CECP

Global Business Leaders Explore Responsible Leadership in an Era of Shared Challenges

NEW YORK, February 19, 2026—Discussing responsible leadership in an era of shared challenges, leading CEOs who are a part of a coalition of more than 200 of the world's largest companies collectively representing $8.3 trillion in annual revenue and $33 billion in total community investment attended Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose's© (CECP) Board of Boards this week in New York, New York.

This closed-door, CEO-only session provided a **distinct opportunity for CEOs** to discuss how they can connect their investments in their people and communities and their corporate purpose to the business strategy.

Featured speakers included:

- Brian Moynihan, Chair & CEO, **Bank of America**
- Dave Ricks, Chair & CEO, **Eli Lilly and Company**
- Richard Dickson, President & CEO, **Gap Inc.**
- Richard Edelman, President & CEO, **Edelman**
- Nancy Chung, Management Committee and Executive Committee Member, Managing Partner of the New York Office, Head of the Litigation group in New York, and Co-Head of the Global Investment Funds Litigation Practice, **Sidley Austin LLP**
- Arianna Huffington, Founder & CEO, **Thrive Global**

Key Takeaways

- When asked for words to describe how they were feeling, attending CEOs noted that they felt uncertain, disappointed, unsettled, tentative, and frustrated.
- **Purpose and profit are increasingly inseparable.** Genuine purpose — not performative CSR — is now a core business strategy that drives employee retention, consumer trust, and long-term growth.
    - A company has permission from the public to operate when it feels the value your company provides.
    - Focus on those who might not benefit from your company's innovations right away.
- **CEOs must navigate a set of compounding pressures.** Economic and geopolitical volatility, accelerating AI transformation, shareholder activism, and regulatory scrutiny are all hitting at once, demanding agility rather than relying on long-term static plans.
    - Without purpose, democracy and capitalism will not survive.
    - A collective of companies need to step up on vital issues to encourage those who may not step up on their own.
- **Workforce development is a major differentiator.** Whether it's hiring underserved youth, career-trajectory wage increases, or the broader push for skills-first hiring over four-year degrees, companies that invest in their people — especially entry-level workers — are seeing real business returns.
    - Companies can be clearer on what they want people to do. Companies weren't meaning enough to anyone.
    - An employee can't have a relationship with a brand without empathy, inclusion, and belonging.

- **AI governance, not just adoption, is the real leadership challenge.** The conversation has shifted from "are you using AI?" to "is it delivering value and do you have oversight?" Unintended consequences, regulatory divergence, and cybersecurity risks are now boardroom-level concerns.
    - AI mirrors what humanity wants it to be; we have a choice in what we do with these new tools.
    - Chase trust; we better trust what we are building.
- **Authenticity inside the organization has to come before external storytelling.** Purpose-driven messaging only lands when it's genuinely felt by employees first. Culture, internal communications, and meaningful day-to-day connection to mission are what make external narratives credible.

"The Board of Boards provides a forum for CEOs to candidly share their experiences—both successes and setbacks—in embedding purpose at the heart of their organizations," said Daryl Brewster, CEO of **CECP**. "In an increasingly complex and unpredictable environment, these leaders rely on corporate purpose as their compass for navigating critical decisions and driving meaningful impact."

The list of attendees included:

- **Annie Seelaus**, CEO, Seelaus
- **Bill Rogers**, CEO and Chairman, **Truist Financial**
- **Bijal Shah**, CEO, **Guild**
- **Bob McCormick, Executive Director,** Council of Institutional Investors
- **Brian Shaw**, CEO, **Discovery Education**
- **C. Thomas Evans Jr.,** Interim CEO, Secretary & General Counsel, **Kemper Corporation**
- **Dale Strange,** President and Chief Operating Officer, **Blackbaud**
- **Darrel Hackett**, US CEO, **Bank of Montreal**
- **Doug Conant,** Founder & CEO, **ConantLeadership**
- **John Wood**, Vice Chairman, **Heidrick & Struggles International, Inc.**
- **Jon Clifton,** CEO, **Gallup**
- **Karthik Rao,** CEO, **Nielsen**
- **Kecia Steelman,** CEO, **Ulta Beauty**
- **Margaret Rogers,** CEO, **Pariveda**
- **Jon Clifton,** CEO, **Gallup**
- **Peter Gleason,** CEO, **NACD**
- **Mark Weinberger,** Former Global Chairman and CEO, **EY**
- **Michael Brandstaedter,** President & CEO, **The Topps Company**
- **Olu Beck,** Board Member, **Freshpet**
- **Richard Smith,** Founder, **The ONYX Group**
- **Sara Armbruster,** President and CEO, **Steelcase**
- **Shelly Lazarus,** Chairman Emeritus, **Ogilvy**
- **Soraya Alexander,** CEO**, Benevity**
- **Theodore Dysart,** Vice Chairman, **Russell Reynolds**

This year's 2026 Sandy Weill Force for Good honorees, recognized at the event, are:

- Brian Moynihan, Chair, President & CEO, **Bank of America**
- Dave Ricks, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, **Eli Lilly and Company**
- Richard Dickson, President & CEO, **Gap Inc.**

The Sandy Weill Force for Good honorees advocate on behalf of their companies to create a better world through business, and the recognition acknowledges a CEO's leadership in the community and within their companies.

Additionally, this year's Lawrence A. Wien Legacy Award honoree is **Ginni Rometty**. Ginni Rometty was the ninth Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer of **IBM**. Under her leadership, the 100-year-old company reinvented 50 percent of its portfolio, built a $25 billion hybrid cloud business, and established leadership in AI and quantum computing. Rometty also drove record results in workforce transformation and supported the explosive growth of an innovative high school program to prepare the workforce of the future in over twenty-eight countries. She was named *Fortune*'s #1 Most Powerful Woman three years in a row, is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, and has been honored with the designation of Officier in the French Légion d'Honneur. Today, Rometty serves on multiple boards and cochairs OneTen, a coalition of companies driving a SkillsFirst movement to unlock career opportunities for talent without four-year degrees. She is the author of the bestselling book *Good Power: Creating Positive Change in Our Lives, Work and World*. She exemplifies CECP founder Paul Newman's belief that businesses can always "do more", where CEOs' purpose-driven and values-first work raise the bar.

CECP also thanks **Sidley Austin LLP** for hosting the event, **YourCause by Blackbaud** for its support of all of CECP's events.

The 2027 Board of Boards will be held in New York City. Interested CEOs can reach out to info@cecp.co.

CECP Media Contact
Katie Leasor
kleasor@cecp.co

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About Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP)
Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose® (CECP) is the only nonpartisan business counsel and network dedicated to driving measurable returns on purpose. We promote responsible purpose-driven business as it increases customer loyalty, builds employee engagement, improves brand trust, attracts top talent, connects with strategic investors, and contributes to the bottom line.

More than 200 of the world's leading companies seek to improve their return on purpose through access to CECP's solutions in insights and benchmarking. With our companies, we harness the power of purpose for business, stakeholders, and society.

For more information, visit http://cecp.co.

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