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DAZED & CONFUSED

NAVIGATING CRISES THAT HAPPEN ALL AT ONCE

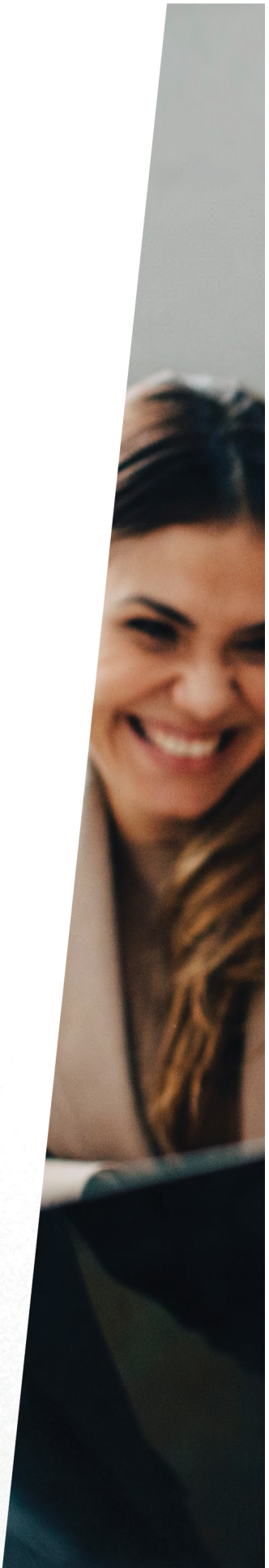
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Illustration by **TIM AMES**



The 3:30 AM Club

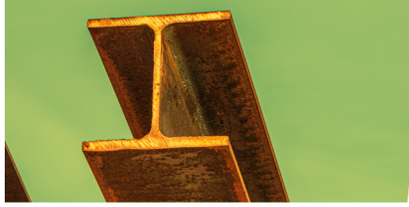
Fifteen percent of the population does their best work in the wee hours. Should the corporate world adjust?

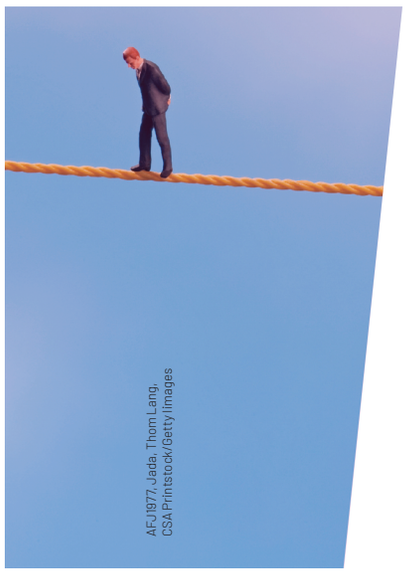
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AFJ1977, Jada Thom Lang, CSA Printstock/Gettyimages

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
GARY BURNISON



Connectorship

Same place, same time—years ago. And neither of us had any idea...

I met with an executive who I didn't know. As we talked, I was intrigued to learn he was passionate about music.

"I used to perform," he told me.

"Just curious—what was the strangest experience you've had on stage?" I asked him.

With that, he gave me a puzzled look—clearly not sure where I was going with this off-the-cuff question.

To fill the pause, I stepped in. For me, there was only one answer. So, I quickly rattled off everything I remembered: "Royce Hall—UCLA. There's this world-famous pianist—playing Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto. And suddenly... he just froze up. Wouldn't play another note. The entire place was stunned into silence."

With every detail that punctuated my story, the leader interjected—speaking more to himself than to me: "Yeah, yeah, yeah... that's exactly what happened that night."

Then he delivered the punchline: "I was there—playing cello in the orchestra."

My jaw almost dropped.

No doubt, life and leadership are filled with experiences that are equal parts coincidence and happenstance. However, the art of connecting in meaningful, authentic ways requires intentionality and effort.

Our firm's psychologists call it connectorship—and there are three dimensions involved: trust, authenticity, and organic shared experiences.

For leaders, it may be more natural to think about setting strategy and driving growth. But how often do we really think of creating connections—looking up from spreadsheets and looking out to people, relationships, and the experiences we share?

It's the emotional side of leadership—and it never goes out of style. Nor can it be replaced, even with tomorrow's technology.

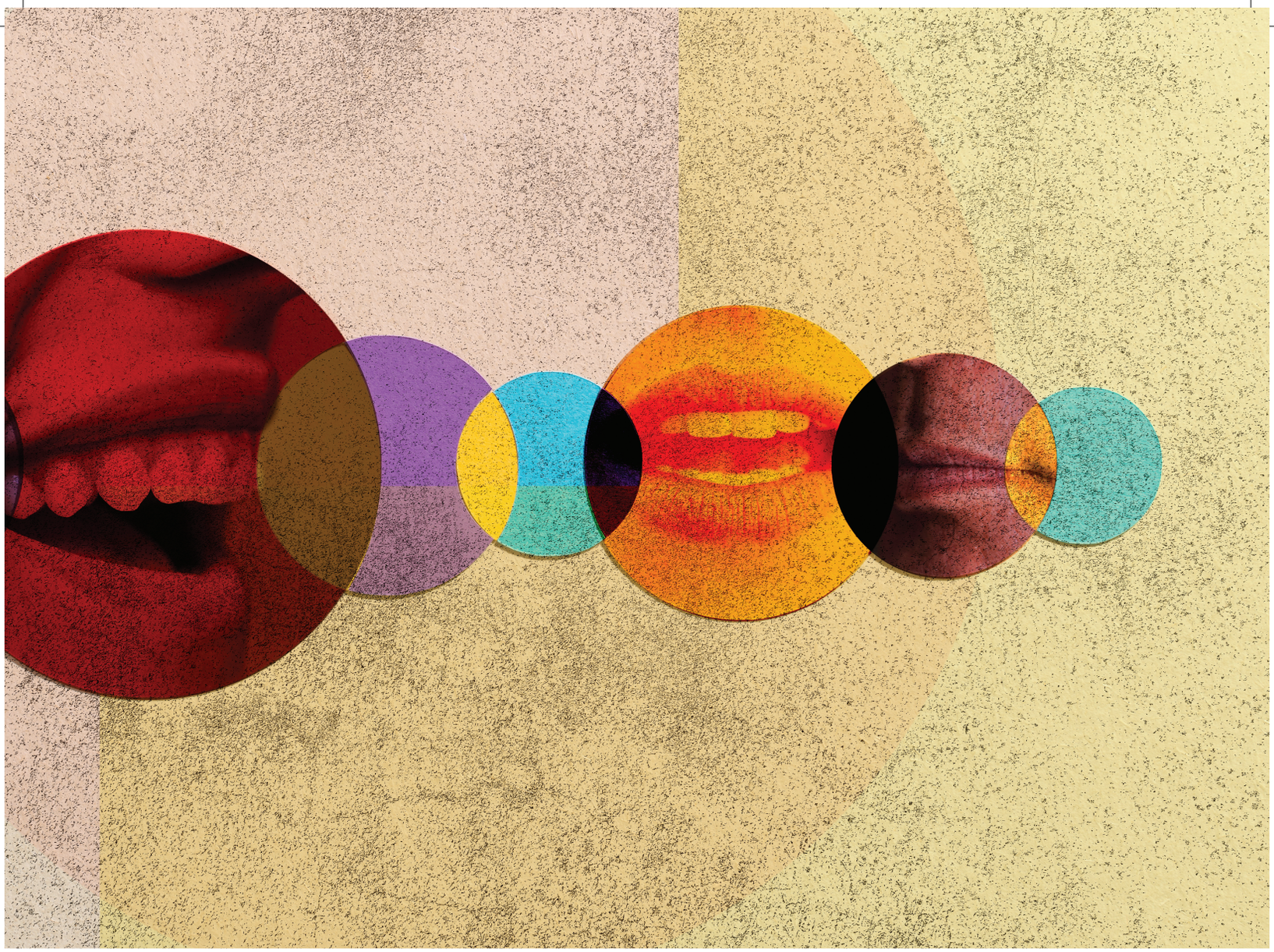
Research shows that people hunger for connection and thirst for friendships. It's our human nature. In fact, time and again, studies show that most people have fewer friends than they want.

So, what bridges that gap? It's possible the void can be filled in part as AI becomes intertwined in our lives—offering more connections than people currently have. But AI cannot truly replicate what it genuinely feels like to be loved, to belong—and share experiences.

For leaders, there's a lesson here.

Over the years, while traveling overseas

Zero Creatives, Klaus Vedfelt, Zanuk, RunStudio, Mirage C/Getty Images; Adobe Stock



on business, I have seen the musical *Mamma Mia!* multiple times, in different countries.

Often, I am not able to understand one word, but I always feel an overarching sense of connection through an emotional shared experience of song and story. Complete strangers, not even able to speak the same language—always dancing in the aisles together to the songs we all know so well.

And that brings us back to that unforgettable night when everyone in that UCLA concert hall—audience and performers alike—held their breath. As we sat there, the conductor slowly walked over, leaned down, and whispered something to the pianist. After hearing those words, immediately this star performer played with a passion that was palpable to everyone.

Throughout the performance, one question lingered on my mind: What did the conductor say? What could he have possibly uttered that turned the entire performance around—from silence to symphony?

Later, I learned of his simple but profound message: "We do it because we love the music."

That's the power of the experiences we share—and the connections we create.

The art of connecting in meaningful, authentic ways requires intentionality and effort.

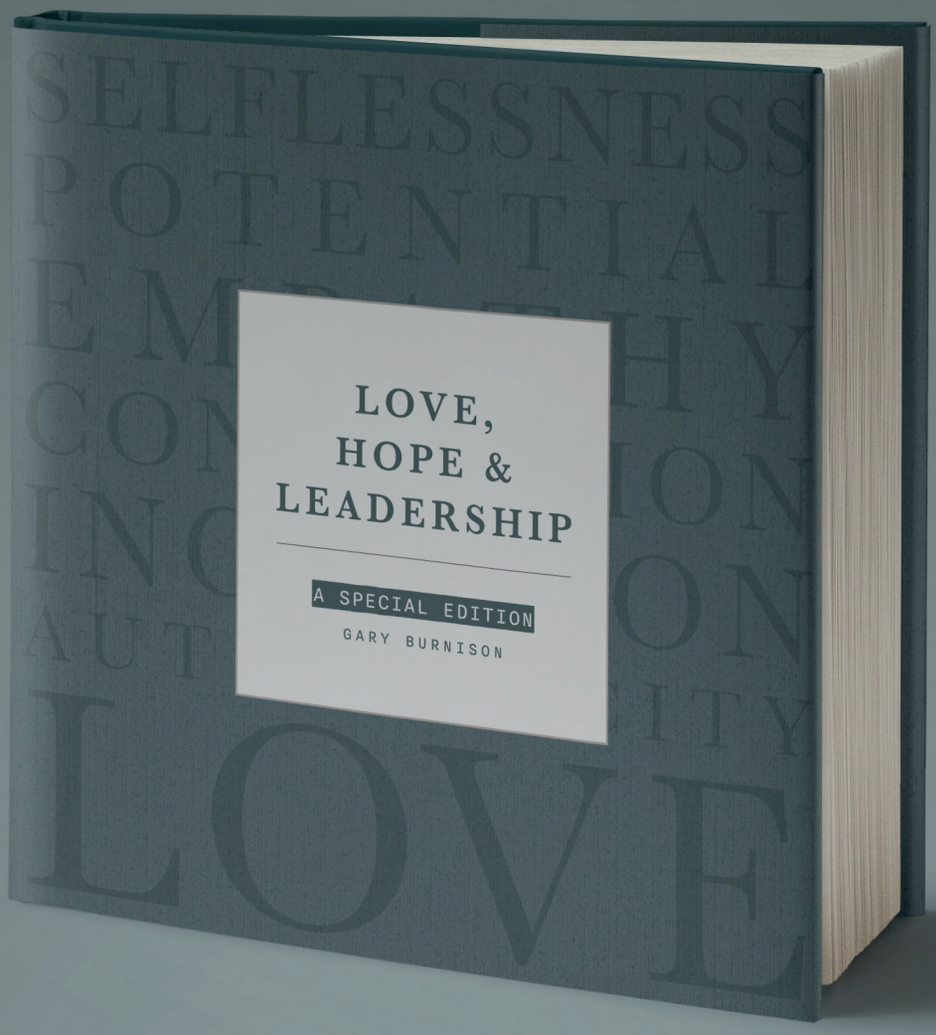
Read the new book from Gary Burnison: *Love, Hope & Leadership: A Special Edition*. Available where books are sold.

Photo Illustration by **LESLIE DELA VEGA**

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WILEY

BRIEFLY ON...

"The next six to 12 months could be make-or-break."



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Illustration by **ROB DOBI**

STRATEGIES

Rethinking Resources

More for factories? Less for training? In a tough year, firms are weighing wholesale changes in corporate funding.

By Russell Pearlman

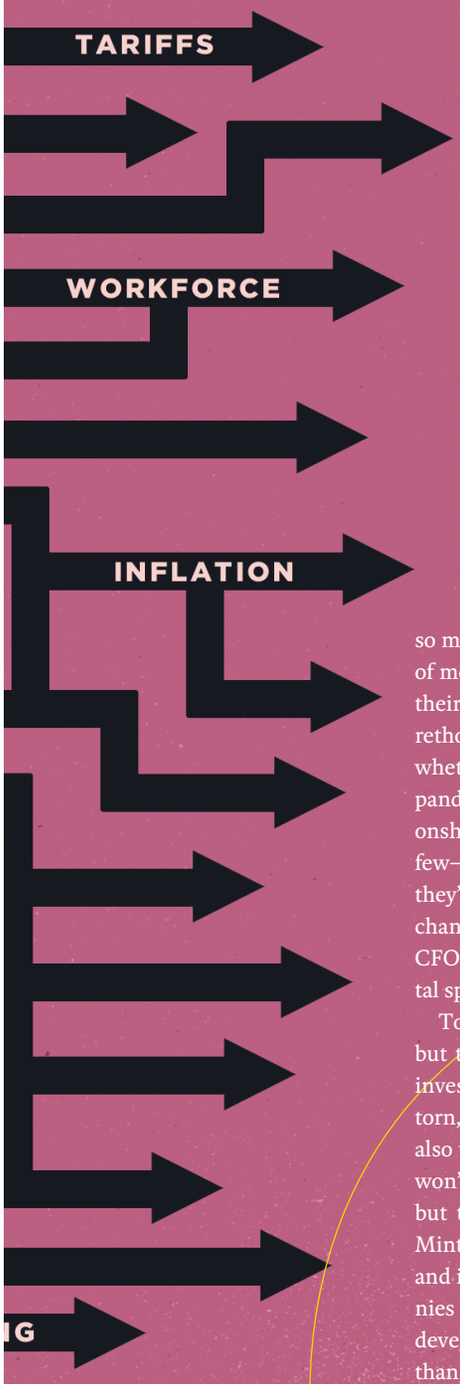


A trade war. A new technology that could disrupt everything, maybe. The specter of inflation, a recession, or both. And don't forget volatile stock and bond markets and their irritated investors. As an executive of a major airline told investors recently, "It's impossible to predict this year with any degree of confidence."

What a time to be trying to figure out how to spend the company's cash! In 2025, this exercise (usually involving dreary spreadsheets and dry meetings to determine the allocation of a company's resources) has become considerably more fraught. While they're certain they need to make massive long-term investments—in technology, supply-chain reorganization, workforce development and other pricey projects—companies feel very little certainty about the short-term business environment. "For CFOs steering the ship, the next six to 12 months could be make-or-break," says John Signa, CEO and founder of E78 Partners, a finance-focused consultancy.

The last time corporate-finance departments faced

In8finity, Cnythzl, AppleUZR/Getty Images



TO SPEND OR NOT TO SPEND

As firms reevaluate how to allocate their funds, here are some key areas.

NEW FACTORIES

THE QUESTION:
With new tariffs, should firms produce more domestically?

THE COST:
US companies invested $234 billion in new manufacturing construction last year.

THE BEST ADVICE:
Building new facilities is a huge step, so experts suggest waiting out global trade wars for now.

AI INVESTMENT

THE QUESTION:
How much should companies pour into this technology?

THE COST:
Generative AI spending hit $366 billion last year.

THE BEST ADVICE:
Continue spending, but plan for investment returns to take years.

LABOR

THE QUESTION:
How much should a company allocate toward labor/hiring costs?

THE COST:
Costs can vary, but firms typically spend between 15 and 30 percent of their gross revenue on payroll.

THE BEST ADVICE:
Spend to keep the best talent, while being mindful that AI may eliminate jobs.

so much pressure was in 2021. Back then, in a survey of more than 1,000 CFOs worldwide, 56 percent said their asset-allocation plans needed to be completely rethought. Two tough questions faced the CFOs: whether some of the major changes wrought by the pandemic—telemedicine, remote work, supply-chain onshoring, and new safety procedures, to name a few—were going to stick around; and if so, whether they'd need funding. Most firms put their money on changes related to digital—specifically, 68 percent of CFOs reported they'd upped their percentage of capital spending in this area.

Today, technology is a major decision factor again, but this time around, the question is how much to invest in artificial intelligence. Many executives are torn, fearing they'll fall behind if they don't invest, but also worrying that a full-throated commitment to AI won't pay off. "They want to invest in the right place—but they don't know the right place," says Shanda Mints, Korn Ferry's vice president of RPO analytics and implementation. Aside from technology, companies are trying to figure out how much to spend on developing the skills of their own workforces. More than 80 percent of organizations are reporting a skills gap within their employee base. But employee training is often one of the first areas to lose funding when the business environment deteriorates.

For many organizations, however, these financial decisions are small potatoes next to bigger-picture questions, such as, "Where should our stuff be manufactured?" The current US administration has, with its tariff policies, made it considerably more expensive to produce things outside of the country, then import them. But factory construction takes a lot of time and often a lot of money. A semiconductor factory, for example, could cost more than $12 billion to build—and wouldn't begin producing microchips for years. At this point, many corporate-finance executives aren't much interested in taking sides between countries during the trade dispute, Signa says. They just want things settled.

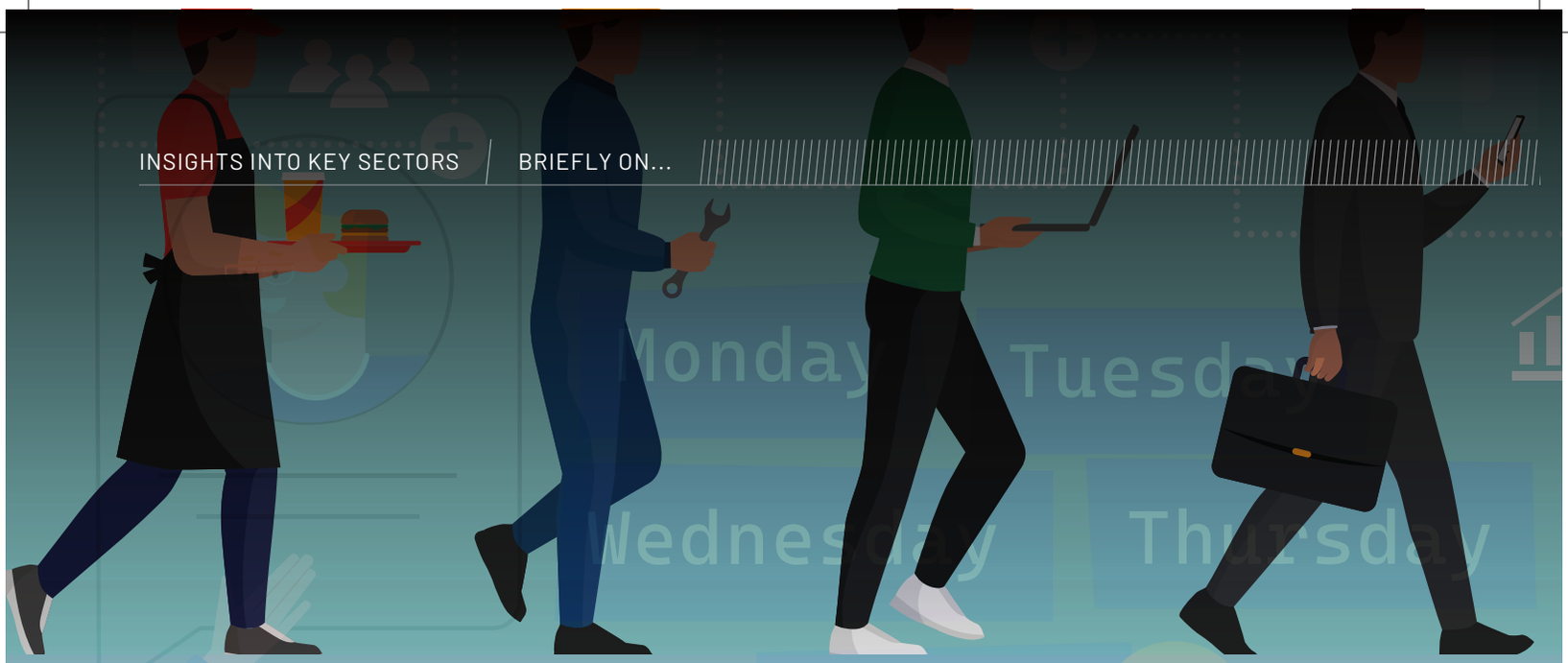
And finally, leaders splitting up resources have to keep an eye on shareholders; many have been turned off by this year's particularly volatile stock market, prompting some firms to consider stock buybacks or raising dividends. Whatever is decided will be pricey: S&P 500 companies returned $1.6 trillion in 2024, an all-time high.

Experts say that the 2021 allocation playbook could still apply this year, at least to some extent. Firms should ensure that they have the best, most up-to-date data on cash flow, working capital, and supply-chain risks, so that they can make smart, informed decisions. They should also consider increasing their short-term cost certainty, potentially by hedging their commodity or currency exposure. These moves won't necessarily make allocation decisions easier, but they might give executives a little more confidence in making them.

THE TAKEAWAY

Most firms still need to keep funding AI as much as possible.

Illustration by **ROB DOBI**



TECHNOLOGY BY PETER LAURIA

Is Everyone Turning to Gig Work?

YOUR NEIGHBOR WORKS AS A DRIVER for a ride-sharing service a few nights a week. A friend of your wife's, who has built a large audience on social media, has launched a career as a "momfluencer." After getting laid off, a fellow dad at your kid's school has decided not to return to the corporate world and instead will work for himself, as a contractor.

Chances are, you know someone—or are yourself—engaged in some form of "gig work," either as a main source of income or as a side hustle. What was once considered a temporary trend is now dominating the job market. Indeed, according to a new study, the gig workforce is growing three times as fast as the traditional one, with an estimated 400 million workers worldwide, including 80 million in the US. Within two years, gig work, led by Gen-Z talent, will represent half of the developed world's workforce. What started out as a short-term solution to bridge the gap between jobs has become "a much stickier" career path, says Alexandrea Ravenelle, a gig-economy researcher and sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The longer people are in gig work, the more difficult it is for them to transition out," she says.

Leaders have always embraced gig workers as part of their labor force—contractors, interim employees,



Elana Labs, Nadezhda Fedrunova/Getty Images

freelancers, and others—because they are cheaper and don't require benefits. They can also help fill skills gaps during times of technological innovation, like the AI-focused present. And while it dates back to the early part of the 20th century, gig work really took off with the digital revolution, which allowed people to work from anywhere and market themselves independently, instead of having to rely on others. In 1990, gig work comprised 10 percent of the labor market; now it's three times as large.

There are as many explanations for the rise in gig work—that people can't afford to live on a single income, that it's impossible to find a staff position, and so forth—as there are jobs. Regardless, it's become a major work-staffing issue that corporate leaders are only beginning to address at scale. Among their concerns: A disproportionate number of gig workers could create a void in the leadership pipeline, erode culture, slow down transformation, and potentially—because of the short-term nature of gig work—lower both engagement and productivity.

Indeed, Emilie Petrone, a vice chair in the Global Human Resources and CEO Succession practices at Korn Ferry, says firms need to make traditional corporate roles and career paths more attractive. Some are designing rotations that mimic gig-based work, in order to offer people exposure to different roles and areas across the company. Others are providing gig workers with portable benefits that follow them across gigs, longer contracts that offer progressively more responsibilities, and training and development programs to enhance skills and experience. As Petrone sees it, the narrative about younger generations embracing gig work because they're disenchanted with traditional paths isn't entirely true. Leaders can win over workers, she says, by "reframing the narrative around career development in a corporate framework."

THE TAKEAWAY

Companies can sway more workers away from gig jobs.



Kilito Chan/Getty Images

RETAIL

BY ARIANNE COHEN

A Cornerstone of Retail Lives On. Why?

IN NEARLY EVERY TOWN AND CITY, they are still there: retail stores. And in nearly every case, the question is there too: Why?

Not too long ago, it looked like e-commerce was unstoppable. Growing at a double-digit pace every year, it had everything going for it: convenience, wider selection, and a customer base of 5 billion potential shoppers—many of whom are prone to late-night click-and-splurges. What could possibly slow down this giant?

Turns out, plenty. Although e-commerce, to many, may seem

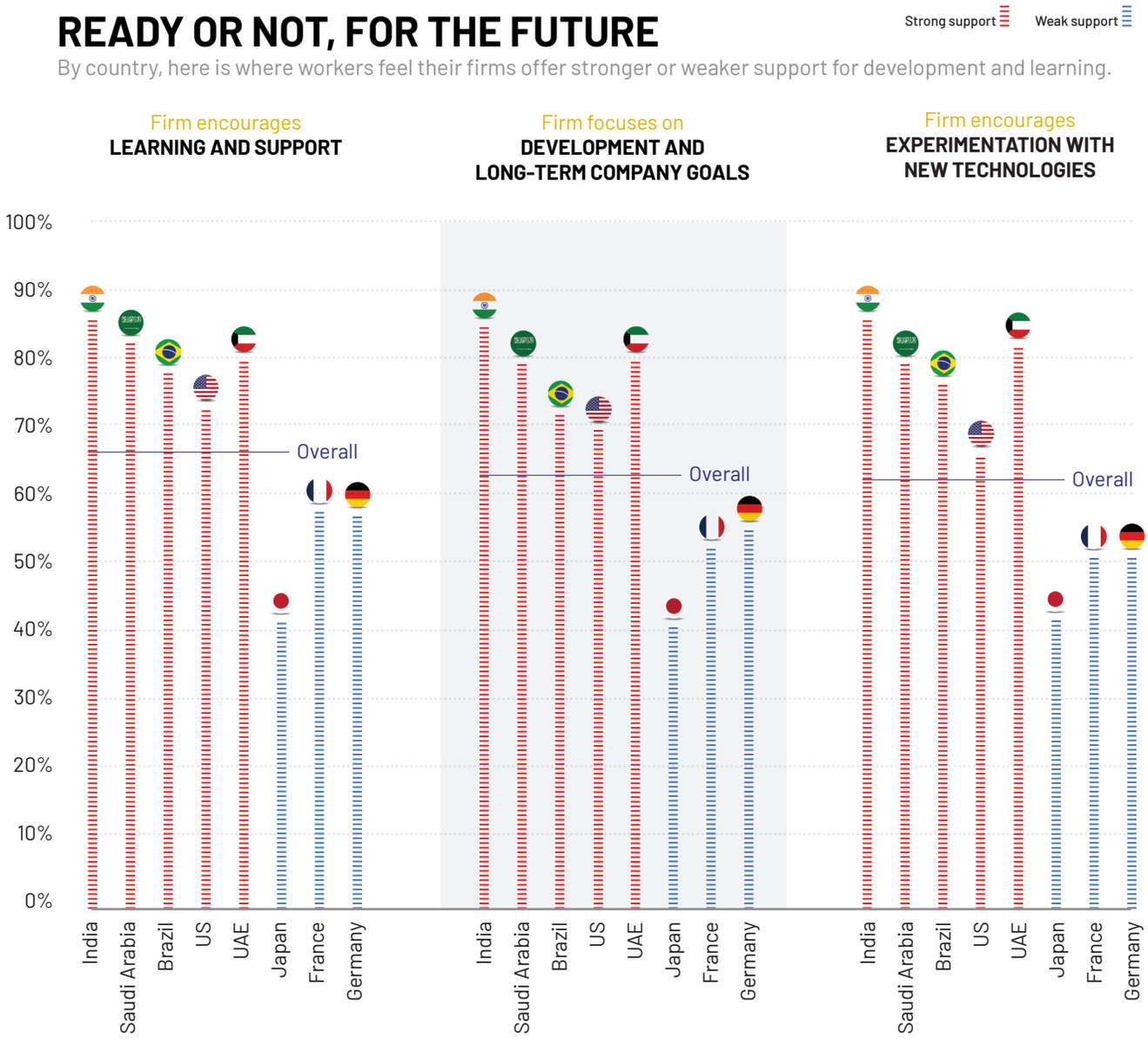
dominant, in terms of retail it's actually not, with digital sales accounting for only 22 percent of all retail sales. Every single week, remarkably, nearly three-quarters of shoppers still set foot in a store and enact a choose-and-buy process that hasn't changed in over a century. "There's no question that brick-and-mortar is here to stay," says Jessica Grisolia, director of retail industry solutions for Swiss data firm Scandit. "Online sales are growing very modestly."

To be sure, e-commerce is still promising, with people buying certain goods, like electronics, online

DATA

READY OR NOT, FOR THE FUTURE

By country, here is where workers feel their firms offer stronger or weaker support for development and learning.



Source: Korn Ferry's Workforce 2025 Global Insights Report

Oleksandr Shnuryk/Getty Images

THE TAKEAWAY

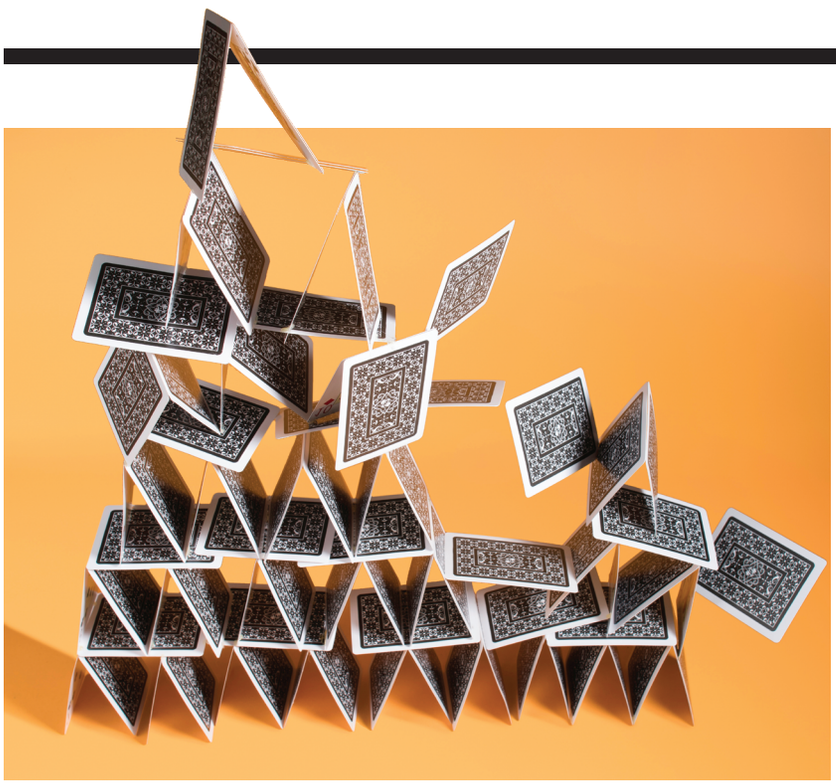
AI proponents take note: Digital transformation has limits.

much more often than in person. But the stubborn resiliency of brick-and-mortar is a glaring reminder of how hard some human habits are to change, and of the limits of digital transformation—both of which may impact AI's growth someday. For example, since the pandemic, young shoppers in particular have shown a curious penchant for pushing their own carts around real-life stores, no doubt pausing to touch the fashion and cosmetics offerings, on trips that take quadruple the time of digital shopping. "Turns out Gen Z likes to shop in-store much more than older generations," says Craig Rowley, a senior client partner and retail expert at Korn Ferry.

Retailers increasingly like it that way too, after realizing that e-commerce stuck them with doing much of the work that customers used to do, such as pushing carts, checking out items, and transporting items to their homes. "That's additional workload on top of already razor-thin margins," says Joel Brock, partner at digital-services consulting firm West Monroe.

Then there's the debacle of returns, which have proven to be a circus for retailers and customers alike. (Who among us doesn't have a home littered with "I meant to return that" items?) "The most important issue for retailers is that reselling that item is extremely difficult," says Grisolia. Many returns come from season-specific, online-exclusive promotions, which have often ended by the time a return commences. To sell the item, the retailer must discount it. "Now the customer is buying that discounted item instead of buying something else," she says. And if the return is an exchange, the retailer has already provided two to three items, and the customer has only paid once. We won't even broach the return-fraud problem, which has been especially pervasive in Europe.

E-commerce's failure to dominate offers a fundamental lesson: Some in-person experiences cannot be replicated online. Trying on pants, or holding up two items of apparel to make an outfit, simply cannot be done from home. Surprisingly, grocery delivery has been ground zero of this realization. "You just never get the same bananas that you'd pick out yourself," says Brock.



Micky Suarez/Getty Images

LEADERSHIP BY PETER LAURIA

The C-Suite Shuffle

FIRST, THERE WAS A MEETING with the CFO to discuss investing in a new digital application to streamline workflows. Next was a debriefing with engineers to iron out some bugs with an AI chatbot, followed by

a progress update for the CEO on the construction of a new data center. But it wasn't the chief technology officer leading all of this, or even the chief digital officer. Instead, odd as it might seem, it was the CHRO.

As firms seek to speed up decision-making and adjust to the impact of AI, they are taking a hard look at the org chart—including the C-suite. Firms are remaking the leadership and executive ranks by combining and eliminating positions, merging departments, and increasing the number of direct reports that senior managers and C-suite executives are responsible for. David Fields, a veteran real-estate industry executive who serves as an advisor and board director to property-development groups, says the "C-suite shuffle" is a function of the accelerating pace of change in business. "Firms are asking what the organization should look like in five or 10 years," he says, "And how can they rethink the C-suite and other aspects of the org chart to achieve broader thinking and capabilities."

THE TAKEAWAY

Firms are seriously rethinking the shape of their C-suite.

Among the changes firms are making is collapsing two roles—like CFO and COO, or CMO and CCO—into one. Some firms have gone a step further and merged departments, such as human resources and technology, then put the new function under the leadership of one executive. Still others have eliminated layers of middle and senior management and reassigned direct reports. Dan Petrossi, a senior client partner in the Global Technology practice at Korn Ferry, says such moves enable firms to respond more quickly to changes involving markets and competitors. "The more consolidated top leadership is, the faster you can move," says Petrossi.

The changes are starting to show up in the data, with CMO roles declining 8 percent last year and chief-communications-officer-roles down 6 percent over the same time frame. To be sure, the change does pose one challenge: finding leaders with the right skills and management acumen for two different roles. But Lucy Bosworth, a senior client partner and global account lead at Korn Ferry, says flattening the C-suite helps in two ways: It delegates more day-to-day decisions to fewer people, and it allows CEOs to focus on big-picture challenges—including how to adopt AI, transform corporate cultures, or create organic growth strategies. "It shrinks the span of control to a smaller, tighter group," says Bosworth.

WHAT'S ON THE NEXT BOARD AGENDA

1

STRATEGY

With trade wars still undecided, boards are stepping up oversight of long-term moves.

2

EFFECTIVENESS

To help ward off activists, boards are looking at director evaluations and refreshment.

3

SUCCESSION

With CEO turnover high, boards are looking hard at leadership pipelines and succession plans.

HISTORY LESSON

BY ARIANNE COHEN

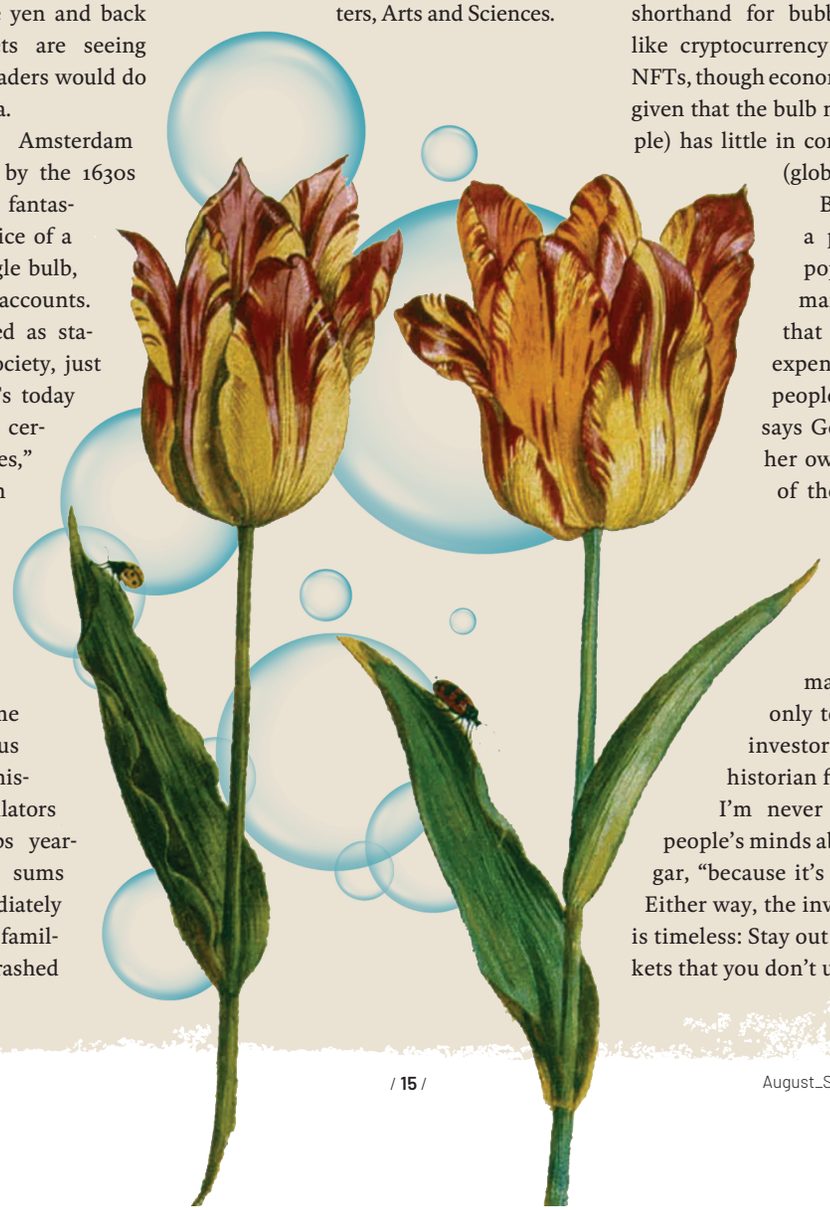
Tulip Mania

That famed Dutch bubble of the 1630s has implications for today's markets.

AS THE MARKETS overflow with traders shifting their assets from dollars to rare metals to Japanese yen and back again—currency markets are seeing record trade volume—traders would do well to recall tulip mania.

Tulips appeared in Amsterdam in the late 1500s, and by the 1630s ended up commanding fantastic sums—nearly the price of a modest house for a single bulb, according to some accounts. Expensive tulips "served as status makers in Dutch society, just as owning certain NFTs today signals membership in certain digital communities," says Adam Hayes, an economic sociologist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Indeed, Dutch social clubs facilitated trading and boosted hype.

What ensued became among the most famous speculative bubbles in history. In this case, speculators had been buying bulbs year-round, spending large sums of money for no immediately tangible asset. (Sound familiar?) The bulb market crashed one February; this is relevant because months later, when bulbs became available again, many buyers refused to pay, leaving tulip sellers furious and empty-handed. The tulip market became an immediate laughingstock. "Even then, people thought it was crazy to spend that much on a bulb," says 17th-century historian Anne Goldgar, chair of European history at USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.



Jacob Marrel; Artpartner-Images/Getty Images

Tulip mania is now a mainstay of economics textbooks and documentaries, and the topic of a lengthy, surprisingly active Wikipedia page. The storyline is not just an historical anecdote, but a "cultural script," says Hayes. "It's a narrative template that we use to make sense of similar-looking phenomena," he says. People commonly reference tulip mania as shorthand for bubble-prone markets like cryptocurrency or blockchain or NFTs, though economists bristle at this, given that the bulb market (small, simple) has little in common with crypto (global, innovative).

But there may be a problem with the popular tale of tulip mania. "In fact, not that many bulbs were expensive, and not many people were involved," says Goldgar, who wrote her own detailed history of the era, *Tulipmania*. She counted far fewer buyers, at price levels far lower. Yes, in her view, tulip mania happened, but only to a small group of investors. "An economic-historian friend tells me that I'm never going to change people's minds about it," says Goldgar, "because it's too good a story."

Either way, the investing lesson here is timeless: Stay out of intangible markets that you don't understand.

‘We need massive amounts of electricity.’ Nuclear Power’s Sudden Comeback



More than three-quarters of a century ago, nuclear-powered electricity was born in Chicago. A team of scientists led by Enrico Fermi created the first sustained nuclear reaction. It lit up four light bulbs, a relatively small amount of energy, but it led the way for much more. Indeed, the heyday of building atomic power plants had begun. In 1951, Russia started building a grid-connected reactor, the only one that year. And by 1979, the peak year, 234 plants were under construction globally.

But heydays don’t last forever. While nuclear energy was presented as cheap and clean, its reputation quickly got soiled after some epic disasters. The first, in 1957, was in northwest England at Sellafield nuclear reactor. In 1979, there was a partial nuclear meltdown at US-based Three Mile Island. In 1986, the Chernobyl, Ukraine, plant exploded, immediately killing 31 people. In 2011, a tsunami disabled the cooling system of a nuclear plant in Fukushima, Japan. “Everyone thought nuclear power was safe, then something happened and got everybody concerned,” says Rob Thummel, senior portfolio manager at Tortoise Capital. “That’s kept nuclear on the sidelines; people wanted to shut it down.”

So what is happening now? It appears nuclear is making a comeback. For one, China is betting big on more nuclear power. It is constructing 30 new reactors to add to the 58 operable ones it has, according to the World Nuclear Association. WNA also says the impetus for building is air-pollution emissions from coal-powered electricity. India said it’s planning to add another six reactors to its already operational 24. “Nuclear power is reentering the space and China is leading the charge,” says Pete Earle, director of economics and economic freedom at the American Institute for Economic Research.

Portrait by ROB DOBI

Nuclear power is reentering the space and China is leading the charge.



Armckw/Getty Images

By 2021, some major European countries had embraced the idea of net-zero carbon, aka reducing carbon-dioxide pollution. That meant finding a way to cut down on using fossil fuel and instead focusing on renewables such as solar and wind power. There's a problem with relying on renewables to consistently generate electricity: "Most of these green energy sources don't provide consistent power," Earle says.

An example of such a problem was in late April when there was a complete blackout in Spain, Portugal, and parts of southern France. While Spain's premier dismissed claims that too much reliance on renewables was the cause, others weren't convinced.

Just last spring, Spain boasted it had achieved net-zero carbon emissions. That was due to a massive volume of solar power which triggered a plunge in electricity prices from 145 euros ($165) per megawatt-hour in early January to 11 euros by late March. But the price collapse also meant Spain's nuclear power was no longer economically viable, so its plants closed down temporarily. Therein lay the problem. Solar power is notoriously unreliable, and with no nuclear power to rely on, a crash of the grid couldn't be avoided, says Daniel Lacalle, chief economist at Madrid-based investment company Tressis.

Shortly after the blackout, Denmark's government said it was now considering reversing its five-decade ban on using nuclear power because it didn't want what happened in Spain and Portugal to happen in Denmark. "With nuclear, some of these renewables are suddenly viable," Earle says. And even before the blackout, Norway and Sweden were considering adding nuclear power, including small modular reactors. These are similar to the nuclear-power units in some submarines.

"I think nuclear is inevitable," says Peter Morici, professor emeritus at the University of Maryland. "We need massive amounts of electricity, and that is the only way to get it."

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.

‘This relationship is at the core of alignment.’ Rethinking CEO–Chair Dynamics



Years ago, when I was a new CEO at another consulting firm, I spent a week in Boston with the company’s chairman of the board. The trip wasn’t just to hammer out specifics of the job transition. Rather, it was to get to know each other—to understand how the other person thought, how we viewed the company’s current state, and what we wanted to achieve together.

While the trip was time-consuming, it was paramount to setting me up for success in my chief-executive role. It helped me understand the different levels of responsibility and authority the board chairman and I held. And it built a level of transparency and trust that fostered better communication between us from the get-go.

In today’s operating environment, the importance of the relationship between the CEO and the board chair has never been more critical. Beyond being the bridge between the board and top management, this relationship is at the core of strategic alignment. Chairs must simultaneously act as a sounding board and challenge CEOs without threatening their authority. They must keep the CEO apprised of how the board is feeling and—without being overly prescriptive about solutions—deliver tough messages. After all, the worst kind of chair is someone who hasn’t gotten over being a CEO.

Of course, while the relationship may be important, chairs haven’t always been active, and not all CEOs have embraced their help when they have been. To get a glimpse of where chairs and CEOs stand, Korn Ferry’s Board and CEO practice surveyed nearly 200 board members. The good news

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**



The CEO-chair dynamic is more of an art than a science.

TwoMeows/Getty Images

is that the study—titled *Board Chair of the Future*—found that a typical board chair sees their role in these uncertain times as a combination of company strategist, CEO mentor, and overall stabilizing force. Forget ushering through approvals: Board chairs are actively shaping the company's direction, whether it's the need for adaptability and innovation (singled out by 75 percent of directors in the study) or the adjustments required amid a heightened risk and regulatory environment (cited by 70 percent).

The chair's help is particularly important when you consider that six in 10 CEOs at public companies are first-timers. Clearly, such newcomers need a chair who is a thought partner—who actively provides oversight, helps with crisis response, and even engages with the public at times. Some CEOs might find this intimidating, but it's important for them to recognize that the chair's role is to offer different perspectives and provoke deeper thinking. Simply put, the chair is trying to coach the CEO to be their best.

So how can board chairs foster this type of relationship? Much of it comes down to putting in the time. While some CEOs and chairs speak weekly or monthly, others may touch base daily. Some calls may have specific agendas—say, to discuss tariffs or run a new idea past the board—while others may be more general: What's keeping you up at night? How do you want the board to deal with tension? And when possible, off-sites or face-to-face get-togethers can greatly improve the company's chances of success.

Of course, like any relationship, the CEO-chair dynamic is more art than science. Just as some couples have specific date nights while others go out spontaneously, CEOs and chairs need to develop a check-in frequency that works for them. Depending on the specifics of the transition, this may take trial and error, and it may be a bit awkward at first. But at the end of the day, all of that time pays off, because instead of just having good communication, the chair and CEO have something more potent: a great connection.

Griesedieck is vice chairman and managing director of Korn Ferry's Board and CEO Services practice.

‘These are positions AI simply can’t replace.’ Step Aside, Robot, Emotional Intelligence Is Here



A drumbeat of news has hailed the benefits of AI for the workplace of the future. The technology will process decisions faster. It will be a great tool for workers of many kinds. But even as this nonhuman world grows, I find that it has a paradoxical undertone: Emotional intelligence will be even more important for the jobs machines *can’t* fill.

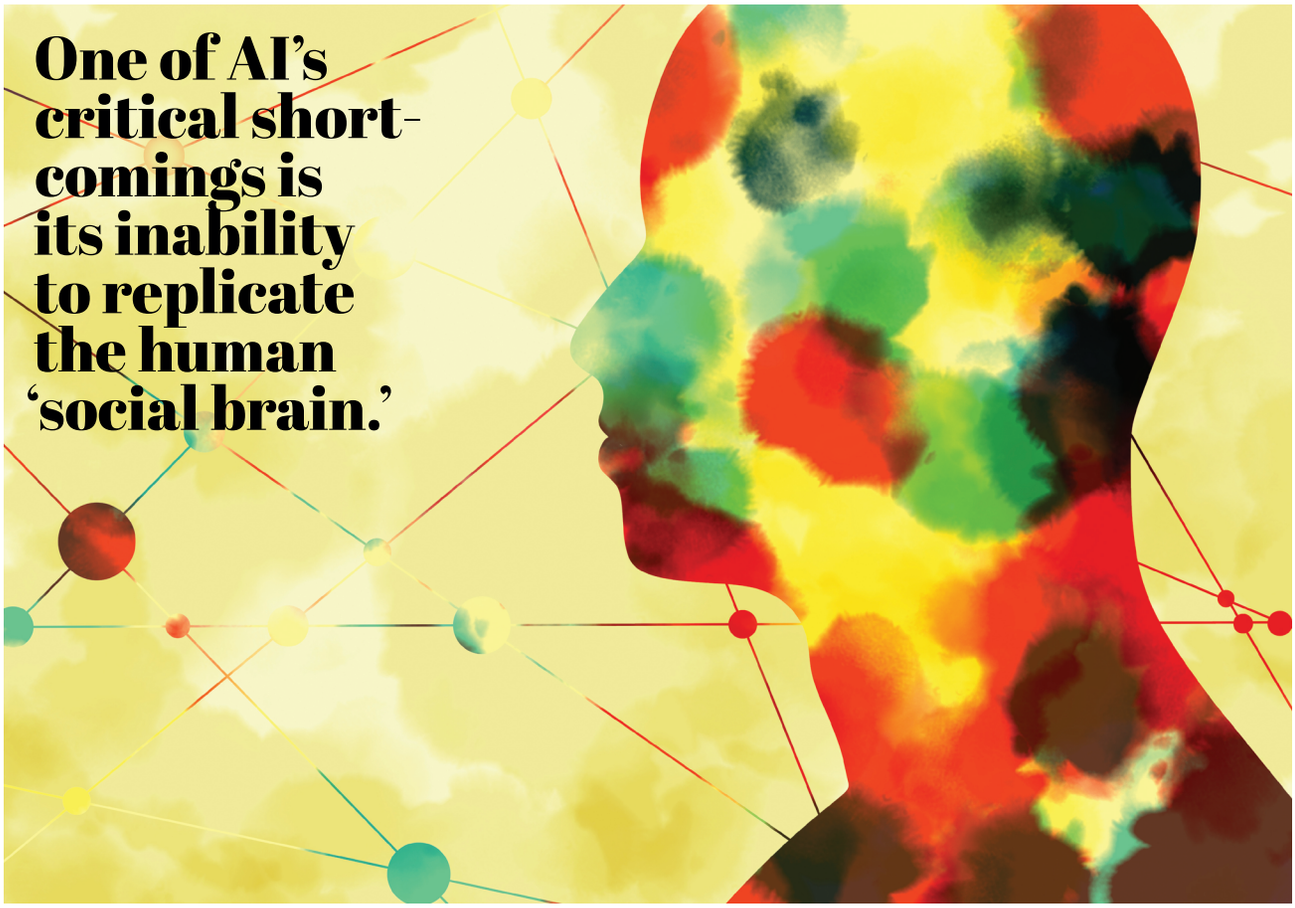
The biggest limitation of AI, it seems to me, is its lack of emotions. These language-learning models are, in essence, elegant code. “In the age of AI, EQ counts” is how Alan Guarino, vice chairman for Board and CEO Services at Korn Ferry, succinctly put it to me.

Indeed, one of AI’s critical shortcomings is its inability to replicate the human “social brain,” the complex circuits in our forebrain that lock into the brain of the person in front of us and pass emotion back and forth. You can see the social brain in operation when two people are in rapport. The key ingredient of rapport is full mutual attention, along with a nonverbal synchrony. When two people lock into each other this way, a third ingredient emerges: good feelings.

When a leader exhibits executive presence, that’s rapport in action. The person who receives that sense of presence feels positively about their relationship, and about that leader. Presence implies concern and caring, and promotes trust and loyalty.

Of the positions AI simply can’t replace, leadership is the most obvious. But this irreplaceability encompasses many other roles in which trust, caring, and responsiveness to emotional nuance matters. This human skill makes us appreciate doctors, teachers,

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**



Evgeny Gromov/Getty Images

therapists, even salespeople and marketers. Consider, too, how people pass emotions between each other without saying a word about them—again, due to the brain's social circuits. A large portion of what we understand comes to us as an unspoken, but crucial, emotional context for the words we hear.

This nonverbal transmission of mood matters for business. A series of studies at the Yale School of Management by Professor Sigal Barsade showed that if the head of a team was in a bad mood, people on that team "caught" that mood—and performance plummeted. Conversely, if the team leader was in an upbeat mood, performance improved via the same process of transmission.

Smart companies will help employees (those who survive the coming AI revolution) enhance their emotional-intelligence skill set. Those skills include resilience and emotional balance, effective communication, true empathy and listening, and the ability to motivate, inspire, and influence. While these qualities are essential to effective leadership, they also happen to be among the key skills for the future identified by a World Economic Forum global survey of employers.

These people skills are learned and learnable. But let the buyer beware: The quality and "stickiness" of the many emotional-intelligence programs available to companies varies greatly. To evaluate the helpfulness of the one you use, you might try a before-and-after assessment of the full spectrum of emotional-intelligence workplace competencies. This is best done using a 360-degree tool wherein people who work with someone day-to-day rate them anonymously. This ensures a more objective evaluation than self-assessment does. One such 360-degree measure is the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, or ESCI-360 (full disclosure: I had a hand in its design). The ESCI-360 captures the degree to which someone improves in this set of personal skills.

Bottom line for business: Amp up the emotional intelligence in your training and development offerings. This human skill set can be upgraded at any point in life, if the learner is motivated. And offering schooling in emotional intelligence should help any business, no matter what the AI future brings.

Goleman is the author of the international best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence*, and *Optimal: How to Sustain Personal and Organizational Excellence Every Day*.



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DAZED & CONFUSED

By Russell Pearlman

With so many crises now happening at once, **is a new breed of leadership needed**?

THE PROBLEM
Leaders are trained to deal with disruptions, but handling them simultaneously creates new challenges.

WHY IT MATTERS
Wrong decisions can cripple a company's future.

THE SOLUTION
Leaders need to develop a new temperament and redesign strategies both for operations and people management.




Illustrations
By Tim Ames



n the surface, you might think a leadership expert like Ralph Gigliotti would have it pretty easy with clients these days. After all, profits have been up for four quarters at big firms, inflation is no longer the economic boogeyman, and more and more employees are returning to the office.

But Gigliotti, who directs the Office of Organizational Leadership at Rutgers University, says that nearly every business leader he talks to these days shares a similar, the "sky is falling" feeling. He started teaching a global leadership course in Singapore in May, and says his students, all mid- and senior-level executives, complained about major disruptions piling up, and had one question: What do we do? "It does seem like crisis has become a near-constant condition," he says.

It's no surprise to anyone in the C-suite that the world around them, along with all aspects of the business climate, keeps accelerating.





And there isn't a leader among them who isn't used to dealing with each of the disruptions this fast pace brings. But experts say there is something decidedly different going on these days—namely, how so many setbacks keep happening at the same time. It's easy to create a list of them: tariff announcements, closely followed by a massive plunge in the stock market. Firms pouring millions into AI, only to discover that a much cheaper version from China may become viable. Economists putting the chances of a US recession at 40 percent one week, then 80 percent the next. The war in Ukraine seemingly nearing an end, just as a conflict in Iran was making headlines.

From the standpoint of a corporate leader, how tough does this get? Mike Lawford, president and CEO of the billion-dollar Canadian energy-production firm NuVista, says he is used to the tension that wild swings in energy prices can produce, but even he was thrown for a loop this spring when the trade war escalated and once rock-solid Canada-US relations took a turn. "It all hit the world all at the same time, and everyone was saying it's all bad," he says.

In such cases, experts say, leaders can wind up feeling disoriented and exhausted. That, in turn, leads to bad decision-making. We decided to look at four key areas that leaders need to keep an eye on and adjust for during these times, from how to make critical supply-chain decisions, to managing people, to handling today's political divide, even to adjusting their own temperament. For his part, Gigliotti says he and other leaders have little choice but to focus energy on areas they have the greatest control over. "Even when the broader context feels chaotic, that keeps us moving forward," he says.

TEMPERAMENT

This spring, during a routine check-in with his manufacturing CEO client, the vendor noticed that the boss was distracted. The leader's strategy had been upended by the new US tariff policies, impacting both the company's day-to-day business and also a longer-term reorganization. Plus, he was getting pushback

"STEER THEM DIRECTLY BACK TO **WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO THEM AND THEIR ORGANIZATION**— OTHERWISE, IT'S LAND MINES."

from investors over the firm's quickly sinking stock price. The normally affable, open CEO was curt, irritable, even rude. "I felt really badly for him," says the vendor, who asked not to be named to preserve his business relationship.

Right now, CEO temperament is the topic of conversation in client calls, team meetings, and professional gatherings. Leadership coach Saara Haapanen was at a conference in April where the topic was ostensibly how HR departments could shape corporate culture, but the issue of how bosses are leading right now kept coming up. Managers, particularly senior-level ones, she says, are struggling because they feel like they're under assault. "Not everything is an emergency," she says, "but when you're being inundated it can be tough to figure what really is dangerous." Indeed, Kevin Cashman, Korn Ferry's vice chairman of CEO and enterprise leadership, agrees. "The general energy and hopefulness among leaders is low, and depressive feelings are so high," he says.

When everything seems uncertain, it can be tempting for leaders to default to a more traditional so-called "directive," or authoritative, approach to management. *Do this. Do that. No dissent.* It is a style that experts say can be valuable in the short term if everything is really on the brink. But today, many of the same experts say some perspective is in order. Even though it seems like everything is apocalyptic for the firm, it's most likely not the case. Instead, most of today's mounting disruptions boil down to difficult but manageable challenges around growth, expenses, technology, and people. Top bosses likely will find a combination of leadership styles—the ability to articulate a shared mission or the knack to generate consensus, for example—that will be more effective than just relying on the directive approach. "People don't need more control; they need more clarity, care, and coaching," Haapanen says.

If leaders are finding themselves angry, afraid, or irritable, it can be valuable to turn to other leaders in their firm who may be feeling the same way. Pausing and identifying the emotion can help mitigate its impact and reduce stress, Haapanen says. "When a leader is grounded it helps the whole team feel steady," she says. Most importantly, experts say, leaders should fall back on their sense of purpose and the purpose of the organization.





By reminding teams, and themselves, why the work matters, leaders can not only reduce the fears of the uncertain environment, but also increase the motivation of employees.

MANAGING PEOPLE

Leaders aren't the only ones dazed and confused, of course. Indeed, based on many surveys, ordinary workers are far more wary of what AI, trade wars, and the other 2025 disruptions will do to their lives. It's not hard to see why, when C-suite executives estimate that nearly 60 percent of entry-level roles will be eliminated by AI, according to one survey from upskilling-software provider edX. The onus is on leaders for getting workers to buy into changes such as new work assignments, additional training, or just doing more with less.

One of the biggest mistakes leaders make is trying to shield their teams from disruption instead of guiding them through it. It's a natural response, particularly in the corporate world. But HR and communications experts say leaders do better if they communicate early, set clear expectations, and do not change course without explanation. That can help employee sentiment hold steady—even in volatile environments. "People can handle disruption when they have something solid to hold on to," says Eric McNulty,

"THESE HELP **A COMPANY'S ABILITY** TO TAKE A PUNCH."

associate director of the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative at Harvard University.

That buy-in is critical, because organizations are increasingly finding that they can't just foist something on employees and expect success. Perhaps the biggest evidence for this relates to employee training, something that is becoming critical as firms seek to upskill workers trying to engage with AI. In all, firms spend nearly $100 billion a year on corporate-training programs, but most employees feel it is more of a check-the-box exercise. Indeed, one study found that less than a quarter of employees say they are using their company's AI-skills training programs. It's not for lack of interest; almost two in five said they would leave their job for a place with better AI training.

Some leaders are taking a collaborative approach when it comes to big challenges, hoping that keeping teams abreast of what's going on will give them more of a chance to positively impact the company's situation before things turn dire. Lawford, the NuVista CEO, used to have department leaders give status reports individually to senior executives. Now, he says, they all meet at the same time, which gives everyone a better sense of where the company is going and how best to craft solutions together. "We, as the executive team, don't want to show up to say, 'By the way, this is how we are reacting,'" he says.

Lessons from Other Turbulent Times

We've had dizzying times before, and they've provided lessons that modern leaders can use.

2020-2022

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

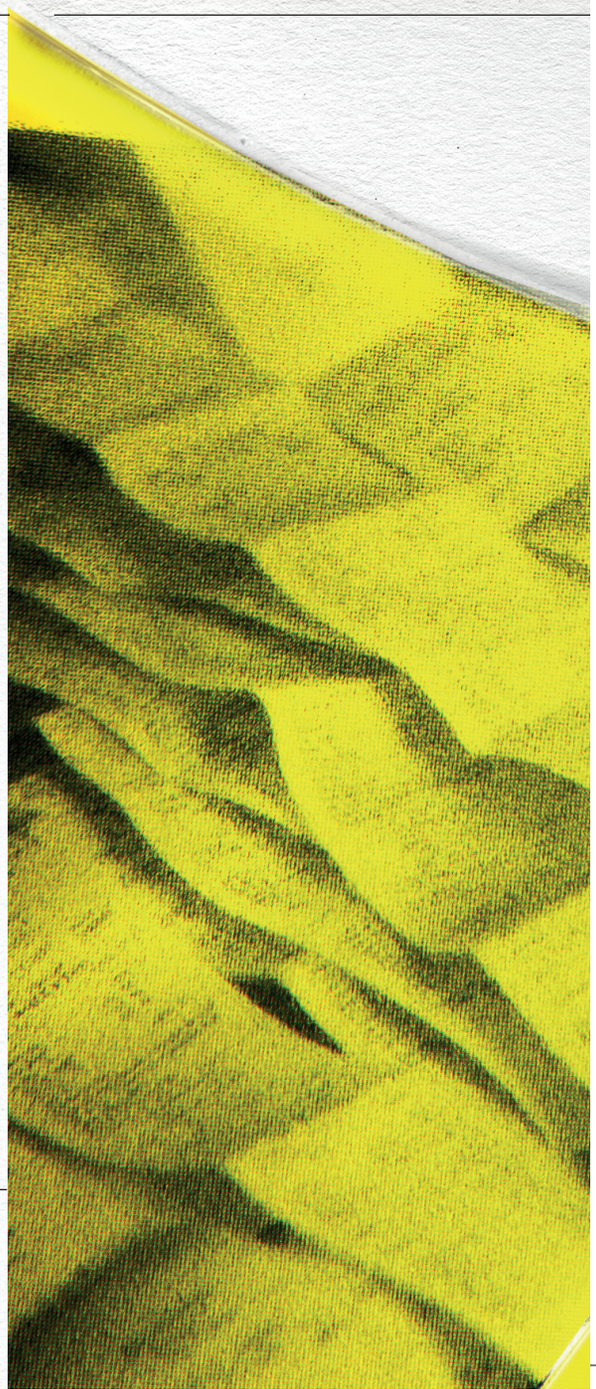
BE READY TO PIVOT. Conditions turned quickly, but the best firms—and leaders—adapted to the circumstances. It wasn't just ***getting people to work remotely,*** either. Leaders embraced new ways to manage, innovate, and inspire.

SUPPLY CHAINS

Once an afterthought for most CEOs, supply chains became a top priority during the pandemic—and that was before the word tariff was so commonly used. Between the pandemic and now, many organizations began massive supply-chain overhauls. Some of their changes were done to lessen the reliance on one country supplying critical parts or products. Other firms spent millions on digital transformation, hoping the ability to more precisely analyze inventory, production, and demand data would allow their factories and logistics operations to become far more productive. And firms worldwide spent an estimated $11 billion to add robots to warehouses and factories, hoping automation could speed up production times and cut overall costs.

Then came the April tariff surprise from the US, which upended many of those commitments. And that upending has continued as more large tariffs keep

"IT ALL **HIT THE WORLD ALL AT THE SAME TIME** AND EVERYONE WAS SAYING IT'S ALL BAD."



2008-2009

THE GREAT FINANCIAL CRISIS

HUBRIS IS A BUSINESS LIABILITY. In 2005 and 2006, there were alarm bells about a potential financial crisis, but ***many leaders chose not to listen***. Their intransigence ultimately caused a huge amount of harm to their stakeholders and their reputations.

1972-1974

THE GREAT INFLATION CRISIS

DON'T NEGLECT THE BALANCE SHEET. Many leaders were caught off guard when interest rates skyrocketed, ***peaking at 14 percent***, and the debt loads of their organizations went from manageable to unsustainable. Leaders needed to keep a better eye out for early signs of troubling trends.

1929-1939

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

TEMPERAMENT MATTERS. In a time of true crisis, employees want to know that their leaders have their backs. President Franklin D. Roosevelt inspired many in the United States as he led with ***a combination of intelligence, confidence, and optimism***.

coming—seemingly on a weekly basis. That of course has thrown a wrench in the plans of nearly any company that produces goods in one country and sells them in another. Most companies set up their supply chains assuming it would be relatively inexpensive to move parts, products, and people around the world, says John Jullens, founder of Arbalète, a supply-chain consultancy. "Companies have to be rethinking that because we're moving away from that relatively frictionless world," he says.

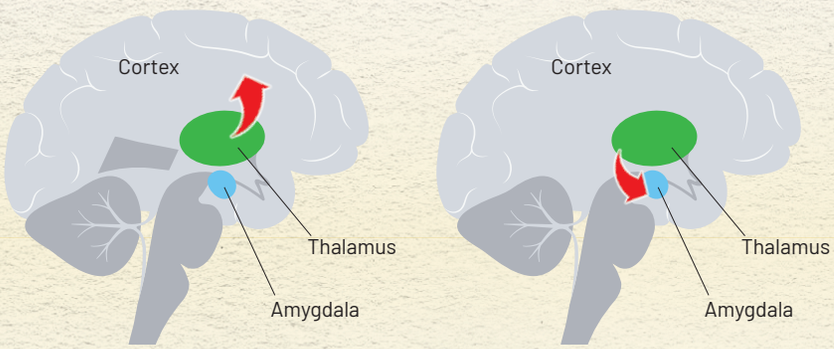
A tariff-inspired cost crunch could force a CEO's hand and put a halt to any long-term supply-chain plans. "Everyone has a fiduciary responsibility," says Erik Olson, a Korn Ferry senior client partner. However, experts caution that CEOs shouldn't just cancel whatever long-term supply-chain remodeling their firms were undertaking before the trade war started. Companies can't just stop in the middle of a digital transformation, for instance. Without fully following through on implementing AI or robotics, a company could wind up spending money and not seeing any gains.

Most experts say there are no easy answers here, but that in general, CEOs should be looking to build more toughness and adaptability into their supply chains. In the short term, companies can build up inventories in case of shortages or build better relationships with their suppliers, helping them with financing, for example. "These help a company's



Battles in the Brain

Leaders immersed in crises may not realize it, but being bombarded by information actually makes one part of the brain work against the other. Uncertainty, fear, and anxiety can trigger the amygdala, the part of the brain that governs a human's flight-or-fight instinct. If the amygdala's response is powerful, it can send an immediate reaction to the brain's central relay station, the thalamus, overwhelming any information from the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that handles critical thinking and complex decision-making.



Normal circumstances | Amygdala hijack

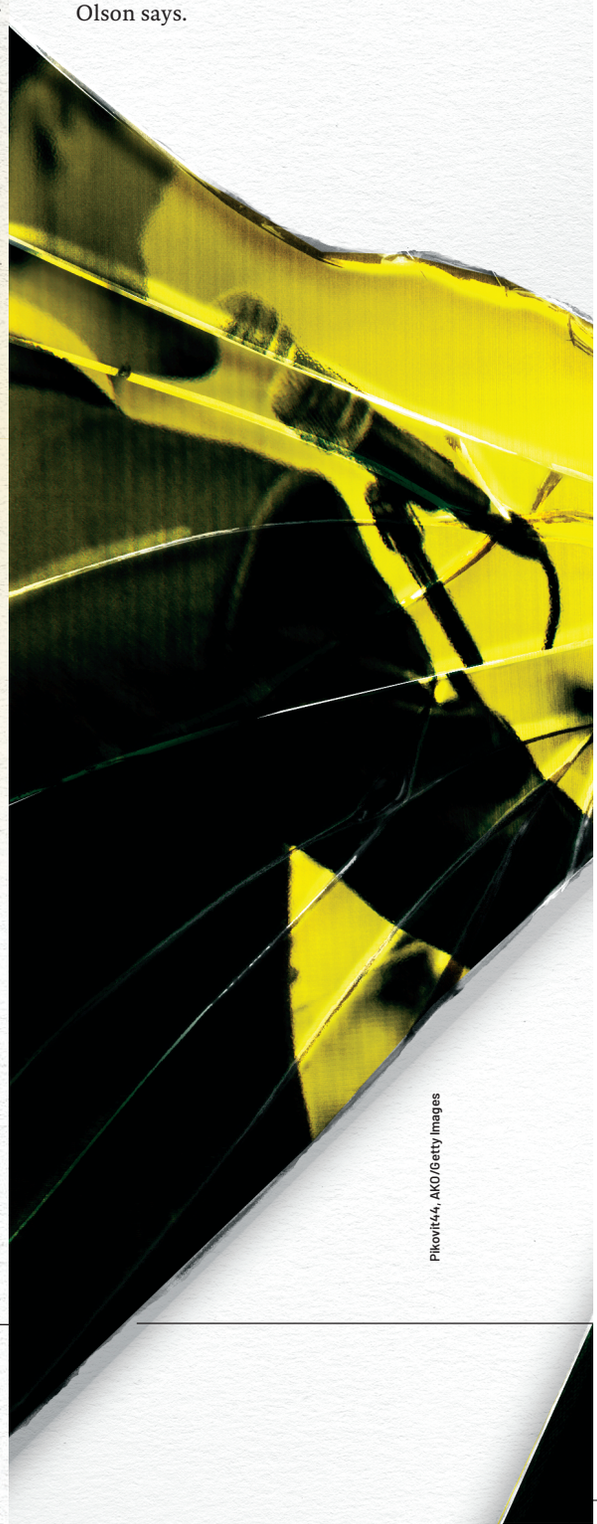
328.77 MILLION TERABYTES
Amount of **information created each day**, equivalent to more than 164 trillion copies of *War and Peace*.

74 GIGABYTES
Amount of **information an average person consumes each day**, equivalent to 16 movies.

100,000 WORDS
Number of **words Americans process each day**, which is like reading two books daily.

ability to take a punch," Jullens says. At the same time, companies can build resiliency by broadening their supplier base and testing alternative ways to build products. Finally, the long-term goal should be to help supply-chain executives make faster decisions when it comes to product design, logistics, and production.

These are big organizational changes, Jullens says, and all this will take human brainpower. CEOs should be looking for executives who are not only on top of how current events are impacting the company's operations, but also able to design and present a compelling future supply chain. After the US announced its first major round of global tariffs, an aerospace CEO confided to Olson that she was livid that her supply-chain executives didn't have an incisive next step. "She wanted to immediately ask for new talent," Olson says.



Plkovit44, AKO/Getty Images

POLITICAL ISSUES

Keep your head down. Just ignore the topic. That's been the conventional wisdom for leaders when it comes to politics. It's certainly something many leaders prefer. More than half—52 percent—of company executives said their CEOs would be less vocal in 2025 than previous years, according to a survey from software provider Benevity. But what happens when politics becomes the most talked-about issue? Worse, what do bosses do when customers say they'll take their business elsewhere based on the firm's relationships with the federal government, or if employees believe a firm's return-to-office policies are being determined by the boss's political leanings?



"THE GENERAL ENERGY AND **HOPEFULNESS AMONG LEADERS IS LOW** AND DEPRESSIVE FEELINGS ARE SO HIGH."

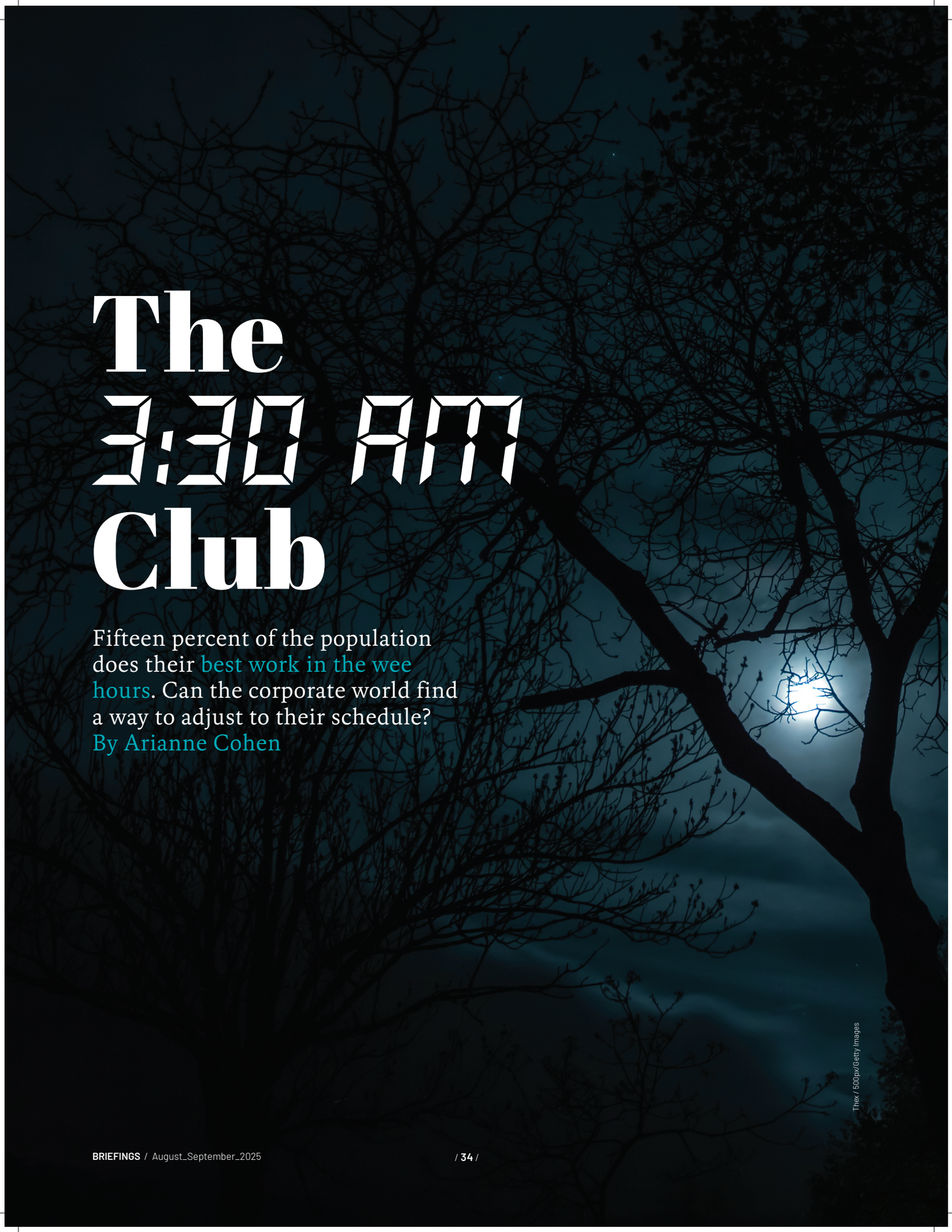
That's the situation many bosses find themselves in. With a client, the wrong step can be particularly costly. "You risk your reputation, you risk the business, and it can blow back on the organization," says Louis Montgomery Jr., a principal at Korn Ferry's HR Center of Expertise. Even when the boss doesn't say a word, that doesn't stop employees from thinking the boss cares about politics. Indeed, according to a 2024 survey from career-software company ResumeHelp, 59 percent of employees believe their manager's political beliefs influence their management style.

Experts say the best answer is to be very nuanced around discussing politics, separating it into two situations: times when leaders should talk and times when they should gently steer away from the topic. Some light political discussion is OK, too; for example, in sectors directly impacted by immediate political moves, such as government and defense contracting. Indeed, some companies did use lobbying and other political discussions to get carve-outs from the US during the early days of the trade war. If a firm or sector is falling in or out of favor, political nuances will naturally emerge on a regular basis. "It's discussion of administration policies as they affect future business," says Montgomery, who navigates these conversations by sticking to the business topics at hand.

Then there are the thornier situations, when clients, employees, or other stakeholders bring up the topic. Almost a quarter of workers say they have witnessed a colleague behave aggressively or counterproductively because of their political beliefs. Leaders might feel stuck when someone else talks politics. Here, experts advise deftly pivoting. "Steer them directly back to what's important to them and their organization," says organizational strategist Kim Waller, a senior client partner at Korn Ferry. "Otherwise, it's land mines."

The 3:30 AM Club

Fifteen percent of the population does their best work in the wee hours. Can the corporate world find a way to adjust to their schedule?
By Arianne Cohen



Thex / 500px/Getty Images



THE PROBLEM

The professional world is scheduled around the daytime, but certain workers perform best late at night.

WHY IT MATTERS

Some of these people are wildly talented and can help the firm succeed.

THE SOLUTION

Leaders need to create serial schedules to adjust to workers' peak hours.

One time, Liviu Tanase tried to work from 9 AM to 5 PM. "I even tried waking up at 8 AM," he says, despite being a night owl since childhood. As the CEO of ZeroBounce, an email-verification company, he was surrounded by early-rising entrepreneurs—who was he to do it differently? After all, 8 AM is practically midday by the standards of avowed early risers like Howard Schultz, Richard Branson, Indra Nooyi, and Bill Gates. Tanase's experiment failed spectacularly. "I was tired and hungry and moody all day. It was killing my productivity." At night, he repeatedly stayed up too late, leaving him hugging the pillow and hitting snooze at 8 AM. He abandoned the effort, and reverted to the schedule he keeps today: dinner, then family time, and a return to work around 11 PM.

Tanase is among the roughly 15 percent of workers whose circadian rhythms, known as chronotypes, lead them to do their best work in the wee hours. Some are extreme early risers, sometimes called "larks," who naturally wake up at 3 AM or even earlier, while others are still awake from the previous evening, not hitting the hay until 4 AM or 5 AM. These larks and owls speak rapturously about the calm of night, when there are no ringing phones or crying kids or pressing errands and they are able to do their best work. "At night everyone's in bed and I can come alive," says London Wolfe, a business alignment strategist.

Yet despite constituting more than one in 10 workers, it's a lifestyle at odds with corporate norms. It flies in the face of the best practices spouted by everyone from executives to doctors: Take good care of yourself by going to bed in the later evening. Don't ever send emails at 3 AM, or coworkers will think you're unhinged. "Leaders prefer morning workers, and society has a general bias toward morning people," says Cristiano Guarana, professor at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, who studies sleep in organizations.

Like early birds, night owls typically go through a phase of enduring the corporate world's schedule, only to find their health and spirits broken. Following a lot of late night "what am I doing with my life?" anxiety, owls eventually break free and accept their true selves. Staying up late becomes an identity. "The reality is, it's exactly who I am," says Tanase. And so it's wildly crushing when corporate managers announce that the job starts at 9 AM. As they face all that, not to mention colleagues offended by late-night or predawn emails, you can hear their cries: Is there a better way to manage employees who sleep to the beat of their own drum?

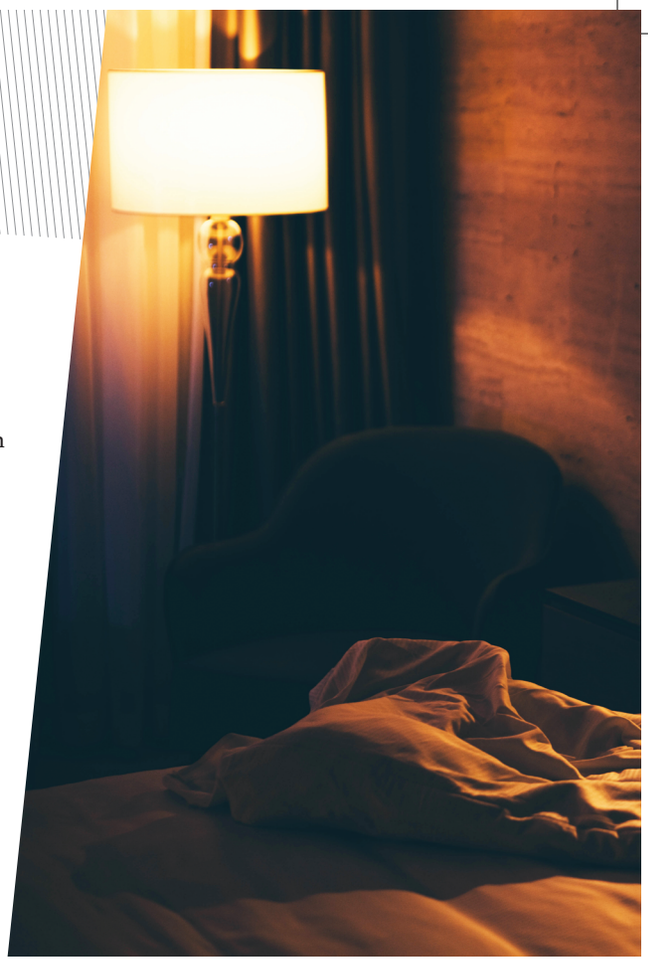
BLAME OUR TRIBAL TIMES

You could say that Tanase is a night owl because tens of thousands of years ago, someone in the tribe had to stay awake to scare away the lions on the savannah. Humans would not be as successful a species if all people conked out after sundown. Instead, some people protected the clan at night, while others were up hunting before the heat; they kept an eye on the young children overnight as well. Before the widespread use of fire, hunter-gatherers likely slept based not on the time of day, but on their surroundings: If the environment was safe, they could sleep. Without any source of artificial light, they probably slept mostly at night when safe, but also napped during the day. "They were flexible with sleep," says Kevin Koronowski, who runs a circadian-clock-research lab at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The adoption of fire shifted



Tetra Images/Getty Images


"SOCIETY HAS A
GENERAL BIAS TOWARD
MORNING PEOPLE."



those patterns, allowing hunter-gatherers to stay up a bit later—but also creating the permanent need for someone to remain awake to keep the fire going. Then came agriculture. Farming schedules require people to do the same tasks at predictable times of day, leading to regimented sleeping patterns—which can be pleasant for extreme larks, and a nightmare for owls. Some respite arrived with the spread of indoor light, whether from candles or light bulbs, which returned populations to the wildly varying sleep schedules of yore. "With artificial light came infinite possibilities," says Koronowski.

These days, humans' waking and sleeping patterns fall on a spectrum, with approximately 85 percent of the population landing in the middle of the spectrum: wake up sometime between 5 AM and 8:30 AM, and go to sleep sometime between 10 PM and 12:30 AM. Some extreme larks and owls have mutations to the genes that drive circadian rhythm, known as clock genes. Two groups of these genes, known as the PER and CRY families, shift what time the pineal gland releases melatonin, a hormone that primes the body for sleep: Larks have an earlier melatonin release, and owls a later release.

In the morning, early birds often have a more robust spike of cortisol, a hormone associated with wakefulness. "It's less pronounced

ONE EXTREME OWL'S SCHEDULE

Meet **Christopher Kaufman,** a professor of business and leadership studies with a very defined, and very late, work schedule.





Maria Korneeva, MirageC, Dimitris66/Getty Images



"AT NIGHT EVERYONE'S IN BED AND I CAN COME ALIVE."

in night owls," says Koronowski. Critically, most employees' peak work hours typically appear roughly three hours after waking—though some night owls say theirs come later. Most corporate firms fumble these peak performance hours with commutes or mandatory meetings, which waste top performance hours and torture night owls.

REARRANGING SCHEDULES

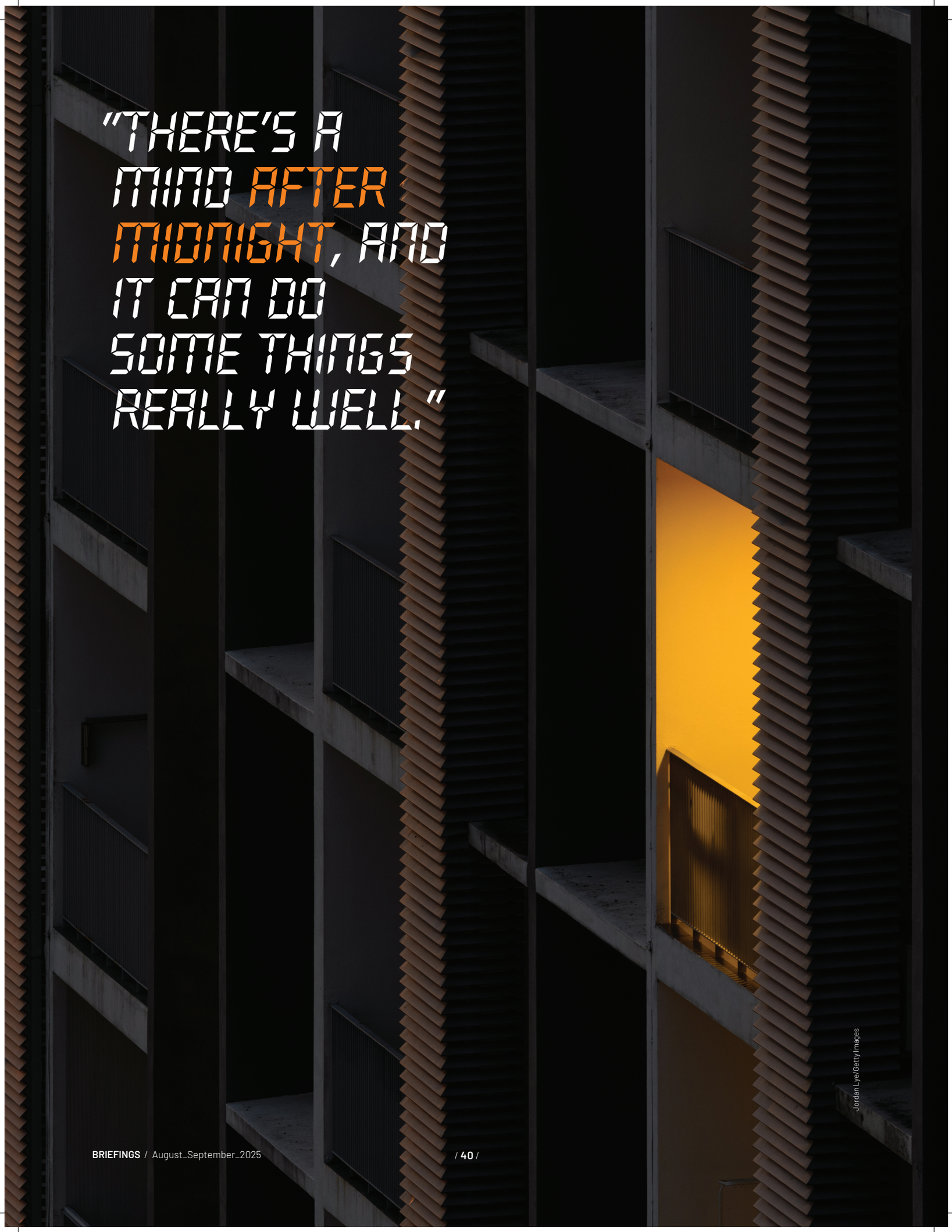
Not surprisingly, many extreme larks and owls gravitate to roles that accommodate their off-hours habits. Asia Solnyshkina, CEO of software-development firm ProSense, has tailored her all-night hours to work closely with European clients just after her family goes to sleep in Mexico City. She then moves on to Saudi Arabia, and when morning breaks, she meets with local clients. "I'm doing negotiations, Zoom calls, pitching, everything," she says. She sleeps from 8 PM to 2 AM, and works from 2 AM to noon, a schedule that also allows her to spend time with her young children during the day, and be present for both their bedtimes and wakeups.

For many, shifting work hours is just the tip of the iceberg. The real challenge is knowing how to harness off-hours habits for high-quality output. "It's a neurochemical-vampire tightrope," says Christopher Kaufman, professor of business and leadership studies at Westcliff University. "There's a mind after midnight, and it can do some things really well, and not others." At 11 PM, he can be found in business attire, at a standing desk, with three glowing screens in a state he calls night-owl mode. He does his best work until 2 AM, and then enjoys a creativity boost, as the rationality of the prefrontal cortex fades and ideas emerge freely. "That means more creative and more intense flow states," he says. But by 4 AM he's flagging, meaning that those ideas can't be immediately harnessed into anything due the next morning. Rather, he returns to the ideas at midday, in a different state of mind. It took him years of trying to draft and edit between 4 AM and 5 AM to learn that producing and turning in assignments the same morning doesn't work. "That's the problem with night owls: We're seen by peers as sloppy," he says.

Extreme larks and owls readily admit to two other major downsides of wee-hours work. First, with fewer people around, fewer resources are available. This is best illustrated by hospitals, where doctors commonly struggle to get tests like MRIs and ultrasounds done during the night. "It's just easier to get things done in-house during the day, and that's probably a true statement for everywhere," says Larry Edelman, a physician at University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health, who has happily worked the overnight shift in the emergency room for 14 years. During the day, lots of extra hands are available, such as physician executives who can come down to help. "At night you might be calling someone for 30 minutes before they answer the phone."

Edelman is quick to note that this cuts both ways. The environment is more relaxed at night, largely because staffers are calmer. "There's a lot more anxiety during the day," he says. "People are worried because the boss is around. At night, the nurses are a lot cooler."

The second downside is not enough sleep. The extreme owls interviewed for this story said they sleep five to six hours per night, which is two to three hours short of typical adult-sleep needs. Guarana, the professor who studies sleep in organizations, co-led a research project looking at the sleep deprivation of leaders, and found that although tired leaders believe their relationships with their teams are fine, the workers classified their relationships with their sleep-deprived leaders as not good. "It's similar to asking a drunk person whether they're drunk. Sleep-deprived people engage in self-deception," says Guarana. "Regardless of your chronotype, sleep should be nonnegotiable."



Jordan Lye/Getty Images



Yotin Kamnont. Photoplotnikov. -VICTOR-. Dimitris66. BojanMirkovic/Getty Images

SLEEP SUCCESS

Experts say some key habits can boost rest and productivity on every sleep schedule.

EAT STRATEGICALLY. "Eating patterns positively reinforce your circadian rhythm," says Koronowski. The key is to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner over a 12-or-so-hour period, and not eat within three hours of bedtime.

KEEP THE SAME ROUTINE. Stay on your schedule, even if it's weird. "What's important is regularity," says Guarana. By waking and going to sleep at roughly the same time, you can limit negative impacts on health and work performance.

DON'T DO IMPORTANT WORK LAST. Cognitive abilities mildly decline through waking hours, and really plummet toward sleep time. "You might be error prone when it's late," says Koronowski. Instead, do busywork last.

WEAR BLUE-LIGHT GLASSES. Pop them on two hours before bedtime to filter out the blue light that prevents the body from releasing the sleep hormone melatonin. "This is even more important for owls—it helps them fall asleep faster," says Guarana.

EDUCATE COWORKERS ABOUT CORE HOURS. The best time for collaboration is early afternoon. "That's when everyone is both most alert and most awake," says Guarana. Coworkers often don't know this, and will set meetings for, say, 9 AM or 4 PM.

3 AM LEADERSHIP

Tanase's own experience has informed his leadership style. He focuses on employee output, and doesn't care what time his employees start their days. Unlike many firms, his avoids "core hours," the required times when everyone is available, and instead allows teams to hold mandatory meetings as needed.

Experts say that awareness is half the game when managing early birds and owls. Studies show that neurodivergent people are much more likely to be night owls, particularly those with ADHD. For these populations, working at 3 AM is not about just circadian rhythms, but also the ability to curate one's own environment. "During the day, you can't always find the quiet pockets you need. It's overstimulation," says Wolfe, the business alignment strategist, who finds it much easier to hyperfocus when she's chosen the music and lighting, and isn't distracted by nearby construction.

Just as important as understanding chronotypes is not taking advantage of them. "Keep in mind that some started their day at 3 AM," says Guarana. In practice, leaders often give both larks and owls more work, such as handing off a project when leaving the office to an employee working late hours. He suggests acknowledging that *everyone* has a set amount of time and cognitive resources for work.

In the end, experts say savvy leaders can balance varying chronotypes into successful serial work. It looks like this: The night owl pecks away at night, and hands over the reins to the lark, who hands them off to the daytime worker. But this only works when employees don't feel compelled to answer calls and emails during their sleep hours. Guarana says that sleep modeling is perhaps the most critical modeling a leader can do. "Protect your followers' sleep time."

CONSTRUCTION'S PRODUCTIVITY PROBLEM



PM Images, Aliaksandr Trafimovich/Getty Images

Most home building remains a tedious process, holding back the industry for decades. Can it catch up with the future?

By Meghan Walsh

THE PROBLEM
The construction industry has been plagued with inefficiencies.

WHY IT MATTERS
Broader development relies on built infrastructure.

THE SOLUTION
Innovating how and with what we build.

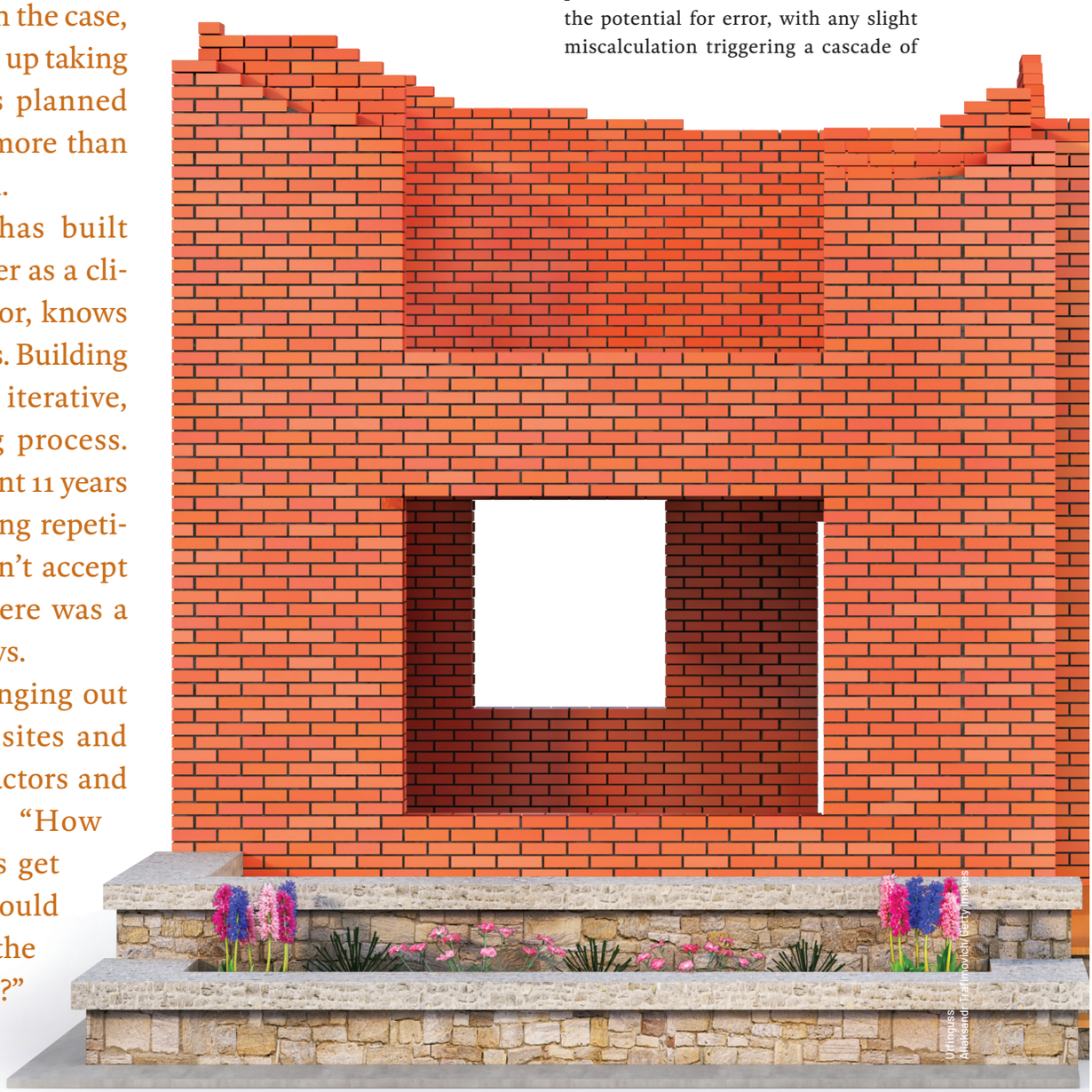


When Tessa Lau, an expert in AI, machine learning, and robotics, undertook a home remodel in 2018, she was surprised to see how rudimentary the process was. Carpenters attended to each detail by hand. Reworking and mistakes proliferated, including the kitchen island almost being built in the wrong place. And, as is so often the case, the project ended up taking twice as long as planned and costing far more than originally quoted.

Anyone who has built anything, whether as a client or a contractor, knows this is how it goes. Building is an imperfect, iterative, and painstaking process. But Lau, who spent 11 years at IBM automating repetitive tasks, couldn't accept that. "I knew there was a solution," she says.

Lau started hanging out at construction sites and talking to contractors and workers there. "How does the process get held up?" she would ask. "Where do the mistakes happen?"

That's when she learned about layouts. Before construction begins, contractors and tradespeople have to transpose the blueprints onto the building surface. Referring to the drawings, they meticulously check distances with a tape measure and, from their hands and knees, snap chalk lines. The process can take weeks and is rife with the potential for error, with any slight miscalculation triggering a cascade of



Ufuoma Ighoyota/Aleksandr Tarlinovich/Getty Images

problems down the line.

Lau's solution is a Roomba-esque, AI-powered robot known as Dusty that—or should we say who—zooms around the worksite marking the layout. What can take the most skilled workers weeks to do, Dusty achieves in a couple of days with exact precision. "It takes about five seconds showing a demo to a grizzled old superintendent before they're sold," Lau says.



Tessa Lau, founder and CEO of Dusty Robotics.



Across the globe, the construction industry is fantastically large and important, yet somehow, a good part of it is still catching up to the modern age. To a shocking degree, steps taken for granted in many industries—robotics, computerization, artificial intelligence—lag behind at many of the outfits that erect our homes, small buildings, and factories. Studies have found construction, one of the largest sectors of the global economy, to be the least digitized, with productivity stagnating and, in some cases, declining over the last half century. For this, there are myriad reasons, some beyond the control of industry leaders, but others are ripe for recalibration. Experts say innovation will be the key to reversing the alarming trend line in productivity.

Certainly some areas, such as large commercial building, have modernized much more than others. But with the world engrossed in today's AI advancements, the woes in other parts of construction are a jarring reminder that progress rarely happens at the same pace from one business to another. And in this case, the stakes are high: The housing shortage in the United States—and around the globe—is driving home prices beyond the reach of the middle class; civil infrastructure is in dire need of upgrades; and net-zero energy ambitions require significant structural modifications. On its current trajectory, construction output could fall short of demand by $40 trillion over the next 15 years.

"OFTENTIMES, INGENUITY AND INNOVATION ARE BORN OUT OF NEED."

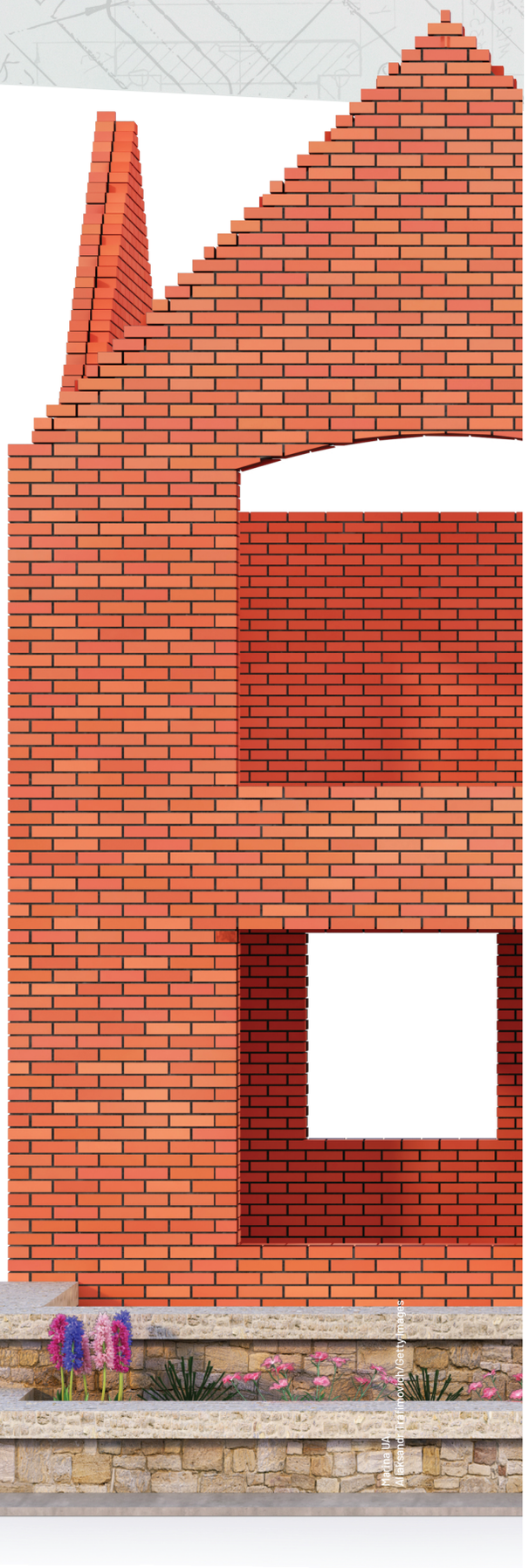
"If building isn't able to innovate to keep up with the economy, that's a very big problem," says Henning Roedel, former robotics lead at DPR Construction, a large technical contracting firm, and founder of Hardhat Robotics, which pioneers technology solutions in building. "We're at the point that we need to do something about it."

For hundreds of years, construction evolved alongside the broader economy and modern science. New materials improved efficiency. Power tools and heavy-duty equipment supplemented manual labor, upping output. But a 2023 paper titled "The Strange and Awful Path of Productivity in the US Construction Sector" reveals that sometime around the 1970s, the industry diverged from this path. The authors, two economists at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, show that productivity for residential buildings began to fall at an average of 1 percent a year; by 2020, the value added per worker was 40 percent less than 50 years prior.

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics released a report last year tracking industry productivity since 2007. The single-home and infrastructure sectors experienced declining productivity over the entire span; multi-home only recently began to show modest gains; and commercial hovered at less than 1 percent until the last five years, when it shot up to almost 16 percent. Meanwhile, during that same period, manufacturing experienced a ninefold increase in labor productivity.

Construction's productivity problem is not particular to the US, either. While worldwide total productivity improved by 50 percent from 2000 to 2022, the construction sector's increased by only 10 percent—and most of that growth came from developing countries that were catching up with foundational practices. Western nations remained stagnant.

To be sure, researchers have highlighted these dismal output rates before. And productivity, the gold standard in measuring long-term industry



Martins UA / Aleksandr Trifonov/Getty Images

THE NUMBERS:
Industry Productivity and Potential

1%
Average rate construction productivity fell per year from 1970 to 2020

4M-7M
Estimated shortage of single-family housing units in the US

70%
Potential industry growth over the next 16 years

$50B
Investment in AEC technologies from 2020 to 2022



Sources: Becker Friedman Institute for Economics, University of Chicago; Brookings Institute; McKinsey Global Institute



progress, is notoriously difficult to quantify, prompting critics to question these studies. Still, few deny that there's plenty of room for improvement. "The industry definitely is aware of its productivity challenges," says Audrey Lynch, a senior analyst at BuiltWorlds, a Chicago-based construction research and media network.

But if productivity is an issue, there are many questions as to why. "The disappointment was we couldn't hang it on anything in particular," says the 2023 University of Chicago study's coauthor Chad Syverson. No doubt politics and bureaucratic red tape are factors, but experts say there are a number of other contributors. For starters, the nature of the work makes standardization difficult. Unlike manufacturing, which involves assembling the same thing over and over in a controlled setting, each building site and project is unique, from the underlying earth to bespoke designs. And the profession as a whole ranges from sole contractors doing kitchen renovations to multinational firms building skyscrapers that pierce the horizon—and everything in between. Meanwhile, a multitude of stakeholders have to cooperate, including architects, engineers, regulatory agencies, material suppliers, and tradespeople.

"WE'RE AT THE POINT THAT WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING."

This complex and collaborative process makes it difficult to assess risk and control outcomes. Typically, contractors protect against high risk by passing costs onto the customer when the unforeseen occurs. Tight profit margins and a competitive bidding process also reduce the incentive to solve for such problems, leading to a lack of innovation and investment in new

Urfin Juss/Getty Images

technology across the industry.

Making matters worse is a persistent and worsening worker shortage. “The labor shortage is an existential crisis for the industry,” says Roedel of Hardhat Robotics. “It will force the industry to change.” The US alone has roughly half a million field vacancies. And with one in five workers over 55 and leaders struggling to fill the pipeline with young, skilled talent, pressure is increasing on firms to do more with less. “Oftentimes, ingenuity and innovation are born out of need,” Korn Ferry senior client partner Dan Pulver says. “It will be painful for a little while, but things will ultimately shift.”

Seven years ago, when Lau was designing Dusty, the friendly jobsite robot, few of the companies she would ultimately pitch to had appointed a chief technology or data officer. That’s changing. Within the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) industry, Pulver says, recruiting for CTOs and CDOs is one of the hottest markets. Larger firms are also assembling dedicated innovation teams, such as the one Roedel was on.

Investments in construction technology have reached all-time highs over the last several years. “The market is there,” Pulver says. An estimated $50 billion was invested in AEC technologies between 2020 to 2022, an 85 percent increase over the previous three years, according to one survey. With this cash flow, a suite of solutions is rapidly emerging.



Turnouss/Aleksandr Timovich/Getty Images



New software aims to streamline the project-management process and incorporate data analytics to inform decision-making. Building information modeling (BIM) allows creators to erect what's known as a virtual twin, which can expose potential planning pitfalls ahead of time. On the jobsite, fully and semi-autonomous tools are making building safer and more efficient, including AI-powered drills that can detect obstructions, titrate torque, and learn as they go. Hefty price tags mean only the biggest players can afford much of the tech right now, but as costs come down, Roedel says, there will be more widespread integration. "The challenge has been that the industry is very slow to adopt these new technologies," he says.

On the site of a large hospital build in the Southeast, Dusty isn't just printing layouts. The zippy robot is printing QR codes, which link to punch-list items such as the fixtures that need to be installed in each room. "All of this information already exists," Lau says. "We're bringing it out into the field where it's useful."

The construction industry is foundational to modern civilization. Without it there are no houses, hospitals, roads, or sewer lines. Limited output has a profound impact on social, political, and environmental development too. Take Los Angeles, for example, where historic wildfires in January incinerated roughly 16,000 structures. But even before that, the region was facing a severe housing shortage. Meanwhile, local leaders are preparing to host the Olympics in just three years.

"IT WILL FORCE THE INDUSTRY TO CHANGE."

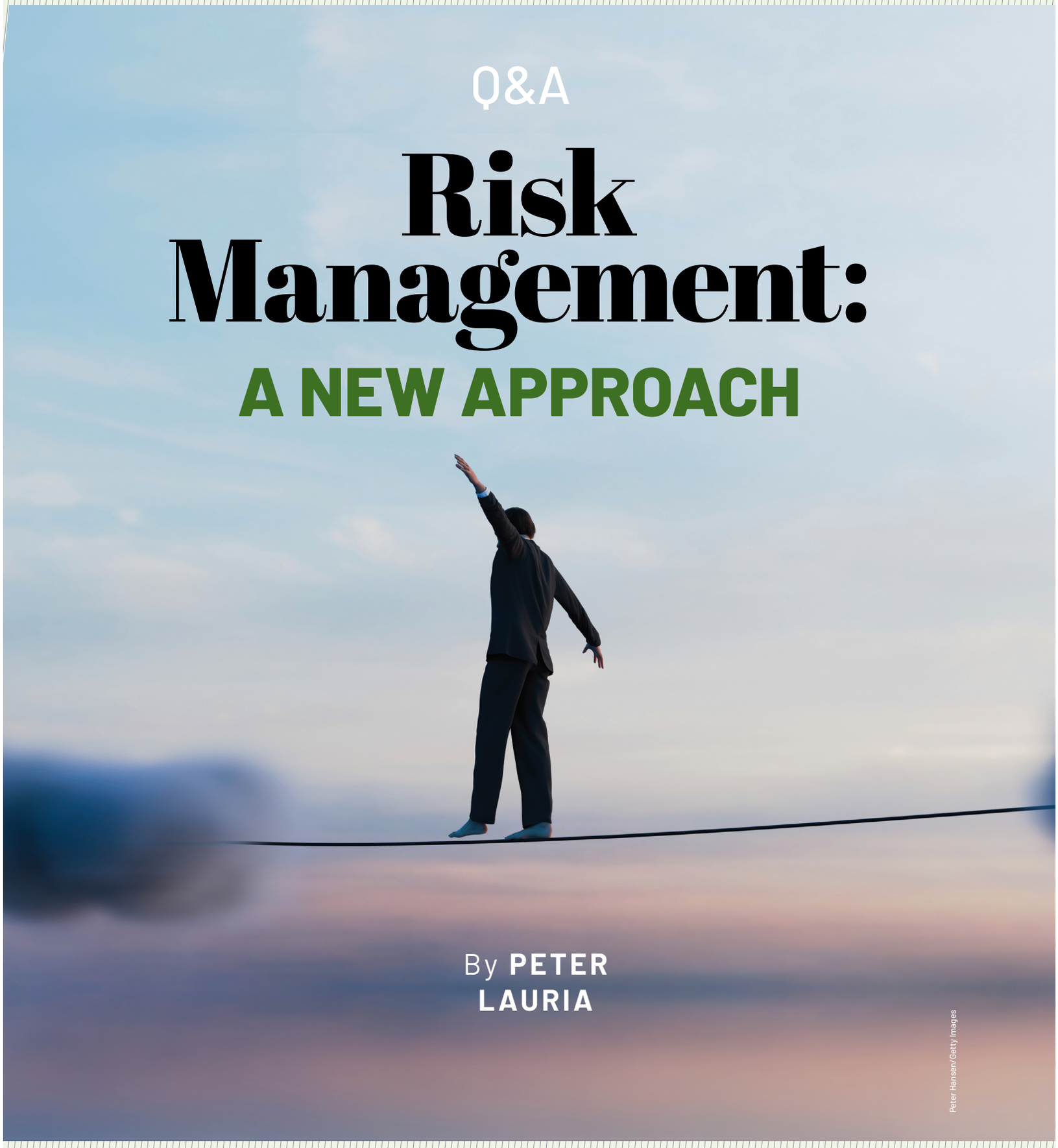
Across the country, housing supply has failed to meet demand for years, inflating prices and putting homeownership out of reach for much of the middle class. A record one quarter of homeowners and half of renters spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs; this, of course, has implications for the broader economy. Between 4 million and 7 million new single-family homes are needed to meet demand. That's not all the fault of the construction industry's poor level of productivity, but it does mean there's significant opportunity for industry expansion. Construction spending worldwide has the potential to grow by some 70 percent over the next 16 years, from $13 trillion in 2023 to $22 trillion in 2040, according to the McKinsey Global Institute.

Experts say the construction industry will need to turn its ingenuity inward in order to assemble the scaffolding it needs to emerge from its multi-decade hole. Acknowledgement of a problem will be the first step, but there is robust optimism that the industry is on the precipice of significant transformation. "Building has defined us as humans from the first tools," Roedel says. "We've built our way out of disaster before."

Q&A

Risk Management:

A NEW APPROACH



By **PETER LAURIA**

Peter Hansen/Getty Images

At the board level, managing the ever-expanding list of risks facing firms has taken on a whole new meaning.

THREE CURRENT DIRECTORS WALK US THROUGH IT.





Tariffs. AI. Geopolitics. Activists. Cybersecurity.

The list of risks firms must deal with in today's business environment goes on and on. Literally. More than a few companies have filed annual reports with the SEC that contain risk factors to performance that run 20 pages or longer. And more risks keep popping up every day, as shareholders press firms on issues ranging from climate change to CEO succession to workforce planning, and everything in between. All of which has changed the game for the group that is ultimately most responsible for a firm's future: the board. For at least some of them, risk management has taken on a whole new meaning. "Enterprise risk is no longer what it used to be," says Elise Schroeter, global head for Korn Ferry's organization and talent strategies for the Board and CEO practice. "It is so much more existential, unpredictable, and often incomprehensible nowadays."

Directors are being more proactive in stress-testing management's strategic plans, for instance, and developing contingency playbooks for dozens of different scenarios, from the pros and cons of building new domestic factories to deal with rising tariffs, to weighing whether the mounting costs of AI are worth it, to guarding against a cyberattack. While the number of boards featuring dedicated, stand-alone risk committees has remained relatively stable, boards are adding specific risk-oversight responsibilities to existing committees or ad hoc working groups that will dive deeper into the myriad risks facing companies.

Board directors themselves aren't immune to risk, either. Activist investors have made priorities of director succession and board effectiveness, homing in on individual-director performance and weighing it against a host of factors such as age, tenure, experience, and skills. To be sure, board change now ranks above M&A as the top objective for activist campaigns. Board change has been the focus of more than half of all campaigns so far this year, well above the four-year average of 35 percent.

Against that backdrop, we decided to convene a panel of three impressive big-firm directors: Jason Few, the CEO and director at FuelCell Energy and a director on the board of Enbridge; David Fields, who serves on the boards of EastGroup Properties and CBL Properties; and finally, Jack Stahl, who is chairman of the board at United Natural Foods and a director at Catalent Pharma Solutions. They come from different industries—pharmaceuticals, real estate, clean energy—but the challenge for each to navigate today's world remains similar. Below is a lightly edited version of our conversations.

How has the uncertainty and volatility in the business environment impacted the board's ability to assess future profits and growth?

David Fields: REITs (Real Estate Investment Trusts) have a significant transactional focus, and uncertainty elevates caution in completing transactions. That doesn't mean no deals are happening. It means it impacts how you get to yes, and the pace it takes to get there, which can be significant financially. In terms of forecasts, this may call for a conservative approach by building an uncertainty factor into what would be a normal transaction process.

Jason Few: Long-term agreements are what drive business in the energy space, so stability is important because billions of shareholder dollars are on the line. Uncertainty for us is the enemy of sensible decision-making. As a board, it's important for us to build a margin of safety into the business and think about capital commitments carefully to ensure projects remain viable under adverse policy and market swings. That could mean embedding optionality into contracts for our customers, such as shorter time frames, which changes our forecasting scenarios.

Jack Stahl: The key to operating in the environment we are in now is to develop a clear destination for the business and build your strategy around that. Aligning strategy gives boards a lens to evaluate

Hiroshi Watanabe/Getty Images



what challenges and risks are most important to address now. For some firms, that could be liquidity and cash. For others it might be protecting supplier relationships.

Of all the issues occurring today, which do you think is the most top of mind for boards, and why?

Fields: It's not about any one issue, but about the intersection between issues and the multilayered risks that creates. Directors need to be able to see that and look at opportunities for joint efforts amongst board committees to navigate them. In essence, these enumerated issues (AI, cybersecurity, tariffs) become catalysts to rethink structure and talent development for what may be a more lasting and resistant state of uncertainty. It's a moment to strengthen the organization's armor.

Stahl: For us, it all starts with talent. If you have the right talent, it gives the leadership team much more capacity to deal with unexpected issues and risks that arise. If you don't, it doesn't matter what issue is most or least important, the organization won't be able to achieve what it wants to.

Few: Tariffs are the biggest issue right now. Not that any other issue is less important, but for the boards I sit on, it's tariffs. We need to be flexible and deal with the realities of today—where we buy materials, source minerals, and the cross-border relationship between the US and Canada are directly impacted by what happens with tariffs.

How can directors help firms navigate a world with seemingly endless unforeseen challenges and risks?

Few: Directors can't minimize the notion of normalizing black swan events. They have to expand what they consider in the risk framework and constantly challenge and stress-test management's assumptions. Succession planning is more important than ever. Directors need to ensure a robust leadership pipeline is being built and that every seat occupied on the board is a value-added seat.

Stahl: It starts with satisfying yourself as a board that you have



"You can't respond to risks one by one."

– David Fields

the right strategy and destination as grounding for setting priorities. Staying at that elevated level and resisting becoming too tactical in the face of uncertainty creates less friction and allows leadership the time, energy, and capacity to drive performance and deal with the unexpected.

Fields: You can't respond to risks

one by one. You have to maintain a consistent, holistic approach. Boards are having much more specific discussions about how committees can expand or collaborate to address risks. The framework is to constantly assess, reassess, and adjust so that boards can start recognizing patterns and deploy a more strategic approach.

CEO turnover is at an all-time high. How much of it is owed to leaders wanting to get out on their own, instead of dealing with activists and the unprecedented disruption their firms face?



"Develop a clear destination for the business and build your strategy around that."

– Jack Stahl

Stahl: The demands on CEOs today are dramatically higher than in the past, and certainly higher than when I was a CEO. There was a degree of predictability in the role that is not there today. The bar has been raised in terms of what great CEO performance looks like. It's a very challenging role, so I'm sure there are leaders who have had success who have chosen to do other things in the face of the total commitment of energy and focus seemingly required to be successful today. At the same time, being a CEO will continue to be a very

RISKY BUSINESS

Among the many risks boards must manage, here are five that directors often cite as the most challenging.



ECONOMIC/ POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Three-quarters of directors in one survey consider **uncertainty around tariffs and geopolitical strife the biggest risk** they face in the near term.



FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

With growth slowing and the specters of a trade war and recession looming, **boards are focused on mitigating risk** around capital allocation, compensation, liquidity, and revenue and earnings performance.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The risks directors cite with AI include **return on investment, organizational capabilities, ethical and security concerns,** and even their own knowledge.



TALENT

As talent becomes harder to find and retain, boards are taking a harder and deeper look at their firms' talent to **ensure they have the right mix** to achieve strategic goals.



LEADERSHIP

Succession planning has always carried some risk, but the combination of tech disruption, activist action, and record-high **CEO turnover has heightened the stakes** for boards—and for directors themselves.

KadirKaba, Bubaone, Naveed Anjum, BGBlue, Andrii Moroziu/Getty Images

appealing role for many people.

Few: I don't know if it has to do with the challenges and risks they face, but I do think most of the turnover is driven by CEOs opting out. There's no question many leaders are burned out from the constant crisis management and are stepping down to make room for others to lead. But most surveys show that while CEOs have a pessimistic view of the global economy, they also have an optimistic view of their own businesses.

Fields: It's difficult to pinpoint individual circumstances, though it's fair to say that post-pandemic fatigue is certainly a factor in the high rate of turnover, combined with shareholder pressures, technology demands, and the expectation to anticipate a broader set of risks.



"Directors can't minimize the notion of normalizing black swan events."

— Jason Few

How has the job of being a director changed given the amount of risk in the environment right now? Has the role gotten harder in recent years, and why?

Few: Boards have to move much faster now, and they have to get more technical and go deeper into more issues than ever before. The role of being a director has shifted from oversight and quarterly review to active advising and ongoing partnership.

Stahl: The landscape boards must cover is broader and more complex, and that takes up more of your focus in terms of opportunity and risk. That's true for CEOs and other leaders as well, though. Everyone has to be more thoughtful and discerning about what has to go right for the company.

Fields: I don't subscribe to the idea that being a director today should be perceived as being harder. Because of the complexities, I think it is a really exciting time to be a director, actually. We have the opportunity to rethink the traditional ways in which boards have operated, and I think, quite frankly, that there is an open ear to this in the corporate world. We have the chance to reimagine how boards work, how they're structured, what kind of perspectives and expertise are needed, and how we choreograph our discussions to handle broader, multidimensional risks.

What role does the heightened state of risk play in the activist landscape? Are firms and boards more vulnerable to activist activity in an uncertain environment?

Stahl: To the extent that risk translates into volatility in business results and stock prices, there is more opportunity for activists. The longer that volatility lasts, the more the activist is seen as a "solution." When that happens, firms with lagging relative performance over a sustained period are vulnerable, as are boards with very long-tenured directors. Boards can thwart shareholder restlessness by being more accountable and transparent and demonstrating proactive risk management.

Fields: The expanding menu of risks may create more entry points for an activist to make the case that a board isn't performing. While risk and uncertainty can consume a board, they can also be channeled to reaffirm the board's commitment to strategic priorities. If the fundamentals are solid and the story we're telling matches the results we're delivering, the board is in a stronger position to withstand scrutiny.

Few: The risk environment has created more vulnerability for management and boards, especially with respect to composition and succession. But if directors and boards are doing their jobs properly, they shouldn't have to change anything about how they interact with activists. Good governance includes having an annual review of vulnerability relative to activists wanting to engage with your company.

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PURSUITS

C-Suite Transcendence

Leaders turn to meditation in times of uncertainty and challenge. *By Meghan Walsh*



Zeljkosantrac/Getty Images

Tammy Delaney-Plugowsky was an executive in the public-health sector in Canada during the COVID-19 crisis. She was working long hours under pressure to meet exceptional demands, while also raising three kids. Sure, she was experiencing brain fog, and drinking and eating more than usual to take the edge off, but, for the most part, she thought she was coping. One day, her body physically shut down. What at first seemed to be disease turned out to be the effects of prolonged stress.

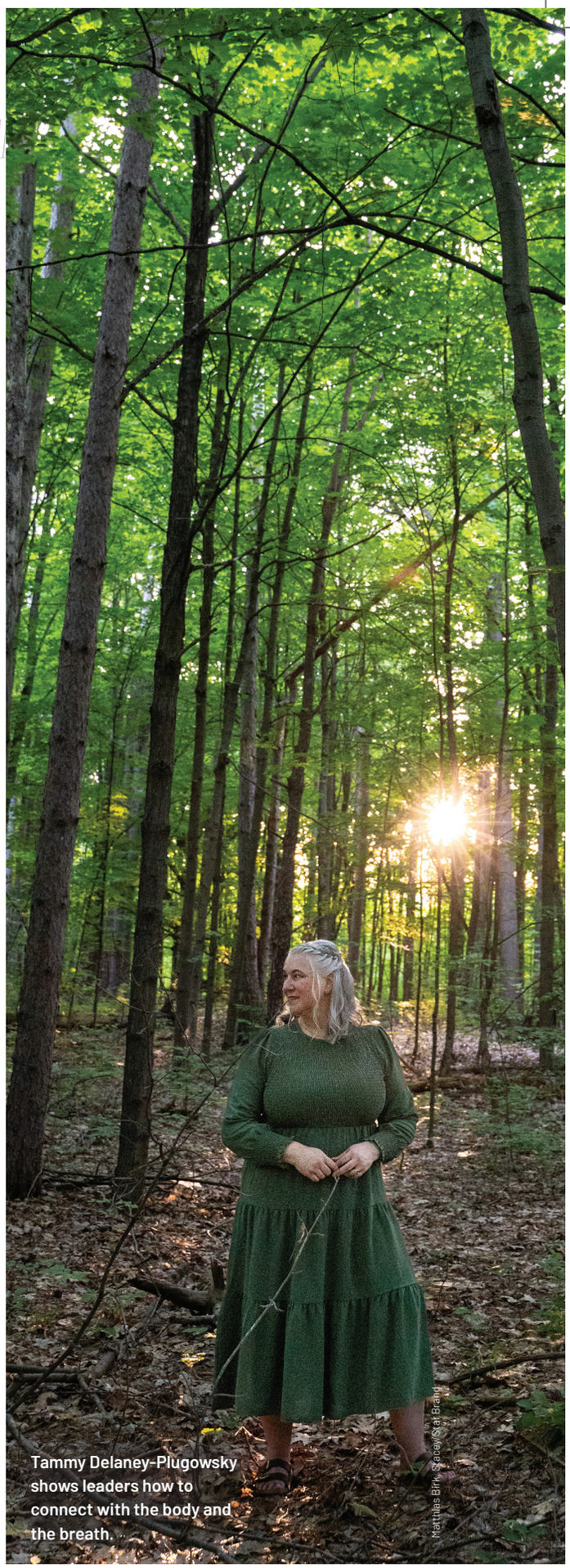
That moment of reckoning led Delaney-Plugowsky to begin engaging with meditation and breathwork. These practices allowed her to quiet her mind enough to connect with her body and a deeper truth: How she was operating was unsustainable—and unfulfilling. She ultimately pivoted to create Executive Exhale, a somatic-informed leadership-resilience company for those in health and service industries. "As leaders, we need to know how to pause," Delaney-Plugowsky says. "We can't lead others if we're disconnected from ourselves."

In the words of modern philosopher Bayo Akomolafe, "Times are urgent, we must slow down." Meditation at its core, experts say, is a way of pausing, stopping long enough to observe the subtleties of thought, emotion, and sensation that otherwise go unnoticed. Many of the world's most influential leaders attribute their steadiness to a daily sitting practice. Ray Dalio, founder and CIO mentor of asset-management fund Bridgewater Associates, has said that the best advice he can give anyone is to meditate. This ancient practice reaches back thousands of years but has become particularly relevant today, as executives navigate immense uncertainty and rapidly shifting conditions, from tariffs to volatile global politics to AI.

An extensive body of research shows that meditation regulates emotions, improves focus, spurs creativity, and leads to better decision-making. A study from Harvard Medical School found that mindfulness rewires brain regions related to learning and working-memory capacity. An INSEAD and Wharton School collaboration found a 15-minute daily practice counteracts a tendency toward the sunk-cost fallacy, which many consider the most destructive



Matthias Birk teaches stilling the mind to the highest achievers.



Tammy Delaney-Plugowsky shows leaders how to connect with the body and the breath.

Matthias Birk, Stacey/Stat Brand



Maria Teresa Tovar Romero, Michael H, Tim Robberts, Boonchai Wedmakawand, Nes, MoMo Productions/Getty Images

THE ART OF

Play

Professionals tend to be productivity oriented. Meanwhile, in our downtime, we seek novelty through traveling, learning, or buying new toys. Play, known as the work of childhood, is about doing something for the sake of joy rather than a result. (Spoiler alert: It also brings a host of wellness benefits.)



1 **Seize the moment.** Either block off unscheduled time to allow for spontaneity or find small opportunities, like singing in the shower.

2 **Be fully present.** If only just for a short time, commit to taking a break from your to-do list and worries.

3 **Learn your style.** Individuals have different preferences. Recall how you played as a kid. Did you gravitate toward board games, improvisation, or dance parties?

4 **Get silly.** Set self-consciousness aside. Follow curiosity and allow yourself to engage with the world in new ways.

and costly cognitive bias affecting organizations.

While many executives may come to meditation for stress management or to improve performance, Matthias Birk, an instructor at Columbia Business School, global director of partner development at White & Case LLP, and Zen teacher, says they often find much more, as Delaney-Plugowsky's story illustrates. "Meditation is a great source of tapping into intuition," Birk says. He explains how, during periods of uncertainty, leaders can't rely on what's worked for them in the past. The circumstances can't be controlled. "They have to be able to listen deeply and attune to what needs to be done now," he says.

Birk, who with stints at Goldman Sachs and McKinsey & Company has spent his career guiding high achievers, points to what he sees as the defining traits of the greatest leaders throughout time, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. "There is a strong connection between great leadership and the ability to self-transcend," Birk says. These leaders, he explains, were able to move beyond personal desires and fears to a purpose that serves the greater good. "The true outliers, who were able to move society beyond what we thought was capable and lift people to new levels of consciousness, led from self-transcendence," Birk says.

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MEDITATION



Schedule a **regular time** every day without distractions.



Find a **quiet and comfortable** location to sit upright.



Either **close the eyes or lightly gaze** at a single spot.



Bring your **attention** to the breath.



When thoughts and **sensations arise**, note them, then bring awareness back to the breath.



Find a **teacher and community** to support your practice.

Illustration by **PETER HOEY**

VISIT

Tasmania, Australia

Reckon this one's a ripper.

Almost half of the island's land area, including World Heritage sites, is protected as a reserve. The first environmental-focused political party in the world was founded in Tasmania.

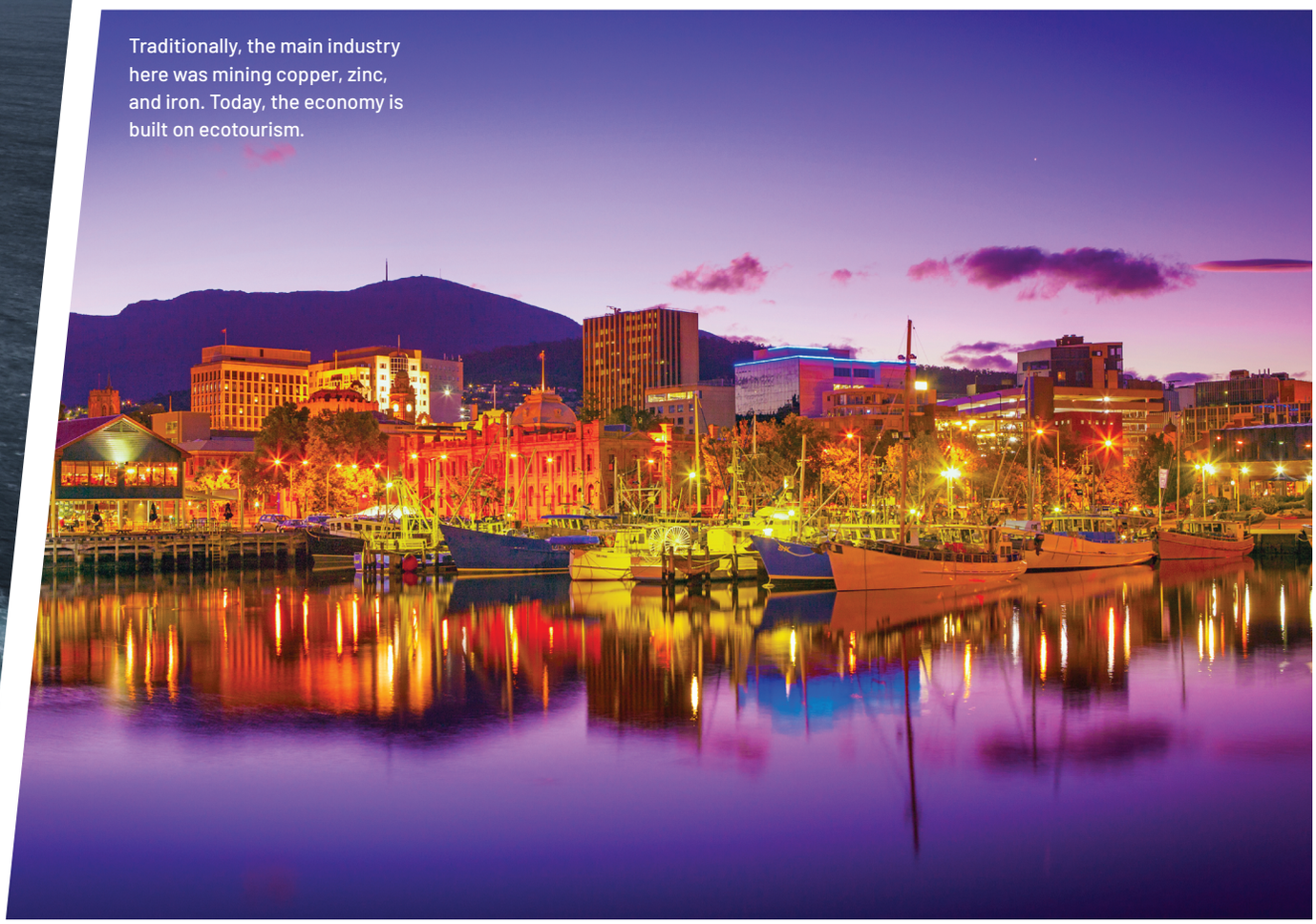
An island 150 miles off the southern shore of Australia with a population of about half a million, Tasmania—or Tassie, as the locals call it—is known for its peculiarity, a manifestation of its colonial past, native cultural heritage, and geographic isolation. The Palawa, Tasmania's Aboriginal people, spent almost 10,000 years developing a way of life intertwined with the natural world before the British turned the island into a penal settlement in the 1800s and the 20th century saw an influx of mining. Today, Tasmania is returning to its roots by building an economy based on ecotourism. Beyond the culture, for the remote worker, Tasmania offers a lower cost of living than the mainland, exceptionally clean air, a relaxed pace of life, and a stunning backdrop.



Marked by red lights and upside crosses, Dark Mofo is a winter-solstice celebration of the island's Gothic culture.

Posnov, Scott E Barbour, The Layers; Colour, Abderahman Hassanein/Getty Images, Jordan Hatch





Traditionally, the main industry here was mining copper, zinc, and iron. Today, the economy is built on ecotourism.





There is an emphasis on local food sources, including wild salmon, crayfish, abalone, black truffles, and leatherwood honey.



The Palawa have preserved long-held land-based traditions like shell-stringing, dance, and storytelling.

READ, LISTEN, WATCH

The Past is the Present

Some make the argument that history is fractal, with particular moments representative of enduring trends and truths that extend through the annals. The who, what, when, and where may change, but the why repeats. If that's so, it makes sense that historical nonfiction is thriving during a time when many are attempting to make sense of the here and now.

As a literary genre, historical nonfiction holds within it a multitude of subgenres, from romance to true crime to biography. While these works are based on rigorous reporting that attempts to remain true to real events and people, the stories are told by authors living in the current era and, therefore, through the lens of hindsight. Instead of sensationalizing, these reads explore broader contexts that can sometimes only come into view when given space.

There continues to be strong reader demand for works that highlight untold stories and reexamine existing narratives. The global book market, valued at $150 billion in 2024, is estimated to reach more than $192 billion by 2030, driven by educational texts. As you'll find, learning doesn't have to be dull. Here's a *Briefings* list of thought-provoking and riveting historical-nonfiction reads.

THE NEW YORK GAME

BY KEVIN BAKER

Baseball may be America's pastime, but the sport was born in New York, and came to represent the city's struggles and possibilities.

THE WIDE WIDE SEA

BY HAMPTON SIDES

In 1776, Captain James Cook was killed by natives after sailing ashore on the island now known as Hawaii. What happened? An exploration of the Age of Exploration.

KING OF KINGS

BY SCOTT ANDERSON

The author of Lawrence in Arabia *presents a narrative of the events leading to the Iranian Revolution and an era of religious nationalism.*

MURDERLAND

BY CAROLINE FRASER

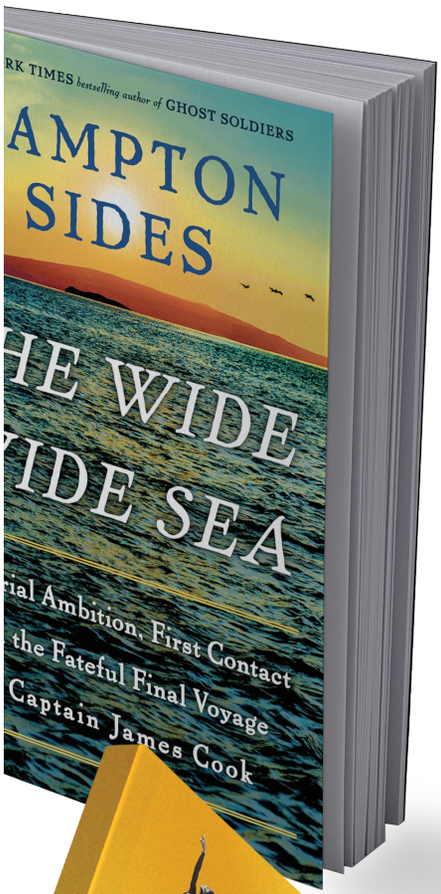
A true-crime thriller about the proliferation of serial killers in the Pacific Northwest who emerged amid environmental destruction and despair.

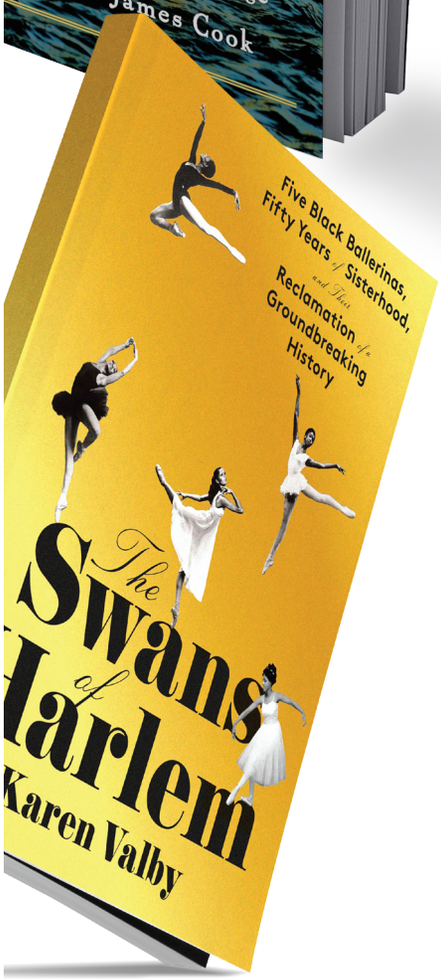
THE SWANS OF HARLEM

BY KAREN VALBY

A love story of five professional Black ballerinas who embodied grace, grit, and the power of female friendship during the height of the Civil Rights movement.







SUGGESTED

Fly High



Aerial filming is no longer the realm of professionals with expensive tech. Amateur visual artists can now capture premium wide shots from a mountain top or over the ocean with the DJI Mini 4 Pro, an ultra-lightweight entry-level drone offering slow motion and time-lapse in 4K clarity. Weighing less than 249 grams, the Mini 4 Pro is easy to pack and light enough that it doesn't have to be registered with the FAA, and it provides 34 minutes of flight time.

DJI Mini 4 Pro, $759

DJI

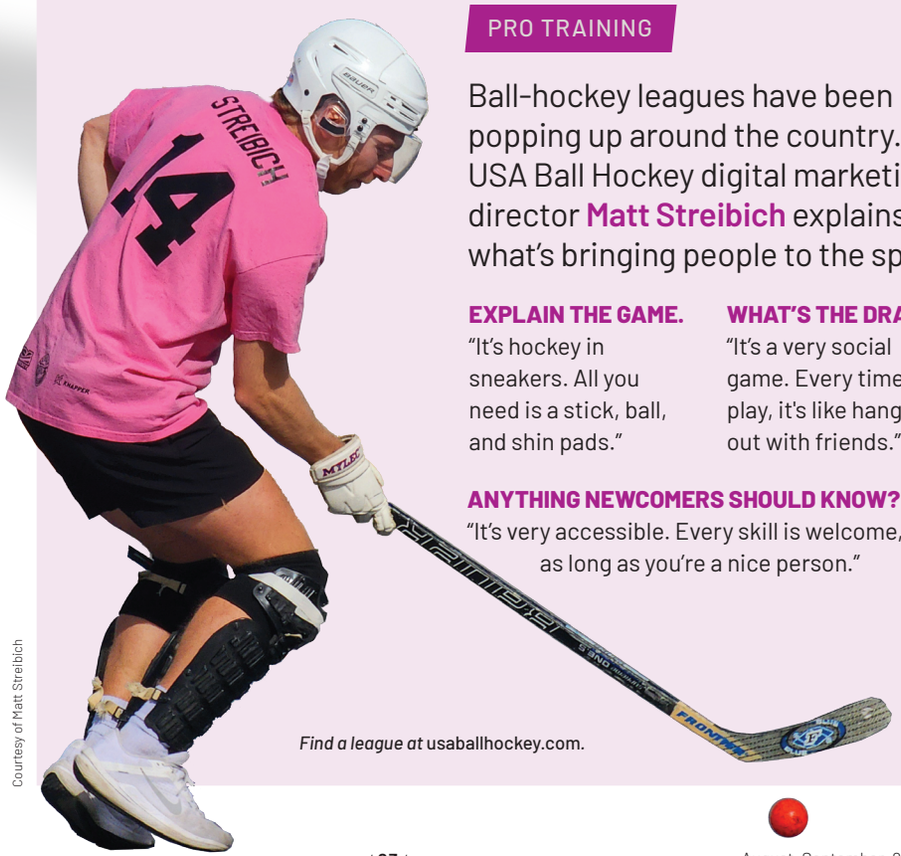
PRO TRAINING

Ball-hockey leagues have been popping up around the country. USA Ball Hockey digital marketing director **Matt Streibich** explains what's bringing people to the sport.

EXPLAIN THE GAME.
"It's hockey in sneakers. All you need is a stick, ball, and shin pads."

WHAT'S THE DRAW?
"It's a very social game. Every time you play, it's like hanging out with friends."

ANYTHING NEWCOMERS SHOULD KNOW?
"It's very accessible. Every skill is welcome, as long as you're a nice person."



Find a league at usaballhockey.com.

Courtesy of Matt Streibich



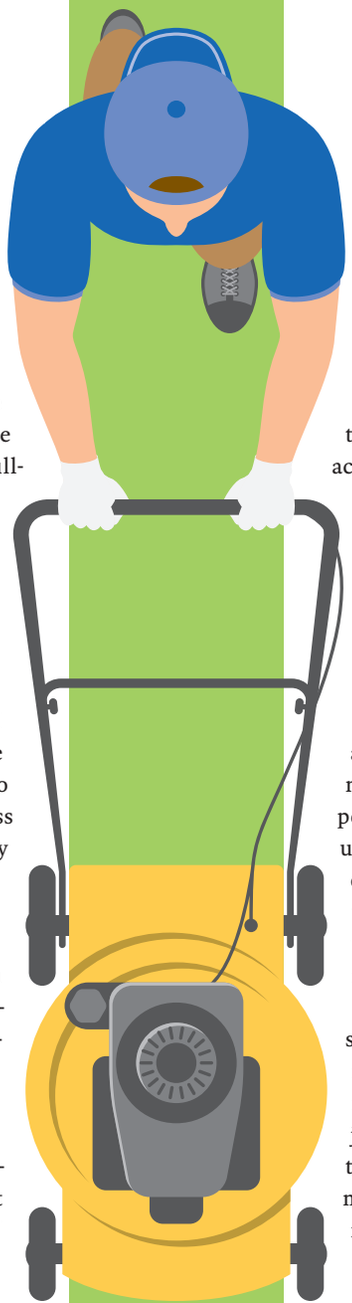
CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
JONATHAN DAHL

Mow Through

It was our family's Saturday-afternoon ordeal, Dad trying to start the lawn mower. Decades ago, it meant pulling hard on a cord, again and again, listening as the engine would burble, almost start, and then stall. Comically, my dad, in full sweat under a summer sun, would have to push the darn thing on a decline to try to rev up the motor while pulling the cord. It would take dozens of tries.

Today, many lawn mowers are battery operated—and still I find myself struggling to get mine going. My handyman can do this with his eyes closed, and he seems tickled at what a dud I am. Sure, maybe I could figure out how to start the modern lawn mower, but I'm happy to rely on someone else's skill set. Bless his heart, whether it's fixing a leaky sink or a stuck door, he has so many skills I'll never have.

Somehow, this is a little bit like what is happening with AI. Sure, you can use ChatGPT these days and present everything from a perfect marketing plan to a stunning graphic to, well, even a pretty good "Endgame" column. But do you tell anyone? In the back of your mind, aren't you worried that spilling the beans might cost you your job someday? Then again, if you show you can power through the project without touching the technology, you risk appearing like a disposable Luddite. Either way, you might end up in the same sad boat.



As we know, most firms haven't developed policies about disclosing to colleagues or clients how much they use one of mankind's greatest achievements. Part of that may be a simple fear about the AI's liability. Is the company, the worker, or no one at fault when information relayed from AI is wrong? Who wants to open that can of worms? But to me, the lack of policies on transparency signals just how blind firm leaders seem to be about how omnipresent this technology has become. Studies show perhaps 40 percent of workers are using ChatGPT. Setting the rules on AI disclosure is not a problem to worry about years from now. AI, with its strengths and its dilemmas, is here now.

All of which means hiding your skill set or refusing to develop one is probably a fool's errand. It does no good to live in fear of your own job security, and is instead better to show off the partnership you can make with it. Go ahead, I must tell myself, mow your own lawn.

Woolpin/Getty Images

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All the Music Revealed

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Revelation 2 Stereo Amplifier, Preamplifier, and Phono Preamplifier.
Casework shown in Stardust.

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