

Human Resources

DISTINGUISHED LEADERS

Human resources executives in Orange County confront a myriad of challenges in today's dynamic workplace landscape. Balancing employee well-being with organizational objectives is paramount, especially amid evolving labor laws and cultural shifts. Recruitment and retention pose persistent hurdles, exacerbated by a competitive job market and changing demographics. Additionally, navigating diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives demands adept leadership to foster a truly inclusive workplace. Addressing conflicts, promoting mental health support, and adapting to remote work trends further strain HR capacities. Moreover, staying abreast of technological advancements and leveraging data analytics for informed decision-making remains a perpetual challenge in optimizing workforce performance and satisfaction.

After an extensive selection process, these 18 HR leaders demonstrate they have what it takes to navigate the ever-changing HR landscape. They have streamlined onboard processes, instituted paid paternal leave, and worked to be recognized as one of OC's Best Places to Work. One introduced a new Work from Home (WFH) ergo program to ensure employees have a safe and ergonomic working area, decreasing the chance of a Worker's Comp request.

***METHODOLOGY:** The honorees did not pay to be included. The profiles were chosen from the nomination materials submitted. This list is not comprehensive, and includes only executives for whom nominations were submitted and accepted after an editorial review. The Distinguished Leaders are serving in senior leadership roles and demonstrate an impact on the Orange County community. Honorees are listed alphabetically.*

2024 DISTINGUISHED LEADERS – HUMAN RESOURCES



JAN BLUE

SVP, CHRO & CAO

Jan Blue's transformative leadership and strategic vision have been instrumental in evolving Hoag's Human Resources from its humble beginnings in 2009 as a single hospital with 2,500 employees to a leading multi-hospital healthcare system employing over 8,500 individuals, alongside 1,800 physicians and 2,000 volunteers, serving nearly half a million patients across Orange County.

Under Blue's guidance, Hoag has seen remarkable advancements in its organizational culture and HR operations. She has redefined what it means to be a dynamic and inclusive workplace, introducing innovative HR models that support Hoag's evolving needs. Her efforts have solidified Hoag's reputation as a premier employer of choice, having become a 5x Candidate Experience Award winner, attracting top talent, and significantly reducing turnover rates through implementing best practices in recruitment, training, HR technology, shared services, compliance, and risk mitigation.

Blue's commitment to professional development is evident in the comprehensive Learning and Development (L&D) initiatives she has established. These programs offer employees clear pathways for career advancement and leadership development programs, ensuring Hoag attracts and retains the best in the field.

Recognized as a thought leader and mentor, Blue's compassion and dedication resonate with everyone she interacts with.



VINCENT CHOU

DIRECTOR, HUMAN RESOURCES

ViewSonic Corporation has been a global leader of visual display solutions for over 35 years. The company has a culture of innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusion.

As the head of human resources at ViewSonic, Vincent Chou ensures that the best candidates are part of the company, regardless of ethnicity, religion, age, or experience level. He oversees the various programs that led ViewSonic to win the "Best Place to Work" three years in a row from the OCBJ. From offering robust benefits, a healthy work environment, and morale building activities, such as birthdays and holiday events to catered lunches and activity groups, Chou implements the best practices to acquire talent and reduce turnover.

As a small-to-medium business, ViewSonic has doubled in size in the last seven years. Led by Chou, the company has fully embraced a hybrid work environment. During the pandemic, Chou and his team spearheaded the work-from-home program, and ViewSonic was one of the earliest companies to send employees home and provide equipment as needed. ViewSonic continues to offer flexible work schedules, in which employees select the days in the office.



MARILEN COUGHENOUR, MPA

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HR STRATEGIC PARTNER

Marilen Coughenour is developing and delivering HR strategic services for City of Hope Orange County, Orange County's most advanced network of cancer care. Trusted by City of Hope Orange County senior executives, faculty and staff, Coughenour is a dynamic leader who brings more than 25 years of human resources expertise to her role that includes providing guidance and support to more than 800 health care professionals working at City of Hope Orange County Lennar Foundation Cancer Center in Irvine and clinical locations across the county. City of Hope's \$1 billion investment in Orange County also includes the county's only specialty cancer hospital, opening in 2025.

Coughenour's responsibilities include identifying and leading integrated HR solutions that drive positive impact, advancing employee relations, compensation, workforce planning, talent acquisition, employee development and engagement, organizational design and culture, leading HR change management, and developing and deploying HR best practices.

Coughenour, who joined City of Hope in March 2023, considers it an honor to be working alongside City of Hope Orange County leaders, physician-scientists and dedicated staff who are committed to eradicating cancer and creating healthier communities.



CHRISTINE DUNHAM

SR DIRECTOR, PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE

Christine Dunham radiates positivity, unmatched enthusiasm, and an authentic leadership style that challenges the status quo, inspires forward momentum, and connects people to business results. With 25 years of L&D experience, she is an exceptional facilitator deeply committed to the growth of Kantatans and leaders.

Since the merger, Dunham has displayed an unwavering commitment to uniting the organization. She navigated the team through change, established a compelling communication rhythm, initiated DE&I campaigns, and built strong foundations through trust initiatives. Dunham champions inclusive, transparent and fair practices, a flexible working model, and programming/infrastructure to inspire a culture of recognition and feedback.

Through a profound understanding of the human element in the workplace, Dunham has cultivated an environment where employees feel valued and empowered to contribute their best. Her efforts contributed to Kantata earning recognition as a Certified Great Place to Work and 2023 Top Company Culture.

As the driving force behind the Playbook and Values Creation effort, she embodies the core values of Putting People First and Leading the Way. Recently honored with Kantata's highest distinction, the Peak Performer Award, Dunham is recognized among top global business leaders. In her crucial role, Dunham fosters a winning culture, where employees are not just part of a team but an integral part of a thriving community.



JOSHUA FELIX

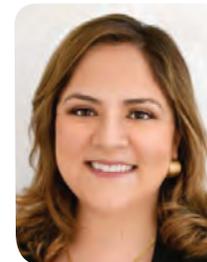
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER

When the global pandemic hit, students suffered setbacks in social skills, psychological health and learning loss. In response, California lawmakers invested heavily in expanded learning.

However, at that time, there was a staffing crisis and Think Together was faced with an implementation challenge. Joshua Felix, working in partnership with the chief operating officer, spearheaded a talent acquisition effort that included the creation of a 50-person talent acquisition team which resulted in the hiring of more than 5,000 people in one year to help students persevere and overcome educational challenges.

In 2024, Felix led a herculean effort to move hundreds of site coordinators from non-exempt to exempt roles. This project was aimed at investing in organizational excellence and continually improving the employee experience and culture. To accomplish this monumental task, Felix created and managed a cross-organizational task force that included staff from program & operations, finance, benefits, marketing & communications and legal. Along with the operational component, this project included a significant investment from Think Together, more than \$10 million annually.

Felix has also been a staunch advocate of advancing employee morale and providing feedback mechanisms through the implementation of a successful employee engagement survey that feeds into Think Together's overall goal of changing the odds for kids.



MINNETTE GALLARDO

CEO

With over two decades of experience leading human resources departments for renowned OC corporations, Minnette Gallardo embarked on her journey establishing Regal Resources in 2012. A trailblazer in remote HR and Payroll outsourcing, Gallardo specializes in transformative practices like business strategy, change management, recruiting, and hiring strategies.

In the past year, she expanded HR and Payroll outsourcing service offerings to meet community demand. This enhancement complements the existing suite of HR outsourcing services, providing companies with a seamless and cost-effective solution.

Additionally, Gallardo initiated efforts to empower the business community through complimentary HR education sessions. These interactive events foster networking opportunities among business owners, executives, and HR professionals, nurturing a collaborative environment to explore innovative solutions and legal insights.

Gallardo's commitment to excellence and innovation has made her a trusted leader in HR and Payroll consulting. She continues to redefine industry standards, providing top-tier services to diverse industries while mentoring and nurturing people. Her dedication to empowering businesses and fostering connections underscores her vision for a stronger, more interconnected community.

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HIQ LEE

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, NA

Hiq Lee has been instrumental in driving organizational performance at Experian through a variety of initiatives.

Talent Acquisition: Lee has implemented innovative strategies to attract top talent, resulting in a more skilled and diverse workforce. His efforts have led to a stronger team capable of meeting the company's evolving needs.

Improving Morale: Through effective leadership and communication, Lee has boosted morale across the organization. She has fostered a positive work environment where employees feel valued and motivated to perform their best.

Reducing Turnover: By implementing retention strategies and addressing underlying issues, Lee has successfully reduced turnover rates. This has resulted in a more stable workforce, saving the organization time and resources associated with hiring and training new employees.

Work-from-Home Policies: Recognizing the benefits of remote work, Lee has championed flexible work arrangements. This has improved employee satisfaction and work-life balance, leading to increased productivity and engagement.

Overall, Hiq Lee's strategic approach to talent management and employee engagement has significantly contributed to Experian's success, positioning the organization for continued growth and excellence.



FAHMI NAHAS

GLOBAL HEAD OF HR,
CARDIOVASCULAR & SPECIALTY
SOLUTIONS AND ABIOMED

As global head of HR for Johnson & Johnson MedTech Cardiovascular & Specialty Solutions and Abiomed divisions, Fahmi Nahas is one of the OC business community's biggest champions. Nahas has led J&J MedTech's recent expansion in Irvine, which has grown to approximately 1,500 associates through talent acquisition, relocation, and acquisitions, creating a thriving medtech ecosystem. Nahas believes OC is becoming a top tech hub destination, and through his work at J&J MedTech and as the talent chair for CEO Leadership Alliance of Orange County, he is dedicated to developing, retaining, and attracting talent to the area.

In line with Johnson & Johnson's credo, Nahas has catalyzed a purpose-driven culture at the company's Irvine campus, where employee surveys show strong engagement and alignment to positively impact patient lives and transform healthcare experiences through medtech innovation. Under Nahas' leadership, the Irvine campus has formed 10 Employee Resource Groups that meaningfully connect employees, driving the company's inclusive culture by celebrating associates' diverse talents and backgrounds. Nahas also is central to J&J MedTech's work with local schools - including those in under-resourced communities - to encourage students to pursue STEM careers and remain in OC to further develop the medtech ecosystem.



JOSE PEREZ

VICE PRESIDENT,
PEOPLE & CULTURE

Jose Perez exemplifies kindness, integrity, helpfulness and creativity - the four core values of Goodwill of Orange County. In everything he does as the leader of the People & Culture department, he puts the needs of Goodwill's workforce and program participants first. Perez is a tireless advocate for people with disabilities and sees the ability in everyone. As a veteran and Latino leader, Perez is a role model for Goodwill's workforce and makes every team member feel valued and respected. Perez actively recruits and supports people in the community who are looking for a pathway to opportunity, and helps them connect to jobs throughout the Goodwill operation and in the community. During his tenure at Goodwill, he has helped thousands of individuals find meaningful work.

Perez oversees Goodwill's Strategic Plan initiative focused on creating a "Best Place to Work". Under this leadership, Goodwill has enhanced its benefits packages to better meet the needs of today's workforce, including introducing a robust tuition reimbursement program, vast learning academies, and personalized career navigation available to all Goodwill team members. Perez's work is establishing Goodwill as an employer of choice for the OC community, a great place to start or grow your career.

Perez has a long history of being a transformational leader. He makes himself available 24/7 to any of Goodwill's 1,300+ team members, delivering daily on Goodwill's commitment to being a person-centered org.

HOAG WOULD LIKE
TO CONGRATULATE
JAN BLUE
FOR BEING RECOGNIZED
AS A DISTINGUISHED LEADER
IN HUMAN RESOURCES.



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MELISSA PLATT

SVP TALENT & ENGAGEMENT

Melissa Platt was able to drive turnover down by 10 percentage points through better screening, improvements in on-boarding, and direct follow-up to engage new teammates. Additionally, she implemented multiple employee engagement activities to strengthen the culture of Nvision. She has been instrumental in growing 500% in terms of employee count, revenue, and EBITDA. Throughout this growth, HR function has been a cornerstone and foundation of her leadership.

Platt took the leadership role through the difficult period of COVID, through multiple integrations, the addition of more than 1,000 new teammates, navigating the many new rules and regulations pertaining to employees, implementing a new HRIS system, and the growth of more than 80 additional clinics to the company's footprint. Platt has been a trusted partner to whom employees feel confident in her abilities to help regardless of the situation, and she works to always strengthen employee relationships which in turn benefits the organization.



The Word & Brown Companies



FLOR REAL, SHRM-SCP

VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Flor Real has achieved a great deal during five years with the organization. She has 25+ years of experience in all aspects of HR management. A few of her WBC highlights within the past year include the UKG Redesign – she streamlined our employee portal to increase visibility and make it easier for employees to find company documents and links. Real also transitioned the Company from gift card recognitions to implementing a new employee point-based recognition platform. UKG Wallet, a platform she introduced, allows employees an advance on their paychecks to assist with financial emergencies. Real also redesigned the Mid-Year and Annual Review process to make them more impactful, taking into consideration management's time and effort when writing reviews.

In addition, Real introduced a new Work from Home (WFH) ergo program providing employees a budget to "shop" from a catalog of approved office furniture ensuring employees that are working from home have ergonomic and safe working areas, decreasing the chances of a Worker's Comp request. Lastly she incorporated the volunteer program - adopted a local Title 1 School in Santa Ana; working with the school's principal, the volunteer program has allowed employees to support school events such "Read across America," "Read for the Record," and the school's Winter Festival.



ANDREA RIGGIO

HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR

Andrea Riggio has played a pivotal role in the exponential growth and success of Shopoff Realty Investments during her tenure. Serving as the go-to resource for training and support, she has demonstrated exceptional skills in simplifying and optimizing software to eliminate obstacles for both managers and individual employees.

Beyond her responsibilities at Shopoff Realty Investments, Riggio has spearheaded the creation and transition of two affiliate companies, showcasing her ability to navigate international employment policies and implement new organizational structures seamlessly.

In an extremely difficult hiring environment, she has excelled in finding quality talent, helping to onboard new team members, and working with managers to ensure the new employee is engaged. In 2023 she onboarded 13 new employees, including Shopoff's chief financial officer.

Her commitment to ensuring employee engagement and her meticulous attention to detail have made her an invaluable asset to the organization. Riggio embodies the entrepreneurial spirit at Shopoff, constantly seeking personal and professional growth. Her contributions to the company's success make her richly deserving of acknowledgment as a key part of the fabric of Shopoff Realty Investments.

On Behalf Of The Entire Sunwest Bank Team, We Would Like To Congratulate

KARA TREBS

On Being Honored In The Orange County Business Journal's

DISTINGUISHED HR LEADERS



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TAIZO SHIBAYAMA

VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Taizo Shibayama possesses a list of impressive achievements. As vice-president of human resources of Landsea, Mr. Shibayama runs the human resources department of a multi-state corporation of

roughly 500 employees. This alone makes Mr. Shibayama a highly accomplished Human Resources professional.

Beyond this, during the past few years, Mr. Shibayama has succeeded in the following companywide tasks: created and implemented Sarbanes-Oxley compliance for Landsea; oversaw all HR-related matters involving four acquisitions; assisted in helping to take Landsea Homes Corporation public; created and implemented COVID-19 protocols during the pandemic; created and implemented Cal-OSHA mandates and other safety protocols; created and implemented employment policies from scratch for Landsea; assisted in doubling Landsea's workforce; and helped create human resource departments at Landsea for six states.

Landsea is currently a vibrant, rapidly expanding company. Mr. Shibayama has been instrumental in leading the company from a one-state private company to a publicly traded one with operations in six states. The Landsea management team highly respects him.



KARA TREBS

CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICER

Kara Trebs, a key leader at Sunwest Bank, has played a crucial role by spearheading the Human Capital (HR) department. In 2023, Trebs initiated the establishment of the Learning and Development (L&D) Department, encompassing an Operations Training Program, Analyst Program, leadership and management training, and customized product training. Additionally, she has overseen office renovations aimed at reflecting the company's culture and fostering a collaborative environment. Trebs has also introduced various health and wellness initiatives, such as a healthy snack program and team/department wellness challenges. As part of these efforts, she has implemented Smart Dollar, a financial wellness program for employees.

Trebs conducted a survey pilot, distributing engagement surveys to capture real-time feedback from the staff, ensuring comprehensive data collection throughout the employee lifecycle. Among her notable achievements, Trebs led the creation of a Health Savings Account (HSA) plan. She actively contributed to developing the plan product, which launched in 2021, and collaborated on the accompanying app. Over the past six years, there have been no premium increases for benefits, including medical, vision, and dental, showcasing her dedication to employee well-being.



AMERICA VALDEZ

DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Serving as the human resources director at Community Legal Aid SoCal (CLA SoCal), America Valdez has transformed the organization's HR landscape. Her innovative approaches and dedication have played a pivotal role in shaping a more dynamic, skilled, and inclusive workforce.

Under her guidance, the HR department has become a model of efficiency and productivity. She has continuously shown a commitment to refining systems and practices, ensuring they align with and support the organization's mission and values. Valdez is relentless in her dedication to fostering a culture of growth and continuous improvement. Through targeted initiatives, she has created an environment where employees are encouraged to learn, develop, and contribute to their fullest potential.

Under her leadership, CLA SoCal successfully designed and implemented a comprehensive competency framework to enhance their ability to identify, train, and develop the next generation of leaders. Recognizing the importance of technological skills in the modern workforce, Valdez has championed a technology training program that will equip the workforce with the skills needed to thrive in an ever-evolving technological landscape.

Valdez has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to excellence, innovation, and the well-being of employees. Her deeds and achievements reflect her dedication and speak to why she is an invaluable asset to the organization.



CONGRATULATIONS TO MARILEN COUGHENOUR FOR KEEPING HOPE AT WORK IN ORANGE COUNTY

City of Hope Orange County salutes Marilen Coughenour for being recognized as one of the Distinguished Leaders in Human Resources. Trusted by City of Hope Orange County senior executives, Marilen is a dynamic leader who provides guidance and support to more than 800 health care professionals working at City of Hope Orange County Lennar Foundation Cancer Center in Irvine and clinical locations across the county.

Marilen's responsibilities include identifying and leading integrated HR solutions that drive positive impact, advancing employee relations, compensation, workforce planning, talent acquisition, employee development and engagement, organizational design and culture, leading HR change management, and developing and deploying HR best practices.

Congratulations, Marilen, and thank you for growing the team that is changing the future of cancer care in Orange County.



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SHARON WINGFELDER

CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER AND SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

Since her promotion to chief HR officer in 2021, Sharon Wingfelder's leadership has further elevated First American's world-class, people-first culture, helping the company develop, retain and attract top talent as the company leads the digital transformation of its industry. Under her leadership, the company developed and launched a new HR strategy to provide standardized workforce tools and resources - helping attract the right workforce, increase retention, and prepare our people to be their best today and in the future, all while providing an exceptional employee experience.

To put learning and development at employees' fingertips, they implemented UFirst - a new learning program platform organizes 40+ learning resources into one location. The content is organized into six categories with the goal of encouraging employees to embrace a growth mindset by providing resources to enhance their leadership skills, technical expertise, or personal well-being in the ever-changing workplace.

Under Wingfelder, they have implemented several new benefits and programs, like paid parental leave program, floating holidays, increased PTO/STO, and Calm to help employees thrive.

Her efforts have led to continued national recognition as a premier employer, including being named one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For by Fortune Magazine for the eighth consecutive year, and a leader in LGBTQ+ inclusion.



AMY YEAGER

VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES

As vice president of human resources, Amy Yeager independently manages the company's HR operations with a hands-on and strategic approach. Her contributions to the organization's growth and success have been significant, as she has developed policies, procedures, and systems that have increased efficiency, compliance, and cost-effectiveness. Additionally, Yeager has instilled a culture of excellence and innovation that benefits the company and its employees.

During the past three years, she effectively managed the company's rapid growth, which included expanding to 13 states across the US and Canada and increasing headcount by 95%. Yeager implemented new programs to streamline procedures, such as enhancing the recruiting methods and new hire orientation to improve onboarding, writing and implementing HR policies, enhancing employee benefits offerings, establishing employee recognition programs, revamping the performance management and review processes, and implementing ongoing learning and development opportunities.

Yeager's contributions to the company's growth and success are immeasurable, as evidenced by her hard work and dedication that have enabled the company to achieve its strategic objectives while maintaining compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Her innovative approach to HR management has created a culture of excellence and innovation that has positively impacted the company and its employees.



DAVID ZAMUDIO

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES

As EVP of Human Resources for KBS, David Zamudio possesses high levels of efficiency and business acumen, as well as a fresh perspective on leadership that has placed him at the top of his field.

Since joining KBS nine years ago, Zamudio has demonstrated a profound ability to leverage the strengths of existing team members and create effective processes for recruiting and onboarding top talent. As a former Marine, he values morals and integrity, allowing him to identify and recruit HR professionals who foster a strong degree of trust in confidentiality, holding this position even during current challenging economic conditions.

One of Zamudio's most significant accomplishments since joining KBS is his revamping of HR procedures, hiring a new team to help him introduce a more efficient payroll system that empowers employees to manage their benefits independently and helping to streamline candidate onboarding into a digital system. Zamudio's department ensures each employee receives a free Fitbit, access to Calm and Vitality apps, a \$50 monthly stipend for fitness classes.

Zamudio has also helped KBS adapt to shifts in office use, developing new activities that promote in-person collaboration and team building that drive employee satisfaction and performance.

CONGRATULATIONS

Christine Dunham

For Your Distinguished Leadership in Human Resources

Christine radiates positivity, unmatched enthusiasm, and an authentic leadership style that challenges the status quo, inspires forward momentum, and connects people to business results.



CHRISTINE DUNHAM
Senior Director, People Development & Culture



Kantata helps people-powered businesses operate efficiently, scale faster, and deliver remarkable outcomes to their clients and employees.

Kantata.com



OUTSOURCE YOUR HR TO REGAL RESOURCES

We'll take care of your human resources needs so you can dedicate your time to growing your business.

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ABOUT REGAL RESOURCES

We are HR business advisors you can trust, serving organizations on local and national levels. Located in Southern California since 2012.

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