

What's NEXT for work 2026

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Is it possible the world could move even faster?

When we talk about the future of work, it often sounds far away. But the truth is, it's already here, just unevenly distributed. Coming at us in cycles.

What many people feel right now isn't chaos.
It's transition without shared language.

I've been talking to leaders for the past 12 months and through my research, I've identified **five key trends shaping 2026** and beyond. These trends are about clarity, not certainty. They dig into what this means for us as leaders and co-workers.

The trends we are looking at in 2026 are:

- 1 • Connecting BUSINESS RESULTS to PROGRAMS**
- 2 • WHOLE person HEALTH**
- 3 • AI: FEAR to FEARLESS MULTIPLIERS**
- 4 • LEADERSHIP and FUTURE OF WORK**
- 5 • UP-SKILLING and CONSTANT SKILLING**

Let's dive into each of these areas to explore how work is evolving and what that might mean for your organization.

1 • Connecting BUSINESS RESULTS to PROGRAMS

If your culture strategy can confidently hold its own inside a boardroom conversation about revenue, then you know it is truly strategic. This means that we cannot treat culture as a hobby. This translates to a critical shift in thinking. Leaders have to stop treating culture and recognition as optional or nice to have. Culture and recognition aren't optional—your culture will drive business results. Most leaders want better results without changing the environment that produces those results, but it doesn't work that way. The environment produces the pressure that drives our culture. If we want to change, we have to start by changing the environment.

One of the ways to do that is to stop protecting legacy silos; if you can shift the organization to address this, you will unlock capacity and foster collaboration across the organization. The strategy piece of this means translating human investments into business results without losing the human part.



2 • WHOLE person HEALTH

I am the most excited about this trend, because it impacts us all. Performance is human before it's operational and we keep seeing this repeatedly. Whole person health is the integrated state where an individual's physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing are supported in a way that sustains high performance, meaning, and life satisfaction over time – it's not about simply surviving work.

Burning people out is not grit or excellence. It's short-term extraction with a long-term cost. That cost always shows up later. Instead, whole personal health recognizes that people do not bring a segmented version of themselves to the office. The systems interact. That translates to treating people like our most important asset by designing work that supports growth, energy, and sustainability.

When whole person health is high, burnout is lower, discretionary effort is higher, turnover is lower, creativity is higher, learning velocity is faster, and trust and belonging are deeper.

If employees have to recover from work in order to live their lives, it's not a performance problem, but rather a systems flaw. Leaders can fix this by reducing unnecessary friction at work, being kind, normalizing recovery as part of performance, creating psychological safety through clarity, and practicing compassion as a strategic leadership skill.

Short-term wins can quietly erode long-term capacity. And that is a problem.

3 • AI: FEAR to FEARLESS MULTIPLIERS

There's speculation that AI will replace leaders. I don't think that will happen. Instead, AI is creating space for leaders who want to learn new ways of connecting, leading, and driving value in a changing world—and building capacity. Leaders who embrace AI accelerate possibility, impact, and capability. Leaning into AI allows us to amplify our talent and expand what we can do together. **A multiplier.**

Everyone is learning on a curve right now. Growth isn't linear, and that is ok. We are building confidence as we build capability. Blended work is the future; human judgment paired with AI intelligence creates exponential scale, deeper insight, and faster strategic clarity.

Those AI fluent employees that join the organization are not a threat; rather, they are a strategic advantage. When we develop them, empower them, and unleash them, we accelerate the future.

Moving from fear to confidence is a leadership skill. We learn, we experiment, we iterate. This is not about perfection. This is about direction. Courage doesn't mean we know everything. It means we are willing to begin.

I wonder, if AI could take **30% of your busy work off the table**, what kind of capacity would that create for you and your team? **How would you spend that time?**

Reclaimed time only matters if it's protected. Capacity is a strategic asset.

4 • LEADERSHIP and FUTURE OF WORK

Leadership has shifted from control to environment design. People perform best when systems support contribution, not compliance. **When leaders invest in people, people invest in the work.**

People don't disengage from hard work. They disengage from work they feel does not have a purpose and in spaces outside of their area of responsibility. When people understand the "why," they move faster, with more intention, and with less friction. Purpose makes hard work make sense. It lives where meaning and performance meet. Context is a leadership gift that accelerates clarity and momentum.

Belonging is created when people feel like valued contributors, not passengers. When people shrink in the environment, it's a signal the environment needs to evolve, not the person. The **key** is to **intentionally shape the environment so people feel safe to contribute at their highest level.**

Purpose is not a slogan. It's clarity. **When people know why their work matters, momentum follows.**

5 • UP-SKILLING and CONSTANT SKILLING

Today, skills are decaying faster than ever and because of that, learning cannot be episodic. Organizations must become learning systems.

Learning is the new loyal. If you want loyalty, you have to help your team truly see a future they can step into. When leaders develop people, they strengthen both capability and commitment, which creates long-term retention. In a market where compensation is easily matched, learning becomes the differentiator.

People stay when they can see a future. **Visibility builds trust.**

When we build skills today for the future, we build organizations that thrive. The talent pipeline is something we intentionally craft, not something we wait to acquire. The future requires us to build capacity now...and faster than the world disrupts it. It's about investing in growth today so your team is more confident and future-ready tomorrow.

WHAT'S BEYOND 2026?

The future of work continues to change. Here are three future-forward trends we're seeing beyond 2026. Keep that seatbelt fastened. Lock in.

- 1** **Nearly 23% of all jobs globally will fundamentally change by 2027.**
(World Economic Forum)
- 2** **Human plus AI teams become inseparable in workflows and decision-making and blended work replaces hybrid work by 2027.**
(Stanford HAI, Forrester)
- 3** **44% of role-critical skills will be disrupted and more than half of the global workforce will require major reskilling by 2027.**
(ELVTR, WEF)

The future is **not** coming slowly; the future of work is arriving in cycles. The organizations who plan work with experts, look for future trends, and double down on their workforce are the ones who will build capability faster than the future will disrupt it.

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