

# Top 10 Insights

From "2025: A Year in Preview"

## MEMORABLE QUOTES FROM "2025: A YEAR IN PREVIEW"

*"When the service is free, the product is you."*

*"Economic forecasters were invented to make weather forecasters look good."*

*"There's more steel recycled every year than plastic, wood, glass, and paper combined."*

*"[Congress] will find a way to deficit finance Social Security so every retiree in this country will get 100% of the payout they thought they were going to get."*



Over 150 CEOs and senior executives were convened by The Conference Board on February 4 & 5 in New York City for "2025: A Year in Preview" to tackle economic headwinds, emerging technologies, and global risks shaping corporate strategy. Amid intensifying fiscal debates, AI breakthroughs, and supply chain worries, the event delivered critical insights on staying competitive and resilient in a complex, ever-shifting environment.

1

### Local Trust Creates a Communications Mandate

With government and media trust bottoming out, employees look to their CEOs for facts and advocacy. Companies can step up by addressing wage fairness, cost-of-living issues, and providing real upskilling. Rather than avoiding controversy, business leaders should act where they have legitimacy.

*"Trust is local—people want leadership from their employer, and they want CEOs to 'stand up and speak for me.'"*

2

### The Economic Forecast Is "Expect the Unexpected"

Major shocks—pandemics, abrupt recessions, sudden conflicts—rarely show up in forecasts. Speakers urged scenario planning and liquidity buffers to weather left-field crises. They also stressed resilience in supply chains and corporate governance. Though unpredictable, organizations that anticipate "unknown unknowns" can pivot faster and emerge stronger from disruption.

*"You can argue everything that really mattered in our management lives came straight out of left field."*

3

### A Debt Crisis We Can't Ignore...and Won't Fix?

US fiscal health dominated the day's conversations: deficits now top 100% of GDP, fueling worries over future treasury auctions. Executives warned that one bad auction could trigger a damaging spike in borrowing costs. But many lamented there's no clear path forward as political gridlock hampers any solution. Most saw the national debt growing, with no imminent fix in sight.

*"We'll be fine until the moment we're not. And we won't know we're not fine until we're not."*

4

### AI-Fueled Cyber Attacks: The Next Ticking Time Bomb

Leaders warned that AI supercharges hacking, phishing, and deepfake scams—hitting every sector from financial services to utilities. Only a third of companies have robust defenses against these next-generation exploits, making intellectual property leaks a real threat. Panelists urged board-level focus on data governance and rapid-response measures. They agreed the coming years will see a steep rise in AI-assisted malware.

*"The consumer has lost control [of their own data]. It's your job in business not to [lose control of your data]."*

*"Only 37% of organizations have a process or means to detect... cyber risk, [or] the leakage of intellectual property [or] data that you don't want in the hands of others."*

*"This is not really the time for businesses to just hope for the storm to pass by."*

*"Tech unicorns seem to be disproportionately in the US and China."*

*"Will the US lose its standing as a reserve currency? Can't see that."*

## 5 Renewables? Not So Fast—Fossil Fuels Aren't Budging

Despite massive investment, green energy has barely dented the global reliance on coal, oil, and gas. Attendees cited slow permitting, underfunded infrastructure, and a shortfall in critical metals as key obstacles. Some predicted it will take tripling current renewable growth to meet 2030 goals. Meanwhile, energy demand keeps rising, especially from data centers and AI.

*"Thirty years ago, 80% of our energy mix was coming from coal, petroleum, and natural gas... 30 years later, it's still 80%."*

## 6 Price-Conscious Shoppers are Doubling Down on Value

Consumers—already squeezed by inflation—are meticulously seeking deals and cutting food waste. These cost-conscious behaviors, like switching to club or dollar stores and curbing brand loyalty, are expected to continue through 2025. Companies must offer clear value propositions to sustain loyalty and share.

*"People are really focusing on not wasting food... We see them prioritizing what the whole family will eat so they're not throwing half of it away."*

## 7 The Drive for Talent: People Investments That Actually Work

As human capital becomes the decisive edge, executives emphasized reskilling, flexible policies, and family supports like childcare. A big theme was the need to align corporate benefits with real-life workforce needs, from mental health services to parental leave. Research showed that improving employee experience boosts loyalty and productivity. Many see agile learning & development as a critical cornerstone for 2025 success.

*"We just did a survey of Fortune 500 CHROs, and four out of five of them said childcare benefits were important."*

## 8 Burnout: The Unseen Corporate Epidemic

While AI solutions promise efficiency, piling new tools on already overburdened teams is eroding morale. Some employees hide extreme workloads, risking sudden turnover or breakdowns. Executives explored ways to identify silent burnout early, from manager check-ins to real-time pulse surveys. The consensus: ignoring mental-health strain imperils both talent retention and firm reputation.

*"We decided to remove our rigid performance-management process and replace it with continuous 'growth talks.'"*

## 9 Culture: Your Biggest Risk or Your Greatest Asset

With workforce values shifting, attendees championed active culture management—like robust dashboards that track ethics, trust, and employee well-being. A healthy culture can insulate a firm during crises, attract top recruits, and reduce reputational damage. Conversely, toxic norms can erode performance and drive away innovative talent.

*"We track it like we do any other performance metric—if it's weak, everything else suffers."*

## 10 Will a Two-Bloc World Emerge—and Who's Stuck in the Middle?

Geopolitical tensions between major powers suggest partial decoupling is no longer theoretical. Firms must map out dual supply chains and tailor strategies for rival blocs. However, global interdependence won't vanish, leaving some regions to navigate uncertain alliances. Businesses that stay flexible across shifting spheres might gain competitive advantage.

*"You have to dance with your enemy to be desirable to your friends."*