



W A L K W E S T

THE BUSINESS GROWTH IMPERATIVE:

The 5 Key Pillars of Next Generation Leadership

Donald Thompson & Kurt Merriweather



Wanted: Next-Generation Leaders to Help Organizations Navigate Change and Complexity

Picture a CEO from the 1950s, time-traveling to present day. He might be completely bewildered by all the changes the modern workforce has undergone. Seventy years ago, the workforce was largely inhabited by white men working in office environments known for their codified processes and prescriptive hierarchies. There were limited opportunities for—and often active discrimination against—others, such as people of color, the LGBTQ community, individuals with disabilities, and women. Today’s workforce has changed significantly—and for the best. It is a thriving, ever-changing mélange of talented individuals representing different races, colors, religions, genders, national origins, and abilities. Over time, the definition of diversity has broadened to consider other variables such as socioeconomic background, age and generation, personality, thinking style¹, personal expression with appearance, work and geographic preferences, and more. As a consequence, Gallup now refers to diversity as “the full spectrum of human demographic differences²,” and many companies now speak about promoting diversity and inclusion to foster the respect, acceptance, and sense of belonging all employees want to experience as they seek to achieve both organizational and professional goals at work.



Companies that embrace diversity and inclusion (D&I) create more opportunities to learn—and lead. There are no “traditional” roles anymore, opening up the potential for growth everywhere. An African-American male CEO leads a storied beauty products conglomerate, while a female CEO oversees an oil and gas drilling company. The Millennial wins a seat at the board of directors table by building and selling a startup, setting strategy with Boomers. The Latinx sales leader who is transgender books multi-million dollar B2B deals and serves as a spokesperson for inclusivity in her company and industry. The socioeconomically disadvantaged student who never took a trip as an adult runs his company’s EMEA region. And the non-binary software coder on the autism spectrum, who favors piercings and flip flops, is richly rewarded for their technology prowess. While perhaps simplistic, these examples are intended to show that there is a rich kaleidoscope of talent and opportunity at companies today. Organizations committed to unlocking the full value of D&I actively seek to break down hierarchies and structures, address both conscious and unconscious bias, and recognize and promote talent equally to create an environment where all can flourish. Leaders know that D&I helps organizations create a better culture, increase the quantity and quality of ideas considered, accelerate the pace of innovation, and achieve better outcomes. For B2C organizations, diverse workforces also provide cultural insights that power effective multicultural marketing and solution design.



A BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Creating a culture that’s known for D&I isn’t just good sense, it’s good business.

McKinsey studies have found that:³

Companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity were

21%

more likely to outperform on profitability.

Companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity were

27%

more likely to drive value creation.

The highest performers had more

women

in line roles than in staff roles on their executive team.

Companies in the top quarter for cultural and ethnic diversity were

33%

more likely to have industry-leading profitability.

That's important because the marketplace is undergoing seismic change. Digital transformation imperatives have increased, due to significant, ongoing marketplace and industry disruption. Employees are increasingly working remotely, to avoid COVID-19 risks. Companies with presence-based businesses, such as higher education and membership organizations, are redesigning their business models in real-time, virtualizing a formerly face-to-face consumer experience. And across all industries, companies are digitizing processes and services to move beyond business survival to growth. Those fortunate enough to weather economic storms well, such as technology companies, are redoubling their emphasis on creating organizational agility to address new challenges, capture new opportunities, and fend off new competitors.

“A place of work is more than a property. It’s a living environment that helps individuals and businesses craft and experience a rewarding fusion of life and work. Office culture emerges when people come together in person and in a post COVID world it will need to be adapted as an ecosystem. Moving forward four key factors will have a major role in shaping the future of office demand; remote working, office design, technology and commuting patterns.⁴”

What's needed now, more than ever, is a new generation of leaders who can inspire and direct diverse mobile and remote workforces, make data-driven strategic decisions, and help their companies create the flexibility and nimbleness they need to continuously transform and capitalize on emerging market developments. We believe that there are 5 key pillars that are essential for next-generation leaders to accomplish this formidable mission.

1. Managing multicultural, multi-generational teams
2. Developing social media fluency
3. Committing to continuous learning
4. Mastering technology and data
5. Thinking like a startup

Let's study these concepts in greater depth.

SKILL #1: MANAGING MULTICULTURAL, MULTIGENERATIONAL TEAMS

In organizations today, leaders are managing incredibly diverse teams. Globalization; immigration; intermarriage; and the ability to study, work, and live in other cultures, has created a “melting pot” of diversity in countries and organizations around the world. The United States is slated to become “minority white” by 2045, due in part to the growth of multi-racial, Asian, and Latinx populations⁵. And while English may be the language of business, many employees speak a second language (or more) at home. This multiculturalism brings a richness of perspectives to the world of work. However, it can also introduce inter-relational complexities, as teams seek to understand and honor each other's language, heritage, cultural customs, and work expectations, among other differences.

In addition, today's workforce is unique in that four generations are working side-by-side, each generation bringing their own expectations of career development, workstyles, and technology fluency to their roles. For example, Boomers may feel more comfortable working at an economically stable company that provides defined structures and jobs, but less upward mobility. Meanwhile, Millennials and Gen Zers may seek to experiment, take risk, and work for a company that has an authentic purpose, said Walk West CEO Donald Thompson in the firm's recent podcast on next-generation leaders.⁶

Similarly, Gen X may struggle to adopt new technology, while younger workers understand Agile and DevOps, creating solutions side-by-side with customers; and communicate via chat and text, rather than email. And let's not forget that the workforce itself is no longer a monolithic entity: Suppliers, customers, and partners collaborate and co-create alongside employees, contractors, cloud-based talent pools, and gig workers, meaning that the talent mix on projects is constantly changing.

Generations In The Workplace

BROUGHT TO YOU BY JLL RESEARCH

	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
PERCENTAGE OF WORKFORCE IN 2025	8%	28%	33%	31%
SIGNATURE PRODUCT	Television	Personal computer	Tablet or smart phone	Google Glass, graphene, nano-computing, 3D printing, self-driving cars
COMMUNICATION PREFERENCE	Face-to-face or email	Email or text messaging	Online and mobile instant messaging	Facetime
PERSONAL VALUES	Success; Live to work; Prefer not to WFH; Efficiency	Balance; Work to live; Flexibility at work	Individuality; Live, then work; Location/ Amenities	Purpose; Work to live; Video technology; Green tech

Employees regardless of their age are going to want flexibility in post COVID environment. The workplace is going to have to transform to meet WFH needs but also re-examine the purpose the office provides from both a corporate occupier and employee perspective. 64% of millennials are most eager to return to the office, the highest percentage of any age group.

All of these differences have the opportunity to create interpersonal clashes and the opportunity for devaluing the “cultural other.” However, leaders can communicate shared organizational values, such as a purpose-driven mission, opportunity for all, the meritocracy of ideas, and a commitment to growth through innovation, to keep teams cohesive and focused on delivering the organizational company mission. Think of companies committed to creating a beautiful, elegant customer experience through technology, such as Airbnb, Facebook, and Microsoft. Consider organizations such as Patagonia, REI, and Toms in the retail sector where leaders have rallied workforces around social good missions, such as environmental sustainability or buy-one, give-one business models. Think of the companies now donating millions of dollars to COVID-19 relief to meet the world’s most urgent needs. At these organizations, employees highly value purpose, integrity, and community activism in action and are more likely to be deeply engaged in their work.

[The Diversity Movement](#) can help leaders master collaborative decision making, cross-functional teamwork, and D&I practices (especially through scenario-driven training and interventions) that can help expose workers to team members’ differing perspectives, helping them gain greater appreciation for their strengths; develop “cultural fluency,” or the ability to successfully navigate different cultures; and synthesize disparate ideas into a greater whole to increase business impact.

SKILL #2: DEVELOPING SOCIAL MEDIA FLUENCY

So, what is the next tool next-generation leaders need? Social media is a powerful tool that leaders can and should adopt, both to build their own brand and grow the business. Many leaders today are hired, in part, due to their social media prowess, especially if they are in customer- and public-facing roles, such as executive management, sales, and marketing. Across all roles and all levels, 70% of organizations check candidates’ social media profiles before hiring them.⁷

In the podcast on next-generation leaders, Donald Thompson said, “People want to be in business with, buy from, and partner with experts, right? And you can’t scream from the rooftop, “I am an expert.” You have to create demonstrated value in the social spectrum, so to speak. That validates that you’re worth being a part of the conversation.” As proof of the value of social media, Thompson cited having dinner with a business leader running a \$2B organization who had listened to Thompson’s D&I podcasts and wanted to share insights on the topic.⁸

Externally, social media skills can help leaders:

1. Build an iconic brand for their expertise and organization
2. Connect with others and increase engagement around—and momentum for—a specific industry topic
3. Lead development of an industry imperative, such as standards development, emerging technology adoption, partnerships, cross-organizational information sharing, and others
4. Cut across bureaucracies and red tape to fast-track industry initiatives

Internally, social media skills can also help leaders accomplish a number of key goals including:

1. Reposition internal organizations to build better relationships with key stakeholders, such as the C-suite, board of directors, and line of business heads
2. Align workforces to deliver the corporate and functional strategy
3. Build and motivate workforce to address strategic imperatives, such as digital transformation, customer experience initiatives, or regulatory findings
4. Articulate shared values, such as D&I, political and legislative activism, community involvement, and environmental sustainability, among others
5. Communicate and reinforce desired workforce behaviors and tie them to the corporate strategy
6. Address setbacks, such as M&A roadblocks, business and customer losses, data breaches, and more

“Walk West has developed a Social Media and Strategy Management course, that helps practitioners build a social strategy and cross-platform crisis and communication plan.”

A master class on social media (and more generally, media) skills has been on display during the pandemic. In the biotech and healthcare arenas, competitors have shared information and joined forces to pursue COVID-19 treatments and vaccines; struggling for-profit organizations have donated supplies and services in spite of their own economic hurt; and companies have pivoted to develop new health and sanitation products to address resource scarcity in the market. While leaders at these companies are likely not striving to build brand in a calculated manner, the reality is that they are creating enormous positive goodwill among B2B and B2C buyers in the marketplace as well as strengthening new partnerships. It's entirely possible that in the near future we will witness a ground-breaking deal or partnership due as much to good corporate stewardship as the strength of a company's solution set.

Presence-based organizations such as higher education institutions have used social media to engage with prospective and current students, communicate fast-changing policies (such as the move to online instruction), and deliver virtual tours and graduations. And membership groups, such as alumni groups, social-affinity organizations, and museums, can offer virtual docent-led tours of grounds or collections or create invitation-only experiences, such as performances, lectures, fireside chats, and more to continue engaging with audiences and driving donations and revenues.

SKILL #3: COMMITTING TO CONTINUAL LEARNING

In this frenetic, ever-changing marketplace, the need for learning has never been more apparent. Next-generation leaders are increasingly running a business where change may be measured in hours and days, not weeks and months. As a consequence, they must continually develop both hard and soft skills to harness the best human and technological insight, gain internal alignment around strategies, and help organizations constantly evolve. In a sense, leaders are the ultimate operating systems, connecting and collaborating with stakeholders and teams, synthesizing new knowledge, adopting new technology, and constantly upgrading their approach. They know that what worked last year—and even last month—may no longer be relevant to running their business.

“Next-generation leaders should view themselves as human operating systems, leveraging talent, technology, and the continual evolution of their knowledge and skills to outperform and deliver their organization’s strategy.”

Many organizations don’t have the budget—or time—to send emerging leaders through traditional pipelines, such as executive MBA programs. They may offer corporate universities or leadership training, but even those programs may not keep pace with the frenetic pace of change that companies are experiencing. Few mid-market companies likely have the ability to build out the team, tools, and full suite of courses their leaders and workforce need to evolve new skills and capabilities.

“More than 50% of leaders don’t believe that their organizations’ talent development initiatives are building the skills and capabilities they need for the future.”⁹

Fortunately, the market has responded. Technology academies, Software as a Service (SaaS) vendors, and professional associations offer training that can equip leaders and their teams with new soft and hard skills and help them gain critical industry credentials. As with other training, executive leadership training is increasingly interactive, gamified, and delivered in bite-sized chunks to build understanding and retention over time. Interactive training increases topic retention more than “Death by PowerPoint” lunch and learns by a factor of 6X, found one study.¹⁰

Most leaders, however, go the extra mile by taking full ownership of their own professional development. They may work with an executive coach or mentors to set strategy, but they will create their own personal academy to develop the full toolkit they need to lead. In terms of soft skills, new competencies can include developing emotional intelligence, asking the right questions, leading teams of subject matter experts, delegating authority, holding value-based conversations with the business, and mastering public speaking, among other abilities. Hard skills can include acquiring professional certifications, learning how to code, and participating in and speaking at industry conferences to stay on top of new trends, among other gains. That's smart, because across all workforce roles there is a 42% shift in the skills required to do digital work by 2022.¹¹

Because leaders are time-starved, they make the most of every moment to learn. That may mean scheduling time for certifications, listening to audiobooks or podcasts while exercising, or reading new business books on tablets at night. They also look for opportunities to immediately apply new insights, knowing that taking action trumps book knowledge and that they need to continually place new bets to help propel their organization forward.

For organizations, continuous learning is a win-win. Whether they build, buy, or simply require ongoing learning, these organizations benefit from the fact that leaders are constantly refreshing their skillset to match pace with the digital marketplace. Higher compensation and new leadership opportunities typically follow, as organizations seek to retain executives from leaving and going to competitors. In the podcast on next-generation leaders, Kurt Merriweather, VP of Strategy and Transformation for Walk West, said, "The more that they learn inside the organization, the more valuable they'll be to you as a leader, and they'll also be more valuable in the external marketplace."

“Walk West is developing a platform called Walk West on Demand to help organizations access expert advice and microlearning needed for rapid skill development.”

SKILL #4: MASTERING TECHNOLOGY AND DATA

At organizations today, technology has become both the foundation and the framework for driving a digital business. Most organizations are developing a hybrid or multi-cloud strategy to speed innovation, run and scale the business, and reduce risks and costs. Pandemic pressures, which have driven remote work at scale, have only increased cloud services adoption. Companies are managing more applications, more devices, and connections than ever before as they adopt digital-first business models, enable global workers, increase Internet of Things (IoT) deployments, and manage more edge sites and connected equipment.

NEXT-GEN LEADERS OVERSEE AN INCREASINGLY DIGITAL BUSINESS



Employees:

Use three or more devices to do their work.



Applications:

Employees use between eight¹² and thirty-five¹³ applications a day to do their work.



Cloud:

Some 85% of companies have adopted cloud computing¹⁴ to drive results in their race to create digital businesses.



Endpoints:

5% of organizations manage more than 100,000 end sites, while 61% manage 1,000 or more.¹⁵

So, what does this mean for leaders? While executives may not be expert in an entire technology stack, they should understand technology and how it creates significant business value. Literally millions of dollars of cost savings and future revenue improvements are on the line, in terms of increasing productivity, designing a new customer experience, streamlining supply chains, and reducing cybersecurity and operational risk. When evaluating technology investments, Thompson says he looks for 10X ROI for purchasing and deploying technology for himself or the business.

Leaders typically champion technology initiatives; authorize budgets; and work with IT executives and teams to make sure new technology accomplishes strategic purposes, without creating undue risk to the business or destabilizing the network or interlinked processes. As with learning, many leaders are increasingly partnering with vendors to implement SaaS solutions or platforms to gain speed to market, because there simply is no time to build solutions anymore.

Similarly, leaders need to be experts in understanding and interpreting data. While strategy-setting used to be a mix of intuition, judgement, and expertise, increasingly it is fueled by historical and predictive analytics. Organizations are aggregating data from myriad sources (including online search and social media) and transforming data into a single version of "truth" that leaders can rely on to help make decisions. Data visualization dashboards and no-code analytics platforms are putting these capabilities in the hands of leaders themselves, reducing the time and effort required to get critical data needed for decision making, while rules-based automation streamlines critical operations, reducing time delay and error.

Retail and ecommerce companies have relied heavily on technology and analytics to match production and stocks to consumer demand. Think of retailers rapidly building out BOPIS (buy online, pick up in store) capabilities, plus adding curbside pickup to meet greater needs for these services. Consider grocery and retail stores shifting product mixes to meet local consumption and telecommunications and entertainment companies increasing bandwidth in different geographies to meet increased demand. Think of Zoom scaling its business as tens of millions of businesses and consumers suddenly adopted its platform to hold meetings and video calls. Analytics and cloud services enabled these rapid changes.

Similarly, in the financial services and healthcare industries, companies have had to demonstrate similar agility. Financial services companies have used technology to initiate loan and credit card forbearance requests and handle high mortgage refinancing requests. And biotech companies are using open-source data and technology to develop COVID-19 treatments and vaccines.

JLL TECHNOLOGY JOURNEY

JLL is on a journey to revolutionize the commercial real estate industry through having business conversations enabled by technology.

JLL's business intelligence tools use technology to empower clients to make data-driven decisions. These tools dramatically shrink the three to four months it usually takes tenants to gather the information needed to select, lease and customize a space. Instead of taking several days' worth of tours to allow tenants to scout locations out in person, they can now be immersed in a 3D tour of multiple properties in a fraction of the time. Virtual reality shows where amenities and transit stops are in relation to potential spaces, and our technology calculates various commute times, labor costs, economic data and more. This technology can also build 3D space plans to show companies how different layouts serve their business needs. This saves time, reduces cost and mitigates risk. Nothing about the workplace will be the same in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. With the right technology on their side, companies convert a business need into physical space all in a virtual meeting. JLL's technology helps make the next normal safe and efficient.

SKILL #5: THINKING LIKE A STARTUP

As this paper has demonstrated, the businesses and teams next-generation leaders manage have changed dramatically over the past few decades, requiring new competencies. The fifth major skill that we believe leaders need to possess is "thinking like a startup." As the title indicates, *The Startup Hats*, by serial entrepreneur David Gardner discusses the many roles startup leaders must take on to grow and scale their ideas into viable companies. Among them are acting as an entrepreneur, banker, navigator, and more. The common denominator is that leaders must be extremely flexible, take on new roles or competencies that are required to drive the business, and have an unrelenting focus on growth. "Every leader needs to be thinking about how to reinvent themselves and their businesses on a daily basis," says Kurt Merriweather¹⁶ in the next-generation leader podcast.

HOW TO THINK LIKE A STARTUP FOUNDER

Next-generation leaders can learn from the startup world by flexibly adopting new roles required to deliver growth. In “The Startup Hats,” entrepreneur David Gardner describe roles as hats that include:



ENTREPRENEUR



MARKETER



NEGOTIATOR



NAVIGATOR



SALESPERSON¹⁷



SALES MANAGER



BANKER



RECRUITER



LEADER



CONSTRUCTION



MANAGER

McKinsey research on leadership finds that those executives who focused intensively on growth (like a startup) outperformed their peers in the market. They adopted seven core beliefs and behaviors, including adopting an intensive focus on growth, taking risks, having a bias towards action, fighting for growth with long-term strategies and investments, sharing a growth story rooted in purpose, and delegating control to others. Some 70 percent of leaders who adopted growth-oriented mindsets grew their top-line revenue twice as fast as their peers.

These leaders were also:

- 70 percent more likely to make multiple long-term bets than just a few (in the European Union).
- 70 percent more likely to set aside the budget to fund growth initiatives, teams, and capabilities (in North America).
- 50 percent more likely to build organizations that put customers first (in North America).
- 70 percent more likely to prioritize speed over perfection (in North America).
- 80 percent more likely to communicate growth successes often (in the European Union).
- 70 percent more likely to ensure that every employee understands the growth strategy and what it means for them (in the European Union).
- 40 percent more likely to create explicit incentives to reward risk taking in their teams (in the European Union).

Perhaps the penultimate example of the growth-oriented leader in modern times is Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, who is known for his commitment to making long-term and multi-billion dollar investments in building his company’s business and technology platform, has built the ultimate customer experience in retail with the Prime program, is obsessed with operational excellence, and favors speed in decision making. While Amazon and AWS are models of efficiency, Bezos also makes moon-shot bets on new technology, such as his ongoing investments in Blue Origin, a space company. Amazon’s leadership principles are outlined on the company’s website, providing a north star for all employees to follow.



WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION/PROJECT MANAGEMENT

JLL's workplace transformation process walks a client through a visioning and programming initiative that establishes a holistic approach to a basis of design. The initiative is unique in that it looks at factors that focus on optimal employee work styles, collaboration trends and desired amenities.

The JLL project management team is then able to take the gathered data during the workplace transformation, and drive the process, to translate the basis of design into a space that can be fully utilized by the client. This approach moves beyond the walls and doors and focuses on confirming that the delivered design supports the client's culture and values.



THINK LIKE A START-UP

At JLL, we are accustomed to adopting an entrepreneurial mindset in order to understand the various stages of building a company from the ground up, and how those companies scale during each phase.

For example, in the start-up phase, the top priority for a company of 1-10 employees may be flexibility, as they may work in a shared space or be forced to adopt a partial work-from-home model. Once that company reaches 10-100 employees, it's time for their first office, and their priorities will shift to establishing culture and identity, which we can help companies achieve by optimizing their real estate.

In the next phase of 100-500 employees, it may be time to develop a company headquarters, and attracting and retaining talent will become a key priority. At this point, the real estate focus shifts to finding and customizing a space with the right nearby amenities, transit stops, and wellness perks while building out a office that is comfortable and inviting to the employees spending 40+ hours a week there.

Finally, after a company reaches nearly 500+ employees, a start-up has grown nationally or even internationally and their priority may shift to branding consistency across all their markets.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the future is yet unwritten, organizations know that certain trends—workforce diversity, remote and mobile work, marketplace change, digital transformation, and speed of execution—are here to stay. Organizations are moving faster than ever and placing strategic and often risky bets on unproven business models and technology in real-time. What they need, more than ever, are leaders committed to deep and continual personal and professional growth so they can inspire their teams to do likewise. Those individuals who master the five key skills of next-generational leadership will be well-equipped to drive outsized business results and evolve their organizational and workforce capabilities to meet the demands and opportunities the future brings.

If your organization needs help scaling to create an inclusive culture, develop next-generational leaders, and accelerate innovation, JLL is here to help. With our 5 key pillars - commitment, compassion, client-focus, connectivity, and cast optimism - we can help your company capitalize on the wealth of insight and capabilities your next-generation leaders and employees possess, to drive transformation further and faster than ever before.



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Learn more at [JLL Raleigh-Durham website](#).

ABOUT JLL

JLL (NYSE: JLL) is a leading professional services firm that specializes in real estate and investment management. JLL shapes the future of real estate for a better world by using the most advanced technology to create rewarding opportunities, amazing spaces and sustainable real estate solutions for our clients, our people and our communities. JLL is a Fortune 500 company with annual revenue of \$18.0 billion, operations in over 80 countries and a global workforce of more than 94,000 as of March 31, 2020. JLL is the brand name, and a registered trademark, of Jones Lang LaSalle Incorporated.

For further information, visit jll.com.

ABOUT WALK WEST

Walk West is a full-service digital marketing agency that specializes in strategic communications, web design and development, digital media, video production, professional development, and media placement. It was founded in 2007 and remains driven by its values of collaboration, accountability, curiosity, transparency, adaptability, and care.

Learn more at walkwest.com



DONALD THOMPSON

[CEO](#) | [LINKEDIN](#)

With two decades of experience growing and leading firms, Donald Thompson is a thought leader on goal achievement, influencing company culture and driving exponential growth. Under his leadership, Walk West has been recognized by Inc 5000 as the fastest growing marketing firm in North Carolina in 2018 and 2019. As a Certified Diversity Executive (CDE), he conducts workshops with C-suite executives who are looking to develop, expand or optimize their diversity and inclusion practice. Donald has written for publications including Entrepreneur.com and CNBC.com and has published his own eBooks on decision making and diversity in the workplace.



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With over 20 years of experience, Kurt Merriweather has led product teams and partnerships for global brands like Discovery, AOL and Procter & Gamble. As VP of Strategy and Transformation at Walk West, Kurt is responsible for leading the Insights and Innovation team to develop new business concepts and ventures for the firm including The Diversity Movement. Kurt is a patent holder for a streaming media application and holds a Bachelors of Science degree from The Ohio State University and an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

NOTES

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¹⁷ The Startup Hats uses the term salesman. However, sales person is more inclusive.