

Valley Business

# FRONT

VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE  
BUSINESS JOURNAL  
ROANOKE/NEW RIVER VALLEYS & REGION

FREE • ISSUE 115 • APRIL 2018

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## That Certain Business Style

Niké Schwarz,  
Realty Direct



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Does this magazine make my butt look fat?

It might if you roll it up and shove it in your back pocket. The FRONT is rather compact, but even though we're not as bulky as most standard magazines (and certainly not in comparison to the tabloid size publications), it still might make your nether regions expand when compressed into the sleek and mod and form-fitting apparel that is rather popular these days.

But go ahead and shove that magazine in any available pocket or accessory you have. We're just happy you want to carry it along. We certainly had a good time doing this FRONTcover feature on fashion and style. We're glad so many of our readers and stakeholders actually care about professional appearance.

Here in Virginia, we might not be in front of the fashion world (YET), but we have a fair share of business men and women of all ages and vocations who enjoy putting their best foot forward. Well, to be more precise, putting it all out front. With style. And grace. And a little flair. From head to toe.

  
Tom Field

“ ”  
Fashion is instant  
language — Page 19

“ ”  
They're not giving away their  
secrets and neither are we — Page 27

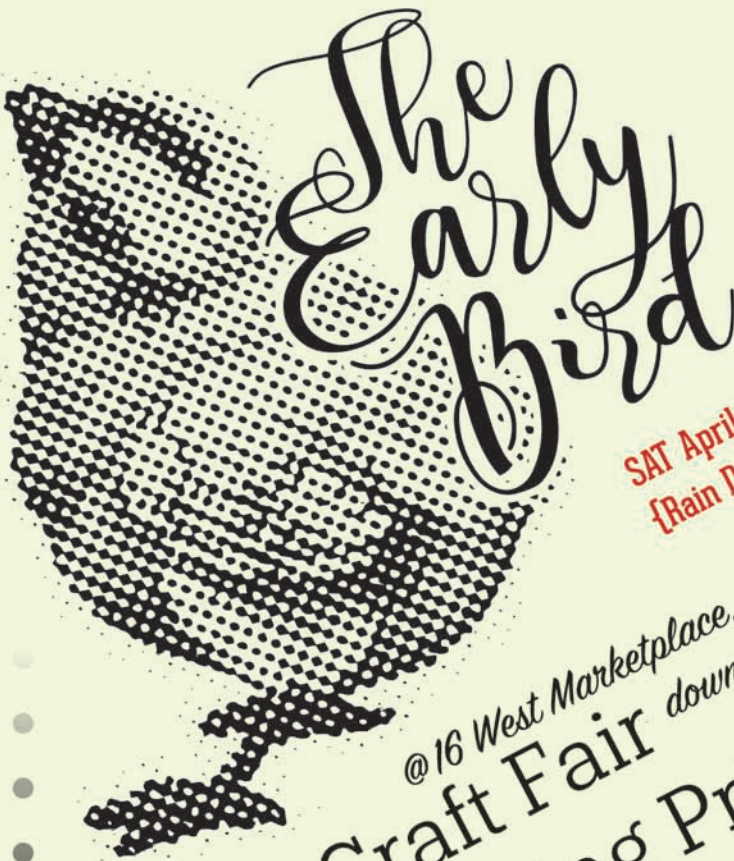


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“  
We decided to  
gamify it — Page 33



Cover photography of Niké Schwarz  
by Bella Muse Photography.

# Valley Business FRONT

APRIL

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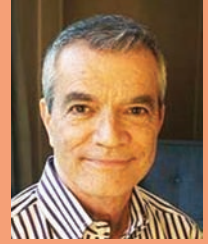
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Bruce Bryan



Dan Dowdy



Mike Leigh



Nanette Levin



Michael Shelton



Kathy Surace

## Editorial Advisory Board

Valley Business FRONT has organized an Editorial Advisory Board in order to help direct coverage. FRONT selected a group of diverse business professionals, who will serve as a sounding board throughout the rotational term.

This board has been given the task of helping FRONT understand the issues and develop coverage. "Members essentially have a red telephone at their hand," says publisher Tom Field. "They can inform us best on what is important, what is new, what impacts the greater community. Of course, our red phone reaches right back to them as well, for assignments and insight on our coverage. Although the members are encouraged to keep FRONT updated on their own industries and the key players, they aren't limited to their area of specialty, as all commercial enterprises ultimately collaborate to impact our quality of life here in this part of Virginia." An additional contribution by the Editorial Advisory Board involves direct input on the various FRONTLists we present throughout the year.

# CONTRIBUTORS



Tom Field



Keith Finch



Kathleen Harshberger



Christine Liana



Carissa Mulahn



Theresa Passeretti



Nicholas Vaassen

Biographies and contact information on each contributor are provided on Page 54.

## 2018 Members

**Nancy Agee** Carilion (Wellness)  
**Laura Bradford** ClaireV (Retail)  
**Nicholas C. Conte** Carilion (Legal)  
**Warner Dalhouse** Retired (Finance)  
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**Stuart Mease** Virginia Tech (Education)  
**Mary Miller** ACI (Tech/Industry)  
**Ed Walker** Regeneration Partners (Development)

You will note that the Board is comprised of experts in many different business / industry “fronts.” This is intentional, as we are reporting on all the areas that affect our regional economy and are important to you. In keeping with our policy of being “the voice of business in the valleys” we ask each reader to join us as an editorial partner by calling or e-mailing us your ideas. You know more than we know about your business—or you certainly should—and that inside knowledge shared with our readers will make us all better at what we do.

“”

There are people who perform remarkably well despite their bad or unconventional form — Page 44

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# Our Professionals, *Looking Good*



## FRONT 2018 Business Style & Fashion Report >

**Executive Summary:**  
*FRONT snagged some local professionals in fashion, style, and clothing retail to get a sense of what's happening with our personal business image here.*

By Tom Field

Did you know that this part of Virginia—Southwest, Blue Ridge, Central, Southside, Shenandoah Valley—has become identified as "The Fashion Hub of the Mid-Atlantic"?

Yeah, no one knew that.

Our business and technology associations, chambers or commerce, economic development entities and various tourism and recreational groups are always working hard to brand our region and point out the noteworthy and well-deserved accomplishments that keep turning up as the world watches. But fashion? That's never gotten much attention or showed up on too many radars.

Maybe if we stop squinting in the sun of the mundane, put on those Ray-Ban sunglasses and make sure our Rolexes are



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV

**Anders Byrd, Long and Foster – choices complement action**

**Blake Owen, Trugreen – pulling off pattern**

**Brad Driver and Stacy Jennings, Planet Fitness – sharp dressed men**



# COVER STORY

set on the current date and time, we might notice there is a strain of people who are stepping up to look as good as the very picturesque mountains, valleys, lakes, rivers, skies, and four full colored seasons that do make the calendars and place us squarely on the map of most admired locations in the world. And the truth is, we don't even have to rely on brand name fashion merchandise to make our statement.

We don't really have a "Blue Ridge" style that we call our own (bib overalls is narrow and no longer the default stereotype), but we do have plentiful examples of business professionals who make a mark.

You know the people who look sharp. You run across the man who has a sense of style and pays attention to details. You work with the woman who cares about her appearance, but isn't garish or keeps her phone on constant selfie mode. Maybe you're that man. You're that woman.

Yes, we have some stylish, well-fashioned, clean, sharp, professional people here. And despite the age old argument about how much it should matter, appearance does matter. That's why we're publishing this report. We have a legitimate business sector here in the arena of fashion, apparel, accessories, beauty and related products and services. And we have valid consumers to support it all.

Here's what some in the business have to say about it.



Courtesy of Garrett's & Meg's



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV

**Chris Turman, State Farm Insurance** – when casual still says you care

**Clay Taylor, Waldvogel Commercial Properties** – light tones are calming

**Donnie Marshall, Best Buy (with fiancé, Kianna)** – attention to details



**Daniel Colston,  
American Financial  
Planning – good  
looks with comfort**

## Try To Keep Up With Trends... Not!

Meg Weddle owns and operates Garrett's Menswear Depot and Meg's Specialty Womenswear, located in Radford for 32 years. She's a native of the New River Valley (born in Radford, raised in Blacksburg) and currently lives in Draper with her husband, Garrett, and son, Joe. A graduate of Virginia Tech with a degree in Education, Meg taught at Radford University as an adjunct professor "The History of Fashion, Retail Mathematics, Fashion Merchandising" in the Fashion Department. She currently sits on the Radford University Design Board, and served as a previous board member of First National Bank and the Radford Chamber of Commerce. She was named Radford Business Person of the Year in 1988. Meg is an outdoor enthusiast, gardener, enjoys water skiing, history, art, and anything fashion.

**As a long time experienced style and fashion retailer, when we asked you about people you considered to have good taste in their professional appearance, you immediately began naming them. What made these individuals come to the top of your mind?**

These individuals came to my mind because they are tuned in to the importance of professional presentation and appearance. They are very aware of the importance of detail in every aspect of their life and especially their clothing. They all know what a difference dressing well makes in the way they feel about themselves and how others perceive them. So what came to my mind first was not the client's image, but their mentality and attention to detail.



**Meg Weddle, Garrett's Menswear Depot & Meg's Specialty Womenswear**



**Bart Wilner, Entre Computer Center – professionalism is a signature**

FRONT



**Natalie Faunce, Daytime  
Blue Ridge – simple lines  
with elegant touch**

Steve Curtiss Photography and Garland  
Gravely, Fashionista Roanoke

# "Work It, Baby!"

Marissa Yi is a professional photographer who is seen often at business and professional events throughout the region. She provided our FRONTcover shot of Niké Schwarz, a principal real estate broker at Realty Direct, and who Marissa says, "has amazing fashion sense!" We asked Marissa the following question:

**As a professional photographer who works frequently with subjects in fashion and modeling, what produces your best images?**

Photographing people, knowing what lens works best for full body portraits or closeups is important. The wrong focal length can add weight or distort the face and/or body. Shooting up at a person can accentuate or give the illusion of a double chin, so always shoot at eye level or slightly down. Because I'm pretty short myself (just barely 5'3") I bring a ladder or step stool with me to photo shoots. My experience working as a model helps when it comes to posing, as well.

When my clients invest in their portraits or headshots with me, I assist in choosing a wardrobe that flatters each individual and reflects their style. For couples and families, I have them wear complementing, not matching outfits. For headshots and bridal or boudoir portraits, I work with professional makeup artists who are experienced in contouring and application to guarantee people look their best. Most importantly, I help my subjects to be confident and relaxed to ensure beautiful photographs that capture their personality.

**Here's Marissa's business and places where you can view some of her work:**

**Bella Muse Photography, Design, and Vintage Rentals**  
[www.Bella-Muse.com](http://www.Bella-Muse.com) // Facebook Instagram  
**Marissa Yi Design: Etsy Instagram**  
**Adorkable: Etsy Instagram**



**What are some common mistakes you see people making with regard to their style or wardrobe choices?**

Probably the biggest mistake that I see people make regarding wardrobe choices is that they try to follow trends that are not suited to their figure or body type. Another area that causes people to make fashion mistakes, is a perceived clothing bargain on the internet, that ends up being an off color, a bad fit and a wrong feel. So people do need to be cautious when buying garments on line, because it is so easy to make a mistake without seeing items firsthand.



Scott Smith, Financier – exercising the cool factor

Bella Muse Photography

**The professional male, the professional female: who has the more difficult challenge here in our part of Virginia?**

I think that both the professional female and male can experience wardrobe difficulties living in Southwestern Virginia. Perhaps the most common problem area, is the fashion savvy client being perceived as "over the top" and unapproachable because they enjoy wearing the newest of fashion. Lots of times a new fashion will look outstanding on an individual, but it is not a look congruent with the majority of folks in this area, so it unfortunately becomes not a useable option. A similar challenge that both my male and female clients experience is loving a certain fashion look that is too dressy for the underlying rural lifestyle in this area. Lastly there is the issue of clothing availability, experienced by both male and females in this area, just based on the lower population levels in Southwestern Virginia.

**What directions are you seeing for 2018 in men's and women's fashion?**

What I see for men's clothing in 2018 is definitely a closer fit, showing little or no excess of fabric. This is prevalent in sportswear and especially in men's suits. The color blue, in so many shades, is definitely the color of choice, especially in men's dress clothing for 2018. For women's clothing there is less emphasis on black and a more colorful, but yet subdued and neutralized color direction for women. Also regarding color, we are experiencing a real emphasis toward monochromatic (tints and shades of the same color) and analogous (colors that are beside each other on the color wheel) color schemes. There is also less emphasis toward constructed garments (jackets), and a direction toward more unconstructed pieces (wraps, cardigans).

## Color? Sure... Pick One!

Donna Wallace works as a fashion stylist at Frances Kahn of Roanoke and can also be hired as a personal stylist. She works with clients in determining their core style, and helps them choose a color palate. She spends time going through their closets, and she recommends what to keep and what needs to... just go away. After the wardrobe audit, Donna will suggest how an individual should pair what she or he currently has with new items to refresh the selections. She'll even do the shopping on behalf of the clients or alongside them.

**As a fashion consultant and one who has worked in the clothing retail environment, what "shopping tips" would you have for the professional man or woman in our part of Virginia here?**

Versatility! Think outside of the "Business Suit" box. Some jobs do require wearing a suit, but not all of them and not all the time. To expand your work wardrobe and to save money at the same time, buy clothes that can transition for



**Donna Wallace, Stylist and fashion consultant at Frances Kahn Roanoke**

**Zuheil Banuelos,  
business owner, stay-  
at-home mom, Autism  
Awareness activist –  
style that moves  
with you**



Steve Curtiss Photography  
and Garland Gravely,  
Fashionista Roanoke



# COVER STORY

causal to work to dress. One way to do this is to determine your core style and to choose a color plate to work within.

**What's usually the FIRST thing you notice when you see a man or woman you know is exhibiting good taste in style and fashion?**

Classic pieces that are worn with a modern flair. Such as a white cotton button down worn with a patent leather loafer. It elevates even a basic pair of jeans into a work appropriate outfit when paired with the often forgotten "third" piece that pulls it all together. This can be a blazer, cardigan, vest, scarf or tie.

**Color seems to be one of your priorities when it comes to decisions on fashion. What works today or where might we be heading with this in the next year or so?**

For the most part, Americans have too much color in their wardrobe. Picking one main color extends your wardrobe and makes getting ready easier. A monochromatic outfit not only is more classic, but it makes you appear taller and slimmer. As with any trend, color, should be brought in with accessories and a few, can't live without pieces. This season's colors are pale baby blue and blush pink.

**Biggest fashion mistake?**

Not having things altered by a seamstress. Very few pieces fit perfectly right off the rack. I have almost everything I buy altered. It makes a world of difference when your sleeves hit at the correct place or the hem is at the most flattering part



Courtesy of Donna Wallace, stylist



Courtesy of Donna Wallace, stylist



Courtesy of Donna Wallace, stylist

**Nicole Terrill, Roanoke College – classic work, not stuffy**

**Heath Hardage Lee, author and biographer – when wardrobe tells a story**

**Heather Neff, Virginia Lutheran Homes – leveraging lines**



**Anna and Randolph Davis, Myra Jane's Boutique - here to make something happen**

Bella Muse Photography

of your leg or a snap is added to keep your blouse together. It's the difference between looking sloppy or tailored.

## Embrace the Unexpected

Garland Gravely is president and co-founder of Fashionista Roanoke, Inc., which focuses on workshops, seminars, and fashion-related events for the community, now going on ten years. He majored in Fashion Merchandising at Virginia Commonwealth University and has over 25 years of experience working in the retail industry. When there is a fashion show, event, group, or you even walk up on a group of exceptionally dressed and colorful folks around Roanoke, there's a good chance Garland is in the mix.

**Fashion can go from traditional to edgy; retro/vintage to contemporary to post-modern. What should a guy / gal think about when making these style choices?**

When thinking about a style choice a person should consider what is best for them and their lifestyle and who they are as a person. What you choose to wear tells the world about who you are. Fashion is instant language.

**As someone who follows fashion, what causes YOU to notice a person whom you consider to exhibit "style"?**

One of the first things I notice about a person is how well the look is put together. I tend to notice more if they are thinking outside the box or if they are willing take a risk. I love when people do the unexpected when it comes to fashion and style.

**Any predictions on where you see fashion headed in the next few years?**

I see the future of fashion as a bright road ahead. I see fashion and technology really coming together more so than it is now... for example, articles of clothing that will regulate your body temperature or change colors based on your mood. Also I see a future when fashion will be genderless.

## Casual Counts, Too

Tyler "The Tailor" Smith is a professional clothier and wardrobe consultant with the local Tom James Company that serves the Roanoke and New River Valleys. He was born and raised in Vinton, went to William Bryd High School, then on to what he calls "the best school in the state": James Madison University, earning his degree in marketing. He deals with all areas of fashion, but particularly enjoys what is currently trending.

**Men's business fashion doesn't seem to change as drastically from year to year as women's fashion does; however, what are some of the areas today's modern**



**Garland Gravely,**  
Fashionista Roanoke



**Tyler Smith,**  
Tom James Company



Marissa Yi, Bella Muse Photography - confidence is part of stunning

Bella Muse Photography

# COVER STORY

**professional man should consider to show that he is current and relevant?**

Men's fashion actually changes much more frequently than most guys realize. The easiest areas to address to show you are current and relevant are styling, fit, and coordination of your outfit. Style is the one area that changes most often in super trendy areas. Luckily, there is a rule-of-thumb industry standard where you can't go wrong: that would be a two-button, single breasted jacket with notch lapels and side vents on the top... and straight front, plain bottom (no cuff) slacks on the bottom. Outside of that styling, you are either going to be trendy or dated, depending on what the styling is.

Never underestimate your shoes when putting the look together.

In a casual office, what do people notice? Your shirt. In a professional dress office, what do people notice? Your shirt (jacket stays on back of door most of the time).

**What are some trends or smart decisions you see happening here in our region of Virginia?**

This trend isn't here QUITE yet, but I believe it will make its way here eventually: dress boots. Dress boots are great because you can dress them up or wear them casually. I'm all about pieces that give you the best bang for your buck in multiple situations.

Another current trend is the "smart or weekend" casual look. Many businesses around here are using that look for their casual Fridays or multiple days of the week. It's an underrated area of a guy's wardrobe that I find more guys need my help with than anything. Anyone can throw on a navy or grey suit and put it together, but that weekend look is a struggle area. If you do it up right, people will take notice in that. And by weekend look I mean a nice pair of jeans or chinos, some transitional shoes



**Sam Waller, Glass Monkey Window Cleaning – a statement that matches his business**



Ronnie Lee Bailey - Documentary Portraiture



**Kathy Surace,**  
Peacock Image


(not too dressy), and a well-fitting shirt. Some guys will rock a sweater or sport coat with that look too.

I stress how important casual wear is to my clients often. You don't want to look like a baller in the office and a scrub in casual situations. If you invest in nicer, versatile casual wear, it'll make your whole wardrobe mesh better. No one likes to stand in front of their whole wardrobe and think, "well what the heck do I wear to this? I don't want to overdress but I also don't want to underdress.

## Does this Make Me Look... Good?

Lastly, we reach back out to Kathy Surace, who has served as our business journal fashion columnist since 2006. Kathy is also the proprietor of Peacock Image, a style and fashion consultancy, where she provides personal wardrobe services to individuals and businesses.

### What question are you asked the most from individuals who are concerned about their style?

My clients ask me to tell them what looks good on them, what they should keep in their wardrobe, what they should discard, and what they should add to their wardrobe. My job is to help them understand how to use their clothing to look their personal best. I'm not selling them clothing, so they trust my unbiased opinion. First and foremost, my goal is to help them look their best and feel confident. 



Courtesy of Garrett's & Meg's

**Kay Dunkley, Roanoke Higher Education Center – adding spirit to one's profession**



Steve Curtiss Photography and Garland Gravely, Fashionista Roanoke

**Lora Trout, Promote Commotion and Fashionista Roanoke – no question there's a creative spirit**



FRONT

**Marty Muscatello, FoxGuard Solutions – we're here for business**

# Best Dressed

You know sharp dressed men or women when you see them. Here is a list of some of the business professionals we were given in our FRONTsurvey who received multiple "nominations" by other professionals who would notice such details:

Abby Verdillio  
Amanda Smith Buyalos  
Anders Byrd  
Andrea Muscatello  
Andy Brady  
Anna Davis  
Antonio Hash  
Ashley Hash  
Bart Wilner  
Beckie Lynn Spaid  
Blake Owen  
Brad Driver  
Brian Campbell  
Caroline LeRocca Hammond  
Catherine Justice  
Chris Turman  
Clay Taylor  
Daniel Colston  
Donnie Marshall  
Doug Kidd  
Douglas Charles Jackson  
Douglas Jackson

Elliot Broyles  
Garry Norris  
Greg Goebel  
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Heath Hardagee Lee  
Heather Neff  
Hunter S. Johnson  
Jacob W. Palmer  
Jerome Hamm  
Joshua Friday  
Kay Dunkley  
Kevin Devine  
Kyle Edgell  
Laura Hewit  
Lisa Thompson  
Lora Trout  
Lyn Day  
Marissa Yi  
Marty Muscatello  
Natalie Faunce  
Nicole Terrill  
Nike Schwarz

Quintin Bennett  
Randolph Davis  
Robin Miles  
Sam Waller  
Sara Bremer  
Sarah Pennino  
Scott Smith  
Seth Guldin  
Shelli Martin  
Stacy Jennings  
Steve Musselwhite  
Tammie Earick  
Terry Wildman  
Todd Ayers  
Tofer Flowers  
Tommy Bryant  
Tyler Pugh  
Vernice Conceitid Bell  
Vicki Love  
Virginia Wiegand  
Webster Day  
Zuheil Banuelos



Courtesy of Donna Wallace, stylist

**Hal Cone, Roanoke Podcast for Good – a look can exude positivity**



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV

**Seth Guldin, Virginia Tech graduate school – respecting the occasion**



Courtesy of Tom James Co / Roanoke-NRV

**Tommy Bryant, Edward Jones – a mod metro perspective**



## Business Dress

By Kathy Surace

**Executive Summary:**  
*Poor-fitting shirts are obvious to the attentive; here are the basics to ensure you're wearing it properly.*

### Measuring for a dress shirt >

For a dress shirt to be comfortable and look sharp, it must fit correctly. If you buy your shirts through a clothier you needn't worry about this because that's their expertise – quality clothing and a great fit.

However, many men buy ready to wear shirts and struggle to achieve the right fit. Too many people don't know how to take their measurements to get the best fit.


Two very important measurements are the collar and the sleeve length. Take the collar measurement by placing the measuring tape around the base of the neck where the collar will sit. Holding it lightly - not tight - place a finger or two inside the tape for ease. The finished shirt should fit lightly around the neck with a little space for ease of movement. It should never squeeze or dig into the neck.

Sleeve length is found by measuring from the center of the back of the neck, across the shoulder, down the outside of the slightly bent arm to the wrist bone. The finished sleeve length should slightly cover the wrist bone.

The shirt shoulder line is also crucial to a good fit, falling exactly where the arm meets the shoulder. Never should it hang down the arm or pull toward the neck.

For the midsection, a man can choose traditional fit, which allows ease for movement and comfort, or slim fit, which skims the body closer. Torso measurements can ensure a shirt that fits as preferred. Measure the chest just under the arms and across the widest part of the chest and back. Measure the waist at the natural waistline. The shirt should neither cling, causing buttons to gap, nor billow loosely. Several of my sources say even high quality shirts will shrink after several washings so plan for that as you make your purchase.

When wearing a suit jacket the shirtsleeves should peek out a half-inch from under the jacket and the collar should be visible above the jacket collar in the back. However, the tie should never show between the shirt collar and the jacket collar at center back.

Last, but not least, proper shirt length is important to ensure the shirt stays tucked in neatly when the arms are raised. Make sure that the shirt tail ends 3 or 4 inches below the beltline, but not below the crotch. 

Comments? Email [kssurace@aol.com](mailto:kssurace@aol.com)



## Soft skills in the workplace >

I attended a gathering of concerned business leaders anxious to promote a resurgence of downtown business. Several complained that, while some new employees came with excellent educations and great technical skills (often called hard skills), many lacked the softer skills.

In my business etiquette seminars I often say that, in this fiercely competitive business arena, soft skills (in other words, good etiquette) are simply another tool you need. While the softer skills and etiquette alone won't get you anywhere, it will give you an extra edge that will make the difference between you and another person who is just as smart and well educated.


I then add that, according to research conducted by Harvard University, The Carnegie Foundation, and The Stanford Research Institute, technical skill and knowledge account for only 15% of the reason we get a job, keep a job, and advance in a job. In other words, 85% of our job success is connected to our diplomatic skills, our people skills, our softer skills. This usually elicits a groan from those who are in the more technical professions e.g. engineers, accountants, and IT workers. They usually prefer to get from A to Z in a linear fashion, without "wasting time with the niceties" as one participant told me.

The fact remains, though, that we can be the very best in our field, but it will make little difference if we can't get along with our co-workers, our superiors and our clients.

So what are soft skills?

Well, for one thing, unlike hard skills which can be measured, soft skills are not easily quantifiable. And yet we all instinctively recognize the person who demonstrates them. Some say that soft skills cannot be taught, that you either have the ability naturally or you don't. This writer disagrees with that notion. Like any other skill, awareness and practice is key here.

Soft skills, or people skills, are sometimes linked with our EQ, or Emotional Intelligence Quotient. It can include traits such as good manners, good communication skills, effective leadership and the ability to positively manage people. Central to Emotional Intelligence is empathy: the ability to understand and feel what another human being is experiencing. I believe that, if you develop that special skill, it can be invaluable in your professional life.

The late, great Barbara Jordan, American lawyer, educator and politician, said "If you're going to play the game properly, you'd better know every rule." An unwritten rule for professional success is to sharpen and use your people skills. 



## Etiquette & Protocol

By Kathleen Harvey Harshberger

**Executive Summary:**  
*Good etiquette can make the difference between all employees in general and the above average.*



## Delving deeper into skin care issues >

### **Executive Summary:**

*Starkey Medical Esthetics provides services to help people look and feel as young as they can.*

**By Nanette Levin**

"I wanted to deliver high quality skin care services to the public and felt like we needed a little more variety in the community," says Michele Meinhart, when asked about why she started Starkey Medical Esthetics in 2003. The firm's three locations are in Blacksburg, Roanoke and Salem.

Meinhart is CEO, responsible for supervising nurses and the rest of her 14 employees. She also performs the medical procedures, such as injections of fillers like Juvederm®,



Botox® and spider vane treatments. She's a Board Certified Family Nurse Practitioner and Master Esthetician.

"We really have been wanting to target business professionals because the population in general is aging, there are a lot of baby boomers who are concerned with their appearance and they want to look professional but don't want to look overdone," states Meinhart. This is particularly relevant for real estate

agents, bank professionals, attorneys, doctors and CEOs, she says.

"We treat a lot of doctors and lawyers already, but would like to reach out to more of them," Meinhart admits. "We even have people in the media who come in, but they're not giving away their secrets and neither are we," she reveals. "For people in the public eye all the time it's important for them to look good but they also value privacy so they like to come to a more

private office," she says. Meinhart claims a youthful appearance is often perceived as more capable, which is why she feels her services are well suited for business leaders.

## Supporting rainbows and youth

"We do a lot of work with the transgender population," Meinhart states. Ladies & Gents of the Blue Ridge is a group her firm embraces. "It's really important to me that we support them in their journey and help them with what they want to achieve. That's tough stuff to go through," she explains. The majority of services she provides for this segment involves laser hair removal.

Meinhart is a strong proponent of Junior Achievement. She's backed the organization through donations, a fundraiser and discussions

to build awareness. "They really support the entrepreneurial spirit – I love JA," she says.

## Looking natural

"People don't want to look tired or old," explains Meinhart. Her aim is to "help people get a youthful, healthy appearance without looking unnatural." She describes her offices as a "medical setting with a little bit of a spa feeling." "It's not like you come there to get a message and relax," she says. "Our patients come to get things done."

The typical Starkey Medical Esthetics customer is a 35-year-old woman who is either coming in for laser hair removal or Botox®, says Meinhart. "We have a range of 14-92 – believe it or not I have a 92-year-old that gets Botox® because she's dating a 70-year-old," she states.

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"Hair or wrinkles or saggy skin or bad acne – we're fixers. They're not just there to drink a glass of wine and relax. We're problem solvers. It's the way our patients see us and the way we see ourselves," says Meinhart. She explains that a lot of her procedures involve stimulating the skin to produce healthier cells or "wake the sleeping cells to make them more productive."

Skin solution issues generally involve developing a plan that includes activities over several months. "Often people have not taken care of their skin at all then come to me when they're 50 and look like they're 75 and it's really wrecking their confidence," she says.

Clients are predominately women, but men come in too for mostly Botox® or hair removal – often from the back but sometimes facial hair too. Botox and hair removal represent the biggest



need for both genders, Meinhart states.

Meinhart offers free consultations. This involves an appointment that lasts about 15 minutes to look at issues, assess skin under magnification and review before and after pictures of patients with similar issues, then discuss solutions. 

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# spotluck

## LYNCHBURG



Randy Sass

### The Sass on Spotluck >

**Executive Summary:**

*The Spotluck app offers "a new element of engagement to Lynchburg's dining experience."*

**By Carissa Mulahn**

Cherian Thomas and Brad Saylor, co-founders of the Spotluck dining app, like to 'spin the wheel.' A modern, bright green roulette wheel is the featured centerpiece of this unique app. A quick download, a few key strokes of info, then the FUN touch of the wheel, and You're Off! Savings Await! Suddenly, my prize appears: 25% off at Market at Main! Wow, easy as can be, AND I save money, AND this whole thing put a smile on my

face. I briefly chuckle when I think of how well children would react to this—"What did we win? Where do we get to go?!? What does 25% off mean, Mama?"

For the end user, there is little more than smiles and savings, fun and food. Randy Sass, the local Lynchburg influencer responsible for bringing the app to the area, caught the Spotluck vision immediately, choosing to focus on the smiles and savings, food and fun, while taking the uphill climb inherent in onboarding local restaurants in stride. Sass has loved the dining scene since childhood, when his mother worked at Charlie's on Graves Mill Road. Sass also understands what it takes for local business to succeed on the world of 2 for \$20 at Applebee's and Amazon Prime free delivery. So when the opportunity arose to bring a new element of engagement to Lynchburg's dining experience,

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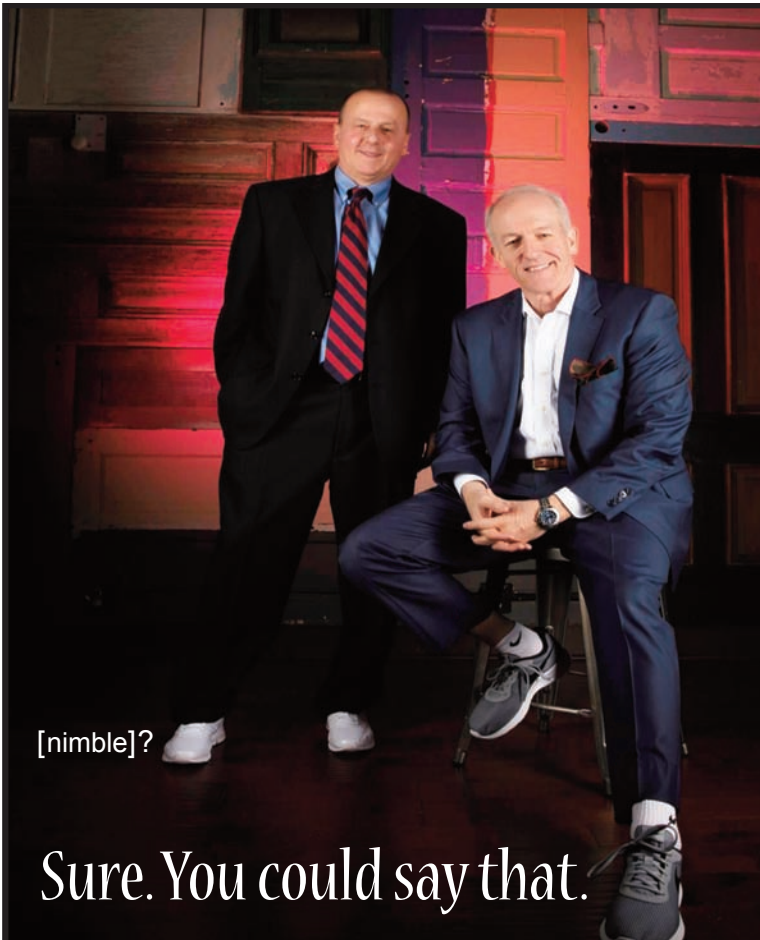
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Sass jumped. "I told them about our downtown upgrades, from city, state and private developers. I told them about LU's expansion, our new city stadium, and the work being done on Main Street Bridge. I told them how Bluffwalk wasn't even there 5 years ago. I just made sure they knew how much investment has come into our city here lately."

Founders Cherian Thomas and Bradford Saylor describe Sass's application a little differently. Out of over 1000 applications from potential local partners in areas ranging from major metros to 'mini cities', "Randy's application exploded off the page," says Thomas, CEO and co-founder of Spotluck. "We intentionally set up our application process so we can see through the bullshit. We're looking for someone's heart toward their city." Sass's heart of love for Lynchburg shone through in an instant. After the initial

video interview, he submitted presentation data, stats on city specifics, and perspectives from city, state and private developers describing why they bet on Lynchburg. Sass was invited for a face to face conversation and aced that as well. Thomas says, "we knew Lynchburg was an ideal market from a tech perspective. Unlike Manhattan, Philly, Baltimore or DC, where there's a new dining app every other week, Lynchburg seemed prime for a new tech engagement of Spotluck's nature." Not surprisingly, results of entering the Lynchburg market on Feb 1 2018 thrilled the company immediately. Spotluck tracks their stats closely and are happy to relay that, in Lynchburg, over 6,000 users have generated close to 25,000 spins to bring in approximately 12,000 diners and generated a GMV (Gross Merchandise Value calculated from average plate costs per restaurant and specific purchasing) of just over \$248K for



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the 14 restaurants participating (data specific to submission date of article, 3/20/2018). For Spotluck, these results are as explosive as Sass's initial application for consideration.

Spotluck has been featured on NBC, FOX, ABC, CBS, Bloomberg, The New York Times, Entrepreneur.com, MSNBC, and several other media outlets throughout the U.S. and enjoys ever increasing success with

each passing month. As Thomas describes it, many other markets have been disrupted by new approaches to pricing based on maximizing industry inherent pricing fluctuation. These market disruptors calculate incentive to engage dynamic pricing opportunity that benefits the average consumer—think Priceline, Zara, Aldi, perhaps even Dollar General—can this be done for dining? Thomas and Saylor

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believed it could, and dug in hard to develop the proprietary software behind Spotluck that calculates an end user incentive based on time, day and weather—the three largest influencers of dining industry. The only element remaining to be addressed was engaging the end user. The fancy calculations and detailed data mean nothing unless there is a consumer base that wants to USE THE APP...how do consumers best engage?!?

“We decided to gamify it,” Thomas says. The roulette wheel, the anticipation of a win and a prize everyone wants is certainly working to everyone’s benefit thus far, from diners to restaurant owners to creators and influencers.

Two questions have come from locals that consumers want perspective on: How does Spotluck make their money? Participating restaurants pay a flat fee per usage, a fee

that is small enough not to overshadow the profit from the consumer’s visit to the restaurant. And, why does Blacksburg’s Spotluck only have 8 restaurants, while Lynchburg’s has 14? The credit here goes to Spotluck’s evolution in understanding how to impact mini cities. The role of local partner, which Randy Sass plays with gusto on Lynchburg’s behalf, is a new concept within the Spotluck landscape. Blacksburg doesn’t have a local partner because Spotluck didn’t have that role when they showed up on the Blacksburg scene. Pivoting without losing sight of your true purpose is key in business, the pivot to local partners created great success for Spotluck in Lynchburg. Which leaves us with two questions; will such a staunch advocate as Randy Sass rise up for the Roanoke dining scene? Will a local advocate attempt to better infuse Blacksburg’s Spotluck engagement? 

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# Business Operations

By Mike Leigh

## Executive Summary:

*Performance evaluations hardly constitute effective leadership; in fact, relying on certain analytics could be counterproductive.*

## The role of leaders >

This month we continue the series on W. Edwards Deming's 14 points for management to follow as covered in his book, *Out of the Crisis*. Each point will be discussed in a separate article.

### **Point #7** – *Adopt and Institute Leadership.*


This point is arguably the most controversial (and least followed) point that Deming makes. Consider what he writes:

*The job of management is not supervision, but leadership. Management must work on sources of improvement. A focus on outcome (management by numbers, MBO, work standards, meet specifications, zero defects, appraisal of performance) must be abolished, and leadership put in place.*

This is exactly opposite of what most leaders do today. Most managers still look for supervisors that “hit the numbers,” put out fires, and hold their employees accountable. And their idea of improvement is to simply set higher goals the following year. If your systems are stable, this will make things worse. Leaders will fail to gain the confidence of their employees because they are only concerned about the numbers, and you won't improve.

Deming offers three suggestions (with which I fully agree!) to help institute leadership in your organization:

- **Leaders must know the work.** Too many supervisors do not understand the work being done by their employees. Thus, they can't effectively hire, train, and help their employees in their work, and must gravitate toward a focus on quotas and numbers. Consider promoting from within and having your new college hires “get their hands dirty” by spending time doing the work they will be supervising.
- **Leaders must remove barriers for hourly workers.** The hourly workforce in your organization are those who are directly providing value to, and interacting with, your customers. A leader's primary role is to remove any obstacle or challenge that prevents employees from effectively doing their job. If you don't enjoy listening to employee suggestions and complaints, and helping them improve their processes, then a career in leadership or management may not be a good fit for you.
- **Leaders must work on sources of improvement.** A leader who spends all day putting out fires is not improving anything. Instead, management should focus on implementing process and system improvements. (See my article in the February 2018 of FRONT.)

Do you disagree with Deming on this point? Let me hear from you. 

Next month: *Point #8 – Drive Out Fear.*

## Riders on the storm &gt;

Our client certainly reads the headlines. "I want you to make me a Stormy Daniels contract!" he said over the phone.

"I'm sorry," I said, "You aren't coming in very clearly. Could you please repeat that?"

"I have all sorts of secrets!" he said. "We're doing all sorts of high-tech research over here, as you know. Well, I want you to write a contract for me like the Stormy Daniels contract."

"Does your wife know about this?" I said.

"No, no," he said. "I'm talking about the money. Her contract says that she has to pay one million dollars if she ever says anything about the affair. And now the President's attorneys are saying that she violated the contract twenty times, so that she owes twenty million dollars. I want you to make me a non-disclosure agreement like that."

"You mean you want your non-disclosure agreement to specify a fixed amount of money damages?" I said.

"Yes," he said. "If an employee ever discloses any of our trade secrets, then I want the penalty to be one million dollars for each disclosure."

"OK, I see now," I said. "However, I'm afraid that won't work. You see, a penalty clause in a contract is not enforceable."

"Really?" he said. "Then what happens if a guy breaches the contract? Doesn't he have to pay anything?"

"Oh sure, if someone breaches a contract then he or she can be made to pay," I said. "However, the payment isn't a fixed penalty. Instead it's called 'damages.' The amount of damages varies depending upon the harm that the breach caused you."

"Isn't the purpose of damages to discourage people from breaching the contract?" he said.

"No," I said, "actually the purpose of the payment of damages is to 'make you whole,' which means that it's supposed to put you in exactly the same place where you would have been if the other guy had not breached the contract."

"Well, if someone gives away one of our trade secrets, then that easily could cost me a million dollars," he said.

"Ah, but you would have to prove to the court how much it cost you," I said. "And frankly it seems unlikely to me that disclosing any one of your trade secrets would cost you the same amount as the others. I know your trade secrets. Some of them are really valuable, but others aren't. So if for example someone discloses a trade secret and it costs you \$50,000,



## Shark Patrol

By Keith Finch

**Executive Summary:**  
*Penalty clauses in contracts are generally unenforceable; however, there may be some provisions if a few conditions are met.*



The purpose of the payment of damages is to ‘make you whole,’ which means that it’s supposed to put you in exactly the same place where you would have been if the other guy had not breached the contract.



If it’s very hard or impossible to calculate how much damage a particular breach will cause, then it’s OK for a contract to specify a fixed amount of damages for that breach, so long as the fixed amount is a reasonable estimate of the amount of damages.

then that’s what you get. If the trade secret is worth a million dollars, then that’s what you get.”

“But lots of contracts require you to pay fixed penalties,” he said. “For example, my brother runs a construction company and he was late completing a bridge. He had to pay \$1000 for each day he was late.”

“Ah, that’s a bit different,” I said. “If it’s very hard or impossible to calculate how much damage a particular breach will cause, then it’s OK for a contract to specify a fixed amount of damages for that breach, so long as the fixed amount is a reasonable estimate of the amount of damages. When you do that, the fixed amount is called ‘liquidated damages’ and it is enforceable.”

“Well, I think that a million dollars is a reasonable estimate of what it’ll cost me if an employee discloses one of my trade secrets,” he said. “Can’t we just put in the contract that me and my employee agree it’s a reasonable estimate?”

“It’s not enough to agree that it’s a reasonable estimate, it has to actually be a reasonable estimate,” I said. “In your brother’s case, it might be reasonable to estimate that the city would suffer damages of \$1000 per day if the bridge wasn’t finished. But in your case, since you have trade secrets of different values, you can’t just slap the same value on all of them. Also, not every kind of disclosure is going to cost you the same amount. Suppose one employee told a trade secret to her mother, while the other published it in a magazine. Would each disclosure cost you the same amount?”

“No,” he said.

“So it wouldn’t be a reasonable estimate of your damages for you to get the same amount for each type of disclosure,” I said. “The court would decide that your liquidated damages provision is an illegal penalty and would refuse to enforce it.”

“But what about the Stormy contract?” he said. “She has to pay a million dollars for each disclosure. Surely the President’s lawyers didn’t make a silly mistake like that.”

“Actually they did,” I said. “Her situation is very similar. She could presumably make any of a number of different types of




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disclosures, each of which would cause a different amount of damage. For example, if she disclosed a video, surely it would cause more damage than disclosing a text message. Similarly, it would cause less damage if she were to make the disclosure to a friend then if she were to give a television interview. There's simply no basis for assigning a single fixed amount of damages to every type of disclosure."

"So the Stormy contract is unenforceable?" he said.

"The one-million-dollar liquidated damages part of the Stormy Daniels contract certainly is unenforceable," I said, "Although perhaps it could have been made enforceable with a bit of forethought. For example, the President's attorneys could have created different levels of liquidated damages for different types of secrets and for different types of disclosures, and included calculations in the contract to justify their estimates of the damages amounts."

"Well then, could we try something like that?" he said.

And so we spent some time discussing and categorizing our client's various types of trade secrets and the various types of possible disclosures, and in the end we wound up with a table identifying several different types of trade secrets (ranging from customer information to unfiled patent applications) and several types of disclosures (ranging from telling one's spouse to sharing secrets with a competitor) and establishing the amount of liquidated damages for each. The amounts are backed up with economic data that's included in the contract. It's far from simple. But it's probably enforceable. 

Keith can be reached at [keith@creekmorelaw.com](mailto:keith@creekmorelaw.com)

**Note:** *facts have been changed to preserve confidentiality. Oh, and this isn't legal advice—you should consult a (good) lawyer about protecting your trade secrets, drafting a non-disclosure agreement, calculating the dollar value of harm to your reputation as a reality television star and/or Leader of the Free World, etc.*



The one-million-dollar liquidated damages part of the Stormy Daniels contract certainly is unenforceable.

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**ENTRÉ**



Alan Bayse and Mosby

## Ouch! When benefit costs hurt your company >

### Executive Summary:

*Benefit programs are a major business expense; a knowledgeable consultant like Alan Bayse can help control costs.*

### By Christine Liana

If you oversee a benefits program for your organization, do you outsource it or delegate it to your human resources staff? How much do they know about funding options, controlling costs, and current healthcare legislation? Who's making informed decisions that affect your company's profit or loss?

If your business doesn't have the time or knowledge needed to devote to your benefits program, it's time to talk with a professional benefits consultant. After all, if you wouldn't file complicated tax returns without the expertise of a CPA, why take a chance when it comes to managing this expensive, complicated portion of your business?

### Meet your business neighbor

Alan Bayse, Registered Health Underwriter and Certified Business Consultant, knows about benefit plans. He's been in the business for 34 years, and has helped clients including Botetourt County government, Grayson County government, Scott County schools, Bland County schools, Wise County, Wise

County schools, Williams Supply, and West Window Corp. of Martinsville.

A former Virginia Tech student in the Corp of Cadets, Bayse joined the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War, worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency, and was named DIA Soldier of the Year in 1971. After the military he drove locomotives for Norfolk & Western, then returned to school and earned a management degree from Radford University. After working for Blue Cross/Blue Shield and later as vice president of Corporate Benefits Consultants, Bayse started his own business, Bayse & Company, Inc. in 1992. He sold the business in 2013, and in 2016 started Independent Benefit Consulting. He and his wife make their home in Botetourt County.

### Facing reality

A successful benefits program isn't just another administrative function handed off to the HR department. Bayse shares his insight into the realities that employers face:

- *They need to understand they're running a healthcare business. It's most likely their second largest expense. Unfortunately, most of the task is turned over to HR ... never trained in funding, benefits, etc.*
- *Wellness is a \$10 billion dollar business. You're being told that you need to complete HRAs, screenings, and other diagnostic testing, [much] of which creates false positives and more tests, possibly invasive. The Journal of the American Medical Association stated in a June 19, 2014, article: "preventive health checks in adults do not reduce disease or mortality but increase diagnosis and drugs."*



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- *Do they [broker or consultant] receive commission from the very entity from which you purchase your healthcare insurance? Are there bonuses for renewing your business? If changes are recommended, are they changes recommended by the carrier to the broker/advisor? You need to be aware of other options that benefit you more.*

## Law of attraction

While we're talking about costs, are the incentives in your benefits package attracting the right employees?

People typically care more about protecting their own money, time, and property than anyone else's. They tend to use more when they're not accountable for it, including paid leave, expense accounts, and unnecessary medical tests because insurance pays.

In their book, *Who Survives? How Benefit Costs Are Killing Your Company* (Cheyenne, WY: Health as Human Capital Foundation, 2011), authors Wendy Lynch, PhD and Hank Gardner, MD state: "what you pay for, you attract." Lynch's and Gardner's 10-year extensive research of numerous companies, hundreds of jobs, and almost a million employees across the United States led to discovering combined factors of successful policies — and ones that fail.

Their premise is simple: aligned incentives through shared responsibility (e.g. less pay for less than a days' work; penalizing for inefficiency and monetary waste) and shared rewards (e.g. profit-sharing; performance-

based bonuses), can help organizations eliminate deadweight, reward high-achievers, and increase productivity and profit.

High-performing employees wanting to increase their quality of life through earning power are motivated to take care of their health. They're attracted to incentives like higher salaries or wages, bonuses/profit-sharing, and education and advancement opportunities. Investing in them is investing in your business. But when organizations give in to "Me-First" entitlement demands with superfluous benefits, including free meals, concierge services, and electronic gadget giveaways, their loyal, high performers are forced to share this cost burden. Are your employees there for the right reasons?

## Making the decision

Like choosing the right independent insurance agency for your commercial insurance program, so it is with deciding on a consulting firm for your company's benefit plan. What sets Independent Benefit Consulting apart from larger firms? According to Bayse:

- *We do not accept additional monies for the following: additional rewards for the amount of business that's placed with one carrier or organization. In most cases these organizations tell the client their fees and say they don't receive additional commissions or money for your organization, which is partly correct, but they do receive additional money for a combined amount of business with one carrier or organization.*
- *Larger organizations hire Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) to assist employers with their drug costs and they collect money from the PBM for doing so. We do not.*
- *We see that Rx rebates go directly to the client. Most organizations receive commissions for the selection of a PBM. We want the client to receive the rebates, which are substantial.*
- *We work with the client so they understand that some vendors and wellness programs are cost creators not necessarily cost-saving. There's a new approach that creates*




verifiable results which we have not seen with current programs.

- Clients are taught ways to save monies on dental, prescription drugs, and technology.
- We can provide technology products that will save up to 50% of your HR department's time, and arrange to do this at no cost.
- Most of all, it's personal assistance and good partnerships that create success.

## In the Ballpark

Bayse noted that his consulting fees are competitive yet below the going rates for larger consulting firms. But fees aren't the only thing in the ballpark. Bayse's ability to help others is demonstrated on the ball field, having coached softball for talented athletes such as the Women's Club Team at Virginia

Tech in 1994-1995, which became a varsity sport the following year. He later coached the women's softball team at Roanoke College in 1996-1997, and in 1998, it also became a varsity sport. From 1999 to 2005 they won six ODAC Championships, were NCAA Regional Champions two of those years, and advanced to the NCAA Division III Championship. "There were a lot of awards, [and] I was blessed with some very good assistant coaches and some awesome players," said Bayse. Returning to Virginia Tech in 2007 and 2008 as a women's softball volunteer coach, they won the first ACC Championship in 2007, advancing to the NCAA Division 1 National Championship in 2008.

Bayse sees similarities between athletes and his clients in how each strives to improve in order to experience success. 

For more information about Independent Benefit Consulting, visit: [ibconsultingllc.com](http://ibconsultingllc.com)



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## A Little Insight

By Bruce C. Bryan

**Executive Summary:** *FRONT* introduces a new columnist who will briefly share ideas, concepts, and experiences you can apply to your own business or profession.

## Multitasking is not really a thing >

Use this new column as a thought-starter or as the impetus to make that change or take that next step.

### Doing2Things at Once

It's really a made-up phrase. In my mind, I've come to the realization I simply cannot do it. (I'm pretty sure those of you who are reading this can't either, no matter how much you think you can.)

Multitasking? Nah. Sometimes we can do multiple things in a really fast sequence, but when we try to do two jobs at one time neither typically gets the proper attention.

The other night I was listening to the news, while trying to do something else I'm sure, and I heard a statistic – ***Pedestrian Traffic Deaths are at a 25 Year High in the United States.*** The anchor stated marijuana has something to do with the increase, but even bigger is the impact of texting and walking. These experts took all the fun out of texting and driving and now they don't even want us to text and walk.

*That's because it's not safe. You can't do two things – especially like that – at once.*

### Watch4The Lessons

They are simple really. One is for advertisers and the other is for people engaged in any kind of business.

1. Your advertising had better interrupt because, if you're lucky, people are only halfway paying attention to start. Grab their attention first and then try to begin the process of winning over their hearts and minds.
2. Focus on one thing at a time when the one thing is something that requires your attention. Sometimes you can walk and chew gum (or text), but when your mind needs to be engaged it is best to absolutely do one thing at a time. Otherwise you'll end up doing neither particularly well.

They say advertising isn't life and death. Generally that's true, though even that can depend on what multitasking duties you marketing and business people are trying to accomplish. Focus completely instead. You will be better at most everything you do.

## Can you write off that medical expense? >


With the change in the healthcare law and the implementation of Obamacare, the health insurance landscape has just about everyone scratching their head. Add to that tax reforms beginning in 2018 and it's no wonder people are confused about how to handle these expenses on their returns. Medical expenses are something you always want to deduct on your tax return when you can.

2018 offers a lot of savings that apply. Don't forget to add Medical premiums to your Schedule A. Vision care and products can be another big expense for those of us that need glasses and/or contacts – include this. Hearing aids and the out of pocket expenses associated with provider visits are deductible. You don't have to pull your hair out when teeth are pulled. Dental expenses are deductible. Prescriptions too.

So, when does it make sense to itemize? For 2017 and 2018, medical expenses are only deductible once they exceed 7.5% of your Adjusted Gross Income (AGI). This changes in 2019, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. Here are some items you may not have considered:

- Expenses for weight loss programs if you're working to burn off fat after the diagnosis from your doctor of a specific illness and an associated recommendation for a lighter you.
- Transportation expenses for medical travel including bus fare, gas or mileage on your vehicle.
- Meals purchased at hospitals and other facilities where you're staying for medical care.
- Home renovations made for medical conditions or diseases which can include construction, installation and/or maintenance costs.

Use these deductions while you can. Come January 1, 2019, taxpayers can claim only the amount of total unreimbursed allowable medical expenses that exceed 10% of your AGI.

Many fail to claim some pretty sizable sums because they don't know they can. When it comes to your health, you can lower your blood pressure by tracking costs for tax savings later. Learn what is allowed and you may find funds for that vacation you need. 

*Michael Shelton owns 360 Financials Solutions and 360 Tax Solutions. Email him at [michael@discover360Financial.com](mailto:michael@discover360Financial.com) with questions, story ideas or for help with your financial issues.*



## Financial Figures

By Michael Shelton

### Executive Summary:

*Most people don't realize how broad the range of allowable tax deductions are for medical expenses. Read on to see if you're missing out on sizable sums.*



## On Tap from the Pub

By Tom Field

### Executive Summary:

*There exists a lot of lessons, tips, and solid advice for those of us who desire to succeed; we should pay heed, right?*

## Squish the bug >

Most kids who have played enough baseball and softball have heard this advice. "Squish the bug" reminds batters to use and turn that back leg and hip into the swing so they get the most power transferred when hitting the ball. In practices and games, it's common to hear coaches (and parents) hollering "Squish the bug! Squish the bug!" when they see their young athlete standing flat-footed at the plate.

Good form is important. Ask any violinist holding her instrument at the wrong level or bow at the wrong angle. Ask any painter about to stab the canvass at 90 degrees with a gob of acrylic dripping from a coarse brush on what's supposed to be a Bob Ross happy little tree. And god forbid, ask any golfer who dares to lift his head in the middle of a drive off the tee.

Listen to me! You're not supposed to do it that way!  
Do it this way!

The coaches are right. They know what they're talking about.

Except when they don't.

I watched a girl consistently hit line drives and even home runs—until the coach started paying attention. "Choke up on the bat!" he said. "Widen your stance! Up to the front of the box! Head down! Elbow up!" (And he didn't even tell her to squish the bug.)

His well-meaning advice was delivered in machine gun fashion, often at the second the ball was released from the pitcher's hand.

You see, there are people who perform remarkably well, despite their bad or unconventional form. I see them in sports, in the arts, and in business. There's the guy who runs a multi-million dollar digital enterprise—who put away his own smart phone and replaced it with a voice-only flip phone. On the flip side, there's the gal who never makes a sales call and gets 100% of her business from incoming leads through automated software. There's the old man who still hand-delivers his product and produces it on original and outdated equipment, who is unimpressed with the option to move it all online.

A coach would have insisted and proven to each of these individuals how wrong they are. How much they could improve by simply changing to a more successful form.

Coaches aren't valuable unless they instruct you to do something differently. Otherwise, you don't need them.

## Letters

### Look closely



What's funny is I have an 8 ball sitting on my office desk at Coldwell Banker Townside Realtors to remind me that sometimes you just have to ask direct questions. Incidentally the 8 ball usually gives an appropriate response when I do ask it questions.

**Steve Eaton**  
Blacksburg

### Q&A

Tom Field hit it squarely between the eyes in his recent "On Tap from the Pub" comments on what constitutes a quality interviewer.

Throughout my career I've responded to literally thousands of media queries and

more than 400 studio and stand-up interviews, often with network news or the likes of the New York Times, Washington Post, or London Times. Even from some of those sources, the questions from the interviewer weren't always interesting or on-topic. Sometimes during one of these iffy interviews I caught myself staring into a dark void of space as I contemplated what the question just asked meant—about anything in this galaxy. It takes a real pro to draw anyone of us into the interviewer's line of questioning.

Five of the best interviewers I ever worked with were Don Imus, Molly Moore (Wash Post), Thomas Ricks (then the NYT), the late David Bloom (NBC), and David Halberstam. What did all of them have in common? Each one of them made the one being interviewed feel like what he/she was saying, for that moment in time, was the most interesting and important thing they had yet to hear in their entire life. You wanted to be interviewed again by each.


Well done, Mr. Field!

**Barry N. Moore**  
BBB Central Virginia  
Richmond

*Send letters to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto:news@vbFRONT.com) or any FRONT contact of your choosing (page 6). Submissions may be edited. You can see, read, print any current or back issue online at [www.vbFRONT.com](http://www.vbFRONT.com)*

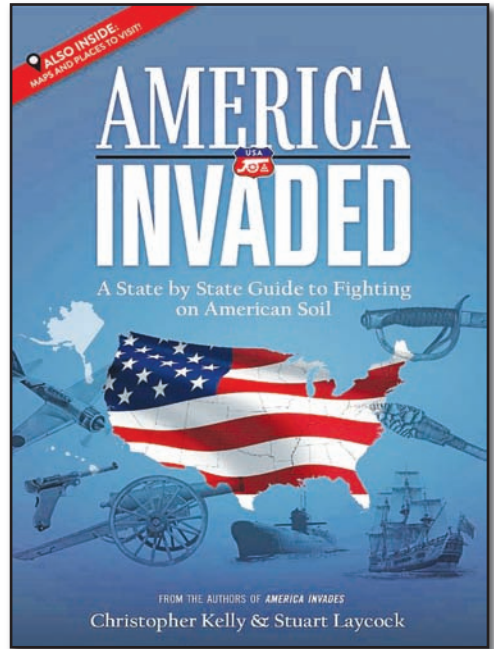
To be fair, the majority of folks benefit from a coach. But when the conventional form isn't really going to work for you, or you've traveled along a different journey, you might want to seek different expertise.

Someone who has reached a higher level of expertise or is clearly operating at a much higher caliber might be a better option. A teacher who has never taught. A coach who has never coached.

That person probably doesn't even see a bug to squish in the first place. 

## Books @ the FRONT >

Following are book recommendations from our contributors and business people in the Roanoke and New River Valleys who are inveterate readers. Readers are invited to submit short reviews of books you've read during the past six months. Our goal is to recommend good books on any topic and in any genre. Send reviews to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto:news@vbFRONT.com)



### *Unwelcomed*

Have you ever wondered why some towns in Texas have French names? Or why there's a statue of a Shawnee chief at the U.S. Naval Academy? Or what coastal wildlife refuges have to do with American fears of invasion? And what the Olive Oil Riot in Montana was really all about?

*American Invaded: A State by State Guide to Fighting on American Soil* (History Invasions Press; 2017) by Christopher Kelly and Stuart Laycock has the answers to these intriguing questions, and many more. All are rooted in one often-overlooked fact: the United States of America, which throughout history has invaded dozens upon dozens of other countries from Normandy in 1944 to Iraq in 2003, has itself also been invaded on countless occasions. Americans are often resistant to this notion. Yet, ever since humans first set foot on the North American continent, they have explored, discovered, established boundaries—and subsequently invaded—all across the territory we now call the United States.

This book provides a snapshot of the waves of invasion—qualified as episodes of fighting on U.S. soil—that have touched all fifty American states and Washington D.C. Drawing on years of meticulous research including a drive through 36 states, they chronicle some of the many explorations and invasions that

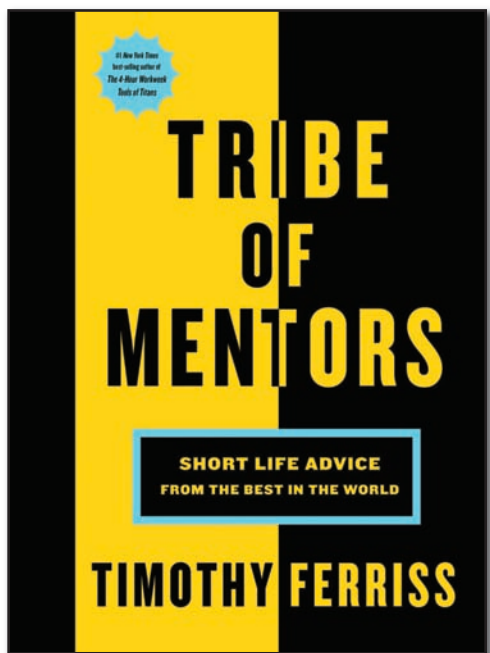
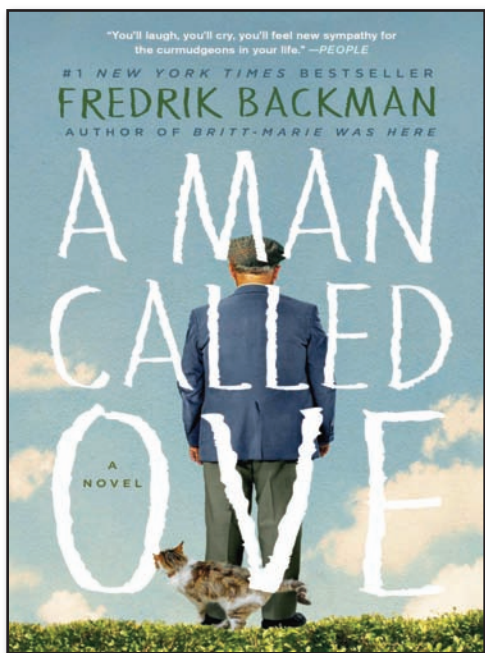
founded or destroyed towns, that set and reset state lines, and that shaped the peoples and culture of this nation. Readers will be reminded of the fluidity of political boundaries of the states. New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont were eventually detached from Massachusetts. West Virginia was carved out of Virginia during the Civil War.

—Katie Riess

### *Grumpy old man*

Fredrik Backman is a master at character studies. In *A Man Called Ove* (Washington Square; 2015) we get that proverbial cranky neighbor who shouts at the kids to stay off his damn lawn. Set in Sweden where the Saab is the only reasonable choice of automobile, you'll meet a man at the end of his rope—even as that rope has been meticulously maintained and kept perfectly straight for six decades. Ove is missing more than just the letter "L" before his name. But no wonder. Little glimpses along a way replete with injustices and unfairness make empathy for the curmudgeon not only possible, but imperative.

Backman's Ove is as real as a man standing right there in front of you as any. It's like watching Disney's *Up* when every hope was stripped away for no good reason at all. It's



like watching Mr. Rogers get sucker punched right in the gut for merely putting on his left tennis shoe before his right (because someone thought it should go in the other order). In Ove's neighborhood, everything does not always go as planned; we realize his 'hood is no different than our 'hood; and there is certainly a grumpy old man living down the road from us, worthy of our attention.

—Tom Field

### And so can you

What good is a book that asks the same questions over and over? Quite a lot as it turns out. Timothy Ferriss' *Tribe of Mentors* — subtitled "Short Advice from the Best in the World" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 2017) — offers what a hundred or so people at the top of their game claim see as the secrets to their success. Ferriss' regular readers — he is author of *The 4-Hour Workweek* and *The 4-Hour Body* — are no stranger to big books and *Tribe of Mentors* is no different. Somewhere in the almost 600 pages most reader will recognize someone. Thankfully, the three-to-five-page profiles make easy "dip-into" reading.

The famous — Neil Gaimann (Ferriss' "personal white whale") and Arianna Huffington — to the famous in their fields — Steve

Jurvetson (venture capitalist) and Stephanie McMahon (professional wrestling) — offer thoughts on books, success and unusual habits. Each addresses, in various levels of details, the obvious: advice to those just entering an industry, how have they improved in the last five years and how to refocus when feeling overwhelmed. Other questions are surprising: "If you could have a gigantic billboard ... what would it say?" and "What purchase of \$100 or less has most positively impacted your life?"

The biggest challenge with the book might be trying to see beyond Ferriss who intersperses the randomly presented interviews with his own "Points I am Pondering" (quotes), a lengthy introduction on how and why he wrote the book, final thoughts and a detailed compendium of his TED talks, top 25 podcasts and a blog of resources. Ferriss includes even those who did not participate in interludes called "How to Say No," "polite declines ... so good I included them!"

—Doloris Vest

**The reviewers:** Tom Field is a creative director and the publisher of FRONT; Katie Riess is a publicist with PR Workzone in Plymouth, MA; Doloris Vest owns Book No Further book store in downtown Roanoke.



Courtesy of UW/NRV

## Craps pay >

**United Way** of the New River Valley hosted their 7th annual formal fundraiser, **Valentines in Vegas**, on Saturday, February 10, 2018 at the German Club Manor in Blacksburg, VA, raising \$19,805. All monies will benefit the United Way's local human and health building efforts in the community and their 25 local partner agencies.



# FRONT 'N ABOUT



Courtesy of Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge

## Pass it on >

Eight arts and cultural attractions in the City of Roanoke are offering a discounted joint pass called the **Star City Pass** that allows one visit to each attraction at a 31% discount versus individual ticket prices; adult and youth passes are available and valid through August 31, 2018; and the attractions include: **Kids Square Children's Museum; Harrison Museum of African American Culture; History Museum of Western Virginia including the O. Winston Link Museum; Mill Mountain Zoo; Pinball Museum; Science Museum of Western Virginia; Taubman Museum of Art; Virginia Museum of Transportation.**



Courtesy of Blue Ridge Marathon

## Running of the kids >

**Carilion Children's and Family Service of Roanoke Valley** organized the Global Youth Service Day in Roanoke to partner with the Foot Levelers Blue Ridge Marathon on April 21 to host its third annual 1 Miler that encourages and mobilizes young people to improve their own communities. The non-competitive race starts right after the Marathon at 7:35am at Elmwood Park.



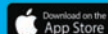
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# FRONT 'N ABOUT



## Salem's lot >

Salem-Roanoke County Chamber of Commerce held its Annual Gala at Hotel Roanoke on March 23 where **R.M Johnson** (left) was recognized as primary Business of the Year, along with **Hart Motor Company** (right) (over 80 years of service), **Salem Civic Center** (50 years), and **City of Salem** (two centuries), among other awards. Pictured with winners is chamber executive director Jill Sluss along with president Toni McLawhorn (right) who also handed over the gavel to 2018 incoming president Teresa Hamilton Hall.

*Valley Business FRONT is FRONT'n About at many events each month. Check the social media links at [www.vbFRONT.com](http://www.vbFRONT.com) for more coverage.*

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– Doris Ross

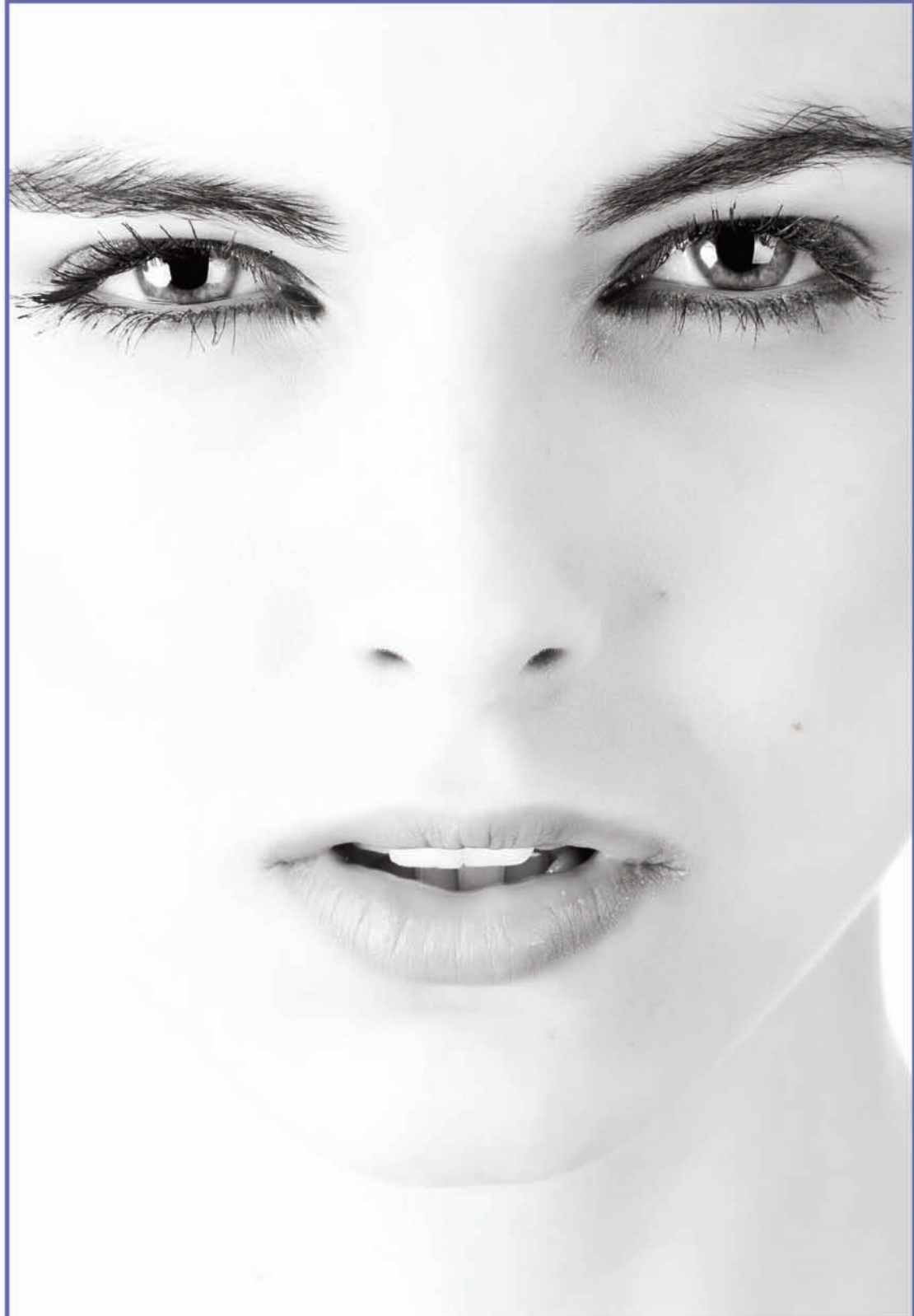


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# Career FRONT

## FINANCIAL FRONT

**Andrea Milliron** and **Jessica Clarkson** were appointed as vice president, market relationship managers for Member One FCU. Milliron will serve the Roanoke, Franklin County, and New River Valley markets, and Clarkson will serve the Lynchburg market.



Scott



Nipper

**Mitch Scott** has joined as mortgage loan officer (Electric Road, Roanoke) and

**Heather Nipper** has been named mortgage loan officer (Colony Park, Blacksburg) at Bank of The James Mortgage.

**Tony Kallsen** has been named executive vice president and chief credit officer at Carter Bank & Trust.

## DEVELOPMENT FRONT



Hunley

**Rachele Hunley** joined as senior sales associate where she will specialize in Residential and Commercial Sales at Poe & Cronk Real Estate Group.

**Sara Fisher, Ginger Francis, Steve Eller, Michele Reynolds** and **Janet Wilkinson**



Fisher



Eller



Michele Reynolds



Wilkinson

have been hired as sales associates to the real estate firm for Lichtenstein Rowan Realtors.



Jeff Reynolds

**Jeff Reynolds** has been selected as an associate broker for Lichtenstein Rowan Realtors.



Dix

**Josh Dix, Gina Arthur, Danny Goad, Jenna Lawrence, Chris Martin** and **Daniel Turk** were added as sales associates at RE/MAX All Stars Realty in Daleville.



Carissa Mulahn  
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## Have a career announcement?

Send announcements to [news@vbFRONT.com](mailto:news@vbFRONT.com). Photos should be color, 300dpi. A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.



Arthur



Goad



Lawrence



Martin



Turk

### EDUCATION FRONT

**Myra Sims** was appointed as new director of athletics at Hollins University.

**Richard Blythe** assumed the role of dean of Virginia Tech's College of Architectural and Urban Studies.

**Timothy Hodge** has been promoted to associate vice president for budget and financial planning at Virginia Tech.

**Robert Broyden** has been promoted to associate vice president for capital assets and financial management at Virginia Tech.

**Daniel Cleveland** was named to the newly created position of assistant dean of advancement for the Virginia Tech College of Liberal Arts and Human Services.

**Michelle Turek** was hired as principal gifts officer for Virginia Tech.

### WELLNESS FRONT

**Beth Bankston** is the new chief administrative officer at Jefferson Surgical Clinic.

**Lynn Epperly** was promoted to chief manager at Warm Hearth Village.

### CULTURE FRONT

**Nic Schell** has been selected as director of operations for Roanoke Pinball Museum.

### OTHER FRONTS

**Bob Sowder**, a Roanoke-area commercial real estate and drone photographer has won the 2018 "Best of Real Estate Photography" award by Houzz.

*Compiled by Nanette Levin and Tom Field*



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# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Dan Dowdy** is the business development director for Valley Business FRONT and owner of The Proofing Prof proofreading services (www.proofingprof.com). His background includes service in the U.S. Air Force and an extensive career in education, including teaching college-level writing competency and business courses, and working for a Fortune 100 company. [ddowdy@vbFRONT.com]

**Tom Field** is a creative director, marketing executive and owner of Berryfield, Inc. in Salem, and owner of Valley Business FRONT magazine. He has written and produced programs and materials for local and international organizations for more than 30 years. [tfield@berryfield.com]

**Keith Finch** is an attorney with Creekmore Law Firm in Blacksburg [keith@creekmorelaw.com]

**Kathleen Harvey Harshberger** is a graduate of Radford University and the Protocol School of Washington. She conducts seminars

in business etiquette, international business protocol, and dining skills She has an international clientele in business, government, and higher education. She is a certified Protocol Officer. [harshbergr@aol.com]

**Mike Leigh** is president of OpX Solutions, LLC, a performance improvement company that helps organizations pursue operational excellence. A retired naval commander and former GE manufacturing manager, he has extensive experience in leadership development and process improvement. [Mike@OpXSolutionsLLC.com]

Waking up with the peaceful sound of bird chatter while watching the sun rise over the mountains is one of **Nanette Levin's** simple pleasures. Still considered a foreigner by some local residents (she moved to Roanoke at the end of 2015), Nanette's determined to illuminate local treasures for business and pleasure through her company, Roanoke Revealed. When she's not enjoying nature and writing or creating marketing strategies for clients, she's growing fresh vegetables & herbs, seeing the sights in the area and occasionally hopping on a horse. [nlevin@fulcrumny.com]

**Christine Liana** is news editor and business writer for Valley Business FRONT. She has a

30-year business background in banking, insurance, law and local government, in which she's worked with a diverse management and client base. Christine earned a Certificate in Management from Darden Graduate School of Business, University of Virginia. [businessmail@mailfence.com]

**Carissa Mulahn** is a highly engaged networking professional who recently opened the Roanoke office of Sales Recruiters of Virginia. A graduate of Liberty University and Leadership Roanoke Valley, she has completed multiple trainings and seminars with Cortex Leadership Consulting, and considers her successful launch of her daughter, Jessica's professional career in NYC as her proudest accomplishment. [CMulahn@Salesrecruitersofva.com]

**Theresa Passeretti** is an account executive for Valley Business FRONT; a native of Roanoke, married and mother to two girls, she has an AAS degree in Environmental Studies and serves on the board of directors for Clean Valley Council. She enjoys the outdoors, has a passion for local business and superior customer service and is excited to see the positive growth and momentum in Virginia's Blue Ridge region. [tpasseretti@vbFRONT.com]

**Michael Shelton** specializes in working with Roanoke and Lynchburg area residents age 55+ who want to ensure they won't run out of money before they die. He currently holds his Series 6, 63 & 65 licenses and received the prestigious Chartered Financial Retirement Counselor designation. He's an Iraqi Freedom War Veteran. As owner of both 360 Tax Solutions and 360 Financial Solutions, he takes client satisfaction seriously and makes himself available to every client and prospect of his firms. Tune into Fox radio for his weekly Small Business Figures show. [michael@discover360Financial.com]


**Kathy Surace** is FRONT Business Dress columnist, an image consultant and owner of Peacock Image in Roanoke. She was a fashion consultant for a major clothing chain for a number of years. [kssurace@aol.com]

**Nicholas Vaassen** is a graphic designer with 16 years experience, specializing in publications. His design projects include FRONT, lifestyle, real estate, municipal, classified sales and cultural organization magazines in Roanoke and southwestern Virginia markets. [nvaassen@berryfield.com]



Everything doesn't need to be the most expensive — Page 61

# FRONT NETWORK



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 Tristina Pagans, LMT  
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# FRONT Notes

## *New donuts in town*

**Duck Donuts** held their ribbon cutting on March 17th. They're located in Promenade Park at 3564 Electric Road in Roanoke County.

## *New York Pizza, anyone?*

**Tony Avellino's** held its grand opening on March 9th. They are located on 3606 Franklin Road in Roanoke City.

## *Rolling to the ocean depths*

The **Deep-X** team from Virginia Tech earned a finalist spot in the \$7 million Shell Ocean Discovery XPRIZE global competition with their autonomous under water vehicle, Javelin. Dan Stilwell, professor of electrical and computer engineering and director of the Virginia Tech Center for Marine Autonomy and Robotics lead the

team of two graduate students including Jack Webster, an ocean engineering student and Stephen Krauss studying electrical engineering.

## *RAMP support*

**Delta Dental of Virginia** has contributed \$30,000 to the Regional Acceleration and Mentoring Program (RAMP) to support innovation and entrepreneurship in the Roanoke and New River Valley areas to help pay for expenses and programs at the RAMP's headquarters at 709 S. Jefferson St. in downtown Roanoke.

## *RIDE Solutions contest*

The **8th Annual Bike Shorts Film Festival** is seeing film submissions about the people, culture and bicycles that drive them in and around Southwest Virginia. The Festival will premiere

with a screening at Grandin Theatre on Friday, April 17th with additional showings in Blacksburg, Lynchburg, and Clifton Forge throughout May.

## *Goodwill hunting*

**Goodwill Industries of the Valleys** has opened a new store in Pearisburg near Walmart.

## *ADDY Awards*

The **AAF Roanoke American Advertising Awards** presented 16 gold ADDY Awards and 27 silvers at a presentation attended by over 200 members. Highlights included: **Howard Packett Award for Creative Excellence (Best of Show)** - Carilion Clinic, Clinic at 10 Annual Report for Carilion Clinic; **Best of Print** - Carilion Clinic, Clinic at 10 Annual Report for Carilion Clinic; **Best of Interactive** - Firefli, Homestead Creamery Website for

Homestead Creamery; **Best of Film, Video, and Sound** - Abandon Films, The Farmer for Carilion Clinic; **Student Best of Show** - Lindsey Boone, Nair Men's Hair Removal Spray, Virginia Tech; **Student Judge's Choice** - Madeline Seelhammer, Ginger & Poppy, Liberty University.

## *One word: plastics*

**Tessy Plastics** in Lynchburg announced a \$9.2 million expansion that should create about 34 jobs and boost production for the injection mold contractor for the automotive, aerospace, military and consumer industries.

## *Paper work*

**WestRock** paper mill in Covington is in negotiation phase with the Paperworks Union as the last contract remains under an extension after a 2015 expiration.

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*Smith Mountain businesses sold*

**Smith Mountain Building Supply** and **The Cabinet Gallery** were sold to Richards Building Supply Company, an Illinois-based wholesale distributor of building materials. The family-owned purchaser was established in 1978. Smith Mountain Building Supply opened in 1986. The Willard Companies bought it in 2000 and continued to serve the greater Roanoke, Lynchburg and Smith Mountain Lake areas. Richards Building

supply will lease the current space at Westlake Towne Center in Hardy, VA from the Willard Companies.

*Filling the pipeline*

**Virginia Western Community College**, **New River Community College**, and **Danville Community College** are offering a two-week workplace safety course as part of a partnership (and agreement to supply at least 25% of workers from this region) with Laborer's International Union of North America,

*Have an announcement about your business?*

Send announcements to **news@vbFRONT.com**  
 A contact / source must be provided. Inclusions are not guaranteed and all submissions are subject to editing.

in preparation of new construction jobs with the Mountain Valley Pipeline project running through Southwest Virginia.

*Honorable gift*

**Virginia Tech** received a \$20 million donation from former

private equity director and the university's former provost Dave Calhoun for scholarships and funding of a new "Beyond Boundaries" multidisciplinary program and Calhoun Center for Higher Education at the Virginia Tech Honors College.

# First Fridays

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MAY 18

**FUZZY LOGIC**

JUNE 1

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JUNE 15

**THE KINGS**



## FRONT Notes

### *Sally goes to Washington*

The National Gallery of Art in Washington DC has on display the work of Lexington's **Sally Mann** in an exhibit entitled "A Thousand Crossings" which features photographs of Rockbridge County.

### *Energy Star certification*

**Poe & Cronk** announced they're the Property Manager for the only multi-tenant office buildings currently ENERGY STAR certified in

Southwest Virginia. The Wells Fargo Tower at 5162 Valleypointe Parkway and the North End Center in Blacksburg, VA have earned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ENERGY STAR® certification.

### *Two out of three VA awards*

**Richfield Living** was a 2017 Quality Initiative Recognition Program Recipient, named by the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) for both their Assisted Living Centers, The

Oaks and the Joseph C. Thomas Center. Only three assisted living providers in Virginia received this recognition, two of which went to Richfield Living.

### *Smaller dishes*

**DISH Network** direct-broadcast satellite service announced a reduction of about 450 employees this summer at its customer service center in Christiansburg; also converting most positions to telecommuter work-at-home.

### *New courtside*

**Liberty University** has announced plans to construct a new, 125,000-square foot sports arena beside its larger Vines Center to host men's and women's basketball games, women's volleyball games, and other activities.

### *Flying along*

**KMR Aviation Services** in Bedford announced a \$1 million expansion and the expectation of about a dozen new jobs; the company assembles

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components, provides maintenance, leases and sells parts for the airline industry.

*Drug money*

**Dickenson County** has filed a \$30 million lawsuit against Purdue Pharma and other painkiller manufacturers claiming the pharmaceutical companies misrepresent addictive qualities of their product that

contribute to opioid misuse, overdoses, deaths, and other casualties of its residents. The suit follows similar actions by other local governments across the nation.

*First parking space*

**ValleyStar Credit Union** gets the distinction of being the first business at the new Summit View Business Park

in Rocky Mount; the site is expected to complete its first phase in June.

*Jeff's cluster*

**Roanoke City** announced a "cluster" approach to a localized economic development initiative that will focus on innovation, inclusion and establishment of a technology and entrepreneurial boost along South Jefferson Street, led by special

projects coordinator Marc Nelson.

*Mill time*

**Town of Altavista** has approved a 600-acre regional industrial facility and creation of a Staunton River Regional Industrial Facility Authority to redevelop an old mill site in northern Pittsylvania County.

*Compiled by Nanette Levin and Tom Field*

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This sunroom solution was inspired by the woodland view and designed to bring the outdoors in.

## Furnishing homes from the floor up >

### Executive Summary:

*Halifax Fine Furnishings specializes in "capturing the feeling" of each room—with an emphasis on "fine."*

### By Nanette Levin

Think Persian rugs are the best quality your money can buy? Valeta Pittman doesn't, and she ought to know. She and her husband, Jack, have been learning from some of the

world's most knowledgeable dealers of fine carpets since the 1980s. This interest and knowledge gained spurred a passion that remains today at Halifax Fine Furnishings, where Pittman's favorite customers "start from the floor up."

The showroom, perhaps appropriately located kitty-corner from the "Gucci Kroger" on Brambleton Avenue, has a relatively small footprint. Yet, the place is artfully arranged to make you feel like you're in a big space while simultaneously being invited into someone's cozy residential living room. The firm functions as both a retail store and design resource.

### Rugs as the ideal design centerpiece

"Because we're known for our beautiful rugs, that's what people often come in for to start," says MaryJean Levin, a Virginia Tech graduate in interior design and the sole employee. Halifax also offers quality furniture and accent pieces. Primary manufacturers supporting the inventory and custom order options include Wesley Hall, Hickory White and Leathercraft.

Levin works alongside Pittman more like a partner than a staffer. She incorporates her interior design talent into most sales at the store, for no additional charge. "When someone comes in to buy a lamp, that requires designer service – a lot of thought goes into that" Levin explains. She provides everything from paint recommendations and upholstery choices to layout suggestions and accent ideas. "The client really brings the things



A love of sailing drove the color selections in this living room design.

they love to the mix and the designer helps them put into the mix, not only their story, but beautiful design as well," Levin says.

"It can be as small as a picture they love and they want to capture the feeling of that in a room," explains Levin, on how she begins her consultative process to help clients enjoy "being surrounded by things that you love (in a living space) that functions well."

Typical client projects begin with a two-hour design consultation at a customer's home where Levin starts to provide suggestions and ideas. This might involve a room or a piece of a room and can be as big as an entire house. Often, the pair work with contractors "making sure walls are in the right places," Levin explains.

"We help busy home owners custom design their home furnishings," says Pittman. Often, this means "blending what people already have with what they're purchasing from us," Levin adds. "Everything doesn't need to be the most expensive. You need to know where the value will show,"

Levin says. It might be a decorative piece that's the focus, or the furniture that houses it as an example she notes. Attention to detail is a core tenant of the firm, including ensuring "drapes are steamed and perfectly hung," Pittman adds.


The Pittmans bought their current location in 1990. It's a business condominium where they own the building but share responsibility for maintenance of the property it's located on with others.

## Persian turned Indian aficionado

While Pittman still buys most of her rugs from Middle Eastern producers, things have changed

since the 1980s. At that time, color and quality of Persian rugs were unmatched. Then dealers and designers were forced to work with other countries. "After the embargo, we started seeing really pretty product, from India, primarily," she states. "That's what you're seeing in America today, where weavers can respond to changes in fashion, color and design. So it's an interesting process to see how things have evolved over the years in the rug industry," Pittman notes.

"It all starts with a really solid hardwood frame," Pitman explains of the furniture she carries. "Construction and attention to detail in the design – that's what you pay for," Levin adds.

Store hours are from 10-5 Tuesday through Friday and 10-4 on Saturday, but both Pittman and Levin are happy to be available by appointment on Mondays weekends and afterhours. 




Owner Valeta Pittman and Interior Designer Mary Jean Levin

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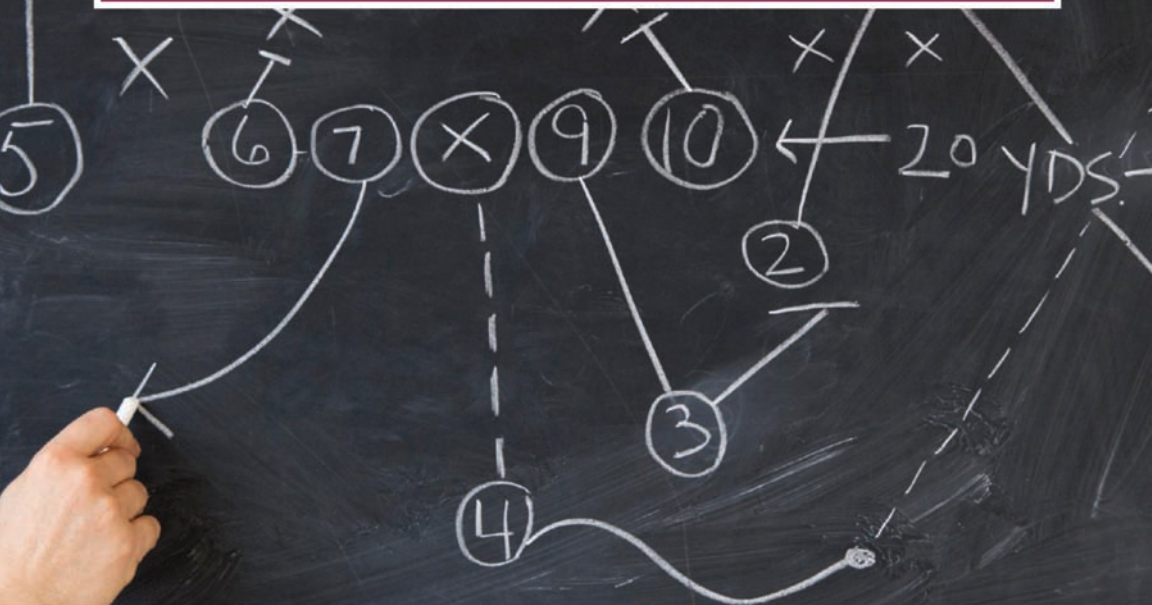
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