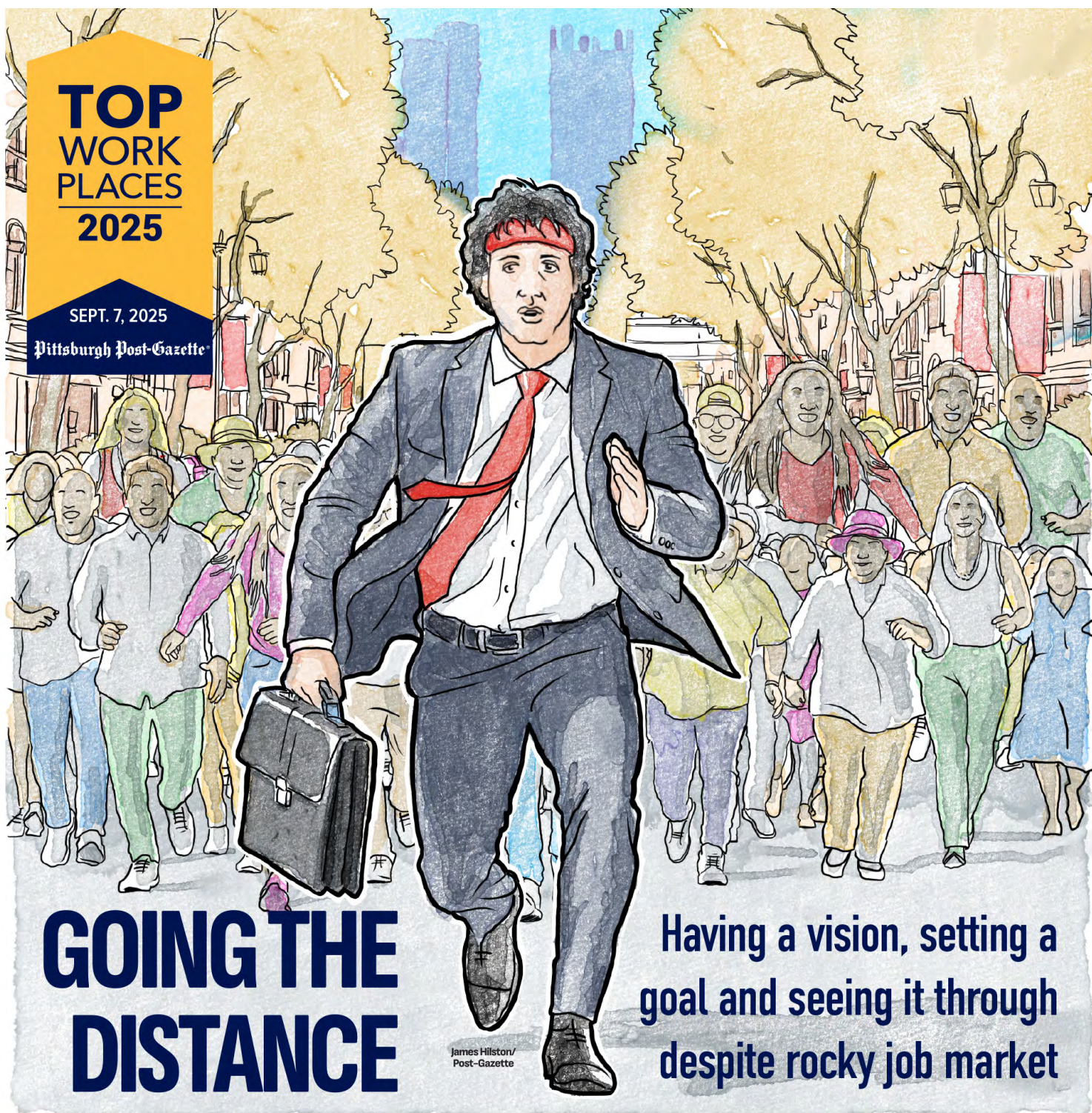


TOP WORK PLACES 2025

SEPT. 7, 2025

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®



GOING THE DISTANCE

James Hillston/
Post-Gazette

Having a vision, setting a
goal and seeing it through
despite rocky job market



WHO ARE THIS YEAR'S TOP WORKPLACES? THE NEW LISTS ARE HERE.



How a company earns Top Workplaces honors

By Bob Helbig
Energage

If you want to really know what's happening at work, ask the people on the front lines.

That's the foundation of the Top Workplaces award. For the 15th year, employee survey company Energage has partnered with the Post-Gazette to honor the best places to work in Greater Pittsburgh.

This award can't be bought; it has to be earned, based on employee feedback. Winners are chosen through a scientific survey process. Positive employee feedback equals recognition. Workplaces that don't have strong feedback are excluded from the winners list.

Energage crunches the data based on a 25-question survey that takes just a few minutes to complete. The survey asks employees for

their feedback on such factors as pay and benefits, direction, leadership, meaningfulness, and appreciation. Energage scores companies based on the responses.

Organizations do not pay any fees to survey employees or to earn a Top Workplaces designation. If they choose, organizations can purchase the survey data. There is no obligation for winners to purchase any product or service.

For the 2025 winners list, 2,937 organizations were asked to survey their employees, and 127 agreed to do so. Based on the survey feedback, 89 employers have earned recognition as Top Workplaces in Greater Pittsburgh.

"Top Workplaces awards are a celebration



of good news," said Eric Rubino, CEO of Energage. "They exemplify the significance of a people-first workplace experience, reminding us that employees are the heart of any thriving organization."

To qualify for Top Workplaces recognition, employers must have at least 50 workers in the region. Employers are grouped by how many employees they have in Greater Pittsburgh. Employers are grouped into similar sizes to best compare similar employee experiences. They are ranked within those groups based on the strength of the survey feedback.

Employers earn Top Workplaces recognition if their aggregated employees feedback score exceeds national benchmarks. Ener-

gage has established those benchmarks based on feedback from about 30 million employees over 19 years.

Survey results are valid only if 35% or more employees respond; employers with fewer than 85 employees have a higher response threshold, requiring responses from at least 30 employees.

Why might a particular employer not be on the list? Perhaps it chose not to participate, or perhaps it did and employee feedback scores were not strong enough. Energage also runs tests on survey feedback and in some cases may disqualify an organization if, for example, a high number of employees said they felt pressured to answer positively.

To participate in the 2026 Top Workplaces awards, or for more information, go www.post-gazette.com/nominate

PAGE 4

With hybrid work, companies are getting creative to maintain relationships.

PAGE 8

Workplace dress codes are shifting to guidelines rather than strict rules.

PAGE 10

How education companies are using artificial intelligence in the learning process.

PAGE 17

The spotlight is always on your team's leadership — even at a Coldplay concert.

PAGE 24

Marketing your business means connecting with the community.

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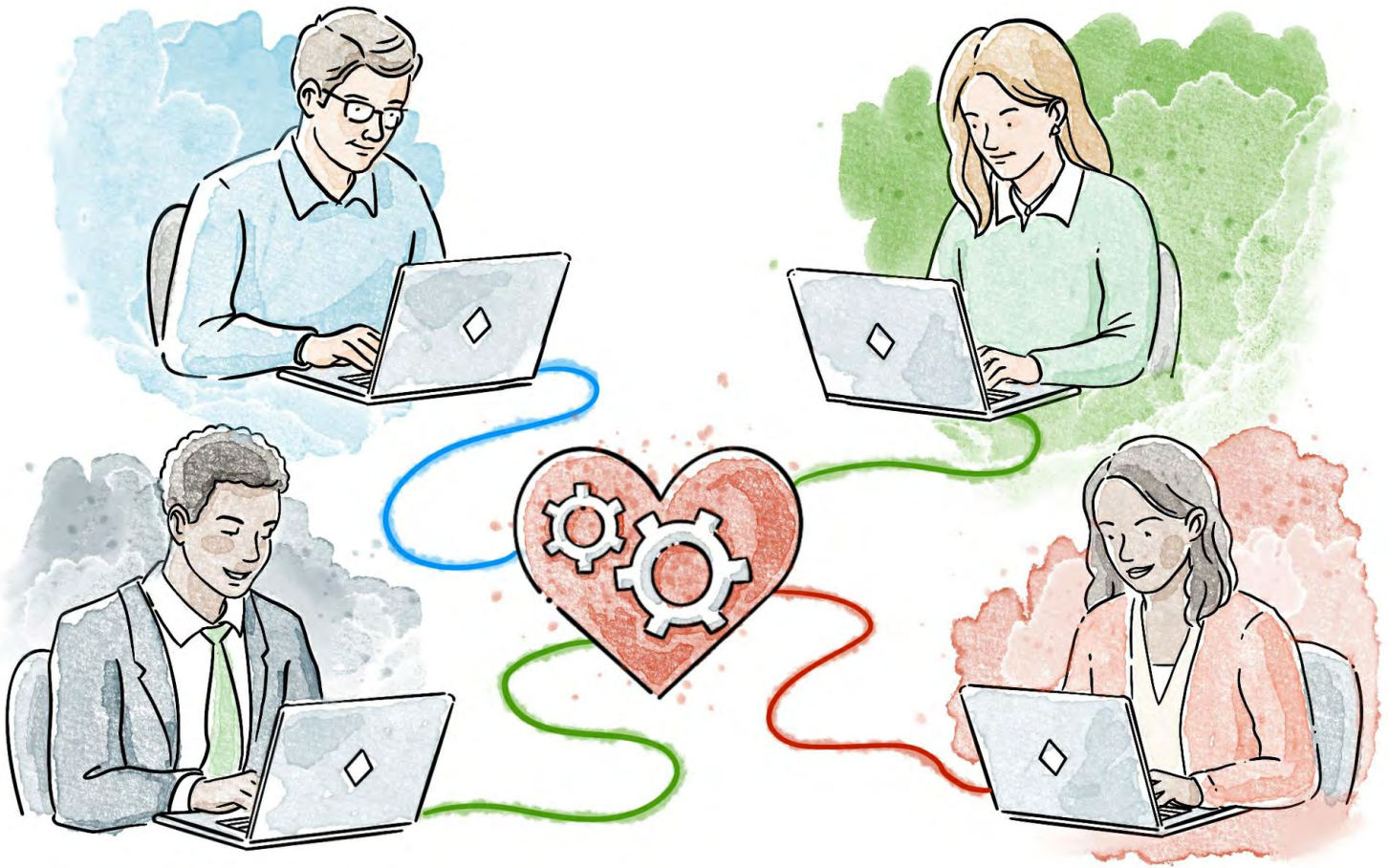
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James Hilston/Post-Gazette

A remote but close workplace

By Joe Lister
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

With many American workers still operating from home, companies are getting creative to maintain positive relationships

First came the Zoom calls. A chorus of “Can everyone hear me?” rang across the home desks of workers as their offices sat empty.

Then came Microsoft Teams chats that replaced watercooler conversations.

And — suddenly — Americans were having far fewer conversations at work about what happened last weekend in college football, entertainment or their personal lives.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans began working from home at un-

precedented rates. The number of employees who didn’t come into the office tripled nationally from 6% in 2019 to 19% nationwide in 2021, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

In some places, that rate was as high as 35%.

With so many of their staffers working from home, American businesses whose na-

ture of employment doesn’t require in-office work had to grapple with whether they should give up on the relationships that come with in-person work.

In many cases, Pittsburgh-area employers, sensing a level of importance in workplace relationships, said they have tried to stay close to their employees.

Mark Markosky, for instance, smiled on a

recent day.

“It’s cookie day,” he said, brandishing a sweet disc that’s missing a bite.

The CEO and co-founder of The Markosky Engineering Group Inc., Mr. Markosky tries to keep the atmosphere around his company easygoing. Mini-holidays, like cookie day — which can also include beer — keep things light.

“We’ve always been known as a company that really doesn’t take themselves real seriously,” Mr. Markosky said. “We have a lot of fun with our work. It doesn’t have to be dry.”

Mr. Markosky said some people might

SEE **UNITE**, PAGE TW-5

UNITE, FROM TW-4

feel the company is wasting time and money eating cookies.

He doesn't care.

His employees' work ethic makes up for the time lost between bites, he said.

The Ligonier-based engineering firm works on a hybrid schedule — employees generally come into the office two or three times a week. Depending on their preferences, some staff members come in more, others less, Mr. Markosky said.

Despite not seeing his employees each day, Mr. Markosky said that didn't hurt his relationships with the staff or his bottom line. And with fewer staffers in the office each day, Mr. Markosky didn't have to find new, larger, office space when he expanded his staff, saving the pain and expenses of packing up.

Working on a hybrid schedule in the post-2020 working world has, in some ways, benefitted his relationship with other employees at branch offices in Ohio and West Virginia.

"Historically, a branch office started to feel like the red-headed stepchild," he said. "But now that so many people who actually are assigned to the headquarters are also hybrid, now they're in a big Teams meeting, and — hey, you're hybrid. I'm hybrid.

So geography doesn't make as big a difference."

In Forest Hills, Service Coordination Unlimited hosts even fewer employees in its office — though that decision wasn't spurred by the pandemic.

The firm that provides social services and service coordination for older adults and those with disabilities realized in 2016 that it wasn't effective for employees to go in from their home to a job site and back to the office.

Now, only a handful of management-position employees work in-person at SCU. Most of the staff of around 120 is out in the field or at home.

However, with in-person communication largely wiped out, the company has made an effort to find alternatives. Employees come into the office at least once a month for in-person team meetings, along with bi-monthly staff meetings and monthly meetings with managers. The design, said Chief Operating Officer Todd Proper, will allow the company to survive yet another pandemic.

SCU also focused on what it refers to as "social capital," a corporate term that simply means finding ways to make personal connections with employees. Outside of regular meetings with direct supervisors, employees can also meet in-person with Mr.

Perkins and Mr. Proper on their bi-annual statewide road trip.

Each week, the organization offers employees the chance for a virtual game night. Quarterly, SCU puts together regional- or full-staff gatherings at picnics, baseball games and more.

The efforts seem to have paid off.

HR Director Erinne Roach said the company's turnover rate last year was around 22% — not bad in an industry that saw annual turnover rates around 40% in the late 2010s, according to the National Institute of Health.

Mr. Markosky said he believes few of his employees ever leave simply because they're happy.

He hopes his efforts at augmenting workplace culture haven't scared any employees away. And he said he offers competitive salary and benefits.

But his employees, he added, including younger staff members, are still interested in creating relationships in and around the workplace.

"I think one of the things that differentiates you with especially younger staff, is those kind of things, because it's people stuff," he said.

"They're more willing to just do whatever it takes to get the work done and do a good job because of those things."

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Walking the line to help others

How a people-first strategy can drive nonprofits to achieve maximum community impact

By Katie Hovan
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

People-first strategies can drive meaningful change.

At least — that's the approach these Pittsburgh-area-based nonprofits, and many others, are incorporating as they navigate the delicate balance between operational sustainability and community impact.

In East Liberty, Youth Enrichment Services seeks to empower disadvantaged youth through safe summer housing and leadership development programs.

In Brentwood, GBU Life, a nonprofit insurance provider, aims to build organizational resilience by investing in the well-being of its members and employees.

Together, these organizations show how centering people can be a moral compass and a model for long-term success.

Founded 134 years ago, GBU has faced industry shifts, society changes and, like every other company, a global pandemic. And like most every company, it quickly adopted remote and hybrid work.

"Whether you're on-site, remote or in a hybrid role, our team members are the heart of our organization," said Kristen Abels, GBU's human resources director. "[We're] committed to fostering that culture where people feel valued, supported and feel included."

Today, 41% of its employees work fully remote, while 59% operate on a hybrid model. Remote employees are located across the country, including Minnesota, Texas, Wisconsin and Florida.

GBU has introduced a new role within its human resources department — an employee engagement specialist meant to enhance connections and preserve its "family-style culture," officials said.

"[It's] a unique HR function," Ms. Abels said. "It was a creative way to speak to our employees and let them know [communication] was a priority to us."

The organization uses Motivosity, a digital platform that enables employees to celebrate accomplishments and participate in contests, such as a pet photo competition or a Mad Hatter Tea Party.

GBU additionally hosts companywide "town hall experiences," where remote and on-site employees come together for important updates and team-building activities. They attend local outings such as live performances or Pirates baseball games and the organization hires food trucks to come on-site.



Sebastian Foltz/Post-Gazette

Mayor Ed Gainey receives a plaque from the Youth Enrichment Services (YES) foundation on July 7. In East Liberty, YES seeks to empower disadvantaged youth through safe summer housing and leadership development programs.

Back in East Liberty, Dennis Floyd Jones, executive director and founder of Youth Enrichment Services (YES), is a former professor of physical activity and sports science at West Virginia University who launched the YES project in Charleston, W.Va.

His goal, he said, was to give kids in underprivileged communities learning opportunities in summer instead of hanging out on the streets.

"If a kid is not doing well in 180 days of school and you don't change something, they're not going to do well if you just extend the days," Mr. Jones said.

YES planted roots in Pittsburgh in 1994. Mr. Jones said over the past 30 years, 6,000 kids have come through the program, and 121 students graduated in the past year.

Some kids come involved through the juvenile justice system, but many other stu-

dents attend the special summer enrichment programs.

Mr. Jones said the "secret sauce" of YES is the relationships the organization forms with volunteers and participants.

It's about "making the kids feel like they're seen, they're heard, they're noticed, they're valued and they're appreciated, and [helping] them to find their voice," he said.

The organization pours over \$200,000 back into its participating students annually via stipends and access to resources such as travel, public transportation and technology, officials said. Its activities ensure children are able to see various facets of the world outside of Pittsburgh, with trips to several cities, most recently Chicago. Its Youth Civic Leadership Academy, where students learn community leadership skills during a 17-week class at the Heinz History

Center, allows participants to bank three college credits at Community College of Allegheny County.

"The role is to help the teens understand the value of each other's lives," Mr. Jones said.

He said YES gives students who might not otherwise get an opportunity a shot at learning civic leadership and development.

One standout is alum Glen Almon, who came into the program with a high SAT score and said he wanted to get into community college.

"We almost passed out," Mr. Jones said. "We said, 'There's no way with that score you're just going to community college.'"

Mr. Jones and other volunteers enrolled Mr. Almon in Allegheny College. He is attending the University of Pittsburgh and studying Africana Studies.

Workers are offering mixed feedback about pay

By Bob Helbig
Energage

Getting paid is getting tough.

Through Q2 of 2025, Energage research showed satisfaction with pay was one of the least favorable aspects of employees' workplace experience. Only 69% of employees answered favorably when asked to respond to the statement "My pay is fair for the work I do." That's compared with an overall favorability score of 79% in response to all 25 workplace statements administered by Energage.

Employees need to feel like they're getting a fair return for the work they're putting in.

But interestingly, the same Energage research shows that employees are more positive about pay in the first six months of 2025 than they were during the same period of 2024. In fact, satisfaction with pay was up the most for any statement.

So what gives?

It suggests there are winners and losers in the battle for compensation. Some employers are working hard to meet the expecta-



David Goldman/Associated Press

Through Q2 of 2025, Energage research showed satisfaction with pay was one of the least favorable aspects of employees' workplace experience.

tions of employees and others are not.

Experts say the current economic environment is making it tough for employers to meet pay challenges and for workers to see wage growth.

"While demand for workers is softer now than it was before the pandemic, the supply of workers also is tighter," said Nela Rich-

ardson, chief economist for ADP. "A smaller share of the population is working or looking for work, and people who are employed are putting in fewer hours. New-hire wages haven't budged in a year.

"In this kind of labor market, the odds of anyone getting a pay raise are dead even."

Pay is one of the key ways employees judge how much their organization values them. And if they feel their pay is low, it's hard to convince them that their organization truly cares — particularly if they hear about the organization's recent profits or costly investments elsewhere.

Employees need to make money to provide for themselves and their families, one of the most basic human needs. And employees who feel valued by their organization are more likely to be engaged and put in more effort to help the organization be successful.

Employees are their own best advocate when it comes to their compensation. They can reference external resources to stay informed on average salary and salary ranges for employees with similar roles, experience, and locations.

Well ahead of the next pay review period, employees can inform their manager that they will be asking for a raise, and begin assembling a case for why they deserve one. If employees receive bonuses based on individual performance, they can also work with their manager to help determine their targets.

Employers should expect employees to discuss compensation with their coworkers, as they're often well within their rights to do so. If there are dramatic differences in pay for similar work, it's better to address them than hope they never leak.

Also, a strong, positive culture and fun perks help differentiate organizations. But they're no substitute for a living wage, especially in areas with high costs for housing, food, healthcare, and more. Make sure your organization isn't ignoring the reality of what pay means for employees, or demonizing them for caring about pay.

Bob Helbig is media partnerships director at Energage, a Philadelphia-based employee survey firm. Energage is the survey partner for Top Workplaces.

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'Dress for your day'

Workplace dress codes shift to guidelines rather than rules

By Lily Stern

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Gone are the days of strict rules about workplace attire.

According to research from human resources firm Brightmine, the percentage of companies enforcing stringent dress code policies declined from 30% in 2018 to just 4.3% in 2024. They've been replaced with guidelines and phrases such as "just be professional," "business casual minimum" or even "zoom pants."

The directives all tie into the increasingly common post-pandemic standard of "dressing for your day" seen at several corporate workplaces in Pittsburgh.

Sydney Manning, vice president of employee experience at Clearview Federal Credit Union in Monroeville, said Clearview adopted this as a trial policy in the summer of 2018.

"We decided to introduce more modern, simplified dress guidelines for our corporate offices that summer — a model of 'dress for your day,'" she said.

Employees were instructed to use good judgment when incorporating casual attire into work outfits, depending on their planned meetings, presentations or consultations. This allowed them to choose what "appropriate" might look like based on their daily tasks.

"Our goal was to simplify our guidelines and demonstrate that we're a flexible organization," Ms. Manning said. "It went so well that in September 2018, we adopted that program for all of our office employees."

Ms. Manning, who has worked at Clearview for 40 years, called it a departure from the company's old standards.

"Previously, we spent a lot of time being fashion police," she laughed. "This shift allowed us to spend our time on things that are much more meaningful."

Alicia Romano, CEO of housing aid nonprofit Community Human Services (CHS) in the Strip District, described her organization's dress code as promoting "authenticity, dignity and mutual respect."

"Our dress code is casual and professional to support the nature of our work," Ms. Romano said. "Employees are encouraged to dress reflecting professionalism

through intention rather than formality. Our roles involve direct engagement with unstably housed individuals, and we want to create an environment that feels approachable, respectful and inclusive."

Above all else, Ms. Romano emphasized that in a dynamic workplace, comfort is key. Even jeans and sneakers can be appropriate depending on the day's to-do list.

For Jessica Minkus, CEO of accounting firm Bookminders, a South Side Flats-based financial services company, enforcing guidelines manifests in multiple ways, including paying attention to the clients on the agenda that day.

"We've always said to match their dress code," she said. "If you're going into a law firm in the city, they'll probably have a different dress code than a nonprofit. As a third party, if we are in their spaces, we match the standard they set for their internal staff."

Days in the office for in-person training sessions or informational meetings are relatively relaxed. However, the dress code still calls for a minimum of business casual for consultations.

"Which just means looking polished and crisp," Ms. Minkus clarified. "It doesn't have to be a suit and tie, or just khakis or a skirt. It's just making sure that you look like a professional accountant."

Five years post-pandemic, working from home has become the new normal in many corporate positions, so dressing down for a home office environment is feasible and typical.

Only about a third of Clearview employees work in person daily, per Ms. Manning. The remaining staff work remotely or in a hybrid capacity.

But corporate dress standards still apply to everyone — meaning suitable backdrops and attire for virtual meetings.

"If I'm on a call with my team, I might be wearing a Clearview T-shirt or something similarly casual," she said. "But if I'm virtually presenting to a department, or if I'm interviewing a candidate or a vendor, I'm going to dress for that kind of day."

At CHS, most employees (those not in programming with 24/7 staffing) choose both their schedules and locations during the workday, as long as they're available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"We honor a hybrid work model that allows staff to have work-life balance," Ms. Romano said. "Administrative staff tend to work in the office more by choice; it helps them separate their work life from their personal life."

Professionalism is key, local companies said, and it takes various forms.

That's not to say there aren't still some



James Hilston/Post-Gazette

Gone are the days of strict rules about workplace attire, but professionalism will always remain a requirement, Pittsburgh-area companies say.

strict do's and don'ts.

"Anything is fine as long as it's not dirty, torn, political, generally offensive, etc.," Ms. Romano said. "We ask that attire is respectful and welcoming to the diverse communities we serve, but we value and support staff bringing their whole selves to work."

To mitigate any confusion about their open-ended dress code, Clearview uses a "Q&A" model. That lets them enforce rules like "no ripped jeans" or "no tanks" without setting explicit lines.

"You're still at work, and you still need to look the part," Ms. Manning said. "We want to create an employee experience where you can be yourself and be engaged in what we're doing without being distracted by rules."

"You don't have to be in a suit at your desk to build credibility with clients or your coworkers, but there's reasonableness to everything," Ms. Minkus added. "We expect everyone to show respect for our work, brand and clients."

Work-life balance doesn't happen by accident

By Bob Helbig
Energage

If you believe the stereotype of remote workers, everyone who works outside the office has it easy. But new data released by Gallup suggests otherwise.

Fully remote workers have the highest levels of engagement but are less likely to be achieving work-life balance, Gallup says. Only 36% of remote workers surveyed say they were thriving in their lives overall, compared with hybrid workers (42%) and on-site remote-capable workers (42%). Only their fully on-site non-remote-capable counterparts (30%) reported a lower rate of personal fulfillment.

So much for the joys of freedom.

"These findings suggest that being a fully remote worker is often more mentally and emotionally taxing than working on-site or working in a hybrid arrangement," Gallup said in a May release.

Furthermore, fully remote employees are also more likely to report experiencing anger, sadness and loneliness than hybrid and

on-site workers, Gallup said. They are more likely to report experiencing a lot of stress the previous day (45%) than on-site workers (39% for remote-capable, 38% for non-remote-capable), while having about the same stress level as hybrid workers (46%). These differences hold true even when accounting for income, Gallup said.

The data suggest organizations that want to support the work-life balance goals of employees can't assume workers, including remote employees, are achieving balance on their own. These best practices can help encourage a workplace environment that supports work-life balance:

Review company policies: Rules around vacation, sick time, scheduling, and other time off can have unnecessary obstacles. Review policies for opportunities to simplify, streamline, and otherwise improve.

Consider what the workplace culture conveys: Messaging the importance of work-life balance is good, but what does your culture reward? If promotions typically go to those burning the midnight oil, your organization might be sending mixed mes-

sages about what is valued.

Assess staffing needs: While keeping a low overhead is important, employee well-being must also be a priority. Review staff levels across the organization to ensure one employee's vacation doesn't burden employees who are covering for them. If that is happening, it can create an atmosphere of resentment.

Manage meeting times: When folks try to schedule a large meeting, especially at the last minute, doing so might create problems. Lunchtime meetings, early meetings, and late meetings also can interfere with employees' non-working hours. Avoid them.

For employers looking to go further, here are some other tips on creating a positive culture for work-life balance:

Consider flexible work arrangements: Flexible schedules, remote work options, and hybrid models can accommodate individual needs and preferences.

Offer additional time off: Give workers additional time to recharge their batteries with more paid holidays, half days before long weekends, summer Fridays, or extra

days off for birthdays or wellness.

Give mental-health and well-being support: Provide resources for counseling or stress reduction, mental health days, and encourage employees to prioritize self-care.

Implement family-friendly policies: Programs that support childcare and adult care needs, and even ones that allow pets at the office, can support employees and reduce stress.

Communicate and set expectations: Provide clear communication regarding work hours, meetings, and availability. Consider implementing automated reminders for managers to respect time off and encourage employees to unplug during vacations.

Here's another suggestion that can help employees who struggle: Place transition work blocks on the calendar before and after paid time off. This allows time to prepare to be off and time to catch up upon return.

Bob Helbig is media partnerships director at Energage, a Philadelphia-based employee survey firm. Energage is the survey partner for Top Workplaces.

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Tech is everywhere. Embrace it.

Carnegie Learning is one of many companies using artificial intelligence to enhance education

By Darin Martin
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

With technology rapidly advancing — perhaps faster than it ever has in human history — businesses across the globe are facing an unprecedented challenge: Staying ahead of the curve.

From artificial intelligence and automation to breakthrough innovations in health care, education and communication, the rapid pace of technological development has created both opportunities and pressure for companies to continuously evolve.

A company spokesman says it's 'been using artificial intelligence for over 25 years — it's in our DNA'

DNA," said company spokesperson Justin Netz Roth. "The company was founded out of Carnegie Mellon University based on pioneering research in AI and cognitive science, and we've been applying that expertise ever since."

AI is helping doctors spend more time with patients, allowing for safer inspections of bridges and other important infrastructure — via robots — and allowing vehicles to transport goods and human passengers around city streets and highways with no one at the wheel.

Gov. Josh Shapiro is embracing AI, as are companies, organizations and nonprofits from every conceivable corner of business, nonprofit and government worlds.

At Carnegie Learning, its deep-rooted expertise with AI has shaped the company's approach to education, Mr. Netz Roth explained.

"Our flagship platform, MATHia, uses AI to deliver real-time, personalized feedback and adapt to each student's learning needs, helping educators better support every learner," Mr. Netz Roth explained.

Carnegie Learning also integrates AI into its internal operations across various departments. For example, their HR team uses AI to generate surveys and communication drafts, and streamline repetitive adminis-

Take Carnegie Learning, an education software company that "provides solutions for K-12 math, literacy and world languages."

"Carnegie Learning has been using artificial intelligence for over 25 years — it's in our



Carnegie Learning

A Carnegie Learning classroom, which is using artificial intelligence to enhance the educational experience, officials said.

trative tasks. This has helped free up valuable time, allowing staff to focus on more meaningful, human-centered work, officials said.

The ever-growing use of AI has made day-to-day tasks far more efficient for Carnegie Learning.

"In education, it allows us to scale truly personalized learning, something that would be impossible without AI," Mr. Netz Roth shared. "Internally, teams are finding value in AI-powered tools that support content development, trend analysis, and productivity."

Despite the advantages, leveraging AI effectively comes with its own set of challenges, he said.

"It's not plug-and-play," he cautioned. "AI requires thoughtful integration, regular

oversight, and a clear understanding of where it adds value and where human insight must lead. We've also learned that training and change management are key to successful adoption."

This approach has been key in Carnegie Learning's journey to make AI a truly valuable tool, he said.

Rather than rushing to adopt new technologies or relying on AI without a clear strategy, the company has taken the time to understand its potential and limitations, he said. By carefully considering each implementation, they've ensured that their AI solutions are not just innovative but also practical, effective, and ethically-sound.

Carnegie Learning strives to build AI systems that are aligned with their core mission of improving education, while also en-

suring they are adaptable to the changing needs of students, educators and schools, he said.

"We approach AI with intention and care, especially because we serve students, educators, and schools. We prioritize data privacy, bias mitigation, and ethical design in all our AI applications. We ensure our tools are transparent, accountable, and aligned with our commitment to equity and high-quality instruction," Mr. Netz Roth said.

Internally, security, confidentiality, and compliance are top priorities when implementing any AI-powered solution, he added.

"And we're always mindful that AI should support human judgment, not replace it," Mr. Netz Roth emphasized.

Is it a job or a career? These 6 steps can help

By Gary Markle
Catalytic Coaching

"How many of you have a career?"

I love asking this question in workshops with employees. While a few raise their hands immediately, the majority often look at each other as if unsure. Even when working is done virtually, you can feel that cautious pause. But here's the truth: just by choosing to work, you've set yourself on a career path.

A career isn't just a job; it's a journey with purpose, meaning, and direction. It's a job with time-based context, reflecting both history and growth. A fulfilling career doesn't only define what you do for a living — it defines who you are.

The comedian Chris Rock once said, "With a career, there is never enough time. With a job, there is always too much time." It's a sentiment that resonates, especially for those who feel stuck in what they consider "just a job." For employers and managers, this distinction holds important insights.

Most organizations rely on a mix of routine, even menial, work — tasks that are re-

petitive, physical, and often demanding. But does that mean it can't be meaningful? I believe we can elevate almost any work conversation from job to career by understanding what drives each individual and connecting with their purpose.

Take Hector, our neighborhood window washer. A man in his 60s, he's worked six to seven days a week for decades, handling ladders and scrubbing windows, rain or shine. But what stands out about Hector is his smile and the genuine joy he finds in his work. He knows his clients by name and treats every window he cleans with the same pride. For him, it's not just about washing windows — it's about giving families a fresh perspective. Hector's job is cleaning; his career is building community.

My father spent over 30 years in the automotive industry, initially loving his work as a business manager for General Motors. But after leadership changes, those final years felt more like an endurance test toward retirement. He reached his pension goal, but his true purpose emerged only after retiring: to read every book that mattered to him—a

"career" in lifelong learning that he pursued passionately to the end of his days.

I learned from my father's experience. Watching him grind through those last years, I made a vow to never stay in a position that drained my soul. When my job at Exxon started feeling less like a career and more like a job, I moved on. That decision set me on a path to a role that's given me almost limitless room to grow.

How can you keep your career on track, moving toward your goals? Here are some steps to consider:

Do a Happiness Check: Are you genuinely happy and growing? Or are you just covering the bills? If it feels like a dead end, it's time for a change.

Find a Career Coach: If you have access to Catalytic Coaching, you're ahead of the game. Your direct manager acts as a coach, guiding you through development. If you don't, consider hiring an executive coach to help chart your path forward.

Begin with the End in Mind: Look deeply and ask yourself fundamental questions like, "What do I really want to

achieve?" Imagine the path to get there, and start taking steps.

Find Your Special Purpose: Aim for work that aligns with your talents and what you enjoy. Tools like Gallup's CliftonStrengths and Marcus Buckingham's StandOut Assessment can help you identify what drives you.

Strategize for Progress: If your current job doesn't support your career aspirations, plan a path forward. Even small steps in the right direction — like moving to a different department — can set you on track.

Execute the Plan: Every job that doesn't contribute to your goals is just procrastination. So, take action and make it count.

If you're ever in an audience where I ask, "How many of you have a career?" I hope you'll raise your hand proudly and confidently. Let's all work toward careers, not just jobs, and build futures that make us proud.

Gary Markle is chief catalyst at Catalytic Coaching and senior business partner with Energage. Energage is the survey partner for Top Workplaces.



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Good leaders understand the importance of putting workers in a position to succeed. "My job description is to put people in a position to be successful ... whatever that means, at any given time," one local boss says.

Good leaders help people succeed

By Chayil Dozier
Pittsburgh Post Gazette

In 2022, Matthew McClellan, a certified public accountant at Herbain + Co., pitched an idea to his bosses to start offering new services.

He wanted to be more involved with the companies he worked with. So he pitched an idea to start offering fractional chief financial officers.

"I literally had done accounting and au-

'It's about knowing people and meeting them where they are and finding the best way forward.'

ditig work for almost 20 years, and I just wanted something different," said Mr. McClellan. "I wanted to be more involved on the client side, help do their books, get all that stuff ready, meet with the owners — help that business grow."

Mr. McClellan said he saw a need.

His bosses were willing to put him in the position to fill it — because good leaders actively seek to put their people in a position to succeed.

"We have a lot of family-owned businesses where maybe they can't hire the right personnel to help them do things," he said.

"[If] we can go and help our clients and advise them ... where they don't need somebody full time, they can pay us ... a fractional amount — you know, weekly, monthly, whatever."

The company provides services from accounting and advisory, to HR consulting, wealth management and risk management services.

Offering fractional CFO work would only

SEE **GOOD**, PAGE TW-13

GOOD, FROM TW-12

make them more useful to their clients, Mr. McClellan said.

"If we can get our foot in the door and become part of that client and that business, it just opens up so many other service departments in our firm," he said.

"Some of my clients I talk to daily. It's like I'm part of their business and part of their team," he said.

What started as two people in Western Pennsylvania has grown into a team that is now more than 20 people spread across the state.

"We never had that department, and just starting it from the ground up out in Western Pennsylvania was a significant accomplishment for me," he said.

That approach is seen elsewhere.

Bob Zupanek, president of PT Services Group, said he leads his team of 52 with a focus on the group, not himself.

"My job description is to put people in a position to be successful ... whatever that means, at any given time," Mr. Zupanek said. "I like to try to clear the path for people."

Located in the heart of Downtown, PT Services Group connects financial insurance advisors with companies and business owners. It's been ranked as a Top



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Bob Zupanek of PT Services Group: "You've got to meet people where they are — and where they are at the given time changes."

Workplace for 14 years.

"I think in a lot of organizations, people get locked into certain titles," he said. "But business problems don't always fit perfectly."

Mr. Zupanek said that when three people have three separate ideas or potential solutions, he tries to get them in a room so they can come up with the fourth idea.

"It's the combined idea that comes out, that is the one I think is

successful," he said.

"I think anytime with leadership ... It's about knowing people and meeting them where they are and finding the best way forward," Mr. Zupanek said.

"You've got to meet people where they are — and where they are at the given time changes."



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Small companies 149 or fewer employees in the region

RANK	COMPANY	YEAR FOUNDED	SECTOR	HEADQUARTERS	LOCATIONS IN REGION	EMPLOYEES IN REGION
1	AEC Group LLC	2019	Value added reseller	Oakdale	1	72
2	Bookminders	1991	Certified public accountants and consultants	South Side Flats	1	78
3	Portage Learning	1972	Education	Beaver Falls	1	145
4	Crawford Consulting Services, Inc.	1993	Construction	East Pittsburgh	1	96
5	Sherrard, German & Kelly, PC	1990	Law	Downtown	1	55
6	Mid-Atlantic Surgical Systems	2007	Medical devices and products	Carnegie	2	112
7	Edgar Snyder & Associates	1982	Law	Downtown	1	129
8	Grossman Yanak & Ford LLP	1990	Certified public accountants and consultants	Downtown	1	99
9	Bridges Hospice	2011	Hospice	Monroeville	1	128
10	Key Environmental, Inc.	1995	Engineering	Carnegie	1	50
11	Metz Lewis Brodman Must O'Keefe LLC	1998	Law	Downtown	1	73
12	Waldron Private Wealth	1995	Financial advisers	Bridgeville	1	66
13	Community Human Services	1970	Human and social services	Strip District	1	89
14	Mohawk Construction	1980	Roofing and siding	Canonsburg	1	55
15	Service Coordination Unlimited, Inc.	2012	Human and social services	Forest Hills	3	95
16	The Markosky Engineering Group, Inc.	1999	Engineering	Ligonier	1	90
17	PennEnergy Resources	2011	Utilities	Cranberry	1	126
18	NAMS Transportation	1963	Services - Other	Cheswick	1	50
19	Target Freight Management	2009	Logistics	South Park	1	50
20	Goldfish Swim School - Pittsburgh	2014	Education	Pine	4	127
21	COE Distributing	2010	Wholesale distribution	Smock	1	121
22	Herbein + Co., Inc.	1972	Certified public accountants and consultants	Reading	3	50
23	Turner Construction Co.	1902	Building construction	New York City	1	67
24	Dollar Energy Fund, Inc.	1983	Human and social services	Downtown	1	119
25	The PT Services Group	1992	Financial services and insurance	Downtown	1	52
26	enkompas Technology Solutions	1997	Managed services and outsourcing	Sewickley	1	95
27	Liberty Insurance Agency	1950	Insurance consultants and brokers	Scott	1	60
28	Castle Biosciences	2008	Health care	Friendswood, Texas	1	76
29	GBU Life	1892	Life Insurance, annuities and retirement investments	Brentwood	1	70
30	CTR Payroll HR	1964	Payroll	Cranberry	1	50
31	Premier Automation	2002	Electronics manufacturing services	Monroeville	1	130
32	Gecko Robotics	2013	Industrial services	Allegheny Center	1	130
33	Justifacts	1982	Services - Other	Murrysville	2	88
34	Total Quality Logistics - TQL	1997	Logistics	Cincinnati	1	79
35	Franjo Construction Corp.	1997	Building construction	Homestead	1	130
36	Beemac Trucking & Logistics	1984	Logistics	Harmony	2	73
37	Innovative Systems, Inc.	1968	Enterprise software	Green Tree	1	82
38	Ally	1919	Bank	Detroit	0	102
39	Carnegie Learning, Inc.	1997	Primary/secondary Schools	Downtown	1	124
40	New Home Star	2008	Agents/brokers	Elmhurst, Ill.	1	50
41	Walnut Capital Management, Inc.	1998	Property management	Shadyside	8	125
42	The Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School	2004	Education	West Chester	1	100
43	Schaedler Yesco Distribution, Inc.	1924	Wholesale distribution	Harrisburg	1	52
44	Pittsburgh Airport Marriott	1987	Hotels	Coraopolis	1	108
45	McKinney Properties	1946	Property management	Wilkinsburg	1	94
46	Veterans Leadership Program	1982	Human and social services	Strip District	1	65
47	Ford Office Technologies	1991	Managed services and outsourcing	Connellsville	2	117
48	City Charter High School	2002	Primary/secondary Schools	Downtown	1	99
49	Snively Forest Products	1912	Wholesale distribution	West Mifflin	1	51
50	Ideal Integrations	2003	Information technology	West Mifflin	1	143
51	Century Support Services	2003	Collections and debt settlement	North Huntingdon	1	100

Source: Energage

Post-Gazette

Large companies

400 or more employees in the region

RANK	COMPANY	YEAR FOUNDED	SECTOR	HEADQUARTERS	LOCATIONS IN REGION	EMPLOYEES IN REGION
1	PANTHERx Rare Pharmacy	2011	Pharmacy	Irwin	2	694
2	EQT Corp.	1888	Energy industry services	Downtown	4	1,000
3	Bechtel Plant Machinery, Inc. (BPMI)	1956	Government - Other	Monroeville	1	1,062
4	CGI	1976	Consulting	Fairfax, Va.	1	650
5	Form Energy	2017	Energy storage	Weirton, W.Va.	1	432
6	First Commonwealth Bank	1982	Bank	Indiana	62	985
7	AHN Healthcare@Home - Greater Pittsburgh	2000	Home health care services	Troy, Mich.	2	733
8	Jim Shorkey Family Auto Group	1974	Auto dealerships	Irwin	5	1,024
9	MSA - The Safety Co.	1914	Manufacturer of safety products	Cranberry	5	1,062
10	First National Bank	1864	Bank	North Shore	1	1,260
11	Pitt Ohio	1979	Distribution, logistics, and freight	Strip District	1	609
12	Charter Foods	1998	Restaurants	Morristown, Tenn.	1	989
13	PENN Entertainment	1972	Casino	Wyomissing	1	611
14	#1 Cochran	1965	Auto dealerships	Monroeville	1	1,859

Midsize companies

150-399 employees in the region

RANK	COMPANY	YEAR FOUNDED	SECTOR	HEADQUARTERS	LOCATIONS IN REGION	EMPLOYEES IN REGION
1	Tudi Mechanical Systems	1987	Other - energy industry services	McKees Rocks	1	168
2	Kimpton Hotel Monaco Pittsburgh	2015	Hotels	Downtown	1	150
3	Schell Games	2002	Mass market applications / software	Station Square	1	170
4	Alliance for Nonprofit Resources	2008	Human and social services	Butler	3	150
5	New York Life Insurance Co.	1845	Life Insurance, annuities and retirement investments	New York City	1	187
6	Mascaro Construction Co., LP	1988	Building construction	Chateau	1	211
7	Independence Excavating	1956	Heavy construction and civil engineering	Brecksville, Ohio	1	200
8	RareMed Solutions	2018	Pharmacy	Findlay	1	226
9	Seegrid Corp.	2003	Industrial services	Findlay	3	240
10	Center for Community Resources, Inc.	2002	Human and social services	Butler	1	352
11	Clearview Federal Credit Union	1953	Credit union	Moon	22	398
12	Henderson Brothers	1893	Insurance consultants and brokers	Downtown	1	166
13	Yough School District	1936	Primary/secondary schools	Herminie	1	225
14	Expedient	2001	Managed services and outsourcing	North Shore	4	155
15	Cleaveland Price, Inc.	1975	Electrical equipment, appliances and components	Trafford	1	373
16	Koppers, Inc.	1988	Wood products	Downtown	2	155
17	R&R Express	1983	Distribution, logistics and freight	Findlay	1	250
18	Guttman Energy, Inc.	1931	Wholesale distribution	Belle Vernon	2	160
19	Northwestern Mutual	1857	Life insurance, annuities and retirement investments	Milwaukee	4	215
20	Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers	1996	Restaurants	Baton Rouge, La.	4	284
21	Orbital Engineering, Inc.	1969	Engineering	Uptown	1	165
22	ECI	1957	Engineering	Lawrence	5	315
23	Don's Appliances	1971	Furniture, home furnishings and accessories	Robinson	12	183
24	Delaney Chevrolet, Inc.	1971	Auto dealerships	Indiana	7	300

Source: Energage

Post-Gazette

Special awards

The following special award recipients were chosen based on standout scores for employee responses to specific survey statements. Employees rate these statements on a seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Awards by company size			
AWARD	CRITERIA	COMPANY SIZE	RECIPIENT
Leadership	I have confidence in the leadership team of this company	Large	Bansi Nagji, PANTHERx Rare Pharmacy
Leadership	I have confidence in the leadership team of this company	Midsized	Rob Mallinger, Kimpton Hotel Monaco Pittsburgh
Leadership	I have confidence in the leadership team of this company	Small	Danielle Mizia, AEC Group LLC
Overall winners			
Direction	I believe this company is going in the right direction	Large	EQT Corporation
New Ideas	New ideas are encouraged at this company	Large	Form Energy
Managers	My manager helps me learn and grow/My manager cares about my concerns	Midsized	Schell Games
Doers	At this company, we do things efficiently and well	Small	Mid-Atlantic Surgical Systems
Meaningfulness	My job makes me feel like I am part of something meaningful	Large	Bechtel Plant Machinery, Inc. (BPMI)
Values	This company operates by strong values	Large	CGI
Clued in Senior Management	Senior managers understand what is really happening at this company	Midsized	Tudi Mechanical Systems
Communication	I feel well-informed about important decisions at this company	Small	Bookminders
Appreciation	I feel genuinely appreciated at this company	Small	Portage Learning
Work/Life Flexibility	I have the flexibility I need to balance my work and personal life	Midsized	Alliance for Nonprofit Resources
Training	I get the formal training I want for my career	Midsized	Independence Excavating
Benefits	My benefits package is good compared to others in this industry	Small	Metz Lewis Brodman Must O'Keefe LLC
Well-being	This company does a great job of prioritizing employee well-being	Small	Sherrard, German & Kelly, P.C.

Source: Energage

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Don't go viral, leaders

The spotlight is always on leadership — even at a Coldplay concert

By Bob Helbig
Energage

The viral story of the summer — when a kiss cam caught two executive leaders in an extramarital embrace at a Coldplay concert — underscores the critical importance leadership plays in the workplace.

Workers want to know they can trust their leaders. They look to leaders for demonstration of good character, values and honesty, said Lisa Burke, a consultant at Energage who works with executive leaders on strategy and employee engagement.

"What employees look for is leaders walking the talk of the values of the organization, because the values really set the standard for what the culture looks like and feels like," Ms. Burke said. "That's how you know you're in a good culture."

Employees will look for work elsewhere if they don't feel a sense of trust and respect, she said.

Employers need to ensure workers are focused on a common mission and shared values. "They also feel when it's authentic," Ms. Burke said.

That's not to say leaders don't make mistakes. When they do, they need to own them, she said.

"You should be as transparent as possible," Ms. Burke said. "It's acknowledging what's occurring in the moment and then becoming forward focused, future focused."

When dealing with a controversy, Ms. Burke suggests leaders become more visible and listen more. Leaders need to understand employees' concerns about the future of the organization, she said.

"It's a great opportunity for continuing to build that trust and respect and relationship," Ms. Burke said.

The relationship between leadership and organizational culture impacts just about everything, she said. Here are key ways leaders support a people-first culture and healthy employee experience.

Expectations: Leaders need to communicate roles and responsibilities clearly.

Core values: Strong values keep an organization moving forward, while weak ones threaten its success. The best leaders establish meaningful values that resonate at all levels of the organization.

Employee feedback: Insights from employees help leaders observe employee engagement levels, gain a fresh perspective on



Getty Images

The CEO of Astronomer, Andy Byron, suddenly resigned after a viral video of him embracing Kristin Cabot, the company's chief people officer, at a Coldplay concert was released.

what is and isn't working, and find viable solutions to challenges.

Communication and support: Communicating important decisions effectively throughout the organization lays the groundwork for improvement.

Opportunities to learn and grow: Leaders who believe in the power of people-first cultures understand employees' abilities and interests, and they align those with the organization's needs.

Appreciation: Leaders who celebrate personal and organizational achievements reinforce a culture of employee recognition. Who and what leaders celebrate tells employees a lot about the organization's culture.

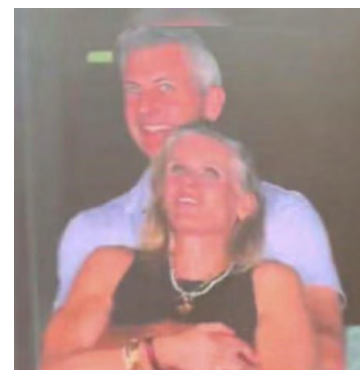
Accountability: Companies operate efficiently and well when leaders successfully

drive a culture of accountability.

Action: Good leaders give thanks for honest feedback and set expectations for the next steps; uncover focus areas that can impact organizational culture; set goals and spur improvement; share and communicate results; and measure and evaluate progress.

Inclusiveness: Leaders must be genuinely open and respectful to individual differences. An inclusive workplace means people have equal opportunities to contribute ideas and feel a sense of belonging. This increases commitment to the organization and its goals.

Bob Helbig is media partnerships director at Energage, a Philadelphia-based employee survey firm. Energage is the survey partner for Top Workplaces



TikTok

An open-minded approach

How three educational institutions strive to teach and reach their students

By Mia Rose Kohn
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Educators can literally change the world. They can propel wide-eyed students eager to learn and shape them into the best versions of themselves. But teaching also can be taxing and exhausting.

Nationwide, 82% of public school teachers say education has declined over the past five years and only one-third are satisfied with their jobs, a 2024 Pew Research Center survey found.

College faculty aren't faring much better. The National Education Association reported in 2023 that nearly 40% of professors feel emotionally exhausted, with similar rates of burnout.

In Western Pennsylvania, however, three educational institutions landed in the Top Workplaces of 2025: Portage Learning, Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School and the Yough School District.

The schools' leaders say they share three common values: an open-minded approach to technology, trust in their employees and strong workplace relationships.

Keeping pace with change

Beaver Falls-based Portage Learning has facilitated remote education since far before Zoom was even a thing.

Ken Hartman, a chemistry professor at Geneva College, began tutoring several students in the college-level chemistry courses they needed to enter nursing school in 1972. He sent exams tucked into orange envelopes and lectures recorded on VHS through snail mail.

Today, equipped with a six-person team of filmmakers and a staff of 191, Portage Learning offers 32 college courses to its students of all ages in a range of subjects taught by college faculty from around the country, President and CEO Steve Michalik said.

Portage was prepared to teach virtually when the COVID-19 pandemic forced universities worldwide to transition to online, said Mr. Michalik. Between March 2020 and April 2021, enrollment increased by 75% and has continued to grow.

Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School (PALCS) also was ahead of the curve when COVID hit. Founded in 2004, PALCS serves over 3,000 students K-12 with virtual public education.



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The office building of Portage Learning in Beaver Falls. Portage Learning is an online education institution that offers 32 college courses.

"During the pandemic," said CEO Karla Johnston, "we were already skilled in how to teach children online and to make it safe, to make it encouraging for them, and also to give them the skills that they needed during the pandemic."

Enrollment grew. Teachers and students continued their education with some amount of normalcy, said Ms. Johnston.

PALCS' teachers were already well-versed in Zoom and Canvas — a learning management platform used by many universities — as well as navigating the laundry list of technological distractions for students learning virtually, said Ms. Johnston. Now, PALCS is embracing a new technology entering classrooms: AI.

"I know that many school districts felt like they wanted to ban the use of AI," said Ms. Johnston. "I wanted our students to learn about what AI was and how to use it in an appropriate way. Like we're not just going to copy and paste what ChatGPT says, but we're going to use it to elevate our original conversations and thoughts."

Mr. Michalik noted the importance of embracing technology with an open mind, but also with caution — particularly because Portage serves students of all ages and diverse educational backgrounds.

"You need to be thinking ahead, but not implementing ahead, so that you're not cre-

ating something so novel that it is inaccessible to people," he said.

Trust between educators and administrators

Ms. Johnston attributes PALCS' positive culture to the mutual trust teachers and administrators feel towards one another.

"I think what makes us an amazing workplace is that teachers here are treated like professionals," she said. "You're talking about highly trained, highly skilled educators: these people have bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and so they are treated as such. They are the experts."

By contrast, only 18% of public school teachers nationwide think the American public trusts them to do their jobs well, the 2024 Pew Research study found.

Superintendent Anthony DeMaro said Yough School District in Westmoreland County also offers an online option, which roughly 5% of students utilize. The district runs five brick-and-mortar elementary, middle and high schools for its 1,800 students.

District officials said they prioritize relationships built in the classroom. The district does provide every student with a personal device and offers tech training to teachers on professional development days, but its mission is to make classrooms "the place to

be," Mr. DeMaro said.

"With the competition out there for kids wanting to do an online option, what can we offer? Building relationships, building trust with our students," he said.

Each year, Mr. DeMaro chooses a central theme for his staff. Last year it was "you generate hope" and the year before, "remember your why." Part of these missions, he said, is prioritizing the emotional well-being of students, and by extension, teachers.

"We're not dealing with freight, we're dealing with people," Mr. DeMaro said. "How to break down an algebraic equation or how to do a text dependent analysis — that will come. Academic success will come, but you have to focus on making sure that the students feel safe, welcomed and valued."

Yough's graduation rate is 98%. All nine of the district's board members are alumni, and teacher turnover is low, with most spending their entire careers in Yough, said Mr. DeMaro.

Like Portage Learning, Yough School District incorporates acts of service into its workplace culture. Through the Helping Hands Foundation, staff, parents and students cook meals several times a year for food-insecure community members, and the district helps cover the cost of clothing and shoes for students who can't afford them.

How do you handle feedback in the workplace?

By Bob Helbig
Energage

Feedback can be a painful truth in the workplace. Whether it's from a customer or a co-worker, feedback can often feel like an irritant.

But that gut-punch feedback is really a gift, says Nebraska-based workplace consultant Jason Lauritsen, who authors a weekly check-in e-newsletter on workplace issues.

"Years ago, during a talent review process, my boss handed me what I now call my YOU SUCK List," Mr. Lauritsen recently wrote. "It was a roundup of critical feedback from her and a few senior leaders about what I'd need to change to be considered for a promotion."

"It felt brutal. Like a list of all the ways I was failing — compiled by the very people who had a say in my future."

"But that list changed my career. What felt like criticism was actually a roadmap. These were real barriers — just ones I couldn't see on my own. Once I could see them, I could address them."

Mr. Lauritsen also points out our first re-



Steven Senne/Associated Press

Feedback from your employees or employer can feel like criticism, but for those who embrace it, it can also provide a roadmap to improved performance, experts say.

action to critical feedback is usually wrong.

"Our brains are wired to protect us, so when we feel attacked (even by feedback), we defend," he said. "We deflect. We shut down."

"When I got that list, I didn't say thank you. I got angry and defiant. It took me weeks to even look at the feedback again,

and even longer to put it to use."

Saying "thank you for sharing that" creates space between your reaction and your response. "It buys you time to get curious instead of combative," he says.

Mr. Lauritsen offers three choices you can make when you get unexpected or uncomfortable feedback:

1. Ignore it. "You can hear feedback, thank the person, and then decide not to act on it. But — there's a catch. If the feedback is pointing out something that's getting in your way, ignoring it won't help you move forward."

2. Investigate it. "Feedback from others is always filtered through their lens. Research shows that over 50% of our evaluations of others reflect more about the evaluator than the evaluated. So take it seriously — but not personally."

3. Embrace it. "Remember when we were in school and the teacher corrected our work? That feedback wasn't personal — it was meant to help us learn."

Regular, helpful feedback is essential for employee growth, performance, and engagement. When employees consistently

receive clear, constructive input, they gain a better understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement, empowering them to develop their skills and contribute more effectively.

Ongoing feedback also fosters open communication and shows that managers are invested in their team's success.

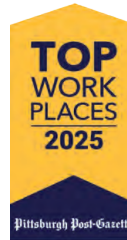
Energage urges employers to use employee survey results, comments, and other feedback to identify gaps in learning opportunities and to improve existing programs.

Feedback helps employees improve and feel valued for the skills they've developed. Ensure managers provide regular feedback about employees' work, including strengths and areas for growth, especially those relevant to current or desired roles.

Over time, this kind of supportive feedback culture builds confidence, accountability, and continuous improvement across the organization.

Bob Helbig is media partnerships director at Energage, a Philadelphia-based employee survey firm. Energage is the survey partner for Top Workplaces.

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James Hilston/Post-Gazette

Where workers feel cared for

How companies are incentivizing their team

By Thai Theodoro
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For most people, a four-day week sounds like a fantasy — a distant land where Mondays aren't feared and your boss can't reach you.

At City Charter High School, it's not a dream — it's company policy.

Dara Allen, CEO and principal, said her leadership style wasn't shaped by bad bosses of the past but by a commitment to collaboration and care.

"They are helping to drive the results,"

she said. "Not just because someone from the top says, 'You need to do this,' [but because] people are intrinsically motivated and work very hard."

Planning at the school begins with the recognition that teachers and non-instructional staff devote significant time to the day-to-day operations that keep the school running.

"We work on prioritizing a culture where students feel seen, they feel known, and they feel cared for," Ms. Allen said.

SEE **BAD**, PAGE TW-21



Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers

Raising Cane's employees at the chain's Pleasant Hills location. "At Cane's we put our crew members and our restaurants first and at the center always," said Warren Sewell, regional vice president for Raising Cane's.

BAD, FROM TW-20

Teachers at City Charter follow their students through all four years of high school, which Ms. Allen believes is key to creating a tight-knit and motivated community.

"That structure helps to develop relationships that enable students to feel cared for and feel special," Ms. Allen said. "It also helps to boost morale among the team, so that they feel like they're united."

Rather than feeling isolated or siloed, staff are encouraged to collaborate, she added.

"People feel fulfilled, and students feel known and cared for and are able to reach their potential," she said.

Part of that strategy? Teachers work just one Monday a month — a policy Ms. Allen said is meant to reduce burnout.

"That extra day off during the week has made a huge difference," Ms. Allen said. "Folks have been more vocal about wanting a work-life balance since the onset of the pandemic. So our four-day schedule is another way that we feel that we have supported folks."

Even the occasional Monday at work comes with perks. The school's chef prepares meals so good, staff line up with to-go containers, Ms. Allen said.



Raising Cane's employee poses with the University of Pittsburgh's panther mascot at the chain's Oakland location.

Raising the bar(becue)

Warren Sewell, regional vice president at Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers restaurants, has nearly two decades in the industry and says both positive and negative experiences have shaped the way he leads.

"I have worked in the past with leaders that were more a 'tell you what to do and get

done,' versus 'ask questions, explain the why and show you how,'" Mr. Sewell said. "At Cane's, we champion that type of leadership."

"We're going to get hip to hip and show you the way so you can learn," he added.

One initiative at Raising Cane's is that, regardless of your role, every employee learns how to be both a fry cook and a cashier.

Fun, Mr. Sewell said — sporting his Raising Cane's cap and jersey — is at the heart of company culture.

"At Cane's we put our crew members and our restaurants first and at the center always, so they are in the best position to take care of our customers," he said.

With a menu that hasn't changed in almost 29 years, expectations for consistency are high.

That's why recognizing good work is essential, Mr. Sewell added.

"We're servant leaders, meaning there's nothing we wouldn't do for the folks inside our four walls. Restaurants are always at the center, and there's no job too small or too big for us to do together," Mr. Sewell said.

Allan Poag, restaurant zone manager at the Fifth Avenue location in Oakland has been with Cane's for a year and a half.

"Being a leader here has been fun, I enjoy the crew," he said. "We all always try to be happy and have a smile on our faces."

That energy extends beyond the kitchen. Mr. Poag said the team holds parties and cook-outs for holidays including Easter, Christmas and Memorial Day — all on the clock.

"Everybody comes in, they wanna work, they like to laugh and play around, we don't want to make work dreadful," Mr. Poag said. "Cane's is not like any other fast-food restaurant."

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Gecko Robotics

Gecko Robotics co-founders Jake Loosararian, left, and Troy Demme. The company is regarded as a unicorn business, defined as a privately owned startup company that crosses the threshold of \$1 billion dollars in value.

Sink or Swim

Facing challenges, and even failure, can propel a company to new heights

By Jeff Middleton
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Every business has its ups and downs through the course of its natural life. Whether the beginning, middle or end of the story is rocky, there is bound to be failure at some point — and that forces owners to make the decision to sink or swim.

Facing down failures can have the effect of helping those at the helm of the ship lead their crew toward a better place. That's been

the case for two companies in the Pittsburgh area — North Shore-based Gecko Robotics and Jim Shorkey Auto Group headquartered in Irwin.

Gecko Robotics is software company that specializes in tech, primarily wall-climbing robots, drones, robot dogs and fixed-sensors that collect data on infrastructure. Its products can be found in U.S. Navy warships and submarines, or in the commercial space and energy, mining and manufacturing industries.

SEE **FAILURE**, PAGE TW-23



Jim Shorkey, founder of Jim Shorkey Auto Group, stands in a sea of Suzukis at a North Huntingdon dealership in this 2013 photo. Since surviving the strains of the pandemic, the auto group has opened multiple new stores, including five new locations in Georgia in 2022.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

FAILURE, FROM TW-22

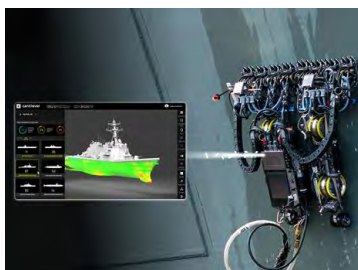
Co-owner Jake Loosararian began building his business after graduating from Grove City College in 2012 with a degree in electrical engineering.

He had heard stories about inefficiencies at a local power plant and took to building his first robot from scratch in his dorm room. The robot, which was being made for a senior project in an electrical engineering class at the time, failed frequently, but after days and days of continuous work around the power plant that Mr. Loosararian had gone to see, the robot found solutions to structural issues that saved the operator millions of dollars.

After beginning this journey in college and attempting to do everything by himself, the initial moments of failure both on the business side and robotics side taught Mr. Loosararian valuable lessons that he's carried through growing his business into what it is today.

"I bootstrapped [Gecko Robotics] originally," Mr. Loosararian said. "I didn't really understand that whole tech scene. It was very foreign. I poured my life savings into it. And you get a lot of scars that way. I was completely broke and was homeless for a year and a half."

Mr. Loosararian was down to his final \$100 at one point as he attempted to build



Gecko Robotics

One of Gecko Robotics' robots attached to a ship hull to measure its integrity. Data collected also helps generate a 3D model of the infrastructure on the company's trademarked software, Cantilever.

his startup business. At the point of his homelessness, he was sleeping on the floor of his friend's apartment and sometimes even in the factories where he was conducting his work.

Fast forward to this year, when Gecko Robotics officially became a unicorn business — defined as a privately owned startup company that crosses the threshold of \$1 billion dollars in value.

Moving beyond just focusing on robotics, Gecko created its own AI-powered software,

Cantilever, that is able to analyze data to accurately identify current and future structural problems that could cost companies thousands or even millions of dollars in damages.

Building strength through challenges

For the Jim Shorkey Auto Group, a company that was started by Jim Shorkey in 1974 and is now run by CEO James Shorkey, failure wasn't an imminent issue when the dealership first got off the starting block.

But there would be bumps in the road ahead that management and the sales teams had to work around.

The family auto group has been expanding since its founding. The group has branched out into different markets, helping deliver all sorts of vehicle brands such as Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram, Fiat, Kia, Mitsubishi, Ford, Cadillac, Mazda and Chevrolet.

Human Resources Director Beth Robosky has been with the company for 17 years and seen its ups and downs since she joined in March 2008.

COVID-19 forced a temporary change in the approach to selling automobiles, she said.

"The limited inventory and all of the different things around the world that would affect our daily transportation and getting

the vehicles and all of these things, that was probably one of the biggest things we went through as a company," Ms. Robosky said.

"We just were super well-prepared as soon as we started realizing this could potentially be a problem. We started building plans and avenues to not only get our team members through it but to get our customers the vehicles they were still looking for."

Since surviving the strains of the pandemic, the auto group has opened multiple new stores, including Chevrolet dealers, Mitsubishi dealers, a new Toyota dealer in Pittsburgh and five new locations in Georgia in 2022. The company's most recent expansion was in Greensburg with a new Toyota dealership this year.

Challenges — at least the ones that you work through — help build strength, according to Mr. Loosararian, who does not forget those days of barely being able to pay the bills as he tried to build his business.

"That really tested my resolve, and it's important to go through because it helps you understand and not take for granted the context, environment, people you're working with and the customers. It's all their worlds. So it makes you pretty resilient and persistent."

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Edgar and Sandy Snyder during the Anne Lewis Humanitarian Awards held at the Fairmont hotel in Downtown Pittsburgh on June 13, 2013.

Know what works for you

By Joe Lister
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

**Marketing the business takes different forms,
but connecting with the community is key**

To many Pittsburghers, Edgar Snyder is the guy on the billboards.

He's been on your TV, in your newspapers and at the gate when you walk into PNC Park. The Edgar Snyder and Associates name still hangs above the personal injury law firm's North Shore office, even if Mr. Snyder isn't heading the firm these days.

However, before he became associated with personal injury law in Pittsburgh, Mr.

Snyder was, in his own words, a pariah. A pioneer of marketing in law, Mr. Snyder demonstrated how risk-taking can lead to massive growth — and a few downfalls.

In 1982, Mr. Snyder gave up criminal law and began his own personal injury firm. A few years earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down an Arizona law that barred attorneys from advertising — a law that would

be inconceivable in the modern era.

With the newfound freedom of the industry in hand, Mr. Snyder placed a small ad in the Pittsburgh Press about rights that clients should have in drunk driving-related cases.

Within a year, Mr. Snyder said, he was Pittsburgh's most-popular drunk driving attorney, a label he wanted to get away from.

He began promoting his personal injury business — getting into TV, onto billboards and expanding his newspaper presence.

Despite the legality of his actions, Mr. Snyder's colleagues weren't necessarily fans.

"You had no law firms that were doing marketing. And when I came out with ads in the newspaper and television, the nicest thing they would say is, 'What was a good trial lawyer doing becoming a prostitute?'" Mr. Snyder said.

SEE **CONNECT**, PAGE TW-25

CONNECT, FROM TW-24

Mr. Snyder was undeterred — and profitable.

"All that criticism didn't bother me, because I knew that it was working. I knew we were doing a good job for people that had really never had lawyers before," Mr. Snyder said.

More than 40 years later, Edgar Snyder and Associates has continued to aggressively advertise its product to Pittsburgh and the surrounding area. The firm has had its marketing flubs along the way — including one campaign to reimagine the mostly-retired Mr. Snyder as a cartoon character.

The worst of the marketing mistakes, Mr. Snyder said, came when he was still running

the firm. One ad on TV featured two young children crashing into each other in toy cars. One child stood up, told the other they were calling Edgar Snyder and read Mr. Snyder's phone number to the audience.

The ad was pulled after three days. "Within 24 hours of putting these ads on television, we got dozens of calls from people saying that you are exploiting children. We never saw that coming," Mr. Snyder said. "I remember saying at the time, I'm in love with the ad, but I'll lose my business, and then all I have is this ad."

In the modern age, the firm is still on TV, billboards and sports arenas, and it's out in the community, too.

"We're very big on community involvement. We're very big on charitable work —

not to promote the brand, but because that's part of who we are," said Rob Fisher, chief marketing officer and owning partner.

"We're going to this event because we believe in it, not because we're trying to show our brand name, if that makes sense. We don't do things we don't believe in."

For the staff at New York Life's Pittsburgh-Johnstown branch, getting into the community is the best way of marketing. Billboards don't sell life insurance or retirement plans for younger agents who are still building a rapport — though they can create name recognition.

The real marketing comes from everyday, grassroots involvement in fairs, local sports leagues and community events.

"A lot of our newer agents, advisers, you know, look at their local community," said managing partner Kenny Price. "Typically, newer agents in their first couple to three years are the ones that want to get out there."

While good advertising can be effective, that sort of mix of community involvement and just putting a face on an institution that works for the New York Life team has been Edgar Snyder and Associates' greatest tool, too, executives at the law firm say.

"This is Edgar Snyder. This is how big we are. This is what we can do to help you from a resource perspective," Mr. Fisher said. "We all look a little bit different, talk a little bit different, but that's how we help you."



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EQT

The Mountain Valley Pipeline, operated by EQT, spans just over 300 miles from northwestern Virginia to southern Virginia.

‘Nothing easy is worth doing’

By Leia Green
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

**Leadership is not about taking the easy path;
it's about defying odds and staying the course**

Every innovative business — every innovative endeavor, for that matter — faces long odds, multiple obstacles and surprising challenges.

Two local companies, among many others, are showing that even with a proverbial waterlogged box of matches, it's possible to spark progress — in these cases, within the world of domestic energy production.

Consider Form Energy CEO Mateo Jaramillo, who co-founded an energy storage startup with four others in 2017.

Form strives to provide a solution to the rising demand for reliable energy through an iron-air battery that cost-effectively stores energy for 100 hours at a time.

The battery, composed of iron, water and air, is manufactured at Form's plant in Weirton, a location chosen for its interconnected location and "great labor pool," Mr. Jaramillo said.

While a prototype for the battery existed seven years ago, many obstacles lay in the path to commercialization, he said.

"Too many challenges to articulate," said Mr. Jaramillo, who was a former vice president of products and programs at Tesla.

Form is attempting to produce iron-air batteries on a larger scale than has ever been achieved before, while striving to keep the product low cost.

"What we are doing is hard," Mr. Jaramillo said. "Nothing easy is worth doing."

But after years of research and development, product engineering and testing, the battery is ready for commercial use. Mr. Jaramillo said the business is yet to be profitable, but the demand is "tremendous."

"Being paranoid about success leads to success," he said, adding that Form is not the right place for everybody — the work is challenging and the waters that lie ahead are uncharted.

However, the pioneering nature of the company can attract ambitious employees looking for something new.

"I really wanted to move into a career where I could solve a lot of problems," said Alia Rafiq, senior manager of technical program management at Form, in a company-made day-in-the-life video. "I really thought this was a once-in-a-career opportunity."

Downtown-based natural gas producer EQT Corp. was also involved in a difficult — albeit very controversial — project that it believes can make the U.S. energy grid more reliable, affordable and accessible.

EQT operates the Mountain Valley Pipeline — a 303-mile-long pipe that will link Appalachian shale gas to markets in the Southeast, where demand from power generation and data centers is expected to be robust. The company describes it as critical infrastructure for national energy security. The construction of the pipeline was a joint venture between EQT, NextEra Energy, Consolidated Edison, AltaGas and RGC Resources, involving 6,000 workers.

It faced multiple obstacles, including regulatory reviews, soaring costs, lawsuits and strident pushback from environmental groups.

Jeff Klinefelter, director of project development for EQT, was appointed to lead the pipeline's construction. He said he knew it would be a difficult project.

And it was: In 2018, when the pipeline was merely a plan, Mr. Klinefelter said plans

called for construction to take one year and cost just under \$4 billion dollars. It ultimately took five years and costs soared to \$8 billion.

EQT believed that the pipeline would help satisfy America's energy needs.

Environmental groups argued that it was simply damaging. The pipeline wends through precious forest ecosystems, they said, causing tree loss and land disturbance.

The project was hit by four lawsuits that made their way to the Supreme Court, and Mr. Klinefelter said more than 600 on-site protests stalled construction.

At one point, he said, the team began to question the project's feasibility.

"We had multiple conversations about throwing in the towel," Mr. Klinefelter said. "But we said we just got a little more to go, just a little more to go."

He said they pushed construction forward, "inch by inch," funneling resources into meeting environmental compliance standards. He said they paid \$20 million to \$25 million per month to fulfill regulatory requirements and to focus on environmental compliance "from the top to the bottom."

The pipeline began moving natural gas in June 2024.

"That mindset is the only reason we got where we did," he said.

How to listen — and surround yourself with talent

By Hailey Talbert
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Overcoming doubt. Embracing feedback. Building a team with people “who are better than you.”

Business leaders have many keys to success, but for Deb Mohapatra, senior vice president and business unit leader of Downtown-based CGI’s U.S. Great Lakes Business Unit, one he credits for his success is simply embracing all that comes his way — the uncertainty, the surprises, the obstacles, all of it.

“I’ve certainly faced challenges that have helped me grow — both as a professional and as a person,” Mr. Mohapatra said. “Early in my consulting career, I quickly realized you don’t choose who you work with. You’re constantly collaborating with a diverse set of individuals across industries — some are easygoing, some more challenging. You must adapt, engage, and find common ground.”

Founded in 1976, CGI is among the largest technology and professional services companies globally. Mr. Mohapatra said his work in



Mohapatra

consulting has showcased his skill of collaboration.

“I had to learn to be comfortable saying, ‘I don’t know,’” Mr. Mohapatra said. “Active listening and humility go a long way in building trust and credibility.”

With each project comes the opportunity to work with new people, he said.

“Consulting keeps you on your toes — the rapid shifts between projects felt disorienting at first. I’ve learned that embracing this pace is part of what makes consulting so fulfilling. It keeps you agile and constantly learning,” Mr. Mohapatra said.

Through his work at CGI, he has learned adaptability and openness.

“In consulting, every new assignment is a door,” Mr. Mohapatra said. “You just need to be willing to walk through it.”

Consulting also has taught him how to appreciate feedback.

“Feedback is a gift. It means someone sees potential in you and wants you to succeed,”

he said. “I’ve been fortunate to be surrounded by peers and leaders who saw things in me before I saw them in myself. CGI’s culture of ownership and collaboration has given me the confidence to keep evolving.”

Teamwork is also key, he added.

“It’s about what our team can accomplish together,” he said. “I believe a leader’s job is to build a team so strong that its excellence reflects on the leader. That means surrounding yourself with people who are better than you in many ways — and celebrating that. When everyone brings their best, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.”

Madison Edwards, manager at RxARECARE Operations of the PANTHERx Rare Pharmacy, also overcame challenges in her early career. She has been with PANTHERx for nearly five years, working her way up from clinical pharmacist to supervisor and now manager.

“One early hurdle was taking on leadership responsibilities unexpectedly while covering for a colleague’s leave. It was a great opportunity, but it pushed me out of my comfort zone before I felt fully ready — and that forced me to learn quickly on the job,” Ms. Edwards said in an email.

Challenged with changes in reporting structure that came with the rapid growth of the company, Ms. Edwards learned to focus on her goals and be adaptable, and to focus on the mission: “to improve the lives of those with rare and devastating conditions.”

“When I was assigned to report to a new manager, at the same time I had applied for that same role, it could have been discouraging. But instead, I saw it as a chance to grow,” Ms. Edwards said. “I set aside personal disappointment and focused on supporting our team so we could succeed together. That experience really taught me how to lead without a title and how to put the team, and our mission, first.”

“I had the incredible opportunity to attend the United in Hope conference in Phoenix for the Prader-Willi Syndrome community. While there, I met the parents of the very first patient to receive Vykat XR. When I recalled their daughter’s name, the connection was instant — and we were all in tears. It reminded me that our work isn’t just about launching therapies and medications — it’s about people, families and improving lives.”

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