



# ADVISORY

Spring 2021



## Working From Anywhere: The Benefits of Remote Work

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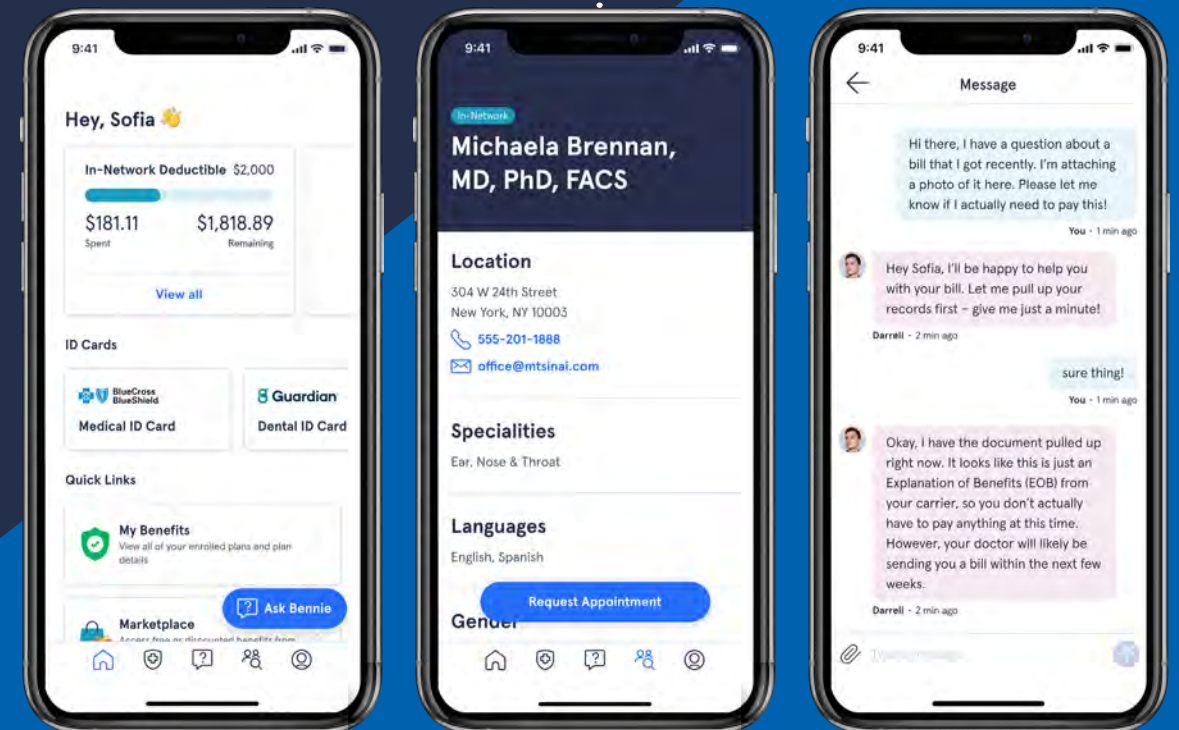
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# Spring 2021

## Table of Contents

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<b>Welcome to HR Advisory Magazine</b> <i>By: Chris Flores, Director of Marketing, Bennie</i>	06
<b>Working from Anywhere: The Benefits of Remote Work</b> <i>By: Susan Ladika</i>	08
<b>Author Spotlight: Mai Ton</b> <i>Q&amp;A with Mai Ton, Author of 'Come into My Office: Stories from an HR Leader in Silicon Valley'</i>	11
<b>Supporting Your People as the Workplace Evolves</b> <i>By: Katie Stricker, Co-Founder &amp; Chief Coaching Officer, Sayge</i>	14
<b>HRA Member Spotlight: 'Loving a Good Mess'</b> <i>Highlighting Tiffany Castagno, CEO &amp; Founder, CEPHR, LLC</i>	20
<b>Bennie Customer Spotlight: Common Thread, 'Cool HR'</b> <i>By: Panagiota Hatzis &amp; Emily Porter, Common Thread</i>	24
<b>Building Employee Financial Resiliency: 7 Steps for Success</b> <i>By: Robert Shaye, CFP®, Founder, Fireside Finances</i>	28
<b>The Office Reimagined</b> <i>By: Joanne Sammer</i>	30





## Welcome to HR Advisory Magazine

Chris Flores  
Director of Marketing, Bennie

**Bennie**

**The week of March 9th, 2020, was one we'll never forget. The novel coronavirus was declared a national emergency and on my way home from the office, I remember reading an overwhelming amount of news articles about COVID-19 with a bag filled with whatever I could grab from my office desk. I had no idea that was the last time I'd be commuting home from our office.**

As a leader at Bennie, I was immediately concerned about all of our team members. We had a young, fast-growing team with people who had never worked remotely. I kept asking myself, how are they truly feeling? Are they safe? Do we have the right resources in place for their behavioral wellness? And of course, how will they remain productive?

One of the most powerful resources developed during that time and continues to help hundreds of people managers and myself is HR Advisory. It's a community built for knowledge sharing and tackling relevant and impactful topics. It was amazing to see this group open up discussions around remote work, returning to the office, virtual happy hour ideas, virtual onboarding guides, and so much more. During the peak times of COVID-19, HR Advisory grew from 75 HR leaders to nearly one thousand members today. This fast-growing community of HR professionals and emerging thought leaders are now connected to help solve real-world problems, anytime and anywhere!

In this first issue of HR Advisory Magazine, we delve into a number of topics that became top of mind during the pandemic. Over the past year, remote work became a major theme, and Working from Anywhere: The Benefits of Remote Work writer Susan Ladika shares insights from this new world of work. Likewise, as we return to work, Joanne Sammer provides fresh ideas in The Office Reimagined. We also have great conversations with HR Advisory members Mai Ton, Tiffany Castagno, Panagiota Hatzis, and Emily Porter in this issue.

A special thank you to our sponsors, Bennie employees, Bennie customers, and this HR Advisory community for your ongoing support. And to all our readers, we hope you enjoy our very first publication of HR Advisory Magazine!

**Sincerely,  
Chris**

# Working From Anywhere

By: Susan Ladika

## The Benefits of Remote Work

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic began, forcing countless organizations to abruptly switch to remote work, Auth0 was founded by executives on two continents, with a majority of its employees working remotely. A focus on remote work allows the identity authentication company to “hire the best people where you can find them,” says Carolyn Moore, senior vice president of people. “It really helps from a diversity standpoint.” With an emphasis on productivity and results, rather than how many hours employees sit in front of their computers, “it takes management and leadership with an ability to be empathetic for this to work well,” Moore says.

About 60 percent of employees were working from home as of October, a survey of nearly 350 North American organizations by the global advisory company [Willis Towers Watson found](#). While keeping employees safe during the pandemic was the primary driver for shifting to alternative working arrangements, employee retention, engagement and productivity were cited as key reasons for continuing to allow employees to work from home, the survey found. Auth0, based in Bellevue, Wash., was launched in 2013 by co-founders in the United States and Argentina, Moore says.

With more than 700 employees in 37 countries, 60 percent of employees already were working remotely. With the pandemic, the company switched to 100 percent remote work, and Moore expects the majority of employees will continue to work remotely once the pandemic winds down. With remote work, employees have the flexibility to deal with both work and non-work issues that crop up during the day. “It’s a bit easier to have a better quality of life and work when you work from home,” Moore says.

At Interactions, which provides virtual assistants powered

by artificial intelligence, “we found that remote work offers employees better work-life balance, it eliminates commutes, and gives people the ability to live in a location that best suits their families’ needs,” says Chief People Officer Mary Clermont. The company, based in Franklin, Mass., employs about 450 people and switched to remote work with the pandemic. In June it decided it would permanently be a company that primarily operated virtually, Clermont says.

### “If companies backtrack from workplace flexibility it “creates a competitive disadvantage for an employer.”

The digital management company 1E is taking a similar path, says Nick Bartlett, chief people officer at the London-based company. The company’s 265 employees in the United States, United Kingdom and India, began working remotely with the start of the pandemic, and the vast majority want to remain that way. The change has allowed employees to spend more time with their family and friends, or take up new hobbies. Even Bartlett has gained 3 ½ more hours each day as he no longer commutes to the company’s headquarters. By swiftly equipping employees for remote work and adjusting processes and systems, “we quickly learned how to be the best we could be remotely,” Bartlett says. Because there are no physical boundaries that result from people working in offices, Auth0 has found, “flexibility really does improve innovation,” Moore says, and employees are encouraged to talk to anyone in the company at any time.

### Effective Management

Successful remote work starts at the management level. Leaders need to “demonstrate empathy and concern for employee well-being,” says Casey Hauch, strategic sales and marketing leader at Willis Towers Watson. “Organizations are really showing up for their people.” “Clear channels of communication are key,” Clermont says, and Interactions’ Chief Executive Officer Mike Iacobucci virtually provides employees with company updates every two weeks. Managers also check in with employees every two weeks to see what issues they are concerned about, and what the company can be doing better, she says. With a remote workforce “the playing field is leveled,” Clermont says. Several employees have told her “they now feel uniquely supported by their teammates and managers because information flows uniformly when everyone is together in one Zoom room.” It’s also important to maintain corporate culture when employees are working remotely. “I think it’s all about creating space for relationships to thrive,” Bartlett says. Managers from 1E spend more time engaging with

### “I think it’s all about creating space for relationships to thrive,” Bartlett says.

their team members, and have often had more meaningful conversations as a result, he says. And managers are encouraged to pay attention to team members who are quiet, Bartlett says. “It could be they are struggling with the lockdown or they’re not engaged.” To encourage interaction between employees, many organizations are holding remote work or social events. At Auth0, the company uses Slack channels to organize book groups, a dog lovers club and a cooking club, Moore says. It also has had a talk by a sleep expert and entertainment by a magician. And to create separation between home and work, Auth0 has created a

meeting-free Friday, Moore says.

### The Future

The move to remote work is widening the talent pool for many organizations. At 1E, for example, the company no longer needs to look solely for potential employees who live near its hubs in New York City, London and Delhi. “You can go as far and wide as your legal process allow you to go,” Bartlett says. For 1E, that means looking across all 50 states, and the whole of the United Kingdom and India, he says. The Willis Towers Watson survey found about half of employers are considering employees differently, based on where they are based. In the United States, “the war for talent is amplified every year,” says Mary Tinebra, North American HR and digital transformation leader at the consultancy Mercer. Remote work and flexibility allow employers to consider hiring those who are want to work outside the usual 9-to-5 constraints, she says. And if flexibility is not allowed, organizations run the risk of losing the talent they have, Tinebra says. And having a

### “If flexibility is not allowed, organizations run the risk of losing the talent they have.”

remote workforce doesn’t necessarily mean eliminating offices entirely. At Interactions and 1E, the companies will continue to have collaboration hubs. “There’s a percentage of the population who just don’t want to be remote. That’s OK, too,” Bartlett says. That means employers should ask employees what they want going forward. “Don’t force them into a role that’s not right for them,” he says. But a primarily remote workforce allows companies the opportunity to downsize their office space and to create environments designed to foster collaboration, Tinebra says.

A recent survey by PriceWaterhouseCoopers found 55 percent of employees would prefer to work remotely at least three days a week. If companies backtrack from workplace flexibility it “creates a competitive disadvantage for an employer,” Tinebra says. With the desire for remote or hybrid working arrangements, “the purpose of the workplace has really changed,” Hauch says. It will become a place where employees go to “collaborate and innovate on certain things. It’s not an everyday going to the workplace kind of thing,” Hauch says. ■

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### AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

## Mai Ton

Author of 'Come into My Office: Stories from an HR Leader in Silicon Valley'

*Q&A with Mai Ton; Hosted by Ina Elcott, Bennie*

Throughout her 20 year career, Mai Ton has found herself working in diverse industries from finance to legal to accounting to technology. After being offered the opportunity to build an internal team from scratch and after being forced to wear the many hats it takes to build a company from the ground up, Mai fell into the world of Human Resources.

*"That's what HR people do nowadays. They handle everything from employee engagement to office design to architecting the future of work. They wear many hats and must be strategic and tactical in the same moment."*

As Mai began her career in the startup world, she quickly learned what it took to start a business because she had to wear so many hats. After two opportunities in the startup world, Mai ventured into the legal and consulting world where she discovered the importance of investing one's time and energy into the people of the company.

**"There's no playbook, and no template. You just go out, you do what you think will produce the best results"**

She leveraged her experience at a law firm, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, and technology startups, to focus on professional etiquette and relationship building skills. This became the first set of tools in her own toolbox. Over a fifteen year period, Mai joined five startups and had a fast jolt to the executive teams along the way.



*"I thrive in building. I'm a builder. I love going in and figuring out what to do with all the employees, how to scale the infrastructure, understand what tools we need, and in the end, how we are going to engage and retain employees."*

Mai gets to use her creativity in a professional manner, especially when it comes to thinking and brainstorming different ways of running people programs. This creativity is what pulled Mai to the tech industry: The ability to create people programs that didn't previously exist.

*"There's no playbook, and no template. You just go out, you do what you think will produce the best results. I love the thrill of blank space, and trying to create something that the world hasn't seen yet. I thrive in that motion."*

After many years of high effort work, Mai burnt herself out. After taking time off to reset and anchor herself, Mai wanted to focus on being one of the most thoughtful leaders in the HR space. No longer coming to decisions quickly, Mai

Mai Ton, Author of 'Come into My Office: Stories from an HR Leader in Silicon Valley'

realized the importance of acquiring different perspectives when solving a problem. She also realized that staying curious is at the heart of why employees stay devoted to companies.

*"When you feel like you're learning, you feel like you're growing and that's at the heart of why employees stay at companies. It's not because of the 401(k) match, the free food or the great compensation package: It's actually because people are growing and they value that career growth."*

Recently Mai found a company that allowed her creativity to flourish while at work. She started to write about all the crazy stories that happened inside startups where she worked. She started a Google document which became a form of therapy after a hard day's work. As a result, 'Come into My Office: Stories from an HR Leader in Silicon Valley' was born. What first started as a form of therapy and a Google document has now turned into a three-part book soon to be published.

**"It's not all free food and games every day. It is hard work with constant deadlines and lots of moving pieces that make juggling a career in tech one of the most fascinating experiences."**

*"I had such a fortunate career being an HR leader in some great startups. I began writing as a form of therapy. There was so much going on and sometimes it felt so good to bang out words on the keyboard to write a story or chronicle what happened."*

I wanted to demystify the world of tech. There is a common perception that everything in tech is fun, full of games, and easy, but that's not the case. It's utter chaos. When companies have high growth rates, people have to juggle competing priorities and wear multiple hats. These

environments can become tense, and personalities can become intense, which makes these companies hard to navigate.

**"When companies have high growth rates, people have to juggle competing priorities and wear multiple hats. These environments can become tense, and personalities can become intense, which makes these companies hard to navigate."**

*"It's not all free food and games every day. It is hard work with constant deadlines and lots of moving pieces that make juggling a career in tech one of the most fascinating experiences."*



Mai Ton, Author of 'Come into My Office: Stories from an HR Leader in Silicon Valley'

Mai was able to build and grow companies, work side-by-side with CEOs, and be the internal coach to her executive teams. Her career catapulted because of her opportunity to work in the fast-paced, always changing, tech industry.

**"I wanted to balance the book by unveiling the world of tech's bad and good sides. I'm trying to strike a fine balance of "here are some stories of why things happen the way they do and what you might not have heard in the press."**

Five years in the making and thirty-one thousand words later, Mai's vision is coming to life with an April publication date for her book. Mai hopes this book will unveil what really happens behind the scenes in startup land.



Mai is currently the Chief People Officer at Kickstarter. Kickstarter is a crowdfunding platform that exists to bring creative projects to life. Artists, musicians, filmmakers, and many creators have used Kickstarter to turn their creations into reality.

*"If you think about creators and artists in the world, their life's work is to produce something wonderful and original. Most of them live on meager income in order to focus their time and attention on their creative work. Luckily, I work at Kickstarter and I'm encouraged to bring my creative project to life. My creative project happens to be a book. It's been wonderful for me to try to balance my time and have an employer that can give me that independence and freedom to fulfill a dream of mine. The ability for all of us to have a job which pays the bills AND encourages us to pursue our personal dreams is the future of work. Companies who allow employees to pursue their personal and professional passions together in parallel will win."*

**What recommendations or tips do you have for any new writers or those that want to start writing for the first time?**

*"Just start writing. Don't block yourself. Don't put pressure on yourself. Don't gate yourself. The world loves to learn and the world loves to read."* 🗨️

# Supporting Your People as the Workplace Evolves

By: Katie Stricker, Co-Founder & Chief Coaching Officer at Sayge



**In early March 2020, we spoke with our core team about working from home. If we were going to work remotely for more than one month, one person said they'd head to their family home in California. "If you want to go, go now," we said. "There are too many unknowns about travel. You might not be able to get there." Three days later, they were on a flight to California where they stayed for the next year.**

Navigating the unknown has taken on entirely new meaning this past year, and it continues to change. HR Leaders are navigating the unknown, not only for themselves, but their entire employee population. Positioned on the front lines of business, HR Leaders are called on to answer new challenges, like, "How can we foster connection through digitally-enabled collaboration?" and, "How can we support work-at-home parents while they care for their kids?" These same HR teams are also asked to address familiar challenges magnified by COVID-19—things like employee mental health, workplace health and safety, and belonging.

According to McKinsey & Company, these challenges have been further exacerbated for diverse groups. When the World Health Organization issued a global health emergency, although I was impressed by the response of HR Leaders, I was not surprised. As a people-first, tech-enabled coaching platform and a Coach myself, our team at Sayge knows that the most forward-thinking HR Leaders have always been focused on supporting their people, regularly going above and beyond. In response to COVID-19, we applaud HR Leaders for doing more of what they've always done: adapting to support their people in new ways, navigating the unknown, and being flexible as the workplace evolves. Last year, we saw some employees struggle more than ever. We also saw a pattern emerge for nearly everyone: the need for connection and additional support in their growth and development. Fortunately, we continue to witness many dedicated HR Leaders earnestly ask the most pressing question, "How can we better support the needs of our people?"

## **Helping HR Leaders Support & Connect Their People**

When we launched Sayge in 2017, we envisioned a future where teams had consistent, remote access to the best Coaches, enabling a more personalized experience; then

## *Supporting Your People as the Workplace Evolves*

we built our company around that idea. Three years later, when the world quickly shifted to remote work, we were uniquely positioned to continue supporting HR Leaders and their people at a much-needed time. As teams prepare to transition back to the office, stay fully remote, or create a hybrid work model, we believe training and coaching will remain essential in the workplace. In partnership with HR Leaders, Coaches work to understand and meet the distinct needs of individual employees. Right now, that means helping teams feel supported and connected.

## **Supporting Your People as They Transition Back to the Office (Whatever that Looks Like)**

A few weeks ago, a friend called me to say her employer was requiring everyone to return to the office in January 2021. This gave her a heightened sense of anxiety. After

## **Positioned on the front lines of business, HR Leaders are called on to answer new challenges, like, "How can we foster connection through digitally-enabled collaboration?" and, "How can we support work-at-home parents while they care for their kids?"**

a bit more digging and open-ended questions (I can't help myself, I am a coach!), it turned out that returning to the office wasn't necessarily required, but that's how the information was received. We talked through options: Who could she speak with? What was the risk of exposure? What was the underlying fear? And, what did she want to happen? My friend is not alone in these fears. As organizations progress through reopening phases, we're seeing similar concerns arise among the teams we work with: fear of contracting COVID-19 or exposing family members to the virus, emotional stress, and social discomfort or anxiety. Fortunately, training and coaching can help alleviate some of these shared fears and make the back-to-office transition a bit smoother, whatever that may look like. HR Leaders and Coaches can recognize and respond to the disproportionate effects of COVID-19. At Sayge, we always

strive to recognize and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual. As organizations transition back to the office, it will be important for Leaders to recognize that different groups of employees have been affected differently, and disproportionately, by the pandemic. McKinsey & Company reports that "women, LGBTQ+ employees, and people of color are more likely to report acute challenges during the pandemic." Personalized, premium coaching—especially when it's offered at a one-on-one level—is one way to better support your people. Coaches can focus on the distinct needs of each employee, giving employees an opportunity to truly connect, to be seen, and to be heard. HR Leaders and Coaches can help people ease back into the office. Some people at your organization are likely hesitant to return to the office for emotional and social reasons. Personalized coaching and training can help with this transition too. For instance, as Coaches, we are trained to help people uncover



the real source of fear and explore all of their options. In some cases, speaking with a therapist may be beneficial, but oftentimes, coaching is enough. With coaching, people recognize the value of a simple conversation with their manager or HR Lead—by expressing their concerns, they can generate better outcomes. At Sayge, our mission is to enable every individual to realize their potential. As we transition back into the office, we know Coaches and HR Leaders will continue to adapt their offerings to meet the



With the right support, we will connect with each other, tap into our resilience, and continue to answer our most-pressing question, “How can we better support the needs of our people?”

changing needs of the people they support. HR Leaders and Coaches can serve as constants for employees. I recently heard from a Coachee that just knowing they had access to a third party—beyond their family, friends, and boss—was a saving grace during this time. Their Coach provided a space for them to let go of things that were holding them back and truly focus on progress. Given the uncertainty we’re all experiencing, some people are grasping for an opportunity to share and release. As the crisis continues to develop—and our post-COVID-19 landscape continues to take shape—HR Leaders, managers, and Coaches can all serve as much-needed constants for employees.



### Conclusion

The best HR Leaders focus on supporting their people. Whether you provide internal coaching or work with an external coaching platform like Sayge, Coaches can help support your people as they transition back to the office—whatever that looks like for your organization. HR Leaders and Coaches can both recognize and respond to the disproportionate effects of COVID-19, help people ease back into the office, and serve as a much-needed constant.

On March 1, 2021, our team member who spent the last year in California safely landed back in New York City. I’m also happy to say that while we were separated across time zones, our core team worked together as seamlessly as possible this past year. And our global coaching community—a community that has always been remote-first—has thrived with Sayge during this time, but also within their own organizations as they’ve seen leaders respond to the increased need to truly support and connect their people.

Although there are still a lot of unknowns ahead for us all, with the right support, we will connect with each other, tap into our resilience, and continue to answer our most-pressing question, “How can we better support the needs of our people?”



To learn more about Sayge & their coaching offerings, visit [hellosayge.com](https://hellosayge.com).

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# Loving a Good Mess

Highlighting Tiffany Castagno, Chief Executive Officer & Founder, CEPHR, LLC

A Wisconsin native through and through, Green Bay Packer fan Tiffany Castagno earned



her Master of Human Resources & Labor Relations at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee shortly after earning her degrees in arts, human resources, communications, adult education and training at Ottawa University. Aside from Tiffany's extensive educational background, she is also a sister, daughter, wife, fur baby mom, social media enthusiast, poetry fan, and night owl by trade.

Her passion for social justice and community drove Tiffany to pursue a career in social work. But when her path did not go as planned, Tiffany found herself enduring a different journey that still fulfilled her desire to help others. *"You have to believe in yourself, there were times where I felt very stuck in my career, very stuck in life, and had to grow as a person and a professional, find mentors and go through all this awkward uncomfortableness. But when you're uncomfortable, that's when we grow."*

Tiffany wasn't getting the support and empathy she needed from HR at the beginning of her career journey, which sparked her interest in the HR industry. She found herself starting her career in Human Resources and never looked back. *"I've always had this nagging feeling that I want to help serve more people. So, when I see people who are not practicing empathy in the HR space or when they're not moving the needle strategically, it's tough for me to watch. I want HR to have a seat at the table."*



Thirteen years later, Tiffany has worked in all different industries leading HR departments and has now found herself taking on her next challenge—Solopreneurship. Her success throughout her HR career came from her love of good root cause, or "a good mess" as Tiffany would put it. If something was not jiving for Tiffany, she was determined to find the cause and amid the coronavirus pandemic, CEPHR, LLC was born, a Human Resources Consulting firm founded on the values of integrity, trust, empathy, and active listening.

*"I'm very passionate about making sure that the HR community continues to advance, that we're seen as transformational versus transactional. And so for me, it's putting people first because people are the hub of an organization, it's integrity, its trust."*

Aside from her collaborative partners, referral network, and business tribe, Tiffany is a team of one. She is the CEO and founder, the administrative assistant, the bookkeeper, and

*Loving a Good Mess, Tiffany Castagno, CEO & Founder, CEPHR, LLC.*

the list goes on. *"Time blocking is my friend. Anchoring solid SMART goals is key. Project planning is something I do a lot of. I try to bring in an agile concept and methodology to my business as well which is something you don't always see with HR."*

CEPHR pairs people and strategy through thoughtful, meaningful connections to help you avoid costly turnover, increase retention, build and foster an engaged team, consistently assessing your needs, and seeking feedback along the way. What's important to its stakeholders is important to us. Each client is unique and each creative approach and plan is tailored to the client's needs. This process is known as Tiffany's co-creation process. *"Co-creation is where we talk about where a client is now and how we can work towards getting unstuck, how we scale their business, how we build infrastructure, enhance current structures and really help them build a strong employer, brand and culture. And that's the magic for me. That's the part that I love because I get to watch them grow and flourish as an organization."*

## We asked Tiffany, how was that transition from working for someone and then now becoming your own boss?

*"It was rewarding in the sense that all the things I felt were either missing, or there was a gap, or where I wasn't elevated or celebrated, I was now in control of. I get to provide light and joy in the middle of a pandemic. I do miss working with a team, but I get my fill of that now. I get to connect with so many people all over the world. Having limitless opportunities and potential at your feet to just create and listen to the market and see what people want and building that, is indescribable."*

## Tips for new entrepreneurs?

*"I will give these three that really have been a focal point for me. 1. Give yourself grace. You don't always have to do*

*everything. The world wasn't built in a day, and so just be very kind to yourself. The highs can be high and the lows can be low in entrepreneurship. 2. Build a business tribe. Have a collective of people around you who support you fiercely, who want to see you win and where there's reciprocity because unfortunately that doesn't always happen. 3. The third thing, done not perfect. A great friend of mine gave me this advice because sometimes you want everything to be so perfect for your client or prospect that you can spend way too much time in the weeds, especially as a solopreneur, versus getting something that you're satisfied with that will meet their needs. That's great. But there can always be a better version. We should always strive to be better versions of ourselves. It's not perfect. Done not perfect, one of the greatest gifts that you can give yourself as an entrepreneur."*



## What were the hardships of starting your own business amidst a pandemic?

*"I honestly anticipated that it would be hard. I thought, this is the wrong time, is this capitalizing on people's potential loss? And it's actually been the opposite. As I sat for two to three months not working, I thought, well, what do I want to be doing next? I'm very deeply embedded into my community and my social media community in terms of LinkedIn. So, I just kept hearing recurring themes of the struggles that people were having and the mental health challenges that are out there for people. I didn't have a plan and none of us saw this coming and some people didn't have a business continuity plan or a strategic plan and it's been a blessing because I've been able to help these people."*

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BENNIE CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

# Cool HR: An Interview with Common Thread

By: Panagiota Hatzis & Emily Porter, Common Thread; Hosted By: Ina Elcott, Bennie

## COMMON THREAD

**Panagiota Hatzis, Partner & Vice President, Differentiation  
Emily Porter, Director of People + Talent**

From an outsider's perspective, Common Thread Collective is an agency of entrepreneurs that know what it's like to run an e-commerce business. They've experienced the late-night calls and negotiations you may also be experiencing first-hand. Based on the mission statement to help entrepreneurs achieve their dreams, the team will work endlessly to ground your dreams and turn them into strategies and specific growth goals. From a client perspective, that means you will have someone by your side to figure out what your financial dream might be. CTC is a workplace to discover your dreams and find meaning. We sat down with Panagiota Hatzis, Partner & Vice President of Differentiation, and Emily Porter, Director of People + Talent to learn more about what it's like to run what they call "cool HR".

**Panagiota:** When it came time to start thinking about college, Panagiota realized she was interested in psychology. Being a first-generation Greek American and exposed to the workplace at such an early age, Hatzis knew work would

be a huge part of her life. *"All I knew was you're going to spend a lot of your life at work and if I can help make that better for people, I wanted to do that, and I love psychology. Why do people do what they do? Industrial-Organizational psychology is just that. It answers the question: why do people hate coming to work and how do you make it better, or why do people love coming to work, and how do you capitalize on that?"* - Panagiota

**Emily:** Emily also grew up in the workforce helping out at her dad's office at an early age. Early in life, Porter loved to help people. She wanted to make a positive impact and give back to people in whatever way or capacity she could. She found herself attending a with a great speech therapy program with the hopes of working with hard-of-hearing children. *"When it comes to the HR people space, there are people who knew this is what they wanted to do, and they followed that trajectory. I feel along my career HR chose me. My experience is a mix of different roles and industries, each building upon the other, and when you put it all together it makes sense. Because at the heart of it is people and the desire of making their life at work better."* After graduating,

### Cool HR: An Interview with Common Thread

Porter found herself helping others in a different capacity, managing teams of forty-plus people having to do a lot of the HR elements we see in the industry today. *"I realized this is really what I want to be able to do. Where can you have the most impact on the organization and to help people, the good, the bad, and the indifferent? How can we best celebrate them, help them through difficult times, challenge them to grow, and essentially partner to navigate through all of that?"* - Emily

**"When I came to CTC, I brought a line item that is now on our profit and loss statement called Surprise and Delight. And it is all about, what are we doing to actually surprise and delight our people? How do you bring more meaning to what they're doing? How do you make them feel seen and known? That doesn't mean that you have to buy them a Tiffany's necklace, but maybe it is buying them a coffee or you overheard that they have a new mantra for the year and you buy a symbol of that for them. It's an intentional approach to making people feel seen and known. It's building that relational equity so that when the time comes for those difficult conversations, defenses are lower because they're like, "oh, you've seen me before, you're for me, you're with me."**  
- Panagiota Hatzis

**Panagiota:** When someone says they work in HR, let's be honest, most people have the same negative reaction. HR notoriously has a bad reputation within the business world. *"But ultimately, when you view it through the lens of, how do you continue to partner with your people? How do you make them the best versions of themselves? We are the department that hands out raises; it's not finance. We give out the promotions, right? We set up all of your benefits and so when you continue to highlight that and allow for people*

*to live into their meaning and provide that platform, HR can be a wonderful thing."* - Panagiota

When you function from taking care of the internal customer or your staff, that fundamentally differentiates certain HR departments from other agencies. Both Hatzis and Porter's stories, although as different as they are, share the same common thread, if you will, around customer service-centric work and the importance of humanizing the HR experience. *"Your employee is the biggest asset you have in a company, not the computer depreciating over time on a balance sheet. It is your employees. And how are you caring for them? How are you seeing and hearing them and valuing them, showing them you appreciate them? Allowing people to step into being their truest authentic selves, where they feel physically and psychologically safe, is so key and so critical. You end up getting something not only where your employees are thriving, but also from a company's perspective, you're able to hit the bottom line results needed to continue to grow your business."*

### So, what is "Cool HR"?

At the center of Common Thread Co.'s company lays their five values:

#### 1. Clear is Kind

Based on Brené Brown's clear is kind, unclear is unkind, clear is kind means rejecting assumptions, seeking understanding, and then offering direct feedback. Expectations aren't the enemy; they are the standard for success.

#### 2. Plant New Flags

For Common Thread Co. this means looking within and asking yourself "what are you doing to stretch yourself?" Plant New Flags means approaching life with an unstoppable growth mindset, never allowing achievements to plateau. Set goals that grow bolder each day. Stop hesitating and fail forward.

#### 3. Embrace I.D.E.A.

I.D.E.A. is an acronym for inclusivity, diversity, equity and access. Within Common Thread, embrace I.D.E.A. means

Cool HR: An Interview with Common Thread

being an equitable workplace that honors the validity of all voices – across race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability. A safe space to bring your whole self. CTC is actively living into this value through this article outlining their 5 commitments to an equitable future.

**4. Respect the Rest**

What are you going to do as an individual to allow yourself to detach from your work. Common Thread Co. offers a very generous PTO policy, but you have to plan to use it. Respect the Rest means planning ahead and giving yourself the chance to live from a place of balance. Work isn't meant to get in the way of life. It's meant to be part of your life, so what are you going to do as an individual to ensure you are planning ahead to get your work covered and managed by your peers?

**5. Start Palms Down**

What can you do altruistically? Start Palms Down means leading with compassion and service – giving without expecting to receive. Make consistency a superpower. Go above and beyond in delivery. It's not just stating your values, but living by them. It's growing and staying consistent and true to those values. *"Everyone takes responsibility for the culture of our values and mission, not just the partners, not just the executive team... And it's something that has continued to be stressed and flexed. Everything that we do goes right back to our values."* - Emily

**How does CTC stay true to these values?**

"As we're growing, it's not always what's easiest, it's what's right and we've got to stay true to our values. It's something I've seen modeled day in and day out just in my tenure here, going all the way back to my interview. Something that makes me so proud to work at CTC is it's not just something written on the wall or a box to check off. This is a true embodiment that everybody at CTC puts into action." Each workweek is bookended with gratitude. Mondays, the team starts by going around and stating one thing that they're grateful for. Then to end the week, team members go around and give out commendations based on the five core values. *"So, when we say that we live our*

*values, we make sure they're not just things that are written somewhere. We live by them week by week."* - Panagiota

**How did CTC continue to grow remotely, amidst the pandemic?**

It all comes down to intentionality. Common Thread Co. was able to hire fifty-three employees in the last year and ninety percent of those employees were hired amidst the covid pandemic. Employees now span over nineteen states across the country covering all timezones. The team hopes to reach 160+ employees by the end of the year. *"There is not one thing that we've done to grow and scale as successfully as we have that hasn't been thoroughly thought through. A lot of it has been risky, but rather than focus on "I don't know if this is going to work", it's been more of "we've thought it through, our intentions are good, let's try and see the impact..."* - Panagiota

Internally, employees are allowed to participate in a program called **"Tell Me Your Dreams"**. This benefit offers staff a chance to discover, pursue, and achieve a "future reality you want to create." CTC sponsors the time and fronts the bill for your adventures into TMYD. It's a safe space where employees have the opportunity to look inside themselves and learn who they want to be and how to get there with a mental health guide. It's unique and especially relevant today. *"We empower you to find your dreams and we give you the resources to do it. Tell Me Your Dreams is how we live into our mission statement for our staff. And it's something that we pride ourselves on."* - Panagiota

**At CTC, Panagiota and Emily do what they can to bring meaning to what people are doing day in and day out because at the end of the day if you find meaning to who you are at work, it's going to transcend into every other part of your life. Positive psychology has found statistical evidence that meaning is the singular largest contributor to happiness in life and the Common Thread Collective HR team works hand-in-hand with their employees to find that meaning.** 🗨️

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2. 401k Averages Book Update Includes Fees for Plans with \$100,000 Average Account Balances, PR Newswire, 2018: <https://prn.to/3uU4Kec>.

3. Goodbye 401(k) Transaction Fees, Human Interest, September 2020: <https://humaninterest.com/blog/zero-401k-transaction-fees/>.

4. G2: Human Interest Inc.'s 401(k) administrative services (<https://www.g2.com/products/human-interest>), and Google (<https://hi-info.co/googlereviews>): Human Interest, Inc., as of March 4, 2021.

# Building Employee Financial Resiliency

## 7 Steps for Success

By: Robert Shaye, CFP®, Founder of Fireside Finances

*Disclaimer: The following article is provided for educational purposes only. It is not investment advice or tax advice. Individuals and companies are encouraged to check with their investment advisors and plan fiduciaries for more information.*

While the Covid-19 pandemic taught us many important lessons, one key learning was the need to be financially prepared. We all know that a distracted employee cannot do their best work. As an employer, you may find yourself asking “What can we, as a company, do to build the financial resiliency of our employees?” Presented here are seven actionable steps to help you answer that question:

**1. Let your employees know you care about reducing their financial stress**, improving their financial literacy, and most importantly, follow through with that statement. This messaging could be standalone email or even a simple mention at the next all-hands. Be clear to your employees that you are here to help them navigate financial uncertainty, especially during challenging times such as Covid.

**2. Offer an unbiased education program.** Even small to midsize companies can offer robust financial wellness programs that include workshops, virtual sessions, office hours, and digital resources. When evaluating a financial wellness partner, focus on the provider’s motives. Ask these questions:

- How are they compensated? (Employees will be adverse to salespeople who are using the guise of education to build their client list. Avoid providers who also sell investment



products or investment management.)

- How successful are their programs and what metrics will you track at your company to measure success? Top programs track Net Promoter Score and repeat employee engagement.
- Are the presenters professional educators AND financial professionals? (Be wary of “coaches” who have been through a simple 6-week training program.) Look for credentials such as CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ (CFP®) or Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA), and teaching experience.
- A good place to start is with your 401(k) provider. Many providers offer educational sessions free of charge. (Note: quality can vary greatly between providers and instructors.)
- What topics will be covered? Financial Wellness is more than just 401(k) education; it includes budgeting, student loan / debt management, fund selection, home buying education, and more. Ensure the program you select is comprehensive.

**3. Leverage your employee affinity groups and networks (ERGs, Diversity Clubs, etc.) if your company is large enough to have them.** Using this channel provides a value-add for them and the educational sessions can be tailored to the group’s specific needs. Encourage employees to include their spouses, partners, and family members. Sound financial planning is indeed a family affair! A great way to demonstrate you truly care about your employees is by including their loved ones.

**4. Complete a 401(k) Tune-Up. How is your 401(k) participation?** Does your company offer a competitive

### Building Employee Financial Resiliency: 7 Steps for Success

match and are employees taking full advantage of it? What are folks on Glassdoor & Brightscope saying about your 401(k) plan? Do you offer a Target Date Fund and broad-based index funds with expense ratios less than 0.25%? Do you offer a Roth 401(k) option? Take a moment to assess your other financial benefits as well. Perhaps your commuter benefit isn’t that helpful anymore due to Covid. Can you re-route those funds to provide a more robust health and wellness benefit for your employees?

**5. Looking for an easy, low-cost option?** Perhaps you have a small team and don’t want to stand up a full financial wellness program just yet. Here’s an idea: send/buy each employee a copy of a well-respected personal finance book (my favorites are *The Simple Path to Wealth* by JL Collins and *Playing With Fire* by Scott Rieckens). Show a talk (there’s a YouTube recording of a great fireside chat of JL Collins at Google.) *Playing With Fire* is also a 90-minute documentary which is very entertaining. Show the video(s) and host a virtual discussion. Offer to send lunch or dinner to those who participate or give employees an UberEats / Doordash credit. It’s very likely you already have a few personal finance buffs at your company, leverage them and see if they want to spearhead the event.

**6. Implement a Charitable Benefit.** Despite the financial stressors of Covid-19, most donors plan to maintain or even increase the amount they give to charity. (source: Fidelity Charitable). Encourage your employees to donate to charities of their choosing and make it easy by using platforms such as Benevity and Overflow.co. Benevity is a platform that makes corporate matching easy, while Overflow.co is a platform that makes donating appreciated securities extremely easy. This can be especially helpful for employees at publicly traded companies that compensate with RSU’s and/or employees with ESPP plans.

**7. Take credit for your financial resiliency efforts!** Let current AND prospective employees know about the programs you offer. Brief it up to senior management and highlight the results.

**Robert Shaye, CFP® is the founder of Fireside Finances. His company provides financial wellness programs for companies across the United States. Rob is also a lecturer at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy where he teaches Personal Financial Management. He can be reached at [rob@firesidefinances.com](mailto:rob@firesidefinances.com). Learn more at [firesidefinances.com](https://firesidefinances.com).** ■





# The Office Reimagined

By: Joanne Sammer

Photos within Content Courtesy of Ted Moudis Associates

**When the first Covid-19 lockdown began in March 2020, Jahia Solutions Group closed its Boston office. With no employees using it, there was no compelling reason to keep it open. As the pandemic continued and all of but 5 of the company’s 90 employees working remotely, it also became clear that the company’s offices in Toronto and Paris were going to be too big for the company’s future needs. “We will probably need 60% to 70% of the space we had prior to the pandemic,” eventually including a brand new space in Boston, said Jamie Cerniglia, the company’s head of HR.**

The timing of this new workspace is still up in the air, but a picture of what it will look like and how it will work is becoming clearer. “We will probably bring in old-school cubicles with higher walls, air filtration and making everything as contactless as possible,” said Cerniglia. Above all, the company wants to create a space where employees feel safe and comfortable, while also creating opportunities for collaboration and connection among those employees. “The office is not going away but it is going to change,” she said.

## A Work in Progress

The process of creating this type of post-pandemic office

is very much a work in progress for most employers that could last a year or more. Software firm TechnologyAdvice in Nashville has identified four phases for setting up its post-pandemic work environment. “We are in the early stages of phase one and how quickly we move forward will depend on the state of the world,” said Shayleen Stuto, the company’s vice president of human resources and administration.

The first phase focuses on helping employees decide on a long-term work arrangement—work from home, work in the office or a hybrid of both.



## The Office Reimagined



Phase two will require employees to make their choice. Once the company knows how many employees choose which option, they will be able to design workspace to accommodate both full-time office workers and hybrid workers who will be in the office more sporadically. Given the social distancing requirements that are likely to be in place for some time, the company will not have room for everyone to be in the office on a given day. Therefore, the company plans to implement “hotel desking” where hybrid employees must sign up for workspace in advance of their office days to make sure they have a place to work. This phase is unlikely to start until late summer or fall at the earliest, said Stuto.

Phases three and four are more long-term focused with plans for enhanced remote working and, eventually business travel and in-person meetings when it is safe to do so. For example, the company will be adding requirements for home offices to ensure more structure for those spaces, such as a requirement that they be separated from the main living space and that employees maintain certain core business hours. New hires will also have to come to the office for their first week of training.

## Setting the Right Tone

Creating a safe and comfortable space is the big challenge for employers. They can overcome it by striking a balance between the purpose of the office and how it feels to those working there. Rachel Robinson, studio design principal with Ted Moudis Associates in New York, emphasizes agility

in work spaces so they can support different functions as needed throughout a given day. For example, designated rooms for video conferencing allows greater control over the sight, sound and ambiance of these interactions. In addition, using design elements that bring nature into the office help decrease “stress and anxiety, enhance the mood and creativity, and, most of all, encourage greater productivity in the workplace,” she said. Incorporating elements you might find in a contemporary spa or a home can also “create a welcoming ambiance, ensuring that the transition back to the office is as comfortable and intuitive as possible.”

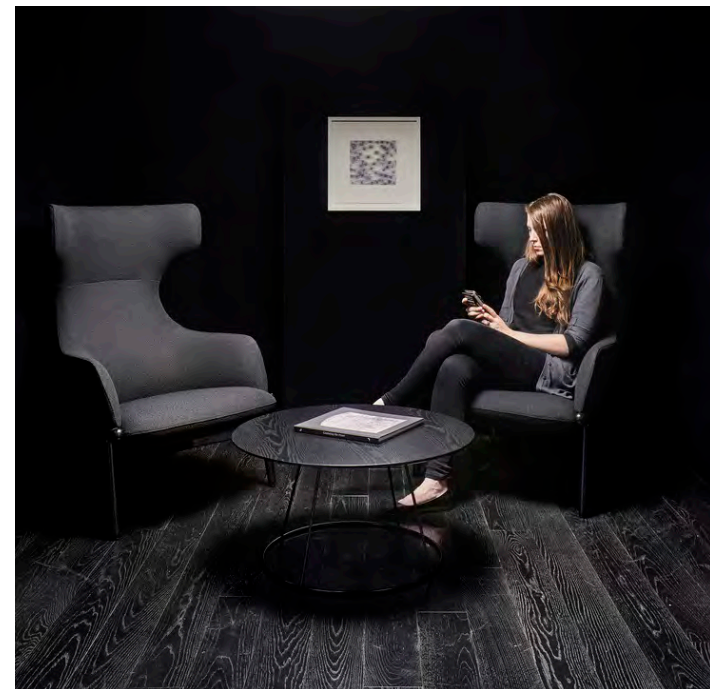
When accounting firm Green Hasson & Janks LLP opened its new headquarters in downtown Los Angeles in November 2020, it did not seek to accommodate all of its 180 employees. Even before the pandemic, the firm had been





## The Office Reimagined

moving to a more remote workforce. “We designed the office for flexibility to create multiple ways to work,” said Tom Barry, managing partner. “The office is now a spot to congregate and use community facilities, not to work from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday.” For this approach to be effective, however, work and the meetings and gatherings supporting that work now have to be more intentional. With access to furnished outdoor roof space, employees have been able to have al fresco gatherings and meals. “It still needs to be programmed so we can maximize opportunities to gather and bond,” he said. “You need the right number and mix of people.”



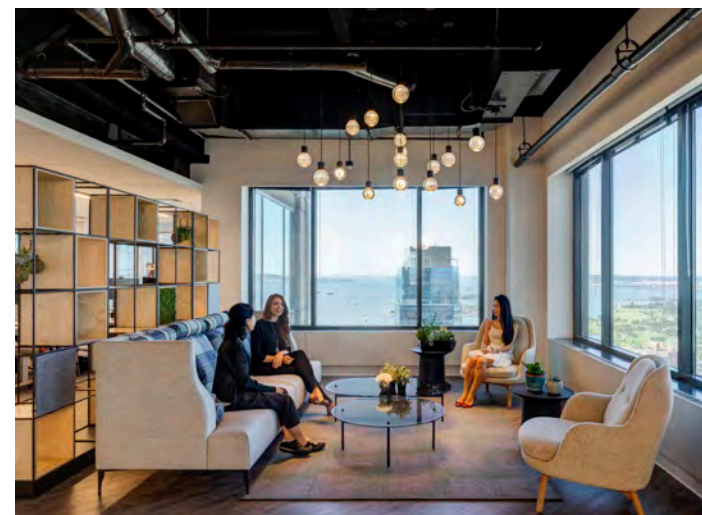
### Manage the Physical Environment

Employers cannot overlook the logistics of post-pandemic work environment if employees are still concerned about contagion. Employers must create office configurations that allow for adequate social distancing, like one-way walkways and limiting capacity in shared spaces like elevators and conference rooms. “A lot of employees have been feeling the social isolation and are anxious to come back to the office and be around others, but they still want to be careful,” said Lupita McLane, Chief People Officer for accounting firm Seiler LLP with four offices in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Whatever physical set up an employer chooses, it is crucial to make sure employees are happy with it. National Business Furniture in Milwaukee laid out its planned changes so that employees could provide immediate feedback on the configurations of each room or area. This can impact something as simple as whether to use plants or tables to separate chairs in the waiting area or where to place cleaning caddies so that they are a readily accessible reminder to sanitize surfaces after use. The company is also developing checklists and other reminders to keep spaces clean. “This is an ever-evolving process,” said Desiree Carpenter, HR Generalist.

### Focus on What Matters

Of course, the relationships people build in these spaces will be the most important element of the post-pandemic workplace. “We have to trust one another because we can’t perform without trust,” said Anne Marie Finch, Chief People Officer at Templafy, SaaS firm with offices in New York and Copenhagen. She has seen some employees blossom during remote work, with more introverted people becoming less inhibited during virtual meetings and employees get to know each other in new ways as they see each other’s family members in the background of video calls and share their concerns about the health and well being of their families and friends. “They probably would not have had that opportunity in the pre-pandemic work environment,” said Finch. ■



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