

Making his Mark

Jay County High School graduate has handled finance during period of rapid growth for Kentucky bourbon distillery

By LOUISE RONALD

The Commercial Review

For the past 26 years, Portland native Mitch Wagner has been vice president of finance for Maker's Mark, a bourbon distillery outside Louisville in Loretto, Kentucky.

When Wagner joined the company, it produced 200,000 cases of bourbon a year.

"This year, we will do 3 million," he said in a phone interview last week.

Over that same time, Maker's Mark went from being "a product that was basically available in central Kentucky, southern Indiana, and some in Tennessee" into a worldwide brand.

"It's everywhere," said Wagner.

"It has been gratifying for me over the years to be part of a small team working to grow Maker's Mark around the world," he told Louisville Business First in 2020, when the publication featured him in its Best in Finance.

But when Wagner was a student at Jay County High School (he graduated in 1979), his goals were simpler.

"I wanted to go to college," he said. "I'm the first person in my family



Wagner



Photo provided

Mitch Wagner, a 1979 Jay County High School graduate, has served as vice president of finance for Maker's Mark bourbon distillery of Loretto, Kentucky, for more than a quarter century. The business has seen its production grow from 200,000 cases per year when he started to more than 3 million this year.

to have gone to college. ... The idea was to better myself by earning a degree."

He went to Hanover

College in southern Indiana, where he discovered a talent for numbers.

"I was pretty sure that something in accounting

or finance would be my strong suit," he said.

After graduating, he went to Ball State University for a master's degree

in business administration. Unable to find a suitable job in Portland, he worked as a cost accountant at the Sheller-

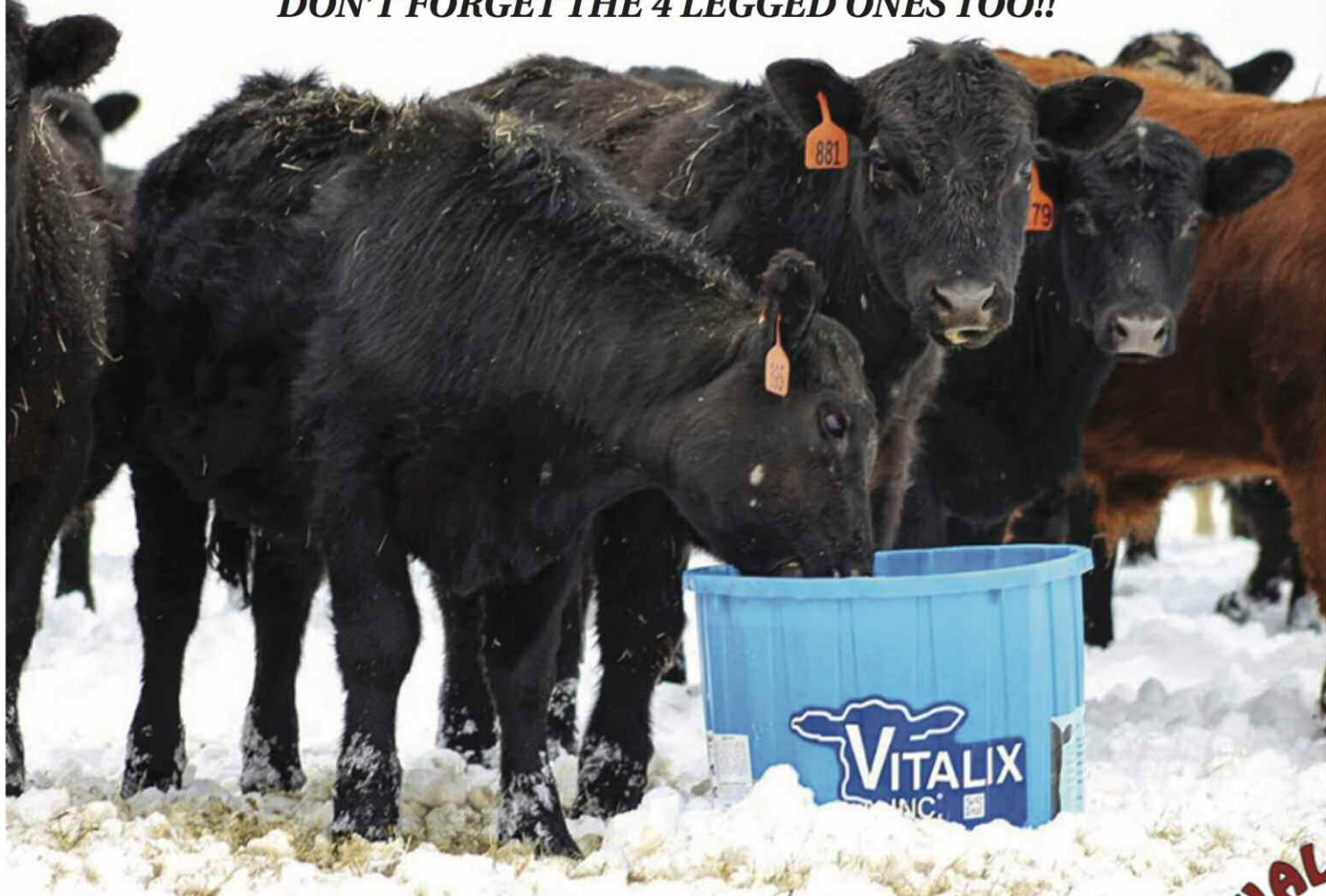
Globe plant in Union City for 2.5 years as he finished his master's degree.

See Mark page 4C

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Quality, Value

We need a Thanksgiving classic

Editorial

(Editor's note: This editorial is being reprinted from Nov. 23, 2005. Jack Ronald wrote it, imploring readers to be "... enormously thankful simply to be alive, to have lived ...". It seems appropriate this Thanksgiving, seven months after Jack's death. We are enormously thankful simply that we had Jack in our lives. We hope this Thanksgiving that you take the time to appreciate those who mean so much in your lives and truly heed Jack's advice.)

Where's Charles Dickens when we need him?
The 19th century British author did a splendid job with "A Christmas Carol."
But what 21st century America needs is "A Thanksgiving Carol."
It wouldn't star Scrooge, that

old skinflint, but instead would feature an all-too-typical middle American with a profound sense of victimhood.

You know the sort of person we're talking about, the kind who's always moaning about how bad things are, who tends to blame everyone but himself for his shortcomings, who has finely tuned his sense of perpetual grievance.

Unlike Scrooge, who counted

every farthing and could tell you exactly how much he was worth, this character doesn't count much of anything. He's much more interested in what he doesn't have — and what his neighbors have — than his own blessings.

Instead of three ghosts, this fable could get by with one. Maybe it could take the shape of a pilgrim, or perhaps even a turkey.

Its charge would be to take this glass-half-empty character by the scruff of the neck, whisk him supernaturally to a place of greater perspective, and set him down to do some accounting.

Our Thanksgiving ghost would remind the unapprecia-

tive lout how lucky he is. Lucky to be living in this country, lucky that his home and his community have escaped the ravages of war.

The ghost would point out to him the famine, the brutality, and the pestilence endured by huge chunks of humanity each day.

The ghost would talk to him about freedom, his ability to speak his mind, express his opinions, and even sound off about his gripes.

The ghost could talk to him about creativity, the marvels of the human mind.

Zooming out into space, the Thanksgiving ghost could point to the blackness of dead and inhospitable planets, dying

stars, and mysteries beyond comprehension.

Then the Thanksgiving ghost could gesture at earth and its infinite bounty and rich tapestry of nature.

If that doesn't make you feel blessed, the Thanksgiving ghost would say, if that doesn't make you enormously thankful simply to be alive, to have lived, then you are beyond the help Thanksgiving Day can offer.

In our version, with all apologies to Dickens, the ungrateful lout would wake up tomorrow morning a new person, who has added to his blessings a new sense of perspective and appreciation for all that we so shamelessly take for granted.

Enjoy each day. — J.R.

Appreciate the table you have

(Editor's note: This column is being reprinted from Nov. 24, 2004. Jack's reminder in this column is that we should all be thankful simply to have a seat at any table, big, small or in between. Thanksgiving might even be a little more lively if the seating arrangements were less rigid — little kids, big kids, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents all intermixed. Rather than worrying about who you're not sitting next to, be thankful for those with whom you are able to share a meal.)

By JACK RONALD
The Commercial Review

It was a typical Ronald family Thanksgiving, probably in the mid-1960s.

In those days, the clan — as many of my father's siblings, their spouses, their children, and grandchildren as possible — gathered together for a huge celebration.

At its peak, when my grandmother was still alive, Thanksgiving was so big that a single house could barely contain it. More than once, it took over the fellowship hall of a Presbyterian church in Richmond.

Like any family gathering, this one had its traditions and its protocols. And one of those involved the seating arrangements.

There was an adults' table. There was at least one little kids' table. There was a big kids' table. And some years there was a bigger kids' table.

To move from one to another was to mark a rite of passage. But that rite of passage was more important to some than to others.

I never really gave it much thought, because my cousin John Luginbill and I were close enough in age that we made the transitions together.

For others, it was a big deal indeed.

That was the case at one memorable Thanksgiving in the mid-1960s at that church fellowship hall in Richmond.

One of our out-of-state cousins arrived with some serious expectations about the seating arrangements.

He was ready, he had decided, to make the move up the ladder. It was time for him to be seated at the big kids' table instead of the little kids' table.

Back in the Saddle



What I do recall was learning a lesson about maturity and perspective, figuring out that some things were worth fussing about and others weren't.

At least that's what he thought.

When the time came to enjoy the holiday meal, he found that the adults in charge had other ideas. His placemark was at the table for the little kids.

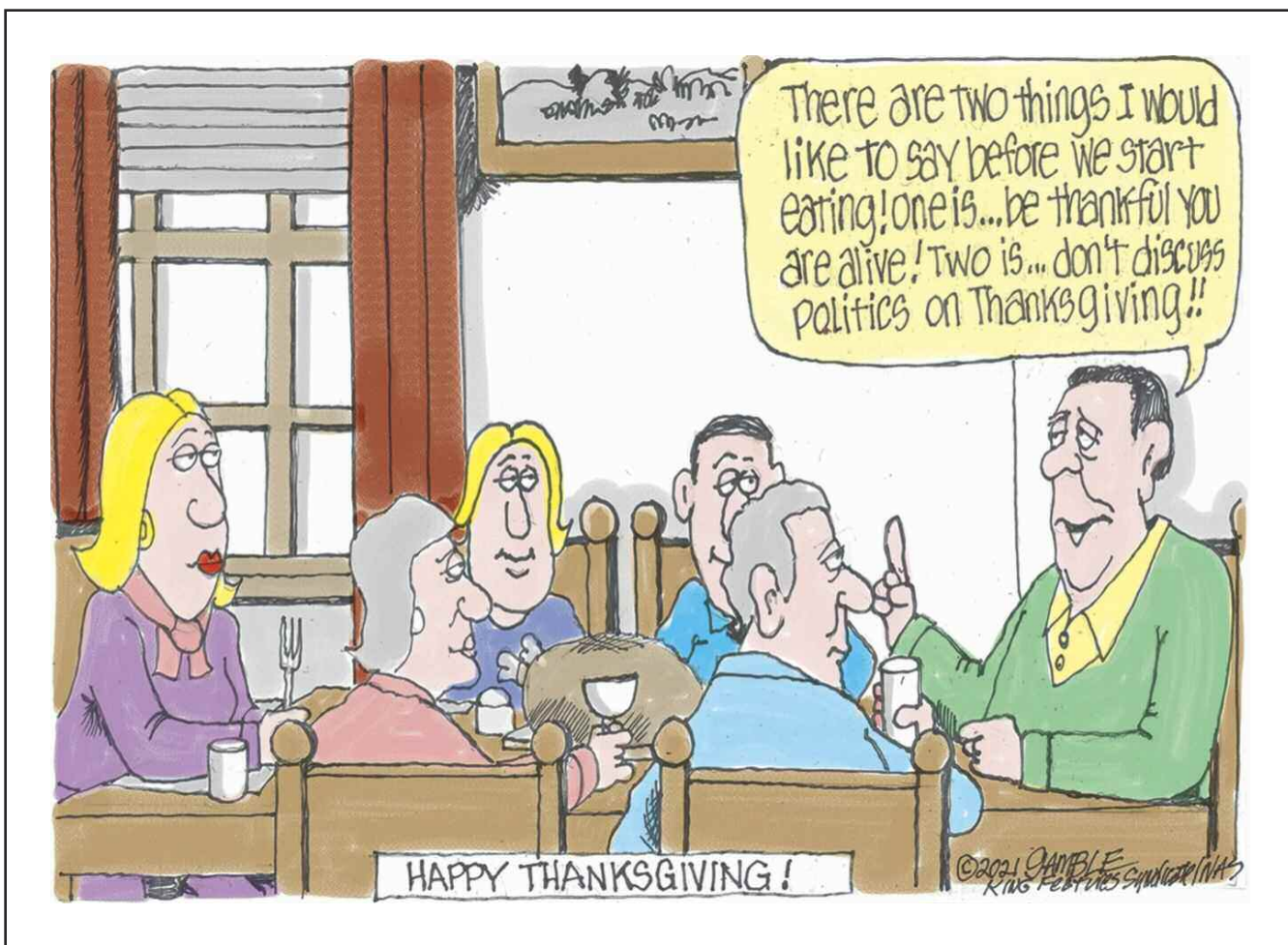
His reaction spoke volumes. His face reddened. He lost his temper, had a tantrum, made everyone else in the place uncomfortable and wept. He also proved — once and for all — that he wasn't ready for the big kids' table just yet.

I don't recall what the upshot of his tantrum was, whether he was squeezed in with the big kids, who were mortified by his behavior, or still relegated to be with the little kids where he could sullenly pout the afternoon away. What I do recall was learning a lesson about maturity and perspective, figuring out that some things were worth fussing about and others weren't.

That sort of perspective helps on a day like Thursday, when you're focusing on your blessings and your gratitude.

And it reminds me that any seat at the table with family is a good seat.

Enjoy the day. As for me, I'll try to find a spot with the little kids if they'll squeeze me in.



Gratitude is a muscle we must flex

By DAVID VON DREHLE
The Washington Post

When I was a boy, my large family passed a spoon around the table during our Thanksgiving feast. Each in turn, we held the utensil like a microphone and declared what we were thankful for.

Today, I have these 800 words, more or less, as my spoon, and I'm thankful to all who do me the honor of reading. Especially those regulars who endure the duds, the errors and the points of disagreement to participate with me in this communication of writer and reader.

I remain thankful for the things I mentioned half a century ago. A home to live in. Food to eat. Mom and Dad, long gone from the holiday table but frequent visitors to my thoughts and dreams. Raising my own kids has opened my eyes to how utterly unprepared parents are; each child is unprecedented. We don't shape them so much as we discover them, and try to do as little damage as possible in the process. I would have been more forgiving had I realized how often I would end up seeking forgiveness.

Robert Emmons is a leader in the emerging science of gratitude. Research done by Emmons and others confirms what many of us already sensed: that gratitude makes us feel more peaceful, less overwhelmed by stress. The act of writing down blessings in a daily journal is linked to lower blood pressure, better sleep and fewer symptoms of psychological distress.

Though I am a journalist, I've never been a journaler. Rather than write out my gratitude, I endeavor to make it my first focus of each day, sitting on the edge of the bed, clearing the cobwebs just after the alarm. I'm back for another day, I tell myself.

"Every morning began with infi-

nite promise," Robert D. Richardson wrote of Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Any book may be read, any idea thought, any action taken. Anything that has ever been possible to human beings is possible to most of us every time the clock says six in the morning. On a day no different from the one now breaking, Shakespeare sat down to begin Hamlet."

I am thankful for such days, each one a chance to do better. Although I am no William Shakespeare, I share the world with Shakespeare, with Toni Morrison, with a glorious novelist new to me named Anne Griffin. It's a world supplied with precisely the right amounts of gravity and atmosphere, enough water and sunlight but not too much of either. Scientists have gazed thousands of light-years in search of another such place, and still, this is the only one for sure, a beautiful lifeboat in an oceanic emptiness. I'm grateful to all who are working to preserve it.

One recent morning as I opened my bleary eyes, I thought how lucky I am to have them. These exquisite organs through which energy moving in tiny waves — billionths of a meter from wave peak — registers as a rainbow of light. Perceiving infinitesimal differences in wavelengths, the eye sorts the entire visible spectrum and renders every shade of every sunset, every mountain peak and sea-kissed beach, every leaping ballerina, every scrambling quarterback and

David Von Drehle



the welcome in every loved one's face.

I listened to my wife's breathing and felt thankful for ears. These improbable contraptions — tiny chambers of flesh membrane, tiny bones and tubes of liquid — somehow transmit longer waves of energy to form all the blessings of sound, from Beethoven to Gladys Knight, from a baby's laughter to the thunder and patter of a rain-storm.

Two eyes and two ears: four miracles in the first 10 seconds of my day. Yet consider the wisdom of Helen Keller, who lost both sight and hearing only to absorb from her teacher that "the best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen nor even touched, but just felt in the heart."

Keller's life teaches that gratitude is a muscle. It strengthens us with use. Emmons has found that grateful people ripen even in hardship. They are energized by adversity. They grow deeper through loss.

Ultimately, gratitude is somehow linked with hope and hope is the prerequisite of action. One must be grateful for the earth before one can save it. One must be thankful for beauty before one can spread it. Science shows that pleasure is fleeting, so an ungrateful person can have all the wealth ever dreamed of, and bask in it for an hour, yet feel empty again tomorrow.

By contrast, gratitude can make a legacy from almost nothing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, impoverished, imprisoned and ultimately martyred by the Nazis, left riches to the world. "In ordinary life," he observed, "we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."

Von Drehle writes a twice-weekly column for *The Post*.

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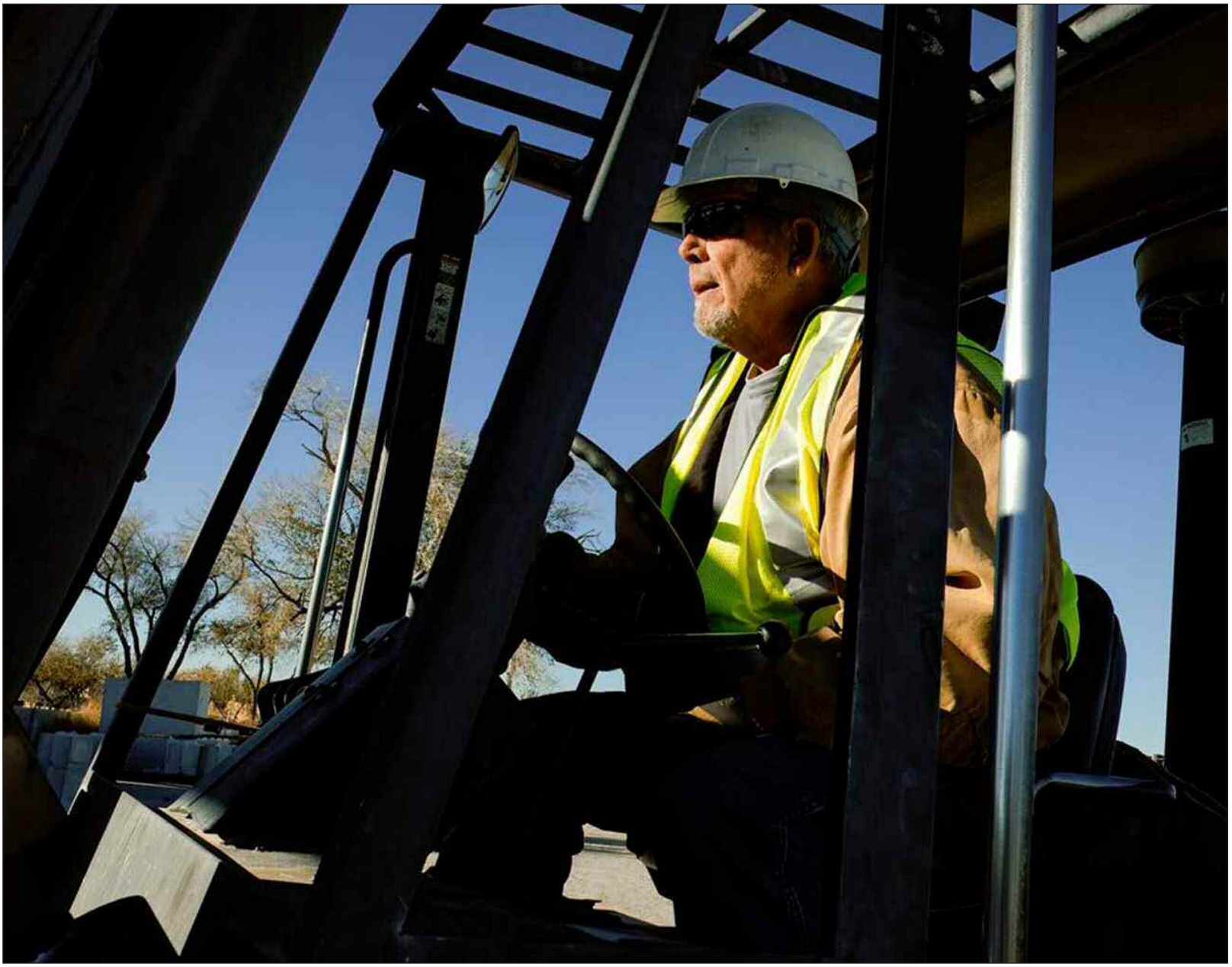
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Octogenarians on the job



For The Washington Post/Ramsey deGiv

John Tomkins operates a forklift while loading concrete casts recently in Algodones, New Mexico. He is 77 and plans to keep working after he turns 80.

Working past 80 is becoming more common

By TARA BAHRAMPOUR
The Washington Post

Last year, when Bob Hyde was 78, he stood in front of a mirror and decided it was time to retire. Hyde, who lives in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, ran his own accounting company and was glad to be free of deadlines, payroll, and hiring. He learned to make sourdough bread and kimchi, and began teaching himself clarinet.

But retirement lasted less than a year. "I missed the engagement," he said. Hyde had been employed since he left home at 16 and joined the British army. Now, on the cusp of 80, he is back in the workforce, doing accounting for a concrete company.

"I found I needed something to engage my mind," Hyde said, adding that he has a cushy job compared to his 77-year-old boss, who is "out there every day as they're pouring concrete."

"I think retirement is voluntarily putting one foot in the grave, or if you like, ordering up the particle board box."

Much hand-wringing has accompanied the fact that Joe Biden is by far the oldest person to hold the nation's highest office. When he turns 80 on Nov. 20, he will be the first octogenarian to serve as president, spurring questions about how old is too old for the job.

But working past 80, while still the exception, is not as rare as it once was. In recent decades, the number of octogenarians in the U.S. workforce has soared, from around 110,000 — or 2.5% of the 80-plus population — in 1980 to a high of

around 734,000 — or 6% of all octogenarians — in 2019, according to a Washington Post analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data. (The numbers begin falling after the pandemic started, with around 693,000 — or 5.5% of the population — working last year.)

That makes sense, given that American life expectancy has steadily increased — from 47 for

a baby born in 1900 to 68 in 1950 to 79 in 2019, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control, (though life expectancy, too, dipped in the last couple of years).

Once a person survives childhood and young adulthood, the outlook improves even more. When Biden was born, in 1942, life expectancy was 66. But an 80-year-old man today can

expect on average to live to 88, and an 80-year-old woman to nearly 90, according to Social Security Administration actuarial estimates. That means everyone turning 80 this year has lived well past the life expectancy for the year they were born.

Since there are more octogenarians around, it stands to reason that more of them are still working — and if they are

healthy, experts say there is no reason they shouldn't. The number of years since a person's birth, or chronological age, matters less than their biological age — how well their bodies and brains are functioning, said Dan Belsky, assistant professor of epidemiology at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health.

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Pictured is the Maker's Mark stillhouse. As the company has continued to grow, one of the challenges for vice president of finance Mitch Wagner has been planning ahead. Bourbon being distilled today won't be sold for six years, so it's necessary to project how much will be needed in the future as well as to make sure warehouses are available to store it.

Mark ...

Continued from page 1C
Wanting to move into management, Wagner then took a job with Roadmaster, a bicycle and fitness company in Olney, Illinois, where he stayed for three years before once again deciding to expand his skills.

"I needed to build my career mosaic so one day maybe I could have the job that I have," he said. He was successful in more ways than one.

Not only did he take a new job that broadened his understanding of financial planning, forecasting and analysis, he got involved in the bourbon industry.

Wagner worked for Old Fitzgerald Distillery in Louisville for six years, begin-

ning in 1989. He was comptroller of the company when he went to the first Kentucky Bourbon Festival in fall 1994.

That's where he met Bill Samuels Jr., president of Maker's Mark.

Wagner went to the festival's black-tie gala as a competitor, but he was determined to talk to Samuels.

"He was viewed as a legend," Wagner said.

The two had a conversation that lasted about 10 minutes.

"I really enjoyed that," Wagner thought when he got home. "I need to send that man a note."

This was in the days before email. Wagner wrote by hand about his admiration for Maker's Mark and how much it meant

that Samuels had taken time to speak with him.

Then he added a postscript: "If you ever need a finance person, please don't forget me."

A week later, he got a call.

Maker's Mark's vice president of finance would be retiring in June of 1995. Would Wagner be interested in applying for the job?

The hiring process took more than six months but in April 1995, Wagner landed what is still his dream job.

He is responsible for keeping track of supply and demand and planning ahead how much bourbon to produce. This is particularly tricky because of how long Maker's Mark ages its whiskey.

"You have to produce what you

plan to sell in six years," Wagner said. "That's tough."

He needs to stay on top of the company's capital investments.

"When you're making all this whiskey, you need to build warehouses so you'll have somewhere to store it," he said.

Facilities for producing the whiskey also require periodic updating and expansion.

Plus, of course, he's responsible for "the basic stuff" — paying the bills, securing financing, ensuring that internal controls are functioning properly.

People sometimes ask Wagner why he's stayed in the same position so long, but the growth of Maker's Mark and the boom in the bourbon industry in general keeps the job changing.

"It's not just been closing the books," he said. "It's been lots of investment, lots of time spent planning for the future."

Did growing up in Portland help prepare Wagner for the job?

Yes, he said. He learned the value of hard work, study habits, and self-awareness.

"All those things ... I guess I picked up growing up," he said. "It's all a part of who I am."

His advice for JCHS students?

"Study hard and try to go to the best university that you can. Try to develop a self-awareness ... because it impacts those that you interact with. ... Try to develop listening skills," he said. "You just need to build that mosaic over time that supports your dreams."



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Unused cards spark inquiry

By **LESLIE PATTON**
Bloomberg

A group of unions filed a complaint against Starbucks with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, asking the agency to investigate how the coffee chain accounts for unused money left on customers' stored-value cards and accounts.

Starbucks claimed \$181 million in revenue from money that wasn't spent on gift cards and loyalty accounts in fiscal 2021, an uptick from about \$145 million the previous year. While that's just a small percentage of profit and revenue, the proportion of income coming from unused company credit has grown in recent years, according to the complaint that was filed Wednesday by the Strategic Organizing Center.

The group, known as the SOC, is made up of unions including the parent of Workers United, which is driving a unionization campaign at Starbucks's U.S. locations. Hundreds of stores have voted in favor of forming unions, although the pace of unionization petitions has slowed in recent months.

The SOC argues that Starbucks's disclosures around unredeemed credit, known in the industry as breakage, are inadequate for investors. It adds that the Seattle-based company hasn't explained how Covid-19 and store closures may have affected its calculations, given diners' ability to spend gift credits was likely impaired by pandemic-related store closures.

Starbucks got about 43% of its revenue in fiscal 2021 from stored-value programs, which range from gift cards to credits in the company's loyalty app. A small part of that is unredeemed rewards. The \$181 million represented less than 1% of sales in 2021 and 4.3% of net income before factoring in taxes.

"Starbucks discloses so little about breakage that this significant, and likely material, aspect of Starbucks' financial health is a virtual black box for investors," said Michael Zucker,



Bloomberg/Gabby Jones

Starbucks claimed \$181 million in revenue from money that wasn't spent on gift cards and loyalty accounts in fiscal 2021. That was an increase of \$36 million over the previous year.

the SOC's executive director. He argued the use of unredeemed credit "could be masking a failure to meet earnings expectations, or even allowing the company to double-count revenue."

A spokesman for Starbucks declined to comment on breakage beyond the company's annual report.

Michael Halen, a Bloomberg Intelligence restaurant analyst, said Starbucks gives less disclosure than some peers on how it calculates and processes unspent credit, "which is kind of surprising." The credit represents "a very large percent of their transactions and total U.S. sales," he added.

In the U.S. and many other markets, the stored-value cards don't expire. Starbucks says that based on historical redemption rates, a portion of the funds aren't expected to be redeemed and "will be recognized as breakage over time in proportion to stored-value card redemptions." In its most recent annual filing, Starbucks says that those redemption patterns vary by market.

Starbucks credit is issued via gift cards, which are sold at retailers and

at its own cafes. It's also available on rewards accounts, which can be replenished by purchases online or on the mobile app. The credits can be used at all company-operated locations and most licensed stores across North America, China, Japan and many other international markets, according to company filings.

Other restaurants also recognize unspent gift-card money, or breakage, as revenue over time and offer some details as to how they calculate that. Texas Roadhouse, for example, says that based on historical data, about 4.5% of its gift cards sold won't be spent.

So far, about 250 Starbucks locations have voted to unionize, a small portion of its 9,000 company-run U.S. stores. The dispute with activists has become increasingly bitter, and regional National Labor Relations Board officials have issued dozens of complaints against the company.

Starbucks has repeatedly said it follows U.S. labor rules. The chain has sought to blunt the union drive in part by raising wages, adding new equipment and offering training that aims to make workers' jobs easier.

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Octogenarians ...

Continued from page 3C

"An 80-year-old today and an 80-year-old twenty years ago represent different pockets of individuals; they're not directly comparable," he said. "Today there are many physically active, cognitively healthy 80-year-olds, taking classes, running around, governing."

Ageism can make it harder for older people seeking employment, but unlike countries with broad mandatory retirement ages, the United States has few restrictions on working after a certain age (commercial pilots, for example, must retire by 65). As the population continues to gray, many politicians and other leaders have stayed in their jobs well past typical retirement age. Nancy Pelosi is 82, Mitch McConnell is 80, Anthony Fauci is 81. "We've never seen a cohort occupy dominant positions in society for so long," Belsky said.

That may have surprised President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who finished his second term at 70, at that time the oldest a president had been. A possibly apocryphal story has him saying a sitting president should never be older than that. But Stuart Jay Olshansky, a professor of public health at the University of Illinois in Chicago, warned against blanket declarations about age and ability. "Just because

you as an individual might not be able to do something over the age of 70 or 80 doesn't mean somebody else can't do the job," he said. "There's people that can make it out into their late 80s and 90s that are processing as well as or better than other people that are younger."

Scott Goldstein, 80, started working at Hecht's department store in Washington D.C. when he was 14; he is now a lawyer working 40 hours a week in Miami and has no intention of stopping. "I've seen friends who have sort of retired and deteriorated mentally, and I don't want that to happen to me," said Goldstein, who is also a pilot and flies small planes on weekends. "I remain mentally alert while I work."

Some brain changes do take place in older age, said Joe Verghese, chief of cognitive and motor aging and of geriatrics at Albert Einstein College of Medicine/Montefiore Health System.

"Your ability to process information for instance, slows down, the processing speed slows down. Your ability to multitask when you're presented with different information at the same time, that gets affected as well," he said, adding that slower processing can affect a person's ability to make split-second decisions.

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Octogenarians ...

Continued from page 5C
But absent disease affecting cognition, older workers also have some advantages, Verghese said. For example, people often become better decision-makers as they age.

"Your judgment is a factor of not only biological process, but experience, and your judgment skills might actually improve over time because you have multiple experiences to draw from," he said. When it comes to the job of president, "Most of the major decisions that I can think of that have affected this country haven't been split-second decisions, they would have been decisions that required consensus building, taking input of people, and I think age gives you a bit of greater ability to do that."

One reason older people may take longer to make decisions is because after one's early 40s, the myelinization, or insulating

sheath around brain axons, begins to break down, meaning messages are not transmitted as effectively, said Rex Jung, a neuropsychologist and assistant professor of psychology at the University of New Mexico.

That can make precision pursuits such as math more challenging, but it can also loosen up one's brain associations, making it easier to see the big picture, and to improvise and create, which could explain why jazz musicians and abstract artists often do some of their best work in older age, he said.

It can also be an asset for, say, a world leader. "One of the benefits, if you will, of this slowing down, is slowing down, and being more deliberate in our thought processes, [making] sure that you do look before you leap, and aim before you fire," Jung said, adding, "Older people are known for this thing called wisdom."

Even so, not all of them want to still be working. John Tomkins, owner of Precast Manufacturing New Mexico, where Hyde is employed, still works 40 to 60 hours a week because he can't afford to retire. "This is a small business, I've invested my life and my money into it," he said, adding that he started working at the company, which his father started, in 1958 at age 12.

A widower, Tomkins would like to travel and see more of the country, he said. But "every time I think about selling it there is something that happens that prevents me from doing so."

At the same time, he said, working "keeps my mind and my body sharp. ... I never had any desire to belong to a country club or play golf or any of that nonsense. If I'm going to be alive I'm going to be doing something productive. I think

human value comes from the goods and services that we produce. What else is there in life?"

Elizabeth Shaughnessy, 85, is president of the Berkeley Chess School, which she founded in 1982. The organization brings chess to around 150 schools in the San Francisco Bay area and hosts classes and tournaments. Shaughnessy estimates that she works at least 40 hours a week, including many weekends.

"It never occurred to me that I would be doing anything else," she said. "I'm not the sort of person who sort of wondered all my life when I might retire. When the game first clicks for a child, she said, "To see their little eyes, the joy of that moment, it's very wonderful ... It energizes me."

Hazel Domangue, 82, teaches memoir-writing to seniors and U.S. veterans at Howard Community College in Columbia,

Md., and recently formed a company, Precise Expression, LLC, to offer writing instruction. She said her views on working in old age have evolved.

"When I was younger I thought the same thing that others think — 'No, he's too old, he should have retired a long time ago,' " she said. "But as I grew older, grew old, it's just not true."

One advantage Biden may have is that he has spent his life in government, Domangue said. "He's doing what he's done for years, for 50-plus years, and he understands the job," she said "He's not going as a neophyte. He's doing what he knows how to do. ... If your mind is still sharp, why not?"

Tomkins would go further. Two of his best employees, a welder and a salesman, were men in their 80s.

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Small business...

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Treons reach out to help neighbors

By LOUISE RONALD
The Commercial Review

In March 2021, Mustard Seed Remodeling began doing business in Portland.

Founders Jon and Corina Treon chose their new company's name from the biblical image of something as tiny as a mustard seed (about the size of a grain of coarse sand) having the power to move mountains.

Recently, a local mountain started to shift positions.

In July, the Treons established the Love Thy Neighbor Project Inc., a non-profit with Jon as president and Corina as vice president. Its mission is "to serve God and our community through acts of kindness by preserving and beautifying homes for those who cannot."

The couple has long been concerned about those who need this kind of help.

"A lot of people are on fixed incomes or have only one income," said Corina. When money is tight, "it often comes down to a choice of buying food or making repairs."

Her philosophy is "if you can, you should."

"We have the skills and the knowledge," she said. "I want to do this and I want to help people."

There's nothing complicated about individuals helping other individuals. It's a bit more complicated for companies to do so.

"When we started Mustard Seed, we did have intentions of doing charity," Jon said, "but we knew



Photo provided

Jon and Corina Treon, who launched Mustard Seed Remodeling last summer, have extended their reach with the creation of the non-profit Love Thy Neighbor Project. Its focus is on helping those in need with their home repairs.

very little" about the business end of charity work.

They learned quickly. The Love Thy Neighbor Project has been recognized as a 501(c)3 by the Internal Revenue Service.

Its board of directors has established procedures for identifying those in need of its services and set

Neighbor gave a presentation to his staff.

"They thought this thing through step by step," Gillespie said. "They're making sure the people (they help) really need it."

The staff chose to give \$500 from their "jeans fund" (built from \$1 donations per staff member each week to be able to wear jeans on Fridays) to Love Thy Neighbor.

"Each employee has a vested interest in that donation," said Gillespie. Jon was gratified by Gillespie's confidence.

"We tried to think things out," he said. "We tried to imagine how we would want that money to be spent if it was coming out of our own pocket."

Individuals can apply on their own behalf or they can be nominated by others. Then begins the process of reading the applications, reviewing the need, assessing the job, interviewing the potential recipients and making sure funds are available to cover the costs. Only then can a project begin. (Any leftover funds are rolled into the next project.)

More than 40 applications have been submitted since they first became available over the summer. Board member Matt Arnold, who also works with the Treons at Mustard Seed, said it took "long meetings to sift through them all."

But decisions have to be made.

And the Love Thy Neighbor Project is ready to announce its first decision. Sisters Kira and Monica



Culy nominated their parents, Kevin and Denise Culy of Portland.

Last year, Kevin got COVID-19 and developed pneumonia. He was hospitalized for three months before his release in August 2021, and has revisited the hospital several times since.

Before his illness, Kevin did a lot of fix-up jobs around the house. He'd begun a project to repair a roof leak that was causing dampness and damage in the wall of one of their bedrooms. That work came to an abrupt end.

"I haven't been able to do any kind of physical labor," he said.

Kevin's sister heard about Love Thy Neighbor Project applications and told Monica about them.

"Maybe you can nominate your parents," Monica said her aunt suggested. "We filled out the application right away."

(According to Kevin, one of Denise's co-workers also nominated the couple.)

Then the Culy's got a phone call. They'd passed the initial review and were selected for a site visit to assess the job.

"I'm still kind of shocked by it actually," Monica said.

"It was definitely a relief," said Kira.

Their parents were flabbergasted.

"We just had no idea they nominated us until we got the call," Denise said.

"It was a complete surprise," Kevin agreed.

The family enjoyed their recent meeting with the Treons to finalize project details.

"(Corina) said as soon as she read our application, she picked us right away," said Kira.

"It's something that's going to help them live a better life in their own home," Arnold said.

Jon Treon is excited about getting to work on the Culy's bedroom sometime in April.

"It'll be nice to complete one of those projects," he said.

"This is just the first," said his wife with a smile. "But you've got to start somewhere, right?"

For more information on how to submit an application or make a donation, email lovetheynborprojectin@gmail.com, call (260) 251-5685 or send a message through their page at [facebook.com/lovetheynborprojectin](https://www.facebook.com/lovetheynborprojectin).

Octogenarians ...

Continued from page 6C
And given the choice, he would opt to hire from that age bracket.

"Today if you want someone with experience, wisdom and a work ethic, I think I would prefer to go with the older crowd," he

said. "This generation [of young workers] want flexible work hours, they don't want to be managed, they don't want to be told what to do, they may or may not show up on time. I would stick with the older generation anytime."

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