

Accelerate Agenda with Think Tanks

October 28–30, 2026 · Omni Hotel | Dallas, TX

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

7:00 AM – 5:30 PM

Registration Open

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

An Accelerate First-Timer Welcome Reception

Your Accelerate experience starts with the people you meet.

Designed exclusively for first-time attendees, this welcome reception is an opportunity to get connected before the full event begins. Meet fellow first-timers, connect with members of the Accelerate community, and get a feel for what to expect over the days ahead.

Whether you arrive knowing several people or no one at all, this is your chance to make those first introductions, ask questions, and start building relationships that can continue long after Accelerate ends.

Come as a first-timer. Leave already part of the community.

General Session 3:00 PM – 5:30 PM

3:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Conference Welcome

Hattie Hill, Strategic Consultant, Arrowfly

David Jobe, SVP, Arrowfly

Luke Kircher, President, Prosper Events, SVP Arrowfly

Matt Logan, Chief Executive Officer, Arrowfly

3:30 PM – 4:00 PM

The Big Three: The Competitive Advantage of Community

What happens when competitors recognize that some of the industry's biggest challenges are better solved together? This conversation brings together perspectives from across contract foodservice to explore how leaders can compete fiercely in the marketplace while still investing in a stronger talent pipeline, sharing ideas and learning alongside one another. Against the backdrop of rising operating costs, workforce pressures, supply chain volatility and evolving guest expectations, the discussion will examine how collaboration can strengthen both individual organizations and the industry as a whole.

At the center is a bigger leadership question: Can community itself become a competitive advantage? Through leadership development, cross-industry relationships and intentional investment in emerging talent, this session explores how building the next generation of leaders together can create stronger organizations, a deeper leadership bench and a more resilient industry.

Panelists:

Laurel R. Elliott, Director of Culinary Consulting, Sales & Offer Development – Entegra Procurement Services (a Sodexo Company)

Christine Petersen, Senior Director, Account Management, Avendra International US

Angie Young, Vice-President of Experience, Flik Hospitality Group

Presented By: Sodexo AALF, Sodexo EBRG

4:00 PM – 4:30 PM

What We Owe Each Other in the Age of AI - TRUST

As organizations move quickly to embrace AI, leaders face a challenge that goes far beyond technology: How do you evolve the business without losing the trust of your people?

Employees are watching roles change, companies restructure, and jobs disappear while being told to embrace the possibilities of AI. Leaders cannot always promise that every job will be safe or every role will remain the same. So how do you communicate honestly about what is changing without creating unnecessary fear, offering false reassurance, or dismissing the very real concerns employees have about their future?

This candid conversation will explore the responsibility on both sides of that transformation. If organizations are asking employees to embrace AI, what do they owe their people in return? Transparency. Development. Reskilling. Clear pathways into new opportunities. And a thoughtful strategy for transitioning talent when technology fundamentally changes the work.

Employees have a responsibility, too. As AI evolves, how willing are we to evolve with it? What does adaptability look like? What skills, relationships, judgment, creativity, and leadership will continue to create uniquely human value?

Because trust isn't telling people that nothing is going to change. It's giving them confidence that you'll be honest with them when it does.

This is not a conversation about predicting where AI goes next. It's about building organizations, cultures, and people capable of moving forward together while keeping humanity at the center of progress.

Panelists:

Ray Blanchette, Founder & CEO, Sugarloaf Holdings, LLC

Rich Faltot, VP, Restaurants & Hospitality, Point B

Kristi Kingery, Chief Supply Chain Officer, Tropical Smoothie Cafe

Carl Orsbourn, SVP – Enterprise Sales & GTM, Invisible Technologies

Presented by: Point B

4:30 PM – 4:45 PM

Accelerate Charity Spotlight: No Kid Hungry

At Accelerate, leadership is about more than advancing our own careers. It's about using our influence to create opportunities and make an impact beyond ourselves.

In this special Charity Spotlight, No Kid Hungry will share how its work is helping ensure children across the country have access to the food they need to grow, learn, and thrive. Together, we'll recognize the power of the restaurant and foodservice community to rally around a shared mission and help build a future where every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Presenters:

Sara Jamshidi, Sr. Director, Corporate Partnerships, Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry

Presented By: No Kid Hungry/Share Our Strength

4:45 PM – 5:30 PM

Redefining High Performance: What Hospitality Can Learn from the Ninja Course

This isn't just a keynote. It's a live demonstration of what high performance really looks like in hospitality.

In an industry where every moment matters, how do great teams perform under pressure, adapt in real time, and consistently deliver exceptional guest experiences?

You'll see it unfold live.

Two elite athletes will take on a Ninja Warrior style course on stage, where every leap, miss, and recovery becomes a powerful metaphor for what happens behind the scenes in hospitality. Because just like on the course, success isn't about perfection. It's about how quickly you adjust, support each other, and keep moving forward.

Drawing from his experience as an entrepreneur, CEO, and leadership researcher, and insights from his newly released book *Redefining High Performance*, based on a national research study, Ty Bennett connects these lessons directly to the realities of hospitality. Staffing challenges, high expectations, constant change, and the need to deliver excellence shift after shift.

This session challenges the outdated push harder approach to performance and replaces it with a smarter, more sustainable model. One built on alignment, energy, and purpose.

You'll leave with practical strategies to elevate how you train your people, lead your teams, and create a culture where high performance is not just expected, but repeatable.

This is a high energy, immersive experience designed to help you build teams that don't just keep up, but stand out.

Key Takeaways

- **Lead for Lift:** Create the kind of leadership that energizes your team, builds trust, and drives retention in a high turnover industry.
- **Train for Agility:** Develop training that prepares your people to think, adapt, and respond in real time, not just follow scripts.
- **Perform Through Pressure:** Equip your team to stay composed, focused, and guest centered, even during peak demand and unexpected challenges.
- **Recover and Repeat:** Learn how top performers reset quickly after mistakes and deliver consistently great service, shift after shift.

Presenter:

Ty Bennett, Speaker, Author, Entrepreneur, Leadership Inc.

Presented By: Keurig Dr Pepper

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Book Personalization

Ty Bennett, Speaker, Author, Entrepreneur, Leadership Inc.

Presented By: Keurig Dr Pepper

5:30 PM – 9:00 PM

Block Party Dinner

Presented By: McLane Foodservice, Inc.

Participating Sponsors: Beaver Street Fisheries, CIA, Datassential, Keurig Dr Pepper, Kraft Heinz, Wow Bao, Jones Dairy Farm

Thursday, October 29, 2026

6:30 AM – 5:30 PM

Registration Open

6:30 AM – 7:45 AM

Networking Breakfast

Presented By: Jones Dairy Farm

General Session 8:00 AM – 9:15 AM

8:00 AM – 8:05 AM

Welcome

Presenters:

David Jobe, SVP, Arrowfly

Hattie Hill, Strategic Consultant, Arrowfly

Luke Kircher, President, Prosper Events, SVP Arrowfly

Bridget McCall, Head of Strategic Growth & Business Development, Jones Dairy Farm

Ryan Robinson, President & CEO, Jones Dairy Farm

8:05 AM – 8:35 AM

Raising the B.A.R. - Inside the Next Era of Yum! Brands

What does it take to lead one of the world's most influential restaurant companies through a period of extraordinary change and emerge stronger on the other side?

In a candid conversation between two leaders helping shape Yum!'s future, Sean Tresvant, Chief Executive Officer, Taco Bell Division, and Yum! Chief Consumer Officer, sits down with Yum! CEO Chris Turner to explore the choices, convictions, and leadership principles behind the company's next chapter. From growth and consumer relevance to technology, franchisee success, culture, and the changing economics of the restaurant business, this is a rare look inside how Yum! is thinking about what matters now, what comes next, and what it will take to win. The conversation will touch on the company's "Raising the B.A.R." priorities – Battling for the future consumer, Accelerating restaurant economics and Reaching the full potential of digital and technology.

Moderator:

James Fripp, Chief Culture, Opportunity, and Belonging Officer, YUM! Brands, Inc.

Panelists:

Sean Tresvant, Global Chief Executive Officer, Taco Bell, Chief Consumer Officer, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Chris Turner, Chief Executive Officer, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Presented By: YUM! Brands, Inc.

8:35 AM – 9:15 AM

Inside Yum! Brands: How Leaders Collaborate

How does one of the world's most influential restaurant companies make the decisions that will shape its future?

For a rare Accelerate experience, Prosper brings Yum!'s senior leaders together on one stage for a candid conversation unlike a traditional executive panel.

This isn't eight executives giving nine presentations. It's a conversation about how a leadership team actually leads: where they agree, where they challenge one another, how enterprise strategy becomes brand-level action, how competing priorities get resolved, and how leaders build the trust required to make consequential decisions at extraordinary scale.

From people, culture, and consumers to technology, capital, growth, and operations, Accelerate attendees will get a candid look at the leaders behind Yum! and how they work together to Raise the B.A.R. for the future.

Moderator:

James Fripp, Chief Culture, Opportunity, and Belonging Officer, YUM! Brands, Inc.

Speakers:

Erika Burkhardt, Chief Legal & Corporate Secretary, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Jim Dausch, Chief Digital & Technology Officer, Yum Brands & President, Byte by Yum, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Naiara De León, Incoming Chief People & Culture Officer, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Shannon Hennessy, Chief Executive Officer, Habit Burger Grill

Ranjith Roy, Chief Financial Officer, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Sean Tresvant, Global Chief Executive Officer, Taco Bell, Chief Consumer Officer, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Chris Turner, Chief Executive Officer, Yum! Brands, Inc.

Presented By: YUM! Brands, Inc.

9:15 AM – 9:45 AM

Networking Break

Presented by: ezCater, Inc.

9:45 AM – 10:30 AM

Think Tank Group 1 (Choose from 6)

Select one session to attend:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

From Functional Excellence to Enterprise Leadership

Every organization believes it handles disruption well. The reality is more complicated.

When crisis hits, markets shift, or unexpected disruption reshapes the landscape, leaders often default to familiar behaviors. Some steady the ship. Others unintentionally amplify confusion. The challenge is that few senior leaders receive honest feedback in the middle of the storm. No one tells them what they are missing. No one challenges how they are showing up.

This think tank creates space for candid reflection on how leaders truly respond under pressure. It explores why communication breaks down during disruption, how the inability to articulate direction in uncertain moments erodes trust, and how senior teams can develop a common language to navigate volatility with clarity.

Participants will engage in structured dialogue around:

- The difference between perceived composure and actual effectiveness
- Why senior leaders often lack real-time feedback during crisis
- The cost of unclear direction when teams are looking for certainty
- How to build shared frameworks and language before the next disruption hits

The goal is not to critique leadership. It is to strengthen it. By creating a confidential environment where senior leaders can speak openly, align around common definitions, and learn from expert insight, this session equips participants to lead more intentionally when the next storm inevitably arrives..

Speaker: James Pogue, Ph.D., President/CEO, JP Enterprises

Presented by: Wray Executive Search

FINANCE

The Economics of Growth: Protecting Profitability While Scaling a Brand

Growth creates opportunity, but sustainable success requires more than increasing sales and opening new locations. It demands financial discipline, operational alignment, and a clear understanding of how every decision impacts the entire business.

Join James McGehee of Dave's Hot Chicken for an inside look at the financial strategy behind one of the industry's fastest-growing restaurant brands. Drawing on his unique perspective as both a franchisor and franchisee, James will explore the importance of protecting four-wall economics, maximizing return on invested capital, and balancing the needs of guests, franchisees, and ownership.

Through real-world examples from Dave's Hot Chicken, participants will examine how financial decisions influence everything from menu innovation and marketing to operational efficiency and long-term growth. This interactive Think Tank challenges rising leaders to think beyond their individual functions, evaluate decisions through a broader financial lens, and understand what it truly takes to build a profitable, scalable business.

Speaker: James McGehee, CFO, Dave's Hot Chicken

Presented by: Dave's Hot Chicken

OPERATIONS / HR

We don't build leaders alone: Cross-functional team development

This interactive think tank explores how strong leaders are built through cross-functional partnership, not within one function alone. Through a candid conversation, we'll examine how HR and Operations can move beyond traditional boundaries, navigate moments of disagreement, and turn different perspectives into stronger leadership and business outcomes. Attendees will hear practical examples of how collaboration can accelerate talent growth and will leave with ideas for strengthening partnerships across their own organizations.

Speaker: Lois Alexis-Collins, Chief People Officer, Field Operations, Chipotle Mexican Grill

Garrett Calderwood, VP, Operations Services, Chipotle Mexican Grill

Presented By: Chipotle Mexican Grill

SUPPLY CHAIN / CULINARY / PURCHASING

The Hidden Engine of Foodservice Resilience: How Loyalty, Not Logistics, Is Solving the Industry's Biggest Gaps

Why the Most Powerful Data Isn't in the ERP – It's in the Relationship

In an industry drowning in noisy, slow data and disconnected players, the real competitive advantage isn't found in another dashboard – it's found in trust. In this high-energy, interactive session, we'll walk through a real crisis – how a cheese maker and its customers navigated a massive shortage not with panic, but with proactive, data-informed, solution-focused communication. You'll see how loyalty data became early-warning radar, how transparency built trust when systems failed, and how a simple act of listening and updating – powered by real-time insight – turned a disruption into a decade-long growth story.

Speaker:

Steph Earleywine, President, RealTime Solutions by Buyers Edge Platform

Rebecca Kurowski, VP, Sales and Marketing, RealTime Solutions by Buyers Edge Platform

Presented By: Buyers Edge Platform

TECH / INNOVATION

Find Your Best AI Initiatives: From Possibility to Business Impact

AI is creating new opportunities across the foodservice industry, but with endless possibilities, how do leaders determine where to start and what will actually move the business forward?

This interactive Think Tank challenges participants to move beyond the AI hype and identify practical, high-value opportunities within their organizations. Through industry-specific scenarios and collaborative table discussions, participants will explore where AI can strengthen decision-making, automate routine work, improve the guest experience, and drive measurable business results.

Working alongside peers, participants will evaluate potential initiatives based on business impact and implementation complexity, separating quick wins from longer-term strategic opportunities. Each participant will leave with a prioritized AI initiative, a measurable goal, and a practical 90-day action plan to

begin turning possibility into progress.

Speaker: Carl Orsbourn, SVP GTM Enterprise, Invisible Technologies

Presented by: Invisible Technologies

OPERATIONS / HR

What Are You Missing? The Science of Reading Nonverbal Signals

Human communication is far more than words. Most of what we take from a conversation comes from facial expressions, posture, tone, eye contact, and subtle shifts in energy. Yet decades of research show we are surprisingly bad at reading those signals accurately. We overread body language, misinterpret emotional cues, and assume meaning where none exists, and in a high-pressure hospitality environment those misreads turn into tension, conflict, and turnover. This session opens with a 15-minute look at the neuroscience and psychology behind nonverbal perception: why the brain jumps to conclusions and where it reliably gets people wrong. We then flip the stage into a guided Think Tank where leaders work real scenarios and practice a simple Signal Check framework that improves accuracy, cools assumption-driven conflict, and strengthens how a team reads one another.

Speaker: Dr. Melissa Hughes, Keynote Speaker, Author & Human Potential Alchemist

Presented by: Founding Farmers Restaurant Group

General Session 10:45 AM – 12:00 PM

10:45 AM – 11:30 AM

AI Amplification of the Workforce

Synthetic intelligence is weaving into the workforce from many different angles. It is helping amplify human capabilities and automating hundreds of small and large tasks formerly done by hand. While there are some concerns about what is being taken over by digital capital, there are also amazing opportunities for human capital when leaders find the right balance in the workplace. Scott Klososky is on the front lines of operationalizing AI at scale across many organizations and will be sharing practical ideas and advice for the restaurant industry. Don't miss this chance to gain fresh insights on the positive leveraging of new forms of intelligence in processes and workflows.

Speakers:

Suresh Iyer, Chief Operating Officer, Henny Penny Corporation

Scott Klososky, Founder & CEO, Industry Defenders

Presented by:

Henny Penny Corporation

11:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Greg Creed Building a Better Table Award Presented by Olo

Greg Creed, Global Marketer, Author, and Retired CEO

James Fripp, Chief Culture, Opportunity, and Belonging Officer, YUM! Brands, Inc.

Hattie Hill, Strategic Consultant, Arrowfly

David Jobe, SVP, Arrowfly

Luke Kircher, President, Prosper Events, SVP Arrowfly

Katie Hards, SVP, Customer Experience, Olo Inc

Presented By: Olo

12:00 PM – 1:15 PM

Networking Lunch

Presented by: DataDelivers, LLC

1:30 PM – 2:00 PM

The Profitability Imperative: How the Best Operators Are Reengineering the Business to Win

Restaurant leaders are facing a structural reset: rising labor and food costs, changing consumer expectations, technology disruption, margin pressure and a supply chain that must become faster, smarter and more resilient. This Executive level conversation explores where leaders are finding the next points of leverage—from menu and purchasing to labor, technology, capital and strategic partnerships—and what they are willing to change to protect profitability without sacrificing the guest experience or long-term growth.

Moderator:

Aaron Marshall, VP, Strategic Planning, McLane

Panelists:

Jim Bitticks, Chief Executive Officer, Dave's Hot Chicken

Amanda Hyde, Chief Operating Officer, SPB Hospitality LLC

Presented by: McLane

2:15 PM – 3:00 PM

Think Tank Group 2 (Choose from 4)

Select one session to attend:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Three Mindsets of High Performance

High performance isn't just about what your team does. It's about how they think while they do it.

In this interactive think tank, we'll explore the three core mindsets from Redefining High Performance, based on a national research study: Confident Curiosity, Relaxed Intensity, and Empathic Drive. These aren't just ideas. They are the mental disciplines that allow leaders and teams to stay adaptable, focused, and connected under pressure.

Through guided discussion, you'll reflect on where these mindsets show up in your leadership and where they may be missing. Together, we'll unpack how to balance results and relationships, urgency and composure, confidence and humility, the tensions that define leadership in hospitality.

You'll leave with practical insights and simple shifts you can apply immediately to elevate how you lead, develop people, and create a culture where high performance is sustainable, not exhausting.

Speaker: Ty Bennett, Speaker, Author, Entrepreneur, Leadership Inc.

Presented by: Keurig Dr Pepper

SUPPLY CHAIN / CULINARY / PURCHASING

The Imperfect Choice: How to Win When Trade-Offs Are Inevitable

Supply chain leadership often means choosing between imperfect options.

This session helps leaders navigate moments when cost, speed, quality, and availability cannot all be optimized at once. Participants explore how to prioritize trade-offs, communicate decisions clearly, and maintain trust with internal teams and external partners under pressure.

The emphasis is on clarity and credibility when ideal outcomes aren't possible.

Speaker: Jeff Burrus, Vice President of Supply Chain, El Pollo Loco, Inc.

Presented by: El Pollo Loco, Inc.

TECH / INNOVATION

AI Roulette: No Slides, No Hype, Just Your Questions

Most AI sessions sound the same: a deck, big promises, and no time for your questions. There's no deck in this Think Tank, only a wheel. Spin it and the table decides where the conversation goes.

Five categories are in play: How Does It Work? Show Me the Money. Should We Be Worried? Where Do I Start Monday? Hype or Real? When the wheel lands, ask anything inside it. You'll get a straight answer, not a talking point. Bring your sharpest question or your biggest doubt. You'll leave knowing what's real, what's noise, and what to try first on Monday.

Speaker: Adam Dumey, Global Vice President Retail, World Wide Technology

Presented by: World Wide Technology

BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Beyond the Sale: The Art of Becoming an Indispensable Partner

The best salespeople don't just know how to sell. They know how to build relationships people want to stay in.

Being a great partner requires more than understanding your product or delivering the perfect pitch. It means knowing when to listen, when to challenge, how to read the room, how to understand what your partner actually needs, and how to create value even when there isn't an immediate sale on the table.

In this Think Tank, Accelerators will explore the nuances that separate transactional relationships from trusted partnerships. The conversation will examine how credibility is earned, how expectations are managed, how great partners navigate difficult conversations, and the small behaviors that can strengthen or undermine a relationship over time.

Participants will challenge themselves to think beyond "How do I win the business?" and ask a more important question: "How do I become someone people want to do business with again?"

Speakers:

Susan Berg, Sr. Manager National Accounts, DIRECTV FOR BUSINESS®

Eric Henley, Sr. Manager, DIRECTV FOR BUSINESS®

Presented by: DIRECTV FOR BUSINESS®

3:15 PM – 4:00 PM

Think Tank Group 3 (Choose from 5)

Select one session to attend:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Craveable, Profitable, and Healthier: Leading Change Across the Menu

Can our industry create craveable, profitable, and healthier menu items that find traction with today's consumer? The answer is yes, but how do you go from idea to implementation? In a focus group format under Chatham House rules, participants will explore how leaders build alignment across a company in diverse roles like marketing, operations, finance, supply chain, culinary, and beyond to move healthier menu ideas forward. Using examples from the Culinary Institute of America's Healthy Menus R&D Collaborative, attendees will work together to identify common friction points as well as solutions to work through them, discuss evidence-based decision-making, and identify leadership skills that help move menu innovation forward.

Speaker:

Robert E. Jones, VP, Strategic Partnerships & Industry Leadership, The Culinary Institute of America

Presented by: Healthy Menu's R&D Collaborative

MARKETING

Think Like the C-Suite: A Workshop on the Forces Reshaping Foodservice

The next five years won't reward the cheapest brand or the most automated one. They'll reward the operators who maintain their guests' trust while everything around them shifts. This interactive workshop is built around the C-Suite Foresight Report from Prosper and Datassential, which draws on candid interviews with 12 restaurant leaders to identify six forces shaping the future of the industry. Through small group case studies, we'll unpack each force and pinpoint strengths, weaknesses, and immediate opportunities.

Speaker:

Shara Orem, VP of Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships, Datassential

Presented by: Datassential

MARKETING

Future-Proofing the Brand: Using PEST Analysis to Navigate What's Next

Restaurant and hospitality leaders spend much of their time solving what is directly in front of them: labor challenges, rising costs, guest expectations, operational pressures, and competitive demands. But many of the forces that will shape the future of a brand are developing far beyond the four walls of the business.

In this strategic Think Tank, Jennifer Dodd will introduce the PEST framework, helping leaders examine the Political, Economic, Social, and Technological forces influencing today's foodservice and hospitality landscape. Participants will explore issues ranging from regulatory and supply chain disruption to changing consumer behavior, inflation, emerging technology, AI, and new forms of competition.

The session will then move from awareness to application. Participants will work through their own brand's PEST Strategic Matrix, identifying key vulnerabilities and opportunities across each area and considering how those insights should influence strategic planning, investment, operations, marketing, and growth.

The goal is to help leaders build the discipline of looking beyond today's immediate challenges and create a more proactive approach to navigating disruption, protecting the business, and positioning their brands for long-term growth.

Speaker:

Jennifer Dodd, CEO, Main Squeeze Juice Co.

Presented by: Point B

TECH / INNOVATION

From Pilot to Practice — Making Innovation Stick

Ideas only matter when they're adopted and the AI wave is a perfect example. There is a lot of discussion about the existential danger of AI while at the same time, organizations can benefit from operationalizing at a faster pace. This session explores how leaders can move from experimenting to safe and secure everyday workflows. Participants will examine adoption barriers, change fatigue, and communication strategies that help teams embrace new synthetic intelligence tools without resistance. The focus of this ThinkTank is on operationalizing AI at scale, not theory or philosophical debates.

Speaker: Scott Klososky, Founder & CEO, Industry Defenders

Presented by: Network Distribution

BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Built to Deliver. Called to Lead.

What happens when a high-performing individual contributor is suddenly called to lead people? In this session, Amy Mrozinski explores the shift from personal performance to people development—and what she learned when she realized the best sales principles were actually leadership principles all along. If

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there are truly only two roles inside any enterprise—building the business or building the organization—then the leader's job is clear: acquire, develop, and retain the very best talent including their own.

Speaker: Amy Mrozinski, Senior Director of Sales-West, Grande Cheese Company

Presented by: Grande Cheese Company

4:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Networking Break

Presented by: Norton Creative

General Session 4:30 PM – 5:15 PM

4:30 PM – 5:15 PM

The Community Quotient: Designing Workplaces for Connection & Impact

The focus on creating connected workplace cultures has been building momentum over the past few years, and now is the time to create a fusion between why it is important and how to do it, and that is at the heart of this energizing and soulful presentation from Liz Bohannon. Participants learn from Liz's experiences as a leader of a global brand and what it takes to create meaningful connection across your organization that is grounded in a sense of purpose and driven by impact. Growing your company as a connected community is the only way to inspire the kind of collaboration and innovation that will keep you rising to the next level even in the face of change and uncertainty.

Presenter:

Liz Bohannon, Forbes Top 20 Keynote Speaker / Bestselling Author / Podcaster

Presented By: DIRECTV FOR BUSINESS®

5:15 PM – 6:15 PM

Networking Reception

Presented by: Mars Snacking

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Book Personalization

Liz Bohannon, Forbes Top 20 Keynote Speaker / Bestselling Author / Podcaster

Presented by: DIRECTV FOR BUSINESS®

6:15 PM – 8:00 PM

Dinner

Presented by: Buyers Edge Platform

Friday, October 30, 2026

6:45 AM – 12:15 PM

Registration Open

6:45 AM – 7:45 AM

Networking Breakfast

Presented by: First Watch

General Session 8:00 AM – 8:20 AM

8:00 AM – 8:20 AM

General Session Welcome: Reflect. Connect. Accelerate.

As we begin today's General Session, we'll take time to reflect on the insights, breakthroughs, and connections that have defined the first two days of the Accelerate Conference and yesterday's Think Tank Breakouts. This is a moment to come together as a community—sharing what inspired you, what challenged you, and what you'll take back to strengthen your teams and organizations. Together, we'll turn key takeaways into lasting transformation.

Presenters:

David Jobe, SVP, Arrowfly

Hattie Hill, Strategic Consultant, Arrowfly

Luke Kircher, President, Prosper Events, SVP Arrowfly

8:30 AM – 9:15 AM

Think Tank Group 4 (Choose from 6)

Select one session to attend:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Leading Under Pressure — Mental Health, High Performance, and Sustainable Success

High-impact leadership comes with invisible pressure.

In this deeply human and honest conversation, Atul Sood shares his experience navigating intense executive pressure while managing bipolar disorder, including lessons learned during periods of hypergrowth and burnout. This session moves beyond theory and into lived experience, exploring how leaders maintain clarity, stability, and effectiveness while carrying significant responsibility.

Participants will explore:

- The hidden toll of constant travel, fundraising, and performance pressure
- How high-functioning leaders can unintentionally ignore warning signs
- Practical habits for protecting mental resilience while leading teams
- The difference between peak productivity and sustainable performance
- Creating cultures where mental health is acknowledged, not hidden
- This think tank is not clinical. It is practical. It provides leaders with tools and perspective to manage their own mental health while leading others with empathy and consistency. The goal is to normalize the conversation, reduce stigma, and equip rising leaders to succeed without sacrificing long-term wellbeing.

Speaker: Atul Sood, Managing Partner, Sood Advisories

Presented by: Sood Advisories

SUPPLY CHAIN / CULINARY / PURCHASING

Beyond the Kitchen: How Collaboration Drives Excellence

Great guest experiences are rarely created by one department, one idea, or one leader. They are built when teams collaborate across functions, challenge their own thinking, and take shared ownership of the outcome.

Drawing from his journey from the kitchen to the boardroom at Firebirds Wood Fired Grill, Chef Steve will explore how culinary collaboration can become a catalyst for stronger operations, better culture, consistent execution, and memorable guest experiences. Participants will examine how Firebirds brings different perspectives into the development process, why self-awareness and accountability matter when working across teams, and how leaders can expand their influence by becoming better collaborators.

The session moves from the operational side of collaboration into the leadership behaviors behind it, including self-reflection, accountability, listening, curiosity, and learning from difficult feedback. The goal is to challenge Accelerators to consider not only how their teams collaborate, but also what they personally can change to make collaboration more effective.

Speaker:

Steve Sturm, COO, Firebirds Wood Fired Grill

Presented by: Firebirds Wood Fired Grill

OPERATIONS / HR

Margin in Plain Sight: Keeping More of What You Already Earn

Too often, we celebrate the operators with the best location and the biggest top line. The best operators have the healthiest bottom line, built on the right habits and the right metrics. That is how we pay people fairly, partner fairly, and take care of our guests for the long haul.

In 2025, 42% of operators said their restaurants were not profitable. The median income before taxes in 2024 was 2.8% of sales for full service and 4.0% for limited service. Most of that money leaked out in small, repeated ways nobody was measuring.

In this working think tank, David Cantu spends 15 minutes on where margin leaks across food, labor, and everyday controllables like comps, supplies, utilities, linen, and paper goods. The next 30 minutes belong to the room. Designed for VPs, regional managers, GMs, and managers.

Cost savings should never come at the expense of your team or your guests. We will explore how to balance the right metrics, and how to build variable comp for managers and chefs around store level EBITDA (SLEBITDA), fair even when a GM cannot control their lease. Hourly teams have same day pay. What is the equivalent for managers and chefs? Bring your ideas.

Participants will explore:

- Why forecasting comes first for every cost line
- Where food, labor, and the small controllables leak
- Why SLEBITDA may be the most important year over year number
- How to balance metrics so savings never cost you your people or your guests
- Creative, fair variable comp for managers and chefs

You do not need a better location or more sales to keep more of what you earn. You need better habits and the right numbers. Leave with one leak to go after in the next 30 days.

Speaker: David Cantu, CEO, Craftable

Presented by: Craftable

TECHNOLOGY / INNOVATION

The AI Talent Shift: Rethinking What Leadership Work Looks Like Next

Most conversations about AI in the restaurant industry start with the same question. "Will this replace my team?" The more useful question is different. What does my team actually spend their time on, and what would we do instead if that work took an hour instead of a week?

This Think Tank session moves past AI as a tool-adoption exercise and into what it actually changes about how leadership work gets done. When the bottlenecks that used to define a role start to dissolve, the roles themselves shift- and the shift cuts across every function, not just the obvious ones. Coverage that used to

be impossible- hyper-local performance analysis, individual coaching plans for every manager, store-by-store menu engineering- starts to look reasonable. That opens strategic questions most operators haven't had to answer yet.

This session will challenge leaders to move beyond basic adoption and begin thinking creatively about how AI can augment judgment, reveal unseen opportunities, and reshape how work gets done at scale. The session is interactive by design. Bring what your team is stuck on. You'll leave with two or three concrete opportunities to test in the next 30 days, and a sharper sense of what the shift means for how you hire, coach, and structure your organization going forward.

Speaker:

Jesse Maddox, Strategic Partnerships Manager, DoorDash

Presented by: DoorDash

BRAND DEVELOPMENT

The Art of Selling

The profile of a sales executive has changed.

Today's leaders are expected to drive revenue, build culture, mentor talent, and operate with integrity under constant pressure. Success is no longer just about closing deals. It is about building durable relationships, developing high-performance teams, and creating long-term trust in the market.

In this candid think tank, Ali Templin draws from her journey from early cold-calling roles to building mentorship programs at scale. She shares lessons on resilience, embracing failure, and doing the hard work when no one is watching. The conversation explores what it takes to lead modern revenue organizations, where credibility, character, and consistency matter as much as quota attainment.

Participants will discuss:

- How resilience separates short-term sellers from long-term leaders
- Why integrity compounds faster than tactics
- How to build teams that perform without burning out
- The power of mentorship and paying it forward
- The discipline of "Author Up, Edit Down" and leading with clarity
- This session challenges leaders to rethink what it means to succeed in sales today. The goal is not just to grow revenue, but to grow people.
- When relationships are prioritized, integrity is non-negotiable, and leaders give more than they take, performance follows.
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Speaker: Ali Templin, VP of Enterprise Sales, Palona AI

Presented by: Palona AI

MARKETING

Every Leader Is a Marketer: Storytelling to Win Buy-In

Great ideas don't sell themselves. Leaders do.

Rolling out new technology. Asking for budget. Pitching a creative campaign. Reorganizing a team. Much of leadership comes down to persuading people who can say "yes" or "no."

Too many good ideas stall not because they're wrong, but because they were never sold well.

Marketers win over guests every day by understanding what they care about. In this interactive Think Tank, Jen Kern, CMO of Qu & Olivia Ross, Director of Growth from El Pollo Loco, show leaders from every function how to use that same playbook inside their organizations. Using a simple five-part framework based on how marketers plan campaigns and drive traffic, you'll learn to treat stakeholders like customers.

Think Tank Exploration: The 60-Second Pitch

Bring a real change you need to lead. After a short framework walkthrough, you'll build your own Internal Campaign Brief. Then, in groups of three, you'll pitch it to a skeptical "stakeholder" while a peer scores you,

and everyone rotates through each role. A few volunteers close the session by pitching to the full room.

You'll learn to:

Why good ideas fail without a good story

Frame the problem in the language of the person you need to convince

Use proof to build credibility, even when you're not the most senior person in the room

Make a clear, specific ask instead of hoping for support

Leave with a finished pitch, peer feedback to sharpen it, and a framework you can use when you need buy-in.

Open to leaders from every function. No marketing experience required.

Speakers:

Jen Kern, CMO, Qu

Olivia Ross, Director of Growth & Digital Innovation, El Pollo Loco

Presented by: Qu

9:30 AM – 10:15 AM

Think Tank Group 5 (Choose from 6)

Select one session to attend:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Stop Admiring the Dashboard: You Don't Have a Data Problem. You Have a Process Problem.

Most organizations don't have a data problem anymore. They have a decision problem.

We've invested in more platforms, more dashboards, more reporting and more sophisticated analytics — yet the decisions that actually move the business still take too long, get buried in debate, or wait for one more piece of data.

This Think Tank explores how leaders separate signal from noise, identify the problems actually constraining growth, and make confident calls with the information already in front of them. We'll examine what a better decision process looks like — one that creates clarity, ownership, action and measurable movement instead of another report.

Let's fix a problem your organization has been studying longer than it has been solving.

Speaker:

Pat Riley, VP, Sales & Marketing, DataDelivers, LLC

Presented by: DataDelivers, LLC

FINANCE

You Don't Know Tip - How Net Tip Distribution Predicts Employee Retention

Your POS shows you what guests tipped. It doesn't show you what your team took home.

Between the gross tip and the paycheck are pooling rules, sharing rules, service charge policy, CC Tip Deductions, and payout timing. 90% of tipping enabled restaurants run some form of tip distribution, and the impacts of this data are almost always invisible to operators while being felt daily by the front line employees.

Kirk Grogan, COO and Co-Founder of TipHaus, brings proprietary net distribution data and findings from thousands of restaurants and a 6,787-employee survey to a working session on what tip data reveals about performance, fairness, and why people leave.

Speaker:

Kirk Grogan, Chief Operating Officer, TipHaus Inc.

Presented by: TipHaus Inc.

OPERATIONS / HR

THE SIXTH SENSE OF HOSPITALITY: Designing the Invisible Experiences Guests Feel—but Never See

The guest experience begins long before the first bite. Sound, scent, lighting, temperature, energy, and atmosphere are constantly sending signals that shape how guests perceive a restaurant, often without them realizing it.

In this interactive Think Tank, Brad Newberger, President & Co-Founder of Ambiance IQ, takes leaders inside the science of sensory experience to explore how the brain processes an environment and how those signals influence emotion, behavior, memory, and connection. Participants will experience these principles firsthand through sensory exercises involving sound, scent, temperature, and limited visual cues, then turn the lens on their own brands.

The session challenges leaders to ask a different question: What does your restaurant actually feel like to your guest? Participants will identify where their experience is reinforcing the brand, where sensory friction may exist, and where intentional changes could create a more memorable and differentiated experience.

Think Tank Exploration: Participants will experience different sensory environments, explore how sensory inputs influence perception and behavior, map the sensory experience of their own restaurants, and identify one or two opportunities to intentionally improve what guests see, hear, smell, feel, and remember.

Speakers:

Candy Foust, VP of Growth, Ambiance IQ

Brad Newberger, President & Co-Founder, Ambiance IQ

Presented by: Ambiance IQ

SUPPLY CHAIN / CULINARY / PURCHASING

The Transparency Paradox: What to Share, What to Ask, and What to Hold Back in Negotiation

The best negotiators don't share everything, but they don't hide everything either. Explore the Transparency Paradox and learn what to share, what to ask, and what to hold back to unlock better negotiation outcomes.

Speaker:

Kristi Kingery, Chief Supply Chain Officer, Tropical Smoothie Cafe

Presented by: Tropical Smoothie Cafe

TECH / INNOVATION

Experience Is the Menu: How Customer Experience Shapes Customer Decision-Making

Most QSR brands invest heavily in products, promotions, and technology while overlooking a powerful reality: Customer experience is merchandising. Every digital screen, menu layout, ordering flow, recommendation engine, drive-thru interaction, loyalty offer, and operational process influences what customers choose to buy. This interactive Think Tank explores how leaders across the business can move beyond convenience and satisfaction metrics to intentionally shape customer behavior. From segmentation and contextualization to AI-powered decision engines and continuous experimentation, attendees will learn and discuss practical frameworks for using customer experience as a strategic growth lever. The next generation of QSR growth will not come from serving more customers. It will come from helping customers make better decisions.

Speaker: **Jackie Walker**, Chief Experience Officer, Creative Realities, Inc.

Presented by: Creative Realities, Inc.

Friday, October 30, 2026

MARKETING

The Hidden Cost of an Empty Shift: The State of the U.S. Workforce and Why Hiring Is Now a Revenue Strategy

An unfilled position is more than a staffing challenge. It's lost revenue, increased pressure on existing teams, and a missed opportunity to deliver a great guest experience.

As the U.S. workforce continues to evolve, restaurant leaders must rethink how they attract, hire, and retain talent. What was once viewed primarily as an HR function has become a critical driver of operational performance, profitability, and long-term growth.

This interactive Think Tank will explore the changing realities of the labor market and the true business impact of hiring inefficiencies. Participants will examine how technology, automation, and smarter hiring strategies can reduce friction, accelerate hiring, and strengthen the connection between workforce decisions and bottom-line results.

Through collaborative discussion, leaders will challenge traditional approaches to recruitment and identify opportunities to turn hiring from an operational necessity into a competitive advantage.

Speaker:

Tori Lasiter, Regional Sales Director, Paradox a Workday Company

Presented by: Paradox

General Session 10:30 AM – 11:15 AM

10:30 AM – 11:15 AM

Stay Culture: Becoming the Leader People Don't Want to Leave

Every leader has a short list of people they would hate to lose. The question is whether those people know it. In this session, Ryan Leak makes the case that people rarely stay because of a policy or a perk. They stay because someone made an intentional effort to capture their imagination, to help them see a future worth sticking around for. Ryan will give leaders a practical way to do that for the people who matter most to their team, starting with the very next conversation. Your leaders will walk out knowing who is on their list, what those people need to hear, and how to build a culture people choose to stay in.

Speaker:

Ryan Leak, Chief Executive Officer, The Ryan Leak Group

Presented by: DoorDash

11:15 AM – 12:00 PM

Book Personalization

Ryan Leak, Chief Executive Officer, The Ryan Leak Group