

Building strong leaders

through physical and mental resilience

Presented by Salt and Roar Fitness



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Message from our CEO

As a driven leadership team at Salt Recruitment Group, we are proud to guide our talented teams that creates futures for our customers across the world. For more than a decade, we've had the privilege of guiding our growth into a global recruitment agency. With a workforce spread across 20 strategic locations, we have over 1100 full-time staff and freelancers combined, working on projects with some of the most recognised names in the digital sector.

Our leadership philosophy is at the heart of empowering individuals and fostering a culture of well-being, high performance, and collaboration. These principles are central to Salt's corporate ethos. We understand that our team's well-being is key to driving success healthy, supported individuals create thriving workplaces. Through this commitment, we've implemented well-being initiatives, conducted interviews with experts in their fields and partnered with charitable organisations to enhance our social responsibility - aligning with our belief that leadership extends beyond business metrics.

Leaders must prioritise the well-being, performance and resilience of our people and the communities we serve, and it begins with how we lead by example.

From my role at Salt to my involvement in mentoring entrepreneurs through life coaching and serving as a board trustee for a multi-academy trust, I am a firm believer that physical health is critical for mental well-being. Healthy habits can come in many forms, and I advocate for mastering the basics: nutritious eating, staying hydrated, getting adequate sleep, and integrating exercise and self-care into daily routines.

These principles guide my leadership style, and I work to instil them in the people I coach and mentor. I am driven by the pursuit of excellence, not only to continually refine my own capabilities but also to inspire and empower others to unlock their full potential.

I believe that success as a leader should always start with self-care.

Elliot Dell. CEO

We extend our gratitude to everyone who participated in the interviews and the team that collaborated to create this document, drawing on new and established insights from sporting and business leaders in our network.

We hope this resource supports and inspires you on your journey.



Introduction

Success in the workplace, much like in sports, relies on a strong foundation of physical and mental resilience.

While parallels between athletes and business leaders often highlight resilience, success in the workplace demands a different kind of endurance. It's not a sprint but a continuous effort to build habits that sustain performance over time. Leadership, both physically and mentally, is about being your best self to support and empower your team. By maintaining and fostering resilience, leaders can navigate ongoing challenges, inspire others, and lead with strength and clarity.

While sport offers powerful examples, leadership isn't about how much someone can bench press - it's about discipline and a mindset that prioritises health in all forms. Whether it's a morning run, yoga session, or mindful breathing exercises, taking time to focus on physical and mental well-being is essential for thriving at work.

Customisable well-being

Companies that offer a wide range of well-being programs see 11% higher retention rates. This supports the idea that leadership and well-being should cater to diverse individual needs, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends Report

Exercise and leadership

Executives who exercise regularly are rated as having better leadership abilities. The study found that physically active leaders are perceived to be more effective in handling work-life balance, stress, and overall leadership challenges.

A study by the Center for Creative Leadership



ROAR

A big thank you to ROAR for collaborating on this guide

Founded by 3x Olympian **Sarah Lindsay** and UK's leading body transformation expert **Rich Phillips**, Roar Fitness is the only London and Dubai personal training gym able to offer its clients an Olympic training experience like no other in its field.

Their highly experienced team of nutritionists, strength coaches and world class personal trainers, all come together to offer clients the most comprehensive and cutting edge personal training experience imaginable.

roar-fitness.com





Physical health and workplace performance

How physical activity boosts productivity

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), regular physical activity can improve work performance by 15%. Employees who engage in physical activity report feeling more focused, energised, and capable of managing workplace stress.

Physical activity not only enhances physical health but also sharpens mental acuity, which is crucial for sustained productivity in leadership roles. The benefits of this extend to their teams, as leaders who maintain a healthy lifestyle and set a positive example, can lead to increased morale, reduced absenteeism, and higher overall productivity.



"Our role as leaders is to support our team's well-being, but we can't forget our own resilience and needs in the process. For me, it's all about routine. I'm a big believer that exercise makes a real difference in my ability to lead effectively and stay sharp, both mentally and physically."

Elliot Dell, CEO Salt

Cognitive benefits of exercise

A British Journal of Sports Medicine study shows that even moderate physical activity can improve cognitive function, memory, and decision-making. Leaders who exercise regularly can think more clearly and respond more effectively under pressure.

This highlights the importance of integrating physical activity into our daily routines, not just for personal health but for enhancing our leadership capabilities.

Stress relievers

When asked what her stress reliever was as part of our Women in Tech Series, Claire Tran, a Software Engineer answered; "Exercise. It helps me switch off when I get home and maybe the endorphins play a role too."

The same was echoed by Saidah Sahad from Singapore as part of our Women in Tech interviews. "Exercise [is my stress reliever] – as someone that has completed 2 marathons and cycled on a 12 days excursion around Indo-China, I can say I practice what I preach!"



Sarah Lindsay

3x Olympic Speed Skater and Founder of ROAR Fitness. Sarah Lindsay represented Team Great Britain in short track speed skating at Vancouver 2010, Turin 2006 and Salt Lake City 2002. We look back at our interview with Sarah for our podcast as she shares the most recent insights into leading a business and how it has been impacted by her career.

Harnessing personal brand and leadership in business success

As an athlete, I initially avoided building a personal brand, I felt like it was a distraction and time and focus away from training. I suffered with low confidence so I think I was happy to go along with this stance. However, since retiring, I have definitely used my sporting pedigree to elevate my status within the personal training industry. It has given me great experience and education and also exposure to an amazing network of people that continue to be there as a resource for help and information.

This pedigree, alongside our excellent product at Roar, has attracted high-profile clients, creating a snowball effect that drives both media exposure and business growth. Our success stems from the unparalleled quality of service, which fosters a thriving culture for staff and clients.

Proving that leadership isn't just about visibility, but delivering exceptional results.

Preparing yourself first to managing a team

You may only have 20 minutes between races to recover, and prepare physically and emotionally for the next race so your emotional turn around has to be quick. I think this makes you very practically minded and able to box feelings (good and bad), and control adrenaline levels.

This ability to be methodical has proven to be very useful in business especially during stressfull periods and also I think with managing my team. I'm fairly good at not taking other peoples behaviour towards me or the business personally which I believe in turn means I can really listen to what people are saying without being defensive and understand better how to help them.





Sarah Lindsay

Action is the right decision

I very strongly encourage my team to prioritise their own training and not let their physical health and fitness slip if they are struggling in other area of their life.

Problems and challenges only progress when you take action so in those difficult times and situations I will never tell people what to do but I will listen and then ask them what are they going to do? Action is always the right decision.

Physical resilience will help you manage stress

Physical resilience is 99% psychological. Training daily to the limit can be emotional because you are always exhausted, but also because every session feels important. This emotional control is what really helps in business, especially when managing stressful periods or leading a team.

As a professional speed skater, resilience became second nature. In business, just like in sport, you face losses, but it's about bouncing back, staying positive, and focusing on the next challenge.

Build confidence and make better decisions

Being fitter and stronger without any doubt makes you more confident.

Pushing through a workout and achieving something physically helps clear your mind and empowers you to make decisions.

Don't be scared to try, you know, just get out there, try and do what you love.

Manage setbacks and focus your energy

I chose not to worry about things I cannot change and focus my energy into where I can make a difference. Everything is better after a workout. Action is always the right decision.

I've had moments in competition where I had a major crash, but I had to get back in race mode immediately. It's a dramatic example, but it shows how quickly you learn to move on and focus on what's next.



Expert Insights

McKenzy Cresswell

McKenzy Cresswell launched his F3 career at the age of 15 and is currently one of the brightest talents in the F3 UK motorsport scene.

In our interview, McKenzy shares insights on what it means to be an F4 driver and how mindfulness is an extremely important part of training.

As a driver, mindfulness can be one of the most important parts of preparation. Knowing how to focus on the task at hand and function at your optimum, which is referred to as being in the present moment, can make a massive difference in performance during a race weekend.

Stay focused

There are several techniques for restoring focus, such as developing a habit of concentrating on your breathing. When you sense a distraction or anxiety, training yourself to pick up again on your breathing patterns naturally restores the mind's effort towards the moment.

Handle the pressure while leading the race

Your ability to handle the pressure while leading can make or break a race and being able to keep a cool head and maintain the level of concentration needed to perform at your best is a key element of leading a race. The sight of other cars in your mirror can throw off even experienced drivers.

Learn to move on from mistakes

Being in the present moment can benefit many situations. If you have made a mistake, the importance of knowing how to move on from that mistake and focus on what's ahead cannot be overstated. A race, like daily life, rarely ever goes exactly to plan, and you need to be in the present moment when it doesn't.



Expert Insights

Mackenzie Marlo

Mackenzie Marlo is an Engineering student and equestrian rider for the New Zealand national team who has shared with us how support, routine and a motivated mindset can set anyone up for success.

Have a support system

Riding is quite an individual sport, when you are out there it is just you and your horse working together to get the best result, but you are always surrounded by people that are supporting you to help reach your goals so really it is teamwork, your coaches, the vets that work with you to get your horses to peak performance, the farrier, your support crew, your grooms, its one big team!

Create routine for high performance

I work my two horses daily, and have weekly coaching sessions for dressage and jumping. I work out at gym most days and work with the high performance psychologist on a regular basis who helps me stay focused!

Keep a healthy mindset for you and others

Equestrian can be a tough sport particularly eventing as you have 3 disciplines – Dressage, Showjumping and Cross Country so you have to have a different mindset for each one. It's not only keeping yourself fit and healthy but also your horses!

Make a motivational plan

I stay motivated by working with my coaches and having a plan in place for each horse to prepare for each event. My family have been amazing in supporting me particularly this year starting my Engineering degree. This sport makes you very resilient, especially when you have been working for months and your horse is unsound the day of the event!



Creating futures, creating resilience

There are many ways to strengthen your physical resilience, and our team at Salt is no exception. We've asked some of our team members to share their personal experiences and approaches to maintaining physical health. Here's what they had to say.



Danica Grobbelaar

"I stopped drinking four years ago, which improved my training and gave me more energy and a clear mind at work."

"I make sure to get fresh air during the day and try not to sit at my desk continuously. I take walks and have coffee meetings when possible."



Dave Baker

"On office days, I get off the underground two stops before Waterloo and walk the rest of the way to clear my head and plan my day."

"I spend lunchtime running or in the gym and have also started practicing mindfulness."



Daniela Sanchez Calva

"I work out in the morning to wake up and reduce stress. It helps me be more motivated for work and gives me a way to mentally process challenges."

"In the morning, I exercise, and in the evening, I practice hot yoga and meditation. I also play in a basketball league with my networking group, 'Monday Girl.'"



Giovanna Zulim Estradiote

"I attend weekly therapy sessions and walk to and from them. I also do Pilates twice a week."

"Before starting work, I do a quick stretch and breathing session to help me focus."

Creating futures, creating resilience



Hugo De Brugh Mound

"Calisthenics has become both my routine and my obsession. I am a year and a half in, and the progress I have made physically and mentally has completely changed my life. I use outdoor gymnastics gyms, which is tough in the winter here as it reached -25°C. But I love the fresh air and working out under an open sky."

"Alongside body-weight training, I lift weights at home and do high-interval sprinting and skipping. I also do a lot of walking, through the woods or on the beach. Taking my pup on adventures and it ties in well to my photography."

"The most important things that keep me grounded and calm, is time with my daughter and playing music, which she oftens takes part in. She loves sitting beside me at my piano and plonking away at the notes. It has inspired me to write a piece for her."

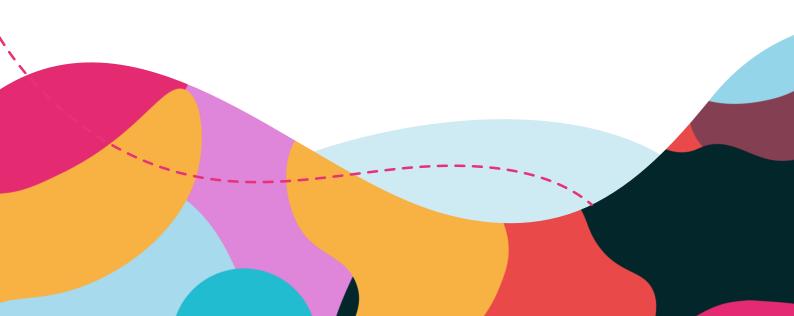


David Delbecq

"I play tennis at an advanced level and try to play at least twice a week. From a mental perspective, I find this allows me to switch off entirely for two hours each time. Living in a forest has also been great for reevaluating my spirituality. I also hike in the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah National Park."

"I avoid snacks by moving my home office away from the kitchen. I take my dog for walks and play tennis regularly. I also go to bed early and wake up at 5:00 am every day."

"I take walks outdoors with my dog and children. I also stick to a consistent wake-up schedule and early bedtime."





Top leadership challenge: 37% struggle with maintaining work-life balance

With nearly 1,000 votes on our most recent LinkedIn poll, balancing work and personal life emerged as the biggest challenge for leaders, followed closely by managing stress and burnout at 34%



Mental health and leadership

Mental resilience and productivity

A study by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that employees who manage stress through mindfulness or physical activity have a 31% higher productivity rate. This shows the link between mental well-being and effective leadership.

"You've got to find something that makes you shine and stick to that and do your best and that way you will be recognised for those skills and stand out against your competition"

Christine MacKay, a Guinness Book of Records holder and CEO
Who was interviewed by Salt as part of #SaltSessions
Women in Tech interviews.



"When we talk about bravery, I've already made the brave decision.

I already jumped off the cliff and worked out how to build a parachute, and now I'm at the bottom going "Come on guys, it's fine! It's scary. You absolutely must be a coach. You absolutely must hold people's hand, but at the same time, you also need to shove them off the cliff, because most people won't take the risks that they're capable of overcoming."

Amelia Sordell, founder of Klowt discusses business bravery with Salt for the Creating Futures Podcast.

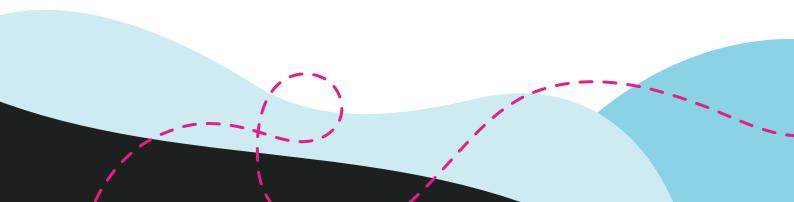
Mindfulness and emotional intelligence

Research from the Harvard Business Review highlights that mindfulness practices can increase emotional intelligence, which is key to effective leadership. Leaders who practice mindfulness show better decision-making skills, empathy, and emotional regulation - critical elements in leading teams.

Inclusive well-being

Research from the American Psychological Association shows that 79% of employees believe flexible well-being approaches, like mindfulness, walking breaks, and virtual exercise programs, are key to maintaining mental health at work.

This reflects that leadership isn't limited to athletic feats but includes diverse paths to resilience.





Serena Dell

Serena Dell is a business owner, yoga teacher, MSc Psychotherapy student, wife, and mother, specialising in supporting individuals navigating trauma.

Flexibility on and off the mat

Mindfulness has taught me the importance of flexibility - not just physically but emotionally and intellectually as well. The lessons you learn on the yoga mat extend beyond the physical practice. They teach you how to release control over what you thought you knew or could manage. This flexibility allows you to adapt to the inevitable changes and obstacles in both business and life, working with what is present rather than resisting it.

Breathe: your anchor to calm

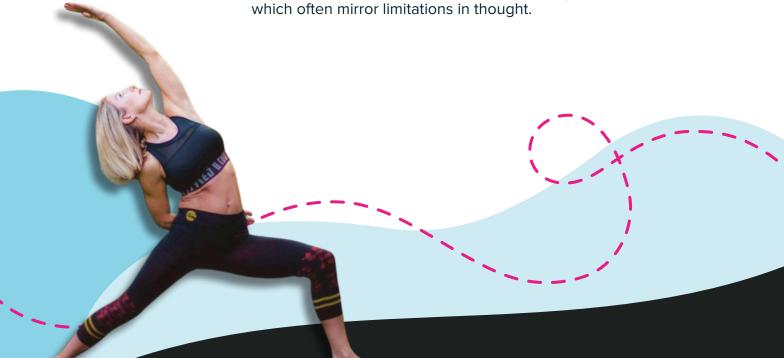
I monitor my breath daily as a key mindfulness practice. The breath acts as a looking glass into how we're responding to life. Smooth, calm breaths reflect a settled nervous system, while short or held breaths signal tension or stress. In a stressful situation, I might initially tense up, but by becoming aware of my breath, I can shift back into a parasympathetic state of rest and digest. This allows me to make clear, wise decisions rather than reactive ones I might later regret.

Leading with mindfulness

Mindfulness plays a crucial role in effective leadership, especially in high-pressure roles. A mindful leader helps individuals feel seen and heard, creating a sense of personal accountability that elevates the entire team. Since all relationships stem from the one we have with ourselves, investing in true self-care - both mentally and physically - allows leaders to bring clarity and balance.

How to start practising mindfulness

My advice is to be patient with yourself. Mindfulness isn't just about new techniques; it's unlearning long-standing patterns that may no longer serve you. Progress may not be linear and stepping back can lead to valuable insights. Keep a journal and write unstructured and without judgment. This can offer clarity in moments of clouded thinking. Plus, practices like yoga, with its scientifically proven benefits for the mind and body, can help break the limitations of your physical self,





Jamie Peacock MBE

Jamie Peacock is a renowned rugby league player with a storied career spanning over two decades. He is now a leadership coach and wellness advocate.

Physical exercise strengthens our "well-being armour"

When you physically exercise, you think differently when you sweat and I think the hormones that release endorphins can help you with any challenges you've got. If I'm finding a day particularly challenging, if we can get out and do exercise that makes me sweat a little, I tend to be able to think of the answer to that problem. And the challenges I've got in front of me don't seem quite as big. It creates discipline. When you are consistent with your exercise routine, you build muscle memory and that impacts a part of your brain which makes exercise easier to do but also problem-solving.

Filter the noise and choose to pour water

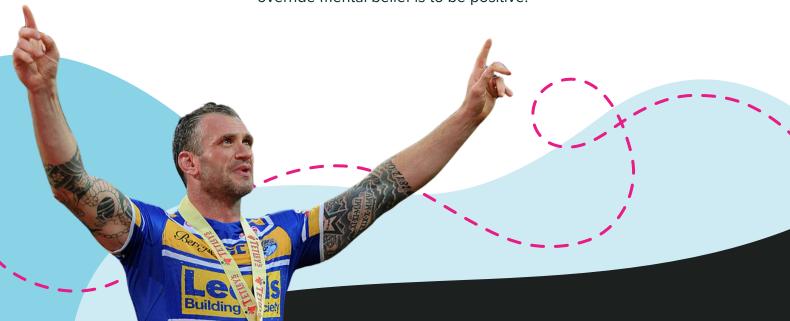
I think quite often to be resilient, we face problems and challenges and we overestimate and catastrophise problems. I have two techniques I use. First I think to myself, is this noise? Or is it relevant? And I write this down. If it is noise, I've not to worry about it. But if it is something that needs to change, I write down what I need to do to change.

The second technique helps build emotional resilience. "Do I want to pour water on this?" If you can pull back at the moment when you feel challenged and think to yourself, 'I can pour petrol on this fire and make things worse, or I can do something different and pour water on this fire and put it out'. So they're two techniques that I think work around being resilient in the workplace.

Routines and healthy habits will create a positive environment

Well-being is different for every single person. To create consistency, you need to find routines and daily rituals. Small actions that you commit to daily that allow you to be at your best. The impact that it has on everybody else around you is positive because they get the best version of you. As you progress on your career journey, you need to experiment and find out what works and what doesn't work for you. You want to build positive routines, explore things and find out what works best for you.

I've got daily routines that I stick to that allow me to deal with stressful moments. It doesn't mean I never have stressful situations but It allows me to deal with them better. For example, I'm in bed every night between 9 and 9.30pm. I sleep in a dark room with no electronics and aim to get up at 5am every day. My aim each day and intention each day is to be excellent. That's my aim. That's my override mental belief is to be positive.



Expert Insights

Hannah Phillips MBE

Hannah Phillips talked to Salt while launching her own company - aiming to bring play back into the lives of children and adults.

In our interview, Hannah shares insights into her degree in Mindfulness and how it has helped her with her health.

Once you've been affected with illness, it can be very difficult to trust the body that is causing you pain. I flipped my mentality. Pain is not my body betraying me, it is my body saying: you need to slow down, you need rest, you need this care.

I started to explore that world. I ate better, did emotional freedom tapping, started to meditate and bring myself into a different space. I'd get up at 5 am and do meditation and other strategies — and I felt great.

Don't try and be perfect

There are times where I don't want to get out of bed at 5am. There are times where I go for weeks without meditating. One thing the holistic side of things taught me is that I am not perfect, and I don't want to be perfect. I try lots of different things and stick with what works for me.

Getting out of the comfort zone

In terms of getting outside your comfort zone, I don't mean going bungee jumping. You can have micro goals and challenges that you set yourself in the moment. As it's the summer holidays, I've recently challenged myself to 10 days of play.

Any progress, whether big or small, is still progress

Sometimes I've got so fixated on this bigger change, that I had to step back celebrate every small win. If you've changed the mentality of at least one person in the room, or you've provided something for a hospital that they didn't have before, that is progress.





Nathan Andres

Nathan Andres has a principled methodology – REAL. He is an HR practitioner, wellbeing leader, coach, author, and global keynote speaker.

In an interview with Salt, Nathan gives advice on how to build resilience and authenticity the REAL way.

Wellbeing activism is about bringing fact information into companies about wellbeing and mental health, and helping companies and leaders then lean into that discomfort about the realities of their own workforce, in order to drive positive change, as well as gains in employee wellbeing and higher productivity and engagement in the company.

Take back control

When we learn resilience is ultimately about taking back the control from a hard thing or adversity, obstacle or difficult event, we can use what we know to then bounce beyond it.

Be clear on your values

I encourage people to do the work and get super clear on who you are and what your values are and how those values help inform your life, mission and purpose. We can use those as a North Star to really guide us to do the things we need to do and help make the decisions we need to make in our life.

Lead by example

Leaders, particularly at C-Suite level, need to look at how they're building culture and what cultural elements are tied directly to wellbeing, mental health and workplace engagement.





Only 15 minutes of movement can change your mental health at work.

A study revealed a 22.5% improvement in workers' mental states, reduced stress by 14.7%, and boosted productivity by 33.2% after a week of daily desk breaks.



Leading throughout your career journey

When you or your team progress through their career, the distinction between being a manager and a leader becomes increasingly significant. Leadership is a skill that develops over time and is built on consistent practices that prioritise both physical and mental well-being. Leadership isn't about simply managing resources - it's about creating a thriving, positive environment where teams can grow, collaborate, and achieve together.



"I don't like the phrase manager. I'd much prefer the word leader. Because a manager is allocating resources, given a set budget or a set goal. A leader sets a vision, sets a plan, and then inspires to achieve."

Richard Smith, Managing Director, Salt MENA

True leadership

Leadership goes beyond day-to-day management. It's about guiding your team on a journey and aso accepting and even cel; ebrating failure along the way.

"In order to reach your goals, time and sweat must be sacrificed."

This is how Michelle Lin reflected on her journey changing career paths from Cultural Anthropology at UC Berkeley to UI + UX Designer in the USA as part of our WIT series.

Lauren Dallas CEO and Co-founder at Future Females also mentioned in her interview with Salt how celebrating failure can lead to success. "At Future Females – we actively celebrate failure! We operate on the 'Failure Club' principle, that 'it's easy to succeed if you set the bar low enough'. And rather we should constantly strive, and celebrate if we fail, that at least we were taking risks, and consider how much further we'd come than if we'd settled. A motto we operate on – if you don't take risks, you don't drink champagne."

The Salt way; global Strava challenge

One lap around the world — one team, one goal.

40,075 km

We track our team kilometres — every run and walk logged by our Salties contributes to our global movement. Every quarter, we measure our collective distance, building a sense of unity across borders.



Thank you to all our contributors for sharing their insights.

In order of feature.

Elliot Dell	CEO, Salt Recruitment Group	(in) (i)
Sarah Lindsay	Co-founder of ROAR Fitness	(in) (in)
Jamie Peacock MBE	Leadership coach and speaker	(in) (in)
McKenzy Cresswell	British F3 Motorsport racing driver	(in) (i)
Mackzenie Marlo	New Zealand Equestrian Athlete	(
Danica Grobbelaar	Operations Director, Salt ZA	(in)
Dave Baker	Practice Manger, Salt UK	(in)
Daniela Sanchez Calva	Consultant, Salt CA	(in)
Giovanna Zulim Estradiote	Intern, Salt BR	(in)
Hugo De Brugh Mound	Associate Director, Salt UK	in
David Dalbecq	Commercial Director, Salt North America	(in)
Amelia Sordell	Founder of Klowt	(in) (i)
Serena Dell	Founder of Serena Dell Yoga	in (6)
Hannah Phillips BEM	Teacher and co-founder of Yallah Play	in
Nathan Andres	Author, coach and activist	(in) (i)
Richard Smith	Managing Director, Salt MENA	(in)



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