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Matt McCane, a line cook for Juniper Grill, laughs with the servers during lunch hour rush at the Cranberry restaurant. The company uses Value of the Person training to improve workplace relationships at its restaurants.

Love, respect and workforce strategy?

A program born in 1970s labor strife at a Glassport plant still spreading the gospel of dignity

By Joyce Gannon
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

After her father died in 2013, Nancy Alderson McDonnell grappled with how to carry on his legacy.

Decades ago, Wayne Alderson garnered national recognition for Value of the Person — an employee relations philosophy that promotes love, dignity and respect for all workers as a means to improve productivity and workplace culture.

Chronicled in books, national news accounts and a documentary film, the program evolved from Mr. Alderson's efforts in the early 1970s to mend hostile union-management relations at Pittron Steel, a foundry in Glassport.

After Mr. Alderson left Pittron, his daughter worked with him for years to grow Value of the Person into a consulting practice that offered workplace reconciliation training to hospitals, schools and corporations, including H.J. Heinz, 3M, Volkswagen, Boeing and Ford Motor.

By the time he died at age 86, it had scaled back to one client, and Ms. McDonnell was involved in training and other projects for Restaurant Holdings — the parent of local eateries Atria's and Juniper Grill that is owned by her husband, Pat McDonnell.

"It was an overwhelming time for me to think about what I would need to do to redirect the business without Wayne," she said.

Mr. Alderson had always been the face of the company, led the seminars and "could command the room," Mr. McDonnell said.

Several months after her father's death, a trip to help a client near St. Louis helped Ms. McDonnell's decision. On the flight from Pittsburgh, she struck up a conversation with a Chicago business executive who said her job sounded like something he had read in a book "about a guy named Wayne."

The book happened to be "Stronger than Steel," a biography of Wayne Alderson.



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Wayne Alderson, left, created the program. In this 1978 photo, he is with his daughter, Nancy Alderson McDonnell, along with Francis "Lefty" Scumaci and Reid Carpenter. All were members of the working committee of the first annual International Labor-Management Prayer Breakfast.

He had also read "Theory R Management," a book Ms. McDonnell co-authored with her father that prescribes doing what's "right" and "responsible" in the workplace.

Both books helped shape his leadership style, the man told her.

"Dad always said, 'It's not about the messenger; it's about the message,'" Ms. McDonnell said. "I finally understood what he meant."

Love and respect?

After that first solo outing to do a seminar for

Amsted Rail in Granite City, Ill., she tapped her lifelong friend Barbara Yogan to join the firm as vice president of training and development.

Their sessions include presentations for large groups, break-out discussions and workshops in which participants talk about family life, hobbies and work experiences that have left them upset and dissatisfied.

The crux of their message is that everyone — from maintenance workers to mid-level

A Consol legal battle riled by a reluctant witness

Gender discrimination settlement stalls

By Anya Litvak
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A gender discrimination lawsuit against Consol Energy Inc. that seemed all but certain to fade into a confidential settlement two weeks ago re-emerged into public view again last week, when the coal company asked a judge to schedule a trial date in the case brought by its former president, Katharine Fredriksen.

According to a motion filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, the Cecil-based company said a Jan. 30 article about the settlement in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, which referenced what a potential last-minute witness is said to have told Ms. Fredriksen's attorneys, made Consol rethink its willingness to close the matter.

Instead, the company wants the chance to depose Eve Flaherty, a former executive assistant at Consol.

Ms. Flaherty, who now works at a different company, wants nothing to do with "anybody involved in that mess," she said when reached by the Post-Gazette on Thursday morning. She just wants to be left alone, she said.

Over the past two weeks, Ms. Flaherty has twice refused Consol's request to write an affidavit disavowing the comment attributed to her by Ms. Fredriksen's attorneys — that she allegedly heard Consol's CEO Jimmy Brock say he would "get rid of that girl's ass" the first chance he got. However, Consol's attorneys wrote that Ms. Flaherty told them last week that her words were misrepresented by Ms. Fredriksen's counsel.

On Monday, Gerald Stubenhofer, one of Consol's attorneys in the case, said Ms. Flaherty told them "she never heard (Mr. Brock) say those words. Period."

Mr. Brock has denied saying anything like that.

For few days this week, it looked like Ms. Flaherty's wish to be left out of this case would be granted.

After the judge in the case, Marilyn Horan, called a status conference Monday afternoon, the two sides asked for a 10-minute recess to confer with each other. An hour and a half later, Consol's attorneys and Ms. Fredriksen's lawyers came back into the courtroom

A 1970s workforce program preaches dignity, respect

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supervisors and owners — deserves to be loved, respected and treated with dignity. The key is getting managers and employees in the same room to experience the training together.

“I know it sounds corny,” Ms. Yogan said. “We use the word ‘love.’”

“It’s really taking you back to the basics of what you learned in kindergarten,” said Mike St. Clair, vice president, operations North America, for Amsted Rail’s Griffin Wheel Division, which has trained people at four plants employing a total 900.

Among the takeaways Amsted’s wheel division has adopted is celebrating employee successes. To recognize a facility that had the best safety record in 2019, Mr. St. Clair and other managers cooked steak dinners for workers during all three plant shifts.

The payoff

“Starting with the premise of treating people with dignity and promoting their dignity can really have benefits for employees and stakeholders,” said David Wasieleski, a professor of business ethics at Duquesne University’s Palumbo-Donahue School of Business.

Most businesses, he said, are “rooted in old assumptions ... that focus on short-term profit ... and that wealth and worth is defined in terms of the economic growth of the company.”

Mr. Wasieleski said Value of the Person includes aspects of humanistic management — “a growing worldwide movement that promotes human dignity and well-being,” he said.

Though Mr. Alderson got a lot of attention for Bible studies he convened at Pittron, the program doesn’t use prayer or preach religion. “It’s based on biblical principles, but it’s not a religious movement. ... It’s not a love fest,” said Mr. McDonnell.

There are always skeptics in the audience.

“Some in management may be afraid to step out and talk about love, dignity and respect because it could be a



Pam Panchak/Post-Gazette

David Cudnick, vice president, operations, for Restaurant Holdings at Juniper Grill, The company uses the training program.

sign of weakness,” he said.

Standing at the plant gate

Restaurant Holdings, which holds no financial investment in Value of the Person, has contracted the program to train Atria’s workers and recently launched it for Juniper Grill staff.

At the first session, Juniper Grill managers, executive chefs and senior executives gathered for two days at the DoubleTree Hotel in Green Tree to discuss topics like how to hold colleagues accountable while treating them with respect.

That means providing employees with tools they need to do their jobs, said David Cudnick, vice president of Restaurant Holdings.

“If I don’t give them the proper way to bread the chicken for a chicken parmesan dish and then I’m in the restaurant and I’m critical, I’m holding them accountable and it’s not fair.”

A second session included Juniper sous chefs, servers, line cooks and other hourly

workers — as well as managers. Spouses and significant others are invited to some training events.

“We saw two or three marriages revived and a lot of work relationships brought back on track,” said Sharell Mikesell, retired vice president, science-technology for Owens Corning, an insulation and fiberglass producer that in the 1990s brought Value of the Person seminars to its technology center in Granville, Ohio.

Mr. Mikesell, now a consultant based in Scottsdale, Ariz., described himself at the time as a “pretty brutal” manager. After the training, he scheduled times to wander through the tech center and “see who I could meet.”

That’s the approach Mr. Alderson took, and that is documented in the film, “Miracle at Pittron,” which is shown at each seminar.

Following an 84-day strike in 1972, Mr. Alderson, then vice president, operations, began visiting sick employees at home and standing at the plant’s gate to chat with workers as they finished

their shifts.

In the 21 months that he led the turnaround initiative, Pittron swung to a profit, and labor grievances and absenteeism dropped.

When the plant was sold in 1974, the new owner invited Mr. Alderson to stay — on condition he drop the Bible studies.

He left to launch Value of the Person.

The trainers

Several individuals who experienced training with Mr. Alderson now help facilitate the seminars.

Paul Limbach, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Amsted Rail, sent several surly managers to the seminars in Pittsburgh about 14 years ago. “One was suddenly going around the shop saying good morning to everyone, getting them new tools and asking how they’re doing.”

Mr. Limbach said he underwent his own transformation in the seminars.

Relations at the time were so strained between the

company’s management and its 1,000-member union workforce that he and the head of the United Steelworkers local didn’t speak.

Following the training, they began communicating and eventually became friends.

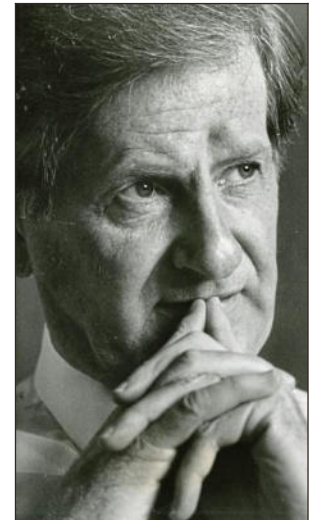
Retired Heinz executive John Turyan, of Lakewood Ranch, Fla., was on the road 18 weeks last year to speak at Value of the Person sessions.

He brought the program to Heinz’s soup and baby food factory on the North Side in the 1980s where it helped him forge bonds with union leaders and workers — relationships Mr. Turyan credits with convincing the Pittsburgh food giant to make a \$100 million-plus investment in modernizing the plant in the 1990s.

“Wayne challenged me to get out on the factory floor with the people,” he said. “We had some hard negotiations and worked to get rid of differences and baggage people had carried for years.”

Father to daughter

When Ms. McDonnell



Harry Coughanour/Post-Gazette
Wayne Alderson, creator of Value of the Person, in a 1985 photo.

graduated from Grove City College in Mercer County in 1978, she put off plans to become a teacher to help her father with the business — then located in their Pleasant Hills home. It moved Downtown, later to Mt. Lebanon, and now leases space at Restaurant Holdings’ headquarters in the Strip District.

The only full-time employee besides Ms. McDonnell and Ms. Yogan is an administrative assistant.

Customers added since Ms. McDonnell took over include Amsted’s wheel division; Owens-Illinois glass plants in Canada and Texas; Univar, a Chicago-based chemicals distributor; Geneva College; and Grove City College.

The company doesn’t reveal revenues.

Those who worked closely with Mr. Alderson say Ms. McDonnell has come into her own at the helm.

A bout with breast cancer five years ago gave her even more resolve, Mr. McDonnell said.

“Wayne used flip charts, and now Nancy is using PowerPoints and videos,” Mr. Limbach said. “She had to figure out how to sing the song her way.”

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