

# 2026 HR CONFERENCE

Tech Enabled. People Centered.

Raleigh, NC | May 5-6

McKimmon Conference and Training Center



## A Note from Our CEO

Welcome to the 2026 Catapult HR Conference.

I'm so glad you're here. Whether you've joined us before or this is your first conference, you already know something important: people are the heart of every great organization. That belief drives our mission and is why we gather each year, and it's exactly what this conference is built around.

This year's theme, "Tech Enabled. People Centered." couldn't be timelier. New technology is reshaping the way we work, at a pace none of us could have fully anticipated. And yet, the most pressing question in every boardroom and HR office remains the same: how do we build and preserve cultures where people truly thrive?

Over the next two days, you'll hear from some of the sharpest minds in the industry and beyond. Dr. Laura Ullrich will set our economic outlook and what it means for today's workplaces. Bruce Tulgan will navigate us through dynamics of a multi-generational workforce, and our breakout speakers will provide practical, day-to-day tools that will help preserve the human thread that holds teams together.

Beyond the important content you'll take away from these sessions, I hope you'll also take full advantage of learning from others in the room. The connections made at this conference, across industries, job titles, and experience levels, are often what our attendees remember most. That's the real value of the Catapult network.

Thank you for investing in yourself, your team, and the profession. We don't take lightly the trust you place in us each year to grow your workplaces with confidence.

Now let's get to work.

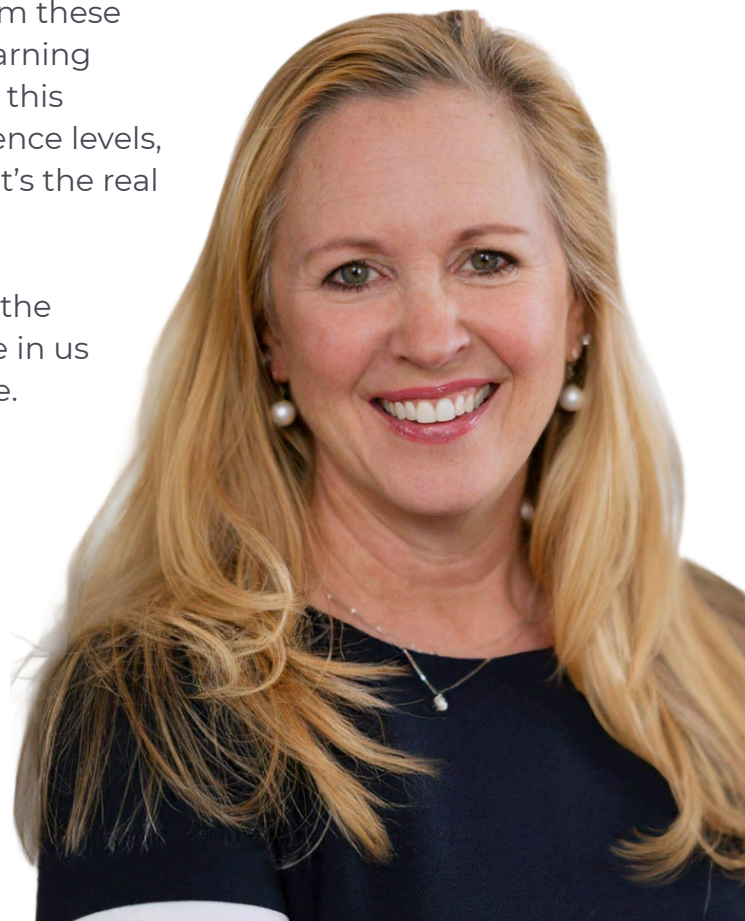
Warmly,



**Cheryl Richards, Ph.D.**

President & CEO

Catapult Employers Association



# Spark Hunt

Keep your eyes open. Sparks are everywhere.

## In-Person: Hidden Sparks

**Think you've got an eye for detail?** Sparky has scattered himself throughout the conference — tucked into signage, peeking out from corners, hiding in plain sight on surfaces you'd never think to check.

**How to play:** Hunt down as many Sparks as you can throughout the event. Some are big and bold. Others? Sneaky little things you'll only catch if you're really paying attention. Snap a photo of each Spark you find and keep a running tally.

**The prize:** The attendee who spots the most Sparks walks away with a prize!

## Virtual: Spark Search

Between sessions, we're dropping a shared visual into the feed — and our Spark is hiding somewhere inside it. First person to find him, wins!

**How to play:** When the image appears, scan it carefully. The first person to spot the Spark and call it out wins. Quick eyes, quick fingers, quick win.

**The prize:** First to find the Spark takes home a prize!



# Meet the Keynotes

From Indeed to Tough Day, meet the names taking the stage.



**Bruce Tulgan**

Founder & CEO  
RainmakerThinking, Inc.



**Katherine von Jan**

Co-Founder & CEO  
Tough Day



**Dr. Laura Ullrich**

Director of Economic  
Research Indeed



**Rod Gray**

National Corporate  
Accounts Director  
Drylock Technologies



# AGENDA | DAY 1

8:00 am **Registration, Networking, and Breakfast**

9:00 am **Welcome & Introduction** Room 2 ●

9:15 am **Building Culture in a Digital World** **KEYNOTE**  
Room 2 ●

11:00 am **Breakout**  
• The Great Generational Shift Room 2 ●

12:00 pm **Lunch**

1:15 pm **Breakout**  
• Legal Update Room 2 ●

2:45 pm **The Practical Power of AI:  
Breaking Through Your  
Biggest Challenges** **KEYNOTE**  
Room 2 ●

# PROGRAM | DAY 1

9:00 am **Welcome & Introduction**

9:15 am **KEYNOTE Building Culture in a Digital World**



**Bruce Tulgan**

Founder & CEO, RainmakerThinking, Inc.

Most managers simply don't practice the fundamentals of leadership on a regular, consistent basis, and the costs can be monumental. Bruce shares decades of research about what gets in the way for so many leaders and managers and how to tackle the most common challenges managers face. Get past the seven greatest myths about leadership and learn eight steps back to the fundamentals of high structure, high substance management communication.

10:30 am **Break**

11:00 am **Breakout**

## 1. The Great Generational Shift — The Workforce Is Changing, Are You Ready?



**Bruce Tulgan, Founder & CEO, RainmakerThinking, Inc.**

Bruce shares decades of research about what makes generational difference in the workforce so uniquely challenging today: First, there is the numbers problem facing employers, which means that skilled workers will be in greater demand than supply for the foreseeable future. Second, there is a profound change in norms and values and expectations in the emerging workforce, and the new short-term transactional mindset. Third, we are all living through the most profound changes in work since the Industrial Revolution. Learn cutting-edge best practices for optimizing generational diversity in your organization and managing workers at every point on the generational spectrum.

# PROGRAM | DAY 1

12:00 pm **Lunch**

1:15 pm **Breakout**

## 1. Legal Update



**Charlotte Smith, Labor and Employment Law Attorney,**  
Ogletree Deakins

Stay ahead of rapid legal change in this timely legal update designed specifically for HR leaders. This session will cover key federal and state employment law developments impacting today's workforce, with practical guidance on what HR professionals need to know now and how to prepare for what's next.

A dedicated focus will explore the growing legal and compliance implications of artificial intelligence in the workplace—including AI-driven recruiting tools, performance management, monitoring, and decision-making. Attendees will gain insight into emerging regulations, risk areas such as bias and data privacy, and best practices for responsibly adopting AI while protecting the organization and its people.

2:45 pm

**KEYNOTE**

## **The Practical Power of AI: Breaking Through Your Biggest Challenges**



**Katherine von Jan**  
Co-Founder & CEO, Tough Day

AI is reshaping how work gets done—and those who learn to harness it will lead the next wave of innovation. Katherine von Jan, Co-Founder and CEO, Tough Day, will explore the latest advancements in AI and how they can help you overcome your five most persistent challenges. From streamlining operations to unlocking smarter insights, you'll gain a fresh perspective on what's possible and how to move forward with confidence in an AI-powered future.



9:15 am

## Building Culture in a Digital World

Bruce Tulgan

Founder & CEO, RainmakerThinking, Inc.





11:00 am

**Breakout**

1. The Great Generational Shift —  
The Workforce Is Changing, Are You Ready?



Bruce Tulgan, Founder & CEO, RainmakerThinking, Inc.

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1:15 pm

## Breakout

### 1. Legal Update



Charlotte Smith, Labor and Employment Law Attorney,  
Ogletree Deakins







2:45 pm

## The Practical Power of AI: Breaking Through Your Biggest Challenges

Katherine von Jan  
Co-Founder & CEO, Tough Day







# AGENDA | DAY 2

8:30 am **Registration, Networking, and Breakfast**

9:00 am **Welcome & Introduction** Room 2 ●

9:30 am **Winning the War for Talent:  
Two Fronts, One Fight  
Panel Discussion** **KEYNOTE**  
Room 2 ●

11:15 am **Breakout**  
• Using AI for Employee Culture Room 2 ●

12:15 pm **Lunch**

1:15 pm **Breakout**  
• If Not You, Who? Room 2 ●

2:45 am **The Power of the Pen:  
Building Culture and Connecting  
in the Workplace in a Digital World** **KEYNOTE**  
Room 2 ●

# PROGRAM | DAY 2

9:30 am

**KEYNOTE** **Winning the War for Talent:  
Two Fronts, One Fight Panel Discussion**



**Dr. Laura Ullrich**

Director of Economic Research, Indeed



Dr. Cheryl Richards, President & CEO,  
Catapult



Gary Salamido, President & CEO, NC Chamber



Brian Denisar, CEO, Bobbit Construction, Inc.

Dr. Laura Ullrich, Director of Economic Research at Indeed, will present a data-driven analysis of national and regional labor market conditions shaping hiring outcomes. The presentation examines how AI is influencing work today and the implications for jobs, skills, and productivity in the years ahead. The presentation concludes with an economic outlook that connects labor market trends to the broader economic environment.

Dr. Cheryl Richards, Ph.D., will then lead a distinguished panel of CEO's discussion on how companies are responding to the talent conundrum.

10:45 am **Break**

11:15 am **Breakout**

## 1. Using AI for Employee Culture



Katherine von Jan, Co-Founder & CEO, Tough Day

Employee culture is evolving, and AI is changing how organizations understand and shape it. This session introduces Tuffy, an innovative AI tool designed to support stronger, healthier workplace cultures. Discover how AI can identify cultural friction points, elevate employee voices, and help leaders take timely, informed action. You'll leave with a new perspective on how technology can enhance—not replace—the human side of work.

# PROGRAM | DAY 2

12:15 pm **Break**

1:15 pm **Breakout**

## 1. If Not You, Who? The Breakthrough Strategy HR Needs to End Employee Disengagement



Jill Christensen, Best-Selling Author & Award-Winning Keynote Speaker

Organizations that lead in employee engagement outperform competitors by 147% in earnings and grow nearly twice as fast. In addition, engaged employees are 87% less likely to walk out the door. And yet, despite this undeniable evidence, only 31% of U.S. employees are engaged at work. So, the question is: Now that leadership has outsourced employee engagement to HR, how do you create a culture so extraordinary that people can't imagine leaving? In her best-selling book, *If Not You, Who? Cracking the Code of Employee Disengagement*, Jill uncovers the missing piece of the puzzle and reveals how HR can transform culture from the inside out. The payoff? Higher productivity. Stronger retention. Greater profitability. And renewed respect for the HR function. That's not just valuable... it's priceless.

2:45 pm

**KEYNOTE**

## The Power of the Pen: Building Culture and Connecting in the Workplace in a Digital World



Rod Gray  
National Corporate Accounts Director,  
Drylock Technologies

In a fast-paced, digital-driven era where communication often gets lost in the chaos of emails, texts, social media posts and instant messages and notifications, how can HR professionals stand out and build authentic relationships? Join Rod Gray for an engaging 60-minute presentation, "The Power of the Pen: Building Culture and Connecting in the Workplace in a Digital World," where Rod explores the transformative impact of handwritten communication in the workplace.

# PROGRAM | DAY 2

2:45 pm

Through a dynamic mix of insightful statistics, real-life HR stories, and practical strategies, you'll learn:

- The psychological benefits of handwritten communication and how it can elevate your employee engagement efforts.
- Creative ways to integrate handwritten notes into your everyday HR practices, from candidate follow-ups to internal relationship building.
- How modern tools, including AI, can assist you in crafting heartfelt messages without compromising their personal touch.
- Actionable steps to make writing handwritten notes a regular habit, empowering you to cultivate a culture of appreciation and support.

Expect to leave inspired and equipped with tangible strategies to implement in your organization, along with a challenge to commit to writing at least two handwritten notes each week.

Discover the art of meaningful communication and learn how a simple ink pen can make a profound difference in your workplace culture. Join us and unlock the power of the pen!





9:30 am

## Winning the War for Talent: Two Fronts, One Fight Panel Discussion

Dr. Laura Ullrich

Director of Economic Research, Indeed



Dr. Cheryl Richards, President & CEO, Catapult



Gary Salamido, President & CEO, NC Chamber



Brian Denisar, CEO, Bobbit Construction, Inc.





11:15 am

**Breakout**

1. Using AI for Employee Culture



Katherine von Jan, Co-Founder & CEO, Tough Day





1:15 pm

**Breakout**

1. If Not You, Who? The Breakthrough Strategy HR Needs to End Employee Disengagement



Jill Christensen, Best-Selling Author & Award-Winning Keynote Speaker







2:45 pm

## The Power of the Pen: Building Culture and Connecting in the Workplace in a Digital World

Rod Gray

National Corporate Accounts Director, Drylock Technologies







# Thank You to Our Partners and Sponsors!

When we set out to create an unforgettable conference experience, we knew it would take a community. On behalf of Catapult, we extend our deepest gratitude to our incredible partners and sponsors—your support and commitment were instrumental in bringing this event to life. Thank you for helping us make this experience impactful, inspiring, and truly special.

## Sponsors



### Share your experience!

Please take a moment to share your experience at our HR Conference | Tech Enabled. People Centered. Thank you!



# About Us



## Your HR Runs on Catapult.

Launched in 2021 through the merger of two historic employer associations founded in 1958, Catapult brings nearly 70 years of collective expertise to thousands of employers across the US. We provide essential people services—including outsourced HR, recruiting, compliance, and business advisory—to help organizations navigate their biggest challenges. At Catapult, we handle the complexities of the workplace so you can focus on building an exceptional one.



## Everything you need in one partner.

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<b>Compensation &amp; Total Rewards</b>	Compensation Consulting	Wage & Salary Surveys	Benefits Administration	Healthcare Solutions	401K Plan for Members
<b>Learning &amp; Development</b>	Management Development	Technical Skills & Professional Dev	HR Certifications & Training	Workplace Culture	In-Person, Online, Micro & Self-Paced
<b>Strategic HR Solutions</b>	Outsourced & Fractional HR	HR Projects, Investigations & Outplacement	Talent Assessments & Coaching	Engagement Surveys	Strategic Consulting





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