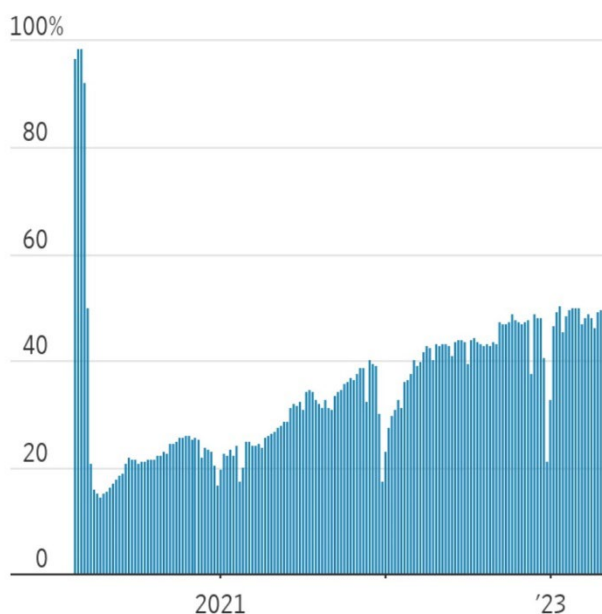


J. Michael Locke Musings

#224: Musing May 20, 2023

I do not think workers are going back to the office ([ceos-thought-the-return-to-office-debate-was-over-they-were-wrong](#)). Some companies were trying to force the issue but the trend of increasing office usage over the last six months has stalled out at 50%. Here is a graph showing the percentage of office use compared to pre-pandemic. I am not saying you have to go all remote but the 5 days in the office model is dead.

Average office occupancy compared with prepandemic levels for the 10 biggest U.S. markets



Source: Kastle Systems card-swipe data

Musk doesn't agree with me. He thinks employees should be in office. *"I think that the whole notion of work from home is a bit like the fake Marie Antoinette quote, 'Let them eat cake,'" Musk said. "It's not just a productivity thing," Musk said. "I think it's morally wrong."* Musk referred to tech workers as the *"laptop classes living in la-la-land,"* telling Faber it was hypocritical to work from home while expecting service workers to continue to show up in person." (CNBC)

Corporate building landlords should take a page from their mall compatriots and create new categories of tenants such as pickle court operators. That is right – mall owners are building pickleball courts in abandoned Bed, Bath & Beyond and other shuttered tenants. [business/pickleball-malls-retail-bed-bath-beyond](#) (thanks John Hughes). This is a further continuation of the developing model of "live, work,

play” which combines apartments with shops, restaurants and activities in one location.

Someone recently asked me for the top recommendation I had to improve executive effectiveness. My answer, to paraphrase Burr, was “talk less, listen more.” Too many developing executives feel the need to show how smart they are and over talk. The sophisticated veteran executives often sit quietly and listen. Not talking doesn’t equal listening. Listening is an active activity where you are really absorbing what someone is saying. “ *People who talk less are more likely to get promoted at work and more likely to prevail in negotiations.*” (Time magazine). There are tests for “talkaholism” like this one. Hope you aren’t a talkaholic. <https://time.com/6248095/talk-too-much-quiz/>

Most people think of management in terms of those “below” them on an org chart. You also have to “manage up.” Your boss is a human being with his/her own set of idiosyncrasies, biases etc. You have to manage your boss, putting thought into how to present material, when to engage him/her, measuring your reactions etc.

The fact that we allow our elected officials in Washington to trade in individual stocks is crazy. Most countries do not. Leave it to this entrepreneurial outfit which decided to “embrace it” by offering an ETF (exchange traded fund), which mimics what politicians are buying and selling. You can buy the republican ETF or the democratic ETF. <https://www.subversiveetfs.com/kruz>

With all of the discussion of online shopping, interesting stat that more than 85% of total retail sales occurred in physical stores in 2022 according to the US Census Bureau (from WSJ).

We are making it too easy on our youth. In college sports, dissatisfied players can now jump into the “transfer portal” if they don’t like their current coach etc. Legendary Michigan State basketball coach Tim Izzo called it out simply. With the transfer portal - “is anyone going to learn how to fail?”

We focus so much on achievement of our children versus the learning journey. An opinion piece in New York Times recently talked about “accomplishment vs achievement.” [youth-achievement-happiness](#). *“Achievement is the completion of the task imposed from outside — the reward often being a path to the next achievement. Accomplishment is the end point of an engulfing activity we’ve chosen, whose reward is the sudden rush of fulfillment, the sense of happiness that rises uniquely from absorption in a thing outside ourselves....Our social world often conspires to denigrate accomplishment in favor of the rote-work of achievement. ...Pursuit of a resistant task, if persevered in stubbornly and passionately at any age, even if only for a short time, generates a kind of cognitive opiate that has no equivalent. There are many drugs that we swallow or inject in our veins; this is one drug that we produce in our brains, and to good effect. The hobbyist or retiree taking a course in batik or yoga, who might be easily patronized by achievers, has rocket fuel in her hands. Indeed, the beautiful paradox is that pursuing things we may do poorly can produce the sense of absorption, which is all that happiness is, while persisting in those we already do well does not.”*

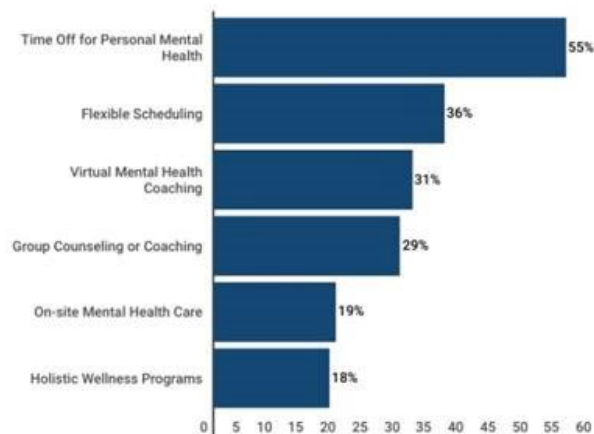
ChatGPT is not going to help us build grit in our children. Now they can write the college admissions essay with a simple prompt and feedback. [can-chatgpt-write-a-good-college-admissions-essay](#).

Private colleges have overplayed the Chivas Regal effect. This is the concept that consumers will equate higher price with higher quality. Private schools have been relentlessly marching up their advertised tuition but then discount it “behind the scenes” through robust institutional scholarships (the average discount is now over 50%). The problem is when the published price prevents the consumer from even

considering the school and that is increasing. Time to get to real pricing disclosure. [are-private-colleges-losing-potential-students-due-to-a-bad-marketing-tactic](#)

Companies need to catch up with the mental health crisis coming out of the pandemic. Employers must expand the various ways they can support employees and their family's mental health. It's as important as physical healthcare and most companies are not offering significant solutions. Aflac (2021) Workplace Benefits Trends below:

Which of the Following, If Any, Does Your Company Offer to Assist Employees with Mental Health and Self-Care?



I hate the digital tipping culture. We are constantly asked by point of sale machines whether we want to tip (bagel store, subway, online ordering of sushi etc.). Now it has even come to self-checkout kiosks which the WSJ called "emotional blackmail." Who are you tipping when you did everything yourself? IMO this is just a way for the company to shift labor cost onto the consumer. One leading restaurateur out east tried to get rid of tipping and raised his prices but no one else followed. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/20/dining/danny-meyer-no-tips.html>.

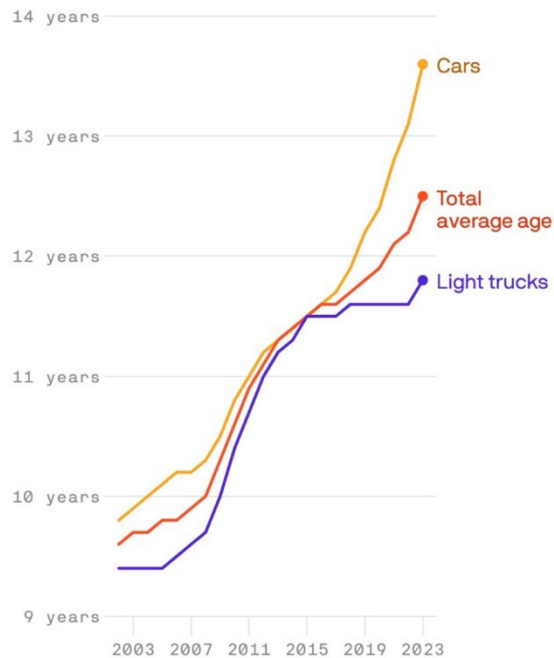
Forbes recently did a survey to see how people felt about the new wave of tip requests via technology. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/digital-tipping-culture/>. Here were the key takeaways:

1. Most people tip when it's expected—95% of respondents said they tip at least sometimes, with 76% saying they tip always or often.
2. The majority of respondents say they tip an average of 11% to 20%.
3. Most people tip more when they leave a digital tip. Nearly 65% of people tip at least 10% more when they tip digitally versus with cash.
4. One in three people feel pressured to tip, while 18% feel uncomfortable about tipping.
5. Forty percent of people don't think food truck workers should ask for tips, while 38% think tips shouldn't be solicited at fast-casual restaurants.
6. Quality of service affects tip amount the most (72%), followed by personal budget (56%).

Are you a flipper or a long hauler when it comes to cars? I have some friends who lease and change cars every three years. The Locke's are long haulers led by the 2011 suburban with 210,000 miles. New data shows we are actually slightly below average on how long we hold our cars.

Average age of U.S. vehicles, by type

Annual average as of January 1 each year, 2002 to 2023



Reproduced from S&P Global Mobility; Chart: Axios

I must say I am exhausted by all of the “causes” and “special days.” Now our small suburb is promoting No Mow May. From our town officials: *“No Mow May is a conservation initiative to allow grass to grow for the month of May to create habitat and forage for early season pollinators and other wildlife. This program invites residents to refrain from mowing their lawn, or a portion of their lawn, to support the survival of pollinators and increase the diversity of wildlife. Reduced mowing in the month of May will also lessen carbon emissions and reduce energy consumption.”*

Congrats to our son Skip on his graduation from college. I had ChatGPT write a commencement speech with advice for today’s graduating seniors below. It was written in 25 seconds using this prompt (thanks to John Hughes for assist).

Prompt: "Please write a commencement speech for college graduates. Please have the speech be at least 1000 words. There should be 3 main themes to the speech: 1. take risks; 2. Embrace technology and change; 3. work hard"

Response:

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and most importantly, the incredible class of [Year], congratulations on this momentous day of your college graduation! Today, we gather here to celebrate your achievements, to honor your dedication, and to embark on a new chapter in your lives. As you prepare to step into the vast unknown, I want to share with you three essential themes that will guide you in your journey: taking risks, embracing technology and change, and working hard.

First and foremost, taking risks. As you stand at the precipice of your future, remember that true growth and success often come from stepping outside your comfort zone. It is natural to feel apprehensive about the unknown, but remember that the greatest discoveries and accomplishments in history were made by those who dared to take risks. Be audacious in your dreams and relentless in your pursuit of them. Trust in your abilities, seize opportunities, and do not be afraid to fail. Failure is not a sign of weakness, but a stepping stone towards greatness. Embrace it, learn from it, and let it fuel your determination to rise above any obstacle that comes your way.

The second theme I want to emphasize is the importance of embracing technology and change. We live in an era of unprecedented technological advancements and rapid change. The world you are entering is vastly different from the one your parents and grandparents knew. Embracing technology and change will not only allow you to navigate this complex landscape but also open doors to unimaginable possibilities. Embrace the digital revolution, harness the power of innovation, and seek to understand the transformative potential of emerging technologies. Embrace change not as a threat, but as an opportunity for personal and societal growth. Adaptability will be your superpower as you navigate the ever-evolving professional landscape.

However, amidst the whirlwind of change, one thing remains constant: the value of hard work. Working hard is the cornerstone of success. It is through hard work that you will bring your dreams to life, transform ideas into reality, and make a meaningful impact on the world. There will be times when you feel discouraged, when the path ahead seems insurmountable. During those moments, remember the dedication and perseverance that brought you to this point. Embrace the challenges, stay focused on your goals, and put in the effort required to achieve them. Remember, success is not an entitlement but an outcome of relentless determination and hard work.

Beyond these three themes, I implore you to maintain a sense of purpose and integrity throughout your journey. Seek meaning in your work and find ways to contribute to the betterment of society. Make ethical choices that align with your values, and let integrity be your guiding principle. Remember, the impact you make is not just measured by personal achievements but by the positive influence you have on the lives of others.

As you venture forth, do not forget the support system that has been instrumental in your success. Take a moment to express gratitude to your professors, mentors, and loved ones who have stood by your side throughout this journey. Their guidance, encouragement, and belief in you have played a significant role in shaping the person you have become. Cherish these relationships and continue to foster connections with those who inspire and challenge you to grow.

In conclusion, as you step into the world beyond these walls, remember the power of taking risks, embracing technology and change, and working hard. Let these principles guide your actions, shape your decisions, and fuel your aspirations. Embrace the unknown with confidence and resilience, knowing that you have the knowledge, skills, and determination to create a brighter future for yourselves and for generations to come.

Congratulations, class of [Year]! May your path be filled with adventure, purpose, and fulfillment.