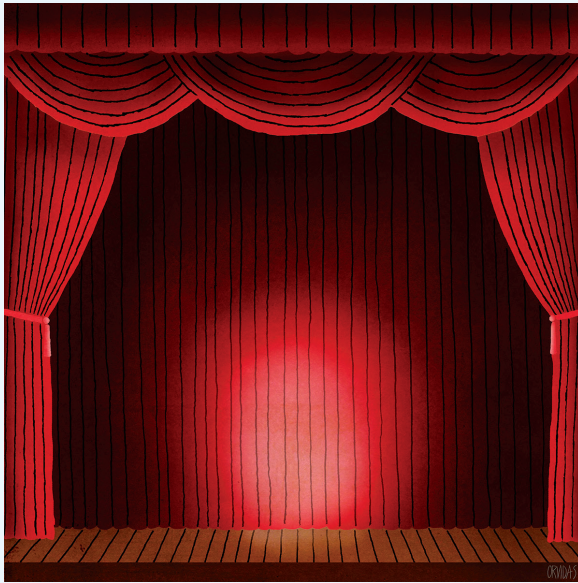


# Without People, There Is No Show



**I can still remember riding my bicycle through my hometown on that day in**

July 1969, and hearing the shouts and cheers coming through the screen doors of the houses in our neighborhood. “The Eagle has landed!” “We did it!”

The Apollo 11 mission proved that the sky was no longer the limit.

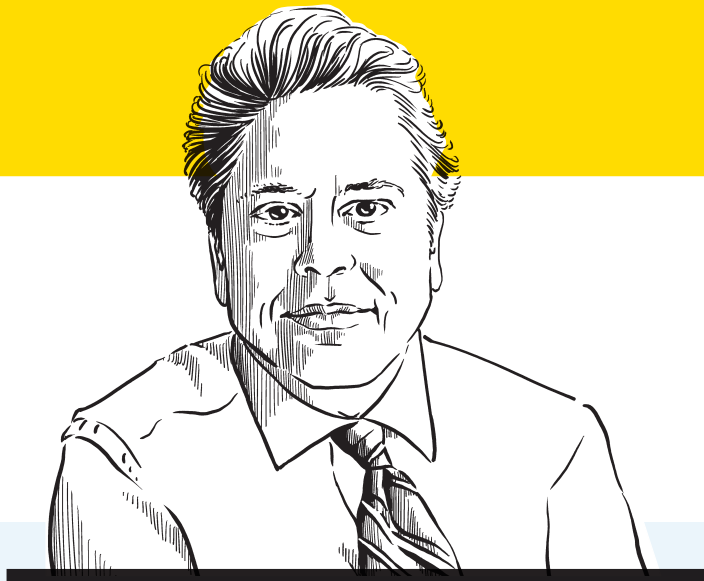
Rockets and technology that had

been unheard of only a decade before had taken us all the way to the moon. But the humans left the footprints behind. For all the technological wonder, people had made the difference.

Today we stand on the threshold of another technological era, where ever-increasing digital inroads seem to raise the question: Have employees become irrelevant?

A surprising number of CEOs apparently hold that view, as revealed in Korn Ferry’s interviews of 800 leaders of multimillion-dollar global businesses:

- More than two-thirds of CEOs (67 percent) believe technology will create greater value in the future than people.
- Nearly half (44 percent) think that robotics, automation and AI will make people “largely irrelevant” in the future of work.
- When asked to rank what their organization’s top five assets will likely be in five



years, the company's workforce did not even make the list. Instead CEOs named (in order): technology, innovation, product/service, brand and real estate.

Well, as a CEO, I guess the bright spot is technology doesn't talk back (as people do). But wait, that's not even true—thanks, Siri.

Nevertheless, the findings above are, quite frankly, shocking to me. A LinkedIn post I wrote on it created quite a stir with some 120 comments—many of them emotionally charged responses to the leaders surveyed who see technology as more crucial to the future of work than people.

Although people spend as much as one-third of their day staring at their hand-held screens, I don't know anybody who was ever inspired by their smartphone. That takes a human being.

This is not to dismiss the fact that technology is a potent differentiator. Show me a company that isn't in some way a "tech firm," and I'll show you a company that's largely irrelevant. Technology has unleashed productivity and changed the way we work and live—all the way back to the Industrial Revolution. In the 1800s, 90 percent of people lived on farms; today in the U.S. that number is a mere 1 percent.

But too much reliance on technology at the expense of talent is shortsighted. An economic analysis commissioned by Korn Ferry found that human capital represents a potential value of \$1.2 quadrillion for the



### Manufacturing manager

Posting on LinkedIn, in response to Burnison column

**"Technology, R&D, products and services, brand and real estate are all products of people. Lose the right people and it all fails.... A balance between AI and employing people has to be reached."**

this: At least 50 percent of the labor force will be freelancers—not outsourced or insourced but *self-sourced*, applying highly specialized skills to multiple companies simultaneously. People will more routinely work into their 70s and usually into their late 60s. In fact, it will be common to hire or "rent" a 64-year-old first-time employee. Moreover, people will work for as many as 25 different companies during their lifetime and enjoy multiple careers. (As a baby boomer, I will have worked for four companies; my daughter, who is 24, has already worked for two organizations post-college.) And knowledge will determine a worker's earnings for life.

Yes, technology will continue to disrupt the labor force. But we have to remember, rockets didn't take us to the moon; it was the engineers and the dreamers. The Internet didn't create a globally networked economy; it was the innovators and creators.

From sports to entertainment to business, it's still pretty simple: The team with the best talent usually wins. ●

global economy—more than twice the value of tangible assets such as technology and real estate.

The debate should not be either-or, technology versus people. It's obviously both. The bigger dilemma is the future of work. How will we deal with a labor force that is increasingly porous, specialized and transient?

The future of work looks something like



### Management consultant

Posting on LinkedIn, in response to Burnison column

**"The one thing that technology will never demonstrate or unleash is the power of enthusiasm. When people feel they are being invested in they become a much greater force than any amount of technology investment."**