STEEL FAITHFUL

STORIES OF GOD AT WORK IN PITTSBURGH

1952–2018

MICHAEL KING / BOB JAMISON / BRUCE BARRON

Six

A HOLE IN HIS HEAD, GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL IN HIS HEART:

WAYNE ALDERSON AND VALUE OF THE PERSON

Visitors touring the American Steel Foundry plant of Amsted Rail in Granite City, Illinois (near St. Louis) are typically surprised by what they see. Throughout the facility—which is unusually clean for a foundry—employees wave, give thumbs-up signs, and offer to talk about what they do. It feels more like a community than a workplace. Of course, no group of 800 workers is unanimously happy, as employees' online reviews indicate, but many describe caring supervisors and even a family environment.

Every department at American Steel has "point men," or people who stay abreast of employees' concerns and raise them with management at regular meetings. And if you come on the right day, you might find 20 employees gathered for a lunchtime Bible study, which plant managers sometimes attend.

"A lot of employees tell us their home lives are better," said Paul

Limbach, Amsted Rail's chief operating officer. "It's not a storybook place, but it's definitely different."

When visitors ask for an explanation of how American Steel became this way, Limbach gives them a copy of a nearly 40-year-old book called *Stronger Than Steel*. That's because the positive culture at American Steel is a direct, living legacy of the book's protagonist, Wayne Alderson, who led an even more stunning transformation of a similar plant near Pittsburgh in 1973.

Stronger Than Steel, one of the first books by famed Reformed author and theologian R. C. Sproul, vividly chronicled the amazing life of Wayne Alderson up to its publication in 1980. But there's a lot more to say about Alderson, who died in 2013, and his Value of the Person organization, which continues (under his daughter's leadership) to assist businesses across North America in meaningfully implementing love, dignity, and respect in the workplace.

AN UNFORGETTABLE SACRIFICE

Wayne Alderson was born in 1926, the fourth child of a fourth-generation coal miner in Canonsburg, southwest of Pittsburgh. At that time, their section of Canonsburg was a company town. The Aldersons lived in mining company housing and shopped at the company store, which meant that their debts to the company often exceeded Lank Alderson's wages.

The miners, trapped in a life of long, dangerous work for low pay, were seeking to unionize, and the company was determined to break up the union. As a result, young Wayne gained a deep appreciation of labor-management conflict in a setting where, in Sproul's words, "a miner's status was often measured by the number and size of the scars on his head left by the police."

Lank Alderson wanted his sons to become miners, but he harbored no illusions about whether his company appreciated him. Often, after an exhausting workday, he would tell his wife, "Edith, if they'd only value me as much as they value the mule." As Wayne explained many years later, that comment was no exaggeration:

> In those days, mine mules were well trained and well kept. They were the high tech of the mines since they were the best advance warning system a mine had against explosions. It was a known fact that the mine owners considered it much easier and cheaper to replace a miner than to replace a well-trained mule. My father's desire to be treated as well as a mule left an indelible mark on me.

When Lank Anderson broke his leg in an on-the-job fall, his spirit was broken too. Unable to work, he was evicted from company housing and abandoned the family. Penniless, Wayne's mother gave her youngest child to relatives and set up a tent on a vacant Canonsburg lot, where she and her other six children lived for several months. "I remember looking out the tent flaps with my brothers and sisters and seeing houses on the hills of Canonsburg, aglow with electric lights," Wayne wrote later. "It looked like another world to us, a world of warmth and security that was beyond our grasp."

At age 18, Wayne Alderson volunteered for World War II. (He had tried to sneak into the military at age 15, but the recruiter knew his mother and turned him away.) Stationed in northeast France in February 1945, he volunteered to be one of his company's "point men," or advance scouts, along with his best friend Charles "Red" Preston. In that role, on March 15, 1945, he became the first American soldier to step into Germany. A few days later, after penetrating the heavily fortified Siegfried Line, he confronted a German soldier who threw a grenade at his feet. Wayne shot the soldier dead, but the grenade exploded and shattered his skull.

Semi-conscious and exposed to certain death, Wayne survived only because Red Preston wrapped his arms around him and shielded him. Red took a bullet in his head, laying down his life for his friend. Wayne survived, but with an indentation in his forehead. For the rest of his life, anyone who looked at Wayne would see an unmistakable scar, the reminder of his journey through the valley of death. His daughter Nancy Jean, as she grew up, would often hear him say, "I believe that God placed

the hole in the middle of my forehead so that every day, when I woke up and looked in the mirror, I would be reminded that Red died for me."

Though spared by this living parable of Christ's sacrifice, Alderson would not experience his own spiritual awakening for another 20 years. As one of his admirers said of this time period, "He met his wife and they married, he went to college, he became an elder in the church [Pleasant Hills Community Presbyterian Church in suburban Pittsburgh], and then he became a Christian, and it was in that order."

One night in 1965, Alderson awoke from a dream with "Matthew 10:32" imprinted on his mind. He looked up the verse and read, "Whoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father in heaven." At age 39, Alderson made that confession.

THE MIRACLE OF PITTRON STEEL

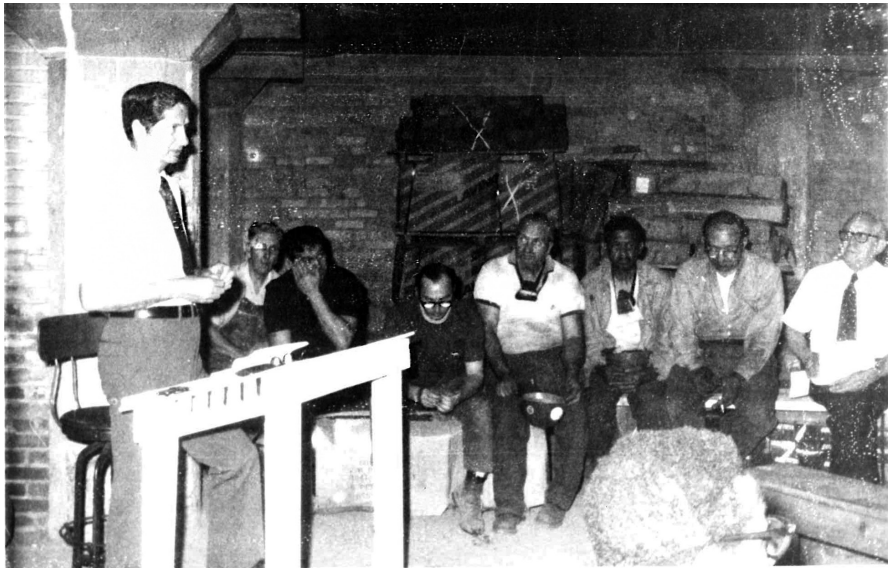
In that same year, Alderson, by then equipped with a degree in accounting and business administration, joined the financial department of Pittron Steel in Glassport, 12 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. By 1969, he was Pittron's controller and chief financial officer. As such, he could see that the plant was struggling financially. Extreme labor strife was much of the problem.

In October 1972, Pittron's unionized employees walked off the job and stayed out for 84 days. During the wildcat strike, Sproul recounted, Alderson went on a retreat with some church friends at "a facility tucked away in a remote section of the mountains of western Pennsylvania." While there, Alderson was deeply touched as the retreat speaker challenged Christians "to put their faith and values to the test in the real world … to come out from under the shelter of their steeples and into the marketplace." Sproul modestly omitted that the retreat site was the Ligonier Valley Study Center and that the speaker was R. C. Sproul.

Shortly thereafter, Alderson began interfacing with union leaders (even though he was not a member of the Pittron negotiating team) and achieved an end of the strike. As vice president of operations, he then initiated "Operation Turnaround," determined to eliminate

labor-management bitterness as well. Alderson revolutionized the foundry's atmosphere by learning employees' names, walking the plant floor to interact with them, and personally thanking them at the end of their workday. On some days he extended his hours long enough to talk with workers from all three shifts. When his employees were dealing with illness or death in their family, Alderson showed up at the hospital or the funeral home. Drawing on his faith, his union upbringing, and his concern for reconciliation, he demonstrated that he valued every person at Pittron. As he did so, the changes were unmistakable—and not just during work hours. Employees' wives wrote Alderson notes of appreciation, explaining that their husbands were no longer coming home angry because they felt cared for at the workplace.

Soon the formerly fractious plant even had a weekly Bible study, although it was initially proposed by union president Sam Piccolo, not management. "I knew they were testing me," Alderson commented several years later. "After all, the ones who asked weren't even Christians." And in a July 1974 *Guideposts* magazine article, Alderson described himself as a reluctant preacher: "I knew sharing [God's] love, or witnessing,

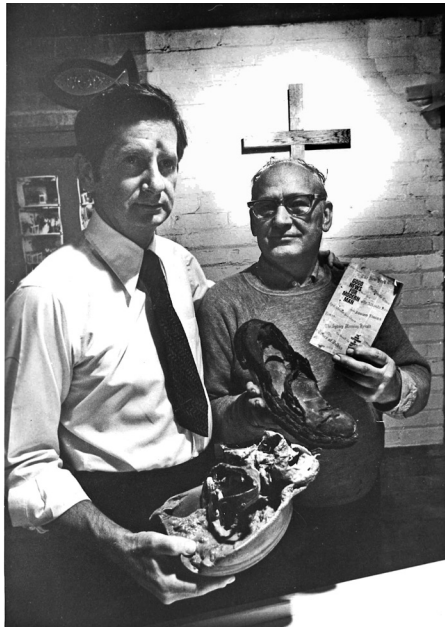


Alderson shares with employees at the Pittron chapel.

was part of being a Christian, but I wasn't sure it was right for this situation. I certainly didn't want to use Christianity in the foundry." But by late May 1973, less than five months after the strike ended, a *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* article titled "Religion Plays Role in Labor Relations at Glassport Firm" reported that 40 percent of Pittron's 430 employees were attending lunchtime Bible studies in a storage room converted into a chapel.

During the 1974 energy crisis, when low supplies and rationing actually made it hard for Americans to fill their gas tanks, Alderson convinced Pittron to let employees take whatever gas they needed from the company reserves, with no questions asked. When the gas ran out and Alderson didn't know what to do, a man who had heard about his gesture called and offered two thousand more gallons.

But that wasn't the biggest miracle. On November 9, 1973, while Alderson was discussing his emerging "value of the person" concept with U.S. Senator Robert Taft and industrial and political leaders in Canton, Ohio, a malfunction during the pouring of a 110,000-pound ladle of molten steel caused a huge fire, yet incredibly no one was injured. After the spilled hot metal had burned out, a worker pried open his charred locker to find everything burned or melted—except his paperback New Testament, which was barely singed.



Alderson and George Protz after the 1973 fire at Pittron Steel. The hard hat and shoes in Protz's locker were destroyed; the Bible survived.

It was called the "Miracle of Pittron," and it became famous in a powerful documentary by Robin Miller that would reach

the White House. After viewing the film, President Gerald Ford expressed his hope that Alderson's Value of the Person program could become a model for labor-management relations across America.

There was one more miracle: business results. Pittron went without a labor grievance for 21 months, during which productivity rose by 64 percent and sales quadrupled.

RELEASED TO A WIDER PULPIT

Starting in August 1973, "The Pittron Story," a four-page occasional company newsletter, delivered more spiritual inspiration than corporate details. The August issue featured the gift of a Bible from Piccolo, now a believer, to Alderson. "Truth has become the basis of a new relationship at Pittron," Piccolo said. "Our meetings [in the chapel] began with five or six people. Now after 13 weeks the program has reached hundreds of workers. … The human relations element is now strongly present in our plant and the word 'brother' has gotten into the right perspective."

On January 20, 1974, the anniversary of the strike's end, a thousand people attended a "service of gratitude" to thank God for the changes at Pittron. In February 1974, both Pittsburgh newspapers featured Pittron's gift of free gas to its employees.

On March 31, with Easter approaching, Pittron president George Hager sent every employee a letter with a gift certificate for a canned ham at the nearby Orlando's supermarket. An accompanying letter from Alderson mentioned that John Yanderly of Pittron Department 14 had crafted metal castings of praying hands that would be "available at Orlando's when you call for the ham if you want one." For many years, the Glassport borough building was also graced by a set of Yanderly's praying hands.

Miller's documentary captured Pittron's transformation for wide distribution. Miller visited the plant out of personal interest (or perhaps with a potential film project in mind) and told Alderson after his tour, "You need to capture this. The world will never believe what I have seen." With Alderson's encouragement, Miller spent considerable time at the plant, mingling with workers, attending chapel sessions, and interviewing

Alderson and his two faithful co-presenters from the United Steelworkers, Lefty Scumaci (left) and Sam Piccolo (right).

union members and executives. He also filmed the first Value of the Person conference, a three-day event held in June 1974 to commemorate Pittron's 75th anniversary, with Westinghouse Electric Company CEO Don Burnham and Pennsylvania's lieutenant governor among the speakers. The only scene Miller had to reenact for his hour-long production was the fire.

In fact, Miller was on site to film the beginning of the end at Pittron. Textron, Pittron's parent company, capitalized on the foundry's smashing success to sell it to Milwaukee-based Bucyrus-Erie. Miller captured the scene in Pittron's chapel as alarmed workers asked Alderson if Pittron had been sold and stated ominously, "If we lose [Wayne], we'd have trouble here." Alderson spoke of the growing recognition their story was receiving and assured them, "If I leave, I'll take with me what you have given me. And I'd like to think I'm leaving a little of myself with each one of you."

The sale happened in October 1974. Alderson flew to Milwaukee three months later and spent a full day with Bucyrus-Erie's CEO, who said he could keep his job if he discontinued his innovative gestures of

conviviality, like walking the floor with the workers and providing an office for the union president. Alderson declined. He returned home and told a Pittsburgh reporter, "We spent eight hours together, talking. I made a friend that day and lost my job."

"I was this close to saying yes, but I couldn't," Alderson said later when describing the interview. "[The CEO] was asking me not just to compromise, but to capitulate everything I stood for."

Alderson told Bucyrus-Erie that Pittron had four other good managers trained in his principles. All four were fired. By July 1976, the employees were on strike again; in 1981, the foundry closed permanently.

But for Alderson, the end of his job at Pittron was the beginning of a new career. As his wife, Nancy, told him, "You have been set free to take this message to the world." He was besieged by public speaking invitations and requests to mediate labor-management conflicts (which he frequently did for no pay), reportedly being shot at while trying to resolve a labor dispute in Tennessee.

In October 1975, *Miracle of Pittron* premiered at a Glassport school auditorium, with about 1,500 people in attendance. President Ford, who had previewed the film, sent his best wishes by telegram. (Never bashful about approaching the halls of power, Alderson had sent the President a five-page letter a year earlier, inviting him to visit Pittron.) Alderson's press release on the film premiere indicated that he had formed "an organization dedicated to improving the quality of work life in American industry."

Alderson's "organization" was pretty much himself. But two key partners added to his credibility: Piccolo, Pittron's union representative, and United Steelworkers international office staff member Francis "Lefty" Scumaci, who had visited Pittron to check out what was happening there and became a believer in both Alderson and Jesus Christ. Piccolo and Scumaci would be Alderson's union sidekicks at countless public appearances, corporate seminars, and prayer breakfasts over the next three decades.

The other key source of Alderson's credibility, of course, was demonstrated success. His ideas were not just theory—he had applied them at Pittron with amazing results.

A newspaper article on Alderson's October 1977 visit to Hamilton, Ontario—Canada's leading steel city—revealed his willingness to steal a line from Sam Shoemaker. It reported that Alderson told his audience, "My challenge is to make Hamilton as well known for God as for steel."

Presumably Alderson had gotten that line from Pittsburgh's master of networking for the kingdom of God, Reid Carpenter. The two met around that time after Carpenter was invited to a viewing of *Miracle of Pittron* and, in his typically edgy way, brought along a group of inner-city African Americans with Black Panther connections. The young men were in tears by the end of the film. Carpenter would become one of Alderson's biggest supporters and a presenter at numerous Value of the Person seminars.

Volkswagen, which had recently opened a plant an hour southeast of Pittsburgh, became one of Alderson's first major clients in 1978. By then, he had added a crucial resource that would greatly enhance his communication capacity: his daughter. Nancy Jean Alderson, upon graduating in communications from Grove City College, turned down other job offers out of a deep conviction that she was called to work for her dad. She never took another job. The professional relationship between father and daughter would endure for 35 years.

"My role was to help him create a seminar," Nancy Jean (now Nancy McDonnell) explained. The Value of the Person seminars that she developed would spread to corporations all over North America. The enterprise also upped its professionalism by relocating out of Alderson's basement to share office space with the fledgling Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation.

A BIG PRAYER BREAKFAST

Carpenter's organizing skill came in handy when Lefty Scumaci challenged Alderson to hold a major prayer breakfast that would highlight the need for labor and management to come together under God. With prominent support from Carpenter, John Guest of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Sewickley, and Robert Holland of Pittsburgh's fashionable

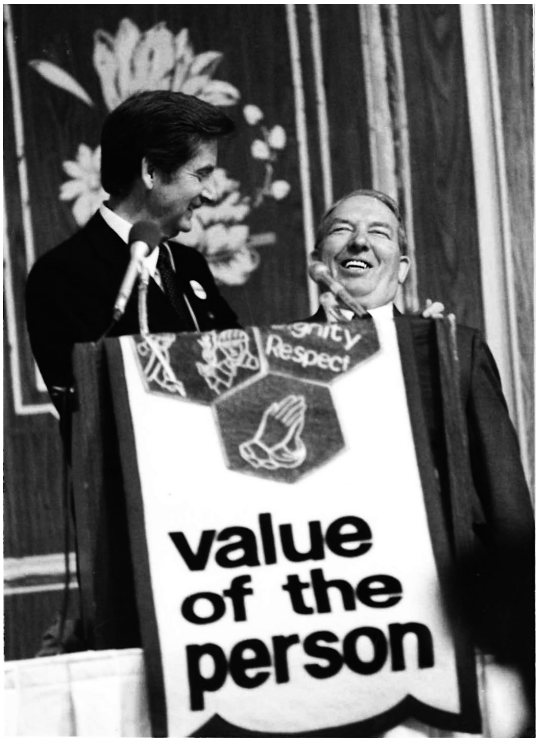
Shadyside Presbyterian Church, the first Labor-Management Prayer Breakfast took place on December 1–2, 1978. (Despite the title, it included Friday night seminars along with the Saturday morning breakfast at the Hilton Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh.)

National Steel Corporation CEO George Stinson (recruited by Guest, his pastor) and United Steelworkers president Lloyd McBride (with Stinson participating in the invitation) agreed to co-chair the event, making it a national news item. Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caliguiri proclaimed Value of the Person Week. Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh, U.S. Senator John Heinz, and U.S. Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall were among the speakers.

The Labor-Management Prayer Breakfast became an annual Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation project and lasted for 13 years, with typical attendance of 2,000. The always-entertaining Tony Campolo, Baptist pastor and sociology professor at Eastern University near Philadelphia, was on the program each year, joined by prominent voices from business and labor. When the famous Solidarity movement—the first trade union movement behind the Iron Curtain—started in 1980, the prayer breakfast couldn't get Solidarity's leader, Lech Walesa, out of Poland, so it did the next best thing by flying in Walesa's stepfather, a New Jersey dock worker.

The prayer breakfasts were unmistakably ecumenical. Alderson and Carpenter were widely recognized evangelicals; Piccolo and Scumaci, Alderson's closest partners on the labor side, were Catholic. Pittsburgh Catholic Bishop Donald Wuerl consistently attended; Carpenter described Wuerl as a reconciling agent, thanks to his close relations with both business and labor, and "the most important validator of the Prayer Breakfast."

During those years Alderson was twice considered for U.S. Secretary of Labor (by Presidents Carter and Reagan) and even briefly contemplated a 1988 run for president. He also appeared on NBC's *Today* show in March 1985 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of his other claim to fame—his World War II penetration into Germany.



Alderson welcomes Stanislaw Walesa, stepfather of famed Polish union leader Lech Walesa, to the podium at a Labor-Management Prayer Breakfast.

A BOOK AS GOOD AS THE SEMINARS

Other than attending a Value of the Person seminar, the best way to grasp the uniqueness and power of Alderson's work is to read the careful formulation of his ideas in *Theory R Management*, coauthored with his daughter, Nancy Alderson McDonnell.

Alderson argued that all three prominent theories of business management—Theory X (employees need to be constantly monitored), Theory Y (employees should be supported and encouraged), and Theory Z (employees should be involved in decision making)—remain confrontational at their core. Even in Theories Y and Z, management still sets the rules; the driving force is "we say you must" rather than "let us" work together.

Theory R contains five fundamental concepts: doing what is *right*, building *relationships*, *reconciliation* as the fundamental goal, *responsibility* taken by everyone, and *results* as a by-product. Alderson emphasized that results must be the endpoint, not the beginning point; if building relationships becomes just a gimmick to improve business results, the effort will smack of insincerity and will not succeed. "Relationships are not engineered," he stated. "Those that are engineered usually turn out to be big disasters."

Theory R Management took what Alderson had done instinctively as a servant leader at Pittron and placed it in a management framework. For example, he used his bold decision to offer his employees free gasoline during the 1973 energy crisis as an illustration of a virtually ubiquitous systemic problem in corporate America: the presence of "palace guards" who intervene between top executives and rank-and-file employees. In his determination to show Pittron employees that he personally cared about them, Alderson explained, "I refused to be intimidated by my palace guards" who thought that giving away a precious commodity would set a horrible precedent. Similarly, when describing his efforts to address deplorable work conditions at Pittron, Alderson drew a contrast between his belief that basic conditions should never be a matter of negotiation and the palace guards' view that management should never do anything for the union without extracting concessions in exchange.

The book puts meat on the Value of the Person mantra of "love, dignity, and respect" with numerous specifics, such as listening to people without a preconceived agenda, showing concern for every aspect of people's lives and not just their work productivity, being present in times of crisis, writing notes of appreciation, and offering practical assistance to victims of layoffs. It also gives examples of actions that can subtly show disrespect, like not telling employees what was done with their suggestions or giving a higher-quality bonus party to managers than to other workers.

Theory R Management is interpersonally sensitive but not spineless.

It offers guidance on isolating and neutralizing managers who refuse to value the people they manage, and on gearing policies toward the 90 percent of staff who are faithful rather than the 10 percent who cause most of the problems.

By 1994, when *Theory R Management* was published, the proof of Alderson's effectiveness had spread far beyond Pittron. The book cited examples from his work with major corporations like 3M and Gillette, as well as from Japanese companies like Honda and Matsushita that had made similar commitments to valuing people.

Alderson delivered Value of the Person seminars at individual companies from the late 1970s to 2011, plus open-enrollment seminars in Pittsburgh and elsewhere through 2004. The seminar team typically included Alderson, his daughter, and Scumaci or Piccolo, plus colorful messages from motivational speakers like Reid Carpenter and Tony Campolo.

Alderson had a lasting impact on many companies and untold thousands of individuals. At 3M Corporation alone, for example, 2,000 employees at multiple plants received Value of the Person training between 1987 and 1991. At 3M's Little Rock, Arkansas facility, the union presented thank-you cards to management for introducing Value of the Person there. "It's the only worker motivation program that's been palatable to the unions," Scumaci told the Little Rock newspaper after a December 1989 seminar.

CONVERTING A SKEPTIC AT GRANITE CITY

In fact, American Steel Foundry initially found out about Value of the Person via labor, not management, when a representative of the boilermakers' union gave Paul Limbach copies of *Stronger Than Steel* and *Theory R Management*.

"We were really good at enforcing rules and regulations," Limbach said, "but it was evident, given our relationship with the union, that we could never become a world-class company."

After reading the books and talking to Alderson, Limbach decided

to send one of his toughest, most unyielding supervisors to a Value of the Person seminar. "He came back acting completely different," Limbach recalled. "Suddenly he was being very nice, explaining things to people, and requesting input. The union even called a special meeting to try to figure out what he was up to."

Limbach sent three more of his toughest managers to another seminar. At this point, Alderson discerned that the real skeptic at American Steel was Limbach. So he called the three together at the seminar and told them, "Paul does not want to do this, and all he needs is for one of you to break ranks and he'll drop the idea." Sure enough, when the managers returned to Granite City, Limbach called them into his office individually. All three said they supported bringing Value of the Person to American Steel.

At the first on-site seminar, Limbach and union president David Spellmeyer, who had been barely on speaking terms, reconciled and began to build a relationship. The impact of Value of the Person was so great that enough seminars were scheduled to reach nearly the whole plant workforce. Value of the Person has now been working with American Steel for 14 years and has become part of the fabric of daily operations. The collaboration has expanded to include supervisor training, ongoing workshops for "point men," and a condensed one-day seminar to deliver the message to new hires right away.

Limbach highlighted two practical changes that Value of the Person brought to his leadership and to plant operations. First, he realized that "I was being very aggressive with the 10 percent and never spending any time with the 90 percent"—that is, focusing on the complainers rather than helping the majority of employees to excel. Second, he discovered that building quality relationships with workers yielded a major change in their attitudes toward innovation, because now "the people trust us enough to be willing to try something and give us advice knowing that we'll listen to it." This sense of labor-management teamwork is especially important now that implementation of new technology is crucial to competitiveness; employees who formerly viewed robots as a

threat to their jobs are now open to changes that could improve their productivity.

CHANGE AT 3M

Clair Murphy oversaw Value of the Person training for a thousand employees as site director at 3M's Cottage Grove, Minnesota plant. In that role, he observed Alderson's influence even at a company that was already highly person-centered.

In Murphy's view, much of the impact of the two-day seminar happened at the concluding session, which discussed how Value of the Person could affect the family. Spouses and significant others were invited to attend this session and hear what the employees had learned.

To reach all plant employees, Cottage Grove held eight seminars. Along the way, Murphy noticed the impact spreading from those who had already attended Value of the Person to those who hadn't. "You could see people picking it up like allergens," he stated. "By the last seminar, the people had already learned much of it before they got there."

As one impressive sign of how Value of the Person changed a plant manager's relationships with workers, Murphy said, he was frequently asked to speak at the funeral when a 3M employee or retiree died, because the family knew he would have something personal and positive to say about their deceased loved one.

Murphy has been retired for over 20 years, but he knows that Alderson's impact remains strong at Cottage Grove. At one party for retirees, an employee who had joined 3M after Murphy's retirement tracked him down to say thank you, asking, "Are you the person who brought Value of the Person here?"

Ray Meier, who coordinated the seminars at Cottage Grove while working for Murphy, commented, "Wayne's presentations were something to see. You could sense afterwards that people felt a lot happier than they had been." For Meier, two keys to the seminars' success were that they included both labor and management perspectives and that everyone in the plant—plus spouses—went through the same training.

WORTH HIRING TO TEACH RESPECT

Alderson's personal presence was riveting—"he would look you dead in the eye as if he was looking right through you," Limbach said—but many more people were reached indirectly through the books or satisfied customers. Wayne Thompson, who has spent a 40-year career in manufacturing for the roofing industry, was initially one of those.

"I was visiting one of our suppliers, 3M," Thompson recalled. "At the end of the tour, the plant manager gave me a copy of *Stronger Than Steel* and said, 'I don't know what you believe, but I think you would enjoy this book.'

"I read it on the plane flight home. I couldn't put it down. It helped me to see something I had kind of known all along but never fully understood—that the success I'd had up to that point was all about caring for people.

"Then I became a plant manager in Ohio and quickly found that I'd run into a buzzsaw, with all kinds of union problems. After a couple weeks I was sitting at my desk, wondering what I'd gotten into. I looked at my bookshelf and there was Wayne [on the cover of *Stronger Than Steel*] staring at me.

"I think the Lord told me to call this man. We talked twice and he decided to come to Ohio and look at what was going on in the plant. After that he said, 'We can turn this around, but we need to have a Value of the Person seminar.'

"Convincing my boss that we needed to pay someone to teach us how to respect each other was a long conversation. But eventually we had the seminar with Sam Piccolo and his wife, Wayne and his wife, and Nancy Jean. It was terrific, it brought people together like never before, and the plant improved.

"Later I accepted a job with another company and was gone for five years, then this company brought me back. When I returned, people who had previously been skeptical told me with great sincerity that they had realized the long-lasting benefits of what Value of the Person had done for them personally and for the plant."

Thompson has distributed copies of *Stronger Than Steel* widely throughout the roofing industry. He also credits Alderson with encouraging him to become a public speaker and tell his own inspiring story: Thompson was illiterate, teased, and mistreated due to severe dyslexia until a fifth-grade teacher took enough of a personal interest in him to discover his problem.

Alderson taught Thompson another memorable lesson on a late-night stroll through the plant. "Let's walk around until we find someone doing something right," Alderson said. When they encountered an employee lining up shingles with precise care, he approached the man. "I'm visiting here," he said, and I just recognized how much you care about your job and how well you want to do it. This is the most beautiful section of inventory I've ever seen." He then turned to Thompson and said, "I think you should write a note about him, send it to his home, and put it in his personnel file." To make sure that Thompson didn't forget, Alderson had him handwrite and mail the note before they went home that night.

The following week, the employee tracked down Thompson to thank him. "I showed that letter to my wife and daughters," the worker said through tears. "They couldn't believe the plant manager wrote me a letter telling me how good a job I did. The only letters I'd ever received were reprimands. My wife bought a frame for your letter and we put it above our bed, and she has me read it to her every night."

Thompson said he has applied that tool many times since then, remembering Alderson's words: "It's not hard to be a leader, you just have to have a heart. When you care for other people, great things happen."

STILL A BARGAIN

Sharell Mikesell has been a huge fan of Value of the Person since 1992, when two of his employees convinced him to bring Alderson to Owens Corning where he was vice president for science and technology. Over two years, he arranged seminars for 400 staff, 200 spouses, and even a group of teenagers who had a special session with Reid Carpenter. After a

long career in the plastics industry and at Ohio State University, Mikesell still thinks Value of the Person is unique—and a bargain.

"Some of the largest business consulting firms try to do something like this but they get more tied up in process," Mikesell explained. "Only Value of the Person actually gets to changing people's hearts and minds. And the cost was about one-third of what you would pay a big-time consultant."

Mikesell called the challenge to become open and vulnerable in front of his employees "gut-wrenching" but rewarding, as he saw work relationships improve through transparency and mutual respect. He also highlighted Value of the Person's unique inclusion of spouses. "Making them feel like a part of the company was a touching event," he explained. "Recognizing and addressing how baggage from home and the workplace affect each other is something that no other cultural initiative addresses. We saw several marriages revived as a result." Like Clair Murphy at 3M, Mikesell reported receiving appreciation from employees up to 20 years later for Value of the Person's enduring impact on their families.

Mikesell contended that many business productivity programs fail to achieve the best possible results because they overlook the most basic ingredient: people. "This is shown over and over at companies that have multiple plants with the same tools and knowledge but a wide range of performance outcomes," he stated. "The difference is all about how well they work together, understand each other, like each other, and know they are appreciated, valued and respected by leadership.

"Of all the organizational, motivational, and self-improvement programs I have attended in over 40 years in business, only Value of the Person effectively teaches how to address root-cause issues."

IMPACTING A FUTURE FAITH-AT-WORK LEADER

Al Erisman was a research and development director at the Boeing Company when he happened to hear Wayne Alderson on a radio interview. "It was the first time I realized how my faith could be connected to my work, beyond just acting ethically and sharing my faith," he said. "I bought a

copy of *Stronger Than Steel* on the way home from work, read it all the way through that night, and called Wayne on the phone the next morning. We talked for an hour and became friends for 40 years. He changed the way I managed in my research position and how I saw my role in business."

Erisman subsequently brought Alderson to Seattle for a series of seminars and a presentation to Boeing management, discovering not only his effectiveness as a presenter but also his unshakable intensity. On one occasion, as they drove across Lake Washington between appointments, Erisman interrupted their discussion to point out Mount Rainier rising in the distance. Alderson replied without emotion, "That's great. Now as I was saying … ."

After retiring from Boeing, Erisman joined Seattle Pacific University as executive in residence and then as head of its Center for Integrity in Business. "I rarely give a talk without speaking about Wayne," Erisman stated, "and I often say that he changed my life. He showed me how to think as a Christian about labor-management relationships. People frequently come up to me after my talks and tell me that Wayne made a difference for them as well."

Erisman knew Alderson long enough to observe his ongoing commitment to self-improvement. "The principles never changed, but the seminars he gave in 2005 were very different from 1985," he explained. "References to technology showed up more."

Alderson's message was firmly rooted in biblical principles, but he had a standard answer when asked if his was a religious program. "Wayne said in every seminar that he made no apologies for his Christian beliefs," Sharell Mikesell noted, "but he always conveyed that the things we would talk about were love, dignity, and respect and how to display them. That defused any sense that the seminars were about religious conversion."

AN AMAZING MENTOR

On top of everything else, Alderson poured himself into long-term mentoring relationships of enormous depth. One of the appreciative recipients

was Scott Stevens, who served as youth pastor at Alderson's church and is now lead pastor at North Way Christian Community, a suburban Pittsburgh megachurch (see chapter 10).

At Alderson's memorial service, Stevens explained that after he preached his first sermon as youth minister at Pleasant Hills, "I was approached by this intense gentleman who looked me square in the eye and said, 'That was okay. Just okay. Borderline unacceptable.' I remember seeing these laser-blue eyes and the hole in his head. I had never met Wayne before. He said, 'If you want to get serious and be a real point man, then call me. But don't call me if you can't take being pushed or challenged.'

"I got a lot of one-on-one time with Wayne, about twice a month for several years. There were moments when I wouldn't feel privileged [to have the opportunity]. He would just hammer away. He would ask a question, listen, say 'don't BS me,' and go right to the point. You couldn't do anything but tell the truth to Wayne. … If you said you would do something for your wife or kids, he would check with the wife and kids and see if you did it. … At the end he would always say, 'I believe in you and I love you.' I have learned more about my gifts and weaknesses from Wayne than you could ever imagine."

Michael Baileys, a U.S. army officer who grew up at Pleasant Hills Community Presbyterian Church, had a similar "brutally honest" mentoring experience that extended over 15 years. "Wayne saw the value of developing the next generation of lay leadership and decided to seize the initiative," Baileys said. "He gave tough counsel and it was a treasure. As Proverbs 27:6 says, 'Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.'

"Wayne would not let you wiggle away from your shortcomings. His mentorship bespoke a deeper level of relationship than I have experienced anywhere, even from pastors." From their many meetings at an Eat 'n Park restaurant, Baileys also remembers Alderson's generous tips, reflecting his compassion toward people who worked hard for not much money.

Paul McNulty, deputy attorney general during the George W. Bush administration and now president of Grove City College, met Nancy Jean Alderson when both were Grove City undergraduates and was invited to attend a Labor-Management Prayer Breakfast. Having heard from his daughter about McNulty's leadership potential, Alderson took the time to explain to him who was who and let him eavesdrop on some behind-the-scenes conversations.

"I see a lot of politicians who are always looking past the people they are talking to, looking for their next connection," McNulty said. "Wayne did not do that. He saw a college kid there to learn and took time to greet and encourage me, make me feel comfortable, and enable me to benefit from the experience."

McNulty remained in periodic contact with Alderson over the next two decades and intentionally applied what he learned from Value of the Person to his workplace—Capitol Hill—with remarkable results. "During the Clinton impeachment process," he recalled, "I was chief spokesman for the House Republicans. In a very stressful situation, while debating the White House spin machine and Democratic operatives, I was very self-conscious about showing love, dignity, and respect. I tried to maintain self-control in language and tone, show courtesy to my opponents, and characterize their position in such a way that they would feel they had been represented well, not misrepresented for my own advantage.

"As a result, I made good friendships with a lot of Democrats. Later, when I was at the Justice Department [and became involved in a controversy over the firing of several U.S. attorneys in 2006], time and time again Democrats would defend me and say, 'Whatever the issue is here, we don't think it is McNulty.' In fact, [Democratic Senator] Chuck Schumer became a key defender of me, because he remembered how I had dealt with him."

THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH

Alderson's mentoring style reveals perhaps his most shocking trait: his penchant for direct, fearless comments that no one else would dare to

make. (Imagine telling a pastor whom you've never met that his message was "borderline unacceptable" and then inviting him to lunch.) This classic style served him well in the tense 1973 encounter that made Value of the Person possible—his clandestine meeting with union leaders that broke the stalemate at Pittron.

Sam Piccolo opened that meeting by presenting a piece of paper with the union's demands. Alderson threw the paper down without looking at it, saying, "I'm not here to talk about demands." At that point another union member broke into profanities, pulled out a switchblade, and declared, "I'm going to slit your throat!" Alderson shouted back, "Either cut my throat, or shut up and sit down!" As he recounted in *Theory R Management*, after a tense silence Piccolo said, "OK, we'll settle."

That same daring directness traveled with Alderson to other companies. Wayne Thompson recalled Alderson and Piccolo showing up for one meeting and finding labor and management in their typical positions, on opposite sides of the table. "Before we get started, I think I can offer a suggestion that would help right off the bat," Alderson said. "Obviously there's a problem here, because all the union's on one side and management is on the other side. I want you to mix it up." As he started pointing to people and telling them to switch sides, he said, "Sam, does that remind you of anything?" Piccolo picked up the cue: "Yes, it does. He did the same thing when he came to Pittron and made me sit right next to this goofy-looking man with a hole in his head."

Alderson had a knack for identifying the skeptics at seminars—typically the people sitting in the far back with their arms folded—and drawing them out. Limbach recalled a seminar at American Steel during which an employee spewed forth an awe-inspiring series of complaints about bad work conditions and supervisors who wouldn't listen to him. "What should you do in that situation?" the man challenged Alderson. Wayne paused for a moment and then, as if to sympathize with the employee's woes, responded in an astounded tone, "Man, you should just go and shoot yourself!" That answer might not have pleased the company's risk management department, but it brought tension-releasing laughter from

the audience and broke down the employee's defenses, helping him to see that complaining would not make his life better. By the end of the day, the employee and Alderson were "best buddies," Limbach said, "and he came back to work as one of the more transformed guys in the plant."

In most contexts, Alderson saved his barbs for the powerful while treating workers with gentleness. "Wayne would say that when there is a broken relationship, the one in the position of power has the primary responsibility for resolving it," Erisman explained. "That is why he pushed so hard for management to take the lead in resolving labor issues. Whatever bad things the union might have done were not relevant to him, because management was in the position of power."

Erisman once recommended Alderson for a large, lucrative mediation job for a company preparing to negotiate a labor contract. But when the company told him that it would select the candidate and then introduce that person to the union, Alderson withdrew from consideration, saying that "the strategy was doomed to failure" because labor would resist the process if it didn't have a voice in choosing the mediator. The company would soon suffer a crippling strike.

Said Ray Meier of 3M, "His method was very simple, not boisterous but down-to-earth. He treated the workforce as his equals and talked on the level of the people who were there."

Alderson's daughter offered the simplest summary of how he could get away with seemingly insulting comments: "Even though he said things that were abrasive, people could tell that he loved them."

THE MESSAGE GOES ON

"It's the message, not the messenger," Wayne Alderson often said. Since his death in 2013, his daughter has been proving that. Nancy Alderson McDonnell (now president and CEO of Value of the Person Consultants; www.valueoftheperson.com) and Barbara Yogan (vice president for training and development) continue to deliver seminars throughout the United States and Canada, along with a team of colleagues who have deeply experienced the message themselves.

The Value of the Person seminar team ready for action. Left to right: Nancy Alderson McDonnell, Paul Limbach, Ed Self, Donnie Chandler, Barbara Yogan, John Turyan.

One of the team members, John Turyan, has a 35-year history with Value of the Person. Turyan took an entry-level job at the H. J. Heinz Company in the mid-1960s, obtained his undergraduate degree and MBA while working there, and eventually worked his way up to plant manager. A Cursillo weekend (see chapter 4) in 1979 brought his Catholic faith to life, and he later served as lay director for the Cursillo movement in Pittsburgh. But it took Wayne Alderson to show Turyan how to bring his faith into the workplace.

Turyan came to know Alderson in the early 1980s through two providential connections. The first was a college friend of McDonnell, whom Heinz happened to hire as a trainer. Then Turyan received a copy of *Stronger Than Steel* from a Heinz Pittsburgh factory worker who had an auto accident on a rainy night and who was comforted by the man whose car she had hit—none other than Wayne himself.

Turyan followed the same pathway as Limbach: first he sent others to a Value of the Person seminar, and then he attended himself and was profoundly challenged. "Wayne got me out of my comfort zone, which was dealing with numbers and corporate issues," he explained, "and got me to touch people. He inspired me to visit the union hall, sit down with workers, and talk about our families."

Turyan introduced Value of the Person to Heinz plants in Pittsburgh

and Holland, Michigan and saw great results: "Communication improved, long-term resentments were dropped, and cooperation between production and maintenance employees improved, as well as between management and union officials. Our focus on employees contributed to a turnaround in previously declining business performance."

Turyan became a speaker at Labor-Management Prayer Breakfasts and a close personal friend of Alderson. He had retired to Florida and had not participated in a seminar for many years when McDonnell, shortly after her father's death, called and asked him for help in continuing Value of the Person. Turyan agreed to assist and quickly discovered that the message was still powerful even without Wayne. He came to see himself as called to fulfill a statement that a Catholic priest had made to Alderson during a small-group retreat 20 years earlier: "Value of the Person must continue some day without you."

Other seminar presenters come from American Steel, which Turyan calls "the Pittron of this generation": Limbach, retired lead supervisor Ed Self (ironically, one of the hardliners whom a still-skeptical Limbach sent to investigate an Alderson seminar), plant manager Donnie Chandler, and several unionized employees.

"The journey is going on, thanks to the team of committed presenters who, each in their own way, have been prepared for this role over the last 40 years," McDonnell said. "The message is touching hearts and changing lives, and we are all deliverers of it."

McDonnell herself, however, was unquestionably the ideal person to lead what her father had begun. "Any father would dream of having a daughter as devoted as she has been," said Paul McNulty. "It is really a further demonstration of Wayne's credibility, because nobody knows a man better than his wife and children."

When she first graduated from college, McDonnell felt called to help her father. Now she believes that she was called to even more—that God was preparing her to carry on what her father started.

McDonnell and her team continue to demonstrate that the Value of the Person message is just as powerful without the original messenger. "In

every organization we assist," Yogan noted, "results have been remarkable, from employee engagement to productivity improvement—all as a by-product of doing what is right."

At the same time, some aspects of Wayne Alderson can only be revered, not reproduced. Many of his admirers stress that his personal effectiveness was inseparable from his personal history as a point man in Germany and at Pittron, from his experience of the sacrifice of Red Preston, and from the unmistakable, disconcerting hole in his head.

Stan Ott, longtime senior pastor at Pleasant Hills Presbyterian, recalled a time when Alderson, sitting in the front row, stared at the communion table rather than looking at Ott throughout his message. "I found that somewhat bothersome," Ott said. "When I talked with him afterwards, he said that during the whole sermon, he was looking at the communion elements and thinking of Red Preston. For everyone else, that was a nice war story; for Wayne, even 50 years later, it was an intensely vivid reality. He knew what it meant to have someone give his life for him. It was a humbling moment for me."

Wayne Alderson will never be replicated—and given his unusually blunt, hauntingly intense ways, probably no one would want to try. But his example and his message remain as compelling as ever. By applying Christian truth to his business life, Alderson rejected the prevailing assumption that adversarial labor-management relationships were the norm. His heroic commitment to the men of Pittron demonstrated his credibility and earned him a platform for the remaining 40 years of his life. Through the generosity, attentiveness, and sensitivity he displayed to those in need, he disarmed critics, won over skeptics, and taught thousands of people to value themselves and others as God does.