KORN FERRY | ISSUE 72



THE VOICE OF LEADERSHIP

Briefings

2026 Beat the odds!



How firms and workers can reverse today's toughest challenges in the New Year


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COVER STORY

Beat the Odds in 2026: In the C-Suite. In Your Career. In Life.

The deck may seem stacked against you. We found ways 2026 can be your—and your firm's—year.

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Illustration by **TIM AMES**



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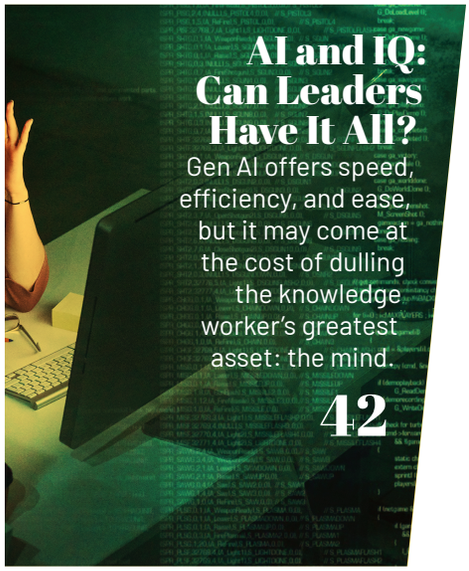

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Gen AI offers speed, efficiency, and ease, but it may come at the cost of dulling the knowledge worker's greatest asset: the mind.

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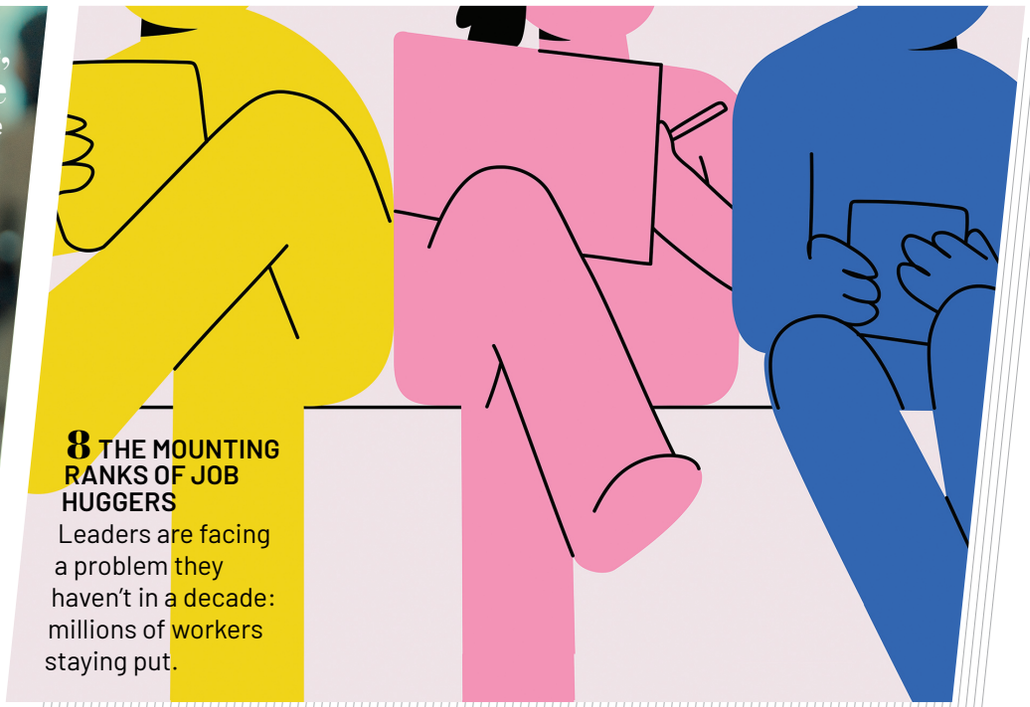
Oscar Wong, DMP, Brastock Images, Anton Vierietin/Getty Images



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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **GARY BURNISON**

What It Takes To Land The Next Job

Excerpted from Burnison's latest book, I Need a Job!: Be Noticed. Land the Interview. Get Hired.

It was years ago, when I was in the hospital for an outpatient procedure—nothing major, but the kind of thing that requires anesthesia and a little recovery time afterward. As I lay there in my light blue hospital gown with an IV in my arm, an anesthesiologist came in to see me.

I was expecting more questions about how I felt and the last time I ate or drank anything. Instead, the anesthesiologist checked my chart and, of all things, asked me what I did for a living. When I told him, he said, "Oh, I could never do that— way too much pressure!"

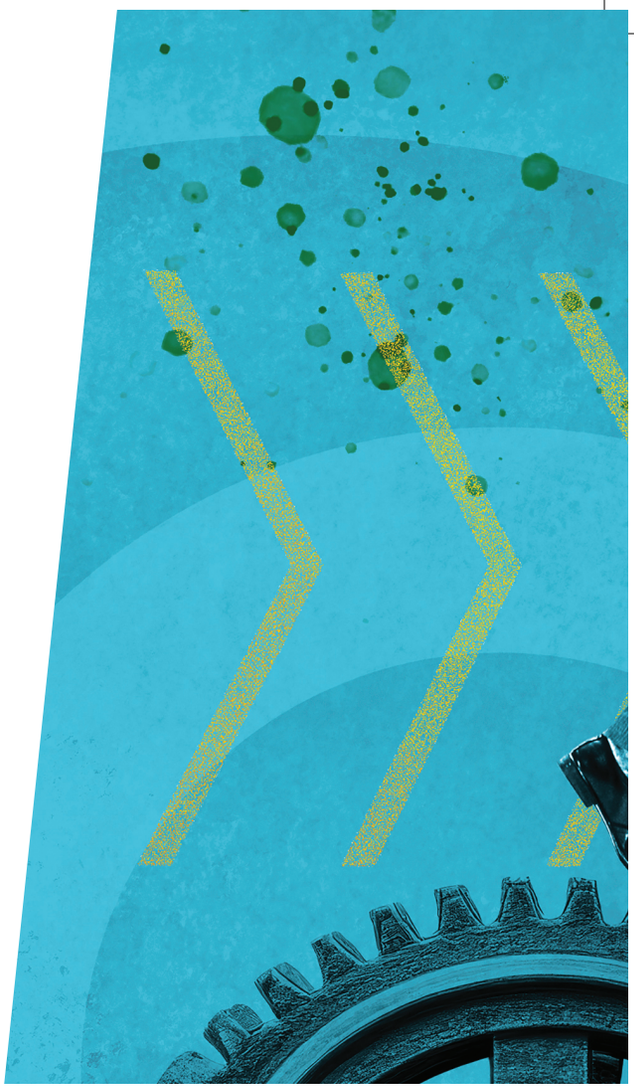
The next thing I knew, the procedure was over, and I was being taken on a gurney to the recovery room. It registered that the anesthesiologist was wheeling me.

"Everything okay?" I murmured in my groggy state.

Seeing I was awake, the anesthesiologist gave me a big, reassuring smile. Then he reached into his white coat and pulled out a two-page document. He held it up in front of my face.

Blurry-eyed, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Of all things and of all times—this was his résumé!

"When you mentioned Korn Ferry," he said, "I figured it was my chance."



Really? I may have been a captive audience, but I wasn't exactly in a frame of mind to network.

Think about it—here's a highly competent anesthesiologist in a profession that requires incredible awareness, focus, judgment, and decision-making. But when it came to looking for a new job, he was like so many professionals who just don't know the best way to go about it.

It's not enough to get a resume into someone's hands—or, these days, simply upload it into a company's applicant tracking system (ATS).

No matter where you are in your career, getting a job today takes much more than just updating your résumé and sending it out everywhere. In fact, more often than not, you won't even need a résumé; instead, you'll be online assessing, video responding, and amplifying your visibility in the world of ATS.

Instead, it all comes down to your **A.C.T.**—an acronym that stands for being ***authentic***, making a ***connection***, and giving others a ***taste*** of who you are.

Deagreez/Adobe; Elnur/Adobe



Timeless and true, your A.C.T. is what you need to navigate today's perpetual uncertainty and frenetic pace of change. The more the world changes—with AI, ATS, and all the rest—the more we return to the basics: who we are and how we can connect with others. Indeed, this is what got us here—and what will take us there.

OUR WAKE-UP CALL

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

These are the comments I hear in almost every conversation about the job market, as each opportunity and posting attracts hundreds, if not thousands of applicants. Not only that, but as many as 70 percent of positions are now being filled by internal candidates or someone who has been referred. That's why you must have a plan.

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

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

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

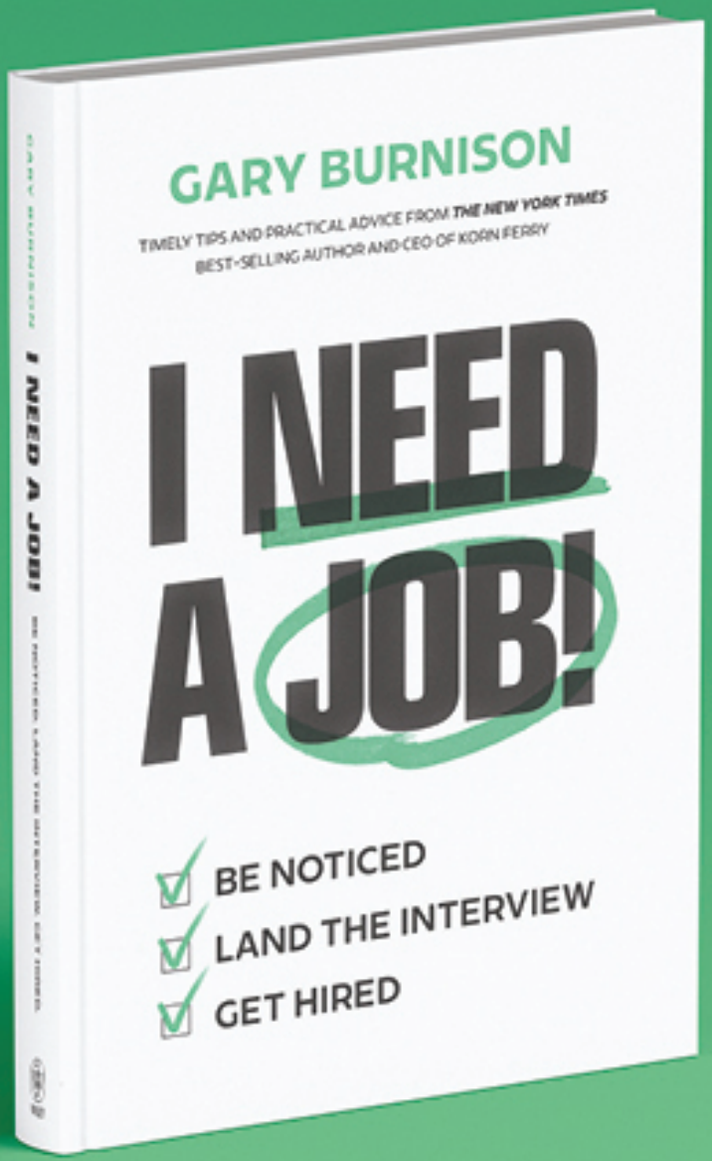
The truth is landing your next job, and especially advancing your career, takes a lot of purposeful thought and action. It starts with a shift in mindset—as well as evolving your skill set. That's how you'll not only rise to the challenge of the ever-evolving job market but adapt to whatever comes next.

***I Need a Job!* by Gary Burnison** is available where books are sold.

Illustration by **LESLIE DELA VEGA**

LEARN WHAT REALLY GETS YOU THE JOB

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



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BRIEFLY ON...

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"Forget adopting AI—this may be a bigger issue in 2026."



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Illustration by **ROB DOBI**

TALENT

The Mounting Ranks of Job Huggers

Leaders are facing a problem they haven't faced in a decade: millions of workers staying put.

By Russell Pearlman



Imagine a corporate leader arriving in an auditorium for an annual town-hall meeting with a couple hundred staffers. The first thing she notices is how many faces look familiar—in fact, too many faces. Scanning the room, she realizes she can't find a single new hire in the crowd. Not one. It dawns on her: Hardly anyone has left the firm in the last year.

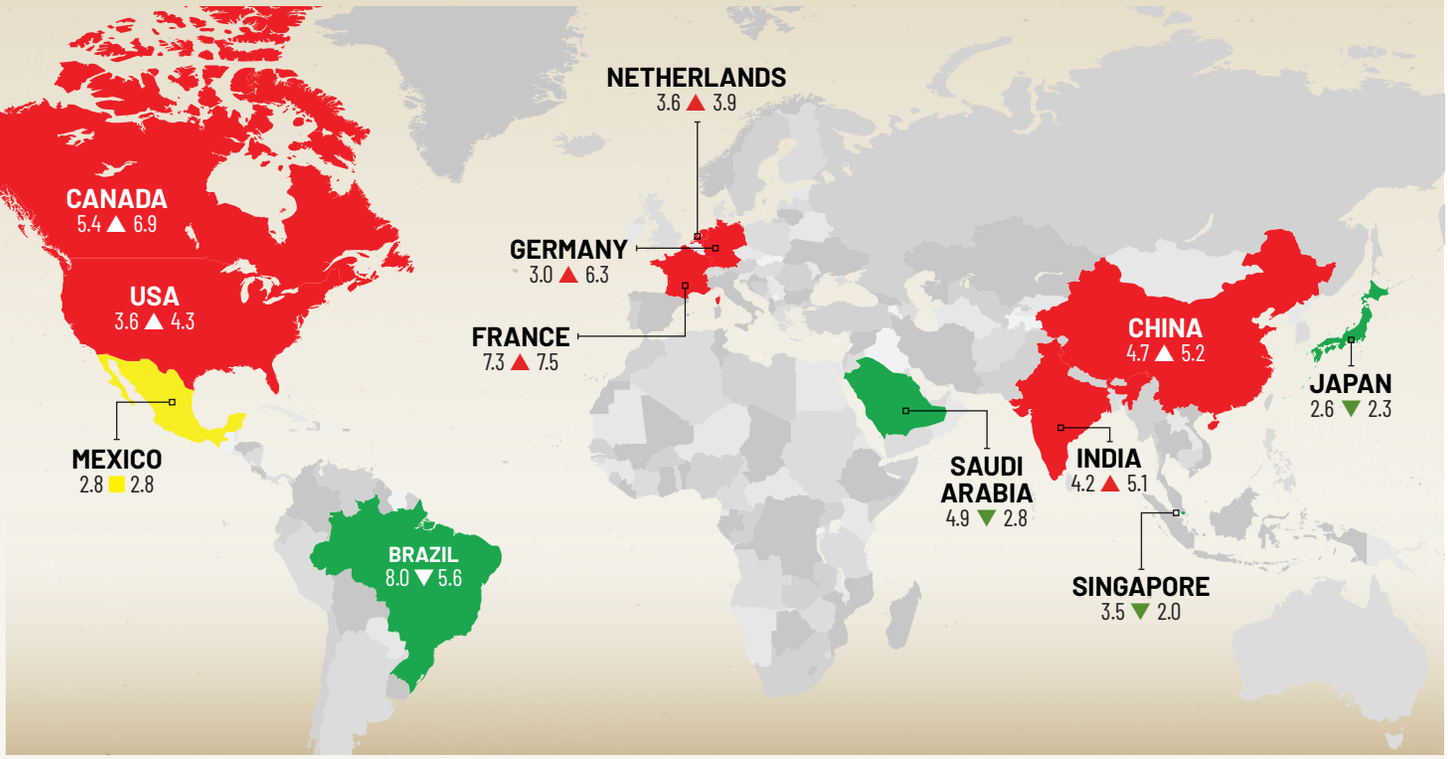
Multiply this by the thousands, and eventually millions, and you begin to realize that the corporate world has quite a problem on its hands. Forget adopting AI, in fact—this may be a bigger issue in 2026. Last fall, the term "job hugging" swept through the media, as workers young and old decided it was better to stay put than leave. Today, they are still staying put.

Indeed, the population of job huggers is quite eye-opening. The current quit rate in the US is 2 percent a month, which, except for the worst periods of the pandemic, is the lowest in nearly a decade. It equates to a rather stunning statistic: The 1.5 million workers who would normally have left their companies each month are instead sticking around—more than 10 million of them since the start of 2025. Leaders, of course, like to have experienced employees, but they also need fresh blood to energize their firms. Plus, they worry that job huggers are much more

Illustration by **ROB DOBI**

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES AROUND THE WORLD (Dec '22 vs. Jul '25)

Unemployment rates have ticked up in a number of countries.





Poligrafistka/Getty Images

focused on staying employed than on taking risks to innovate. "There's a lot of struggle finding ways to incentivize full-time employees to work harder or differently," says Raquel Braun, cofounder of the media-consulting firm Mulier Fortis.

It's not difficult to figure out why so many workers are clinging to their roles. While unemployment hasn't increased much, there are 40 percent fewer open roles than there were three years ago. Meanwhile, firms report that attracting new recruits who already have work has become much harder. Many don't want to go through a job-search process that can take months or years; others worry they'll find themselves in a last-in, first-out situation if the new organization restructures, says Brittney Molitor, a Korn Ferry managing consultant in the firm's Human Resources Professional Search division.

Experts say that there are a variety of ways, even if none are foolproof, to get the most out of a group of job huggers. For starters, leaders can do a better job of figuring out who among them are the highest-potential and highest-productivity workers—and return the embrace with salary bumps and development opportunities. "We want our best talent to hug," says Kevin Cashman, Korn Ferry's vice chairman for CEO and enterprise leadership. Conversely, firms may need to evaluate which of their job huggers might not be worth the extra investment. In many cases, companies' current systems, including evaluations, feedback sessions, and other performance tools, don't always do a good job identifying top talent.

There are more jarring options as well, including reassignments. Moving workers can be a way to fill jobs vital to future projects while also trimming costs associated with old ones. Plus, the reassignment, if communicated and well executed, could energize the job hugger. Layoffs are an option too, of course, but experts caution that carrying them out too quickly in today's business world could scare off talented new hires, and cause staff shortages during unanticipated growth spurts.

Importantly, experts say employers shouldn't let all the job hugging lull them into a false sense of security. "Organizations should acknowledge retention may be high for the wrong reason: fear, not loyalty," says California employment lawyer Eric Kingsley. Indeed, experts say the job-hugging phenomenon could easily fade, and companies that don't make an effort to keep today's job huggers could eventually find themselves short of top talent.

THE TAKEAWAY

Smart firms will find ways to embrace job huggers.



TECH BY PETER LAURIA

AI: It Just Wants a Little Sweet Talk

AI, AT ITS CORE, IS SUPPOSED to be a machine. No emotions. No humor. No empathy. And that's pretty much how companies and workers are seeing it as they gradually adopt AI tools. The only problem: AI is starting to develop its own "human" qualities—and firms must adapt quickly, before it's too late.

A new study finds that chatbots and AI agents, not unlike humans, literally respond better to charm and sweet talk. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania found that prompts using psychological techniques of persuasion can produce improved responses from large-language models. Conversely, the study found that the wrong words can steer AI in a detrimental direction, creating possible risks for companies.

This is the latest in a body of research demonstrating that how people "talk" to AI—politely or rudely—is just as important to the technology's response as a prompt is. That means that firms and workers need to be acutely aware of how to approach and develop this once-in-a generation technology. Nearly one-third of employees regularly report using ChatGPT for work tasks and 80 percent of firms are planning to adopt AI chatbots—frequently the first point of contact for customers and clients—by the end of this year. "There could certainly be some unexpected downsides," says Nigel Melville, a professor of technology and operations at the University of Michigan. Developing chatbots that are too vulnerable to human persuasion, or too stubborn, can backfire, he adds. "Once it's broken, it's hard to rebuild."

To be sure, Bryan Ackermann, head of AI strategy and

Flavia Morlachetti/Getty Images

THE TAKEAWAY

Leaders need to be aware that AI is still in its early stages.

transformation at Korn Ferry, says leaders need to think differently—particularly as they increasingly deploy chatbots and agents both internally and externally—about the algorithms and safeguards used to develop AI's "personality." "Context engineering is critical for generative AI and agentic AI to be able to effectively work as part of the organization," says Ackermann. Already, firms are dealing with the "spiral of misery" customers experience when chatbots don't deliver what they want.

There is also the risk of "jailbreaking"—hackers using sweet talk to circumvent security restrictions and gain access to internal systems. Researchers did find they could manipulate ChatGPT into violating safeguards designed to keep it from providing confidential, sensitive, or otherwise prohibited information. "The same techniques that allow users to get a really good answer from AI are also able to get it to return a forbidden one," says Michael Welch, a Korn Ferry senior client partner who specializes in AI and digital transformation.

Welch says the challenge for firms is to develop chatbots and agents that can be intuitive and adapt to user inputs on the fly—without being so pliable that they can potentially jump the guardrails controlling their interactions. That's part of why developers of large-language models employ sizable teams of engineers to continually refine and optimize personality and behavior models. In the end, says Welch, humans remain an important part of recognizing and training AI agents and chatbots to understand and block paths of manipulation. "AI can only learn from people, so how we approach it is how it will behave towards us," he says.



DNY59/Getty Images

LEADERSHIP BY RUSSELL PEARLMAN

The Other Turnover in the C-Suite

CEO DEPARTURES, WHETHER FORCED OR voluntary, continue to set records and make headlines. But another major change has been happening much more quietly among firms' top lieutenants.

Even with all the corner-office departures, the average CEO tenure is still hovering around 7.4 years, as those who stay tend to hang on for a long time. But take a look at the other members of the C-suite, and you'll find that the tenure for most is the length of a US presidential term: four years. It's a big shift from the past, and it's one that experts say is quietly redefining how the very top operates these days—for better or worse. "There will not be a return to the decade-long executive tenures that once defined corporate

leadership," says Peter Cohan, professor of management practice at Babson College.

Within Fortune 500 firms, chief legal officers and CFOs have the longest non-CEO tenures, at 6.1 years and 4.8 years, respectively. After that, however, average tenure drops fast, with chief information and chief human resources officers at around 4.5 years, and most everyone else at four years or fewer. Clearly, many CEOs are not pleased with what their lieutenants have done lately. According to a recent Korn Ferry survey, only 10 percent of CEOs and directors were "extremely confident" that their C-suite leaders would thrive over the next three years.

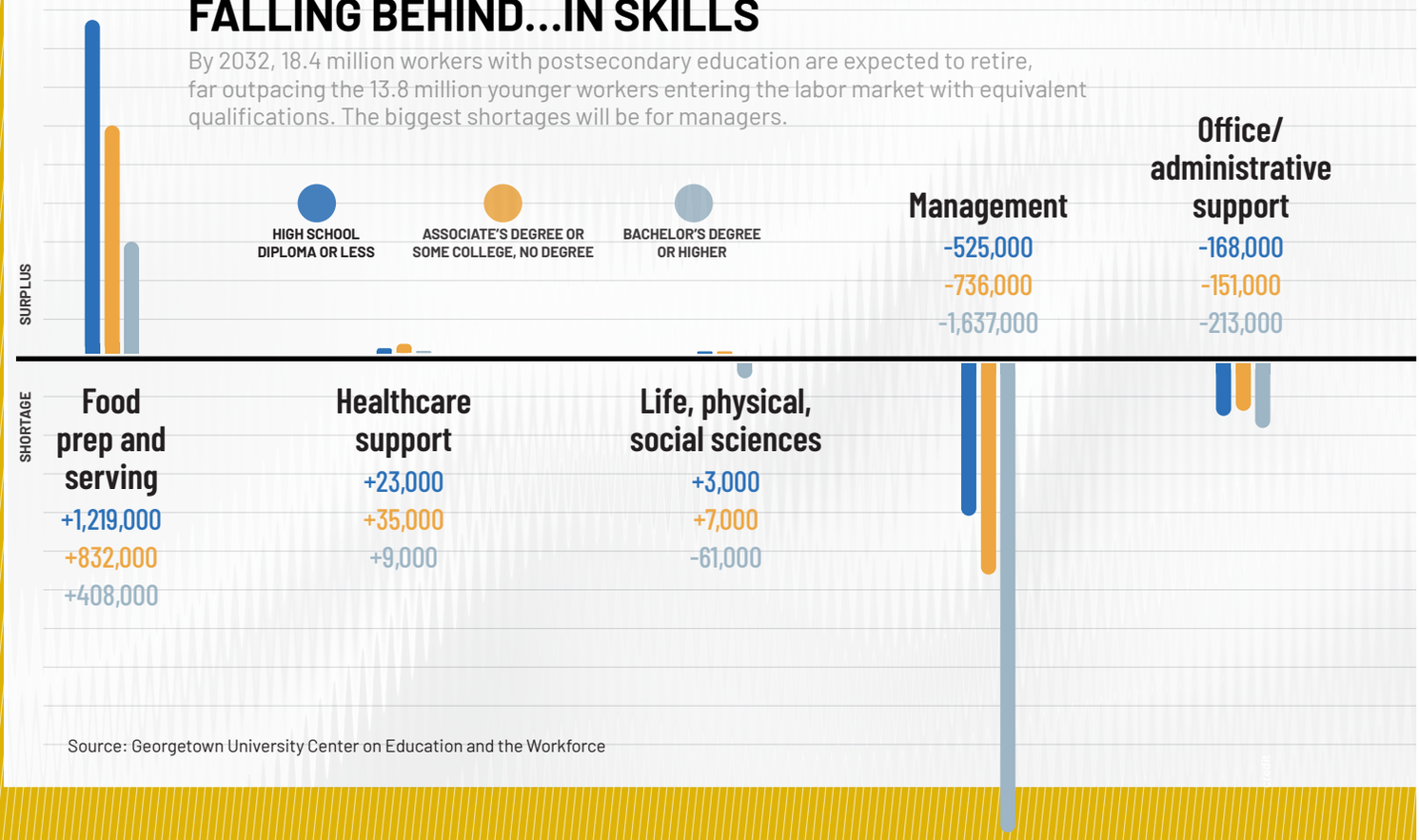
Experts put a lot of the blame on stakeholder impatience: When a company isn't performing well, investors tend to push the CEO into first dumping subordinates. Plus, while a new CEO is usually granted a honeymoon period, functional executives typically aren't. "New executives are being asked to make a big impact in 90 to 100 days," says Stephanie Broadright, a Korn Ferry senior client partner specializing in recruiting revenue leaders. "No one hits pause to make a new business strategy." And the pace of change in some functional areas, especially technology, is burning out many top lieutenants.

"CEOs are so aware of today's pressures, and their C-suite hasn't caught up," says Noa Gafni, a consultant and lecturer at Columbia University. One interesting solution has been to merge roles, whether it's the CFO and COO or the CCO and CMO. Developing C-suite leaders with cross-functional experience helps firms build more well-rounded executives, as does having a CEO who encourages collaboration, rather than competition, among direct reports.

DATA

FALLING BEHIND...IN SKILLS

By 2032, 18.4 million workers with postsecondary education are expected to retire, far outpacing the 13.8 million younger workers entering the labor market with equivalent qualifications. The biggest shortages will be for managers.

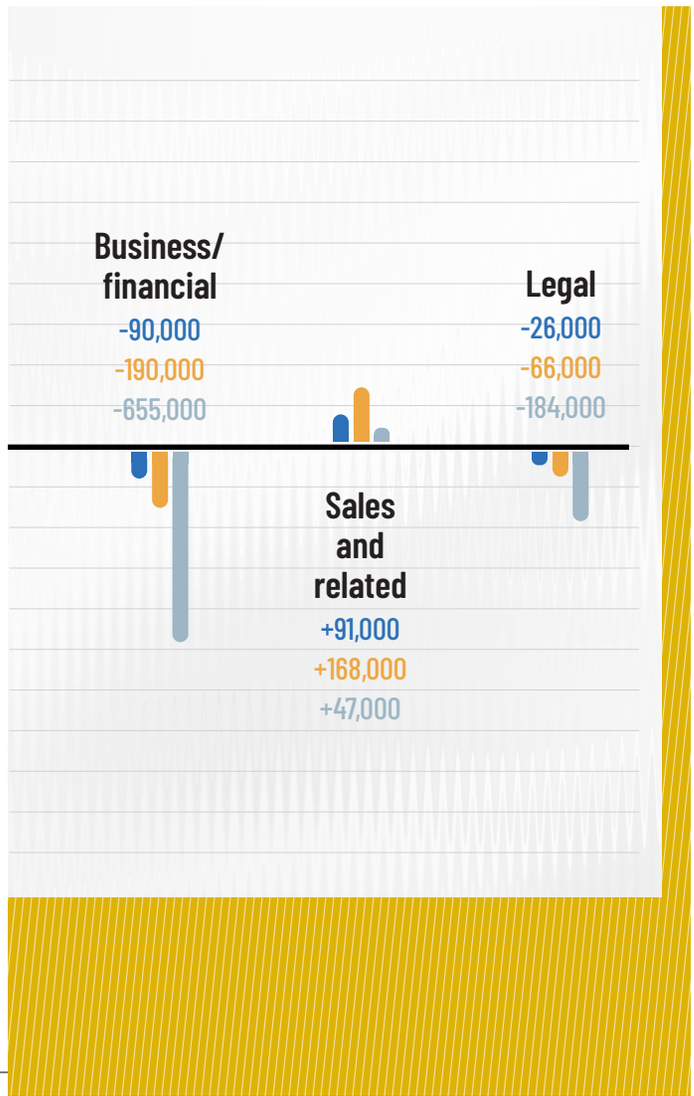


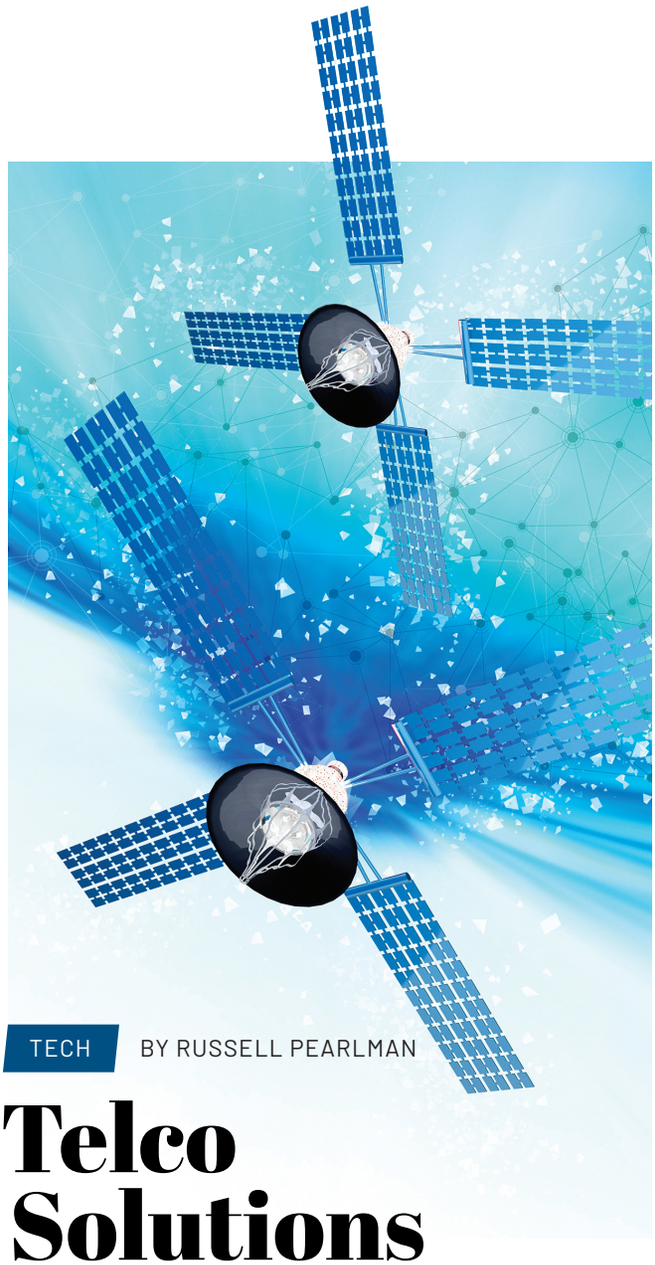
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

THE TAKEAWAY

Firms are redefining how to view the C-suite.

As for the CEO's bosses—the board—directors don't seem to mind the game of musical chairs. It makes sense to them, in today's fast-shifting business world, to bring in one skilled executive to solve the current set of problems and another when those challenges change. "Boards increasingly view executives as strategic assets deployed for specific missions, rather than long-term stewards," says Cohan. That's fine, say experts, as long as directors know they need to develop top talent internally that can take over when a C-suite job opens up. "If you want the best odds and the best outcomes, that's what boards need to do," says Jane Edison Stevenson, global vice chair of Korn Ferry's Board and CEO Services practice and global leader of its Board and CEO Succession practice.





Victor Habbick Visions/Science Photo Library/Getty Images

TECH BY RUSSELL PEARLMAN

Telco Solutions From the Sky

FOR SOME TIME NOW, telecommunications firms have been trying to find ways to boost more revenue growth on Earth. Many have started looking skyward for help, but experts warn they'll need to make some big changes on the ground first.

The world's wireless carriers have spent billions to roll out 5G service, the latest generation of wireless technology, and to lay a foundation for future service upgrades. But they haven't been able to charge much of a premium for the new service. Wireless-service revenues are growing

THE TAKEAWAY

In this and other industries, leaders need to embrace total revamps.

by only 1 percent to 2 percent annually, below the rate of inflation, and hardly enough to cover the increasing costs of their big hardware rollouts.

Finding growth, of course, is an issue in almost every industry these days. But in the case of telecom, there may be help coming from above—namely, from satellites and satellite firms. Many telecom firms used to view satellites as a pricey, impractical alternative to broadband. But thanks to some technological breakthroughs, thousands of cheaper satellites were recently launched into low-Earth orbit. They will deliver high-quality service to millions of customers who currently have poor or no coverage. "These new satellites are a game-changing technology," says Jon Peha, professor of electrical and computer engineering at Carnegie Mellon University. Analysts predict that there could be more than 60,000 satellites in orbit globally by 2030, compared to 12,000 now. The satellites will not only reach unserved areas, but will also provide data to cars, wearable devices, phones, and nearly anything else that can connect online. "Convergence is no longer optional—it's essential," says Sylwia Kechiche, senior director of industry analysis at Opensignal, an industry market-research firm.

There is a catch, of course. The talent running satellite and telecom firms couldn't be more different: Traditionally, the former attract people seeking long, stable careers, while the latter often appeal to risk-takers. Experts say leaders on both sides will have to ensure that these disparate groups can work well together. Each workforce will need to be able to jump between software, AI, product, aerospace, and cybersecurity, which means that legacy organizational structures will need some overhauling. "A bureaucracy that worked in a stable era will not suffice in a dynamic satellite era," says Sue Ribot, a Korn Ferry senior client partner in the firm's Global Software and Technology practice.

The transition will require getting existing telecom workers acclimated to a lot of changes, something industry leaders have been struggling with. Many of the largest providers worldwide have gone through waves of layoffs; according to one survey, over 60 percent of telecom companies acknowledge that recent reductions in compensation and benefits are hurting talent retention. "It all hinges on having the right talent in the right places at the right time," Ribot says.

WHAT'S ON THE NEXT BOARD AGENDA

1

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Directors can't lose sight of how this technology will totally transform their firms.

2

THE LONG TERM

Pressure is mounting to reduce financial reporting times and for boards to think more long term.

3

C-SUITE DEPARTURES

Turnover for many roles in the C-suite is increasing, jeopardizing leadership stability.

HISTORY LESSON

BY ARIANNE COHEN

The Original Luddites

British textile workers protested new tech 200 years ago—and lost.

AFTER TRAINING FOR FOUR TO seven years, they were among the economy's most employable workers, known for their skill and acuity. Then came a new technology that accomplished much of their work without them. They soon found themselves unemployed. In their stead, employers hired an influx of cheap, low-skilled workers.

No, we're not talking about 2025. We're talking about 1812, when a group of skilled textile workers—think lace makers and hosiers—took center stage in Nottingham, England, to protest new technologies that produced textiles faster and with less labor. Their leader, Ned Ludd, was portrayed as a Robin Hood-like figure (he hailed from the same region) who strove to save jobs that are unfamiliar to us today, like croppers, who trimmed the fuzzy nap on wool to create attractive garments.

The new clothing produced by cutting-edge technology was not great. Factory-made socks were prone to developing holes within a year or two, unlike the handmade versions that might last a decade. "Machines were producing shoddier articles, more cheaply, and displacing workers," says Kevin Binfield, a Murray State University professor and author of *Writings of the Luddites*. The artisans petitioned Parliament on the grounds that the poorly made garments ruined the reputation of the craft—much as today's creatives, offended by so-called "AI slop," take issue with its low-quality, unoriginal content.

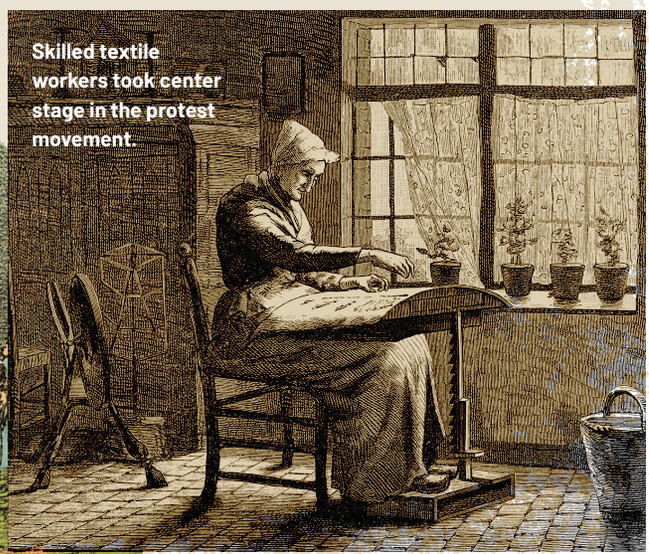
Today, of course, the term "Luddite" refers to someone opposed to new technology, but the original Luddites were less concerned about new equipment than they were about being replaced by less skilled workers. As the movement spread through parts of England, so did violence: Luddites attacked entire mills, but were eventually crushed, both physically and economically, by the government's military (perhaps you've heard the saying "poor as a stocking knitter"). The industrial revolution forged ahead.

Luddites were also the original work-from-home contractors, known for constructing garments from their own weavers' cottages. They did not respond well to their employers' sudden demand that they make cloth in factories. The class of worker impacted by Luddite-era mass automation—mostly skilled artisans—closely mirrors the modern artists, translators, graphic designers, copywriters, and others impacted by generative AI. "They're remarkably similar," says Brian Merchant, author of *Blood in the Machine: The Origins of the Rebellion Against Big Tech*. "Luddites were protesting for autonomy, control, and freedom."



English laborer Ned Ludd leading a so-called "Luddite Riot."

Working Class Movement Library, elu/Getty Images



Skilled textile workers took center stage in the protest movement.

‘The government is so crucial in breaking down barriers.’ UK’s Magical Ride to AI Superpower



When people think about mega-sized tech companies, they are likely to think of corporations that were created and grew huge in the US or China. Those have dominated the sector in ways that no other country has achieved. That is, until recently.

As if by magic, the UK now ranks third globally in artificial intelligence. Private investments in British AI totaled $28 billion from 2013 through 2024, trailing only China at $119 billion and the US at $471 billion, according to Visual Capitalist data. On the face of it, there’s no reason for the UK to be a magnet for artificial intelligence. But like it or not, much of it comes down to the government understanding that AI is the future. “It understands where things are going and is being proactive,” says Ted Mortonson, managing director and technology desk sector strategist at Baird, the investment firm.

Britain’s government isn’t just a cheerleader for AI. It’s also playing a vital role in getting things done, such as removing regulations and other red tape. “The government is so crucial in breaking down barriers,” Mortonson says.

The government also knows how fast AI is growing and how it may help lift Britain out of what looks like extended stagnation. And it may well do so, given what happened on the US West Coast after the COVID-19 shutdowns, says Bryan Ackermann, Korn Ferry’s head of AI strategy and transformation. An incredible amount of money from AI development turned around the fate of Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area, Ackermann says. He’s particularly impressed by the growth in Silicon Valley over the last 18 months. “If that happens to the UK, the real benefit will be for the economy,” he says. “It has a cascading factor.”

The UK is also attractive for AI investment because of its multiple universities and deep bench of AI experts and scientists in related fields. “Britain

Portrait by ROB DOBI



Sean Gladwell/Getty Images

has been at the forefront of technology research, especially AI, for many, many years,” says Vinay Menon, a Korn Ferry senior client partner and global lead in its AI practice based in London. “We have a very strong cohort of universities that do cutting-edge work.”

But the most crucial thing about Britain’s AI miracle may have less to do with Britain itself and more to do with its tight relationship with the US. Already, American tech companies are investing heavily in Britain. Mortonson says the US sees the UK as a key strategic ally not just in business, but also in defense. In fact, the two go together in many ways. A healthy economy increasing the UK’s AI capability should help maintain a formidable defense force and raise wages and wealth.

Defense spending, especially in the UK and many other European countries, is both growing and shifting fast toward buying AI-driven weapons systems, such as autonomous drones that can detect and identify the enemy’s moving targets. Ukraine has already embraced drone weaponry in its war with Russia. “We need weapons systems that we can rely on,” Mortonson says.

Of course, the UK government must surmount several hurdles before it can deliver what it has promised. Britain is currently deeply in debt. Parliament faces a country that has always been more risk averse than America, and its long-standing burdensome regulations have held back much needed change. The promised goal of building new power plants may meet resistance from future governments or from people living near new industrial buildings.

While the growing use of AI is likely to disrupt existing work roles, leaving people without jobs for a while, there may be a surprisingly favorable result over time, Ackermann says: “Every tech disruption has caused jobs to transition.” And these will be new roles. “Then it requires people to learn new skills,” he says.

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.

‘They aren’t using old playbooks for new problems.’

The Advantage of Enterprise Resilience



If you’ve sat in a board meeting of late, I bet you’ve heard some version of “If it happens, this is what we’ll do.” The “it” could be anything: a cybersecurity breach, navigating political turbulence, AI disruption, or a toughening consumer base that’s spending less because of nervousness about the future.

The constant vigilance by boards and the need to have contingency plans for contingency plans is exhausting. We’re going through more CEO-succession exercises than I’ve ever seen—not because people are retiring or moving on necessarily, but because boards are genuinely worried about continuity in ways they never used to be.

What’s more, the unspoken assumption that politics is something that happens around boards, not to them, is dissolving. In previous years, it didn’t really matter who was in power, because the fundamental framework of business remained stable. But now the rules are shifting, and political pressure is no longer background noise. It’s affecting the day-to-day operations of companies in ways we never anticipated.

No doubt, this all can make a person’s head spin. But there’s another way to view these issues: as a chance for companies to hone what I’d label enterprise resilience. Sure, it’s a bit of an abstract concept, but the idea of enterprise resilience is that you’re ready for whatever may come your way. If your industry is highly regulated, for example, how do politics affect your operating environment? If you’re consumer-facing, how do you respond to

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**



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shifting consumer sentiment, like a burgeoning movement away from processed foods, or the trend toward cheaper retail alternatives during economic uncertainty? And if you're in the energy sector, how do you deal with the surging global demand for data centers, or the impacts of energy-supply disruptions and volatile prices?

These questions are at the core of enterprise resilience. In organizations where it's embedded in or on its way to becoming part of an organization's aura, board meetings take on a different tone. Directors sit as a group asking: *If we win, how do we sustain that? If we lose, how do we pivot?* They view culture as a critical part of every strategic conversation. They aren't using old playbooks for new problems, but actually planning for the future by embracing the instability of the present and moving through it.

At a time when the psychology of leadership is shifting and there's a constant need to think about stability and reassure markets that we're prepared for whatever comes next, having enterprise resilience may be the difference between barely staying afloat and growing and thriving. Sometimes it's in the most difficult environments that good companies become great companies, because uncertainty drives people to change.

In a sense, priorities for boards and top leadership are going through a tectonic shift that I think needs more attention. For directors, leadership was once all about managing stakeholders, particularly major investors. Attention was put heavily into market developments and how your firm responded to them, which included the push for shorter-term revenue-growth results that kept stock prices high. But today, enterprise resilience could be the true test of leadership.

Indeed, the organizations that will thrive in 2026 and beyond won't be those that simply weather the storm, but those that have fundamentally reimagined what it means to be resilient. The ones that have moved beyond reactive contingency planning to proactive adaptation and have learned to see political and cultural shifts not as threats to manage, but as realities to navigate strategically. In a world where the only constant is change, enterprise resilience isn't just about survival—it's about turning uncertainty into competitive advantage.

Schofield is chair and managing partner of Korn Ferry's Board & CEO Services practice in the UK.

‘Don’t forget the need for person-to-person excellence.’

AI Skills Are Important—Up to a Point



“I was in the bottom half of my class in college, but I’ve done well in my career,” a vice president at a global consulting firm told me. It was emotional intelligence, he added, that explained his success.

As we enter the brave new world of AI in the workplace, this human skill set will matter greatly, as it always has. Emotional intelligence, of course, is a different way of being “smart”: self-awareness, managing your emotional life, and understanding those around you—and putting that all together to have effective relationships.

These days, determining how to make the best use of AI in a company is top of mind for decision-makers. No one wants the competition to outdo them on this key transition. Even so, the human qualities that drive productivity still matter immensely. Great leaders need emotional intelligence.

This key fact can be lost amid the excitement spurred by AI. But consider this: A cadre of brilliant technologists at the top of a firm may mean that many “nerds” are in leadership positions. And people disengage when their boss is a person they don’t trust or feel a connection with.

To be sure, someone gifted in the tech realm can also have a great deal of emotional intelligence. That’s an ideal combination. But to hire or promote mainly for tech excellence risks installing leaders who are low in the personal qualities leadership demands.

As AI allows companies to flatten their hierarchies, leaders will be directing more and more people. At some companies today, a manager or CEO may have 50 direct reports. This broader human-to-human

Portrait by **ROB DOBI**



Donald Iain Smith/Getty

interface makes people skills all the more important. That's because outstanding leaders know how to inspire, guide, and tune into the feelings of those they lead—as well as understand and manage their own feelings. These human skills are crucial, for instance, in managing workers' fears as AI leads to jobs disappearing or taking new forms.

A Korn Ferry survey of 250 global CEOs and directors found that while nearly 70 percent ranked tech skills and AI as their top leadership priority in coming years, only 38 percent cited emotional intelligence. But the challenges of leading people have not changed. Companies everywhere need leaders who are confident, self-aware, calm, clear, empathetic, and able to lessen people's fears while inspiring them to do their best work.

In its most recent *Future of Jobs* report, the World Economic Forum lists dozens of core competencies it deems essential for success in coming years. While analytical skills lead the list, emotional intelligence in one form or another—like motivation or active listening—dominates the top 10. That's no wonder: Researchers find that high levels of emotional intelligence in leaders mean workers feel more engaged with their jobs and are more productive.

What can a company do if a valuable employee lacks elements of this personal and interpersonal skill set? The good news here comes from the research of Richard Boyatzis, professor at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University: Given the right motivation and coaching, most leaders can boost their emotional intelligence. In an emotional-intelligence course for executives returning to business school for their MBA, Boyatzis found not only that they had improved on target skills, but also that bosses and fellow workers perceived the improvement up to seven years later.

The lesson here suggests caution rather than unbridled enthusiasm when it comes to the tech-savvy digital experts who can help you bring AI into your company. Don't forget the need for person-to-person excellence in your leaders and throughout your workforce. My advice: Hire for the skills you need, but develop for the perennial human qualities of leadership—emotional intelligence.

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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2026
BEAT the ODDS
PROVE YOUR VALUE
REDESIGN ALL ROLES
GET THAT PROMOTION
THRIVE WITH AI
FOCUS ON WELLNESS

Beat the Odds

Whether you're a leader or a climber, the deck may seem stacked against you. We look for ways you and your firm can thrive in the coming year.

By Arianne Cohen ▪ Illustrations by Tim Ames



The Problem

Headlines paint discouraging prospects for businesses and careers.



Why It Matters

Too much gloom and doom stalls productivity and innovation.



The Solution

Corporate chiefs and workers need to overhaul both leadership roles and career advancement.

2026: Beat the Odds

It's hard to be a CEO in an environment of unremitting change. Especially if you are Heather Perry, CEO of Klatch Coffee, which is opening 20 new locations across Southern California. "It's pretty wild," she says. "There are ups and downs, and you never know what's coming at you." No, she's not describing a theme-park ride—she's describing her daily work.

A graph of coffee prices over the last year looks like an illustration of the Alps: The cost of beans has peaked and plunged repeatedly, largely due to an on-again, off-again tariff on Brazilian imports. Few domestic sources are viable since US bean output is so small. But ultimately, such day-to-day challenges are not Perry's greatest stressor. "Going to bed is the hard part," says Perry. That's when her mind plays through the scenarios that keep making headlines: Will tariffs reverse? Will weather destroy the coffee crop? Will a social-media misstep emerge?

Bit by bit, gloom and doom seems to have become a permanent mindset for many business leaders. Sure, most executives have become accustomed to change, but what's hard to stomach is the steady drumbeat of incoming disruption that hangs over every corporate discussion and every Zoom call. Repeatedly, there is the talk of tariff-fueled inflation; AI, the once-in-a-generation technology that isn't paying off yet; and unpredictable global shifts. According to the C-suite Stress Index from insurer Sentry, some 47 percent of leaders cite economic volatility as a top concern, 44 percent point to supply-chain challenges, and 38 percent single out labor shortages—all matters largely beyond executive control these days. This, while shareholder activism continues to hit record levels. In challenging weeks, leaders compose their "I'm quitting" speeches in the shower.

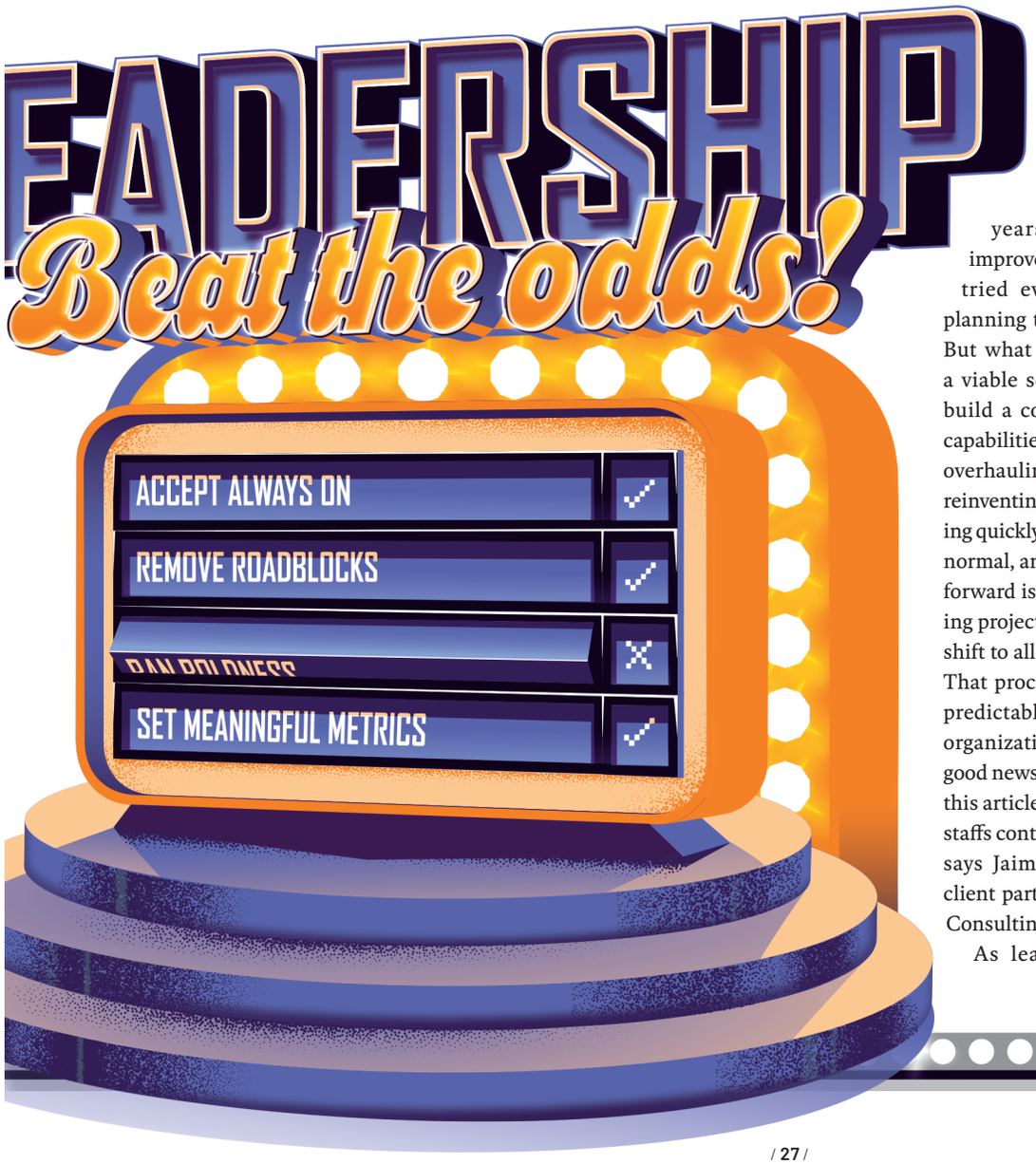
It's not much better for workers, who face unrelenting headlines about an "impossible" employment market and find themselves clinging to their jobs in a way that has led to a new phrase: job hugging. High stress, extreme burnout, and financial insecurity concerns naturally follow. Engagement is now at a 12-year low, according to Gallup figures, and just 31 percent of employees say they feel involved with and enthusiastic about their jobs.

Yes, it's rough out there, even terrible, rotten, and treacherous. The odds certainly don't favor many firms and groups as we plunge into 2026. But we had to ask: Does it have to be this way? Experts say executive outlook can be a state of mind, centered on looking for wins. So *Briefings* decided to go hunting for some key steps and strategic turnarounds that will help businesses and careers as we dive into a new year.

Leadership

Sure, there are private jets and high payouts. But CEOs at most firms struggle to keep their heads afloat. Executive whisperers report that nearly every CEO spends half of their Sunday meeting with their leadership team, and the other half catching up on memos and board papers. When they look at the news, they see headlines about new records being broken in CEO exits, both in 2024 and in 2025. And whether they are CEOs or not, most high-level leaders feel that they're being bombarded with the unknown. Their survival depends on learning to cope with permanent disruption on an enormous scale, even as they're under persistent pressure to drive quarter-over-quarter metrics.

Previously, executives oversaw change initiatives that might span three to five years—a timeline that now seems laughably long. Currently, one company in five is completely reinventing its businesses every 12 months, according to data from Accenture. Executives can no longer rest after completing a change process, says Lesley Uren, CEO of Korn Ferry Consulting. "Now there's one change, then another wave, then another." Most firms and executives are simply not designed to cope with those constant whitecaps of change.



An entire industry has sprung up in recent years just to help leaders improve their outlook. CEOs have tried everything from scenario planning to pep talks to meditation. But what seems to be emerging as a viable solution, say experts, is to build a company with "always-on" capabilities. Under this model, a firm overhauling its business plan is not reinventing itself, but simply responding quickly to the markets. It's the new normal, and experts say that the path forward is not simply a C-suite training project, but an organization-wide shift to allow nimble responsiveness. That process requires removing the predictable roadblocks that prevent organizations from being agile. The good news—yes, there is good news in this article—is that "leaders and their staffs control all of those roadblocks," says Jaime Maxwell-Grant, senior client partner in the UK and Ireland Consulting practice at Korn Ferry.

As leaders enter a new year,

> In challenging weeks, leaders compose their 'I'm quitting' speeches in the shower.

those following this strategy are clarifying their priorities. What are the top-line metrics on which the whole company needs to deliver? The handful of goals could include operational performance, innovation, or sales numbers. "If what people are working on isn't one of the priorities, they probably shouldn't be working on it," says Maxwell-Grant. Firms can jump-start these priorities with a town-hall meeting every 10 weeks, highlighting a singular priority. Once set, the tactic is to activate at scale, which happens when leaders and managers focus on executing strategy. "That is their job, going forward," says Maxwell-Grant.

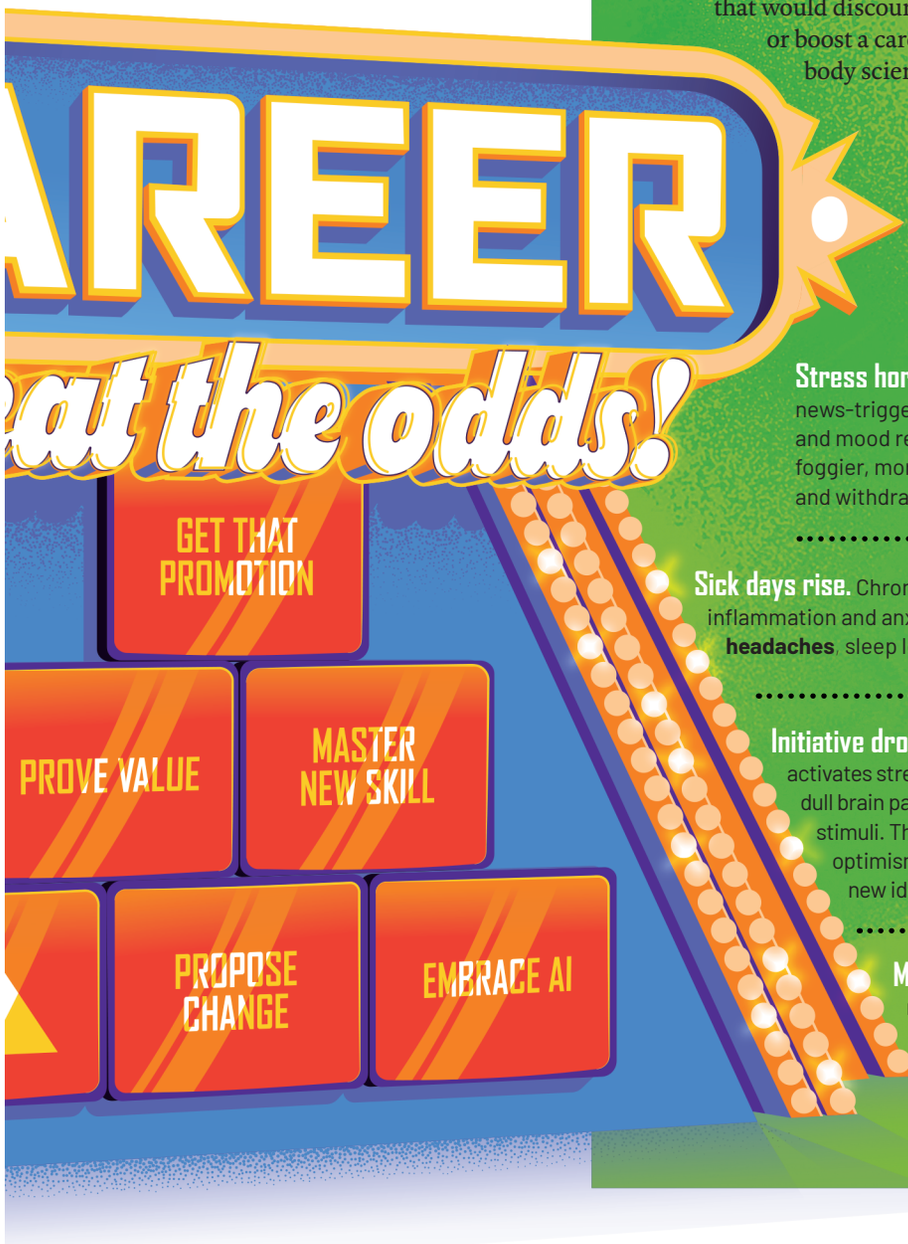
In the past, experts say, traditional management revolved around oversight, delegation, and relationship maintenance. But in today's hypercompetitive landscape, those skills are table stakes. An execution-first mindset requires managers to think less like supervisors and more like project coordinators who translate high-level strategy into concrete, actionable steps that teams can complete this week. Speed is crucial. While you are reading this sentence, successful companies have already moved to implementation.

Career

We used to know how to grow our careers, in good times or bad. But the old advice—*network, overperform, get mentors*—no longer guarantees a successful career. Gone are the days when snagging a job at a top firm was a golden ticket to a well-trodden path of career development and promotion. Constant change in the business environment is putting extraordinary pressure on firms to trim workforces: US job cuts are up 75 percent from 2024, with more than 800,000 lay-



offs through July 2025. Over the last ten years, sectors including retail, tech, and government have shrunk. Even high performers are clinging to their roles. Simply put, the skills



The Bad News Bears

Job Openings Fall 50 Percent! CEO Exits Hit New Record! For more than a year, there's been a steady stream of tough news that would discourage anyone trying to lead a company or boost a career. Here's some of the brain and body science on what negative news does to us.



Mental bandwidth shrinks. Negative headlines **tax the prefrontal cortex**, reduce working memory, and drain attention needed for focus, planning, and critical thinking.



Stress hormones spike. Chronic, news-triggered cortisol can disrupt memory and mood regulation, leaving employees foggier, more reactive, and **prone to fatigue** and withdrawal.



Sick days rise. Chronic media stress can elevate inflammation and anxiety, **leading to more headaches**, sleep loss, and stress-related absences.



Initiative drops. Repeated negativity over-activates stress and fear circuits, which in turn dull brain pathways that respond to positive stimuli. This ultimately **lowers drive**, optimism, and the willingness to volunteer new ideas.



Moods spread. Through mirror neurons in the brain, which facilitate empathy with others, one anxious coworker can **trigger stress in another coworker**—turning tension into a team-wide drop in morale.

you bring to the table are no longer enough to ensure job security.

The constant pressure of meetings and metrics is leading to a lack of attention to learning and development: One recent study of corporate supply-chain goals at 700 global companies found that 88 percent failed to mention people at all. Growth on the job is no longer handed out.

According to former CHRO Tim Toterhi, founder at career-coaching firm Plotline Leadership, there's

> "That makes you much more valuable—and, candidly, more difficult to replace."

Five Facts, Five Reasons for Hope

Some indicators suggest a bit of optimism for corporate leaders and career-focused workers in the New Year.

AI Can Create 'Breathing Room'

Experts see **AI boosting output** anywhere from 5 percent to 40 percent, depending on the role—enough to finally give workers more breathing room for innovation and special projects.

Global Growth Holding Up

Despite fear of rising prices, a key economic survey sees **global growth holding steady** at 2.9 percent in 2026.

A Powerful Tech Partner

Fears of job replacements may be overblown: A 2025 Australian government report says that **only 13 percent of jobs can be fully automated** by AI by 2050.

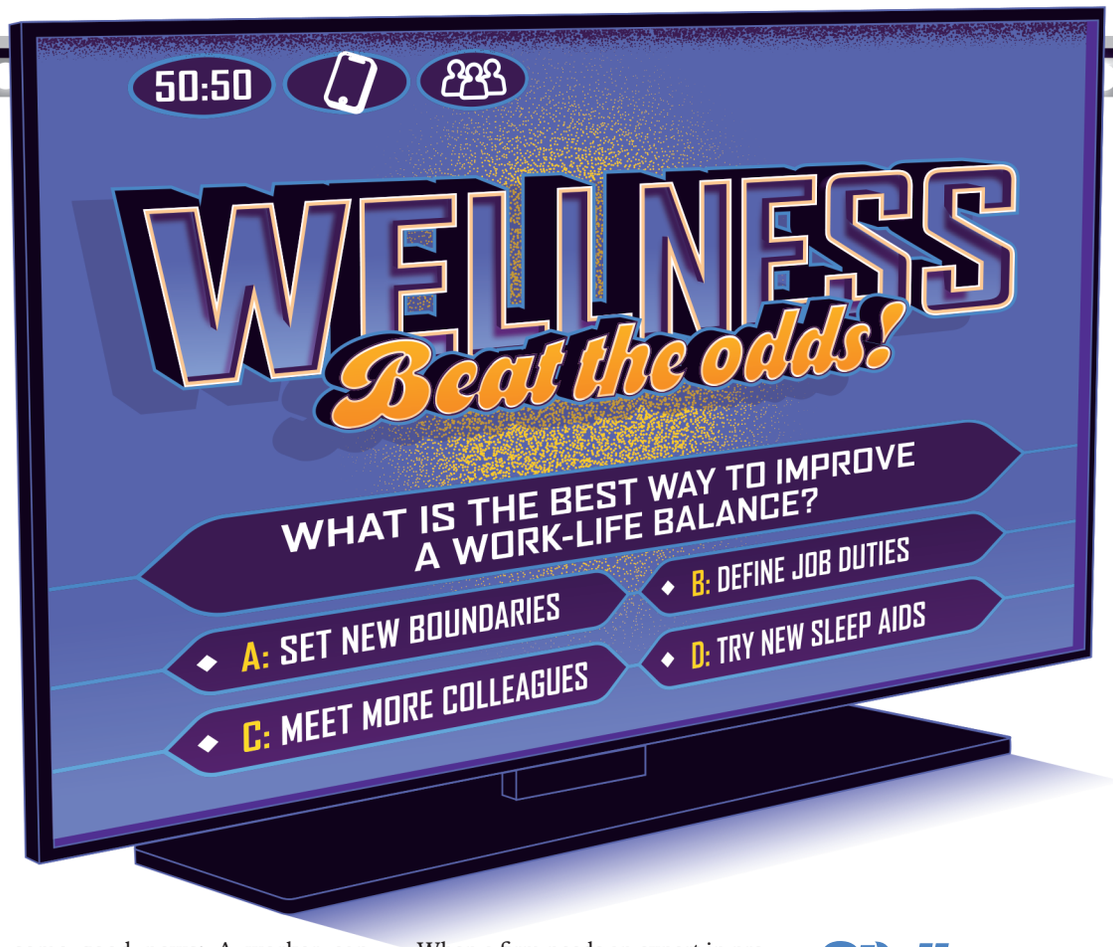
Net Job Gains

The World Economic Forum is predicting **a net gain of 78 million jobs** by 2030, an indication that tech and other global disruptions can become a positive for the labor force.

Wall Street Resilience

Few analysts foresee a long-term market disaster, in part because **US retirement-account assets alone exceed $40 trillion** that needs to be invested. A strong market is a core provider of assets to business.

Sources: MIT, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Jobs and Skills Australia, World Economic Forum, Investment Company Institute



some good news: A worker can remain employed by demonstrating real value that goes beyond—ideally far beyond—the original scope of their job. One tactic is to become an employee who fills two roles for the price of one. Perhaps you're a subject-matter expert who's also the first to understand new tech and train colleagues on it. Or perhaps you're a finance person who is also running HR for the finance and legal departments. "That makes you much more valuable—and, candidly, more difficult to replace," says Toterhi.

If multiple roles are not in the cards, experts say that some employees secure their job by developing reputations as specialists. Generalists are no longer viable. When a firm needs an expert in production design or content marketing, its leaders want to know who's got the right knowledge and background. "Unique and specific branding buys you job stability when careers are chaotic," says Toterhi. Fill in the blank: I'm the person who's awesome at ____.

Wellness

With the workplace resembling the Hunger Games, how can any manager, leader, or employee survive? Much of the workforce feels stuck, in one way or another. Yet "stuck" encapsulates a wide variety of scenarios, nearly

Companies are redesigning roles to include natural recovery periods.



2026: Beat the Odds

> "If what people are working on isn't one of the priorities, they probably shouldn't be working on it."

all of which fuel stress and burnout, which is a formula for poor mental health.

For many, employee mental health may be a tired subject, with advice you can recite from memory: Get enough sleep, exercise more than you think you should, eat healthfully, quit the booze or cigs or pot. Yet burnout continues to mount: 44 percent of US employees report feeling burned-out, 45 percent are "emotionally drained" from work, and 51 percent feel "used up" at the end of the workday, according to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management. Meanwhile, the number of people taking mental-health days has soared by 300 percent since the pandemic. Sure, supportive bosses and teammates buffer the stress, along with robust corporate mental-health support. But no amount of massage benefits and soothing whale-sounds music in the restroom can counteract roles that require long hours with minimal autonomy. The fundamental problem, the pros will tell you, isn't individual resilience.

Corporations are increasingly paying attention to job design—that is, creating positions in which workers can sustainably succeed, and remain energized and motivated, for years. The most progressive companies are redesigning roles to include natural recovery periods, meaningful decision-making authority, and clear boundaries between urgent and merely important tasks. Organizational-strategy experts now consider smart job design to be a core part of always-on companies: Amid intensive work, employees must be able to recover, feel in control, and achieve both their own and corporate goals. Firms are discovering that sustainable performance isn't about pushing harder—it's about designing systems that allow people to push smarter.

Those who are surfing the waves have come up with their own survival strategies. At Klatch Coffee, Perry reminds herself to play the long game. Klatch has been in business for three decades, and she'd like to see it do three more. She's laser focused on the details within her control, which are primarily related to daily experience, from cup feel to barista hospitality. This micro-focus allows her to find meaning and mastery in the midst of broader uncertainty. "Whether it's $5 or $10, it has to be a good experience that they want to do again tomorrow," she says. "And me too."



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Always the Hire, Never the Fire

(And It's OK to Be a Little Jealous)

It may be one of the toughest job markets in years, but a batch of career darlings are still leaping from one great role to the next. The question is, *how*?

By Arianne Cohen



TIRED



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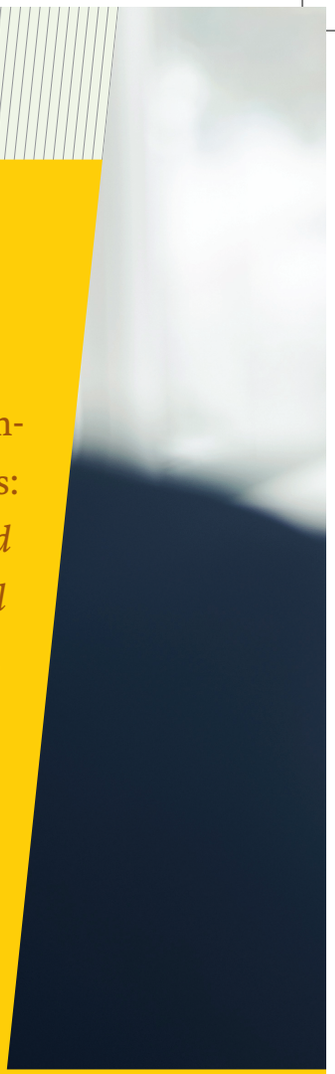

When friends of Laura Podesta are unemployed, they ping her with questions: *Hey, how did you pivot so quickly? What'd you do to get your new job? Did you tell people that you got laid off?* Not exactly, she says: "You have to say that you're available to do what you're best at." Her main advice: Get out there.

As you can imagine, her friends, some of whom have churned out more than 150 job applications without receiving a single reply, might find this answer a little frustrating. But they continue to ask for Podesta's advice. And no, she's not a career coach. It just so happens that in a two-decade career—through recessions, pandemics and, yes, even today's brutal job market—she has only been unemployed for a total of 10 business days. She will tell you how she left a television news job on a Friday and began a PR stint the next Monday. How she was laid off once—but had another role lined up five days later. When she shifted to launching her own agency, she immediately signed clients, who keep her busy. As she puts it, "I've always had a fair amount of work." So much, in fact, that she had to let a client go. "I've been lucky in that way," she says.

Always eager to help, she might tell a recently laid off friend, "You want to climb under the covers and not come out, but that's the opposite of what you should do!" It's easy for those who have been unemployed to look at her askance. As her hiring record suggests, she is delightful—exactly the type of smart, upbeat person one wants on their team.



Cecilie Arcurs, Slavadubrovin/Getty Images

There are a handful of people who seem to be living in an alternate universe, almost a paradise.

We all know someone—or some people—who has been unemployed for the better part of this year. Among knowledge workers, you hear their pain: applying for jobs with thousands of applications, pestering anyone for help, and waiting months, even *years*, just for an interview. In all, one-quarter of unemployed people nationally have been jobless for 27 weeks or longer; for men over age 55, it's 33 weeks. That's eight months. With odds like that, it's not surprising that a growing army of candidates are not only pulling their hair out—they're giving up.

Yet amid all of this mayhem and despair, a handful of folks seem to be living in an alternate universe, almost a paradise. They're coasting along,



Name:
Laura Podesta

Profession:
Public Relations Strategist

Years Employed:
15

Business Days Unemployed:
10

Secret Sauce:
Extensive networking

easily shifting from job to job, with jaunts to Greece and Wimbledon in between. Call them "always hired." Or just call them something else—blessed, lucky, carefree. Their profiles span genders and ages and industries, and if you had to ask them, not all of them were heroes in their prior jobs. But they share an enviable trait: They stay at a job because they want to, not because they must. When they're feeling a wee bit stale, they switch—horror headlines about endless job searches be damned. Even HR pros are mystified by these career chameleons, who seem to operate in a world where economic downturns don't apply and layoff announcements just bounce off them.

While the rest of us are frantically updating our LinkedIn profiles and rehearsing elevator pitches, they're fielding unsolicited offers from headhunters. Their résumés read like a greatest-hits list of lucrative career decisions. Most frustratingly, the entire concept of unemployment is foreign to them. The question is, how exactly do they do it?



Name:
Sam Wright

Profession:
Head of Partnerships and Operations

Years Employed:
9

Business Days Unemployed:
21

Secret Sauce:
Self-branding as relentless

For centuries, men with flair like Podesta's—career aces—cruised from job to job, as needed, via the old-boy network. This exclusive system of informal connections was structured around elite schools and families, reinforced through private clubs and fraternities, and maintained through golf and tennis, weddings and funerals. Long before a company publicly announced a job opening (if it announced it at all), peers told each other about the open seat, and recommended each other for the role. A word-of-mouth recommendation from the right person sealed the deal.

This system often bypassed formal application processes altogether, and gave friends of friends significant advantages, while icing out talented workers who often didn't know a job was open until they read about the new hire in the newspaper. These roles were commonly onboarded without ever going through human resources. The tacit agreement was that peers would help each other reciprocally, and they did.

This system began to slip in the 1960s, as equal-opportunity labor legislation loosened the old-boy network's stranglehold on top jobs. In the decades that followed, the growth of workplace diversity as a business advantage further loosened its grip, as did the influx of women into the workplace. To be sure, substantial vestiges of that system still operate. As recently as 15 years ago,

The Price of a Job Search

Landing on one's feet is increasingly expensive. What was once a matter of printing a few résumés and making some phone calls has evolved into a costly endeavor. From hiring a career coach to—yes—a branding consultant, it all adds up.

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high-level employees looking to fill a position simply called their friends and asked for recommendations. But today's hiring practices involve a much more rigorous process, regardless of whether a candidate personally knows the employer. There are applications to fill out, three or five interviews to attend, references to collect, companies to study, strategies to articulate. Even for the most well-qualified applicant, it can be a rather brutal process.

But not for Sam Wright, head of operations and partnerships at tech platform Huntr. He's been out of school for a dozen years, and somehow, he says, he "always lands on his feet." He's leapt smoothly from one job to the next—four times in those dozen years—including a transition into tech despite having no industry network or connections. How do people like him triumph, again and again?

"People who always get hired aren't necessarily the most qualified."

It seems unexplainable, and even annoying, that some candidates always win the hiring game. You might assume that the always-hired are easy on the eyes. In truth, research on attractiveness and job offers is mixed, showing that some employers favor good looks in public-facing roles like sales and



PR, while others perceive beautiful applicants to be entitled, not hard-working, and more likely to leave. Could the always-hired simply have amazing career achievements to lean on? Nope, says Lacey Kaelani, CEO of data-job-hub Metaintro, who herself has only had 11 unemployed days in her whole career. Her firm analyzed some 600 million available jobs and the candidates who snagged them and found that qualifications were not part of the special sauce. As best she can figure, successful hires all share a *vibe*: "People who always get hired aren't necessarily the most qualified," she says. "They're the best at making hiring managers feel confident about saying yes."

There is a consistency to their approach: Before applying, they research companies obsessively, and offer up value, not desperation. They speak in action-oriented language, connecting what they did at their last job to similar strategies from which the new company could immediately benefit. Their confidence vibrates and resonates. They do not use AI auto-apply tools, ever ("I can talk for 20 minutes on this," says Kaelani). She's found that the most successful job seekers apply to five to 10 highly targeted roles instead of 60 or 100. Simply put, they treat job searching like business development.

It turns out that Kaelani's husband is an always-hired type too. When working as the director of engineering for a major bank, he sought a higher salary, and put feelers out for who else was hiring. The offers came in left and right, "and he wasn't even formally on the market," she says. It all suggests another key trait: well-developed networks.

Any career guru will suggest networking, but those who always get hired do it in a specific way. "One client, a CTO, maintains a spreadsheet of close contacts and sends each a personalized email or text a few times per year," says executive career coach Kyle Elliott. "He's updating them on his career and life, and checking in on how they're doing." Elliott has noticed this is a differentiator between executives who land their next roles easily, and those who don't. Another client posts regularly on LinkedIn to stay consistently visible, and recently launched a podcast featuring CEOs and CMOs as guests—who quickly enter her network, of course. This strategic nurturing of networks pays dividends: When positions open up, these people are already top of mind, and when they want a new job, they can reach out with a simple text. It's a far cry from sending blind appli-

He always lands on his feet, leaping smoothly from one job to the next.



Sakchai Vongsasiripat/Getty Images

cations on LinkedIn, or handing out business cards at an awkward networking event. Most haven't attended a conference or sent a cold outreach message in years, says Elliott.

This well-greased network frequently proves invaluable when a quick exit is necessary. At some point in their careers, most employees find themselves stuck in less-than-ideal situations: They need the money, so they stay put despite a bad boss, or hellish workload, or toxic culture. Always-employed types simply say, "Adios." At one Midwestern company, *five* people in a role reporting to the C-suite have exited in four years. "They each had confidence that they'd be able to find their next job," says Dave Brazel, leader of the Digital Leadership Development sales team at Korn Ferry. "It speaks to their track record of success up to that point—they *chose* to exit."

While most of us would be thinking, *Wouldn't that reflect badly on me?!*, career aces know that one negative experience is just that, and doesn't stick to them. They are, after all, Teflon: Nothing sticks except job offers.



By now, it may seem like it's impossible to compete with these spectacular, always-employed people. But how can you become more like them? Wright attributes his success to his sales-pitch strategy. "I pitch myself to CEOs and startups as a very driven person. I can sell your product because I'm relentless." He speaks directly to decision-makers, and positions himself as unyieldingly persistent. It is, in a word, a vibe.

Podesta is similarly focused on the sales pitch. She approaches looking for work as a temporary sales role in which you must let people know what you bring to the table: *This is what I do, this is why I'm good at it, and just so you know, I'm available to do it now.* "My biggest advice is to be open and honest with your connections, quickly, that you're in need of work," she says. She considers connections to encompass not just work colleagues, but also friends and family—and coffee-shop acquaintances, and dog-run friends, and vacation buddies. Everybody.



Name:
Lacey Kaelani

Profession:
Entrepreneur

Years Employed:
12

Business Days Unemployed:
11

Secret Sauce:
Planning ahead while employed

It's OK to be of two minds about the advice of the always-hired: Yes, it can be annoying, and yes, they're 100 percent right. The frustration is real—to watch someone effortlessly navigate systems that feel rigged against the rest of us naturally breeds resentment. But beneath that irritation lies an uncomfortable truth: Their strategies actually work, and the wisest approach is swallowing your pride, extracting the useful insights, and learning to say "Congratulations! Yet another cool job!" without letting your voice crack. After all, success rarely comes with the luxury of choosing your teachers.

AI and IQ

Can Leaders Have It All?



Gen AI offers speed, efficiency, and ease, but it may come at the cost of dulling the knowledge worker's greatest asset: **the mind**.

By Meghan Walsh



The Problem

Studies show misusing AI can diminish critical thinking and creativity.

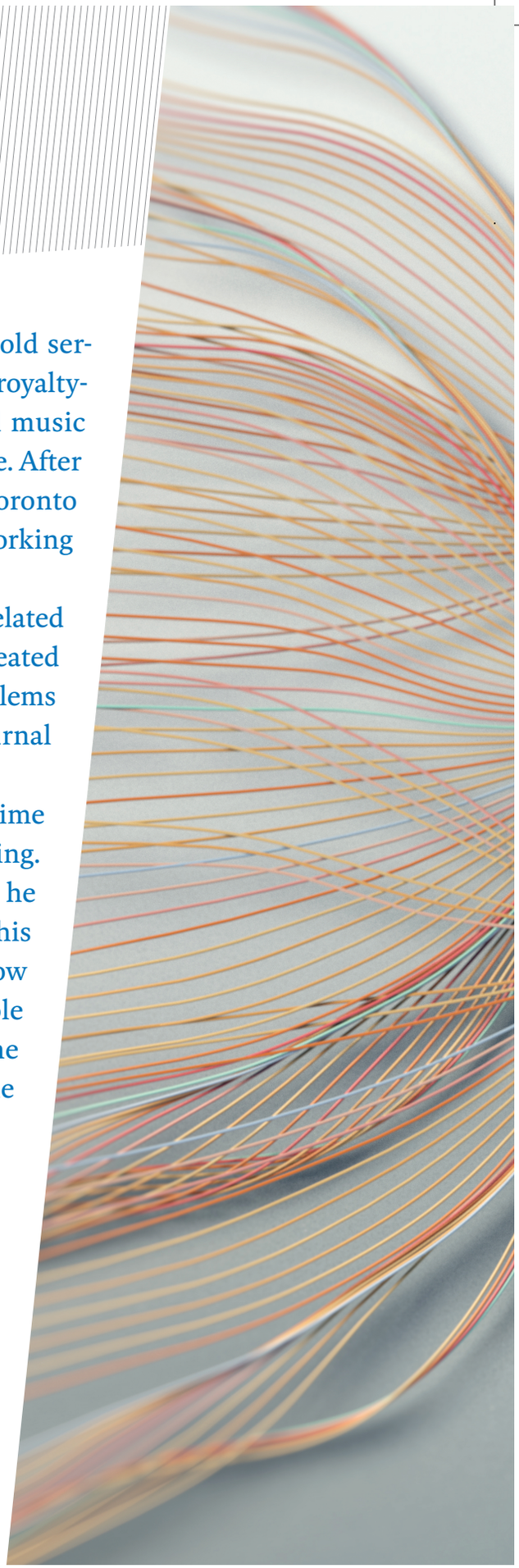
Why It Matters

Human ingenuity is essential to stewarding the future.

The Solution

Employ the technology in support of learning.

Vithun Khamsong/Getty Images



For the last few months, Siddhant, a 34-year-old services manager for Curve Royalty Systems, a royalty-management platform for record labels and music publishers, has adopted a new evening routine. After he puts his three-year-old son to bed, the Toronto resident proceeds to spend the next four or more hours working with ChatGPT and various other generative AI apps.

Siddhant is not a coder or a tech guy; he holds a music-related master's in fine arts. But in a short period of time, he's created numerous digital apps to solve software and workflow problems for himself and his clients. "It's surreal," says the nocturnal citizen developer.

Through the tools he's built, Siddhant is saving enough time in his day that he can now, ironically enough, study coding. Not because he has any plans for a career change—it's so he can understand how better to collaborate with AI to serve his clients. "You as a human need to be smart enough to know when it's BSing," Siddhant says, stressing the human role in this relationship: "If I had AI 10 years ago, without the real-world context I have now, I wouldn't have known the questions to ask."

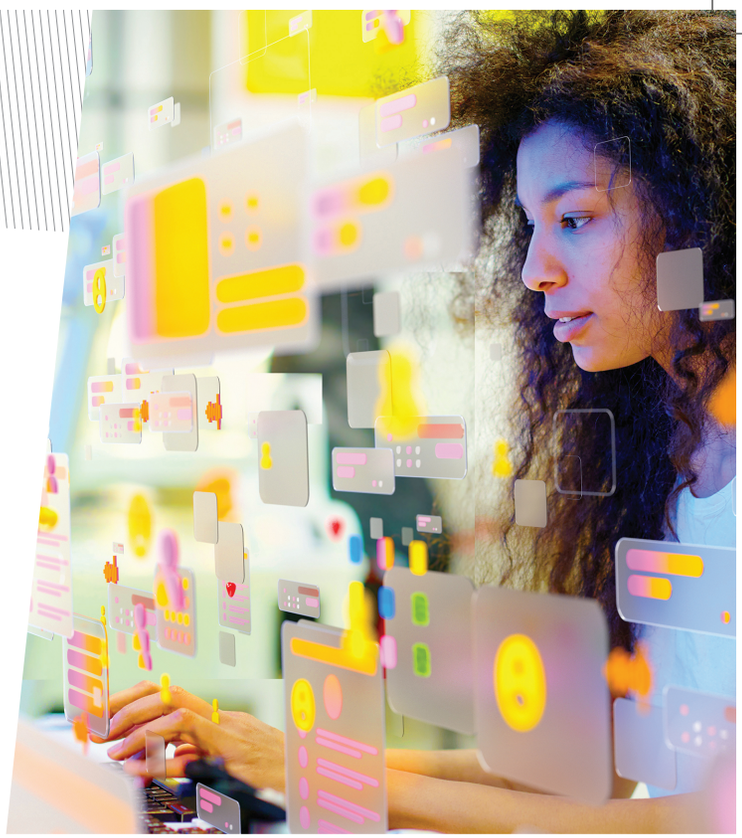
When ChatGPT launched three years ago, it became the fastest-growing consumer application in history, reaching 1 million users in just five days. Now, it's nearing 1 billion users, many of them knowledge workers using the technology to perform a variety of daily duties. Promising access to information, improved productivity, clearer communication, real-time insights, and almost instantaneous digital problem-solving, AI has, in a very short period, become integral to the workplace, including the C-suite. For both businesses and workers, the allure is obvious.

But there is more to this story. Adoption of ChatGPT and similar tools has been so quick that researchers are only beginning to understand the impact—on humans. A number of studies are demonstrating that AI isn't just rapidly transforming the ways we learn, create, and execute. It's also changing how we think—just not, as it turns out, the way most of us want. Indeed, some worry the technology may be eroding the very cognitive capacities that help Siddhant collaborate so successfully with ChatGPT: an internal reservoir of industry knowledge, robust critical-thinking skills, and the intuition to know when to call BS. For Amelia Haynes, a research manager at the Korn Ferry Institute, it all raises a



“What are we trading for efficiency and proficiency?”

Yuichiro Chino/Getty Images



key question as the AI revolution looms: "What are we trading for efficiency and proficiency?"

The Talented Intern

This is not the first time humans have questioned the impact of a new technology on cognition. When symbols were introduced to capture language, for example, there were fears as far back as Grecian times that writing would weaken long-term memory. When calculators were popularized, alarmists claimed we would lose our ability to conceptualize mathematics. And when Google debuted and smartphones hit the market, people fretted that we'd no longer remember anything.

To varying extents, all of these fears have been borne out. Researchers point to the so-called Google effect, a phenomenon where users have a tendency to forget information that they can easily look up online—which can have broad implications for learning and comprehension. But that is generally how evolution works. Something is gained, something is lost. While the philosophers and pundits grapple with whether that trade-off is good, bad, or indifferent, time is the ultimate judge. "I used to have decent handwriting," Siddhant says. No longer. "Certain skills will leave as I don't use them. It's a give and take." Who knows, maybe the day will come when we don't

The Thinking Person's Guide to Using Gen AI

Want to avoid digital amnesia? Here are steps and prompts that experts offer for using gen AI to strengthen learning.

Use AI to **interrogate your understanding** of a topic, instead of to write the report.

Prompt: ___

"Here's how I understand [insert topic]. Can you evaluate my explanation and ask me questions that would help me deepen my understanding? "

Answer questions yourself before having ChatGPT answer them.

Prompt: ___

"Can you compare my response to the correct answer and explain where I went wrong or right?"

Go to the source. Once you've read gen AI's summary, **read the primary source**.

Prompt: ___

"I read a summary of [insert topic]. Can you help me find primary sources and highlight any complexities I might miss at a surface level?"

Source: Korn Ferry Institute

Rakdee, Novan Adhi Putra, Natalia Horban, Vladimir Ivankin, KO.Jart/Getty Images



Andriy Onufriyenko/Getty Images

"Many people say they use it for everything."

have to architect sentences at all.

Coined in 1955, the term artificial intelligence refers to the ability of a machine to emulate human cognition and decision-making. Advanced AI systems known as generative AI (gen AI) go beyond just aggregating information. They can analyze large datasets and identify patterns, allowing for creation—from authoring text to composing art to generating code.

Currently, we are in the age of hybrid intelligence, when digital learning systems still require human governance. Experts say, though, the day is not far off—and may already be here, in some ways—when AI will be able to operate independently. The embodiment of this technological consciousness is known, of course, as the AI agent. "For the first act, AI was a helper," says Bryan Ackermann, who leads Korn Ferry's AI and Transformation sector. "We were calling it a talented intern." But the intern kept getting smarter and smarter. Earlier this year, AI became contemplative, asking clarifying questions. It went, as Ackermann points out, from being a helper to a peer. And as AI pulls alongside the knowledge worker, responsibility is shifting from execution to oversight. In this role, the cognitive capacities most threatened by the technology, such as critical thinking and ingenuity, may become the most relevant.

Michael Gerlich, head of the Center for Strategic Corporate Foresight and Sustainability at SBS Swiss Business School, offers this analogy: Gen AI can help improve the candle so that it burns longer and brighter and is cheaper to make. But it won't invent the light bulb. "The step from candle to light bulb is what the human does," Gerlich says, "and that process is not linear."

✦✦✦

The Illusion of Learning

Siddhant's vibe-coding sessions go something like this: He'll conceptualize a problem. Then he'll prompt ChatGPT to help create a digital solution. He will refine his prompt or give feedback to the program when it doesn't interpret his query as intended. Once he has the makings of a fix, he will ask other gen AI iterations to explain how the code ChatGPT drafted is working, so he can better comprehend the mechanisms at play. Man and machine will continue this process until Siddhant has exactly the answer and understanding he seeks.

Siddhant is a case study in best practices for utilizing this powerful technology. He is careful not to outsource aspects of his work that are integral to his personal competency. For instance, he recently authored an article for a trade publication offering advice for the next generation entering the music industry. He outlined the piece himself based on his own insights, then asked AI to smooth and proofread it. "Instead of allowing it to make me dumb, I'm now able to prioritize things that actually make me smarter," he says.

But many people would use AI to write the entire article, along with any other text the job requires. And to summarize any necessary reading. And to analyze data. And to brainstorm ideas. And to tell them what, when, and how much to eat. "Ask people how and why they use it," says Gerlich, "and many people say they use it for everything."

When humans outsource aspects of thinking, it's called cognitive off-loading—which isn't inherently a negative thing. Most people agree that using AI to put meetings onto a calendar frees up mental capacity for more complex purposes. The problem is when cognitive off-loading is deployed in place of developing proficiency. Neuroscience has shown that knowledge and skill are intertwined, explains Barbara Oakley, a professor of engineering at Oakland University and global expert on learning. To think critically or creatively about something, we must understand it deeply, which requires having key information stored internally.

Let's say you've just learned a new system at work. The next day, you need to explain an aspect of that system in an email to a colleague. The act of recalling and articulating the relevant processes reinforces that understanding in your brain. Down the road, when a function isn't performing optimally, you'll be able to conceptualize the problem and collaborate with AI on a solution. But if ChatGPT writes that email, you bypass the cognitive labor that's necessary for deep knowledge to take root. AI can be a tremendous learning support, experts say, but how and when it's deployed is crucial.

While the first studies of gen AI's impact on cognitive function were self-reported, neuroscience is now using EEGs to show what's taking place inside the brain. A study out of the MIT Media Lab, titled "Your Brain on ChatGPT," found that those who used the app to write an essay had significantly less neural activity and fewer connectivity patterns than those who performed the task using just their brains or a search engine. (Remember, neurons that fire together, wire together.) The brain-only group showed stronger activation of networks linked to creativity, memory, and semantic processing. Anecdotally, they also took more ownership of their work and could better recall it. And, of course, their writing was more original.

A plethora of other studies have had equally dreary findings, showing that over- or misuse of gen-AI tools blunts critical thinking, motivation, and satisfaction. Perhaps most concerning is that AI creates the illusion of learning. Users aren't aware of the gaps in their knowledge, a phenomenon known as digital amnesia. That leads to developing a false sense of competence. "We're seeing that people, like professors, who previously said they were not, are actually offloading," Gerlich says.

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Collective Liability, Collective Response

Who is most vulnerable to being seduced by ChatGPT's allure? Those who are underprepared, overwhelmed, and stressed out. Particularly prone to such a trifecta are older professionals, who may rely on AI to compensate for cognitive decline, and young workers, who may be developing learning skills. On the other hand, those who are calm, capable, and confident are more likely to delegate tasks with discretion, a finding that holds true across generations. Like so many of the ills that plague modern corporations and those who work for them, the risks of AI to human functioning are linked to onerous demand.

How leaders are approaching AI, Korn Ferry's Ackermann says, generally falls into one of three categories: 1) those who lean into the efficiency play; 2) those who are frozen; and 3) those who are thoughtfully transforming. Leaders who want to avoid a future workforce unable to think outside of the box, he says, must train employees in best practices and set manageable workloads, which, by all accounts, isn't an easy task in today's world. AI is advancing so quickly, it's hard to keep up. Meanwhile, there is tremendous pressure to do more with less in half the time. "There is a lot of FOMO going on," Ackermann says.

Ultimately, AI's impact on human cognition is a collective challenge that requires a collective response. It requires investment from educators, tech developers, business leaders, the professions, and individuals. Companies—and leaders—that fail to enter this new frontier with foresight and empathy may find themselves ill-equipped to steward AI into the future. (Unfortunately, the skills of leadership are not readily outsourced to automation.)

The next act of this story may be defined not by the emergence of AI agents, but by how well man can integrate machine into daily work life. Leaders can employ this technology to make workers produce faster but shallower work—or to expand their cognitive potential in all directions. That may just turn out to lead to a place beyond the light bulb. "At the end of the day," Korn Ferry's Haynes cautions, "it's all about how you engage with it."



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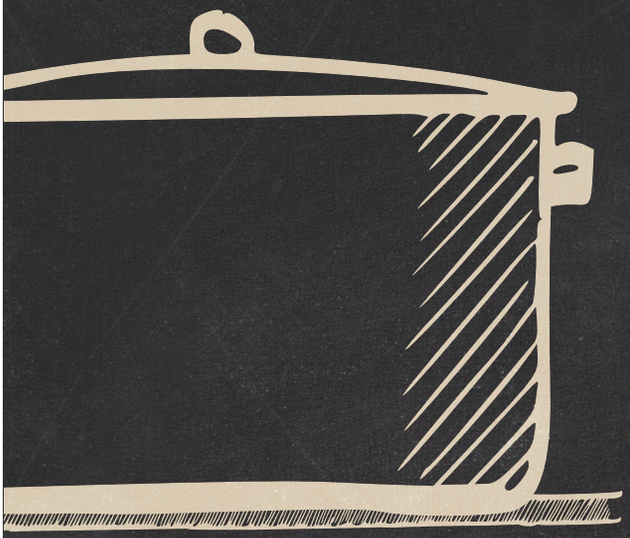
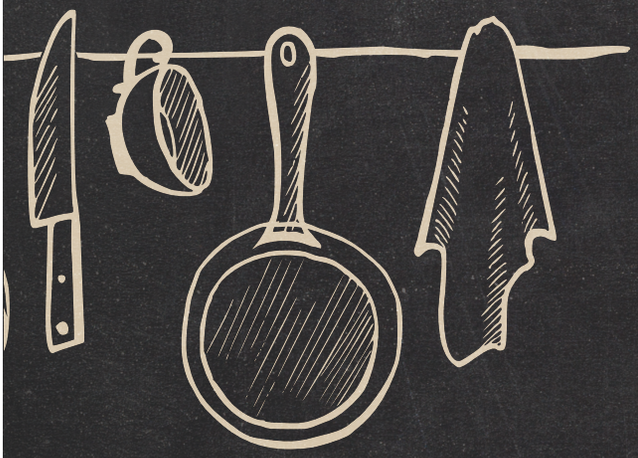






A CHANGE OF DIET

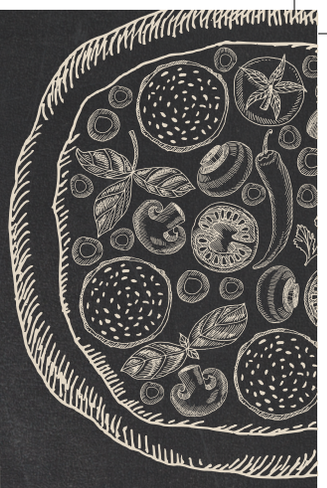


THE PROBLEM

By Peter Lauria

The food business has rarely faced so many changes in consumer tastes so fast.





A CASE OF INDIGESTION?



People are changing what they eat. Can the food business, from fast food to groceries, keep up?



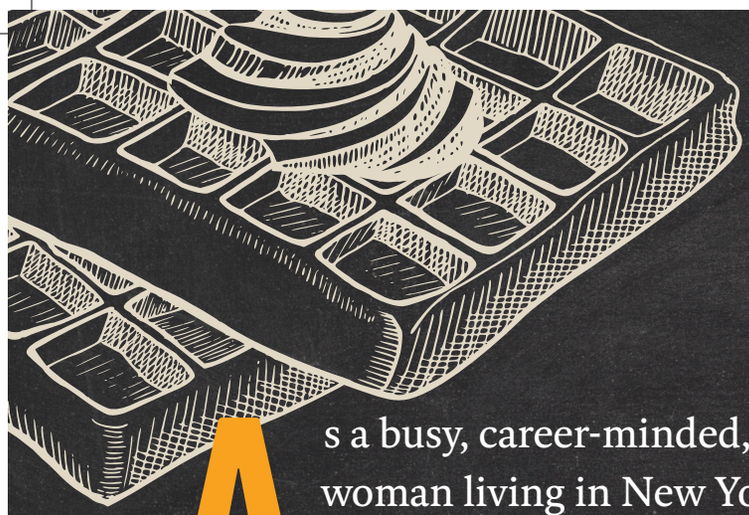
WHY IT MATTERS

Restaurants, fast-food chains, and grocery stores form a major pillar of the global economy.

THE SOLUTION

Create more nimble organizations that won't be caught off guard by rapid change.







As a busy, career-minded, single woman living in New York City, Nina Mehta sees dining out as an important part of her professional and social life. Or, rather, she did. The digital-media producer has been going to restaurants a lot less frequently lately. She's also been ordering in less and being more intentional about what she cooks at home—and not just to be healthy. Rising food costs, an unsteady economy, and a long period of unemployment following a layoff have, as she understatedly puts it, "impacted my finances."

"Saving money was a huge reason for changing how I eat," says Mehta, who says she's cut her eating and ordering out from one to two meals per day to less than one per week.

Mehta isn't alone. She's one of the tens of millions of people around the world who are changing their food habits and giving a host of huge businesses—from restaurants and fast-food chains to grocery stores—a serious case of indigestion. While some of the changes may be temporary, they're creating enormous challenges for big firms to keep up with, and industry pros fear many may reflect more permanent lifestyle changes. Already, the health-food craze that so disrupted food businesses seems here to stay, while inflation sent waves of shoppers to discount aisles, and they never left. Now, everything from tariffs to an out-of-nowhere boom in the use of weight-loss drugs is shifting habits even more. In the US alone, six million people trying drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy find themselves eating a lot less and a lot differently.

Together, these shifts amount to a shakeup the likes of which the food sector hasn't faced in generations. It's one that helps some sectors but throws a curveball at others. Foot traffic at restaurants is down across the board, for example, but many outlets have done well raising prices or cutting back on serving sizes. A handful of the world's most iconic chains were forced to shutter locations and threaten bankruptcy, but stalwarts like McDonald's and Starbucks decided to remake stores, menus, and the customer experience to stay ahead of the game. On the grocery side, as many as nine out of 10 consumers have changed their shopping habits because





of higher prices, with about 44 percent trading down to generic brands. Yet at the same time, both restaurants and grocery stores are getting a boost from higher-end shoppers buying online or from instant-delivery apps. In short, while the disruptions of AI and various global events draw most of the world's attention, it turns out that simple human eating habits can be just as jarring. "The changes have been slowly building over the last 10 years or so," says Mark Moeller, a restaurant and hospitality consultant with four decades of experience. "Now, they are converging and exploding all at once."

History shows that dramatic shifts in the way people eat usually dovetail with significant socioeconomic or cultural changes, often brought on by technological advancement. In the early part of the 20th century, Americans ate primarily what they farmed, with meat being a luxury reserved for the well-to-do. As the advent of refrigeration, canning, and other industrial processes increased access and storage, people began eating more meat and dairy, first in America then globally. The last two decades of the 20th century saw the rise of processed and convenience foods and quick-service meals, and, paradoxically, the beginning of diet culture. Then, 21st-century shifts in globalization and sustainability helped usher in more international and vegetarian fare.



Marchiez. Vadimguzhva. Fourleaflover/Getty Images

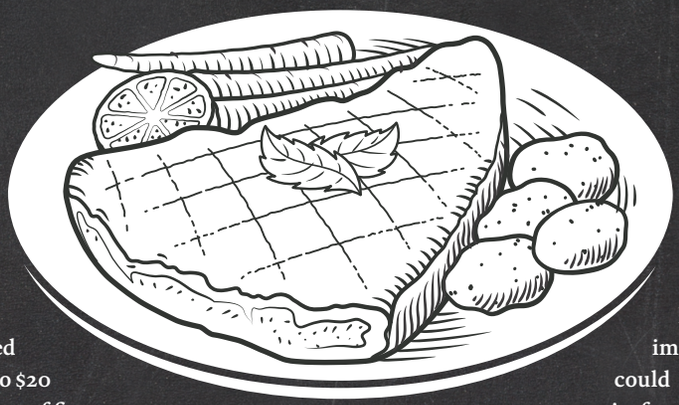


> "DETERMINING WHAT'S A FAD VERSUS A TREND IS ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS FOR A FOOD LEADER TODAY TO FIGURE OUT."

The difference now, says Nolan Lewin, executive director of the Food Innovation Center at Rutgers University, is that eating habits are changing faster, more often, and on a more global scale than in the past. "Determining what's a fad versus a trend is one of the hardest things for a food leader today to figure out," he says. It's also one of the most critical, with tremendous costs associated with being too late to a trend or too early to a fad. Lewin speaks from firsthand experience: His team helped launch Impossible Foods, one of the companies that set off a feeding frenzy for plant-based meat in the years leading up to the pandemic, then watched as consumer interest cooled off.

Indeed, the plant-based meat business is an object lesson in how consumer tastes change—and how they change so much





faster today. From 2019 to 2022, the industry grew at a nearly 20 percent rate; by 2030, the market was projected to swell from about $6 billion to $20 billion or more. The share prices of firms in the business soared, and restaurants started promoting plant burgers and other veggie options. In the blink of an eye, those growth projections have shrunk by almost half, with plant-based meat now accounting for about 1 percent to 2 percent of the retail meat market, down from a peak of 3 percent. As Lewin explains it, "Consumers went back to comfort foods, regulations changed, and venture money pulled out."

But plant-based meats are just one example of how consumer fickleness is upending the sophisticated financial modeling at food firms. While gluten-free diets have long been a necessity for those with celiac disease, around a decade ago gluten-free foods became a shopping staple for millions. The push to remove food dyes and coloring is trending, although it will require years of reorienting and retrofitting manufacturing and supply-chain processes to achieve. And then there is the popularity of low-sugar, high-protein diets, which has turned foods like granola, yogurt, and snack bars into strong growth categories for firms.

Alyssa Rojo doesn't have diabetes or any chronic illness that would require a GLP-1 prescription. She exercises regularly and maintains a complex diet that includes intermittent fasting, prioritizing protein, and tracking calories and metabolic rates. But earlier this year, the registered nurse, who's just entering her 40s, began taking a generic version of Ozempic to offset weight gain resulting from hormonal changes. "Weight loss is personalized and unique, and diet and exercise weren't doing anything for me," she says.

The GLP-1 did. In her first few months on the drug, Rojo lost 30 pounds. And with it, she lost her appetite for big dinners, to the point that she's ordering only appetizers when she goes out. "It drastically changed how I ate," she says.

Such individual stories are impressive, and medical experts applaud both the weight loss and the improved diets. But no one in the food industry saw this coming at the scale it's occurring. At least one major investment bank is projecting GLP-1 users could grow to 40 million globally, 17.6 million of them in the US alone—with many of those people changing their habits. Indeed, one study found grocery spending fell between 5 percent and 8 percent for households within the first six months of starting a GLP-1, while one-third of people in another study said they ordered smaller portions at restaurants or simply ate out less. The potential financial impact of mass GLP-1 adoption could be huge, given that the profit margin for the average restaurant is only about 4 percent, and even less for the typical grocery store.

People still like going out to eat, however, and as stressed-out parents with hungry teenagers know, mobile ordering and delivery apps are a convenient, if expensive, way to answer the dreaded "What's for dinner?" question. To be sure, much of the food industry has subsisted on the spending of affluent consumers for the last few years, says Christopher Fuqua, head of the Restaurant practice at Korn Ferry. Absent that spending, the sector is similar to the broader economy: "In many ways, it's been a stagnant environment," he says.

And there is much the food industry is doing to adjust. Some fast-food chains, for example, are redesigning the drive-thru experience and creating additional space for

Marchiez/Getty Images

What We Eat—Over Time

As habits have changed, the food industry has had to adapt and shift. Here are some of the most popular foods over the past 125 years.

Turn of the 20th Century *(c. 1900–1915)*

- Wheat breads & flour-based staples (loaves, biscuits, pies)
- **Red meat** & pork fat (beef roasts/steaks, pork, lard for cooking)



- Potatoes & dairy (starch foods, milk, butter, cheese)

> "PEOPLE AREN'T GOING OUT AS MUCH, SO WHEN THEY DO, THE EXPERIENCE PROVIDED REALLY MATTERS."

Gorr, Kinga Krzeminska, BWFolsom, Mizan, Brian Hagiwara/Getty Images

mobile pickup, says Scott Taylor, Jr., professor at the University of South Carolina's College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management. "The increase in mobile ordering is a major area of focus for operators," he says, pointing to how DoorDash alone grew orders 20 percent, to a record 761 million, in the second quarter of 2025. Remarkably, drive-thru lanes can account for up to 75 percent of revenues at some US fast-food restaurants today. And that's including the operators who are squeezing out more profits with double lanes, with one for ordering and one for pickup.

Meanwhile, restaurants are doubling down on the dining experience, creating loyalty programs, special menus, themed events, and other promotions and programs to drive traffic. In the end, experts say, the food business may discover that its futures comes down to what started all the turmoil of recent years: what humans like. "People aren't going out as much, so when they do, the experience provided really matters," says Chad Moutray, chief economist for the National Restaurant Association.



Great Depression *(1930s)*

- Starchy staples & fillers (bread, potatoes, cornmeal)
- Beans/legumes with rice (low-cost protein "stretchers")
- **Canned & preserved foods** (soups, fruits/veg, Spam)



Mid-to-Late Century *(1960s–1990s)*

- Fast-food burgers & fries (drive-thru culture)
- Frozen/boxed convenience meals (**TV dinners**, casserole helpers)



- Sugary breakfast cereals & soft drinks

Turn of the 21st Century *(c. 2000–2005)*

- Fast-casual staples (burritos, subs; **coffeehouse beverages**)



- Chicken-centric meals (poultry, chicken nuggets, cooked chicken breasts)
- Refined-grain mainstays (pizza, pasta, white-bread sandwiches)

Present Day *(mid-2020s)*

- Protein-and-grain "bowl" meals & chicken (quick serve, meal kits)
- Plant-forward sides & salads (more veg/whole grains, not strictly vegan)
- Ready-to-eat packaged snacks & drinks (**granola bars**, protein bars, energy drinks)



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PURSUITS

Is Virtual Grass Greener?

Indoor golf simulators are changing the game—and executives. *By Meghan Walsh*

Chrysonthia Horne had renounced golf. The 32-year-old's dad taught her to swing when she was younger, but living in New York City and working a demanding job at an investment firm meant she didn't get to play very often. After one particularly disastrous session at the driving range, she swore off the game entirely. "I'd step up to the ball and my brain would get scrambled," she says. "It turned every experience into such a slog."

Then indoor golf simulators, known as sims, started to pop up in the city, and she'd go hang out with her husband as he hit balls. One day, at minute 45 of an hourlong session, she casually picked up a club. Boom. "Golf sim unlocked my swing," says Horne, who has since returned to hitting the links outdoors as well.

Traditionally known as a sport only available to those with access to wide-open spaces and lots of free time, screen golf is rapidly bringing the game into a new era. Sim users grew from 3.8 million in 2015 to 8.1 million last year, with more than half never



Chrysonthia Horne reclaimed her swing with an indoor simulator.

Paul Miles teaches leadership lessons through golf.



having played on a course. One third of today's golfers are millennials. The green is a primary way executives network, and, in this way, golf sim is leveling the playing field and attracting players who otherwise might not have joined the foursome.

Today's golf-simulator setups are more technical than those of entertainment venues like TopGolf, but often still have a social atmosphere. Users book a bay and hit real balls at a large impact screen, which is able to register the trajectory of the ball with increasing precision. Meanwhile, cameras capture every angle of the swing for review. Users can play the world's top courses or fun challenges. The spots are packed after work hours, with dedicated golfers practicing their swings, colleagues blowing off steam, and leaders looking for insight into how they're executing.

The golf great Arnold Palmer famously remarked that "golf is a game of inches. The most important are the six inches between your ears." Indoor sim, even more than outdoor golf, strips the game of any influence beyond the mind. Paul Miles, founder of leadership-development program In The Swing Leadership, helps executives work out their kinks in the C-suite through swinging the club. Miles lives in the United Kingdom where, during the long winters, he relies on sims. There is no wind or rain to affect his swing, so in just a few minutes he can gain clarity on his inner weather report. If he's forcing life, he comes through his swing too soon, creating slice. If he's holding back and not committing to tough decisions, he tops the ball. "Once I understand what I'm doing, I can get to a place of neutral and inner calm very quickly," Miles says, comparing hitting balls to a

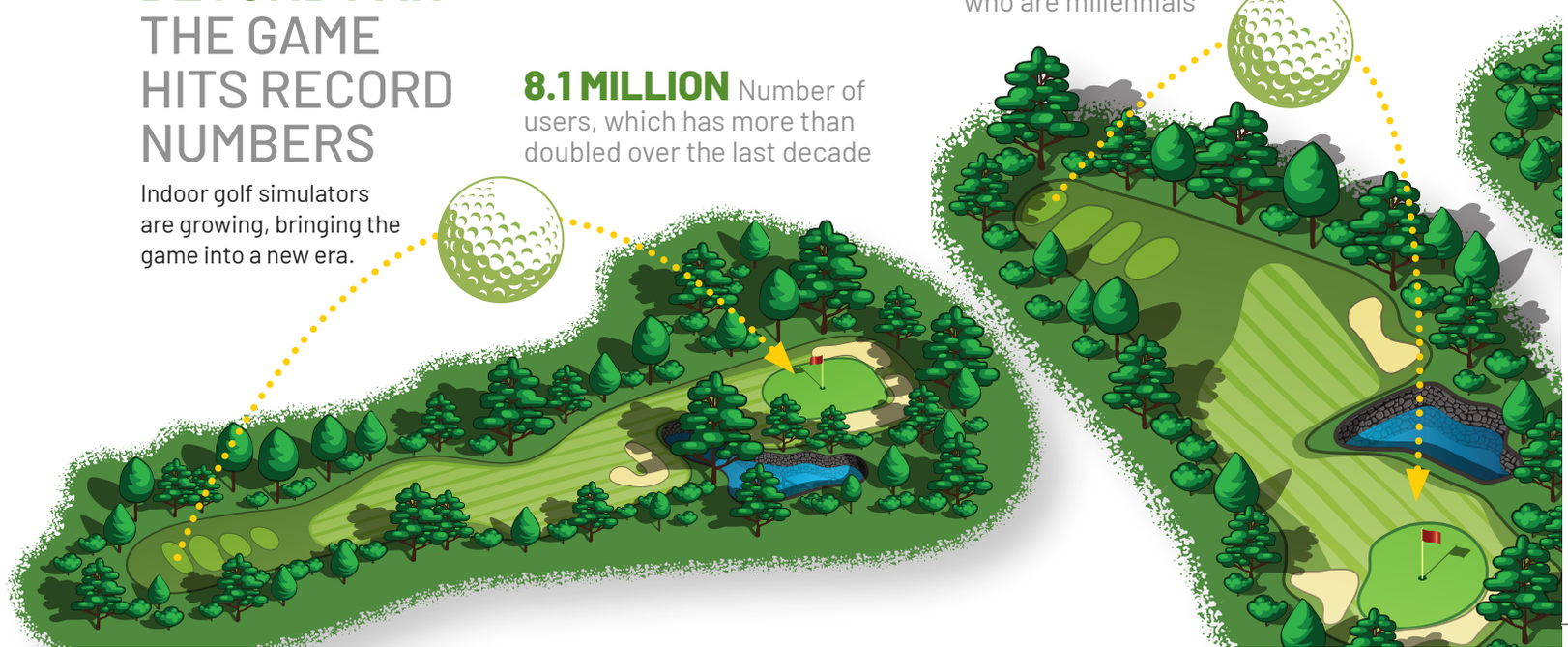
Courtesy of Chrysonthia, Carly Bedwell

BEYOND PAR: THE GAME HITS RECORD NUMBERS

Indoor golf simulators are growing, bringing the game into a new era.

8.1 MILLION Number of users, which has more than doubled over the last decade

1/3 Share of golfers who are millennials





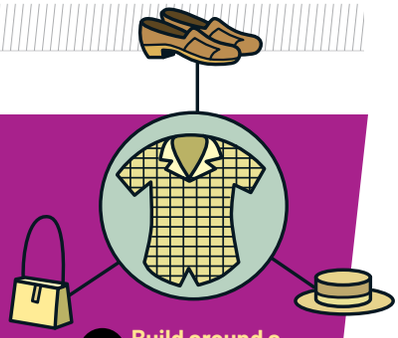
THE ART OF

The Perfect Outfit

What we wear, for better or worse, is an expression of who we are. Meanwhile, an outfit that really pops can dress us from the inside out, evoking confidence and competence. Assembling a just-right ensemble, though, is no easy feat.



1 Consider the occasion and setting. Does it call for casual, professional, or formal? What will the temperature be? Balance style and comfort.

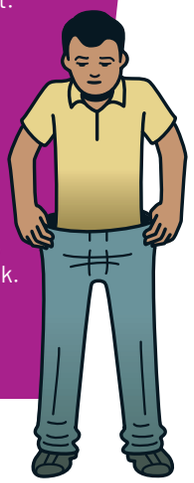


2 Build around a hero piece. Start with a standout item, like a bold jacket, patterned skirt, or statement shoes. Then select pieces to complement.

3 Choose colors and designs that flatter and feel like you. Neutrals are a versatile foundation, but don't be afraid to add personality with a pop of color or a surprising texture.



4 Try it on. Pay attention to how you feel wearing the outfit. If something is off, keep experimenting until it's just right.Remember, accessories complete the look.



Andriocolt, Slissoupitch/Getty Images

form of hypnotherapy. He then carries that calm into work, and coaches his clients in doing the same.

Miles says Horne's fears are universal. Everyone is worried about looking bad on the first tee, he says. When competition and fear are taken out of the equation, it changes the dynamic. People open up. And all of a sudden the game becomes a means of connection, insight, and calibration. "The practice gives you immediate feedback around failure," Horne says. "You're able to diagnose what happened, then let that failure go as you set up to hit the next ball, and when it clicks it's so beautiful."



51% Share of sim golfers who have never played outside

$1.74 BILLION Size of the global sim market in 2024

Illustration by **PETER HOEY**

VISIT

Ladakh, India

The high life.



Ladakh is strategically located on the border between China and Pakistan.



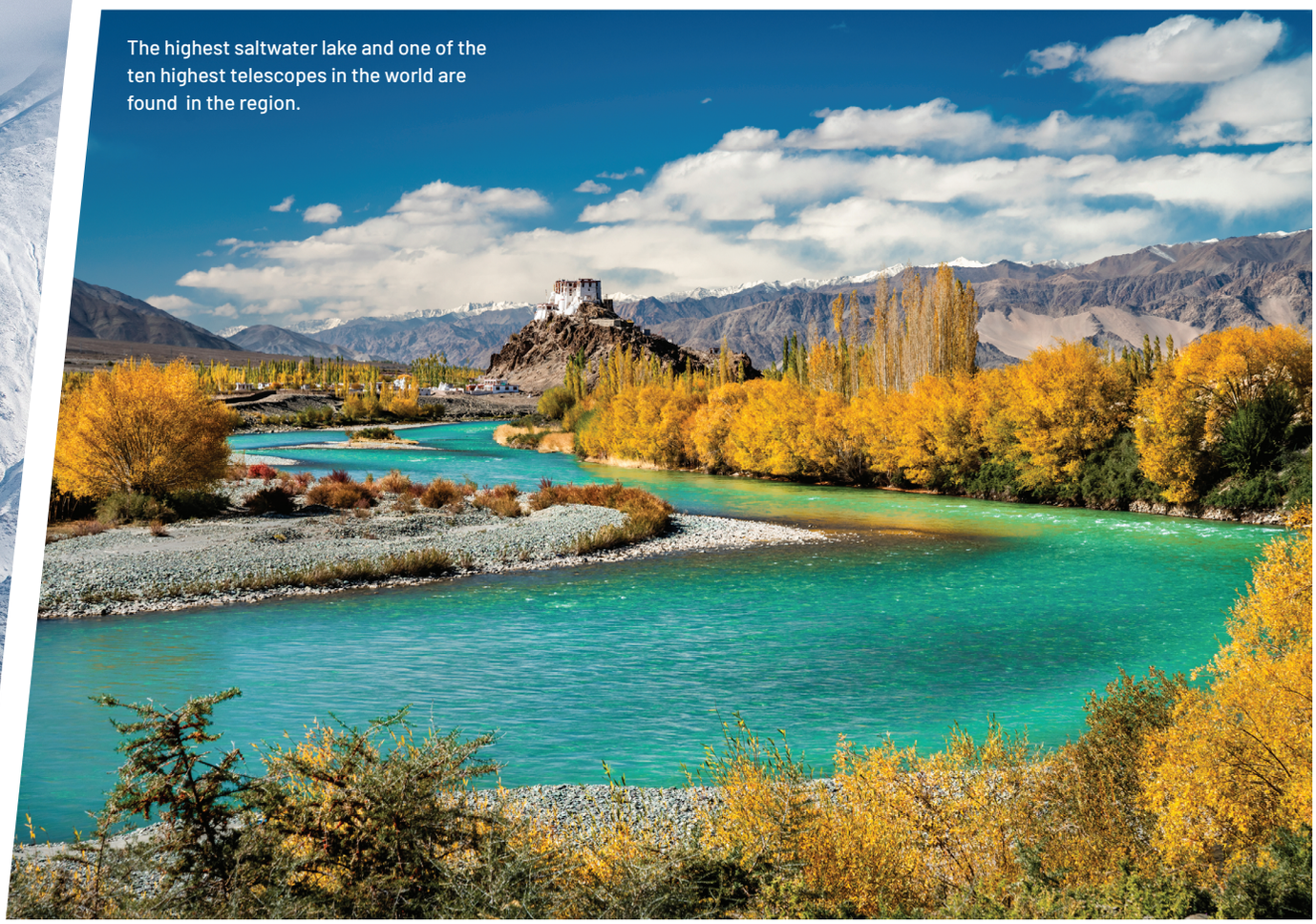
Visitors can try yak-cheese pizza or a bowl of thukpa, a Tibetan noodle soup.

Leaders in Ladakh, the "Land of High Passes" situated north of the Himalayas, are pushing to establish the region as a high-altitude tourism destination by improving connectivity and upgrading infrastructure. In the meantime, it's an adventurous destination for the digital nomad searching for spots the rest of the world has yet to discover. During the week, clock in from one of the new coworking spaces in Leh, and on the weekends go explore the surrounding mountain peaks, saltwater lakes, or Buddhist monasteries. While the city's elevation sits high at 11,500 feet, the cost of living remains quite low compared to other areas in India.



Guen Jeyguni, Umesh Gogna, Yumi Mini, Mahendrahum, Suparna Hazra/Getty Images





The highest saltwater lake and one of the ten highest telescopes in the world are found in the region.



Ladakh produces and exports highly sought-after and luxurious pashmina.



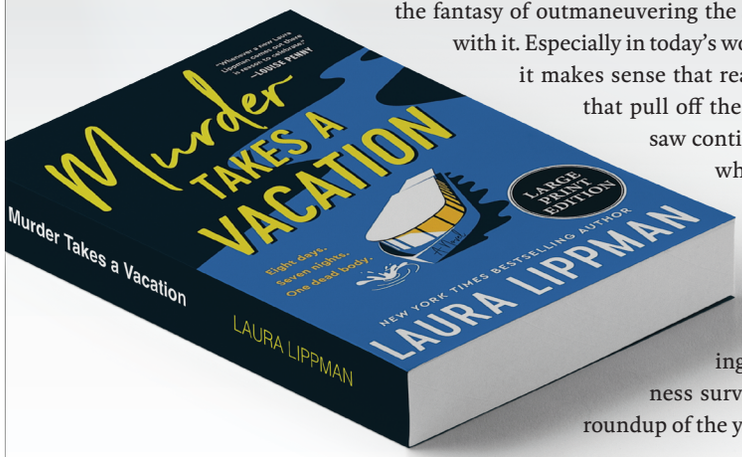
In this hub for trekkers and adventure enthusiasts looking to explore the Himalayas, the eco-tourism industry is growing rapidly.

READ, LISTEN, WATCH

Zeit-Heist

It's hard to put down a good heist novel. As readers, we're drawn into the scheming required to pull off crimes of such magnitude. First, the crew must be assembled. Then every obstacle cleverly anticipated and each step expertly executed. One miscue and it all falls apart. The high stakes keep the pages effortlessly turning.

But there is also an element of rebellion inherent in the heist: We get to root for the bad guys. Of course, stealing is wrong. Yet it's so satisfying to see David prevailing over Goliath, even if it involves some moral ambiguity. Heist novels let us live out the fantasy of outmaneuvering the system—and getting away with it. Especially in today's world of overwhelming odds, it makes sense that readers are drawn to stories that pull off the impossible. The last year saw continued demand for thrillers, while the broader global fiction market is projected to grow from an estimated $11.2 billion in 2024 to $11.4 billion in 2025. From a simmering feminist noir to a wilderness survival story, here's *Briefings'* roundup of the year's best heists.





MURDER TAKES A VACATION

BY LAURA LIPPMAN

In one of the year's top reads, a widow wins the lottery and books a Parisian cruise, only to end up investigating both a murder and an art heist.

HAMMAJANG LUCK

BY MAKANA YAMAMOTO

After a failed heist, the two main characters must learn to trust each other again as they give it another go in this cyberpunk sci-fi about betrayal and the search for home.

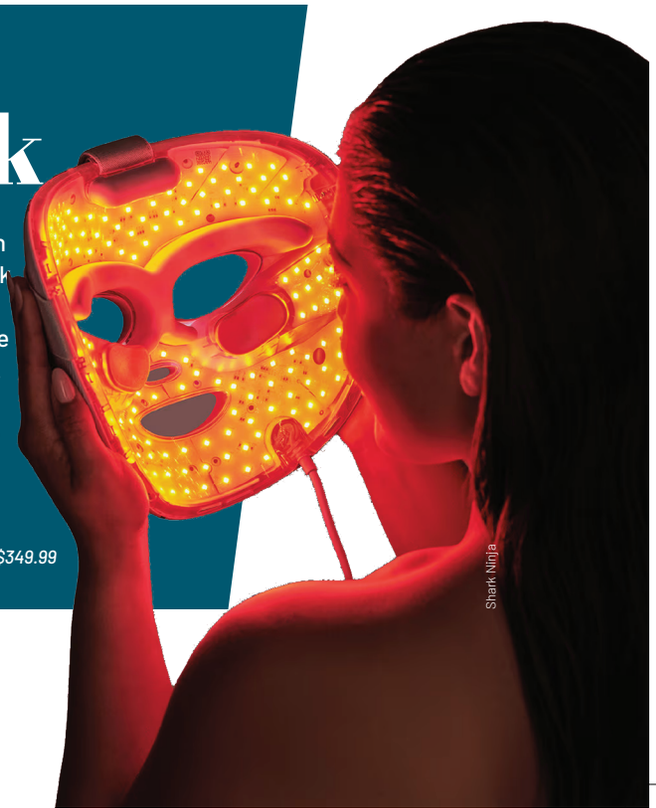
SUGGESTED

A Light in the Dark

When the days turn dreary and social calendars take a toll on sleep schedules, it's the perfect time of year to try the Shark CryoGlow LED Face Mask. Slip on the mask in the morning before work—the light therapy combined with an under-eye cooling system gives the face a lift in as little as 10 minutes. Red, blue, and infrared LEDs target dark circles, acne, and fine lines. Clinically tested and FDA-cleared, the device has been shown to create visible improvements.

Shark™ CryoGlow™ Red Blue & Infrared iQLED Face Mask & Under-Eye Cooling, $349.99

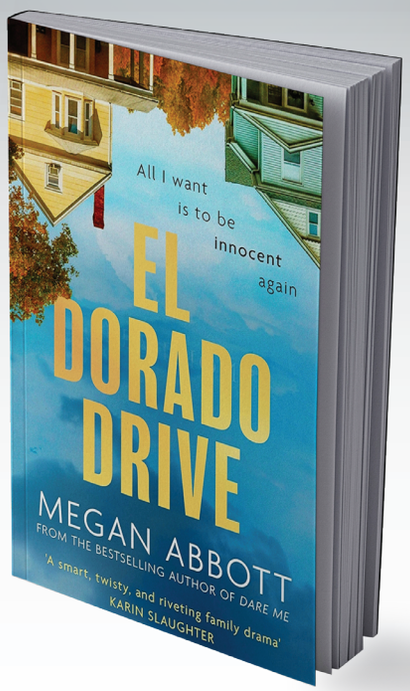




EL DORADO DRIVE

BY MEGAN ABBOTT

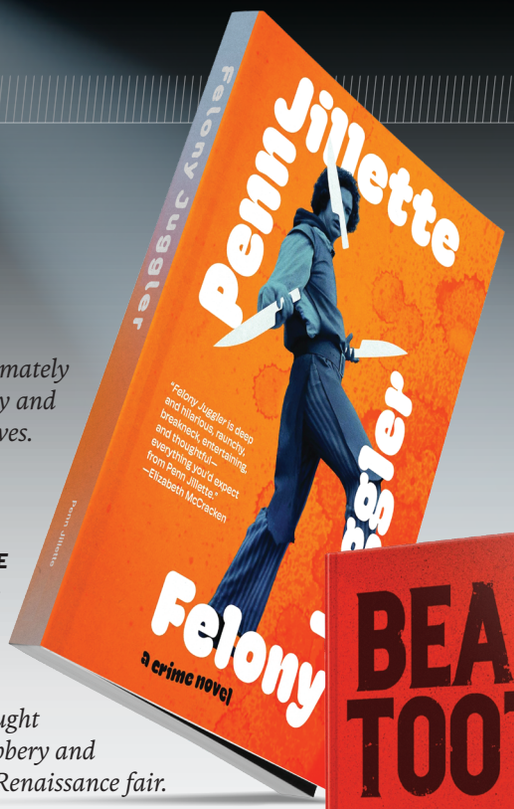
Three sisters in suburban Detroit are drawn into a women-led money scheme that ultimately tests their loyalty and unravels their lives.



FELONY JUGGLER

BY PENN JILLETTE

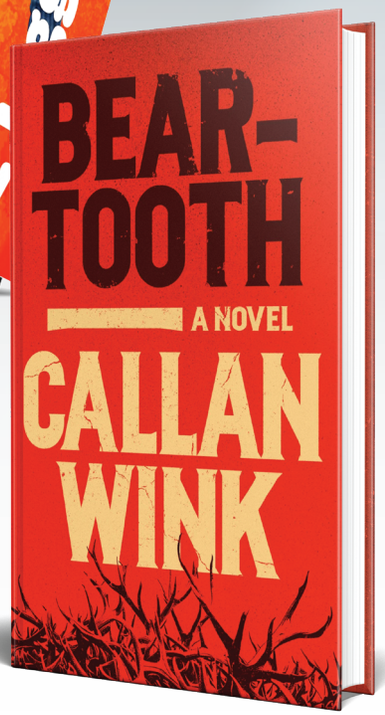
A semi-autobiographical story about a street performer who finds himself caught up in a bank robbery and hiding out at a Renaissance fair.



BEARTOOTH

BY CALLAN WINK

A Yellowstone River fly-fishing guide writes about two brothers who end up fighting to survive in the wilderness of Montana after dire circumstances lead them to succumb to temptation.



PRO TRAINING

Instructor **Loui Pacheco** explains how Versaclimber classes take stair-stepping to the next level.

WHAT IS A CLASS LIKE? "It's a 30-minute cardio-based workout, with different zones of intensity set to music."

WHY CLIMB INSTEAD OF SPIN? "It's a true full-body workout. Unlike a seated position, the athletic stance engages the core and glutes—and you'll burn double the calories."

WHAT SHOULD FIRST-TIMERS KNOW? "The initial few classes can feel like hell, but after the third class it becomes an addiction because of the energy."

Learn more at versaclimber.com/group-fitness



Versa Climber



CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER
JONATHAN DAHL

Outsmarting AI?

"This conversation can serve no purpose anymore."
—HAL 9000 computer, "2001: A Space Odyssey"

I swear, I really wanted ChatGPT to write this column. And I think I gave it a pretty detailed and helpful prompt, even asking politely if it needed any more information. But its attempts at composing the text just didn't come out right. I did share an example of my writing with it, but how was ChatGPT supposed to know that I'd never use phrases like "the transformation feels less like a revolution and more like a quiet unease" or "performative adoption is everywhere"? It just sounded—how can I (or ChatGPT) put this? Artificial.

I'm sure the technology will get a lot better, and at a mind-blowing pace. But the mounting evidence suggests that, at least for the foreseeable future, the warnings about AI wiping out the vast majority of jobs for humans have been overblown. In my view, the real issue about AI isn't job replacement, it's job disruption—more specifically, disruption in the workplace. Unlike anything we've ever seen before.



Most experts agree that while AI can't fully take over most jobs, it can lop off a good chunk of almost anyone's role by writing their emails, proposing strategies, and doing incredible research in a matter of seconds. Now that workers can have maybe 20 percent to 30 percent of their time (or more) given back to them, how in the world will companies manage that? We're talking about millions upon millions of workers. Even the most highly motivated employee might not know how to productively use all that extra time. Can companies (or even AI) ever hope to track how each and every worker spends their day? Would they (or their workers) ever want them to?

And I'm just scratching the surface of all the workplace disruptions, way beyond the privacy and accuracy issues that make headlines today. Which AI tool is best to work with? I call it "the AI dating game"—the tools we pair ourselves with will matter enormously as the tech becomes more specific and useful. Then there's the matter of firms keeping employees up to speed on all of AI's constant improvements. We've never seen a tech change so fast. And the other day, I noticed two people had skipped a meeting and dispatched their AI agents to take notes in their places. Is that OK? Only a blink of an eye ago, in our *This Week in Leadership* newsletter we raised the question of whether or not employees should disclose their use of AI, out of fear of losing their job. Now that seems ridiculous—of course you need to be working with it, if you want to keep your job.

I think it's this workplace implementation that is going to give firms fits for a long time, and I doubt even AI will have all the answers. Indeed, it's going to take some special smarts to handle this right, with firm leaders doing a lot of redesigning jobs, developing new workflows, and elevating workplace training. In short, this will need to be a conversation with a purpose.

Elenabs/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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