

CEO OF THE YEAR Awards

2024 Winners Stay in the Headlines

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Sandra Beaver: Evolus on Track to Hit \$700M Revenue

■ By PETER J. BRENNAN

NEWPORT BEACH — **Sandra Beaver** has promised investors that **Evolus Inc.** will triple revenue to \$700 million by 2028.

To reach that goal, the Newport Beach maker of facial injections would need an annual compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27%.

Thus far, it's well above that CAGR as sales climbed 32% to \$266.3 million in 2024. Analysts are projecting 32% growth this year to \$353 million followed by another 33% increase to \$469 million in 2026.

"We're on a great trajectory to hit our goals," Beaver told the Business Journal. "We have an excellent sales team, and we're in an exciting market."

Since winning the Business Journal's **CFO of the Year Award** in the public sector a year ago, it's been a busy time for Beaver. Among the company highlights she's been involved

with:

■ Evolus' signature product, **Jeuveau**, is approaching 14% market share; Jeuveau's main competitor is **Botox** from **Abbvie Inc.**'s **Allergan**, which operates out of Irvine.

■ The company is preparing for a second quarter launch of injectable hyaluronic acid gels called **Evolysse**, which received approval in February from the **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**. The product is the first to receive FDA approval to mention weight loss potential on its label, Beaver said. Evolysse also transitions the company into a multi-product supplier.

■ Hosted Evolus' first Investor Day since going public and participated in the Nasdaq closing bell ceremony.

■ Played a key role in company's interna-



Sandra Beaver
CFO
Evolus Inc.

tional growth, supporting successful market launches in Spain and Australia, further establishing the company's global footprint.

■ Honored in New York City as a Rising Star at the 2nd Annual CFO Leadership Awards, hosted by **StrategicCFO360** and **The CFO Leadership Council**.

■ Non-GAAP income from operations in 2024 was \$300,000 compared to a \$23.4 million loss from operations in 2023. It's the company's first ever annual adjusted profit, reaching it a year ahead of schedule.

"We're really disciplined about where we put our money," she said. "We're getting great operating leverage."

■ The total number of purchasing accounts to date since Jeuveau's launch has grown to more than 15,300, surpassing 50% account penetration in the U.S. The reorder rate among customers remains at approximately 70%.

■ Enrollment in the Evolus Rewards consumer loyalty program grew over 40% to 1.1 million consumers by the end of 2024.

Since joining Evolus as CFO in 2022, the employee count has grown from 160 to 350. The stock last week fell 14% to \$10.48 due to pending tariffs. It has a \$665 million market cap (Nasdaq: EOLS).

"It's been a great fun year for Evolus. We're about to launch our second product line. It's a lot of excitement. It's a big transformation for the company." ■

John Ing: Growing KidWorks Beyond Santa Ana

■ By EMILY SANTIAGO-MOLINA

SANTA ANA — Six months ago, **John Ing** embarked on his fifth run as chief financial officer, this time at Santa Ana-based **KidWorks Community Development Corp.**

Ing won the Business Journal's **CFO of the Year Award** in the nonprofit category last May for his work at the **Illumination Foundation**, which provides emergency housing programs and recuperative care services for locals dealing with homelessness.

The CFO strengthened Illumination Foundation's fiscal health during his five-year tenure as revenue jumped 165% to \$55.4 million in 2023; it continued climbing last year, rising 13% to \$62.7 million.

A week after the awards ceremony, he left Illumination to spend the next few months focusing on family. Then in October, Ing started in his new role at KidWorks.

"I've reached a point where I've done what I needed to do with Illumination," Ing said at the time of the awards.

When word of his departure from the foundation spread, KidWorks Executive Director,

and longtime friend, **David Benavides** reached out to ask him about joining the team.

"I think it was the first phone call I took," Ing told the Business Journal.

The executive added that he aimed to join an organization still focused on vulnerable populations in Orange County.

KidWorks serves the at-risk youth and families of central Santa Ana by providing programs centered on personal and leadership development as well as college and career readiness. Through its "hub-and-spoke" model, the nonprofit operates three community centers that combined serve over 650 children, youth and parents in weekly programs and more than 3,000 community members annually.

"It was an easy decision for me to make," Ing added.

The nonprofit operates a pre-school on-site at its Santa Ana headquarters on Chestnut, also hosting afterschool programs and tutoring for kids in pre-school and all the way to college.

"The kids that we serve are largely socio-



John Ing
CFO
KidWorks Community
Development

economically disadvantaged. I always say I just need to make an impact on one life," Ing said. "Just like me, someone made an investment in me when I was growing up."

When Ing first arrived in the United States as an 8-year-old with his mother, they found themselves staying at the occasional shelter or sleeping on an available couch. He credits his high school accounting teacher **Patricia Rowley** for the choice to major in English to build communication skills before moving

into a financial career.

One Child at a Time

Ing noted that KidWorks is about tenth of the size of his previous workplace with 45 to 50 employees currently serving the city of Santa Ana.

One of Ing's current priorities is to drive the nonprofit's growth as it looks to expand its services to more neighborhoods.

"Our organization is heavily invested in relationship building with each child that we serve. It's not a cookie cutter approach to community development," Ing said. "It's one child at a time, one family at a time, one day at a time and that requires a lot of just up close and personal attention."

As CFO, he is focused on establishing systems and processes at KidWorks that will both enable growth and minimize any pain points.

"I look forward to being a meaningful contributor to KidWorks," Ing said, adding that he wants to help **Benavides**, "our leadership team and the board dream bigger." ■

Guita Sharifi: Urges More Support for Charter Schools

■ By KEVIN COSTELLOE

IRVINE — **Guita Sharifi** has a message for Gov. **Gavin Newsom**: "Come and visit one of our charter schools."

Sharifi, the CFO of charter school management company **Lifelong Learning Administration**, won a **Lifetime Achievement Award** from the Business Journal almost a year ago.

She would like Newsom to "tell us why he doesn't really support more funding" for charter schools.

She notes that California has a moratorium on opening one category of new charter schools until the beginning of next year.

Charter schools are publicly funded, but some have gained a reputation as being elitist, while causing considerable controversy. Sharifi said President **Donald Trump**'s administration is "very school-choice" but the state of California isn't.

"Education and school choice should be every legislator's top issue," she told the Business Journal on March 28.

There is a "lot of commotion as far as government regulations" are concerned.

In California, for example, that includes more meetings and paperwork.

Diversifying in States

Lifelong Learning, a public charter school network, is based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The nonprofit manages about 120 schools across the U.S., with 90 of them in California. Its only private school in California is the on-line **Houston Academy**.

Sharifi says she works in Irvine and manages about \$550 million. Some 40 finance team members are also based here, with many of them working remotely.

"We're trying to diversify in different states," she said.

Most of her organization's branded schools are called Learn4Life.

"Other states have other types of regulations versus California."

She says the company's program is popular with parents and students.

"We also introduced a private model versus a public school model. We expanded our reach."

"We just opened our first private school in Florida, in Boca Raton."



CFO Guita Sharifi at the Learn4Life school in Charleston, S.C.

She added: "We're looking to also open one in Orange County."

The organization is now running schools in Ohio, Michigan, Florida, South Carolina, Texas and California.

She notes that some states are providing families with vouchers for education at either

public or private schools.

"We could possibly expand into the private model so we can accept those vouchers," she said.

Millions in School Savings

"While our partners are improving educational outcomes, we work behind the scenes and save them thousands of hours and millions of dollars," Lifelong Learning says on its website.

Sharifi fled from Iran shortly before the 1979 revolution, eventually receiving a doctorate in Chicago.


She previously held various professional positions, including chief financial officer at the **Alzheimer's Family Services Center** in Huntington Beach, director of finance-national at **Saratech** in Lake Forest and CFO at **Western Youth Services** in Laguna Hills.

Sharifi joined Lifelong Learning Administration in October 2019 after serving in the healthcare field, including the CFO spot at Radiant Health Centers in Irvine.

Sharifi won the nonprofit award at the Business Journal's 12th annual **CFO of the Year** event in 2019. ■



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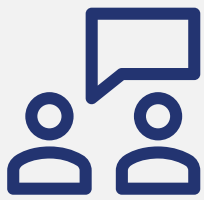
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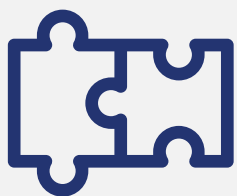
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Tim Hoffmann: Takes Lead of Embla's Finance Initiatives

■ By PARIMAL M. ROHIT

IRVINE — **Tim Hoffmann** joined Icelandic medical device company **Embla Medical** in 2021, and three years later he was recognized with the Rising Star Award at the Business Journal's 17th annual **CFO of the Year Awards** at the **Irvine Marriott**.

It was in those three years that Hoffmann and Embla, which has an office in Irvine, witnessed steady growth in profitability. The global mobility company reported about \$800 million in annual revenue and was valued at \$1.8 billion when Hoffmann, a former championship-winning volleyball player at **University of California, Los Angeles**, was recognized by the Business Journal.

Embla has continued to grow in the past year as they provide prosthetics and other mobility-related products for amputees and disabled persons (Nasdaq: EMBLA).

Hoffmann said **Össur**, Embla's parent company, underwent significant organizational changes since last year's awards ceremony. Hoffmann's role has also changed, shifting from Embla's CFO for the Americas to the top financial executive for the parent company's global initiatives.

Össur, headquartered in Iceland, transitioned from a regional business unit model, focusing on the Americas, Europe and emerging markets, to a global business unit.

Shifting to a global business unit model, however, gives Össur greater opportunity to



Hoffmann was promoted to oversee Embla's and Össur's global finance initiatives

focus on its three core specialties: bracing and supports, chronic solutions and patient care.

The Embla executive added his company ex-

perienced "high single-digit revenue growth" over the past year.

"We've consistently delivered strong results on the top line and are trying to draw profitable growth," Hoffmann told the Business Journal.

The company operating out of Irvine recently reported 6% sales growth for the full year of 2024, driven by its patient care and prosthetics/neuro orthotics segments.

Hoffmann said the Americas account for more than half of Össur's revenues.

"It is still our biggest and most important market," Hoffmann said.

Accessing end users in emerging markets in Asia and Africa is where Embla and Össur hope to expand in the coming years, Hoffmann added. ■

Joyce Pae: Exciting Year Ahead for Verus Aerospace

■ By YUIKA YOSHIDA

ANAHEIM — Since winning the Business Journal's **CFO of the Year Awards** last May, **Joyce Pae** has gone from managing two balance sheets at **Verus Aerospace** to focusing only on one.

She was recognized for keeping Verus afloat during the pandemic and overseeing the company's split, which led to the formation of **Kinetic Engine Systems** — a new firm focusing on manufacturing engine components.

Last August, Kinetic appointed **John Stockman** as its new CFO, replacing Pae who had served as CFO of both Verus and Kinetic for more than a year.

"Now that I'm not managing two companies, I am 100% dedicated to operations at Verus Aerospace," Pae told the Business

Journal.

Prior to completing the split in May of 2023, Verus and Kinetic generated about \$600 million in revenue and had a combined 2,000 employees, according to Pae.

"We are picking and choosing contracts, so I'm not going to say that revenue has been growing, but profit margin has been growing," Pae said.

It's an exciting time for aerospace, especially coming off a turbulent year for the industry with the temporary grounding of the **Boeing 737 Max** planes and seven-week strike of 33,000 Boeing machinists, Pae said.

These production quality issues negatively impacted demand from suppliers, but now that's changing, she said.

A large portion of Verus' clientele is commercial, but Pae said that they're also trying



Joyce Pae
CFO
Verus Aerospace

to get more military contracts.

Verus, headquartered in Anaheim, has over 500,000 square feet of manufacturing space across the nation, including in Torrance; Wichita, Kansas; and Tacoma, Washington.

It's more vertically integrated compared to

other aerospace companies, performing its chemical processing in-house, Pae said.

All aerospace parts must go through the process to ensure the metal is durable enough and meets the qualifications of the original equipment manufacturer (OEM). It's a critical step in the quality and assurance procedure.

"There's more stress in the aerospace industry because we have to make sure that we produce quality parts," Pae said. "We've seen it in 737. If something happens, people die, so we take our jobs really seriously."

Doing chemical processing internally also saves the company from having to pay premiums and keeps costs down, Pae said. ■

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Inspire an evolution: Building and executing a strategic finance vision

Translating the strategic vision of a chief financial officer (CFO) into measurable action items can be a fine art—one that shines a spotlight on an organization's comprehensive finance operation. Building a thorough, successful strategy is the first step toward making positive changes during uncertain and evolving times, when proven leadership is needed more than ever.

The overarching mission of today's CFO is to provide that leadership—as well as operational oversight and system coordination—of financial products and services that address the organization's strategic needs and issues. An effective approach will see the CFO's focus shift from a tactical level of cost control to one that drives key decisions across the company.

While a well-defined corporate strategy transforms the finance function into a high-performing operation, the process is often accompanied by an unsettling amount of change. As a recent Gartner survey revealed, more than half of change management initiatives fail, underscoring the critical need for CFOs to place a strong focus on managing these changes in order to drive success.

The CFO should be viewed as the custodian of an organization's strategy, responsible for steering change across the finance operating model while also accommodating industry impacts. Modern CFOs have not only expanded their functional scope; they are also increasingly relied upon to drive changes that affect the organization as a whole, becoming a virtual superpower behind the enterprise strategy. (<https://www.gartner.com/en/finance/insights/cfo-strategy-in-times-of-change>)

Piecing together the strategy

The success of a strategic vision can be measured by how seamlessly the corporate CFO and functional strategies align. The functional strategy is defined as the collective or individual grouping of the finance functions and how it lines up with leading practices. World-class organizations assign leaders who are visionaries, embrace change and are able to evaluate the current state with an unbiased viewpoint. A CFO must also determine the degree of change necessary to become best in class, as it is this gap that will indicate future success for the organization.

Finance functions of the office

Driving strategic financial change begins with an in-depth examination of each functional area to yield the current state of conditions, needs and obstacles in achieving the vision. Termed "bridging the gap," the deviation between the current state and leading practice lays the groundwork for defining next-stage goals and outlining the steps needed to achieve them.

A future-state plan and pathway include a series of functional blueprints that directly align with the vision and strategy established by the CFO. These blueprints include critical details that expose the future-state operating model among the respective components: organization and people, process, technology, performance management, data and policy, and controls and compliance.

Equally important to achieving the optimal future state is ensuring that it aligns with the corporate strategy and obtains buy-in from key stakeholders: This buy-in is dictated by a large number of factors, including future-state value, clear articulation of efficiency, effectiveness, automation, control, integration and the reduction of overall finance cost. The ability to support the future state with a financial return on investment is the primary ingredient sought by stakeholders.

Because custom-tailoring the approach is a necessity—as the DNA, strategy, industry and related regulations differ among organizations—it is important to remain flexible, assign innovative stakeholders, think outside of the box and gain alignment before beginning the process.

Moving from today's status quo to tomorrow's operating model

The finance operating model forms the foundation and building blocks of every finance organization, but shifts in the model are required in order to transform, to remain relevant in the market, to stay current and to be competitive. A clear strategy will set the curve and degree of change as well as establish the pace at which change occurs.

It is important to remember that advanced preparation beats a reactive response of continuous blocking and tackling. CFOs are faced with designing the operating model of the future to confront a very dynamic marketplace, recognizing that today's reality must align with tomorrow's objectives. Each function in the current environment can be adjusted to ensure the bigger picture is understood and that a successful transformation program is achieved.

Well-defined strategies, combined with functional and reliable data, create an edge in the marketplace. Successful CFOs know that the design of their company's operations and the models they follow are as critical to success as any



product or service.

The path to transforming and innovating can be measured by the relative strength of each component of the finance target operating model. Every function within an organization includes seven components, each of which should be analyzed and ranked across a spectrum of lagging to leading in their field. Only after a thorough review of operational practices should executives set a course for the future. While any of the seven points can represent a catalyst for change, each company must begin by understanding and defining their corporate strategy to ensure that finance is aligned with the overall vision.

Analyzing each component of the target operating model will also help identify key areas that hinder finance executives from accomplishing the strategic mission and underscoring the business case for change. The seven components of the operating model are defined as follows:

- **Strategy:** First and foremost, establishing strategy is essential. There should be a clear and defined execution path that links the functional strategy to the corporate vision.
- **Organization and people:** Because people represent an organization's most important asset, aligning them based on strengths, weaknesses, experience and succession is just as critical as defining their roles and responsibilities.
- **Technology:** Business-led technology enablement is a leading practice, making it imperative to include optimal technology within any future business blueprint. Performing these steps in reverse can create a cascading effect of problems.
- **Process:** Process design requires exceptional objectivity in order for an organization to free itself from current habits and practices. The tendency to believe that the current state is best practice is shortsighted.
- **Policies, controls and compliance:** Evaluating and documenting standard operating procedures, policies and control matrices is a fundamental requirement of any change, helping reduce risk and manage challenges.
- **Data and reporting:** Data is a challenge for every organization, from access to accuracy to ease of reporting. Appropriately integrating finance application architecture, including reasonable levels of data governance with the correct reporting engines and warehousing, creates a culture of informed business decisions, thereby minimizing the risk of manual error.
- **Performance management:** Finance teams must be viewed as the backbone of the corporation, easily serving internal and external customers with varied and extensive data.

Each component of the operating model has its own unique value, yet when assembled and aligned with the overall corporate strategy and leading practices, the pieces comprise a high-performing finance function. Though the corporate strategy sets the vision, careful planning, coordination and alignment are required to design the future-state operating model of each functional area. It is important to heed the fact that finance plays an integral role in every aspect of a company's daily operation, and that improved performance makes the most of people, budgets, time and data resources.

This article is Part One of a seven-part series providing a practical playbook for today's CFOs at rsmus.com

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What Powers My City's Economic Engine? Understanding Embedded Local Growth Characteristics

Just like with a car engine, when an economy is running with all cylinders fully powered, it can run faster and with greater output. But clog one cylinder, and you're going to need more fuel to achieve the same effect. As part of the Fifth Third Bank and UNC Kenan Institute's Empowering American Cities project, we've developed a measure to reflect the elements that drive an extended metropolitan area's (EMA's) economic growth: *Embedded Local Growth Characteristics* or "ELGC" for short. It's a composite indicator that includes an EMA's productivity, industry mix and demographic shifts.

What ELGCs affect my city's growth?

Industry Mix and Productivity

Industry mix is the variety and distribution of industries within an EMA, categorized by sectors, such as Finance and Real Estate, Manufacturing, Business Services, and Education and Health. Productivity measures output per worker.

EMAs with strong growth have a high degree of diversity in the industry mix, and a prevalence of high-productivity industries with a large amount of output per worker relative to other industries. For example, the Finance and Real Estate sector is currently the most productive in the US, making up just 6% of the workforce while generating over 20% of gross domestic product. EMAs with a large share of jobs in high-productivity sectors tend to have strong ELGC and high growth potential. The reverse is also true: Those EMAs with a large share of jobs in relatively low-output sectors, such as Leisure and Hospitality, have lower growth potential.

Diversification supports economic resiliency, as communities not overreliant on a single industry are better equipped for stability and growth.

Demographic Trends

For an economy to grow, it needs an active and growing workforce. A healthy-size "prime working age" population (ages 25-54) and overall EMA population growth (including birth rates outpacing death rates and migration into the area) are favorable trends. Positive demographic trends strengthen the ELGC and the engine for economic growth.

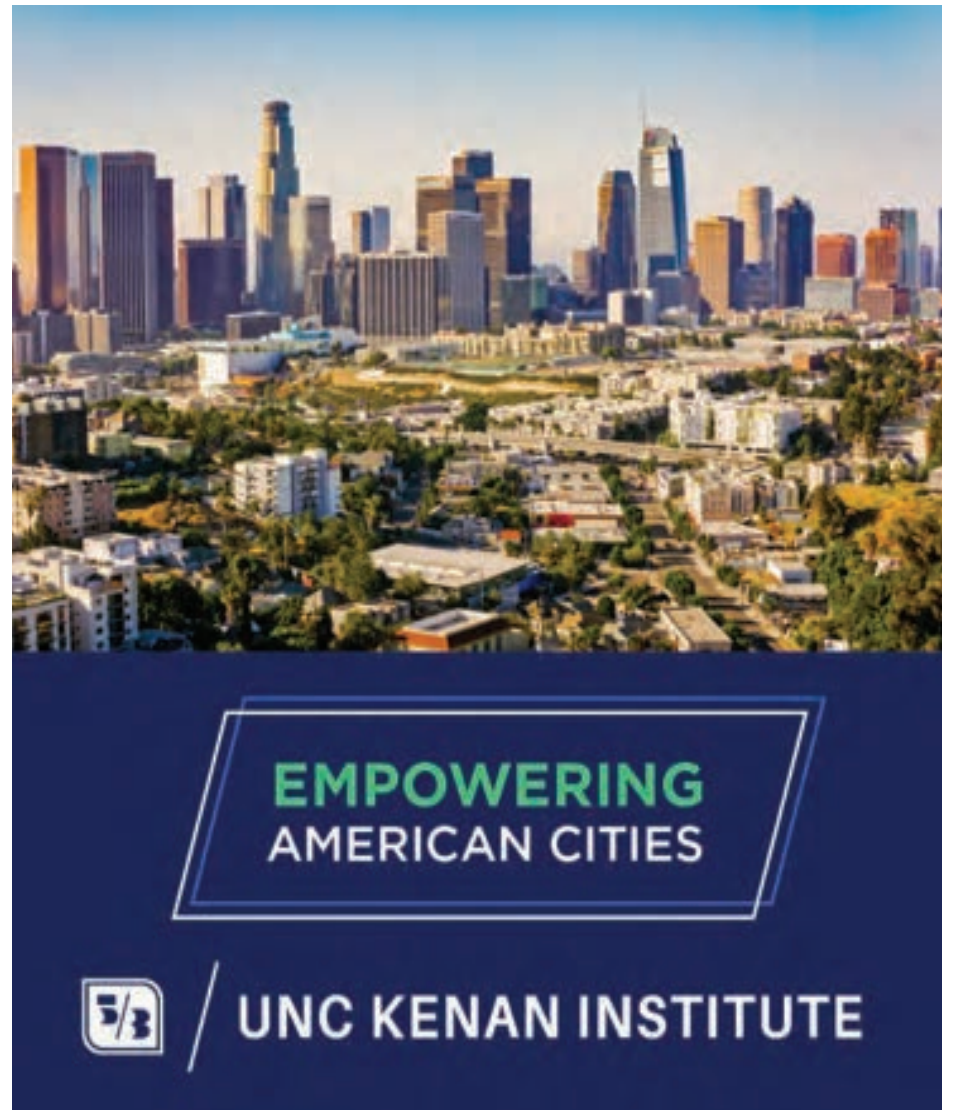
Workforce Skill Level

An EMA's workforce is its economy's lifeblood. But quantity of available workers is not enough; they must also have the skills and training that match industry needs. Using education level as a proxy for skill level, EMAs with a high share of educated workers tend to have strong growth potential.

That said, education level is not a perfect measure of skill level—many valuable skills are learned on the job or through vocational training—but there is a positive association between educational attainment and productivity.

How does my city improve its ELGC?

- **Anticipate Changing Industry Trends:** Identify new technological advances so that businesses remain flexible and meet market demands. For example, the shift in the automotive sector from internal combustion to hybrid and electric engines is a contemporary example of an industrywide trend with accompanying challenges and opportunities for businesses.



- **Diversify Industry Makeup:** Prevent overreliance on one industry by upgrading, augmenting and advancing existing industries. Attract new plants and firms from industries currently underrepresented in their area.

- **Invest in Community Development Projects:** Attract and retain a skilled workforce by providing amenities that appeal to prime working age individuals, such as cultural institutions (e.g., theaters and museums), dining and retail establishments, affordable housing, green spaces and transportation.

- **Support Public-Private Partnerships:** Train and upskill workers to meet the workforce needs of local industry. These partnerships often support trade development programs that establish talent pipelines from local community colleges and other educational institutions to businesses in need of skilled workers.

Consider learning from top ELGC performers

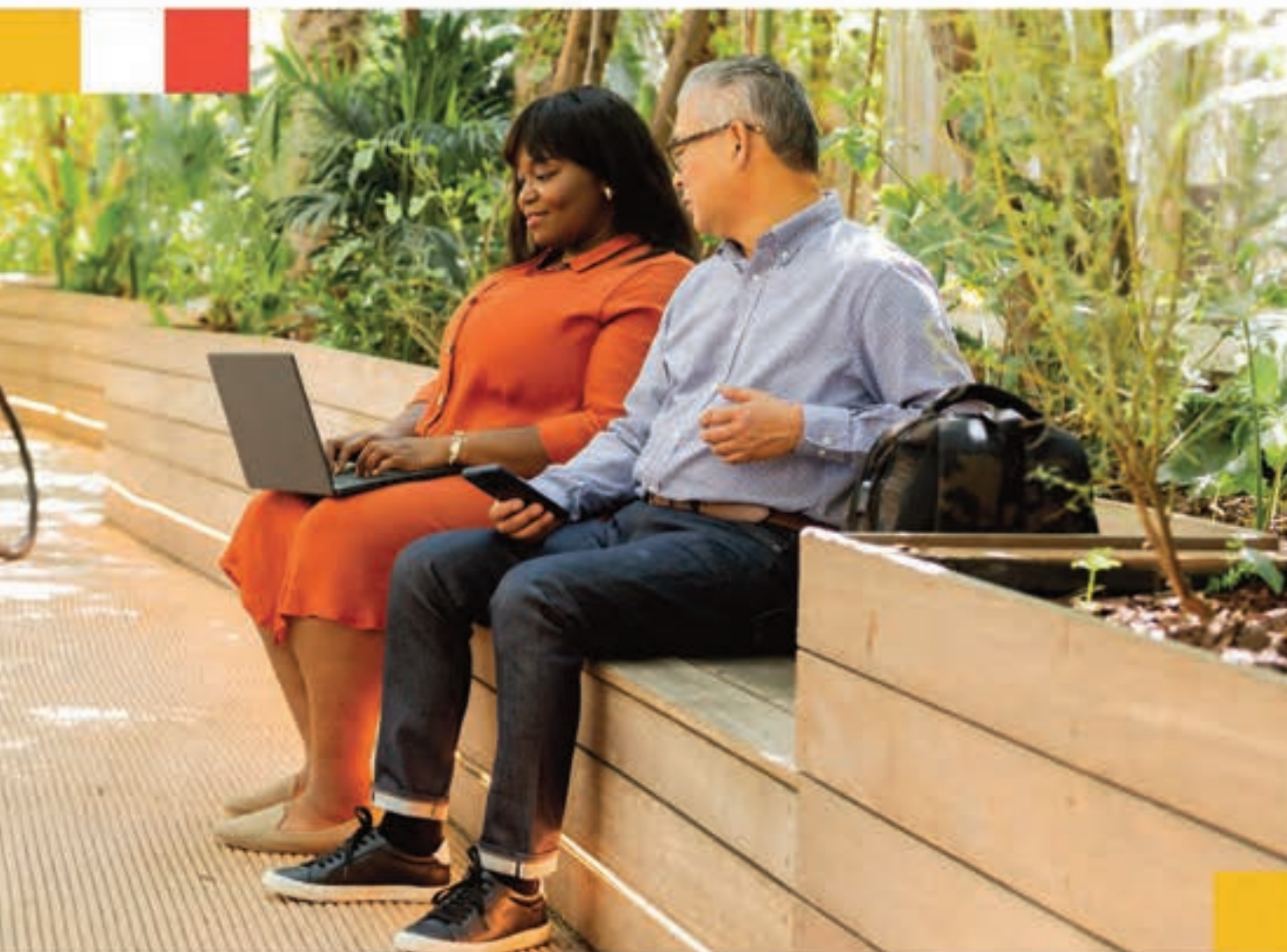
While no two metro areas are exactly alike, it is possible to find EMAs with similar dynamics and a wide range of best practices for optimizing economic engines. To learn more about Embedded Local Growth Characteristics and to compare your area's industry mix and productivity to the leading EMAs, visit <https://www.EmpoweringAmericanCities.com>

To connect with Fifth Third Bank's team in Orange County, contact Aaron.Olson@53.com.



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Two Important Considerations When Choosing a Leadership Mentor

By Colin Craver, Market Executive, Irvine, CA

A new report from the Association of Business Mentors shows that 65% of business leaders felt that the mentoring they had received helped them directly boost their revenues, and 64% said the same of their profits. The research also showed 7 out of 10 business leaders said working with a professional business mentor improved their mental health and confidence.

I've found those benefits to be true in my own 20-year career. And as the report also said, it can be harder than expected to find a business mentor.

Having recently celebrated National Leadership Day, February 20, my thoughts have been on leadership development and ways mentoring has fueled success in my own financial services career, from my first banking job in 2005 to my current role as a Fortune 50 company leader in Irvine, CA.

Throughout my career, early career to midcareer, mentors have helped keep me nimble, innovative and avoid stagnation. Most importantly though, they have always provided me with a unique perspective on how to handle business challenges. Learning to reframe a situation and apply a new point of view has been invaluable in my role as a senior leader. From early career to midcareer, having had about 5 mentors over 20 years has kept me nimble, innovative and even out of ruts at times.

In my experience, there are two important factors that outweigh others for both mentors and mentees in business.

Skills at Stages

In the early stage of a career, mentorship is often internal, possibly company focused, prioritizing the rote skills needed to navigate the industry.

The mentor acts as a guide helping to blaze a trail along and build an important foundation. Early stage career mentors can have a positive impact on mentee salary increases, exposure, awareness and performance, compared with their non-mentored counterparts' data point, according to Financial Management Magazine. Further, as a result of increased engagement and leadership awareness, early career mentees may achieve promotions at a faster rate than their counterparts as well (44.6 months vs. 59.4 months).³

During midcareer, a senior-level mentor can help develop a strategic skill set with their mentee for an external or outside-the-company focus.



At the mid-career level, a senior mentor can help develop strategic skill sets with an external focus that extends beyond company or industry.

Many business leaders may plateau in midcareer, and a skilled mentor can make the link to acquire additional skills or find additional projects to handle. The mentor might even advocate or sponsor the leader for key "stretch" assignments. As a result, mentored managers are also most likely to see the largest salary increases compared to their non-mentored counterparts (6.3% vs. 3.9% annual salary increase).³

A mid-career leader could also find themselves strategizing on complex decision making and hiring manager skills with their mentor, which could lead them to senior-level career opportunities and roles.

The Mentor Relationship

Some of my most-influential mentors have come from outside my industry, even sometimes from unexpected sources, such as social and community activities outside of business.


Regardless of where mentors are discovered, the key is that it takes a commitment of time by both mentor and mentee, and each must be consistent about meeting. It could be monthly, every other month or even quarterly, but committing to a regular meeting schedule is essential to success.

The meeting does not have to be long: 30 to 45 minutes will do. But the mentee needs to prep for the meeting with their mentor just as they were attending a meeting with their boss.

The mentee should be prepared with issues, concerns and career ideas to discuss with the mentor. It is critical that both sides should find the conversation beneficial, and the relationship both positive and synergistic.

In recognition of National Leadership Day this year, make sure to find and connect with a mentor that can provide you key networking and connecting opportunities that can take your leadership influence to the next level in your career.

Colin Craver, Market Executive, Irvine, CA



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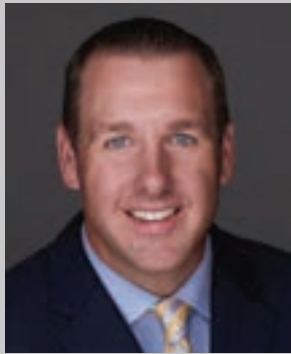


PNC Regional President Discusses PNC's Expansion in Orange County

Jarrold Ingle

Jarrold Ingle is the regional president and head of Corporate Banking for PNC Bank in Orange County-Inland Empire.

Ingle leads the Orange County-Inland Empire market, overseeing business development and client relationships for all business lines, as well as helping lead PNC's local philanthropic initiatives. Additionally, as head of Corporate Banking, Ingle serves as the senior executive leading business development and relationship management for middle market and large corporate banking clients.



In this Q&A, Jarrold Ingle, PNC Bank regional president for Orange County & Inland Empire, talks about the bank's role in Orange County, its commitment to their clients, and what the future might hold.

Jarrold, can you tell us about your role in Orange County?

As PNC Bank Regional President for Orange County & Inland Empire, I lead the Orange County-Inland Empire markets, overseeing business development, client relationships, and PNC's local philanthropic initiatives.

How has PNC's presence in Orange County evolved?

PNC officially entered Orange County in the Fall of 2021, and since then, our story has been one of continuous growth and evolution. In the early days, our focus was on building a strong team and recruiting top local talent. We showcased how we leverage our national capabilities for local-level impact and highlighted the unique culture that sets us apart, and over time, those conversations led to deeper connections with business leaders and a growing recognition of what PNC brings to the region.

Since then, our presence in the market has accelerated thanks to significant client growth, strategic branding, bold sponsorships, and meaningful community engagement that have deepened our impact.

How does PNC provide tailored financial solutions to meet the unique needs of corporate clients?

Our approach begins with building a strong relationship and understanding each client's unique needs and priorities. We don't offer one-size-fits-all solutions or simply hand over a product and move on. We recognize that the needs of a trucking logistics provider differ from those of a publicly traded medical device manufacturer. So, we take the time to craft tailored strategies that align with our clients' specific goals.

With dedicated business lines focused on different industries, we come prepared with proven examples of how we can navigate any hurdle, demonstrating our ability to drive success and showcase the value we bring to each relationship.

With the potential for lower interest rates this year, where should companies be directing their investments?

Every company's situation is unique; some are carrying significant debt, others have strong cash reserves, and some are focused on acquisitions. Because of this, our recommendations vary based on each company's specific needs and financial position.

In a cycle where interest rates are expected to come down, short-term working capital financing becomes more attractive. On the other hand, long-term rates increased at the end of 2024, which has implications for real estate and equipment financing sectors. This creates a "tale of two stories," where different companies will need to approach their investment strategies differently.

In general, we advise businesses to make decisions that align with their balance sheets and long-term goals. We're not suggesting that companies rush to deploy capital just because rates are shifting. The key is to remain strategic and focus on sustainable growth, and we're here to support companies making the right moves in their unique circumstances.

How does PNC help companies navigate economic uncertainty?

Helping companies navigate economic uncertainty is at the core of what we do. At PNC, we strive to be a trusted advisor, building relationships that go beyond transactions. Our bankers have spent decades in Orange County, earning the confidence of business leaders and serving as steady partners through economic ups and downs.

Uncertainty is nothing new. The economy has always been cyclical, and we've helped companies weather whether unpredictable events, from recessions to global disruptions, like COVID-19. While no one can predict exactly when the next challenge will arise, our approach is rooted in preparation. We work closely with businesses to ensure they're ready for whatever comes next, providing strategic guidance and financial solutions to help them stay resilient in any environment.

What differentiates PNC from other financial institutions?

What sets PNC apart is our ability to operate at the scale of the largest banks in the country while delivering a personalized, local experience. As one of the biggest financial institutions in the U.S., we have the balance sheet strength to not only support businesses of all sizes, but also provide cutting-edge treasury management solutions and foreign exchange capabilities that rival any in the industry.

But what truly differentiates us is how we deliver those solutions. We take a local, boutique-style approach, something you'd expect from a small community bank. Our bankers are deeply embedded in the communities they serve. They've built their lives there, send their kids to schools in the area, and support neighborhood businesses. That firsthand understanding allows us to provide tailored financial solutions that meet the specific needs of each market, whether its small business with simple banking needs or large corporations navigating complex financial strategies.

PNC proudly champions early childhood education. What is your approach to providing services that make the greatest impact?

PNC is committed to early childhood education across our national footprint. Through a comprehensive approach of grant funding, employee volunteerism, awareness and advocacy, our national philanthropic initiative, PNC Grow Up Great, supports families, educators, and community partners in providing innovative opportunities that enhance learning and development for our youngest community members, setting a path for success that lasts a lifetime.

Research shows that a child who enters kindergarten ready to learn is more likely to do well in school, graduate on time, go onto higher learning, achieve financial stability, and contribute to the community. High-quality early childhood education is the foundation of a brighter future for children, and society at large. In fact, our data shows that investments in high-quality early education generate up to a 13% return on investment.

Nationally, PNC collaborates with well-known early education experts like Sesame Workshop and Lakeshore Learning to develop free resources and programs that encourage young children to discover, learn and grow.

In Orange County, we engage with nonprofits such as Pretend City Children's Museum, Beyond Blindness, KidWorks, CIELO, MOMS, Project Scientist, Think Together, and the Museum of Teaching and Learning to support programs for children, parents, caregivers, and early educators. Talk about investment in talent at the local level. At PNC, we believe our success is directly tied to the success of the communities we serve. That's why we invest in talent locally, where our impact could be felt the most. Our bankers aren't just financial professionals, they're members of the community. They live and work in Orange County, understand the local landscape, and are passionate about helping individuals and businesses navigate their financial needs, no matter how complex. Because they have deep roots in the area, they recognize what success looks like at a local level and are committed to fostering growth that benefits everyone.

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Why Project Work is a Smart Move

At Conexus we are hyper-focused on helping our candidates find employment that enhances their skills while keeping them relevant in this hyper-competitive marketplace.

- Many times, as recruiters we come across outstanding candidates that are hesitant to take interim work while searching for their next “dream job”. Little do they know that by playing the waiting game, they are likely to diminish their stock value in the open market.

Scenario: You’re recently unemployed and looking for your next “perfect” job. You don’t want to take the “wrong” job and are really focused on Culture, Growth Opportunity, Company Stability, and a commute situation that fits your needs. You would rather wait than jump into something that might not be the right long-term fit. You may not realize it, but you are a perfect contender for INTERIM / PROJECT BASED work. Why is that?

The facts are:

- The current unemployment rate for CPA’s and MBA’s in Southern California is less than 2%. **You are always more employable when you are working now as opposed to currently unemployed.**
- **What you thought was your “Dream Job” may change** as you explore industries you’ve never had exposure to and companies that you may never have imagined working in.
- Other candidates with your same credentials and skill sets are actively engaged in project work while simultaneously looking for a long term, salaried position and **they always have an edge in landing their next role over someone who is currently unemployed.**
- In taking a project – **you will be able to work in different industries more easily** as it’s common for clients to be much more flexible in hiring people with non-industry backgrounds. **This is tremendously valuable**

for our candidate as it can open entirely new career opportunities and an entirely new network of professionals, they may have never had the chance to meet prior.

- In taking a project- **you will be exposed to new software / ERP systems – another huge value add to set you aside from other candidates.**

• **In taking a project- there is always a high percentage chance you will be made an offer to take a fulltime job** – at that point you would also be able to make a *very informed decision* as to whether the company/culture/people and work is what you want to commit to long term. You are not obligated – but **you have the luxury of choosing after having seen first-hand the inner workings of the company.**

- **Ask yourself- what is the downside to taking project work?**

In Summary:

It’s important to understand your options and how best to utilize your skills in a market that is always moving forward and hyper-competitive.

Think of your resume as a *House for Sale*. The more that house sits on the market, potential buyers start looking at that house as a problem house. Otherwise – it would have sold by now.

Conversely, candidates that sit for months at a time in between roles while looking for their next long-term role limit themselves significantly in comparison to candidates that are working on a temporary project while selectively looking for their “perfect” long term home.

Ultimately, the benefits of short-term consulting in between jobs far outweigh the negatives. Contact us directly to learn more about our interim roles and opportunities.

Conexus is Latin for Connection; Joining Together; Combination

Making quality connections and joining people together are what we do, but we focus on consistently doing it better than our competition.

We are experienced search experts who believe that clients benefit by partnering with an innovative, ethical, dedicated, and collaborative firm. The Conexus team brings decades of experience conducting challenging searches, identifying, recruiting, qualifying, and delivering the best and most appropriate candidates for positions at all levels. Our clients call on us to deliver candidates for their Permanent, Temporary, and Special Project recruiting needs.

While many search firms manage their employees via quotas solely tied to volume, Conexus manages its professionals’ using metrics that measure quality and hold its team to a higher standard. They are designed around a pursuit for clients’ success and satisfaction in the Talent Acquisition process.

Conexus’ client focused metrics include:

- Percentage of searches successfully completed: more than 90%.
- Percentage of clients that engage us for more than one search: nearly 100%.
- Average time to successfully complete searches:
 - Vice President and above: less than 60 days.
 - Experienced hire and middle management: less than 30 days.

Our keys to success include:

- Functional and regional focus.
- Extensive training with some of the top trainers in our industry.
- A heavy investment in technology to minimize time wasted on administrative tasks.
- A strategic, organized, disciplined search process.

- Passionate, intelligent employees.
- A mantra of consistently putting clients’ needs first.

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How to Achieve Strategic Cost Optimization in IT to Support Continuous Transformation

Managing increasingly complex IT environments has become a significant challenge for CFOs and CIOs as technology becomes central to innovation and growth. Technology sprawl creates more complexity and risk, which, if not managed effectively, can drive up costs and hinder business results. Strategic cost optimization is a key priority so CFOs can support continuous transformation and ensure that new technology investments accelerate business goals. AI-enabled Managed Services are key to achieving this.

Navigating the Challenges of Technology Complexity

Today, businesses increasingly depend on technology to drive operations, enhance customer experiences, and maintain a competitive advantage. As a result, technology has become an integral part of daily processes. This growing reliance on technology requires careful management to ensure it contributes to overall business success and remains aligned with organizational goals.

- **Abundance of Technology Choices:** The wide range of technology options makes it challenging to select tools that align with business objectives while avoiding unnecessary complexity that can disrupt operations and hinder progress.

- **Cloud Transition Challenges:** Businesses face complexities when transitioning to cloud platforms. These challenges include addressing data security, ensuring compliance, and integrating cloud solutions with existing systems, which require extensive planning and strategic investment.

- **Fragmented Technology Strategy:** A disjointed technology strategy can prevent organizations from achieving their goals effectively. Misaligned technology leads to inefficiencies, wasted resources, and missed collaboration and innovation opportunities. A cohesive strategy is crucial for streamlining operations and optimizing business outcomes.

- **Managing Technology Operations Costs:** As IT environments become more complex, managing technology operations costs becomes increasingly tricky. Effective cost management strategies are needed to optimize IT spending without sacrificing service quality or operational efficiency. Without a structured approach, businesses risk overspending on technology that does not provide proportional value.

- **Cybersecurity Threats:** The rapid growth of cybersecurity threats presents a significant risk. Businesses must invest continually in cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive information and maintain customer trust. Increased spending on security technologies and protocols is necessary to mitigate the growing threat of cyberattacks.

- **Shortage of Skilled IT Professionals:** The shortage of qualified IT professionals is a significant challenge. According to PWC, 55% of CFOs view talent acquisition and retention as a serious business risk. This talent gap can hinder innovation and the successful implementation of new technologies, making it difficult for businesses to stay competitive.

- **Lack of Processes, Frameworks, and Tools:** Many organizations lack the processes, frameworks, and tools to manage complex IT systems effectively. This results in inefficiencies, poor service delivery, and an inability to capitalize on technology investments fully. Implementing frameworks like ITIL or PMI can streamline operations and improve service outcomes.

- **Insufficient 24/7 Technology Support:** Organizations often lack the breadth and depth to provide continuous coverage for critical technologies. To ensure reliable service and avoid disruptions, businesses must invest in skilled personnel, or AI-enabled managed services that provide 24/7 support, preventing gaps during off-hours or emergencies that can impact service reliability and customer satisfaction.

Top 5 Strategies for Managing Tech Complexity through Managed Services
Organizations can leverage AI-enabled managed services as a strategic approach to cost optimization and continuous transformation, effectively navigating the challenges of IT complexity. By outsourcing IT management to a Managed Service Provider (MSP), companies can optimize their operations and focus on driving business growth while maintaining control over costs.

1 **Centralizing services** through an MSP allows organizations to streamline operations by reducing redundancy and simplifying management. This consolidation helps lower operational costs and increase efficiency, enabling businesses to focus on their core objectives. Companies gain access to

expert support and resources without significant in-house investments by working with an MSP, making it a valuable tool for achieving cost optimization and continuous transformation.

2 **Automation and standardization** are critical in achieving efficiency and cost savings. Businesses can minimize human error and reduce operational overhead by automating routine tasks and standardizing processes. This allows organizations to manage complex IT environments more efficiently, driving operational efficiency and strategic transformation. Additionally, automation frees up valuable resources, allowing businesses to allocate them to more strategic, growth-oriented initiatives.

3 **A cloud-first strategy** helps organizations optimize IT spending while ensuring scalability. AI-enabled managed services can provide ongoing monitoring of cloud usage, identify underutilized resources, and recommend cost-saving measures to avoid unnecessary expenditures. Organizations can scale their infrastructure efficiently by optimizing cloud resources and supporting their long-term transformation efforts while keeping costs in check.

4 **Predictive analytics** is also key in strategic cost optimization. With 47% of CFOs saying their top priority is building predictive models and scenario analysis capabilities, leveraging tools for real-time insights into IT performance and spending patterns can enable them to make informed, data-driven decisions. This proactive approach enables organizations to quickly identify inefficiencies, optimize technology investments, and support continuous transformation initiatives without overspending.

5 **AI-driven monitoring** via MSPs can help build organizational resilience, especially as businesses navigate an increasingly complex and evolving landscape. Managed services help optimize IT resources, enabling CFOs to maintain agility, foster transparency, and support continuous innovation while keeping IT costs in check.

Benefits of Partnering with an MSP for Continuous Transformation

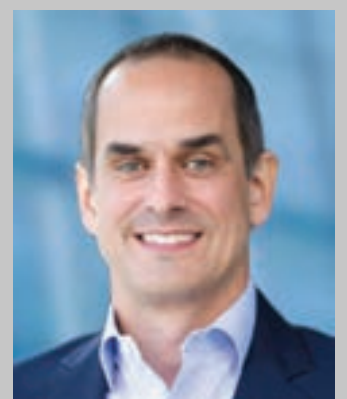
Partnering with an MSP offers several advantages contributing to cost optimization and transformation. MSPs help businesses adapt quickly to market demands by offloading routine IT tasks and freeing resources for higher-priority strategic initiatives. They also provide access to cutting-edge technologies, allowing businesses to stay ahead of trends without significant upfront investments.

Subscription-based models simplify IT budgeting, offering predictable costs and helping businesses control expenses while maintaining flexibility. Continuous support and proactive improvements ensure that technology evolves in line with industry shifts, keeping businesses competitive in a rapidly changing market.

Embarking on a Continuous Transformation Journey

To achieve sustainable growth, organizations must embrace innovation and ensure that their IT infrastructure remains cost-efficient and adaptable. By partnering with Synoptek, you can achieve strategic cost optimization while driving continuous transformation. Our Envision, Transform, Evolve approach helps align your technology infrastructure with your business goals, ensuring you remain agile and responsive to new opportunities and challenges. Ready to explore how AI-enabled managed services can drive your business transformation while optimizing costs? Connect with our experts to learn more about how Synoptek can help you achieve your goals.

Stephen Currie is the Vice President of Support Operations and Development at Synoptek. With 26 years in technology, he excels in Cloud Hosting, Networking, Security, and IT Service Management. A strategic leader, he builds high-performing teams, drives growth, and optimizes costs. Previously at MindSpring, he played key roles in product development and mentoring. At Synoptek, he focuses on leveraging technology for customer success. Stephen holds a Bachelor's in Aerospace Engineering, from the Georgia Institute of Technology.



A large, abstract graphic of a tree where the branches and roots are composed of glowing blue and purple lines, and the foliage is a dense cloud of multi-colored dots (blue, orange, red, purple) against a dark background.

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Taking a Holistic Approach to Health Benefits



The term "whole-person health" has been a buzzword in the medical field for nearly four decades, but the broad and evolving nature of this phrase often leads to different interpretations by different stakeholders, from patients to care providers to plan sponsors. This presents a challenge in defining a uniform holistic approach to health and wellness in employer-sponsored benefit design.

"Whole-person health" and "holistic health" can have broad meanings because they encompass various aspects of health, said Heather Dlugolenski, U.S. employer chief strategy officer at [Cigna Healthcare](#). These terms are not just about managing illness, but also about recognizing and fostering behaviors that contribute to overall wellness.

In a recent fireside chat with [Employee Benefits News](#), reporter Deanna Cuadra at the news outlet's "Benefits at Work" event, Dlugolenski offered her perspective on implementing a whole-person approach to health care benefits.

The importance of healthy behaviors

Adopting and maintaining healthy behaviors is the key to achieving whole-person health, Dlugolenski said. She noted that the concept first gained prominence in the 1970s, when people recognized the significant impact diet has on health. "This led to an explosion of innovation and services aimed at promoting healthy eating, which expanded to other healthy behaviors," she said.

Dlugolenski shared some of her own health care experiences to illustrate the importance of monitoring patient behaviors. After delivering her sons via C-section, she was given the standard opioid regimen as part of her recovery. In what is ultimately a common experience for people in similar situations, she began exhibiting signs of dependency while in the hospital, like checking the clock and asking about her next dose. In fact, [Cigna Healthcare research](#) shows that 1 in 5 people are at increased risk of opioid addiction with just a 10-day prescription.

Recognizing these signs, her medical team changed her medication in order to prevent a potential opioid addiction. "The hospital staff noticed that I was exhibiting these behaviors, and they intervened immediately," she said. Years later, Dlugolenski lost a lot of weight following the death of her father. "I had a regular check-up appointment relatively close to his passing with a doctor whom I adore. She noticed the physical change and asked several questions about my behaviors and emotional state," she said. This led to a deeper conversation that resulted in Dlugolenski seeking help through an employee assistance program. The interplay between physical health and emotional well-being is a key aspect of a whole-person health approach to care, which can lead to better outcomes, she said.

Looking beyond physical and mental health

Dlugolenski stressed that whole-person health involves a wider understanding of the factors that impact overall well-being. "We are well aware of the significance of addressing mental health needs and the correlation of a healthy mind and a

healthy body, but whole-person health is actually more than that," she said. She referenced ongoing research from [The Cigna Group on vitality](#), which enables individuals to pursue life with health, strength, and energy. The research highlights that vitality extends beyond physical and emotional well-being; it also incorporates environmental health, spiritual wellness, a sense of purpose, financial stability, and even the quality of an employee's relationship with their manager.

"Being healthy is much more than the absence of physical ailments or having positive test results. It involves a broader spectrum of factors," Dlugolenski said. She added that the definition of "whole-person health" will continue to evolve, and that is a good thing. "It will push us to better address workforce needs in all dimensions of health," she said.

Taking a personalized, flexible approach to care

In discussing the design of whole-person health benefits, Dlugolenski noted the importance of segmented, tailored offerings. "It's not just about offering an oncology management program for employees and family members dealing with cancer, it's now having distinct programs to manage breast cancer, to manage colorectal cancer, and so on. It's designing benefits to meet the individual needs of each employee."

Dlugolenski suggests that organizations conduct extensive data analyses to understand the whole-health needs of their employee populations and to design benefits around those needs. Integrating navigation services is crucial to deploying personalized solutions to the people who need them. Employers need to have flexible plans and service network options that can nimbly adapt to changing workforce needs and to the introduction of new treatments and technologies.

Flexibility is also crucial to successful benefit design. Dlugolenski advocates for a "test and learn" mindset when designing and implementing benefit programs. "This approach can help companies adapt to unforeseen challenges," she said, "so they can better meet the whole-person health needs of their employees."

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Legacy systems

Why companies should have a formal CFO succession plan

About one-quarter of CFOs say their companies do not have a formal CFO succession plan.¹ Devising and formalizing the plan can be painstaking work—and it requires follow-through. However, better to confront it now than to have to identify the next CFO while scrambling to address a key departure.

In a dynamic business environment where priorities continually shift, most companies want CFOs who are forward-looking and skilled at finding paths to cost-efficient growth. A company's next CFO should be conversant in strategy, fluent in technology, and capable of thinking commercially. If that sounds impossibly demanding, it's because it reflects the CFO's current duties. Demographic shifts and rising CFO turnover² now coincide with a change in expectations of what the CFO role entails. Quite simply, the job description has not only expanded but has also become increasingly complex³—with CFOs now having greater influence over corporate strategy. Given this expanding influence, it would seem pertinent for boards to formalize a detailed map for CFO succession.

The sweet sound of succession

As an indicator of just how much the CFO's job has changed in recent years, consider what CFOs say they are looking for in their successors:

In Deloitte's 2Q 2024 CFO Signals survey, participants were asked to choose the top three traits, skills, or experiences they regard as most important in identifying their possible internal successors. The three answers that drew the most respondents: operational experience (37%), familiarity with new technologies, and network leadership (both at 30%). Neither accounting skills nor financial planning and analysis made the top three.

Certainly, a firm grasp of company-wide systems and processes enables finance leaders to assess and prepare for operational risks. But the importance placed on technology fluency, as seen in the survey, also likely reflects the expected impact on finance of advanced technologies—particularly artificial intelligence (AI). While CFOs may work closely with the chief technology officer or chief information officer, a finance chief's ability to bring a big-picture perspective to choosing use cases for Generative AI (GenAI) appears to be paramount.

Separation anxiety

Preparing someone to take over a job can generate mixed feelings. There's typically some awkwardness and anxiety on both sides. As such, it creates an opportunity to earn trust and demonstrate commitment, which makes intentional planning that much more consequential.

As formal a process as it may be—and as vital as it is to a company's long-term performance—leadership succession invariably contains an emotional component. CFOs should keep that in mind when identifying potential successors. It's also generally unwise to designate a deputy CFO or heir apparent. Doing so can lead to confusion about who is making financial decisions. Plus, it may lead highly valued employees—particularly those who thought they might be up for the job—to seek employment elsewhere.

Heir care

While the primary responsibility for the CFO succession plan is generally in the hands of the CEO, CHRO, or board of directors, CFOs can help identify possible successors and prepare them to take the reins. How? Here are some steps to consider:

1. **Update the succession criteria.** Ensure the company's CFO role profile looks ahead at least three years. Then intentionally cultivate a succession pipeline that's ready for the future. Taking stock of how well-aligned the pipeline is with the CFO profile enables the company to put in place a readiness strategy and plan.
2. **Execute the succession strategy.** Identify and fill skill gaps at the individual and cohort level. CFOs should give each internal candidate coaching and feedback, finding ways to accelerate readiness by putting them in situations where they can learn. This may mean setting up a job rotation system, assigning them to high-profile projects, adding mentors into the mix, and more. Experience in—and exposure to—other parts of the business can be critical.
3. **Show them the ropes.** CFOs don't want to leave successors figuring out the job on the fly. That means providing documentation on performing various aspects of the role. It's also important to expose them to experiences with the C-suite and the board, preparing them for the kind of interaction required at that level. On top of that, make sure a possible successor fully appreciates and understands how the work of the department supports vital decisions management must make.
4. **Leave a clean slate.** Once a new CFO has been chosen, the exiting CFO should use the last 100 days or so to wrap up their own legacy. That may mean making tough calls—decisions on people, budgets, and portfolios—so they can leave their successor with a clean slate. CFOs should avoid entering into any game-changing deals, or at least make sure to involve the CFO's successor, who will have to live with it. Once the CFO has done all they can do, they should get out of the way. Their successor should feel free to make decisions that reflect changing priorities.
5. **Prepare for the transition openly and honestly.** The new CFO's job is not to be the same as their predecessor. With an internal successor, in particular, it's important to make clear that they have license to carry out the job as they see fit. Role clarity is vital; employees need to know who's in charge of finance. After a six-to-nine-month interim period, it's critical for the incumbent to step back, offering solicited advice from afar.

How Deloitte can help

Finance functions shouldn't be left to an under-qualified, overwhelmed, or simply unfit successor. Deloitte can serve CFOs as they solidify their succession plans, identify the right successor, and implement a seamless transition for their teams. Our unique approach can result in new leaders who uphold and enhance the organization's financial integrity and strategic vision. We look forward to helping exiting finance chiefs achieve this—and more—as they succession plan with precision and care.

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Endnotes

¹"2024 CFO Signals™." The CFO Program, Deloitte.com, June 2024.

²"Why CFO turnover at public companies just hit a 3-year high." CFO Daily, Fortune.com, May 2024.

³"The CFO Agenda." The CFO Program, Deloitte.com, 2024.

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Get in touch today

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Top Trend in Education Lets Parents Tailor Education to Their Children

More and more parents are turning to microschoools as a solution for a high-quality, student-centered education that fits the needs of today's busy families. These schools offer flexibility that allows students—many of whom are student-athletes, performers, or college-bound—to balance their academic work with their personal passions. Whether on campus, at home, or even while traveling, students can complete assignments at their own pace, with the added support of experienced academic coaches guiding them along the way.

Recently, a partnership between the California-based Stanza Education Corporation and Florida-based Palm Beach International Academy (PBIA) launched its first microschoool location in Florida and plans to open in Orange County, Calif.

As a mission-driven, non-profit institution, Palm Beach International Academy, a Stanza Education School, prioritizes student success. With structured but flexible scheduling, students balance academics, extracurricular activities, and personal passions. Our curriculum, with 300+ courses, ensures students are ready for their future, whether that means higher education, professional pursuits, or global opportunities. Through one-on-one instruction, small group learning, independent study, peer collaboration, or virtual engagement, students have the freedom to learn anytime, anywhere, while meeting the highest academic potential for each student.

Some of our benefits include:

- Academic support from Academic Coaches, Teachers and Tutors
- Flexible scheduling to accommodate students with diverse needs, including athletes, performers, international students and those needing more support
- Personalized Learning Plans developed for each student based on their NWEA and MindPrint assessment results
- Cognia accreditation ensuring high academic standards, and a course catalog with more than 300 courses, many of which that are NCAA and UC A-G-approved
- A learning environment that meets every student's needs allowing them to work in individual learning spaces, small groups or in one-on-one instruction with content experts



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The education landscape is evolving, with microschoools gaining significant attention. These small, personalized learning environments are designed to offer tailored experiences for each student, with smaller class sizes fostering deeper engagement. Often seen as a modern take on the one-room schoolhouse, microschoools have become increasingly appealing to parents. This is especially true in a time when public schools are grappling with teacher shortages, limited course offerings, overcrowded classrooms, and concerns over bullying and safety.

For information about Palm Beach International Academy, please visit www.pbiacademy.org. Enrollment applications are accepted year-round.





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How can CFOs turn their vision for bold transformation into tangible business outcomes?

If you're a CFO, the challenges you face are more complex than ever before. They may seem more urgent, too—because that future we've talked about for so long is, without a doubt, here.

The CFO's role is changing. . .

Emerging technologies are reshaping the finance landscape at an extraordinary rate, and in turn, these changes are shaping the typical responsibilities of a CFO. CFOs are expected to not only meet regulatory requirements and provide accurate financial reports, but also to drive bold, data-driven transformations that create new, tangible value for companies. The most successful CFOs will blend the pragmatic requirements of today with the possibilities of tomorrow, navigating the delicate balance between visionary leadership and day-to-day actions.

Successful transformations are not easy. Here is some guidance for CFOs across industries.

Focus on clear communication

Research from the EY organization and the University of Oxford found that when employees clearly understand their leader's vision and purpose, the chances of a successful transformation jump by 2.6 times. In successful transformations, 48% of people felt that leadership clearly explained why the organization needed to change. Only 25% felt the same in less successful transformations.

Clean up data

Quality data is critical for the short- and long-term health of any business. CFOs must determine whether they're collecting the quality data needed to make informed decisions and develop reliable forecasts. Just as important, finance leaders should implement robust data governance practices that instill confidence in the security and quality of their numbers. Every step made to clean up data is a step toward stronger decision-making.

Invest in the right technology

In that same EY study with the University of Oxford, 48% of respondents in successful transformations said their organizations had invested in the right technologies. Meanwhile, only 33% of respondents from underperforming transformations said the same thing.

Three key questions CFOs should ask when making their technology investments:

- Is finance going to have world-class enterprise resource planning (ERP)? Should that ERP be in the cloud?
- What other digital technologies should we be leveraging?
- How will generative AI (GenAI) be leveraged?

These questions — and the guidance above — are good starting points, but they are only the beginning of the conversation.

To continue the conversation, reach out to Mary Garrett, EY Orange County Office Managing Partner, at Mary.Garrett@ey.com.

The views expressed by the author are not necessarily those of Ernst & Young LLP or other members of the global EY organization.

About EY Orange County

- Nearly 700 professionals
- Services include audit, assurance, tax, consulting, transactions and more
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 - Healthcare
 - Life sciences
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 - Technology
 - And many more

• **Mary Garrett**, an Orange County native, is the Office Managing Partner, leading all EY Orange County professionals in delivering high-quality client service and bringing top talent to the firm.



• Mary also leads the Orange County Audit practice, providing Assurance and Business Advisory services to a diverse range of regional, national and global clients. She works with high-growth public, private, private equity portfolio and emerging companies on a variety of transactions, including IPOs, mergers and acquisitions, and international expansion.

• She is passionate about supporting the community and illuminating the path to financial literacy and education for youth in Orange County.

"Congratulations to all of the honorees of this year's CFO of the Year awards. Your leadership makes Orange County a rewarding place to work, and I'm deeply grateful to be a part of this community with you."

– Mary Garrett



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Cybercriminals are using AI to target your finances

Cybercrime has become more advanced over the years, but the level of sophistication could take a quantum leap forward with the explosive growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI).

AI is making it easy to mimic a real person's voice or create a scam website that looks exactly like a real one, making it far more difficult for the average person to know whether a call, email or link is real. According to one 2023 survey,¹ 75% of security professionals reported an uptick in attacks over the past year, most attributing the increase to generative AI.

Larry Zelvin, Executive Vice President and Head of the Financial Crimes Unit at BMO Financial Group, is one of the foremost authorities on cyber risk. He sat down for a wide-ranging conversation about the many online issues businesses and ultra-high-net-worth families face and how to defend against them.

How is AI changing the game?

It only takes somebody a couple of hours and a minimal fee to create a credible deepfake video, which is a fake video that appears to be real. These videos can be developed using AI tools and a two- to three-second voice recording gathered online. What we're concerned about is that criminals are using the voice recording to develop a fake message about a potential family emergency. What the recipient sees or hears is their loved one in trouble, expressing an urgent need for money or information. In this sense, the "phishing" experience is becoming more complex.

Criminals are also using AI to improve the tailoring of their phishing attacks through enhanced social media and other publicly available information searches, making it complicated to detect and validate the legitimacy of an email. We used to watch for red flags like misspellings or poor grammar, but with AI, messages are more sophisticated. We've seen examples where clients have received detailed, professional-looking financial brochures, but it's all fraud.

Are criminals using AI to impersonate executives?

When a CEO is talking to their direct reports, these individuals have a sense of what the CEO typically asks and how he or she speaks. The concern is less at the executive level and more with employees a few levels down within the organization who don't always have direct interaction with the CEO or organization leaders. An employee may receive a message along the lines of: 'Hey, I'm coming to you because I've got a matter of urgency, and I can't reach the Chief Financial Officer or deputy and need you to send

this wire.' The message seems legitimate; it may have the general tone of the executive and come from their email address. To help their leader, the employee sends the wire.

Larger organizations have an advantage over small- and medium-sized businesses because they have established processes, procedures and employee training to watch for this type of fraud. When you don't have that security infrastructure and awareness programming in place, the organization is at a greater risk.

We know criminals are actively looking for situations to exploit. Could that pose a risk to some families? Should families introduce their kids to their financial advisor?

When it comes to family members having access to funds, identify who may put you at risk. If you have somebody that has the ability to move funds, that's a risk. If you have somebody that is of a legal age where they could potentially take out loans or create other indebtedness, that's a risk.

Once you have identified those who have the power to make significant business decisions, bring them in by educating them on security best practices, the latest scams and introduce them to your wealth professional or team.

What should you do if you suspect that you are interacting with a fraudster?

I recommend that you investigate. Look up the contact on LinkedIn or Google and contact the company they work for to validate they are who they say they are. When calling the organization, always make sure you're using phone numbers you've used in the past or have been taken from their website.

How is BMO keeping ahead of cybersecurity risks?

Our Financial Crimes Unit is a security operations team that's the first of its kind in Canada. Founded in 2019, the FCU combines expertise from our cyber security, fraud, physical security, and crisis management teams to detect, prevent, respond to, and recover from security threats. In addition to using leading-edge security technology, data and analytics tools, we operate on a global scale to help ensure our clients' safety in different time zones.

When it comes to addressing AI, we have technology in our call centers that uses AI to match people's voices. We also work with a company that has a database of people who have committed fraud; this team has captured their voiceprint and will notify our agents in real-time that they may be talking to a fraudster. We continuously educate our employees on deepfakes—what they look like, red flags to watch for, and where to report them.

To learn more, contact our Orange County based teams.



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Represented Cambro Manufacturing in its acquisition of Nationwide Fab



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Represented Flywire in connection with its senior secured credit facility



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Represented Moffatt & Nichol in connection with its acquisition of New Orleans-based architecture firm, Waggoner & Ball



Represented Advanced Real Estate Services in connection with \$250 million real estate investment fund



Represented ManagedLab Services in its sale to Flagship Facility Services



Represented Evans M Manufacturing in its sale to HPG



Represented Enerresponse LLC in its sale to EIV Capital Partners



Represented BOXFOX, Inc. in its sale to Sugarfina Corporation



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Soaring High: Accounting and Finance Roles In High Demand Despite Changing Economic Landscape

The hurdle of an accounting and finance talent shortage continues to rise — and firms and corporations, alike, are fighting to stay in the race. With the demand for skilled professionals outstripping the supply, it's high time that companies turn their focus to both attracting new talent and keeping existing employees engaged.

Understanding the Talent Shortage

Accounting and finance professionals have long been in demand. But in recent years, the gap between the required skilled workforce and available candidates has widened significantly. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 300,000 accountants and auditors have left their profession in the past few years: the cause being a mixture of career changes and retirement. The problem of filling these open roles is being exacerbated by a shortage of new talent entering the field. We're seeing a near 9% decrease in accounting majors since 2012, according to the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants. And despite the instability of today's economy, the scarcity of skilled professionals has been simmering beneath the surface for some time now.

Impact on Businesses and the Industry

The effects of the accounting and finance talent shortage can't be underestimated. Companies constantly grapple with the pressure to stay compliant with ever-changing regulations, perform detailed financial analyses, complete risk assessments and maintain strong financial reporting.

An understaffed team may lead to lower productivity, increased workloads for employees, longer hours — and ultimately an increased risk of burnout. This can result in diminished employee morale and engagement, which may further intensify the talent gap by contributing to higher employee turnover.

Getting Creative to Attract New Talent

Employers need to think outside the box and adopt innovative strategies to attract new finance professionals. Here are some methods that have proven successful:

1. Broaden the talent pool by looking beyond the traditional finance and accounting candidates. Seek out applicants who possess strong soft skills — critical thinking, communication and a strong willingness to learn. Develop and pursue a more diverse hiring strategy that considers candidates from various educational backgrounds.
2. Take on temporary professionals. Employers continue to turn to consultants' specialized skill sets to complete key projects and temporary assignments. For hesitant businesses, this hiring approach also enables hiring managers to "try before they buy" for contract-to-hire or direct hire placements down the line.
3. Invest in flexible work arrangements. This can include remote work, job sharing or flextime to cater to changing employee preferences and enhance your organization's appeal to candidates seeking a better work-life balance.
4. Build connections with staffing and recruiting firms. Investing in additional partnerships, including universities and colleges, can help your company secure a steady pipeline of young talent who are both seasoned or can be trained to suit your business requirements.
5. Showcase your organization's commitment to professional development and continuous learning. Offering financial support for certifications, designations and further education can be a major draw for ambitious, career-focused candidates.

Retaining Your Current Employees

Attracting new talent is only half the battle — retaining your skilled staff is equally essential to alleviate the challenges resulting from the talent gap.

As indicated in our 2025 Salary Guide, "obtaining market-rate salaries" remains the number one priority of accounting and finance professionals. This originally bumped 2022's priority of "growth potential and career challenge" to the number two spot last year, and "flexible work schedule" to a close third. Top priorities in mind, here are some tips on retaining your finance employees:

1. *Consider compensation.* Even with the uncertainty of the employment landscape, salaries for accounting and finance professionals are trending upwards.



Plus, with the climbing cost of living expenses, this isn't only a priority for incoming workers but current employees. That's why it's important that, in addition to base salaries, you consider providing financial incentives for exceptional performance, such as bonuses, stock options or profit-sharing plans.

2. *Provide opportunities for growth and development.* Enable your employees to grow within your organization by offering on-the-job training, skill development programs and regular performance evaluations. This not only helps them build their careers but also ensures that you'll have a reliable pool of talent ready to fill more advanced roles.
3. *Embrace flexibility.* Over the past few years, the working world has witnessed a remarkable shift as employees enthusiastically adopt flexible work schedules. Today, the irresistible allure of a hybrid work model is one of the primary factors keeping professionals loyal to their current companies. As we forge ahead in 2025, organizations must master the art of crafting sustainable flexible work arrangements to ensure their long-term success.
4. *Make employee satisfaction a top priority.* Regularly gauge your staff's happiness levels and be proactive in addressing any concerns. Consider implementing team-building activities, organizing company events and developing a mentorship program.
5. Foster a culture of recognition and appreciation, where employees receive positive, timely feedback on their work. By recognizing their efforts and contributions, you strengthen their loyalty and commitment to your organization.

In a world where numbers tell the stories of commerce, the scarcity of accounting and finance professionals is an unfolding problem that demands attention. Companies must wield effective strategies to attract skilled individuals, while keeping the loyalty of current professionals. How will you empower your business to tackle the talent drought head-on?

About Century Group

Century Group is an award-winning recruiting and staffing firm that provides top-tier talent to start-ups, mid-market and Global 1000 enterprises on a direct-hire, temporary and temp-to-hire basis. We work one-on-one with candidates to match them with opportunities that are best suited for their qualifications. So, whether you're looking to hire — or looking for your next role — with our specialized focus, extensive talent network and 35 years of experience, we've got you covered

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Building a World-Class Finance Team in a Resource-Constrained Environment



By Justin Jessee, Founder and CEO of Impactful Resources

Even with limited resources, leaders can create a powerhouse Office of the CFO by optimizing talent elasticity and density.

The labor market has been in a neutral state as leaders grapple with economic and geopolitical concerns. This market stagnation has caused compensation to plateau, making lateral moves a popular career transition for professionals in Orange County.

On a larger scale, the continuing accounting talent shortage has led to growing financial restatements and weaker internal controls. Bloomberg stated that in 2024, there were 340,000 fewer accountants than five years prior. Consequently, material weaknesses resulting from accounting talent deficiencies have increased for four consecutive years, with 60% of annual filings citing "lack of accounting talent/expertise" as a challenge in 2024¹. This poses a few challenges:

Challenge #1: Current employees face overwhelming workloads, resulting in inaccurate reporting and missed deadlines.

Challenge #2: Organizations can't efficiently scale their workforce to meet changing workload demands, especially during periods like year-end close or an annual audit.

Challenge #3: Slowed hiring widens skill gaps as teams miss out on current expertise and new perspectives, limiting their ability to innovate and meet business needs.

To navigate the changing labor market and the accounting talent crisis, CFOs must optimize their workforce for both short-term and long-term impact. **Finance leaders can maximize the ROI of their talent investments by growing talent elasticity and talent density.**

Talent Elasticity: Agility in a Competitive Market

For finance leaders prioritizing cost efficiency, risk mitigation, and effective resource allocation, talent elasticity is an agile solution. Talent elasticity is an organization's ability to quickly scale its talent resources up and down to adapt to different workforce demands.

$$\text{Talent Elasticity} = \text{Hiring Velocity} - \text{Hiring Friction}$$

An organization's hiring velocity (speed of the hiring process) and hiring friction (inefficiencies hindering success) determine whether it can scale talent proficiently. Lower friction leads to faster scaling.

On-demand interim consultants are the most effective way organizations can build talent elasticity. These professionals accelerate productivity on day one, all while remaining cost-efficient.

On-demand staff offer teams relief during periods of high-intensity workloads



Project-based consultants create long-term impact through executing time-sensitive assignments like ERP implementations and "quick-hit" process automations. Similarly, interim professionals help organizations rapidly boost capacity and capability during periods of increased workload demands. Cost-effective and agile, interim consultants accelerate month-end close, power M&A deals, and more.

Make the most of your talent investments by seeking interim consultants who embody these key traits:

- **Trusted Partner:** Leverage their subject-matter expertise to establish credibility, communicate effectively, and collaborate with key stakeholders.
- **Proactive:** Forecast future client needs and implement high-impact solutions.
- **Results-Driven:** Deliver specific, tangible impact for high-value projects.
- **Team Catalyst:** Empower internal teams through process improvements and help organizations retain expertise after they leave.
- **Triage Expert:** Quickly assess and prioritize critical activities, solve complex problems, and minimize disruption.

Talent Density: Lasting Impact with Force Multipliers

CFOs can also increase leverage, bridge skill gaps, and position their teams for long-term success with talent density. Developed by Netflix alum Patty McCord, talent density is the amount of high-performing professionals compared to an organization's total workforce.

$$\text{Talent Density} = \frac{\text{Amount of High-Leverage Professionals}}{\text{Total Workforce}}$$

To grow talent density, organizations must attract and retain high-leverage professionals known as force multipliers. These individuals have a compounding effect on your organization's workforce, resulting in greater innovation and productivity.

$$\text{Talent Density Execution} = \text{Why} + \text{What} + \text{How} + \text{Who}$$

Start developing talent density by defining your why (organizational mission and needs), what (expected hiring outcomes), how (strategic human capital strategies), and who (force multipliers).

Why: Organizational Mission and Needs

Begin with clearly defining your mission. Next, examine your talent needs from both a top-down and bottom-up perspective. Examples include improving compliance and risk management, filling skill gaps, increasing productivity, meeting deadlines, and improving processes.

What: Expected Hiring Outcomes

Detail hiring outcomes like key deliverables, performance metrics, and ramp-up time (time to adjust to a new role).

How: Human Capital Strategies

Diagnose workforce skill gaps, define success, and deliver excellent hiring outcomes. Optimize the candidate experience to attract and engage top applicants. Finally, create an employer value proposition highlighting the opportunities and benefits employees can expect.

Who: Force Multipliers

Force multipliers create disproportionately higher impact through time savings, process improvements, risk mitigation, and strategic decision-making. They bridge skill gaps and future-proof workforces through driving insights, innovation, and collaboration. For example, they can implement new automation tools that free up bandwidth, allowing teams space to upskill and work on more impactful tasks.

Impactful Resources: Execution. Redefined.

CFOs can overcome labor market challenges and maximize talent ROI by strategically building talent elasticity and density within their teams.

Locally owned and managed since 2012, Impactful Resources is a leading provider of accounting, finance, and IT resources based in Southern California. As a full-service human capital firm focused on supporting emerging growth and middle market companies, we help firms scale to meet the needs of rapidly changing market conditions. Whether the solution is a special project, interim backfill, or a permanent placement, Impactful Resources can satisfy a wide range of client needs. We'll help you find your next force multiplier!



Justin Jessee is a hands-on human capital executive with 20+ years of experience in finance, accounting, IT, and business development. Justin is the Founder & CEO at Impactful Resources, establishing and overseeing the firm's client engagements. Justin has worked, consulted, and managed engagements from start-ups to Fortune 100 companies on a broad range of strategic, operational, and financial projects.

For more information, please visit www.impactfulresources.com.

¹ Trends in material weaknesses. KPMG. (2024).



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KeyBank data shows West Coast firms maintain faith in economy, future prospects

In a region celebrated for resilience and innovation, new data shows Western middle market leaders are championing the U.S. economy — even as turbulence in labor, inflation, and global markets tempers their own company outlook.

In late 2024, KeyBank surveyed over 700 owners and executives of middle market businesses (\$10 million – \$1 billion in annual revenue) across the U.S. Results show the West region balancing elevated economic confidence with caution around company prospects.

A majority of West region middle market business leaders remain confident in the overall U.S. economy, with 61% reporting an “excellent” or “very good” economic outlook — the highest among all regions. However, just 75% express a positive outlook for their own companies, the second lowest among the four regions. Concerns about labor market trends, inflation, energy costs, pricing power, and a shifting geopolitical landscape appear to be softening company-specific optimism.

West region breakdown

Percentage of companies with an “excellent/very good” outlook



Despite high economic optimism, potential reasons for lagging company confidence include labor market challenges and cybersecurity threats.

Nonetheless, Western businesses remain optimistic about leveraging technology to address economic, labor, and operational challenges.

Factors leading to a positive company outlook

Among businesses that rated their company outlook as “excellent” or “very good,” 41% expect significant revenue increases, 52% foresee moderate increases, and 39% feel positive about their ability to attract and retain talent.

Leaders cite AI implementation and broader technology automation as top methods of expansion. West region respondents with high outlooks also note:

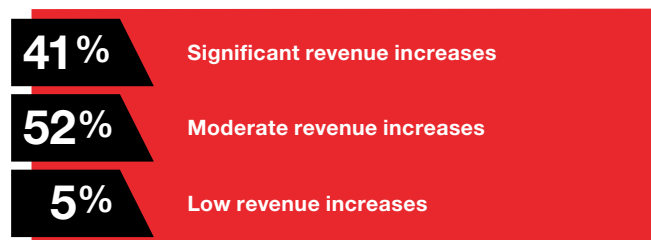
- **Better timeliness of raw materials (38%)** – highest among regions
- **Improved cybersecurity (38%)** – also leads all regions, though down from mid-2024
- **Ability to attract/retain talent (39%)** – second-highest ranking factor

Efficiency improvements (52%) and technology investments (49%) remain key drivers of confidence, while only 26% of leaders impacted by higher energy, oil, and gas costs reported decreased revenues from those expenses.

Increased revenue expectations

Among businesses with “excellent/very good” company outlook

Base: West respondents



Notable concerns

Inflation and labor costs continue to weigh on leaders' minds. Currently, 36% cite overall inflation and 31% cite higher labor costs as negative impacts. Over the next year, 31% still anticipate inflationary pressures, while 23% are concerned about labor costs, along with higher energy and oil/gas prices (both at 23%).

Confidence in the ability to raise prices is notably low (27%), down 10 percentage points from mid-2024. Among businesses affected by rising energy, oil, and gas prices, 60% report smaller profit margins.

Western leaders also note the political landscape (29%) as a factor contributing to strong outlook, second only to the Midwest. However, only 21% see the potential for lower taxes, the lowest level of tax optimism across all U.S. regions.

Conclusion: Access to capital is key

Despite economic headwinds, West region middle market leaders remain focused on technology-driven efficiency, cybersecurity measures, and talent retention. Many plan to invest in growth opportunities, including AI and other innovations, even while managing uncertainties around labor markets, interest rates, and inflation.

KeyBank's middle market experts understand the unique challenges Western businesses face and can help leaders navigate these issues with customized insights, real-time counsel, and access to capital for continued growth.



Robert Besser is KeyBank's Southern California Commercial Banking Leader. He leads the targeted growth strategy in the market and manages a high-performing team of senior relationship managers and payments advisors. Together, they provide trusted lending, treasury, and capital markets strategic advisory solutions to middle market clients across California and the Southwest. Connect with Robert directly at Robert.Besser@key.com or (310) 744-2219.

Robert Besser
Commercial Banking Leader
KeyBank



With a focus on understanding the unique dynamics of middle market businesses, KeyBank can help you navigate challenges and seize new opportunities with confidence. Our relationship-driven approach means that as the economy shifts, we stay focused on your success — not just for today but for years to come.

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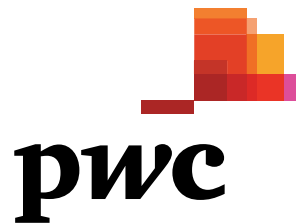


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What's important to CFOs in 2025

Five topics shaping the finance leader agenda

As the complexity and scope of the chief financial officer (CFO) role grows, so too does the finance leader's influence on your company's growth trajectory. And while fears of an imminent *recession may be fading*, it's wise to exercise caution. A brewing risk outlook—including potentially abrupt geopolitical and public policy shifts—promises more volatility. With a unique bird's-eye view of your company's financial health, CFOs are positioned to drive a nimble business strategy underpinned by a solid foundation structured on risk analysis and profitability—whatever the year ahead may hold.

Embrace the CFO's new mandate

The role of the CFO has become one of the most complex and demanding in the C-suite. From financial expertise to strategic decision-making to risk and stakeholder management, successful CFOs should possess a diverse skill set to help guide companies through ever more complex business landscapes and financial and regulatory environments.

Now, with technology powering much of business innovation and transformation, finance leaders are juggling a packed agenda. These demands will require you to call upon equal parts business savvy, strategic insight and tech experience as you work with your C-suite peers.

Looking ahead:

Amid persistent economic uncertainty, the value of a strong CFO can't be overstated. No longer confined to financial reporting, savvy finance leaders can harness the power of modern data, predictive analytics and financial intelligence. Your ability to foster cross-functional alignment and enable the business to be guided by data-backed decision-making can position your company for successful outcomes.

Unlock the ROI of reinvention

Top-performing CFOs recognize the need for a self-funding budget to help drive enterprise transformation. These CFOs don't hesitate to make strategic investments—introducing new revenue streams, entering new markets and integrating new technologies like GenAI—in their business models. Embracing technology can improve performance and productivity while maintaining or reducing costs. Tech tools can also enhance the return on investment for major expenditures, while prioritizing assessment of the total cost of risk at multiple levels—in business, programs, technology, data, security and controls.

Looking ahead:

To fund investments, CFOs are turning to technology to enhance productivity and reduce costs. To speed adoption, connect with your *chief information officer* and *chief transformation officer* to align budget priorities, integrate strategic planning decisions and respond swiftly to market changes.

Take action on climate

Growing environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting requirements have created a sense of climate urgency among executives, including finance leaders. While complying with these requirements may require a complex transition to investor-grade reporting, experience in accounting and controls will be critical to a seamless transition.

Delivering reliable ESG reporting is just the beginning. *Nearly a third of CFOs* are analyzing how climate change scenarios could impact financial performance. Utilize your unique view and tools for forecasting to integrate sustainability into your business strategy, analyze risk and explore opportunities for growth through sustainable products and solutions.

Looking ahead:

While you're preparing for proposed and enacted ESG disclosure requirements, think long term. Sustainable strategies can deliver growth, viability for the future, return on investment and a positive impact on society—all while striving to meet decarbonization and other ESG goals. Consider also how tax incentives, renewable energy and green financing can help fund your sustainability strategies.

Modernize the finance function

As the role of the CFO expands, so does the influence of the finance function. With data volumes exploding, finance leaders are becoming data stewards. Using advanced analytics and cloud technology, CFOs can drive strategic insights to that can improve forecasting, better manage cash and even rethink organizational structures.

But talent with the necessary strategy and tech skills to help guide the enterprise through uncertainty is getting harder to come by. Demand is particularly high for those with skill sets like data analysis and forecasting—and knowledge of the tech that powers them.

Looking ahead:

Successful finance transformations start with people. To get there, reimagine roles and reskill staff to hone analytical capabilities, considering where you may need to attract specialized talent or explore a managed services model. Technical upskilling is important, of course, but investments that improve non-technical capabilities are just as critical — like data-driven storytelling, communication and innovation.

Practice trust as a discipline

As a primary point of contact for investors, analysts and other stakeholders, finance leaders should be able to effectively communicate financial performance and the company's strategic direction. As risks—including geopolitical tensions, digital advancements, regulatory complexity, cyber breaches and changing consumer expectations—multiply and converge, CFOs and the rest of the executive team may need to practice greater agility.

When your internal and external stakeholders know they can count on disciplined, transparent and accurate communication and controls, you send a clear message that you and your finance team have risk considerations versus profitability well in hand.

Looking ahead:

Are you fostering a culture of trust and resilience—both in your function and across the enterprise? By prioritizing funding for risk management, cybersecurity, governance and controls you can help drive a culture founded on transparency, accountability and trust.





DIVORCING IN CALIFORNIA: UNTYING THE KNOT AND DISENTANGLING THE YACHT

By Paul Nelson, Esq



Divorcing in California is never dull. But if you're in a high-net-worth marriage? Congratulations—your divorce just got its own season on Bravo.

We're not talking about who gets the Vitamix. We're talking business valuations, RSUs, beach houses in Big Sur, and debates over whether the vintage Porsche is "transportation" or "an appreciating asset with sentimental horsepower."

California is a community property state, which means everything acquired during the marriage is split 50/50... in theory. But toss in offshore accounts, a Bitcoin cold wallet no one remembers the password to, and that pre-IPO investment your spouse made after one too many martinis at Mastro's, and that "clean split" becomes anything but.

Let's break it down.

First: **business ownership.** If one spouse ran the company while the other "just helped with the books," courts may still treat it as a marital asset. Valuations require forensic accountants and business appraisers—some of whom bill more than your plastic surgeon.

Then there's **deferred compensation**—RSUs, stock options, and golden handcuffs (not the fun kind). Many execs don't realize these are community property until the court breaks

out the "time rule apportionment" formula.

The hidden landmine? **Commingling.** That Malibu rental bought before marriage but paid off during? You might've just made it community—or at least partly. That vertical collection of Screaming Eagle aging in the temperature-controlled cellar? Yes, that's probably community too—vintage by vintage.

And yes, there's **spousal support**—aka "lifestyle equalization." California courts don't care if your spouse never paid a bill. If they got used to private Pilates, Aspen in the spring, or flying private from the east side of the airport, you might be footing the bill long after the final judgment. Think of it as a luxury maintenance clause, a golden parachute for one, or an affluence adjustment built into your post-marital finances.

Privacy is another premium concern. One careless filing and your balance sheet becomes more public than your wedding registry.

So here's the takeaway: If your finances require a CPA, two estate planners, and a separate tab for crypto, your divorce deserves the same level of strategy.

Because in a high-asset divorce, it's not just about division. It's about *preservation*—of wealth, reputation, and sanity.

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How City of Hope Orange County
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City of Hope Orange County, the region's most advanced and largest cancer research and treatment network, is leading the way in workforce development through its strategic partnership with Cristo Rey Orange County High School's Corporate Work Study program.

This innovative collaboration provides students with invaluable hands-on professional experience in healthcare administration and operations, enhancing City of Hope Orange County's ability to guide the next generation of healthcare leaders.

Through this transformative partnership, Cristo Rey students gain critical workplace skills while City of Hope Orange County harnesses the energy and fresh perspectives of young talent—creating a powerful investment in Orange County's future healthcare workforce.

JOIN ORANGE COUNTY'S LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

Forward-thinking organizations looking to enhance their community impact can take inspiration from City of Hope Orange County's leadership example.

Cristo Rey Orange County is preparing to welcome its 3rd class next year and is **actively seeking 30 new corporate partners** who want to demonstrate the same commitment to excellence and community investment.

Be like City of Hope Orange County —inspire the future workforce and others in Orange County by partnering with Cristo Rey.

Join the 45 visionary companies already partnering with our Corporate Work Study program and shape Orange County's next generation of professionals.

“We love having the Cristo Rey students on our team. While we open their eyes to the possibilities in healthcare, they bring new energy to our priorities.”

-Annette Morgan,
Chief Operating Officer
City of Hope Orange County



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Q&A with Taylor Hoang, F&M's CFO

In honor of National Financial Literacy Month 2025, we discussed the importance of financial literacy with F&M Bank's Chief Financial Officer.

Q: What is your role as Chief Financial Officer?

A: I collaborate with the CEO and other executives to develop and implement the Bank's financial strategy, which includes providing financial planning, analysis, and reporting to support long-term business decisions.

Q: Why is the financial wellness of the community important to F&M Bank?

A: A strong foundation of financial literacy can help support various life goals, such as saving for education or retirement, using debt responsibly, and running a business. Also, financially literate people are generally less vulnerable to financial fraud.

Financial literacy is not universally taught in schools and not everyone has financially savvy parents who can pass down knowledge. By sharing this reality, we can remove the shame of not knowing. We empower through knowledge.

Q: What is F&M Bank doing to encourage financial wellness?

A: In collaboration with F&M Bank Foundation and F&M's CRA Officer, the Bank approaches financial education not as a literacy or knowledge issue, but from a wellness perspective. With physical wellness, we are taught how to properly take care of our bodies and learn when something is good or bad for our health. The same perspective can be applied to finances. Knowing the information is only part of it; creating habits and modeling our behaviors to be in-line with our financial goals allows us to be financially healthy and successful. As such, it is not enough to simply share information: we go a step further and create opportunities and environments for long-term success.

Q: What are F&M's Financial Literacy programs?

A: Our bank conducts in-school presentations for K-12th grade and partners with colleges, universities, and nonprofits to bring financial education to their programs. At every life stage, introduction and comprehension of terminology and concepts are instrumental in developing a secure financial future. By partnering with all these organizations to bring financial education, we can ensure credibility and tailor the information to make sure it is relevant, age-appropriate, and sensitive to their specific situation.

To learn more about F&M Bank's financial literacy initiatives, visit FMB.com/Community.

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Strategic Recruiting: How Baker Tilly Taps Into Irvine Valley College's Pipeline of Promising Accountants

"A good teacher has a huge influence," he says. "I love the learning process – and working with students to figure out a career path."

Shakstad is the campus recruiting manager at Baker Tilly, a top ten certified public accounting firm with a global footprint. In this capacity he works proactively with Irvine Valley College's (IVC) staff to recruit students as paid interns, an opportunity that allows them to gain valuable real-world experience, develop core skills and work alongside professionals.

The paid internship program is a boon for both students and employers, says Shakstad, who is passionate about instilling an understanding of and love for accounting in students. "With a goal of converting our interns into full time associates, we have been very successful with our recruiting efforts at IVC. Most students there are exceptionally serious about their accounting studies – on track to transfer to a four-year school and earn an accounting degree."

IVC also offers the Guaranteed Accounting Program (GAP 4+1) in tandem with Cal State Fullerton, offering a flexible pathway to bachelor's and master's degrees – and in the process gain credits for the Certified Public Accountant (C.P.A.) credential.

To recruit the right students, Shakstad relies on IVC accounting faculty, which he finds to be "engaged and hands on. They consistently go the extra mile to offer extras like organized tours of top accounting firms."

Shakstad says there are two core qualities he looks for when hiring students: curiosity and the ability to foster relationships. "In public accounting, relationship



Garrett Shakstad

building – and the ability to work smoothly with clients and colleagues – is key," he says. Also important is natural curiosity: a keen interest in how things work. "Curiosity drives the quest for knowledge and helps people ask the right questions and actively listen – fundamental traits for a successful public accountant."

He typically works closely with Bennet Tchaikovsky, a longtime IVC professor of accounting. "Garrett has been incredibly supportive of our students, giving his time to assist them prior to transferring to a four-year school as well as once they have transferred," Tchaikovsky says. "With Garrett's guidance, multiple IVC students have been successfully hired by Baker Tilly over the past few years."

Shakstad, who himself is a community college alum – he transferred from El Camino College to USC to obtain his B.S. in accounting – says two-year colleges provide an invaluable option. "They offer an important stepping stone – offering flexibility and affordability with supportive, hands-on faculty."

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Meet Garrett Shakstad

The campus recruiting manager at Baker Tilly, a top ten certified public accounting firm, Garrett is passionate about instilling an understanding of and love for accounting in students. When recruiting paid interns, he works closely with IVC's accounting department to hire top talent – enabling students to gain valuable real-world experience.



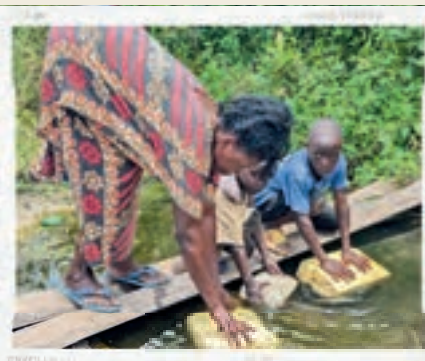
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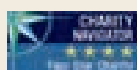
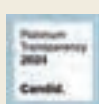
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Celebrating CFOs: The Cornerstones of Smart, Strategic Transactions

CFOs are more than financial stewards—they are the architects of strategic growth, the risk managers of major business decisions, and the driving force behind successful mergers and acquisitions. As we celebrate the achievements of top CFOs in this edition of the Orange County Business Journal, Adams Corporate Law recognizes their critical role in shaping the financial and operational success of businesses across California.

Our firm has worked alongside CFOs across various industries, guiding complex transactions, structuring deals that maximize value, and providing legal and strategic support to help financial leaders close deals with confidence. From due diligence and contract negotiation to post-merger integration, we specialize in protecting and empowering CFOs as they execute high-stakes transactions.

California's fast-evolving M&A and business environment brings both opportunities and challenges. Many businesses are already affected by tariffs, government spending cuts, and immigration, as well as changes to regulatory oversight, taxes, and national priorities. CFOs play a pivotal role in evaluating opportunities for major transactions, extending beyond financial oversight to strategic decision-making. We partner with CFOs to proactively identify legal risks, structure favorable deal terms, and ensure acquisitions and new ventures align with long-term business goals. With our legal expertise, financial leaders can navigate complexities, mitigate risks, and drive transformative deals that fuel corporate growth.

As we honor this year's outstanding CFOs, we invite you to discover how Adams Corporate Law can support your M&A and new business initiatives. Whether you're preparing for an acquisition, securing investor financing, or positioning your company for a strategic sale, we are here to ensure your success.

Visit adamscorporatelaw.com to learn more or call (714) 619-9360 to discuss how we can work together to make your next deal in California a success.



Adams Corporate Law is a leading law firm specializing in a full range of corporate legal services for businesses, investors, and funds of all sizes—with a particular emphasis on mergers and acquisitions. We are the “lawyers who close deals.”



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– Ethisphere, March 2025

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Royal Asscher Diamond Company is best known for its diamond cutting and was selected by King Edward VII of England, to cut the famous 3,106-carat Cullinan Diamond, which later became part of Great Britain's Crown Jewels. In keeping up with new diamond cutting techniques and technology, Royal Asscher developed the Royal Asscher Cut, taking inspiration from the historic work with the British Crown Jewels that used the standard of 58 facets, and significantly improved the beauty of the diamond by increasing the number of facets to 74. This enhances the sparkle and creates a stunning "hall of mirrors" effect. Every diamond, like a human fingerprint, has certain distinguishing characteristics. The 4 C's; cut, color, clarity, and carat weight, are the globally accepted standards for assessing the quality of a diamond.

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Educational events feature recognized experts and include breakfast, lunch or cocktails, with time for networking (November 2024's "Practical Solutions for the Modern Boardroom").



Join FCD members and guests at networking events like this cocktail reception at Newport Beach's Balboa Bay Club (September 2024).



At FCD's Aspiring Directors event (April 2024), panelists share tips for securing a board seat. This year's event adds workshops on board bio creation and effective networking.



Access the insights and connections that matter. Scan the QR code to learn more about FCD's upcoming events!



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CONGRATULATIONS TO

Brian Peay

on his nomination for *Orange County Business Journal's* 2025 CFO of the Year Awards.

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CFO of The Year Award Nominees

Todd Abboud, CFO*Main Electric Supply Company LLC, Santa Ana*

In March 2024, Todd Abboud joined as CFO of Main Electric Supply Company, the largest independently owned electrical supply distributor in California. Main Electric is experiencing significant growth from its original location in Los Angeles to eighteen locations throughout the Western US. Abboud oversees finance and accounting and since joining, he has overseen the company's expansion into three new markets and supporting organic growth within existing locations, while identifying and implementing operational efficiencies. These efforts and internal investment along with Abboud's M&A experience and 30 years in corporate banking has positioned Main Electric to scale further and achieve its growth plans.

**Josh Alkema, VP of Finance Transformation***MeridianLink, Costa Mesa*

Josh Alkema has played a pivotal role in steering the MeridianLink accounting team through dynamic challenges. Of those challenges, two accomplishments stand out as sources of immense pride for Alkema. Firstly, helping to lead the accounting team through the transition from a private to a publicly traded company while implementing rigorous SOX controls. His team navigated this complex landscape, ensuring precision and compliance. The transition to a publicly traded entity demanded heightened precision, and implementing SOX controls became an ongoing challenge-one that they tackled head-on. The second accomplishment has to do with transitioning away from a more traditional accounting role, into one that owning and driving a key pillar for the business as the Finance Transformation leader. In this role Alkema is responsible for providing a vision of how various financial systems need to be over-hauled in order to improve the company's overall operations and data flows, to facilitate quicker decision making and reduce reliance on manual detective controls.

**Curtis Allen, CFO***Phoenix Energy One LLC, Irvine*

Curtis Allen is a partner and chief financial officer of Phoenix Energy One, LLC an oil and gas investment company that empowers everyday investors to participate in an industry traditionally dominated by institutions, private equity and public companies. Allen has been with the company for five years and has played a pivotal role in its rapid growth and success from \$8.5 million in revenue in 2020 to \$280 million in revenue in 2024 and an estimated \$500 million in revenue for 2025. Allen brings over a decade of experience in financial services with an emphasis on investment analysis. As a CPA, Allen has a range of experience from private taxes to auditing billion-dollar defense contractors. He has also spent over seven years managing investments for personal and corporate clients. In addition, Allen has held Series seven and 66 licenses and has successfully passed Level 1 of the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA). In his role at Phoenix Capital Group, Allen leads all accounting and finance functions while managing critical day-to-day operations. Under his financial leadership, the company has become the fastest growing oil and gas investment firm in the nation, deploying an unprecedented \$800 million in oil and gas assets within just three years.

**Gus Alvarez, CFO***Quality Health Partners, Santa Ana*

Gus Alvarez, an accomplished financial leader, has been instrumental in driving the success of Quality Health Partners. With a focus on strategic growth, Alvarez has implemented innovative financial strategies that have optimized resources, streamlined operations, and achieved significant revenue growth.

**Lauren Beale SVP, Chief Accounting Officer***CareTrust REIT Inc., San Clemente*

With over a decade of experience in accounting and leadership roles, Lauren Beale's professional journey exemplifies exceptional expertise, dedication, and leadership in the field of accounting. What makes Beale's career even more remarkable is her ability to rise to the top in a male-dominated industry. Throughout her tenure at CareTrust, she has not only excelled in her technical accounting expertise but has also broken barriers in leadership. Her perseverance and resilience have allowed her to navigate challenges and create a space for herself as a trusted executive. This journey is an inspiring testament to her leadership, determination, and ability to succeed in an industry where women are underrepresented in senior roles. Under Beale's leadership, CareTrust's accounting department has grown and evolved. She has built a strong, cohesive team that embodies a culture of accountability, integrity, and collaboration. Her focus on mentorship, professional development, and fostering an inclusive work environment has been instrumental in attracting and retaining top talent, further strengthening the department's impact on the company's overall success.

**Brad Biddle, CFO***XR LLC, Huntington Beach*

Brad Biddle is a result driven senior executive with more than 25 years of progressive experience in financial management of manufacturing and distribution companies in the high-tech and consumer products industries. He is a proven leader working with board of directors, banking institutions, and attorneys. Biddle is a CPA with an established record of success.

**Kelly Blair, CFO***Mark IV Capital Inc., Newport Beach*

Kelly Blair has redefined the role of chief financial officer in commercial real estate by fostering a culture of open communication and thoughtful mentorship at Mark IV Capital. As the CFO of this leading private investment firm, which focuses on high-quality commercial real estate and private equity investments across the U.S., Blair

oversees all financial activities and reporting, directly influencing the company's fiscal health and future success. Her strategic leadership has transformed Mark IV's finance department into a more dynamic and interactive entity. Through her exemplary management skills, Blair has shaped the department to be streamlined and effective, which translates to greater efficiency throughout the organization. Blair's deep and broad expertise in accounting, capital markets, strategic financing, and capital raising has been instrumental to Mark IV's progress. Under her guidance, the CFO role has evolved to be significantly more strategically focused and empathetic, driving the firm's growth and stability and supporting Mark IV in achieving increasingly higher business goals.

**Peter Bonfiglio, CFO***Stretto, Irvine*

Peter Bonfiglio is a high-energy chief financial officer with more than 25 years of experience in helping companies grow both organically and through acquisition. In his role as CFO at Stretto, Bonfiglio has successfully directed Stretto's strong financial performance as the company continues on its rapid growth trajectory. He brings in-depth expertise to his role in financial planning and analysis, acquisition integration, forecasting, consolidations, enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementations, Sarbanes-Oxley compliance, and managing business unit profit & loss statements among many other areas of expertise. Prior to joining Stretto, he led executive teams through a range of transformational financial processes in leadership roles at market-leading companies including SimCorp North America and Wolters Kluwer.

**Benjamin Brewster, CFO***Pathway Capital, Irvine*

Benjamin Brewster joined Pathway in 2018 and is the chief financial officer of corporate financial operations. He oversees the financial and accounting administration of Pathway and its related entities, the tax compliance for Pathway's legal entities and funds of funds managed by Pathway, and Pathway's valuation department. He works closely with senior leadership on executing strategic initiatives and also chairs Pathway's Valuation Committee. Prior to joining Pathway, Mr. Brewster worked as a managing director in the audit department of KPMG LLP, where he was responsible for overseeing the financial statement audits of SEC registered investment advisers, private equity funds, hedge funds, senior debt funds, and other closed-end alternative investment funds. He also has experience performing audit and attestation services for various financial institutions, including publicly traded banks, broker dealers, business-development companies, and specialty purpose acquisition companies. Mr. Brewster received a BA in economics from Brigham Young University and is a certified public accountant.

**Rodney Burris, President & CFO***Care Partners, Irvine*

Over the course of the previous 15 years, Rodney Burris has had the opportunity to serve as a leader in regional, executive and board member roles across a spectrum of healthcare organizations. These ventures have spanned from large corporate structures to small start-up companies. His intensity, drive and passion to care for others is a derivative from playing the role of "patient" many times throughout life. These events have inspired Burris to build high performance teams that desire to broaden their positive impact through creation and innovation. Most recently, Burris joined Silverado serving as the vice president of operations for Silverado At Home in 2014. Over the previous two years, the At Home service line consistently broke every Revenue, EBITDA and census record multiple times since the inception in 2006. Prior to joining Silverado, Burris joined the four founding partners at Mission Healthcare, Inc. as the chief financial officer, chief operations officer and member of the board of directors. During Burris' tenure, Mission enjoyed an expansion from skilled intermittent Home Healthcare to Hospice, Infusion Clinic and non-medical HomeCare while the valuation of the company went from \$300,000 to approx. \$25 million over the same time span.

**Jared Callister, VP Finance***QSC Audio, Costa Mesa*

Jared Callister leads the global finance team for QSC, LLC joining the company in 2013. Founded over five decades ago and headquartered in Costa Mesa, QSC, LLC is a globally recognized leader in the design, engineering, and manufacturing of award-winning solutions and services. The company's Q-SYS segment provides a cloud-first platform for audio, video, and control, built on a modern, standards-based IT architecture. Callister has more than 20 years' experience in corporate finance and accounting matters, including management of accounting, taxation, treasury, risk management, and financial planning and analysis functions. At QSC, Callister provided financial leadership to support and enable consistent and sustainable growth in domestic and international markets while building a robust finance team across various regions. These efforts culminated in a transformational event with Acuity Brands, Inc. (NYSE: AYI) acquiring QSC, LLC in January 2025. Prior to joining QSC, Callister enjoyed a rewarding career at the Deloitte Orange County office for over 11 years, serving and advising corporate clients and business owners on various accounting and tax strategies - including mergers and acquisitions, accounting methods, global expansions, and international taxation.

**Kirk Colburn, CFO & COO***Partners Bank of California, Mission Viejo*

Kirk Colburn has served as chief financial officer of Partners Bank





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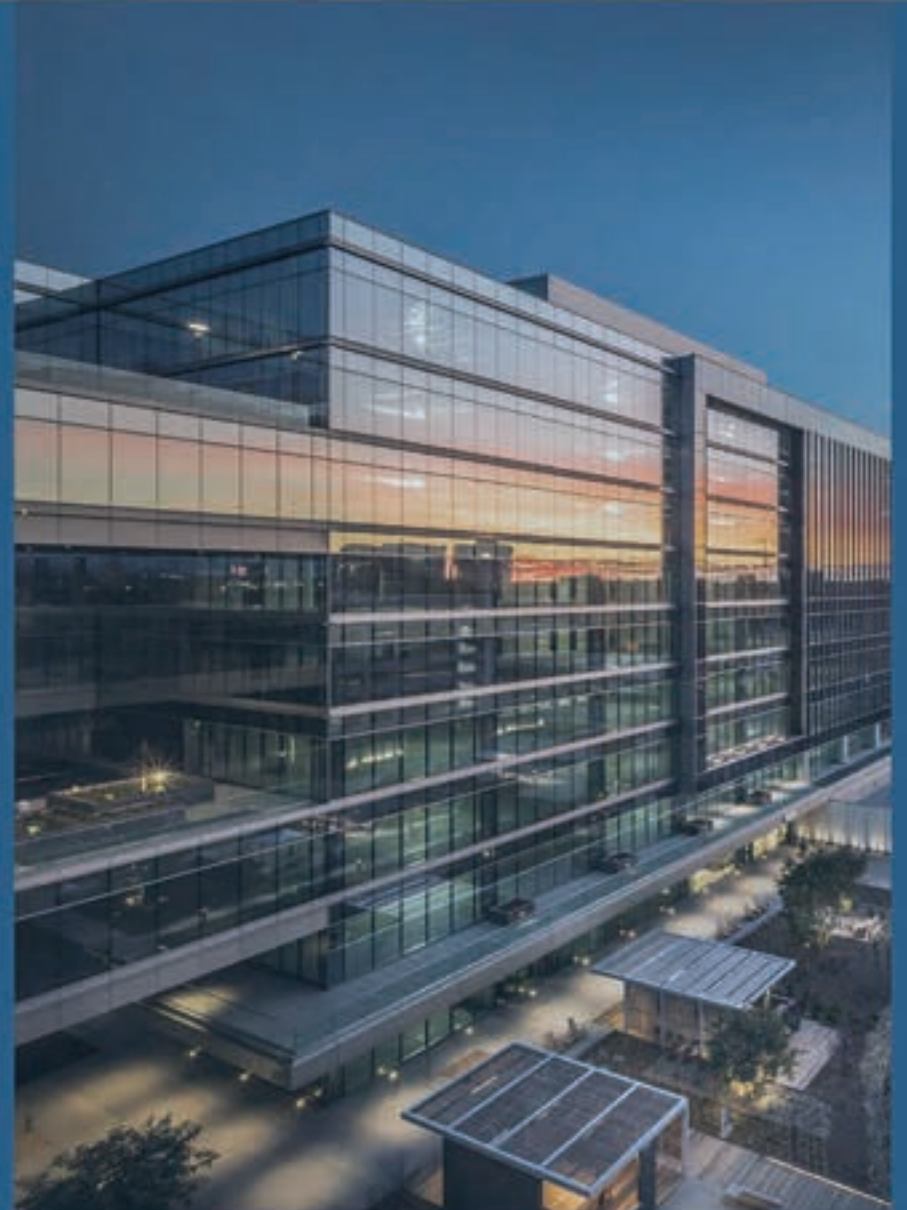
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CFO of The Year Award Nominees

of California for 16 years and recently added the responsibility of chief operating officer. During his tenure, he has help guide the bank through a great recession, pandemic and the 2022 interest rate hike. In 2018, Colburn began teaching personal finance as a guest speaker at Chapman University. Colburn joined the board of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Capistrano Valley in 2022 to help guide their finance committee.

Keith Crider, VP Strategy and Finance Transformation PepsiCo, Aliso Viejo

Keith Crider holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from Baylor University and is a Certified Public Accountant. He began his career at Ernst & Young, specializing in financial services, entrepreneurial businesses, and high-tech industries. Seeking to deepen his expertise, Crider earned an MBA from the University of Texas at Austin, which propelled him into a successful career at Frito-Lay, a division of PepsiCo. Over the past 20 years, Crider has held progressive roles in finance and strategy across PepsiCo's foods and beverages sectors. As CFO of the \$5 billion Beverages West Division, he delivered strong business results through transformation and operational excellence. Currently, Crider is a leader in Pepsico North America Strategy, focusing on transforming the organization by simplifying processes through technology, enhancing standardization across functions, and standing up lower cost global capability centers. Known for his financial acumen, strategic thinking, and leadership, Crider is passionate about driving efficiency and innovation to deliver sustainable business growth.



Tony Dabbene, CEO & CFO

IHI Power Services Corp., Aliso Viejo

Tony Dabbene boasts a distinguished professional track record, marked by significant achievements and transformative experiences. From being the Public Company CFO of the only Calimant to have won a NAFTA case for his work with Metalclad Corporation, to his impressive 30-year career in executive leadership with global conglomerates like IHI Power Services Corp., LG&E Energy and EBASCO, Dabbene is a true example of what it means to be an outstanding corporate steward that yields successful and lasting business outcomes. Since 2022, Dabbene has excelled as the chief financial officer (CFO) at IHI Power Services Corp. (IPSC), achieving notable success in reducing employee turnover from 80% to 0%, building a strong finance department and leading a comprehensive Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation. Initially brought out of retirement for a three-month stint to revitalize the financial department upon request from Steve Gross, then chief executive officer and president of IPSC, Dabbene's remarkable contributions quickly transformed his temporary assignment into a permanent role. Today, he leads a dynamic management team and remains dedicated to enhancing the company's ERP system and propelling strong organizational growth.



Trang Davel, Vice President - Corporate Controller

Tungsten Automation Corporation, Irvine

Trang Davel began her career at BDO Orange County, where she spent five years as an auditor and expanded her professional expertise with an international secondment in Australia. This experience provided her with a strong foundation in financial operations and auditing practices. Prior to joining Tungsten, Davel served as the U.S. controller at Viant, where she oversaw accounting for U.S. operations. She successfully reduced the financial close process from 30 days to just four and played an integral role in the company's acquisition by Time Inc., a publicly traded organization. In 2017, Davel joined Tungsten (formerly known as Kofax) as the AMS controller following its acquisition by Thoma Bravo from Lexmark. During this transition, she managed the complex integration of Kofax and Lexmark's ReadSoft businesses, which required extensive carve-out reporting and consolidation efforts. Davel prioritized mentoring her team, optimizing processes, and ensuring accurate and efficient reporting under private equity ownership. Her leadership led to her promotion to corporate controller, where she oversaw global accounting and order fulfillment operations. She was instrumental in supporting Tungsten's transformation from a document capture leader to a digital workflow automation pioneer, culminating in the company's rebrand to Tungsten Automation to reflect this strategic shift.



Amy Dickerson, CFO

Regenesis, San Clemente

Amy Dickerson is the chief financial officer of Regenesis, an environmental remediation company that has been eliminating exposure risks from PFAS and other contaminants in groundwater for over three decades. In this role, she oversees the global financial management of Regenesis. She also manages numerous departments, including accounting, finance, customer service and human resources. Since joining Regenesis over a decade ago, Ms. Dickerson's leadership has been pivotal to the company's growth. She has managed the implementation of multiple software programs including an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. These systems have streamlined accounting and operations processes and have improved efficiency across the company. She also assisted in the setup and establishment of Regenesis' new manufacturing facility in Gallatin, TN. The new facility allowed the company to bring all manufacturing in-house. She also launched an ongoing company-wide mentoring program to foster internal talent development and established additional programs to promote employee engagement.



Amy Djou, Chief Accounting Officer & Deputy CFO

First Foundation Inc., Irvine

Amy Djou is a skilled Deputy CFO & chief accounting officer with over 20 years of experience in banking. At First Foundation Bank, where she has worked for eight plus years, Djou has been a key player in transforming financial processes. She joined the bank in 2016 as a controller, when it had \$3 billion in assets, and helped it grow to over \$13 billion. Djou has led teams through several acquisitions and improved efficiency through automation. In late



2022, she served as interim CFO during a challenging time for regional banks, showing her ability to handle complex financial situations. Now, Djou oversees accounting, SEC and regulatory reporting, tax, and compensation. Her energetic and experienced approach makes her a vital part of the bank's success.

Shawn Edwards, CFO

AutoAlert, Newport Beach

Shawn Edwards is a seasoned chief financial officer with over 15 years of experience driving growth and operational excellence in SaaS, private equity and middle-market companies based in Orange County and throughout the nation. Throughout his impressive career, Edwards has specialized in transforming businesses into high-performing private equity platform companies, executing over a dozen M&A transactions valued at more than \$1 billion. He has consistently positioned organizations for long-term success, leading teams through strategic expansion and change management. In his current role as CFO at AutoAlert-a BlackRock portfolio company originally founded in Orange County by Jeff Cotton of Fletcher Jones Mercedes-Benz Newport-Edwards oversees finance, HR, legal and go-to-market functions, strategically leveraging the company's deep local roots to drive growth. Edwards balances financial acumen with emotional intelligence, earning recognition for his relentless sense of urgency and ability to foster collaboration and trust across teams, clients and executive peers. His well-rounded understanding of both big picture and detail-oriented nuances, combined with a commitment to creative, one-phone-call problem-solving-rare in the industry-drives sustainable progress and measurable results.



Gary Fabian, CFO

Kind Lending, Santa Ana

Gary Fabian has been instrumental in leading Kind Lending thru explosive growth. Despite a tough mortgage environment, Kind Lending more than doubled last year going from funding \$3.4 billion in originations in 2023 to \$7.5 billion in 2024. Fabian led several new bank warehouse lines taking the capacity from \$200 million to \$850 million. Since Fabian came on board in 2021, he has been responsible for scaling the accounting, finance, and treasury department from scratch. Given COVID, liquidity and capital market turmoil, and interest rate fluctuations, Fabian's 30+ years finance experience was fully exercised as he adeptly managed and grew the company where other mortgage companies retrenched.



David Fiduccia, CFO

Americo Builders LLC, Anaheim

David Fiduccia is an accomplished financial leader with extensive experience in managing and optimizing financial operations across diverse industries. Currently serving as chief financial officer at both GCI Site Services Inc. and Americo Builders, Fiduccia oversees multi-million-dollar budgets, drives profitability, and ensures financial sustainability for high-quality construction projects. Additionally, as director of finance and managing partner at Coerver Orange County, he manages financial strategies to support youth development programs within a globally recognized sports organization. With over two decades at Amway, Fiduccia held roles including chief financial analyst, senior financial analyst, and lead supply chain planner, where he managed budgets exceeding \$260 million, implemented enterprise financial systems such as J.D. Edwards and Hyperion, and spearheaded a \$20 million supply chain modernization project. His expertise includes budgeting, forecasting, financial analysis, and cost optimization, as well as leading cross-functional global teams to improve operational efficiency. A results-driven professional, Fiduccia excels at streamlining processes, driving strategic initiatives, and delivering impactful financial insights to support organizational growth and excellence.



John Finnucan IV, CFO

FirstElement Fuel, Irvine

John Finnucan joined FirstElement Fuel, Inc. as its chief financial officer in November 2023. Responsibilities include capital raising, forecasting and planning for transactions, managing cash position to prepare for future growth, monthly financial reporting to investors and other market participants, and team building. Accomplishments in year one include: closing new capital raise of \$25 million with a strategic investor, improvements to cash management, financial reporting and controls, establishing trusted relationship with Board, Investors and Founders to secure buy-in for key initiatives and capital, and negotiated successful outcomes with debtholders and external stakeholders.



Jason Formagus, VP Finance

Virgin Galactic, Tustin

Jason Formagus is a strategic, and operationally focused finance executive with proven success at large scale aerospace and infrastructure companies. Achievements include directing and streamlining finance functions, including financial planning and analysis, project finance, and strategic planning, as well as positively impacting financial results by identifying areas of operational and vendor contract improvement, creating strategies to implement, and developing processes and reporting to ensure that the intended outcomes are achieved. Mr. Formagus is currently responsible for the financial support to the three primary operating units of Virgin Galactic, which includes the existing fleet of vehicles as well as the development and manufacture of the next generation vehicles and rocket motors. Support to these business units includes program budgets, forecasting and reporting, project scheduling as well as indirect budget management. Additional responsibilities include supporting executive level operating and strategic reviews, vendor negotiations, and performing scenario analysis to support Board reviews and Earnings Calls. Prior to Virgin Galactic, Mr. Formagus had successful leadership roles with leading infrastructure and aerospace companies, including AECOM, Raytheon and Boeing.



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CFO of The Year Award Nominees

Andrew Guarni, CFO*Hoag Health System, Newport Beach*

Andrew Guarni is the executive vice president and chief financial officer at Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian. Since joining Hoag in 2012, he has been integral in strengthening the organization's financial stability and advancing its strategic initiatives. With an accounting degree from West Chester University and 35 years in healthcare finance and administration, Guarni combines a passion for numbers with a commitment to people. His leadership extends beyond spreadsheets—he fosters collaboration, inspires philanthropy, and champions patient-centered care. He is also a proud ambassador of Hoag's mission, elevating its community impact. Throughout his career, Guarni has executed large-scale initiatives, including tax-exempt financing, hospital consolidation, mergers and acquisitions, and organizational turnarounds. He has also led hospital and physician practice acquisitions, managing everything from initial discussions to post-acquisition integration.

**Ben Gunther, SVP Finance***AWP Safety, Santa Ana*

Ben Gunther has fifteen years of experience in financial reporting, planning, analysis, raising capital, acquisitions, joint ventures and due diligence. His accounting experience includes public and private company financial reporting, consolidated financial statements for multiple special purpose vehicles, audit, accounting system design and implementation, internal controls, and taking a company public. He has been part of the management team for the close of private equity commitments and project development ranging from \$25 million to more than \$500 million. When he started his tenure they were \$110 million in revenue and they were 700 employees and now have 7500 employees. Gunther has overseen 14 acquisitions since he started with his current company.

**Dan Hart, CFO***Avid Bioservices, Tustin*

Dan Hart is the chief financial officer of Avid Bioservices, a dedicated CDMO focused on development and CGMP manufacturing of biologics based in Tustin. In his role as CFO, which began in August 2018, he oversees the company's accounting, FP&A, SEC reporting, investor relations, treasury, risk management and information technology.

**Stephen Hui, CFO***Animal Dermatology, Irvine*

Stephen Hui joined Animal Dermatology Group in 2022 and serves as the chief financial officer for the company. He is a hands-on leader and a trusted strategic adviser to the CEO and the Board. Hui oversees the areas of FP&A, finance, accounting, investor/lender relation, IT, human resources, and supply chain. For the past 15 years, Hui has had a track record of working with Private Equity sponsors on multi-site medical businesses, ranging from dentistry and radiology to wellness and veterinary services. Hui received his MBA from the USC Marshall School of Business where he specialized in MIS and Operations. Hui grew annual revenue by over 300% over three years via M&A, Denovo, and Same Store Growth

**Nate Janzen, CFO***Magnolia Foods, Mira Loma*

Nate Janzen is a strategic CFO within the food industry. He started his career in investment banking doing mergers and acquisitions in the food, beverage, and agriculture industries at Lazard. After five years at Lazard, he went on to join a former client, Del Real Foods, where he served as VP of Finance and Purchasing. After five years helping to profitably grow Del Real, Janzen joined sister company, Magnolia Foods, the largest independent manufacturer of tortillas in Southern California, as CFO. During his three years as CFO, he has helped the company to become cash flow positive following the pandemic and is focused on driving future organic and acquisitive growth.

**Tucker Johnson, CFO***EnergyCAP LLC, Ladera Ranch*

Tucker Johnson is an executive leader with ~15 years of broad experience within private equity and venture-backed growth companies, as well as public accounting. His operational and analytical expertise is leveraged to drive strategic decisions that yield growth and scalability throughout the business. Johnson has deep financial and operational competencies enable change through people process and systems in fast paced, cross functional environments. He also has a strong track record includes both organic and inorganic growth culminating in successful outcomes.

**Marc Johnson, CFO & Treasurer***North American Client Services / NAHS Holdings Inc., Mission Viejo*

Marc Johnson is currently CFO at NAHS Holdings Inc., an operator currently of 12 Skilled Nursing Facilities with over 1,800 employees throughout California. Mr. Johnson is responsible for overall financial management of the company, its financial reporting and transparency, and for multiple corporate functions including controllership, reimbursement, treasury, tax, IT, HRIS, and long-range planning. Mr. Johnson played a critical role in the divestiture of 24 of 36 skilled nursing facilities, successfully transitioning them to new operators. This complex initiative required strategic negotiations, financial structuring, and operational execution to ensure seamless transitions while maximizing



financial returns and mitigating risks. Through rigorous financial analysis, strategic cost-cutting measures, and enhanced liquidity management, Mr. Johnson improved cash flow efficiency, optimized working capital, and positioned the company for long-term financial health. Mr. Johnson has over 25 years of financial and operational experience in healthcare and manufacturing and has successfully, enhancing financial stability while driving operational efficiency.

Ron Kalfus, CFO*MDxHealth, Irvine*

Ron Kalfus is an accomplished CFO with a wealth of experience in the diagnostics and life science sectors. Since 2019, he has been the financial leader at mdxhealth, a NASDAQ-listed diagnostics company specializing in prostate cancer. At mdxhealth, Kalfus has spearheaded several significant financial initiatives, including leading the company through an IPO in 2021, raising \$50 million, as well as the acquisition of the Oncotype Genomic Prostate Score (GPS) business from Exact Sciences in 2022 for \$100 million, integrating over 40 employees into mdxhealth. As part of the acquisition, Kalfus helped establish a \$70 million loan facility to fund the acquisition, which was later refinanced to \$100 million facility with OrbiMed. Since joining mdxhealth in 2019, the Company's revenue has grown, with significant improvements in gross margin and EBITDA. The Company is expected to reach positive adjusted EBITDA in 2025 with revenues in the \$108-\$110 million range.

**Brian Kamradt, CFO***Summit Interconnect, Irvine*

Lindsay Goldberg a PE Firm bought Summit in 2022 from another PE Firm. \$250 million company heading to \$280 million. Summit is beginning to be able to produce more complex mother boards. Their competition are closing manufacturing facilities left and right as Summit continues to grow organically and make acquisitions. With limited cash flow Brian Kamradt has been able to reinvest heavily in CapEx that is benefiting their ability to take market share.

**Nick Khalili, CFO***Cornerstone Group, Irvine*

Cornerstone Dental Specialties aka Cornerstone Group set out over 25 years ago to answer these questions; How do we deliver Endodontic services through a unique platform that is simple, better, and faster? How could a Practice serve its associates, its referrals, and most importantly, their mutual patients more effectively? The answer was combining state of the art technology, collaborative treatment planning methods, improved communication, cutting edge equipment, and algorithms honed by dozens of talented Endodontists over hundreds of thousands of cases. They not only have Endodontists practicing under them throughout the United States but they have also started the process of acquiring practices in order to be able to create a streamlined root canal experience for patients. As they expand business and see the potential it provides for the dental community as a whole, they have restructured to include multiple surgical specialties along with general practitioners as they expand across the United States. They now have multiple dental practices across the nation where they serve patients.

**Ricky Khetarpaul, CFO***Health-Ade Kombucha, Buena Park*

Since joining as CFO three years ago, Ricky Khetarpaul has led a financial turnaround of the Health-Ade business - across strategy, people and processes - to deliver industry leading top and bottomline growth in 2023 and 2024. As a 10-year old, historically founder led business, Khetarpaul brought the financial professionalism and discipline to Health-Ade such that the brand is the #1 share performer and fastest growing kombucha in 2023 and 2024, while expanding gross margins and building off a secure and solid financial base. Khetarpaul led the development of Health-Ade's long term strategy of sustainable, balanced top and bottomline growth while improving gut health of the masses while creating value for retail partners. He worked on executing on one of the strategic pillars of "mainstreaming kombucha", Health-Ade entered into three highly strategic partnerships with Ryan Seacrest, Los Angeles Dodgers and iHeart Media to bring kombucha awareness to the masses, and improve gut-health across the country

**Jin Kim, CFO***Ajinomoto Foods North America, Irvine*

Jin Kim has over 28 years of professional experience and +11 years of experience as CFO leading multi-national CPG and B2B businesses. He started his career in auditing and continued developing into his current EVP/CFO role. Prior to Ajinomoto Foods North America (AFNA), Kim was the CFO for Asia Pacific and North & South America for Barry Callebaut. He has lived in Malaysia and Singapore while managing Asia Pacific. During his 10 years at Barry Callebaut, he consistently drove EBIT growth at 1.3x top line growth, developed top talent and implemented various process improvements. Kim joined AFNA in 2023 and had an immediate impact to the business performance and organizational development. AFNA had a record year in profits last year and is positioned to outperform again. He has been a trusted business partner and advisor to the CEO and a leader focused on developing his team while continuously seeking opportunities to advance the impact that finance and accounting can have on the business.

**Gary Lu, CFO***Bioamerica, Irvine*

Gary Lu, CPA, serves as the chief financial officer of Biomerica, Inc., a leading diagnostics company dedicated to advancing global health. With over 20 years of experience, Lu has navigated complex financial and operational challenges, driving



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transformative results for Biomerica. Under his leadership, Biomerica secured significant capital through both S-3 and ATM offerings, enabling strategic growth and innovation. Lu played a pivotal role in the creation of a new commercialization vertical for the revolutionary inFoods® IBS diagnostic test, successfully transitioning it from R&D to a market-ready product that addresses a critical unmet need in healthcare by offering a personalized, non-drug solution to help patients identify foods that trigger irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms. Lu has also been instrumental in optimizing Biomerica's product mix, reducing costs to improve its financial sustainability, and modernizing financial systems and data analytics to enhance decision-making and operational efficiency.

Michael Martinson, CFO

Ambry Genetics Corporation, Aliso Viejo

Mike Martinson is the chief financial officer of Ambry Genetics, where he manages the Company's finances and accounting. Mr. Martinson previously held a role as the financial controller at Ambry Genetics. Prior to joining Ambry Genetics, he worked at Squar Milner LLP as a senior auditor with a focus in life sciences. Mr. Martinson received his B.A. in Business Administration-Accounting from California State University Fullerton College of Business and Economics.

**John Meloun, CFO**

Xponential Fitness, Irvine

John Meloun is the chief financial officer at Xponential Fitness, a position he has held since July of 2018. He has an extensive background in financial leadership across multiple industries. Throughout his career, Meloun's leadership style significantly impacted financial performance through strategic financial management and a team-oriented approach. Since joining Xponential, Meloun has successfully guided the company through its initial public offering on the NYSE in July of 2021. He helped drive the company's growth from a young startup to a global fitness franchising company with over 3,100 studios now operating globally. Meloun has supported the company through multiple strategic acquisitions and divestitures, engineering the portfolio to optimize growth and profitability. Meloun played a significant role in navigating Xponential through the COVID-19 pandemic challenges, including optimizing capital allocation, providing opportunities to franchisees by enabling support resources, including ensuring staffing was maintained at headquarters to support franchisees.

**Steve Molineaux, CFO**

Bradshaw International, Rancho Cucamonga

Steve Molineaux drove record-breaking 2023 company EBITA; up 28% vs. 2022. He partnered with the operations team in constructing and opening a East Coast distribution warehouse - a \$130 million investment - to optimize company network. In addition, Molineaux successfully drove market expansion into new retail channels, to grow topline.

**Tim Mullany, CFO**

Tide Rock, San Clemente

Tim Mullany's experience includes; leading operations and finance for Tide Rock Holdings and its portfolio companies, as well as analyzing and onboarding strategic acquisitions. Tide Rock has experienced exceptional growth; recently accumulating ~20 companies in its portfolio, including four in the past year. Further, Mullany was CFO of Jack in the Box (Nasdaq: JACK) having wide-ranging responsibilities running corporate strategy, strategic finance (M&A), Investor Relations, Sales Analytics, Consumer Insights, FP&A, Treasury, Accounting & Tax.

**Danielle Nagao, CFO**

Radiant Health Centers, Irvine

Danielle Nagao is a seasoned financial leader with 25 years of experience across multiple industries, including media, entertainment, e-commerce, and not-for-profit. She began her career at Deloitte Consulting, managing financial ERP implementations for Fortune 500 companies and government agencies. A graduate of the University of Southern California with a Bachelor of Science in Accounting, Nagao has applied her expertise to drive financial sustainability and operational excellence in every role she has held. Since joining Radiant Health Centers in 2023, Nagao has been instrumental in securing funding and grant opportunities at key state and federal levels, achieving FQHC Look-Alike designation, and implementing Epic, a top-tier Electronic Health Record (EHR) system. She also provided financial leadership and strategic support for the organization's largest health equity campaign. Nagao is deeply committed to public health and dedicated to expanding access to compassionate, stigma-free healthcare for the LGBTQ+ community.

**Mary Nguyen, Controller**

CHOC, Orange

Mary Nguyen is the controller for Children's Hospital of Orange County (CHOC), one of the best children's hospitals in the country. Nguyen has assumed progressively greater levels of responsibility over the years by leading Accounting and Finance functions within healthcare and non-profit industries. She is a focused and determined individual that has brought value and process improvements that led to greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness. She is a mindful team member, leader and mentor. She is committed to CHOC's mission to nurture, advance and protect the health and wellbeing of children.

**Matthew Pagano, CFO**

Pan-Pacific Mechanical, Fountain Valley

Matthew Pagano serves as the CFO of Pan-Pacific Mechanical, one of the most preeminent mechanical contractors in the United States. The company does about \$450 million in top-line revenue and builds large, sophisticated projects like Hospitals, Sports Arenas, Universities, and High-Rises. The company has been in business for over 77 years and is a large employer to the local unions in each respective region. Currently, PPM has offices in Northern California, Orange County, San Diego County, Los Angeles County, and Oahu, Hawaii.

**Richard Park, CFO**

HdL Companies, Brea

Richard Park serves as the chief financial and administrative officer for HdL Companies, which was recently named to the prestigious GovTech 100 list for its innovation and impact within state and local government markets. In this role, Mr. Park drives key financial strategies, analytics, and processes through collaboration across the HdL organization. Since joining the firm in 2019, his financial leadership has resulted in doubled revenues and consistently growing profitability and driving employee shareholder value. Mr. Park has been instrumental in the national expansion of HdL Companies, pursuing and investing in mergers and acquisitions, strategic partnerships, and other growth initiatives across more than 15 states. As CFO, he has led the development and administration of the company's Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP). HdL Companies has been consistently recognized by the national ESOP association for its community engagement, advocacy for employee ownership, financial literacy, and communications excellence. Throughout his career, Mr. Park has completed strategic, financial, and investment work across the Americas, Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, exceeding \$2 billion in financial value.

**Brian Peay, CFO**

American Healthcare REIT Inc., Irvine

Brian Peay has served as chief financial officer of American Healthcare REIT (NYSE: AHR) since June 2016. As CFO, Peay oversees all accounting, capital markets, and financial matters for the company, leading a team of approximately 70 experienced accounting and finance professionals. Under his leadership, the company successfully merged its non-traded predecessor REITs and internalized the REITs' external management companies. Notably, in February 2024, Peay spearheaded the company's public offering and listing of its shares on the NYSE, becoming the largest initial public offering event for a healthcare REIT in history. Shortly after its listing, Peay and AHR executed a secondary public offering, resulting in the company raising over \$1.2 billion of equity capital in 2024. Additionally, his strategic contributions have facilitated completing over \$650 million in accretive external investments in 2024.

**Nick Poan, CFO**

Physical Rehabilitation Network (PRN), Costa Mesa

Nick Poan brings nearly 20 years' experience serving as a catalyst for driving operational and transformation proficiencies for publicly- and privately-held companies, most notably in the healthcare services industry. In his role, Poan is pivotal in strategically assessing and mitigating financial risks as well as providing dependable outcome-oriented controls and reporting processes that help establish sustainable and profitable efficiencies. Poan's early financial skills, experience and success, specifically in the multi-site healthcare sector, were developed working for organizations such as: Alliance HealthCare Services, Envision Healthcare, Elements Behavioral Health and NVISION Eye Centers. Poan holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Chapman University.

**Paul Potvin, CFO**

California Fish Grill, Newport Beach

Paul Potvin is part of team that has grown California Fish Grill from eight restaurants to ending 2024 with 58 locations and from \$18 million in annual revenues to \$140 million in 2024. He is involved in implementing infrastructure to scale the company, including the transitions of accounting and payroll systems. Potvin worked with IT to develop, assess and implement an IT Road map which has included going to a cloud-based infrastructure, implementing point of sale systems, kitchen management systems, a theoretical food cost solution, a theoretical labor solution, implementing online ordering, implementing third party delivery solutions and rolling out of self-service kiosk to name a few. Potvin was part of the pandemic response team to financially guide the Company through the Covid-19 pandemic including working with vendors on securing supply of seafood, ensuring the company had adequate funding, interfacing with landlords on negotiating rent waivers or deferrals, reviewing and securing governmental aid programs, and maintaining relationship with lender during a difficult time.

**Brian Profancik, SVP Finance**

SageView Advisory Group, Newport Beach

Brian Profancik, CPA, is senior vice president of finance at SageView Advisory Group, a national registered investment advisory firm with over \$200 billion in assets under management. He oversees the firm's financial operations, including capital management, financial reporting, audit, tax compliance, and the integration of mergers and acquisitions—supporting the company's significant expansion through 12 acquisitions in three years. His focus on process efficiency and automation has led to major system upgrades and operational improvements across the





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CFO of The Year Award Nominees

organization. Before joining SageView, Profancik served as chief financial officer at ABP Capital, a private real estate lender and private equity investor, where he led all finance and accounting functions. Previously, he was vice president and corporate controller at William Lyon Homes, a \$1.2 billion publicly traded homebuilder, where he was instrumental in the company's IPO and strategic financial initiatives. Profancik began his career in public accounting with Deloitte and spent over 18 years in the construction and homebuilding industry. He also served as an Adjunct Professor of Accounting at California State University, Fullerton, from 2002 to 2016.

Ben Reynolds, CFO

Temco Logistics, Irvine

Ben Reynolds is an accomplished financial executive with extensive expertise in strategic financial leadership, risk management, and fostering commercial partnership growth. Recognized for a disciplined approach to fiscal stewardship, Reynolds excels in aligning financial strategies with overarching business objectives, ensuring long-term value creation. A proven leader in strategic commercial initiatives, Reynolds has successfully cultivated partnerships that enhance organizational performance and expand market opportunities. Known for a commitment to precision and innovation, Reynolds leverages advanced analytics and forecasting to support informed decision-making. Dedicated to excellence, Reynolds continues to drive impactful change through strategic vision and financial acumen.



Anna Ricardo, CFO

Merical LLC, Anaheim

Anna Ricardo has quickly become a driving force behind the company's resurgence in the industry where women remain underrepresented. Ricardo's leadership stands out as a testament to the impacts of female executives. With over 30 years of experience in strategic financial management, Ricardo joined MeriCal, LLC during a challenging period post-pandemic. Leveraging her extensive expertise in nutritional supplement manufacturing, she has played a pivotal role in revitalizing the company's top-line growth but moreover, delivering operational results flowing through to the bottom line. Ricardo's strategic financial planning and resourceful problem-solving skills have streamlined operations, improved cash flow and identified new revenue streams. Her leadership has not only stabilized her growing accounting and finance team but also positioned it for long-term success in the highly competitive nutritional supplement market. Under her financial stewardship, MeriCal has seen double digit growth, reflecting her ability to turn challenges into opportunities. Ricardo's transformational impact of experienced, innovative female leadership in navigating and overcoming business adversities.



Ruud Rinkel, CFO

Horizon Brands, Costa Mesa

Ruud Rinkel is CFO and member of the executive leadership team of Horizon Brands, a consumer products company, and Namawell, a related company that sells high-end cold press juicers to everyday consumers. He oversees finance operations, strategic planning, growth initiatives, and scalability of processes and systems. The company's sales have nearly tripled during Rinkel's tenure. He has been with Namawell from its inception, where he built the entire e-commerce organization and infrastructure from the ground up, and is now selling to customers worldwide. Before Horizon Brands and Namawell, Rinkel set up international markets and was involved with various acquisitions, including a one-billion-dollar business unit from Pfizer. He has restructured debt to become profitable for venture capitalists, earning the company the "Corporate Turnaround of the Year" award from M&A Advisor magazine. Born and raised in the Netherlands, Rinkel started his career in the international audit practice at PricewaterhouseCoopers in Amsterdam and Silicon Valley, where, at the time, he was one of their youngest employees going abroad.



Jim Salita, CFO

National Underground Group, Irvine

Jim Salita joined NUG in 2023 when results were negative operating profit and cash flow. The company was losing close to \$1.5 million each month. He joined the company with the focus of 'shrinking profitably', a smaller footprint and top line but positive operating profit / cash flow. The results after 18 months are tremendous: over \$20 million in operating profit, one successful divestiture and created value year over year of \$120 million for Orix Capital group. Results were achieved with relatively flat revenue. Instead profit group was created in three specific areas that include: operational efficiency, reduction of fixed costs, and pricing adjustments.



Justin Satterfield, CFO

Upright Construction, Irvine

Justin Satterfield is an accomplished CFO with 15+ years of experience in both private and public accounting. He has a proven track record in managing accounting departments, performing detailed account analysis and reconciliation, and overseeing the preparation and review of financial statements. Specializing in construction, government contracting, and multi-state/multi-company corporations, Satterfield brings a wealth of industry expertise to his role. Known for his strong problem-solving skills, Satterfield excels in addressing complex financial challenges and driving process improvements. His leadership is characterized by mentoring staff, promoting professional development, and ensuring high-quality,



Mario Urzua
Chief Financial Officer

Congratulations

Mario Urzua



on your well deserved nomination for

CFO OF THE YEAR!



BRANDYWINE
HOMES

Hoag Proudly Celebrates Andrew Guarni

Executive Vice President and
Chief Financial Officer at Hoag

Congratulations to Andrew Guarni on his well-deserved nomination for Orange County Business Journal's 2025 CFO of the Year Award. His leadership, vision, and dedication continue to drive excellence, innovation, and impact at Hoag.

hoag.



CFO of The Year Award Nominees

efficient work. Satterfield fosters strong relationships with his team and cross-functional departments, creating a collaborative environment that aligns with and supports operational goals. His ability to enhance financial reporting, improve accounting teams, and build trust with senior leadership has consistently contributed to organizational success. Satterfield's strategic vision and hands-on leadership make him an invaluable asset to Uprite Construction.

Justin Scarpulla, CFO

Identiv Inc., Santa Ana

Justin Scarpulla serves as chief financial officer at Identiv, Inc., a global leader in radio frequency identification (RFID) and Bluetooth low energy (BLE)-enabled Internet of Things (IoT) solutions. With over 25 years of financial leadership experience, Scarpulla has a proven track record of scaling operations and driving growth in companies from multi-million- to multi-billion-dollar enterprises. At Identiv, he advances the company's ambitious vision and growth strategy, which has included recently transitioning its production facilities from Singapore to Thailand to maximize cost savings while maintaining quality. Scarpulla also led the strategic sale of Identiv's Physical Security business, which enhanced its financial position with \$144.2 million in proceeds to fuel its IoT-focused future.



Mark Schultz, CFO

Jamboree Housing Corporation, Irvine

Mark Schultz, CFO, manages the accounting, finance and IT divisions supporting Jamboree's growth objectives. His role involves ensuring that financial activities align with Jamboree's business plans and strategic goals. With a 35 year history in the real estate industry focused on multifamily, affordable housing and senior living, Schultz has demonstrated his capabilities in these areas through his recent tenure as CFO. Schultz has implemented many new policies/procedures at Jamboree over the past year to optimize cash flow and financial performance of the company. He instituted a new investment policy to move liquidity to high yielding money market funds, equities and fixed income investments and realized over \$2 million in investment income. He has also developed five year cash flow model to easily project earnings and investments.



John Scott, CFO

Angry Chickz, Aliso Viejo

John Scott is a distinguished financial executive with over three decades of expertise in financial management, strategic planning, and operational leadership. Currently serving as the chief financial officer (CFO) at Angry Chickz, Scott plays an instrumental role in shaping financial strategy and driving growth in a dynamic and fast-paced environment. Scott's previous roles include serving as CFO for Yoshinoya America and holding

various leadership positions at Mountain Mike's Pizza, Pieology Pizzeria, and BJ's Restaurants. His extensive career in the restaurant industry began at the age of 16, and by 20, he was managing a pizza restaurant. While transitioning to the finance sector during his college years, Scott has always maintained a deep appreciation for the hard work and dedication each team member contributes to providing guests with exceptional service. John Scott's career is marked by his commitment to operational excellence, financial integrity, and strategic growth, making him a valuable asset to every organization he serves.



Marc Serrio, CFO

GEM Pack Berries, Irvine

At Gem-Pack, Marc Serrio supported them growing into the 2nd largest distributor of berries in the United States. He has Fortune 100 Experience at Disney & Taco Bell. Serrio is a 3rd generation farmer family, he negotiated favorable terms with banking partners. The Well Pick acquisition grew them from 25 employees to 150 employees and then has grown 100 more and now their revenue is above \$800 million.



Kerry Shiba, CFO & SVP

Iteris Inc., Santa Ana

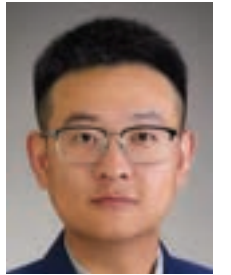
Kerry A. Shiba is senior vice president and chief financial officer at Iteris, having joined the company in February 2023. Shiba has over 40 years of experience leading finance and accounting organizations for large-scale manufacturers and distributors. He also has played key roles in guiding strategy, including business acquisitions and divestitures, market focus and operating efficiency. Shiba most recently served as chief financial officer for Romeo Power, Inc. (NYSE: RMO), until a successful sale of the company to Romeo's largest customer. Romeo was a leading independent designer and producer of battery modules and packs primarily used in commercial electric vehicles. Shiba holds a bachelor's degree in Accounting and Political Science from Baldwin Wallace College.



Winfred Shu, CFO

TP-Link Systems Inc., Irvine

Winfred Shu is a highly accomplished financial executive with a proven track record of driving profitability and growth. As CFO of TP-Link Systems Inc. he has been instrumental in transforming the company's financial performance, leading it from loss to sustained profitability. His leadership has been critical in establishing the company's popularity in the US market. Shu's expertise spans financial and tax accounting, reporting, analysis, expense



Congratulations to CFO of the Year Nominee, Brian Kamradt.

Congratulations to Brian Kamradt on being nominated for CFO of the Year — a well-deserved recognition of his outstanding leadership and financial expertise. His strategic vision and commitment to success are vital in driving Summit Interconnect's growth and in strengthening our position as the largest privately held PCB manufacturer in North America.



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CFO OF THE YEAR

Nominee

Our visionary Chief Financial Officer, Alex Thurman, has been nominated for Orange County Business Journal's CFO of the Year! This prestigious nomination is a testament to Alex's exceptional leadership, financial expertise, and commitment to driving sustainable growth and innovation. It is with honor that we recognize the impact he has made in shaping our company's future with precision, integrity, and forward-thinking. This nomination demonstrates his unwavering commitment to excellence and his ability to help steer our organization toward a bright future.

Help us congratulate Alex on this well-deserved nomination!



*Alex Thurman,
Sr. Vice President and
Chief Financial Officer*

CFO of The Year Award Nominees

management, risk management, and operational efficiency. He has spearheaded strategic investments in operating assets, including multiple facilities in Orange County and the construction of the company's Global Headquarters in Irvine, contributing to local economic development and job creation. Under his financial stewardship, TP-Link Systems Inc. has experienced significant growth and solidified its market leadership.

Randolph Siwabessy, CFO & SVP, Finance & Value Transformation

UCI Health, Orange

Randolph Siwabessy provides financial leadership over the academic and clinical enterprise of UCI Health and UCI School of Medicine, encompassing a wide range of responsibilities. His primary functions include overseeing business and finance for the UCI Health system, physician enterprise, and the UC Irvine School of Medicine, with direct oversight of financial accounting and reporting, financial planning and analysis, government reimbursement, payor contracting and strategy, population health management and value-based care, revenue cycle management, and supply chain management and care at home platform. Additionally, he serves as executive for the UCI Health Accountable Care Organization. Siwabessy has built upon and continued the strong financial performance in revenue and margin to support the tripartite mission of UCI Health. Since he joined in 2021, UCI Health revenue has grown by 15% a year. He has demonstrated an exceptional ability to collaborate with various leaders, sought alignment across multiple entities, established processes that promote accountability, and led an engaged and highly effective finance and value transformation team.



Brittany Slater, CFO

OrangeTwist, Newport Beach

Brittany Slater serves as the chief financial officer at OrangeTwist, where she has been instrumental in driving financial transformation and strategic growth. Under her leadership, the company successfully closed its first private equity transaction, a pivotal milestone that positioned OrangeTwist for sustained expansion and innovation. Slater has been at the forefront of transitioning the company from relying on an external accounting firm to establishing a high-performing in-house finance team, significantly enhancing operational efficiency. Following the private equity transaction, she led the implementation of NetSuite and Power BI, equipping the organization with cutting-edge tools for robust financial analytics and data-based decision-making. Slater's strategic foresight has been vital in developing a scalable infrastructure and replicable business model, ensuring OrangeTwist is well-prepared to achieve its long-term objectives.



Tobin Sloane, CFO & EVP

Ware Malcomb, Irvine

Tobin Sloane is CFO/EVP at Ware Malcomb, a contemporary and expanding full-service design firm providing planning, architecture, interior design, civil engineering, branding and building measurement services to commercial real estate and corporate clients. Sloane joined Ware Malcomb in 2004 as CFO and was promoted to the expanded role of executive vice president and CFO in 2020. A member of the executive team and board of directors, Sloane provides vision, oversight, and direction to the firm's finance/accounting, human resources, legal, and administration functions. Starting his Finance career in 1995, Sloane is an accomplished financial professional and business-savvy leader. He brings experience in financial analytics, accounting, management, and operational leadership. He is well known for his strategic and innovative approach to the company's financial management and growth. Sloane holds a Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in Finance and Accounting and a Bachelor of Science with an emphasis in Business Administration, both from the University of California, Riverside.



Wade Slome, Founder & CFO

Sidoxia Capital Management, Newport Beach

Wade Slome is an esteemed leader in the financial services sector, with over 30 years of experience. Founding Sidoxia Capital Management in 2007, Slome has cultivated a capital management practice that fills a void in the financial services marketplace. Through Slome's leadership, Sidoxia's approach is fueled with optimism, providing client-driven guidance that focuses on building bright futures. Having managed a \$20 billion-dollar fund and worked in the industry in a variety of capacities over the course of three decades, Slome's extensive experience and credentials allow him to provide institutional-quality service to Sidoxia's clientele. Additionally, as CFO, he led the company through the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Pandemic with strategic vision and agility. Earning acclaim for his signature approach, Slome has been a resource for CNBC and ABC News. He has also been quoted in The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, New York Times, Dow Jones, Investor's Business Daily, and Bloomberg among other publications. Dedicated to supporting the next generation, Slome has taught investment and financial planning courses at the University of California, Irvine.



Kevin Strange, CFO

Inari Medical, Irvine

Kevin Strange has a distinguished record of accomplishment during his 20 years in the medical device industry. Inari Medical has benefited from Strange's business leadership during the past five years, assuming roles of increasing responsibility which culminated in overall financial leadership of the company as CFO.



Congratulations!

STEPHEN HUI

Chief Financial Officer
Animal Dermatology Group, Inc.

Stephen Hui has been nominated for the 2025 CFO of the Year Awards, for his excellent leadership in driving innovation and growth. Join us in congratulating him on this well-deserved recognition.





CELEBRATING WINFRED SHU, CFO OF THE YEAR NOMINEE



TP-Link Systems, Inc. proudly celebrates Winfred Shu, our CFO and Orange County Business Journal CFO of the Year nominee.

Winfred's leadership drives TP-Link's growth, creating jobs and opportunities right here in our community.

But his impact goes beyond the balance sheet. He represents TP-Link's Connect & Care values by supporting local partnerships with the Anaheim Ducks and Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, building a stronger, more connected OC.

Congratulations, Winfred! Your vision and commitment inspire us all.



CFO of The Year Award Nominees

Initially, as the company's VP of Strategy and Business Development, and then as SVP of Finance, Accounting and BD, Strange led the creation of the company's first five-year strategic plan that was presented to the Inari Board of Directors. He also led several strategic, minority investments. One of the investments (LimFlow) developed two years later into Inari's first M&A opportunity, a \$415 million acquisition led by Strange and completed in Q4 of 2023. Limflow has already proven to be a significant revenue growth driver for Inari. As the company's CFO, he provided financial leadership toward the company's announced sale to Stryker Medical. This sale is targeted to close in Q1 of 2025. Prior to Inari, Strange spent 15 years in the Medical Device space with Boston Scientific, Bank of America, Wells Fargo and Medtronic. His professional responsibilities span from strategy & business development to Wall Street research to medical device sales.

Brent Stringham, CFO

Lantronix, Irvine

Since joining Lantronix, Brent Stringham has helped the company achieve five acquisitions, a \$45 million to \$150 million+ in revenue growth and four main locations. He was recently named CFO after being with Lantronix since 2012 and previously served as the Company's interim CFO and chief accounting officer. He brings deep institutional knowledge and extensive financial expertise to the role. Prior to joining Lantronix, Stringham held financial leadership positions at Iteris Inc., Netlist Inc., and Ernst & Young.



Mark Sweetman, CFO

SA Recycling, Orange

Mark Sweetman is the CFO of SA Recycling, one of the world's largest metal recyclers. As a member of SA's executive team, since its formation in 2007, Sweetman has overseen the exponential growth of SA through extensive M&A activity. With over sixty acquisitions to date, SA has become the largest metal recycler in the USA with 3600+ employees at over 140 locations in 15 states. This rapid growth has brought many challenges, from developing financial systems for a niche industry, managing frequent cultural integrations, ensuring compliance with multi-state regulations and tax systems etc. Sweetman seeks to overcome these challenges by creating a collaborative and supportive culture with a strong team and he is proud that virtually all SA's management have long tenure with the company. One of Sweetman's most significant accomplishments is securing the finance for approximately \$1.5 billion in acquisitions, with traditional debt, from a syndicate of banks over the years. Sweetman is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.



Alex Thurman, CFO

Glaukos, Aliso Viejo

Alex Thurman has served as Glaukos' senior vice president, chief financial officer since

April 2022. He previously served as the company's vice president, finance from December 2016 to March 2022, and before that as its vice president, global tax and administration when he joined Glaukos in July 2016. Mr. Thurman has been instrumental in building out Glaukos' finance organization by overseeing significant growth of the finance team, navigating the transition to SOX compliance, instituting the financial infrastructure to serve 16 new international direct sales markets and leading the integration of the company's new ERP system from a financial perspective. In addition, he oversees the company's Global Technology Systems group and certain corporate strategic initiatives. This past year, Mr. Thurman was instrumental in executing transactions that eliminated all of Glaukos' convertible debt and unwound a portion of an associated hedge instrument which provided a significant amount of cash to the company. Prior to Glaukos, he held increasingly responsible financial and tax leadership positions over a 20-year period at Allergan, Inc., Deloitte and Arthur Andersen.



Jake Tucker, VP Controller

Thomas James Home, Aliso Viejo

Thomas James Homes: reinvention of the company over the last 24 months. Current leadership team redesigned the company from a custom homebuilder to a scalable business that operates like a production homebuilder. Oaktree put in an equity investment in 2018. Ares has a preferred interest so there are two large PE firms to answer to.



Mario Urzua, CFO

BrandyWine Homes, Irvine

Mario Urzua exemplifies excellence in leadership, financial acumen, and the ability to drive transformative success. With a career spanning over two decades, Urzua has consistently delivered exceptional results, earning his place as a key leader in the real estate and homebuilding industries. His unwavering commitment to innovation, resilience in the face of challenges, and strategic vision make him a deserving candidate for this prestigious award. Urzua began his career at PwC in the competitive environment of Big 4 public accounting, where his CPA credentials, robust educational foundation, and insatiable work ethic enabled him to rise rapidly through the ranks. His career trajectory eventually led him to the role of chief financial officer, a position where he has consistently demonstrated his ability to lead and execute at the highest levels. In 2020, Urzua joined Brandywine Homes, where his leadership has been transformative.



CARE PARTNERS Home Care

The Architect of Success

NOMINATED FOR CFO OF THE YEAR

Rodney Burris
Chief Financial Officer

The Care Partners Team proudly congratulates Rodney on this well-deserved nomination. Your leadership and vision have strengthened our mission of "Bridging the Gap in Healthcare." We are honored by your dedication and inspired by your commitment to excellence.

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Magnolia Foods

Celebrates

Our Chief Financial Officer

Nate Janzen

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Leadership that broadens healthcare horizons

Randolph P. Siwabessy does more than ensure that Orange County's premier healthcare provider operates at peak efficiency.

Under his leadership as chief financial officer and senior vice president, UCI Health continues to exceed national fiscal benchmarks with double-digit growth. This sound financial footing enables us to expand our world-class care to patients at the growing UCI Health – Irvine medical complex and four community hospitals and their affiliated medical offices.

Above all, his close collaboration with our clinical leaders means that Orange County's only academic health system consistently ranks in the top 10 nationally for quality and patient safety.

We celebrate Randolph Siwabessy, a trusted leader and financial steward.

UCI Health

CFO of The Year Award Nominees

Nnikhil Vasa, CFO

Booster Fuels, Irvine

Exciting inflection point with their technology stack that does fuel delivery with tech enablement. The company grew from \$100 million to \$115 million and grew profit margin by 40% in that timeline by cost cutting and growth initiatives. Refinancing with lenders, capital raise, all while they march towards being EBITDA positive they have been responsible stewards for the equity investors which has preserved the cap table in this rising interest rate climate which has been done by very few growth companies since 2023.



Dave Wambold, CFO

Biogas Engineering, Yorba Linda

Dave Wambold has been the key executive working closely with the CEO in driving the company growth from \$6 million in 2022, \$25 million in 2023, and \$66 million in 2024. They are on track to generate over \$100 million in revenue in 2025. He has taken an expanded CFO role where he represents the company at conferences, trade shows, and sales with key account discussions. He led the company in changing banks and ascertaining a \$10 million line of credit. He led the company through a first year audit. He transitioned the company ERP from Quickbooks to Netsuite. Wambold created the accounting processes from scratch including implementation percentage of completion project accounting and revenue recognition for a new SaaS subscription model the company recently rolled out. He also led the real estate space purchase and buildout helping ensure the company has the space to continue to grow.



Tony Wang, CFO

Southland Industries, Garden Grove

As chief financial officer, Tony Wang oversees the finance and safety departments of Southland Industries, and serves as a vital member of the executive leadership team. First joining Southland in 1997 as a financial analyst, Wang's impressive career path, from an entry-level position to executive leader, speaks to his valuable strengths and deep industry expertise. During his 20-plus years at Southland, he has assumed integral leadership roles in ERP implementation, acquisitions, joint ventures, benefits administration, and development of regional controllers. Additionally, he has been involved in various process improvement initiatives.



Ryan Weirich, CFO

Energy Tubulars Inc., Seal Beach

Ryan Weirich is a dynamic CFO with a proven track record of driving financial and operational excellence across multinational organizations. With extensive experience in large private companies, he has successfully led organizations with revenues exceeding \$770 million. As CFO of Energy Tubulars Inc. Weirich has led the financial transformation, implemented business intelligence for improved reporting, opportunistically introduced cost-effective offshoring initiatives. In addition, Weirich is leading key strategic initiatives, including captive insurance, AP automation, section 1202 tax planning strategies, and AI assisted month end close. Prior to this, at Noble House Home Furnishings, he played a pivotal role in scaling revenue from \$183 million to \$722 million, optimizing inventory management, and securing a \$200 million ABL facility. Weirich's expertise spans cash management, supply chain optimization, strategic planning, and M&A execution. With a strong analytical foundation and a commitment to operational efficiency, he continues to drive profitability and sustainable growth in complex financial landscapes.



Wesley Wilson, Partner, Chief Investment Officer & CFO

Avanath, Irvine

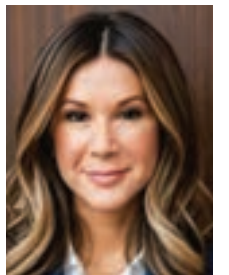
As partner, CFO & CIO, Wesley Wilson has been instrumental in shaping Avanath Capital Management, a multifamily owner and operator that primarily focuses on affordable and workforce housing, into the impactful and influential investment management firm it is today. Since joining Avanath in 2016, he has played an integral role in strategically growing the firm's portfolio from approximately \$500,000 to more than \$4 billion in assets under management. He is responsible for overseeing all financial and investment performance for Avanath, which currently owns and operates more than 15,000 units across 50+ cities throughout the country, as well as crafting its strategic plans for growth. Wilson successfully leads the firm in investments, finance, strategy and fundraising. His achievements include spearheading Avanath's first open-ended fund. With commitments from foreign and domestic institutional investors, Avanath continues to invest in improving, preserving, and adding to the country's affordable and workforce housing stock and making a positive impact in residents' lives. Prior to joining Avanath, Wilson was a controller with CIM Group, LP, where he was responsible for the accounting and finance for \$28 billion in Opportunistic Real Estate Funds.



Melinda Wohl, CFO

Decisionpoint Systems Inc, Laguna Hills

Melinda Wohl played a critical role in the execution and integration of 12 acquisitions, during her tenure driving rapid growth and expansion into new markets while managing the complexities of each acquisition, ensuring seamless integration and realization of synergies. She successfully led capital raising efforts, securing substantial funding through a combination of equity and debt financing. Wohl also enabled strategic investments and operational expansion by ensuring the company had the necessary capital resources. She transitioned to Public and Subsequent Sale: Orchestrated the company's transition from privately held to public, initially listing on Nasdaq and later on the NYSE. Wohl managed the sale and merger of the business into a privately held entity, maximizing shareholder value. She also served as a trusted advisor to the CEO and the board of directors, providing strategic financial insights and contributing to key decision-making processes. Wohl is responsible for ensuring financial strategies are aligned with the overall vision and goals of the organization, driving sustainable growth.



Liyuan Woo, CFO

TOCA Football, Costa Mesa

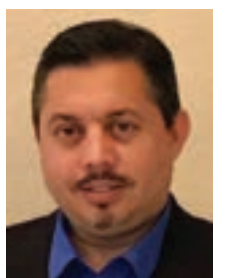
Toca expanded rapidly with a lot of acquisitions and because of that they were facing liquidity issues upon Liyuan Woo starting. Woo led a Series F round that brought in \$100 million and then also led a refinance of \$20 million bringing on JP Morgan as the lender. They have a globally dispersed workforce and with the World Cup and Summer Olympics coming to the United States this is there chance to scale their company to new heights. Woo has been CFO for both public and private companies. At The Hydrafacial Company, a beauty health category creator that pioneered skin health innovation with patented hydradermabrasion technology, she helped acquire five companies, went public, sold in 90 countries, and had sales boots on the ground in eight markets. Before that she was a COO & CFO at The VOID, a highly rated VR brand introducing consumers to fully immersive location-based, hyper-reality experiences that merge virtual and physical environments.



Farouk Yaftali, SVP Finance

Tungsten, Irvine

Farouk Yaftali is responsible for heading up finance for a \$900 million company. He has also transformed the finance department and upgraded talent within Tungsten. Process and data improvement in 2022 new ownership bought Tungsten: TA Associates & Clearlake Ingram: led M&A for 10 years, looked at 100 deals, worked on large acquisitions, evaluating and assessing and integrating them.





Congratulations

NICK KHALILI

The Cornerstone Team is excited that our CFO Nick Khalili has been nominated for **CFO of the Year**.
Good Luck! Your Cornerstone Family.





Congratulations 2025 Nominees!

PUBLIC COMPANY

Ajinomoto Foods North America / **Jin Kim**
 American Healthcare REIT, Inc. / **Brian Peay**
 Avid Bioservices Inc. / **Daniel Hart**
 Biomerica, Inc. / **Gary Lu**
 Glaukos Corp. / **Alex Thurman**
 Identiv, Inc. / **Justin Scarpulla**
 Lantronix / **Brent Stringham**
 MDxHealth / **Ron Kalfus**

PRIVATE COMPANY

Americo Builders LLC / **David Fiduccia**
 Angry Chickz / **John Scott**
 Animal Dermatology Group / **Stephen Hui**
 AutoAlert / **Shawn Edwards**
 Avanath Capital Management / **Wesley Wilson**
 Biogas Engineering / **Dave Wambold**
 Bradshaw International / **Steve Molineaux**
 BrandyWine Homes / **Mario Urzua**
 California Fish Grill / **Paul Potvin**
 Care Partners At Home / **Rodney Burris**
 Conexus Advisors / **Megan Seaford**
 Cornerstone Group / **Nick Khalili**
 DecisionPoint Systems, INC / **Melinda Wohl**
 Energy Tubulars Inc. / **Ryan Weirich**
 EnergyCap, LLC / **Tucker Johnson**
 FirstElement Fuel Inc / **John Finnucan IV**
 GEM Pack Berries / **Marc Serrio**

HdL Companies / **Richard Park**
 Health-Ade LLC / **Ricky Khetarpaul**
 Horizon Brands / **Ruud Rinkel**
 IHI Power Services Corp. / **Tony Dabbene**
 Iteris Holdings / **Kerry Shiba**
 Kind Lending / **Gary Fabian**
 Magnolia Foods / **Nate Janzen**
 Mark IV Capital, Inc. / **Kelly Blair**
 MeriCal, LLC / **Anna Ricardo**
 National Underground Group / **Jim Salita**
 North American Health Services Holdings, Inc. / **Marc Johnson**
 Pan-Pacific Mechanical / **Matthew Pagano**
 Partners Bank of California / **Kirk Colburn**
 Pathway Capital / **Benjamin Brewster**
 Phoenix Energy One, LLC / **Curtis Allen**
 Physical Rehabilitation Network PRN Group / **Nick Poan**
 Quality Health Partners / **Gus Alvarez**
 Regenesis / **Amy Dickerson**
 SA Recycling / **Mark Sweetman**
 Sidoxia Capital Management / **Wade Slome**
 Southland Industries / **Tony Wang**
 Stretto / **Peter Bonfiglio**
 Summit Interconnect / **Brian Kamradt**
 Temco Logistics / **Ben Reynolds**
 Tide Rock / **Tim Mullany**
 TOCA Football / **Liyuan Woo**
 TP-Link Systems Inc. / **Winfred Shu**
 Upright Construction / **Justin Satterfield**

Ware Malcomb / **Tobin Sloane**
 XR, LLC / **Brad Biddle**

NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Hoag Hospital / **Andrew Guarni**
 Jamboree Housing Corporation / **Mark Schultz**
 Radiant Health Centers / **Danielle Nagao**
 UCI Health / **Randolph Siwabessy**

RISING STAR

AWP Safety / **Ben Gunther**
 Booster Fuels / **Nikhil Vasa**
 CareTrust, REIT / **Lauren Beale**
 CHOC / **Mary Nguyen**
 First Foundation Bank / **Amy Djou**
 Inari Medical / **Kevin Strange**
 Main Electric Supply Company, LLC. / **Todd Abboud**
 MeridianLink / **Josh Alkema**
 Orange Twist / **Brittany Slater**
 QSC Audio / **Jared Callister**
 SageView Advisory Group / **Brian Profancik**
 Thomas James Home / **Jake Tucker**
 Tungsten Automation / **Trang Davel**
 Tungsten Automation / **Farouk Yaftali**
 Virgin Galactic / **Jason Formagus**

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Ambry Genetics / **Michael Martinson**
 Xponential Fitness, Inc. / **John Meloun**



Master of Ceremonies

Murray Rudin

Managing Director,
 RLH Equity Partners

RLH EQUITY PARTNERS

Dinner & Awards Program

May 8, 2025

6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Tickets*: \$325 / Table of 10: \$3,100



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Meet the Judges:



Julie Beckley - Senior Vice President – Business Development, Wells Fargo Commercial Banking

Julie Beckley is a tenured SVP - director of business development on the Southern California Commercial Banking team at Wells Fargo. She is responsible for the business development of new middle market relationships, targeting companies with sales in the range of \$25 million to \$5 billion in revenues with a focus on developing business in Orange County. Beckley's primary responsibilities include working closely with prospective clients to thoroughly understand their short- and long-term financial and strategic objectives and to provide appropriate thought leadership. Beckley provides an insightful understanding of the full range of credit and non-credit suite of products and services at Wells Fargo and her client centric approach is an asset to help meet the financial needs of OC companies across various industries. She has held multiple positions in her 35-year banking career, including over 23 years in the OC market.



Erika Coniglio - Business Development Director, RSM US LLP

Erika Coniglio invests time in getting to know people and companies to determine the best path for collaboration. With over 25 years in consulting and professional services, including 16 years at RSM, she has steered notable achievements, such as guiding an Orange County firm to the #1 rank on Inc. magazine's fastest-growing list in 2000. An expert in C-level relationship management across telecommunications, IT and finance, Coniglio spearheads the growth of RSM's Southern California practice. She engages new clients, supports existing ones in the Irvine office, and focuses on audit and assurance, tax, business advisory (including transaction support) and enterprise risk management. Coniglio's commitment extends throughout Orange County and the Inland Empire, where she provides solutions for sectors like healthcare, technology, manufacturing and business services. Known for her strategic vision, Coniglio fosters trust and respect in every relationship, laying the groundwork for lasting partnerships.



Eugene De La Cruz - Middle Market Manager, Umpqua Bank

Eugene De La Cruz is a distinguished banking executive with over 20 years of experience in Southern California's financial services industry. As senior vice president, middle market banking market manager at Umpqua Bank in Irvine, De La Cruz leads a Commercial Banking team dedicated to providing holistic working capital support, offering strategic advisory services to help companies optimize their financial operations and achieve sustainable growth. His leadership and strategic vision make him a trusted partner for business leaders seeking to navigate the complexities of today's financial landscape.



Devin Dickson - Managing Director, BMO

Devin Dickson leads a team of middle market bankers that specializes in providing comprehensive banking solutions for companies. As a native of Orange County, Dickson is passionate about providing local businesses with tailored financial solutions to help support their growth and success. Dickson holds a B.S. in International Business Management from Brigham Young University - Hawaii, and an MBA from Pepperdine Graziadio Business School. He resides in San Clemente with his wife and three children.



Brian Fischbein - Business Development Director, Synoptek

As business management director for Synoptek, Fischbein is responsible for cultivating and expanding strategic relationships to drive growth. With extensive experience across technology and financial sectors, he brings a unique perspective on executive career paths and business success. Fischbein has successfully launched and scaled two businesses focused on executive career placement, roundtable discussions, and high-value relationship building. His commitment to integrity and transparency has earned him the trust of executives nationwide, particularly in Southern California, where he serves as a trusted advisor. Outside of work, Fischbein is a devoted father to three children and an active supporter of youth sports, particularly at Mater Dei High School. He is also a passionate advocate for theater and dance, supporting his daughters' artistic pursuits. A dedicated member of YPO, Fischbein has served on the boards of several prominent local charities, reinforcing his commitment to community impact.



James Gibson - Senior Vice President, Commercial Banking, KeyBank

James Gibson joins KeyBank as a senior relationship manager responsible for expanding the bank's relationships with financial services partners and middle market companies primarily in the Orange, Inland Empire and San Diego counties in Southern California. Based in Newport Beach, he has more than 20 years of experience working in financial services in the region.



Stacy Hubbard - Principal | Managing Director, OC, Marsh & McLennan Agency

Stacy Hubbard is a principal and managing director for the Orange County office the associate managing director for the Los Angeles office. She specializes in employee benefits for both public and private industry sectors. Hubbard has been in the health care industry for over 28 years and has experience with fully insured and self-funded health plans. Her responsibilities include client consulting and management, compliance, strategic planning, and project management. Prior to joining MMA, Hubbard managed the client services department in Orange County at Gallagher Benefit Services for eight years. Prior to moving to the broker side of the industry, Hubbard worked for seven years at Beech Street, a national PPO network for self-funded employer groups. Hubbard earned a bachelor's degree in organizational learning and a master's degree in healthcare administration (MHA) from Chapman University. She is actively involved with the Ronald McDonald House organization and volunteers her time for various events throughout the year.



Justin Jessee - Chief Executive Officer, Impactful Resources

Justin Jessee is the founder & CEO at Impactful Resources, an Orange County based human capital boutique focused exclusively on supporting the Office of the CFO. Jessee is a reformed CFO turned human capital executive with 20+ years of experience in finance, accounting, IT, and professional services. Jessee has worked, consulted, and managed engagements from start-ups to Fortune 100 companies on a broad range of strategic, operational, and financial projects. He is the OC leading authority in helping CFOs be more Impactful.



Steve Krenik - SVP / Relationship Manager, U.S. Bank

Steve Krenik is a senior vice president / relationship manager in the Orange County Commercial Banking office of US Bank. He has been with US Bank since April 2005. Krenik has more than 30 years financial services experience in commercial lending, commercial real estate, consumer lending, mortgage lending, merger/acquisition financing, and ESOP transactions. Prior to joining US Bank, he held similar positions with Mellon 1st Business Bank, City National Bank, Home Savings of America and Household Bank. His focus is working with companies with revenues between \$25 million and \$1 billion and providing a wide array of solutions those companies will require from their bank. Krenik earned his Bachelor of Science in Finance from California State University Northridge.

**Gloria Lee - Client Relations Partner, *Rutan & Tucker LLP***

Gloria Lee is the firm's client relations partner and responsible for the strategic growth of business development opportunities for the Firm's attorneys and the implementation of client relationship initiatives for the Firm. Prior to becoming the firm's client relations partner, Lee focused on the financing and development of commercial, residential and resort properties. Her practice included representing lenders, developers, landlords and tenants in all aspects of real estate transactions, including real estate secured financings, acquisitions, dispositions, title review and due diligence analysis. She also has experience with the structuring, development and regulation of residential, commercial, condominium, timeshare, and fractional use planned developments and associations.

**Thomas Lowrey - Senior Relationship Manager, *PNC Bank***

Tom Lowrey is a senior relationship manager for PNC Corporate Banking. Lowrey is responsible for managing a book for corporate clients and driving new sales activity. He advises clients on solving complex problems in the areas of capital planning and structuring, investor relations, treasury operations, balance sheet and cash flow risk management, and liquidity/investments. Lowrey has over 20 years of banking experience.

**Tim Meade - Director, *PwC***

Tim Meade is a director in PwC's Private Company Services practice and focuses on business development efforts and relationship management in Southern California. He specializes in the identification and development of new opportunities and is integral in building and leading winning PwC teams. He also serves as lead relationship executive to a number of our most important SoCal-based clients, collaborating with key service Partners to leverage his knowledge of the client and translate issues into impactful solutions. Meade is well versed in all of PwC's offerings across the firm and serves as the "voice of the client" within our network of subject matter experts and leadership. He is well known in the business community as a super-connector and has more than 30 years of business development experience, including 15 in professional services.

**Paul O'Mara - Senior Vice President, *U.S. Bank***

Paul O'Mara is a senior vice president at U.S. Bank managing a portfolio of middle market relationships in the Orange County Commercial Bank. He provides the bank's wide array of products and services to middle market clients in the Southern California Region. Prior to assuming his current role, O'Mara was managing director at Union Bank managing the Orange County Middle Market team. From July 2009 to October 2019, O'Mara was regional vice president at Wells Fargo Bank. O'Mara held a number of other positions at Wells Fargo over 20 years including divisional sales manager where he managed a team of business development officers covering the Midwest portion of the country. O'Mara spent 16 years at Continental Bank/Bank of America as a market executive for the middle market lending division in Chicago. O'Mara earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Finance from Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL. O'Mara is a member of the University of California-Irvine Chief Executive Roundtable. For the past five years, O'Mara has been a board member of the J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center. Paul is a Board member of the Forum for Corporate Directors (FCD).

**Melissa Pollard - Senior Vice President, *Fifth Third Bank***

Melissa Pollard is a senior vice president and senior relationship manager for Fifth Third Bank's commercial banking practice in Orange County where she brings 37 years of experience to her clients. She has been with Fifth Third for seven years where she is responsible for new business development and ongoing client management. She previously worked for Comerica Bank for 20 years and Bank of America for 10 years. She earned her BS and BA degrees from the University of Richmond in Virginia. An east coast native, Pollard has been married for 34 years with two grown children, and they have lived in Aliso Viejo for the past 27 years. She enjoys spending time with her family, traveling and other outdoor activities. Pollard is a longstanding director on the board of Association for Corporate Growth Orange County and their exclusive Women in Leadership banking sponsor since inception. She also serves on the Associates Board of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Orange Coast's Women of Greatness Committee. In addition, she is an active member of Orange County United Way's Women United, Financial Executives International, Center for Business Growth, Executive Connections, and ProVisors.

**Matt Primeau - Partner and Founder, *Conexus***

Matt Primeau has over 16 years of executive staffing leadership and recruitment experience. Prior to Conexus, Primeau served as co-founder and partner for Citadel CFO, helping clients and candidates find the right match for their strategic business hiring needs and career path objectives. Having started his career placing interim and interim-to-hire CPAs and MBAs and degreed accounting and finance professionals, Primeau then shifted to placing direct hire finance and accounting professionals and passive candidates at the manager, director, VP, and C-Levels. Prior to co-founding Citadel, Primeau managed both direct hire and interim practices for large human capital companies where he served as branch manager, practice director and managing director all within the Finance and Accounting Staffing space.

**Richard Reisman - Publisher & Chief Executive Officer, *Orange County Business Journal***

Richard Reisman is publisher of the Orange County Business Journal. Reisman joined the Business Journal in 1990. Since then, the publication's acceptance by the business community has been dramatic. Paid circulation and advertising volume has grown significantly, making it possibly the top Business Journal in the country. Prior to the business journal, Reisman was director of marketing for the Orange County edition of The Los Angeles Times. Earlier in his career, Reisman practiced law in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. While in private practice in Washington, Reisman served as special counsel to the House Ethics Committee. Reisman holds an MBA from UCLA, where he was awarded the R.C. Baker Foundation Fellowship, and a law degree from George Washington University, where he graduated with honors. Reisman is listed in "Who's Who in America" and has served on numerous boards.

**Barnaby Wang - Associate Director, Executive Search, *Century Group***

Barnaby Wang is a managing director and 9th year president's club recruiter for the Orange County Executive Search practice at Century Group. He holds 21 years of experience in specialized finance & accounting staffing focused on executive search, permanent placement services, and temporary staffing. Prior to joining Century Group, Wang had worked at two international publicly-traded staffing firms in three major metro markets: Orange County, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Wang has been a board member of the Orange County Chapter of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) since 2011 and is currently a governor. He graduated from UCLA with a Bachelors of Art Degree in Psychology and has served as president of the UCLA Alumni Network in Orange County.

**Lisa Westhafer - Senior Vice President, *Fifth Third Bank***

In her role as senior vice president, Lisa Westhafer leads the marketing efforts for Fifth Third Bank's Commercial Banking office in Orange County, focusing on serving clients in the market with revenues between \$20 million to \$500 million. Westhafer assists privately run companies with their financing, treasury management and capital market needs. Westhafer has been in the financial services industry for over 25 years. Prior to entering into the banking field, she worked for both the Walt Disney Company and Arthur Andersen. A Southern California native, Westhafer is married, has a 10-year-old son, and lives with her family in Nellie Gail. She earned her degree in business from the University of Washington and holds a CPA designation (currently inactive) and is Series 7 and 24 licensed. When not working or spending time with her family, Westhafer enjoys traveling, scuba diving, interior design and cooking.