PEOPLE LEADERS SHAPING GLOBAL WORKFORCES

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BALA SATHYANARAYANAN

Matching human potential with global ambition

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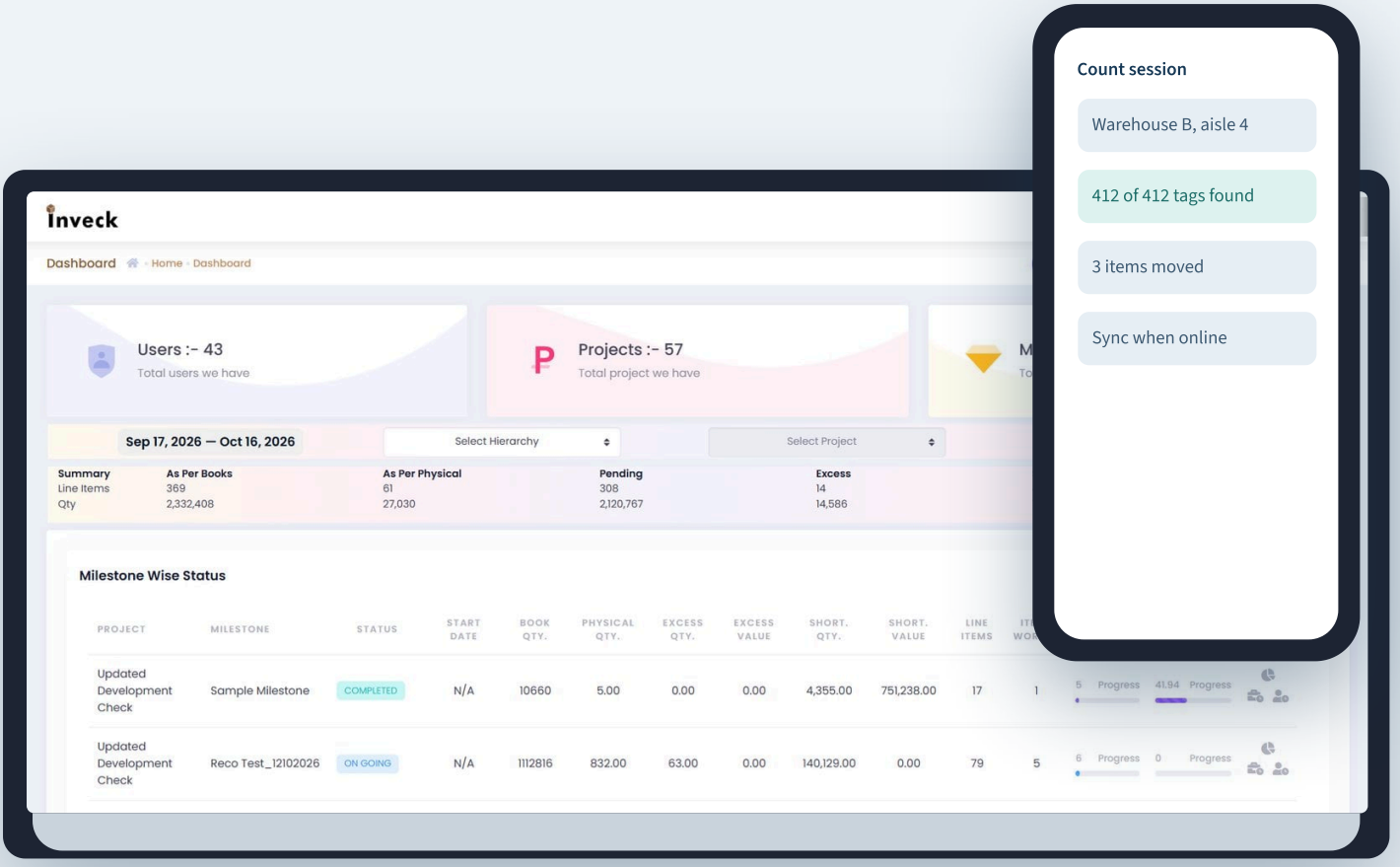

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FROM THE EDITORS

Editor's note

People Leaders Shaping Global Workforces

Behind most decisions that matter there is a person willing to explain the trade-offs. In this edition that person is Bala Sathyanarayanan, Chief Human Resources Officer at Greif.

The Chief Human Resources Officer of Greif on reading the culture of a global manufacturer, and on working with the chief executive and the board so that the people plan and the business plan are the same plan.

Our cover story follows Bala through the choices that shaped the work, from the early years to the decisions being made now, and asks what other leaders can take from them.

Also in this edition: Who pays for AI? How finance and technology chiefs can share the budget. AI spending sits awkwardly between capital budgets, operating budgets and the departments that want it. A joint fund with two signatures, and the rules that make it work.

Plus: Kelly Augspurger: Care planning, reimagined. A family's experience with extended care set Kelly Augspurger on a mission: to replace confusion and sales pressure with clarity, education and genuine advocacy.

If something here changes a decision you were about to make, we would like to hear about it. ■

The Editors



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THE
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Where leaders sit down to talk.

The CIO Table is an international magazine for the people who run large organisations: chief information officers, chief technology officers, chief executives, finance chiefs and security leaders. We publish interviews, essays and analysis about the decisions they make, online and in this magazine.

Most coverage of senior leaders is either promotional or adversarial. We aim for something more useful: a serious conversation about how a decision was made, what it cost, what it changed and what the person would do differently. ■

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Bala Sathyanarayanan

Matching human potential with global ambition

CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER, GREIF

The Chief Human Resources Officer of Greif on reading the culture of a global manufacturer, and on working with the chief executive and the board so that the people plan and the business plan are the same plan.

Every organization carries an invisible current that determines how people think, feel, and perform. Human Resources is the discipline that reads this current, shapes it, and strengthens it. It listens beneath the surface, noticing the unspoken patterns that influence motivation, trust, and collaboration. It gives structure to ambition and direction to talent. As industries grow more interconnected and technology rewrites expectations, HR has become the craft that ensures people remain grounded, capable, and confident in their journey.

Within this craft, Bala Sathyanarayanan brings a distinctive presence as the Chief Human Resources Officer at Greif. He stands out for his ability to understand the deeper rhythm of people and connect it to organizational strength.

A Global Journey Forging a Transformational Leader

Bala's career is a story of rich global exposure and continuous learning across some of the world's most respected companies. His professional path evolved through significant leadership roles at Xerox, HP, Coca-Cola, United Technologies, and Avaya before he joined Greif in 2018. With academic foundations that include a BS in Electronics and Communications Engineering, an MBA from the University of Madras, a Master's degree in Human Resources Management from Rutgers University, and the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School, Bala brings a multidisciplinary perspective to every role he undertakes.

In each organization, he absorbed lessons that shaped his leadership philosophy. Coca-Cola strengthened his belief in developing people. HP and United Technologies taught him how deeply HR must be intertwined with business strategy and operational success. Xerox refined his skills in global transformation and large-scale change leadership. At Greif, Bala oversees Global HR and Communications across more than forty-five countries and nearly three hundred entities. His influence has elevated employee engagement from the thirty second percentile to the eighty seventh percentile in manufacturing by 2025, reflecting the success of his One Greif and One HR mindset. His approach combines global alignment with local adaptability, supported by digital transformation, data driven insights, and a strong focus on belonging and equity.

Aligning Purpose, People, and Performance at Greif

At Greif, Bala positions HR as a central driver of business success. His leadership is rooted in the belief



Bala Sathyanarayanan
CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER, GREIF

Photo: Matt Reese, greif.com

that exceptional customer service begins with empowered and engaged employees. Working closely with the CEO, executive leaders, and the Board, he ensures that human capital strategies fully align with the company's vision of becoming the best performing customer service company in the world.

Through One Greif and One HR, Bala champions global consistency while honoring local needs. He has introduced initiatives such as Greif University for global learning and Lead to Last for leadership development. These programs equip employees with the capabilities required to deliver outstanding customer experiences. Engagement scores have risen tremendously under his guidance, moving from the thirtieth percentile to the eighty fifth percentile in manufacturing. Bala also drives cultural and digital evolution through analytics, AI enabled tools, and inclusive practices that support gender pay equity and vibrant employee resource groups. His integrated strategy unites people, culture, and technology, creating a strong foundation for world class customer service and sustained organizational performance.

Uniting a Global Workforce Through Shared Purpose

Greif's presence in more than forty countries brings the challenge of leading a workforce shaped by diverse cultures, regulations, and expectations. Bala approaches this complexity with a clear intention to unify people under shared values while respecting local differences. His One Greif and One HR frameworks provide the structure for global alignment in policies, leadership behaviors, and cultural priorities.

> **Bala's career is a story of rich global exposure and continuous learning across some of the world's most respected companies.**

Bala ensures that employees around the world experience a consistent sense of purpose through transparent communication, strong leadership development, and digital enablement. Programs like Greif University and Lead to Last foster common leadership competencies across regions. He relies on data driven insights and employee listening tools to monitor engagement levels and tailor actions to local needs without compromising global alignment.

His commitment to belonging and recognition ensures that employees everywhere feel valued and connected to Greif's mission. By blending cultural awareness, technology, and strategic capability building, Bala successfully cultivates a cohesive global culture that strengthens engagement, performance, and customer centric excellence throughout the organization.

When Digital Becomes the New Heartbeat of HR

Bala has seen digital technology completely redefine the way HR functions within a multinational industrial company like Greif. For him, technology is not a support tool but a strategic engine that powers decision making and workforce readiness across more than forty countries. Under his leadership, HR has evolved into an insight led and digitally enabled function that uses analytics, AI, and automation to strengthen talent acquisition, performance management, and engagement.

Digital platforms such as Greif University and advanced learning systems allow employees to continuously develop skills and stay agile. Technology has also made global communication seamless, enabling stronger collaboration and inclusion across diverse regions. Bala's approach uses data to anticipate workforce needs and align HR with business priorities, turning what was once a transactional function into a strategic partner. Through analytics, automation, and digital learning, he supports a future ready global workforce that advances Greif's mission of delivering exceptional customer service.



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A Compass of Meaning for a World of Talent

Purpose driven leadership sits at the heart of Bala's philosophy and guides how he inspires employees around the world. He believes that when people understand how their work connects to a meaningful purpose, they bring greater passion and commitment to their roles. At Greif, he reinforces the idea that every employee contributes to the company's purpose of creating packaging success together while striving to be the best performing customer service company in the world.

Bala brings this purpose to life through the One Greif mindset and shared values that span more than forty countries. Leaders are encouraged to model purpose through authentic communication, recognition, and inclusive behavior. Initiatives like Greif University and Lead to Last develop leaders who connect business goals with individual contribution. Global town halls, storytelling, and regular listening channels highlight how teams embody Greif's purpose across different communities. Through these actions, Bala creates a sense of belonging and inspires employees everywhere to turn shared purpose into daily impact.

Strengthening Engagement Through One Greif

One of Bala's most influential achievements at Greif is the creation of the One Greif engagement strategy, which has significantly elevated both employee motivation and business performance. Recognizing that engagement is directly linked to execution, he championed a multi-year approach focused on communication, leadership development, and recognition.

A key element of this effort is the global engagement survey followed by structured action planning. These insights led to programs such as Lead to Last, which equips leaders to inspire trust, purpose, and accountability. Bala also expanded learning opportunities through Greif University, giving employees around the world access to continuous development and career growth.

These efforts have produced remarkable results. Engagement scores in manufacturing rose from the thirty second percentile to the eighty fifth percentile, demonstrating stronger collaboration, motivation, and customer focus. Bala's commitment to creating a culture of belonging, growth, and recognition has turned engagement into a powerful driver of Greif's performance and its aspiration to be the best performing customer service company in the world.

Shaping a Global Leadership Ecosystem

Bala approaches talent development and succession planning at Greif with a strategic, inclusive, and future-ready mindset. Leading a workforce spread across more than 40 countries and multiple industries, he focuses on building leadership depth and global capability at every organizational level.

A cornerstone of this approach is Lead to Last, Greif's flagship leadership development program, designed to equip current and emerging leaders with the skills to drive performance, strengthen engagement, and embody the company's purpose. This is complemented by Greif University, a digital learning platform that ensures continuous and personalized learning opportunities for employees in all functions, from manufacturing teams to senior management.

Bala uses data-driven talent analytics to identify high-potential talent and align succession pipelines with dynamic business needs. He ensures diverse representation in leadership readiness through intentional inclusion and equitable access to development opportunities. Regular talent reviews with business leaders help maintain agile and globally coordinated succession planning.

> **Through One Greif and One HR, Bala champions global consistency while honoring local needs.**

By combining technology, leadership development, and inclusive talent practices, Bala cultivates a sustainable leadership ecosystem that prepares Greif for the future and ensures that the right people, with the right values and capabilities, are ready to lead across its diverse global operations.

Embedding Inclusion as a Strategic Advantage

For Bala, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) sit at the heart of Greif's culture and long-term business success. He views DEI as a strategic imperative that enhances innovation, employee engagement, and customer excellence, rather than treating it as a standalone initiative.

Under his leadership, Greif has introduced a comprehensive global Inclusivity framework anchored in awareness, accountability, and action. This includes the launch of Employee Resource Groups that foster connection and belonging, inclusive leadership training, and data-driven evaluations that support equity in compensation and career advancement. Notably, Greif has achieved global gender pay parity, continuously reinforcing progress through transparent metrics and regular reporting.

DEI principles influence every aspect of the company's talent lifecycle, from attracting diverse candidates to developing inclusive leadership pipelines. Bala also promotes inclusion through open dialogue, employee listening sessions, and recognition of cultural diversity across Greif's global footprint.

By embedding DEI into the company's operating fabric, Bala ensures that inclusion becomes a catalyst for stronger teams, sharper decision-making, and sustained competitive advantage, reflecting both a moral commitment and a business necessity.

Bringing Governance Discipline to People Strategy

As a NACD Certified Corporate Director, Bala infuses governance excellence and boardroom best practices into Greif's HR strategy and organizational

leadership. His corporate governance background strengthens alignment between HR initiatives, enterprise oversight, and long-term value creation.

He applies core board-level principles, transparency, accountability, and strategic foresight, to all aspects of the people strategy. This includes treating leadership development, succession planning, and culture-building with the same rigor as financial or operational priorities. Bala provides data-driven insights to the Board on workforce metrics, culture health, and diversity outcomes, reinforcing HR's role as a driver of enterprise performance.

Ethical leadership and compliance are central to his approach, ensuring that integrity and responsibility are embedded throughout Greif's global operations. By blending governance and human capital strategy, Bala elevates HR into a strategic governance partner capable of anticipating risks, enhancing resilience, and upholding stakeholder trust.



His boardroom perspective ensures that leadership capability, culture strength, and workforce readiness remain central to Greif's long-term vision of becoming the best-performing customer service company in the world.

Forging the Future Workforce

Greif, under Bala's leadership, is addressing workforce skill gaps through a comprehensive upskilling and reskilling strategy designed for the future of industrial manufacturing. Bala recognizes that technology, automation, and sustainability are reshaping the industry, so he has embedded continuous learning and capability building into Greif's people strategy.

At the center of this effort is Greif University, a global digital learning platform that provides employees with technical, leadership, and professional development programs. This is complemented by Lead to Last, which develops leaders who can navigate digital transformation and evolving customer expectations.

Bala also uses data and analytics to identify emerging skill needs across more than forty countries and customizes training based on those insights. Partnerships with learning providers and opportunities for cross functional mobility further ensure employees can adapt and grow with the business.

By fostering a culture of lifelong learning, Bala ensures that Greif's workforce remains agile, innovative, and prepared for changing industry demands, strengthening operational excellence and the company's commitment to exceptional customer service.

Embedding Responsibility into Culture and Practice

At Greif, sustainability and social responsibility are deeply integrated into workforce policies and corporate culture. Guided by Bala's leadership, the company aligns its people strategy with its People, Planet, and Performance framework to ensure that business growth reflects environmental stewardship

and positive social impact.

Bala emphasizes that sustainability begins with people. Greif promotes a safe, inclusive, and purpose driven workplace where employees feel empowered to take part in environmental and community initiatives. Programs focused on volunteerism, wellbeing, and ethical leadership encourage employees to connect personal responsibility with Greif's purpose.

From a workforce perspective, sustainability influences recruitment, development, and performance management. Environmental awareness and social accountability are woven into leadership expectations. The company's focus on inclusion, safety, and engagement strengthens long term social sustainability by supporting fairness, respect, and belonging across its global footprint.

Greif's environmental goals, progress on emissions reduction, commitment to circular packaging, and achievement of global gender pay parity are communicated openly and linked to performance outcomes. Through this integration, Bala ensures sustainability is a shared mindset that inspires employees to create value responsibly and reinforces Greif's reputation as a leader in sustainable industrial packaging.

Humanity at the Heart of Digital Progress

Looking ahead, Bala sees the next major challenge for global HR leaders as balancing rapid technological advancement with the human experience of work. As AI, automation, and data analytics reshape business operations, he believes HR must ensure that digital progress strengthens human connection, purpose, and growth.

At Greif, Bala is preparing for this future by creating a digitally fluent, agile, and resilient workforce. Through Greif University and Lead to Last, employees are developing critical skills in digital literacy, leadership, and adaptability. Data driven insights guide talent strategy, enabling the company to anticipate shifts in workforce needs across its global operations.

Equally important, Bala emphasizes wellbeing, inclusion, and engagement as essential elements of competitiveness. He believes the most successful HR leaders will be those who connect business transformation with human transformation, ensuring that technology empowers people, leadership remains authentic, and organizational purpose continues to inspire performance in a rapidly changing world. ■

NAME	ROLE	ORGANISATION
Bala Sathyanarayanan	**Chief Human Resources Officer**	**Greif**



Photo: CHUTTERSNAP / Unsplash

ANALYSIS

Who pays for AI? How finance and technology chiefs can share the budget

BY THE CIO TABLE EDITORS



AI spending sits awkwardly between capital budgets, operating budgets and the departments that want it. A joint fund with two signatures, and the rules that make it work.

Artificial intelligence refuses to sit in one place on the books. The build looks like a project, the run looks like a utility bill, and the benefit turns up in somebody else's department. Left alone, the ambiguity produces pilots paid for from budgets nobody tracks, run costs that land on the IT line after launch, and savings that several parties claim and none banks.

The remedy is a set of agreements between the CFO and the CIO, made early, while the sums are still small.

Why the usual lines do not fit

Traditional software investment had a familiar shape: a capital project, a go-live date, a predictable maintenance charge. AI spending rarely behaves that way. Much of it is cloud consumption and subscriptions, which are operating costs, and under IFRS the work of configuring and customising cloud services is often expensed rather than capitalised. Some internal development may qualify as an intangible asset, but the criteria are demanding and the judgement belongs to finance, not to the project sponsor.

Usage-based pricing adds a second complication: running costs grow with adoption, so success costs more than failure, and a fixed annual budget copes poorly with a cost that rises precisely when the project works.

The third complication is organisational. The benefit of an AI tool in claims handling accrues to the director who runs claims. The cost, unless someone intervenes, accrues to the CIO.

One fund, two signatures

A practical answer is a single AI investment fund, set annually, that needs both the CFO's and the CIO's signature to release money. Business units bid into it. Neither chief can approve a project alone: the CFO tests the value case, the CIO tests feasibility, data readiness and risk. It pays for pilots and early scaling; nothing reaches production without passing through it.

The price is speed, and a heavy process pushes experiments into shadow budgets. A small allowance below a set threshold helps, limited to approved tools and non-sensitive data, provided every experiment is registered.

Gates agreed before the money moves

The fund should release money in tranches, from pilot to limited production to scale, with each gate's criteria written down before the pilot begins: a quality threshold measured on a test set the business owner accepts, an adoption level among intended users, a unit cost per transaction below an agreed ceiling, and sign-off on risk, including data protection and whether the use case falls into a category the EU AI Act treats as high-risk.

Fixing criteria in advance matters because a team that has spent months on a model will always find a reason to continue. Criteria agreed at the start give both chiefs a neutral basis for saying no.

Agree what counts as a saving

The most common dispute about AI value is definitional. Is an hour saved a saving if no cost disappears? Do avoided hiring and redeployed capacity count, and at what rate? Answer them in writing before the pilot starts.

A workable convention separates cash savings, which reduce a budget line, from capacity released, which is reported but not banked until it becomes a budget change. Finance should own the baseline and measure it before the tool arrives, because baselines reconstructed afterwards flatter the result. The business owner should own delivery, and once a saving is booked, the relevant budget should fall. A saving that never leaves anybody's budget was not a saving.

Who owns the run cost

After launch, three costs persist: inference, which varies with usage and the choice of model; data, covering pipelines, storage, quality checks and labelling; and people, for monitoring, evaluation, retraining and support. The last is most often missing from the business case.

A sensible split keeps the shared platform central: contracts with model providers, common infrastructure, security and evaluation tooling. At the scale gate, the run cost of each application moves to the business unit that books its benefit, through a usage-based chargeback. To encourage adoption, the centre can subsidise run costs for a fixed period, provided the end date is set in advance. Each application should carry a unit cost target and spending alerts, so changes show up in weeks, not at year end.

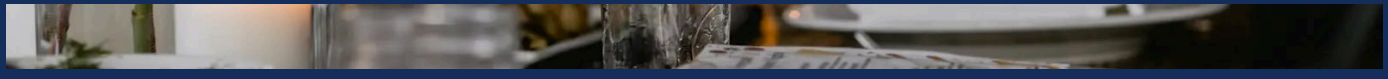
Stopping gracefully

A portfolio in which every pilot survives has no discipline. Stop criteria belong in the same document as gate criteria: a project that misses its gate twice, or whose unit cost cannot be brought below the value it creates per transaction, ends.

Ending well is a process. Switch off endpoints and integrations, close supplier commitments, delete or archive data under retention rules, and record which components can be reused. Unspent money returns to the fund. A team that stops a weak project early should be treated no worse than one that ships a strong one, or nobody will stop anything.

What the board should see

Boards do not need model metrics. They need one page, updated quarterly: total AI spending split between build and run; the portfolio by stage; savings agreed against savings realised, confirmed by finance; unit cost trends for the largest applications; material risk and regulatory issues; and projects stopped, with the money returned to the fund. That last line is most often left out, and it is the clearest evidence that the gates are real. ■





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PROFILE

Kelly Augspurger: Care planning, reimagined

BY THE CIO TABLE EDITORS



A family's experience with extended care set Kelly Augspurger on a mission: to replace confusion and sales pressure with clarity, education and genuine advocacy.

Profile at a glance

Care planning without the fear

Kelly Augspurger understands long-term care planning from both sides of the kitchen table. Watching her own family navigate extended care showed her how stressful and confusing the process can be, and it left her convinced that families deserve a calmer, clearer path to peace of mind.

Her route into insurance ran through an unlikely training ground: a used car dealership she co-founded and helped run for twelve years. There she learned to build a business from nothing, managing staff, marketing the offering, negotiating deals and, above all, delivering the kind of service that keeps customers coming back.

The dealership sharpened her problem-solving, communication and organizational skills, taught her to adapt as conditions changed, and deepened her grasp of financial management. Most of all, it taught her to read what each customer actually needed.

Her family's own experience had shown her how much the right guidance matters. Too often, people were left to piece together complex care decisions on their own, under pressure and without impartial advice. Kelly believed there was a better way, and that it should begin with education rather than a sales pitch.

What stayed with her was the relief on a customer's face when a problem was finally solved. She wanted to build her next venture around that feeling, this time in a field where the stakes for families are far higher than a set of car keys.

Advice first, never a sales pitch

Building Steadfast

Becoming a mother made the next step clear. Kelly wanted control over her schedule and the freedom to run her own business, so that work and family could both come first. Together with her husband, Adam, she launched Steadfast Insurance LLC, an independent agency devoted to extended care planning.

She chose the niche deliberately. Populations are ageing and demand for long-term care is rising, yet the options can feel impossibly tangled. Kelly sees helping families protect their quality of life as a calling, and she set out to make the subject understandable.

Education before recommendations

Steadfast's difference is education. Because so many people feel overwhelmed by long-term care, the team focuses on sharing objective information before suggesting anything. An online health questionnaire lets clients share details privately and at their own pace, part of a digitized prescreening process that makes planning faster and simpler.

Detailed conversations then shape each recommendation around a person's priorities, budget and goals. Kelly asks thoughtful questions to understand a client's whole world, from the people who support them to their financial ambitions, so the final plan reflects both their hopes and their worries.

Most of her clients purchase coverage in their fifties. Partnerships with financial advisors across the country allow Steadfast to help families nationwide, and Kelly regularly gathers client feedback to keep refining the way the agency supports them.

A client story: when "no" wasn't the answer

A couple we will call John and Kim, names changed for privacy, came to Steadfast in their mid-seventies. Because of John's health history, most long-term care insurers would have turned him away. Kelly found another route: a joint policy that repositioned an asset they already owned into an annuity designed to pay for care.

The structure doubled the benefits the couple could access, and gave them what Kelly values most: confidence that their family is protected if care is ever needed.

Clarity for every family

A library for every question

Kelly believes informed clients make better decisions, so Steadfast has built a deep library of learning tools: explainer videos that untangle complex ideas, practical guides, blog posts and a YouTube channel. Its podcast, Steadfast Care Planning, features Kelly in conversation with experts who help older adults and their families navigate ageing well, and it is available on all major listening platforms. The team studies what audiences watch and read to decide what to create next.

The approach works. One client, Andy, discovered Steadfast's resources online and then booked a personalized consultation. He came away well informed, at ease with Kelly's knowledgeable but friendly style, and confident in the plan he chose.

Steady by name, steady by nature

Kelly describes her mission as reimagining extended care planning through education, honesty, innovation, empathy and advocacy. As the industry adopts new technology, Steadfast embraces user-friendly tools that improve the client experience without losing the personal attention that defines it.

For Kelly, the company name is a promise: to stay alongside clients and their communities as their lives unfold, so every family can face the future feeling heard, independent and confident.

Steadfast Insurance LLC is an independent long-term care planning agency co-founded by Kelly and Adam Augspurger. ■

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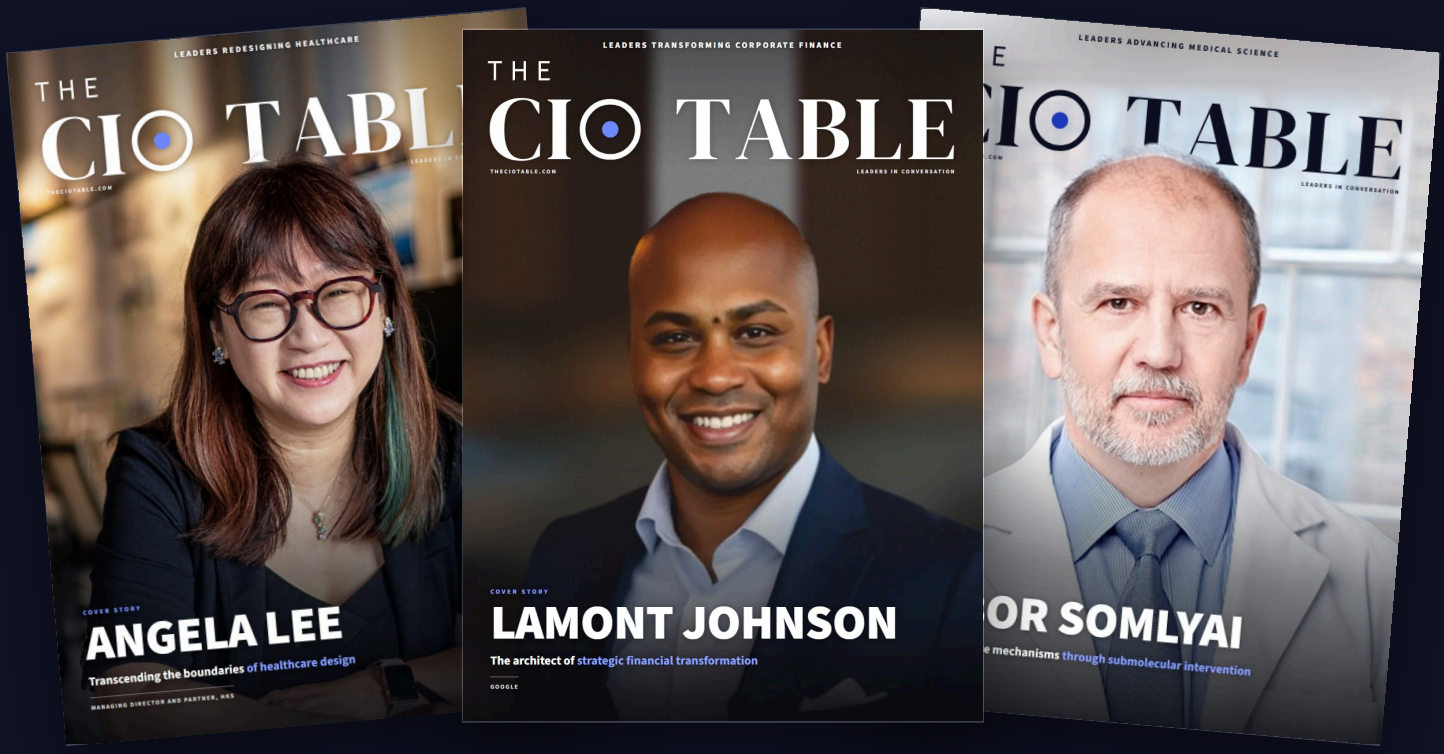

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