



WALLY WHO? ©

Don't Let Anyone Hijack Your Company Culture

By

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Our company culture – that nebulous yet defining awareness of whom we are, how we act, and what we believe – is created primarily by the character of the founder / owner. One reason a management transfer often doesn't make the grade is that the new position fits that person's adopted culture as poorly as a High Society matron put in charge of a trailer-park brood on the program *Trading Spouses*.

Typically, charismatic founders touting hard-held beliefs have no trouble creating businesses in their own image. Larry Ellison created a tough-guy company; Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield created a cuddly one. Some business owners aren't so dynamic: and not any of *you*, dear clients.

The not so born leader may be pensive, lackluster, or may communicate poorly. Missing discernible passions or strong preferences, leave little imprint on their employees.

Employees in companies with vigorous leaders guide behavior by asking: what would Wally do? Employees in companies with non-descript owners barely recall who Wally is.

Some owners may not care if their business doesn't resemble them. However, companies can't help but develop personalities over time. And here's where the Limburger-in-the-icebox principle comes in.

Foods in the refrigerator absorb the odors of whichever of their shelf companions is most aromatic.

Likewise, companies not identified by their owners sometimes assume the personalities of their most dynamic, personable, or just plain loud staff member. Without attention from the owner, a company's culture is at the mercy of the human equivalent of stinky cheese.

There are obvious reasons not to let an employee – even unintentionally, hijack your culture. For example, the strongest personality in the business may be some jerk you brought in to make rain. Sure, he plays symphonies with your top line, but the idea of others imitating his arrogance and frat-boy manners makes you tremble. He may be someone whose values differ from yours.

But other employees won't recognize it, because you have failed to make your values clear.

I know one owner who was very cautious about advancing any new

ideas, and who spent most of his time out of the office (another way owners sacrifice influence). In his absence, a persuasive supporter of improvements captured the imaginations of the staff. Sometimes your company's dominant personality may be a model of integrity and charm, and you're employees' affection for him or her, a testament of support. Nevertheless, staff loyalty is important; you can't afford to let it get lost.

If the company's de facto heart and soul quits employment for any reason, morale will plummet, and guess who will be blamed. And if, heaven forbid, he or she leaves to start their own business, expect to see your best people pied-piper'd out of the building.

Owners can be many things: benevolent, dictatorial, funny, hip, hypercompetitive, brilliant, even charmingly nerdy. The one thing they can't be is invisible. Don't leave your company culture to default.

Contact Ron Hequet **now**, and discover how to achieve your goals and improve the condition of the organization or yourself:

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