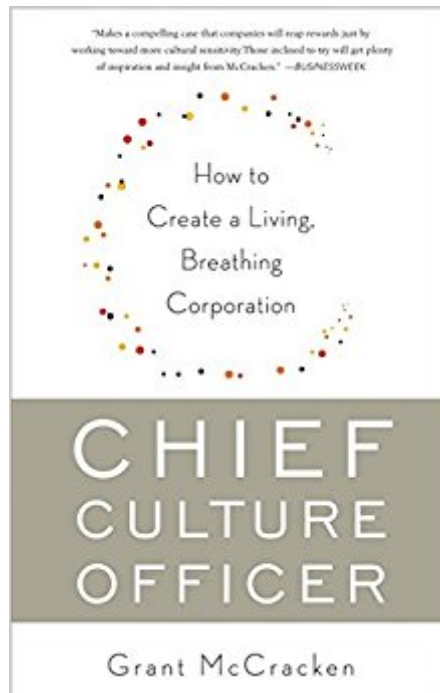


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# Chief Culture Officer: How To Create A Living, Breathing Corporation



## Synopsis

The American corporation--deaf and blind to the world around it--needs a new professional. It needs a Chief Culture Officer. Grant McCracken, an anthropologist who now trains some of the world's biggest companies and consulting firms, argues that the CCO would keep a finger on the pulse of contemporary cultural trends while developing a systematic understanding of the deep waves of culture in America and the world. The CCO would be the corporation's eyes and ears, allowing it to detect coming changes, even when they exist only as the weakest of signals. Trenchantly on point and bursting with insight and character, Chief Culture Officer is sure to expand your horizons--and your business.

## Book Information

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Basic Books; 1 edition (May 10, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0465022049

ISBN-13: 978-0465022045

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 22 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #285,075 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #142 in [Books > Business & Money > Management & Leadership > Planning & Forecasting](#) #304 in [Books > Business & Money > Marketing & Sales > Marketing > Research](#) #376 in [Books > Business & Money > Marketing & Sales > Consumer Behavior](#)

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. McCracken (Flock and Flow), a research affiliate at Convergence Culture Consortium at MIT, argues that every company needs a chief cultural officer to anticipate cultural trends rather than passively waiting and reacting. CCOs should have the ability to process massive amounts of data and spot crucial developments among an array of possibilities; they will be able to see the future coming, no matter which industry they serve, and create value for shareholders, move product, create profit and increase the bottom line. McCracken provides an impressive list of individuals deeply connected and in tune with the zeitgeist including Steve Jobs, A.G. Lafley, Mary Minnick, Joss Whedon and Johnny Depp--who fought Disney in order to create a campy male lead in the Pirates of the Caribbean movie--as well as such corporations as Starbucks

and Nike that have refashioned culture. McCracken's case is persuasive, and his book, peppered with pop culture references and enlivened by his restlessly inquisitive nature (and ability to strike up conversation with just about anyone), makes for enlightening and entertaining reading. (Dec.)

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Seth Godin, author of *Tribes & Purple Cow* —“The title of this book is a lie. It's not merely for companies that decide they need a Chief Culture Officer, or even just for those who aspire to that job. It's for you. Right now. If your job involves marketing, inventing, selling or simply investing in companies that make stuff, this book is a must read.”

• John Deighton, Brierley Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School —“For those who are open to its thrall, Chief Culture Officer will change the trajectory of their lives.”

• Faris Yakob, Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Strategist, McCann Erickson New York —“In Chief Culture Officer, Grant McCracken highlights the increasing importance of cultural understanding for brands that wish to remain relevant—and profitable—in the protean flux of the modern marketplace, as he carves out a new role for the 21st century corporation. The best marketers can hope for is to create something that resonates so strongly it becomes part of our cultural fabric. This book is an indispensable tool for achieving that goal.”

• Tyler Cowen, author of *Create Your Own Economy* —“I have deep admiration and respect for Grant McCracken, a nimble thinker who combines a mastery of marketing, culture, anthropology, and modern business practice. Chief Culture Officer has many lessons for anyone interested in understanding how to run a successful business in the early 21st century. It will prove one of the most stimulating books of the year.”

• Philip Kotler, author of *Chaotics: The Business of Managing and Marketing in the Age of Turbulence* —“Marketing gets failing grades when it comes to understanding and using culture. In Chief Culture Officer—a delectable cultural soup that is sure to stir your taste buds—Grant McCracken makes a compelling case that culture will be marketing's next silver bullet. I whole-heartedly endorse his call for bringing culture-thinking into the company.”

• Ben Casnocha, author of *My Start-Up Life: What a (Very) Young CEO Learned on His Journey through Silicon Valley* —“This is a marvel of a business book: highly entertaining, original, and provocative. Entrepreneurs who want to understand their customers, target market, and the cultural dynamics that shape the business world—which is to say all entrepreneurs—need to read it.”

• Richard Gref, CEO, AIGA | the professional association for design —“Grant McCracken, once again, sees clearly the patterns in which

innovation, enterprise, and smart people can influence change, create value, and respond to popular culture, where real people experience choice. The book is terrific and spot on. —Marian Salzman, partner and chief marketing officer, Porter Novelli —“Grant McCracken has cracked the holy grail of what’s next to blend talent management, corporate strategy, and trendspotting, and his storytelling style captivates and educates. I am blown away. —Henry Jenkins, author of *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* —“Building on decades of eye-opening research into the culture of consumption, Grant McCracken demonstrates why many companies get blindsided by cultural factors that were hidden in plain view, and offers a compelling argument for why they need to bring cultural expertise into their executive suite. Here’s hoping more corporate executives hear his call. —This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am a big fan of Grant McCracken. I’ve not just enjoyed his books, but gotten some powerful ideas for my professional life from them over the years. I’ve read McCracken when he’s being insightful. I know what that looks like. Chief Culture Officer does not have the kind of material Grant McCracken writes when he’s been insightful. Instead, it’s filled with embarrassing ideas that appear to have been made off-the-cuff. Actually, that’s just the kind of flippant approach to business that McCracken suggests in this book that a Chief Culture Officer ought to be following. He suggests that watching reality TV shows like *Real Housewives* is a good form of ethnographic research. He advocates for the blind groupthink of brainstorming that Christian Madsbjerg and Mikkel B. Rasmussen deftly exposed in their more recent book *The Moment of Clarity*. In the closing pages of *Chief Culture Officer*, McCracken disparages academic anthropologists who have, as a culture, adopted the practice of writing more like irrelevant philosophers than observers of culture. His criticism is right on target, but in this book he has largely over-reacted to anthropology’s academic rhetoric of nonsense by embracing the careless style of the worst business writers. As an alternative to academic anthropological writing, McCracken suggests that people investigating the culture of consumption try to express ideas that are just barely good enough for the moment, but can be easily thrown away. He uses the metaphor of Thor Heyerdahl barely keeping *Kon Tiki* afloat, and then throwing it away as soon as he makes landfall. That’s not the kind of material that an enduring brand will be made from. Corporations need Chief Culture Officers, but not the kind of Chief Culture Officers Grant McCracken writes about in this book. There’s a happy medium between abstracted academic nonsense and slapdash improvisation. Chief Culture Officers need to be observant and discerning. They need to be able to practice thick description based on how consumers actually live, and not be

content with the thin veneer that can be grasped through a passing glance and a few notes scribbled down on Post-It notes. I could not be more disappointed in this book. Grant McCracken is a brilliant thinker. Read his other books. They're magnificent. Leave this one alone.

I read this book when it was first published in 2009 and then read and reviewed Grant McCracken's more recent book, *Culturematic: How Reality TV, John Cheever, a Pie Lab, Julia Child, Fantasy Football . . . Will Help You Create and Execute Breakthrough Ideas*. Of all the current observers of the contemporary business world and, especially, of the evolution of workplace culture, I know of no one else who sees more and sees more deeply than he does. Here's a case in point. Just as Dave Ulrich has been an advocate for several years of adding a chief human resources officer (CHRO) to an organization's management team, McCracken is determined to add another. As he explains, "That's what I want to do with this book [Chief Culture Officer]: invent an office and an officer - the Chief Culture Officer, the person who knows the culture, both its fads and fashions, and its deep, enduring structure. I hope this book will be read by two groups: people inside the corporation who want to make the corporation more intelligent, strategic, and responsive, and people outside the corporation who want to turn their knowledge of culture into a profession and a career." Years ago, Southwest Airlines' then chairman and CEO, Herb Kelleher, explained the importance of culture to its success: "Maintaining excellent customer services involves a process of getting people to understand the importance of it to them in their daily lives as well as in others'. We were a little concerned as we got bigger that maybe some of our early culture might be lost so we set up a culture committee whose only purpose is to keep the Southwest Airlines culture alive. Before people knew how to make fire, there was a fire watcher. Cave dwellers may have found a tree hit by lightning and brought fire back to the cave. Somebody had to make sure it kept going because if it went out, there would be very serious problems. The fire watcher was the most important person in the tribe. I said to our culture committee, "You are our fire watchers, who make sure the fire does not go out. I think you are the most important committee at Southwest Airlines." As current chairman and CEO Jerry Kelly would be the first to affirm, the same can be said of Southwest Airlines today. These are among the dozens of passages of greatest interest and value to me, also listed to suggest the scope of McCracken's coverage:

- o Dependence on Gurus (Pages 5-15 and 39-40)
- o Coca-Cola Company (8-10, 138-141, and 178-179)
- o Dan Wieden (17-21)
- o Lance Jensen (21-25)
- o A.G. Lafley (28-30, 125-127, and 143-144)
- o Chris Albrecht (32-36)
- o Milton Glaser (36-39)
- o Fast and slow cultures and CCOs (41-64)
- o Convergence culture and CCOs (61-64)
- o CEOs and CCOs (109-112)
- o Culture: Breathing out and breathing in (112-117)
- o Anthropology (119-120 and

173-178)o Empathy and CCOs (125-129)o Branding/Brainstorming (138-143)o New media (145-150)o Michael Eisner (155-157)o Gurus as enemies of culture (161-162)o Philistines (171-179)These are among McCracken's concluding observations: "The corporation has been keeping culture at bay for a very long time. Our job is to manage its new spirit of openness. The best way to do this is to demonstrate the value of what we do, as when we supply critical intelligence, help answer the big questions (what business are we in?), see the significance of shifting [especially disruptive] technologies, read sudden changes in consumer taste and preference, sift the perfect storm of the economy for opportunity and danger, and perform better pattern recognition is the first order of business."In sum, we are the first generation, and we have to act like one."I presume to add an observation by Peter Drucker: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Members of the "first generation" to which Grant McCracken refers must keep in mind that most of the greatest barriers to change initiatives are cultural in nature, the result of what Jim O'Toole so aptly characterizes as "the ideology of comfort and the tyranny of custom." It is perhaps possible but highly unlikely that an organization can create and then sustain a living, breathing, thriving enterprise without a CCO who has both authority and responsibility as well as sufficient resources to address "the first order of the day." Without such a commitment, there will be no second order of the day.

Books are always better when you find unexpectedly find yourself in the acknowledgments. That being said, Chief Culture Officer is very good. Grant McCracken is one of a handful of business writers and bloggers who a) has a deep understanding and love for the topics he covers, b) writes about them in an inspiring and unexpected way, and c) isn't a tool. I take a special joy in obscure allusions or connections and I get the feeling that Grant does, too. I really think someone who had previously been completely ignorant about current business thinking could pick up this book and, if they diligently followed every thread and read every book Grant mentioned, leave with a complete understanding. I felt like Grant cited half the books I've read in the last few years. My only criticism is that he regularly got distracted inside of his own book and never finished the stories he started - what happened to the hidden sneaker shop? Someone tell me.

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