



Disconnect Day One: All that really matters is the consumer

Attendees of meeting in the desert start rallying behind change, former Netflix chief talent officer gives fresh take on 'innovation.'

BY [CAROLINE FEENEY](#) [Managing Editor](#) | MAR 26

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The future of the real estate industry could hinge on whether it's able to fundamentally shift from a business of sales to a business of service, according to real estate leaders who voiced their calls to action at the inaugural day of [Inman Disconnect in Palm Springs](#).

"Real estate agents like myself are incentivized to do more, not to do better," said 27-year-old Tim Heyl, CEO of [the Heyl Group](#), a top producing real estate team for Keller Williams, on an outdoor stage at Inman Disconnect. "How can we sell more? How can we make more money? How can we build wealth for ourselves? That doesn't put our mind on our end consumer."



Tim Heyl at Disconnect. (Credit: Melissa Fuller)

Though Heyl put forth three other issues facing the industry, including consumer uncertainty during the transaction, the ubiquity of part-time agents and a lack of transparency for both buyers and sellers, he chose improving service as [the principle](#) he'll be spearheading throughout the event.

What could a shift toward service look like in practice? Patty McCord, former talent chief of Netflix and the author of *Powerful: Building a Culture of Freedom and Responsibility*, explained how a focus on the consumer can allow everything else in a business to fall into place.

"Yes, we are servants," said McCord on stage. "The people that we serve are our clients and our customers who use our products."



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Former Netflix talent chief Patty McCord at Inman Disconnect (Credit: Melissa Fuller)

“It’s not about you,” she said in telling how the streaming giant came to be, and its early roots as a DVD mail service. “It’s not about your industry. It’s about the people that you serve in the communities that you’re in. When you obsess with them, you can be straightforward ... [then] transparency is about serving their needs, not figuring out how you should operate.”



Attendees gather at the opening of Disconnect in Palm Springs, California. (Credit: Melissa Fuller)

McCord advised business owners to take a look at where they want to be in six months to a year and then work backwards from there. “Build your team based on the delta between the people that you have and what you want to accomplish,” she said.

Other attendees at the event made their case for what they believe the industry should prioritize, ideas that will be discussed and debated over the next two days and eventually finalized and documented as a manifesto to ignite change.

Red Oak Realty’s Vanessa Bergmark will be shepherding the movement behind more diversity in leadership positions, both in age and gender. “It’s time to start including more women at the top of real estate,” she said to the crowd, sharing how she had been inspired lately by the younger generation. “It’s gotta change. It’s got to look different, whether it’s in a suit or it’s in a dress — it’s high time.”

McCord echoed a similar sentiment: “The more that we reflect our customers in terms of diversity and inclusion, the more they’re going to trust you as an industry and the more they’re going to want to keep working with you.”

Cynthia Adams of Pearl Home Certification asked fellow attendees to get behind the “[new energy economy](#)” to combat climate change by making houses more sustainable so we can collectively “improve the legacy we are leaving our children.” Charlie Ashby, president of VIP Realty Group, will be leading up the charge on open data as the expiration of the National Association of Realtors’ decree with the Department of Justice over antitrust violations [quickly approaches in November](#).

But so far, the energy around committing to a better and more consistent consumer experience is the most palpable. Will the solution come from a tech company that takes an Amazon approach to the transaction, as predicted by real estate coach Tom Ferry, or an industrywide change to shift agents from independent contractor to employee status, to give brokerages the ability to manage their talent, a suggestion industry consultant Rob Hahn is preaching?

More to come in the days to follow.

Meanwhile, McCord left brokerages with one big piece of actionable advice: “Go back and look at every single thing you’re doing in your business and ask, ‘Why?’”

If your answer is “this is the way we’ve always done it,” then you’ve got

work to do.

“Here’s how you can innovate: stop doing stupid stuff,” she told attendees.

“Transforming the way you work can happen for any one of you.”

Email Caroline Feeney

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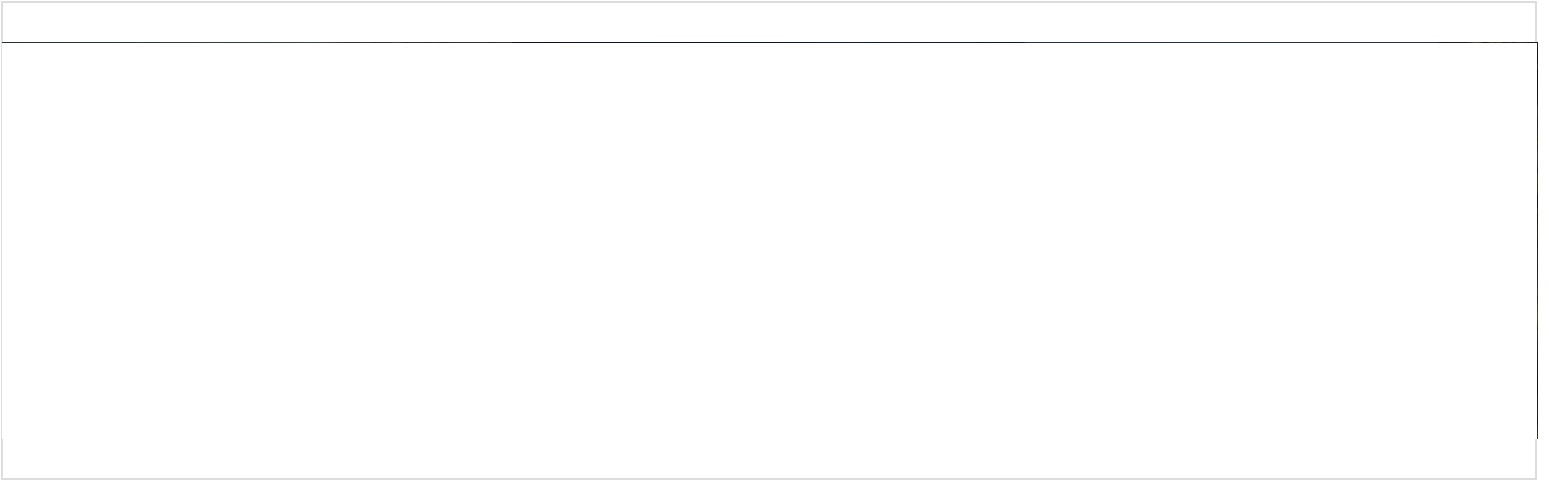
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Caryn Josepher · Marketing Associate at Bay Equity Home Loans OC

This sounds like an interesting panel! I'm super interested to see where this goes. Here is the thing...most agents don't know who their audience is. It would be interesting to see if they help agents understand their own market first so they come up with the solutions to serve them.

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