



## *My Dad, My Inspiration*

Written by Eve Bilger

*Art Bilger is setting a strong example of how to build solid workforces and help others.*

**E**ight years ago, Art Bilger realized there were critical socioeconomic forces in play that were propelling the nation toward a devastating unemployment crisis. He knew that as technology continued to advance, expanding globalization and keeping people alive longer, the traditional mechanisms of educating the population were not adapting quickly enough to prepare people for the modern world of work.

After picking the brains of influential people from various industries, Bilger realized there was not enough being done to address the looming unemployment crisis because of a lack of communication between the business, nonprofit, and government leaders who had the power to implement the strategic changes American workers and learners so desperately needed.

“One of the biggest obstacles our country faces in building the workforce we need for the jobs of the future is the lack of awareness of how quickly the employment world we live in is changing,” he says.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN BARENBOIM

Bilger at the 2017 Milken Institute  
Global Conference

While structural unemployment as a socio-economic issue is complicated, Bilger's goal was simple: He wanted Americans to understand the challenges facing our workforce and bring business and community leaders together to share and develop innovative solutions.

"I knew there was something I could actively do to get people talking about these issues," he remarks.

In 2016, Bilger founded WorkingNation, a nonprofit campaign devoted to raising this critical issue to the level of a national discussion to reach people and entities that can effect change, to connect the dots for companies and communities looking for solutions to their own workforce issues, and to identify for workers and job seekers where the jobs of the future will be.

"This issue affects all of us, regardless of our backgrounds, and the best way to get people to see themselves as part of the equation is to tell stories about workers and leaders who are at the forefront of navigating the new world of work," Bilger notes.

WorkingNation uses storytelling to get people thinking, and via videos, live events, and written articles, is helping bring innovative solutions into view.

Although the realization that led him to create WorkingNation may have felt clear all of a sudden, in reality, it was the result of Bilger's experiences as both an investor in communications, technology, and education companies and a philanthropist devoted to creating opportunities for people in need. As a venture capitalist, he has always looked to invest in innovative companies that revolutionize how we learn, how we age, and how we communicate.

He has used his many successes to drive his philanthropy. He and my mother, Dahlia, raised us to understand that the responsibility of having networks of opportunity is to help create them for others. Bilger serves as the vice chairman of the Skirball Cultural Center, an advisory board member to the Milken Institute's Center for the Future of Aging and the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream, an executive committee member of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, and a Bet Tzedek board member.

Bilger's experiences building communications companies from the ground up under the incredible leadership of hardworking individuals like Ted Turner and Rupert Murdoch taught him the invaluable role that communications plays in society.

"In 1985, I became the investment banker for Ted Turner and watched what Turner Broadcasting and CNN did and the influence it had," Bilger remembers. "Subsequently, I ran the largest Fox affiliate group of stations in the country and watched what Rupert Murdoch did and the impact that he had through media communications. It was my tie to probably two of the most innovative and influential early-stage



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media companies that showed me how influential you can be using that mechanism. If I had never worked with Ted or Rupert and seen the power of communications, I would probably never have had the idea for WorkingNation.”

Under Bilger's leadership, WorkingNation has grown significantly and become an amplifier for solutions to one of the nation's toughest problems.

“I'm proud that, in a short period of time and as a small organization, we are recognized by incredibly significant organizations throughout the country as being an important piece of the equation,” he says.

Over the years, WorkingNation has built up an impressive network of partners who have helped extend its reach, convene thought leaders, and promote the successful efforts of the country's changemakers. WorkingNation has collaborated with corporations, conference organizers, nonprofits, foundations, and others on events and various media initiatives, all focused on sharing

solutions aimed at closing the work and education gaps created by rapidly changing technology.

Today, WorkingNation's partners include Lumina Foundation, Comcast-NBCUniversal, JPMorgan Chase & Co., the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the Milken Institute, and many others.

In 2020, members of the WorkingNation team contributed to more than 125 articles, television shows, radio shows, and podcasts, including in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg Radio, the *Los Angeles Times*, NPR (*All Things Considered* and *Here and Now*), and *USA Today*.

Last year alone, WorkingNation released its first-ever digital magazine, *Inquire Within*, joined the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia to present an online series of conversations about kick-starting employment in the community, collaborated with CWI Labs on a series of interviews that led to the creation of its miniseries *An Equitable Recovery*, and worked with Frank Luntz and his company, FIL, to conduct the first WorkingNation American Workers Survey.

For Bilger, the impact of the skills gap and unemployment is about much more than ensuring people have good incomes.

“Oftentimes, the mainstream conversations around employment focus on the economic numbers, but an important message we work hard to amplify is that employment is also about people finding purpose in life and the





far-reaching, positive impact having a good job can have on a person, family, or community,” he says. “It isn’t only about economics, it’s about dignity. I think the psychology of individuals and the stability of their psychology can be very much influenced by employment.”

The impact that purposeful work can have on a person or community is truly life changing. In Bilger’s eyes, one of the most important books of our time is Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. He uses it as a guide and hands out a copy of it to nearly everyone who comes into his office.

The world of work looks starkly different than it did even a generation ago, and Bilger is a big believer in the idea that a person shouldn’t expect to know exactly what his or her career will look like when they graduate from school. As jobs and the skill sets they require continue to change, people will need to continue to learn new things.

“I think one of the most important things people need to understand about preparing for the future of work is lifelong learning,” he explains. “No matter who you are, you’re not coming out of school, whatever level of schooling you finish, walking into a job, and retiring 30 years later. It doesn’t matter if it’s you, or me, or the person working the assembly line at a factory in a small town. Lifelong learning is going to be key to employment over our lifetimes.”

The idea of lifelong learning is a key message throughout WorkingNation’s stories because building up the collective talent within society benefits us all.

For me, my father’s constant encouragement that over the course of a person’s career, he or she could and would do many different things has led me to where I am today. When I graduated from college at age 21, I was unsure of what I wanted to do, but my dad had given me the confidence to know that the most important thing I could do was seek out opportunities to learn. Having the opportunity to work alongside him to build WorkingNation from scratch has not only opened my eyes to critical socioeconomic issues but also helped me discover career interests I didn’t know I had and develop my talents with real passion.

In the 28 years I have been alive, I have never seen my father take a single day off, and it is this drive and tireless commitment to work he believes in that has guided my own work. As he says, “It takes hard work and real dedication to take advantage of opportunities and achieve whatever goals you set for yourself. It really takes some kind of emotional dedication to what you want to happen.”

Bilger’s dedication to helping people find good and meaningful employment through WorkingNation has built a nationwide network of motivated individuals who are coming together to create real change.

Or, as he elegantly put it: “The world needs problem-solvers, people who are dedicated to helping others and are willing to work hard to find solutions that can really change the course of their lives.” **LM**