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Courageous Chickens:

A Qualitative Study of Why Operators Choose to Work for Chick-fil-A

Introduction

Aristotle once said “Noble also are...all actions done for the sake of others, since less than other actions are done for one’s own sake; and all successes which benefit others and not oneself; and services done to one’s benefactors, for this is just; and good deeds generally, since they are not directed to one’s own profit” (Aristotle).

In the midst of a series of recent corporate scandals and collapses, Chick-fil-A, a \$1.5 billion company, has remained faithful to its core values. Chick-fil-A founder Truett Cathy has long since puzzled the restaurant industry since instituting that his chain of chicken restaurants remain closed on Sunday. Since the humble beginnings of Chick-fil-A more than 50 years ago, Truett Cathy has espoused his personal beliefs and theology into his business. The culture created at Chick-fil-A by Cathy has left an impression on the business world that will not soon be forgotten.

The communication of Truett Cathy’s ethics has left a mark on the Chick-fil-A organization that few others have experienced. This paper will attempt to answer the question that asks: What draws operators to come and work for Chick-fil-A? Many similar quick service restaurants offer franchise rights to individuals with lucrative earning potentials. At the same time, many fast food restaurants offer owners the opportunity to operate multiple restaurants under local or regional corporations. Chick-fil-A operators neither own nor seldom operate more

than one restaurant at a time. Yet, Chick-fil-A operators are some of the most loyal quick service restaurant workers in the business.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to identify those organizational culture traits that lead individuals, specifically operators, to come to work for Chick-fil-A. John Meyer stated the importance of understanding the symbols and culture of organizations as he noted that “eliciting the symbols that make up the day-to-day life world of communicators in organizations is crucial for assessment because they represent the key sense-making actions of organizational members” (472). Making sense of the day-to-day life of individuals who choose to be Chick-fil-A operators is what this research intends to do. What factors influence individuals to pursue Chick-fil-A as a career? What traits of the founder, Truett Cathy are deemed most important and passed along through the operators? Why Chick-fil-A and not other quick service restaurants? Why the longevity in service and the low turnover rate? These are all valid questions about the organization that this type of qualitative research can help answer.

Literature Review

Organizational culture involves much more than the intersection of personal ideologies working together towards a common goal, in this case to be “faithful stewards.” Organizational culture entails a myriad of individual beliefs coming together to work towards a common goal, often much bigger than the actual work being produced. Leadership within organizations, including Chick-fil-A, are now faced with the challenge of assimilating a host of cultures, personalities, religious beliefs, and attitudes into a cohesive team, in their effort to build their respective group.

Organizations have been known for many years to be places of congregation where more than just work is conducted. Morgan rightly defined a huge problem that looms over many organizations when he stated that:

There is much more to culture and corporate culture than meets the eye. Many management theorists and practitioners influenced by the metaphor fail to recognize this. As a result, they think and talk about culture as what may be described as “the level of slogans,” and their methods and techniques of cultural change usually do little more than dent surface reality (137).

Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo were perhaps the first to officially recognize that organizations contain and are somewhat of themselves, cultures. Consider their idea that “organizations are places where people work and do a whole lot of other things, and all of these work things and other things constitute life in that organization” (117).

Organizational culture can be expressed by how executives come together to discuss business proposals or the topic of conversation between factory workers on their lunch break, or in the case of this paper, by the words and “virtual” expressions used in an e-mail and sent to various members of an organization. At the heart of Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo’s research included a list of seven levels of sense making indicators found within organizations that were: relevant constructs, facts, practices, vocabulary, metaphors, stories, and rites and rituals (124-126). This perspective is concurrent with Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo’s idea that organizational culture is “accomplished communicatively” and seems to offer a logical starting point for research (121).

Geertz stated of organizational culture that it can be compared to man as “an animal suspended in web of significance he himself has spun...culture [is] those webs, and the analysis

of it [is] therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (5). Navigating the often-tangled web of organizational culture can be difficult in itself, to say nothing of individual cultures all coming together and competing for things like advertising dollars, additional staff members, better morale, and more loyal group members. Through communication, Pepper aptly notes, “To communicate is to organize. From a communication theory point of view, the communication behaviors of organization members are what constitute the actual organization”

Littlejohn stated that, “task oriented actions not only achieve immediate objectives but also create or reinforce certain ways of understanding experience” (216). A mission statement or a list of business rules can no longer be the sole defining factors of an organizations culture. Instead, organizational culture is expressed by how executives come together to discuss business proposals and the topic of conversation between factory workers on their lunch break, or in the case of Chick-fil-A, how operators interact with their crew and co-leaders.

The Web of Ethics and Values

The web of ethics within organizations is what interests me. How are ethics disseminated within successful organizations? How are ethics formulated within organizations? Who are the gatekeepers within organizations that decide what is ethical and what is not? Littlejohn stated that interpretive researchers “celebrate subjectivism, or the preeminence of individual experience” (15). Margolis asked of organizational responsibility, “How do we judge the questionable conduct [found within organizations]?” (433). From the outset of his research, Margolis stated that his goal was to develop an “ethics responsive to, but not dictated by, the empirical reality of organizational life” (447). Margolis’ study examined a four pronged

approached to organizational ethics that included: responsibility, causal and moral responsibility, rescuing dignity, and prescription and practical guidance.

Margolis observed the need for a “normative foundation from which to judge human conduct” (447). I would argue that the only way to have a normative foundation is to determine right from wrong, and devise a list of constraints that individuals can follow which would guide them in decision-making. This list of absolutes would then be the basis for all decisions regardless of the empirical circumstances. At the heart of Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo’s research was a list of seven levels of sense making indicators found within organizations that included: relevant constructs, facts, practices, vocabulary, metaphors, stories, and rites and rituals (124-126). This perspective concurred with their idea that organizational culture is “accomplished communicatively” and seemed to offer a logical starting point for research (121).

Methodology

In a debate surrounding organizational research, Linda Putnam et al stated that

A critical approach to organizations uncovers the processes through which social actors are systematically denied access to the expression of their own interests. Critical analyses of the relationships among discourse, meaning, and power are vital to understanding the nature of organizational life. (226)

Putnam et al’s idea here recognizes the validity of the critical theory approach to organizational study and using this methodology to make sense of organizational living. At the same time, Putnam et al also argue that by conducting ethnographic research, the researcher is then able to immerse themselves in the organization. Putnam et al continued noting that “in studying organizations we need to center our work on people” (231). In my attempt to get to the heart of local Chick-fil-A operations, I chose to center my work on the people who are operators. For the

purpose of this paper, I chose to undertake a series of four in-depth interviews with local Chick-fil-A operators. Based on Bland and Slater's research, the "use of qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews in business ethics research has been relatively rare" (168). At the outset of their research, Vivienne and Slater noted that "qualitative work aimed at addressing those tasks [such as the decision process and behavior] must precede significant quantitative work" (169). I would argue that this is in agreement with Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo's idea that many organizations have made use of metaphors, stories, and rituals in their effort to construct a healthy, vibrant culture and the qualitative methodologies are one significant way to discover them.

The Operators

Over the course of a one-month period, a series of four interviews were conducted with local Chick-fil-A operators. All of the interviews were conducted on-site at the Chick-fil-A restaurants located in Virginia Beach, VA and Norfolk, VA. Three male operators and one female were interviewed. The ages of the interviewees ranged from mid-30s to late 40s and each of the operators were married with a family. The Chick-fil-A work experience of the operators varied from 3 years to over 20 years with one of the operators not having been made an "official" operator yet. More will be noted about that particular individual later.

Each interview was conducted by the researcher and transcribed by the researcher and an assistant. Following transcription, key themes, ideas, vocabulary, and shared thoughts were extracted from the interviews and analyzed against Michael Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo's research on organizations and culture. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo's initial research views organizations as cultures containing the following indicators (124-126):

1. Relevant constructs

2. Facts
3. Practices
4. Vocabulary
5. Metaphors
6. Stories
7. Rites and rituals

Materials and Data Collection

A brief interview guide was developed for the research that was constructed of open-ended questions designed to prompt the participants to expound on their initial involvement with Chick-fil-A. Following a few “warm-up” questions, participants were asked specific questions surrounding their decision to work for Chick-fil-A and what factors were involved in their choice. The interview guide was not presented to the participants ahead of time, although a brief description of the research was given to them over the phone prior to the interview. Each interview lasted up to 1 hour. Key questions from the interview guide included:

1. What factors influenced you in deciding to become an operator?
2. What values do you regard as important as a person / and as an operator?
3. How do your beliefs align with Truett Cathy / CFA?
4. Define the “Golden Rule.” How does the Golden Rule impact your daily decision-making process at CFA?

The questions listed above were supported by a series of probing and deeper questioning as deemed appropriate by the researcher. In addition to answering all of the questions asked by the interviewer, each of the individuals also signed release forms allowing the material to be used by the researcher without legal concern.

The History of Truett Cathy and Chick-fil-A

Samuel Truett Cathy was born in 1921 in the rural Georgia town of Eatonton. Cathy was born at home with the help of a mid-wife. Cathy's parents could not afford a doctor or hospital and so most of the medical care responsibilities fell upon Truett's mother (Cathy 12). Truett was described as a very loving and caring boy growing up. During the rare quiet moments in the Cathy household, Truett could be found perched upon his mother's lap stroking her ear lobes as a sign of affection (*The S. Truett Cathy Story*). The legacy that Truett's mother left him as a hard worker and a servant-style lifestyle remains with him today. Truett once noted that the only time he ever saw his mother's eyes closed was during her wake following her death. Mrs. Cathy was always the first one out of bed in the morning and the last one in bed each evening. Following the family's move to the Atlanta area, Truett's mother, noticing the family's dire financial crisis, opened a boarding house serving up to seven or eight additional people each week (Cathy 15). The Cathy home was a bustling hub of activity. The seven boarders, Cathy's parents, and the seven Cathy children, Esther, Agnes, Myrtle, Horace, Gladys, Ben, and Truett all had to share the same bathroom. While this was at times, stressful and chaotic, moments like these would serve as the first examples to Truett Cathy of serving others and working in a variety of complex arrangements. Times were busy and everyone was expected to do their part to keep the home functioning. One of Truett's earliest memories is of the many hours he spent in the kitchen with his mother.

Growing up in a boarding house introduced me to hard work and taught me the value of diligent labor. I learned to shuck corn, shell peas, wash dirty dishes, set the table, shop for my mother at the corner grocery store, and even flip eggs and pancakes on the grill (Cathy, *It's Easier to Succeed* 37).

Truett Cathy's father was a true product of the stock market crash in the late 1920s.

Truett recalled that, "Dad never recovered from the depression. He could not rise above discouragement, relied heavily on the older children to take care of him, and verbally abused my mother, who was criticized if she answered and criticized if she didn't" (Cathy, *It's Easier to Succeed* 37). Cathy had a tough relationship with his father. "[He] was a strict disciplinarian—with a mean streak. 'He wasn't the kind of man I would have liked to have as a father,' he says. 'He ruled the house with a leather strap, and he wasn't afraid to use it'" (Nevin).

Truett's father was also unwilling to help with the simplest of tasks with his children. During his childhood when Truett ran a paper route, he noted,

Most of the young fellows who dragged out before dawn had their fathers' help with the family car in rainy or cold weather. Not me. Father would stay in bed, having not the least inclination to yield to my pleading for his help or for the use of the family automobile, no matter how severe the weather. (Cathy, *It's Easier to Succeed* 39)

When commenting later in his life on the principles of his success, Cathy stated,

The key to our success, I am convinced, was our commitment. When we're fully committed to something, we're not likely to give up or become discouraged, and we're not likely to fail. Commitment works in our business life as well in our relationships with our families and with the Lord. Had I not been fully committed to the success of the Dwarf House, any of a number of roadblocks might have put us out of business: food shortages, a difficult labor market, the need for more customers (Cathy 43).

Being committed to the new restaurant required long hours and a tremendous sacrifice. Despite these conditions, Truett eventually restored contact with a long lost friend, Jeanette McNeil, who was now living back in the area. Following a series of dates and courtship, most of which centered on the Dwarf House, Truett expressed his love for Jeanette and the two were married in 1948. Change was in the air for Cathy as he recounted that “Jeanette made an immediate impact on my spiritual life, for while I had been a committed Christian, her level of commitment showed me a new way to live” (52). Jeanette worked at Truett’s side until 1951 when the Cathy’s began having their children Dan, Don, and Trudy (Hattwick). Life seemed to be going well for Truett. The Dwarf House was holding steady, marriage was bliss, and work was fulfilling. Then, tragedy struck one Saturday afternoon. Truett’s two brothers, Ben and Horace, decided to take an airplane ride up to Chattanooga, TN. Ben and Horace were pilots and wanted to attend an air show. During an emergency landing in bad weather on their way to Chattanooga, both of Cathy’s brothers perished (Cathy, *It’s Easier to Succeed* 52-53). Truett was devastated and relied heavily on the help of Jeanette in running the Dwarf House until the children were born. Time passed and Cathy bought Ben’s remaining interests in the Dwarf House from his widow and continued pressing forward with the business. Following Ben’s death, Cathy opened a second restaurant and was keeping extremely busy, essentially operating two full-time jobs (Cathy 67). More bad news struck Cathy in the early morning hours of February 24, 1960. The newer of the two restaurants was on fire. The restaurant would be considered a total loss and Cathy had only insured it for \$25,000, hardly enough to even begin rebuilding. As if the news of the restaurant was not enough, Cathy was also told soon after the blaze that he had a medical condition that would require surgery and would place him out of work for at least 30 days (67).

Time for a Change

Times were changing and with them, the idea that Cathy had to revolutionize the way quick service restaurants are managed, operated, and franchised. Breaking from tradition, Cathy borrowed \$90,000 from the bank and began work rebuilding the Dwarf House. The new restaurant would operate differently though, customers would serve themselves. Cathy's idea eventually flopped and he was left with a large debt and no solution to turn the business around. Ironically, after consulting with another entrepreneur friend, Cathy ended up leasing the new restaurant building to another restaurant chain named Kentucky Fried Chicken (Hattwick). Had it not been for the fact that Kentucky Fried Chicken operates on Sundays, Cathy may have been persuaded to stay with the franchise as an operator. Cathy returned to operating one restaurant, the original Dwarf House in Hapeville.

Chick-fil-A

Discontent with the status quo, Cathy strived to take a risk again. This time, Cathy was determined to find a way to serve chicken sandwiches, fast. Cathy used his mother's basic formula for marinating the chicken and pressure cooking it to seal in moisture and flavor, Cathy set out to make his new idea a reality.

Cathy began experimenting with different ways to cook and serve poultry quickly and economically. He started with a breast fillet, and began serving it fried on a bun, which eliminated the problem of customers getting grease on their fingers. This was the prototypical Chick-fil-A sandwich, and Cathy began to perfect it with different cooking methods (eventually he settled on a pressure cooker with peanut oil), and different spices and seasonings--including the addition of a pickle to the sandwich, which would become a lasting part of the Chick-fil-A

formula (Chick-fil-A, Inc.). Ultimately, Cathy found the right recipe and began selling the sandwich from his Dwarf House restaurant. Cathy noted, Sales for the new sandwich continued to climb. Eventually it outsold hamburgers at the Dwarf House. That caused me to think ahead. I had no intention of starting a chain of restaurants. The Forest Park experience had cured me of that idea. I didn't want to go through that again (Cathy, *It's Easier to Succeed* 122).

Cathy's next challenge was to decide how to proceed with this idea of a quickly cooked chicken sandwich that seemed to be taking off. Questions about selling the idea to another chain surfaced. Questions about keeping the recipe, protecting it legally, and starting a chain also surfaced. Cathy chose the later. In his efforts to find a name for the new cornerstone of his restaurant business, Cathy recounted that "As I was driving home, I took the words chick and fillet and hit upon the name Chick-fil-A. I especially liked the A at the end. It reminded me of top quality, sanitary conditions, and excellent service" (122). News of the invention of the first, quick-served chicken sandwich spread rapidly and the Chick-fil-A concept of restaurants came into the forefront.

In 1967 Cathy had hit on a stroke of brilliance, one which would come to seem as basic as sliced bread, but like sliced bread was once revolutionary: "At the time," he told the Newcomen Society thirty years later, "there were precious few restaurants--fast-food or otherwise--in malls. People would come to the malls to shop and go elsewhere to eat. We saw this as an opportunity to reach customers where they shopped and before they went elsewhere." As malls grew, so did Chick-fil-A. By 1971, it had seven restaurants in Georgia and the Carolinas, and within three years, it would triple that number (Chick-fil-A, Inc).

Chick-fil-A continued explosive growth for the next two decades and into the 1980s, then another turning point came. Cathy had recently purchased 75 acres in metro Atlanta for the new corporate offices of Chick-fil-A. The \$10 million it required to spend in order to build the offices was a “vast sum considering the size of [the] company and the capital needs required by [the] tremendous growth at the time” (Cathy 120). As interest rates hit 21% the cost on construction for 100 new restaurants for Chick-fil-A nearly devastated the company. To make matters worse, the two large hamburger chains, McDonalds and Wendy’s had recently decided to enter the chicken market and were beginning to impact Chick-fil-A’s bottom line (121). In the midst of all of this activity, Cathy recognized that drastic measures were needed if Chick-fil-A were to survive. Cathy scheduled a two-day executive meeting in an effort to work through the mounting crises with his top executives. Dan Cathy, Truett’s oldest son and then a V.P. for Chick-fil-A, began asking simple, yet pointed questions that led the discussion. Cathy recalled, “Dan asked more basic questions: ‘Why are we in business? Why are we here? Why are we alive?’” Cathy continued, “By the end of the day we had developed two statements, which became Chick-fil-A’s Corporate Purpose and a direct reflection of Truett Cathy’s personal theology: ‘To glorify God by being faithful stewards of all that is entrusted to us’ and ‘To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A’” (124). The following months after the development of the corporate statement saw a return to positive sales, growth and profit. Since then, Chick-fil-A has garnered positive and negative responses from their decision during that executive conference, yet they have remained faithful to it. Dan Cathy remarked in an interview regarding the closed on Sunday policy and the company’s Christian heritage that:

He [Truett Cathy] didn’t want to have to wash dishes on Sunday afternoon like he had to do when he was a kid in a boardinghouse, and he didn’t want to ask others

to do what he didn't want to do himself. It's become an icon of our corporate purpose. We're not affiliated with any religious denomination. We look to the Bible for the sense of duty and how we treat people and how we deal with conflict. We don't claim to be a Christian business. Someone said that there is no such thing as a Christian business. Christ never died for a corporation. (Sixel)

Despite going against conventional wisdom and incorporating biblical standards for his company, Truett Cathy and the two later CEOs, have stood by their convictions and decision to remain closed on Sunday and continued to grow the business.

For the most part, however, Chick-fil-A's religious inspiration has served it well, perhaps never more so than during the corporate scandals of the decade. In testimony before Congress, at President Bush's economic forum in Waco, TX, in numerous television interviews and his recently published autobiography, Truett Cathy has told the story of his humble beginnings and religiously-inspired success with evangelical zeal (Barancik).

Findings

Four major themes were discovered and several language patterns (vocabulary) emerged as a result of this research. The four themes included:

1. Value alignment with the corporation
2. Value alignment with Truett Cathy
3. Influence of the Golden Rule
4. Desire to help young people

Value Alignment with the Corporation

When asked about how their values aligned with those of the Chick-fil-A corporation, a similar response was noted, particularly the following surrounding the level of importance placed

on work / family balance: “That is why I chose to go with Chick-fil-a hopefully to have that career, corporate uh, job, kind of balanced with what our family is supposed to be about and what we are supposed to be as people” (Earle). “The fact that is was very family oriented. I just, you don’t see that. You care about your employees” (Haines). Each of the participants continued this theme of family involvement in one form or another during their interview process or subsequent work involvement with Chick-fil-A. Several of the operators had their spouses working directly with them full-time in their stores or as part-time employees during high-volume periods especially surrounding major holidays. One operator described the very personal involvement of her husband and father:

He [Melody Clark’s husband] comes in and he well, he is my nugget guy at Christmas. We sell a tremendous amount of nuggets at Christmas and he is probably the only one that can stay up on the nuggets. He knows how to prepare all the food. He is not much on the registers. Um, he doesn’t want to deal with the money, you know, but to walk around and talk with the guests and “How are you?” and just that servant spirit. You know he is a conversationalist. People love him. He is a people magnet. That is what he does. He comes in a does a lot of my repair and maintenance and of course my painting. But he has his own job and when I can’t be here, and if he knows it is a big day, something like, I had my baby December 6th, if anything can be any stressful is to be out of your restaurant the month of Christmas. He and my father ran my restaurant. (Clark)

For Melody and others involved in the business, it becomes much more of a family operation and much less of a place to earn a living. Family involvement does not just mean lending a hand during busy moments, but also helping the operator to make key decisions. One manager-in-

training to be an operator noted the importance of his wife's opinion if he were asked to move to a different part of the country to run a store:

My wife and I you know we try to make decisions together, so it is not like this is something I said I got to do. She was supportive in the beginning or it wouldn't have worked. So um, she has responded very well. She is a strong person just like I am. (Earle)

Value Alignment with Truett Cathy

As noted in the history of Chick-fil-A, the founder, Truett Cathy has had a lasting impact on the culture and values of the organization. While many of the respondents mentioned the fact that the restaurants were closed on Sunday as a value that aligned with their personal beliefs, they also took their responses to a deeper level. "The spiritual walk, is probably the main factor" (Earle).

Truett is an inspirational type of person. You can not read his book, listen to him talk, and whether it's at a seminar or an informal gathering and not just be, uh, in awe of what the Lord's blessed him and accomplished in his life. (Davis)

"He is such a giving person. I don't think I will ever give as much as what he has given to people and how he has influenced people" (Clark).

The generosity factor is number one. I give a ton out in the community, I, I try to uh, support as many organizations and youth groups and "what-nots" as I can. He is big on that. And hey, just give it away, don't worry about it. It'll come back. (Haines)

Influence of the Golden Rule

The “Golden Rule” as it is often referred to, comes directly from the words of Jesus Christ. “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Holy Bible, Matthew 7:12). While attending a recent Chick-fil-A national conference, I noticed each of the 3,000 attendees had at the bottom of their name badge the slogan “Here to serve” (Linkletter et al.). In addition, cards placed on each of the seats reminded participants “...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things – as a man thinketh...so is he” (Linkletter et al.).

Each of the respondents had candid remarks about the importance of applying the Golden Rule in their business operations. The following remarks were made when asked about what the Golden Rule meant to them:

The concept of do unto others is really infused throughout the stewardship process here. You can't, you couldn't run this place other than, if you are going to be the kind of operator that is authoritarian, to come in here and point your finger, do, do, do if you don't get in there elbow to elbow with them and realize what you are asking them to do is really something you should be willing to do yourself first of all .And you don't want to treat them in a way that you don't expect them to be treated the next level down. I have personally always adopted the philosophy of ,if I respect the people under me then they will respect the people under them because that is what the expectation is. (Davis)

You know going back to the basic principles of doing business, of treating others the way you want to be treated. You know just the smile can go a long way. If

someone is having a bad day a little bit of a conversation with them can just make their day better. (Clark)

“Treat others as you would have them treat you. Uh, we do it with our employees. You know I treat each of them as if they were my own kid” (Haines). While the examples varied depending on the operator’s experience, the importance of applying the Golden Rule to their individual businesses was evident. Each of the respondents had significant knowledge of the Rule and each applied it in different ways to their crew and customers. One of the respondents who had not attended the national Chick-fil-A conference earlier in the year had still made a point to apply it to his operations. Although I am not sure if this was a result of personal conviction or promptings by the corporate office, he was applying the Rule and used it as a backbone in his approach to people. “You know the values of treating that customer like you want to be treated. Treating them with the utmost respect...but, you also have to build that relationship” (Earle).

Desire to Help Young People

The overwhelming theme that crossed through each of the respondent’s interviews was their strong desire to assist young people. This is a particularly important point in this research. Up to this point, the initial impressions given by the operators as driving factors to deciding to work for the organization included: family lifestyle, desire to own their own business, potential to be a part of a successful company, and a general interest in serving others. At one point in each of the interviews, the respondents initiated a response that directly correlated their involvement with Chick-fil-A to their desire and ability to help young people and make a difference in their lives. The responses were mixed in tone, but all carried the same theme to assist the younger generation as noted in the following responses:

You know hopefully I can set the example for some of these younger kids. That is what I tried to do when I was a youth director. Try to make their life better...I will share with them my mistakes so maybe I can prevent them from making the same ones and keeping them from having to go through that struggle. (Earle)

One respondent went into detailed description about the involvement of his wife in working with the young people in their store as he stated:

We really want to give, um, the kids that work here an experience in most of their first jobs that they can take with them, you know they can go to the next company they will be able to see either a difference in the way the other company is run or they will be able to build upon their experience here and and [sic] take the ethical practices with them...that sort of an impact and plus the number of young people that come through here. Kim and I, my wife, had always uh, had a desire to, she used to be a teacher, to help young people, to not, because that age, especially the teen-age years you tend to be pulled this way and that way we wanted to give them an environment where hopefully they could get their feet on some more solid ground. (Davis)

Other respondents gave practical advice on how they are trying to influence their younger crews.

It is all about money it's not about what you can do for someone else. You know trying to [teach] them the proper way to wait on people and how to communicate with people and you know how to make them feel good while they are at the counter. I feel like we are a stepping stone to something bigger and better in life. (Clark)

One of the most notable displays of crew involvement came from a respondent who described the crew training process in which he personally walks each new employee out on the lot and attempts to set a foundation for their employment experience at Chick-fil-A.

We do a vision value walk the day, the day they are hired. We take about 30-40 minutes and I walk them out to the corner out there and I talk about the competition and what is different about us and that when they come into this family, this is what we expect and we talk a lot about how, customer forms an opinion in 3 seconds of you, whether you know it or not, and it is based on what, your appearance, the way you speak, clothing you have on. It is no different than my restaurant. You know they walk through that door they are going to form an opinion in 3 seconds. Do they see clean tables, do they see you smiling, are they being greeted, and you know you work really hard to overcome that bad 3 seconds if it is bad.

Language Patterns (Vocabulary)

The following key words were apparent in each of the interviews. Although definitions of the words were not solicited by the researcher, the use of similar vocabulary denotes a definite cultural alliance of sorts as described by Pacanowsky and Odonnell-Trujillo,

Another distinguishing feature of any organizational culture is the particular vocabulary used by its members. This specialized vocabulary, sometimes called vernacular or argot, often provides clues as to what are the relevant constructs, facts, and practices of organizational life. (125)

The vernacular of the respondents included words such as: values, environment, vision, ethic, and people. The corporate purpose of Chick-fil-A which states the organization's desire to be "a

good steward” would seem to be reflected in these types of words. The values of the organization and operators, the type of environment the operators create in their stores, the vision of Truett Cathy, the work ethic they teach and lead from, and the people they care about are all an expression of their vocabulary being lived out through Chick-fil-A.

Discussion

This initial research surrounding Chick-fil-A operators offers a nugget of knowledge that can be gleaned from this organization and its founder. Troester noted in his research that the ideal position for an internal spokesperson, in this case Truett Cathy, is that of a “propagandist” (536). He concludes by noting the best kind of propaganda is that which is true. Chick-fil-A set a precedent in the restaurant business when it decided to remain closed on Sundays. This series of interviews has revealed additional levels of organizational culture specifically dealing with imparting a cultural vision and strong work ethic to a younger generation. The respondents in this series of interviews were concerned with keeping the business profitable, but also believed they were trying to do their part to make their communities a better place to live by focusing on the welfare of their crews.

Additional research could be to expand the interview base and continue with the same line of questioning surrounding the ethics of Truett Cathy and the respondents desire to impart knowledge to their crew members. Much more time could also be devoted to expounding on the language patterns found in the operator’s choice of words. Although it was not the focus of this research, it was evident that significant patterns exist and warrant further exploration. Research could also be completed to tie-in Pacanowsky and O’Donnell-Trujillo’s other organizational cultural indicators, including stories, rites and rituals, and metaphors similar to the Golden Rule

example. Truett Cathy's nature of storytelling could also be useful in analyzing the culture of Chick-fil-A from a narrative perspective.

At the very least, this research has illustrated the level of detail involved with something seemingly as simple as selling chicken. This research has shown that for many of the operators, running a Chick-fil-A unit is more about serving others, stewardship, and returning something back to their communities. Regardless if crew members make Chick-fil-A a career, the respondents in this research all seemed to point to their desire to leave a lasting impression on their employees. As one respondent noted, "I feel like we are a stepping stone to something bigger and better in life" (Clark).

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