

FINDING BRAVE

with Kathy Caprino

Transcript

Finding Brave Episode #38

Embracing Your Age and Wisdom - The Making of a Modern Elder

With Chip Conley

Chip Conley: When you create an environment where you have a mixture of ages, just like a mixture of genders, a mixture of races, you create a better workplace and more effective teams.

Kathy Caprino: Hello, everyone. This is Kathy Caprino, and welcome to my podcast, *Finding Brave*. I've created this show for everyone who longs to create something bold and brave in their life, to rise up, speak up, and stand up for who they are, and to reach their highest and biggest visions. Each week, I'll be speaking with inspiring guests from all walks of business, leadership, entertainment, the creative arts, and the entrepreneurial world, and they'll be sharing their intimate stories of finding brave and offer their best strategies for building your most rewarding, joyful, and meaningful life, business, and career.

Hello, everybody. Welcome to *Finding Brave*. This week, this is Kathy Caprino, and what a month it's been, I have to say. There's been a lot of finding brave moments for me, including spraining my knee, and it not healing, and going for the MRI tomorrow, and what that's done to my ego, which is just going to be all about what we talk about embracing who we really are. I'm so excited to share with you all my guest today, Chip Conley. Chip, thank you for joining us in the middle of something very important for you.

Chip Conley: Well, you know, you started with organ recitals, and I might recite some of my organs that are not working how they used to either.

Kathy Caprino: Okay, maybe not. Maybe not. Next time, we say we will. Everyone, we are talking today about something, I was just telling Chip, I literally hear about this perhaps every single working day that I'm at my desk working with professional women. I'm calling it embracing your age and wisdom, the making of a modern elder, but we're going to get all of this, what this means. First, let me tell you all about Chip.

Chip Conley is the author of the new book *Wisdom at Work: The Making of a Modern Elder*. Bestselling author and hospitality entrepreneur, Chip is a strategic advisor at Airbnb. Oh, I can't

wait to hear more about that. At age 26, which totally blows me away, he founded Joie de Vivre Hospitality and turned it into the second largest boutique hotel brand in the world. After selling his company in 2010, he joined Airbnb as the head of global hospitality and strategy, helped turn it into the world's largest hospitality brand. Conley has received hospitality's highest honor, the Pioneer Award. He serves on the boards of the Burning Man Project and the Esalen Institute, and is the author of *Peak*, and the New York Times bestseller, *Emotional Equations*. Wow. Thank you for being here, Chip.

I want to tell you, I read in your materials that you draw heavily on Maslow and Viktor Frankl, and I just fell off my chair. If you haven't read *Man's Search for Meaning*—

Chip Conley: Now another organ's broken.

Kathy Caprino: That's right. Oh my. That book ... I read a lot of books, as I know you do, that is and was the most instrumental book I've ever read, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl, so I'm dying to hear why those two, Abraham Maslow and Viktor Frankl, and then we're going to jump into what we're talking about here. What is the making of a modern elder? Tell me first about those two experts and psychiatrists.

Chip Conley: Sure. My two favorite leadership advisors are both psychologists. You know, I really appreciate the intersection of psychology and business design. It can be a complex intersection. What I loved about Maslow, is Maslow helped us to see how people could have priorities in life, and there's a hierarchy of priorities, a hierarchy of needs, and then I applied that to organizations, in my own company, 3,500 employees. Our employees are customers, they're investors. That helped us go through two once-in-a-lifetime downturns in the same decade.

With Frankl, I had a flatline experience. I actually died on stage giving a speech. We won't go any more details on that, unless you want to.

Kathy Caprino: I do want to.

Chip Conley: That night in the hospital, I had his book in my briefcase. I always found Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning* a great reminder that my life is joyous, and I should be more full of gratitude. I'm not in a concentration camp. To understand that meaning is what really created fuel for people, I ended up turning that really difficult experience for me, of having a flatline experience, into an equation, despair equals suffering minus meaning, with the idea behind there that suffering is sort of ever-present, it's always there if you want it, but the meaning and despair are sort of inversely proportional to each other.

The more meaning you have, the less despair you have. Once I sort of figured that out, it was like, "Okay." Going into the Great Recession, having a lot of difficult things happening in my life at that time, I was able to realize that, if on a weekly basis, I just made an inventory of all the things that gave me meaning this week, that focus on the meaning helped reduce the despair.

Kathy Caprino: That's so beautiful. I have to say, the people I'm most drawn to have, I would say, a depth of understanding that many people don't. Often, that comes from a life-changing experience. I think, in a way, those breakdown ... not in a way. Those breakdown moments are what create breakthrough, because we need that perspective shifting thing, don't we?

Chip Conley: Yeah, the key is to make sure that you just don't have them, you know, every year.

Kathy Caprino: Yeah, I would agree.

Chip Conley: Every decade, maybe, or maybe each stage of your life. You know what? Here's one thing, Kathy, that I really appreciate, and this has been sort of my evolution here at Airbnb, going from being the boy wonder, starting a company at age 26, and then joining Airbnb at age 52, not being the boy wonder, being the modern elder. I was twice the age of the average employee. One of the things we don't talk a lot about, although you might talk to your clients about it, is there's a lot of transitions that happen in midlife, and we as a culture, as society ... Society's amazing about how it creates rites of passage, and rituals, and celebrations, to help people through transitions.

If you think about it, in puberty you have quinceañeras, and bat mitzvahs, and bar mitzvahs. When you're moving from adolescence to adulthood, you have graduation ceremonies and commencements for high school or college. You're going to make a commitment to someone in marriage, you have a wedding. You have a baby, you have a baby shower. You die, you have a funeral. Between baby shower and funeral, nada. It's partly because midlife, which is defined now as 45-65, didn't exist 100 years ago. The longevity—

Kathy Caprino: Right. That was death.

Chip Conley: 47 years old was the longevity in 1900 and then it was 77 by the year 2000. We added 30 years to our lives, but we have done zero to recognize that midlife is a period of life that now, frankly, is maybe 35-75, because I think people are going to live longer, and they're feeling irrelevant earlier. We need to figure out how to address the fact this is a period of life that has all kinds of transitions. Menopause, divorces, leaving a career, leaving a company, changing locations, and we have not figured out how to provide the rites of passage for that.

Kathy Caprino: Oh my gosh, you're so right. I don't want to take up all our time, we have so much to talk about, but I have to ask you a question that has just occurred to me. Part of, I think, the difficulty of transitions is there's intense mixed emotions. For instance, I'm recently divorced after 30 years. I moved from a big house and downsized to a beautiful, small apartment.

Chip Conley: This is you? Yes?

Kathy Caprino: This is me.

Chip Conley: This is you? Oh, wow.

Kathy Caprino: Right, and my daughter's 24 and my son is going to be a senior in college. We're really close, and he's leaving the house tomorrow. Even my dog, who can't be left alone, my beagle, there's so many mixed emotions. I love her, she adds meaning to my life, but there's some burden there. I'm going to say it. It's like having an infant.

I think what's hard is our society doesn't allow us to have mixed emotions. It's not comfortable. In other words, "You should be happy your son's going off to college," and I'm thrilled for him, but there's mixed. I'm sad, I'm lonely when he leaves because we have so much fun. What do

you think?

Chip Conley: When you look at little kids, what you notice about young children is, when they're at their most present, they don't have a mixed emotion. The emotions you see about anger, or whatever it is, it sits in its purest form. The process of going from childhood to becoming an adult is learning, and becoming more fluent, about the equations of emotions happening inside of you. You're not just having the purity of a singular emotion. You're having multiple emotions at once, which can be complicated, and therefore, what's shocking to me is we don't have emotions classes, where we help people, teach like Emotions 101 in college. It would be not a bad idea, so people could really understand and become a little more self-aware about what's happening inside of them. Yes, I agree.

Kathy Caprino: Right. I think you've said it so beautifully. Let's jump into the thing we're really focused on now, which is ... Well, we'll start here with ageism, how people ... I don't know how old you are, Chip, but I'm 58—

Chip Conley: I'm 58 in two months.

Kathy Caprino: Oh, really? I'm 58 and one month.

Chip Conley: Oh my gosh.

Kathy Caprino: Almost two months.

Chip Conley: Wait, when was your birthday?

Kathy Caprino: June 2nd was my birthday.

Chip Conley: You're a 1960 baby.

Kathy Caprino: 1960.

Chip Conley: I'm a 1960 baby, but two months from now, I turn 58, on Halloween.

Kathy Caprino: Oh. Oh, that's got some meaning, I'm sure. Wow. Spirits rising. All right, so tell us what you feel is going on here, from your perspective, and also from dealing with so many employees. What's happening? Why do we feel so kicked to the curb, and what's going on?

Chip Conley: Well, what's going on is that there's a structural change, not just in the economy, but just in how we value things. Historically, we valued wisdom, because, in many ways, things weren't changing that quickly, and so the elders in the society would pass on land wisdom about how to farm properly, and how to understand, like Farmer's Almanac was all about understanding things that a 20 year old wouldn't understand but an 80 year old certainly would.

As things change, we've moved into an industrial society, and so brawn became more important, and brawn is more for a 20 year old than an 80 year old, and then brain became more important in the tech economy. We're in an era right now where digital intelligence, what I call DQ is maybe more important than IQ or EQ, and therefore, if digital intelligence, if it's the defining characteristic of what most companies are looking for, who is the most digital savvy out

there? Well, it's the digital natives. The digital natives are young people ...

You and I ... I love the fact that we're the same age. You and I grew up where the dominant technology of our era was television, but that had zero effect on our career. These kids ... I shouldn't call them kids, because they're young adults, and they're middle-aged adults starting to be. Some of the millennials are in their mid-30s and later. They grew up with technology. In many ways, it super charged their career path. Some of the resentment that boomers have towards millennials and some gen-Xers is partly because, frankly, they have gotten the great benefit of becoming so fluent in their technological skills and prowess that it gives them a huge career benefit. What does that mean?

Kathy Caprino: It's like a language, isn't it?

Chip Conley: Yeah, it is.

Kathy Caprino: It's a language that some of us, at our age, are hanging on. I think I'm pretty savvy, but you can't be—

Chip Conley: Yeah, we're doing a video call.

Kathy Caprino: Zoom, I love it. It's not at all the same as growing up at age two looking at your iPad, you know? You're not supposed to be doing that, but you know what I mean.

Chip Conley: Here's the opportunity. Here's the opportunity. The pendulum is starting to swing in the opposite direction. The pendulum swung very, very wide to one direction saying, "Everybody wants a millennial in their company, and not just one, maybe hundreds of them." In essence, many of the fastest growing companies in the world have been started by people that are younger, not just than 40, but sometimes younger than 30. They start their businesses even maybe younger than 20.

You see that, and what's great is this is beautiful for innovation, but we expect these young digital leaders to miraculously embody the relationship and leadership wisdoms we have had decades to learn. What I think is the opportunity, the grand alliance here, is to create a generational potluck like we've never seen before, because we have five generations in the workplace at the same time.

Kathy Caprino: Yeah. Oh my gosh.

Chip Conley: I can teach. I mean, here at Airbnb, I was the mentor to the CEO, and I was also his intern. I was an intern in the sense that I didn't know a thing about technology, but I knew a lot about leadership and strategy and emotional intelligence. I think what I've been able to help here is to create a trade agreement. They give me DQ, digital intelligence, and I give them EQ, emotional intelligence, and we're both better off for it.

Kathy Caprino: There's so much to say. I just want to hug you up for something. You said you were an intern. You know, I love that. So many people that have reached a level of success you have, and are a thought leader, an influencer, bestselling author, would never say that. That's one thing, I think, that's special for all of us to understand, that ... I mean, I talk about humility. I'm not a fan of

humility for women, because we've been slapped with it to death, but I feel that there's a humility there that you understand that you are learning and gaining as opposed to, "These young whippersnappers."

Chip Conley: Yeah, we can complain as much as we want, but this is the world we live in.

Kathy Caprino: This is it.

Chip Conley: It's the question, how do we resiliently adapt, and resiliently adapt in a way that works for us and for society?

Kathy Caprino: I've got a million questions, but one thing. There's DQ, right? Let me ask you this, I just spoke to a potential new client yesterday who talked about one particular field. I'll leave it out, but she said all they want are young, young people. Do you think some of that is because it's not just the digital understanding, it's that these kids are killing themselves and working—

Chip Conley: Yeah, I mean, if you look at—

Kathy Caprino: —themselves to the bone, and we don't want to do that anymore, and we have better things to do?

Chip Conley: I think some of it's that. I think some of it's, as you're an older worker, especially if you're experienced in the same workplace, you've made increases in salary over a long period of time, so you can be more expensive. There's a whole lot of ... You're talking about who's more expensive, younger or older workers, there's a lot of variables in the equation, which we could get into. What I will say is this, is that there's a lot of hubris from young people, a lot of young people, and that's maybe cultural.

When you create an environment where you have a mixture of ages, just like a mixture of genders, a mixture of races, you create a better workplace and more effective teams. Especially if your customers are the full range of people on the planet, then you want to have people in the room who represent that. In tech companies, what you see is, maybe 5 to 10% of tech employees are 40 or older, the younger companies, and that's not healthy if you're actually serving a customer base out there, it is all ages.

Kathy Caprino: You know that, and I know that, and about 1,000 authors have written about it. There's been 10,000 research studies about it, that we need diversity if we're going to serve a diverse ... we know it. It's not happening yet. I sense that your new book, tell me if I'm wrong, is talking to us as individuals, about how to embrace who we are, but also build an inter-generational bridge. I feel like the bigger impediment is the CEO, the leader, the senior managers. What do you think about that?

Chip Conley: Yeah, and the recruiting team. My book is written primarily for people in midlife, but it's written for anybody who's trying to understand how to create more inter-generational collaboration. There's one chapter, the ninth chapter of the book, that's really written for the CEO and HR teams of the world, and it really shows with great evidence why many of the stereotypes around older people are not accurate, and the top 10 ways you can be a more age-friendly company in a smart way, that's good for your bottom line, good for your reputation.

What I'm hoping to do is making sure that this book, *Wisdom at Work*, is a book that's catalytic. It actually creates some movement. The good news is I'm being asked to give a lot of speeches at large companies about this, and they're getting it. I mean, the idea of diversity, the idea of taking diversity, which most companies at this point are pretty clear about that relative to gender and to race ... They may not be doing it very well, but at least they know the value of it. To actually expand that and say, "Why not apply it to age as well?"

I mean, there's others. Sexual orientation, disabilities, et cetera. The two that people know the most are gender and race. Expand that, and include age, because frankly, it's good for the company, it's good for society, and in a world ... in the US, where we have a four percent unemployment, and it was under four percent recently as well, we need to look for new ways to recruit people that previously might not have been working. There's a lot of people who I think are going to live and work until much later in their life than they thought they were going to.

Kathy Caprino: I love it.

Chip Conley: In some cases out of necessity, and in other cases, because they just love it. Let's take that into account as a long term strategy for recruiting.

Kathy Caprino: Oh, how wonderful. You said there's 10 practical steps. Can you give us the three that you feel you're not really seeing here? You're not seeing management and recruiting folks doing this. They say they are, but they're not.

Chip Conley: Yeah, I think one of them ... This is the most obvious one for me, and in fact, it's part of the reason I went to just a consultant status at Airbnb, is all this data out there that says older workers, 50 and older, one of the things that they want as a benefit in the future, is the ability to move to a part-time role and then sort of slide out over time, and make sure that the company sort of doesn't have this cold turkey perspective of, "On your 65th birthday, or on your 50th birthday, whatever the date is, you're gone."

There's institutional wisdom there, and knowledge that that person has. Also, those people actually ... the older person says, "You know what? I don't want to leave all of that behind. I don't want to leave my community of people I have built 15 or 20 years of relationships with, and then all of a sudden I'm gone." Companies know this. HR departments say it's one of the higher priorities for older workers, and then yet, almost no companies offer that kind of gradual process, of going from full time and part times. As well as 401(k) programs and all kinds of other matches, it's only for full-time employees. Healthcare insurance. Some of these things are only for full-time employees.

That's an obvious one, and because that one's like, "Okay, yes. There's a cost involved. If you are offering some benefits to people who are actually part-time, it costs the company a little bit more." We're talking about a fraction of the people in the company who this is affecting, and frankly, they're often the ones who have all that institutional wisdom. That's one great example.

I'd say another example would be larger companies, this is particularly relevant ... it's less relevant to a smaller company. There's something called ERGs. ERGs, ERG is our employee resource groups. There is affinity groups, where people within a company say, "I am a woman, and I want to be a part of other women, part of women at IBM." We as a group, in our office, we

have 500 people in the office, and 250 of us are women, and 100 of us are on this women's group, and so they meet regularly. You see that with affinity groups around demographics.

Very, very few companies have an ERG for people who are older. Frankly, people who are older are nervous about even setting them up, because especially in the tech world, you almost don't want to out yourself. This is sort of like gay people 20 years ago, 10 years ago, and in some places, still today. You don't want to out yourself, because all of a sudden, you might get ostracized, or in this place, you might actually be seen as, "Oh, I didn't realize Joe," or more important Josephine, because women actually have this even worse than men in terms of the ageism issues, they don't want to out themselves.

What you have, is you have a collection of people who are whispering about things that are happening with them, that don't have any kind of organizing platform as a demographic group. We're starting to see this change. In the tech world, here at Airbnb, we created something called Wisdom at Airbnb, and it's people 40 and older. 40 and older, I was like, "Wait, they're not that old."

Kathy Caprino: Wait a minute here.

Chip Conley: Honestly, in this workplace, 40 and older is a small fraction of the workplace. That's another good example. I'd say the third example is more abstract one, which is most companies have, at your bigger company, or even a smaller one, you have like a Asia strategy. Like you say, "Asia's growing so big. How are we going to grow in Asia?" Or, "How are we going to create a new strategy around this or this?" No companies I'm aware of, or very few of them, have a longevity strategy.

We're all going to live longer. That means both our employees are going to be here longer, and our customers are going to be here longer, so what does that mean in terms of the lifetime value of a customer? What does that mean in terms of how do you tap into that institutional wisdom and that inter-generational collaboration? Most companies have spent zero time looking at something that we saw a 30-year increase in longevity in the 20th century, from 47 to 77, and now we have biotech, and we have all kinds of other things that may actually extend that even further.

What companies are actually getting smart about this?

Kathy Caprino: Oh gosh. I have this burning question, Chip. How'd you get so smart? When you were 26 and you did ... I mean, people listening here ... Oh, there's so much I want to ask. I would also, before I ask you this question, I do think, and maybe you're not targeting anyone who isn't in the corporate world, but I want to say for people listening, I got laid off after 9/11 when I was 41 in a way that was so brutal I snapped, and I said, "I will never return to corporate America." I mean, it was never a really good fit for me. I always felt out-of-the-box. I just felt, "Ugh." The politics made no sense. It led me to become a therapist and then to start my own business as a coach and a writer.

I do want to throw this out to people who are listening. I do believe that for a segment of the world, fitting into a corporate box, even if it's a fluid one, is not the right thing. I would say to anyone who feels like, "I love what Chip is saying, I couldn't agree more, but I'm not

experiencing it in any damn place I go and work." You know, it might be, like it was for me, I wanted to be my own boss. I wanted to call the shots. I wanted to partner with who I wanted to partner with. What do you think about that idea, that maybe it's time for people who feel that way to go their own way?

Chip Conley: Well, you know, the thing that a lot of people don't know is that the fastest growing demographic of entrepreneurs in the US today is people 55 and older.

Kathy Caprino: Who said what I said. You know, "I'm done with this."

Chip Conley: Exactly. Every time anybody's done a research study, they've shown this. The question is why is it that people 55 and older are starting businesses? There's two really fundamental reasons. Actually, there's three. The first one is, they did get laid off, and they can't get a job.

Kathy Caprino: Right. They're like, "Well, I'm going to make lemonade from this nonsense."

Chip Conley: Yeah, exactly. We're not talking about necessarily big tech companies that they're going to create, but a consulting business or a design company or a franchised Subway franchise. Who knows? That's number one. Number two is, there's a lot of people at age 45, 55, 65 even who've just said, "I'm tired of working in a toxic environment. I want to create an environment where I have the influence over the culture. I may only have three employees, but at least I feel like I have some autonomy. I can feel proud about the place I'm creating." That's a second piece.

Then, there's a third reason, is they want to create work that matches their lifestyle. In that case, it could be they say, "You know what? I want to work part-time, but the company I work for doesn't even have that as an option, so I'm going to start my own part-time business, and I'm an entrepreneur now, but my intention is to keep it part-time, because I want to have a good life." These are three exceptionally good reasons.

For those who really want to learn about that, and I talk about it a little bit in the book, in terms of how people start a business later in life, there's a beautiful TED talk by a guy named Paul Tasner, T-A-S-N-E-R, 66 years old, who started his first business at that age. There's more and more evidence out there that going out and doing it on your own is not something that's just meant for 20-year-old, hoodie-wearing boys.

Kathy Caprino: I love it. Now, go back and please answer my question. How did you do this at 26? Your first amazing ... you know, people listening here want to learn not just the what but the how, right? How'd you do it? How did you have that kind of thinking?

Chip Conley: I had a little bit of background in commercial real estate development. I didn't have any background in hotels, but I knew something about real estate, and hotels are a form of real estate. I was working for a real estate developer, I wanted to create a real estate division in that company focused on hotels. They didn't want to do that, so I said, "I'm going to go start my own company." They laughed and said, "You don't know a damn thing about hotels." I said, "You know, I don't, but I can actually talk to people who do, and I know a lot about real estate, and so I'm going to actually go out and buy a broken down motel in the center of San Francisco in a bad neighborhood, and go out and raise money," because I was from a middle class family, so I raised money from people I went to college and graduate school with and friends of the family.

I bought this bankrupt little motel. It was a 44-room motel on an acre of land, and I learned from the ground up, from people in the company that I hired that knew more than I did, and I was very humble about just having to learn. It took me three and a half years in that first property to get it to a place where it was succeeding, and then I grew it. Over the course of 24 years, I created 52 boutique hotels, and found about 50 different restaurants, and —

Kathy Caprino: Did you have entrepreneurship in your family history, or were you—

Chip Conley: No. I mean, my father, ultimately, around the same time that I was creating my business, he created a real estate business himself, but no. No entrepreneurship there, but I had it in my bones from age 10 and 12, creating a little restaurant in my parents' living room or dining room. I always had a fascination with creating things that people wanted. I wanted to make people happy. That's why I called my company Joie de Vivre, you know, French for joy of life.

Kathy Caprino: Right. Oh man. You have so much to teach us all. Now, what do we need to know that we haven't covered about being a modern elder? What do the listeners need to understand that we haven't covered?

Chip Conley: I think that the thing people need to know about being a modern elder versus a traditional elder, the traditional elder of the past was full of reverence. People revered them. The modern elder is full of relevance. Relevance basically means that you better be able to learn and evolve your identity. This is not about people coming to you, and bowing down, and out of obligation, showing reverence for you. It's about you actually being as much of a learner or a student as you are a teacher.

I called myself at Airbnb, because at age 52, I joined a tech company, and I had no tech experience, and I had to learn everything about tech. I said, "I'm an intern as much as I am a mentor." The reason I said that, and I called myself a mentern.

Kathy Caprino: Ah, you're good with sticky language.

Chip Conley: The reason I liked that is because it was a recognition that I would intern publicly and mentor privately. What I mean by that is interning publicly basically meant I was open to being the dumbest person in the room, but I asked a lot of why and what if questions that a four year old might ask, not what and how questions. What and how questions are optimization questions. Once you've already said, "Okay, we're on this path," how and what are we going to do to optimize it? Why and what if questions are inefficient questions, but they can sometimes create the ability to see a blind spot.

Our company was full of blind spots. A great company, but ... I asked these questions, and it led to people saying, "Wow, Chip sometimes asks the most off-the-wall questions, but like right there." I ended up becoming the intern who publicly asked a lot of questions, and people called me catalytically curious, because I was catalyzing other people to be curious as well. I was surrounded by people who were young, and they were know-it-alls, because that's what you thought you had to be as a young person in Silicon Valley, is you have to be the smartest person in the room. I was proving that you can be the dumbest person in the room, and still be extremely valuable.

That's the interesting publicly. The mentoring privately was that nobody wants me mentoring them in the middle of a meeting, somebody the age of their parent. That was more like a private thing. I'd have private conversations and say, "Hey, I noticed something in the meeting. Would you like some advice on that? If you don't, don't worry about it."

Kathy Caprino: Would that be on an idea that that person posited, or their approach?

Chip Conley: Particularly, it had a lot to do with how someone was running a meeting. If a meeting didn't go well. It would come from a place of humility. It would come from a place of like, "I'm here to serve you."

Kathy Caprino: Of helping.

Chip Conley: It would come from a place of not competing. One of the great things about being older in a land full of mostly young people is people don't see you as competitive. That's actually a good thing, in the sense that—

Kathy Caprino: You're not a threat. You're not a threat to them.

Chip Conley: It means that they're much more willing to be candid with you, authentic with you, learn with you. Mutual mentoring is the future. I mentored people, but I also was mentored by them in subjects I didn't know well. I think the bottom line here is I think that the idea of a modern elder is that they are curious and wise at the same time.

Kathy Caprino: All right. One final thing here. Oh, stay on another half hour. Can you be honest? When you came with that beautiful mind that you have, and open heart, did you experience people going, "Who's this guy? What the heck is he thinking?"

Chip Conley: Yeah.

Kathy Caprino: I have another point to make here. I think that for someone to succeed in doing what you did, you have to have a bedrock of confidence that will not be shaken. I don't want to be a genderist, but my world is women's issues, and I think women struggle with this more. Not simply because of neurobiology, but because of culture and society. We're pleasers. You know, there's a million things going on.

I think, in order for us to do what you're saying, we have to accept that people will be uncomfortable, that people will be maybe threatened. "What does this guy ... What does this woman think she's got?" You know, I remember coming into my last VP job that almost killed me, I felt so pressured to make an impact day one. Well, I should've shut up. I mean, what can you say without knowing the business well enough? They wanted me to change things within three seconds. I should've said, "I'm not doing that. Let me learn."

In order to do that, you have to have a lot of confidence that you will learn and you will make an impact. What do you say about confidence?

Chip Conley: Well, I would say there's a beautiful Harvard Business Review article on this subject by Zenger Folkman. I actually talk about it in my book, *Wisdom of Work*.

Kathy Caprino: We'll link to it below.

Chip Conley: Yeah, there's a beautiful study that showed the following, is that there's a sense that as people get older, they get more set in their ways. What they were able to show, is that as people get older, they start getting a little more confident in their skills and in their point of view. That's, to some degree, their intuition. This is particularly true of women. As people get more confident, they're more willing to take feedback. As they get more feedback, they get better.

The thing that's beautiful about this study, is they show that women starting around age 35 or 40 start getting into a flow where they actually start getting to a level of confidence. Confidence breeds confidence, and success breeds success. Yes, you can be in difficult environments, and I'm not a woman, so I don't know, but what I can say is when you have that confidence and you show the evidence of why you should have that confidence, it leads to this beautiful sense of, "You get better at what you do because you're open to feedback from people because you're confident."

The key is when you think of people in a company, you think like, "Well, they don't want to hear feedback because they're cocky." No, they're just confident, and they actually have a growth mindset. Read Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*. It's all about how do you move from a fixed to a growth mindset? That is part of what makes a person more confident, because actually instead of being fearful of actually failing, and always feeling like they're just trying to prove themselves, they're just constantly trying to improve themselves.

Kathy Caprino: Good grief. That's so helpful. Do you have a course coming? You have your book, but do you have a course on becoming a modern elder?

Chip Conley: I have an academy. I have a campus. I have the Modern Elder Academy.

Kathy Caprino: People come physically to it?

Chip Conley: Three acres of beachfront property in Mexico. An hour north of Cabo San Lucas in Baja. Yes, you can go to ModernElderAcademy.org, and people come for one week or two week programs to learn how to repurpose themselves in midlife and to mine the mastery and wisdom of what they've built. It's the first midlife wisdom school in the world with its own curriculum.

Kathy Caprino: How long has this been in existence? Two days?

Chip Conley: It was in beta program from January to June this year, with 153 people who went through it and gave us feedback, and it opens to the public November 4th.

Kathy Caprino: Oh my gosh. You know, everybody who's following me needs to attend, I have a feeling. You know? Chip, it's so inspiring. I love your work. Aren't we blessed to have your work in the world? Thank you for joining. Where can people learn all about this? Of course, we'll link down below, but where do we send folks?

Chip Conley: Go to ChipConley.com, C-O-N-L-E-Y. ChipConley.com. You will see both me and my part of the site, you'll see the book, *Wisdom at Work*, part of the site, and you'll also see the Modern Elder Academy part of the site.

Kathy Caprino: I just want to leave everyone with this. It's just a very healing experience to have you talk about not just what we hear every day, that, "Oh, there's so much wisdom in people over 50." It's wisdom that needs to be incorporated. That needs ... but not just one way. It's an exchange of wisdom that we have to ... It's just kind of a spiritual concept, if you ask me, that we're honoring what everyone has to offer, but we need to be open to that. Am I onto something?

Chip Conley: Yeah. Let's recognize that our peak as adult humans physically is probably our 20s, financially, in terms of salaries, it's usually between mid-40s and mid-50s, but our peak as humans, as emotional beings who understand other humans and understand ourselves, goes into our 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. The thing we have to look forward to is the fact that, if you want to play on the playing field of who's the best physically, or who's got the biggest salary? Maybe for those of us who are 58, we're playing on the wrong playing field. The playing field that we should be playing on, and I think that more companies need to be focused on, is the playing field of humans. We are hopefully growing whole more than we are growing old.

Kathy Caprino: Oh. That's just the way to end. All right. Let me throw in a *Finding Brave* tip again. If you feel like what's going on in your world doesn't match this beautiful perspective, then do something. Do something different. Maybe it's your work culture, maybe it's a conversation with your HR, maybe it's becoming a consultant. I think we all know what despair feels like, when the meaning isn't there, and when the dignity ... I just did a Forbes interview today, Donna Hicks, when the dignity is no longer there. We can have control over that by changing what's going on for us. Right, Chip? Would you agree?

Chip Conley: Absolutely.

Kathy Caprino: Thank you so much for joining. It's so inspiring. I'm going to see you at the academy with my bathing suit on. All right, everybody. Thank you, Chip. Thank you so much. Everyone, I hope you feel this infuses you with some bravery to be the intern, be the mentor, embrace everything you are, everything you've learned, but also everything we want to learn. We want to keep learning and growing, and that's a beautiful thing. Nothing to feel vulnerable and ashamed about. Have a wonderful week, everyone, and we'll see you next time. Thanks again, Chip.

Thanks so much for joining us today, and please don't forget to check out [FindingBrave.org](https://www.findingbrave.org) for more programs, resources, and tips. Tune in next time for your weekly dose of *Finding Brave*.