

Running Head: Unhealthy Hidden Agenda

Chapter 1 – The Injury

Judy entered the Wendy's restaurant through the back door. As she walked to her fry-station she couldn't help but think what a strange weekend she had experienced.

Yesterday, the spirit of Dave Thomas had convinced her to return to her job when she had walked off in the throws of apathy. Judy later reflected that this had been brought on by the monotonous work cycle she felt forced to obey. Luckily, Dave was able to show her that her job was very important to the organization and proposed that thinking of the restaurant differently would help her to better understand and accept her working reality. Then, earlier today, a strange new employee came into the restaurant to be trained. Judy and John had left him with the impression that the food-service workers at Wendy's were far less than enthusiastic and dedicated to the organization, which was true. That new employee also turned out to be the ghost of Dave Thomas. After this episode, Judy promised Dave that she would work hard to strengthen the culture of the Wendy's restaurant and try to better align employee outlooks with those of the organization.

Judy began working the fry-station cycle as customers trickled into the establishment. She tried to focus on the importance of her job, and encouraged herself to take pride in her position and in the Wendy's organization. She tried and failed. Judy could not help but notice and grow annoyed with the assembly-line-like structure of her job. "I should be preparing myself for college by stimulating my mind and growing in my education. Working in this job is doing the exact opposite of that. These work tasks are broken down so they can be repeated over and over. Mentally and spiritually I am gaining nothing from this, only giving of myself to Wendy's. These skills are not transferable to any other job I will have."¹

An Unhealthy and Unethical Hidden Agenda: Domination Tactics of the
Fast Food Industry

Her mind drifted back to the writings of Max Weber and his notion of bureaucracy. Try as she might, Judy could not feel comfortable working in this type of environment where two classes of workers existed: the upper-class managers and the lower-class food-service workers.² It just didn't seem fair.

"How am I supposed to strengthen the culture and align my values with the organization when I am of the oppressed class?" Judy thought, "My managers have all the power over my work and all I can do is simply comply with their orders. I work so hard with no recognition or reward from them. If anything, my hard work that helped earn those award plaques on the wall has been completely overlooked by my managers."³

Judy continued, "What's more, the factory-like set up in this restaurant is oppressive in and of itself. I am being used simply as a way to increase efficiency. This position requires no skill and completely ignores my human needs.⁴ My managers have complete control over what I do, and, despite the simplistic nature of my work, they insist on watching me like a hawk."⁵

"Judy!" Rhonda, the manager, yelled from her back office, "Those tomatoes aren't going to slice themselves, you know!"

Judy bit her tongue as she walked over to the cutting station and began chopping up the ripe, red fruits. Judy continued to sulk with abandon. "Working here is like going to war, my managers are the generals and I am the front-line soldier in the direct line of fire... Ow!"⁶ Suddenly, in mid-sentence, a sharp pain ran through Judy's arm. She looked down to see that she had cut her hand with the knife's large blade. Blood began to spew from her veins.

Judy grabbed some paper towels and put them on the incision. She began to apply pressure to help control the bleeding. Judy ran back to Rhonda's office.

"Rhonda, I cut my hand!" Judy cried

"Let me see," Rhonda said as she took Judy's hand and removed the towels. "Oh, you'll survive. Just keep putting pressure on it for awhile and then get a band-aid out of the First-Aid kit if you really need one. Anyway, you know you're supposed to wear the protective cutting glove when you're slicing the vegetables!"

"You mean that silver glove that John borrowed to complete his Michael Jackson costume on Halloween? Yeah, he never brought it back and it has been missing for six months," Judy shot back, half out of pain and half out of brewing resentment.

"Hmm," Rhonda thought as she looked through her files, "Corporate must have forgot to account for that expense in this year's budget..."⁷

Chapter 2 – An Evil Influence

The ghost of Dave Thomas ascended into the heavens. He was headed back to the spirit world after he had just taken the form of Tommy, a new employee at Wendy's, and learned much about the weakened culture of the organization. He knew he had to find his daughter to fill her in on what just happened.

When he arrived at his designated hamburger palace in the clouds, Dave looked around and spotted his red-headed offspring. Wendy, his restaurant's namesake, was vainly adoring herself in a large golden mirror. Even though she was facing away from him, Dave knew it was her from her blue frock and unmistakable flaming crimson pigtailed.

"Wendy, I've returned from Earth," said Dave, "I was able to convince that girl, Judy, to return to her food-service station. I was even able to convince her to help strengthen the culture of the Wendy's organization within that particular restaurant."

“Good, good. then it’s all going perfectly according to my plan,” Wendy cackled. She turned around to face Dave and he couldn’t help but shudder. Wendy was no freckle-faced kid with beaming eyes and a big smile as she was portraying on the organization’s logo. In fact, she was quite hideous. She sported a gnarled nose and had more than a few warts rooted on her face. Her teeth were rotten and her eyes glowed a sickly yellow. Here in the spirit world she was known as “Wicked Wendy.”

“She’s a good kid,” Dave said in reference to Judy, “A smart one though, I just hope she is not freaked out about my appearing.”

“Shut up!” Wicked Wendy interrupted. “I don’t need details! As long as she is back to frying the nuggets then that is all that matters.” Wendy turned back to the mirror and began to stroke her hair. She gave herself a toothless smile and a suggestive wink - she thought she looked great.

“Soon,” Wicked Wendy said, “Wendy’s will be the empire I always dreamed it should be.”

Dave let out a sigh. He didn’t bother to say anything else. He knew what was coming next, Wicked Wendy loved to review her sinister intentions.

“Oh David, I am so pleased with how things are going! And those humans don’t suspect a thing,” Wendy went on. “Our restaurants are so clean, inviting, and affordable - perfectly designed to attract families.⁸ Those absent parents spend so much time at work that they use our Kid’s Meals to show their sons and daughters how much they “love” them. That’s why we target our advertising directly towards children, that way they’ll choose to come to Wendy’s, and of course the guilty parental units comply.⁹ It is so easy!”

Wendy kept going. “We give those humans what they want, a clean, dependable, and family friendly environment, and they give us what we want, their money¹⁰ We keep that kitchen and food preparation area open and brightly lit so they think our establishment is sanitary.¹¹ Little do they know that, no matter how clean that kitchen may appear to be, they are putting the dirtiest thing of all in their mouth, the food!”

Dave frowned. He was ashamed of this truth; the food at Wendy’s was extremely unhealthy.¹² He was well aware that the sugar, fat, and high-fructose corn syrup that made up most of the menu was scientifically found to be addictive to the human body (Highfield, 2003, p. 3). Even their salads, portrayed as a more healthy option, contained as many calories as a double cheeseburger (“Wendy’s Nutritional Information Guide,” 2009).

“As long as they remain addicted to our food, Wendy’s will survive, expand, and flourish.” Wendy boasted forth, “I am such a genius! People don’t have time to cook anymore, our food is so reliably tasty,¹³ our restaurant is so inviting and clean, and their kids are begging for Kid’s Meals. Exploiting these demographics has only helped propagate the Wendy’s business. Those humans have no clue that they are enslaved to our menu and the fast food way of life.”

Dave was ashamed. He started the Wendy’s restaurant business with good intentions, but somewhere along the way it had turned into an instrument of ascendancy over its patrons and society at large. Wicked Wendy was obsessed with the expansion of the restaurant all over the world.

“The bureaucratic structure of each restaurant is the perfect way to legitimately exploit our food-service workers,” Wendy said. “Stressful and hazardous working conditions? I don’t care! Work them like dogs!”

Dave could really see how cold-hearted Wicked Wendy was. Wendy explained, “The assembly line structure of food production, the deskilling of the workforce – all ways to increase productivity and efficiency. It’s all about maximizing profits, Dave. That’s why we buy our produce from Third World countries like Mexico and the Philippines, because it is so much cheaper.¹⁴ I don’t care if it is considered unethical, I only care about expanding our business and making more money for our empire!”

Wendy was laughing and smiling to herself in the mirror. She had no concern for her workers or patrons, only herself and her organization. “You see Dave, that is why franchising is so important, we keep opening up stores without ever having to put in actual capital of our own. That way, we can grow as a company and reap the benefits without ever spending a dime.¹⁵ To increase growth Wendy’s sponsors movies, television shows, sporting events, scholarships – my name is everywhere!¹⁶ We are unstoppable!”

“But Wendy,” Dave asked, “Why do we do this? It seems so wrong.”

“Wrong?” Wicked Wendy shouted angrily, “We do this to make money. The more profits we generate, the more power we have. With enough power, Dave, we can control the world! All of the things we do to create a good image for Wendy’s and generate customers is really used to generate profit, and this serves our needs at a deeper level.”¹⁷

“What do you mean “needs,” Wendy? We’re not even alive,” Dave commented.

“Every organization has deeper needs that motivate its actions. For me, I want to be known worldwide. When people say “Wendy’s” I want them to think of me. I want Wendy’s to be the most successful restaurant there ever was. I want to see my name in lights!” Wicked Wendy answered. “As long as we maintain the surface reality then our customers and workers

will unknowingly continue to work to serve and protect the investment of the shareholders and the things I personally want: money, power, and fame.”

Dave should have known. Wicked Wendy was extremely vain, despite the fact she was so ugly. That’s why he had to portray her as a beautiful little girl on the logo, no one could ever know the dark side of Wendy’s.

“Now get out of here, David. I’m late for my Fast Food Axis of Evil committee meeting with Ronald, the Colonel, and the King.”

Chapter 3 – A Rebellion

“Don’t you see, Rhonda?” Judy said, “Our welfare as workers is inferior to the profiting of the company.” Judy had been telling Rhonda what she had been thinking about before she cut her hand. “The Wendy’s organization doesn’t care about the health of its customers or the safety of its workers.¹⁸ You have to agree that this is amoral.”

Rhonda could see Judy’s point. The restaurant had many health and safety hazards and provided little job satisfaction to its core employees all in the name of making a profit. Rhonda said, “You know, I’ve been abiding by this belief that the most important goal, above all, is to generate profits for the restaurant. This weekend has taught me that there is much more to an organization than making money.”¹⁹

“Not to mention the class division within our workforce,” Judy added. “Though you are in a higher position than me, we are both working for these invisible shareholders that reap all the benefits of our hard work.²⁰ This class structure of food-service workers versus managers threatens our free spirit and creativity as individual employees.²¹ We are trapped in this division

and we both suffer, we are distracted from the fact that this organization is dominating our livelihood and disposition.”

“Well not anymore,” Rhonda said. Judy was surprised as Rhonda stood up and took off her golden nametag. “Today, Judy, let us choose social consciousness over profitability and efficiency. Enough with being trapped in this legitimized yet depraved and abusive bureaucratic system!”²²

“I’m with you, Rhonda,” Judy said. Together, they busted out of the manager’s office.

Rhonda went to the front counter and took the microphone that the order-taking worker called the items into. Speaking into the microphone, Rhonda said, “Attention Wendy’s customers... this Wendy’s is officially closed! Food-service workers, come with me!”

Rhonda, Judy, and the food-service workers all headed out the back door, giving high-fives along the way. “To our local, organic farmer’s market!” Rhonda proclaimed. The group of employees cheered and paraded down the street together, throwing their nametags and visors into the sky.

Prologue

“What are they doing?” Wicked Wendy shouted, “Why are they leaving?” Wendy and Dave had sensed the commotion and watched the great rebellion from the spirit world.

“Stop them!” Wendy demanded of Dave.

“Not this time, Wendy,” Dave replied.

Wendy began to panic. She realized that somehow the employees had caught on to her goal of ultimate domination for her organization. She looked down at her hands as they began to

disappear. “No! No! This can’t be happening! My power is fading!” The image of Wicked Wendy became less and less opaque as the Wendy’s employees drew further from the restaurant.

Wendy cried out, “Without customers, without compliant employees, I am nothing.” And with that she faded into thin air.

Dave smiled. “I knew you could do it, Judy!” he thought to himself. Despite his convincing her to remain blind to the hidden goal of domination that Wicked Wendy worked so hard to achieve, Judy had seen through it all and had refused to contribute to the deep structure’s agenda. He was so proud. Now he could work towards making Wendy’s an organization that did not thrive from dominating its industry and customers.²³

Now that Wicked Wendy was gone, Dave was free to be the only spiritual influence over the Wendy’s restaurant business. By leaving the restaurant, Judy and the others had liberated Dave from Wicked Wendy’s control. “Judy,” Dave thought, “I can’t thank you enough.”

¹ Time and time again Judy has noticed how the production policy of factory assembly line work limits an employee’s ability to develop any skill outside of the singular task being performed (Morgan, 2006, p. 304). The deskilling of workers has been cited as a domination tactic used by the fast food industry to capitalize on part time, minimum wage workers (Schlosser, 2001, p. 20).

² Class division can clearly be observed in many modern organizations. Since the beginning of formal work environments, there has consistently been a hierarchical division between those who rule, lead, and give orders and those who take and obey those orders. “We find the same system reproduced in modern organization in terms of the distinctions between owners, managers, and workers” (Morgan, 2006, p. 299).

³ Judy is describing a mode of domination known as the “rational-legal” typology. The bureaucratic structure in Wendy’s helps to legitimize this type of domination her managers enact. Rational-legal domination is characterized by a ruler who has his or her power legitimized through “rules, regulations, and procedures” (Morgan, 2006, p. 295). The managers at Wendy’s use this type of domination to legitimize their demands within the organization. Judy and the other food-service workers feel compelled to obey the orders of the managers as a result of this domination tactic.

⁴ Here, Judy feels frustrated with the mechanistic set-up of her workplace. “With the appearance of the factory system... every second of wasted time or inefficient use of time represented a loss of profit” (Morgan, 2006, p. 300). Wendy’s abides by this notion, using the assembly-line system to increase productivity at the expense of its workers welfare.

⁵ This working situation that Judy describes can lead to unnecessary stress in her role as a food service employee "One's working conditions, role, career aspirations, and quality of relations at work interact with one's personality to influence personal stress levels and physical and mental well-being" (Morgan, 2006, p. 311). This is clearly the case with Judy. Creating high-stress work situations is one way organizations can dominate its employees.

⁶ Morgan would agree with Judy's comment "From the point of view of a member of the "secondary" labor market ... who is engaged in a low-status job that values and uses few of his or her abilities ... it may make much more sense to understand organizations as battlegrounds than as united "teams" or friendly pluralist coalitions" (2006, p. 313).

⁷ Judy's work injury is an example of a common work accident that will go overlooked by the Wendy's organization. This injury could and should have been prevented by replacing the lost glove. However, "the issue of costs versus safety looms large on the unofficial agenda in many corporate decisions. Often, it is the issue of cost that wins" (Morgan, 2006, p. 306). In this case, the welfare of a food-service employee is secondary to the profits made by the company, which explains why the glove was not immediately replaced.

⁸ Here, Wicked Wendy begins to outline some of the tactics used by the fast food industry to manipulate its customers. Interior design and the modest cost of food are both ways to attract customers with families. By making the interiors "more pleasant, more comfortable, and, above all, more respectable" (Carr, 2007, p. 4), Wendy's is able to secure a customer base that will generate profits for the organization's shareholders.

⁹ Children were found to be the deciding factor in where three out of four families ate (Levenstein, 1993, p. 229). Because of this, fast food restaurants have notoriously targeted advertising campaigns towards children, as well as providing play parks and free toys, in order to generate an association between a child's desire for fun and novelty with eating at that particular fast food establishment (Carr, 2007, p. 4). Exploiting children through advertising campaigns is a dominating force in the Wendy's organization.

¹⁰ During the rise of the fast food industry the American public was fanatical about cleanliness and hygiene in the restaurant setting (Levenstein, 1993, p. 228). Fast food restaurants, like Wendy's, profited from this preoccupation by "basing success on customer confidence in the quality and cleanliness of their food" (Carr, 2007, p. 6). Again, we see how Wendy's uses demographic attitudes and beliefs to strategically attract and retain a customer base.

¹¹ Also using the assumption that cleanliness contributes to customer loyalty, many fast food restaurants, including Wendy's, keeps the kitchen and food preparation area in full view (Schlosser, 2001, p. 197). This gives the impression that the organization is hygienic and has "nothing to hide." However, Wicked Wendy reveals that these principles do serve a hidden agenda.

¹² "Food companies spend billions of dollars each year promoting (and distributing) health-damaging products, thereby contributing to the high incidence of cancer and various forms of liver, kidney, heart, and lung disease" (Morgan, 2006, p. 291). Wendy's is an example of a company that sells unhealthy food that has been known to be physically detrimental to the health of the consumer.

¹³ Wicked Wendy shows here how providing consistent service, a themed and family friendly interior design, and a standardized menu attracts customers by playing on their need for comfort and reliability. This marketing strategy can be considered a dominating factor because it generates emotions within a consumer that will influence them to dine at Wendy's despite other less-than-attractive aspects, such as the health quality of the food (Carr, 2007, p. 5).

¹⁴ Exploitation of Third World countries has been one way many organizations have dominated its workers near and far. "The Third World, despite widespread hunger, has become a net exporter of foodstuffs ... the best land is used to produce crops for export rather than local consumption" (Morgan, 2006, p. 325-326). Organizations that capitalize on these cheap exports can be considered unethical for buying these good while ignoring the welfare of the individuals who harvested them.

¹⁵ "The franchise system involved expansion through the use of other peoples' capital, whereby a fast food chain could sell the right to replicate its' proven successful restaurant formula to a local entrepreneur" (Carr, 2007, p. 8).

The franchising system was an incredibly powerful way Wendy's was able to expand across the country and the world. Because of this, Wendy's is the third most profitable fast food restaurant chain. Business growth contributes to the domination of the organization over society at large, and serves the deeper interests of the shareholders.

¹⁶ Wendy's sponsors and underwrites several media and community entities, including family friendly television shows and college scholarships for students excelling in athletics. Not only does this give the Wendy's name visibility but it also creates an image that Wendy's supports wholesome and popular media and societal events and achievements. This image maintenance can detract the average citizen from realizing any disreputable or unethical business the organization may practice and further helps the organization to be an instrument of domination.

¹⁷ Here, Wicked Wendy illustrates the main focus of Critical Theory. This Wendy's restaurant systematically distorts the surface reality - which legitimizes an oppressive, hazardous, and bureaucratic work situation, manipulates and preys upon its customer base, and utilizes produce from the Third World - to serve the deeper, hidden goals of profit accumulation by the organization's shareholders as well as Wicked Wendy's motivating factors of vanity and power.

¹⁸ Karl Marx would support this observation made by Judy. "It was Marx's opinion that capital lived "vampire-like ... sucking living labor" and that, in general, capital took no account of the health or length of life of the worker" (Morgan, 2006, p. 305). His writings parallel the work experience of Judy at Wendy's.

¹⁹ This management ideology is popular and upheld in many organizations. "Management ideology is seen as serving the needs of capital accumulation above all else" (Morgan, 2006, p. 315). This is a way managers distort the surface reality in order to increase profits for the organization's shareholders. It can be proposed that this management technique is dominating and oppressive to workers, however, it is openly integrated into the teachings of modern business schools (Ghoshal, 2005, p. 76).

²⁰ Here, Judy observes that "asymmetrical power relations ... result in the majority working in the interests of the few" (Morgan, 2006, p. 293). In this case, the few are the organization's shareholders and Wicked Wendy.

²¹ Judy is describing to Rhonda the ideas of Weber regarding bureaucracy in organizations. "For him, the process of bureaucratization presented a very great threat to the freedom of the human spirit ... because those in control have a means of subordinating the interests and welfare of the masses" (Morgan, 2006, p. 295).

²² Morgan identifies this dilemma by noting that, for corporate executives, "a sensitive social conscience or undue concern for people may prove economically paralyzing and prevent their organizations from operating in a decisive and efficient way" (2006, p. 332). Regardless of this predicament, Rhonda and Judy agree that social consequences should take precedence over the profits of the company.

²³ In the opinion of this author, it is important to note that, though organizational domination can be readily observed in many business practices, there is hope for change. Morgan would say that if we focus only on the dominating effect of organizations then "we may blind ourselves to the idea that nondominating forms of organization may be possible" (2006, p. 333). Modern organizations should actively work to find ways to change any techniques of domination their company may utilize, including oppressive bureaucratic employee structures and purchasing Third World exports. If changes can be made to lessen or eliminate the dominating tactics of organizations then workers, managers, and corporate executives could take more pride in their business decisions and occupational roles and feel satisfied that they have made a contribution to society rather than only capitalizing from its worth.

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