



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

# HOW TO ENGAGE A HYBRID WORKFORCE

BY HOLLY DOLEZALEK, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal held a panel discussion recently on hybrid workforces. Panelists included Julie Kimble, CEO of KimbleCo; Kim Skanson, president of Cargill Business Services; Jill Haspert, CEO of Foxtrot Marketing Group; Mercedes McFarland Jackson, a shareholder at Fredrikson & Byron; and Mary Jayne Crocker, executive vice president and chief operating officer at Bridgewater Bank. Kathy Robideau, market president and publisher of the Business Journal, served as moderator.

**Kathy Robideau:** Let's talk a little bit about hybrid work: if we think it's here to stay and if it is or isn't, what do we think about the models. How do we think it's going to work?

**Julie Kimble:** I do think it's here to stay. Talent is demanding it, especially women. There are some really great studies and surveys out there. I'm sure many of you have seen them. Boston Consulting's research discusses differ-

ent models: fully co-located, alternating on-site/on-demand, connected remote, work from anywhere. So there are some really interesting models emerging. Yet I think it is something that larger companies seem to be adapting to more quickly and at a greater percentage. Small to mid-sized firms struggle more with having some in the office, some out of the office. I know a company that would like to be able to offer hybrid, where every-

body's in the office on the same days and everybody's out of the office on the same days, so they can mentor and collaborate, build teams and maintain culture.

**Jill Haspert:** Our new talent coming in is demanding the flexibility; it is a key benefit that they're looking for. We're seeing that particularly in younger generations. I don't want to over-emphasize the generational differences, but we're seeing it more there. We

were 100% in the office before Covid-19. We've got employees in six states, so of course there were some folks in other states who were working from home. But we were not a work-from-home culture. So on March 13, 2020, we fell off a cliff and we sent everybody home – of course with technology and support they needed to make it happen. I was skeptical that it would work. We surveyed our employees in June 2020

**MODERATOR**

**Kathy Robideau**  
Market president  
and publisher,  
Minneapolis/St. Paul  
Business Journal

Kathy Robideau was promoted to market president and publisher of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal in February 2016. Robideau led the Business Journal's advertising team since 2010. Prior to that, she was chief operating officer of Winter Park, Fla.-based Nurse Staffing. She is a member of The Itasca Project and serves on the boards of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Thielen Foundation. She is the president and founder of the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal's Women's Leadership Council. She attended the University of Cincinnati and is a graduate of Capella University.

**PANELISTS**

**Jill Haspert**  
CEO, Foxtrot  
Marketing Group

Jill Haspert is a transformational servant-leader serving as CEO of Foxtrot Marketing Group, a full-service provider of promotional products and e-commerce branded merchandise stores. Part of the Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures family of companies, Foxtrot is proud to be one of the largest ethnic minority-owned businesses in the Twin Cities. When she was promoted to CEO in 2018, Haspert oversaw the transformation of Foxtrot's business model, strategic priorities, branding and company culture, resulting in company-best financial performance and engagement scores. Prior to joining Foxtrot, she spent over 15 years in finance, marketing and general management with General Mills Inc. and American Express. Haspert has served on numerous philanthropic boards throughout her career and is now on the board of Carlson Women Global Connect and a member of Leadership St. Paul class of 2021. She was named a 40 Under 40 honoree by the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal in 2021. Jill holds a Bachelor of Arts in economics from Gustavus Adolphus College and an MBA from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota, where she served as president of the National Association of Women MBAs.



**Mercedes McFarland Jackson**  
Shareholder,  
Fredrikson & Byron

Mercedes McFarland Jackson is a shareholder in Fredrikson & Byron's private equity group and bank and finance department, specializing in debt finance transactions. She represents corporate borrowers, private equity funds, and financial institutions in connection with a variety of commercial lending transactions, including acquisition financings, senior, second-lien and mezzanine financings, debt restructurings and debtor-in-possession financings. McFarland Jackson is a current member of MSPBJ's Women's Leadership Council and also serves as board chairwoman for EMERGE Community Development and as a board member of the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Prior to relocating to the Twin Cities, McFarland Jackson was a partner in the Chicago office of Kirkland & Ellis, an AmLaw 50 law firm. She received her Bachelor of Arts from The Ohio State University and Juris Doctor from Yale Law School. She lives in Twin Cities metro with her husband and two children.

and I was shocked to see that more than 90% of our employees were looking for a hybrid environment and enjoyed working from home. Now I can't see us going back. It's become part of how we operate. Those water-cooler conversations are largely gone, so we had to really focus on norms of communicating and implementing more chat and Slack and text and other ways to communicate that weren't part of our culture prior to Covid.

**Mercedes McFarland Jackson:** Law firms have always been set up to allow attorneys to work remotely. We have to be able to work everywhere. Our litigators are traveling to trials in other states. When I moved here from Chicago in 2012, I had the option of just continuing to work for that firm remotely indefinitely. What we hadn't had set up was for all of the rest of the firm's infrastructure to be remote, as well. Law firms rose to the challenge and rolled that out so they could continue to serve their clients. At this point, I think, a lot of people do want to be back in the office, but not five days a week, eight or more hours per day. Now that we've shown we can work effectively while remote, and people have already invested in their home offices, they're asking for remote flexibility, but it's not just that. Here in the Twin Cities, we're seeing law firms from coast to coast coming into this legal market with job offers to attorneys and others to join their firms and never have to set foot in their law office. So I think in order to retain our talent, and continue to attract talent, you're going to have to be flexible and meet people where they are or where they want to be. There are certainly benefits to being in the office, and we're working toward understanding what that looks like for individuals and departments and particularly new employees – for example, what is the best way to train and onboard them? I think we'll ultimately be back in the office, on the same days at the same times, but it's still very much a work in progress.

**Kim Skanson:** The concepts around it are not new. What I think is different is hybrids around I'm going to work semi-remote, I'm going to be in the office, or I'm going to be full time or not. It's giving employees the choice. I was looking to hire a role in India a month ago, and one traditional question is, "Are you willing to relocate?" And the response from our top candidate was, "Absolutely not, nor does the market require me to." Companies – big, small, private, public – need to provide the avenues for people to have choice. That's what matters most to people – that they can do what they want to do. You can't assume that what works in one place, even in the same company where you're really trying to drive a culture that's the same regardless of the location, is going to work. So it's not really a one-size-fits-all. We as leaders have to be more in tune with people and what they want.

**Mary Jayne Crocker:** That's a good segue into what I wanted to share. Bridgewater Bank like other companies, did not have remote employees prior to the pandemic. However, when we welcomed everyone back in June, we reviewed every position. We evaluated the need to be on-site

and collaborate, the tenure of individual employees, the risk associated with being remote and their role as a people leader. The plan we came up with when we built out our hybrid schedule was very different depending on what kind of position but also consistent across the bank. We got input from each manager to gain buy-in because there were certain positions that would have to be full time in the office and some that would be hybrid. Each people leader would have to be on board for this model to be successful. For managers, we felt that it was important to be in the office at least 80% of the time because they needed to have visibility, do training and coaching. So we have a hybrid model that is based on title, tenure and contribution style. No one is fully remote, but about 40% of the bank does have the option to work from home 40% of the time. We continue to collect feedback and will re-evaluate as the pandemic changes.

**Kimble:** Mary Jayne, there's a study out by McKinsey. Instead of looking at a position, they looked at activities within that position, and that might be really helpful. It ranks all the attributes of a role – communicating with colleagues or clients, processing information, interacting with computers – to rank which jobs work better in an office setting and which can be more remote.

**Robideau: How is having a hybrid or remote workforce impacting your diversity, equity and inclusion efforts? Let's talk about culture and how DE&I is maybe a part of that.**

**Skanson:** The past year and a half has taught us, or reminded us, of the importance of supporting the whole person. Everybody went through the past year and a half and what it meant to them personally. They had their own impacts, their own health scares, people they knew who were impacted, life that was torn up in a way that they weren't prepared for and had different reactions to that. It heightens the importance, but it validates the importance of us knowing our team. So it's things like engagement survey results, where you talk about them and you share your vulnerability and you build a safe place where people can talk and open up. At Cargill, we started every meeting with discussions of, "How are you, really?" We take time at every meeting, regardless of what it's about, to touch base with people, just so we're building that into our culture to put people first. At the end of the day, it's the people who matter, who execute the operations of the company. If people aren't in a good place, it's not a good thing. People don't realize that disengagement costs the global economy \$8.1 trillion in lost productivity each year. That's 10% of the GDP. So if companies don't stay on top of employee engagement and build the culture where people feel like they matter and feel supported, that's what's at stake.

For me to sit on camera for eight hours straight, that isn't realistic. So, it's back to setting the culture. It starts when we can just be who we are. "I'm not going to be on camera, here's why ..." We're all going to be okay, people around me are showing their whole selves, and their dog is barking

in the background. It's just being understanding of the situation we're all in.

**Haspert:** We conduct a large employee survey every 12 months and then we do pulse checks. We saw enormous gains in our employee satisfaction and engagement, and I think it was because the perceived hierarchy that people felt like was there got squashed. And that was a good thing. You're seeing people in the environment they live in, and you are seeing some of those things that go wrong and they're being more vulnerable. That was an unintended benefit. The question for me is, how do we keep the momentum as we design the future and plan for what this looks like next? How do we keep the core of what's good about hybrid work, but not in such a stressful type of environment?

**Kimble:** Something that's really key for any kind of hybrid workplace: to maintain transparent and open communications and make sure that leadership is visible and accessible to employees. And be on top of the variety of incentives that can engage teams and keep people connected.

**Crocker:** Your workplace is one of your communities. After people spent months at home, in some cases isolated from their co-workers, as they return they are recognizing the significance of that workplace community. It's really important to make people aware of how much support that community offers and for leaders to realize that this is an important part of our role. If you bring your whole self to work, if you are authentically you at your workplace, that workplace community will be stronger.

**Robideau: So do you think that now there's more of a workplace community, because before, you left all your personal stuff at home, and now you bring your whole self to work?**

**Crocker:** At Bridgewater, we have always started our weekly meetings by sharing our personal business best. This practice allows others to have a window into what other people are doing, what they think is important, and what drives them to thrive. It's also a really good way to change the dynamic in a meeting. It changes one to a positive mindset, and it removes one from whatever they were doing prior to the start of the meeting. This has been a really helpful practice.

**McFarland Jackson:** It's really important for the leaders to make themselves available to everyone. One of the things I've noticed at Fredrikson, particularly over the past year and a half, is firm leadership reaching out to people. And not just saying "my door is open," but actually calling and setting up those meetings. We have an affinity group for diverse attorneys at the firm, and instead of only having our normal quarterly meetings via Zoom, we're meeting one-on-one every couple of weeks or every month. That can be over Zoom or over coffee if you want to meet in person. It's just a way of staying in touch on that personal basis in the middle of all of this change.

**Robideau: What are some things you or your organization has changed post-pandemic?**

**Skanson:** Cargill is a large company, and we do business in 70 countries, so for us to make wholesale benefits changes is complicated. I wouldn't say I've seen drastic changes, but there's an awareness of needs like that. In Asia, we have given stipends to employees for getting things they need ergonomically. We've upgraded Wi-Fi. We have formal and informal wellness programs and practices, for example, initiatives to encourage employees bringing their whole self to work, yoga instructors teaching virtually using videoconferencing to our teammates. We just build back to what's important to the culture. Regarding time off, it's just do what you need to do right now. I watched the delta variant hit Asia before it hit here. Cargill was procuring and supplying oxygen tanks to help employees in India. We'd get access to doctors through our networks so employees' families were taken care of. It was kind of a no-holds-barred thing. I told my leaders, "Do what's right." We're not going to stand up a formal process of giving people more time off, we're just going to do the right thing, have everybody be as safe as possible, try to provide access to what they need, and be supportive.

**Haspert:** We implemented many tactical changes like many companies did. We added a wellness room for meditation; we gave people subscriptions to MasterClass and Calm; we gave people PTO. But I didn't realize how much my team was looking at me to be the role model. I kept preaching, "Close your laptop, walk away! Don't send emails all weekend long! Take care of yourself, go for a run, do a walking meeting." And the feedback I got was, "That sounds awesome, Jill, but you're not doing that." They weren't using all of these awesome things, the EAP and the wellness room and all these great benefits. We were giving it to them, but the leaders in our company needed to model and embrace those behaviors first.

**Kimble:** From a real estate perspective, a company saves about \$11,000 per worker for somebody who works remotely or from home about two to three days a week. So it can add up to pretty significant savings, especially for very large companies. This data is from the study, "The Business Case for Remote Work," published by Global Workplace Analytics.

**McFarland Jackson:** I think we're still thinking about that in the law firm world, because we have attorneys who want to be able to come into the office, and when they come in they need and want their own private office space to work effectively. And what does that look like in terms of the real estate? I think I've participated in at least three surveys at this point, as we are trying to flesh out what partners and employees want out of their post-pandemic workplace, what do they like about what we're doing now, and what do they want to change, so that when we do return to the office, we can have already started that pivot.

**Skanson:** We have a site where we share personal pictures, to share what's going on in your life, for example, what are you doing this weekend? It's all entire leadership team, but it has nothing to do with work. It's just somebody's daughter graduated from college, it's a recipe, it's some-

body's garden. So that's one more way that we're staying connected. We also have a standing "meeting" where people come if they're able. There's no agenda and it's open to any topics, nothing work-related, and it's just an avenue to come and talk. We do it by region, so there are others who culturally might be going through the same things.

**Kimble:** A good outcome of the pandemic is that it's caused us to be more authentic and real with each other, which is really nice. Getting people back into the office has been a challenge for some companies, and I think the workplace is changing. We're finding companies going back to that hot desk scenario, and also really relying on new technologies to track space usage, as well as to provide connection and communication tools for teams.

**Robideau: What's hot desk?**

**Kimble:** Hot desking is when an employee doesn't have an assigned desk or office anymore. Landlords are then taking excess space created by few designated offices to create more interesting collaborative and group space. This creates cost efficiencies and space that is more aligned to the changing space needs. Also, building owners are focusing on things like touchless technologies, HEPA filters in their HVAC units, upgraded cleaning standards so people feel safe. There's a real health and wellness focus on the physical space. Another example of a change in real estate space: We are on the development team for a large multifamily project, and we went back in to redesign and create nooks for working at home so people had a designated spot to work.

**Haspert:** Julie, that's exactly what we did. We are entirely a hot desk organization now. We relocated our headquarters during the pandemic and took the opportunity to completely re-think how we use office space. We created spaces for private conversations, private phone calls, we created a wellness room – and I love it. I feel like our office is now the true social and collaborative hub of our company, and the focused work, the individual work, the expectation is that will happen at your individual workstation, which is at home. I think it's great. In our former office, when I had the big office with the big desk, even though my door was open, people didn't come in as often as I would have liked. But now that I'm working in that collaborative space, I hear ideas and energy from the team, and it's those ideas that are going to keep pushing us forward and help us improve as a company.

**Crocker:** BWB's committees have been really instrumental in creating water-cooler conversations. At BWB, we have a health and wellness committee. This group has hosted either an event or some kind of activity outside once a month throughout the pandemic. They also share recipes, introduced a mindfulness app, and been really focused on creating opportunities for people to share how they maintain their health and wellness throughout the pandemic. Our DE&I committee created book clubs, talks and opportunities for people to get together and discuss things they were concerned about, either in the DE&I space or just generally. Our

mentorship committee has also assisted during this time. They've encouraged people to get together with their mentors. At BWB, we give everyone a \$200 stipend and say, "You can spend it however you think it's appropriate," to build those mentorship programs. I think those committees have really helped to create the supportive community I spoke of earlier, and keep it alive. When we brought people back into the bank, we also had happy hours once a month, so people could re-engage as they felt comfortable. As we've talked to people who were really apprehensive about coming back to the workplace and really had enjoyed being at home, it's an unexpected positive for them that they're now enjoying having some of those conversations they had missed.

**Robideau: As we finish up here, what are some things you're doing to hang on to your employees? Or maybe you don't want to share. [laughter]**

**Kimble:** No. 1 is just flexibility. To the extent that you can allow people some choice, I think that will be the key to both retain and attract talent.

**Haspert:** For us, it's creating interesting and challenging work. How do we keep the work engaging and purposeful, and continuously challenge our employees? We're thinking about other things, too, like internal promotions, pay increases, more PTO, and all those strategic things that go along with it, but for me it really boils down to, do they like the work and am I constantly pushing and challenging the team in a meaningful way? Are they growing and developing as leaders? My motto throughout the pandemic was, "Compassion and accountability are not mutually exclusive." As leaders, we must have deep compassion and understanding for challenges our employees are facing, while partnering with employees to set the bar high in terms of the work to be done and moving the business forward.

**McFarland Jackson:** I think everything we've been talking about goes to really understanding your employees and trying to give them what they need and want in the workplace. We can be flexible to a certain extent in terms of where you work, and we're going to do the work to make sure that we remain a collaborative, supportive and accountable workplace, no matter where that work is done.

**Skanson:** I recently read that 47% of the workforce will look to leave their current employer if they don't have flexibility. I think we're all saying the same thing: We must figure out how to offer flexibility without sacrificing what we deliver as a company. I think it's inevitable, people are going to leave if they're not feeling valued, challenged or given flexibility. That's the new norm and expectation.

**McFarland Jackson:** And there's a huge cost to losing that talent. This thing that I don't want to do because it would be unfair to everyone else, what would it cost the company if I didn't do it?

**Crocker:** I think making sure people feel valued, heard and part of something is all important, and obviously flexibility is going to play into that, as well.



**PANELISTS (cont.)**

**Mary Jayne Crocker**  
Executive vice president  
and chief operating  
officer, Bridgewater Bank

Mary Jayne Crocker has been with Bridgewater Bank since its origin in 2005 and has served as executive vice president and chief operating officer since January 2014. Prior to her role as COO, she was the bank's senior vice president of communications, where she was instrumental in building awareness of the Bridgewater Bank brand, creating the branch network, introducing banking solutions and helping develop a strong positive culture. In her current role, Crocker is responsible for directing the implementation of all strategic initiatives. Each day she ensures BWB delivers on its promise to be the finest entrepreneurial bank in the Twin Cities to clients, investors and BWB team members alike.



**Julie Kimble**  
CEO, KimbleCo

Julie Kimble is CEO of KimbleCo, a full-service, WBE-certified, commercial real estate services firm. With a focus on optimizing real estate for its clients, KimbleCo provides leasing, sales, project management, fee development and consulting services. With over 36 years of experience, Kimble has leased and developed over 4 million square feet of office, industrial and multifamily housing across the U.S. Prior to launching KimbleCo in 2014, Kimble was vice president and general manager at Johnson Controls Global Workplace Solutions. Her tenure included a London-based role with profit-and-loss accountability for a \$350 million Fortune 10 customer account with leadership of a 600-member team in 32 countries. For 13 years, Kimble was vice president at The Opus Group, a national commercial real estate development firm. Kimble is the 2021 president of NAWBO-MN and serves as chairwoman of the city of Roseville Planning Commission.



**Kim Skanson**  
President, Cargill  
Business Services

Kim Skanson is the leader of Cargill Business Services, a global organization partnering across Cargill Inc. to transform how work is done more efficiently, effectively and consistently, enabling Cargill to leverage its size and scale. Prior to joining Cargill in 2014, Skanson worked to transform the Target Corp. enterprise architecture capability, among other strategic initiatives. Skanson began her career as an engineer at Travelers, where she held various positions in financial services and was pivotal in helping define the company's customer relationship management strategy. Skanson is an active leader in the community, serving numerous nonprofit organizations, including being a board member for the Park Nicollet Foundation, as well as mentoring in many ways. Skanson is a champion for STEM education and opportunities for women and children, and has served as a board member and adviser for Women Leading in Technology and Code Savvy. She has a Bachelor of Arts in management and MBA. Skanson and her husband, Cisco, have three sons, Tanner, Sawyer and Ryder. Outside of work, she enjoys yoga, playing ice hockey, coaching baseball, and cheering on her boys at their sporting and extracurricular activities.