A Shared Purpose

An Interview with Jennifer Tejada, Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, PagerDuty

EDITORS' NOTE *Jennifer Tejada is the Chairperson and CEO of PagerDuty. She brings to the role 25 years of diverse experience spanning mass consumer products to disruptive cloud and software solutions. She has a successful track record in product innovation, optimizing operations, and scaling public and private enterprise technology companies. She is also an active tech investor as an LP in multiple firms, including Operator Collective, Harlem Capital, and Penny Jar. Prior to her role at PagerDuty, Tejada was CEO of Keynote Systems, where she led the company to strong, profitable growth before its acquisition by Dynatrace. Before Keynote, she was Executive Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer at Mincom, leading its global strategy up to its acquisition by ABB. She has also held senior positions at Procter & Gamble and i2 Technologies. Tejada currently serves as a board member of The Estée Lauder Companies Inc. Tejada earned a bachelor's degree in organizational behavior and business management from the University of Michigan, where she was a member of the Women's Golf Team.*

Jennifer Tejada

COMPANY BRIEF *PagerDuty, Inc. (pagerduty.com) is a global leader in digital operations management. The PagerDuty Operations Cloud revolutionizes how critical work gets done, and powers the agility that drives digital transformation. Customers rely on the PagerDuty Operations Cloud to compress costs, accelerate productivity, win revenue, sustain seamless digital experiences, and earn customer trust. More than half of the Fortune 500 and approximately two thirds of the Fortune 100 trust PagerDuty including Cisco, Cox Automotive, DoorDash, Electronic Arts, Genentech, Shopify, Zoom and more.*

How would you describe PagerDuty's culture?

At PagerDuty, our culture is underpinned by a shared purpose – we build products that give teams time to change the world. We believe time is the most valuable currency, and that trust is the paramount outcome of effective customer focus. We're a team of earnest, curious, and driven individuals who care deeply about solving complex, high-stakes problems for our customers. We believe in operating with urgency and empathy, always putting the customer first. That's not just a slogan, it's our top cultural tenet: Champion the Customer. We are imperfect – sometimes we don't get it right for the customer. We try to make this a learning opportunity, and we always look for ways to better ensure customer success.

We're proud of the diversity of our team, intentionally comprised to reflect the global community we serve. That reflection is essential in ensuring empathy for our customers who span nearly half the Fortune 500 and the Forbes AI 50.

We recently hosted Coach Steve Kerr at a company meeting, and something he said really stuck with our team: "You learn more from your losses than your wins." We try to embed this mindset – resilience, growth through challenge – in how we operate.

Our culture is also one of ownership. We empower people to take the lead, to step up, take risks, and grow. Last year, over 80 percent of our employees engaged in our social impact work by volunteering, giving, or participating in our match program. It's just one example of how people here are motivated not just by what they do, but why they do it.

You have been CEO of PagerDuty for nearly nine years. How have you maintained and evolved the culture as the company has scaled?

Culture isn't static. You have to intentionally evolve it to anticipate the dynamism of business, the market, society, and people. When I joined PagerDuty in 2016, we were in hypergrowth mode, primarily serving developers with a single mobile product. Fast forward to today, and we're an enterprise platform powering mission-critical operations for 31,000 customers, including both the largest and most innovative companies across every major industry, with a suite of automation and AI solutions. We've scaled, but our foundation is still rooted in elements of our early values, including urgency, ownership, empathy, and of course, championing the customer.

The ever-changing tech market ensures I am never bored, and I certainly experienced the need for different leadership mechanics in different market conditions of growth stages. I am a sailor, and as a skipper, you try to anticipate the conditions and plan for them ahead of a voyage, but sometimes things change fast.

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Rough conditions demand decisiveness and agility, and a focus on survival more so than smooth sailing in easy conditions. You don't change your core principles, but you do adjust. Crew culture is even more important in a storm than in sunshine. Our employees know they can rely on us to stay grounded in our purpose while adapting to the world around us.

What is your advice to young people just starting their careers?

I often tell young people: Be the bear, not the salmon. It's a mantra I share with my daughter when she feels the force of inertia – what should I do versus what would I like to try? Think of a bear intentionally wading in and out of a stream, versus the salmon being forced in the current. Too many people follow the herd, chasing the same goals, without asking: Is this even the right stream for me?

Curiosity is a superpower. Ask yourself not just what you should do, but what you could do. Think of your career less like a ladder and more like a journey with many paths where you choose your own adventure. Lateral moves, new experiences, and unexpected challenges are often what prepare you to lead with real perspective, especially in an era shaped by AI and constant change.

Success isn't about title or trajectory. It's about impact, growth, and doing what you love with purpose.

How important is it to balance technological advances, especially AI, with the human touch?

Technology is here to serve and elevate people and their contribution, not replace them. AI and automation are incredibly powerful, but they need human direction and judgement to reach their potential. At PagerDuty, we use a framework we call "fully automated, human in the loop, and human-led." It's about matching the right level of automation to the nature of the problem.

We give our employees secure access to LLMs and agents, with AI training, and encourage them to integrate it into their work. By leveraging AI and automation, we free up capacity for more creative, strategic, and meaningful work. For example, with our own AIOps solution, we've reduced the need for manual effort dramatically, doing the work of 30 people with a team of 10.

That's efficiency, but it's also human-centered innovation.

How have your past career experiences influenced how you invest in PagerDuty's talent?

My journey is somewhat unusual – more adventure than a well-marked path. I started in a foundational leadership training program at P&G, which gave me the lessons to learn fast and the practice to lead early. I spent over a decade overseas, raised a young family, and often found myself in the second-in-command role, supporting CEOs while quietly building resilience and range. It wasn't until a mentor challenged me – "You're already doing the job. Why aren't you stepping into it?" – that I realized I had more to explore. That moment shaped my leadership philosophy.

At PagerDuty, we invest in people who bet on themselves. Our "Take the Lead" value means we reward initiative, not pedigree. We offer flexible growth programs, from coaching to courses, and we encourage self-directed development. My role, and our managers' accountability, is to clear the path and provide the structure, but not to dictate the journey. Leadership comes in many forms, and we're here to help people find theirs.

When designing innovative technology, why is it essential to bring together different perspectives?

Innovation thrives on the richness of experience, background, thought, and lessons learned. Our customers are global, and their needs are varied and complex. To anticipate and solve their problems, especially when it comes to preventing disruptions in mission-critical work, we need teams that reflect the real world. That's why we build cross-functional, inclusive teams that look at challenges from every angle. We are building a platform that is not only powerful, but intuitive and relevant across different industries, geographies, and use cases. When you build with empathy and celebrate ideas from across teams and the market, you build for resilience and impact.

We are in the most exciting moment I have experienced in my career with AI lifting the potential of what's possible. It's disruptive and fast paced, which makes it incredibly fulfilling even if challenging. AI can make dreams a reality, and we need to make sure everyone is included in learning and benefiting from this revolution. ●

Jennifer Tejada speaking during the AWS Re:Invent CEO Keynote in December 2024