is a science, and one that has improved greatly thanks to technology. The deployment of advanced radar and satellite systems in the 1980s and 1990s, along with the emergence of computer models that can mimic atmospheric conditions, have, within the span of a few decades, made once-useless five-day forecasts 90 percent accurate. Short-term hurricane tracking has improved by 50 percent since 2007, and technology has extended tornado-detection times to 20 minutes from just five minutes. "You used to have to wait to see a tornado to know one was coming," says Weber.

At the same time, however, extreme events like flash floods, wildfires, and earthquakes are no more predictable today than they were during the last millennium. That's partly due to the randomness with which they occur, but a bigger factor is how they behave, says Lucy Jones, one of the world's most prominent seismologists and earthquake scientists. "Weather events are predictable because changes in the atmosphere

Zhengshun Tang, Feifei Cui-Paoluzzo/Getty Images



DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images

can be measured," she says, "but nothing observable changes before an earthquake happens." To be sure, she adds, despite early-warning systems, high-resolution fault imaging, sensors, and other modeling advances, earthquake prediction is "not much better than random."

As for basic predictions like whether it will be cloudy or sunny a week from now, accuracy decreases the further out the forecast gets. Data shows that seven-day weather forecasts are still less than 80 percent accurate, while 10-day forecasts are essentially a coin flip, averaging 50 percent accuracy. The industry rule of thumb is that weather models gain about a day's worth of accuracy per decade.

The hope is that AI will compress that timeline. AI can run more simulations and identify patterns in bigger datasets better and faster than any human can, allowing meteorologists to run more simulations and explore a wider range of forecast outcomes. But AI is itself constrained by the fact that it's trained on historical data, and with extreme weather events happening not just more frequently but also more randomly than ever, past patterns—if they exist—may no longer be reliable. As Weber puts it: "What if a weather event happens that we've never experienced before?"

BREAKTHROUGH BOTTLENECKS

In many cases, it isn't technological innovation that's hitting a plateau—rather, it's other factors holding up a breakthrough. Here are five constraints that often stall innovation.

01 FUNDING:

Capital to fund research or extend the development cycle often dries up before innovations are ready to be commercialized.

02 REGULATIONS:

Laws and policies around safety, public impact, and other concerns can slow or block adoption of new tech.

03 PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE:

Designing products with limited lifespans can prevent more durable innovations from coming to market.

04 COMMERCIALIZATION CHALLENGES:

What works in a laboratory sometimes doesn't work in the real world if consumer demand isn't there or the costs are too high.

05 SUPPORTING SYSTEMS:

Adjacent networks and infrastructure (e.g., charging stations for electric vehicles) aren't advanced enough to drive adoption or scale innovation.



03 COMMERCIAL AIRSPEED

THE PLATEAU:
Commercial flights can't exceed 600 mph.

LENGTH OF PLATEAU:
About 50 years.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE:
Economics around fuel and operating costs, along with safety and regulations.

In 1975, a flight between New York and London took between seven and eight hours. Fifty years later, how long does it take? Maybe 30 minutes less.

Planes are still flying at the same speed, up to 600 mph. It's not that they can't go faster: The Concorde, a supersonic jet that began operating in 1976, proved that they can. It's that optimizing speed isn't financially viable for airline carriers—which the Concorde proved as well. Only 14 Concorde planes were produced for commercial use during the 27 years the aircraft was in operation, and the entire fleet made fewer than 100,000 flights.

Massive operating costs, prohibitively high ticket prices—a round-trip flight between New York and London cost about $12,000—and one high-profile crash conspired to make the Concorde commercially untenable. "When it comes to flying, people care about cost and safety even more than they do about speed," says Parviz, the scientist and engineer.

Concorde flights cost so much because they averaged about 16 passenger miles per gallon of fuel, whereas a typical 747 plane averages 50 to 80 passenger miles. Fuel prices, smaller seating capacity, high maintenance expenses, and other factors made the Concorde's operating costs more than 80 percent higher as well.

Over the last half-century, carriers have optimized for cost and safety, rather than speed. This year, global net profit margins across the airline industry are projected at 3.9 percent—firmly in the "razor-thin" category. But some of the world's smartest investors are betting that advances in technology and thermodynamics will eventually make supersonic flights commercially viable. One firm has raised $1 billion from investors and completed a successful civilian test flight, prompting outfits like United Airlines and American Airlines to order new supersonic planes.

And there are other start-ups underway in China, Russia, and elsewhere. And again, as with batteries and weather forecasts, AI is driving much of renewed interest. Parviz says AI is being deployed to help design planes that are more aerodynamic, optimize routes, improve fuel efficiency, and—with the goal of loosening restrictions on flying over land—reduce noise pollution, including sonic booms. "AI can fundamentally change the economics for faster planes," Parviz says. "We're not even midflight with it right now, no pun intended."

"When it comes to flying, people care about cost and safety even more than they do about speed."

Zhengshun Tang, Stitade/Getty Images

AHEAD OF ITS TIME.





French luxury watchmaker B.R.M Chronographes is celebrating the 50th anniversary of legendary German tuning house bb-auto with an automatic chronograph limited to 50 numbered pieces.

Founded in Frankfurt, bb-auto released its most famous build—the Polaroid commissioned Porsche 911 “Rainbow” Turbo Targa—in 1976. New-age materials, leading-edge technology, and audacious style made bb-auto creations ahead of their time then, and classic icons today. Just like B.R.M

Bernard Richards Manufacture

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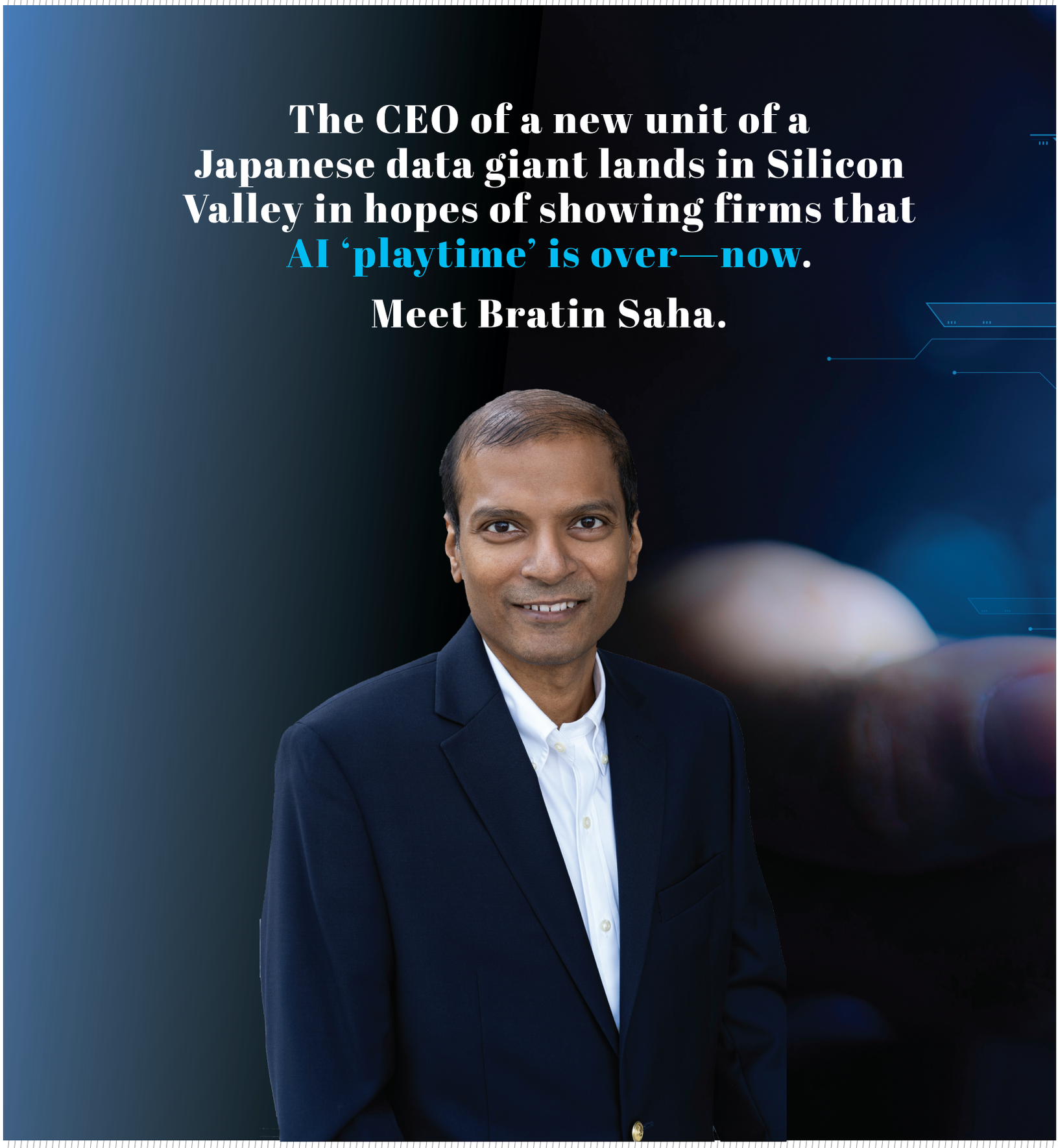
The CEO of a new unit of a Japanese data giant lands in Silicon Valley in hopes of showing firms that AI ‘playtime’ is over—now.

Meet Bratin Saha.





Ookawa/iStock/Getty Images



Bratin Saha has a blunt message for companies still treating artificial intelligence as an experiment: Playtime is over. For Saha, who was appointed CEO of NTT DATA AIVista about a year ago, it's game on.

NTT DATA, the Tokyo-based IT-services provider with about $30 billion in annual revenue, launched AIVista in December 2025 and installed Saha as its leader with a mandate to help firms operationalize AI at scale. And it's not as if it placed him far from the action—the company is smack dab in the middle of Silicon Valley, the heart of artificial intelligence.

As Saha sees it, his mission is to help move firms "from the pre-AI era into the post-AI era." It's a tall order for the most seasoned leaders, but for a first-time CEO like Saha, it's a career-defining challenge. But he arrives with some critical experience, including helping to build Amazon's AI services at AWS and the software infrastructure at Nvidia, and creating the AI business at DigitalOcean, a cloud firm in Colorado.

To be sure, Saha's background as a product leader and operator is what differentiates him from the classic services-company CEO. Put another way, he has serious credibility with the engineers, coders, and builders in Silicon Valley. The goal is to commercialize AI at scale for firms, as he has done with other new technologies for the 75 percent of Fortune 100 companies that NTT DATA counts as clients.

In one of his first interviews as CEO, Saha spoke to Korn Ferry about the challenges firms have with scaling AI, his experience leading a company for the first time, and his goal of democratizing the tech. Below is an edited version of the conversation.

A new global report from NTT DATA proclaims that "playtime for AI is over." What do you mean by that?

For the past few years, enterprises have been experimenting with AI and running pilots. The problem is that many of those pilots do not deliver business value. But the ones that do create value can be transformational. Companies now have to get serious about deploying AI at scale. The bottleneck is not the technology itself. It is operationalizing the technology: moving from prototype to production value. Companies that do not get serious over the next 18 to 24 months risk being left behind.

What is it about the next 18 to 24 months that makes them so critical?

In the technology world, we are used to Moore's Law, where computing power doubles every two years. AI's progress is an order of magnitude higher. Over the last two or three years, it's been doubling roughly every six months. A 24-month window could mean the technology gets about 10 times better. Leaders cannot think in terms of five-year planning cycles anymore.

The NTT DATA report also claims that only 15 percent of firms are positioned to be AI-ready leaders. Can you explain what that means and why so few firms are at that level?

Enterprise AI is hard; I'm not going to sugarcoat that. But it can be made easier. AI is trying to automate human work, and humans operate with company-specific knowledge. A graduate who joins JPMorgan and one who joins Goldman Sachs may have similar educations, but after a year they operate differently because



AIVista is a unit of Tokyo-based giant NTT DATA.



> “Companies now have to get serious about deploying AI at scale.”

Yuichiro Chino/Getty Images; Robson 90/Alamy

they have learned the company’s proprietary processes, controls, customers, and priorities. AI models have learned what is public. What they do not have is that “last mile” knowledge. Bridging that gap is critical.

What do you mean by “last mile” knowledge?

The last mile is the difference between what the model knows and what it needs to know to be effective inside a company. To make AI work in production, you have to capture that knowledge in a form agents and models can use.

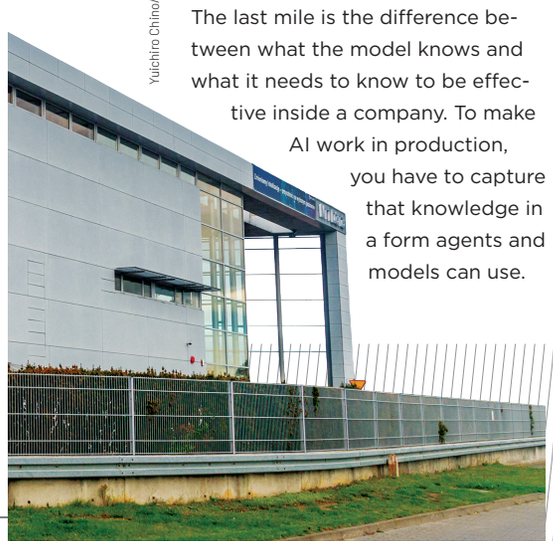
You’ve said that the main bottleneck for firms with AI is moving from proof of concept to production at scale. How do you break that bottleneck?

To me, there are a few ways. The first is last-mile specialization. You cannot take AI out of the box and expect it to work inside an enterprise. You have to train it with the same proprietary knowledge that you train a human with. Second is change management. Third is business-domain knowledge. You also need good data rigor and a clear use case. You cannot boil the ocean with your first deployment, but you also cannot pick something so trivial that you fail to learn how to deploy AI at scale.

What did you want to accomplish in your first year?

The first priority was to build the organization. The second was to set the strategy by understanding key customer pain points. The third was to deliver production outcomes—not pilots or proof points, but something that works in production. We have hired the leadership team, developed a differentiated strategy, and started building products with milestones toward production with multiple clients.

What motivated you to move from the product/operator





side into the CEO role?
I helped build models and the plumbing around models. But if 80 percent or 95 percent of pilots are not getting to production value, you have to ask what is going on. I realized that to democratize this technology, I needed to be on the side that does the last-mile deployment. AI is ultimately a people thing. It changes how companies work, how employees work, how the workforce looks, and how humans interact with technology.

Your public comments suggest that retrofitting AI into legacy infrastructure at big firms is inherently challenging. Does that mean legacy firms are at a disadvantage versus AI-native firms? Or can they be restructured?
An AI-native way of operating is fundamentally different. Take a word-processing application. Today, you create a document, edit it, and finish it. In an AI-native world, that document becomes dynamic. You could tell agents to update it with new information as it becomes relevant. What used to be a static process becomes an always-changing process.

Products become living things that are always connected and constantly refreshed. So you have to approach and think about AI native-products differently.

Both sides have advantages and disadvantages. Existing businesses have domain knowledge, business knowledge, customer data, and an understanding of how clients use their products. AI-native companies do not carry the burden of legacy systems, but they may lack the domain expertise and customer data. It is a race. The winners will be the ones that move fast enough, with urgency and flexibility.

> **"AI is ultimately a people thing. It changes how companies work, how employees work, how the workforce looks, and how humans interact with technology."**

You're far from new to the challenge of building a new enterprise on an enormous scale, having led Amazon Web Services's AI products into a multibillion-dollar business. What lessons did you learn there that will help in this new venture?
The work at AWS is the subject of three Harvard Business School case studies. Looking back, there were some key lessons that mattered. The first is customer obsession. Stay relentlessly focused on the pain point and how to solve it. The second is "nail before you scale." In a fast-moving market, there is a temptation to move fast, win a few customers, and pile up pilots. But you have to get it right before you scale it. The third is knowing your durable advantages and building on them. At NTT DATA, those advantages include global reach, client

[11:44 PM]Andriy Onufriyenko/Getty Images



relationships, domain knowledge, and change-management expertise.

Are there any parallels from the transition to cloud computing that can be applied to AI transformation?

Cloud made IT faster and more efficient. It transformed business models, but it was still taking an existing thing and improving it. AI is different. It is the first technology where we are saying it can analyze, think, and act like humans do, which is not an improvement of an existing technology but a completely different ball game. The opportunity is 100 times greater.

There are a record number of first-time CEOs in the US. As a first-time CEO at a new NTT DATA company, what's been your most unexpected challenge?

The increase in demands on your time. I have grown from engineer to manager to director to VP to CXO, and the demands on time always go up. But the CEO transition drove a step-function change in the demands on time. It requires ruthless prioritization, cutting out noise, and exercising judgment about what to do and what not to do—especially in an environment with so much AI hype.

How has your view of leadership changed now that you are a CEO?

You become aware that you represent the company in every room, every conversation, and every statement. A misplaced word or false step reflects on the organization and everyone in it. That weight is real, and you have to stay conscious of it all the time.

With all the challenges CEOs face, what makes stepping into the role attractive for you right now?

We are at a truly transformational point. There is an opportunity to do work you can be proud of and leave a legacy. Helping NTT DATA move from being a leader in the pre-AI era to a leader in the post-AI era is hugely motivating. I want to help democratize enterprise AI for organizations that have the ambition but have not yet gotten there. So, I think the opportunity to leave a mark, do real transformation in the industry, and democratize one of the most important technologies humankind has invented makes the hard parts worth it.

GET TO KNOW **BRATIN SAHA**

Alumnus of Harvard Business School, PhD in computer science from Yale University, B.Tech in Computer Science from IIT Kharagpur.

Holds more than **70 patents** and has published more than **30 papers**.

As VP of Software Infrastructure at Nvidia, **led global software infrastructure** for product lines.

Helped **scale AI services at Amazon Web Services from zero to a multibillion-dollar business** as well as one of the fastest growing businesses in AWS history; work was the subject of Harvard Business School case studies.

As chief product and technology officer and Section 16 Officer at DigitalOcean, **launched DigitalOcean's AI products** and other innovations, contributing to a 30 percent increase in market capitalization.



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PURSUITS

Grandma's Got Game

Leaders turn to age-old hobbies to slow down.

By Meghan Walsh

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“It soothes the nervous system and lets my mind relax.”



After Lauren Patterson logs off as chief executive officer of the advertising agency she cofounded and puts her two toddlers to bed, she pulls out the LEGO set she hides from the kids. One by one, she clicks the colorful, riveted plastic pieces into place. Currently, she is assembling a three-foot by two-foot replica of the famous Van Gogh sunflowers. “Having the tactile experience of a grandma hobby is a good, like the kids say, 'touch grass' moment,” Patterson says. “It soothes the nervous system and lets my mind relax.”

A “grandma hobby” is any practice that’s performed without technological mediation, often something that doesn’t require rigorous physical or mental effort. It’s a slow-paced, minimal-skill activity, such as crafting, reading, beading, drawing, or solving puzzles. Needlepoint is especially trendy (sales are up more than 200 percent year-over-year). These pastimes, once relegated to seniors and kids, are now emerging as an antidote for terminally online adults of all ages. The explosion of interest in birding, knitting, and breadmaking represents a collective yearning to slow down and to reengage with the physical world.

Of course, the irony here is that social media and the internet are driving this trend, with searches for analog hobbies almost doubling this year. There are entire websites and accounts dedicated to grandma, or analog, hobbies. Business executives are posting on LinkedIn about their geriatric pleasures of choice.

Ekaterina Vasileva-Bagler, Prostock-Studio, Zbynek Pospisil, Olga Yastremska, Thanasis, Light Field Studios, Aire Images, Sasha Bell, Richard Drury, Oscar Sanchez Photography/Getty Images, Marcie Green

BUILDING AN ANALOG BOX

Compile a stash of supplies so that when the urge arises to reach for your phone, your hands instead go to a puzzle or pen. Some ideas for the executive’s hobby box:





Work in Progress Wednesday on TikTok elicits tens of thousands of users to post pictures of their unfinished creations—because these pursuits are about a process, not an outcome. But psychotherapist and author Phil Lane says, "We might view these as much more than just empty or unproductive activities—they are actually vital tools for staying healthy."

Work-related burnout reached an all-time high last year, Lane points out. The constant stimulation and subsequent cortisol dump takes a toll on the nervous system, leading to cognitive impairment, depression, insomnia, and weakened immunity. Meanwhile, digital interfacing has, to an extent, replaced hobbies. These days, we reach for the phone when we're tired, bored, stressed, or amped. We sit in front of the computer or TV late into the evenings. The problem is the pastimes of the past served not just as entertainment but also to bring people into the present moment and help them to unwind.

In response, people intuitively began creating analog boxes filled with easily accessible alternatives to scrolling or working that they could reach for instead. It's a way of redirecting the mind and body. Lane contends it may be more about regressing to a simpler time than jumping ahead to retirement. He likens it to a concept in psychology that involves "adaptive regression in service of the ego," which essentially posits that creativity and play can be skillful ways of coping and self-regulating. "By allowing ourselves to occasionally let go of the seriousness of life, we are doing our mental health a favor," he says.

On Patterson's desk she has a vase filled with pastel-hued flowers, not from the garden but from her childlike interest in methodically snapping together building blocks. "It adds some fun and whimsy," she says of her LEGO art. "It's not about launching an Etsy store. It's just about making LEGOs for the process of doing it. Not everything has to be productive for it to be worthwhile."

THE ART OF

Asking Hard Questions

Many go to great lengths to avoid asking uncomfortable questions. Others feed off the thrill. Few are skilled in courageous inquiry. But when done well—and with compassion—asking hard questions is a gift to the inquisitor and the recipient, because both will learn from what emerges.



1 Get consent. Check whether it's a good time before diving in. Asking a hard question when someone is stressed or distracted is unlikely to be productive.



2 Soften the blow. Imagine swinging a baseball bat wrapped in big, fluffy pillows. Lower the person's guard by beginning with a phrase like, "I'm trying to better understand ..."



3 Keep it simple. Ask just one clear, intentional question at a time and make sure the recipient understands the context. Don't shotgun multiple inquiries.



4 Listen deeply. Allow silence, so the person can give a contemplative response. When they're finished, repeat back what you heard—and give gratitude.

Illustration by **PETER HOEY**

VISIT

Reykjavík, Iceland

A living lab.

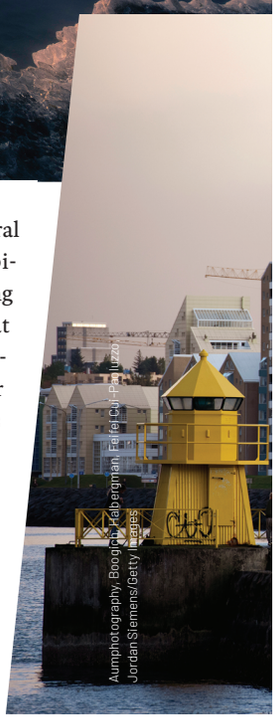


Perched on the edge of the Arctic, Iceland is teeming with 130 volcanoes as well as black-sand beaches created by hot lava flowing into the cold Atlantic waters.



Sprinkled throughout Reykjavík's quirky neighborhoods are an abundance of public pools and high-end geothermal spas called "lagoons." Hot tubs of all shapes, sizes, and temperatures are where locals congregate to socialize and relax.

Iceland has long lured visitors with its natural beauty. Now, Reykjavík, the country's capital, is attracting leaders interested in learning more about a number of innovative projects that are leveraging nature in service to human development. Indeed, Reykjavík has become a living lab for sustainable urban infrastructure as the city strives to reimagine its public transit, density, and water utility systems. Meanwhile, as the high-tech sector grows, the small country located on a tectonic bridge between North America and Europe is becoming a destination for data centers due to its subarctic cooling capabilities and renewable energy grid. If workers can step away from the glow of the city and computer screen, they might just catch a glimpse of the northern lights.



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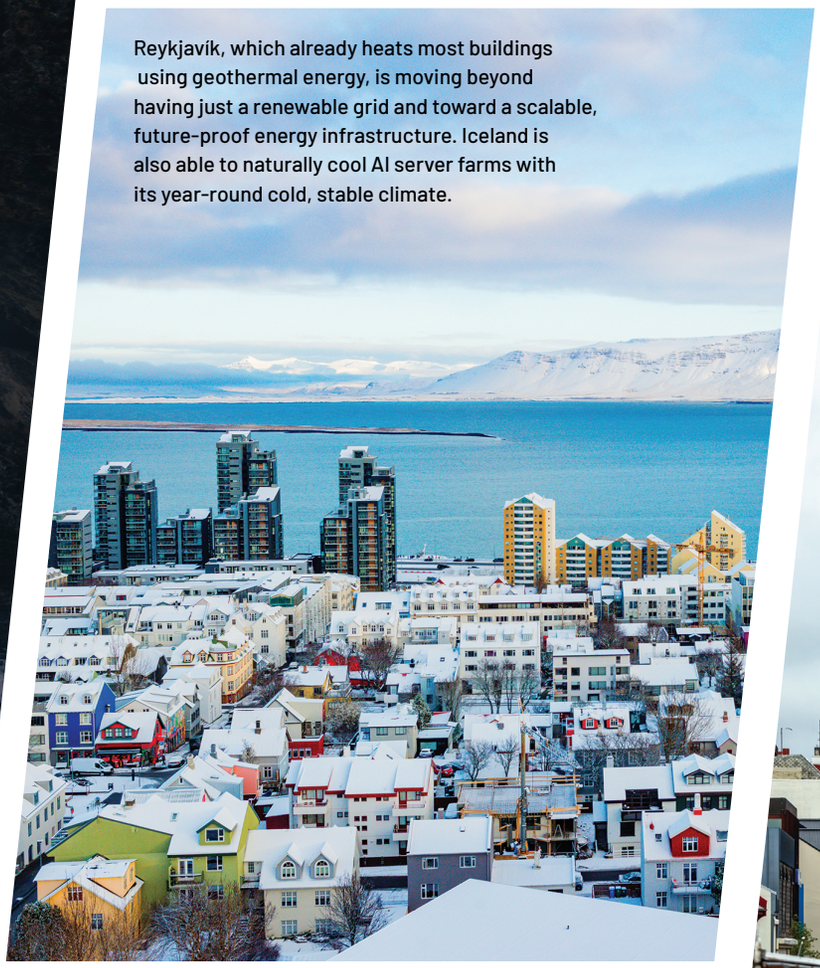
Reykjavík, which already heats most buildings using geothermal energy, is moving beyond having just a renewable grid and toward a scalable, future-proof energy infrastructure. Iceland is also able to naturally cool AI server farms with its year-round cold, stable climate.

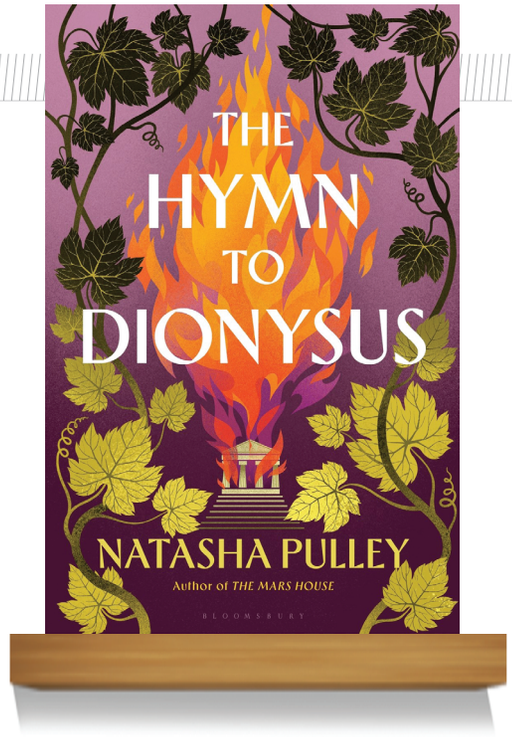


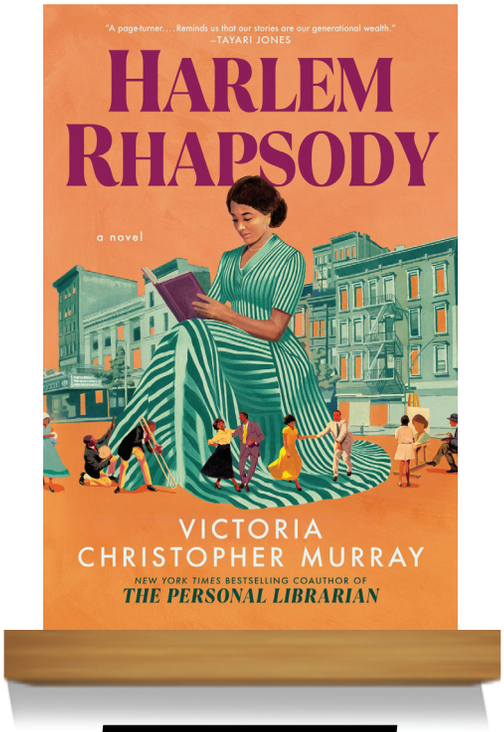
The capital region has a population of around 250,000 people, accounting for the majority of Iceland's population. Reykjavík is consistently ranked as one of the cleanest, safest, and most environmentally friendly cities in the world.

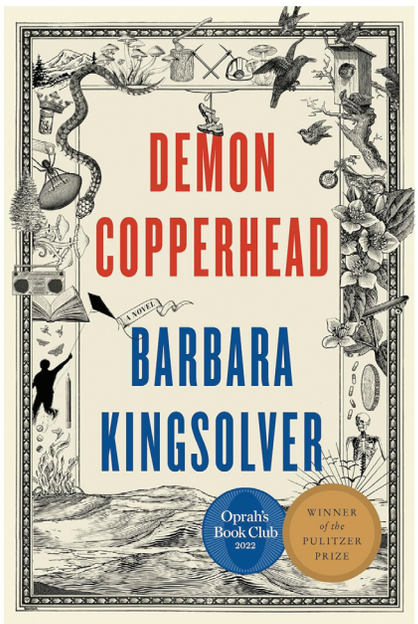




As the hub of Iceland's economy, Reykjavík last year boasted the world's fifth-highest GDP per capita. The city is experiencing a diversified expansion, driven by tourism, green energy, IT, aluminum smelting, and biotech.







READ, LISTEN, WATCH

Revisionist Revivals

It's been said there are only two types of plots: a man goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town. But new renditions on classic variations of this formula are expanding beyond the man and the stranger, sharing the perspectives of those on the margins of literature. Over the last few years, there has been an explosion of fiction releases that reimagine familiar storylines, from Greek mythology to Biblical tales to beloved literature.

These new interpretations sometimes transport the plot to a modern context or play with adding a genre twist. In other instances, authors are retelling stories from the perspectives of supporting characters who were sidelined, which subtly—or not so subtly—probes previously assumed narratives. Part of what may be driving this latest plot twist is the erosion of institutional gatekeeping, with a 38 percent surge in self-publishing last year that added 4 million books to choose from. Here is *Briefings's* compilation of contemporary takes on timeworn favorites.

THE HYMN TO DIONYSUS

BY NATASHA PULLEY

In this reworking of the Greek myth, a soldier suffering from PTSD finds healing and meaning through his encounters with a wild and mysterious god.

HARLEM RHAPSODY

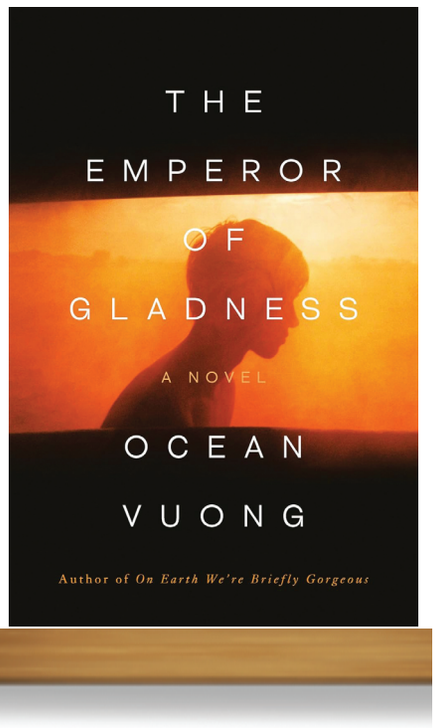
BY VICTORIA CHRISTOPHER MURRAY

The story of a Black literary editor who worked for W.E.B. Du Bois in the early 1900s and played a pivotal role in shaping both the future of literature and the Harlem Renaissance.

DEMON COPPERHEAD

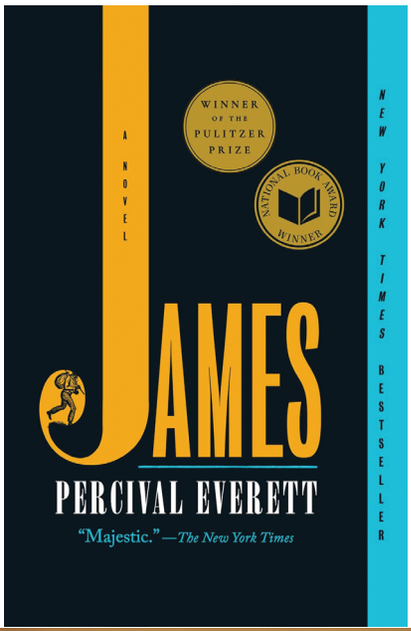
BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Recently re-released as a new edition, this modern retelling of Charles Dickens' David Copperfield explores the opioid crisis in rural America.



THE EMPEROR OF GLADNESS *BY OCEAN VUONG*
This story of a young Vietnamese-American man who forms an unlikely relationship with an elderly Lithuanian widow is considered an adaptation of A Fine Balance, *originally set in India.*

JAMES *BY PERCIVAL EVERETT*
A spinoff of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn *told from the perspective of the enslaved Jim, who escapes slavery to join the young outcast on his raft journey down the Mississippi River.*



SUGGESTED

Makin' Moves



Treadmill desks are great for keeping workers moving, but not so great at moving around themselves. Enter the Cubii Go, an under-desk elliptical designed to migrate easily when and where it's needed. Lightweight and compact with a retractable handle and built-in wheels, the Cubii Go can be rolled from the home office to the living room to the kitchen table. The workout machine, which includes 10 resistance levels and an app for tracking movement, is also quieter than many other options, so colleagues won't hear it humming in the background during meetings.

Cubii Go, $219

PRO TRAINING

Coach Kathy Donato explains why animal flow has people getting down on all fours.

GIVE US THE DL.
"It's a quadrupedal movement training system, like yoga mixed with parkour and mixed martial arts."

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO DO?
"It's freeing. We take our shoes off and get to explore. The mind reconnects with the body."

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?
"Moving laterally and in different ranges of motion creates a more resilient body and improves cognitive processes."



Find out more at animalflow.com.

Courtesy Cubii, Global Bodyweight Training



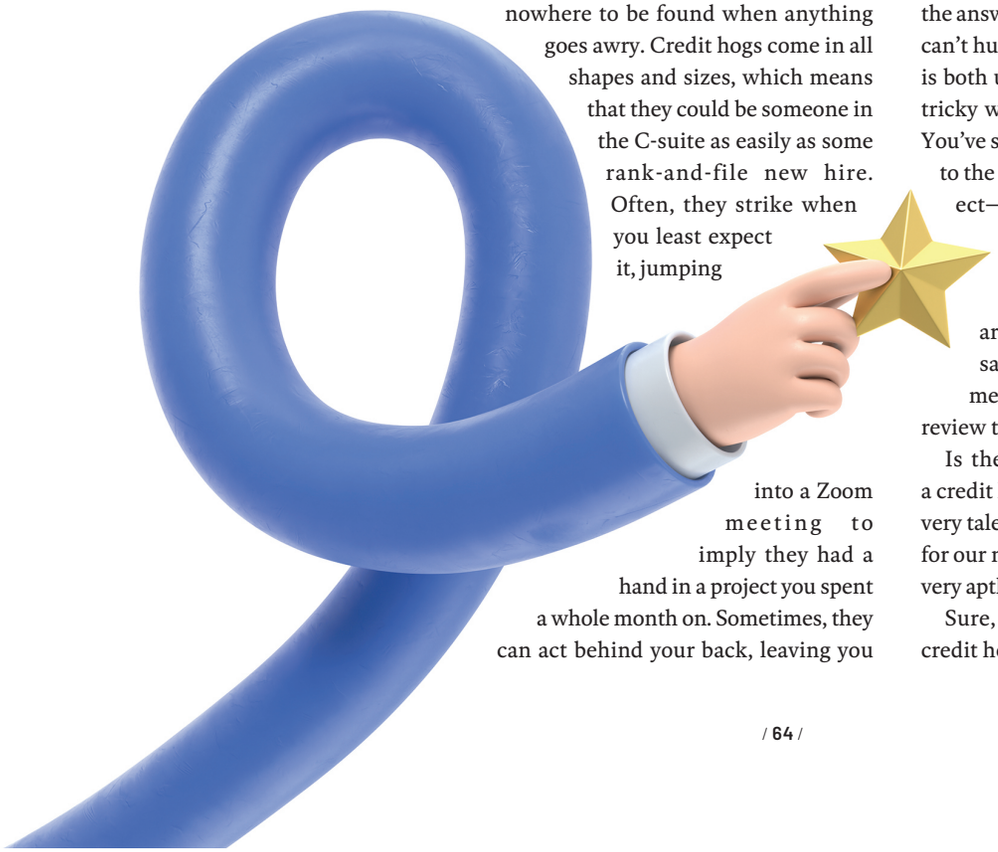
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
JONATHAN DAHL

Taking Credit

In modern times, the number of workplace challenges just keeps growing. Moving up the corporate ladder may get you nowhere now. Raises, and dare we say promotions, are becoming an ordeal. And have you tried to concentrate in an open workspace, where colleagues might be loudly discussing dinner plans just as you're trying to calculate next year's product costs?

But there's another kind of workplace dynamic that predates all of this and is no joy to navigate: Dealing with the credit hog.

You know the kind. They're first in line when compliments are being dished out, and nowhere to be found when anything goes awry. Credit hogs come in all shapes and sizes, which means that they could be someone in the C-suite as easily as some rank-and-file new hire. Often, they strike when you least expect it, jumping into a Zoom meeting to imply they had a hand in a project you spent a whole month on. Sometimes, they can act behind your back, leaving you wondering why your boss didn't notice your effort.



To be fair, credit hogs are not always the bad actors they seem. Sometimes the misdeeds are more accidental, like their boss thanks them for a job they didn't do, and they're too flustered to know how to react. Some credit hogs are simply the boss's favorite employee, the way your elementary-school teacher probably had a pet student. But don't be fooled, a lot of credit snatchers know exactly what they are doing, and they can be a serious career hindrance. I mean, why does your work matter if your boss and company don't know about your biggest contributions?

There are ways to combat credit hogs. Sometimes, the answer is as simple as talking to them. It certainly can't hurt to let a colleague know that being shunted is both unfair and demoralizing. But it can be really tricky when it's your manager taking all the credit. You've seen how this works: The boss sends an email to the CEO congratulating "the team" about a project—when, of course, it's just a way to get his name out front. How do you handle that?

With care, I guess. You have to pick your battles with management, and some are worth it, and some are not. Some experts say it's best to keep a list of your accomplishments and have them ready come performance-review time.

Is there more to do? Yes, but I'd rather not be a credit hog, so I refer you to a colleague of mine, the very talented Arianne Cohen. She wrote a nice piece for our newsletter, *This Week in Leadership*, in a story very aptly named "5 Ways to Deal with a Credit Hog."

Sure, I edited it, but in no way am I taking any credit here!

Sisi Liu/Getty Images

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2026
The Absolute Sound
EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD

Pure Inspiration

Your high-end journey begins with the Constellation Inspiration 2 Preamplifier and Stereo Amplifier. Like all of our components, both feature true dual-mono, fully balanced circuitry and the Constellation Switch-Mode Power Supply that delivers 20 percent greater power and 20 percent lower noise.

The Absolute Sound editor-in-chief Robert Harley says the preamplifier's ability to "convey music's rhythmic flow," and the "transparent air in the top octave," is matched by the amplifier's resolution, dimensionality, and "tremendous dynamic impact." Both bear Constellation design hallmarks of casework and "bulletproof build quality exuding a refined elegance."

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