

## **Meet the Woman Rewriting Work's Playbook.**

Denise Brouder traded Wall Street for workplace reform. Now she's reshaping how we measure success at work.

By Sofia Marcus



Denise Brouder, founding member of the Future of Work Alliance, pictured in a professional headshot. (Denise Brouder)

Before the sun rises in Westfield, New Jersey, Denise Brouder is already working hard towards reshaping the future of work.

The 5-foot-5 redhead trained herself to wake up at 5 a.m., long before emails hit the inbox and before her kids are up.

“I was so driven by the opportunity within the future of work,” Brouder said in a Zoom interview. “I was looking for time in all parts of my day.”

Brouder is a founding member of the [Future of Work Alliance](#), a coalition of over 40 experts focused on redesigning work with trust, flexibility, and AI integration. She's spent years advocating for a new way to measure success – one that fits people's lives, not the other way around.

Her interest in flexibility started long before remote work became common.

Born in Queens, New York to Irish immigrants, her family moved back to a small village called Williamstown in County Galway, Ireland when she was 10 years old.

At 22, during her final year studying economics and finance at the University of Limerick, she took a leap of faith and cold-emailed big banks in New York asking for an internship.

When one wrote back, she canceled her job contract in Dublin, took out a loan for 300 pounds, and bought a one-way ticket to New York – landing on Wall Street, which had always been her dream.

She started at Merrill Lynch and later joined Goldman Sachs. But after having her first child, she began questioning the rigid structures of corporate work.

“When any woman becomes a mom, they face this really difficult decision about their career,” she said. “I needed inherent flexibility to shape my very young family. The traditional world of work could not offer [that].”

She pivoted to startups and workplace transformation, drawn by the freedom to rethink systems from the ground up.

In 2018, she launched [SWAY Workplace](#), a learning and development company designed to help teams navigate hybrid and remote work. It eventually shut down in October 2024, but the mission stayed with her.

“Honestly, it was kind of solving my own problem,” she said. “I think that’s what a lot of entrepreneurs do. They have an idea, and they want to solve their own problem. That’s the problem I set out to solve.”

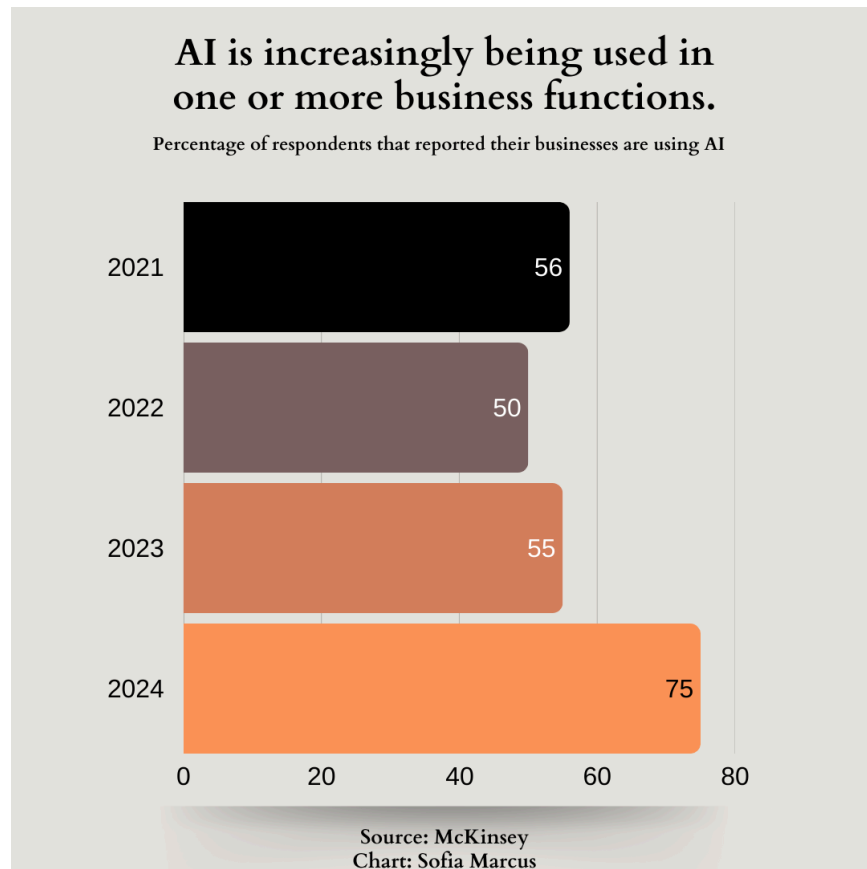


Denise Brouder speaking about the future of workplace culture at [SXSW 2023](#). (Denise Brouder)

Even before the pandemic, Brouder saw bigger shifts happening in how we work. She began researching the [future of work](#) back in 2019 – when the conversation mostly focused on [artificial intelligence's](#) (AI) impending potential to displace people.

“Back then, I wanted to run onto a hilltop and scream ‘it’s coming!’ We have to really prepare for this,” Brouder exclaimed.

Her early warnings have since been echoed by research. A 2024 [McKinsey report](#) found that nearly 80% of companies use AI in at least one business function. But many also struggle to hire qualified talent for roles like AI ethics and data science.



To Brouder, these trends aren't threats – they're signals.

“Having our work amplified by AI is a net positive to all of us, and I hope people see that,” she said.

Dan Smolen, host of the workplace podcast “[What's Your Work Fit?](#)”, said Brouder has long recognized that technology alone won't change work.

“What Denise was describing with this trust platform is a bottom-up ideation,” he said. “She was one of the first to capture it.”

He and Brouder have worked closely together through the Future of Work Alliance, which she revived in 2024 after a pandemic pause to rebuild a shared vision for the future.

“She always brings process, intention, and clarity,” said Sophie Wade, a workforce innovation specialist and close friend. “These days, we don’t necessarily know how things are going to evolve, but she’s always had this intentionality.”

The alliance’s work has grown to include research on equity, AI integration, and trust.

In March 2025, they published a [research paper](#) about building a just and humanized workplace. Their findings suggest that companies embracing flexible, trust-driven environments report higher retention and engagement.

A 2023 [Gallup study](#) supports this, showing that when communication and support are strong, 95% of employees begin to fully trust leadership.

Brouder believes in removing unnecessary barriers to give everyone equal access to opportunity.

“I want to level the playing field for opportunity and access to work – and then let the best person win,” she said.

Beyond leadership, Brouder has an innate ability to bring people together. Her collaborators describe her as a sharp listener and a unifying force.

“I decided to work with her on the Future of Work Alliance simply because of her vision,” said Mart Musekura, a global workplace strategist and innovation leader. “She has plenty of ideas to sell, but she’s always a great listener.”

As the world of work continues to evolve, Brouder remains focused on helping others adapt.

“If I can help elevate the collective work being done as the model for modern work, then what a great thing to do,” she said. “So less talking, more action, and get it done.”