



KORN FERRY

Briefings Podcast

A new deep dive into leadership



DOWNTIME

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PURSUITS

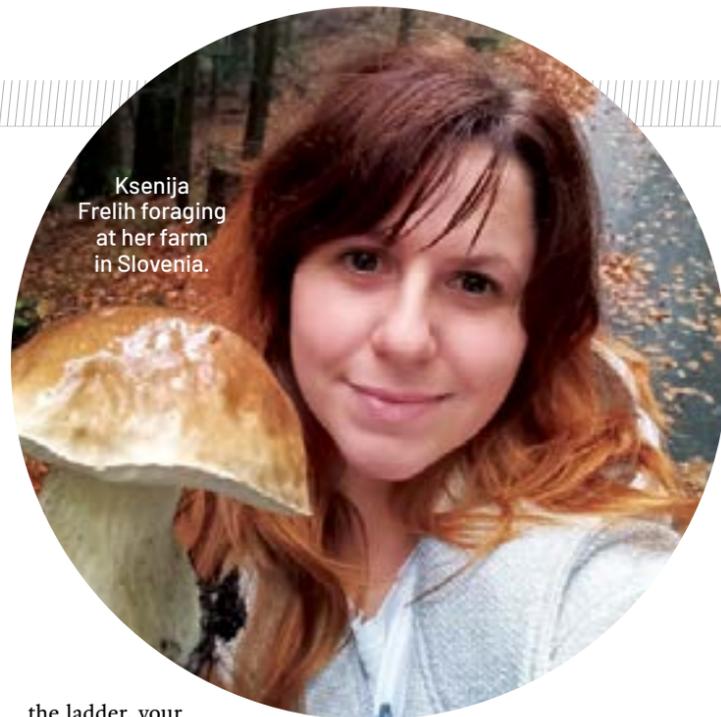
The practice of foraging in the woods offers insights for the office.

From Forest to Fork to Corner Office

By Meghan Walsh



Alex Ratson/Getty Images



Ksenija Frelih foraging at her farm in Slovenia.

Ksenija Frelih usually leaves her office in the capital of Slovenia by 3 pm, driving an hour home to the farm where she lives with her family. The 43-year-old has worked in a variety of corporate quality-assurance roles. These days she serves as a liaison, supporting higher-education institutions in preparing students with practical skills to transition into the workforce. Frelih thinks a lot about the conditions and competencies that foster success—and it’s her experiences outside of the office that provide much of that insight.

the ladder, your horizon is a little bit wider, but it gets harder to see farther down,” Frelih says. “You can read a book about how to spot mushrooms, but, in the end, it’s about the miles you’ve walked looking at the forest floor.”

Since the pandemic, the practice of spending long hours hunting for rare, flavorful, and nutritionally dense mushrooms has become somewhat of an obsession for many. (We’re not talking magic mushrooms, which are illegal in many US states.) Over the last decade, fresh-mushroom sales have increased 20 percent, while demand for specialty mushrooms has doubled, according to research firm Circana. People are bypassing stores to pick the specimens directly.

It’s a practice Mike Kempenich, who spent 17 years as a corporate recruiter, eventually turned into a full-time career with the launch of Gentleman Forager.

Courtesy of Ksenija Frelih; Courtesy of Mike Kempenich

When Kempenich was growing up, every spring his family would collect grocery bags full of morels, whose abundance and meaty, nutty flavor earned them wide acclaim as the gateway mushroom. Sure enough, as an adult, Kempenich expanded his search for less common varieties. After several years studying the biology of fungi, he began to cultivate the rare spores he found in the Minnesota forest and sell them to high-end restaurants and grocers. It turns out cultivating mushrooms is not unlike cultivating workers. “That mushroom isn’t going to grow unless you give it what it wants,” the 60-year-old says.

Over the years, Kempenich pivoted to focus on creating healthy convenience foods with medicinal mushrooms. Think orange sparkling water with lion’s mane for improved cognitive function. Roughly two decades ago, when Kempenich first started spending long hours foraging in the wild, his friends thought he’d lost his mind. But now public interest in the culinary and nutritional value of mushrooms has proved to be more than a fleeting pandemic trend.

“It’s an endlessly fascinating science,” Kempenich says. “The more you learn, the more questions it raises and the more you want to learn.” Foragers come to know not just seasonality and the conditions that prompt fruiting, but also the symbiotic relationship mycorrhizal mushrooms have with certain plants. Hoping to find chanterelles? Look for oak trees. If you’re after porcinis, expand your search

Mike Kempenich, founder of Gentleman Forager.



Leaving work midafternoon allows Frelih plenty of daylight to forage. Lighting is an essential component to spotting wild-growing mushrooms. “Sometimes you won’t see any mushrooms, then you revisit the same place and the lighting is different, and they will pop,” says Frelih, who happened upon foraging while walking her dog. The metaphor for business leaders is an obvious one. “When I started my professional career, I went from one promotion to another. With each step up

MUSHROOM-HUNTING MUST-HAVES

Foraging doesn’t require much, but since picking a poisonous variety or getting lost can have very real consequences, it’s important to be prepared.



A **field guide** with details on appearance, smell, habitat, seasonality, and toxicity.



An **identification app** to cross-reference the field guide (try iNaturalist).



A **knife**. Any sort of kitchen or pocket knife will do.



A **topographic map and GPS device**. Mushrooms grow at specific elevations—and you don’t want to get lost.



A **picnic-style wicker basket**, which allows the spores from the picked stems to fall to the forest floor for continued propagation.

to include birch. “It’s like a giant Easter-egg hunt,” Kempenich says.

Part of Kempenich’s work includes educating amateur foragers, including corporate clients. Like Frelih, his customers come to experience the awe not just of expansive vistas, but of the intricate unfoldings of the forest floors. “There is all this stuff that happens out there that no one ever sees,” Kempenich says. “With foraging, you purposely move quite slowly, so you notice so much more. The beauty around you becomes much more pronounced.”

THE ART OF

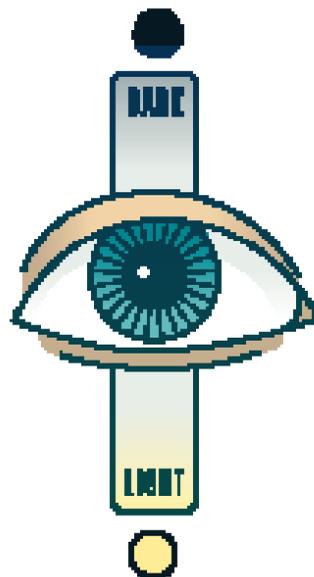
Stargazing

It’s free, it’s available year-round (though warmer weather does make it more enticing), and it’s the real deal—unlike traveling to space via a screen. Indeed, there is nothing like looking upon the cosmos to invoke the vastness of life.

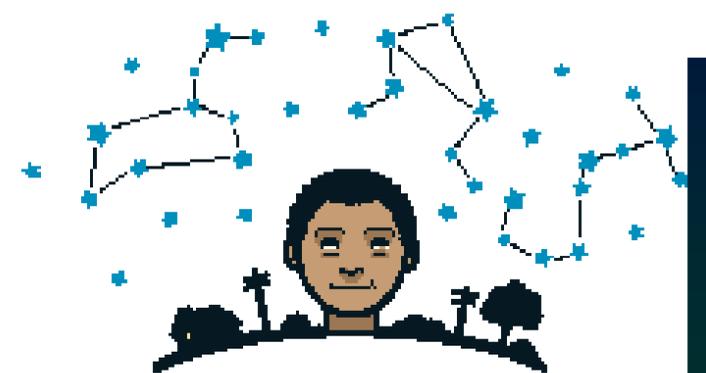


1 Find an observing site, ideally away from tall buildings and light pollution. Even going to a nearby park can make a difference.

2 Give your eyes time to adjust. The process of adaptation takes about half an hour and measurably increases the number of stars visible to the eye.



3 Pay attention to color, size, and scintillation. The cooler the color, the hotter the star, and size often indicates proximity to earth. A star that’s not twinkling may actually be a planet.



4 Look for patterns. These will lead you to constellations, which you can confirm at the end of your stargazing session with an app (don’t blow your eyes out during). And always stay for the shooting stars!

VISIT

Cary, North Carolina

A suburban sanctuary.

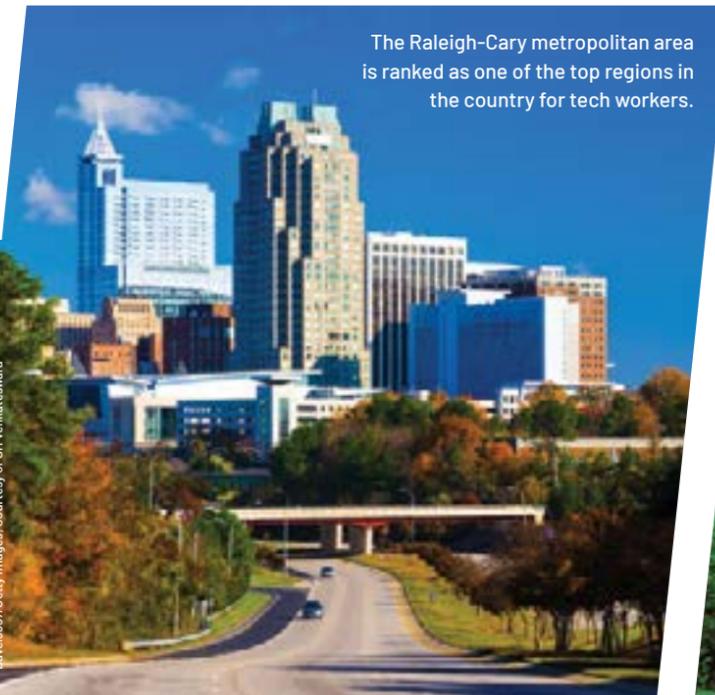


With fewer than 200,000 residents, Cary boasts 30 public parks and an 80-mile greenway.

Shahansu Roy/Getty Images; D. Guest Smith / Alamy; carync.gov

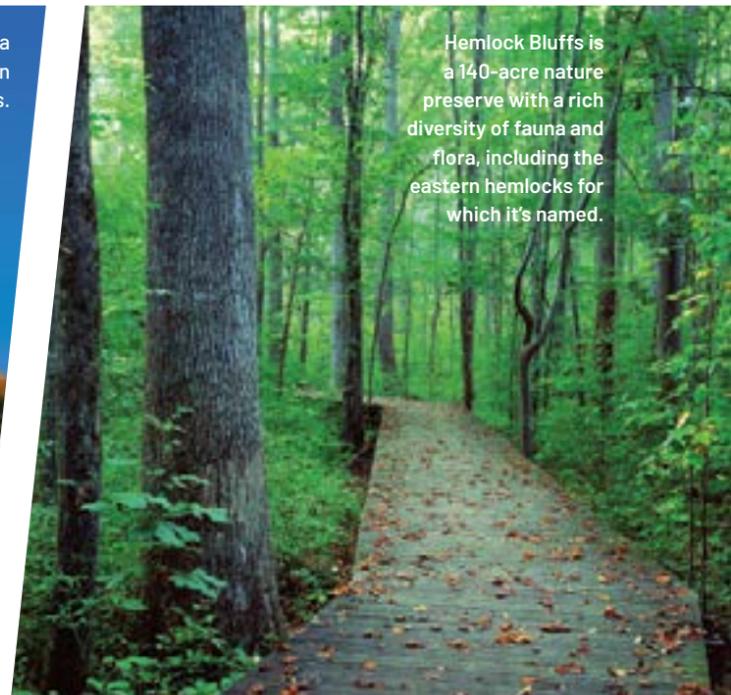


Visitors flock to Cary each year for its majestic Chinese lantern festival.



The Raleigh-Cary metropolitan area is ranked as one of the top regions in the country for tech workers.

ibavei997/Getty Images; Courtesy of Sri Venkateswara

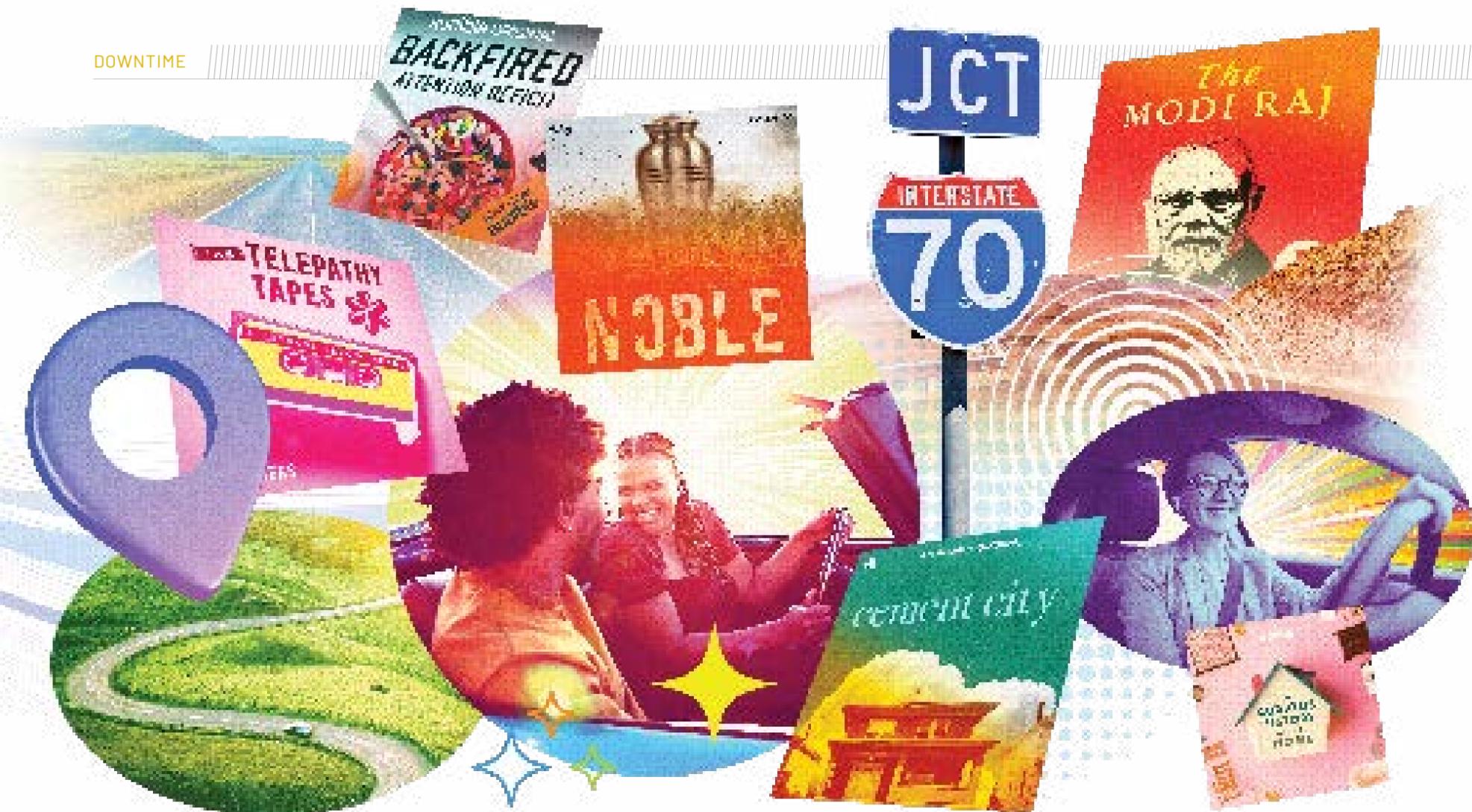


Hemlock Bluffs is a 140-acre nature preserve with a rich diversity of fauna and flora, including the eastern hemlocks for which it's named.



Sri Venkateswara, modeled after a famous temple in Southern India, is the largest Hindu temple in North America.

This idyllic, tree-lined Eastern seaboard enclave is consistently ranked as one of the best places to live and raise a family in the United States—and it's only getting greener since the city offered residents free native seedlings for planting. Cary, a short drive to both Raleigh and Durham, is home to Research Triangle Park, the largest research hub in North America, with more than 50,000 jobs in tech and healthcare. For this reason, Cary attracts top minds from around the world. Nearly 70 percent of adults here hold a bachelor's degree. And when residents want to escape to a less manicured venue, the Outer Banks beaches are only three hours east and the Blue Ridge Mountains three hours west. ▀



READ, LISTEN, WATCH

Road-Trip-Worthy Podcasts

Welcome to the golden age of spoken-word audio. The podcast industry is booming, with voracious audience demand emboldening producers to further explore the bounds of what’s possible in this nascent medium. Podcasting has expanded beyond basic interview-style or informational constructs, embracing emotionally engaging long-form narrative storytelling. Highly produced serialized podcasts tell a single story over multiple episodes, sometimes blending fictional elements and deeply reported investigations into real-life events.

Despite declining attention spans hampering other media forms, regular podcast listeners tune in for an average of 54 minutes per day, which is up from 33 minutes per day five years ago. Market researchers say the industry, worth \$30 billion in 2024, is expected to grow to more than \$100 billion by 2030. Almost half of listeners say their favorite time to tune in is behind the wheel, so *Briefings* curated a list for those long summer road trips that will educate, entertain, and emotionally move. ■

BACKFIRED: ATTENTION DEFICIT *An exploration of the unintended consequences of the attention-deficit drugs prescribed to 15 million Americans.*

THE MODI RAJ *This limited series from The Economist tells the origin story of Narendra Modi, one of the world’s most powerful leaders.*

CEMENT CITY *Two documentary journalists move to one of the struggling Pennsylvania towns that politicians obsess over.*

THE CURIOUS HISTORY OF YOUR HOME *A domestic historian shares the untold and often epic stories behind the everyday objects in our homes.*

Klaus Vedfelt, Anders Blomqvist, Freemixer, Yoann JEZEQUEL/Photography, Polychroms Giannakakis/Getty Images

Illustration by SEAN MCCABE

SUGGESTED

Backyard Birding Goes Pro

When birding, the most essential learning happens through firsthand observation, of course, but it can also be useful to catalogue. The Bird Buddy Pro Solar Smart Bird Feeder takes snapshots of its visitors and uses AI to identify the species. Now you can name your feathered friends and track their visits. The system, powered by a rooftop solar installation, even sends alerts when sick birds stop by, along with tips to prevent the spread of disease.

Bird Buddy Pro Solar Smart Bird Feeder, \$219



BirdBuddy

PRO TRAINING

Fitness instructor **Britany Williams** introduces barre, the workout created by a ballerina that brings the burn by combining Pilates, strength training, and yoga.

TELL US ABOUT BARRE. “It’s a high-rep, low-weight, full-body, stamina-based workout set to music, with an emphasis on core.”

WHAT HOOKED YOU? “Barre builds stamina in your mind and body so you can stay with the work.”

WHAT SHOULD BEGINNERS KNOW? “No matter what, you’re going to feel like a fish out of water in your first class. Stick with it.”



BDW Fitness

For more information, visit www.britanywilliams.com.