

Executive Profile

BRIAN KENNEDY

PRESIDENT AND CEO, BUCK INSTITUTE FOR AGE RESEARCH

HQ: Novato.

Background: Seven months ago, the Jeffersonville, Ind., native was happily toiling in his University of Washington lab, looking at nutrient signaling pathways that are linked to dietary restriction, when the Buck Institute came calling. For the time being, he maintains his lab in Washington as well as an independent lab in China.

First job: I carried mail (in Louisville) for the post office in the summer. It was great: I was outside, exercising and taking a different route every day.

Education: Bachelor's degree in math and biochemistry, Northwestern University; Ph.D. in biology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
Residence: Novato.



Business strategy

How's business: The researchers here are on the cusp of understanding what aging is. It's a good time to be working on aging.

Biggest challenge for your business: The scares over federal funding. We're over half-funded by NIH money.

What will change at your company in the next year: For one, we'll have a new building, funded in large part by the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine. The

other thing is we're establishing a Buck advisory council with people pretty much from around the world to get our message out and talk about these issues of aging.

Management philosophy

Guiding principles for good management: My biggest philosophy is to be ego-free, find the best idea, no matter whose it is — it doesn't have to be mine — and go for it.

Best way to keep competitive edge: When I became an assistant professor, I got involved in everything I could. It's a big commitment in time, but you have the broad interactions and you get an idea of what's going on in the entire field of age research, and then you can apply those concepts to your research.

Why people like working for you: You work hard to find the best people for the job and then you trust them to do their job.

Mentors: Leonard Guarente at MIT and Jack Rowe, who was president of Mount Sinai Hospital and CEO of Aetna.

Judgment calls

Best business decision: Taking this position. I had tenure and could have stayed as a faculty member. But research on aging doesn't get the (status) it deserves when it comes to funding. I didn't have a platform at Washington to really make that case.

Hardest lesson learned: When I got out of college and got married — about three weeks later — I was in a car accident and then in a wheelchair for six months. I was driving down I-65 after dark and a drunk driver was going the wrong way — it was driver on driver — and he didn't survive. Before that, some part of me felt I was a good scientist but I had issues with confidence. Sitting

there thinking about things changes your perspective: "Wait a minute, I only have one chance to go through this thing." If something works, great; if it doesn't work, then I know I didn't let myself get in the way.

Toughest business decision: On the business side, you're looking at productivity and annual budgets and three- and five-year plans; it's hard to measure that in a lab. I made the decision to separate the business side from the lab side.

True confessions

Like best about job: The new challenges that come with it, and I like the ability to reach out and meet people, like those who have an impact on policy.

Like least about job: Trying to find time for my own lab is very difficult.

Pet peeve: Scientifically, it's that people get too closed-minded and they don't take enough risk. People want incremental advances but you have to take big risks and people are scared to pursue that.

First choice for a new career: Novelist.

Predilections

Most influential book: "Young Men and Fire," by Norman Maclean.

Favorite cause: I'm living it. Aging's not something that people have to suffer through without any therapies.

Favorite movie: "Adaptation."

Favorite restaurant: Bungalow 44 in Mill Valley.

Favorite way to spend free time: Fly-fishing and golf.

On your iPod: Nature and science podcasts.

Automobile: 2006 Toyota Prius.

— Ron Leuty ■