



THE TOP 25

INSPIRATIONAL *Leaders*

Celebrating
our 16th
Year of
Publishing

Featuring

NICOLE CONGER

The Law Office
of Nicole Conger, PLLC

-Story on Page 8





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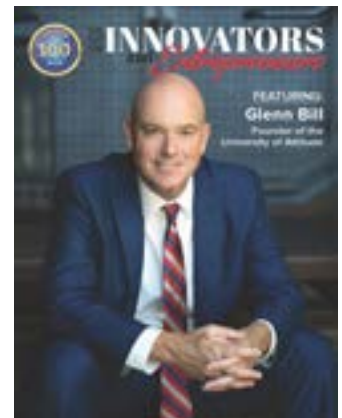
Editor-in-Chief:
Heather Andrews

Graphic Design:
Soha Farrokhi

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I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the exceptional leaders featured in this issue for allowing us to share their extraordinary stories. Each journey reflects courage, purpose, and an unwavering commitment to making a meaningful impact in the world. Their achievements remind us that leadership is not defined solely by titles, but by the strength, heart, and resilience they bring to every challenge. It is my hope that their accomplishments continue to uplift others, spark new possibilities, and inspire future generations to lead with vision, integrity, and compassion.

Joseph Nunziato
CEO, Redwood Media

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Featuring

A - D: Argue, Tyler-43; Baek, Dr. Chris-28; Beyer, Kurt-39; Burton, Lee-26; Conger, Nicole-8; Domingues, Dr. Heather-16; Dunn, Jim-30

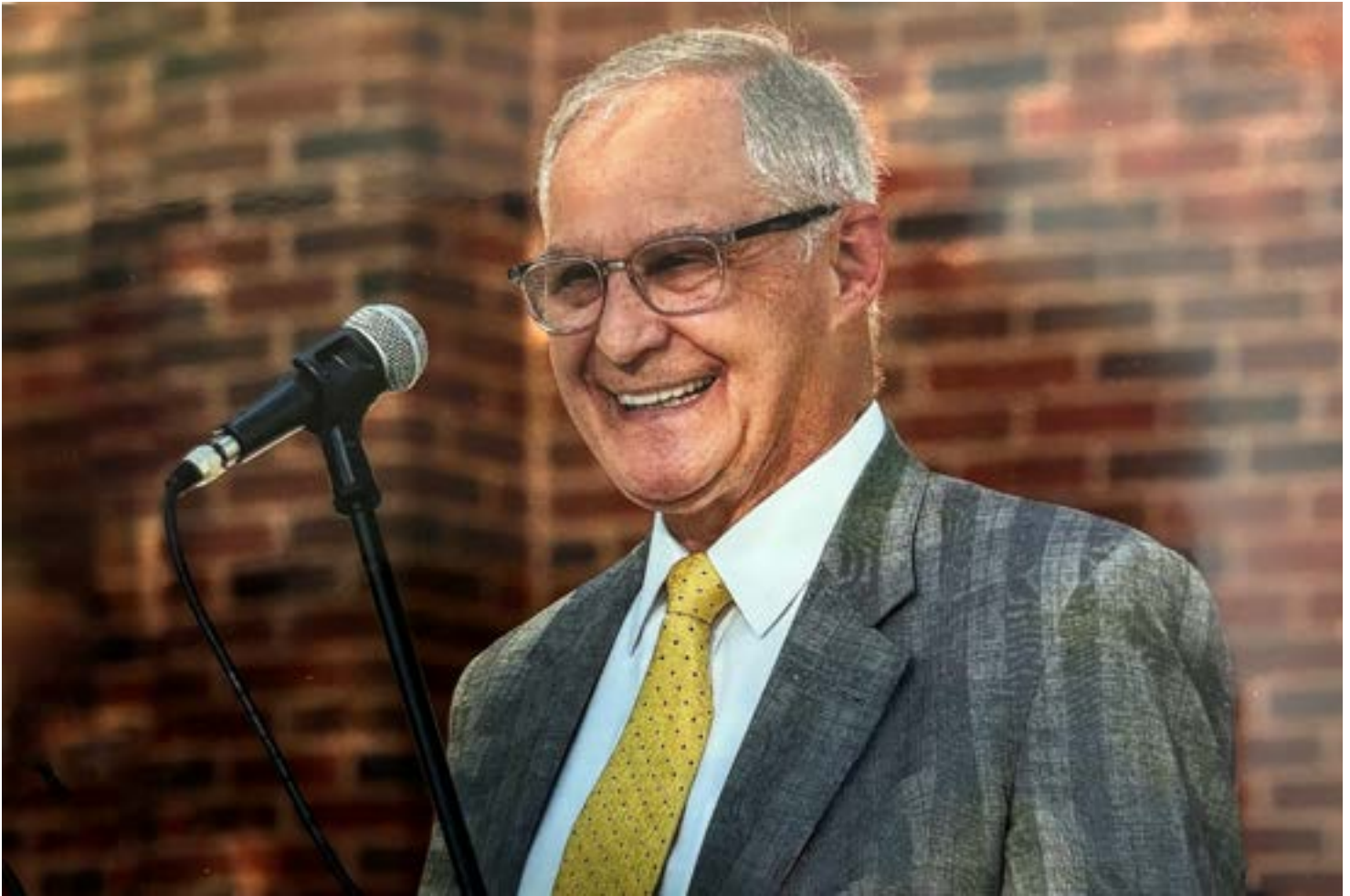
E - L: Fuentes, Kai-12; Geraci, Michael-35; Hakimata, Paul-14; Jones, Dr. Douglas-38; Kauffman, Daniel-22; Keegan, Brendan P.-32; Kruidenier, Payton-42; Lopez, Eric-10

M - R: Marino, Jude Thomas-40; McGinley, Kyle-42; Montgomery, Fred-4; Pichardo, Jennifer-20; Porter, Alan-41; Reid, Jason-18

S - Z: Vega, Dr. Luisa-24; Walden, Joshua-34; Wance, Felipe-36; Yukilevich, Mayya-37

**THE TRAILBLAZERS. THE LEADERS.
THE CHANGE-MAKERS. THE DREAMERS.**

We bring the stories of extraordinary people to the world.



FRED MONTGOMERY

Mentor, Advisor: NEL 2.0/ Community Corporate Mentorship Program under Sunshine Enterprises

When a Good Idea Finds the Right Engine

When Fred Montgomery was last featured, NEL 2.0 was gaining momentum—quietly, deliberately, and with measurable impact. Today, that momentum has a more focused direction.

Since that previous publication, NEL 2.0 has transformed, becoming the Community Corporate Mentorship Program under Sunshine Enterprises. This transition marks a pivotal evolution—proof that Fred’s concept worked so well it demanded a larger platform. What began as a second-generation mentorship model has now been absorbed into a respected, established organization with the infrastructure, credibility, and reach to scale it across Chicagoland. For Fred, the change represents validation. For the entrepreneurs it serves, it represents acceleration.

Over the past year, Sunshine Enterprises and Fred’s mentorship framework have merged into a more powerful engine—one that pairs graduate-level mentorship with faster access to capital, deeper operational guidance, and long-term support. Entrepreneurs once navigating growth alone now have teams. Ideas once slowed by funding gaps are moving forward in weeks, not months. And Fred, relieved of administrative burdens, is doing what he does best: Finding mentors and matching them with entrepreneurs.

The results speak for themselves.

Entrepreneurs mentored through the program now have products on shelves at Mariano’s and Walmart, serve municipal clients including the Aurora Police Department, and are receiving local and regional media attention. They are hiring, expanding, buying property, and building businesses that generate not only income—but independence.

This is not a story about a program being handed off. It is a story about an idea growing up.

Q&A with Fred Montgomery

Fred, Sunshine Enterprises has adopted NEL 2.0, now called the Community Corporate Mentorship Program. What does this new chapter represent?

It represents scale and sustainability. NEL 2.0 was always designed to be different—more flexible, more personalized, and more realistic about what entrepreneurs actually need to grow. Sunshine Enterprises saw that this model was working and recognized that by integrating it into their ecosystem, we could dramatically expand its reach. Sunshine already provides excellent foundational training for entrepreneurs—from side hustles to early-stage companies. What the Community Corporate Mentorship Program adds is that next level. I often describe it as graduate school for entrepreneurs. It's not time-limited, it's not one-size-fits-all, and it doesn't rely on a single mentor trying to be everything to everyone. Now, with Sunshine administering the program and the capital funds, we can move faster, support more entrepreneurs, and remove bottlenecks that often stall promising businesses. And for me personally, it means I can focus my time where it matters most—networking with mentors and entrepreneurs to share best practices.

How did your mentorship model shape the program Sunshine adopted?

The core idea was simple but unconventional: entrepreneurs don't need programs, they need teams. Instead of placing business owners into large cohorts or assigning them one mentor for a fixed period, NEL 2.0 built small, flexible mentorship teams tailored to each entrepreneur's needs. A food business might need finance and real estate expertise. A manufacturing startup might need operations and cash-flow modeling. A service company might need marketing and HR guidance—right now, not six weeks from now.

We also built on-demand access to specialists, so entrepreneurs aren't stuck waiting for a scheduled workshop while their business problem grows. Sunshine saw that this model—combined with quicker, smarter access to capital—was accelerating outcomes in ways traditional programs often can't. By adopting it, they've created a more powerful system that supports entrepreneurs from early promise through real, sustainable growth.

Tell us about the mentors who make this model work.

We simply couldn't do this without our mentors. They are the backbone of the program.

Marcus Yancy, senior program manager for Sunshine's Credit to Capital Program, plays a critical role in integrating financing with mentorship. He helps ensure entrepreneurs aren't just accessing capital—but using it strategically.



“

The core idea was simple but unconventional: entrepreneurs don't need programs, they need teams.

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Ray Bacon, a retired senior executive from the Federal Reserve, works closely with entrepreneurs on breakeven analysis, financial planning, and understanding how money actually moves through their businesses.

Paul Finley brings deep real estate expertise, which has been invaluable for entrepreneurs navigating leases, buildouts, and property acquisition.

Dave and Maureen Grinnell are respected marketing and advertising experts who help businesses clarify their messaging, positioning, and growth strategy.

These mentors donate their time and wisdom, and the impact they have—both practical and personal—is extraordinary.



Since your last feature, several entrepreneurs have made major strides. Let's start with Danie's Natural Juice.

Danie's progress is a perfect example of what sustained mentorship can do. When we last spoke in early 2025, we had secured capital to keep her business moving and assembled a mentorship team that included a finance mentor, myself, and later Paul Finley for real estate guidance. At that point, she was selling at farmers markets and on her website. Today, her business looks entirely different. As of December 2025, Danie is expanding wholesale distribution from 13 to 20 Mariano's locations. She's intentionally reducing her farmers market presence and narrowing her website product offerings—not as a retreat, but as a strategic focus on scalable wholesale production. She also received a grant to open a second brick-and-mortar retail location. However, after analyzing the cost of remodeling and the profitability of retail sales, she decided to emphasize wholesale sales. She is scaling operations so she can sell to 30 Mariano's locations and is looking for more wholesale customers.

Paul and I continue to work closely with Danie. She calls us her Board of Directors. Paul guides decisions around operational requirements—production, refrigeration, freezers and store delivery—while I focus on pricing, margins, and financial metrics, especially in light of rising commodity costs. She's making decisions now with the mindset of a wholesaler, not a market vendor. That shift is everything.



Cassandra's story is particularly powerful. How has her journey evolved?

Cassandra's journey taught me as much as it taught her. When I first began working with her, she had been running a preschool daycare in Englewood for 25 years, teaching 12 students out of the first floor of her two-flat residence. She's an exceptional educator with deep roots in her community, but accounting and financial management were major obstacles. Over 18 months, we worked with an accountant to develop proper financial statements—P&Ls, balance sheets, budgets, forecasts. Despite her effort, she struggled to internalize the skills, and for a time, I wasn't sure she would be able to scale.

Fast forward to now: Cassandra has just closed on a three-storefront building in Englewood. She has expanded her daycare to approximately 42 students. One storefront will serve about 16 autistic children—the first daycare of its kind in the neighborhood. The second will house a traditional daycare with about 26 children. The third storefront will be used for activity rooms, community events, or future expansion. She already has several teachers lined up, and the community response has been enthusiastic. This expansion was made possible through our mentorship team model and the Bridge Loan Fund. The bank required a 20% down payment—\$66,000. Cassandra had 10%. The Bridge Fund provided the remaining 10%, allowing her to move forward with the renovation of the building so it can open for the next school semester. What makes this story special is not just the growth—it's the dignity of it. Cassandra now owns her building, controls her finances, and is using her talents to increase educational access in her community.

Jannice is a newer mentee with a rapidly growing business. What makes her story stand out?

Jannice’s situation highlights why quick access to capital matters. She developed plant-based, hypoallergenic braiding hair—a genuine innovation in an industry dominated by plastic products that cause heat, irritation, and allergic reactions. Her product eliminates those issues. Her business operates both B2B and B2C. She sells wholesale, runs a direct-to-consumer website, participates in industry shows, and white-labels her product for other brands. An “influencer” got involved and her product went viral. Demand exploded almost overnight. She suddenly had a backlog of more than 400 orders and didn’t have the cash flow or production capacity to meet demand. We stepped in quickly. I worked on her cash-flow projections and helped her secure a \$30,000 loan from the Bridge Fund. That funding allowed her to purchase supplies, invest in new machinery that increased production speed fivefold, and clear the backlog. And it illustrates why the Bridge Loan Fund and its ability to provide quick access to capital is a critical feature of the Community Corporate mentorship Program.

You’ve mentioned learning lessons as a mentor. What stands out most?

Understanding pace. Every entrepreneur moves at a different speed. Early on, I assumed businesses should progress at a certain pace—my pace. Cassandra taught me that growth doesn’t work that way. Some entrepreneurs are hares. Others are tortoises. As a mentor, you have to understand not just the business—but the person running it. You have to know when to push, when to wait, when to bring in a specialist, and when to step back.

I also learned the importance of timing in financing the operations. Borrowing money too early or from the wrong source can actually reduce an entrepreneur’s control. Cassandra could have mortgaged inherited properties or rushed into bank financing. By waiting, she was able to identify preschool teachers with experience in autism and find a building that could accommodate her special needs.

How does it feel to see NEL 2.0 grow under Sunshine Enterprises?

It’s deeply gratifying. This transition takes what I could do as an individual and multiplies it through an organization with reach, infrastructure, and credibility. It means more entrepreneurs served, more streamlined access to capital, and more mentors engaged. As the program grew, administration consumed more of my time. Now Sunshine carries that responsibility, and I can spend my energy helping sensible, determined business owners achieve their goals. That’s the work I love.

How can industry leaders get involved as mentors?

We’re always looking for business people who have worked in the private sector and who want to make a meaningful impact. If someone is interested in mentoring, they can contact me, attend an information session and complete a form outlining their expertise. From there, a program administrators will match mentors with entrepreneurs and set expectations for engagement. The commitment is real—but so is the reward. Our mentors consistently tell us they gain as much from the experience as the entrepreneurs do. This work changes businesses, families, and communities. And it wouldn’t happen without them.



The Work Behind the Results

What ultimately distinguishes the Community Corporate Mentorship Program is not its structure, its funding mechanisms, or even its growing list of success stories—it is Fred Montgomery’s role as its connective force. Fred does not simply oversee the program; he animates it. His value lies in the rare combination of strategic vision, pattern recognition, and human judgment that cannot be systematized or automated.

Fred understands that entrepreneurship is not linear. Business plans change. Personal circumstances intervene. Timing matters as much as talent. Where many programs rely on fixed curricula and predetermined milestones, Fred operates in real time—diagnosing problems as they arise and assembling the right people to solve them.

In a landscape crowded with programs, Fred Montgomery remains indispensable because he is not running a process—he is stewarding people, decisions, and outcomes. And that human element is precisely what makes the program work.

CONTACT

Email: fhmontgomery@gmail.com

LI: www.linkedin.com/in/fred-montgomery-b279a422



A Calling Rooted in Light

In a world often overwhelmed by noise, division, and fear, Nicole Conger moves with a different frequency. Hers is a life guided not by opposition, but by devotion—an unwavering belief in humanity, healing, and love as active forces. For Nicole, the ancient struggle of darkness versus light is not an abstract concept. It is a daily choice. And her choice, again and again, is light.

That choice shapes everything she does—as a woman of faith, as a daughter, as a servant to her community, and yes, as an attorney. Law is not her identity; it is her instrument. Her purpose runs deeper, grounded in an immeasurable love for humanity and a conviction that presence itself can heal.

From Austin Roots to a Broader Horizon

Nicole's professional journey began in Texas, where she earned her undergraduate degree Summa Cum Laude from the University of Texas at Austin, graduating in the top two percent of her class and completing a business management degree at the Red McCombs School of Business. She went on to receive her law degree Magna Cum Laude from the St. Mary's University School of Law in 2011, later clerking for the Honorable Emilio M. Garza on the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Today, The Law Office of Nicole Conger, PLLC, marks more than eight years of practice. Though licensed and practicing in Texas, Nicole now resides in Los Angeles—where she speaks often of the kindness, generosity, and beauty she has experienced in her community. Her Austin roots remain firmly planted, but her vision has expanded, shaped by the people and places that continue to affirm her belief in human goodness.

Law as Service, Not Status

Nicole practices plaintiff-side employment and civil rights law, representing individuals across Texas who have experienced illegal treatment at the hands of employers. Her areas of focus include sexual harassment and assault, discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, race, disability, religion, age, and violations involving medical leave. Yet, when Nicole speaks about her work, she does not lead with statutes or strategy. She speaks of listening. Of creating safety. Of bearing witness. Clients entrust her with the most vulnerable chapters of their lives—stories they may never have spoken aloud. For Nicole, being heard is not a legal step; it is the first moment of healing. She does not separate who she is as a lawyer from who she is as a human. She arrives with warmth, color, laughter, and authenticity, even in the hardest moments. In a profession that often rewards detachment, Nicole believes sincerity is radical—and necessary.

Nicole Conger

ATTORNEY | ADVOCATE | HUMANITARIAN

"My choice is light."



www.nicoleconger.com | nicole@nicoleconger.com

LI: www.linkedin.com/in/nicole-m-conger-9abb3019

FB: @Nicole-Conger | IG: @CONGERNICOLE

A Philosophy of Presence and Unity

At the heart of Nicole's life is a simple, expansive philosophy: imagine how many people, places, and communities could heal because of your presence. Her firm is rooted in unity and what she calls "colorful love"—a love that refuses hierarchy, prejudice, or fear. She speaks openly of faith, of God and the heavens, and of healing as the foundation of all relationships and all humanity. Each day, she chooses to show up unmasked, believing that authenticity is what allows people to feel seen, tended to, and renewed. In her view, leadership demands courage—not just to speak truth, but to live it visibly.

“

I want to be remembered as someone who gave all glory to God, whose service extended beyond professionalism, and who advanced human rights with intention.

Her Greatest Inspiration

Nicole's deepest inspiration is her mother, who passed away in 2005. In her final days, as hospice came and went and Nicole lay beside her, her mother repeated a simple refrain: "Always continue your education. Keep going. I'm so proud of you."

A special education teacher by calling and by heart, her mother modeled service without spectacle. Those final words became a compass. Nicole felt a sacred responsibility not only to continue learning, but to live in a way that honored the life and values her mother embodied. That devotion continues to guide how she serves, how she practices law, and how she loves the world.

A Legacy Measured in Light

Nicole does not measure success by accolades, though they have come—recognition from the Diversity Council for Top 50 Women in Law, Go Magazine's 100 Women We Love, Super Lawyers Texas Rising Star, and honors from the International Association of Top Professionals, among others. What matters most to her is legacy. She hopes to be remembered as someone who gave all glory to God, whose service extended beyond professionalism, and who advanced human rights with intention. She wants to be known as someone who truly knew her community, became part of its fabric, and contributed daily—on purpose. Calm but brilliant. Untamed. Authentically herself.



A Letter That Carries the Light Forward

Dear Mommy,

As time passes without you, your presence is even more noticeable by all whose paths I cross. I kiss your picture multiple times daily because of missing you so badly. Aside from looking just like you, they tell me that I am your service-led heart. I share details on every beautiful memory that you created for me, or the ways that you so effortlessly took steps for a better life for us, your students, and strangers.

Thank you again for giving me life, and an extraordinarily rare soul who keeps carrying out the work on my life. I find myself fearless, and even more empowered by God to stay in perfect alignment with Heaven and the Kingdom. Thank you for not making me slow on my calling. Thank you for giving me the courage and stamina to fight the good fight down here on earth, and for covering me with protections from Heaven. I am never alone because I have you with me. Thank you for being my cheerleader in school, in dance, in life. Thank you for every victory from attackers, and filling me to be the example of joy, a cheerful heart of changing the globe, and leaving the planet better than when I arrived. I would give anything to have you back for even five minutes to kiss you and laugh with you. Instead, I continue on the radiant path you set for me, because I know that Heaven is my home.



ERIC LOPEZ

Founder and Principal

A PURPOSE WRITTEN IN HIS DNA

In the summer of 2025, Eric Lopez found himself at a gala dinner in Santander, Spain, during the 28th Annual U.S.-Spain Council Forum. Senators, congressional representatives, and international leaders filled the historic hall. The King of Spain, Felipe VI, arrived. As interim executive director of the Fulbright Association, Eric seized the moment. He shook the monarch's hand and spoke to him about Fulbright, determined to advocate for the program he was working to protect.

"It was surreal," Eric reflected later. "As I was shaking his hand, I thought, 'Who would have thought a kid from the Bronx would grow up to be hobnobbing with royalty?' Not in my wildest dreams did I think that. The last time I had that thought was when I shook hands with President Obama." The evening closed with fireworks exploding across the Spanish sky.

The origins of that defining moment trace back to Eric's roots and the legacy of service embedded in his DNA, stretching back to his great-grand uncle, Nicolás Silfa Canario, a decorated World War II veteran from the Dominican Republic who fought in the Western Pacific Theater. For Eric, the drive to make an impact and serve a greater purpose is not just a career—it is heritage.

The Legend of the Black Egg and the Bronx

Eric often recalls the "Legend of the Black Egg," a story he rarely shares, but one that symbolizes his own unlikely journey. Born and raised in the South Bronx during the 1980s, Eric's world was defined by resilience. "The building I grew up in was the only standing building on the block," he remembers. "Although we weren't blood related, everyone in that building was family. As a young man, I thought the whole world was like that."

Television painted a different reality—neat suburban homes, manicured lawns. "I thought those were fictional TV settings. Then one day my dad, who was a handyman, brought me to a job on Staten Island. I saw a private house and thought, 'What is going on? Why don't we have this?' That's when I started to wonder why society is the way it is. From then on, my aim was to help change this—to make an impact on communities and people's lives. That's what has driven my entire career."

Early Steps Toward Service

Eric's professional path began in the nonprofit space after graduating from Hofstra University. He worked as a client advocate at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS), determined to address systemic inequities he had witnessed firsthand. After three years at NDS, and at the caring insistence of mentor and friend, Dr. Linda Longmire, he applied for a Fulbright grant—an opportunity that would become a turning point.

Fulbright in Hungary: A Defining Year

In 2008, Eric was awarded a Fulbright grant to Hungary. He spent a year in a rural community where Romani leaders had founded the Dr. Ambedkar School. "In that classroom, but for the language, I completely recognized all the social cues, interactions, everything that was going on. I felt like I was back in the South Bronx," he says. "That revelation—that we're all the same, that kids everywhere want the same things—was eye-opening. It was a beautiful, amazing experience."

That year shaped his philosophy of service and reinforced his belief in the power of international exchange to bridge divides.

Building a Multifaceted Career

After returning from Hungary, Eric moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a fellow at the White House Office of Management and Budget, entrusted with projects that impacted millions. He then joined the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, followed by the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility (HACR), where he helped to lead the Research Institute and the HACR Corporate Inclusion Index.

Seeking a broader skill set, Eric entered the private sector, leading outreach and policy initiatives. He later became Executive Director of Governance, Programs & Enterprise Priorities at Comcast NBCUniversal Telemundo, where he learned to navigate corporate leadership at scale.



Over two decades, Eric built trusted relationships with executives, policymakers, and nonprofit leaders. “When someone trusts me, I treat it as a responsibility I must honor—and I will go to great lengths to protect it,” he notes. Alongside these roles, he founded GlobeServe Consulting in 2012, advising nonprofits and corporations on global outreach and partnership development.

Eric has also worked closely with, and continues to support, the work of organizations such as HACR, and CHCI.

Leading Fulbright Through Crisis

Eric joined the Fulbright Association’s board in 2023, quickly rising through leadership roles. By early 2025, he was board secretary. Then, in June 2025, he was asked to step in as interim executive director—the first Latino to hold the role—in the midst of an unprecedented crisis.

The Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board resigned and the program faced the threat of permanent defunding. Alumni, chapters, and international leaders looked to Eric for direction. “These were extraordinary circumstances,” he says. “I was working with Executive directors of commissions across the world to help turn the tide.” He galvanized stakeholders, coordinated advocacy with congressional members, and worked closely with FFSB board members to help save the program.

His diverse background—in government, nonprofit, and corporate leadership—proved essential. “I took all my experiences and applied it here,” he says. The

result: Fulbright’s funding was secured, ensuring the program’s continuation.

Spain: A Moment of Recognition

Eric’s leadership was on full display at the U.S.-Spain Council Forum in Santander. Advocating for Fulbright alongside U.S. senators and representatives, he underscored the program’s impact. The highlight came when he spoke directly with the King of Spain, an honorary Fulbrighter. “I told him about the support we need. He said he was fully supportive. Later, in his remarks, he emphasized international academic freedom and transatlantic cooperation—all that we stand for. That was powerful.”

Full Circle: Back to Hungary

Eric’s journey will come full circle in February 2026, when he will return to Hungary to give closing remarks at the 80th anniversary of the Fulbright Program and the 250th anniversary of the U.S. . For him, it is both a professional honor and a personal milestone.

“My career has been about impact and service,” he says. “That’s what led me from the South Bronx to Hungary, to the halls of Congress, to corporate boardrooms, and now to international stages. To return to Hungary, where it all began, is a reminder that the work of building bridges never ends.”



eric.lopez.2888@gmail.com | LI: www.linkedin.com/in/eric-lopez



Kai

KAI K. FUENTES

President and Founder

A Multicultural Lens on Market Research

Kai K. Fuentes describes herself as a “market research brat.” As the daughter of a market researcher, she was immersed in the field at a young age, conducting her first interview at just 12 years old. Over time, that early exposure blossomed into a stellar career.

kfuentes@ebonysystems.com | www.ebonysystems.com | www.linkedin.com/in/kai-k-fuentes

After garnering more than 20 years of experience in qualitative and quantitative research, Kai developed a unique expertise in uncovering the cultural and linguistic nuances that shape consumer behaviors. Yet she recognized a critical gap in the industry: very few firms were conducting meaningful market research within multicultural and multilingual communities. Determined to fill that void, she founded Ebony Marketing Systems Inc. (EMS) in 2011.

Today, EMS stands as a certified MWBE, DBE, SBE, WOSB, and 8(A) company headquartered in New York. Its mission is to provide creative, innovative, and reliable research solutions, especially in multicultural and multilingual settings. The firm primarily serves transportation agencies, healthcare organizations, government bodies, nonprofits, and corporations, going beyond numbers to capture the experiences of diverse populations across the U.S.

The company’s core philosophy is simple yet profound: traditional, one-size-fits-all research methods no longer suffice. With people of color now representing four in ten Americans, Hispanic and Asian individuals comprising nearly a quarter of the population, and linguistic diversity at historic highs, a multicultural approach is not just valuable—it’s imperative.

What inspired your desire to specialize in a multicultural approach to market research and focus much of your work on the transportation industry?

I’m a Queens girl. Queens, New York is the most diverse borough in the world, and I had the privilege of growing up there. I spent so many formative years riding the 7 Train, where 35 languages are spoken within a 10-stop radius. I went to a high school where only ten of us spoke English. Even in elementary school, my closest friends were from all different religious backgrounds. I was intrigued, and we’re still connected today. Growing up as a young Black woman surrounded by such cultural diversity shaped me. That experience gave me a front-row seat to how people from different backgrounds live, work, and interact—and it showed me early on that a one-size-fits-all approach never works. When I founded Ebony, I wanted to capture those nuances and lead authentically, not as a corporate version of myself. Transportation became a natural focus because mass transit touches everyone, every culture, every community. It’s where diversity is most visible and where equity in service delivery matters most. I wanted to bring my multicultural lens into that space and do meaningful work that directly impacts communities, everyday people’s lives, and generations to come—work that makes my soul sing.

How critical is a multicultural market research approach to the success of organizations now and going forward?

It's not just critical, it's a necessity. By 2030, Gen Z will be the first U.S. generation with more people of color than not. To succeed, organizations must understand these audiences—how they think, how they spend, how they want to be communicated with. For example, mass transit agencies face declining ridership and revenue post-pandemic. To survive, they must adapt, connect with diverse riders, and understand their needs. That's where we come in.

What makes your company's approach unique?

We blend social science with multicultural research. We don't just ask what people do—we uncover why. Our team is multicultural and multilingual, which allows us to connect authentically with target audiences. For one government client, we conducted 30 focus groups in 30 different languages via Zoom, covering everything from English to Tagalog, Hmong, Mandarin, and Haitian Creole. We also meet people where they are—whether that's a coffee shop in Brooklyn or a San Joaquin Valley community center. That kind of cultural and linguistic alignment creates trust and richer data.

Ebony has succeeded where many traditional research firms fail. How is your approach different?

Traditional firms often assign anyone to multicultural projects, without cultural alignment, and the research falls flat. We do the opposite—we enlist moderators and field researchers from the specific target community. A 65-year-old Latina interviewing unacculturated Latina teens won't yield honest insights. But when the interviewer shares the participants' cultural background, trust develops and the data is richer. We once declined a subcontracting offer from a large firm with no multicultural expertise. They tried to run the project themselves and failed. The client came back to us, and we delivered exactly what was needed. That's the power of our approach.

The transportation sector is a big focus for EMS. How are you helping agencies at this critical juncture?

We're one of the few firms still doing in-person field research post-COVID. Our team conducts origin and destination studies, evaluates customer experiences, and gathers community feedback. We don't just bring back numbers—we report what people actually say: "This stop needs more cleaning," "Increase accessibility here," or "Add a stop in this neighborhood." This helps transit agencies make informed, strategic changes that reflect riders' needs.

Can you share some projects that really made your soul sing?

In healthcare, our research contributed to the development of once-a-month HIV medication because patients told us they valued time more than reduced side effects.



That was powerful. We also worked on anti-smoking campaigns targeting urban youth, where we discovered which messages and platforms would resonate most. In disaster preparedness, we studied how Black, Latino, and API communities wanted to be communicated with, and now I see commercials we helped shape. Those moments remind us that our work has a tangible impact.

Tell us about your company culture and your leadership style.

I don't lead from the top down. I see myself as part of the team. We're collaborative and supportive, and I encourage my staff to try new things—even if they fail, it's not failure, it's learning. My secret sauce is creating a respectful, diverse, and loving environment where different perspectives make us stronger. I'm proud of the team we've built, and everything we achieve, we achieve together.

Paul Hakimata

SPECIALIST MOLECULAR GENOMICS



Our perspective blends science and practicality. We begins with two guiding questions: *How does this help the patient?* and *How can we make it faster and better?*



PAUL HAKIMATA: REDEFINING PATIENT-CENTERED CANCER CARE

Paul Hakimata, MSc, MBA, is a specialist in molecular genomics at the Memorial Cancer Institute, part of the Memorial Healthcare System, and designated Florida Cancer Center of Excellence, whose groundbreaking work is transforming cancer treatment delivery. For more than 25 years, he has pursued answers in genetics, molecular biology, and biotechnology, pairing those disciplines with skills in computer coding and healthcare administration. His career began in research, but after the devastating loss of his wife to cancer a decade ago, Paul shifted into the clinical side of medicine. There, he saw firsthand how fragmented systems and slow turnaround times were costing patients precious weeks—time many of them did not have.

Today, his relentless drive to improve workflows and integrate precision medicine across departments has led to innovations that are saving lives and reshaping the standard of care. This is the story of a scientist whose personal tragedy became a catalyst for systemic change, a fearless surgeon willing to listen, and a healthcare system that embraced innovation to better serve its patients.

Memorial Healthcare System: A Mission to Heal

Based in Hollywood, Florida, Memorial Healthcare System is one of the largest public, not-for-profit health systems in the

U.S., employing over 17,000 staff across six hospitals with more than 2,260 beds. Founded in 1953, Memorial is known nationally for quality, safety, and patient satisfaction. Its mission—“Heal the body, mind, and spirit of those we touch”—is carried out through a vision of exceptional patient- and family-centered care, medical education, research, and innovation. It is within this environment that Paul’s strategies have flourished.

A Unique Approach to Genomics and Care

Paul’s perspective blends science and practicality. He begins with two guiding questions: *How does this help the patient? and How can we make it faster and better?* That philosophy led him to focus on precision medicine workflow improvements, breaking down silos that keep departments isolated. By integrating genetics, clinical practice, and technology, he reduces turnaround times, cuts costs, and improves outcomes.

While genetics is his trade, his MBA gave him a grasp of healthcare administration, helping him align scientific priorities with financial realities. His self-taught computer coding skills—developed out of necessity when IT support fell short—have allowed him to build tools that reduce errors, generate usable data, and together with optimizing and integrating the pre-analytical workflow move cancer patients into treatment about a month sooner than the old status quo.

Technology and Innovation

Paul's background in computer coding grew from necessity and a problem-solving mindset he developed early in his career. Mentored by demanding researchers, he learned to anticipate problems and create solutions on the fly—skills that now drive his clinical innovations. His philosophy is simple: jump in, solve the problem, and fine-tune along the way. This approach has sparked a “snowball effect” of tools and strategies that continually improve patient care.

A Journey of Science and Purpose

Born and raised in The Netherlands, Paul was an average student in subjects requiring memorization but excelled effortlessly in logic-based disciplines such as math, biology, and physics. Initially drawn to surgery, he pivoted toward laboratory science and microbiology, where he discovered the emerging field of genetics in the early 1990s.

Internships and research roles took him from the University of Pennsylvania to the University of Miami, Rockefeller University in New York, and Emory University in Atlanta, where he deepened his expertise in genetic engineering and laboratory management. Throughout his career, cancer research remained a constant interest, but the death of his wife from cancer shifted his focus toward the clinical arena. There, he resolved to confront the inefficiencies of healthcare systems and to use his knowledge to shorten the gap between diagnosis and treatment.

A Surgeon Who Listened

The turning point came during a tumor board at Memorial Cancer Institute. Discussing a lung cancer case, physicians noted that while they could recommend targeted therapies, they were always delayed by the wait for genetic data. For many patients, this waiting period was the difference between treatment and death.

Paul saw a simple solution: ask the surgeon to take an extra specimen during the procedure and send it immediately for genetic testing. The idea required no additional time nor cost, but it would cut weeks off the process. When he proposed it, one surgeon said yes.

That small act of listening launched a systemic shift. Today, Memorial averages genetic results within 8–9 days of surgery, delivered around the same time when the diagnosis is available, compared to an added 2- or 3-weeks industry norm. Patients can begin targeted therapies sooner, reducing ER visits and hospital stays while improving quality of life. What began as a five-minute conversation is now evolving into a standard of care, first for lung cancers and, soon, for other cancers as well.

Professional Accomplishments

Over the course of his career, Paul has developed Excel and Python coding tools that streamline workflows, reduce errors, and generate usable data from specimens once considered inadequate. These innovations have cut cancer treatment timelines by nearly a month, giving patients faster access to life-saving therapies. He has also secured grant funding that elevated Memorial Cancer Institute's research and innovation profile, while advancing



process improvement initiatives that showcase how precision medicine, technology, and cross-departmental collaboration can come together to redefine patient care.

The Road Ahead

Paul Hakimata's story is one of resilience, innovation, and patient-centered purpose. From his early days in microbiology labs to his current role at Memorial Healthcare System, his journey reflects a commitment to breaking barriers between science and care.

With Memorial's support and the collaboration of forward-thinking surgeons and physicians, his vision is becoming reality: precision medicine delivered faster, workflows aligned across departments, and patients receiving care that is not only advanced but compassionate. For Paul, the North Star remains clear—every innovation must lead back to the patient.



Email: paulhakimpour@gmail.com
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/phakimpour

Dr. Heather Domingues

INVENTOR AND CEO

Redefining Mobility, Dignity, and Independence

For Dr. Heather Domingues, mobility has always been more than movement—it's freedom, confidence, and quality of life. As a physical therapist with years of experience working in hospitals, rehab centers, clinics, and home settings, she witnessed firsthand how immobility affects every aspect of a person's wellbeing. Those experiences inspired her life's mission: to help individuals of all ages reclaim independence and live more vibrant lives.

Today, as the inventor and CEO of FeedUp™ Solution, a New Jersey-based medical device company, Dr. Domingues is transforming the world of enteral nutrition. What began as a therapist's frustration with clunky feeding setups has evolved into a patented, FDA-registered device that is revolutionizing how tube-fed patients live, move, and heal.

The Moment That Sparked Innovation

The idea for FeedUp™ was born in the therapy gym at Children's Specialized Hospital in New Jersey, where Dr. Heather Domingues worked with patients recovering from brain injuries. While collaborating with the dedicated team there, she encountered a challenge faced across hospitals everywhere: therapists and nurses trying to help patients move while managing the only equipment available—traditional tubes, pumps, and IV poles not designed for mobility. "We were all trying to walk with patients and support their recovery, but the equipment made it incredibly difficult," she recalls. "The pumps would beep, the tubes would pull, and the focus shifted from the patient to managing all the gear."

After searching for a solution and finding none, Dr. Domingues made a bold decision: if the right device didn't exist, she would create it. Of the nine years that followed, three were spent in intensive research and development before the FeedUp™ Feeding Solution became a reality.

When the device officially launched in May 2025, it quickly found its first customers—including the very place where its story began. Dr. Domingues, who has since partnered with Children's Specialized Hospital, was able to bring FeedUp™ back to the clinicians who inspired its creation. One staff member exclaimed, "We're so excited to be able to work with you again!" Now the team is helping Heather share FeedUp™ with the patients who need it most.

How FeedUp™ Works

FeedUp™ is an FDA-registered, Class I medical device designed to keep feeding tubes upright, reducing bubbles, kinks, and interruptions. Compact, lightweight, and fully

portable, it fits neatly into a custom backpack—eliminating the need for IV poles or cumbersome setups. Available in three models (Infinity Moog, Kangaroo Joey, and Kangaroo Omni), FeedUp™ ensures consistent feeding and easy mobility wherever life takes the user.

By integrating thoughtful design with functional simplicity, the device supports the comfort and independence of millions who rely on enteral nutrition. Whether at home, on vacation, or in clinical care, FeedUp™ gives patients—and their caregivers—the freedom to move safely and confidently.

A Win for Patients, Caregivers, and Clinicians

Dr. Domingues's creation doesn't just simplify feeding—it reimagines care delivery for everyone involved. "With the old setups, transferring or walking a patient meant stopping everything, untangling tubes, or dragging an IV pole," she explains. "Now, all you do is attach the FeedUp™ device to a wheelchair or walker, and it goes wherever the patient goes." This portability improves efficiency for caregivers and clinicians, who can now focus on recovery rather than logistics. The benefits extend to patient outcomes as well. Continuous, uninterrupted feeding ensures better nutrition—essential for healing—while the ability to mobilize sooner accelerates physical recovery. "We're hitting on three critical areas," says Dr. Domingues. "Nutrition, mobility, and safety. The quicker someone gets moving, the quicker their body heals."

Toward a New Standard of Care

Dr. Domingues envisions a future where every enteral nutrition prescription automatically includes a FeedUp™ device. "When a patient is prescribed a feeding pump, the next step should be, 'Here's your FeedUp™ device and backpack—this is how you'll stay mobile,'" she says. "You'll be able to go out, socialize, travel, and live your life without renting an IV pole or taping bags to walls."

Her conviction is clear: "This isn't 1912. You don't need to send patients home with IV poles anymore. Keep those in the warehouse and give them something versatile, safe, and modern." For Dr. Domingues, redefining "normal" for feeding-tube users means giving them tools that foster independence and dignity—the same considerations given to patients who need crutches or wheelchairs.

Beyond Functionality: Design for Life

FeedUp™ devices are housed in durable, full-size backpacks designed in partnership with Feeldom, a company known for adaptive gear. These backpacks fit the entire device while leaving room for personal items, blending practicality with discretion. "Right now, our backpacks come in black, but we're expanding

"All you do is attach the FeedUp™ device to a wheelchair or walker, and it goes wherever the patient goes. This portability improves efficiency for caregivers and clinicians, who can now focus on recovery rather than logistics."

to colors and prints, even custom designs with cartoon characters for kids," says Dr. Domingues. "It's about personalizing the experience—making medical care feel less clinical and more empowering. Each feature is intentional. The goal is to make feeding on the go feel effortless and natural, not restrictive or stigmatizing."

Compassion in Action

While FeedUp™ continues gaining traction in hospitals and clinics nationwide, Dr. Domingues's vision extends far beyond commercialization. Aware that not all patients can afford medical devices out-of-pocket, she launched a donation fund to expand access. "We're working through the process to get insurance coverage," she explains, "but in the meantime, we started a PayPal fund so anyone can donate toward providing devices to those in need."

Thanks to early donations, several units have already been shipped free of charge to patients across the country. Supporters can contribute any amount or purchase and donate a full device directly through this link: <https://lnkd.in/gHefy9dN>.

The Future of Feeding

Dr. Heather Domingues's story embodies what happens when empathy meets innovation. What began as a simple desire to help her patients move more freely has become a global step forward in patient care. FeedUp™ isn't just a device—it's a symbol of possibility for millions of people who rely on enteral feeding.

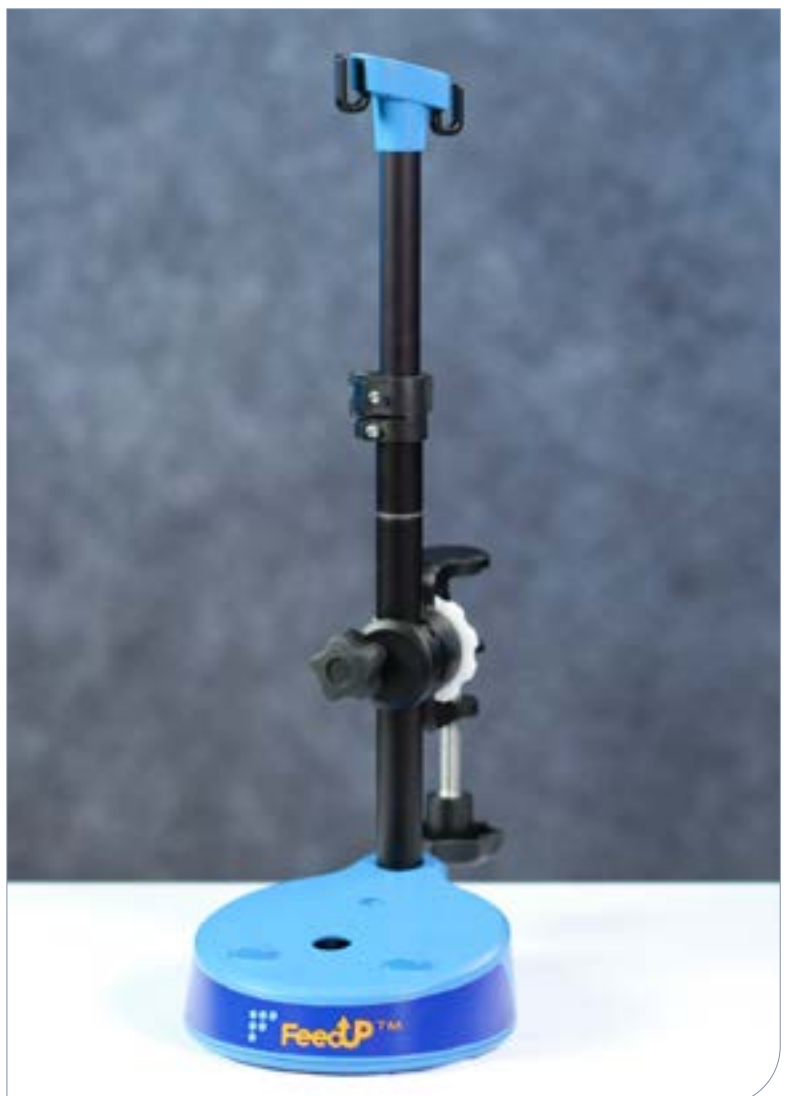


www.feedupsolution.com

heather@feedupsolution.com

LI: www.linkedin.com/in/heather-domingues-3694747a/

Instagram: https://instagram.com/feedup_solution





JASON REID

CEO AND FOUNDER



A Father's Loss That Became a National Mission

In 2018, Jason Reid's life changed in a moment that no parent imagines. While he and his wife were away, their phones vibrated with the same message from their 14-year-old son, Ryan: *"I love you. Goodbye."* By the time they reached him, it was too late. In Ryan's drawer, Jason found two notes. One listed his usernames and passwords. The other held a request that would become his life's purpose: *"Tell my story."*

Jason, a successful entrepreneur who had spent three decades building a nationwide construction company, walked out of the hospital after removing Ryan from life support and went home to start a foundation. His mission was, and remains, unforgivingly clear: eradicate teen suicide by 2030. Ryan's final words became not only a promise, but a legacy. "I couldn't save my son," Jason says, "but if telling his story saves someone else's child, then his story keeps helping the world."

From Business Leader to Relentless Mental Health Advocate

Though Jason had built a thriving company, he realized nothing had prepared him for this mission. "I thought, I'm a business guy. I solve big problems. How do we fix teen suicide?" But as he dove deeper, he discovered a heartbreaking truth: extraordinary people were working tirelessly in youth mental health, yet the problem was too big, too fast-growing, and too misunderstood for any single solution. So, Jason shifted his approach. Instead of trying to solve the entire crisis, he focused on where he could have the greatest impact: parents.

Jason's message is simple, but profound: *Parents must own their children's mental health the same way they own their children's physical health.* To advance this mission, Jason hosts free documentary screenings and speaks at schools, conferences, churches, businesses, and community events—connecting with parents not as a clinician or academic, but as a father who has lived every parent's worst nightmare. "I missed the signs. I don't want you to," he says.

Founding Tell My Story: A Movement of Listening, Tools, and Connection

Based in Irvine, California and founded in 2018, Tell My Story brings youth mental health out of the shadows and into everyday conversations. Since then, the organization has collaborated with more than 50 community partners and national and international organizations, hosting over 200 events and screening its mental health documentaries more than 500 times.

Creating Tools That Help Families Connect

Jason oversees all Tell My Story initiatives, setting the nonprofit's vision, producing its films, interviewing the young participants, and ensuring the organization stays grounded in grassroots, human-centered support. "This isn't a billion-dollar problem requiring a billion-dollar solution," he says. "This is families, neighbors, and communities learning how to talk to each other."

Tell My Story offers resources parents can use immediately:

- The Tell My Story Card Deck, designed to help families break the silence and start meaningful conversations.
- Two mental-health-themed music albums produced with BMG Music, *Songs for the Drive Home*, created so parents and teens can open up together in the safety of a car ride.
- Films, events, and school programs that give both kids and parents the language to ask for help.

“My son asked me to tell his story. I’m going to keep telling it until we end teen suicide—or until I take my last breath trying.”



The Documentaries That Sparked a National Conversation

In 2020, Jason released *Tell My Story*, a feature-length documentary that premiered at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. The film follows his journey across the Pacific Northwest, meeting parents, survivors, mental health leaders, psychiatrists, and teens. What he learned stunned him: kids who smile, laugh, and seem “fine” can be suffering deeply. “They hide it beautifully,” he says. “Ryan hid it. I had no idea.”

The follow-up film, *What I Wish My Parents Knew*, features raw, unfiltered interviews with 10 teens sharing the truths they struggle to tell the adults in their lives. The film has since been shared at over 300 schools, churches, corporate events, community gatherings, and organizations across the U.S. and internationally, each screening facilitated by a mental health professional to ensure a safe and supportive environment for discussion.

SHIFT — A New Film for a New Generation

Released in 2025, the newest documentary, *SHIFT: Do What Moves You*, flips the narrative from despair to possibility. It highlights young people leaning into art, music, sports, and passion-driven pursuits as pathways to mental wellness. The message is universal: even extraordinary kids—champion skateboarders, musicians, dancers—face self-doubt, bullying, and anxiety. What separates them is not perfection, but perseverance and purpose. “Kids need to see what it looks like to keep going,” Jason says.

The TEDx Talk: Understanding the World Our Kids Live In

Jason’s TEDx Talk, “The Hot Lava Game,” distills a core truth: the world today’s kids navigate is not the world their parents grew up in. They face 24/7 exposure to global conflict, online comparison, cyberbullying that follows them home, and unprecedented pressure amplified by social media and now AI. The takeaway is simple: Kids are overwhelmed, and parents must learn to listen without minimizing their struggles. “When they tell you their sky is full of clouds,” Jason says, “our job isn’t to convince them it’s sunny. It’s to ask about the clouds.”

A Message Parents Need and Kids Deserve

Jason’s work is not theoretical; it is deeply personal. The signs Ryan showed—more time alone, irritability—were subtle and easy to mistake for normal teenage behavior. “He was laughing and watching March Madness the week before,” Jason recalls. “They hide it because they don’t want to burden us.” That’s why his message to parents is unwavering: There aren’t enough therapists in the world to solve this crisis. Families must learn to talk, to listen, and to engage daily with their children’s emotional lives.

Carrying Ryan’s Legacy into the Future

Jason still signs every email, every message, and every keynote with the mission Ryan left behind: *Tell My Story*. He speaks for the parents who never knew. He advocates for the kids who don’t yet have words. And he fights for a future where every child feels seen, supported, and worth staying for.

“My son asked me to tell his story,” he says. “I’m going to keep telling it until we end teen suicide—or until I take my last breath trying.”



Jennifer Pichardo

Head of Advancement

Smithsonian's National Museum
of the American Latino

Jennifer Pichardo's career embodies resilience, vision, and an unwavering commitment to representation. Born and raised in Elmhurst/Jackson Heights, Queens—a vibrant neighborhood alive with languages, music, and cultures—she developed a boundless curiosity about the world and a deep appreciation for community. Her parents, immigrants from the Dominican Republic, instilled in her the values of hard work, perseverance, and faith. Those lessons became the foundation of a life dedicated to building bridges across cultures and creating opportunities for others.

Jennifer's career has spanned continents and sectors—international business in Hungary, law firms in New York, nonprofit leadership in Washington, D.C. At every step, one constant thread has guided her path: the drive to connect people, honor stories, and uplift communities. She discovered her calling in fundraising, where her entrepreneurial spirit and global experiences converge to generate transformative impact.

Today, as Head of Advancement for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Latino, Jennifer leads bold fundraising initiatives to honor the dreams, challenges, and triumphs of U.S. Latinos while fostering a deeper understanding of American history and culture. Among her achievements, she spearheaded the \$28 million campaign that established the Smithsonian's first gallery dedicated to Latino history and culture—a milestone not only for the institution but for the nation.

Jennifer's mission extends beyond raising funds—it is about cultivating legacy. Jennifer views her role as advancing the museum's vision while mentoring the next generation of leaders to see themselves in philanthropy, cultural stewardship, and positions of influence. "Representation is not symbolic," she says. "It is the foundation of building a future where every story matters."

What follows is an inspiring conversation with Jennifer, reflecting on her roots, her unconventional career path, and the legacy she is shaping for generations to come.

Jennifer, tell us about your background and growing up. How did your experiences and the values instilled by your parents shape you as a leader?

No matter where I go in the world, I carry Elmhurst/Jackson Heights with me. Growing up in one of the most diverse places on earth, I was surrounded by dozens of languages and cultures. That exposure gave me a love for learning, a curiosity about people, and a spirit of adventure.

My parents immigrated from the Dominican Republic, and they worked tirelessly to provide opportunities for my siblings and myself. I remember vividly the day my father took me to the supermarket where he spent most of his life working so I could understand what sacrifice really meant. Watching him labor with dignity and pride stayed with me. Those lessons taught me that nothing comes easy, but with perseverance, anything is possible. They continue to guide how I lead—with resilience, empathy, and purpose.

Your career path wasn't linear. How did being open to opportunities shape your journey?

I never had a rigid plan—I followed curiosity and embraced opportunities as they came. My first jobs were in supermarkets, and by the age of fifteen I was balancing school while managing the finances and inventory for my family's supermarket—early lessons in leadership, accountability, and trust that continue to guide me today. When my husband Eric Lopez received a Fulbright to Hungary, I joined him abroad and earned a fellowship at an international business software company. I learned Hungarian, managed multimillion-dollar contracts, translated documents, and worked with executives across Hungary and

Hong Kong. That experience broadened my worldview and sparked an interest in law and business.

Back in New York, I worked as a paralegal, preparing legal briefs and translating for Spanish-speaking clients and learning from senior partners who became mentors. Over time, I realized I was most energized by building relationships and advancing causes, which led me to fundraising. At the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute in Washington, D.C., I spent five years working with congressional leaders, ambassadors, and corporate executives—an experience that showed me how policy and philanthropy intersect.

In 2018, I was invited to consult for the Smithsonian on its new Latino gallery, eventually helping raise \$28 million for its opening. Today, as Head of Advancement for the National Museum of the American Latino, I lead fundraising for the new museum. Looking back, every step—whether in supermarkets, abroad, law, or nonprofits—prepared me for this role. My path wasn't linear, but each experience gave me skills, perspective, and purpose that carried meaning and guided me here.

Why is mentoring and representation important to you, and how does it connect to your work at the museum?

When I was in school, I didn't even know fundraising was a career path because I didn't see people who looked like me in those roles. That's why mentoring the next generation is so important. Representation matters. I want young people to know they can be fundraisers, executives, leaders—whatever they aspire to be. At the museum, we are not just building a physical space; we are shaping a lasting legacy—ensuring U.S. Latino stories are preserved, celebrated, and reflected with pride. For me, leadership is about building community, opening doors, and widening the path so those who come after us can walk forward with greater clarity and confidence.

What does legacy mean to you in the context of your work?

Legacy is how you show up in the world and what you leave behind for others. For me, it means ensuring that tomorrow is stronger than today—that the next generation has a foundation to build upon. The museum embodies that vision: honoring the dreams, challenges, and triumphs of U.S. Latinos so they remain part of America's story for generations to come.

Looking back at your journey and your parents' sacrifices, does this role feel like a full-circle moment?

Absolutely. This museum honors the spirit of people like my parents who believed in the American dream and worked tirelessly to give their children opportunities. It may not tell their personal story, but it reflects their sacrifices and those of millions of others like them.

For me, it's profoundly emotional. I feel proud that I get to contribute to something larger than myself—something that will outlive us all. It takes me back to being that little girl in Queens, learning the value of hard work and sacrifice. Now, I have the privilege of helping ensure those values and stories are preserved and celebrated for future generations.



"Representation matters. I want young people to know they can be fundraisers, executives, leaders—whatever they aspire to be."

Who are the leaders and role models who inspire you most?

I'm inspired by trailblazing women who broke barriers while staying true to themselves —Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Dr. Ellen Ochoa, Carolina Herrera, and Retired Lieutenant Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch to name a few. Each embodies courage, creativity, and resilience. Yet my greatest inspiration has always been my mother. She taught me resilience, generosity, and the responsibility to create opportunities for others. Her example reminds me that my work is not just about raising resources—it's about opening doors and ensuring that our community's contributions are seen, valued, and celebrated. That, to me, is the essence of leadership and the legacy I strive to build every single day.

CONTACT: <https://latino.si.edu> | LI: [jenniferpichardo](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jenniferpichardo)



DANIEL KAUFMANN

Director of Gaming Services & Program Development:
Kindbridge Behavioral Health

Owner: Area of Effect Counseling, PLLC



<https://drgameology.com>

daniel.kaufmann@drgameology.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/drgameology

Instagram: @drgameology

Threads: www.threads.com/@drgameology



A Career Built in an Unexpected Place

Daniel Kaufmann has built his career in a place most people never thought to look for mental health insight: video games. A licensed counselor, researcher, award-winning author, and associate professor at Grand Canyon University, he has spent years asking a radical question: *Who do we become when we play?* Today, as director of gaming services and program development at Kindbridge Behavioral Health, Daniel stands at the forefront of how clinicians understand gaming, gambling, and digital play. He designs training programs for universities, treatment centers, gambling operators, and Fortune 500 companies, shaping national conversations about behavioral addictions and digital wellness.

A Philosophy Shaped by Early Resistance

Daniel’s approach is rooted in neutrality: games and gambling are not heroes or villains. They can build resilience and community, or lead to isolation and harm. His goal is to understand how and why people play, and to help them move forward with clarity and compassion. Fifteen years ago, when Daniel first suggested that video games could become therapeutic tools, he was treated as an outlier, but his mentors encouraged him to keep going, and that reinforcement forged his motto: *Continue the Journey*.

A Lifelong Gamer Turned Innovator

A gamer since age four, Daniel noticed early on that the strategy, decision-making, and literacy involved in gaming often surpassed what he was doing in school. That insight became the foundation of his advocacy—gamers are not checked out. Rather, they are often practicing advanced cognitive, emotional, and social skills.

Research, Scholarship, and Industry Leadership

Daniel’s research on player psychology has earned him international recognition. He has contributed to *Psychology of Elden Ring*, *Psychology of Pokémon*, *Psychology of The Witcher*, and *Psychology of The Last of Us*. His own book, *The Gamers Journey*, analyzing more than 200 games as modern mythology, won the *International Impact Book Award* in psychology. Daniel also leads the international research task force for the DSM-5-TR, helping shape criteria for video game disorder.

Building Programs That Change the Field

At Kindbridge Behavioral Health, Daniel’s work extends far beyond direct care. He is a key architect of the organization’s emerging national model for gaming and gambling treatment, building pathways that didn’t exist a decade ago. His role includes designing clinical curricula, developing continuing education modules, and creating specialized training for behavioral health teams across the country. These programs give clinicians practical tools to treat gaming disorders, gambling disorders, and co-occurring mental health conditions, areas where most graduate programs offer little to no training. Daniel also works closely with Kindbridge Research Institute, helping translate complex data into real-world guidance for counselors, policymakers, and industry partners. By integrating

research, clinical practice, and digital engagement, he helps Kindbridge pioneer a more modern, responsive approach to behavioral health.

Leading Florida's PlayWise Project

When Kindbridge secured the state contract for Florida's gambling help resources, Daniel stepped into a pivotal role as director of PlayWise, the state's new gambling helpline and support platform. Beyond managing daily operations, he helped design the system's clinical workflows, triage protocols, and staff training requirements, ensuring Florida's residents would receive timely, informed, and compassionate support.

His leadership extends to the creation of "Kai," the AI support persona built to help individuals recognize gambling or gaming problems. Daniel wrote roughly 70% of the clinical content that guides Kai's interactions, making PlayWise one of the most technologically advanced behavioral health resources in the country. Through this work, he is helping push the field toward accessible, tech-enabled mental health care that meets people where they already are.

Strengthening Clinicians Through Supervision

Daniel's impact also scales through the people he trains. He provides supervision groups to the entire Kindbridge clinical team; therapists across multiple states who turn his frameworks into everyday practice. His supervision blends clinical theory, digital literacy, and real-world case application, giving clinicians a structured way to understand gaming and gambling behaviors. Many describe his guidance as a turning point of their confidence in treating these emerging disorders. In addition, Daniel oversees a dedicated team for crisis response, serving gambling populations in partnership with FanDuel, DraftKings, and BetMGM, an unprecedented collaboration between mental health providers and the gaming industry. Under his leadership, counselors provide rapid, specialized support during moments of acute vulnerability, often preventing crises from escalating.

Transforming Therapy Through Digital Play

Inside the therapy room, Daniel uses video games the way traditional clinicians use toys or storybooks. Whether the client is exploring the vast landscapes of Elden Ring, building relationships in Persona, or leveling-up in MMO games like *Star Wars: The Old Republic* or *Final Fantasy XIV*, he focuses on connecting their life goals with how they play. Their choices—aggressive or defensive builds, trusted companions, preferred safe zones—reveal coping patterns, fears, strengths, and emotional themes. This approach helps clients, especially teens and young adults, feel understood in a way traditional methods rarely achieve.

Influence Beyond the Clinic

Daniel continues to shape the field through multiple leadership roles. He serves on the board of the International Problem Gambling & Gaming Certification Board, contributes



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Your passion has value, your story matters, you are the hero of your own story, and you are capable of more than you've been told.

to national standards through the American Society of Addiction Medicine, and reaches global audiences through his Twitch and YouTube channels as Dr. Gameology. He also owns Area of Effect Counseling, providing services in Florida and Arizona, and continues to teach and mentor graduate students as an associate professor.

Changing the Story About Gaming

Across his work, Daniel challenges stigma, especially the gender biases that lead boys to be labeled “addicted” for the same behaviors praised in girls. He advocates for families to replace fear with informed conversation and for professionals to understand the cultural language of the people they serve.

A Vision for the Future

Whether he is building state-level programs, shaping the next generation of counselors, or streaming to an online community that finally feels seen, Daniel communicates the same message: *Your passion has value, your story matters, you are the hero of your own story, and you are capable of more than you've been told.*



DR. LUISA VEGA

DNP, PMHNP, AGPCNP, APRN

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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At the end of the day, I am a nurse. To be a nurse and lead in a field traditionally dominated by physicians, and to watch other nurse practitioners thrive alongside me, is what keeps me going.

Early Life and Path to Nursing

Dr. Luisa Vega, DNP, PMHNP, AGPCNP, APRN, has built her career on resilience and a drive to serve. Born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Puerto Rico, she joined the U.S. Army Reserves at 18, serving eight years before beginning a career as a telecommunications engineer with Verizon in New York. When the events of September 11, 2001 unfolded, Dr. Vega spent six months at Ground Zero, an experience that left her with health conditions, but also a renewed sense of purpose.

That life-changing chapter prompted her transition to nursing. Relocating to Florida, she earned her nursing degree and began her career at Bay Pines VA in Saint Petersburg, where she worked in the cardiac step-down unit. Her time there sparked an interest in heart failure readmissions, leading her to pursue a doctorate in adult gerontology primary care nurse practice at Duke University.

Later, she became a geriatric nurse practitioner specializing in cardiology, providing care in post-acute facilities. It was there she witnessed the unmet need for high-quality psychiatric services, especially for long-term care residents. Determined to address that gap, she earned a post-master's certificate in psychiatric mental health from Eastern Kentucky University, expanding her expertise into behavioral health and addiction medicine.

Building Psych Health Associates

In 2019, Dr. Vega launched Psych Health Associates (PHA), and by 2020, she partnered with Spectrum Medical Partners, whose financial and operational support helped accelerate growth. Today, PHA is one of Florida's leading behavioral health practices, delivering psychiatric and psychology services to residents of skilled nursing facilities and assisted living communities. Powered by Spectrum, the organization now serves over 180 post-acute facilities across 36 counties, in addition to offering telepsychiatry services for community patients.

What sets PHA apart is its combination of clinical excellence and a service-minded approach. Dr. Vega's background in customer service—dating back to her time with Verizon—has shaped the company's culture. She emphasizes responsiveness, hands-on leadership, and an unwavering commitment to both patients and facilities. Unlike competitors who often struggle with accessibility and responsiveness, Dr. Vega remains actively involved, continuing to see patients herself and maintaining a direct connection to operations.

A Unique Model of Care

PHA's model is designed to improve not only patient outcomes but also facility performance. By providing proactive screenings, timely evaluations, and proper medication management, the organization helps facilities boost their Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) star ratings—a critical measure that affects both reputation and reimbursement.

The team at PHA includes adult and geriatric psychiatrists, psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners, advanced practice registered nurses, medical assistants, and psychological staff. Each is carefully chosen for clinical expertise and empathy, ensuring that patients receive individualized care. Dr. Vega highlights the importance of training her staff & facility care givers in behavioral management, documentation, and non-pharmacological interventions. This collaborative approach not only ensures compliance with regulations but also enhances patient well-being by reducing unnecessary reliance on medication.

The results speak for themselves. Facilities supported by PHA consistently see improved star ratings and reimbursement levels. For families choosing a nursing home for a loved one, these ratings can mean the difference between a two-star and a five-star facility—impacting both quality of care and trust in the institution.

Growth Through Quality and Reputation

Remarkably, PHA has grown without a formal business development team. Instead, its expansion has been driven by word of mouth within the close-knit nursing home industry. Leaders who experienced Dr. Vega's dedication and quality care have carried those relationships into new roles across organizations, bringing PHA along with them. Dr. Vega attributes this growth to consistency and trust. From her earliest days as an independent provider to now leading a more than 100-person team, she has maintained the same standards of accessibility and excellence. Whether handling emergencies, guiding facilities through regulatory challenges, or working directly with patients, her presence reinforces PHA's reputation for reliability and compassion.

A Commitment to Education and Mentorship

Beyond her role as CEO, Dr. Vega is passionate about giving back through education. She serves as a preceptor for more than 15 universities, including Duke University, the University of Central Florida, the University of South Florida, Florida Atlantic University, and the University of Alabama. Her commitment stems from her own experiences as a student, when finding supportive mentors was a challenge.

Determined to ensure others would not face the same barriers, she has mentored countless psychiatric nurse practitioner students—many of whom now work at PHA. In fact, 80 percent of her employees began as her students. She refuses to charge students for clinical placements,

believing strongly in accessibility and in the responsibility of giving back. This philosophy not only supports the next generation of providers but also creates a reliable pipeline of committed professionals for PHA.

Addressing Industry Challenges

Staffing shortages and high turnover are ongoing challenges in long-term care. Dr. Vega and her team address these issues by training facility staff, ensuring continuity of care, and fostering collaboration between providers and nurses. By providing ongoing behavioral health training, encouraging non-medication interventions, PHA strengthens the capabilities of the entire facility. This approach not only improves patient care, but also helps facilities remain compliant with CMS regulations. By partnering closely with nursing staff, and patient's families PHA ensures that care decisions are well-documented, justified, and patient-centered.

Looking Ahead

As demand for quality behavioral health services grows, PHA is preparing for expansion beyond Florida. Partnerships with nationwide (remove electronic health record) health care providers are opening doors to new opportunities in multiple states. With a proven model and a reputation for excellence, Dr. Vega envisions PHA extending its impact to communities across the country.

Continuing the Mission

At the heart of Dr. Vega's journey is her identity as a nurse. Even as a CEO leading one of Florida's largest behavioral health teams, she continues to see patients and remain connected to the daily realities of care. Her background in cardiology, geriatrics, and psychiatry, combined with her military service and personal resilience, has shaped a leader deeply committed to both people and systems.

For Dr. Vega, the motivation is simple: "At the end of the day, I am a nurse. To be a nurse and lead in a field traditionally dominated by physicians, and to watch other nurse practitioners thrive alongside me, is what keeps me going."

Her story is one of perseverance, growth, and purpose—transforming personal hardship into a mission to elevate behavioral health care for some of the most vulnerable populations. Through Psych Health Associates, Dr. Luisa Dr. Vega continues to redefine what compassionate, quality-focused psychiatric care can look like in long-term care settings.





LEE BURTON

PRESIDENT, CEO, AND CO-FOUNDER



Email: lee@functionalmovement.com

Website: www.functionalmovement.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/lee-burton-91956a120

Facebook: www.facebook.com/functionalmovement

Instagram: <https://instagram.com/functionalmvmt>

Lee Burton and Functional Movement Systems: Moving the World the Right Way

A Pioneer in Movement

When Lee Burton co-founded Functional Movement Systems (FMS) in 2001, he wasn't just launching a company—he was sparking a movement. With a Ph.D. and certifications as an athletic trainer (ATC) and strength and conditioning specialist (CSCS), Lee brought an extensive background in sports medicine and strength training to the table. During the establishment of FMS, he served as director of athletic training at Averett University, where he established himself as a forward-thinking leader and innovator in the science of movement.

Over the years, Lee has trained thousands of healthcare and fitness professionals worldwide and consulted for professional sports organizations, first responders, and military personnel. His work has been recognized with accolades such as *Can-Fit Pro International Speaker of the Year*, *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*, and the Virginia High School League *Award of Merit*. But his proudest accomplishment remains reshaping the way people everywhere think about movement and health.

From Athletes to Everyone

FMS started out as a tool for local high school and college athletes, helping them move better, prevent injuries, and boost performance. But the concept quickly caught fire, attracting the attention of the U.S. military, the NFL, Major League Baseball, and professional sports teams around the globe.

Today, FMS is headquartered in Chatham, Virginia, but its reach spans more than 25 countries and 25 languages. What began as a niche idea in sports training has become a worldwide philosophy: that better movement is the key to better living.

"Our motto is simple: Move well. Move often," says Lee. "It's not about doing more. It's about doing it right. Quality over quantity."

Why Movement Matters

We use fundamental movement every day of our lives—balancing on the stairs, reaching for groceries, bending to pick up keys, or twisting to chat with a coworker. It sounds simple, but most people are moving wrong without realizing it. Over time, poor movement patterns lead to stiff shoulders, aching backs, wobbly balance, and nagging injuries.

FMS brings this reality to light through a unique system of testing and assessing. These tools, designed for fitness, performance, and healthcare professionals, measure how people move and pinpoint areas of weakness. The goal isn't just to get people exercising—

it's to get them moving the right way, preventing pain before it starts and creating lifelong durability.

"Everybody wants to feel better, but nobody knows where to start," Lee explains. "That's what FMS does. It's like GPS. Before you can get to where you want to go, you need to know where you are."

The Self-Assessment: A Starting Point for All

The entry point for most consumers is the free FMS Self-Assessment. It's quick, fun, and can be done anywhere—your living room, your office, even at the park. Participants run through basic movements, answer a few lifestyle questions, and receive a score that reveals how well they're really moving.

"People are often surprised by their results," Lee notes. "They're not as flexible or balanced as they thought." But the fun really starts when friends compare scores, sparking playful challenges: a "Reach for the Post-Its" showdown at work, or a "Walking the Tape" contest in the living room. The kicker? To win, you have to move the right way.

Each assessment generates a personalized 30-day movement plan that targets individual needs—whether it's improving flexibility, fixing posture, or reducing pain. As users progress, the program adapts, encouraging retesting and continued improvement. For those who need extra help, the system connects them directly with a certified FMS professional.

Training the Trainers

While consumers benefit from the FMS Self-Assessment, the heart of the business is its network of fitness professionals. Trainers, coaches, physical therapists, and healthcare providers are taught to use FMS tools and philosophy in their practices, giving them a competitive edge and helping their clients achieve better results. To make this easier, Lee and his team recently launched a membership program exclusively for FMS instructors.

"We're always looking for ways to help our community stand out and grow," Lee says. "Now, our fitness professionals can connect with clients through customized self-assessment links that direct consumers straight to them. It's immediate engagement and an exciting way to market their services." This program empowers trainers to capture leads, build loyalty, and create interactive experiences with clients from day one. It's a win-win: trainers expand their reach, and consumers get expert guidance tailored to their needs.

Movement for All Generations

FMS isn't just for athletes or fitness enthusiasts—it's for everyone, from teenagers to grandparents. For older adults, the biggest risks are falls and loss



of independence. FMS addresses these issues with simple, practical techniques: walking on a strip of tape to improve balance, practicing rolling motions to regain confidence on the floor, or learning to rise safely using nearby furniture. "These small things can be life-changing," says Lee. "If you can balance, roll, and squat, you can keep living independently and vibrantly."

At the same time, professional athletes at the NFL Combine and MLB tryouts also use FMS to test and refine their movement. The same philosophy applies: before adding intensity, check the basics. Movement is a continuum that supports everyone—from first responders protecting communities to grandparents playing with grandchildren.

A Global Movement

Since its founding, FMS has grown into one of the largest and most respected movement assessment systems in the world. With a presence across continents and translation into dozens of languages, the company has created a global community of professionals united by a common mission: helping people move well and move often.

This sense of community and excitement is what Lee calls the "FMS Movement." It's not just about assessments or exercises—it's about creating energy, momentum, and a shared belief that better movement equals better living. Whether you're a trainer looking to elevate your career or an individual who wants to feel and perform better, FMS offers a proven, fun, and accessible path forward.

Looking Ahead

Lee's passion for movement continues to fuel FMS's expansion. With new technology, assessments, and training programs on the horizon, the company is set to impact millions more lives. And for Lee, the mission remains clear: to spread the philosophy of quality movement across generations, professions, and cultures.

"Move well. Move often. That's the heart of it," he says. "Because when you move better, you live better. And everyone deserves that."



Dr.
CHRIS BAEK

FOUNDER AND CEO



YUBECK

<https://yubeck.com> | cbaek@yubeck.com
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/drchrisbaek

Dr. Chris Baek, founder and CEO of Yubeck, is a pharmacist, wellness innovator, and purpose-driven entrepreneur who blends science, spirituality, and a deep desire to help others improve their health. After nearly two decades in the pharmacy industry, including key roles at Johnson & Johnson and Takeda Pharmaceuticals, she developed a strong foundation in the sciences. Over time, her own healing journey inspired her to bring together modern science and natural wellness. She holds a Doctor of Pharmacy degree and uses her scientific background to create wellness solutions that provide simple, effective support for daily well-being.

At Yubeck, Dr. Baek leads vision, product development, and partnerships, pioneering wearable wellness solutions that blend natural ingredients with science-driven technology. Her mission is simple: to create practical tools that support everyday well-being without adding stress or complexity to people's lives.

Yubeck's signature innovation, a series of proprietary wellness socks, embodies this philosophy. The first product infuses calming, nature-based ingredients to help promote relaxation. These products are more than a novelty; they represent a shift toward wellness that is simple, sustainable, and seamlessly integrated into daily routines.

The company's promise of impact is already being recognized. Dr. Baek was named a *Top 10 Finalist* in the 2025 *SCORE Pitch Competition* for her innovative approach to sustainable wellness and Yubeck was selected as one of the *Top 100 Health & Wellness Companies to Watch*.

Dr. Baek's personal journey is one of resilience. Born in Korea and raised in Chicago after immigrating at age three, she faced early challenges that shaped her strength. Undiagnosed vision issues, selective mutism, and language barriers made school difficult, and she nearly failed second grade. Through perseverance, she learned English, gained confidence, and graduated with honors. These experiences later shaped her studies in psychology, education, and eventually pharmacy.

After years in the pharmaceutical field, Dr. Baek faced her own health struggles, including Hashimoto's disease and fibromyalgia. She turned to meditation, prayer, nutrition, and holistic practices to heal. This experience awakened a deeper purpose and eventually led to her entrepreneurial journey. Stepping into pageantry at age 50 and being crowned Mrs. Illinois America helped her find her voice, confidence, and a renewed sense of visibility.

Beyond business, Dr. Baek's passion for service has taken her across the globe. She has supported underserved children in India for 13 years, sponsoring those in need and fundraising for essentials such as school supplies and daily living needs. These experiences reinforced her

belief in a greater mission: to build a life-skills curriculum that can empower millions of underserved children worldwide to reach their full potential in this lifetime.

In everything she does, Dr. Baek reflects Yubeck's values: healing, innovation, resilience, and service. Her journey brings together science, holistic healing, and heartfelt leadership.

In the following Q&A, Dr. Baek shares more about her background and vision.

Dr. Baek, can you tell us a little about your background.

I immigrated to the U.S. with my family when I was three, in 1973. My father came first, not knowing English, and worked any jobs he could find. We settled in Chicago, and I remember he was so worried we'd get lost on our way to school that he taped a line on the sidewalk for us to follow. As a child, I was extremely shy and hardly spoke at school. I was diagnosed with selective mutism and struggled academically, almost failing second grade. But I pushed through, and eventually I graduated with honors. That experience planted the seed for wanting to make a difference in education.

I studied psychology at the University of Illinois and later completed a master's in education at Washington University in St. Louis. Teaching was rewarding, but I realized it wasn't what I wanted long term. I shifted to pharmacy, completing prerequisites and then earning my PharmD at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Even while raising a family, I stayed determined, graduating in the top 10% of my class after returning to school one week after giving birth to my son.

What inspired your idea for these revolutionary socks?

It really came from my own journey. Years ago, I faced serious health challenges and spent years studying holistic approaches and nutrition. I realized there had to be more convenient ways to integrate wellness into daily life. That inspired me to combine my pharmaceutical background with my passion for natural health. Wearable technology felt like the perfect answer - products people can use every day, infused with natural agents that support relaxation, sleep, immune health, and overall well-being.

Tell us briefly about your work with orphans in India, and your bigger mission on the horizon.

In 2007, I met a priest from Assam, India, who was raising funds for an orphanage. I began sponsoring children through his program. We raised money for backpacks because that was what the children wanted most. It showed me how even simple things can mean the world to others.

During a trip to Nicaragua, I took part in a small ceremony where I was symbolically named "The Mother of All Children" in recognition of my sponsorship of orphaned children. I didn't think much of it then, but it later aligned with my purpose to help children on a larger scale through a life-skills curriculum.



"I want to help people take control of their health by creating clean, sustainable wellness solutions that truly support them. At the heart of everything I do is a simple mission: to help people feel grounded, cared for, and ready to live fully each day!"

What drives you as both a leader and a person?

I believe struggle creates strength. From nearly failing second grade to balancing pharmacy school with a newborn, my life has been shaped by moments that tested me but also taught me resilience. Today, through Yubeck, I want to help people take control of their health by creating clean, sustainable wellness solutions that truly support them. At the heart of everything I do is a simple mission: to help people feel grounded, cared for, and ready to live fully each day.



JIM DUNN, PhD

PRESIDENT AND CEO

www.ldhcc.com | dunn@ldhcc.com | LI: www.linkedin.com/in/jimdunnphd

When it comes to people, Jim Dunn, PhD, has spent a lifetime proving that they are not just a company's greatest asset—they are its greatest advantage. For more than three decades, he has been at the forefront of strategic human resources, leadership, and organizational development, reshaping workplace cultures and transforming how executives think about their people. Known both as a national leader and a visionary, Jim has built his career around one guiding principle: when people thrive, organizations do too.

Today, Jim serves as president and CEO of LD Human Capital Consulting, a firm he launched in 2023 to bring humanity back into human resources. With offices in Atlanta, Charlotte, Chicago, Dallas, and London, the company partners with leaders across the C-suite—40% CEOs, 40% senior executives, and about 20% first-time leaders stepping into top roles. Its services are broad but focused: executive and business coaching, HR M&A integration, cultural assessment and mapping, workforce development planning, executive recruitment, and total rewards strategy. Each engagement is designed to strengthen leadership capability and create cultures where people—and performance—can flourish.

Jim's work spans executive and business coaching, HR M&A integration, and workforce and leader development, expertise that has supported his greatest professional accomplishments—including serving as a sitting chief HR officer six times across multiple industries. Yet he is just as proud of running a successful practice while serving as the primary caregiver for his mother, Lillian, who suffers from dementia. In fact, LD Human Capital Consulting carries her initials—a lasting tribute to the woman whose strength continues to inspire his work.

In 2024, Jim added another milestone to his career with the publication of his book, *101 Lessons in Leading with Laughter: Research and Real Stories on Humor at Work*, after years of contributing to *Newsweek*, *Forbes*, and other outlets. His earlier career was just as impactful, serving as global head of HR for former President Jimmy Carter and achieving several degrees, including: a BS in chemistry from Howard University, an MBA from MIT, a Master of Public Health and a PhD from Emory University, a PhD from Benedictine University, and a Doctor of Health Administration from the Medical University of South Carolina. He has also earned certifications in nearly every aspect of the human capital field, from compensation and benefits to global remuneration and mediation.



Over the years, Jim has been recognized with honors from *Forbes*, *Savoy*, *CIO Look*, and *Becker's Hospital Review*. But while the accolades matter, what matters more to him is impact—the ability to shape leaders, guide organizations, and keep humanity at the center of work.

What makes your executive and business coaching approach so unique?

Clients have often told me that what makes my approach different is not only my background as an advisor, but that I've truly lived the C-suite experience. Working directly with CEOs and advising boards taught me that leadership isn't theoretical—it's a lived, daily reality with enormous responsibility. When you sit in that seat, you wear several hats at once. You're a member of the executive team, an advisor to the CEO on its effectiveness, and often the one who speaks to the board on behalf of your boss. In fact, during CEO performance reviews, it's usually just you and the board in the room—your boss isn't even there. At the same time, you carry the responsibility for driving culture across the entire organization. The weight of those dynamics can't be fully understood from the outside. That firsthand perspective allows me to connect with leaders in a way that's both strategic and practical. I know what it feels like to be under pressure, to balance competing expectations, and to align culture with business goals. My coaching is grounded in that lived experience, and that's what clients say makes it so valuable.

As an "insider" executive coach, how often do your clients' issues stem from getting in their own way, or getting stuck in their heads?

I'd estimate about 70% of the time leaders are in their own heads, getting in their own way. I often remind them that while no one is asking them to be someone they're not, it is their responsibility to ensure who they are doesn't interfere with

being effective. Ideally, values and roles align, but even when they don't, leaders must still guide teams that are different from them. When engagement scores are low, turnover is high, and their company is paying me to be there, the evidence is pretty clear that something needs to change.

What value do you bring to clients?

One of the greatest values I provide is protecting organizations from the high cost of leadership failure. When companies recruit executives, they often pay a third-party search firm 30–35% of the candidate's base salary. For seven-figure roles, that's a massive investment—and when the leader doesn't succeed, the financial and cultural costs are even greater. By comparison, the cost of six to nine months of executive coaching is minimal, yet it can make the difference between a leader thriving or flaming out.

Your new book, *101 Lessons in Leading with Laughter*, is being celebrated by executives and C-suite leaders as a "brilliant, hilarious must-read" on the transformative power of humor in the workplace. What are some of the questions you explore, and how big a role does laughter play in contributing to greater collaboration, stronger teams, employee retention/loyalty, and ultimately success for leaders and companies?

I'm a lover of laughter, though my life and career have included moments that were anything but lighthearted. For me, humor has always been a way to elevate the good times and soften the difficult ones. I also understand that not everyone values humor in the same way, but when used appropriately, it disarms tension, promotes inclusivity, and even helps resolve conflict. In the workplace, those outcomes are powerful—they foster trust, collaboration, and stronger teams. They also contribute to employee loyalty and retention, which are critical to long-term success for leaders and organizations alike.

BRENDAN P KEEGAN

Redefining Greatness Through Fearless Leadership



Chairman
& CEO

“ My philosophy has always been: if you want to do something extraordinary, you need a roadmap, a repeatable process, and relentless follow-through. You won’t reach greatness on autopilot—you have to drive it every single day. That’s the core of the bFEARLESS movement.



Contact: www.brendanpkeegan.com | b@brendanpkeegan.com
LI: [brendanpkeegan](https://www.linkedin.com/company/brendanpkeegan) | IG: [@bpkfearless](https://www.instagram.com/bpkfearless)

Brendan P Keegan is a rare breed of executive who doesn’t just lead companies—he reinvents them. A six-time president and chief executive officer, 21-time board director, and two-time best-selling author, Brendan is globally recognized as a business visionary and transformative force. With over three decades of executive leadership, he has become synonymous with enterprise growth, fearless leadership, and unwavering excellence.

In 2022, Brendan launched bFEARLESS Ventures, a high-performance investment and advisory firm designed to elevate individuals and organizations through bold action and breakthrough results. With a focus on leadership, board advisory, passion investing, and giving back through mentoring the next generation, the firm is rooted in Brendan’s life philosophy: help millions live and lead *fearlessly*.

Brendan’s metrics speak volumes. In his last company, he led the business transformation of a 56-year-old company, growing it from \$500 million in revenue and \$8 million in earnings to \$2.5 billion and \$186 million in 4 years, increasing its enterprise value from \$125 million to \$1.5 billion—culminating in a historic sale to Bain Capital and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority. He’s raised billions in capital, transformed industries, and mentored hundreds of thousands through his proprietary systems for overcoming fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

Brendan’s influence stretches beyond the boardroom. He is co-owner and board member of Andretti Racing, United Autosports, Merchants Fleet, PURE Electric, Crane Paper, Sky Meadow Country Club and ExpressIt Delivery. He also is active in his community through serving on the RPI Athletics Advisory Board, the RPI Lally Leadership Council, and co-leads the Keegan Family Courage & Faith Foundation, created by his wife—giving over \$10 million to youth academics and athletics.

A sought-after keynote speaker, Brendan has addressed audiences for *Bloomberg*, *Reuters*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *TechCrunch* and major private equity firms worldwide. He hosts *The Fearless Experience* podcast and co-hosts *Fast & Fearless* with McLaren Racing CEO, Zak Brown.

Named *World’s Most Innovative CEO*, *CEO of the Year*, and *Visionary of the Year*, Brendan P Keegan continues to redefine what’s possible—building legacies, empowering leaders, and doing it all without fear.

Q&A

Your mission to build “fearless leaders” is woven through your entire career. Why has this remained so central to your work?

I've always been driven by a purpose beyond profits—something deeper than building billion-dollar companies. For me, the most meaningful legacy isn't scaling revenue from \$500 million to \$2.5 billion. It's mentoring people to overcome fear, uncertainty, and doubt—to become fearless leaders in their careers, families, and communities. That purpose has shaped every aspect of my journey—whether running companies, serving on boards, writing books, giving keynotes, or mentoring the next generation. It's who I've always been. My oldest sister was born with Down syndrome, so I grew up volunteering before I even knew what volunteering was—it was simply part of being a good person. That foundation stayed with me. After college, I was coaching Little League while launching my first job. Today, I continue to mentor students and young professionals, helping them launch careers, land internships, and lead with courage.

People often ask, “Why help someone you don't know?” My answer is simple: when you put good into the world, it finds its way back—not always when you expect, but always when it matters. SO many good things have happened in my life and I trace them all back to fundamentally striving to be a good person. That's the power of leading with purpose—and exactly why bFEARLESS exists.

You've helped transform hundreds of thousands into fearless leaders. What sets your method apart from others in leadership development?

What makes my approach effective is that it's both inspiring and grounded in reality. I truly believe people can achieve what they set out to do—but it won't happen by accident. It takes a clear plan, hard work, and consistent accountability.

As a board advisor to CEOs and private equity firms, I often hear, “Brendan, you're different. You expect action—you expect a documented plan—you demand follow through.” That's the missing link in a lot of leaders and boards. It's easy to say, “We can achieve great things,” but without systems in place to hold people accountable, it rarely happens.



My focus is to give people tangible tools—whether it's daily check-ins, short-term goals, or biweekly assessments. My philosophy has always been: if you want to do something extraordinary, you need a roadmap, a repeatable process, and relentless follow-through. You won't reach greatness on autopilot—you have to drive it every single day. That's the core of the bFEARLESS movement.

How are you helping CXOs move past fear and harness AI effectively?

I often ask executives, “What are you doing to integrate AI into your business?” It's an incredible tool that boosts productivity, sharpens decision-making, and unlocks collective intelligence. There are two types of leaders: those who embrace it and grow—and those who fear it will replace them. For the latter, I coach them to shift their mindset. If AI can cut an eight-hour task down to one, your value skyrockets. The key is to stop fearing it and start using it to elevate your performance, impact, and irreplaceability. It's the most breakthrough enabler we have seen in a generation.

You often cite fear, uncertainty, and doubt as major barriers to success. How do you help CXOs overcome these and become fearless leaders?

Most executives come to me with a clear goal—they want to grow faster, achieve more, and reach new levels of success. But what often holds them back isn't strategy—it's mindset. One of my core mantras is: *Have the courage to fail and the faith to succeed.*

I met a CEO with a \$25 million company who wanted to hit \$100 million in five years. I told him, “That's possible—but you'll need to try new things, and some will fail.” He said, “I hope none do.” My response? “Then you'll likely miss your goal.” Growth doesn't come without risk. If you try eight new ideas, two might fail epically, but two could become your next breakthrough.

I challenge leaders to embrace failure as part of the journey. Every great success story includes setbacks. Fear, doubt, and hesitation can silently sabotage growth. Becoming a fearless leader starts with shifting that mindset—seeing failure as fuel, not fear. When leaders take bold steps, try new products, or explore new markets, they might fail—but they also might uncover something ten times greater than they ever imagined. That's where fearless leadership begins.



Joshua Walden, Broker



www.linktr.ee/Jshwldn
jw.realty.nw@gmail.com | LI, FB, IG: jshwldn

Joshua's understanding of market dynamics, particularly as a millennial broker, gives him a unique edge in navigating the complexities of supply and demand in today's housing market.

For Joshua Walden, real estate isn't just a profession; it's a calling to inspire and uplift those he serves. As a broker with NextHome Prolific in Seattle, Washington, Joshua has cultivated a reputation as a skilled entrepreneur and compassionate guide in the Pacific Northwest's real estate market. Since 2018, he has completed over \$30 million in transactions, helped clients and investors generate more than a million dollars in profit, and brought his unique combination of faith, expertise, and determination to the forefront of his industry.

Joshua's passion for real estate is deeply intertwined with his purpose. One of his most cherished memories is being voted *Most Inspirational* by his peers in high school. "I realized later that this is who I am," he reflects. "This is the core of my being and my purpose. It drives me every day with every person I touch." This profound sense of purpose shines through in his work with first-time buyers, seasoned investors, and everyone in between.

What makes Joshua's approach so unique is his extensive firsthand experience in every facet of real estate. He has personally completed over 13 fix-and-flip rehab projects, with a 14th underway, and owns three rental properties. From rent-by-room arrangements to long-term and short-term furnished rentals, Joshua has a comprehensive understanding of single-family homes and multifamily properties. This breadth of experience enables him to provide clients with unparalleled insights and solutions, whether they're purchasing their first home or managing complex investments.

Joshua attributes his success to his unwavering faith and the strong foundation laid by his parents. Growing up as the son of

a Black Vietnam veteran from Georgia and a Korean immigrant who built a thriving convenience store business in Tacoma, Washington, Joshua witnessed the power of resilience and hard work. "My parents came from humble beginnings," he shares. "My dad made it all the way here to Washington, owns property, owns a business, and is now retired—a true success story. My mom came from very little and now has so much. I look at that and I'm so thankful, blessed, and humbled." Their example inspired him to take risks, build his own business, and pursue his dreams with confidence.

NextHome Prolific provides the perfect platform for Joshua's work. Known for its concierge-style service and philanthropic roots, the brokerage aligns seamlessly with his mission to serve the community through education and connection. Joshua's understanding of market dynamics, particularly as a millennial broker, gives him a unique edge in navigating the complexities of supply and demand in today's housing market.

Above all, Joshua's true reward lies in helping others achieve their goals. "For me, it's about helping people, inspiring people, and being sincere in my intentions," he explains. Whether it's securing the perfect home, flipping a property, or showing clients that they too can achieve success, Joshua approaches every interaction with gratitude and purpose.

From his 14 years of service in the Air Force Reserve to earning degrees in music and exercise science from Seattle University, Joshua's diverse background enriches his real estate journey. Guided by faith and driven to inspire, he is building more than homes—he's building hope and opportunity for others.

MICHAEL GERACI

Head of Retirement Investments
& Manager

With over 18 years of experience in the financial industry, Michael Geraci, head of retirement investments and manager of retirement investment solutions at Commonwealth Financial Network, has made a profound impact on the way advisors and their clients approach institutional retirement plan management. Known for his expertise in strategic planning, investment management, and due diligence, Michael leads a dynamic team of investment analysts and associates who ensure the firm's advisors have the resources they need to make informed decisions for their clients. Michael's retirement investment solutions team oversees AUA of \$30 Billion.



Known for his expertise in strategic planning, investment management, and due diligence, Michael leads a dynamic team of investment analysts and associates who ensure the firm's advisors have the resources they need to make informed decisions for their clients.

At the heart of Michael's work is the *Retirement Plan Investment Recommended List*, a cornerstone resource covering mutual funds, collective investment trusts, stable value products, and target-date portfolios. As chair of the investment committee for the PlanAssist 3(38) Investment Management Program, Michael oversees manager due diligence and investment selection, ensuring advisors have access to top-tier investment options across all major asset classes. His leadership extends to managing relationships with Defined Contribution Investment Only (DCIO) asset managers, positioning him as the firm's go-to expert in retirement investment vehicles.

Michael's career is defined by remarkable achievements. During his tenure, Commonwealth Financial Network's retirement assets under management grew from \$5 billion to \$48 billion in just 10 years, a testament to his ability to drive growth and innovation. He played a pivotal role in recruiting more than \$10 billion in retirement assets to the firm and built out Commonwealth's comprehensive retirement investment research platform and investment management programs. His dedication to professional growth led him to complete the prestigious Wharton School's Certified Investment Management Analyst (CIMA) program, alongside earning certifications including CPFA, CRPC, CRPS, and AIF.

Before joining Commonwealth, Michael served as a senior business consultant at John Hancock Investments, where he partnered with broker-dealers, RIAs, and wirehouse firms to deliver tailored investment solutions. His deep understanding of asset allocation and retirement investment vehicles positioned him as a trusted advisor to clients managing portfolios ranging from \$500 million to \$5 billion.

Beyond his technical expertise, Michael's passion lies in building relationships. He thrives on engaging with a broad spectrum of individuals, from asset managers and portfolio technicians to investment committees. "Working with such a diverse group of people makes the job exciting and rewarding," he says.

Commonwealth Financial Network, headquartered in Waltham, MA, and San Diego, CA, is the largest privately held RIA-independent broker/dealer, renowned for its advisor-first approach. Since its founding in 1979, the firm has maintained its commitment to delivering unparalleled service to advisors and their clients—a vision Michael Geraci continues to champion as he leads the charge in transforming retirement investment solutions.

CONTACT:

www.commonwealth.com | geracimichael@gmail.com
LI: Michael Geraci, MSF, CPAF



FELIPE WANCE
Owner



clubpilates.com/location/southftlauderdale
felipewance@gmail.com
LI: Felipe Wance | IG: @felipewance

From Soccer Fields to Boardrooms

Felipe Wance's story begins on the soccer fields of Brazil, where he played professionally from the time he was eight years old. Discipline, grit, and determination defined his early years. At just 17, he left everything behind when his parents sent him to Washington State as an exchange student. It was the first of many bold leaps that would shape his life. After high school in America, he returned home to pursue a degree in economics and then climbed the ranks of global banking for 15 years, working at powerhouse institutions including BTG Pactual, UBS, and Citibank.

Trading Finance for Fitness

Although he thrived in banking, Felipe never lost his passion for health and wellness—an interest rooted in a family of doctors and dentists. In 2017, he chose courage over comfort, moving back to the U.S. with his 2 kids and launched his first Club Pilates studio in Fort Lauderdale. What began as a single location quickly grew into a fitness empire. Today, Felipe owns multiple thriving studios across South Florida, with more in development. His success has been recognized repeatedly, as his studios have been voted *Best Pilates in Fort Lauderdale* five years running.

A Hands-On Visionary

Unlike many owners, Felipe doesn't lead from a distance. He's in the trenches—coaching managers, supporting instructors, fixing equipment, and even taking classes alongside members. By being present, he creates a culture of excellence and connection. His studios aren't just places to exercise; they are

sanctuaries where people rebuild strength, confidence, and community.

Beyond Business

Felipe has never been content with the ordinary. After selling his first company—a successful travel agency in Brazil—he invested everything into his biggest project yet: bringing Club Pilates to Florida. And he isn't stopping there. With plans to expand further and launch a disruptive art gallery, he's on a mission to fuse physical health, mental wellness, and creativity into something larger than business: a movement for better living.

Changing Lives, One Story at a Time

For Felipe, the greatest reward isn't revenue—it's transformation. He recalls a woman who came into one of his studios using a walker, convinced exercise was impossible. With his encouragement, she began Pilates twice a week. Within six months, she no longer needed the walker, removed the grab bars from her home, and went on to complete more than 1,000 classes. Stories like hers fuel Felipe's drive and affirm his belief that Pilates is not just fitness—it's life-changing medicine for body and mind.

A Legacy of Passion and Purpose

For Felipe, Pilates represents the future of fitness. Unlike traditional gyms focused solely on building muscle, Pilates engages the entire body while sharpening the mind. It's a discipline that helps people age better, feel stronger, and live with greater vitality.

Mayya YUKILEVICH

CHIEF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Few leaders in healthcare bring the depth of perspective and drive for disruption that Mayya Yukilevich does. With 17 years of experience in the healthcare industry—most of it spent navigating the complex world of dialysis—she has built a reputation as both a strategist and a visionary. Her expertise stretches across every stage of the patient journey, from the first nephrologist visit to the life-altering transition to dialysis, giving her an unmatched understanding of where patients often fall through the cracks. It's this clarity that fuels her work at CloudCath, where she is helping to revolutionize the way catheter-based treatments are monitored.

Mayya's career is a study in leadership through impact. At Fresenius Medical Care, she spent a decade mastering the operational intricacies of dialysis. Later, at U.S. Renal Care, she spearheaded growth through joint ventures and M&A, proving her ability to not only scale businesses, but also reshape markets. With a master's degree in economics and specialties ranging from market access to value-based care, she stands at the crossroads of patient advocacy and business innovation—a place where she thrives.

CloudCath, founded in 2017 in San Francisco, is far from a conventional MedTech company. Its remote monitoring platform is the first of its kind to detect signs of infections in peritoneal dialysis patients before symptoms even appear. The company's flagship device, cleared by the FDA in 2022 and now in use nationwide, analyzes drainage fluid in real time with proprietary algorithms. If early warning signs emerge, the system instantly alerts healthcare teams—giving physicians a critical three-day window to intervene before patients feel ill. In an arena where peritonitis is one of the leading causes of hospitalization and treatment dropout, those three days can mean the difference between preserved quality of life and a devastating decline.

But CloudCath is not just about cutting-edge technology—it's about people. Alongside its smart sensor, the company deploys success managers who work directly



with patients and physicians, ensuring seamless communication and faster action when complications arise. This blend of digital health innovation and human support makes CloudCath a lifeline for patients and a game-changer for clinicians.

For Mayya, this is not just business—it's personal. "What we're doing is revolutionary for the industry," she says, "and it's finally solving challenges that have existed in dialysis for decades." Her conviction is backed by results: peritoneal dialysis, long touted as the patient-friendly and cost-effective alternative to hemodialysis, has struggled with high attrition rates due to infection. CloudCath offers a solution that could finally shift the balance, helping more patients stay on the treatment that preserves their independence, their health, and their lives.

With Mayya Yukilevich driving business development, CloudCath is more than a company—it's a movement to redefine renal care. Under her leadership, innovation meets execution, and the result is nothing short of transformative for patients, providers, and the future of healthcare.





Dr. Douglas Jones

CEO and Medical Director:
Global Allergy Immune Network
President of Food Allergy Support Team: FAST



A Leader in Immunology and Patient-Centered Care

Dr. Douglas Jones, CEO and medical director of the Global Allergy Immune Network (GAIN), is a board-certified allergist and immunologist and globally recognized expert in food allergies, long COVID, angioedema, and complex immune disorders. With decades of experience and a reputation for treating patients that other providers could not help, he has built his career on listening first and diagnosing with precision. “You’re not just a case here. You’re a person — and you’ll be treated like one,” he often tells his patients. His commitment to patient care and scientific advancement earned him an appointment to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) working group for COVID vaccines.

Background and Accomplishments

Dr. Jones has led pioneering advancements in food allergy treatments for individuals facing potentially life-threatening reactions, championed long COVID advocacy and solutions, and developed diagnostic and treatment approaches for angioedema. His contributions have been recognized internationally, including acknowledgment by Utah Governor Spencer Cox, the *APEX Award for Publication Excellence*, honors from the Speaker of the House of Australia, and multiple *Best of Utah Body and Mind* rankings, including *#1 Top Allergist* by *Salt Lake City Weekly*. With an MD and certification from the American Board of Allergy and Immunology, he has shaped both clinical practice and public understanding of immune-related disease.

About the Global Allergy Immune Network (GAIN)

Founded in 2008 and now based in Murray, Utah, GAIN specializes in an integrated approach to food allergies and complex immune disorders. Dr. Jones built the practice around individualized treatment—plans that focus on progress over perfection while offering real solutions for patients who have been overlooked, misdiagnosed, or dismissed. Many arrive at GAIN after seeing ten or more specialists, uncertain of what’s wrong or why nothing has worked. Dr. Jones excels at uncovering the real drivers of symptoms, noting that many patients labeled with allergies actually have entirely different conditions. His goal is simple: “Let’s figure it out together.”

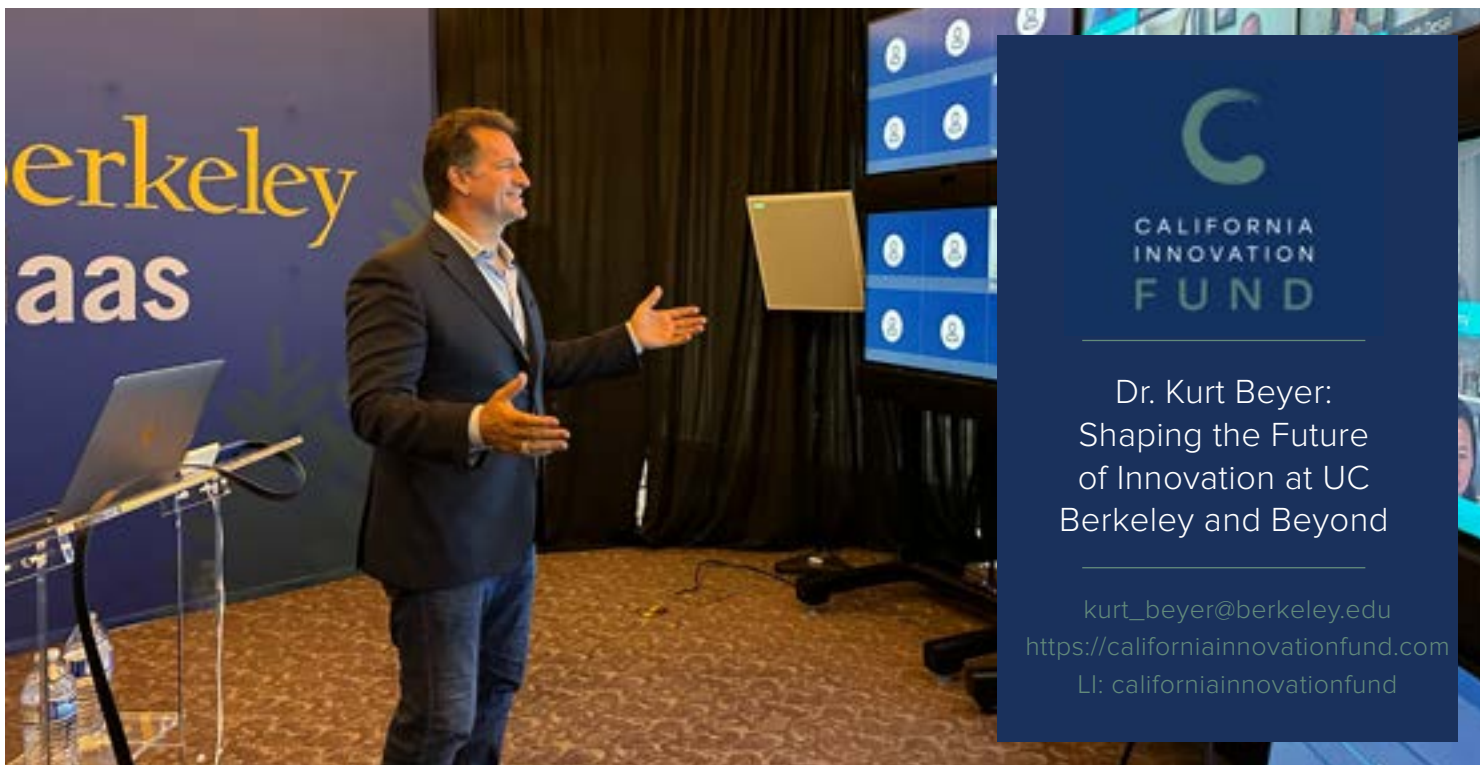
A Diagnostic Approach That Sees the Whole Person

What sets Dr. Jones apart is the combination of his immunology background and his fully integrated, story-driven diagnostic approach. Instead of isolating symptoms, he looks for root causes—how the body is communicating through patterns, history, timing, and lived experience. This deeper investigation allows him to identify conditions that mimic allergies, but require different interventions. By synthesizing a patient’s “headline” with the details beneath it, he helps them break cycles of ineffective treatments and finally make meaningful progress.

Expertise in Long COVID

Long COVID remains one of the most complex conditions in modern medicine, and Dr. Jones has emerged as a leading voice in its diagnosis and care. He follows established diagnostic criteria while diving into each patient’s pre- and post-infection history to understand how their immune, neurological, hormonal, and autonomic systems have shifted. Symptoms often include profound fatigue, brain fog, immune dysregulation, sleep disturbances, neuropathy, and cardiovascular changes. Drawing on his immunology expertise, he addresses the multiple affected systems in a cohesive, individualized way, helping patients regain stability, function, and hope.

<https://drdougjones.com> | gain@myimmunetwork.com | LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/drdouglasjones
Facebook: <https://facebook.com/RAMFATC> | Instagram: www.instagram.com/drdougjones



Dr. Kurt Beyer:
Shaping the Future
of Innovation at UC
Berkeley and Beyond

kurt_beyer@berkeley.edu
<https://californiainnovationfund.com>
 LI: californiainnovationfund

KURT BEYER | Senior Lecturer Entrepreneurship: UC Berkeley, Haas Business School General Partner and Founder: California Innovation Fund

Building a Bridge from Research to Enterprise

Dr. Kurt Beyer has spent the past 15 years transforming cutting-edge research into real-world impact. As a senior lecturer of entrepreneurship at UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business and general partner and founder of the California Innovation Fund, Kurt has helped guide the launch of 80+ venture-backed startups born from the university’s scientific and technological discoveries. With a clear mission—“to turn science into jobs and value for the country”—Kurt works at the intersection of academia, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

A Career Rooted in Service and Strategy

Following his service as a naval officer, Kurt sought to continue serving the country in a different capacity. “After the Navy, the most patriotic thing I could think of was to help turn science into companies that create jobs and add to the GDP,” he says. That calling led him to entrepreneurship and institutional investment. Prior to founding the Cal Fund, he served as a senior partner at Parallel Advisors, where he helped grow the firm to \$6 billion in assets under management. His academic credentials are equally impressive, with a BS from the U.S. Naval Academy, a master’s from Oxford University, and a PhD from UC Berkeley. He is also the author of *Grace Hopper* and *The Invention of the Information Age* (MIT Press, 2009), a biography of one of computing’s most influential pioneers.

Educating Entrepreneurs and Seeding Startups

Since 2010, Kurt has guided the entrepreneurship program at Berkeley Haas, blending academic rigor with startup execution. He redesigned the curriculum to pair MBA students with PhD and master’s students in engineering and the sciences, enabling

them to form interdisciplinary teams and develop viable companies. This hands-on approach has produced a steady stream of startups, including, Catena Bio, EdVisorly, Freewire, Traveling Spoon, and PlushCare—many of which started as student projects in his classroom. Roughly half of the Cal Fund’s portfolio was founded by students Kurt mentored, and he continues to help them grow at the Fund’s general partner.

The California Innovation Fund: A Virtuous Cycle

Frustrated by the limitations of public funding, Kurt pitched a bold idea to the Haas dean: launch an affiliated venture capital fund that reinvests into the university. Today, the California Innovation Fund dedicates itself exclusively to startups founded by alumni of the University of California system. One unique feature? Fifty percent of the general partner’s return goes back to UC Berkeley’s entrepreneurship program. This reinvestment model ensures that successful startups help fund the next wave of innovators, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem. “We’re not just building startups,” Kurt says. “We’re building a system that funds itself and scales impact.”

Driving the World’s Top Innovation Hub

UC Berkeley’s proximity to Silicon Valley positions it at the epicenter of global entrepreneurship. According to a 10-year study by PitchBook published in 2024, Berkeley leads all universities in producing venture-backed startups, even surpassing Stanford. Between them, the two institutions have generated 3,039 startups and 3,358 founders and these companies have raised \$139 billion.

Pitchbook published August 30, 2024: <https://pitchbook.com/news/articles/pitchbook-university-rankings>



JUDE THOMAS MARINO

OWNER

From Corporate Leadership to Wellness Innovation

For more than 30 years, Jude Marino thrived in corporate America, building an impressive career in telecommunications and earning a place in the Winner's Circle at Cox Business—twice. But after three decades in leadership, he sought something more personal, something that would allow him to impact lives directly. That desire became the foundation for Louisiana Medical Group, a Baton Rouge-based clinic specializing in medically supervised weight loss.

A first-generation college graduate who grew up in a modest New Orleans neighborhood, Jude's entrepreneurial journey was fueled by grit, vision, and timing. What began as a side venture in 2023 quickly evolved into one of the most successful wellness clinics in the state. Within a month of opening, Louisiana Medical Group had already welcomed 100 patients. By month two, that number doubled—and the clinic was cash-flow positive. "The first year we made \$1 million, the second year \$2 million, and this year we're on track for \$3 million," Jude shares.

The Growth of Louisiana Medical Group

Founded in 2023, Louisiana Medical Group is the first of four clinics across Louisiana, with a fifth location set to open in Tampa, Florida, by the end of 2025, owned by Jude. The clinics provide personalized weight-loss solutions using compounded GLP-1 medications such

as semaglutide and tirzepatide, integrated with nutrition counseling, customized meal planning, personal training and an ensemble of other peptide therapies for healing, longevity and wellness. Under Jude's leadership, the group's model centers on concierge-style support and consistent patient engagement. Body composition tools, app-based tracking, and regular follow-ups ensure that patients are guided every step of the way. "We don't just prescribe—we partner with patients to help them achieve lasting results," he explains.

Jude oversees clinical operations, patient care, and compliance, coordinating with collaborating physicians to maintain strict adherence to medical and HIPAA standards. He personally conducts consultations, develops individualized peptide and nutrition protocols, and educates patients on holistic wellness practices.

A Business Mindset Meets Medical Expertise

What truly sets Jude apart is his business acumen. While most healthcare founders come from a clinical background, he approached the industry from the opposite direction—applying three decades of business leadership to the medical space. "Medical providers went to medical school. I went to business school," Jude notes. "I worked backward into healthcare." That perspective has proven invaluable. His ability to cultivate relationships with doctors, hospitals, and healthcare systems has made Louisiana Medical Group a trusted referral destination for patients seeking safe, effective weight-management care. His operations expertise also extends to staffing, vendor management, marketing oversight, and continuous program development.

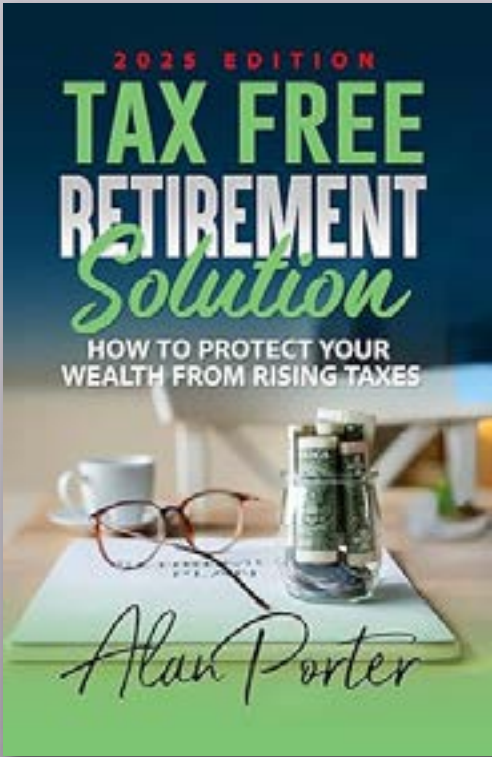
Building a Legacy

Jude's entrepreneurial success and transition from corporate leader to wellness innovator caught the attention of producers at *Inside Success TV*. His story will be featured in the upcoming documentary *Legacy Makers*, premiering at the end of November 2025 across major streaming platforms. The film chronicles his transformation from executive to founder, spotlighting his determination to redefine success and purpose.

Beyond Louisiana Medical Group, Jude also owns The Marino Group, a business consulting firm that helps entrepreneurs launch turnkey wellness clinics. Through both ventures, he continues to build not only thriving businesses—but a legacy rooted in empowerment, health, and opportunity.



www.lmgmedicine.com
jude@lmgmedicine.com
www.linkedin.com/in/jude-marino
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ALAN PORTER

CEO & OWNER

Alan Porter's journey to becoming one of the nation's most trusted financial strategists wasn't scripted—it was forged through service, personal tragedy, and an unwavering commitment to protecting the financial futures of others. A retired Blackhawk helicopter instructor pilot with 21 years in the Army, Alan transitioned into real estate and mortgage lending before charting a course into financial strategy. Today, as the CEO and owner of Strategic Wealth Strategies, he leads a powerhouse team specializing in tax-free retirement solutions, ensuring that clients keep more of their hard-earned wealth.

Alan's mission is personal. When his daughter-in-law passed away from pancreatic cancer at just 39, his son—100% disabled—was saved from financial devastation by a little-known but powerful tool: the terminal illness rider on his wife's life insurance policy. It granted her access to hundreds of thousands of tax-free dollars, lifting a crushing financial burden. That moment ignited Alan's passion. "People don't know these things, and they need to," Alan shares.

Alan has soared beyond traditional finance, earning certifications as a Certified Tax and Business Advisor, and a Certified Financial Fiduciary. He is a member of the Prestigious Circle of Wealth, been published in over 1,168 publications, and was honored in *Who's Who in America* in 2023 for *Excellence in Financial Advice*. He has spoken at West Point, Harvard, and on major media networks including ESPN, ABC, NBC, CBS, CW, and Fox.

At Strategic Wealth Strategies, Alan and his team—comprising elite CPAs, tax attorneys, and financial specialists with over five decades of experience—operate on one principle: think beyond conventional financial planning.

Alan's insights are available now on Amazon in his bestselling book, *Tax Free Retirement Solution*. His message is clear: financial security isn't about chasing market returns—it's about strategy, protection, and taking control.





KYLE MCGINLEY and PAYTON KRUIDENIER



Kyle McGinley: Principal

Email: kmcginley@rossbrown.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/kyle-mcginley-897608a6

Payton Kruidenier: Managing Principal

Email: paytonk@rossbrown.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/payton-kruidenier-6195a4b3

Ross Brown Partners, Inc.

Website: www.rossbrownpartners.com

Instagram: [@rbpccommercial](https://www.instagram.com/rbpccommercial)

When Kyle McGinley and Payton Kruidenier acquired Ross Brown Partners, Inc. in 2022, they set out to take a respected local firm and build it into a powerhouse with national reach. For 34 years, the Scottsdale-based company has been a trusted name in commercial real estate, known for its expertise in office, industrial, and investment properties. Today, under Kyle and Payton's leadership, that legacy is evolving into a bold new chapter—one marked by rapid expansion, innovation, and a renewed commitment to being the industry authority. Together, Payton and Kyle share a clear vision: to build a nimble, full-service real estate platform capable of serving every facet of a client's needs.

That vision has already born fruit. In just three years, Ross Brown Partners has experienced extraordinary growth—7x EBITDA—an especially impressive feat in an industry known for steady, but slow progress. The firm's expansion strategy leverages advanced technologies and brings in professionals from diverse industries, applying fresh perspectives to what has traditionally been an old-guard business. This forward-thinking approach not only sets them apart from their larger, siloed competitors, but also positions the firm as a true consultant to its clients.

Ross Brown's legacy of stability remains central to its success. With average employee tenure approaching two decades, the firm boasts a culture of loyalty and continuity that translates into consistently strong outcomes for tenants, landlords, owner-users, and investors. Under Kyle and Payton's leadership, that strength is paired with agility. Their team provides comprehensive brokerage, consulting, and property management services while maintaining a distinct edge in the industrial sector. Through their sister company, which specializes in development and asset management, they offer clients valuable insights into development strategy, a competitive advantage that few firms can match.

For Kyle and Payton one of their proudest accomplishments is purchasing Ross Brown before the age of 30 and leading its dramatic growth in such a short time. Both share the conviction that Ross Brown's story is only beginning—and that their national consulting platform will soon redefine what clients expect from a real estate partner. We asked Kyle and Payton what sets Ross Brown apart from its competitors.

Kyle: "We advise our clients in a truly multi-faceted way. Because we operate across property management, tenant and landlord representation, investment sales, and acquisition and disposition strategy, we underwrite decisions with a depth of market knowledge and real-time data that most firms simply don't have. Our transactional experience, our relationships, and the performance we've delivered for clients give us the ability to consult from a position of real experience. That's what sets us apart and what will drive our national consulting platform."

Payton: "Our role is to be advisors first. Clients trust us because we understand their assets, their goals, and the pressures they're navigating. We're building a platform where the relationship doesn't stop at a lease or a sale. We stay involved in operations, strategy, and long-term planning. That's where we create real value. We know the market. We know the process. We do what we say."

TYLER ARGUE

President & CEO

“ Every situation we handle—whether a forensic investigation, financial audit, or nonprofit initiative—requires unique solutions. That’s where we shine.



www.westbridgecanada.com
tyler@westbridgecanada.com | LI: tyler-argue



Tyler Argue, the president and CEO of Westbridge Ventures Canada LP, demonstrates resilience and ingenuity in the world of business and social entrepreneurship. From humble beginnings marked by adversity, Tyler’s journey has been one of grit and determination, culminating in the leadership of a firm that redefines investigative services, fraud prevention, and risk management across Canada.

Tyler’s non-traditional path to success has been central to his story. Leaving home at a young age and overcoming challenges, he earned his GED, pursued an associate’s degree in paramedicine, earned the designation as a Canadian Certified Fire Investigator (CCFI-C), and gained certification in cognitive forensic interviewing. These milestones shaped his approach to problem-solving and leadership, which have become the cornerstone of his career.

“I saw gaps in services and customer care during my time with other risk management firms,” Tyler reflects. “I wanted to address those challenges and offer an approach that went beyond traditional big box consulting firms.”

In 2022, Tyler founded Westbridge Ventures Canada LP, headquartered in Calgary with locations in Edmonton, Yellowknife, and Whitehorse. The firm provides a comprehensive suite of services, including investigative risk management, fraud prevention, and strategic community development. What sets Westbridge apart is its client-centric approach and a commitment to tackling complex problems with innovative solutions. Tyler explains, “We don’t just offer core investigative services. We deliver a flexible, holistic suite of solutions that address the broader challenges businesses face today.”

A key pillar of Westbridge’s success lies in its specialization through *Springboard Strategies*, the company’s trade name

for its community and social development initiatives. Through his leadership, their firm has tackled some bold and complex initiatives in the NGO sector which exemplifies his dedication to fostering economic empowerment, cultural preservation, and gender-based violence prevention. Through collaborations with Indigenous organizations, educational institutions, and corporate stakeholders, Tyler has built a reputation as a leader who bridges divides and promotes collaboration.

The firm’s unorthodox approach extends beyond its community focus. Last year, Tyler spearheaded a bold move by merging with an accounting firm—an unconventional step that grew the business significantly. “Everybody thought I was nuts,” Tyler admits with a smile. “But your finances are a risk in your business, so the partnership with Gill made perfect sense. Together, we’re solving problems holistically, and the results speak for themselves.”

Westbridge Canada thrives on critical thinking, creativity, and a dedication to exceptional customer service. Tyler explains, “Every situation we handle—whether a forensic investigation, financial audit, or nonprofit initiative—requires unique solutions. That’s where we shine.”

Under Tyler’s leadership, Westbridge has become a trusted partner to industries like insurance, finance, and corporate sectors. By blending top talent, cutting-edge technology, and a mission-driven focus, the firm continues to redefine what’s possible in risk management services and community development.

For Tyler Argue, the road to success wasn’t conventional, but it’s precisely this adaptable perspective that has driven him to build bridges, tackle complex challenges, and make a meaningful impact on businesses and communities across Canada.

What It Means to Be an Inspirational Leader

An inspirational leader is not defined by a title, a corner office, or the size of an organization. Leadership, at its most meaningful, is not about hierarchy—it is about impact. The individuals featured in *The Top 25 Inspirational Leaders* represent a wide range of industries, roles, and paths, yet they share something far more powerful than professional similarity: a commitment to living as an example.

Inspirational leadership begins with intention. It is the quiet decision, made daily, to act with integrity even when no one is watching. It is the willingness to take responsibility not only for outcomes, but for the culture, tone, and values that shape those outcomes. These leaders understand that influence is not granted—it is earned through consistency, humility, and purpose.

Not every inspirational leader leads a company. Some lead teams, classrooms, communities, families, creative movements, or emerging ideas. Some work behind the scenes, shaping systems and supporting others so that progress can take root. Others stand at the forefront, guiding change with visibility and conviction. What unites them is not position, but perspective: the belief that leadership carries a responsibility to serve something greater than oneself.

At its core, inspirational leadership is rooted in service. These individuals look beyond personal success and ask a deeper question: How does my work improve the lives of others? Whether they are innovating within their industry, advocating for equity, mentoring the next generation, or rebuilding systems that no longer work, their leadership is measured by the ripple effect it creates. They leave people better than they found them—more confident, more capable, more seen.

Another defining quality of inspirational leaders is courage. Not the loud, performative kind, but the steady courage to choose growth over comfort. Many of those featured in this magazine have faced setbacks, uncertainty, or resistance. What sets them apart is not the absence of adversity, but their response to it. They transform challenges into lessons, failures into fuel, and obstacles into opportunities for reinvention. In doing so, they give others permission to persevere.

Inspirational leaders also understand the power of authenticity. They lead as whole people, not curated personas. They are willing to share their journeys honestly—the triumphs and the struggles—because they know that transparency builds trust. By showing up as themselves, they create environments where others feel safe to do the same. This kind of leadership does not demand perfection; it invites participation.

Equally important is their commitment to growth—not only their own, but that of those around them. These leaders invest in people. They listen. They mentor. They elevate voices that might otherwise go unheard. They recognize that leadership is not diminished when it is shared; it is strengthened. Their legacy is not confined to what they accomplish individually, but to what they make possible collectively.

In a world often driven by speed, metrics, and short-term wins, inspirational leaders choose meaning. They think long-term. They act with empathy. They balance ambition with responsibility. They understand that real progress requires patience, reflection, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. Their leadership is not reactive—it is intentional, values-based, and grounded in purpose.

The individuals selected for Top 25 Inspirational Leaders were not chosen simply for what they have achieved, but for how they lead. They stand out because they embody the principle that leadership is lived, not claimed. Through their actions, they remind us that influence begins with example, that service is a strength, and that inspiration is most powerful when it is authentic.

As you reach the final page of this magazine, we invite you to reflect not only on the leaders featured here, but on the leader within yourself. Inspirational leadership is not reserved for a select few—it is available to anyone willing to lead with intention, courage, and care. These twenty-five individuals show us what is possible when leadership is rooted in purpose. Their stories do not signal an ending, but an invitation—to lead boldly, to serve generously, and to inspire others simply by being who you are.

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