There is no universal playbook for fast growth—which has been more apparent than ever during this unprecedented past year. Besides a great idea, a stellar team, and a healthy sprinkle of luck, every founder needs strategic measures to reach the heights of the Inc. 5000. And even once your revenue has begun to skyrocket, the hard work is far from over; learning what it will take to maintain that success, now and in the future, is immensely difficult. We asked dozens of current and former members of the Inc. 5000 for the key moves that have helped them pull it off—and the hazards they’ve managed to avoid along the way.
LeaseQuery, an accounting software provider based in Atlanta, is No. 266 on this year’s Inc. 5000, after ranking No. 29 in 2020.

**GEORGE AZIH**  
Founder and CEO  
LeaseQuery  
“Deciding to hire 50 sales development representatives was the move that put our company on the path to fast growth. At the time, there were only seven people in the company, so it was a daring and scary decision.”

**MARK GALLAGHER**  
Chairman and CEO  
GForce Life Sciences  
“I got a business partner. We laugh about this, but I interviewed him 10 times. I was giving up equity, so I made sure he was the real deal. Once I saw how good he was, I started letting go.”

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We did a video called *The Naked Truth About Laundry*. We thought, what can we do that big laundry won’t do? Take off our clothes to make a point. Since that, we’ve had 18 straight quarters of growth.

We overhired on our executive team. We hired a chief growth officer, chief operating officer, and chief client officer with significant experience, more than our early-stage company warranted. But they drove the confidence in the marketplace—which led to our growth.

Bill Kerr  
Co-founder and CEO  
Avalon Healthcare Solutions

Tampa-based Avalon was No. 4 on the Inc. 5000 in 2020, with a three-year revenue growth rate of 26,011 percent.

Rosie Mattio  
Founder  
Mattio Communications

“It was entirely jumping on this growth industry. I wasn’t going for the weed publications—which are great—I was going for mainstream: *The New York Times and Vogue* and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Now, we’re the largest firm in the space.”

Mattio’s New York City firm, a marketing services provider for cannabis brands and lifestyle companies, is No. 190 on the 2021 Inc. 5000.

Jonathan Propper  
Founder and CEO  
Dropps

“We did a video called *The Naked Truth About Laundry*. We thought, what can we do that big laundry won’t do? Take off our clothes to make a point. Since that, we’ve had 18 straight quarters of growth.”

The video made by the Philadelphia-based ecofriendly home care products company (No. 289, 2020) has 2.2 million views.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 169

3.1M

Number of jobs created by startups in 2020 that were less than one year old
Kevin Liles, founder and CEO of 300 Entertainment, has been a part of the music industry for 35 years, but hasn’t worked a day in his life. Growing the country’s top independent record label isn’t a job, he says—it is his purpose. That is not to say he and the team do not work hard. While there is a misconception that the music industry is all concerts and nightclubs, it is actually a service business, and service is a 24/7 operation. “People [at 300 Entertainment] take personal ownership, not only in the job that they do, but in every artist and every partner we have,” he explains. “I don’t believe people look at hours or how much they are making. I think they look at, ‘Am I making a difference?’”

“We ARE NOT THEM”
Liles co-founded the company alongside Lyor Cohen and Roger Gold in 2012 to humanize the music industry. Partner Rob Stevenson, who joined the team after 20 years with a major label, says 300 is different than other record labels. “This is not a business of things. It’s not a business of CDs or downloads or vinyl or t-shirts; it’s a business of people. A lot of companies don’t understand that. We do,” he says.

At 300, diversity is celebrated among artists as well as in the boardroom: 42 percent of its C-Suite employees are women, and 43 percent are BIPOC. CCO Matthew Signore says the business believes supporting artists takes creative talent and has reverence for “the art of artist development.” Risk-taking is encouraged at all levels, and genres do not matter. This approach has facilitated number-one records, hundreds of Diamond, Platinum, and Gold certifications, and billions of song streams. More importantly, it has allowed artists such as Megan Thee Stallion, Fetty Wap, Young Thug, and Gunna to express themselves freely.

“This IS A FAMILY”
To Liles, the Inc. Best Workplaces designation is “not an award, but a reward” for how hard the company works to serve artists and employees and create a collaborative, family-like culture. Artist needs come first, but 300 respects work-life balance, and employees work together to accommodate each other’s personal lives. “We all have a real understanding of the responsibility we have to each other,” Signore says. The company prioritizes employee well-being, for example, by investing in student loan reimbursement, gym memberships and therapy, and a house in the Hamptons for the team to use, free of charge. “We can’t be the best company if you’re not the best you,” Liles explains.

“Being the best you” was harder during Covid. The company helped by introducing an employee stipend for rest and relaxation and starting a relief fund for staff and their family. Liles committed to keeping everyone employed during the crisis. In fact, 2020 was 300’s biggest year yet. The company forecasts continued growth and international expansion. It is hiring, but not for specific positions. It is about the person, not a role. “I believe there are like-minded people around the world who believe they were truly born to live a life of independence and make a difference,” Liles says. “My mission is to find them.”

At 300 Entertainment, colleagues are family, and everything is in service of artists and their art.
Our decision to pursue work with federal agencies was a game-changer for us. In 2014, several other businesses entered our line of work and diminished our competitive advantage. Switching gears helped us diversify our business model.
3D Pool-Design Software
Company Hires for Fit

Structure Studios helps staff stay connected even when working remotely

Like most companies going remote when COVID-19 hit, Structure Studios scrambled to figure out how to make it work. The 3D pool- and outdoor-living design software company had a major update coming out, and they assured customers it was on track. Founder and President Noah Nehlich knew the team could deliver, but he wanted to make sure employees continued to enjoy a great work-life balance. “That’s important because we spend more time with each other than our families on workdays,” he says. Those interpersonal relationships, strengthened by the company’s supportive culture, are one reason for Structure Studios’ success.

To ensure the lines of communication stayed open, Nehlich and Director of Operations Stefanie Dunn created virtual pods—small groups of people working in designated teams—and included engineers and customer-facing team members in each. “At the beginning and end of the day, we check in with one another and catch up,” Nehlich says. That’s helped with both problem-solving and strengthening connections.

FOCUS ON TEAM BUILDING
In pre-pandemic times, the Structure Studios team enjoyed fun events together. They shared catered Friday lunches, met up for movie nights, and enjoyed company skiing retreats at Lake Tahoe, visiting a winery, or going on a cruise. During the pandemic, Dunn transitioned into monthly Zoom events that included dinner delivered to employees’ homes. The team also decorated cakes with Sonny Robinson of Freed’s Bakery, painted Hawaiian landscapes with artist Jan Tetsutani, and solved online murder mysteries.

Nehlich and Dunn are looking forward to the next in-person retreat and planning session. Like other company trips, the half-day will be reserved to review company accomplishments, set priorities for the year, and invite team members to define individual goals. “Brainstorming in small groups gives us the opportunity to connect with people from different teams and explore exciting, innovative ideas and paths,” Nehlich says. At the end of each quarter, the team meets again to share their progress, helping everyone from Nehlich to the newest hire stay focused, learn about projects, and celebrate achievements.

HOW TO HIRE FOR SUCCESS
When hiring, Nehlich looks at more than just a candidate’s technical skills. “Because we’re a small team, we take the time to get to know people. We know that academic credentials or career histories don’t tell the full story, so we look for amazing people from a wide variety of backgrounds,” he says. That’s especially important in an industry that adopts technological advances and breakthroughs quickly. “We look for people who are excited to explore where their curiosity leads them,” Dunn adds.

They want managers to have decision-making freedom and developers to use the latest tools. “We give them what needs to be solved and the autonomy to figure out the how,” Nehlich says. As a result, the company has low turnover, with many employees on staff for at least five years and nearly a quarter of the team for more than a decade. Creating a culture of trust and camaraderie has created a team that’s built to last.
Since its 2001 inception, BHG, headquartered in Syracuse, New York, and Davie, Florida, has been about innovation-driven growth. That mindset permeates its corporate culture and has made it a leading provider of unsecured loans and other financing to sought-after borrowers.

By 2005, BHG ranked No. 5 on the Inc. 500, and it’s maintained a spot on the Inc. 5000 list 14 times since. An equity partnership with Pinnacle Bank beginning in 2015 brought additional structure and a grounding in banking methodology, but energy, passion, innovation, and trust remain embedded in its DNA.

“Creating innovative financial solutions for borrowers is the reason we exist,” says Al Crawford, co-founder, chairman, and CEO. “A great example is a loan we introduced during COVID that required no payment for 90 days. That grace period was critical to many borrowers.”

Disdain for Comfort Zones
BHG develops creative solutions in part because of the strong relationships it has with more than 1,300 banks nationwide. Crawford has a disdain for comfort zones and points to BHG’s unique approach to risk scoring as an example.

The company’s team of 75 data scientists identified 100 nontraditional characteristics they believed could better predict loan performance and used it to build BHG’s risk-scoring model. “It has predicted performance with greater accuracy than many of the more traditional models,” Crawford says. “Our default rates as a percentage of outstanding loans are at historic lows.”

Trust has always been the underpinning of BHG’s corporate culture. Crawford says it’s critical to attracting high performers. Early on, they identified the characteristics they want in their employees and those they want to avoid.

It boils down to hiring people who are motivated self-starters and trusting them to get the job done. The concept isn’t as simple as it sounds. BHG conducts personality assessments while new employees are onboarding to optimize working relationships and help find their best fit. All employees can qualify for advanced training and personal coaching, and they know their voices are heard and valued.

Avoiding Workplace Toxicity
“We want to avoid those with a negative outlook or pessimism, as it contributes to workplace toxicity,” Crawford says. “We’ve built a culture of people around PMA—positive mental attitude.” A raft of benefits from free health insurance and on-site gyms to mental health support and $1,000 stipends for home offices during the pandemic contribute to that effort.

BHG has grown from 500 employees pre-COVID-19 to more than 1,100 now. “We’ve been able to attract the best of the best from our competitors,” Crawford says.

While he misses what he calls “collisions in the workplace”—those unexpected opportunities that arise from chance encounters—Crawford is confident about the future. “We’re processing 2,500 loan applications a day and expanding into several new areas of business,” he says. “We’re excited about our people, our culture, and the impact we’re continuing to have on the industry.”

A Corporate Culture Built on Trust
Drives Innovation and Growth

While COVID drove layoffs at many businesses, BHG more than doubled its workforce by thinking creatively.
In addition to his social media monetization company Adwizar (No. 262, 2017), Smith founded social media training platform Spectacular Academy. Both are in Los Angeles.

"A lot of counterfeitors started copying our product. In early 2018 we joined Amazon’s Transparency program, which uses machine learning to scan listings and remove suspected counterfeits. Protecting our brand from trademark and patent infringers exploded our revenue."

SPECTACULAR SMITH
Chairman and CEO
Adwizar

"We sustained our growth through A/B testing and social media marketing strategies. I started by mastering social media growth and monetization. Then I mastered Facebook ads. Then YouTube, and then influencer marketing. I went piece by piece."

KIM WALSH PHILLIPS
Founder and CEO
Powerful Professionals

"We focused all of our product offerings on one right-fit client so that all of our promotions, marketing, programming, and customer support could go deep within that same niche."

Based in Alpharetta, Georgia, Phillips’s business coaching company was No. 475 on the 2019 Inc. 5000.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 175

10.5M
Number of net new jobs created by small businesses between 2000 and 2019, accounting for 65.1 percent of net new job creation during that period

AARON MULLER
Co-founder and CEO
ChomChom Roller

"A lot of counterfeitors started copying our product. In early 2018 we joined Amazon’s Transparency program, which uses machine learning to scan listings and remove suspected counterfeits. Protecting our brand from trademark and patent infringers exploded our revenue."

ChomChom Roller, a Bellevue, Washington-based maker of products for cleaning up pet hair, was No. 62 on the 2020 list, and this year is No. 211.
Trustworthy Auto Repair Recommendations

Protecting consumers is at the heart of RepairPal's core values

A uto repair marketplace RepairPal connects vehicle owners with trustworthy, skilled mechanics who provide high-quality repairs at fair prices. RepairPal also values great service. The company evaluates repair shops and dealers through a rigorous certification process that assesses staff training and experience, verified customer reviews, warranty, and pricing.

There are 2,803 RepairPal-certified shops nationwide, and the marketplace has more than 50 partners, including prominent companies such as Consumers Reports, CarMax, Verizon, and USAA.

"We're solving an important everyday problem. We've created a new paradigm for trust in auto repair," says RepairPal CEO Art Shaw.

LIVING THE COMPANY’S VALUES
Five core values provide the foundation for RepairPal's culture: authenticity, being a force for good, collaboration, disruption, and drive. At the heart of RepairPal's rapid growth in its repair network, partners, and revenue is employee commitment to operate by these values. "Our values system is fundamental to all we do," Shaw says, "and attracts us to like-minded people and partners."

Those values shape how the company does business, including selecting repair facilities and business partners, supporting customers, and hiring and empowering employees. Values also represent half of employees' performance assessments. J’aime Davis, senior marketing manager at RepairPal, reports, "We talk about our company values constantly."

Putting People First
Taking a “people first” approach has led to RepairPal’s employee and management mix being quite diverse in a homogenous industry. "Eighty percent of our VP/GMs are people of color, LGBTQ+, or female because they're the best at what they do and because we intentionally seek to hire from a broad spectrum of talent," says Shaw. "When values and performance are prioritized, it's amazing to witness the diversity of people who succeed."

RepairPal’s commitment to employees includes offering employees the best health care benefits at no or low cost, in addition to competitive compensation. "We want to take care of the most important things for our employees and provide them a safe and strong foundation," Shaw explains.

Today, RepairPal employees can work from anywhere, and employees who moved kept their current salaries. While RepairPal went remote to meet employee needs, such location flexibility allows the company to find and hire the very best people from anywhere in the country.

"For us, creating a great culture isn’t focused on perks or fun activities. It's about the way we live and work together every day. When you are centered on your values, you can build a culture and company that does great things," Shaw says.
Employee Passions Are Key in this Winning Workplace

Sosemo focuses on innovative ways to avoid employee burnout and help clients

Larry Gurreri is a movie buff. As founder and CEO of Sosemo, a digital marketing agency that handles strategic media planning, buying, and campaign management for mostly health and pharma brands, he’s also responsible for helping his team avoid burnout. And his passion for film has rubbed off on his team and engaged employees.

Employee satisfaction and engagement are key goals that landed Sosemo on Inc.’s Best Workplaces list. And engaging in fun activities helps boost those attributes.

MAKING REWARDS FUN
In 2017, when team members found out that The Post, starring Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep, was being filmed near their New York City office, they reached out to casting to see if they could act as extras. A few of the 20 team members, who call themselves “Sosemo-ians” - Gurreri says the name has become part of the agency’s identity — scored parts as protestors. True cinephiles, Sosemo-ians also attend the Tribeca and New York film festivals every year.

Sosemo awards “reward points” to employees when they go above and beyond their daily routines to benefit the company. Team members might get reward points for improving training processes or promoting the company, for example. Sosemo-ians pool their reward points and cash them in for fun team-building activities after hours such as axe-throwing or —of course—going to the movies. Each month, the firm awards an “Oscar” to the Sosemo-ian who earns the most reward points.

BUSTING EMPLOYEE BURNOUT
Gurreri’s commitment to cultivating a great culture started when he worked at a large marketing agency. He occasionally felt unsupported and burned out. When he started his own company in 2012, he vowed to never repeat that experience.

As part of the company’s effort to help the team avoid burnout, Sosemo-ians can take mental health days and are offered Kundalini yoga classes. Annual community service days see team members volunteering at an urban farm. Gurreri also hosts one-on-one lunches with each team member throughout the year, to gather feedback about their jobs.

Gurreri knows marketing agency cycles well, so Sosemo has instituted a variable added compensation (VAC) model to increase employee satisfaction. If Sosemo-ians work beyond their allocated hours during peak times, they earn additional compensation based on the number of extra hours they invest. The strategy allows Gurreri to reward the extra work employees put in. It also helps Gurreri keep an eye on employees who may work too much and allows him to hire new employees more strategically. If team members are stretched thin, it’s time to hire someone new.

Gurreri looks forward to being on top of the game for decades, just like one of his heroes, the director Martin Scorsese. As a movie extra in The Irishman, Gurreri caught a glimpse of Scorsese’s passion and attention to detail first-hand.

Passion is also the name of the game at Sosemo. “People here are passionate about what they do, and they’re willing to invest the time to hone their craft,” Gurreri says. And Sosemo’s commitment to their well-being helps them be more effective and engaged as they do so.
Increase in business startups between 2019 and 2020, a rise from 3.5 million to 4.4 million

STEVIE BAINES
Founder, president, and chief growth officer
Forcivity
“We started investing in nonbillable resources like customer success and customer engagement. Our customers were just so happy with the work that we’d done because we genuinely were invested in their success rather than just trying to get that next project. It’s become core to our DNA ever since.”

CHAD HETHERINGTON
Founder and CEO
The Stable
“When you get bigger, it’s hard to maintain that boutique feel. We work really hard to not be like the Titanic. We want to be the little boat that continues to be able to maneuver. We’ve kept a very simple business model.”

Ryan Hogan
Co-founder and CEO
Hunt a Killer

“Story and community are the core of why we exist, and we’ve continued to evolve the business model in search of greater scale: from live events to subscription boxes to premium boxes to retail.”

Steve Baines
Founder, president, and chief growth officer
Forcivity

Earlier this year, Baines’s company, a system integrator (No. 359, 2021), merged with Saratoga Springs, New York-based Jolt Consulting Group, continuing to operate under the Forcivity name.

Chad Hetherington
Founder and CEO
The Stable

Minneapolis-based branding firm the Stable ranks No. 229 on the 2021 Inc. 5000, with a three-year revenue growth rate of 1,909 percent.

Continued on page 179
Coastal Cloud is a Salesforce Multi-Cloud Expert Partner based in Palm Coast, Florida. Through our unique consulting business model, we provide implementations and managed services to assist clients in migrating to next-generation systems. Coastal Cloud, one of the fastest companies to achieve Platinum status with Salesforce, has been recognized as one of the nation's best places to work year after year.

Visit coastalcloud.us

SentinelOne is defining the future of cybersecurity through our XDR platform, which automatically prevents, detects, and responds to cyber threats in real time. With SentinelOne, organizations gain full transparency across their networks at machine speed. We are a values-driver team where names are known, results are rewarded, and friendships are formed. If you're enthusiastic about working in a collaborative, future-looking environment, join SentinelOne. Visit sentinelone.com

"SentinelOne is a privilege to be part of such a values-driven company. Our mission is to defeat every attack, and our people create SentinelOne's commitment and magic."
—Divya Ghatak, chief people officer

EverHive is one of the only companies worldwide providing a holistic, truly vendor-neutral approach to contingent workforce management and optimization. We are also currently the only company offering a hybrid managed service provider (MSP) model. As vanguards of the global workforce, we empower clients to gain a competitive edge through strategic, efficient, effective workforce solutions that evolve and grow with their businesses. Whether you're in finance, entertainment, technology, consumer goods, or gaming, we can help. Visit everhive.com

"EverHive's core philosophy is a people-first organization. Our employees and client relationships are the heartbeat of our company."
—Brandon Moreno, president

6sense is an account engagement platform helping B2B revenue teams identify, engage with, and close more opportunities. Powered by artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and machine learning, 6sense uncovers and decodes anonymous buying behavior to help marketing and sales deliver personalized, multi-channel, multi-touch campaigns to accounts in the market to buy.

6sense is driven by a passionate, results-driven culture obsessed with meeting customer expectations, and beyond. From product development to our own revenue team, we are relentlessly focused on executing and delivering results. Visit 6sense.com

"Our mantra is FAMILY: Fun, Accountability, Mindfulness, Integrity, Love, and YES! We keep these values front and center every day."
says Jason Zintak, CEO, 6sense

"It's a privilege to be part of such a values-driven company. Our mission is to defeat every attack, and our people create SentinelOne's commitment and magic."
—Divya Ghatak, chief people officer

IntelePeer creates smarter customer interactions, through our award-winning omnichannel communications solutions, powering automation with AI and analytics. Our Atmosphere® CPaaS improves customer experience and satisfaction, decreases operational costs, drives new revenue, and improves business processes. All of those benefits are delivered through a single, easy-to-use platform that works seamlessly with existing business software and infrastructure. Visit intelepeer.com

"Cultivating a sense of community, engagement, and trust with employees is key to success. Our customers and employees are essential."
said Ana Milian, director of HR

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"Our mission is to help families create a lasting legacy. We’re proud of the legacy we are starting with our own Trust and Will family by building a team of experts who are passionate about making estate planning affordable and accessible to every American. We truly live our values when it comes to family and work. By offering incredible perks, flexible time off, formal mentorship, and employee advocacy programs, we can recruit and retain the best talent in the nation. Come and join us!
Visit trustandwill.com

"We provide products and education that help real people in real life. It's incredibly fulfilling and is a legacy that our team members can feel truly proud of."
—Cody Barbo, founder, and CEO

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Coastal Cloud has a large team of experts holding 750+ Salesforce certifications who have completed over 3,500 projects for more than 875 clients.
Virtual by Design

When Deanna van Gestel founded Vaniam Group in 2007 as an entirely virtual business, people questioned her judgement. But she wanted to work from anywhere, and she reasoned others might, too. “I wanted a company that reflected my dream of what a company could be, which was not what I had experienced working in corporate America,” she explains.

Although it seemed “a little extreme” at that time, the decision to operate remotely turned out to be a great business strategy, van Gestel says. Without geographic restraints, the independent network of health care and scientific communication agencies could access a larger talent pool. The flexibility focus also conveys a cultural pillar—to put people first—and helps differentiate the organization. “I knew I had to have some advantage for people to trust me,” she says.

PEOPLE COME FIRST

Van Gestel’s hunch was right. Flexible work is now a must-have for many employees. But the ability to work from home isn’t the only thing people value or that makes Vaniam Group unique. Its agencies support pharmaceutical companies developing medicines for patients with cancer. Employees are purpose-driven and appreciate the chance to make a small difference in patient care. Zack Lentz, president and chief strategy officer, says it is not the kind of place that micromanages or obsesses about office hours. It trusts its team to get the work done. It approaches career development differently, too, building roles around people’s interests and skills. “We’ve been able to harness our team’s talents and not be so rigid about what a particular job role looks like,” he explains.

Lentz says he and van Gestel have tried to design the type of culture they would want to work in. COVID-19 was an opportunity to “refocus its efforts” around mental health, diversity, and inclusion. In addition to encouraging candid discussion and running learning and development initiatives, Vaniam Group partnered with Conquer Cancer™ – The ASCO Foundation to fund a Young Investigator Award (YIA) for a physician of color doing meaningful work in cancer research.

INNOVATION DRIVES DIFFERENTIATION

Despite uncertainties, 2020 was a year of rapid growth and mass hiring. This growth was made possible because big pharma and biotech companies trusted in Vaniam Group to help them navigate new challenges. Constant innovation, on behalf of clients and internally, is a Vaniam Group hallmark. “We have a lot of higher achievers who are not satisfied with the status quo,” van Gestel says. Moving forward, the business will focus on enhancing the culture and simply being the best health care communications company possible. It is also expanding globally, with a new virtual office in the U.K.

For the leadership team, earning a place on Inc. Best Workplaces 2021 is more significant than being honored for revenue gains. Van Gestel’s decision to operate remotely remains a pinnacle part of the culture, but the decision to prioritize employees had just as much of an impact because, in return, they prioritize clients. This creates exceptional results, she says. “The magic of the company is mutual trust.”
“Our keys were expanding our science knowledge—we hired a PhD microbiologist to bring credibility to our science team—increasing our expertise on cannabis supply chain and growing practices, and understanding plant health for the purpose of innovating and taking care of our customers.”

PAIGE GOSS
Founder and CEO
Point Solutions Group
“I had a point where I wanted to throw it all away. Shortly thereafter, I brought on a COO/CFO who has helped shape the trajectory of the company. She’s now running the organization from a day-to-day perspective, and allows me to do what I do best.”

Denver IT and engineering services business Point Solutions Group, founded in 2017, is No. 486 on this year’s Inc. 5000.

MICHAEL DADASHI
Founder
MHD Enterprises
“I decided to double down on my meditation practice. Through meditation and mindfulness, I can empty my mind and fill it with ideas and advice throughout the day. Having a ‘beginner’s mindset’ has helped me incorporate humility into my work and leadership, has taught me to be a constant learner, and has shown me the value of being vulnerable and humble enough to say I don’t know something.”

The Austin reverse logistics company made the Inc. 5000 in 2012 (No. 28), 2013 (No. 61), and 2014 (No. 2,854).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 181
Theorem's engineers and consultants are known for designing and delivering groundbreaking solutions to mission-critical challenges within the world's largest organizations. With Theorem's help, Caterpillar removed more than $1 billion in churn from its supply chain by building a platform for real-time visibility. American Express transformed its call center operations from a cost center into a revenue generator. Apple built a platform to manage customer experience in its retail stores.

Theorem helps companies make better decisions and better products, says CEO Brady Brim-DeForest. The firm's success "is driven first by our culture," Brim-DeForest says. "We built a place where the power of deep thinking and the power of real-time feedback drive constant evolution," both internally and within client organizations.

**ACTION ORIENTATION**

The firm is different in a number of ways, from delivering both a process and a product, to achieving results in record time with a lean team of consultants. "We start by building something for our clients, but what we leave behind is an enduring capability that enables them to pick up where we leave off," Brim-DeForest explains. During each engagement, Theorem consultants help clients develop new processes, embrace modern tools, and share new ways of working, he says. "The outcomes we produce, in the form of software and digital products, are important, but they are not as important as the transformation—the journey we take our clients on—that fundamentally changes the way they work," he says.

**ATTRACTING HIGH-QUALITY THINKERS**

At the heart of Theorem's success is the talented team it employs, which is globally distributed by design. The firm's hiring process is less concerned with formal qualifications or brand name employers and more focused on problem-solving abilities and collaborative skills. Theorem hires many types of thinkers, Brim-DeForest says, but resilience and optimism are universal traits.

Employees who have the most success at Theorem have a strong bias towards action and have deep experience in owning a result or outcome, Brim-DeForest says. "They have a strong entrepreneurial mindset and a deep empathy for our clients' challenges."

One of Theorem's hallmarks is its reliance on real-time feedback in every aspect of its business. "Waiting to get feedback is a non-starter," Brim-DeForest says. This continuous sharing of feedback, with a goal of helping everyone improve, "creates an environment where feedback isn't a scary thing," he says. That leads to faster growth and improvement, as well as a feeling of equality and inclusion. Because Theorem's hierarchy is flat, "anyone can deliver feedback to anyone else," Brim-DeForest says, and "after a while, the investment we make in each other becomes addictive."

"The net result is that the people of Theorem make better things, better decisions, and better products," he says.
ASHLEY MERRILL
Founder
Lunya
“We are investing in people in a way we never had a capacity to before. Everything from hiring more senior folks to adding 401(k) matching, heavily subsidizing insurance, implementing profit sharing, and having a more robust growth-training process.”

JOSHUA SCHUSTER
Founder and managing principal
Silverback Development
“Our plan for the future is slowing down, ironically. I want to take two steps backward to leap forward. And by backward I’m referring to constant reinvention, reflection, and adaptation. Growing for the sake of growing isn’t ‘growth.’ It needs to be growth in the right direction.”

DIANA LEE
Co-founder and CEO
Constellation Agency
“We are looking for partnerships to scale our revenue even faster. The proof of concept has already been realized in automotive. We want to replicate that success in verticals such as travel, hotels, and retail.”

Lee started the New York City-based hybrid adtech and SaaS agency (No. 65, 2020) in 2016.
Transforming Clinical Trials and Company Culture

Five years ago, Irfan Khan, MD, left his cardiology practice to expand clinical trial access to a larger, more diverse patient population. Since then, his company, Buffalo, New York-based Circuit Clinical, has built a multi-disciplinary team to transform finding, conducting, and participating in clinical trials. Through a multi-state network of health systems and physicians, Circuit Clinical conducts both traditional and virtual clinical trials in diverse communities, providing clinical research as a care option for people who would otherwise not have access.

In March 2021, the company announced they closed a second round of venture capital funding and finalized a partnership with LabCorp, a global life sciences company. Circuit Clinical recently gained acceptance into the Microsoft Global Social Entrepreneurship Program and the Endeavor Entrepreneur Network. Endeavor accepts fewer than 5 percent of applicants, and gives the company access to a broad network of venture capitalists who can help it reach one of its next goals: international expansion.

TEAM OF DETERMINED ADVOCATES
Driving all of these accomplishments is a group of clinicians and technologists who value both their work and their workplace. “In a high-scale company that’s working to transform its industry, you need a team of optimists,” says Khan, who notes that the now 59-member team nearly tripled within a recent eight-month span and is still “scaling rapidly.”

The Circuit Clinical team believes they can create a better experience for patients as well as the best company for which they have ever worked. A key tool for improving patient satisfaction is TrialJourney, Circuit Clinical’s award-winning participant engagement platform, which is designed to provide ratings and reviews for clinical trials sites.

Like its digital platform, Circuit Clinical has also built its workplace culture by design. Transparency, performance, and accountability—three of the company’s six core values—are put into practice at monthly team meetings. That’s when senior leaders share updates on the progress toward its goals, including financial, operational, and individual performance.

LEARNING TOGETHER
Continuous learning is another core value, so every month Circuit Clinical hosts a high-profile industry leader to speak to the team about “How I Built Me.” The company also sponsors a monthly book club. One book selection, Powerful: Building a Culture of Freedom and Responsibility by Patty McCord, the former chief talent officer at Netflix, inspired some of the company’s core values. Another, Sprint: How to Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days, by Jake Knapp, contributed ideas for developing Circuit Clinical’s product suite.

Mirroring the company’s focus on diversifying clinical research, Circuit Clinical prioritizes workforce inclusion. “We absolutely want a diverse, robust set of opinions at the table,” Khan says.

Rounding out the list of six core values is talent. Recruitment is part of the job description of every team member. “No one is really thought of as an ‘A player’ at Circuit Clinical until they bring someone at least as amazing as they are into the company,” Khan says.
We’ve always known our lane, and we’ve always stayed in our lane. One of the things we say around here is, ‘Let’s get good at what we already know.’ That means we don’t have to reinvent the wheel. We are very good at selling direct to consumer. Let’s just get better at it.

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Cheryl Gentry
Founder and CEO
Glow Global Events
“Process review is our secret weapon. Regardless of how big we grow or how fast we get there, we can always assess, analyze, apply, and then rinse and repeat. By consistently revisiting our processes and our hiring, we spot pain points before they become problems.”

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Founder
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Number of net new U.S. businesses started per day by women in 2019

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GROWTH • INVESTING

“Whole Foods has this program where you can pitch a product in your region. So I dropped off four frozen pizzas. The next week I got an email from the Whole Foods buyer, who said they loved them, and were going to bring them into 30 stores. And that was how it began.”

GAIL BECKER
Founder and CEO
Caulipower

Becker’s company, which sells a line of healthy foods made from cauliflower, ranks No. 260 on the 2021 Inc. 5000, with a 1,771 percent three-year revenue growth rate.

ZAIN SUBHANI
Founder and CEO
Skyline Brands

“I decided that rather than being a jack of all trades, I’d try to be the best at one thing. From being a general manufacturer of homeware products, I focused specifically on a single category. Today we can proudly say we’ve created America’s leading line of air fryers.”


KABIR SHAHANI
Co-founder and CEO
Amperity

“A venture firm offered us $28 million. We were doing only a million in revenue at the time. Making that decision to go big was definitely an aha! moment about what’s required to build a really great, enduring company.”

Shahani’s Seattle-based SaaS company ranks No. 360 on the 2021 Inc. 5000, with a three-year revenue growth rate of 1,319 percent.