



Chief Culture Officer

How to Create a Living, Breathing Corporation

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Levi Strauss & Co., the jeans and apparel maker, missed out on the hip-hop trend. They didn't realize that those kids in baggy jeans represented a whole new — and lucrative — market opportunity, one they could have seen coming if they had been paying attention to the shape of American culture.

Levi Strauss isn't alone. Too many corporations outsource their understanding of culture to trend hunters, cool watchers, marketing experts, consulting firms and, sometimes, teenage interns. The cost to Levi Strauss was \$1 billion. The cost to the rest of corporate America is immeasurable.

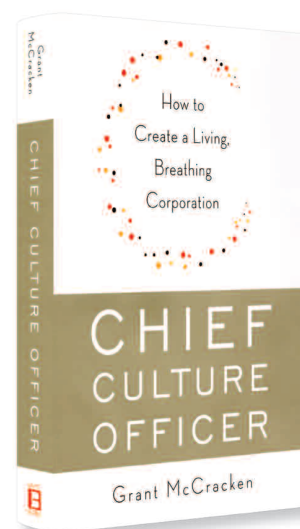
The lesson? The American corporation needs a new professional. It needs a Chief Culture Officer (CCO).

In *Chief Culture Officer*, Grant McCracken, an anthropologist who does training at some of the world's biggest companies, argues that the CCO would keep a finger on the pulse of contemporary cultural trends while developing a systematic understanding of the deep waves of culture in America and the world. The CCO's professionalism would allow the corporation to see coming changes, even when they only exist as the weakest of signals.

Bursting with insight and character, *Chief Culture Officer* is sure to expand your horizons — and your business.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to market, invent, sell or simply invest in companies that make stuff.
- Why companies get blindsided by cultural factors hidden in plain view.
- Why businesses need to bring cultural expertise into their executive suite.
- How to run a successful business in the early 21st century.



by Grant McCracken

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: CHIEF CULTURE OFFICER

by Grant McCracken

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Introduction

Levi Strauss, the jeans and apparel maker, misses hip-hop. The penalty: \$1 billion.

Quaker pays too much for Snapple. The penalty: \$1.4 billion.

Facebook claims 7 billion photos as its own. Embarrassment and recantation follow.

These corporations, like most, were bad at reading culture, bad at staying in touch with culture and bad at working with culture. And it cost them dearly.

By “culture,” we don’t mean corporate culture. And we don’t mean “high culture,” the world of refined taste. By culture, we mean the world outside the corporation, the body of ideas, emotions and activities that make up the life of the consumer.

It’s not that the corporation hasn’t *tried* to take account of culture. It’s resorted to the advertising agency, designer, consultant, cool-hunter and guru. Worst case, someone says, “Let’s see what the intern thinks.” (Now a million-dollar decision rests on a 20-year-old.) But culture is too important to be left to an outsider (or a 20-year-old). When there’s \$1.4 billion at stake, it needs a Chief Culture Officer (CCO).

The corporation has learned many things in the past 100 years. It has mastered most of the mysteries of organizational behavior, operations management, human resources, communication, marketing and finance. Until it masters culture, it makes the world needlessly mysterious and it multiplies risk.

Why Culture Matters

Culture matters for reasons good and bad. First, it is the place to discover advantage, opportunity and inno-

vation. The Four Seasons, Patagonia, Starbucks, Nike, Red Bull, Target, Method Soap — each is a culture play. Each found value in culture. Each *extracted* value from culture.

Second, culture is the breeding ground for cataclysmic change, a North Sea out of which commotion constantly storms. Without a working knowledge of culture, the corporation lives in a perpetual state of surprise, waiting for the next big storm to hit. Without a CCO, the corporation has no way to perform this crucial piece of threat assessment. ●

Getting Past Guru: Being Steve Jobs

People talk about Steve Jobs as if he were one of a kind. Clearly, he is a remarkable man. When we look at what he’s done for Apple, cell phones, digital content, the art of design ... well, he has earned our admiration.

But when it comes to helping Apple navigate culture, Jobs may be less indispensable than we think. With a more systematic approach to culture, many could do what Jobs has done. Let’s not be blinded by the “cult of personality.” It’s good for Jobs. It’s good for Apple. It’s not so good for the rest of us. We have made ourselves guru-dependent.

Many companies depend on a guru: Apple on Jobs, Virgin on Richard Branson, CBS on Les Moonves, Omnimedia on Martha Stewart, Bad Boy Entertainment on Sean Combs.

Steve Jobs

Steve Jobs’ parents sacrificed heroically to send him to Reed College, a small liberal arts school in Portland,



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Ore. But he wasn't happy. He couldn't see the point of his studies and, after six months, he dropped out.

Jobs didn't leave Portland and he didn't leave Reed. He stayed on campus as an unregistered student, walking, thinking, noticing. One of the things he noticed was that campus posters were particularly beautiful. A little investigation told him that Reed had a good calligraphy department, and Jobs decided to take a class, his only class. He promptly fell in love with the art form. "It was beautiful, historical, artistically subtle in a way that science can't capture, and I found it fascinating," he said.

When Jobs designed the first Macintosh computer, 10 years later, his Reed training came back to him. And the rest, as they say, is history. Without his calligraphy course, Jobs says, "the Mac would have never had multiple typefaces or proportionally spaced fonts." And, he says, "It's likely that no personal computer would have them. If I had never dropped out, I would have never dropped in on this calligraphy class and personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do."

Thanks to Jobs and that course, Apple was unique in the tech space. It cared about beauty. And this gave it a strong connection to the creative community, which, in turn, supplied the corporation with a passionate supportive base. Apple enthusiasts were so dedicated to the brand they helped fund each new Apple experiment, embracing, without much complaint, even the odd Apple failure. Jobs had found a way to connect to the creative community. He had found a way to read culture and speak to it.

Jobs wasn't a CCO, but he certainly acted like one. The lesson: Connect to our culture and we will follow you anywhere. And Apple is now so spectacularly in touch with parts of our culture, it seems almost in control of it.

Someone can act as a CCO not because he or she has studied contemporary culture, but because he or she comes from that culture. Eventually, every CCO has to know about the whole of culture, not just the part of it he or she knows from personal experience. Standards, knowledge, continual learning, the ability to process massive bodies of data and possibility, the ability to spot the crucial development in a perfect storm of possibilities — this, and not intuition, is the work of the CCO. ●

Stealth CCOs

The CCO doesn't yet exist, but there are people who act like CCOs and we can learn from them.

Dan Wieden for Nike

Two Rules of the CCO

The first rule of the CCO is: Talk to anyone who will talk to you.

The second rule of the CCO is: Figure out the thing that makes a person interesting. Usually people don't mind the grilling. After all, we are asking them to talk about themselves. The trick is to find the thing they know best that we know least. And then the trick is to find out what this means to them, how it looks to them and how it feels for them. If there's lots of "found art" out there, there's lots of found anthropology, too. Be opportunistic. Seize every opportunity.

By the mid-1980s, the running boom was giving way to a fitness craze, and Phil Knight, founder of Nike, wanted his company to take part. Knight didn't much believe in advertising, but competition with Reebok was fierce and he had begun to work with a small shop in Portland, Ore. called Wieden + Kennedy. Dan Wieden, Portland native and second-generation ad man, proved to be an essential asset.

It was Wieden who coined the slogan "Just do it" in 1988. Most slogans are about the brand ("Coke is it."). But "Just do it" was imperative, impatient, presumptuous and, well, a little rude. This was not the sort of thing consumers had heard before.

Acting as unofficial CCO, Wieden had looked into the life of the consumer. He saw someone struggling to get off the couch into fitness, someone suffering aches and pains, someone tempted by excuses. In "Just do it" Wieden found the three words that allowed Nike to intervene. Acting as unofficial CCO, Wieden had found a way to help Nike ride the fitness wave.

A. G. Lafley for P&G

When A. G. Lafley became the CEO of Procter & Gamble (P&G) in 2000, the company was a powerhouse.

But the new CEO was not happy. Lafley believed his company was a little slow, insular and self-congratulatory. He wanted to reinvent P&G for the 21st century. "Speed and agility," he said, "matter more than heft."

And this is why Lafley made a pilgrimage to Venezuela. He climbed a steep set of concrete stairs to a cramped apartment to interview homemaker Maria Yolanda Rios. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, "For an hour, Mr. Lafley sat in the corner of Mrs. Rios' kitchen, where bright yellow paint peeled off the wall, and listened to the young mother. [Rios produced] 31 bottles of cream, lotion, shampoo and perfume and

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placed them on the embroidered tablecloth. She has two lotions for her feet, one for her body, one for her hands and another for her face. ‘It’s her entertainment,’ Mr. Lafley said.”

It was a telling moment for American capitalism. Lafley was saying, in effect, “These creams and lotions are not what we say they are. They’re whatever Mrs. Rios says they are. If she treats them as ‘entertainment,’ we must treat them as entertainment. Let’s stop listening for what we want to hear.” The most powerful man in this powerful company was saying, “It’s not about us. It’s about her.”

Lafley insisted the corporation take the larger view. In his book, *The Game Changer*, Lafley wrote, “P&G needed to look at consumers more broadly. It tended to narrow in on only one aspect of the consumer — for example, their mouth for oral-care products, their hair for shampoo, their loads of dirty clothes and their washing machines for laundry detergents.”

Lafley disliked the way this approach “extracted” the consumer out of his or her life, focusing P&G on what was important to the company, not the consumer. Lafley said, in effect, *See the whole person*.

This is the role of CCO, to dolly back far enough to see the consumer in his or her life, in his or her culture.

Actually, CCOs move in two directions. They go *inward* toward the consumer more than anyone else in the C-suite. They come to know what these lives feel like to live. But CCOs also move *outward* to capture the bigger picture. ●

Culture Fast and Slow

Homeyness is slow culture. It consists of a set of rules. It specifies our choice of colors, materials, furniture, decorative objects, arrangement, interior design and exterior characteristics. It is the way we take an ordinary space and give it extraordinary powers. It shows us how to turn a house into a home. It is an enduring, deep-seated aspect of our culture.

As a part of slow culture, homeyness is everywhere in our midst and, apparently, everywhere invisible. It shapes Americans’ lives but stays below the radar of American experts.

Pity the CCO who ignores it. It is often homeyness that helps decide whether consumers will embrace a new product, how they will use it, what they will use it for and whether this proves a “keeper” for any given American household.

The Challenge of Fast Culture

Fast culture gets the lion’s share of our attention. It is so much more visible, vivid, obvious and, yes, fashionable. Slow culture plays the country cousin, less interesting, less fashionable. It is punished with neglect. Think of it this way: Fast culture is like all the boats on the surface of the Pacific. We can spot them, number them, track them. Slow culture is everything beneath the surface: less well charted, much less visible. Slow culture is the lesser known half of the CCO competence. But it is equally important.

Fast culture is now the great challenge for the C-suite. Every corporation is like a fishing boat, pitching on high seas, wave after wave crashing through the wheelhouse. Circuit City, recently deceased, failed to take advantage of the “Geek Squad” trend that helped lift competitor Best Buy to greatness. A couple of years before, Best Buy had purchased Musicland, just as kids were using peer-to-peer file-sharing technologies to download their music from the Web. Some responded, others fell. Some advertising agencies grasped what TiVo meant for their business model; others will never catch up.

Fast culture has many origins and the CCO must monitor them all. New cultural developments can come from the worlds of cuisine, sports, music, fashion, moviemaking, websites and new media. Chefs, point guards, engineers, indie bands, Hollywood producers, bloggers, new presidents — any of these can prove a decisive influence. It’s a lot to monitor. To make matters trickier still, we can’t merely monitor the most famous of these players. The new technologies make it possible for obscure players to punt their influence in from the margin. And all of a sudden, too. (Take a bow, Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist, and Arianna Huffington, founder of the *Huffington Post*.)

Fast culture can open up “blue oceans” of opportunity. It can deliver “game-changing” developments. But it also delivers blindsides. The CCO who can manage fast culture can earn his or her income for the year by lunchtime ... every day. ●

Status and Cool

The status convergence and the cool convergence are central for the CCO. They are now foundational parts of our culture, and the great yin and yang of the Western tradition. Both have passed from absolute currency, but they remain active and formative. It’s the CCO’s job to figure out how they work, and the framework they provide for our understanding of fast and slow culture. Without this framework,

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we're chasing trends.

• **Status Culture.** Why do people never live in the living room? They lavish time and money on this room. Then they seal the room away.

The answer is that the living room represents a status message we want to make but don't want to live. And that's the problem. In a room like this, we're obliged to stay "on our best behavior." How very tedious. We would much prefer to be in the kitchen, where we can "just be ourselves."

Almost no one these days tries to pass as a member of a group more exalted than their own. This fiction (or "status counterfeiting") was common in the 1950s, but these days, it does not interest us at all. For most people, self-presentation is like yard work: We do enough of it to keep the place looking respectable. The idea of devoting much of our concern, most of our income and all of our aspiration to great status performances is over, the ideological antique of another age.

• **Cool Culture.** Cool culture is a much newer cultural force than status. It rose as an attack on status. Cool holds status to be an anxious, craven act of conformity, a needy clinging to convention. Cool scorns status as clueless and dopey. It prefers a more thoughtful self-assembly, intelligent choice in music, clothing and attitude that shows one's autonomy and distance from the group. If status is about standing, cool is about standing free.

By the end of the 20th century, the results were in. The winner was obvious. And the victor was ... compromise. For all their intense conflict, the avant-garde and the middle class had achieved a glorious rapprochement. They had fought so long and hard, they now were one. The middle-class world was shot through with avant-garde liberties, encompassing a new latitude of personal expression and a new order of creativity. And the avant-garde discovered that certain kinds of social order, self-discipline and instrumentality were, when all was said and done, obligatory. You couldn't live without them.

Both parties won and lost. The status code would never be the same. Its "anchors" had been permanently loosened. Senior white males were losing their hegemony. Social regulations were in steep decline. Cool had come to accept compromises of its own. Some kinds of self-expression were not to be allowed. Cool also had to accept that personal liberty was probably not going to eliminate social differences or social sameness. A hipster regime was not going to happen.

Cool is an outsider's sensibility now completely internalized, built into every individual and our entire culture.

The larger outcome is clear. Neither cultural constellation will ever seize the day and return itself to its once glorious position. For we are a culture with a third term, a restless creativity. If once we were mainstream and avant-garde, now we are a great wilderness, with thousands of little experiments happening everywhere. Point, counterpoint is dead. The struggle between status and cool is over. We are now a culture overflowing with variety and noise. ●

Producers and Consumers

As the Internet became more robust and well distributed, the corporate world decided to put the world of branding online. Coca-Cola and General Motors wanted to be where the consumers were. But what happened there was a revelation. When corporations made traditional ads and sent them down the chute of a TV show, there really was no clear way of telling whether people liked or even watched them. Only sales figures served as a measure — a very distant and loose measure, to be sure. But with the Internet, you could tell. And when the first websites went up, the numbers came in.

There was a stunned silence in the marketing world. No one could quite believe it. The prevailing assumption had been well steeped in self-congratulation. Big corporations believed people loved them. After all, they had used our brand for years, right? We're part of their family, no? They're going to have to come to our website just to say hi? But no one came. No one cared.

Corporate America, welcome to the new consumer. Brands were discovering they could no longer treat this consumer in the old way, as a simpleton to be talked down to, shouted at, lectured, scolded, bamboozled and browbeaten. In the language of the seminal book *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, the consumer culture now had to be more like a conversation between equals.

Marketing vs. Bud Melman

Fan cultures are especially productive of new content. Consider the case of Bud Caddell. He works as a strategist for a New York-based digital think tank called Undercurrent. That's his day job. But Caddell so loves the TV show *Mad Men*, he decided to contribute to it. He invented a character called Bud Melman, a mailroom clerk at Sterling Cooper Advertising in 1962. And he began to Twitter messages ... in character ... from the mailroom ... from 1962. It's all a little confusing, but here it is in short form: a real person, Bud Caddell, has created a fictional person, Bud Melman, whom he has inserted in the fictional world built by a TV show, from

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which he, Bud Caddell, really Twitters.

This is a devotional activity. It measures how much Caddell loves the show. And it multiplies the show, adding a character, a narrative stream and viewer interest. But it made the AMC network uncomfortable. AMC believed that Caddell was not adding, but taking. And it asked Caddell to cease and desist. Caddell's reply captures precisely why fan cultures matter:

Fan fiction. Brand hijacking. Copyright misuse. Sheer devotion. Call it what you will, but we call it the blurred line between content creators and content consumers, and it's not going away. We're your biggest fans, your die-hard proponents, and when your show gets cancelled, we'll be among the first to pass around the petition. Talk to us. Befriend us. Engage us. But please, don't treat us like criminals.

Marketing Is Changing

The world of marketing is changing at light speed. And this is another reason to hire a CCO. If the corporation is now going to talk to consumers, instead of shout or lie, it needs to know how to start and sustain the conversation. This means a nuanced knowledge of the consumer, the many different kinds of consumers out there, and the depths and facets of any individual consumer. It needs to proceed with a new order of intelligence.

As Steven Johnson says in *Everything Bad Is Good for You*, "For decades, we've worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a steadily declining path toward lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the 'masses' want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies want to give the masses what they want. But in fact, the exact opposite is happening: The culture is getting more intellectually demanding, not less." To live in this culture, to profit in this new marketplace, a CCO is called for.

This may require a complete replacement of the marketing team. In the meantime, it will require the presence of the CCO, someone who knows the culture well enough to engage with it, to talk about it and to contribute to it. ●

Building a Secret Sneaker Store

I was standing in front of a convenience store, one of those places that looks like it's got three weeks to live, tops. In the window was a bottle of BBQ sauce and a couple rolls of Bounty, sun-bleached and dust-covered.

I opened the door and, sure enough, it was one of those sad little candy and cigarette operations. There was a guy sitting behind a counter, framed by lotto tickets.

Two more guys were sitting on a ratty old sofa. They didn't look up.

But behind the Coke machine everything was perfect, clean and well lit. Racks and racks of sneakers. Shoes as far as the eye could see. A secret sneaker sanctum.

The secret sneaker sanctum is the new model of culture. It's how we do things now. Culture streams here in all directions. Behind a Coke machine in Boston.

Dispersive and Convergent

This is a world with lots of ricochet, lots of players, lots of churn. We've got art, commerce, design, professional sports, the steet, journalism, amateur sports, big business, tiny shops and consumers with felt-tip pens. The culture is both dispersive and convergent. It is fast and it is slow. It's about producers acting like consumers and consumers acting like producers. And, as usual, the corporation is the bewildered little brother, trying desperately to keep up.

Change now courses through our world on purpose. Every institution and many individuals are creating novelty as a matter of course. We have to add to this all the change that happens by accident. As change ricochets around the deck like so many cannons, other events are set in motion. Some of these are as cataclysmic as they are unforeseen. Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls these "black swans," events that are, in a sense, unimaginable, until, like a failure of the banking system, they are incontrovertible.

And this is why there has to be a CCO in place. Only a CCO has the weather maps to keep track of all this information. Only a CCO can know those players as groups and as individuals. Only a CCO can manage a market like this. ●

How-To

Noticing has been taken captive by the academic set. Post-modernists celebrate the *flâneur*, a person who strolls, saunters and loaf, noticing the city to which he or she goes. The idea of a flâneur is so prized, it has become a pose. It is played out in cafés, where we see moody young men scribbling in their Moleskin notebooks (the *de rigueur* brand of the moment) tormented by their genius and the need to commit illumination to paper. The cost of the pose is high. Some flâneurs are so busy posturing that they don't actually notice very much. And they are so very scrupulous about what they notice, they miss a great deal. Much of the urgent work of noticing goes undone.

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Morgan Friedman

I much prefer the more sincere act of noticing that comes from a guy like Morgan Friedman. (No, not Morgan Freeman the American film actor) Morgan Friedman is a guy in his 30s who has created new standards for noticing. No posturing for Friedman, no sitting in a café hoping someone will mistake him for a tortured genius.

When Friedman spoke in New York City recently, he suggested that we actually talk to people. In one of his PowerPoint points, he exhorted us to “ask old people what the city was like when they were young.

“Old people are waiting for you. They spend their days on stoops and cafés doing nothing but remembering. They’re the ones at the edge between different worlds connecting them together. Ask them what has changed in their everyday life the most since their childhood. Press them for details: ‘The ice-man used to bring us ice once a week’ or ‘My husband couldn’t afford my dowry!’”

While the flaneur is swanning about the city in reveries of self-exaltation, the Friedmanesque observer is running the city down, seizing the opportunity it gives for investigation. In the place of the PoMoPo (the post-modern pose), Friedman wants us to chat up an ancient neighbor despite the fact that he or she is badly dressed and, well, old. (The CCO is interested in everything, even the banal and unattractive.)

What a CCO Notices

There are two steps of noticing for the CCO. First, observe. Then, explain. Noticing is a matter of having nimble eyes and the ability to spot the telling or troublesome detail. Naturally, we want to be discreet about it. People do not like to be observed. But that’s our job. The thing is not to stare. Keep the gaze moving. Periodically, it is useful to make the gaze go blank, and turn the gaze inward, to simulate distraction, absorption. But even after we have mastered the art of misdirection, someone will spot us.

The second step, explaining, could just as easily be called speculating. You are not looking for an exact rendering of what happened. Work up a rough sketch with no claims to veracity. This isn’t inquiry. It’s something more casual than an experiment. It’s OK to be wrong. The thing is to engage. ●

Philistines

You could be forgiven for thinking the case for culture is irresistible and that it’s only a matter of time

Phatic Communication

Phatic communication is designed to show people how we feel. It doesn’t have much informational content, but does have lots of emotional and social content. This type of communication helps sustain networks, which require a steady stream of small messages which are:

1. I exist.
2. I’m OK.
3. You exist.
4. You’re OK.
5. The channel is open.
6. The network exists.
7. The network is active.
8. The network is flowing.

before every C-suite has a CCO. In fact, there are several parties who refuse or distort the idea of culture. I like to think of them as Philistines, the name traditionally given to enemies of culture.

Enemies in the C-Suite

On his retirement in February 2009, Robert Lutz was the vice chairman in charge of product development for General Motors (GM). Lutz was routinely referred to as the “design czar” at GM. And, indeed, it’s clear he cared about design. He was responsible for the development of the Buick Enclave and the Chevy Malibu.

The trouble is, Lutz knew relatively little about the culture. What Lutz knew was cars, and what he liked about cars, by all accounts, was speed. A former pilot in the Marine Corps, he never got over his love of fast planes. In later life, he purchased and flew an Aero L-39 ex-Soviet jet fighter. And Lutz loved muscle cars.

But if we know anything about contemporary culture, it is that GM was out of step. The Japanese owned quality and used it to take away the sedan market. The Germans owned engineering and used it to take away the upper end of the boomer car market. Detroit struggled to improve on both counts, but it was clear that it would never catch up to Japanese quality or German luxury.

There was a competitive opportunity remaining, a place where Americans could beat the challengers. The real chance for Detroit was design, to make cars that vibrate with the cultural moment as deeply and profoundly as they had in the 1950s.

What Detroit needed was a man or woman in every

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C-suite who understood what was happening in culture. It needed someone who understood what was happening in the minds of boomers (and why they were so deeply wedded to German cars), in youth culture (when the muscle car culture was back with new and strange differences and why cars like the funny, boxy little Scion were flourishing) and in the life, the heart and mind of the soccer mom (for many of whom the minivan felt like the end of everything — especially their youth and their joy). Detroit needed a senior executive who understood the consumer and the American feeling for mobility in every sense of the word.

And what they had was Lutz. He loved cars for his own deeply personal reasons. He loved muscle cars because they went fast. Lutz was worse than average as a “river captain.” It’s fairly safe to say that Lutz did not ever grasp the muscle car revival (the one portrayed by Hollywood in *The Fast and the Furious*). He must have revelled in the power and the glory and all that sound. Just as surely, he must have been mystified by the fact that it was being produced, in some cases, by tiny, winged Hondas. ●

Conclusion

Chris Hughes helped found Facebook and elect the 44th president of the United States, Barack Obama, both before he was 25 years old. As one of the three founders of Facebook, he had his own responsibilities. While Mark Zuckerberg and Dustin Moskovitz were writing code and building the infrastructure, Hughes was trying to figure out what Facebook was *for*. How would people use it? Hughes had CCO-like abilities to call upon. He emerged as the “official Facebook explainer: part anthropologist, part customer-service rep, part media spokesperson.”

Hughes didn’t think Facebook users wanted a virtual Rolodex. (This seemed to be the LinkedIn idea.) He believed the big idea here, the killer app, was *sharing content*. People would use Facebook to distribute knowledge and photographs. And he was right, to the tune of 24 million photos a day. Without Hughes acting as unofficial CCO, Facebook might be yet another online experiment. Certainly, if Hughes were still at Facebook, it would never have declared itself the owner of all the content on the network. The idea was to *share* content, not give it to Facebook.

Hughes helped build My.BarackObama.com (MyBO), a website that put enthusiasts in touch with the campaign and the campaign in touch with them. The party fund-raiser wanted to use the network to raise cash. But

here, too, Hughes had a better idea. He suggested supporters be deputized as spokespeople. He gave power to supporters on the ground and decentralized the campaign. It was daring, to be sure, but it made the campaign responsive to local conditions.

Hughes served both Facebook and the Obama campaign as a COO. He had a feeling for the moment, for the opportunity, and he drew these from his knowledge of who the “consumer” was and what he or she wanted.

The First-Generation’s Responsibility

Acting as first-generation CCO is never easy. The first order of business is humility. Many people in the C-suite will not get what we do. They will think we mean “culture” with a capital C, as in high culture, museums, art and orchestras. Or they will think we mean “corporate culture.” It will be up to us to explain what culture is, why it matters, what we do and how we create value.

We want to help someone in the C-suite solve a problem. We want to show how knowing about culture makes them more strategic and more tactical. We want to make ourselves indispensable, the person who really “gets” the problems that human resources (human capital) is wrestling with. We want to be at the right hand of the CEO when he or she looks into the middle future and asks, “OK, what’s our best play?”

The corporation has been keeping culture at bay for a very long time. Our job is to manage its new spirit of openness. The best way to do this is to demonstrate the value of what we do, as when we supply critical intelligence, help answer the big question (what business are we in?), see the significance of shifting technologies, read sudden changes in consumer taste and preference, sift the perfect storm of the economy for opportunity and danger and perform pattern recognition now that pattern recognition is the first order of business.

In sum, we are the first generation and we have to act like one. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Chief Culture Officer*, you’ll also like:

1. ***Exploiting Chaos* by Jeremy Gutsche.** One of the best trend spotters in North America reveals that periods of uncertainty actually fuel opportunity, reshuffle the deck and change the rules of the game.
2. ***Multipliers* by Liz Wiseman and Greg McKeown.** The authors teach readers how to become multipliers of talent and people and how multiplying can have a resoundingly positive and profitable effect on their organizations.
3. ***Trade-Off* by Kevin Maney.** Maney shows how almost every decision consumers make involves a trade-off between fidelity and convenience — between the products we love and the products we need.