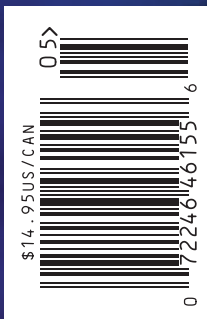
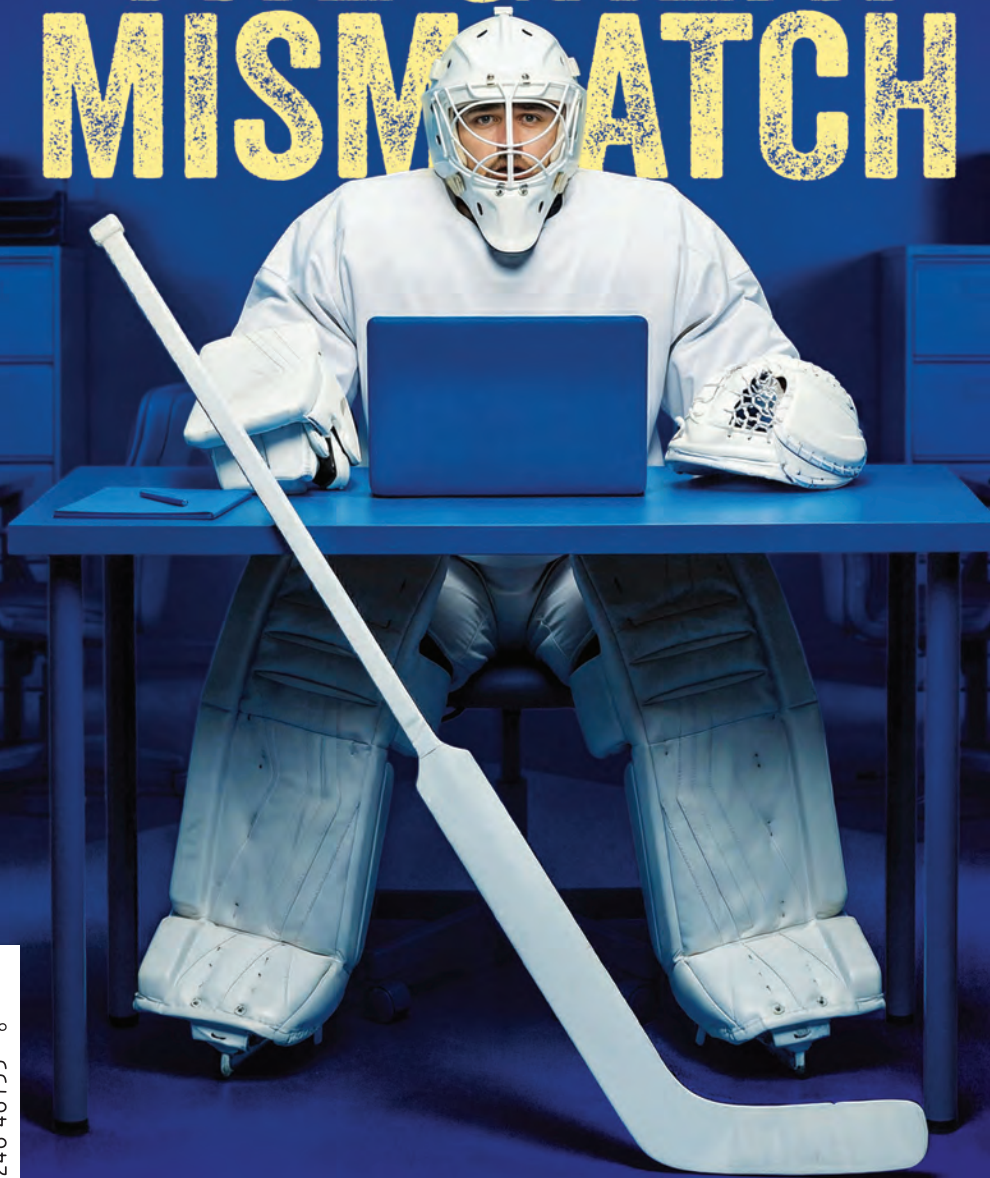




Briefings

HIRING: THE GREAT MISMATCH



COMPANIES ARE FACING THE GREATEST REORDERING OF WORKER TALENT IN A GENERATION. **CAN THEY GET IT RIGHT?**



OFFICIAL TALENT & ORGANIZATIONAL
CONSULTING PARTNER

POWER PEOPLE WHO THE OLYMPIC

BEFORE THE WORLD IS WATCHING, THE WORK BEGINS

At Korn Ferry, we power performance for the world's leading organizations through their people. Now, our work moves to the world's biggest stage. As the Official Talent & Organizational Consulting Partner of the LA28 Olympic & Paralympic Games, we're focused on powering the people behind the LA28 Games: the leaders, teams, and systems that help make Olympic & Paralympic moments possible.

Together with LA28, we're helping build and align a workforce of nearly 5,000 people around a shared purpose, designed to perform when the world is watching.

Follow along to watch moments of great performance unfold.





WINNING THE WHO POWER PIC GAMES

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The new roles are there—but firms say the workforce skills aren't. How to solve one of the greatest talent imbalances in a generation.

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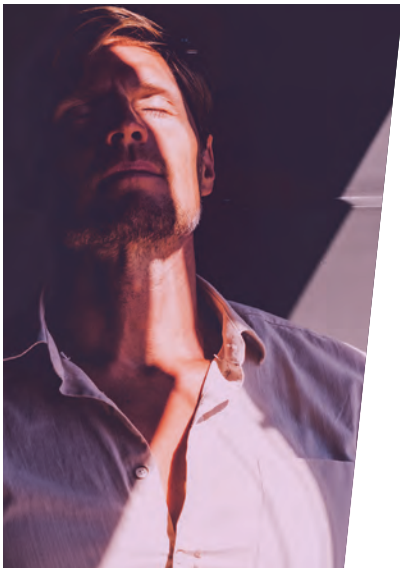
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Leadership News, Every Week KornFerry.com/Insights



CHIEF
EXECUTIVE
OFFICER
GARY
BURNISON



Less Noise, More Plan

Excerpted from *I Need a Job!* by Gary Burnison, Korn Ferry CEO and New York Times bestselling author.

It's the paradox of the current job market. The roles people want the most are often those being eliminated or left vacant because of automation. And the roles that companies desperately need to fill are the least sought after.

That frustration, coupled with the ability of AI to quickly tailor résumés, cover letters, and social media profiles, is prompting job seekers to apply for any job they see. The result is a vicious cycle—more and more people applying for jobs that are less and less likely to be filled.

And yet, as our firm is seeing, many people still cling to the hope that they will be the unicorn that gets the job when no one else will. And therein lies the problem.

It's brutal. I'm frustrated. Nobody is responding.

I'm hearing these comments in almost every conversation about the job market these days—as each posting attracts hundreds, if not thousands of applicants. Not only that, but as many as 70 percent of positions are now being filled by internal candidates or someone who has been referred. As for the remaining 30 percent, making it through screenings and into an interview can feel like winning the lottery.

The number of people reaching out to our firm for guidance and help is unlike anything we've ever seen. No doubt, everyone reading this message can relate.

Just the other day, someone came to me

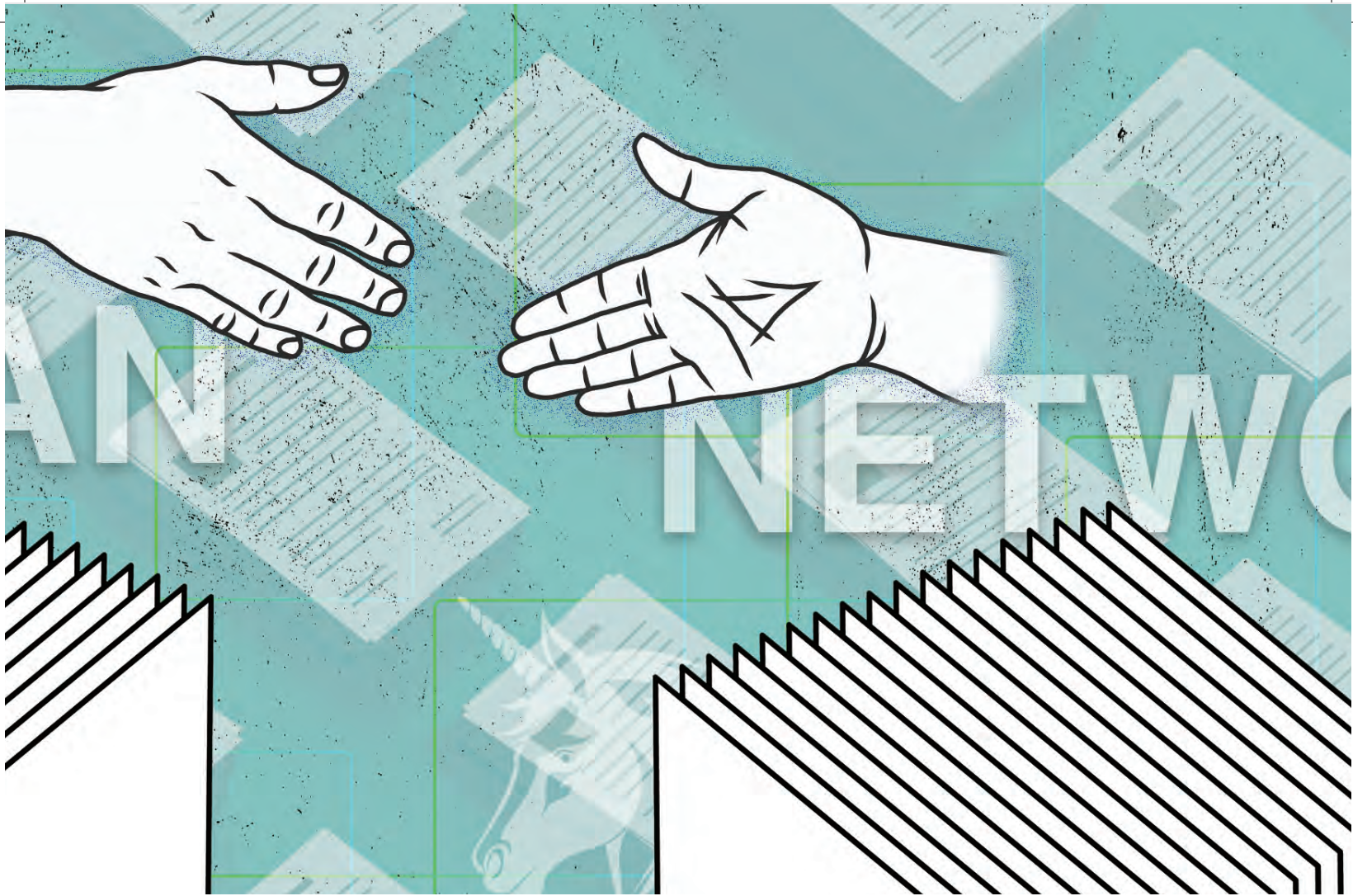
with the same questions almost every candidate is asking: *How can I get noticed? What does it really take to land the job I want? Where can I find my next job?*

To answer, I shared a story—of all things, about going to an ice cream shop with my family many years ago. And sitting at a table in the corner was a teenager filling out an application.

When we were younger, we intuitively knew how things worked. You'd simply go to the place you wanted to work. If the manager wasn't busy, you'd more likely than not get an interview. In other words, you made a connection.

And if your friends worked there, they'd definitely put in a good word for you. In fact, you probably found out about the job from a friend who provided a warm introduction for you.

As time goes on and careers progress, of course things change. But sometimes people get the idea that technology can do all the work. Today, they might even convince themselves that all they need is an online presence



and AI will somehow find them.

The modern job hunt is louder than ever and less human than it used to be.

Landing a job these days takes so much more than simply getting a résumé into someone's hands or uploading it into a company's applicant tracking system. It's online assessing, video responding, and AI amplifying.

No wonder so many people feel dazed and confused—not knowing what to do or which way to go. It's a little like Alice in Wonderland trying to get advice and directions from the Cheshire Cat—not knowing where she should go. So, as the Cat says: "Then it doesn't matter which way you go."

It's time to reorient. Progress requires a plan—and that's for everyone involved in the process. Here is some advice to consider:

KNOW THYSELF – Look within before looking out. The more we know about ourselves, the better we'll be able to tell people who we are—and what we're looking for.

ASSESS FOR SUCCESS – It's both left brain and right brain—who we are and what we've

done. We're looking at both experiences and the culture that fits us best.

TARGET EFFORTS – Invest energy in the companies and roles where we can contribute and flourish.

NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK – It's a contact sport.

FIND A WARM INTRODUCTION – Having someone vouch for and validate—that's what gets us noticed. The six degrees of separation really do work.

HAVE A PLAN – This one matters the most. A random job search won't suffice—not for the seeker, nor for the finder. Be systematic. Step back before stepping in.

Desperation is loud; strategy is calm confidence. It's the steady hand.

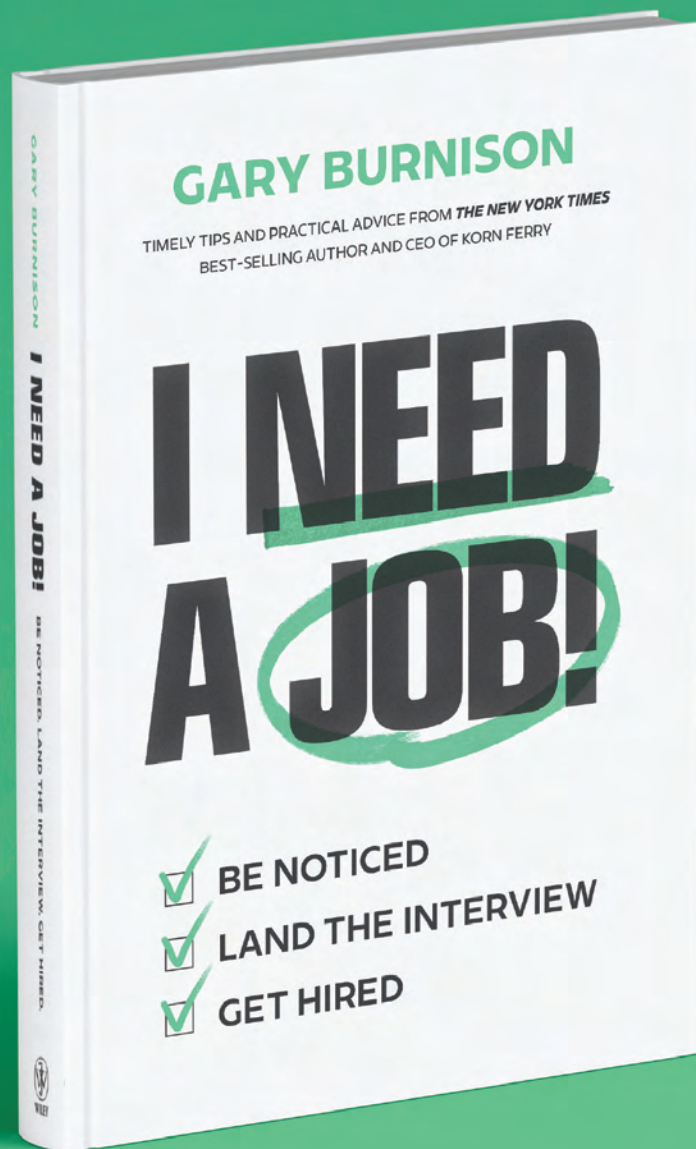
Indeed, when everything else is shouting into the void, what gets through is the voice of reason. Thoughtful, mindful—in other words, a plan. ▀

The number of people reaching out to our firm for guidance and help is unlike anything we've ever seen.

Gary Burnison's new book, **I Need a Job!**, is available at most bookstores and online outlets.

LEARN WHAT REALLY GETS YOU THE JOB

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



BRIEFLY ON...

LEADERSHIP

“Organizations confuse having answers with making decisions.”



Deagreedz/Getty Images

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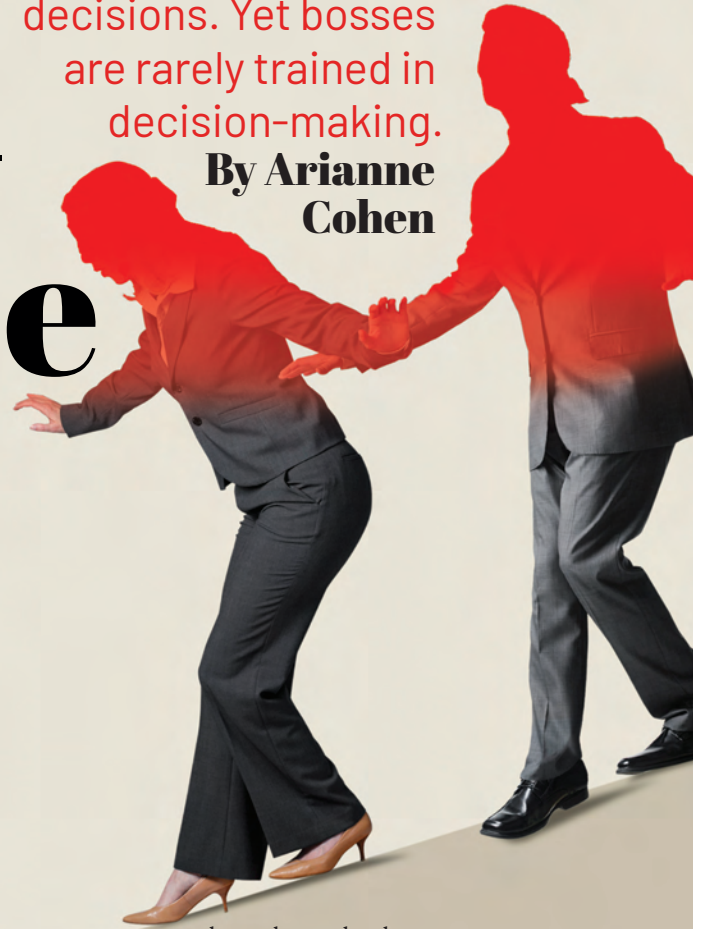
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LEADERSHIP

Can Bad Decision-Making Be Avoided?

Leaders have never had more information to make decisions. Yet bosses are rarely trained in decision-making.

By Arianne Cohen



It's safe to say that corporate success has always hinged on the decision-making of executives. Leadership is a constant fire hose of choices: which strategy to pursue, how to navigate risky markets, how to handle a delicate HR situation, what to say in a speech, what *not* to say in a speech. It's also safe to say that most people in corporate America

struggle to make good decisions—but won't admit it.

Despite billions spent training leaders, 85 percent of mid- to senior-level professionals have never received training in decision-making, and 45 percent *still* do not have a structured way to make decisions (yes, you're supposed to have a framework), according to a new report from the Global Association of Applied Behavioural Scientists. "Decision-making is one of the least systematically taught skills in corporate life," says Usha Haley, a distinguished professor at Wichita State University, and she says this is a critical failing as AI complicates decisions with constant information overload.

Despite this, 91 percent of professionals consider

themselves to be above-average decision-makers, which further compounds the problem: People who think they're good at something don't seek training. Typical mid- to senior-level employees make hundreds of decisions every week, and believe that they're generally making good choices—which is classic outcome bias, i.e. judging by the results rather than decision quality. In reality, experts say, employees' complete lack of decision-making training prevents them from accurately assessing their own skills. Addressing this is "one of the challenges of performance management," says organizational strategist Maria Amato, senior client partner at Korn Ferry. When rated against other employees, "most people are going to feel unfairly rated, almost definitionally."

DNY59/Getty Images

THE TAKEAWAY

Firms need to show managers how to deal with AI overload.



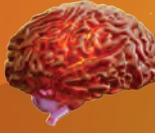







So what are workplace decision-makers doing wrong? A lot. Few use structured frameworks for analysis, and instead most rely on heuristics that oversimplify the situation, allowing them to fall prey to a suite of biases, such as making choices that align with their initial impressions, continuing strategies with high sunk costs, and maintaining the status quo. Most are fundamentally approaching decision-making as a task of deciding *what* to do, rather than a process of deciding how to achieve something. “Organizations confuse having answers with making decisions,” says Joe Lalley, a workshop facilitator in design thinking, a problem-solving methodology. Companies reward speed and certainty, rather than the exploration, perspectives, and cognitive diversity that fuel smart decisions. Good decisions often involve curiosity and listening to frontline employees, Lalley says, but “too often, hierarchy and expertise get in the way.”

In the world of AI, companies will need to train decision-makers to be ready to implement contingency decisions, which will be readily suggested by the technology. “Plan B is just as important as the initial decision,” says Nicholas Grigoriou, a lecturer in marketing at Monash University. Yet all too often, especially during corporate crises, firms fail to test or put in place their “what to do if X happens” action plans. And let’s not get started on group decision-making, which despite being rarely taught, makes up the majority of corporate decisions. (Individual decision-making receives the lion’s share of academic research and theorizing.)

Experts advise that strong decision-makers gather frameworks for likely scenarios. For example, one popular approach, taught by the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, walks decision-makers through 10 steps, including identifying the ethical issues at hand (e.g., “Could this decision be damaging to someone or some group, or unevenly beneficial?”), gathering the facts, evaluating alternatives, testing and implementing the leading choice, and reflecting on the outcome. Notably, post-decision steps, which usually fall by the wayside in corporate settings, are part of the process. The framework is not an algorithm: Rather than automatically selecting the best choice, it allows the decision-maker to do so, working from a strong base of information. And yes, make the excellent decision to get some training ASAP. //

The Styles Behind Decision-Making

These are five popular models commonly operating in corporate cultures.

THE STYLE	AROUND SINCE	WHAT IT IS	WHO USES IT
Directive Decision-Making 	Sliced bread 	Leader makes decisions independently with minimal or no input from others.	Military or executive leaders handling a crisis, corporate honchos
Rational Decision-Making 	1950s-1960s 	A step-by-step approach: Define the problem, identify alternatives, and select a solution.	Analytical, strategic types in stable industries, or running operations
Intuitive Decision-Making 	1980s-1990s 	Rapid decisions based on pattern recognition, experience, and gut feelings.	Experienced leaders in emergency, time-pressured, or ambiguous situations
Garbage-Can Model 	1970s 	Chaotic and anarchic decision-making, where problems, solutions, and participants connect somewhat randomly.	Leaders in loose, complex environments with many competing interests, such as universities
Evidence-Based Management 	Early 2000s 	Systematic gathering of the best available evidence from research, stakeholders, and experts.	Managers in healthcare, academia, and progressive HR teams who want better outcomes and less bias

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TECHNOLOGY

BY PETER LAURIA

Whose Time Is It Anyway?

AS ONE OF THE MORE PROFICIENT AI users on the team, Sarah completed all of her weekly projects ahead of schedule. She even got a jump on some of her tasks for next week. She didn't think it would be a big deal if she asked to stay home on Friday, especially since her kids had the day off from school. Her boss had other ideas: Why not use the time to develop new skills, research competitors, or pitch in on a colleague's project?

As AI adoption continues at an amazing pace, a battle between leaders and employees is brewing over who owns the time the technology is saving and how it should be spent. A study from the London School of Economics found that employees who use AI for tasks at work save an average of 7.5 hours per week—basically, one full day. Leaders, obviously, believe that this time belongs to the firm; after all, the promise

of AI was to increase productivity and efficiency while allowing people to focus on more impactful and complex work.

But, as with nearly every aspect of business and work these days, it's more complicated than that. Employees say AI is overworking them by loading them up with data, and argue that the time off might improve their productivity in the long run. In one survey, nearly half of workers said the saved time should be theirs.

That's not likely to happen, says Brad Bell, director of the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. "Outside of the most enlightened leaders, firms clearly view AI as a way to get more work done, not less," he says. More work is coming employees' way, he says, as evidenced by the enormous

Douglas Sheha/Getty Images

THE TAKEAWAY

Firms won't know how to handle this issue until they can track the time AI has saved knowledge workers.

staff-cutting firms have been making recently, while still maintaining revenue growth. But with burnout at record highs and engagement at historical lows, experts worry that leaders are looking too myopically at AI's efficiency gains for employees. Even if firms aren't likely to let people take four-day workweeks or Fridays off, says Korn Ferry senior client partner Cheryl D'Cruz-Young, giving employees some of the AI-related time savings—rather than making them absorb more work—could be beneficial. “It is clear people want more flexibility, and freeing them up can actually increase productivity in the long run,” she says.

In the end, the issue may come down to how well

companies can actually track the time AI has saved—which can be especially difficult with knowledge workers, says Peter Cappelli, director of the Center for Human Resources at The Wharton School. “It's a lot of work to figure out how much time is really saved from any new practice,” he says. “Most firms are just guessing right now.” For her part, Shanda Mints, vice president of AI strategy and transformation at Korn Ferry, worries that the time AI saves employees will be wasted in the absence of a clear strategy. “Any extra time employees have is usually taken up by putting out whatever fires or emergency comes their way,” she says. ▮



Gerenne/Getty Images

TALENT

BY RUSSELL PEARLMAN

When All Candidates Sound the Same

THE TALENT RECRUITER THOUGHT the candidate's cover letter, résumé, and interview were great, especially when he mentioned skills like “forecasting accuracy,” “interpreting large datasets,” and “building three-statement models.” But the next day, another candidate sent in a résumé that used the same phrases. Then another. And another.

Facing a deluge of competition in a tough job market, candidates have made AI a go-to source for crafting the perfect pitch to win over hiring managers. The only problem is that the tech tends to spit out the same advice and keywords to every applicant for a given role. “AI has commoditized résumés, cover letters, and even interview answers,” laments Malvika Jethmalani, a talent consultant who has spent most of the last decade leading recruiting efforts for companies around Chicago. Ask the technology itself why so many AI-infused job applications sound the same, and it will answer

candidly: Two popular platforms, ChatGPT and Gemini, say that AI tools are trained on large datasets that include common phrasing and best-practice advice, and that this leads to standardized language and an overreliance on keywords.

The problem might only get worse, because hiring on most jobsites has become a brutal numbers game, with hundreds, if not thousands, of candidates applying for a single job in some cases. That forces candidates to use the remarkable skills of AI to craft job applications by the hundreds. Not surprisingly, about two-thirds of job candidates say they use AI in one form or another when applying for jobs, according to the 2025 Market Trend Report by Career Group Companies, a talent market-research group. As the numbers game balloons, experts say, that percentage will go up and up. “Many résumés and cover letters are generated by AI; that’s just reality now,” says Ali Gohar, CHRO at the business consultancy Software Finder.

To some degree, hiring managers should have seen this problem coming. After all, firms led the way when they deployed AI to filter out candidates by keywords and experience. But the problem now is that **it’s slowing down hiring by inundating firms with look-alike applications for a decreasing number of open roles.** “Companies are having to go through hundreds of résumés to find one qualified candidate,” says Brittney Molitor, a Korn Ferry managing consultant in the firm’s Human Resources practice.

For now, experts say the only answer to all this high-tech jostling may be decidedly analog. Simply checking references, a measure some overtaxed HR departments have been quietly skipping, can help. Conducting job interviews face-to-face, and asking questions about the type of culture they thrive in, negates a candidate’s ability to use AI to come up with answers in real time. Recruiters should also be watching a candidate’s reactions, body language, and comfort level. “Watch to see how a candidate reacts to a curveball,” Gohar says. Some recruiters recommend that candidates “audition” for the role: While the candidate is on-site, ask them to code something, pitch a product, solve a math problem, or take a writing test. In the AI era, “auditions let employers evaluate the work itself, rather than the words around it,”

THE TAKEAWAY

Firms can’t afford to let AI look-alikes impede prospects for strong staffing.

DATA

AI ADOPTION RATES VARY ACROSS THE GLOBE

Here is how some countries stack up—and rank globally—on the share of people using a generative AI product.



UNITED STATES

28.3% Adoption Rate

2% Growth Rate in H2 2025



CANADA

35% Adoption Rate

1.5% Growth Rate in H2 2025



UNITED KINGDOM

38.9% Adoption Rate

2.5% Growth Rate in H2 2025

Vector, Stock Ninja Studio/Getty Images



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

64% Adoption Rate

4.8% Growth Rate in H2 2025



ARGENTINA

19.6% Adoption Rate

1.8% Growth Rate in H2 2025



SOUTH KOREA

30.7% Adoption Rate

4.8% Growth Rate in H2 2025



CHINA

16.3% Adoption Rate

0.9% Growth Rate in H2 2025



SPAIN

41.8% Adoption Rate

2.1% Growth Rate in H2 2025



MEXICO

17.8% Adoption Rate

1.1% Growth Rate in H2 2025



AUSTRALIA

38.9% Adoption Rate

2.4% Growth Rate in H2 2025



RUSSIA

8% Adoption Rate

0.4% Growth Rate in H2 2025

Source: Microsoft AI Diffusion Report

STRATEGY

BY ARIANNE COHEN

Buy Now, Pay Later (Maybe)



AS A CONCEPT, buy-now, pay-later plans seemed like a godsend. Following in the hallowed footsteps of layaway plans and credit cards, they arrived on the scene just as inflation was rising, as a way for consumers to buy more in a struggling economy. But depending on your perspective, BNPL may be either a boon or grave threat to retailers.

Purchasing with BNPL is frictionless: At the register, rather than tapping “cash” or “credit,” buyers

THE TAKEAWAY

Leaders can't forget that boosting business can come with a price.

simply tap the name of the buy-now, pay-later company, a financial institution. Moments later, the item is theirs... sort of. The retailer has been paid in full by the institution, so the buyer walks. Later, installment payments kick in. The transaction is interest-free unless the buyer misses a payment, in which case significant interest incurs. Unlike credit cards, BNPL is typically not used for groceries or jeans, but for big-ticket items, such as a fridge or exercise bike. "It's people who are used to certain appliances, and all of a sudden the washing machine doesn't work," says Paco Underhill, founder of market-research company Envirosell, and author of *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*.

BNPL numbers are both enormous and alarming. US consumer debt broke the \$18 trillion mark in 2025. Nearly half (45 percent) of consumers planned to use BNPL for at least one holiday purchase, an increase of 13 percent YOY, for an estimated \$20 billion in holiday spending alone, according to figures from Adobe Analytics. But unlike credit cards, most BNPL services never run a credit check, so a consumer might hold a half dozen payment plans simultaneously. And—critically—BNPL debts are

not centrally tracked, leading to no clear picture of consumer use.

Thus far, BNPL has been a boon for retailers and consumer-goods firms: Stores moved over \$120 billion worth of products in 2025 that they might not have sold otherwise. "It's good for retailers, especially in good times," says retail expert Craig Rowley, senior client partner at Korn Ferry. But in the future? **The doomsday scenario comes when the economy contracts** and people are laid off—many of whom have recently bought appliances and dresses and cruises on BNPL. That's the \$120 billion question: Will they have enough money to pay the bill later?

It's not looking great. A quarter of BNPL users have already made at least one late payment in 2025, up from 18 percent in 2023, according to the Federal Reserve. "It's a testament to the number of lower- and middle-class families that are living paycheck to paycheck," says Underhill. The question is how big those consumer debts can get before they stop people from shopping and drag down the industries that depend on consumer spending, like retail, restaurants, hospitality, and automotive. Only time—and the consumer-debt ceiling—will tell. ▀

WHAT'S ON THE NEXT BOARD AGENDA

1

DIRECTOR EXITS

Nearly three times as many directors—391 versus 111—resigned in 2025 compared to the year before.

2

SHAREHOLDER PROPOSALS

A potential move away from proxy advisors could impact how large investors vote on shareholder proposals.

3

GLOBAL POLITICS

Heightened geopolitical tensions raise mounting concerns about supply-chain disruption, cyberattacks, and other risks.

HISTORY LESSON

BY GLENN RIFKIN

The End of *Life*

The high cost of great photography, along with the advent of TV, eventually spelled doom for the legendary magazine.

WHEN THE FIRST ISSUE of *Life* magazine appeared on November 23, 1936, amid the Great Depression, its impact was immediate and unprecedented. The US public had never seen the likes of this kind of weekly news magazine, focused heavily on photography and long-form storylines, which offered a vivid portrayal of the American experience. Its first issue alone, costing ten cents each, sold an astounding 466,000

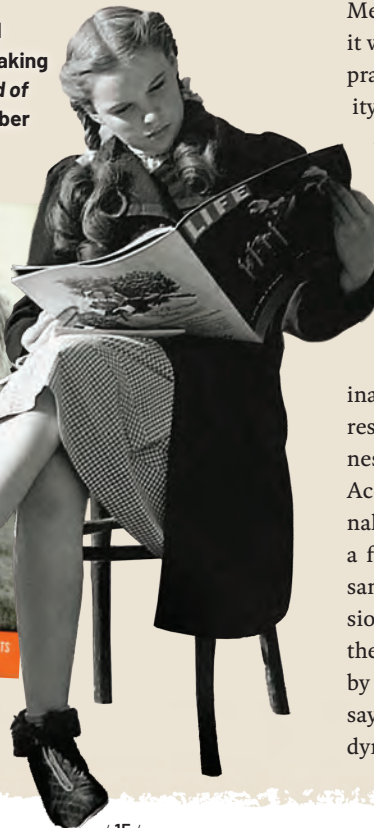
copies. And that's without a cover featuring a celebrity, but rather the newly completed Fort Peck Dam in Montana.

Life quickly became a staple of American households, its stark red-and-white logo as familiar as that of any major brand in the world. Its eclectic mix of stories and picture essays, often featuring celebrities and world leaders, demanded attention and made it the most popular weekly magazine in history. At its peak, in the late 1960s, *Life* boasted a weekly circulation of 8.5 million, with a pass-along readership estimated at around 40 million.

Judy Garland during the making of *The Wizard of Oz* on December 23, 1938.



Time/Life - PictureLux / The Hollywood Archive



Incredibly, just a few years later, in December of 1972, Time Inc. ceased publication of *Life*. This was years before the internet would wipe out print, but the magazine had failed to adjust to the shifting interests of advertisers—or to move on from the high-quality paper stock that made it so expensive to produce. Charles Fountain, professor emeritus of journalism at Northeastern University, says advertisers had started shifting ads for mass-market products, which were the magazine's lifeblood, to television. "It was a unique and singular magazine, but ultimately, it wasn't immune to the pressure of the time."

Could *Life*, with its trademark high-quality imagery and storytelling, make a comeback? Six years after closing, *Life* was revived, first as a monthly, then as a Sunday newspaper supplement, but it never achieved the cachet of the original version. Then, in March 2024, Bedford Media, a holding company, announced it would revive the *Life* brand yet again, praising how its legacy "lies in its ability to blend culture, current events, and everyday life—highlighting the triumphs, challenges and unique perspectives that define us." But the magazine hadn't reappeared as of late last year. (The company didn't respond to a request for comment.)

The innovator's dilemma—the inability of successful companies to respond to new technologies and business strategies—spelled the end for *Life*. According to William McKeen, journalism professor at Boston University, a full-page ad in *Life* used to cost the same as a minute of prime-time television. "Sure, the magazine could stay on the coffee table for months and be read by scores of eyes in barber shops," he says. "But it could not compete with the dynamo that was television." ▀

‘The cost of solar storms could hit \$2.4 trillion.’ Too Close to the Sun



L

ook into the sky and much of the time you’ll see the Sun, at least during the daytime. And much of the population is aware that humans, animals, and plants couldn’t survive without the Sun’s presence. This massive star, central to our solar system, with a circumference of 2.7 million miles,


provides our tiny planet with warmth and vitamins, plus it’s crucial to growing our food. Five thousand years ago, humans knew the Sun mattered, so many routinely prayed to the Sun god. We still use that name for the seventh day of the week: Sunday.

But the Sun isn’t always kind to the Earth. Sometimes the solar surface is very active, with many dark spots. The really bad news is that when there are a large number of spots, there is an increase in solar flares, aka explosions, which cause disruptions on Earth. “Sometimes after a big solar storm, there can be power outages,” says Arnab Rai Choudhuri, a professor at the Indian Institute of Science and an expert on solar activity. Indeed, the events often don’t make big headlines, but the last major solar storm, in May 2024, created various disruptions on

Earth to GPS, radio, and power grids, particularly in the midwestern United States. Farmers there reported “possessed” tractors going in circles, with the GPS mayhem causing a reported \$500 million in damage.

It could have been worse—or more spectacular. Back in 1859, British astronomer Richard Carrington saw an explosion of a large sunspot, which 18 hours later delivered what is known as a geomagnetic storm. In this case, a sudden change to Earth’s magnetic field shut down telegraphs across the globe and caused sparks to fly from telegraph poles. In some places, auroras swept the sky, so bright that people in the middle of the night reportedly thought it was morning and had breakfast.

The worry in the coming years is another so-called Carrington Event, because there is an extra-large sunspot on the solar surface pointed at Earth. Last year, insurance organization Lloyd’s of London said “extreme space weather” entering the atmosphere could interfere with satellites, ground planes,



Extreme space weather could interfere with satellites, ground planes, and interrupt banking.

and interrupt the banking industry, among many other tech issues. The Cambridge Centre for Risk Studies forecasts that the cost of solar-storm damage could hit \$2.4 trillion over the next few years. If the solar event becomes more extreme, the global cost could reach \$9.1 trillion. Such figures would be spread over a few years and would likely have a minimal impact on most developed countries. However, damage claims could be high enough to really hurt insurance company profits, experts say.

To be sure, there have been major advances in protecting the tech and electricity infrastructure. That helped limit the damage in the May 2024 event. “We are now in a better place,” says C. Alex Young, associate director for Science

Communication in the Heliophysics Science Division at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center. Still, it’s worth noting that when the sunspots form on the solar surface, their magnetic fields get twisted and eventually pop. “These releases could be enough to power the globe for thousands of years for all energy needs,” says Young. The risk is not only to infrastructure (people, by the way, are protected from such storms by the atmosphere), but everyday space weather. “We are becoming much more space dependent, particularly satellites,” says Young. “When solar radiation heats the globe, the atmosphere expands and can interfere with connections to satellite systems.” Put simply, the Sun is powerful. ▀

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.

‘Obviously the stakes are pretty high.’ Can AI Give Private Equity an Edge?



T

he private-equity firm had all the numbers it needed—the company’s revenues, its margins, and its bevy of long-term customer contracts—along with an understanding of how fragmented the marketplace was. Its analysts had also met with the company’s CEO

and CFO and had talked with former executives. But before the PE firm drafted a letter of intent for a valuation of \$84 million, the managing director hesitated. Something didn’t feel right. So he decided to hop on a plane and visit headquarters in person.

One of the shining promises of artificial intelligence is that it can eliminate tedious legwork. Marketers can devise a slogan and activation campaign in a few minutes. Healthcare providers can continuously monitor a patient’s vital signs. And supply-chain leaders can anticipate weather patterns without combing through the *Farmer’s Almanac*. But here’s a key question: What if you’re looking to purchase a company for millions or searching for a secondary-market buyer, and you’re considering using AI in order to avoid all of that “pesky” legwork? Is the technology good enough now? Will it ever be?

Obviously, the stakes are pretty high, given that private equity has more than \$5 trillion in assets under management. But in recent months, those stakes have climbed even higher as PE deals take longer to close—and fundraise for—due to market volatility, higher interest rates, and valuation gaps. The challenging deal environment is making it more important for private-equity professionals to pick up the pace. The faster a team of analysts can target companies and provide due diligence, the faster a deal can close—and the sooner the firm can rinse and repeat that process, making AI all the more intriguing.

Yet I suspect from talking to PE leaders that the technology, for all its glory, hasn’t been able to replace good old-fashioned human intuition—and isn’t likely to in the near future. Consider, for example, an activist-takeover battle. These matters are usually driven by traditional activism, legal maneuvering, and corporate governance, with little or no



One of the shining promises of artificial intelligence is that it can eliminate tedious legwork.

inspire buy-in and save a deal. And it can't hop on a plane and talk face-to-face with a CEO to decide whether to issue that letter of intent.

There's also concern in some PE circles that overuse of AI in deals could lead to a dilution of innovation. The contrarian thinking that's led to some of the PE deals most widely

known deployment of AI. Sure, AI probably could help in crafting proposals, simulating voting, and other remedial deal processes. But my point is that it would be functioning as a tool—not setting a strategy—in such a scenario.

The hard truth about AI is that the toughest parts of PE—understanding a founder's temperament, navigating board politics, selling a thesis to limited partners—remain stubbornly human. There are so many gut calls and judgement decisions in private equity that AI can't replace. It doesn't know, for example, when your firm has something of a legacy relationship with a certain group of activists, having done four previous deals with them. It can't pivot during a board meeting that's headed south to

studied in business schools hasn't come from an AI model's recommendations. And if you and your competitors are mining the same data, a herd mentality emerges very quickly. Think about some of the most contrarian plays PE has made, like deciding to focus on middle-market companies when most firms are pursuing bigger deals. Would PE firms make such moves if they relied entirely on AI?

Sure, AI may allow investment professionals to make judgement calls faster and in greater volume. But—as I suspect many leaders throughout the corporate world may discover—no machine will replace the human element of relationships, nuance, and emotional intelligence, let alone our deeply primal instincts. That's just my gut call. ▀

Auzerais is Korn Ferry's head of private markets for North America.

‘It can make leaders blind to what’s really happening.’

The Dark Side of Empathy



T

he journey of our lives is filled with ups and downs. Everyone you work with carries untold stories—triumphs, struggles, heartbreaks—that shape who they are. Empathy helps us bridge these gaps. It lets us feel with people, even when we don’t walk in their shoes. It’s why leaders lean on

empathy: It connects, comforts, and builds trust.

And yes, empathy is a powerful force. Through it, leaders give feedback that lands, navigate conflict without blowing things up, and inspire growth instead of fear. Done well, empathy makes people want to follow you—not because they have to, but because they want to.


But here’s the twist: Empathy has a dark side—bias.

Empathy feels pure, but it isn’t neutral. We don’t feel it equally toward everyone. It can be selective and personal in ways that are often invisible to us. In fact, empathy can cloud judgment, play favorites,

and quietly sabotage fairness in leadership. Worse, everyone else can see this—employees, peers, even clients—even as a leader remains blind to it.

Unchecked, empathy bias creates complacency. Some behaviors are excused while others are punished. Certain employees get free passes while others face scrutiny. Over time, this warps culture, damages morale, and drags down performance. What’s causing this? In some cases, insecurity is the issue: We don’t like our own weaknesses, and when we see them mirrored in someone else, we relax our standards. We justify the behavior and even normalize it, instead of challenging it. At other times, we feel threatened. People who aren’t like us can make us feel uncomfortable. Their style pushes us out of our comfort zone, so we push back hard. We label them “difficult” or “wrong,” and in doing so, make them the problem instead of confronting our own discomfort.

Finally, humans are wired to root for the underdog or the charming good guy. We instinctively want to protect them, even if their performance is lagging.



Empathy isn't the magic bullet we sometimes make it out to be.

Meanwhile, the strong and capable are overlooked, undersupported, or even taken for granted.

When empathy goes sideways in the workplace, it often shows up in the form of passive leaders. These people empathize with employees who avoid conflict, because they avoid it too. They excuse dodging hard conversations and punish those who confront problems directly. The result? Issues fester. Gossip thrives. Problems are whispered about instead of solved.

It also shows up in active, high-energy leaders who excuse stress, chaos, and turnover as “the cost of getting things done.” These leaders empathize with impatient, outspoken employees who push hard. Meanwhile, employees who value stability are labeled as resistant or weak. Neither version is good leadership. In both cases, empathy is at work—but it’s misdirected, selective, and damaging.

Fortunately, there is a solution—and it isn’t less empathy. It’s *better* empathy.

In coaching, I help leaders spot their empathy blind spots. The goal is balance: Empathy can’t go only to the people who make us feel safe, validated,

or familiar. It has to be extended to everyone, especially those who challenge us and the organization to grow.

Directing empathy toward growth means supporting people through discomfort, not shielding them from it. It means encouraging accountability, rewarding resilience, and recognizing that friction can lead to progress. When empathy becomes about growth, it stops being a crutch and starts being a catalyst.

Empathy isn’t the magic bullet we sometimes make it out to be. Left unchecked, it can make leaders weak, unfair, and blind to what’s really happening. But when leaders harness empathy wisely, they elevate standards, challenge mediocrity, and build cultures where people thrive, not just survive.

And that’s where compassion comes in. As Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön writes, “Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It’s a relationship between equals.” Leaders who embrace that truth use empathy not to play favorites, but to walk beside everyone equally—challenging, supporting, and growing together. ▀

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



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HIRING: **THE GREAT MISMATCH**

Firms are struggling to find people with the right skills. **How to solve one of the greatest talent imbalances in a generation.**

By Russell Pearlman • Photo Illustrations by Tim Ames

THE PROBLEM

Firms aren't filling a lot of roles because they aren't seeing the modern skill sets they need, creating an unprecedented talent gap.

WHY IT MATTERS

Organizations can't grow with a workforce that's off-kilter.

THE SOLUTION

Companies need to devote resources to retrain employees and to educate the broader workforce that change is needed.

THE GREAT MISMATCH

Late last year, one of the big US auto manufacturers had to make multiple hires for the same role. It was a traditionally blue-collar position, but one that could change considerably if new technology and techniques sweep across the factory floor over the next few years.

The automaker posted the role in a variety of forums and used some awe-inspiring language to describe the work: *strategic advisor on manufacturing process improvement, background in ISO standards and quality accreditation recommended*. The company got dozens of applicants—and hired none of them.

It's not that there was a shortage of people who could do the job. It's just that the actual role, while highly skilled and well compensated, was neither strategic nor glamorous enough to attract the right candidate. "The role was for a guy who can tighten bolts to a very specific specification and show others how to do it, too," says John Kolm, CEO of Team Results USA, a workplace-productivity consultancy that assisted the manufacturer.



This example, and millions more like it, are rampant in the US job market. Plenty of people want new jobs. According to one survey, some 38 percent of employees intend to look for jobs in 2026, up from 29 percent at the beginning of 2025. That implies that some 65 million Americans are on the hunt. On the flip side, even at a time when firms are holding back on payroll and hoping AI will take over roles, they remain desperate to fill a host of key positions that either partner with AI or that AI can't do. Recently, there were 6.5 million job openings in the US, in industries as diverse as construction (292,000) to professional and business-services (1 million). In January, one major semiconductor company alone advertised for more than 3,000 open positions, everything from electrical engineers and water-treatment specialists to administrative assistants, tax experts, and—perhaps ironically—talent recruiters.



But these days, job candidates and companies can be like the clichéd ships passing in the night—instead of on the open seas, these fleeting connections are made through online job boards or in interviews, only to be lost. The nation’s hiring rate, which measures the flow of new workers into jobs relative to the existing workforce, is at a paltry 3.2 percent, as low as it’s been (save for one month at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic) in a decade. And the US is far from alone: For example, unemployment in the UK is the highest it has been in years.

Once, there was the so-called War for Talent, which theorized that companies wouldn’t be able to find and keep the workers they needed because of demographic declines. Now, experts say, it’s more of what you might call a Battle for Balance—a race to find and develop the people who have the right skills for the roles firms need to fill. “It’s a mismatch of expectations,” Kolm says.

For a while, many HR officials held out hope that more accurate job postings would attract the right workers. Most now feel that this approach hasn’t put a dent in the issue. Indeed, experts say a systematic upheaval is called for—the kind that comes along once every few decades at most. Despite all the postings, many companies can’t figure out whether the skills they seek now will still be in demand in a couple of years. Meanwhile, workers at all levels aren’t sure what skills firms want (or, for that matter, whether they already have them). Everyone is under pressure to make work-related decisions quickly, fearing that AI will make their businesses, or careers, obsolete. The issue is causing major problems now, and potentially even bigger ones down the road.

THE GREAT MISMATCH

“There’s not a talent shortage and people don’t lack ambition.”



A MISMATCH BEYOND AI SKILLS

It's not just artificial intelligence that is upending businesses and causing talent mismatches. According to a survey by the World Economic Forum, a variety of innovations will force leaders to rethink how work is done (and who does it) between now and 2030.



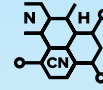
ROBOTS

First Corporate Use: 1959—Robot performs tasks on vehicle-assembly line
2025 Corporate Spending: About \$50 billion
By 2030: “Cobots,” or robots working next to humans, could become financially viable for most businesses.



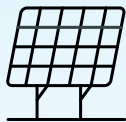
MICROCHIP BREAKTHROUGHS

First Corporate Use: 1962—Chips installed in US Air Force computers
2025 Corporate Spending: \$650 billion to \$700 billion
By 2030: New “power-sipping” chips could revolutionize both factories and offices—but only if companies can find engineers to build and design them.



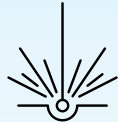
BIOTECH BREAKTHROUGHS

First Corporate Use: 1977—Researchers synthesize a human protein for the first time
2025 Corporate Spending: \$1.7 trillion to \$1.9 trillion
By 2030: “Living factories,” where microbes do much of the heavy lifting, could not only produce new medicines, but also brew plastics and even cement.



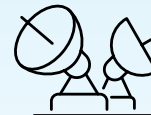
ENERGY GENERATION, STORAGE, AND DISTRIBUTION

First Corporate Use: 1995—Giant lithium-ion battery helps stabilize Tokyo’s power frequency
2025 Corporate Spending: About \$32 billion for battery storage
By 2030: Firms that fill their workforces with “green talent” could turn a significant corporate expense—power—into a potential revenue source.



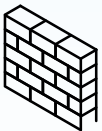
LASER AND OPTICS IMPROVEMENTS

First Corporate Use: 1961—Laser helps researchers investigate how light interacts with matter
2025 Corporate Spending: About \$20 billion
By 2030: Working in the car could become far more productive in self-driving vehicles that can display portable holograms.



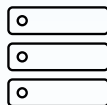
SATELLITE PROLIFERATION

First Corporate Use: 1962—A live television broadcast is relayed via satellite
2025 Corporate Spending: \$360 billion to \$480 billion
By 2030: The number of satellites in orbit could triple over the next five years, making high-quality, low-cost telecom services far more accessible.



NEW MATERIALS AND COMPOSITES

First Corporate Use: 2012—Self-healing concrete used to repair lifeguard station in the Netherlands
2025 Corporate Spending: \$65 billion to \$130 billion
By 2030: Self-repairing, energy-conducting walls and other applications could force companies to find new types of designers and builders.



QUANTUM COMPUTING

First Corporate Use: 2011—Quantum computing solves complex software-verification problems
2025 Corporate Spending: \$1 billion to \$3 billion
By 2030: No longer theoretical, quantum computing could cut research time significantly for finance and pharma businesses.

Magnificon, Icon Magesty, RauAltmu, Medina Creatives, Seemartini, Giorgi Guglidze, Kadrieha, Richard Chambers/Getty Images

The most pressing issue for most organizations is that they can't find people with specific skill sets. Hospitals need nurses and factories need machinists, to be sure, but many firms need workers who can partner with AI. Too few young people are entering the workforce with those specialized skills, and too few older

workers are willing or able to build them. Companies, of course, have always complained about the lack-of-skills problem. But the current mismatch is a complex “minestrone soup” of problems that has slowed down the hiring process at many organizations, says

THE GREAT MISMATCH


The current mismatch is a ‘minestrone soup’ of problems that has slowed down the hiring process at many organizations.

David Ellis, Korn Ferry’s senior vice president of talent transformation. Simply put, experts are anticipating a collision between a dearth of skills and a massive technology-driven labor-market upheaval. The World Economic Forum estimates that between now and 2030, the tech revolution will create 170 million new jobs worldwide while destroying 92 million others. Last fall, Walmart CEO Doug McMillon, who oversees 2.1 million employees, said that AI will change “literally every job.”

Most companies are only beginning to identify the skills their workforces will need to work side by side with AI. These discussions have produced lots of spreadsheets and many weeks’ worth of committee meetings, says Liz Eversoll, CEO of Career Highways, a workplace consultancy in Wisconsin. “It’s a total rewiring,” she says. Even if they’ve figured out the job architecture, companies need time to shift roles around, create new job classifications, recruit new employees, and retrain existing ones. Time, however, is the last thing many companies feel they have, with the pace of AI development potentially making all those efforts obsolete before they even get off the ground. Many mid-sized and large organizations need two years to implement a full workforce transformation, which isn’t nearly fast enough to respond to what they’re facing, experts say. For context, Google’s Gemini AI model is 61 times more powerful than it was in 2023. “HR can’t keep up,” Eversoll says.



This isn’t history’s first massive job market reset, of course. The industrial revolution triggered a seismic shift in labor, with tens of millions of people around the world moving from agricultural and artisanal jobs to production-line jobs in factories. Few of those ex-farmworkers and artisans had the skills to operate the machinery they were being asked to use (unsurprising, given that much of the tech-



nology was brand-new). Early on, their “training” consisted mostly of watching an existing employee for a few hours or days, with foremen handling follow-up development either by correcting the workers who made

mistakes or disciplining the ones who were too slow. Eventually, savvier organizations developed onsite schools to provide standardized training to machinists, salespeople, and others. Some companies even produced step-by-step instructions for operating the new machinery.

This transition, which took decades, was far from smooth.



THE GREAT MISMATCH

The tech revolution will create 170 million new jobs globally, and destroy 92 million others.

Early on, the original Luddites, textile artisans in northern England, smashed the mechanized looms they believed were destroying their livelihood. Throughout the 1800s, in Germany, France, and the United States, workers protested exploitative wages and working conditions. By the 1940s, through a combination of union organizing, government regulation, and innovative corporate thinking, labor markets had settled. Skilled workers could generally find companies willing to hire them, and unskilled workers could join organizations that would train them.

Automation and computers caused their fair share of disruption through the last part of the 20th century. New technologies made it possible for white- and blue-collar workers to do their work faster, better, and cheaper, and with less manpower. For instance, in the 1970s, US Steel's Gary Works, one of the largest steel mills in the United States, had 30,000 employees. By the 1990s, it had only about 6,000 workers, but it was producing higher-quality steel, and in even larger quantities. While occasional strikes took place, there wasn't the broad-based strife that marked the transition brought about by the industrial revolution. "The changes at the end of the 19th century were greater than in any decade of the digital era," says David Deming, a professor of political economy at Harvard and author of a 2025 National Bureau of Economic Research paper on technology disruptions in the labor market.

This was partly due to the economy of the last 40 years, experts say, which created millions of new jobs. Indeed, between 1980 and 2000, the nation's unemployment rate averaged slightly over 6 percent, a moderate rate relative to historical data. Unlike the industrial revolution, which forced people to do different work in a new environment, people in the late 20th century were already used to office and factory work. In addition, much of modern

ENDING THE GREAT MISMATCH

Experts say it may take years to fix this once-in-a-generation mismatch between employee skills and corporate needs, but here's how to accomplish it:

LEADERSHIP MOVES

Hire for skills, not CVs.

To improve the odds of attracting the right candidates, prioritize skills over experience in job descriptions.



Prioritize reskilling.

The World Economic Forum estimates that 50 percent of today's employee skills will be outdated by 2030. Firms that jump on reskilling can gain a competitive edge.

Build talent before you buy it.

HR pros estimate that employees promoted internally are roughly 40 percent less likely to leave in their first year than external recruits.

Use AI to anticipate gaps, not just to automate work.

Workforce analytics can identify emerging skills shortages early, helping firms avoid paying wage premiums for outside hires.

Keep the conversation going.

Firms that have regular discussions with employees about their skills and futures do a much better job of preparing them for business shifts.



CAREER STEPS

Pair technical learning with human strengths.

Improving creative and problem-solving skills will help, since AI is expected to struggle to automate those uniquely human strengths.

Become AI literate, not just AI aware.

Workers with advanced AI skills can expect up to a 56 percent premium in pay, one study shows.



Don't just ladder climb.

Careers that include lateral moves and project work are more resilient and help when transitioning to new jobs.

Don't be shy about bragging.

Workers who clearly articulate their capabilities are significantly more likely to be considered for stretch roles and internal opportunities.



Take ownership of learning momentum.

Don't wait for firms to offer training; raise your hand for it, or if none is available, invest in your own.



work centered around one device: the computer. Learning how to use the burgeoning technology went a long way toward being qualified for thousands of different jobs.

The current mismatch shares elements of the two prior structural overhauls. As in the industrial revolution, millions of workers are faced with having to learn a radical new technology—in this case, AI—that until a few years ago was the stuff of science fiction. And similar to the reset of the late 20th century, unemployment is quite low (since the COVID-19 pandemic ended, the rate has never risen above 5 percent). But today's transformation, experts say, is far more stubborn than its predecessors. For one thing, modern roles often demand highly specialized skills that can require years of training. An out-of-work marketing manager can't immediately become a nurse, no matter how desperate the hospital may be to hire nurses, and white-collar professionals can't immediately learn AI skills. The issue isn't just a lack of training, either; it's a lack of economic and cultural priorities. Unlike the 19th century population boom, the current mismatch, as Ellis notes, is a combination of multiple problems that has slowed down the hiring process at many organizations. Another complication is that the high price of housing makes workers far less mobile than they were in the 18th, 19th, or even 20th centuries—even if they're relocating to try to take advantage of more job opportunities. For example, in 2025, the rate of interstate

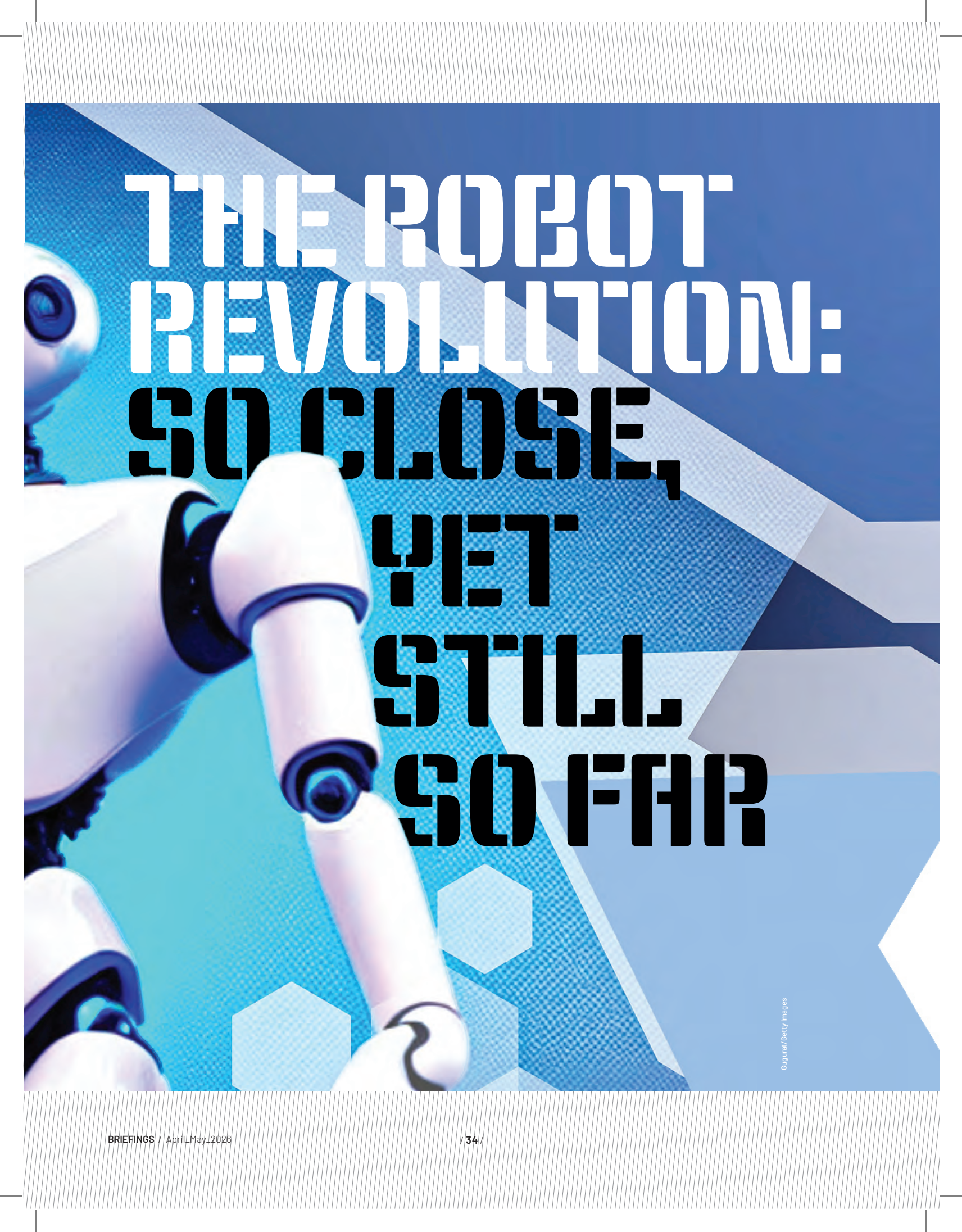
labor migration hit a 40-year low, despite a record number of job openings in Texas, Florida, and other Sunbelt states.

But the biggest difference between today's transition and its precursors is speed. The industrial revolution happened over more than a century; the tech overhaul spanned a generation. The AI revolution will seemingly stretch a decade or less. "The market will equilibrate eventually, but the speed of that equilibrium is what causes pain," Betsey Stevenson, former Chief Economist of the United States Department of Labor, said last year.

Solving today's great mismatch won't be easy for firms. Academics may debate the solution for years to come. For now, Korn Ferry's Ellis says that smart organizations need to simplify their approach to the issue—first by thinking about how specific work will be done. Will AI, humans, or some combination do it? "Answering that question makes it a lot easier to figure out," says

Ellis, and ultimately determine what are the jobs and skills an organization will need over the next several years. Companies can turn to a variety of different software packages to design job architecture, streamline hiring processes, and potentially reduce workforce-transformation time by months or even years.

Once companies identify the skills they need, experts suggest that they stop overthinking their approaches to hiring and training. Kolm, the productivity consultant, understands the urgency leaders feel, but he emphasizes that companies need to grant employees and new recruits time and resources—both for their current work and for their development of the skills they'll need for the future. "Getting people in the door now helps the employer get out of jail today," he says. Leaders should ensure that workers understand that learning these new skills will help them professionally, whether immediately or over the long term. "There's not a talent shortage and people don't lack ambition," Eversoll says. Many new skills won't require years of schooling. For instance, Eversoll suggests giving people a project that requires them to learn one new skill. Another idea: Team people up with different essential skills and have them teach each other. ▀



THE ROBOT REVOLUTION: SO CLOSE, YET STILL SO FAR

Bigurat/Getty Images

THE PROBLEM

INVESTMENT IN ROBOTS IS TAKING OFF AT A TIME WHEN THE TECHNOLOGY HAS FALTERED FOR NON-FACTORY-RELATED ROBOTS.

WHY IT MATTERS

CORPORATE LEADERS SUCCEED WHEN THEY TIME A NEW TECH'S USE CORRECTLY.

THE SOLUTION

TRACK ROBOTICS SUCCESSES—AND FAILURES—CAREFULLY IN THE COMING YEARS AND BE READY TO INVEST AT THE RIGHT TIME.

The AI movement has sparked enormous attention and money around robots. But how close, really, is this tech's "ChatGPT moment"?

BY PETER LAURIA



T

he roughly 65 miles, or 106 kilometers, from Suzhou to Shanghai

consist mostly of congested highways and crowded city streets.

Recently, a humanoid robot set a Guinness World Record for walking the route in four days, marking the longest journey ever for a robot without powering off. In California, another robot developed by an AI startup made headlines for its ability to make coffee, wash dishes, and clean tables. And soon, a robotic version of the beloved character Olaf from *Frozen* will be interacting with kids at Disney's Paris theme parks.

The idea of robots roaming the earth has been with us for more than a hundred years—the earliest modern reference to robots was in a play performed in Prague in 1921.

But now, in part because of how quickly AI is advancing, many people believe we are closer to robot-human coexistence than ever before. “The excitement over AI is spilling over into robotics,” says Ken Goldberg, an engineering professor at the University of California at Berkeley and cofounder of Ambi Robotics, which makes robots for warehouse work. “There’s a feeling a ‘Chat-GPT moment’ is coming for robots.”

Investors certainly feel that way—robotics start-ups have raised more than \$12 billion in venture capital in 2025. Estimates are for the global robotics market to grow from around \$90 billion now to \$250 billion in the next decade, depending on how the market is defined. And that’s just getting started: Some analysts say so-called “humanoid” robots, the most compelling category, could go crazy, from an \$8 billion market today to a stunning \$182 billion by 2035. “The investment thesis is that robots will hit big within the next decade,” says Chris Cantarella, a senior client partner in the Global Technology Market practice at Korn Ferry.

But is the hype taking over the reality? Skeptics say robots aren’t any closer to existing today than they were a century ago, at least not the humanoid kind we imagine or depict in pop culture. Costs are still exorbitantly high—from \$150,000 to

\$500,000 for a single humanoid robot—which makes return on investment difficult. Failure rates, either in terms of battery life or in reliably performing designated tasks, happen too often to justify mass production. “There are still tons of things humanoid robots can’t do,” says Kara Ruskin, a senior client partner in the Technology practice at Korn Ferry. Part of the reason for that, she says, is that researchers and engineers don’t have nearly the same level of data to train robots as they do to build LLMs and generative AI. And then there are the obvious issues around security, sentience, ethics, and more.

So what is the current state of the robotics field? Experts say every corporate leader should know what the likely trajectory of robotics is, or at least be curious about it. No one wants to be taken by another tech surprise, as many people were by the emergence of AI. But the answers are complex, and it turns out the type of robot you have in mind may make all the difference in the world.

INDUSTRIAL ROBOTS

Market size: \$40 billion

Biggest plus: Quick ROI

Drawbacks: High capital

Ft a warehouse facility in Atlanta, the trademark blue tentacles of Ambi Robotics’ parcel-sorting

robots are picking up, moving, and stacking boxes in bins for shipping. Their steel arms use an overhead vision system and AI software to distinguish different sizes, shapes, and packaging materials and suction cup-like grippers to pick up and sort items. To the eye it may look fairly bland, but this a truly amazing machine, capable of moving more than 1,200 packages an hour with 99 percent accuracy around the clock, reducing operating costs by up to 40 percent, according to company data.

Ambi Robotics' robots are not unlike the ones deployed at Amazon, Walmart, and other large fulfillment centers and manufacturing and production facilities across industries around the globe. "Warehouses are where robots thrive," says Gold-

berg. Part of the reason for that is that not unlike their digital brethren, AI agents—industrial robots excel at predictable, repeatable tasks. Moreover, in highly controlled environments, advances in geolocation and other sensory technology allow robots to scan shelves, map paths, and perform other functions to operate more autonomously.

New warehouses and manufacturing facilities are being built and retrofitted with robots in mind. Intuitively, it makes sense—we can more easily navigate an unpredictable environment than a robot can. Financially, the more

"The excitement over AI is spilling over into robotics."

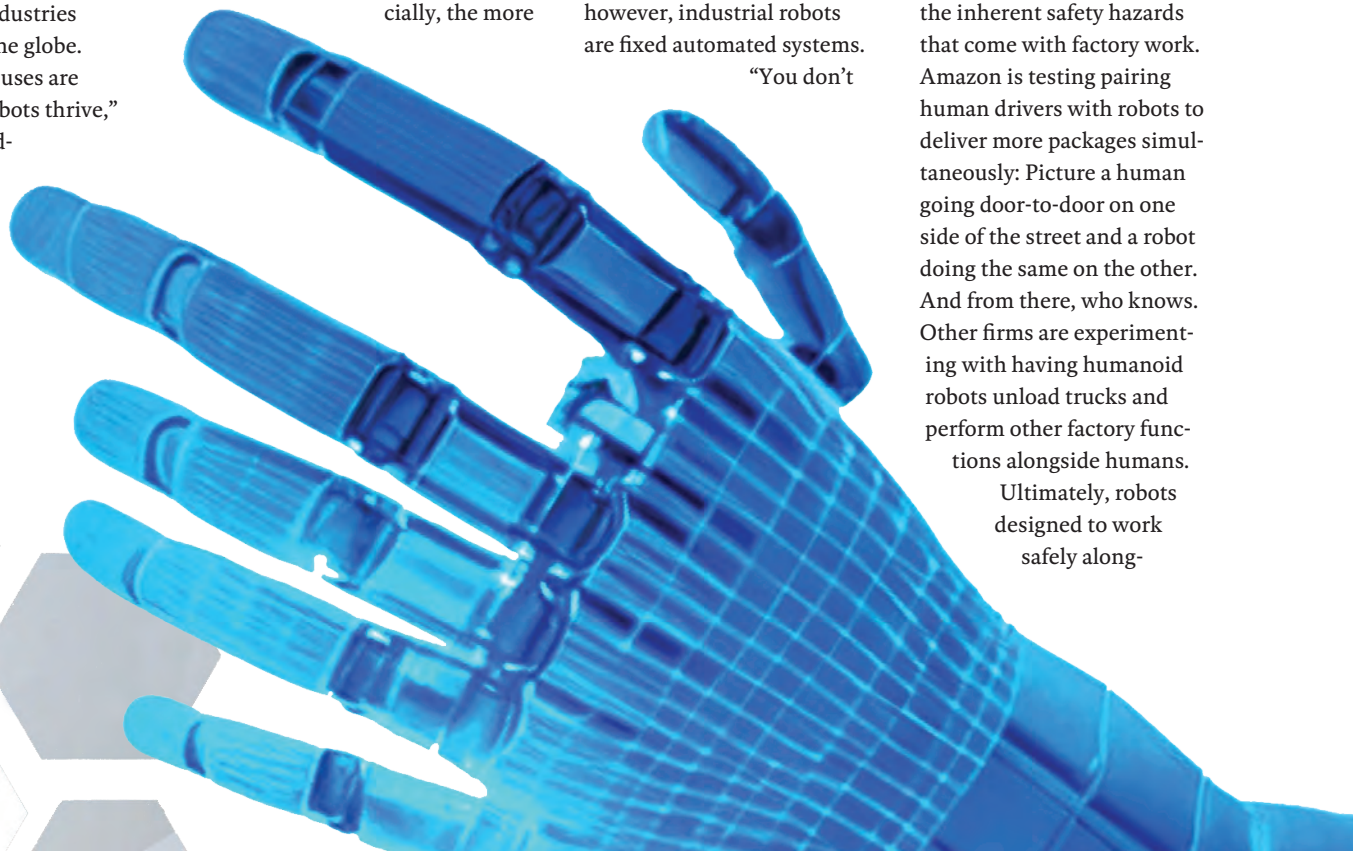
the ecosystem accommodates robots, the more robots you can use, and the more they can in turn drive growth, bring down costs, and generate returns. To be sure, industrial robots are the most mature segment of robotics, with a proven track record of generating returns. The market for industrial robots is estimated at \$40 billion globally, for instance, and despite high upfront costs, it generates a return within 1 or 2 years. For the most part, however, industrial robots are fixed automated systems.

"You don't

need much mobility for that kind of work," says J. Edward Colgate, a specialist in human-robot interaction and director of the NSF Research Center on Human Augmentation via Dexterity (HAND) at Northwestern University.

At least not yet. Money is pouring into research and development of humanoid robots for industrial purposes—to help address the increasing demand for home delivery, the worker shortage in manufacturing, and the inherent safety hazards that come with factory work. Amazon is testing pairing human drivers with robots to deliver more packages simultaneously: Picture a human going door-to-door on one side of the street and a robot doing the same on the other. And from there, who knows. Other firms are experimenting with having humanoid robots unload trucks and perform other factory functions alongside humans.

Ultimately, robots designed to work safely along-



“There are still tons of things humanoid robots can’t do.”

side humans—so-called “cobots”—may be the best answer here, and are already the fastest-growing category in industrial robotics, projected to surpass \$12 billion by 2030. Indeed, analysts estimate between 20 percent and 30 percent of logistics roles will feature some form of human-robot collaboration by then. “More people will be working shoulder-to-shoulder with cobots than humanoids,” says Gary McMurray, deputy director of the Institute for Robotics and Intelligent Machines at Georgia Tech.

SERVICE ROBOTS

Market size: \$40 billion

Biggest plus: Extensive applications and use cases

Drawback: Biggest threat to human jobs

The aerial view of Truist Park in Atlanta, which hosted the 2025 Major League Baseball All-Star Game, was breathtaking. The logo, an intricate design incorporating a dark blue and gold star, sponsor emblems, architectural elements of the field, and scripted red and white lettering, popped off the TV screen against the backdrop of vibrant green grass, rich brown dirt, and stark-white baselines

and bases. But it wasn’t a crew of groundskeepers that painted the logo. It was a battery of Turf Tank robots.

Founded in 2018, Turf Tank currently has more than 5,000 microwave oven-sized autonomous robots painting athletic fields around the globe. Controlled by a tablet, the robot can paint a football field in about three hours—whereas humans, three to four of them, would need a full day to do the job. Though the company counts major universities and professional football and soccer teams among its clients, the All-Star Game was a coming out party, so to speak. “It puts us one step closer on the adoption curve to being more mainstream,” says Kristian Hald, CEO of the Denmark-based company.

The same can be said of specialized robots writ large. If industrial robots are the most mature segment in the field, specialized robots represent the fastest growing. The International Federation of Robotics projects the segment to grow by 20 percent or more annually through the rest of the decade, and some analysts estimate the market size will reach in excess of

\$100 billion by then. Little wonder, when you start to list all of the possible uses just for painting (like parking lot lines!). And already, they are used to monitor fields by farmers and for surveillance and security by law enforcement. Hospitals use them for patient-room delivery, and food-delivery services to send them to hungry kids in dorm rooms across college campuses. They can be found roaming the aisles of supermarkets, scanning inventory and alerting managers to hazards, and late at night vacuuming corporate offices.

Specialized robots are also taking over dangerous tasks, like cleaning wind turbines, and have the potential to deal with fields that are facing massive labor challenges, like health care. “We have to start looking at robots as

part of the solution to the macro issues of an aging population, shortage of workers, and soaring costs,” says Greg Button, president of global healthcare services for Korn Ferry. And finally, most specialized robots so far are relatively inexpensive and easy to deploy. A basic plan at Turf Tank, which leases its robots through a subscription system, runs about \$6,000 per year, but the company says clients can save up to 40 percent by using them.

But despite their appeal, service robots do face several ethical and social issues that could slow their adoption. More than any other category, they would displace people holding jobs. More service

THE INVASION OF THE ROBOTS

Robots have been as much a fixture in business as they have been in pop culture. Here are a few notable moments in history from each category.

1961: GM debuts the **Unimate robot** in a NJ factory to handle dangerous tasks involving hot metal parts, ushering in a new era in manufacturing.

1968: The movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* premieres, introducing moviegoers to **HAL 9000**, a thinking, reasoning, and deeply flawed autonomous machine.

Late 1970s-early 1980s:

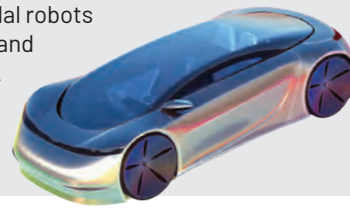
Perhaps the two most popular robots of all-time, **C-3PO** and **R2-D2** from *Star Wars*, become pop culture darlings.

1990s: The first experiments begin with robots capable of walking upright and performing simple tasks alongside humans.

2004: Pixar releases *Wall-E*, a film about a sensitive, empathic robot companion, underscoring the increasing tension between human connection and technological advancement.

2006-2007: **Mobile robots** move inventory for the first time on factory floors thanks to Kiva Systems, the precursor to Amazon Robotics.

2016-today: The era of **autonomous machines and humanoid robots** begins, with driverless cars and wheeled and bipedal robots in stores and factories.



humanoid robots for household work have failed to take off is that training them is incredibly difficult. Researchers have been experimenting with things like digital exoskeletons and gloves equipped with sensors to record bodily movements, but the challenge is that each different task requires hundreds if not thousands of repetitions to create a large enough dataset for a humanoid robot to learn from. Another obstacle to the adoption of humanoid robots in the home is the simple act of walking. Keeping them upright is a challenge because of weight, battery life, and unpredictable environments, to name a few issues.

Still, advances are occurring one after another, giving researchers, investors, and business leaders hope that a breakthrough for household humanoid robots is on the horizon. Case in point: 21 humanoid robots running alongside humans completed a half-marathon in China, underscoring their integration into the physical world. The belief is that AI will help create bigger and better datasets, especially since researchers won't need coding expertise, so that humanoid robots can learn and adapt even faster. "The goal isn't for a humanoid robot to learn how to load one particular washing machine in one particular setting," says McMurray. "It's for it to learn how to do the laundry in any washing machine in any setting." ▀

robots also mean less human interaction, which can impact business (ever get caught in a chatbot spiral of misery?). And some experts worry they will erode the interpersonal skills customers or patients need. Or as Button says of robot nurses, "Different people need different types of care."

HOUSEHOLD ROBOTS

Market size: \$8 billion

Biggest plus: Can learn skills fast with AI's help

Drawback: Hand motion—need extensive training


Back in the early 1500s, Leonardo da Vinci produced some of the earliest and most intricate renderings of the human hand. The works, equal parts art and science, attempted to understand how the muscles, tendons, and bones overlapped and interacted with each other to produce the unique movements of the hand and fingers. More than 500 years later, robotics researchers are still trying to figure this out. Indeed, perfecting the functionality and dexterousness of the human hand is the holy grail for humanoid robots,

because it will allow them to tackle everyday chores. "Replicating the human hand in robots is complicated on many levels," says Colgate, whose primary research attempts to do just that.

Robots, of course, are already in homes doing chores. Everyone probably has at least one friend who uses a Roomba or other AI-driven device for vacuuming. But when it comes to more complex chores requiring hand manipulation, such as folding clothes or cooking, robots are still extremely weak. They can do those things, just not reliably or repeatedly. Or as Goldberg puts it, "A humanoid robot can serve you espresso, but there are other better and cheaper ways to do that."

One of the reasons





Squeaky-clean and by the book, Singapore is fast becoming Asia's new headquarters for high-income families and businesses alike. Can leaders learn from it?

All Business, All The Time

By Arianne Cohen

Jon Hicks/Getty Images

April_May_2026 / BRIEFINGS

Four people riding a bus round-trip in Singapore is a high-wire act. Each person has to swipe their own credit card at the beginning and end of each ride—that’s 16 swipes. No card can be used twice on the same bus. Eight thousand miles from home, will my US credit cards, two of which I never use, even work? Singapore doesn’t mess around with transit-fare evasion. Laws here are actually enforced.

You don’t ignore rules in Singapore, a 284-square-mile country roughly the size of Chicago that’s both well-known and infamous for intensely punishing even minor offenses. Bus violations are no joke. One political party has been in power for 66 years, pushing consistent laws. And in an ironic turn, Singapore’s written-in-stone rules are why global businesses are flocking to the city of 6 million. “Singapore provides something which many companies just don’t find anywhere else, and that’s stability,” says George Haley, director of the Center for International Industry Competitiveness at the University of New Haven. “It makes it really easy to plan.”

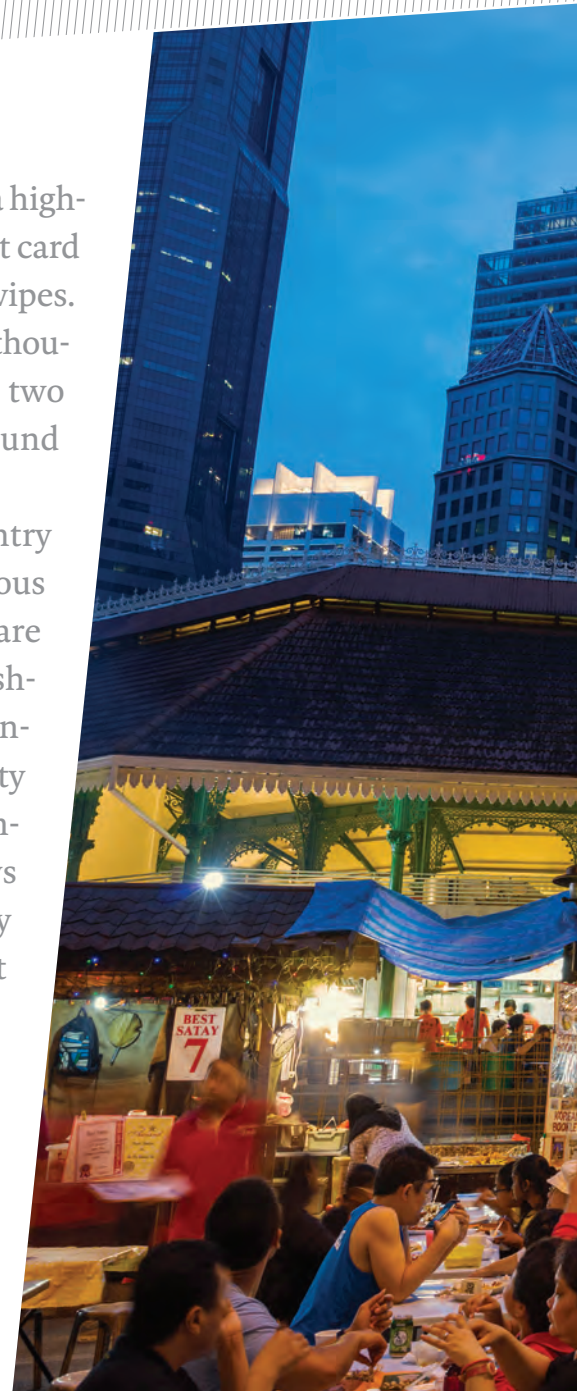
Companies have noticed: Firms as varied as Dyson, FedEx, Shein, and TikTok have all moved their global or EMEA headquarters to Singapore since the pandemic. Today, the city hosts an estimated 4,200 regional headquarters; over 7,000 multinational corporations operate there, according to Singapore’s Economic Development Board—roughly three times as many as in Hong Kong.

Leaders might have something to learn from a city-state that has also become a massive tourist destination, even with mixed press coverage. With four official languages—English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil—Singapore pushes an explicitly multiracial and multicultural vibe, and staunchly maintains political neutrality when possible. You stand on the street

and realize that yes, it is totally possible for people from across the globe to get along, *and* for the bus to always come on time. At a moment when companies need to be razor-sharp on everything from disaster preparation to workforce stability, is Singapore offering a hospitable home base, a blueprint, or both?

The streets of Singapore are relentlessly clean, like someone power-washed all external surfaces. No gum, no graffiti, no mystery puddles. The port, widely recognized as the world’s most efficient, is gleamingly pristine, and populated by well-behaved crews. Despite the oven-like temperature, which hovers around a heat index of 109 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity of 90 percent, one

wants to walk around—and in fact, jogging, biking, hiking, and other outdoor sports are common. Leave your laptop bag sitting on the sidewalk and it will be there when you return. Children as young as seven catch buses solo, which is notable anywhere, but especially in a region where



Gonzalo Azumendi/Getty Images



cities tend not to be family friendly. And the bus *always* comes on time, so everyone takes it. By comparison, Manhattan and Los Angeles seem held together by duct tape and prayer.

To be sure, the port of Singapore has long functioned as a business hub, par-

ticularly as a gateway to Asia for Western companies. Firms can staff up with an educated workforce that ranks No. 1 on the 2025 Global Talent Competitiveness Index and know that the Singapore's 10-year-old SkillsFuture program will fund skill upgrades throughout locals'

careers. Streamlined laws allow companies to set up shop in as little as one day; the rules for incorporation are posted on the internet in four languages, and the task is simply to follow them. It's a far cry from some other Asian countries whose business mores can be foggy to outsiders.



Singapore by the Numbers

Sixty years of obsessive planning have transformed a tiny island with few natural resources into a powerhouse of corporate operations.



Population:
6 million



Office vacancy rate: 4.7%
(among the world's lowest)



Cost of 10-year license to own a car:
\$100,000



Share of foreigners in population:
50%



Percent of office space that is Grade A:
94.8%



City safety rating:
#1 in *The Economist* Safe Cities Index



Number of regional or global headquarters:
4,200



Expat cost of living:
Second highest in the world in the 2024 Mercer Cost of Living Ranking



Life expectancy:
83 (among the world's highest)

(One auto manufacturer is well-known for having spent gobs of money building facilities in Vietnam, only to discover that the local government—unimpressed by Westerners in suits—would not provide the necessary permits to open.) Whether a company needs to operate in Indonesia or China or Malaysia, “Singaporeans know how to deal with all of them,” says Haley. “It’s just chock-full of knowledge of how to operate efficiently across Asia.”

But Singapore’s recent surge of corporate popularity is largely driven by its top-notch, techy COVID-19 management, which proved to be the gold standard for epidemic response. Aggressive testing, tracing, and isolation, along with clear public messaging as early as January 2020, produced only eight weeks of lockdowns (April to May 2020), allowed small-group meetings and travel to continue, and enabled businesses to operate relatively

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The city is covered by trees or foliage, and newer buildings have vertical walls of ferns integrated into their upper floors.

families globally have their family offices in the city. Singapore's family-office services are so sought-after that billboards for millionaire and billionaire financial services hover over downtown streets. Thirteen percent of the city's residents are expected to be millionaires by 2030, according to a report by HSBC.

Foreign businesses have followed suit. Scarred by the logistical backflips of the pandemic, they've sought a location where their headquarters could operate smoothly in the face of global instability. Singapore's preparation for every variety of disaster—disease outbreaks, extreme weather, terrorism, fires—is comprehensive and highly organized, and

freely. This, despite the heavy influx of tourism and travel typical of a port city. "It's a model for how to react during a crisis," says Michael Di Cicco, managing director and head of executive search in Korn Ferry's Singapore office. The same savvy is evident across the government's preparations for everything from future disasters to AI. "The work and thinking of the government is just incredible," says Esther Colwill, president of Asia-Pacific for Korn Ferry. "They're probably the best at understanding tech and adopting it fast, in a really future-oriented way."

The moneyed classes of Asia have taken note of gentle local tax laws. In 2019, Singapore hosted fewer than 200 family offices. By 2024, it was home to over 2,000, including Google cofounder Sergey Brin's. By one estimate, 59 percent of all Asian

Oleks Slobodeniuk/Getty Images



5 Gateway Cities to Asia

For firms that want access to the markets and supply chains of Asia, several cities are aggressively positioning themselves as modern hubs of corporate headquarters, laden with expatriates, professional services firms, and wilting humidity.



Bangkok:

The New Operations Hub

Thailand has emerged as an increasingly popular locale for staffing up.

Population: 11.5 million

Percent expatriates: 5%

Regional or global headquarters: 450

Advantages: Low operating costs, central location, growing start-up ecosystem

Disadvantages: Flooding risks, bureaucracy, political instability



Shanghai:

The Granddaddy of Asian Business Hubs

Reborn in the 1990s, the city now mostly serves Chinese markets.

Population: 31 million, spread over a vast area

Percent expatriates: 40%

Regional or global headquarters: 1,016

Advantages: World's largest port, low operating costs, access to China's supply chains and huge domestic market

Disadvantages: Language barrier, air pollution, complex bureaucracy

In an era of constant change, Singapore is a rational, pragmatic, and often frictionless place to run a business.

spearheaded by a phalanx of government agencies that compensate their staffers on par with private firms. (Singapore's prime minister earns \$2.2 million Singapore dollars per year, while entry-level ministers—the equivalent of United States cabinet secretaries—take home S\$820,000.) Singapore's emergency approach incorporates six pillars: military, civil, economic, social,

digital, and psychological defenses. It's a mix of prevention, planning, and drills, plus community awareness and coordinated multi-agency deployment. Nearly 600 shelters have been built to protect the population in the event of war, and high-rises are plastered with fire-exit routes and assembly points. Public-warning sirens are tested quarterly, with helpful

signage in four languages to explain what the heck the signals mean.

Simply put, while Singapore can deploy 100,000 emergency personnel in a minute, four people riding one of its buses requires tapping four credit cards eight times. This is precisely the calculus that companies can make when setting up shop there. The government is focused not on foreigners' bus experiences, but on forecasting 20 to 50 years out. One word comes up again and again in discussions among local experts: *future*. "I don't see any other government that is so involved in future planning on such a meticulous level," says Kartikey Singh, Korn Ferry's managing director for consulting in Singapore. The government, he says, has systematically put in place the necessary elements for an AI tech hub: a good university system, partnership with the private tech sector, and a healthy



Tokyo:

The Western-Style Financial Center

The corporate-friendly megacity has long been a hot spot for international businesses, and currently hosts numerous Fortune 500 regional headquarters.

Population: 37 million

Percent expatriates: 3%

Number of corporations: 700

Competitive advantages: Political stability, high-quality infrastructure, sophisticated financial markets

Disadvantages: Aging workforce, complex business etiquette, higher cost of living



Mumbai:

The Infrastructure Mess

It's a city well positioned for dominance in 2040 and beyond, though it's currently challenged by urban planning issues like dense traffic and power-grid integrations.

Population: 22 million, very dense

Percent expatriates: 5%

Regional or global headquarters: Approx. 750

Advantages: Domestic market of 1.4 billion, low operating costs, English-speaking workforce

Disadvantages: Extreme traffic congestion, infrastructure issues, bureaucracy



Hong Kong:

The 180-Year-Old Financial Center

Long Asia's premier financial hub, the city serves as the special administrative region of China.

Population: 7.4 million

Number of family offices: 3,384, up from 1,500 in 2022

Percent expatriates: 8%

Regional or global headquarters: 1,410

Advantages: Deep financial services ecosystem, bilingual workforce (English and Cantonese), simple taxation for companies

Disadvantages: Political and governance challenges, high cost of living

commercial landing ground for incoming PhDs. "A lot of their focus is on resilience in the face of technology like AI," he says.

The icing on the cake is that—as lots of expats will attest—Singapore is exceedingly pleasant.

Forty-seven percent of the city is covered by trees or foliage, and newer buildings have vertical walls of ferns integrated into their upper floors. Taking an outdoor business meeting at one of the hundreds of fan-cooled, swank cafés is delightful. Di Cicco says he never used to jog when he lived in other cities: "Here I'm running three times a week. You wouldn't think, right?"

There are downsides. Singapore's arts culture isn't likely to attract much global attention anytime soon, and, by Western standards, freedom of speech and other rights are constrained. And Singapore's

cost of living ranks among the highest in the world for expats. "There are market limitations, namely it being small and expensive," says Aaron Henry, managing director of Foundeast Asia, a global marketing company. It can be particularly pricey to run a company staffed by foreigners: Salaries must be high enough to cover high rents, and business is commonly discussed at golf or exercise clubs whose fees can be exorbitant. "Personally, I prefer to build and manage a team in Thailand," Henry notes. And indeed, in the last couple of years, many firms have shifted their headquarters to Singapore, while maintaining larger staffs elsewhere.

As in all of Asia, business relationships matter, and companies that try to muscle their way into supply-and-distribution

deals while ignoring the business culture of trust and reliability will likely fail. But many see this as a small (and blessedly predictable) price to pay to operate in a leading all-business, all-the-time locale.

As I walk past the glass towers, beneath elevated walkways linking buildings, it's apparent that everything in Singapore functions. It's a relief to not have to worry about subway delays or traffic (no commute within the city proper takes longer than 45 minutes). Sure, businesses come for the stability, but leaders stay for the ease. In an era of constant change, Singapore is a rational, pragmatic, and often frictionless place to run a business. In the wilds of global business operations, says Haley, "it's a layer of sanity." ▀



The Problem

Men's economic, social, and health indicators reveal concerning trends.

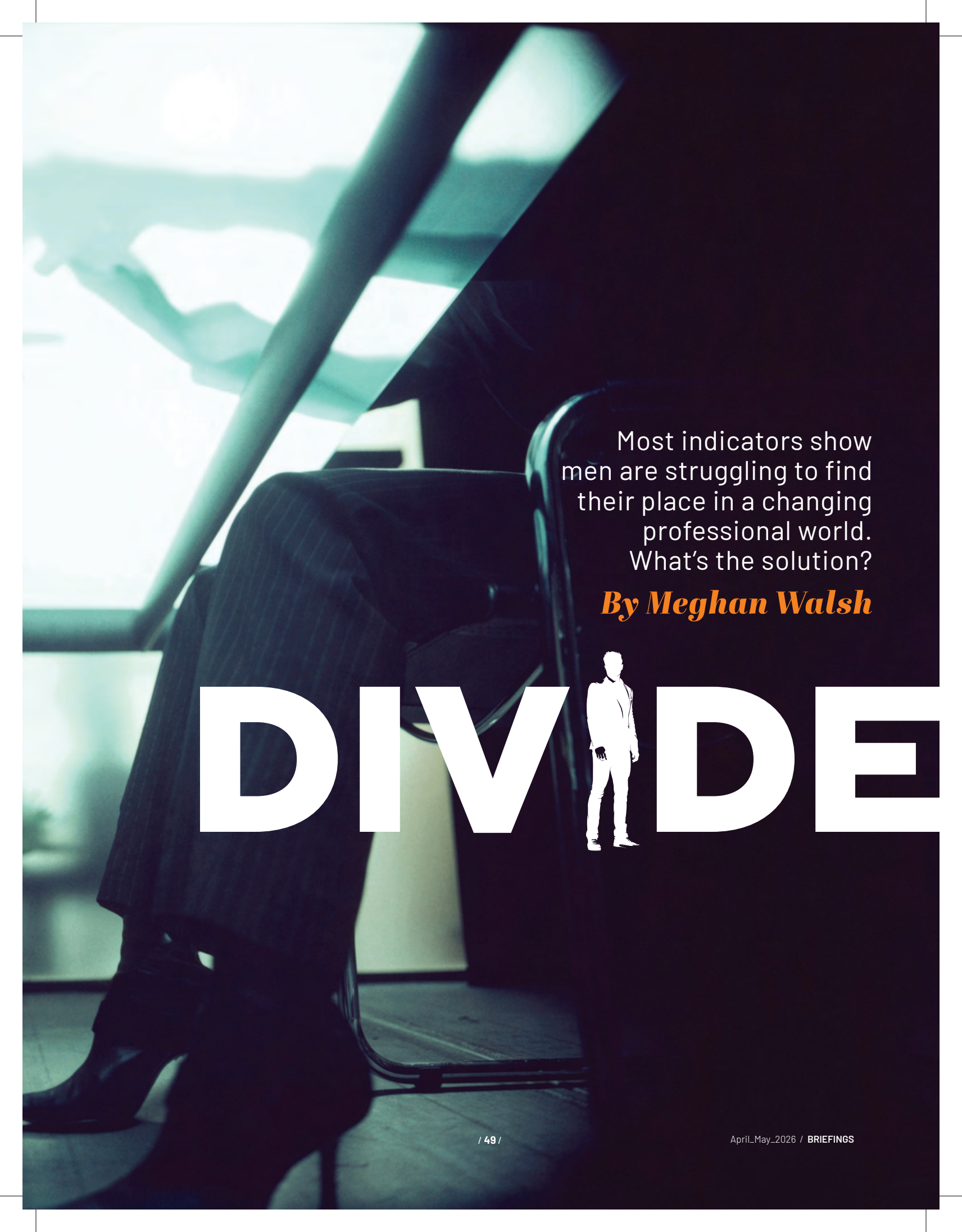
THE MALE

Why It Matters

Outdated gender roles limit workers, industries, and economies.

The Solution

Remake workplace cultures so jobs and skills are not gendered.



Most indicators show men are struggling to find their place in a changing professional world. What's the solution?

By Meghan Walsh

DIVIDE



Juan Candelaria was in his mid-20s and working in the construction industry doing HVAC and other odd jobs. “I wasn’t really doing much with my life,” the now 37-year-old recalls. A conversation with his mom, a healthcare worker, inspired Candelaria to enroll in a semester-long training program at the local community college in phlebotomy (the drawing of blood from patients). Candelaria went from construction, which has an 89 percent male workforce, to a field that is 89 percent female—and, to his surprise, discovered it to be a much better fit.

Now a supervisor, Candelaria has been working for a large laboratory in Albuquerque for more than a decade, tripling his income in that time period and finding in his profession a sense of purpose—and his wife, who is a nurse. “I found that I love patient care,” he says, explaining that he enjoys talking to people and helping them to feel better, in both mood and body.

Candelaria’s story contains many stories. There is the story of the young man professionally unmoored, like many in today’s society. The story of a changing economy with increasing opportunity in the interpersonal fields. The possibilities that emerge when men consider careers beyond those historically regarded as masculine. For several years, headlines have been sounding alarm bells about the state of boys and men: The man meltdown. The male drift. The dangers of toxic masculinity. Underpinning these proclamations are a multitude of trends that suggest some men, particularly those in the working class,

are, in fact, struggling, which has far-reaching implications for businesses.

Indeed, the rate of prime-age men who have been out of the workforce has continued to grow over the last 50 years, from 5 percent in the 1970s to a stubborn 11 percent in recent years. And while women have made progress breaking into a variety of male-dominated fields, including STEM, men have not embraced the HEAL professions—healthcare, education, administration, and literacy—which may be of increasing relevance in the AI-integrated economy of the future. These trends are only likely to worsen, experts say, as a growing number of boys fall behind girls academically and choose to forgo college.

Business leaders might think that more men are helping at home with unpaid labor, especially as more women pursue higher education and join the workforce. Not according to the data. Men who drop out of school and the job market are more likely to be unmarried and without kids. They spend more time alone, online, and watching TV, and suffer from higher rates of depression, addiction, and suicide.

For men, whose societal value in modern history has been linked to being providers, career stability and life satisfaction are deeply intertwined. But as economies and gender roles rapidly change, many men are uncertain of their place. The old script has been torn up but

not yet replaced with a new one. “We’re telling girls they can be anything boys can be, but we’re not telling boys that they can be anything girls can be,” says Cody Ragonese, associate director of programs at Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice in Washington, D.C.

Men, according to Ragonese and other experts, need a new story.

To some degree, gender has long been a ready-made solution for dividing labor. There is little debate, for example, that men and women have unique biological expressions that dictate what they can do physically. But whether men and women are innately suited to certain roles remains quite controversial. Some evolutionary psy-

chologists argue that the psyches of men and women have genetically adapted in response to differing challenges. Social role theorists, on the other hand, contend that personality differences between the genders emerge in response to social, economic, and ecological conditions. This means if women take part in childcare, they are more likely to cultivate a caring disposition, but it doesn’t mean they are born caregivers. Likewise, when men do the caregiving, they become more caring. It’s the classic nature-versus-nurture debate.

Regardless of whether

male and female dispositions come pre-programmed, both sexes have a number of shared capacities as humans: the ability to rapidly adapt, to cooperate, to learn social norms, and to create cultures that reinforce those norms. Gender is one of the first social categories babies internalize, usually by age two. As children grow older, they learn that behaviors that fit these gender roles are rewarded and nonconformity is punished. So they adapt to meet expectations. “Starting very early, genderization sets the trajectory for what in 20 years the labor market is going to look like,” Ragonese says. And despite



“How can the modern man meet the shifting demands and roles happening in society?”

advances in women’s rights, over the last 50 years culture has become increasingly genderized, experts say.

As University of Melbourne professor Cordelia Fine, who studies gender in

HIS(TORY)

The difficulties men are facing in the workplace are documented by several key indicators.



11% – Percentage of prime-age men out of the workforce



1.2x – Likelihood men facing financial hardships will report low self-rated health



22% – Percentage of HEAL jobs (healthcare, education, administration, literacy) held by men



500,000 – Gap between new job openings that will be created in HEAL versus STEM from 2023 to 2033



42% – Percentage of four-year degrees earned by men

Sources: The American Institute for Boys and Men; National Institutes of Health; Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

the workplace, writes in *Patriarchy Inc: What We Get Wrong About Gender Equality—And Why Men Still Win at Work*, hyper-genderized divisions of labor may have made sense in particular contexts: societies with high fertility, economies abundant in roles that require physical strength, and cultures that place low value on autonomy. But in a post-industrial, AI-powered global era, the skills most needed are changing. According to an American Institute of Boys and Men analysis of US labor statistics, over the decade from 2023 through 2033 there will be half a million more new job openings in HEAL than in STEM. Meanwhile, manufacturing jobs have been on a steady decline for the last half a century. The in-



“Men need gender equality just as much as gender equality needs men.”

were equally affected by the financial burden. “There was really only one variable where I found an effect, and that was the proportion of women already enrolled in vet med schools,”

Lincoln wrote.

If, as some argue, certain professions have become socially coded as feminine, so too has education as a whole, which has diminished the perceived value of learning. In 1972, the year Title IX, which prohibits sex-based discrimination, went into effect, men claimed 56 percent of all bachelor’s degrees. Now, the tables have turned, with women earning around 58 percent of four-year degrees. Between 2010 and 2021, the number of Americans attending college fell, with men accounting for the majority of that drop. To be sure, there are many factors calling into question the value of higher education, but the impacts of forgoing school remain.

Trade schools and technical training have also proved to be effective in drawing men back into the workforce. But the pay for those roles has stagnated, creating an increasingly precarious situation.

As it did for Candelaria, learning may offer a path to possibility. But something curious has been occurring as women integrate into educational and professional settings, and it may help to explain the weakening graduation and employment rates for men.

In 2010, sociologist Anne Lincoln published a study examining the changing gender dynamics of the veterinary field. In 1969, men represented 89 percent of veterinary students. By 1987, there was a fifty-fifty split between the sexes. And in 2009, she reported that less than a quarter of veterinary students were male. (Fast-forward to 2024 and that number had plummeted to anywhere from 12 to 17 percent.) While some point to the rising cost of tuition to explain the drop in enrollment, Lincoln’s research found that men and women

demand skill of the day is relational competence, rather than brute strength.

Those who track gender ideologies find that often economic dynamics change first, followed by culture. This has put men in a bind. There are abundant health and education jobs open, but socially men may be punished for straying from more “masculine” career paths. “How can the modern man meet the shifting demands and roles happening in society?” asks Ariel Binder, a research fellow at the American Institute for Boys and Men.

“Who is advantaged and disadvantaged by gender beliefs is a complicated story.”

Men facing financial insecurity are 16 times more likely to experience suicidal ideation, according to an Equimundo survey. Those from the poorest zip codes are most susceptible to opting out of school. “Who is advantaged and disadvantaged by gender beliefs is a complicated story,” says Fine. “It’s tricky to talk about.”

Tricky indeed, affirms Korn Ferry’s president of global healthcare services Greg Button, pointing to gender dynamics in healthcare as an example. While the majority of nurses, techs, and administration workers are women, top leadership is almost exclusively men.

“We have such a female-dominated industry, the conversation has been that we should have females at the top,” Button says. “It hasn’t been a conversation of how do we even this out on all levels.” Button also says there’s a massive shortage of healthcare workers, and that it will only worsen as the population ages—unless recruiters can expand their net. And as roles become more gender balanced, Fine says, they are more likely to be fairly compensated rather than over- or undervalued. Or as Ragonese from Equimundo points out: “Men need gender equality just as much as gender equality needs men.”

Of course, as most leaders readily acknowledge, culture comes from the top. But that doesn’t just mean the C-suite. Boys, experts say, need role models in the classroom, community, and office. “Boys need role mod-

els who look like them,” says Binder of the American Institute for Boys and Men. That means incentivizing men to go into teaching and care professions, as well as creating corporate cultures that allow dads to be more present for child-rearing. Studies have shown that boys from poor neighborhoods are more likely to continue with their education, and thus become reliable workers, if they have father figures in the community, even if those fathers are not their own.

Trade schools and technical training have also proved to be effective in draw-

ing men back into the workforce. Businesses can offer incentives and normalize ongoing education and upskilling. They can even create in-house training, as Candelaria’s employer has done to prepare aspiring phlebotomists.

It’s an insidious feedback loop. When boys and men don’t have strong role models, when they don’t have well-defined purpose, or when they are financially insecure, experts say, they become more susceptible to ideologies that equate masculinity with dominance, aggression, and rebellion. If culture continues to genderize hard and soft skills, it may distinctly disadvantage men. “Thinking, stoicism, strength—these are all good things,” says New York University psychology professor Niobe Way, who wrote *Rebels With a Cause—Reimagining Boys, Ourselves, and Our Culture*. “It’s the dismissing and demeaning of the soft skills. You need your thinking and feeling skills.”



CLOSING THE GAP

Experts recommend several solutions for bridging the gap for men who are struggling to adapt to a changing social and economic landscape.



Create **technical training** opportunities that offer an alternative to traditional higher education.



Provide **living wages** and clear career paths that offer financial stability and purpose.



Ensure boys have **access to role models** in fields with low male representation.



Intentionally de-genderize **social roles** and skills that limit possibilities for the sexes.



Incentivize and **create pathways** for men to go into teaching, healthcare, and other jobs of the future.

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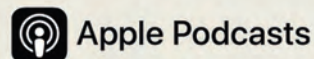


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PURSUITS

The Resale Revolution

A vintage aesthetic is redefining the fashion industry—and how leaders express themselves. *By Meghan Walsh*

Dr. Aisha Mays grew up going to the thrift store with her grandmother, who was always well-styled in slides and A-line skirts. They'd spend hours pawing through rack after rack to find that one piece that rang out in potential. She loved to mix and match different styles, new and old, and to configure unlikely arrangements that

Matej Kastelic/Getty Images

couldn't be found on a mannequin at the mall.

When, later in life, Mays became a physician and medical professor, she questioned whether she'd be taken seriously if she expressed her fashion sense, so she suppressed that part of herself. But as she ascended the rungs of her profession, and particularly when she founded the Dream Youth Clinic, a health organization that serves adolescents, Mays began to realize that the more she expressed her aesthetic through what she wore, the more she was able to connect with her patients—and herself. The ingenuity that she'd cultivated in her closet all those years directly applied to starting a business, to imagining new ways of delivering medicine, and to summoning the confidence and authenticity required of being a leader.

"Thrifting is a way of seeing beyond what is in front of you and building something new," the 49-year-old says.

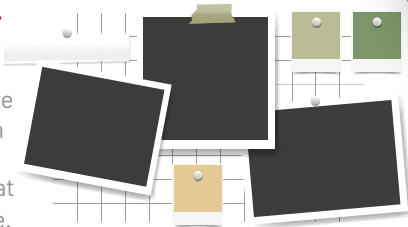
Long considered to be a means to an end for broke college students and those without options, thrifting is increasingly seen as a choice that both expresses and reinforces personal attributes of people of all income and professional levels. The secondhand apparel mar-

3 LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP FROM THRIFTING



INNOVATION.
Creating new outfits with old pieces and contrasting styles teaches the mind to think expansively, while utilizing the resources at hand.

VISUALIZATION.
Thrifiers often create mood boards to capture an essence, then go in search of the wardrobe that will bring it to life.



AUTHENTICITY.
Vintage is all about individual expression. What is your aesthetic and how are you communicating it?

Aisha Mays wore vintage every day for a year.



A. Mokhtari, Lena Berezkina, MadVector/Getty Images

ket in the US is booming, which Pam Danziger, a market researcher who focuses on influential consumers, explains is in part due to affluent shoppers opting to

“Thrifting is a way of seeing beyond what is in front of you and building something new.”

buy used instead of new. “It represents a paradigm shift for luxury consumers, and it’s only gaining traction,” Danziger says. The market grew from \$28 billion in 2019 to an estimated \$56 billion in 2025, and is projected to reach \$74 billion by 2029.

In an era when shopping has become defined by fast fashion, decreasing material quality, and convenience, people are seeking intention and originality, both from their wardrobe and their leaders. A study published several years ago in the *Journal of Business Research* that looked at how daily dress affects perceptions of Fortune 1000 CEOs found people gave higher approval ratings and perceived leaders to be more charismatic if their clothing contrasted with the organization’s culture. If the broader environment provided structure, workers wanted a leader who embodied flexibility. Or the opposite. Vintage fashion, like leadership, is all about finding the exact approach to fit the moment.

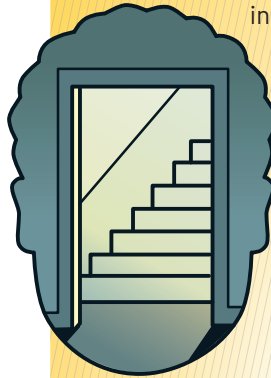
Of course, as is the case with so many trends of today, the pandemic, tariffs, and social media played crucial roles in influencing interest in thrifting, including for Mays. In 2020, at the height of the online-shopping craze, one of Mays’ friends suggested the fashionista try a “no new clothes” challenge. Mays went on to document the experience of not buying anything new for an entire year on Instagram. “It really uncovered a deeper part of my creativity,” she says, adding that it continues to shape how she thinks of fashion, as well as of health and leadership. “I’m always reminding my patients, we are enough, we have enough, and we can create new realities with creativity, passion, and drive.”

Illustration by PETER HOEY

THE ART OF

The Art of Attunement

Attunement is similar to but distinct from empathy. Both an action and an outcome, attunement describes the ways in which we sync with one another in order to relate, which then allows for connection and the creation of secure, collaborative, and generative workspaces.



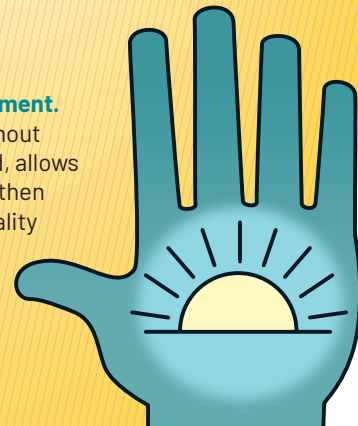
1 Go inward. To connect with others requires first attuning to ourselves. Ask yourself, what is here with me now?

2 Practice full presence. Listen to yourself and colleagues using all of your capacities: mental, physical, and emotional.



3 Expand the aperture. Take into account how personal and cultural history may affect how one relates.

4 Set aside judgment. Openness, without criticism or demand, allows for empathy, which then creates the potentiality of attunement.



DOWNTIME

VISIT

Rijeka, Croatia

The city that flows.



The main promenade is lined with historical Austro-Hungarian buildings, colorful cafés, and shops. The city also includes a 13th-century castle as well as several 14th-century churches.



Known for its raucous festivals, Rijeka hosts a carnival every February, drawing tens of thousands of mask-wearing revelers.



Rijeka is the third-largest city in Croatia, with around 130,000 residents. It also includes a large university student body.



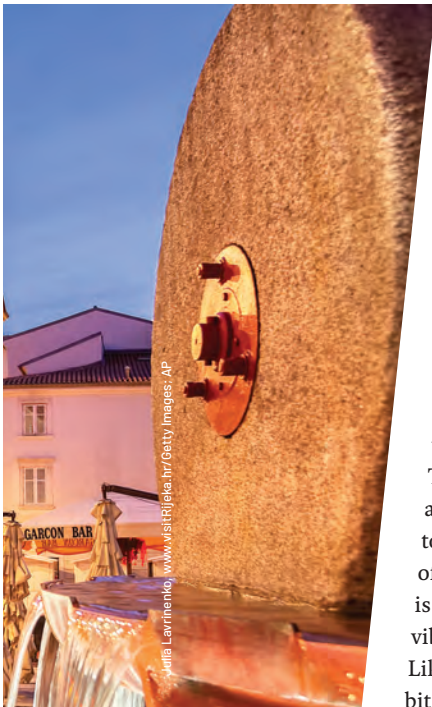
As the country's principal seaport, Rijeka is known for its shipbuilding industry, along with oil, tobacco, and paper production.



While Rijeka offers its own worthy coastline, it's also a short ferry ride from the many iconic islands and towns that dot the Dalmatian Coast.



Set between rolling hills and the Adriatic sea, Rijeka, a name that means river, has much of the innate charm of its more bourgeois coastal neighbors. Its industrial grittiness, however, is just enough to deter the touristy masses, which is what has some choosing the city for a longer stay. Most countries allow digital nomads to reside for six months to a year. Croatia recently increased the length of its special visa to three years, as the remote-work trend continues to promote long-term travel. The Balkan country also has begun allowing partners and family members to join. Named the European Capital of Culture several years back, Rijeka is known for being a local favorite—vibrant and cool, while also affordable. Like a river, life here flows with just a bit more ease. //



READ, LISTEN, WATCH

The Universal Language of Rhythm

Once an art form relegated to specific ethnic regions, Afrobeats has transcended geographical boundaries to become one of the world's most influential musical forces—and in a very short period of time. The genre blends traditional African rhythms with hip-hop, jazz, pop, and other global contemporary sounds. The result is music that's universally uplifting, danceable, and irresistible.

Over the last decade, Afrobeats has become one of the African continent's most powerful cultural expressions and Nigeria's most

From top to bottom: Courtesy of Ayra Starr; Sony Atlantic Records; Four Yes Media; Universal; Jauvat, K. Kikchah, benjanusamees/Getty Images

lucrative cultural export. Spotify listeners of the genre increased by 22 percent last year. Between 2017 and 2022, streams surged more than 550 percent. And industry experts predict that listener interest is more than a passing trend. The Grammys, Billboard, and MTV have all introduced Afrobeats award categories, while Burna Boy made history last year as the first Afrobeats act to perform during the Grammys broadcast. *Briefings* has compiled a list of top Afrobeats artists to jam to this spring as the weather warms. ▀

AYRA STARR

SONG: "RUSH"

Starr is the youngest African female artist to surpass 100 million YouTube views for a single video.

BURNA BOY

SONG: "LOVE"

Rolling Stone named Burna Boy one of its 200 Greatest Singers of All Time.

REMA

SONG: "CALM DOWN"

The song peaked at No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100.

LIBIANCA

SONG: "PEOPLE"

The Cameroonian-American singer, whose music incorporates R&B and soul, competed on NBC's "The Voice."

WIZKID FEAT. TEMS

SONG: "ESSENCE"

The first Nigerian song to make the Billboard Hot 100, with the album reaching No. 1 on the Billboard World Album Chart.



SUGGESTED

A New Kind of Clean

Autonomous vacuums have come a long way since the early days, when they would inevitably end up detoured, banging around hopelessly in a corner. The Roborock Q7 M5+ uses lidar navigation, or light sensors, to navigate and remember room layouts. Users can schedule cleanings with the app, while the automatic docking station empties the dustbin into a large disposable bag that takes weeks to fill. And this robo vacuum doesn't just sweep the floors, it also features a built-in mop pad with adjustable water flow.

Roborock Q7 M5+, \$329.99



Roborock

PRO TRAINING

Coach **Donny Hui** on the sudden spike of interest in adult volleyball.

WHAT'S DRIVING THIS TREND?

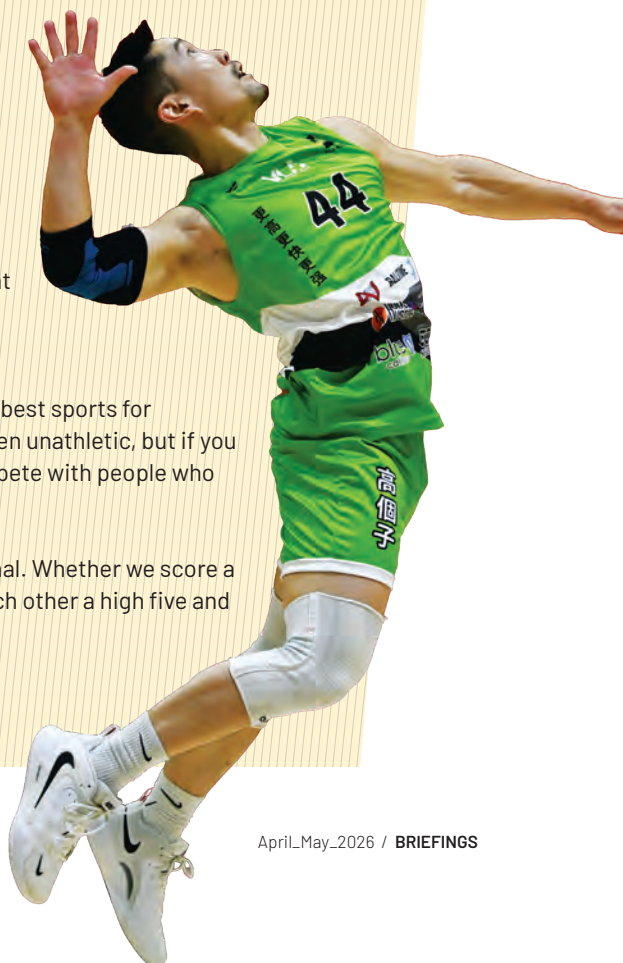
"It used to be a niche hobby, but the pandemic, social media, and a recent anime series have exploded adult volleyball."

CAN ANYONE PLAY? "It's one of the best sports for longevity. You can be short, slow, even unathletic, but if you work on technique you can still compete with people who are younger and more physical."

WHAT'S THE ALLURE? "It's communal. Whether we score a point or make a mistake, we give each other a high five and go out to eat afterward."

Find out more, at www.ElevateYourself.org.

USA/VLA Images





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Jonathan Dahl

One False Step

“What is it that’s not exactly water, and it ain’t exactly earth?”
—*Blazing Saddles* (1974)

We were on vacation, relaxed and unguarded, on a wooded hike in the Florida Keys. I noticed a break in the brush where a path led to a lovely beach straight out of a Caribbean travel brochure, Windx-blue waters beckoning. “Let’s try that,” I suggested to my girlfriend and approached what looked like narrow footprints in thick mud. They seemed like horse hooves, which puzzled me, but I moved forward anyway... straight into disaster.

The first thing I remember was a sickening sound of suction, followed by my feet sinking in slowly, past my ankles. The more I pulled, the more I descended. “It’s quicksand!” I warned my girlfriend, but it was too late. She was stuck, too, amazed she couldn’t get out. It’s true: The harder you fight to get out of this stuff, the more you go down. Then it dawned on me: We were in the middle of nowhere, where we hadn’t seen anyone, in a place full of crocodiles waiting for idiot prey like us.

All we can hope for as leaders is to make decisions that turn out for the best, for our company and colleagues. We can’t be afraid to make them when we see an opening, whether it’s to adopt a new strategy, test a product, or just spot a path to a beach paradise. Doing nothing can backfire. But as we reach for opportunity,

we need to do so with caution. We can’t let our guard down. Sometimes over the course of months, sometimes in a matter of seconds, we need to balance consequence with reward.

It’s important to lead with confidence and a sense of ease. People don’t want bosses who overreact. Project a feeling of calm, but at no time let that projection reduce your awareness of your highly competitive or dangerous surroundings.

And yes, we must accept that we will make mistakes. Once, I interviewed and decided against hiring a promising reporter who went on to become the eventual editor in chief of ESPN. I also turned down a future Pulitzer Prize winner. Sure, I’d like to think most of my hiring calls have led to amazing storytelling in great publications. But to be honest, leadership is probably about getting it wrong a lot. And then recovering and accepting. Regret gets you nowhere.

Which is also true for getting stuck in quicksand. I snapped out of blaming myself—and seeing how the “h o o f-prints” were human, looked for a way out. My girlfriend, who was ahead of the game (as usual), eventually found a stick that a prior victim had left and pulled herself out. I dug with my hands into the thick muck, pulling out one heavy clump after another until I was free, maybe 10 exhausting minutes later.

Rattled, we decided to stay on and try to enjoy the hike. We survived. ▀

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