

# ALLIANCE OF CHIEF EXECUTIVES

BRINGING LEADERS TOGETHER  
EXCHANGING STRATEGIC INSIGHTS  
TAPPING COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

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Since 1996 the Alliance of Chief Executives has been helping CEOs solve their most profound, strategic challenges.

As the premier organization for chief executives in Northern California, we gather leaders from virtually every industry and market sector to engage in confidential exchanges that typically wouldn't—or couldn't—take place anywhere else.

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## Finding the Reasons Behind Your Results

Alliance members share ideas on measuring actual performance and setting new goals when favorable market conditions lift all boats



Sheeroy Desai  
Gild

### By Warren Lutz

Sheeroy Desai, CEO of Gild, is happy with his company's growth. Gild, which provides software that helps companies hire and engage software engineers, has had 400% annual revenue growth in its first two years and just closed \$13.5 million in

B funding. But Desai (Group 309) doesn't kid himself.

"There is a massive shortage of software engineers in today's market, which is creating a supply and demand imbalance that is clearly driving our progress," he says. "If this was 2001 or 2002, we'd be struggling."

While improving market conditions help all businesses, they are also cause for reflection. Most leaders want to know—is the success they are seeing the result of their decisions, or just lucky timing?

Desai admits it's hard to separate the two, but there are clues. "We measure our churn rate religiously every month, and it's actually

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## Big Data, Total Access & the Future of Marketing

Regis McKenna: Social & Market effects of technological change



Regis McKenna  
"Total Access"

### By ACE Staff

At the July 10th Regional meeting in Santa Clara, Regis McKenna discussed the social and market effects of technological change advancing innovations in marketing theories and practices. His most recent book, "Total Access," addresses the future of marketing as computers and the network do most of the work, from data gathering to customer care and response. The marketing function disappears into a network of relationships and responsibilities between man and machine throughout the value chain. Total consumer access to-and interaction with-the marketplace replaces the archaic broadcast model, and requires marketing strategy that addresses every piece of the organization.

McKenna founded his own high tech marketing firm, Regis McKenna, Inc., in

Silicon Valley in 1970 after working in the marketing departments of two early semiconductor pioneering companies. Over the past 30 years, his firm evolved from one focused on high tech start-ups to a broad based marketing strategy firm servicing international clients in many different industries and countries. McKenna helped launch some of the most important technological innovations of the last thirty years, including the first microprocessor (Intel Corporation), the first personal computer (Apple Computer), the first recombinant DNA genetically engineered product (Genentech, Inc.), and the first retail computer store (The Byte Shop).

These are some of the reasons McKenna is included in the San Jose Mercury News' "Millennium 100" as one of the 100 people who made Silicon Valley what it is today. He pioneered many of the theories and practices of technology marketing that have

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# Ask Better Questions to Generate More Powerful Ideas



**PAUL WITKAY**  
**FOUNDER**

I learned in college there were a lot of people who had far higher IQs than me. Somehow, I recognized that these people didn't threaten my success, but were actually great resources to help me learn faster and get things done more quickly and effectively. My subsequent career was shaped by consistently looking to surround myself with people who were smarter than me.

The key to leveraging these smart people was to learn how to ask questions and pick their brains. Today, this skill is more important than ever. As we create the "Internet of Things," the amount of information available online is growing exponentially. As a result, the amount any single individual knows as a percentage of total available knowledge is declining at an accelerating rate.

And yet, information is useless unless we are able to determine what it means. Therefore, the ability to ask better questions is an essential skill for all of us. Warren Berger, author of "**A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas**," helps us learn to do just that.

Warren Berger says that a "beautiful question" is one that reframes an issue and forces us to look at it in a different way. Such a question not only challenges assumptions, but also energizes people to want to talk about them and work on them. For example, the idea behind the instant camera came from a three-year-old girl who asked, "Why do we have to wait for a picture?" It was a great question, one that led the girl's father, Polaroid founder Edwin Land, to find the answer.

When we are overloaded with information, context becomes critical. What matters now is the ability to look at something from multiple sources to understand more fully the challenge we are facing. This requires us to ask all kinds of peripheral questions. We must learn to question not only other people's brains, but to challenge our own assumptions as well.

Warren Berger recommends three stages of innovative questioning:

1. The "**Why?**" stage helps us get to the core and helps focus on those things that matter. Why do we care? Why does this exist? Why has no one done anything about it?

2. The "**What If?**" stage generates fresh ideas for improvement. Most of us are uncomfortable with uncertainty, and as a result, we rush to solutions too quickly. If we take our time to explore a wider range of possibilities, we generate far more powerful ideas, which can then be tested.

3. "**How?**" is the final stage prior to taking action. We ask questions such as: How do we decide which of the ideas to pursue? How will we test these ideas?

A great example of the power of better questions is Deborah Meier, who was the first educator to receive a MacArthur "Genius Grant." Meier believed that schools need to teach students critical thinking skills instead of simply pushing information at them. Meier helped to establish a network of small schools in New York City, where she focused on five learning skills that are matched with corresponding questions:

- **Evidence:** How do we know what is true or false?
- **Viewpoint:** How would it look if we stepped into other people's shoes?
- **Connection:** Is there a pattern?
- **Conjecture:** What if it were different?
- **Relevance:** Why does this matter?

Meier started with two particular ways of thinking: skepticism and empathy. She believes it's critical "to have an open-mindedness to the possibility that you're wrong, or that anything may be wrong." As Berger wrote, over the next decade since launching her schools, ninety-nine percent of Meier's students finished high school—in a city where the dropout rate was between 40% and 60%.

I believe that if we continually challenge current ways of doing things and leverage the power of our collective wisdom, we will discover a continuous stream of breakthrough ideas. Asking questions is key. But asking better questions—and more of them—can inspire exceptional ideas that change everything.

*"Asking questions is key. But asking better questions—and more of them—can inspire exceptional ideas that change everything"*

# Nuggets from Behind Closed Doors

*Alliance members allow selected insights to be captured and shared*

*Inside every private Alliance meeting, there are hundreds of years of experience. While keeping confidentiality of the member who provided the challenge to their group, we've captured (with permission) just a few of the insightful comments from a handful of members. Read what these two members had to say to get a glimpse of what it is like to be an Alliance member.*

## Pat Lashinsky: Want Disruptive Innovation? Look Beyond Your Industry

*The case at hand was brought by a CEO that was looking for ways to innovate in a commoditized market. He felt discouraged by the consumer perception that their industry's products are "all the same" and wondered how he could find the right people to innovate his product portfolio.*

If I were you, I'd hire fresh faces with no direct experience in your industry. While it may take more time to get them up to speed, the infusion of new perspectives will foster valuable innovation.

I'm a new member of this group, so I don't know you as well as the other members. But, my newness may bring

you fresh perspectives. If I were in your shoes, I would suspend the belief that your market is commoditized, and hire fresh talent from outside your industry to drive innovation. Think about Uber: they unlocked billions of dollars of value in a market that many considered commoditized precisely because they weren't taxi people. Instead, they approached the market from a consumer perspectives and said, "Wouldn't it be a lot better if..."

You may worry that it will take too much time to get industry outsiders up to speed. Yet, it is exactly this process of getting outsiders to consider new

problems that generates the disruptive innovation your company needs. For example, I was once transferred into the yogurt division of a large food company specifically because I had no experience in the market – and no preconceived notions of what yogurt should be. Despite the perception that yogurt was a commoditized market, I led my team to create novel packaging that made yogurt exceedingly easy to eat on the go. It immediately set us apart from the competition.



*"Hire fresh talent from outside your industry to drive innovation."*

**Pat Lashinsky,**  
CEO of Taxi Magic

## Praful Saklani: Technology in a Luddite's Industry



*"Tilt the playing field in your favor by adopting advanced technologies to gain even more valuable business insights."*

**Praful Saklani, Co-Founder & CEO of Pramata Corporation**

*The case at hand was brought by a CEO in an industry with weak technology adoption and a history of poor employee retention. He was looking for strategies to differentiate himself from his competitors and better retain his sales force.*

Since your industry doesn't actively embrace technology, you have a lot of green grass to work with. It's worth the investment: deploy sophisticated technology immediately to achieve an enduring strategic advantage.

We've already discussed the competitive advantage your business gained by adopting an enterprise CRM. Yet, your competitors don't even know what a CRM does, let alone the other possibilities that now exist in the age of interconnected data sources. If I were you, I'd tilt the playing field in your favor by adopting advanced technologies to gain even more valuable business insights. These insights can dramatically increase your business' bottom line – and the size of your sales people's commission checks. There's no better way to keep your sales force motivated and loyal than to give them

the sophisticated tools to outfox the competition and close deals. Employee retention issues will quickly fade.

As someone who's been in the Enterprise Software industry for years, I've seen countless companies gain real competitive advantage by leading the technology adoption curve. New advances in enterprise software and big data are helping to advance business objectives on multiple fronts: selling more, retaining customers, mitigating risk, reducing cost – you name it. The leading companies of today are constantly mining new data sources and leveraging this information to facilitate highly optimized interactions with the customer. This can be a real competitive and strategic advantage.

## Avoiding the Pitfalls of "Success Syndrome"



Russ Harrison  
The Leadership Group

**Russ Harrison:**  
**Enduring**  
**leaders never**  
**stop learning**

**By ACE Staff**

Why were the CEOs of IBM, General Motors, American Express, Eastman Kodak ousted during the same 18-month period? Russ Harrison, our keynote speaker posed that question at the May 16th meeting. He described the "success syndrome" as the culprit: sustained success at these companies led to internal focus, complacency, and – most detrimental – disabled learning. These negative institutional traits generated decreased customer focus, increased cost and loss of innovation.

Harrison's perspective on what drives institutional and professional success is based on a 40+ year career where he led Fortune 100 companies, such as Bank of America, McKesson and American Airlines, as well as entrepreneurial organizations. His mantra is to embrace learning and

carry a healthy aversion to convention. Harrison points out that convention is conventional because it *used* to work, and contends that smart people, for whom continued learning is fundamental, apply a persistent challenge to their situation, even interrupting momentum to explore and learn.

Key to refreshing perspective and avoiding entrenchment are role models and heroes. One of Harrison's was Ross Perot, whose evolving vision inspired him as an early employee at EDS. Perot fought institutional inertia. "If you see a snake, just kill it. Don't appoint a committee on snakes."

Harrison concluded his keynote by describing the "quiet confidence" that is found in successful leaders. He said, "Mistakes, after all, are a great driver of learning. Find the events in your life, small and large, in which you have prevailed in difficult situations. Allow such events to become a source of quiet inner confidence, a consequence of which is the ability to overcome the next and larger challenge you encounter."

## Regis McKenna

*Continued from page 1*

become integrated into the marketing mainstream. Some of these include:

- The process of diffusing technology across various classes of users ranging from innovators to early adopters to late adopters and laggards and the corresponding evolution of the "whole product." (The Regis Touch, 1985).
- The development of industry infrastructure modeling whereby a relatively small number of "influencers" establish and sustain standards.
- The focus on "intangibles" as the benefits of technology products.
- The development of "other" as a major, growing segment of market share with the result of "choice becoming a higher value than brand."
- His book, "Relationship Marketing," was a pioneering work in the concept of one-to-one marketing.
- The development of the concept of "Real Time," whereby technology compresses time (from want or need to zero), creating "the never satisfied consumer."

Members throughout the Alliance are welcome to attend any of our keynote breakfasts and meet other members. Look on the back page for a list of upcoming events, or go to the "Events" section of the Alliance of CEOs website.

## Welcome New Alliance Members!

Member	Group	Company	Website	Industry
Jan Arendtsz	280	Celigo	www.celigo.com	Application Integration
Rob Cahill	280	Jhana	www.jhanaeducation.com	Management Training
Matt DiMaria	309	Eye-Fi	www.eyefi.com	Digital Photography Platform
Brad Freitag	T120	FileMaker	www.filemaker.com	Software for Custom Business Solutions
Greg Hartwell	341	Homecare California	www.homecare-california.com	Home Health Care
Jordan Kivelstadt	272	Free Flow Wines	www.freeflowwines.com	Stainless Steel Wine Kegs
Stan Klimoff	T120	Qubell	www.qubell.com	Application Deployment & Management
Rob Munro	280	Idibon	www.idibon.com	Natural Language Processing
Pirooz Parvarandeh	T300	Maxim Integrated Products	www.maximintegrated.com	Semiconductors
Eddy Pintacsi	341	Apex Race Parts	www.apexraceparts.com	High-performance Wheels & Accessories
Susie Quesada	105	Ramar Foods International	www.ramarfoods.com	Asian & Specialty Foods
Ray Silcock	T300	Diamond Foods	www.diamondfoods.com	Premium Snack Foods
John Taylor	280	Hoita	www.hoita.com	mCommerce Gifting
Stephanie Todd	T110	Babette	www.babettesf.com	Women's Apparel
Rob Winkler	Q300	5th Planet Games	www.5thplanetgames.com	Online Games

To learn more about the Alliance of Chief Executives, including membership information, visit us online at [www.AllianceofCEOs.com](http://www.AllianceofCEOs.com) or call (925)942-2400.

# Alliance Community Activities

## CEO Collaborative Forum This Way Up 2014 Barcelona

Alliance members, Curtis Allen, Matt Brown, Kumaran Santhanam, Mike Wakim and Sri Welaratna joined Alliance Founder Paul Witkay in Barcelona, Spain to participate in another successful Pan European meeting with our European partners, CEO-CF, in June.



## Alliance Spring Dinner

The Alliance hosts three All-Alliance Dinners each year to enable all members and their guests to meet other members from throughout the entire Alliance. Many Alliance members and their guests came from throughout Northern California to enjoy our 2014 Spring Dinner at the Silicon Valley Capital Club on May 22.



# Finding the Reasons Behind Your Results

Continued from page 1

pretty low," he says. "That tells me that we have a solution that our customers are happy with and that delivers value."

The answers are important because they affect the goals Desai sets for the company. Are they strong enough—or could the company be overextending itself when the market is favorable? "I've seen instances in which startups grew very quickly and are now contracting because they got ahead of themselves," Desai says. "That is a tricky thing to figure out."



Menko Deroos  
Xicato

When it comes to whether internal or external factors are driving results, Menko Deroos (Group 302) CEO of LED lighting technology provider Xicato said the answer to "what's driving the results?" is often relative.

If your company is growing faster than the market, or its market share is growing, a CEO's actions are likely having an impact. In a market that is growing 10% to 15% per year, Xicato has grown 35% to 50% annually over the past five years. "When you continue to grow faster than the market, increase your market share and increase your margins, you have rock solid indicators that let you know you're on the right course," Deroos said.



Jonathan Corr  
Ellie Mae

In highly cyclical markets, however, the question becomes tougher. Ellie Mae, a provider of loan origination technology for mortgage lenders, faces constant tailwinds and headwinds as a result of the ever-evolving housing market, says Jonathan Corr (Group Q200), the company's President & COO.

During the mortgage refinancing boom of 2012, Ellie Mae experienced tremendous growth. "We knew that it wasn't all our doing, but we always look at the fundamental growth of our business," says Corr. "We measure results based on how well we are penetrating our universe versus our competition, and whether we are delivering on our overall strategy."

The point is to keep stretching, an effort that Corr describes as "both an art and a science."

"We extensively model the effect of what increasing or decreasing mortgage volume will do," he says. "If volume is going to be up, we're going to set aggressive goals because we know there's going to be a tailwind. At the same time, you don't want your goals to be so aggressive that they demoralize your team because they feel unrealistic."

*"...If you're not doing everything you could, and there's a more valuable path out there and you don't take it, you could get stuck."*



Christopher Burnley  
Corefact

Christopher Burnley, (Group 121) CEO of Corefact Corporation, faces the same issue. Corefact sells marketing applications for real estate and mortgage professionals. It's doing extremely well—50% annual growth over the past three years. But Burnley is actually in favor of high goals. "We've always set goals that we could not realistically achieve, and really tried to knock it out of the park," he said. "My general philosophy is to really push, push, push."

Burnley is unsure how much influence the market has had on Corefact's results, but believes that performance and the ability to provide a unique solution are key.

"You have to find a way to either disrupt the established way of doing things and be able to out-price and outperform the competition," he says. "I think we've been successful because we've done those things, plus we can automate almost the entire process for our clients."



Karl Hansen  
The Vita Companies

Karl Hansen, (Group 341) President of The Vita Companies believes his company's uniqueness alone is driving its results. Except for 2009, the company has had double digit revenue growth every year, a fact

that Hansen attributes to the fact that Vita has virtually no sales and marketing expenses. "In most insurance companies, the sales process consumes 15% to 30% of revenue," Hansen says. "We don't have any producers, so we take that money and invest it in our service model."

Vita is fortunate to get essentially all of its business through referrals. The overall economy can still affect the company, though. "When one of our clients goes out of business, we lose that business and revenue drops," Hansen said. "However, we usually get two or three referrals from people who headed off to start a new venture."



Doug Leeds  
Ask.com

Doug Leeds, (Group Q300) CEO of Ask.com, a leading online site for questions and answers, says competition is a great benchmark for companies, regardless of what is happening in their markets. "If everyone is growing by 5% and you're

not, you know you're doing something wrong," he said. "But if you're only growing by 5% too, you know you're not doing something right, either. Knowing the competition allows you to set the benchmark for your performance."

At the same time, Leeds agrees that setting goals is part art and part science. "You could be doing better than everybody," he said, "but if you're not doing everything you could, and there's a more valuable path out there and you don't take it, you could get stuck. You can't get romanced by just winning."

Warren Lutz is a writer for the Alliance of Chief Executives newsletter. He may be contacted at [wLutz@allianceofceos.com](mailto:wLutz@allianceofceos.com).

# Members In The News



**Ekso Bionics Named 'Leading Robotics Company' by Healthcare Robotics**

July 24, 2014

Ekso Bionics, a robotic exoskeleton company, announced that it was featured in Robotics Business Review Industry Special Report 'Healthcare Robotics: 2014' that describes medical robotic exoskeletons as "probably the most exciting segment of the entire medical robotics market right now." Ekso is led by Alliance member Nathan Harding (Group 275).



**5th Planet Games Says Yes to More Money**

July 16, 2014

5th Planet Games reported that it has raised its first round of outside funding in five years of existence, \$3 million in growth capital from DCA Capital Partners and Moneta Ventures. Alliance member Rob Winkler (Group Q300) is the CEO of 5th Planet Games.



**Direct Marketing News names Amy Hoopes, Wente Vineyards, as 2014 "40 Under 40" Award Winner**

July 14, 2014

Congratulations to Alliance member, Amy Hoopes (Group T110), CMO & EVP, Global Sales of Wente Vineyards, who was recently named by *Direct Marketing News* as a 2014 "40 Under 40" Award winner. The exceptional group of national, young marketers will be celebrated at a ceremony on September 30th in New York.



**2 Alliance Members on the List of the Most Influential Women in Bay Area Business**

May 2, 2014

Congratulations to Alliance members Joy Chen (Group 202), CEO of Yes To Inc. and Lisa Dyson (Group 280), CEO of Kiverdi who were named to the 2014 list of the "Most Influential Women in Bay Area Business!"



**Total Defense Announces Merger of**

**Consumer Business & Launches Stand-alone Corporate Cloud Business**

April 21, 2014

Total Defense, a leading provider of internet security solutions merges consumer business line with Untangle and rebrands its enterprise business as iSheriff. Alliance member Paul Lipman (Group 305) is the CEO of iSheriff.



Alliance Group 271 enjoyed a fun venue at Sparky's Hot Rod Garage in San Carlos for their July Meeting. From left to right are: Evan Bailyn, Erik Muller, Alliance Director Ron Yu (in front), Peter Koshland, Kay Mandegarian, Alex Brodsky, Derrick Rebello

# Upcoming Alliance Events

For an updated list of all Alliance events, go to [www.allianceofceos.com/events2](http://www.allianceofceos.com/events2)

The core of the Alliance is our private groups which meet throughout Northern California. Because the collective experience within the Alliance is truly extraordinary, we enable our members to come together in a variety of ways to "cross-fertilize" their diverse knowledge and experiences and connect in meaningful ways. If you would like to be invited to any of the Alliance events below, please contact Laurel Madal at (925) 942-2400 ext. 201 or [lmadal@allianceofceos.com](mailto:lmadal@allianceofceos.com).



## CEO Roundtable: Why Raising the White Flag Can Be a Great Business Decision: Friday, August 22 in San Jose

Too many firms fight noble battles they can't win for far too long. CEOs of these firms need to know when to raise the white flag and accept failure. Running a business is as much about minimizing losses as it is about maximizing wins. Join Alliance member Doug Leeds, CEO of Ask.com, who will lead off the roundtable talking about the process leading up to his firm's November 2010 surrender of search to Google. Event begins at 7:30 a.m. at Hoge, Fenton, Jones & Appel in San Jose.



## Alliance Fall Dinner: Thursday, September 25 in San Francisco

All Alliance members and their guests are invited to attend our Alliance Fall Dinner at The City Club in San Francisco. Our wine reception and dinner is free for Alliance members and their guests! The Fall Dinner is one of three "All-Alliance" CEO Dinners held throughout the Bay Area each year to enable our members to get to know their fellow Bay Area CEOs. Event begins at 6 p.m. Reserve your space early. This is will be a popular event!



## Keynote: Steve Beck, Founder & Managing Partner, cg42: Thursday, October 9 in Santa Clara

Steve Beck, who leads cg42, a consultancy founded on the idea of helping businesses in high pressure situations rise to the challenge, will join us for this Regional Alliance meeting. Beck was previously FutureBrand's Chief Strategy Officer and President of FutureBrand's North American operations. Event begins at 7:30 a.m., at the Hyatt in Santa Clara.



## Keynote: Joe Abraham, Founder, BOSI Global: Friday, November 7 in Santa Clara

Joe Abraham, Founder of BOSI Global – a group of entrepreneurship initiatives including bosidna.com, BOSI Fast 50 and The BOSI Growth Fund, will join us for this Regional Alliance meeting. A professional entrepreneur himself, Joe has started up, grown and exited three companies of his own and invested in over 20 small businesses. He is the author of "Entrepreneurial DNA: The Breakthrough Discovery That Aligns Your Business to Your Unique Strengths." Event begins at 7:30 a.m., at the Hyatt in Santa Clara.



## Keynote: Louis Patler, President, The B.I.T. Group: Friday, November 14 in San Francisco

Award-winning author, speaker and consultant, Louis Patler, will join us for this Regional Alliance meeting. Patler brings pioneering technologies for identifying emerging business and consumer trends, organizational culture, and strategic initiatives to Fortune 500 companies, multi-national corporations, and foreign governments. Event begins at 7:30 a.m., at the Bently Reserve in San Francisco.



## Keynote: Patrick Lencioni, Founder & President, The Table Group: Friday, November 21 in San Ramon

Patrick Lencioni, Founder and President of The Table Group, a consulting firm dedicated to building healthy organizations, will join us for this Regional Alliance meeting. Lencioni is a speaker and consultant with over two decades of experience working with CEOs and their executive teams, and the author of many bestselling books including "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," which continues to be a weekly fixture on national bestseller lists. Event begins at 7:30 a.m., at the San Ramon Valley Conference Center.



## Alliance Holiday Dinner: Thursday, December 4 in Pleasanton

Join Alliance members and their guests for cocktails and dinner at Castlewood Country Club in Pleasanton to celebrate the holidays! The Holiday Dinner is one of three "All-Alliance" CEO Dinners held throughout the Bay Area each year to enable our members to get to know their fellow Bay Area CEOs. Event begins at 6 p.m. Reserve your space early. This is always a popular event, and it's free for all members and their guests!



## Keynote: Patty McCord, Principal, Patty McCord Consulting: Friday, February 6 in Santa Clara

Patty McCord, Principal of Patty McCord Consulting, will join us for this Regional Alliance meeting. McCord is an executive coach for CEOs and their teams to help in defining leadership and company culture. In the early days of Netflix, McCord decided to "write down the things we expect in people." This simple idea led to an infamous document and philosophy now known as, "Netflix Culture: Freedom & Responsibility." Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook called it "the most important document ever to come out of the Valley." Event begins at 7:30 a.m.



## Keynote: Charlene Li, Founder, Altimeter Group: Friday, February 13 in San Francisco

Charlene Li, Founder of the Altimeter Group and the author of the New York Times bestseller, "Open Leadership: How Social Technology Can Transform the Way You Lead" will join us for this Regional Alliance meeting. Li, an independent thought leader on social and emerging technologies, is also the coauthor of the critically acclaimed, bestselling book "Groundswell," which was named one of the best business books in 2008. Event begins at 7:30 a.m., at the Bently Reserve in San Francisco.



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