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VOICES OF IMPACT

OWNING INCLUSIVITY p9

**SOLO VOICES,
POWERFUL CHORUS p20**



Congratulations

GLENN GOLDSMITH



We proudly honor Glenn Goldsmith
for being recognized as Cablefax's

MENTOR OF THE YEAR.

Glenn's exceptional guidance, support, and
leadership have shaped the growth and success of
countless colleagues across our industry.

Thank you, Glenn, for making a lasting impact.

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ABOVE THE NOISE

The worst kind of managers call a meeting only to hear themselves speak. Or they transform the conference room into an echo chamber of their own voice. And when things inevitably go wrong, they look for someone—or something—else to blame.

The best managers are true leaders who seek out a variety of viewpoints and create a safe space for others to find their voice. It's easier said than done. Change has always been constant—but now, the ground seems to shift beneath us before we can take our next step. In times of uncertainty, the familiar calls softly, urging us to stay small and still.

But rather than retreating, the individuals and companies honored in this magazine saw an invitation to rise—to use their voices boldly in championing cultures and workplaces that recognize and value everyone.

Mentor of the Year Glenn Goldsmith appreciated the opportunity he was given and has looked for ways to pay it forward in his decades at Mediacom. AMC Networks turned to employees to champion and amplify independent creators and inclusive content. Inclusivity Champion Tina Perry expanded OWN's borders to serve its audience beyond entertainment. Charter embraced the belief that education is the key to success, launching a program to help employees pursue new skills.

None of that is technically part of their nine-to-five—but it enriches their professional lives, their communities and the people around them. That's what it means to be a Voice of Impact.

In turbulent times, you may have to strain a bit harder to hear those voices. You may find your own voice a little hoarse. But if you keep listening—and speaking—you'll find the harmony.



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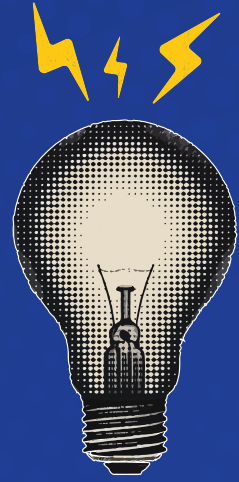


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From Hell Week to Diversity Week to **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WEEK**



By Amy Maclean



For decades, the cable industry has set aside one week a year for knowledge sharing and cultivating future leaders. It's been called by many different names, but it's a mission that continues to live on, even as the industry evolves.

During much of the 1990s, the gathering was often affectionately dubbed "Hell Week" for the sheer number of events crammed into the schedule, anchored by the annual Kaitz dinner—which for 40 years has raised funds to shape cable's future. "The dirty little secret of the cable business may be that despite its disparaging nickname and breakneck pace, the week of the Kaitz dinner is actually much welcomed by industry executives, who see it as having all of the benefits of a trade show, without the obligations," proclaimed a 1997 article in trade publication *Multichannel News*.

It was in September 1997 that the week was rechristened Diversity Week to highlight the industry's dedication to a diverse workforce. That name stuck around until 2025. There was a brief attempt in 2009 to create "Cable Connections Spring Week" and "Cable Connections Fall Week" to cluster industry events, but the effort never really took off. The Diversity Week events left NYC for Denver that year, but it didn't go well. Attendees dropped to 700 from 1,300 the year before and money raised dipped to "more than \$1 million" from \$1.7 million in New York in '08. A snow storm crippling Denver during the week didn't help. The associations successfully lobbied for a return to Diversity Week in the fall in NYC, with the industry obliging in 2010.

This year, the week was renamed Leadership Development Week, a move that followed President Trump's anti-DEI executive order. Organizers say the new moniker is meant to foster greater inclusion across the industry.



Michael Powell with Spencer Kaitz at the 40th Anniversary Kaitz Dinner in 2023. Kaitz founded the Walter Kaitz Foundation in honor of his father.

There were changes taking place even before Trump moved into the White House. Back in 2023, work began to integrate the 40-year-old Walter Kaitz Foundation into the NCTA Education Foundation. Founded in 1983 and named after industry leader Walter Kaitz, the foundation supported initiatives for advancement opportunities for women and multi-ethnic individuals, primarily through fundraising and grants.

"There was the feeling that its purpose and mission was getting long in the tooth. That was in '23, and I'm making note of that date because that was before the world sort of shifted politically, culturally and socially," says NCTA Chief of Staff Nilda Gumbs. After Kaitz merged into the NCTA Education Foundation, Gumbs has served as the organization's head.

Gumbs says the Foundation's new mission didn't really come into full focus until last year's Kaitz dinner, which was themed "Do Good. Be Better. Impact Tomorrow." That became the Foundation's overall quest. Diversity Week's main tenants over the years have been the NAMIC An-

KEY MOMENTS

1979: Women in Cable Telecommunications (WICT) officially launches with a board meeting in NYC.

1980: The Walter Kaitz Foundation is founded as a nonprofit to further diversity initiatives in the cable and media industry. That same year, NAMIC is created as a force behind workforce development in the industry.

1986: NAMIC holds its first conference with NCTA, known then as the Urban Markets Conference.

1996: NAMIC hosts the Urban Markets Conference independently for the first time. The honorary co-chairs were Jeff Bewkes (then CEO of HBO) and Brian Roberts (then President of Comcast).

2001: Urban Markets Conference is renamed Annual NAMIC Conference.

2010: The WICT Leadership Conference launches as the organization's signature leadership development event.

2021: WICT officially changes its name to The WICT Network to be more inclusive of all women in media, entertainment and technology.

2024: The Kaitz Foundation is integrated into NCTA Education Foundation.

1 Networking at the 2024 Kaitz Dinner's Reception

2 WICT CEO Maria Brennan at Leadership Conference

3 Chris Lammers, Dick Green, Alex Kaitz & Spencer Kaitz at 1997 Kaitz Dinner

4 Norman Lear interviewed by Touré at the 2015 NAMIC Conference

5 Mark Kang, Jo Pamphile, then-NAMIC CEO Eglon Simons, former NAMIC CEO Kathy Johnson & Joe Scotti at the 2017 NAMIC conference



The Annual NAMIC Conference made the move to Denver in 2009 for the short-lived Cable Connections Fall week, with snow stranding some attendees.



WICT's 2018 Global Chair Marva Johnson and CEO Maria Brennan take the stage at the Leadership Conference.



Gretchen Carlson keynoted WICT's conference in 2017, a year after she filed a lawsuit against then Fox News CEO Roger Ailes for sexual harassment. The network settled and made a public apology.

nual Conference, The WICT Network Leadership Conference and the Kaitz Dinner. With companies dedicated to continuing the annual gathering, Gumbs talked to industry associations about how the week could best cater to their members' needs.

"We don't need anything that's divisive. We don't need anything that singles out people or makes people afraid, honestly, to ask to attend or be a part of it. Or to silo people or marginalize any one group of our workforce," says Gumbs, who approached the Foundation's board with the new name in March. "Leadership Development Week is really an outgrowth of being sensitive and attuned to what our industry needs, what it can be, and really... as [outgoing NCTA CEO] Michael Powell has said oftentimes—there's no other industry that he's aware of or that I'm aware of that takes a week to celebrate its people."

NAMIC, the National Association for Multi-ethnicity in Communications, was founded in 1980. Its annual conference, now in its 39th year, has always been about "building the talent pipeline that will carry our industry forward," says NAMIC's Chief of Strategy and Programs Anne-Marie Burton.

NAMIC's first large-scale industry event dates back to 1986, when the nonprofit launched the Urban Markets Conference in New York in association with NCTA. That event introduced the first Annual Awards Breakfast, recognizing leaders of color at the NCTA Convention. By 2001, the Urban Markets Conference was renamed the Annual NAMIC Conference, the flagship event for diverse professionals in cable and media.

"Over time, we evolved to reflect industry needs—expanding from a focus on multi-ethnic representation in cable to inclusion and leadership development across the broader media, entertainment and technology ecosystem," says Burton. "This evolution underscores NAMIC's commitment to keeping its pulse on industry trends such as workplace culture, AI's impact, pay equity and elevating every voice."

While The WICT Network often had a presence during the fall week, its Leadership Conference began 15 years ago as the signature leadership

event for the association for women. "What started as a smaller member-focused program has grown into the premier leadership gathering for women in media, entertainment and technology with global reach and thousands of participants over the years," says President and CEO Maria Brennan. "Over time, it became a central anchor within what was then called Diversity Week and helped transform the week into a must-attend industry tradition."

Brennan, who will step down from the organization in April, says she's seen leadership growth become a top priority for companies in her 16+ years leading The WICT Network. "The name has changed, but the purpose is the same: to champion the business imperative of building inclusive high-impact workplaces where every voice is valued and represented," she says. "Leadership Development Week highlights actionable programs—coaching, professional training and future-focused learning."

Of course, the cable industry has a longstanding history of having fun while it's doing business, and that's certainly applied to Diversity Week. There's been a mix of star power and networking on steroids alongside the leadership development opportunities. The 2013 Kaitz Dinner included an unforgettable performance by Jennifer Hudson and an afterparty with Chaka Khan, Chante Moore and Keke Wyatt. Some of the memorable names to grace the NAMIC Annual Conference include the late Norman Lear, Spike Lee, Charlayne Hunter-Gault and María Elena Salinas. The annual WICT Network Leadership Conference has featured Hoda Kotb, Chelsea Clinton, Maria Bartiromo and Katie Couric.

And while the name has changed, the week of industry dialogue and hobnobbing will continue. CFX hears that the week will move from the Marriott Marquis to a new location in NYC next year, with work already underway for the next Leadership Development Week. "Until somebody tells me, no, I am that confident about the event this year and the feeling of togetherness and forward commitment to our industry, despite all of the changes that are happening," Gumbs says. "I am that confident that there will be no reason to not continue our work." ■

Perry Drives Representation and Impact at OWN

By Amy Maclean



Tina Perry, President of OWN, is this year's Inclusivity Champion for her visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to representation. Under her guidance, OWN amplifies Black voices through authentic storytelling and groundbreaking initiatives like the "OWN Your Health" campaign. Beyond her executive role, Perry's advocacy in media, the arts and community health underscores her belief in creating spaces where all voices are valued. "Tina leads with a rare blend of clarity, strategy, empathy and emotional intelligence. For those of us lucky enough to work alongside her, that means every meeting, every pitch, every greenlight and every note session is grounded in the network's mission statement that Tina created and fosters," says Drew Tappon, OWN's Head of Unscripted Development, Programming & Specials. Cablefax spoke with Perry about what drives her inclusive approach.

OWN was obviously built to serve a Black female audience, which is inherently inclusive, but you have broadened that mission. Why?

When Oprah and I thought about the word inclusivity at OWN, one of the first things we talked about was making sure that on screen, we were inclusive of all different types of Black women—from physical skin color, background, socio economic—it was important that all women we were serving in our demographic felt included and reflected. And then an extension of that was about how do we include these women, but also address different parts of their lives.

That's where OWN Your Health and OWN Your Vote came from. How do we remain in service to them as much as we're entertaining them, and talk to this group in a more diverse, inclusive way than other people vying for their time in media and entertainment?

And what are some of your most recent initiatives?

We did an incredible partnership this year with the American Cancer Society. It was called Voices of Black Women, where we were supporting a cancer research project they were doing. The project was to help Black women prioritize their health, but also recruit people to participate in a research study. This year, we also had the privilege of participating in the American Black Film Festival, and we hosted a wonderful panel about the mental health of the creative. We talked about how just because you're creating content, it does not mean that you should not be paying attention to your mental health and taking care of yourself. Every seat was filled, and we had a large number of men in the audience asking questions. I think it spoke a lot about the topic, but also, I realized we were filling a void.

What do you see as the business benefits of fostering inclusivity?

It creates an incredible brand halo for your business. Unscripted or scripted series or movies, there's kind of a ceiling they can hit for brand amplification. But when you have a campaign like this, it just is much louder. I also say that it can frame your brand and also the talent who works with you

differently. Many of the talent that we work with are excited to learn about the campaigns, figure out how they can lead them and be helpful. I know it makes them more excited about working with us.

You're very involved in the arts. How do you see art as giving voice to overlooked communities?

When I think about how I feel about inclusivity and how I lead with it, probably my love of the art was one of the first places I experienced it. The beautiful thing about art is that the person making it is pouring their everything into that piece of work. It's one of the most democratic creative spaces, if you ask me, because it doesn't take a camera or a computer or a stage or acting class to make art. You can make it out of Popsicle sticks. I've encountered people from so many different types of backgrounds—socioeconomically, racially, physical, physicality, disability, sexuality. I think it's one of the most inclusive mediums, but also accessible mediums for people to share their voice and their story.

What advice would you give leaders who want to be stronger champions of inclusivity?

Think about what that word means to you. It's just a very easy thing to do, but you have to start with thinking very broadly about being inclusive. There's no one way to be inclusive, but thinking about it on a regular basis, using it as one of the many filters as you're creating and making, can be healthy. If you do that over time, it'll become a part of your repertoire. ■

Charter Elevates Employees Through Equity

By Noah Ziegler

Charter knows that high-quality service is a key component in maintaining its place as a leading cable operator, but staying at the top requires more than network enhancements and customer-service upgrades. The company's "Investing In You" initiative seeks to bolster its customer service by enhancing the employee experience. With its Employee Stock Purchase Plan (ESPP), Charter takes the "Investing" part to another level—giving its workforce a real stake in ownership as they go about their day-to-day routines.

The ESPP was first unveiled in April. It gave eligible employees the chance to buy Charter stock through payroll deductions, while Charter matches the purchase with a grant of Restricted Stock Units based on the employee's tenure with the company that vest over a three-year period. Employees can contribute up to 15% of each paycheck or a maximum of \$5,000 per year. Approximately 95% of Charter's workforce—including all full-time workers up to the senior manager level—can participate in the ESPP.

It's appropriate that an employee-centric benefit was born from company leadership having conversations with workers. Charter President and CEO Chris Winfrey, as well as EVP of Field Operations Tom Monaghan and several other execs conduct "Market Tours" across its 41-state footprint, during which they include an employee town hall to discuss ways to improve jobs, careers and their well-being. The interactive format allows Charter to get direct feedback from groups that aren't exactly reluctant to speak their minds, according to EVP/Chief HR Officer Paul Marchand. And if they see feedback being taken and implemented, it creates a positive channel of commu-



Charter CEO Chris Winfrey answers questions at a regional employee meeting about the company's Employee Stock Purchase Plan, which gives employees the option to purchase Charter stock and receive matching Restricted Stock Units based on tenure.

nication between some of Charter's frontline workers and leadership.

"What had come up consistently is [Charter employees] would love to figure out a way to be more like owners in the company," Marchand says. "We really wanted to make this about the people that were non-equity participants, and that is a majority of our frontline sales, service, supervisor [and] manager population... the whole point of asking people what you need and then delivering something back, that in itself is a home run. It just means you care and you're listening."

Nearly 70% of Charter's workforce are frontline employees. Charter, however, doesn't sell its employees on the ESPP since it's made up of personal financial contributions, though it thinks it can ramp up the education and communication surrounding the program.

Beyond the potential financial benefits of workers having a piece of Charter's pie, Marchand admits there's an underlying impact to having "Part Owner" along with a title. "When you think and act like an owner, even though you're an hourly employee who's going into a customer's home and doing seven installs

or trouble calls in a day, in the back of your mind... that ownership thing is going to start to come toward the front part of your lobe. I'm not a scientist, but you're going to think about that more regularly," he says.

Certain intricacies, like using a customer's name often in a conversation or leaving correct contact information, become more of a priority when folks have an ownership stake at hand. Marchand thinks employees will become more engaged and inquisitive about how the company is performing—from a team level, to a unit and the company as a whole.

The industry has struggled with frontline workforce turnover, and ESPP is one of the employee-focused ways Charter is hoping to combat that churn rate. Combined with other initiatives targeting other areas of employees' lives, Charter thinks its concoction of benefits works together like gears in a machine.

"This is just one puzzle piece in the whole thing," Marchand says. "This ESPP is out of the gates very strong. We firmly believe that the trial period is behind us, and that this is a sustainable program, and it will cumulatively make a difference." ■

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE:

Dina Anchelowitz at the Heart of AMC Networks

By E.B. Moss



Media often measures success by impressions and reach—think buzzy titles like “Love After Lockup” and “Mama June.” But AMC Networks’ Dina Anchelowitz shows how reach can mean something deeper. As a Production Director, she drives campaigns for brands like ALLBLK and We TV, while also creating lasting impressions on colleagues and extending her reach into the community.

Anchelowitz has deep-seated gratitude for the production work itself. “This is a job we get to do,” she says, explaining, “I enjoy production. I love the collaboration. I love the people I work with, and I love the work.” But when not helping drive audience engagement and fuel franchise loyalty, Anchelowitz finds equal joy serving as co-chair of an AMC Business Employee Resource Group (BERG) called PACE, which provides resources, support and advocacy for parents and caregivers across the organization.

“Even though my kids are older, there’s a lot that I could bring into it,” she says, recalling her own challenges balancing career and family. That kind of empathy translates into company-wide mobilization, making PACE a haven for advocacy and action.

“Our PACE BERG would not have started or become as successful as it is without her vision, dedication and leadership,” says Theresa Patiri, SVP of Production Services for We TV & ALLBLK and PACE Executive Sponsor. “She’s created a space that

brings people together and continues to inspire everyone working alongside her each day.”

From Empathy to Action

A poignant example came when a colleague’s child was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Anchelowitz helped PACE transform a small initiative into an annual multi-office walk for pediatric cancer research.

In 2024, more than 160 employees participated across offices from New York to Houston, raising approximately \$10,000 for underfunded pediatric oncology. Even now, with the event in its third year, Anchelowitz wells up speaking of that child, still bravely fighting, and the community that has rallied to fight on his behalf. “I think kindness is one of the greatest gifts we can give each other,” she explains.

That approach helped shape initiatives ranging from company-wide conversations on postpartum awareness to practical resources for working parents. It’s also what earned PACE recognition as Employee Resource Group of the Year by *Cablefax*, and what led AMC Networks to honor Anchelowitz internally with the Maria Catrone Service Award, given to employees who embody resilience, empathy and strength.

Building Bridges—and Business—Through PACE

Anchelowitz’s leadership is also evident in lighter, yet equally meaningful projects. She spearheaded a

holiday cookbook inviting employees to share family recipes and traditions, fostering cultural exchange and strengthening bonds across teams.

She is also proud of an October talk planned in a collaboration between PACE and PLUS (the LGBTQIA BERG) around Coming Out Day. The event to discuss allyship and celebrate inclusive families will feature speakers from the company and talent, with PFLAG moderating. “The support AMC gives to its groups allows employees to bring their whole selves to work,” she says. “We’re all dealing with different things at home and it’s hard to just leave it behind when you get to the office.”

BERGs, she points out, are more than just a place for colleagues to “talk about their feelings,” though she laughs and admits that does happen. However, she points out that “everything we do does impact the business. There’s rationale behind it.” PACE’s initiatives are all designed to foster connection and resilience among employees.

Listening as Leadership

On her style of leadership, Anchelowitz keeps it simple: “Honestly, I think I just listen.” Then together with the group she says, “We make things happen. But it’s listening and hearing where people are coming from” that helps create spaces where colleagues feel seen, heard and supported, especially where their personal and professional lives intersect. ■



AMC Opens Doors & Expands Horizons Via Curation

By John Saavedra

Through the introduction of its 'Future of Film' task force, AMC Networks is dedicated to celebrating and amplifying creatives and authentic and inclusive content that is overlooked and under-resourced.

Spotlighting diverse perspectives and marginalized voices has long been at the center of AMC Networks' programming philosophy. Just look at its original series slate in recent years: "Dark Winds," "The Terror," "Interview with the Vampire," "The Son" and "Fear the Walking Dead," all shows exploring the experiences of groups that previously faced barriers to entry on television. That's not to say that AMC is the only programmer doing the work to bring new perspectives to its storytelling, casts and creative teams, but it's noteworthy how consistent AMC has been in this effort over the years. And now it's bringing this approach to the film festival circuit with its "Future of Film" initiative and "Rising Stars" collections on the AMC+ streaming service.

Consisting of members from across the AMC Networks organization, the "Future of Film" task force is dedicated to championing and amplifying independent creators and inclusive content. Through the initiative, AMC identifies and partners with film festivals around the country that feature work by BIPOC and LGBTQ+

filmmakers as well as other marginalized groups. AMC licenses short films from each of these festivals and showcases them in curated "Rising Stars" collections on AMC+.

Festivals that AMC has partnered with include the Santa Fe International Film Festival, which is dedicated to promoting the development and release of indigenous storytelling; the ReelAbilities Festival, the largest festival dedicated to the stories of people with disabilities; the LGBTQIA+ festival NewFest; and the Athena Film Festival, focusing on the diverse and complex stories of women. And the task force is always looking for opportunities to expand to new festivals, including those suggested by the organization's Business Employee Resource Groups (BERGs).

"Ideas come from our employee resource groups, our film group or members of the task force that are actively looking at new festivals that are doing interesting work in this space," says Courtney Thomasma, EVP, Linear and Streaming Products & Content Strategy. "Our list has grown and I think also our purpose

has grown. We're going to these with a distribution opportunity in mind and talent discovery as well."

The task force's goal is to elevate new talent from these festivals, while also introducing fresh voices to the programmer's audience, whom Thomasma describes as "early adopters" and "content carnivores."

"We're giving our audiences that definitely lean into the discovery process of finding the next new thing a chance to see some of these filmmakers before we think they're going to blow up," Thomasma says. "We featured, I think probably by now, over 30 different filmmakers throughout these collections, and it's provided a pipeline for them to become writers on our original series. So it's been a really great way of letting the work speak for itself, and opening doors for discovery—both for audiences and sometimes for ourselves."

Thomasma reveals that one filmmaker discovered by the task force at the Santa Fe festival went from being spotlighted in a "Rising Stars" collection to being recruited for the

Dark Winds writers room. She calls that success story a “great proof point of how these sorts of experiences can open our eyes to new talent, and just tell interesting stories that we wouldn’t see otherwise.”

On top of “Rising Stars,” AMC+ also releases collections tied to heritage months and cultural experiences, such as Black History Month, Women’s History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month. The “Celebrating Indigenous Stories” collection, which launched last November, spotlights Dark Winds as well as IFC Film’s Emmy-winning doc “Lakota Nation vs. the United States,” among other titles, including “Indigenous Rising Stars” selections. All of these collections, which are refreshed each month, are also curated with input from BERGs. According to Thomasma, this is an approach that dates back to the 2020 launch of AMC+ and the “human-led” curatorial strategy that the company set for the streamer.

“We were working on the first round of collections, which I believe actually was for Black History Month,” Thomasma says. “We decided to partner with VIBE, which is our business employee resource group dedicated to the Black experience, and said, ‘Hey guys, if you had to pick 25 titles, here’s our inventory, what would you want to spotlight? And not only what you would want to spotlight, but what would you want that to say? ... How do you want to position the collection?’ And from that point onward, we basically started building relationships and building a program of connecting our editorial team with employees across the company from every discipline, many of whom probably don’t work in a content strategy domain in their everyday lives, and we found that we learned every time we did this.”

For its Hispanic Heritage Month collection this year, AMC’s Voces BERG came up with a new curation strategy. “We essentially have two different collections,” Thomasma explains. “‘Nuestras Voces’ [‘Our Voices’] features a really wide array of films, TV series, both in Spanish and featuring Hispanic actors. And then [in October], we’re flipping the collection to be ‘Dulce o Truco,’ which is Spanish for ‘trick or treat,’



AMC+ releases collections tied to heritage months and cultural experiences. In November, it debuted the ‘Celebrating Indigenous Stories’ collection.



This compilation of short films from The Santa Fe International Film Festival’s Indigenous Program was curated by actor Gary Farmer (“Reservation Dogs”) and was available Nov. 25 through Dec. 24.

and we’re spotlighting a collection of Spanish horror.” Thomasma says that this is not only a way to take advantage of the library of great Spanish-language horror titles AMC Networks has built across its brands but also to “evolve the collections over the course of a period and make them feel new and relevant to the moment we’re in.”

AMC also follows a curation “best practice” developed through its partnership with BERGs, which recommended that the programmer “find an evergreen way of keeping these collections live throughout the year. So it doesn’t feel like, ‘OK, this is the month we’re spotlighting this, and then come back next year and see more.’ So in addition to the featured curated spotlight collections that will pop up again throughout the year, we’ve also turned those into evergreen collections that are always available on AMC+ to drive deeper engagement for these communities year-round.”



Nikki Love, one of the leaders of AMC Networks’ task force, participating in a conversation at the ReelAbilities Festival.

It all comes back to facilitating discovery, which Thomasma calls “a really critical part of the work, and really what the partnership with the BERGs helps us do so well. Positioning these in ways that sound both culturally relevant, but also that just sound interesting...I think the joys come whenever we are looking at the performance of a collection and see something new pop that otherwise might never have been discovered.”

Most importantly, all of these employee-led initiatives have helped create spaces for every kind of viewer to feel welcome and seen on the platform. “We want this to feel like it is a service that is human-led and human-curated. We want our audiences to feel that and to see themselves in the product, in the service, in the programming,” Thomasma says. “Just making it feel like this is an inclusive platform and inclusive environment for everyone.” ■

Class in Session for Charter's Workforce

By Noah Ziegler

Research and development don't have to happen only in the office or out in the field. Inspiration may come from traditional classroom learning. That's why Charter introduced a free tuition program for all full-time employees in August 2023. As the initiative crosses the two-year milestone, many employees are taking advantage of the option to bolster their personal portfolios—and Charter also reaps the benefits of having a stronger, more knowledgeable workforce.

A common theme Charter leadership heard from its conversations with employees was the rising costs that come with obtaining a college degree. Combine that with the fact that many employees are putting their own kids through school, and the question soon became how Charter could step in and provide relief. It ultimately led to the company working with Guild, a platform that provides employees with educational, credentialed and career-building resources.

At launch, Charter's Education Benefit gave employees tuition-free access to more than 300 online programs and degrees from 30+ universities and online learning providers. The company covered qualified program-related expenses like books, supplies and enrollment fees. All of this is in addition to Charter's existing tuition reimbursement program of \$10,000 per year at the school of the employee's choice.

"It's all about pride. There is a subset of workers who never would have thought about progression, who never would have thought about completion of their high school diploma, of an associate degree [or] of a bachelor's degree," says Paul Marchand, Charter's EVP/Chief HR Officer. "I think people do it for development, for career growth. I think they do it because they know that as a part of their resume,



Daniel Navas, a Senior Account Executive with Spectrum Business, takes advantage of Charter's Education Benefit, which gives employees tuition-free access to online programs and degrees from 30+ universities and online learning providers.

building their portfolio, building their CV is a good thing. It puts them at a competitive advantage versus neutral or disadvantage. But I think underlying some of the reasons for people doing this is just pride in themselves."

In two years, over 13,000 Spectrum employees have participated in or completed a program. That's a rate 8.5 times higher than Spectrum's legacy reimbursement program, and of participants, 68% are frontline employees.

More proof of Charter's Education Benefit being an enhancement for employees' careers can be seen in trends in promotions. Employees enrolled in the program have gotten promotions at a rate 24% higher than non-engaged employees. Additionally, Charter retains participants at a 10% higher rate than non-participants.

"We're seeing a lot of interest in technology-based programs within our curriculum set, leaning in toward software skills, project management

skills, and AI," Marchand says. "If you think of a customer service rep, they know that one day they could be the supervisor, one day they could be the manager, one day they could run the center, but they also are very savvy to know that inherently, underneath a lot of what they're doing and their leaders are doing, and what that service center is offering is technologically enabled solutions. If they can get themselves more familiar, more educated in technology, I think it makes them that much more valuable."

The introduction of educational perks is something Marchand doesn't want to keep within Charter's walls. "I hope other employers are inspired by what they read and want to do this too. I'm willing to work with them and help them get there," he says, a sentiment that speaks to the camaraderie across the cable industry. "We're proud of it, but we also feel like it's part of what we're supposed to go do." ■

Mediacom's Goldsmith Leads With Intention

By Noah Ziegler

From his time as an intern in 1998 to his current title of SVP of Programming, Glenn Goldsmith has spent nearly three decades not only advancing his career at Mediacom, but also elevating those who have accompanied him along the way. His journey, defined by a relentless pursuit of knowledge and helping colleagues fulfill their ambitions, has been matched by an equally unwavering commitment to mentorship.

What began as informal guidance to interns evolved into established support that spans every level of Mediacom's operations. The inspiration was sparked even before Goldsmith became an official Mediacom employee. During his interview, his first meeting with Italia Commisso Weinand—now Mediacom's EVP of Programming and HR—turned into a three-hour conversation.

"She never offered me a job. She never told me about anything like that, and then after three hours, her assistant knocked on the door to say, 'Hey, you've got a meeting.' And [Italia] looked at me and said, 'Can you come back?' And I've been coming back every day since 1998," Goldsmith recounts.

The warm embrace solidified to Goldsmith that Mediacom held a family-like atmosphere, and thus fostered more opportunities for collaboration and development. If leadership were willing to spend three hours with a prospect, Goldsmith felt that trust and guidance should be reciprocated. But for him, it doesn't matter what title or job level an employee holds.

"I like to reach back to people. I like to talk to people, whether you're at the same level as me or below me, male, female—I don't care about race, I don't care about any of those things. I just want to tell a person my story,"

Goldsmith says. "I want to tell them we have a beautiful company here. Hold on, because whatever your dreams are, they could be realized right here."

Goldsmith himself is an example of achieving one's aspirations. With an associate degree to his name, he went back to school and got a degree in accounting from Marist College while still working at Mediacom. It didn't stop there. "I went back to Seton Hall Law School because I needed to know about contracts. I went to get my MBA because I didn't think having a bachelor's degree in accounting was good enough, because I was dealing with different aspects of the organization [such as] operations, HR, engineering," he says. "Plus, I had to show my kids it's not all about words. It's about action."

His commitment to mentorship goes past the Mediacom walls. Goldsmith contributes to industry associations, including NAMIC and CTAM, as well as his college alumni associations. Through those groups, Goldsmith further expands his guidance to students navigating the challenges that come with entering the workforce and taking the leap into the professional ranks.

Within Mediacom, Goldsmith encourages employees to participate in charitable and community initiatives. As if he doesn't have enough schooling, he regularly contributes to the training content found in Mediacom University, where his insights span topics ranging from workplace challenges to emerging opportunities for growth and the resources needed for career advancement.

"Glenn Goldsmith's journey with Mediacom is a true testament to dedication and leadership. He has grown into a visionary leader whose

impact on our programming division is immeasurable. His strategic insight, paired with a deep commitment to mentoring the next generation, has helped shape not only our content but the culture of our team," says Commisso Weinand. "Glenn's story continues to inspire excellence across our company. When our Founder and CEO Rocco Commisso established the Mediacom Pillars of Our Culture, which include conducting yourself ethically and leading by example, he had someone with Glenn's attributes in mind."

Goldsmith's mentorship has created a ripple effect within Mediacom and the cable industry at large. He'll continue to view mentorship as both a responsibility and an opportunity, but he hopes to preserve the lessons of the industry's pioneers while preparing the next generation to lead with skill, integrity and pride.

"Everybody has talent. You just have to bring that out of them," he says. "It has to be intentional investment—just like anything." ■



Blue Stream Fiber's People-First AI Revolution

By John Saavedra

Metis, Blue Stream Fiber's proprietary AI toolset powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT, is now available to all employees. The company began rolling it out in January.

There have been countless headlines over the last few years about how advancements in artificial intelligence will change the workplace, including the myriad opportunities to streamline repetitive, time-consuming, even tedious tasks to make industries more efficient. But the marquis topic of discussion is a much more straightforward concern: will AI replace human workers in the future?

It's a fear Josh Turiano, Blue Stream Fiber's SVP, AI Strategy & Deployment, knew that he would need to address as his team prepared to launch Metis, the company's proprietary AI toolset powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT. Designed to improve frontline support and customer experience as well as streamline operations, Metis is at its core a chatbot that gives employees instant access to the knowledge and insights they need to resolve issues efficiently and accurately. Features include a conversational AI dispatcher, trouble call triage tools, and troubleshooting assistants, all meant to be simple to use and easily accessible.

That may sound like a dream to more tech-savvy team members, but it's easy to see how this could be a little scary for folks unfamiliar with AI tools. It's why Turiano employed a "human



Josh Turiano began working on Metis in 2024 as a centralized knowledge base powered by AI, but expanded the project to include additional features based on feedback from across the organization.

in the loop" strategy throughout the development and rollout, ensuring that Metis wasn't being designed to replace human workers but as a "copilot" to help them do their jobs better. That involved getting feedback from across the organization every step of the way.

"Don't forget, the human element of your business is one of your most important elements, and not everyone sees it that way," Turiano says



Milton Lopera, who heads Customer Experience at Blue Stream Fiber, says Metis has helped improve customer satisfaction, with many customers renewing for five to 10 more years of service.

of the approach. "Sometimes, if you automate that relationship out of your business, your business becomes soulless, right? And just because it's AI doesn't mean there's no change management. You have to involve the teams on where this fits, because resistance will kill even the best solution early on."

Educating employees about the benefits of chatbots and the power of generative AI in the leadup to the launch

of Metis was pivotal to successfully onboarding team members, including those who had never engaged with the tech before. That education began at quarterly town halls and monthly virtual sessions more than six months before Metis' launch in January of this year.

The next phase: getting employees hands-on experience with ChatGPT. "We had an employee from every department join what was essentially a Champions team pilot," explains Turiano, who met weekly with these pilot users to get their feedback and develop use cases for Metis. "Think about what you do in your day to day, and what can this do to help you" was a key question he asked Champions. "Is it writing email? Is it troubleshooting a piece of equipment that you'd have to spend 10 minutes on Google figuring out for a customer?"

The regular feedback not only resulted in leaders who could confidently guide their teams in using AI and answer questions, but it has also helped Blue Stream avoid one of the big mistakes companies make when they introduce AI to the workplace: shoehorning the tech into processes and systems where they don't make sense for the org and/or aren't helpful to the user.

"Not every workflow needs AI, right? That's fine," Turiano says. "Stop doing rip and replace. Don't just come in with no thought whatsoever and just say, 'Hey, we're gonna replace all of customer experience.' You can't."

In fact, Turiano believes AI implementation works best when you're not forcing employees to use it. The key is empowering them to discover the benefits of the tech at their own pace.

"This is your helper. You have a choice. It will make you much more efficient. It will help you all day, every day, with whatever you ask it, but it is optional," Turiano says. "The goal there is to get them comfortable, because this does make them more efficient. It saves them time."

More than six months into Blue Stream Fiber's Metis era, this education is still ongoing, but all employees now have access to the platform, with new hires training with the toolset from day one.

"I can tell you that there's still employees out there right now that are a bit



In the months since Metis launched, troubleshooting accuracy has improved by 30% and the ISP's NPS score is up from 49 to 52. Employees also report saving anywhere from two to 10 hours per week on tasks.

scared to use the tool because it's new to them, but that's all about the leadership team that we have, coaching, developing them," says Milton Lopera, EVP, Customer Experience. "That's why I'm excited about this new hire class. We're training them upfront, so it's going to be a lot easier for them to adopt it going forward. It's fastly becoming the new norm for the employees."

Turiano was working on Metis as early as spring and summer of 2024, playing with an early version of generative features on his computer at home, originally thinking of it as a way to create a centralized, easy to access way to store company resources, such as training and HR materials, vital safety guidelines and information on products and promos.

"My original thought was just having the power of generatively being able to pull this information and have answers at your fingertips [which] really helps your front lines," Turiano recalls. "This started as just a generative thing, but I can create an AI dispatcher to do very simple requests anytime, all the time. There's no wait for a phone call, and you can talk to it. You don't actually have to type it in. So I think that sparked a couple of thoughts with folks, and then we decided to break this down into six distinct things that we wanted the platform to do, so Metis became kind of a back office system that integrates with ChatGPT, and in the enterprise environment. It has access to our SharePoint, all of our information. We created custom GPTs, and we were able to do it in a

very short amount of time."

Metis is automating repetitive tasks so that Blue Stream can continue to scale. It's also helping technicians on the field. Turiano refers to Metis as a technician's "copilot."

"If you can't get a dispatcher, you can turn to this. It'll do everything that a dispatcher would need to do," Turiano says. "Field technicians are using this now before they even get to the job to see what they're walking into, instead of using their old workforce management tools."

The triage tool is also coming in very handy. "Anytime that a work order goes into the system, previously, we would have like seven dispatch agents that would spend probably 50% of their time going into the billing system, then swivel chair into five other systems to check and make sure that it's valid," Turiano says. "Now it happens within like a minute of the truck roll being submitted, and we're triaging roughly 72% of all the work orders and just sending them to the field. And the rest, we're putting in a dashboard, single source, single pane of glass, saying, 'These are the ones that need potential human resolution.' So again, we're keeping that human in the loop."

Empowering employees to embrace AI that is being purposefully tailored to fit their specific needs is delivering results. Response times have decreased since Metis was implemented, while troubleshooting accuracy has increased 30%, leading to higher customer satisfaction and less improper truck rolls. Blue Stream has also increased its NPS score from 49 to 52 since Metis launched. Roughly 70% of employees are also reporting saving two to 10 hours per week on tasks, allowing them to focus on more strategic work, which Blue Stream equates to over \$2 million in productivity gained in a single year.

"Part of our sales pitch is all about service," Lopera says. "At the end of the day, to us, service is our people, our employees. To me, Metis is really enabling our employees to be that much stronger, and making sure that they're not worried about pressing the right button, looking at the right knowledge base. They can speak confidently and personalize that conversation." ■



Shaping Media's Future, One Student at a Time

The 2025 Spring Interactive Case Study Competition featured MBA students from NYU, Pace Lubin School of Business and Drexel University LeBow College of Business. NYU's Broadband Bandits team took home the first-place prize of \$5,000.

By E.B. Moss

Craig Leddy has always been in the business of explaining the media. First as a journalist and analyst, translating complex technologies and market shifts into stories that made sense, writing for leading trade publications and advising companies on strategy. In 2023, he added the title of author to his impressive resume, explaining the challenging launch of streaming in his book "Fast Forward: The Birth of Video Streaming, Media's Wild Child." But perhaps Leddy's greatest informative impact has been on the next generation of media and tech leaders, thanks to creating the "Interactive Case Study Competition," which has been a career launchpad for MBA students and an eye-opener for their mentors.

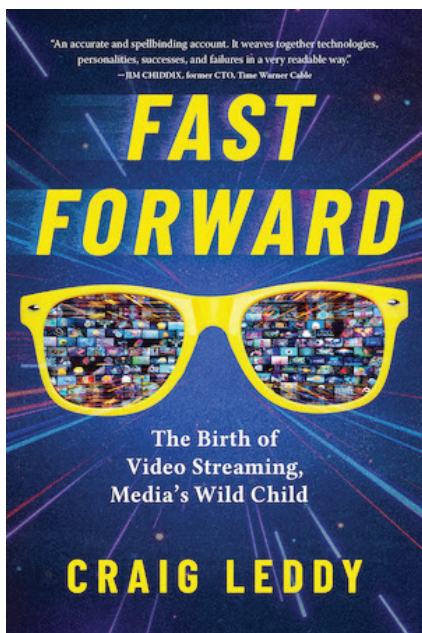
"I've migrated to become an industry educator, primarily focusing on helping people to understand the media and tech space, what the opportunities and challenges are, and how to better advance their own careers," Leddy says. That ethos of instruction and inspiration is why Leddy is being honored with *Cablefax's* Voices of Impact Educator Award, a recognition not of one breakthrough moment, but of the two decades he has spent

bridging the gap between industry veterans and rising talent.

Building a Talent Pipeline

Produced and hosted by Leddy via his Interactive TV Works, Inc. company, the Interactive Case Study Competition tasks MBA students with developing innovative plans around industry issues. The virtual event is held twice a year and has seen more than 500 students go through the program, which often attracts international students eager to understand the U.S. media landscape. "We're very pleased that 60% of our students have been women," Leddy points out, "and we've had over 25 U.S. business schools involved," and mentors comprised of senior executives.

This competition is not just a classroom exercise; it's a months-long immersion in real-world media challenges. It tasks graduate student teams with tackling an industry issue. "They get most of their semester to work on it," Leddy explains, "then they present their plan before a judge's panel of industry leaders, who award the winning team a \$5,000 prize. It's really designed to educate young students about our industry



Leddy's new book examines the ambitious Full Service Network (FSN) project and how it laid the groundwork for today's streaming revolution.

and to provide recruitment opportunities for them.”

Student Innovation and Industry Collaboration

One recent pressing topic students addressed was broadband adoption, prompting them to analyze state-level data, equity initiatives and infrastructure plans—and then address the human element: How do you get people excited about signing up? Their proposals often combined digital strategies with grassroots outreach, embracing community institutions from churches to neighborhood centers.

The results? Sponsors like Spectrum and Mediacom benefit from fresh, actionable insights and access to a well-prepared pool of future talent, while students gain visibility and practical experience that can jumpstart their careers.

“What I love about Craig Leddy’s Interactive Case Study Competition is how it turns our industry’s toughest challenges into opportunities for fresh thinking. The students’ creativity and insight always amaze me, and it’s inspiring to see the future of our industry on display,” says Advance Senior Executive Nomi Bergman, who has served as a judge for several of the case study competitions.

Closing the Education Gap

For Leddy himself, the perspectives students bring are invaluable: “It’s really inspiring, because they come up with these really fresh ideas about our industry. And you just think, ‘Oh, my, we’ve got to hire this person.’”

Clearly, media companies agree about this synergy between student ingenuity and industry need. Leddy is candid about the broader challenge the industry faces. “The industry has an uneven track record as to educating university and graduate students about our industry and putting them on a path for potential recruitment,” he says. The Interactive Case Competition, bolstered by his role as Senior Education Advisor and Lead Instructor for CTAM Advance, where he’s taught more than 7,000 professionals, is his way of closing that gap. He notes with some pride that more than half of the Competition alumni now work in media and tech fields, underscoring its success.

A Career of Context and Clarity

Leddy’s focus on education, analysis and business journalism was a natural background for authoring a book on streaming’s history. *Fast Forward*, which topped the Amazon New Release list in its category, is a chronicle of the largely forgotten Full Service Network (FSN) project in Orlando, which foreshadowed the on-demand video era. “The FSN launch was in December 1994 and the Internet hadn’t really grown—it was still in its infancy,” Leddy explains. “Televisions were in 98% of American homes. Personal computers were only in 15%. So, everybody in the cable, computer and telephone industries were focused on turning the dumb boob tube into an

interactive TV platform.”

The book combines Leddy’s knack for narrative with his educator’s instinct to extract and apply lessons: that ambition, timing and above all convenience are the forces that ultimately drive adoption. And objective information paves the way to future success.

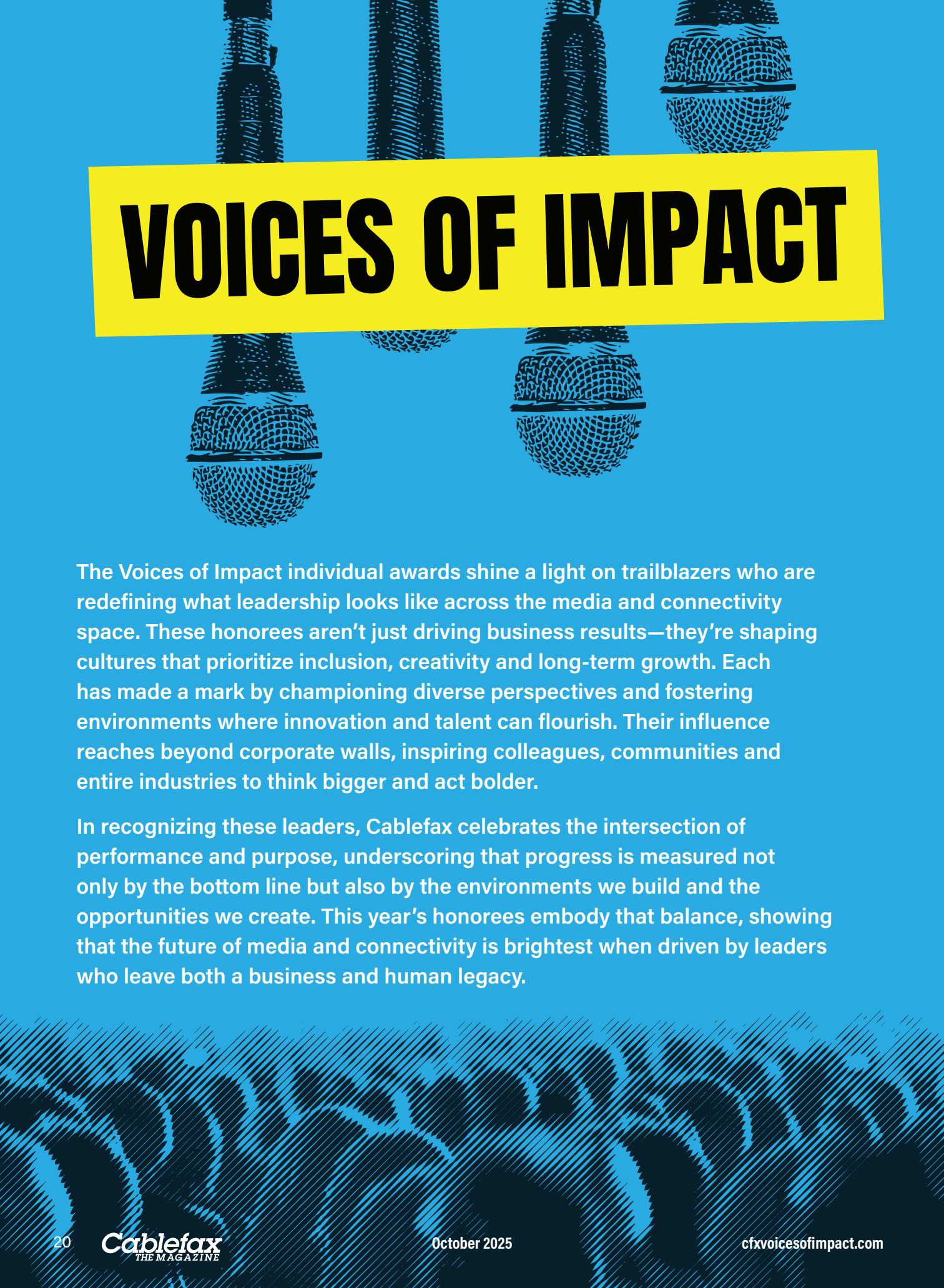
For Craig Leddy, the Educator Award is not a capstone but another milestone in a career dedicated to connecting past, present and future. “We run lean and mean,” he says of his small but mighty team. By educating students, mentoring professionals and chronicling the industry’s history, he has left an imprint that extends far beyond any single competition or course. ■



Leddy has taught more than 7,000 professionals as lead instructor for CTAM Advance.



Leddy has a journalism background, having served as editor of Cablevision magazine.



VOICES OF IMPACT

The Voices of Impact individual awards shine a light on trailblazers who are redefining what leadership looks like across the media and connectivity space. These honorees aren't just driving business results—they're shaping cultures that prioritize inclusion, creativity and long-term growth. Each has made a mark by championing diverse perspectives and fostering environments where innovation and talent can flourish. Their influence reaches beyond corporate walls, inspiring colleagues, communities and entire industries to think bigger and act bolder.

In recognizing these leaders, Cablefax celebrates the intersection of performance and purpose, underscoring that progress is measured not only by the bottom line but also by the environments we build and the opportunities we create. This year's honorees embody that balance, showing that the future of media and connectivity is brightest when driven by leaders who leave both a business and human legacy.



Jessa Cooke

SVP, Educational Programs
The WICT Network

ALMA MATER: University of Pittsburgh

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: To thrive in life, you need three bones: a wishbone, a backbone, and a funny bone. – *Reba McEntire*

Not long after Olivia Trusty joined the FCC as its third commissioner, word came that the regulator would be joining The WICT Network's annual Leadership Conference. That nice get is largely Cooke's doing. She leads the portfolio of learning and development initiatives for the organization for women in media, tech and entertainment. That includes overseeing the annual conference, which has become a perennial must-attend for industry execs. Cooke is a behind-the-scenes strategist, who joined The WICT Network in 2021 after serving as Vice President of Leadership Development and Operations at the International Women's Forum, a global membership organization of senior women executives.

IMPACT FACTOR: With the industry's annual fall gathering rebranding this year to Leadership Development week, Cooke is an L&D mastermind who has worked tirelessly to ensure that The WICT Network is doing its part to advance women in their careers.

How do you amplify the voices of others around you? By listening to colleagues and creating space where ideas are heard and acted upon. For me, it's about fostering a culture where every perspective matters and collaboration drives better outcomes.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? I'd love to curate soundtracks for film and television. The right song can make a story unforgettable. In many ways, it's not so different from my work at The WICT Network, curating programs and experiences that resonate with people and leave a lasting impact.



Lynne Davis

Head of Communications, HGTV
Warner Bros. Discovery

ALMA MATER: Syracuse University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" - *Maya Angelou*

Throughout her illustrious 30+ year career, which includes more than 18 years at HGTV, Davis has championed diversity and inclusivity through her work leading communications and media relations for new and returning series starring BIPOC and LGBTQ+ talent. Her team's efforts have not only generated national press coverage for these programs, but delivered millions of impressions and attracted millions of viewers. Davis also serves on Warner Bros. Discovery's HBCU Event Committee, where she is working with her colleagues to develop a college tour series to educate students on the different careers they can pursue in media and entertainment, and is an active member of The WICT Network, NAMIC, NYWIFT and several other organizations working to mentor and empower communities.

IMPACT FACTOR: Beyond leading campaigns and championing initiatives, Davis is making a difference as a mentor to the next generation of media leaders. She not only mentors other NAMIC members but also makes herself available to junior employees within WBD who seek support and guidance.

How do you amplify the voices of others around you?

It is really about making sure their ideas, contributions and perspectives are heard, valued and given space to grow. In conversations and meetings, I always credit openly by attributing ideas back to the person who shared them. It's also important to celebrate achievements by sharing someone else's successes publicly. And I always strive to be intentional about space and step back when appropriate, so others have the floor.



Marshall Fields

Corporate Facilitator/Executive Coach
Viamedia

ALMA MATER: Spencerian College

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: “We can change the world by changing how we talk to it.”

Fields builds inclusion into systems, not just conversations. At Viamedia, he’s led more than 130 coaching sessions and designed the Management Engagement Training Program, which has since been adopted across 100% of the company’s leadership team. He was a key component in integrating best practices following Viamedia’s acquisition of Local Factor in March. But his devotion to building bridges shows through Positive Communication Habits and Thought Process (PCHATP), an organization he created to work across corporate, community, educational and faith-based settings to usher meaningful conversations and changes where they’re needed most.

IMPACT FACTOR: Fields’ signature initiative, Freedom from Racism Training, is an online course that utilizes emotional intelligence, historical context and situational awareness to combat systemic bias and racism. The now-free program has reached over 6,000 people across the U.S. and has a 4.75-star rating, but Fields wants to impact more. With the Lake Cumberland Diversity Collective and Kentucky Humanities Speaker Bureau, he leads talks on communication, coexistence and cultural competence while supporting youth in rural and underserved communities.

Who or what had the biggest impact on your leadership journey? The biggest impact has come from people who chose to be a resource for me—and from my chance to be a resource for others. It’s the power of choice: advice only matters if we decide to act on it. That realization—that people always have agency—shaped my leadership. Helping others own that power is both a privilege and a responsibility.



Larry Foland

VP, Mid-Tier Operator Relations
CableLabs

ALMA MATER: University of Kansas

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: A couple of my favorites are: “Carpe Diem” and “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” - *Maya Angelou*.

Foland spent more than a decade at OpenVault, and before that made stops at Time Warner Cable and Kansys, a billing and mediation solutions provider that serves telecommunications, utilities and other industries. He took that expertise from operators and vendors before making the move to SCTE’s world, first as a Regional VP, Sales before being promoted to his current title. Now, he’s tasked with managing, maintaining and expanding memberships with mid-sized cable operators across the U.S. Foland’s a constant presence, showing up at a host of industry events—large and small—to wave the CableLabs flag.

IMPACT FACTOR: Foland is often seen in the mix of events as he advocates and advances mid-size operators. Foland has served on the boards of the Mid-America Cable & Telecommunications Association since 2011 as well as the Caribbean Cable & Telecommunications Association since 2016.

How do you amplify the voices of others around you?

“When you’ve reached the top, send the elevator back down for others,” Edith Piaf. I’ve loved this quote ever since I first read it, and it perfectly captures how I think about amplifying others’ voices. It doesn’t always require big gestures—sometimes it’s as simple as recognizing someone’s efforts, offering encouragement, or even saying a genuine “hi” in the hallway. We never truly know what someone may be experiencing, and small acts of acknowledgment can mean everything. Lifting others up and creating space for their voices can take many forms, but the impact can be everlasting.



Vibol Hou

Chief Product & Technology Officer
Paramount Streaming

ALMA MATER: UC San Diego

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Listen. Reflect. Aspire."

Hou not only leads technological innovation and strategy for Paramount Streaming, but has also built a global team of engineers and experts from communities that have previously faced barriers in the workplace. It's a recruitment strategy that has resulted in a team that recognizes the varying needs of Paramount Streaming's diverse consumers and audiences. Hou also employs an ongoing Streaming Tech culture code initiative that encourages team members to regularly share whether leadership is meeting their needs in terms of career development, access to resources and providing room for diverse perspectives to be heard.

IMPACT FACTOR: Hou is not only making a difference at the management and recruitment level but is also championing initiatives that support non-profit orgs and important causes. One key initiative is "Ads for Change," in which Paramount donates portions of valuable ad inventory on the Pluto TV FAST platform. The initiative has supported orgs like Save the Children, World Central Kitchen, the UN Refugee Agency and the International Rescue Committee.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? A doctor. A lawyer. A fighter pilot. These careers all require mastery of knowledge, the ability to see the bigger picture and strong problem-solving skills. I try to lead in a similar way by staying hands on with the details while keeping sight of and evolving the broader vision for my team and organization.



Crystal Kemp

CMO
Conway Corp.

ALMA MATER: Lyon College

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: Encourage, engage and equip others to believe in the possibilities is my personal mission statement.

Kemp has shown fortitude and determination throughout her storied career, which originally began by working for the Forrest City Chamber of Commerce and Conway Chamber of Commerce in Arkansas. It was then she realized her passion for supporting communities and economic growth, and when she joined Conway Corp. in 2000, her enthusiasm only intensified. Kemp has since worked to create pathways for women within her company and in the energy workforce—where women make up 25% of the overall group.

IMPACT FACTOR: Kemp's mentorship and guidance helped her become the first woman president of the Mid-America Cable Telecommunications Association. That's not the only glass ceiling she broke—she's a member of the Conway Kiwanis Club, where she became the chapter's first female president in 2000, the same year Kemp was chosen as Kiwanian of the Year. She was recognized as NCTC's Marketing Executive of the Year in September 2024. Kemp currently sits on the board for United Way of Central Arkansas and MACTA.

Where do you find energy and inspiration outside the office?

Right now, my greatest source of energy and inspiration is leading my Girl Scout troop. I've been a troop leader for 20 years and currently have both Brownie and Junior Girl Scouts. Planning meetings, mentoring young girls and watching them grow in confidence brings me real joy. Even more rewarding is seeing former scouts as adults—hearing how their Girl Scout experiences helped shape who they've become.



Howard Lee

Chief Creative Officer, U.S. Networks
Warner Bros. Discovery

ALMA MATER: New York University's Tisch School of the Arts for Film and Television

Throughout his tenure as CCO, Lee has guided content creation across Warner Bros. Discovery's networks to great success, including at Discovery Channel and TLC, where he also serves as President. Recent big wins include reaching 12.8 million viewers across linear and streaming with this year's Puppy Bowl, while Shark Week continues to lead in key demos on cable. In his roles, Lee also champions content that shines a light on people and communities who may otherwise be overlooked. He's made it his mission to prioritize content that celebrates marginalized individuals and groups.

IMPACT FACTOR: Lee's commitment to telling diverse stories has helped TLC and Discovery Channel stand out as networks that amplify voices and as homes for diversity. He also spearheads TLC's "Give a Little" anti-bullying campaign, which is now in its ninth year of promoting messages of inclusion, acceptance and respect. This year's Puppy Bowl, which partnered with Best Friends Animal Society, also led to all 142 dogs in the game finding homes.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? I've always been drawn to storytelling in all its forms. If I weren't in television, I'd likely be in theater or publishing, something that still allows me to entertain and inspire curiosity. I truly enjoy the unexpected and finding new voices and stories.

Where do you find energy and inspiration outside the office? Running is my reset button. Long runs give me space to clear my head, reflect and reconnect with ideas that get buried in the day-to-day.

ALMA MATER: North Carolina A&T State University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Freedom over survival—build not just to get by, but to create a legacy."

After years on the distribution side at TV One and CLEO TV, Miles made the move this fall to FEVA TV (First Entertainment Voice of Africa). The Canada-based global television network caters to the African, Black and Caribbean audiences, with Miles tasked with scaling U.S. linear and FAST distribution. At TV One and CLEO, Miles fast-tracked FAST deals and scored additional linear carriage for the networks. His list of wins includes getting CLEO in DirecTV's My-Entertainment Bundle as well as scoring carriage deals with Mediacom and Astound Broadband.

IMPACT FACTOR: Miles is bringing networks aimed at Black audiences into more parts of the country, including rural areas. And he's doing it by getting out there and meeting with pay TV and CTV execs one-on-one to extol the value of the programming, establishing himself as a relationship builder versus a behind-the-screen seller.

Who or what had the biggest impact on your leadership journey? Each chapter—BET, TV One, now FEVA—has shaped my leadership, but the most defining influence was Rori Peters, my former boss and mentor. She modeled tenacity and excellence in every space she touched, and she invested in my growth by providing me the opportunity to attend the Cable Executive Management Program at Harvard Business School. That experience sharpened my leadership perspective and equipped me with tools I still use today.



Johnny Miles

SVP, Content Distribution & Partnerships
FEVA TV



Kia Painter

EVP, Chief People Officer
Cox Communications

ALMA MATER: James Madison University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." - Theodore Roosevelt.

It's been 10 years since Painter moved to Atlanta to establish Cox Communication's employee experience, employee engagement and organization design practices, and the company is still reaping the benefits today. Just listen to Charter executives discussing the pending merger with Cox and they'll inevitably point to the strong, customer service-oriented culture the operator has built. Painter is one of the key architects. She helped the Cox team navigate a restructuring at the end of 2024 that saw several long-time execs take buyouts, and she's established herself as a trusted guide as the company maneuvers the Charter transaction.

IMPACT FACTOR: Painter's influence is felt well beyond Cox Communications. She served as industry HR organization C2HR's president in 2024 and is active on the board. She's an at-large director for The WICT Network, a NAMIC Next Generation Leader, an Emma Bowen Foundation board member—and the type of leader who never hesitates to lend a hand.

How do you amplify the voices of others around you? I intentionally use my platforms to share others' contributions or unique experiences. In my workspaces, I actively work to identify and amplify the voices of the "unheard," teammates who may not have the same level of access I have in certain places and I try to bridge that for them.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? I would have been a college professor or a Broadway star.

If your colleagues had to describe you in three words, what would they say? Genuine, thoughtful, grounded.



Andres Palencia

Co-Founder & CEO
LatiNation

ALMA MATER: Cal State Northridge

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Rules are for people who don't know what they're doing."

As the leader of a Latino-owned, bilingual and independently operated network creating English-language content for the Latino and multicultural community, Palencia has worked to grow LatiNation into a national force for culturally fluent programming. The results speak for themselves: LatiNation now reaches 81% of U.S. Hispanic households across 47 linear markets, major FAST/CTV platforms and also has a proprietary app. The network has seen double-digit revenue growth, a 30% increase in original productions and recognition as the #1 Latino digital media ad sales network by Comscore. Inclusivity is at the foundation of that success, both at the center of Palencia's business strategy and the company culture.

IMPACT FACTOR: Lee is building and empowering a multinational, multilingual team that reflects the range of today's Latino audiences, while at the same time bringing together different generations and skill sets.

Who or what had the biggest impact on your leadership journey? Those who have made the biggest impact in my journey had one thing in common. My career milestones are the result of leaders who had an incredible instinct for identifying true potential. Starting with Howard Bolter, who hired me directly out of my internship while in college, to writer Humberto Guida who always advocated for me as a writer and producer and the late Walter F. Ulloa who entrusted me to take the helm at Latino Alternative Television as CEO, to now LatiNation co-founder, COO & President Bruno Ulloa. To their credit, I am not the stand-out success case, but one of many professionals whom they have elevated and helped succeed.



Jo Pamphile

President Emeritus
T. Howard Foundation

ALMA MATER: Columbia University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: I consider myself an Optimistic Realist.

For nearly 20 years, Pamphile has steered the T. Howard Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing opportunities for college students in media, tech and entertainment through its internship placement program. Anyone who has attended the Foundation's annual fundraising dinner has seen her impact—reflected in the dozens of interns in the room, the many alumni now working in the industry and the strong roster of sponsors supporting the cause. Over the summer, Pamphile stepped down and passed the CEO title to Jodi Lopez. But she continues to serve as a valued advisor to the organization.

IMPACT FACTOR: Just do the math. T. Howard is 32 years old, with Pamphile leading it for nearly two decades. That included during the pandemic, where she and her team created a virtual orientation filled with personal touches.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? Likely academia. Looking back, much of my professional journey has been with nonprofits that focus on helping people improve their lives and achieve their goals. That same passion for service and growth could have led me to continue my education, earn a doctorate, and teach—sharing knowledge and inspiring others in a classroom setting.

What had the biggest impact on your leadership journey? A friend introduced me to an instructor at the Fashion Institute of Technology. He was the director of a program that supported those earning their GED while also teaching them textile design and screen printing. The director invited me to work with his students, focusing on building their self-esteem and motivation. That moment marked the beginning of my leadership journey.



Paul Pastor

Co-Founder & Chief Business Officer
Quickplay

ALMA MATER: University of Virginia, UCLA

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Don't worry about failures; worry about the chances you miss when you don't even try." - Jack Canfield

As an openly gay executive for more than two decades, Pastor has championed inclusive leadership at Quickplay, building a company where everyone can thrive as their authentic selves. Beyond fostering a culture of inclusivity at Quickplay, Pastor is also a dedicated advocate for representation across the media and entertainment and tech industries. Pastor led the creation of LGBTQ+ Ally events that serve as vibrant networking hubs at global industry conferences like CES, NAB and IBC and are co-hosted by partners such as Google Cloud. These safe spaces to discuss innovations, trends and business opportunities inspire connection, mentorship and new pathways for underrepresented voices and allies in the industry.

IMPACT FACTOR: Pastor is working to shape an industry where inclusion is second nature and where future generations can lead while being fully who they are. And to underscore mentorship efforts at Quickplay, the company recently welcomed a diverse group of nine interns, all of whom are receiving guidance from Pastor to break into the corporate world.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? The biggest opportunity in the industry is the application of AI tools against nearly every facet of the Media & Entertainment business. It's our responsibility to embrace these changes, drive real value from their application and invest in our teams and people to be prepared for this fundamental shift in the way we work.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? A talent agent.



Eshena D. Roman

VP, Marketing
UP Entertainment

ALMA MATER: Tufts University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "What's meant for me is already mine."

Roman's rapid rise at UP Entertainment—from director to VP in under two years—speaks to the influence she wields. And she takes UP's core mission of "Uplifting Someone" to heart in everything she does—from community events to celebrate the launch of new programming on AspireTV to speaking at various events, including the Black Women Film Network Summit and the National Black MBA Association. She leveraged her partnership with the Black Women's Film Network to create a content series celebrating Black Women's specific impact on film and entertainment, featuring hip-hop and television icon Mona Scott-Young.

IMPACT FACTOR: Roman's willingness to step up has her spreading a message of intention throughout UP and beyond. One example is partnering with Chef G. Garvin through his "G. Garvin Live" event and featuring Black-owned businesses on AspireTV's "City Eats: Atlanta."

How do you amplify the voices of others around you? I embrace opportunities to advocate for my colleagues, especially in rooms they may not have access to. I am a firm believer in giving credit where it's due. Acknowledging how someone contributed doesn't diminish my impact. Rather, it demonstrates my ability to lead and bring out the best in others.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? I would be a performing artist. I used to sing professionally as a backup singer and was also a member of the Grammy-winning Brooklyn Tabernacle choir. I've always sought fulfillment by tapping into creativity, building connections with people, and spreading joy.

ALMA MATER: University College London (UCL)

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."

As a driving force of inclusion, empathy and empowerment at Warner Bros. Discovery, Sadiq is cultivating work environments where people feel seen, heard and valued. Under his guidance, employee resource groups have flourished at the company, inclusion training has transformed from compliance to culture-building and voices across race, gender identity, ability and socioeconomic background have gained meaningful visibility in programming and leadership. Sadiq champions systemic change, embedding inclusion into business strategy, talent development, content creation and supply chains, while ensuring inclusion is measured, resourced and integrated at all levels. He is also a speaker, advisor and advocate across industries, whether its leading global summits or mentoring future leaders.

IMPACT FACTOR: Sadiq launched WBD's first global inclusion learning suite, addressing inclusive leadership, unconscious bias and allyship.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? First, rethinking how we design work for a multigenerational, globally diverse workforce, ensuring inclusion is built into talent pipelines, leadership development and the employee experience. Second, harnessing tech and data to drive accountability; metrics around representation, progression and belonging will be as critical as financial KPIs. Third, moving beyond programs to embedding inclusion into how we make business decisions.



Asif Sadiq

Chief Inclusion Officer
Warner Bros. Discovery



Jason Sarlanis

President, Turner Networks, ID & HLN, Linear and Streaming
Warner Bros. Discovery

ALMA MATER: Boston University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "It's better to attempt to do something great and fail than attempt to do nothing and succeed."

Sarlanis oversees programming development, production, content strategy and operations across TNT, TBS, truTV, ID and HLN, infusing new creative approaches at the networks that include spotlighting overlooked and marginalized communities. Under his leadership, TNT and TBS continue to rank as the top two cable entertainment networks in 2025 in prime, while ID continues to deliver buzzy hits, including its first "docbuster" covering the Sean "Diddy" Combs case, which reached 9.8 million total viewers across linear and streaming.

IMPACT FACTOR: Sarlanis is an outspoken advocate of the LGBTQ+ community and is the founding member of the LA WBD PRIDE chapter as well as a supporter and volunteer at the LA LGBT Center. He is also the driving force behind ID's Domestic Violence Awareness Month campaign, "No Excuse for Abuse," which offers on-air resources, PSAs and tools to ensure viewers are equipped to identify various forms of domestic violence.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? Executives who are willing to go with their gut and make risky choices have a tremendous opportunity right now. At a time when the whole industry is disrupted and many are making fear-based decisions, those who choose to make bold choices can stand out and have a real impact.

If you weren't in this business, what career might you have pursued? I think educators provide such a critical role in our society. Had I not been in entertainment, I would have loved to find a way to help mentor and inspire younger generations.



Janice Silver

VP, Intrapreneurship Academy
Syndeo Institute at the Cable Center

ALMA MATER: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." - Jack Welch

Silver's experience of more than 30 years in marketing, management and training culminates with her work with the Syndeo Institute at the Cable Center. In addition to creating the Intrapreneurship Academy, she previously led marketing efforts and promoted some of her organization's programs, which include the Cable Hall of Fame, Barco Library Collections and Mavericks Lecture Series. She has her hands full with the IA nowadays as she helps rising stars navigate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

IMPACT FACTOR: She launched the Intrapreneurship Academy in 2017, which supplies the rising leaders within the cable industry with resources to develop skills and the ability to encourage innovation and apply it to real-world scenarios within their companies. The IA allows participants to work with an instructor (and each other) to expand opportunities for guidance and collaboration.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? I see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in equipping leaders—especially rising leaders—with the skills, tools, and mindsets they need to thrive in an environment of constant unplanned change. Our industry is navigating unprecedented complexity: new technologies, AI integration, shifting customer expectations, and the mandate to do more with fewer resources. Leaders in middle management are at the center of that challenge.



Jennifer Smardo

SVP, Planning, Design & Construction
Comcast

ALMA MATER: Regis University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: “The key to immortality is first living a life worth remembering.” - Bruce Lee

Smardo has her hands full leading Comcast’s construction and network implementation across its footprint. A 30-year industry veteran, she’s driven priority projects such as the expansion and virtualization of Comcast’s network, deployment of FDX DOCSIS 4.0 and construction of more than 1 million passings in 2024. She’s also led the charge on a cross-company effort to establish a national center of excellence for all construction planning and design activities under the Comcast umbrella. Her efforts throughout her career were spotlighted in 2023, when Smardo was recognized as a Cable TV Pioneer.

IMPACT FACTOR: Smardo’s industry contributions extend beyond the office. She’s held leadership roles with SCTE and served on the association’s board as treasurer, while participating in several leadership initiatives such as The WICT Network’s Betsy Magness Leadership Institute, WICT’s Rising Leaders Program and the Comcast Women’s Executive Leadership Program. Smardo remains a mentor and advocate for inclusivity in what’s a traditionally male-dominated field of work.

Where do you find energy and inspiration outside the office? Outside the office, I find energy and inspiration through volunteering. It’s something I try to do as often as I can, because it connects me with people from all walks of life—each with their own stories, challenges, and perspectives. Giving back is a core value of mine. It grounds me, broadens my view of the world, and feeds my soul in a way few other things can. I’m driven by a deep commitment to making a positive difference—one that reflects both my values and my vision for a better future.



Ravena T. Valentine

EVP, Chief People Officer
A+E Global Media

ALMA MATER: New York Institute of Technology

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: I always cite the great Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel!”

Valentine has a heart for people, shaped by decades of experience—including guiding talent at Citigroup through the 2008 financial crisis. She joined A+E Global Media in 2020, and by 2023 was elevated to lead its “People Team.” In that role, she brings wise counsel to the executive team and fosters community by expanding the company’s Employee Resource Groups. Valentine and her team have built a company with a reputation for valuing its people—earning recognition from Inc. Magazine as one of the best places to work in 2025.

IMPACT FACTOR: In 2025, Valentine stepped into the role of president of C2HR. One of her priorities is to lead conversations with the HR industry group’s members about the artificial intelligence transformation, helping them navigate the technology’s opportunities and challenges.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? Currently in the media industry, it is really hard to see far into the future. We are in such an unpredictable moment in our history. What that does though, is allows us to focus on what we can control. I think helping people, the workforce, with upskilling and retooling to meet the demands of the future, helps everyone with organizational readiness. I think skills like adaptability and curiosity are skills that we need to sharpen in order to win!

If your colleagues had to describe you in three words, what would they say: Smart, Persuasive, Energetic



Adriana Waterston

EVP and Insights & Strategy Lead
Horowitz Research,
a division of M/A/R/C Research

ALMA MATER: Brandeis University

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "This above all: to thine own self be true." - Shakespeare

Horowitz Research has long devoted itself to finding out more about young and multicultural audiences, and Waterston has been firmly part of that charge since joining the firm in 2001. A native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, she oversees multicultural and Latinx research endeavors, in addition to handling project management for select clients. Her focus can be seen through Horowitz's handful of FOCUS reports on specific demographic groups, as well as the State of Media, Entertainment & Tech reports, which cover topics like advertising, social and cultural shifts, viewing behaviors and more.

IMPACT FACTOR: Waterston has moderated hundreds of group discussions, molded online research communities on topics that range from traditional and new media consumption to lifestyles/family dynamics, and conducted in-home ethnographic research. By being fully bilingual, it's helped her further examine Spanish-dominant, bilingual and English-oriented Latinos and their respective media consumption habits.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? It's no secret that in today's socio-political environment DEI initiatives are being abandoned by many corporations. But championing diversity, embracing different cultures, and helping people from disadvantaged communities overcome obstacles to success has been my mission for my entire career and is integral to who I am as a Latina. I will continue to do what I do—developing talent and providing opportunity for qualified people to get ahead in their careers—no matter who they are or where they came from.



Jess Zelaya

SVP, Sales & Marketing
ATX Networks

ALMA MATER: University of Delaware

A QUOTE OR MOTTO YOU LIVE BY: "A rising tide lifts all boats."

In 2023, Zelaya became the first female sales executive at ATX Networks, and in May 2025 was promoted to lead Marketing in addition to Sales. She is the youngest member of the executive leadership team and is also a founding member of the ATX Culture Club, a group that drives innovation, inclusivity, diversity and mentorship at the company. Zelaya is also an active member of WICT Florida, as well as an associate board member of SCTE's South Florida Chapter. Across all of these roles, Zelaya is committed to fostering a culture of equality and creating opportunities for women in the industry.

IMPACT FACTOR: Zelaya has mentored women to find their voices, climb the ranks and develop new skills, reinforcing growth at all levels while opening doors for them. She strongly believes in promoting from within an organization. To that end, Zelaya has implemented daily and weekly reviews to provide the constant feedback necessary for continued growth and development.

How do you amplify the voices of others around you? I make it a priority to listen, create space in conversations for diverse perspectives and advocate for colleagues' ideas when they aren't in the room. I also mentor and sponsor emerging leaders, ensuring they get the visibility and recognition they deserve.

Where do you see the biggest opportunities to make an impact in the next few years? The technology industry has a unique chance to shape a more inclusive future by bridging the digital divide and ensuring access for all. I see opportunities in championing innovation that not only drives business growth but also creates positive social change.



Jess Zelaya

Senior Vice President,
Sales & Marketing

Congratulations, Jess Zelaya!

ATX Networks proudly celebrates Jess and all the 2025 Cablefax Voices of Impact honorees for their powerful voices, bold ideas, and leadership that inspires meaningful action — driving industry progress.

Thank you for leading positive change.



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