

VOL 09 ISSUE 04 APRIL 2025

TRADEFLOCK

SPOTLIGHT

BANKING
IN THE
DARK

THE
MIDDLE
MANAGEMENT
MIRAGE

**ALEXANDER
J.FREEMAN**
CFO, WURSTA INC



MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS
LEADERS
IN USA 2025





WILDERNESS MEETS LUXURY

OYSTER PERPETUAL
DATEJUST



Editor Note



EDITOR'S NOTE

BUSINESS LEADERS DRIVING PURPOSE WITH PROFIT

In today's world, great business leadership isn't just measured in margins — it's defined by meaning. In 2025, leaders across the U.S. are reshaping what success looks like, proving that purpose and profit don't just coexist — they thrive together.

This edition of Most Inspiring Business Leaders in USA 2025 celebrates those who are leading with intention. They're not just growing companies — they're growing people, communities, and ideas. With nearly 5.5 million new business applications filed in 2023 (U.S. Chamber of Commerce), the American spirit of entrepreneurship is alive and thriving, and these leaders are guiding it with vision and heart.

What makes them stand out isn't just strategic brilliance — it's their authenticity. They're building inclusive cultures, championing sustainability, and prioritizing people at every level of the business. They listen. They adapt. And they lead not from the corner office, but from the ground up.

These are leaders who understand that business is a platform for change — a way to uplift, to innovate, and to connect. They see disruption as a doorway, not a dead

end. And while their strategies may differ, they share a common truth: success is sweeter when it's shared.

Their journeys remind us that behind every thriving business is a story of courage, care, and conviction. In spotlighting them, we don't just recognize professional achievement — we honor the human spirit driving it.

Because in the end, the most inspiring business leaders aren't just building empires — they're building a better world.

Vipin Kumar
Editor, Tradeflock

✉ vipin@tradeflock

Publisher	Alok Dwivedi
Editor	Vipin Kumar
Sub Editor	Alex Paul Abhinav Singh
Editors Desk	Mary Thomas Suryansh Abhyudaya Mittal
Production Manager - Digital	Gopal Krishna
Digital Team	Manoj Chauhan Sumit Kumar
Creative Team	Gaurav Kandwal Himanshu Kumar
Manager Operations	Sachin Kaushik
Manager Sales & Operations	Alex Smith Anmol Porwal
Business Relationship Manager	Tanya Jaitly Ashley Reed
Client Relationship Consultant	Atul Gupta
Branding & Marketing	Sanjay Gautam Abhishek Pal Amardeep Singh Anshul
Research Team	Kevin Root Karan Sharma Zishan Nishant
Subscription & Circulation	Indu
Editorial Queries	editors@tradeflock.com
Advertising Queries	advertising@tradeflock.com advertising@tradeflock.us

SDAD Technology publishes the "TradeFlock" magazine and has all rights reserved on the material published in different editions of "TradeFlock." Copying material owned by "TradeFlock" for other use except for personal use and internal reference without written consent/NOC of the Publisher is strictly prohibited.

The opinions and views expressed in "TradeFlock" are not necessarily those of TradeFlock Magazine, its publisher, editor(s), or author(s). We try our best to authenticate the published information and access information only through reliable sources, but we do not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any information published herein, and neither "TradeFlock" nor its authors shall be responsible for any errors. SDAD Technology or its units (TradeFlock) do not take responsibility for any readers' decisions based on the published information.

Printed at Meenakshi Printers and published at 10th Floor, Villa-B28, Manaar Tower, Sector 132, Noida. Distributed by SDAD Technology. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction in the whole or part without written permission is strictly prohibited. All prices are correct at the time of going to print, but subject to change.

MOST INSPIRING BUSINESS LEADERS IN USA 2025

NAME	DESIGNATION	COMPANY
Alexander J. Freeman	CFO	Wursta Inc
Derek Melber	President and Chief Strategist	BrainCore.net
Donald Lacy	Owner	LoveLife Foundation
Jane Lu	Founder & CEO	Showpo
Rashid Taher	Co-Founder	EyeCheq
Robin Daniels	Chief Business Officer	Zensai
Sebastian Pistrutto	Chief Marketing Officer	ParcelShield Holdings, LLC
Sharyn Abbott	CEO & Co-Founder	Ultimate Business International
Sparsh Saxena	AI Product Leader and Technologist	
Stu Schlackman	President	Stu Schlackman

UPCOMING ISSUES

**Most Innovative
Tech Leaders From
USA 2025**

**Best HR Leaders
From USA 2025**

**USA's Most
Influential COOs
2025**

**Most Empowering
Women Leaders
in 2025**

**Most Influential
Leadres to Watch
in 2025**

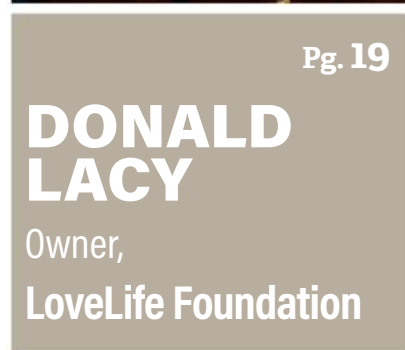
CONTENTS



Derek Melber
President
and Chief Strategist,
BrainCore.net
Pg. 15



JANE LU
Co-Founder & CEO,
Showpo
Pg. 21



**RASHID
TAHER**
Co-Founder,
EyeCheq
Pg. 25



EDITOR'S PICK

- The Era of Fickle Consumers Pg. 08
- Corporate Bartering Pg. 41

START UP OF THE MONTH

- Codeium Accelerating Coding with the Power of AI Pg. 13

SPOTLIGHT

- The Middle Management Mirage Pg. 17
- Banking in the Dark Pg. 23

BIGTAKE

- Lead with Trust by Dr. Elliott Q. Gomez, Major, USA, Retired, LSSBB, CDEI Pg. 30

STORY OF THE MONTH

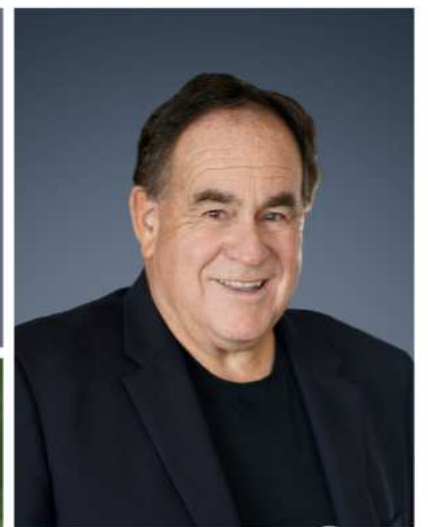
- The Truth Behind the LA Wildfires Pg. 35



**ROBIN
DANIELS**
Chief Business Officer,
Zensai
Pg. 27



**SHARYN
ABBOTT**
CEO & Co-Founder,
Ultimate Business
International
Pg. 33



**SEBASTIAN
PISTRITTO**
Chief Marketing Officer,
ParcelShield Holdings, LLC
Pg. 31



**SPARSH
SAXENA**
AI Product Leader
and Technologist
Pg. 37



**STU
SCHLACKMAN**
President,
Stu Schlackman
Pg. 39

3 IN 1

Charge Your Day
Brain



It all starts with a
NESCAFÉ



Editor's Pick



TRADEFLOCK™
JOURNEY OF LEADERS

Why Even Top Brands Are Struggling to Keep Customers Coming Back?

The Era of Fickle Consumers



Remember the days when buying a pair of Nikes meant you were a Nike customer for life? Or when driving a Ford was practically a family tradition? Those days are fading fast. Today's customers are less loyal to brands than ever, opting for wherever offers the best deal, convenience, or immediate gratification. According to a 2023 McKinsey report, nearly 75% of U.S. consumers have switched brands in the past year due to price, product availability, or better value elsewhere. This shift has left even powerhouse brands scrambling to maintain long-term customer relationships in an economy where loyalty is no longer guaranteed.

Discount Over Devotion

Retail giants like Walmart, Amazon and Target have conditioned shoppers to prioritize price and speed over brand connection. With the explosion of discount culture, loyalty programs and comparison shopping apps, customers now expect deep discounts and lightning fast; otherwise, they are gone. A 2024 survey by PwC found that 63% of consumers choose retailers based purely on price, even if they previously had brand loyalty. In a world where a quick Google search can reveal a dozen alternatives, brand names alone no longer hold the weight they once did.

The Trust Factor: A Double-Edged Sword

Consumers today are also more skeptical. Social media and online reviews have made brand reputations

highly fragile. A single controversy, poor customer service experience, or data breach can send even the most loyal customers running. Take Bud Light's 2023 brand crisis, where backlash over a marketing campaign led to a sharp decline in sales. Or consider Southwest Airlines, which lost significant customer goodwill after a massive holiday season meltdown left thousands stranded. In both cases, decades of brand loyalty unraveled almost overnight.

What Can Brands Do?

The days of blind allegiance to brands may be over, but companies that evolve can still cultivate strong customer relationships. Instead of relying on name recognition alone, successful brands are now focusing on personalization, values-based marketing and exceptional service. Apple, for example, still commands fierce loyalty—not just because of its products but because of its ecosystem, customer service, and brand identity. Similarly, brands like Patagonia and Tesla have cultivated communities around their values, keeping customers engaged beyond just transactions.

Loyalty Isn't Dead—It's Just Different

Consumers haven't stopped being loyal; they've just changed what they're loyal to. Instead of sticking with a brand out of habit, they demand real value, exceptional experiences, and alignment with their beliefs. The challenge for brands? Prove to customers that they're worth more than the lowest price tag. ♦

MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS LEADERS
in USA 2025

A Modern Finance Leader Balancing Data, Strategy And Influence

ALEXANDER J. FREEMAN

 CFO,  **Wursta Inc**

In today's unpredictable economy, where uncertainty has become the norm and expectations have been transformed, the role of the CFO has never been more critical or more complex. Gone are the days when finance leaders were solely guarding the bottom line. Now, they are expected to be futurists, problem-solvers and architects of strategy. This expanded role calls for leaders who can see the full picture, connect dots across functions, and lead with numbers and through nuance.

Few understand this shift better than those who have lived it from the inside, across international borders, diverse markets, and industries. Among them is Alexander J. Freeman, who currently serves as Chief Financial Officer at Wursta Inc., a growing digital consultancy based in the U.S.. He is a seasoned finance professional who has spent the last two decades quietly building a career that mirrors the evolution of the CFO role itself. With experience spanning global giants and high-growth environments, he brings with him a blend of rigor, foresight, and heart that is increasingly rare in the world of corporate finance.

His journey—from managing a \$200M portfolio in Russia & CIS for Dell, to optimizing over \$1.6B in strategic investments at American Express, and leading finance functions across Visa, HID Global, and Diebold Nixdorf—reflects not just career progression, but a continuous commitment to solving complex problems, building high-performing teams, and driving transformation where it matters most.

Beyond his technical expertise, he is known for his results-oriented leadership style and global mindset,

having worked extensively across the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East. He firmly believes in empowering people, aligning purpose with performance, and using finance as a force for clarity and confidence.

In an exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, Alexander shares insights from his journey, reflections on leadership, and his view on what it truly means to be a CFO today.

Q From Citi and Dell to American Express and Visa, you've navigated diverse financial landscapes. What's one financial principle that has remained constant throughout your career, regardless of industry or geography?

If you told my younger self—hustling through a small business and dreaming bigger at business school—that I'd one day be navigating billion-dollar budgets and global finance ops, I probably would've laughed and asked for another cup of coffee. But looking back, one principle has quietly guided me through every role, every company, every twist: keep moving forward, but do it in a smart way.

From managing credit risk at Citi to diving into P&Ls at Dell, building out complex integrations, and later tackling a \$1.5B zero-based budget at Amex (a job no one wanted, by the way), I've learned that careers evolve like portfolio investments. In your 20s, take risks. In your 50s, protect the foundation. It's less about always having the perfect plan and more about adjusting your course with purpose—and attitude.

Finance should never be just about reporting on the past happenings—it should also be about enabling the future



Mentorship helped too, though not always in the traditional sense. Some of my best mentors came from unexpected places—Cicero, Dostoevsky, even the Count of Monte Cristo. I've learned that

"Planning a career is very similar to planning your asset allocation for retirement"
—you learn, you balance, you grow.



True financial leadership means stepping in early, asking the right questions, and helping others see the bigger picture

Q With economic uncertainties and shifting regulations, what's your go-to strategy for ensuring financial resilience in unpredictable markets?

On our journey to the singularity—yes, I like to think about the long term—the environment is always dynamic. The pace at which things accelerate may be out of our hands, but how do we react and adapt? That's entirely up to us. For me, financial resilience is about smart balance. The company has to be lean enough to generate strong profits and cash flow, but not so lean that we miss out on real-time opportunities. It's a tightrope walk. I often say, "Resilience lies in knowing when to optimize and when to invest—when to hold back and when to lean in."

Now, as someone who is involved in running a Google licenses and cloud services partnership business, internationally—right in the thick of AI, Gemini, and all things cutting-edge—you'd think I'd always be chasing the next big thing. But actually, I caution against that. The fundamentals matter. We constantly look for efficiencies across the board—software, real estate, travel, and yes, headcount. That said, I don't believe in "optimizing" so deep that you lose your ability to act. I prefer to keep a smart level of capacity—experienced people who can take on new initiatives or react quickly to the unexpected. That kind of built-in agility is often underrated.

And in an era where "free money" is on pause, I'm a big advocate of building a war chest. Liquidity gives you power—it gives you options. It means you're not just surviving the storm, you're ready to scale when the sun shines again.

Lastly, communication is everything. Finance doesn't work in isolation. I believe other units should understand our financial priorities and vice versa. I keep our approval processes simple and transparent—once people understand the 'why,' they start speaking the same language.

Q Finance leaders often have to bridge the gap between numbers and strategy. How do you make financial data 'speak' to non-finance leaders?

I've always believed that numbers don't speak for themselves—you have to give them a voice. Early in my career, I realized that sharing financial data without context is like handing someone a novel in a language they don't understand. If you want non-finance leaders to care, you have to tell the story behind the spreadsheet.

For me, it starts with relevance. I don't walk into a meeting talking about WACC or capital efficiency ratios unless that's what we're there to unpack. But revenue growth? Cash flow trends? Those speak to everyone. Not every metric belongs in every conversation—and recognizing that is where communication begins.

One moment that stuck with me was having to explain why, despite being profitable, we needed to temporarily scale back bonuses. Naturally, there was confusion. That's when I said, "Profit and cash flow may travel in the same direction, but they don't always arrive at the same time." Those are the moments I live for—where understanding unlocks alignment.

I also believe in choosing a small set of KPIs that are directly tied to business outcomes and easily understood across the board. Then, it's about weaving those into a broader narrative—building a financial story that's shared in chapters, not spreadsheets.

"Great financial storytelling is when data becomes a language everyone speaks, not just a report finance sends."

That's the goal. And to get there, I see myself less as a numbers person and more as an interpreter—bridging the analytical with the actionable, and making sure strategy is something we all build together.

Q In an era of digital finance and automation, where do you see the human element of financial leadership still being irreplaceable?

Even in the age of AI and automation, I've found that numbers alone don't drive alignment—people do. Tools can crunch data, but they can't connect dots across departments or bring clarity to tough decisions. Despite AI advancements—communication, creativity and relationship building will remain a human endeavor for some years to come.

That's where the human side of finance shows up. Whether it's shaping sales comp plans, weighing in on hiring, or supporting customer negotiations, I make it a point to be in rooms where finance isn't always expected—but always adds value. "True financial leadership means stepping in early, asking the right questions, and helping others see the bigger picture."

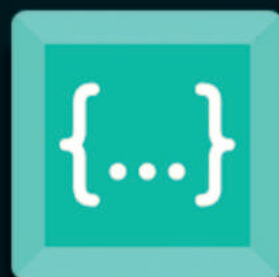
At the end of the day, strategy is about choices—and people still want a trusted voice to help make them. That's one thing automation can't replace.

Q What's next for you? Any unfulfilled career ambitions or personal goals you're excited to chase?

Professionally, I'm exactly where I want to be—and that's a gift. I'm grateful every day for the trust Matt Wursta, our Founder and CEO, has placed in me. My role challenges me, fulfills me, and allows me to contribute meaningfully. But we're not just maintaining—we're scaling. We've got exciting plans for growth, both stateside and internationally, and 2025 is already opening doors we're eager to walk through.

But the part of "what's next" that hits closest to home? That's personal. I was born in a country that no longer exists—the USSR—with a Russian mother and a Ukrainian father. Watching the devastation over the past few years hasn't just been heartbreaking—it's been personal. Now, with whispers of peace emerging, I feel a strong pull to be part of the healing. "Some ambitions live beyond boardrooms—they're rooted in identity, history, and the hope of rebuilding what conflict has tried to erase."

If the opportunity comes, I'd love to help reconnect Western business with Russia and contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction. These won't be corporate milestones—they'll be passion projects. And for me, that's the most meaningful kind of ambition. ♦



codeium

Accelerating Coding with the Power of AI

In the fast-paced world of software development, where efficiency and speed define success, two visionary minds—Varun Mohan and Douglas Chen—saw a glaring gap in the coding flow. Traditional coding required developers to spend hours writing, debugging, and optimising code, often leading to bottlenecks in productivity. Recognising this challenge, the duo founded Codeium in 2021 with a bold mission: to transform the coding experience by harnessing the power of AI to accelerate development workflows.

The Birth of Codeium: Identifying the Gap

Mohan and Chen, both experienced in AI and deep learning technologies, understood the inefficiencies plaguing developers. They observed how software engineers were bogged down by redundant tasks—rewriting boilerplate code, debugging errors, and struggling with code optimisation. This led to the inception of Codeium, a cutting-edge AI-powered coding toolkit designed to maximise developer productivity. By

leveraging deep learning models, Codeium automates repetitive coding tasks, predicts code completions, and improves efficiency without compromising accuracy.

The Road to Success

Like any startup, Codeium faced its fair share of challenges. The AI-driven coding assistant market was already gaining traction, with competitors like GitHub Copilot making waves. The founders knew they had to differentiate their products. Their breakthrough came with Exafunction, a proprietary technology optimising deep learning inference workloads. Unlike conventional AI solutions that relied on costly cloud infrastructure, Codeium dynamically allocated resources, moving computations onto cost-effective hardware such as spot instances whenever available.

This technological advantage allowed Codeium to lower operating costs while maintaining high-performance AI inference capabilities. Additionally, by offering cloud-based and Kubernetes-deployable solutions, Codeium provided flexibility for

enterprises seeking customisable AI-powered coding solutions.

Rapid Adoption and Market Growth

The effectiveness of Codeium's platform quickly gained traction within the developer community. Software engineers, enterprises, and startups alike embraced its intuitive AI-powered capabilities. Its popularity surged due to its seamless integration with existing development environments, support for multiple programming languages, and ability to enhance collaboration among engineering teams.

Tech giants and software development firms recognised the immense potential of AI-powered coding assistants. Codeium became the preferred choice for developers looking to accelerate their workflow without sacrificing quality. The startup's focus on developer experience and cost-efficient AI infrastructure contributed to its rapid adoption across industries.

Funding and Expansion: From Series B to Series C

Codeium's innovation and market potential attracted leading

Codeium extensions are loved by millions of developers

VS Code | ★ 2.46M

JetBrains | ★ 1.27M

Chrome | ★ 70.0K

Cursor | ★ 4.7K

and 40+ more IDEs

investors. On January 30, 2024, the company raised \$65 million in Series B funding from top-tier investors Kleiner Perkins, General Catalyst, and Greenoaks. This funding fueled product enhancements, talent acquisition, and market expansion.

As demand for AI-powered coding tools skyrocketed, Codeium continued to scale rapidly. Seven months later, on August 29, 2024, the company secured \$150 million in Series C funding from General Catalyst, Kleiner Perkins, and Greenoaks. This round further solidified Codeium's position as a frontrunner in AI-driven software development.

With this fresh infusion of capital, the startup expanded its operations, enhanced its AI models, and invested in customer success initiatives. The funding also allowed Codeium to attract top engineering talent, ensuring its continued growth and innovation in the competitive AI coding space.

A Sustainable Growth Model

Unlike many AI startups that struggle with monetisation, Codeium built a robust revenue model. The company generates revenue through a subscription-based pricing structure, offering tiered plans for individual

developers, small teams, and enterprise clients.

Additionally, Codeium's enterprise partnerships with leading tech firms and software development companies have contributed significantly to its financial success. By offering scalable AI-powered coding solutions that integrate seamlessly with enterprise workflows, Codeium has established itself as a must-have tool for organisations looking to enhance developer efficiency.

With the Series C funding, the company is on track to reach annual revenue of over \$200 million by 2025, driven by its growing customer base and continued innovation in AI-powered software development tools. The startup's ability to optimise costs through Exafunction's virtualisation technology ensures profitability while scaling its operations.

The Future of Codeium: Redefining AI-Powered Development

As AI continues to reshape software development, Codeium stands at the forefront of this transformation. With its innovative approach to AI-driven code acceleration, cost-efficient AI inference, and enterprise-focused solutions, the company is poised to redefine the future of coding.

Looking ahead, Codeium plans to expand its capabilities further, integrating advanced natural language processing (NLP) models to enhance code suggestions, improve debugging capabilities, and introduce real-time collaboration features. The company also aims to broaden its global footprint by partnering with software firms across different industries, from fintech to healthcare and e-commerce.

A Game-Changer in AI-Powered Coding

Codeium's journey from a startup tackling developer inefficiencies to a highly funded, fast-growing AI-driven company is a testament to the power of innovation. By identifying a fundamental gap in coding workflows, leveraging AI to optimise developer productivity, and securing strategic funding, Varun Mohan and Douglas Chen have built a company that is revolutionising how developers write code.

With continuous advancements in AI and a commitment to making software development faster and more efficient, Codeium is not just a tool—it is the future of coding. As it continues to push boundaries, one thing is certain: the era of AI-powered software development has arrived, and Codeium is leading the charge. ♦

Founded in - 2021

Founders - Varun Mohan and Douglas Chen

Headquarters - Mountain View, California

\$65M - Series B by Kleiner Perkins, General Catalyst, Greenoaks.

\$150M in Series C by General Catalyst,

Kleiner Perkins, Greenoaks.

**MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS
LEADERS**
in USA 2025

Safeguarding and Strengthening
Businesses for Future

**DEREK
MELBER**

President and Chief Strategist,
BrainCore.net

Cybercrime is evolving at an alarming rate, and by 2030, it's expected to cost the world over \$15 trillion annually. With threats growing more sophisticated, businesses can no longer afford to take cybersecurity lightly. They need leaders who don't just understand the risks but know how to stay ahead of them.

Few people make the leap from designing physical structures to securing digital ones, but Derek Melber did exactly that. With degrees in civil and architectural engineering, he was set to build skyscrapers and bridges. Instead, his curiosity and problem-solving mindset led him to a different kind of architecture—protecting digital infrastructures.

Now, with over 25 years in cybersecurity, Melber has become one of the most respected voices in the industry. As President and Chief Strategist of BrainCore.net, he's shaping the future of IT security, helping organizations navigate ever-changing cyber threats. But his impact extends far beyond the companies he works with. A Microsoft MVP in Security, Active Directory, and Group Policy, a 16-time author, and a renowned global speaker, he has educated thousands of IT professionals on cybersecurity best practices.

His leadership at Tenable, BeyondTrust, and Nanitor, highlights his ability to bridge technical expertise with business strategy, ensuring that security is not just a defensive measure but a competitive advantage.

TradeFlock sat down with Derek Melber to explore his extraordinary career, his vision for the future of cybersecurity, and what it takes to lead in an industry that never stands still.

Q What inspired you to become President of BrainCore.Net, and how does it align with your mission to help others through technology?

That realization sparked the creation of BrainCore.Net. I've spent years mastering Microsoft Active Directory, Group Policy, and security, but my true passion lies in helping businesses navigate these challenges with confidence. Through consulting, training, and security assessments, I ensure organizations don't just implement best practices—they build resilient, future-proof systems. BrainCore.Net is my way of turning technical expertise into real-world impact.

**THEY
NEEDED
MORE THAN
EXPERTISE
—THEY
NEEDED
HANDS-ON
GUIDANCE.**

Q How do you simplify technical jargon, and how has it influenced your leadership style?

"Clarity isn't just about words—it's about impact." I always ask myself, How would I want to hear this? That perspective shapes how I simplify technical jargon. I rely on the Rule of 3—breaking down complex ideas into three clear takeaways. It makes learning, decision-making, and leadership more effective. Simplicity isn't about dumbing things down; it's about making them stick.

Q What's the biggest challenge in securing networks, and how did you turn it into growth?

Security isn't just about firewalls and passwords—it's about mindset. The biggest challenge I face isn't technology; it's the fear of change. People resist new processes because the unknown feels risky, but in reality, staying the same is the real danger—just ask Blockbuster or Kodak. I counter this resistance with small, strategic wins, often in sets of three. Each step builds confidence, proving that security isn't a roadblock—it's the foundation for growth.

Q How has traveling to 45+ countries shaped your leadership or business approach?

Traveling to over 45 countries has shown me that, at our core, people are more alike than we think—we all seek understanding, respect, and a sense of belonging. This reminds me of Nelson Mandela's belief that speaking to someone in their own language speaks to their heart. I've experienced this firsthand—whether sharing a meal with locals in India or navigating language gaps in Rio, I've seen that effort and empathy transcend borders.

"TRUE CONNECTION STARTS WHEN WE STOP SEEING DIFFERENCES AS BARRIERS."

I carry this lesson into leadership and business, knowing that success isn't about changing people but about meeting them where they are. Just like an accent is only a matter of perspective, cultural differences are opportunities, not obstacles. The world thrives when we embrace, not judge, our differences.

Q What drives you daily, and how does it align with your work at BrainCore.Net?

My core purpose is simple—I aim to help someone every day, whether in a small way or a big one.

**IF SOMEONE WALKS
AWAY SAYING,
"I LEARNED
SOMETHING" OR
"YOU HELPED ME,"
THEN THAT'S
A GOOD DAY FOR ME.
SUCCESS ISN'T
MEASURED BY
WHAT I ACHIEVE,
BUT BY WHO I HELP.**

This philosophy isn't just a personal belief; it's the foundation of BrainCore.Net. Whether I'm providing cybersecurity insights, training a team, or answering a simple question online, my mission remains the same—help first, no strings attached. I don't do it for recognition, and in many cases, I help anonymously. Because at the end of the day, leadership and business aren't about personal gain—they're about leaving things better than you found them. ♦



Once considered the backbone of American corporate structures, middle management is rapidly disappearing. Companies, particularly in the tech, finance, and retail sectors, have been aggressively flattening their hierarchies, eliminating middle-tier roles to cut costs and increase agility. From Facebook to Ford, industry giants are reducing managerial positions, betting on leaner, more autonomous teams. But is this truly a strategic evolution or a leadership crisis in the making?

The Case for Flattening
Companies like Tesla, Google and Meta have championed the idea of flatter hierarchies, arguing that fewer layers of management lead to faster decision-making, greater innovation and more employee empowerment. The logic is simple: When you strip away unnecessary bureaucracy, teams can move quickly, employees have more autonomy, and organisations become more cost-efficient. Moreover, a 2023 McKinsey report found that nearly 70% of employees in companies with flatter structures

felt they had more ownership over their work compared to just 45% in traditionally managed organisations. Without the bottleneck of excessive approvals and reporting chains, ideas can be tested and executed more efficiently.

But at What Cost? The Growing Leadership Vacuum
While flattening organizations can streamline decision-making, it also creates significant gaps in leadership, mentorship and employee development. Middle managers have historically played a critical role in

junior employees are left without clear career progression, and senior executives are drowning in day-to-day tasks instead of focusing on long-term strategy.

The Myth of Self-Managing Teams

One major assumption behind flattening is that employees thrive in self-directed, autonomous teams. While this may work for some highly skilled professionals—such as engineers at Spotify or developers at GitHub—it doesn't necessarily apply across all industries.

A 2023 Harvard Business Review study found that in companies that eliminated middle management entirely, team productivity initially spiked but then declined within 18 months. Why? A lack of clear direction, accountability, and professional development. Employees wanted more autonomy but needed leadership to provide structure, guidance, and feedback.

Are Companies Rethinking the Middle Manager?

Some companies that aggressively downsized middle management are now backtracking. Meta, for instance, slashed multiple managerial roles in 2023, only to start rehiring experienced leaders in 2024 after noticing a dip in team cohesion and productivity.

Even companies in Silicon Valley, known for pushing flat hierarchies, are experimenting with hybrid models, where middle managers play a more strategic role rather than just overseeing daily operations. The emphasis is shifting towards coaching, mentorship, and innovation leadership rather than bureaucratic supervision.

What's the Right Balance?

The future of corporate structure is likely not a return to bloated hierarchies but rather a redefinition of middle management's role. Instead of simply acting as task

overseers, middle managers can be strategic enablers—helping to bridge the gap between the executive vision and team execution. They coach and develop junior employees, preparing them for leadership. It becomes easy for teams to collaborate when senior managers are around.

Don't Kill Middle Management—Evolve It

While reducing bureaucracy is essential for agility, completely eliminating middle management is a risky move. The most successful companies will be those that strike a balance—retaining strong leadership while empowering employees to work with more autonomy. As American corporations continue to evolve, the real question isn't "Do we need middle managers?" but rather "How do we make them more effective, impactful, and indispensable in the modern workplace?"

THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT MIRAGE

A CORPORATE SHORTCUT OR A LEADERSHIP CRISIS?

translating corporate strategy into actionable team objectives, offering career guidance, and resolving conflicts before they escalate.

In the absence of this crucial layer, companies are finding themselves facing severe leadership challenges. A 2024 Deloitte survey found that 53% of employees in companies that aggressively eliminated middle management reported feeling directionless, while 58% of senior leaders said they were overwhelmed

by the additional responsibilities of managing junior employees directly.

The Rise of the 'Do-It-All' Senior Manager

With fewer middle managers, senior leaders are being pulled in multiple directions and expected to set strategy, coach employees, and handle operational decisions simultaneously. The result? Burnout, decreased effectiveness, and lower employee satisfaction. An example of this played out at Twitter (now X) under Elon Musk's leadership,

where mass layoffs, including middle managers, forced remaining leaders to take on excessive workloads. The impact? Confused teams, missed deadlines, and a chaotic work culture.

Similarly, in industries like healthcare and financial services, cutting middle management has led to increased stress among frontline employees, who lack the guidance they once had. Without strong managers to bridge the gap,



MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS LEADERS
in USA 2025

Lighting the Path to a Meaningful
And Purposeful Future

DONALD LACY

Owner,
LoveLife Foundation

"The measure of a life is not its duration, but its donation." – Peter Marshall

In America, youth violence remains an unsettling crisis, claiming thousands of lives each year. But behind every statistic, there is a story—a family, a dream cut short. For Donald E. Lacy, Jr., the tragedy was deeply personal. In 1997, his 16-year-old daughter, LoEshe Adanma Lacy, was shot and killed as an innocent bystander in Oakland. Her name, LoEshe, means "Love Life" in Ibo/Nigerian—a heartbreaking irony that would soon become the foundation of a powerful movement.

Instead of being consumed by grief, Lacy turned his pain into purpose. He founded the LoveLife Foundation, an initiative dedicated to uplifting at-risk youth through education, mentorship, and creative expression. By providing training in multimedia, technology, and the arts, the foundation offers young people an alternative to violence, guiding them toward a future of possibility.

Lacy's life has been a testament to resilience—not just as an activist but as a multi-faceted artist. A respected actor, comedian, and playwright, he has graced both stage and screen, starring in films like *Blood In, Blood Out* and *About Cherry*. His critically acclaimed one-man show, *ColorStruck*, now in its 15th year, explores race and identity, using humor and drama to challenge societal norms. The play has captivated audiences nationwide, from the National

Black Theatre Festival to New York's Theater for the New City.

Recognized with numerous accolades, including the Donald E. Lacy, Jr. Social Justice Award, he continues to prove that art can be a catalyst for change. Through his unwavering commitment to justice, storytelling, and mentorship, Lacy reminds the world that even in the face of unspeakable loss, one can choose to rebuild—not just for oneself but for future generations.

TradeFlock sat down with Donald E. Lacy, Jr. for an exclusive interview to delve deeper into his extraordinary journey.

Q How do your multiple roles shape your work with LoveLife?

I've always believed that every experience—whether behind the camera, on stage, or in a writer's room—has something to teach. My work with LoveLife is no different. When I talk to the youth, I don't just give advice; I share real moments from my journey—wins, failures, and everything in between.

One thing I always tell them is, "Success isn't just about talent; it's about learning to work seamlessly with others." Whether you're on a film set or in a boardroom, collaboration is everything. I want them to see that no matter where life takes them, the ability to work cohesively with others will always set them apart.

Q What's the biggest challenge in keeping LoveLife thriving?

Passion drives LoveLife, but passion alone doesn't pay the bills. Like any non-profit organization, our biggest challenge is funding. We don't have a full-time staff—most of our team comprises incredible volunteers who believe in our mission. Most dollars we raise goes directly to the youth we serve, many of whom live at or below the poverty line.

For 28 years, we've been showing up for at-risk youth, even when resources were scarce. *"Until 2022, we never even had an operating budget of \$100,000."* That says a lot about our commitment—but also about the uphill battle we fight every day to keep this movement alive.

Q What does success mean to you beyond awards?

Awards are great, but they don't define success for me. What really matters is seeing the young people I've worked with go on to graduate, build careers they're proud of, and create meaningful lives for themselves.

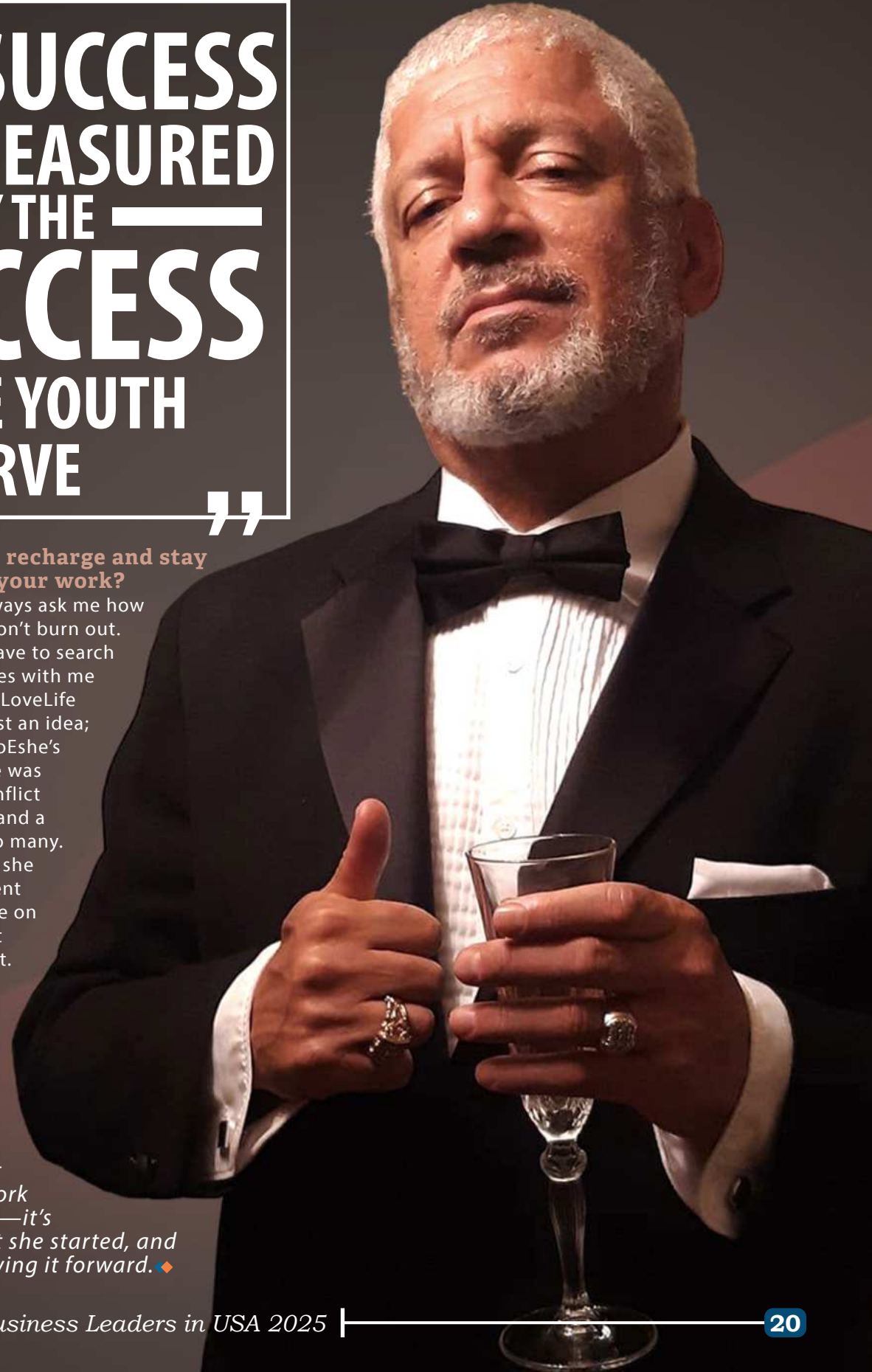
At the end of the day, "my success is measured by the success of the youth we serve." Watching them break barriers, chase their dreams, and build something better for their future—that's the kind of success that truly means something to me.

“
MY SUCCESS IS MEASURED BY THE SUCCESS OF THE YOUTH WE SERVE
”

Q How do you recharge and stay inspired in your work?

You know, people always ask me how I keep going, how I don't burn out. The truth is, I don't have to search for motivation—it lives with me every single day. The LoveLife Foundation wasn't just an idea; it was my daughter LoEshe's dream. At just 16, she was a peace activist, a conflict resolution mediator, and a beacon of hope for so many.

Then, in an instant, she was gone—an innocent victim of gun violence on October 20, 1997. But her light didn't go out. *"My secret is being inspired by her loving, luminous spirit—it fuels me with the strength and purpose to keep showing up for the youth who deserve a real shot at success." This work isn't just what I do—it's who I am. It's what she started, and I'll never stop carrying it forward.♦*



MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS LEADERS
in USA 2025

The Lazy CEO Inspiring Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

JANE LU

CEO,
Showpo

“Success is never about where you start; it’s about how boldly you choose to rewrite the story”

Not every great business story begins with a clear plan or a polished pitch deck. Some begin with failure, fear, and a fire that just won’t quit. Jane Lu, the vibrant, self-proclaimed “Lazy CEO” behind fashion powerhouse Showpo, is living proof that the road to success isn’t straight — it’s messy, chaotic, and wildly rewarding if you dare to keep going.

Years before her name became synonymous with digital fashion innovation, Jane was a disillusioned corporate accountant in Sydney, toggling between spreadsheets and Facebook tabs. When a failed first venture left her unemployed, broke, and pretending to go to work every day to avoid disappointing her immigrant parents, she was faced with a choice — shrink back or start over.

What followed was not a conventional rise but a relentless, unfiltered, and refreshingly real journey that transformed a garage startup into a global fashion empire serving customers in over 120 countries — without a cent of external funding. Here’s how Jane Lu built Showpo into a \$100M juggernaut — one problem, pivot, and playful Instagram post at a time.

The Rock Bottom Reset: When Failure Became the Foundation

Jane’s story is rooted in resilience. After quitting a stable finance career to pursue a pop-up retail business that collapsed almost overnight, she found herself jobless in the middle of the Global Financial Crisis, burdened by debt, and desperately hiding the truth from her parents. Instead of wallowing, she turned necessity into opportunity.

With no capital, limited resources, and an even slimmer chance of success, Jane launched Showpo in 2010 from her parents’ garage — powered by consignment stock, sheer grit, and a vision for fashion that felt fun, fast, and affordable.

What made her different? She embraced failure early, used it as fuel, and learned to move fast. As she often says, “Being a good businessperson isn’t about having all the answers — it’s about being a good problem solver.”

Hustle Meets Hashtag: Building a Brand That Broke the Internet

Before “influencer marketing” became an industry buzzword, Jane Lu intuitively understood the power of relatability and community. While competitors pumped money into traditional marketing, Showpo’s growth was fueled by social media storytelling and Jane’s own unfiltered, fun persona.

Under the playful banner of “The Lazy CEO,” she turned the business’s behind-the-scenes chaos — from warehouse mishaps to office wine sessions — into content that made customers feel like insiders. This authenticity resonated with young women globally, creating a cult-like following of over 3 million fans across social platforms. Showpo wasn’t just selling clothes; it was selling an experience — fun, feminine, and fearlessly self-made.

Scaling Without Strings: The Power of Bootstrapped Brilliance

While many startups today lean heavily on rounds of venture funding, Jane took a road less traveled. Every inch of Showpo’s meteoric rise has been 100% bootstrapped — a feat almost unheard of in the fast-fashion industry.

Through relentless experimentation, data-driven decisions, and a clear understanding of her audience,

Jane scaled Showpo from garage to global without giving up ownership or creative control. She built robust systems, assembled an agile, passionate team, and invested in product development

“You don’t need to have it all figured out to get started. Just start. Fail fast, learn fast, and keep evolving”

— eventually shifting from retailing other labels to creating 50%+ of their own designs. Her approach wasn’t textbook — it was personal, fearless, and proof that you can grow big without selling out.

Beyond Fashion: Leadership, Legacy & The Lazy CEO Mindset

Jane’s impact extends beyond her multi-million-dollar brand. She’s become an icon for modern entrepreneurship — especially for women, immigrants, and anyone who’s ever felt like an outsider in business. From co-founding the 160,000-strong entrepreneur community Like-Minded Bitches Drinking Wine to her role as a Shark on Australia’s Shark Tank, Jane is championing a new definition of leadership: transparent, human, and unapologetically fun.

Her advice is simple but powerful: “You don’t need to have it all figured out to get started. Just start. Fail fast, learn fast, and keep evolving.”

Jane Lu’s story is a reminder that

success isn’t reserved for those who play it safe — it’s built by those willing to show up, laugh at the chaos, and turn their worst days into the best thing that ever happened to them.💡



BANKING IN THE DARK

How Non-Traditional Lenders Are Reshaping Finance —and Your Money?

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the landscape of the American financial system underwent a significant transformation. Traditional banks, once the primary conduits of credit, faced heightened regulations aimed at curbing risky behaviors. This regulatory tightening, while essential for safeguarding the economy, inadvertently paved the way for the rapid ascent of non-traditional lenders operating in the shadows—collectively known as the shadow banking sector. These entities, ranging from mortgage brokers and hedge funds to fintech firms, have reshaped the financial ecosystem, offering both opportunities and challenges.

A New Financial Frontier

Shadow banks function similarly to traditional banks by facilitating credit and liquidity but operate outside the conventional regulatory framework. This lack of oversight allows them greater flexibility in their operations. A study by researchers at Stanford, Columbia, and the University of Chicago revealed that nonbank lenders originated 38% of all home loans—a nearly threefold increase from their share in 2007. More

strikingly, these lenders accounted for 75% of all loans to low-income borrowers insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).

Several factors have fueled this growth. Post-crisis, stringent regulations imposed on traditional banks made lending to certain segments less attractive, creating a void that shadow banks eagerly filled. Additionally, the advancement of financial technology (fintech) has enabled these non-traditional lenders to streamline operations, reduce costs, and reach underserved markets more effectively. This technological edge has allowed them to cater to a broader clientele, including those who traditional banks might have overlooked.

The Good, The Bad, and The Risky

The rise of shadow banking has undeniably democratized access to credit. By stepping in where traditional banks retreated, these lenders have provided essential financial services to individuals and businesses that might otherwise have been excluded. This inclusivity has been particularly beneficial in emerging markets and underserved communities, fostering economic

growth and development.

However, this expansion is not without its perils. The very characteristics that make shadow banks agile—their exemption from certain regulations and reliance on short-term funding—also render them vulnerable. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) highlighted that while shadow banking can enhance financial intermediation, it also poses significant risks due to its potential to amplify systemic vulnerabilities. The IMF noted that shadow banking activities contributed substantially to financial risks in the United States, underscoring the need for vigilant oversight.

The Collapse of Zhongzhi Enterprise Group

While the U.S. has its unique financial dynamics, global events offer cautionary tales. In China, Zhongzhi Enterprise Group, once a prominent player in the shadow banking sector, declared insolvency, revealing liabilities of up to \$64 billion. The company's aggressive and potentially illegal sales practices, coupled with risky lending to developers unable to secure traditional bank loans, culminated



in its downfall. This incident underscores the potential dangers inherent in unchecked shadow banking activities.

Blurred Lines

The boundaries between traditional banks and shadow banks are increasingly blurred. Many shadow banks rely on lines of credit from traditional banks to fund their operations. This interconnectedness means that distress within the shadow banking sector can have ripple effects on the broader financial system. For instance, a small-town bank in Russell, Kentucky, faced significant financial turmoil due to its partnership with a fintech firm, resulting in substantial losses and jeopardizing customer deposits.

The Ongoing Battle Over Oversight

Regulating the shadow banking sector presents a complex challenge. On one hand, over-regulation could stifle innovation and restrict access to credit for those who need it most. On the

other, insufficient oversight could allow systemic risks to fester, potentially leading to financial instability. The IMF emphasizes the importance of international regulatory cooperation to prevent risks from migrating to jurisdictions with laxer rules.

In the U.S., regulatory bodies like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) have attempted to introduce rules to enhance transparency within the shadow banking sector. However, these efforts often face pushback. Hedge funds, for example, have legally challenged the SEC's authority, arguing that certain regulatory measures overreach and lack congressional mandate. This ongoing tug-of-war underscores the difficulty in striking a balance between fostering financial innovation and ensuring systemic stability.

What It Means for Your Money

For consumers, the rise of shadow banking presents both opportunities and risks. On

the positive side, increased competition can lead to more tailored financial products and potentially better rates. However, the lack of stringent oversight means that some shadow banks might engage in practices that are not in the best interest of consumers. It's crucial for individuals to exercise due diligence, thoroughly researching lenders and understanding the terms of any financial products they consider.

The evolution of the shadow banking sector has undeniably reshaped the American financial landscape, offering both benefits and challenges. As these non-traditional lenders continue to grow in prominence, it becomes imperative for regulators, consumers, and the financial industry at large to navigate this complex terrain thoughtfully. Striking the right balance between innovation and oversight will be key to ensuring that the financial system remains robust, inclusive, and resilient against potential shocks.

Scaling Healing through Smart Innovation

RASHID TAHER

Co-Founder, EyeCheq

Eye health screenings remain one of the most underserved areas of healthcare, leaving millions at risk of preventable vision loss. Over 50% of blindness cases result from delayed detection and intervention, not due to a lack of treatment options but because of barriers to access and early screening. The problem isn't just medical—it's an issue of innovation, integration, and reach.

Leading the charge to change this is Dr. Rashid Taher, a vitreo-retinal surgeon, entrepreneur, and investor. As Co-Founder of EyeCheq, he is redefining eyecare screenings by harnessing AI-powered technology to enable faster, more accurate, and more accessible retinal screenings.

With over two decades of experience in vitreo-retinal surgery, Dr. Taher has played a pivotal role in advancing retinal disease management at various South Florida institutions such as Elite EyeCare Specialists, Eye Centers of South Florida, and North Miami Beach Surgical Center. His expertise extends beyond the operating room—he is a seasoned entrepreneur and investor, co-founding Pediatric Radiology of America, the first paediatric tele-radiology platform, DrSmarts, an ed-tech initiative that revolutionized student engagement, and backing innovative healthcare startups as an angel investor.

A graduate of The George Washington University School of Medicine, with specialized training from Boston University and the University of Florida, Dr. Taher seamlessly bridges the gap between medicine and technology. Through EyeCheq, he is not only pioneering the future of retinal diagnostics but also ensuring that early detection and intervention become the standard rather than the exception. TradeFlock sat down with Dr. Taher to discuss his vision, leadership, and the future of eye care.

Q What inspired your shift from practicing medicine to launching a health-tech startup, and how has your medical background influenced your approach?

I didn't leave medicine—I expanded its reach. As a retinal specialist, I encountered too many patients whose blindness could have been prevented if their disease had been caught earlier. The issue wasn't a lack of treatment; it was a lack of timely diagnosis. That raised a critical question: Why should early detection depend on whether a patient happens to seek care?

That question led to EyeCheq—an AI-powered platform designed to bring eye health screenings to people where they

MOST INSPIRING BUSINESS LEADERS in USA 2025

already are. My medical background informs every aspect of this journey, from identifying real patient challenges to ensuring our technology enhances clinical care rather than replacing it.

"As a physician, I could help one patient at a time. As an entrepreneur, I can build solutions that help millions. That's the mission that drives me every day."

Q Can you share a time when things didn't go as planned and what it taught you about resilience and adaptability?

Entrepreneurship is full of humbling moments. One of our biggest challenges at EyeCheq came early on. We had everything lined up—a clinically validated clinical support tool, high-traffic kiosk placements—yet utilization rates were much lower than expected. The demand was there, the technology was sound, so what was missing?

The issue wasn't the product—it was adoption. Healthcare staff, already overwhelmed with their workloads, were hesitant to integrate something new. That realization forced us to pivot. "You don't just build a great product; you build a system that people want to use." We reworked our approach, focusing on education, seamless workflow integration, and demonstrating tangible ROI to healthcare administrators. The result? A 600% increase in screening rates in some of our pilot programs.

Resilience in business isn't just about persistence—it's about listening, learning, and adapting. Sometimes, the key to success isn't pushing harder but seeing the challenge from a different angle.

Q How does EyeCheq ensure its AI technology is ethical, inclusive, and accessible?

AI in healthcare is a powerful tool, but only if it's built responsibly. At EyeCheq, we prioritize clinical rigor, bias mitigation, and accessibility.

"The best technology is meaningless if people can't access it," so we deploy our kiosks in labs, pharmacies, retail healthcare, employer wellness centers, and community clinics—places where patients naturally engage with the healthcare system.

We also ensure that our AI models are validated using diverse, real-world clinical data. Bias in AI can create serious disparities in healthcare outcomes, so we actively collaborate with independent researchers and clinicians to ensure our technology works effectively across all populations.

For us, innovation isn't just about improving accuracy—

it's about creating meaningful impact. EyeCheq isn't just a screening tool; it's a commitment to making eye care smarter, fairer, and more accessible.

Q Looking back at your 25+ years of experience, what are the top three moments that have defined your career?

Performing my first complex vitreo-retinal surgery: The first time I restored sight to a patient who was on the verge of permanent blindness was a moment that solidified my purpose as a physician. That experience continues to drive my passion for patient care.

Launching EyeCheq: Bringing AI-driven eye health screenings to market has been one of the most fulfilling moments of my career. Seeing our technology help prevent blindness in real-world settings is proof of why we started this journey.

Expanding EyeCheq's reach into underserved communities: Ensuring that our technology is accessible to those who need it most—particularly in rural and underserved populations—has been a defining milestone. Every time we expand access, we reaffirm our mission of preventing avoidable blindness on a global scale.

"As a physician, I could help one patient at a time. As an entrepreneur, I can build solutions that help millions. That's the mission that drives me every day."

Q How do you balance being both a healer and a disruptor?

I don't see these roles as mutually exclusive. Whether in the operating room or in the boardroom, my goal has always been the same—to prevent blindness and improve patient outcomes. The difference is scale.

Medicine, by nature, is cautious, and for good reason. But "innovation is not the enemy of medicine; stagnation is." Disruption in healthcare isn't about breaking the system—it's about pushing it forward.

The eye is more than a sensory organ—it is a window into systemic

health. With the advent of large language models and advancements in AI, we are now able to glean more than just ocular health from a retinal image. Soon, we will be able to extract systemic diagnostic insights from retinal biomarkers, detecting conditions such as cardiovascular disease, neurodegenerative disorders, and metabolic syndromes. The future of medicine lies in leveraging these insights, making preventive care more proactive and comprehensive than ever before.

At EyeCheq, we're not just building technology, we're reshaping access to care, ensuring that early detection is the norm, not the exception. That's the future we're working toward—one where no one loses their vision due to a lack of screening, and where innovation serves the fundamental mission of medicine: to heal, but at a greater scale than ever before. ♦



MOST INSPIRING BUSINESS LEADERS

in USA 2025

Unlocking Purpose, Passion,
and Potential

ROBIN DANIELS

Chief Business Officer,
Zensai

IN A BUSINESS WORLD DEFINED BY RAPID CHANGE,
MOST LEADERS STRUGGLE TO KEEP UP. ROBIN DANIELS
DOESN'T JUST KEEP UP—HE DEFINES WHAT'S NEXT.

For over two decades, he has shaped the trajectory of some of the world's most influential companies—LinkedIn, Salesforce, Box, WeWork, Matterport, and Zensai—helping them scale, innovate, and lead industries. His ability to anticipate change and turn uncertainty into opportunity has been a driving force behind billion-dollar IPOs, exponential growth, and market-defining success stories. But leadership isn't just about strategy—it's about vision. Robin believes that success isn't just measured in revenue and market share but in the impact you create. That philosophy has fueled his approach, from leading Matterport's \$3 billion IPO to driving 200%+ vertical growth at Box.



Everyone deserves a chance to succeed in a way that feels right for them, with the right knowledge, skills, and encouragement at the right time.

Now, as Chief Business Officer at Zensai, he's tackling one of today's most pressing challenges: helping companies unlock human potential. With an AI-powered learning and development platform, Robin is driving 50%+ YoY growth, proving that the future of business isn't just about technology—it's about empowering people to thrive in a changing world.

TradeFlock interviewed Robin Daniels to explore his journey, his leadership insights, and how he's shaping the future of success.

Q How do you balance startup agility with the structure needed for large-scale growth?

I've always believed that clarity is the starting point of any great company—big or small. Without it, you're just running in circles, no matter how fast or structured you are. Startups thrive on speed, experimenting like mad to hit their goals, while larger companies rely on proven systems, refining them as the world evolves. But at the core, the best companies share a common trait:

That's the real secret—knowing where you're going and making sure everyone is driving toward it with purpose.

"SUCCESS COMES DOWN TO CLARITY, FOLLOWED BY A CULTURE OF FOCUS, URGENCY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY."

Q What are your biggest leadership lessons from navigating hyper-growth and downturns?

If there's one thing I've learned from watching companies rise, fall, and reinvent themselves, it's this: You can't control outcomes, but you can control inputs and outputs. You can't stop a global crisis, a surprise competitor, or an economic shift. But you can control how your team shows up every day—their energy, collaboration, and willingness to go the extra mile. You can shape the work they produce, ensuring it's innovative, high-quality, and aligned with your mission. Focus on what you can control, and you'll be in the best position to influence what happens next.

Q Can you share a 'crazy' idea that became a game-changer?

Sometimes, the wildest ideas come from the most unexpected situations. In March 2020, when I was CMO at Matterport, the world went into lockdown, and we had a tough choice—stick to our original plan or pivot fast. We had planned to launch Matterport for iPhone at the end of the year, but with people stuck at home, the need for virtual spaces skyrocketed. So, we did something bold—we



fast-tracked the launch to May 4th (Star Wars Day). It was a massive effort across product, engineering, marketing, and sales, but the risk paid off. "In the first week of launching Matterport for iPhone, we had more sign-ups than in the previous eight years combined." Sometimes, the 'crazy' ideas are the ones that change everything.

Q What's the biggest misconception about scaling a company for an exit?

I can't tell you how many pitch decks I've seen where founders proudly outline their "exit strategy" before they've even built something people truly love. And every time, I think the same thing: You're focusing on the wrong finish line. The most successful companies don't chase exits—they chase creating value. "If you focus on creating a great product that people love, the exit will take care of itself." Whether it's an IPO or an acquisition, those opportunities come when you've built something so good the market can't ignore it. So forget the exit. Obsess over the impact. That's what really scales.

Q What's a passion project or personal mission you're currently pursuing?

You know that feeling when you wake up dreading the day ahead? Too many people live like that—stuck, unmotivated, and disconnected from their work. That's why I'm on a mission to change it.

I call it Human Success—helping people find more joy and purpose in what they do. With nearly 70% of people wanting to quit their jobs, it's clear something's broken. I want to fix that by creating a world where work isn't just a paycheck but a source of growth, fulfillment, and meaning. ♦

SUBSCRIBE NOW!



NAME _____

DESIGNATION _____

ADDRESS _____ STATE _____ PIN CODE _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____ CONTACT NUMBER _____

I WOULD LIKE TO SUBSCRIBE FOR 1 YEAR

Payment acceptable in Cheque/DD favouring:
SDAD TECHNOLOGY PVT. LTD.
B-28, 10th Floor, B Block, Manaar Tower, Sector 132, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201301

Now you can also subscribe through
<https://tradeflock.com/subscription/>

Scan To Subscribe



This offer is valid in India only. Allow 2-3 weeks for processing your subscription. Kindly mention your name and address on back of the cheque/DD. Cancellation Refund are not allowed.
Subscription Helpline +91 8929931601 or email at subscription@tradeflock.com



LEAD WITH TRUST

Dr. Elliott Q. Gomez,
Major, USA, Retired,
LSSBB, CDEI



THE ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP STRATEGY FOR THRIVING IN TOUGH TIMES

Leaders cannot command trust; they can only build it through what they say and do and how they act, speak, and behave towards others. A sincere leader keeps their word and cares about the people they lead – building trust from the top down and throughout their organizations. In the case of an authentic leader, the deed reinforces the credibility of the word. Their behavior clears up the ambiguity and answers what to do when it gets challenging.

When leaders are called upon to deliver bad news or be challenged in their role, this is the time that the stakeholders and the wider community will be harshest. Every communication and subsequent action will either entrench that roll-of-the-dice approach or build a belief in you and what you must deliver. So, what should leaders do? They should focus on deep and frank communication. What is happening? Why is this decision being made? What is this complexity, and how are we so optimistic we can pull

through? Can you take a step back and praise and appreciate the team's work?

At least as necessary is listening and asking for input, which good leaders also do, demonstrating the theory that the output must be sought to be delivered. In listening, the leader shows respect, identification with, and empathy for the employee, as well as building connections and learning about the employee's perspective, issues, and needs. The employee's sense of ownership, commitment, and trust is embedded in the listening quotient (Brown & Treviño, 2021).

In sum, empirical evidence supports the critical role that trust-based leadership can play in times of crisis. Leaders' trustworthiness significantly predicts the performance of their organizations at large and with strength under unfavorable circumstances. For example, a study found that leaders' general trustworthiness robustly predicted collective performance across diverse organizations, especially under volatile

conditions. Because of the trust-based bonds that they create with employees, leaders can elicit more significant collective effort from their teams, keep them motivated, and direct their energy towards resilient performance despite adversity. Trust also means that employees will be more likely to initiate inventive solutions and take more risks.

Good leaders lead from the front, great leaders lead from the crowd, exceptional leaders lead from the heart!

Leaders must conduct themselves trustworthy and periodically check in with their people to see and respond to their shifting needs. If leaders believe that trust will stand on its own, they might find that the soil for the trust that they relied on has been washed away. ♦

**MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS
LEADERS**
in USA 2025

Transforming Ideas into Actionable Marketing Success

SEBASTIAN PISTRITTO

Chief Marketing Officer, ParcelShield Holdings, LLC

In a world where a missed delivery can mean the difference between life and death, leadership isn't just about strategy—it's about impact. The healthcare logistics industry, valued at over \$74 billion and growing, is more than just supply chains and shipments; it's a lifeline for millions. At the forefront of this mission is Sebastian Pistritto, a visionary marketing leader whose strategic acumen is redefining how life-saving medications reach the people who need them most.

As the Chief Marketing Officer in the healthcare industry, Sebastian is not just driving brand visibility—he is shaping the future of healthcare logistics. With over 25 years of marketing leadership and an impressive track record as a four-time CMO specializing in B2B SaaS, his approach blends data-driven precision with a deep understanding of market needs. His expertise in Account-Based Marketing (ABM), demand generation, and go-to-market execution has not only elevated ParcelShield's presence but also strengthened its impact on pharmaceutical manufacturers, hospital systems, and specialty pharmacies.

Before joining ParcelShield, Sebastian's leadership roles at GrayHair Software, Jornaya SaaS, RDC, and Lorel Marketing positioned him as a transformative force in marketing. From spearheading award-winning digital campaigns to leading multi-million-dollar acquisition strategies, his career has been defined by innovation, measurable growth, and cross-industry excellence. But what truly sets Sebastian apart is his ability to bridge marketing with purpose. He understands that behind every data point, campaign, or customer engagement strategy is a patient waiting for their medication, a hospital relying on seamless logistics, and a pharmacy striving for better efficiency. His leadership is not just about driving numbers—it's about driving impact where it matters most.

In an exclusive interview with TradeFlock, Sebastian shared insights into his journey, his vision for the future of healthcare logistics, and the strategic innovations that will shape the industry in 2025 and beyond.

Q What key experience ignited your passion for marketing and shaped your purpose in business?

I didn't fall in love with marketing in a classroom or a boardroom—it happened in the middle of a B2B software campaign. The product was brilliant, but the message wasn't clicking. Prospects didn't see how it solved their problems.

So, I flipped the script. Instead of talking about features, we told real success stories. A targeted email campaign spoke directly to industry pain points, and suddenly, engagement soared. Then came the moment that sealed it—a once-skeptical enterprise client signed a multi-year deal after a webinar.

Q How has your leadership style evolved as a four-time CMO, and what principles guide your marketing teams?

In the early days, I was all about execution—hitting deadlines, managing budgets, and ensuring campaigns ran smoothly. But experience taught me that true marketing leadership isn't just about getting things done; it's about inspiring teams to think bigger and drive real business impact.

I moved from managing tasks to empowering individuals, from focusing on tactics to driving vision. Data and innovation became core to my approach, but "the real game-changer was realizing that high-performing teams thrive not on control, but on trust, collaboration, and a shared purpose." That philosophy has shaped my leadership ever since.

Q How do you balance compliance and innovation in highly regulated industries?

I've always seen regulations not as roadblocks but as creative challenges. The key is working with legal teams early, not after ideas are shot down. That way, we build campaigns that are both impactful and compliant.

When direct promotion is restricted, I focus on content marketing and thought leadership—educating instead of selling. "Innovation in regulated industries isn't about bending the rules; it's about finding new ways to engage, inform, and build trust within them." That mindset has helped me drive results while staying firmly within the lines.

Q How do you use data analytics and marketing automation to optimize customer acquisition and engagement?

If there's one thing I've learned, it's that data and automation aren't just tools—they're game changers. Early on, I realized that broad marketing tactics waste time and budget. Instead, I use data analytics to break down customer behaviors, segment audiences, and predict who is most likely to convert.

Marketing automation then takes it further, ensuring personalized messages reach the right people at the right moment. Multi-touch attribution helps fine-tune strategies, so that every channel works smarter, not harder. When used right, data and automation don't just optimize marketing—they transform it.

Q What drives you to share your marketing knowledge, and how does it impact the broader community?

I've always believed that knowledge gains real value when it's shared. Early in my career, I learned how the right marketing strategies can completely transform a business, yet I saw too many people focusing on quick tactics instead of the bigger picture.

That's why I write, speak, and lead thought leadership initiatives—not just to inform but to inspire strategic thinking. "Marketing isn't just about tactics; it's the art of blending creativity, analytics, and business acumen to drive real impact." If my insights help others navigate challenges, innovate, and think differently, then I know I'm contributing to something bigger than just my success. ♦



A mindset that has shaped every campaign since I've led is:



"That's when I realized marketing isn't just about selling—it's about translating value, building trust, and driving real change."

**MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS
LEADERS**
in USA 2025

Transforming the Future of
Education for At-Risk Youth

SHARYN ABBOTT

CEO & Founder,
Ultimate Business International

For millions of children worldwide, the promise of education remains just that—a promise unfulfilled. In the United States alone, high school graduation rates have dropped from 90% in 1970 to under 60% today. Even more alarming, nearly 50% of at-risk youth face incarceration or won't live past the age of 35. These aren't just statistics; they represent lost potential, shattered dreams, and a system that has long neglected the most vulnerable.

Amidst this crisis, one leader stands unwavering in her mission to rewrite the future—Sharyn Abbott. A seasoned entrepreneur, educator, and advocate, she refuses to accept the ordinary. As the CEO and Founder of Ultimate Business International and Ultimate Business University (UBU), she is dismantling outdated educational structures and rebuilding them to serve those who need it most.

Her approach is revolutionary: integrating trade skills, multimedia learning, and personalized mentorship to equip students with real-world opportunities. Unlike conventional systems that enforce rigid curricula, Sharyn's model adapts to individual learning needs, fostering an environment where students learn and thrive. With an ambitious twenty-year expansion plan, she aims to establish programs in 20 countries where homeless and at-risk children face the toughest challenges. But her

work extends beyond education. A renowned speaker, author, and corporate leader, Sharyn has spent decades guiding Fortune 500 company employees and pioneering initiatives that prioritize human potential over corporate gain. Her leadership philosophy, shaped by personal experiences, is rooted in respect, empowerment, and holistic growth. Now, through UBU, she is proving that with the right opportunities, every child—regardless of their circumstances—can break free from limitations and build a promising future.

Sharyn Abbott is not just changing education; she is transforming lives, one student at a time. TradeFlock interviewed her to discuss her journey and mission further.

Q What inspired your mission to empower others?

I've always believed that success isn't just about what you achieve—it's about what you help others achieve. Looking back, I don't think there was a single defining moment when I realized my purpose; rather, it was a journey of small yet powerful realizations. Every time I shared my knowledge and saw someone light up with newfound confidence or clarity, it reinforced what I was meant to do.

“THE MORE I HELPED, THE MORE I UNDERSTOOD THAT THIS WASN'T JUST A ROLE I PLAYED—IT WAS WHO I WAS MEANT TO BE. EMPOWERING OTHERS ISN'T JUST MY WORK; IT'S MY CALLING.”

Whether it was guiding entrepreneurs to build something meaningful, helping authors bring their stories to life, or creating opportunities for at-risk youth to rewrite their futures, I found my greatest joy in watching others break through barriers.

Q What's been your biggest challenge as an entrepreneur?

They say growth begins at the edge of your comfort zone, and I learned that the hard way. My greatest challenge was overcoming my fear of public speaking. I never planned to do it—until my mentor took me to an event, and over lunch, casually announced, “You're the speaker today.” I had no time to overthink, no chance to back out. I just had to stand up and speak.

That one moment changed everything. He kept taking me to different events every month for a year, and before I knew it, I was hooked. What once terrified me became a passion, proving that sometimes, the only way to overcome fear is to step straight into it.

Q How do you plan to scale UBI's vision globally?

I've always believed that every problem has a solution—and the longer I waited for my funds to be released, the more challenges I saw that needed fixing. What started as an education initiative grew into a mission to build sustainable communities that truly change lives.

“IT ONLY TAKES ONE PERSON TO START A REVOLUTION!”

Scaling globally starts with action and we're already in action with the first expansion campus scheduled in Australia, and from there, we'll launch a new one every six months. It's a big vision, but real change happens step by step—and we're just getting started.

Q Why disrupt publishing to favor authors?

After 20 years in the printing industry, I found it offensive that traditional publishers kept the lion's share while authors—who do all the heavy lifting—got mere scraps. That's why I changed the game. By letting authors retain 75% of their sales, they finally get what they deserve and the resources to book interviews and speaking engagements—where the real money is made. It's not just about better royalties; it's about giving authors the power they've always deserved.

Q How has your definition of success evolved?

Success has never been a fixed goal for me—it's a moving target I keep raising. I've always pushed myself harder than anyone else ever could, and over time, my definition of success has evolved. What once felt impossible became just another milestone, and each achievement fuels the next challenge. For me, success isn't about reaching a finish line—it's about continuously proving that limits exist only to be broken. ♦



Story of the Month

FLAMES, FEAR, AND FABRICATIONS

The Truth Behind the LA Wildfires

In an era where information travels faster than wildfire—pun intended—social media erupted with speculation as flames engulfed Los Angeles. Trending hashtags like #LAFireConspiracy and #WildfireAgenda dominated platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok, and each post was more sensational than the last. Some blamed climate change, others pointed fingers at shadowy government agendas, and a few went so far as to claim extraterrestrial involvement. But while misinformation spread like embers in the wind, firefighters battled a real and devastating inferno that displaced thousands and caused billions in damage.

The Hard Facts: What Actually Happened?

The January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires were among the most catastrophic in recent history. With at least 24 lives lost, over 12,000 structures destroyed, and 100,000 people—including Hollywood's elite—forced to flee, the devastation was immense. According to AccuWeather, projected economic losses range between \$250 billion and \$275

billion—potentially making this the costliest wildfire disaster in U.S. history.

Fanned by the notorious Santa Ana winds, the blaze spread rapidly, reducing affluent neighbourhoods and iconic landmarks to ashes. Official investigations are still underway, but preliminary reports suggest a mix of dry conditions, extreme winds, and possibly downed power lines contributed to the catastrophe. However, the lack of a confirmed ignition source has created fertile ground for conspiracy theories.

The Conspiracies: Fact or Fiction?

Insurance Cancellations: Did They Know in Advance?

One of the most persistent conspiracy theories revolves around major insurance companies like State Farm and Allstate dropping thousands of homeowners' policies in high-risk areas just months before the fires erupted. In July 2024, State Farm cancelled about 1,600 policies in wildfire-prone neighbourhoods like Pacific Palisades.

This fuelled speculation that insurance giants had insider

knowledge of an impending disaster, leading to accusations of corporate greed or even complicity in orchestrating the fires.

Reality Check:

While the timing is suspicious, insurance companies have gradually pulled out of California's wildfire zones for years. The state's rising fire frequency and unpredictable losses have made coverage unsustainable. Between 2020 and 2022, 2.8 million homeowner policies were not renewed statewide, with 500,000 policies in Los Angeles County alone. Rather than a grand conspiracy, this trend reflects the financial strain of insuring homes in fire-prone regions.

2. 'Agenda 2030' and Smart City Takeover

Another viral theory suggests the fires were deliberately ignited to clear land for Los Angeles' SmartLA 2028 initiative, supposedly part of a global push for 'smart cities' under the United Nations' Agenda 2030. Some theorists link this claim to previous wildfires in Lahaina,

Maui, alleging that natural disasters are being weaponised to seize land and implement digital infrastructure.

Reality Check:

While Los Angeles is actively working on smart city projects, there is no evidence to suggest these fires were orchestrated for urban redevelopment. Fact-checking organisations like PolitiFact and Reuters have debunked claims that Los Angeles is on the World Economic Forum's Smart City list and there is no credible link between the wildfires and a government-led land grab.

3. A Cover-Up for Sean 'Diddy' Combs?

Perhaps the most bizarre theory claims that the Los Angeles wildfires were a distraction to erase evidence tied to Sean 'Diddy' Combs' alleged crimes. Some believe the fires conveniently targeted areas linked to Diddy's controversial gatherings, leaving his Holmby Hills mansion unscathed.

Further fuelling speculation, theorists claim there are

underground tunnels connecting Diddy's estate to neighbouring properties, including the Playboy Mansion and Michael Jackson's former home—allegedly used for illicit activities.

Reality Check:

While Diddy is indeed facing legal troubles related to sexual misconduct allegations, there is no legitimate evidence linking him to the fires. The claim that his mansion remained untouched is misleading—fires are unpredictable, and many high-value properties in LA employ private firefighting teams to protect their estates. Additionally, no official reports substantiate the existence of secret underground tunnels.

The Real Culprit: Climate Change and Infrastructure Failures

While conspiracy theories make for entertaining TikTok deep dives, the reality is far less theatrical but more pressing. The increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires in California are directly tied to climate change, poor land management,

and ageing infrastructure.

California's fire season has lengthened significantly, with hotter, drier conditions creating the perfect storm for disaster. The state's electrical grid—managed by companies like PG&E—has also been scrutinised for sparking previous wildfires, raising concerns about its role in the latest inferno.

A Cautionary Tale in the Age of Disinformation

As Los Angeles recovers from yet another devastating wildfire, it is a stark reminder of the power of misinformation. While the urge to uncover hidden truths is understandable, it is crucial to differentiate between legitimate concerns and baseless conspiracy theories.

The true focus should be on supporting affected communities, holding negligent corporations accountable, and pushing for stronger climate policies to prevent such tragedies in the future. Because at the end of the day, the real enemy isn't a shadowy elite—it's our collective inaction in the face of a burning planet. ♦

**MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS
LEADERS**
in USA 2025

Bridging Deep Tech, Security, and Scalable Innovation

**SPARSH
SAXENA**

AI Product Leader and Technologist

In a time when 72% of global CEOs say rapid technological change is their biggest challenge, leadership is being redefined. It's no longer just about managing operations—it's about foresight, adaptability, and turning complex technologies into meaningful, human-centered solutions.

The unpredictability of today's business landscape, marked by AI advancements, cybersecurity threats, and regulatory shifts, demands more from leaders. They must not only navigate change but simplify it, humanize it, and build trust around technology's role in shaping the future.

This is where technologists and innovators like Sparsh Saxena shine. With an impressive track record at Microsoft, Shopify, and mission-driven software firms, Sparsh stands at the intersection of technical expertise, UX vision, and enterprise-grade product strategy. His work spans database architecture, system migrations, security engineering, and stakeholder alignment—making him part of a new wave of system-level innovators.

At Microsoft, Sparsh led initiatives in the M365 Security division, securing Microsoft's infrastructure and engineering systems—work that was business critical for Microsoft's customers, including Fortune 500 companies and government entities.



Whether at Microsoft or through independent projects, my goal has always been the same—turn complexity into clarity, and technology into something people can actually use. Sparsh Saxena

Beyond corporate roles, Sparsh's commitment to democratizing technology led to projects like UnSQL AI—a technically ambitious AI tool he created independently to simplify access to legacy databases through natural language. Designed to empower businesses without technical teams, UnSQL AI unlocked value from outdated systems. Its real-world impact and eventual acquisition by a Canadian entrepreneur underscore its technical and business significance.

In an exclusive conversation with TradeFlock, Sparsh Saxena discusses his career journey, leadership philosophy, and how thoughtful, product-driven innovation can create meaningful change for people and businesses alike.

Q What inspired you to move from big tech roles to building UnSQL AI?

I've always believed that the best ideas live at the edge of curiosity and experience. My time at Shopify and Microsoft taught me how small product decisions can impact millions—from streamlining global shipping to protecting sensitive data at scale. But over time, I realized, "AI will reshape everything, and I had the right mix of experience to build something meaningful with it." That's what led me to experiment on the side with projects like UnSQL—a personal tech initiative that eventually got acquired. For me, it was never about leaving big tech; it was about being closer to what's next.

Q What motivated you to turn outdated databases into assets with UnSQL AI?

I've always noticed that in tech, no one wants to deal with the "boring" problems—and that's exactly why I was drawn to legacy databases. They were treated like liabilities, but the real issue was that businesses were stuck spending millions maintaining them or hiring rare consultants just to run basic queries. I realized, "AI was the perfect solution to fix this problem, if done well." That's what led me to experiment with UnSQL as a personal tech

initiative. The idea wasn't just to help big companies—the goal was to make advanced data access possible for small and traditional businesses who didn't have the luxury of hiring expensive data engineers.

Q What lessons from Avid Bags shaped how you built UnSQL AI?

Looking back, Avid Bags wasn't just an e-commerce experiment—it was a crash course in how great products alone aren't enough. While working at Shopify, I saw entrepreneurs thrive not because they had the best products, but because they knew how to tell their story. That experience taught me that a good product gets built, but a great product gets noticed. So when I worked on UnSQL as a side project, I approached it differently—focusing not just on the tech, but on how to make its value clear to the people who needed it most.

Q How do you ensure both tech expertise and business skills in your leadership team?

I've never believed in dividing people into "business" or "tech" boxes—especially in the early days. When I worked on UnSQL as a personal project, I looked for something simple: small, high-agency, ridiculously talented people who could do a bit of everything. I've learned that, "In the beginning, the best teams blur the lines—the CTO should talk to customers, and the CEO should know how the product is built." That overlap creates speed, clarity, and real ownership. Later, when things scale, roles evolve—but at the start, everyone has to know the whole game.

Q What inspired you to build Rustic Flute and make angel investing insights accessible?

I didn't start Rustic Flute because I had all the answers—I started it because I couldn't find them. When I began learning about angel investing, I was overwhelmed by noise and scattered information. So I thought, "If I'm doing the hard work to figure this out, why not share the journey so others can learn too?"

Rustic Flute has since evolved into a widely-read content platform cited in independent newsletters like TL;DR, reaching thousands of global investors curious about India's startup ecosystem. Through research-driven content, Sparsh is bridging the information gap between U.S.-based investors and emerging Indian startups—earning recognition as a credible voice in cross-border investing.

From securing complex systems to independently building AI-driven tools with real-world applications, Sparsh Saxena's career is a case study in multidisciplinary excellence. His contributions—spanning enterprise software, security, AI-driven automation, and product strategy—have not only earned third-party recognition but also helped define what it means to build technology with both purpose and precision. ♦

MOST INSPIRING
BUSINESS LEADERS
in USA 2025

Helping Salespeople Sell the Way Customers Buy

STU SCHLACKMAN

✉ President, 🏢 **Stu Schlackman**

Sales isn't just about what you're selling—it's about who you're selling to. The best salespeople don't just pitch products; they understand people. In fact, research shows that top-performing sales professionals spend 40% more time building relationships than their average counterparts. Why? Because deals aren't won by features and discounts—they're won by trust.

Few people understand this better than Stu Schlackman, a seasoned sales strategist who has spent decades helping professionals master the art of selling through connection. As the creator of the "Four Personality Styles You Should Know" framework, he has shown sales teams how to tailor their approach based on client personalities—leading to shorter sales cycles, higher close rates, and up to 90% revenue growth. But his expertise isn't just built on theory—it comes from decades of hands-on experience in the field. He started his career as an engineer, working on complex systems before transitioning into sales, where he quickly realized that success wasn't just about knowing the product—it was about knowing people. Over the years, he climbed the ranks, leading high-performing teams in companies like Digital Equipment Corporation, DecisionOne Corporation, and Antrim Corporation. From managing multi-million-dollar sales pipelines to coaching organizations through major transformations, Stu has seen firsthand what works—and what doesn't—when it comes to closing deals. His philosophy is simple: sales isn't a transaction; it's a relationship. Thus, he firmly believes that;

TradeFlock interviewed Stu Schlackman to dive deeper into his strategies and better understand how he unlocks the power of Relationship Selling.

Q What made you realize that sales—and later, coaching—was your true calling?
Sales? No way. That's for people who don't need a brain. That's exactly what I told a friend when he suggested

"You can have the best pitch in the world, but if you don't understand the person across from you, you're just talking—not selling."

I consider a career in sales. He just laughed and told me I had no idea how challenging it really was. That stuck with me.

So, I took the leap—and after nine months of intense sales training, I realized he was right. Sales wasn't just about pushing a product; it was about understanding people, solving problems, and building trust. I loved it. Over the next five years, I climbed the ranks, but what excited me even more was teaching others the skills I had learned.

That's when I knew—coaching was my true calling. I moved into sales training, became one of two trainers for a five-state region, and eventually built my own business. Now, for 20 years, I've been doing what I love—helping others master the art of sales.

Q How has "Relationship Selling" evolved for you, and where is it headed?
I used to think sales was all about relationships—but then I realized it's about understanding them. Every customer is different. What motivates one person might not matter

to another. That's when it hit me: "It's not about how you sell—it's about how your customer buys."

I started studying personality styles and saw a gap—everyone took personality tests, but no one was using them to sell smarter. So, I developed my Four Personality Styles framework—Orange, Blue, Gold, and Green—to help salespeople adapt, connect, and close deals more effectively.

The future of sales? Less scripts, more connection. And that's exactly where I'm focused.

Q Do you think the human element is at risk with AI streamlining sales?
At the end of the day, people buy from people. Relationships, referrals, and real conversations still drive sales. AI might help with efficiency, but it will never replace the human connection that makes deals happen. People don't buy from robots—they buy from those they trust. That's why the human element in sales isn't disappearing—it's more important than ever.

"Let's get one thing straight that AI can analyze data, streamline processes, and even assist in sales—but it can't build trust."

Q Is there a sales myth you completely disagree with?

"Cold calling doesn't work."

I hear that all the time—and it couldn't be further from the truth. With all the information at our fingertips today, no call is truly cold. Social media, websites, and industry insights let you personalize your approach and make an immediate connection. It's not about dialing randomly—it's about reaching out with purpose. When you do that, you can contact anyone.

Q How do you coach introverted salespeople, and what's your next big goal?

Introverts actually have a natural edge in sales—they're great listeners. Sales isn't about talking more; it's about asking the right questions. When they lean into that strength, they build deeper, more meaningful connections.

As for what's next, I'm excited to take my training further—developing more online courses and maybe even writing another book. There's always more to learn, and I love helping others grow in their sales journey. ♦



Editor's Pick

CORPORATE BARTERING

The Billion-Dollar Economy You Don't See

When most people think of bartering, they picture an old-world marketplace where traders swap livestock for grain or gold for spices. But in today's corporate world, bartering has evolved into a sophisticated, strategic practice where companies exchange goods and services without ever exchanging cash.

From media companies trading ad space for hotel accommodations to airlines exchanging flight seats for maintenance services, corporate bartering has become a billion-dollar industry operating largely behind the scenes. In fact, the International Reciprocal Trade Association (IRTA) estimates that corporate barter transactions in the U.S. alone exceed \$12 billion annually.

A Game of Strategic Swaps

Unlike cash transactions, corporate bartering relies on perceived value rather than market price. A company with excess inventory, unused services, or even underutilized real estate can trade these assets for something of equal value—often facilitated by specialized barter exchange.

For example, a luxury hotel chain with empty rooms might barter with an airline, offering accommodations for airline staff in exchange for airline tickets for their executives. Similarly, a television network might trade advertising time with a tech company looking to boost its brand visibility.

Corporate barter networks like Tradebank, IMS Barter, and Barter Business Unlimited act as intermediaries, helping businesses navigate complex trades without the need for direct one-to-one exchanges. These networks assign trade credits, allowing companies to barter with multiple partners while keeping transactions fair.

What Do Cashless Transactions Mean?

Bartering isn't just for small businesses looking to cut costs—it plays a massive role in industries like media, aviation, hospitality, and manufacturing. Bartering offers companies a way to maximize resources, reduce waste, and acquire valuable services without depleting cash reserves. However, it also comes with challenges like complexity of determining fair value and taxation under IRS regulations.

A Digital Revolution

With the rise of blockchain and digital trade platforms, bartering is becoming more efficient and transparent. Companies are leveraging AI and smart contracts to match trade opportunities seamlessly, reducing the friction that once made bartering difficult to scale. As businesses continue looking for creative ways to cut costs and stay competitive, corporate bartering may become an even more significant part of the modern economy. The question isn't whether businesses will barter—it's how far this secret world of trade can go. ♦

NIKE



FLIGHT PERSONIFIED

OFF-WHITE x UNION LA x TRAVIS SCOTT x NIKE AJ1 LOW





Mercedes-Benz

GET



BE THE DREAM CATCHER