



**GBT**A Summit  
**2025**

Ladders Summit  
Austin, May 20-22

# GBT A Ladders Summit

## If we had a crystal ball...

**Season 11 Recap**



## SEASON 11 THEME

Ladder's Season 11 challenged participants to envision business travel of the future. Teams considered their project with the theme of "If I Had a Crystal Ball: Re-shape, Re-frame, and Reinvigorate a Trend for the Future of Our Industry." The competition was strong this year, with a wide variety of innovative ideas that address the problems of today with the solutions of tomorrow.



### About GBTA's Ladders

As part of the GBTA Foundation's People Pillar, Ladders empowers rising business travel professionals through mentorship, teamwork, and innovation. Teams are comprised of Mentees, guided by Mentors and Alumni Advisors, and supported by the Ladders leaders, Advisory Board, and Program Sponsors.

All of this effort culminates in an annual summit where participants and industry experts come together for the showcase, education sessions, and networking.



**150+** attendees from  
**18** different countries  
**17** teams competed  
**7** summit education sessions

# HOW IT WORKS

- ▶ The season theme guides the individual team’s project idea.
- ▶ Teams present to industry expert judges for scoring
- ▶ Four finalists present at the Ladders Summit for final judging
- ▶ The winning team presents at GBTA Convention

## Team Presentations at Summit

The four finalist teams presented their projects in-person at the GBTA Ladders Summit 2025. Their season’s-long efforts paid off with an excellent showcase of pitches to an audience of peers and industry experts. With strong performances by all four teams, here are the runners-up, in no particular order.



Team Claire  
with Genome



Team Doug & Ryan  
with Joyalty



Team Emily & Jen with  
the Future of Air Travel



## Congratulations to Team RITA!

Team Rita pitched R.I.T.A., a smart gate for passengers to walk through which would eliminate the need for lengthy security checkpoints to create a seamless security experience.

After winning at the Ladders Summit in Austin, Team Rita presented their idea at the GBTA Convention in Denver. Their accomplishments were recognized in front of an audience of business travel industry professionals.



# MAINSTAGE AT THE SUMMIT

## Power Hour: Looking Through the Crystal Ball Like a Leader

A panel of industry leaders gave insight into how the crystal ball of business travel looks from their perspective. They discussed how to build a successful career towards leadership, gave profound advice for balancing personal and professional time, and shared their expert views on how the business travel industry will look in the future.

Featuring Lauri Reishus of ARC, Justin Lyons of Enterprise Mobility, and Dan Raine of Unlock DATA  
Moderated by Rosemary Maloney of Freeman Company



## Passport to Tomorrow: Unpacking the Future of Travel Trends

Keynote Speaker Daniel Levine of the Avant-Guide institute shared emerging shifts in consumer demands and provided insights into how to address these upcoming trends. He discussed how organizations can prepare now to accommodate the client of the future.

## The Value You Bring to Your Organization: From Discovery to Delivery

Speaking duo Barbara Rose of EY and Lindsay Straub of FCM discussed how to determine and demonstrate the value that you bring to your organization.

Alongside the presentation was an interactive portion where the audience was able to reflect on and better understand their own professional values. Participants created a priority wheel to explore what is important to them in their professional and personal lives.

# BREAKOUTS AND INTERACTIVE SESSIONS

## The Crystal Cup – An Exercise in Industry Prediction

This interactive session was led by Paul Tilstone of Temoji Consulting. Attendees were assigned to random teams that competed to create and share their “newspaper headlines from 2035”.

The exercise prompted creative and exciting ideas as to what the business travel industry will look like in ten years in the future.



## Rotating Breakout Sessions

### Managing Diversity

Leslie Andrews of JLL and Adil Kanji of Porter Airlines led a thoughtful discussion on diversity, bias, and perceptions in the workplace. Attendees walked away with practical strategies for fostering inclusion and collaboration, as well as actionable tips to better champion diversity.

### Ditch the Pitch

This interactive workshop led by Ali Prejean of BCD Travel and Cari Wurzbacher of United Airlines helped attendees refine their networking skills by crafting confident, engaging introductions. Participants practiced starting conversations effectively and learned techniques for exiting discussions gracefully. The session emphasized how strong introductions can lead to more meaningful professional connections.

### Bold Moves, Making a Career Pivot

Panelists Christina Reichelt of Regeneron, Katie Bragan-Anderton of Festive Road, and Paul Coverdale of Concertiv shared their experiences navigating bold career transitions. They discussed internal moves and shifts across industries, and offered practical advice to help professionals approach their own career pivots with clarity and confidence.

# LADDERS FOR GOOD



## A Rung Up

### Pilot of Ladders Student Program

This year marked the pilot of the “Rung Up” program within Ladders, which gave a select group of students at the McCombs School of Business to participate as team members in different groups during the season.

Several students in the program were able to attend the summit, a couple of students were on teams that advanced to the final four, and one student was even on the winning team, RITA.



## Latinitas

### The Annual Ladders Give Back Event

It is tradition for Ladders to host a give back event on the final morning of the Summit. This year’s cause was Latinitas, a non-profit organization that focuses on empowering girls and their communities through culturally relevant education.

Event attendees packed backpacks for students participating in the program with snacks, supplies, stickers, and words of encouragement.

# SEASON 11 AWARD WINNERS

In addition to recognizing the winning team of the season, Ladders also presents awards to outstanding individual participants in the program for their contributions to the program. Winners were announced and awards were presented to them at Summit.



## Mentee of the Year

Anisa Kabura  
Global Travel and Expense Manager at Alteryx



## Alumni Advisor

Mikaela DePeppe  
Customer Success Leader at Concertiv



## Mentor of the Year

Lee Palmer Turner  
Subsidiary Travel Engagement at Amazon



## Outstanding Contribution

Cari Wurzbacher  
Manager, Government & Corporate Accounts  
at United Airlines

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR GBTA LADDERS SEASON 12, 2025–2026



Building on the momentum captured in this season’s wrap up — and our mission to “improve lives and advance careers” under the GBTA Foundation’s People pillar—Ladders is gearing up for its most ambitious season yet.

## 1 NextGEN Workforce 2.0 – University Partnership

Our NextGEN workforce initiative goes from strength to strength. For Season 12 we’d like to do much of the same partnering with a key university to run a similar student track—giving undergrads a front-row seat to real-world business-travel problem-solving while pairing them with Ladders mentors. Think fresh ideas, bold research and a future talent pipeline running straight into our industry.

## 2 Regional Expansion – APAC & LATAM

The Ladders family would like to truly go global. Our goal is to roll out regional initiatives in APAC and LATAM, mirroring the tried-and-tested framework that’s flourished in North America and EMEA. Expect local-time-zone workshops, culturally attuned networking, and fresh perspectives that will super-charge project diversity.

## 3 New Pathways to Lead – Ambassador Roles

Opportunity knocks for every rung of the career ladder. Season 12 plans to introduce Regional Ambassadors and Local-Chapter Ambassadors—purpose-built posts designed to:

- Spotlight rising leaders in a new and creative role expanding the reach of GBTA Ladders
- Strengthen the bridge between Ladders, GBTA chapters and the wider Foundation network.
- Turbo-boost peer-to-peer learning and on-the-ground engagement.

These new positions complement our current line-up of mentees, mentors, alumni advisors, committee members and the advisory board, ensuring every participant has a clear runway to grow, give back and shine.

### WHY IT MATTERS

- Broader talent pool. A student programme widens our lens and injects fresh thinking.
- Deeper global reach. APAC and LATAM cohorts amplify cultural insight and market relevance.
- Richer leadership pipeline. Ambassador roles create more touchpoints for professional development, echoing our long-standing commitment to “recruit participants from diverse backgrounds and geography.”

Together, these initiatives keep Ladders ahead of the curve—reshaping, reframing and reinvigorating the future of business travel talent. Stay tuned: the best is yet to come.



## A WORD FROM GBTA FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBER, LESLIE ANDREWS

“ I continue to be excited and honored to serve as the Advocate for Ladders on behalf of the GBTA Foundation. As we conclude Season 11 and begin building Season 12, I'm eager to cultivate future collaborations.

The theme for this season, "If I had a Crystal Ball: Re-shape, Re-frame, and Reinvigorate a Trend for the Future of Our Industry," was a significant catalyst for innovative ideas and creative solutions that made a profound impact. I'm especially proud of the work done by all 17 teams and their respective mentors, advisors, and the Alumni Advisory Board for making this a truly forward-focused season. A huge congratulations to Team Rita, the winning team for Season 11!

The teams' business solutions prompted all of us to think deeply, question our assumptions, and develop fresh strategies. Finally, a sincere thank you to the Season 11 Ladders Leadership team—Benjamin Ford, Edgar Sams, and Katherine Tomasi—for designing a program that fostered professional and personal growth and truly moved our industry forward.



# OUR GRATITUDE



## Thank You to The Ladders Leadership Team

The success of the Ladders Season 11 would not be possible without our incredible leadership team, currently staffed by Ben Ford of Amex GBT, Edgar Sams of Choice Hotels, and Katherine Tomasi of BCD Travel. Despite working in a demanding, fast-paced industry, this group of leaders dedicated their time and efforts to achieve one of our most successful Ladders Seasons to date.

## And a Big Thank You to Our Sponsors

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