

## Birth of a Work Ethic

*By Mike Harris*

Thinking is the hardest work there is. Thinking is also the hardest thing to teach. One of the chores of a young boy on a farm is to keep the kitchen wood box always full. This wood was in a pile out by the barn, where it was cut and split for house use. My job was to see that there was an adequate supply in the wood box next to the mud room. So a wheel barrow was always handy and I moved the wood from the barn to the kitchen wood box.

My father saw me dumping some wood and called me over. "Mike, do you love your Mom?" "Of course," I replied. "Would you like to do something to make it a little easier for her?" "Sure but what would you suggest?" "Think! You just brought some wood to the kitchen wood box." "Yes." "But what did you do?" "I dumped it into the box." "What does Mom do when she takes the wood from the box?" "She puts it next to the stove." "No, she roots around through the wood you dumped. What would make it easier for her?" "I don't know. I offered to take some into the kitchen, but she said not to bother." "Why?" asked my father. "I don't know," I replied. "Stop! And think!" I did not know what to think. After some silence, he asked, "What does she do when she comes to get wood for the kitchen?" "She digs around, picking out special pieces for what she is cooking, depending on the kind of fire she thinks she needs." "You are getting close. THINK!"

What you could do to make it easier for her?" "I guess if I sorted the wood in the outside box she would not have to root around." "BINGO!" With that he walked away with a big smile.

So a work ethic was born. "Do the job so that it is easier for the next person to do theirs." Did it work? You bet it did. With my first job as a shipping clerk, I had to bundle the cut material and see that they arrived at the different contractors without coming apart. I learned to tie the bundles so that they arrived whole and were easy to untie. I didn't know how to tie a knot, but I learned.

When I insisted that my son get a summer job at fifteen he became the premier caddy before long because he took his job one step beyond just caddying. He met the ladies at the entrance and carried their bags to the club house. The other boys sat on their duffs.

Our kids are real smart. They do not have to be told what to do, they do it! Even now both are in their sixties, and they are happy and doing well. They are smarter than their father, and I like it that way.