



WINTER IS HERE



THE GAME OF THRONES HOUSES AS EMPLOYEE PERSONALITIES

Keep Westeros running smoothly with our employee management tips

WHITE WALKER PAPER

***Spoiler alert!** This white paper includes detailed references to all seven seasons of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. If you're not caught up, wait to read the rest of our white paper – and go finish watching the show!

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INTRODUCTION

WINTER IS HERE - both in the United States and in Westeros, the much sought-after and fought-over land that houses the world of the *Game of Thrones* series. For the majority of the TV show, each house - and individual character - has been fighting for the Iron Throne, and ultimately for the power and control that seat wields. But as we've seen in the past season, unlikely alliances have formed out of necessity to fight against something much bigger than themselves. As Jon Snow put it when he addressed the gathering of leaders in "The Dragon and the Wolf,"

"There is only one war that matters. The Great War. And it is here" (Benioff & Weiss, 2017).

Jon Snow is, of course, referring to the people's collective impending war with the White Walkers, the ancient race of ice creatures attacking Westeros from north of the Wall with their army of zombie-like wights ("White Walkers").

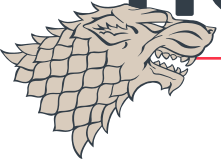
Yes, we get it - *Game of Thrones* is a fantasy series. And here in reality, no one needs to worry about the Night King invading our world with his army ("Night King"). But on a less dramatic level, this story of collaboration among drastically different personalities to achieve a greater goal probably sounds very familiar to anyone who has worked in the corporate world. Take a step back and think about your company - is your office full of Lannisters, or do you have a staff of mostly Starks? Chances are, it's a good mix of houses - or, rather, personalities.

In this white paper, we'll be taking a look at the nine noble houses that fans of the series will be very familiar with, through a corporate world lens. Of course, there may be a few characters that don't match their house, but in general each of the Westeros houses boasts a certain set of personality traits - and usually a motto to go along with them. We'll examine each of the houses as a type of employee, identify their personalities and motivations, and discuss how to manage them both individually and collectively, so you can lead everyone in your company effectively to defeat the White Walkers - or, you know, whatever goals you might have this year.

So whether you're a fan of Game of Thrones and you'll be evaluating your coworkers through a new lens, or whether you've never seen the show at all, the personality traits of these employee types will still ring true.

ARE YOU READY?

THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS



HOUSE STARK

Starks will be among arguably **your most loyal and (stubbornly) honorable employees**. They're driven by honor, honesty, and the need to always do the right thing. The audience of *Game of Thrones* learns that within the first few minutes of the pilot episode - when a deserting member of the Night's Watch shows up at Winterfell, not only does Ned Stark follow the law and sentence the deserter to death for forsaking his vows, but he also conducts the execution. As Ned tells his sons, "The man who passes the sentence should swing the sword" (Benioff & Weiss, 2011).

In the workplace, doing the right thing is certainly a great quality. Who doesn't want an employee with integrity? In fact, integrity, honesty, and authenticity are among the top 15 traits CEOs seek in an ideal employee (Altman, 2017). As basketball coach John Wooden outlines in his book *Coach Wooden's Pyramid of Success*,

"The heart of a person with integrity always wants to do what's right, once he or she is sure what 'right' is" (2009).

However, your Stark employees may be loyal to a fault. They likely **lack political savvy** and may have difficulty navigating office politics. Just look at the fates of Ned, Catelyn, and Robb Stark as the result of politics they could not handle. Ned's unwavering loyalty to Robert Baratheon eventually gets him killed, after he follows King Robert's command to become Hand of the King and travels down to King's Landing only to find a political game for which he is not equipped. Ned strives to do the right thing when he discovers that Robert is not, in fact, the father of his wife's children; he confronts Robert's wife Cersei and gives her the chance to escape persecution before he informs the King of the situation (Benioff & Weiss, 2011). This course of action not only gives Cersei the opportunity to plan King Robert's death, but it also spurs a downward spiral that results in both Ned's death and the death of half his family. Who can forget the Red Wedding? (2013).

In the workplace, this inability to navigate the inevitable office politics could result in failed careers and burnout, despite the Stark employee's skills and hard work. According to psychologist Robert Hogan, there are three basic evolutionary needs underlying workplace relationships: the need to get along, to get ahead, and to find meaning (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014). Under leadership that can fulfill those needs without succumbing to pettiness and negative political traits, the Stark employee can be highly successful. Starks need leaders who can manage tensions within their teams and organizations to create an environment that supports working together toward a company goal.

HR RECOMMENDS

Shield these employees from the politics of the office as much as possible by bringing them into the conversation after the more difficult decisions have already been made. Don't force them to take sides in office politics, but rather loop them in once the plan has been set. Their value lies in finding the best way to execute the plan and move forward.

"WHEN THE SNOW FALLS AND THE WHITE WINDS BLOW, THE LONE WOLF DIES, BUT THE PACK SURVIVES."

-SANSA STARK (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2017)



THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS

HOUSE LANNISTER

“A Lannister always pays his debts” (Benioff & Weiss, 2011). While not the technical motto of the Lannisters, it’s the phrase that everyone associates with their house. They are very ambitious and good at making deals, particularly deals that further their own agenda and personal power. Cersei Lannister is, quite literally, the queen of this particular skillset. She strikes deals left and right in a constant effort to propel herself and her children forward. In season seven alone, Cersei manages to forge deals with the Iron Bank, to fund her mercenary army; she forms an alliance with Euron Greyjoy to acquire the use of his navy; and she even navigates a deal with her brother Tyrion when he and the rest of Jon Snow’s coalition arrive at King’s Landing seeking her assistance in fighting the White Walkers (2017).

However, as anyone who watches *Game of Thrones* knows, a Lannister is not to be trifled with. Your Lannister employees are likely heavily **motivated by money** - think back to all the gold that patriarch Tywin Lannister talks about in early seasons - but more concerning, they are also motivated by stardom. These are employees who want to steal the limelight. They want to be in charge for the sake of being in charge, and they very well may do whatever it takes to achieve that stardom - even at the expense of coworkers and the company. We’re talking about putting their own interests first in the form of backhanded deals and shifting loyalties.

Lannister employees will be **high performers**, there’s no question there. They are characterized by elements of control, initiative, networking, and input and feedback (Shaw). But if they have a higher need for power than for achievement, those Lannisters in managerial roles may suffer from managerial ineffectiveness (McClelland, 2003). Coach these managers on how to foster a sense of strength, responsibility, and pride among their direct reports in order to lead their team to both internal and external success.

And if these employees are happy controlling their own income in roles that allow them individual accolades, they might just be some of your top performers. Keep in mind that not every top performer needs a career path in management; they can often do more for your organization as contributors rather than as leaders.

HR RECOMMENDS

These employees need a structured employee development plan with measurable incentives and a bonus and/or commission plan in order for them to produce the best results for the company – that should speak to money-motivated ambition! An important note here is that these employees won’t forget promises, either implied or direct, and they will spend a lot of time fighting for what they’ve been promised. So don’t promise them anything you don’t plan to deliver on.

“A LION DOESN’T CONCERN HIMSELF WITH THE OPINIONS OF SHEEP.”

-LORD TYWIN LANNISTER (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2011)



THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS

HOUSE TARGARYEN

When anyone thinks “Targaryen,” they think one word: Daenerys. Actually, more accurately, they think 40 words:

“Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, the Unburnt, Queen of Meereen, Queen of the Andals and the Rhoynar and the First Men, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Breaker of Chains, and Mother of Dragons” (Benioff & Weiss, 2016).

Daenerys is the quintessential Targaryen - employees like her are natural born leaders. They are charismatic, they can easily convince large groups to follow them, and they know what they want. We can see this in Daenerys’s ability to bring such a variety of people, from the Dothraki to the Unsullied, to her cause and to get them to follow her of their own volition (2011).

Leadership is ingrained in the Targaryen employee, whether they are technically in that position or not. If Targaryen employees are tied to the mission and vision of a company, they can help lead the charge on following that direction. But if they are not aligned with the mission and vision, and they feel that the company is not going in the right direction, Targaryen employees can easily lead others against the grain (Jon Snow, all over again!) which can create a divide in the workplace. And when a recent Gallup survey says that only 41% of employees know what their company stands for, the Targaryen employees’ power has the potential to grow rapidly and escalate the situation among their peers (Lavoie, 2015).

On the flip side, Targaryen employees can also be **egotistical and entitled**, a quality that becomes evident in the long-awaited encounter between Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow. Jon has traveled to meet Daenerys to ask permission to mine the dragonglass underneath her fortress to use as a defense against the White Walkers. Daenerys’s response is to demand that he “bend the knee” and acknowledge her as the rightful queen of Westeros - which Jon refuses to do. A large part of his reasoning stems from the fact that she is an outsider to the realm, and that her only claim to the Iron Throne is that her father at one point sat upon it (Benioff & Weiss, 2017).

Like Daenerys, Targaryen employees may feel highly entitled to the leadership positions they hold - or, if they don’t hold a leadership position, they may feel that they are owed one. Ego management is the key to getting the best work out of these employees. Three ways to do that include reigning in the entitled behavior by emphasizing their equality with others; assigning them tasks that play to their specific strengths and let them contribute meaningfully; and treating them the same as other employees rather than making exceptions (Lavine, 2014).

HR RECOMMENDS

These employees need job enrichment, often more than others, in order to feel very valuable to the organization. Offer them roles to lead focus groups so they can feel like the spokesperson for their team. And offer them time to share their ideas with management - they will definitely take you up on it.

**“I’M NOT GOING TO STOP THE WHEEL.
I’M GOING TO BREAK THE WHEEL.”**

- DAENERYS TARGARYEN (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2015)



THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS

HOUSE MARTELL

The Martells are the **creatives**. Employees like these think outside the box and flourish in creative roles that give them freedom. We see that in the different way that the Martells - and others from Dorne, like Ellaria Sand - dress and conduct themselves compared to the typical Westerosi, in flowing robes and fluid social roles. They tend to be more free-thinking and not as straight-laced as the "traditional" employee. Of course, there may be some dress code violations for these employees, but they **provide a lot of value** in contributing to the creative vision of the company and creating beautiful deliverables.

Martells don't always play by the rules, rather tending to do what they want. As far back in Westeros history as Aegon Targaryen's conquest of the Seven Kingdoms, the Martells were able to maintain a diplomatic distance from the collective rule of the Iron Throne. They refused to surrender upon Aegon the Conqueror's invasion, making Dorne the only one of the Seven Kingdoms to retain its independence, up until an alliance through marriage centuries later ("Dorne").

This tendency can be both a beneficial and detrimental quality in the workplace. **Independent, original thinkers** often come up with the best ideas and can invent creative solutions to problems. On the flip side, however, they can become **easily bored** and then try to buck the system they feel is repressing them. Martell employees need to be surrounded by coworkers who are different than them, but who are open to taking new perspectives; these types of diverse teams perform better and more creatively than others (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2013).

These employees may also be more **outwardly emotional**, and they can let their emotions rule their decisions. Oberyn Martell certainly does while fighting the Gregor "The Mountain" Clegane in season four's trial by combat. He has an opportunity to win the fight, while the Mountain is on the ground, but because of his pent-up anger at fighting the man who allegedly killed his sister, Oberyn succumbs to the need to hear the Mountain confess to her murder. The emotional mistake subsequently costs him first his eyes and then his life (Benioff & Weiss, 2014).

Employees ruled by emotion, who may be unable to contain that emotion even in the workplace, can be a tad **difficult to manage**. As a coworker, exhibiting empathy, understanding, and respect for these employees goes a long way; as a manager, take this opportunity to transform the problem into a positive change that will help all parties involved in the issue ("When Work Gets Personal," 2013).

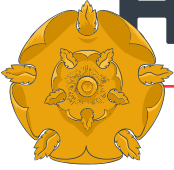
HR RECOMMENDS

Earmark these employees for creative roles in departments like marketing and development. They will be your most colorful employees and they'll help you define your employer brand, so give them opportunities for their creativity to flourish and don't try to box them in. But do try to help them understand rational versus irrational emotions. If you can get them to share their feelings with their manager, rather than with their peers, company culture will not be as negatively affected.

"‘TIS A BIG AND BEAUTIFUL WORLD. MOST OF US LIVE AND DIE IN THE SAME CORNER WHERE WE WERE BORN AND NEVER GET TO SEE ANY OF IT. I DON'T WANT TO BE MOST OF US."

- OBERYN MARTELL (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2014)

THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS



HOUSE TYRELL

House Tyrell is the **epitome of grace**. As viewers will recall, Margaery Tyrell seems to handle every situation thrown at her smoothly and seemingly without effort. That grace is not without ambition, however. Every move Margaery makes throughout the series is highly calculated and pushes her closer to her ultimate goal of becoming queen and gaining power. She continues to marry closer and closer to that power, from Renly to Joffrey to Tommen - all Baratheons (Benioff & Weiss, 2016). Her grandmother, Lady Olenna, is equally ambitious and calculating, going so far as to poison Joffrey to both save her granddaughter from the marriage and rid Westeros of a monstrous ruler. Despite her more blunt nature, Lady Olenna even accepts her own death with grace in season seven, after Jaime Lannister has conquered her home of Highgarden (2017).

The Tyrells are **mediators**, excellent at smoothing things over. Tyrell employees will take on this quality in meeting spaces, even if they are not the ones leading or calling the meeting. They also have the potential to function well as intended mediators in a workplace conflict. If you need someone to spearhead workplace conflict resolution, Tyrell employees will be able to manage a conversation between other more volatile employee types (Heathfield, 2016).

In their effort to be gracious, however, the Tyrells have certain **politician-like qualities**. They may say one thing to your face and another behind your back - the latter, of course, being how they really feel - like whenever Margaery's gracious facade fades while she is discussing her plans with her brother Loras. The Tyrells certainly play their own agenda, but with more grace than a house like the Lannisters, as an example (Benioff & Weiss, 2016).

In the workplace, these politics may surface in the form of backstabbing employees, from belittlers to credit thieves to slackers (Buhl). Most frequently, Tyrell employees take on the climber or hurdler archetypes - using their coworkers as a means to propel themselves forward (Whitler, 2016).

HR RECOMMENDS

Don't be surprised to find these employees in an HR department for their neutrality! Allow them to mediate focus groups and tap them for when tough conversations need to be had, as they'll likely handle them much more softly than other employees would. Note that these employees likely have good intentions and are just trying to be friends with everyone. But don't be afraid to confront these employees if and when their politicking becomes excessive.

"IF YOU GIVE THEM YOUR LOVE, THEY WILL RETURN IT A THOUSANDFOLD."

- MARGAERY TYRELL (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2013)



THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS

HOUSE BARATHEON

The Baratheons tend to be **very efficient** in getting things done. They brush aside bureaucracy and debate, preferring to execute on their plans. They also have no time for politics, which they see as an impediment to their action-oriented methods. King Robert Baratheon and his brother Stannis are perfect examples of their house. Robert led the charge in what became known as Robert's Rebellion, dominating the battlefield and ultimately usurping the Iron Throne. But once he gains control of the Seven Kingdoms, Robert shows no interest in the politics of King's Landing, preferring instead to focus on action-oriented activities like hunting (Benioff & Weiss, 2011).

His brother Stannis is quite similar - once Stannis learns of both Robert's death and the illegitimacy of Robert's supposed heirs, he declares himself the rightful king. But he cannot seem to understand why no one will support him, nor how to persuade other houses to join his cause from his longstanding keep on the island of Dragonstone (2015). This segues into a key Baratheon trait: a Baratheon employee may be a bit of a **lone wolf**, preferring to do things apart from the group and not inspiring the greatest followership.

True, they may sound **disconnected or disinterested**, potentially antisocial. But don't discount Baratheon employees just for being lone wolves. These employees statistically devote greater energy to their work than others who might be more team-based, and their drive is intrinsically motivated (Owens, 2017). Don't force them to collaborate unless it is necessary for the greater goal. And, since they don't tend to preoccupy themselves with what others think of them, don't be offended by their straightforward, sometimes abrasive communication style. It is most important to understand their thoughts and intentions on a project - **elegance isn't their style**.

HR RECOMMENDS

Tap these employees for when you need good results fast, and particularly for projects that don't require a lot of teamwork. Allow them as much autonomy as possible, but also encourage diplomacy - give them the chance to improve their ability to interact with coworkers!

“WE DO NOT CHOOSE OUR DESTINIES...GREAT OR SMALL, WE MUST DO OUR DUTY.”

- STANNIS BARATHEON (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2015)



THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS

HOUSE ARRYN

Employees of House Arryn, like many of the other houses, are **ambitious**. They seek to achieve great heights, and often they are successful. Jon Arryn was Hand of the King to Robert Baratheon prior to his death at the beginning of season one, and he left his wife Lysa and son Robyn with the coveted home of the Eyrie, a protected fortress high up on a mountain (Benioff & Weiss, 2011).

Arryns may be **aloof and distant**, however; in the corporate world, these employees may not really be connected to the company culture or with their coworkers. Just look at Lysa and Robyn Arryn's existence - they live at the top of the Eyrie, with limited social interaction and a general paranoia about the outside world. Plus, Robyn likes to throw anyone who opposes him through the Moon Door, an open hatch in the floor of the Eyrie's topmost tower that leads to a six-hundred-foot drop to the valley below (2014).

One problem in our workforce today is the discrepancy between hiring for "fit" and hiring for organizational values. Arryn employees will often fall into the second bucket - they understand the goals of the organization, they're intelligent, and they're **highly qualified for the job**. But many hiring managers are also looking for personal fit - people they can get along with and develop close relationships with (Rivera, 2015). If they hire a few Arryns to mix in with that group, there might be a disconnect. Make sure that your HR department and hiring managers are expressing a clear description of the organization's true culture to potential employees to avoid these issues.

Should you decide to hire this house, you will probably have to earn their trust each and every day thanks to their paranoia - which can be draining. It is less about ability and more about energy with these employees who may exhaust their managers.

HR RECOMMENDS

Find ways to connect with these employees outside of the office to pull them into the culture. Take them on off-site visits with you. Also, set measurable development goals with short-term rewards for collaborative performance. For example, ask them to organize a small event with you, or lead a small project initiative - the key is to give them progressively more responsibility, but start small. Giving them too much collaboration responsibility too quickly can exacerbate their collaboration issues! Then, commit to helping them achieve the goals. When you consistently and tangibly prove that you're in it with them, and teamwork is in their best interests, you will earn their trust.

"I'M LORD OF THE VALE. WHEN I GROW UP, I'LL BE ABLE TO FLY ANYBODY WHO BOTHERS ME."

- ROBYN ARRYN (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2014)

THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS



HOUSE GREYJOY

Your Greyjoy employees are able to **build an empire** out of nothing. House Greyjoy's reputation as the most formidable house on the seas certainly didn't come out of nowhere. Over time, the Greyjoys built up their navy and their power. The only thing is, the Greyjoys are what we would classify as classic "takers." They never really create anything on their own; instead, they take things and ideas from other people in order to build something. In fact, the Greyjoys live on the Iron Islands, land so barren that they could never grow anything besides the trees they cut down to build their ships. All of their power was gained by raiding lands around them for the supplies they needed (Benioff & Weiss, 2012).

Takers, by definition, are people who use their interactions with others to get as much as they can from them while contributing the least amount possible to the solution (Grant, 2013). It might sound frustrating, but many takers tend to get ahead using this method. And their negative impact on your work culture can be two to three times greater than any positive impact other employees might bring to the table (McQuaid, 2017).

As we have seen particularly with Theon Greyjoy, employees of House Greyjoy may also be **fair-weather friends**. Theon grows up as a ward of House Stark, and seems genuinely loyal to them, even if he feels just a bit like an outcast. But given the opportunity in season one to turn on the Starks to further his personal agenda and return to his family, Theon takes it - shattering any real connections to the people who were supposed to be his second family (Benioff & Weiss, 2011).

The good news is, **Greyjoy takers are fixable!** When you recognize some taker employees in your workforce, you can try to reroute their tendencies by building accountability, giving reputational feedback, and looking for the bright moments (McQuaid, 2017). Theon wasn't the worst person all the time - he did try to save his sister (Benioff & Weiss, 2017).

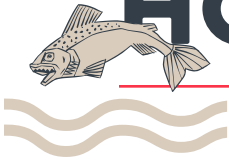
HR RECOMMENDS

Don't take it personally if these employees are just not that into you. These employees have great personalities for product testing or quality assurance. While they may not generate the most original ideas, you can let them help make good ideas great.

"NO MAN GIVES ME A CROWN. I PAY THE IRON PRICE. I WILL TAKE MY CROWN."

- BALON GREYJOY (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2012)

THE NINE NOBLE HOUSES OF WESTEROS



HOUSE TULLY

Members of House Tully are **truly dependable**. They will back you up, whether in a battle or a meeting, and will really get behind an idea. Many of the Tullys that we know from the series are, in fact, supporters of other houses through marriage - Catelyn Stark and Lysa Arryn are both Tully sisters that married into other houses. With Catelyn in particular, we see the incredibly strong support she provides her husband, her children, and House Stark throughout the first few seasons.

The Tullys are also **strong defenders**. Anyone who has watched the last few seasons will remember Catelyn's uncle Ser Brynden Tully, otherwise known as The Blackfish, defending his home of Riverrun fiercely against Jaime Lannister and his invading army (Benioff & Weiss, 2016). And no one can deny the fierceness with which both Catelyn and Lysa defend their own children. Catelyn goes so far as to follow her oldest son Robb to war in order to advise him and attempt to keep him safe amidst the battles to the south (2012).

While their defense is certainly admirable, Tully employees may automatically back a coworker or leader for the sake of providing support - which may make them blind to crucial issues or red flags. Just look at Catelyn - despite her desperate drive to protect her son at all costs, she is unable to foresee the scheming plans of the Red Wedding that lead to both their deaths (2013).

Tully employees are key to any manager striving to create an environment of inclusive leadership (Burke, 2016). Traditionally, the hero-sidekick relationship in the workplace focused on the hero (the manager) while disregarding the efforts of the sidekick. To build an inclusive leadership environment - one in which Tully employees will thrive - a leadership team needs to exhibit six key traits: commitment, courage, cognizance of bias, curiosity, cultural intelligence, and collaboration (Burke, 2016). Working in this kind of environment and under this type of leader will bring out the Tully employee's best work without subjecting them to the potential crippling of a poorly backed decision.

HR RECOMMENDS

If you can get these employees genuinely engaged, they will often become the ambassadors for the company's mission and values. Team these employees with C-level executives to be the employee voice for the executive team. These personalities also make for wonderful support professionals. Every leader needs a great supporter to hold them accountable to goals and initiatives, while also ensuring the legwork needed to actually execute any great vision is achieved. They are incredibly loyal and tend to commit to organizations long-term. These individuals are likely to have more organizational knowledge and history than most: critical information for leaders to have to achieve their strategic goals.

“AS LONG AS I’M STANDING, THE WAR IS NOT OVER. THIS IS MY HOME. I WAS BORN IN THIS CASTLE AND I’M READY TO DIE IN IT.”

- SER BRYNDEN “THE BLACKFISH” TULLY (BENIOFF & WEISS, 2016)

ACROSS THE SEVEN KINGDOMS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM GAME OF THRONES

SO NOW WHAT? Unlike Westeros, where each noble house fights for the Iron Throne, companies are working towards a common goal - or, at least, they should be! Whether that is revenue growth, expansion of offices, new products, or the workforce, companies are forced to learn how to develop and manage employees of all personalities in order to meet that goal. But as anyone who works in an office knows, that's often easier said than done. Luckily, when we look past the dragons and the White Walkers, we can actually find several valuable lessons from *Game of Thrones* that are applicable to today's workplace.

SEND A RAVEN

When information needs to be shared across Westeros, there's only one way to send a message - via raven. This mode of communication has proven crucial in driving a number of storylines and spurring action on the show. Just look at Sam Tarly's raven to Jon Snow in the first episode of season seven, in which he informs Jon that he may have located a large source of dragonglass, the very thing Jon needs to fight the White Walkers, on the island of Dragonstone (Benioff & Weiss, 2017). Without that letter, Jon Snow and his team would not have the resources they need - and Jon would not have traveled to Dragonstone to form the alliance we'd all been waiting for with Daenerys Targaryen.

Communication is key, and while we don't use ravens in the corporate world, we do have email, messaging, and the good old-fashioned knocking on someone's office door. At this point, there is really no excuse not to communicate. Effective communication is crucial not only within your own team, but also across departments. Although many companies still function with departmental silos, a company cannot be united behind one mission and achieve its goals without communicating properly and regularly. 86 percent of employees and executives blame workplace failures on lack of collaboration or ineffective communication (Salesforce, 2012). It's the concept of corporate symbiosis - departments working together to solve a problem and create the best possible solution for their clients, their company, and their coworkers (Sagarin, 2013).



HAVE A CAUSE

Jon Snow's mantra throughout season seven has been "Winter is here." He has always been more removed from the politics and power struggle of Westeros, having no real interest in the Iron Throne and focusing instead on the real problems in the North. But in this past season, it becomes Jon's job to convince leaders of the other noble houses to band together against the impending threat. In a telling display of the human tendency that "seeing is believing," most of his peers only recognize the danger once he physically presents it to them - whether that's Daenerys swooping in to save the day beyond the Wall or Cersei Lannister and company recoiling from the wight that Jon unleashes from a box (Benioff & Weiss, 2017).

In the workplace, as in Westeros, far too often conflict becomes people vs. people, when in reality, it should be people vs. problems. In fact, 60 to 80 percent of workplace conflicts stem from strained relationships between employees (Dana, 2005). Just consider the growing strength of Jon's coalition as he continues to add allies. Divided, there is no way any one of the houses or individuals can defeat the White Walkers - but united, they stand a chance for survival.

The same is true for organizations. Collaboration and teamwork foster creativity and learning while blending the various talents of team members to create the strongest outcome possible (Mattson, 2015).

TRUST YOUR GUT

Our intuition is often correct when it comes to understanding our coworkers (and other people in general). But sometimes we second-guess or question that intuition - which doesn't always yield the best results. Sansa and Arya Stark suffer from that problem throughout most of season seven. The sisters have reunited, but their historical sibling rivalry and dislike has bred an alarming amount of distrust. When Littlefinger tries to drive even more of a wedge between them by planting notes for Arya to find and convincing Sansa that Arya wants to kill her, it seems like that unfounded distrust has finally won. But before we as an audience can start an uproar, the season seven finale reveals that Sansa in fact trusted her gut instinct that Arya would never try to kill her. The Stark sisters are then able to come together and work with their brother Bran to expose Littlefinger's schemes and betrayals - and eliminate him as an enemy (Benioff & Weiss, 2017).

People grow and change with experience. This is true for the Stark sisters, who are no longer the young girls they were in season one, and it's certainly true in the workplace. Jeff Stibel, CEO of Dun & Bradstreet and an M.S. in brain science, outlines your gut instinct as one of four guiding principles for leading teams:

Gut instinct is what your brain does. The brain is a vast prediction machine - it takes whatever information it has, it swirls it up, and it makes a guess. And that guess either proves correct or incorrect. The more you study something, the more you do something, the more your gut takes over (Ifeyani, 2014).

As we advance in our careers, we gain experience and learn to trust our gut instinct more in making important workplace decisions. While weighing the facts and options is generally a best practice, in the end it's often your gut instinct that will guide you. And if your coworkers are truly aligned with organizational goals, they will probably have the same gut reaction.

HAVE A GAMEPLAN

Planning and strategy are a core part of any successful business, including the business of politics. Just ask Tyrion Lannister - he's been strategizing since well before he gained access to an official battle map of Westeros at Dragonstone. Tyrion inherently understands people, and he forms his strategies and advice around that knowledge. Re-watch an episode and count how many times Tyrion says some version of "I know my sister" before delivering sage advice. He knows what to say to the different individuals he interacts with in order to best communicate with them - and he knows how to cleverly plan to get what he needs. Just look at how he discovered that Grand Maester Pycelle was the traitor in the small council while he was Hand of the King, by planting different stories with different small council members to see which one would spill the gossip to Cersei (Benioff & Weiss, 2012).

As in Westeros, success cannot happen in the workplace without a gameplan. Yet, on an individual level, 95% of a typical workforce does not understand its organization's strategy; and on an organizational level, 90% of organizations fail to execute their strategy successfully (Sage). There is an opportunity in today's workplace to change that narrative, and we are remiss as a workforce if we do not take it.

TREAT OTHERS THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED

This is, of course, a classic lesson we're all familiar with. But don't forget what happened to Ellaria Sand and her daughters as a result of Ellaria's own actions - Ellaria poisoned Cersei's daughter Myrcella in season five, and when they finally meet again in season seven, Cersei returns the favor by poisoning Ellaria's daughter Tyene and forcing Ellaria to watch her slowly die (Benioff & Weiss, 2015).

Bottom line: in both Westeros and the workplace, how people treat you can often be a reflection on how you treat them - so you might want to avoid dishing out any Long Farewell poison.

Game of Thrones loves its cliffhangers, and in fact the end of season seven left us with arguably the biggest one of all when the White Walkers and their army broke through the Wall with the help of an ice dragon (Benioff & Weiss, 2017). Although we might have to wait until 2019 for the show to return, we don't have to wait to see what happens within our own workplace. After all, while White Walkers, dragons, and imminent death may not be real-life causes for concern, we can reflect on the different houses in our organization and how we can bring them all together for our own Great War.

Oh - we haven't talked about Bran Stark here. But if we could each take time under the weirwood tree to access our third eye, we would see that we are more in control of this *Game of Thrones* than we think.

“SOMETIMES DIFFERENT ROADS LEAD TO THE SAME CASTLE.”

- JON SNOW (MARTIN, 1996)

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