



# Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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## Jack Kahl: Community Volunteer and Creator of Duck Tape

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on FEBRUARY 11, 2019

An obituary in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* caught my eye. The headline said: “Jack Kahl, 78, volunteer, created Duck Tape.” I had no idea who Kahl was, but I was certainly familiar with Duck Tape, so I read on. As I did, I found myself saying, “What an extraordinary human being!” So, I thought I’d share his story with you.

The obituary (written by Teresa Dixon Murray) said Kahl was “an inspiration to a generation of Northeast Ohio entrepreneurs, and a tireless community volunteer.” Let’s look at his entrepreneurship first. After graduating from St. Edward’s High School and John Carroll University, Kahl started working for a small tape distributor in 1963. Eight



*Jack Kahl poses with his company's signature Duck Tape in 1989. (Plain Dealer Historical Photo Collection)*

years later he bought the company for \$10,000 cash and a loan for \$182,000 and renamed it Manco. In 1998 he sold the company for \$116 million, giving 30% of it to his 350 employees. (He always referred to his employees as “partners.”) He retired in 2000.

Throughout his life, Kahl won numerous awards. Here are just a few of them: *Industry Week's* one of America’s most admired CEO’s (1993), *Cleveland*

## About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame, teacher, student, author, speaker, listener, friend, poet, farm girl.



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Each Monday I’ll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we’re all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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*Magazine's* "Best Boss in Town" (1996 and 2000), and *Inc. Magazine* named him one of three CEO's "to benchmark leadership practices."

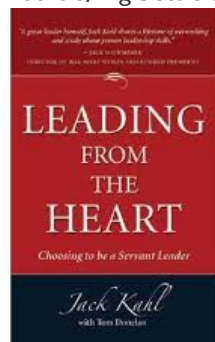
Kahl was a creative marketer. He trademarked the name Duck Tape, choosing a yellow cartoon Duck as its logo. Within only a few years, his company had cornered 40% of the duct tape market. He also introduced scores of new products such as paints and stickers for children, Easy Liner non-adhesive drawer liners, and Draft Busters window insulation kits. But Kahl was more than a successful entrepreneur. He was known as "a mentor and cheerleader" to hundreds of businesspeople in Northeast Ohio. One prominent businessman said Kahl "could not have been nicer." He was eager to share his business knowledge and experiences—both his successes and failures—with everyone. He also liked to share contact information, the titles of good books to read, or just "nuggets of wisdom."

He also had a sense of humor. He promised his employees that he would jump into a nearby pond in a Speedo if the company met certain sales goals. When it did, he kept his promise even though it was October and the water was quite cold. Another time he said he would shave his head if sales reached a certain level. Once again, he kept that promise.

Kahl was a generous volunteer. He was involved with Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Cleveland. He valued education and served on the boards of his two alma maters as well as being a major financial contributor to them. Kahl also served on the board of the Cleveland Clinic. As chairman of the development committee, he headed a major capital campaign that raised \$240 million. Through the years, he and his wife, Margaret, hosted numerous charity benefits in their home in Avon Lake, OH. He also found time to write a book about the type of leadership he strove to practice. The book is entitled,

*Leading from the Heart: Choosing to be a Servant Leader.* (I put it on my list of books to read.)

We might ask: where did Kahl's exceptional generosity come from? One friend said this: "He knew what it was like to be poor, to be someone who suffered, who struggled to pay for education. He wanted to help people who were less fortunate. He never forgot his roots." Kahl and his wife were also very proud of their five children and 14 grandchildren.



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I couldn't write about the creator of Duck Tape without saying a few words about Duct Tape.



\* Duct tape is defined as a strong cloth-backed waterproof adhesive tape.

\* Duct tape was developed by a division of Johnson & Johnson during World War II to seal ammunition boxes to keep their contents dry.

\* Today duct tape comes in a wide variety of colors and artistic patterns. You can even get duct tape that honors your favorite sports team.

\* Duct tape has hundreds of uses: to insulate pipes, to repair carpeting, to fix small boats, to repair shoes, to make a vegan wallet, to open jars, to wrap gifts, to make emergency flip flops, to decorate a helmet, to temporarily repair a turtle shell, to treat warts, and even to fashion outfits for prom night.

\* Duct tape has been stowed aboard every single NASA mission. It is even credited with saving the lives of the three astronauts aboard Apollo 13. The astronauts on Apollo 17 used duct tape to repair a damaged fender on the lunar rover.

\* Duct tape "extends the usability of broken things." Because of this, it has been called "the absolute darling of the do-it-yourself set."

Today we give thanks for creative inventions like duct tape. But more importantly, we give thanks for creative individuals like Jack Kahl, individuals who use the gifts God gave them to serve others with great kindness, generosity, imagination, devotion, and humor.

*Did anything stand out for you in this reflection?*

*Do you know other individuals who serve as generously as Kahl? Would you like to tell us a little about them below?*

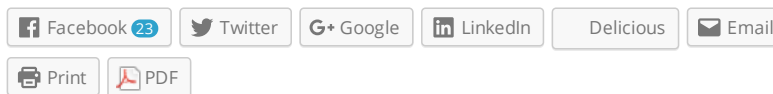
*What's your experience with duct tape? I'd love to hear a few stories.*

When I think of Jack Kahl, I recall this song by Michael Card. (I'm sorry I couldn't find a version with the printed lyrics.) The song is called "The Gentle Healer." The more we are one with Jesus (as Kahl seemed to be), the more healing we can bring to others with our mere presence.



I invite you to share some of your thoughts below. Don't be shy...

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Tagged as: [creator of Duck Tape](#), [Jack Kahl](#), [Servant Leadership](#)

{ 22 comments... read them below or [add one](#) }

**Thomas DeFreitas** February 11, 2019 at 4:00 am



"He always referred to employees as 'partners.'" How limitlessly awesome is that? Rest in peace, Mr Kahl, and thank you for your contributions!

REPLY

**Melissa Medeiros** February 11, 2019 at 4:11 am

Wish I knew him. Hope I can be more like him. Thank you so much.



REPLY

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**John Hopkins** February 11, 2019 at 7:11 am



What a great guy. His employees must have loved him! I know that many who walk the Camino carry duct tape in their backpacks in case of blisters. And on a more personal note, We recently had a clogged tub drain. Before pouring Draino down the drain, I duct-taped all around the mouth of the drain to avoid the corrosive effect Draino would have on the bath tub floor. Thank you, Jack Kahl!

REPLY

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**Tina** February 11, 2019 at 7:11 am



Love, Love, Love this story. What an inspiring man. I will put his book on my list to read.

REPLY

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**Barb** February 11, 2019 at 7:12 am



How very interesting! Thank you so much for sharing.

REPLY

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**Lisa** February 11, 2019 at 7:13 am



Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and may the perpetual light shine gently upon him!

REPLY

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**Lucille Blais** February 11, 2019 at 7:13 am



What a life of greatness, ingenuity and respect for fellowworkers. Wish there were more like him. Thanks for such a practical invention. Sr. Lucille

REPLY

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**Pete** February 11, 2019 at 7:31 am



Duct tape rules! As an AT hiker, duct tape was always with us, used for many repair instances. I wouldn't go hiking without it. I admire Jack Kahl, when I grow up, I want to be just like him.

REPLY

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**Carol** February 11, 2019 at 7:34 am



With few role models for young people, I hope educators & parents highlight this mans life, leadership, & generosity.

REPLY

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**Mary Jane** February 11, 2019 at 7:53 am



I have a small business. I use Duck Tape all the time to mail packages. I will definitely read his book. What a wonderful story.

REPLY

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**Kathleen Magiera** February 11, 2019 at 8:05 am



What a lovey example of servanthood! Thanks for sharing Sr. Melannie.

Kathleen

REPLY

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**Jane** February 11, 2019 at 8:21 am



What a great story! I have ordered the book for my son-in-law, Michael. He is an engineer and has been very successful as "the boss" in several locations. His company sends him as a trouble shooter because of his way with people. He, too, is a leader in his community and in his church. As I read your story, I immediately thought of Michael. Thanks so much for sharing with us as you do every week. You are an inspiration always.

REPLY

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**Fran** February 11, 2019 at 8:55 am



Jack seems to have lived each day with love in his heart. It is inspiring to know that such goodness exists today.

REPLY

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**Jean Canatsey** February 11, 2019 at 9:42 am



Our son, Jeff, was an AirForce mechanic on a C-130. He used to jokingly tell me not to worry about him because you could keep a C-130 in the air with bailing wire, chewing gum and Duck Tape. Those planes ar3 still flying!

REPLY

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**Loretta** February 11, 2019 at 9:57 am



What a beautiful life. How blessed are we to have an example in our current world of a generous man who led from his heart, and shared his time, talent and treasure with those in need. "To those who have received much, even more will be given." And, to hold it all together, a special bonus - Duct tape! May we all turn to duct tape with a new reverence whether we are trying to fix (fill in the blank) or trying to just hold ourselves together as we live the lives God intended for us to live. Thank you Sister for sharing!

REPLY

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**Sr. Sue** February 11, 2019 at 12:03 pm



Like the song said Jack was just an ordinary man who did extraordinary things in a gentle way. Duck tape is a staple in my life. If have used it to get rid of warts, as support for sprained ankles, to block air from coming in the windows and many other projects. As I read the story and listened to the song I was also reminded of my father. Although he was different in many ways he was an extraordinary man in my eyes.

REPLY

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**Joe Johnson** February 11, 2019 at 12:34 pm



My friend Wayne has the “fix it” gene! He can fix anything. He was a jet plane mechanic in the Viet Nam War. He’s mainly generous with those talents with lots of folks here in San Luis Obispo County. Always giving! So he’s also got the “kindness” gene like Jack Kahl!

REPLY

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**Marilyn Woidat** February 11, 2019 at 12:57 pm



This summer my grand daughter, Jeanette will go to Poland with her group from Belmont University to help refugees in a village...I will give her duct tape (just in case there is a need).  
Marilyn Woidat

REPLY

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**David B Consolo** February 11, 2019 at 1:05 pm



Sr. Melannie,  
My reflection on this reading and the life of a generous capitalist is that if the likes of the Progressive/ Democrat AOC gets in office, the world will not have individuals like Jack Kahl. The “Government ” will take care of us equally weather we work or don’t want to work. There will be no incentive to work hard, or get ahead.  
David Consolo

REPLY

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**Rodolfo** February 11, 2019 at 2:38 pm



Reading Jack’s story is the best medicine you can take after you have had your fill of national news and see that we’re going nowhere with them. He was definitely God’s gift to us. Thank you Sister Melanie

REPLY

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**Rosemary** February 11, 2019 at 4:18 pm



When our son was married, my husband's tuxedo waistband broke. We had not even finished the meal and the dancing was coming soon. We could not find safety pins or any other way to fix his trousers. He left the reception to go back to the hotel to get another pair of pants. He came back in quickly and walked over wearing his tux. He came to me and opened his jacket. There I saw a beautifully designed belt made of duct tape. My husband always carries duct tape in the trunk of the car. We danced in thanksgiving at our son's wedding.



REPLY

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**Linda** February 11, 2019 at 5:37 pm



Hi everyone,  
Check out a YouTube for clips of Canadian comedian "Red Green". The original episodes of his long running TV show regularly featured a segment on a hilarious and unique use of duct tape.  
As Red would say, "It doesn't matter if it's a zip tie or duct tape.. fixed is fixed!"

REPLY

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