

Company's culture gives it an edge

Entrepreneur makes values 'living, breathing part of organization'

BY KERRY FELTNER

The power of observation is not lost on Andrew Brady.

When Brady was 7, his father decided to leave a well-established job in the medical services industry for the chance at fulfillment in starting his own firm.

As a kid, the courage of his father's action stuck with Brady, teaching him that choice and fulfillment were vital to living.

"He had to come home and explain it in 7-year-old terms and he said, 'There were certain things I liked about my job and there were certain things I didn't, and I wanted to do more of the things that I liked,'" Brady says. "And as a 7-year-old that made all the sense in the world.

"A lot of, if not all, parents tell you to do what you love. But for someone to so courageously jump in head first I think was something that always really colored my world view," he adds.

Brady, 27, grew up in Irondequoit. He graduated from Cornell University in 2010 with a degree in applied economics and management, with a specialty in strategy. At Cornell he also earned a certificate in Business Opportunities in Leadership and Diversity.

In 2015 he earned his M.S. in applied positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania.

During college he became president and CEO of the fraternity Kappa Sigma—a place where he put his leadership skills to use. While there he helped the organization's future leaders find their potential.

"This was my first opportunity to really be a full-fledged leader, and I was in my element," Brady says.

Once he completed college, his dream was to gain entry into the leadership development program at General Electric. He made it to the final round of interviewing but was not selected—a disappointment as it meant moving home to figure out his next plan.

"So now I go from thinking I'm going to have my dream job and life is great and I'm graduating from a good school with a good degree, and now it's like,



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

"Great, I graduated and now I'm going to move back home," Brady says. "It's a blow to your ego."

His father, looking to change his own workload, hoped to have Brady join the family business; Brady, however, knew he needed more experience to gain credibility.

"From a really young age I was exposed to the entrepreneurial (spirit), how to lead people and how to understand people," Brady says. "That was my long-term goal, but I had this paradigm in my head that the coaching and consulting industry is an industry where a little bit of gray hair benefits. So I always had this limiting belief in my head that I need to put in the time doing other things before I can follow my real dreams."

He started working for Wegmans Food Markets—a longtime client of his father's firm XLR8—from 2007 to 2011 in the firm's management training program.

He was part of the team that started the first Wegmans in Boston, which gave Brady a chance to test the grocery retailer's culture.

"Obviously the secret sauce at Wegmans was the culture, and so how do you re-create that?" Brady says. "So re-creating that culture—that was part of what enticed me as well. ... We do a

lot of developing culture at my dad's business, and still thinking that that's what I want to do, this will be a really neat experience.

"And it was definitely a challenge—it was starting from scratch," he adds.

In 2015, Brady became president and CEO of the XLR8 Team Inc.—a leadership development and culture-focused consultancy—but he has been working at the company his father founded since 2009. His mother also works at the firm and his father continues to be part of the company.

"We help make the values a living, breathing part of an organization and make the culture the competitive advantage of the organization," Brady says.

XLR8's client list includes Wegmans, Rochester City School District, Klein Steel Service Inc. and the RIT Center for Urban Entrepreneurship.

When the company started in the 1990s, coaching and consulting were not as popular as they are now, Brady says. In those days, coaching was seen as a last-ditch effort to remedy problems in the workplace.

"Today our focus (is) on building culture where people are fully engaged and they're finding meaning and purpose in their work. You can't read a business magazine without seeing articles about

that nowadays," Brady says. "Today it's more recognized that it can be for high potentials and for growth and for development versus 'You're really terrible at this. You need a coach,'" he adds.

When a company changes over time so does the culture, Brady says. When people get together to accomplish a goal, norms, behaviors and culture will develop.

"Whether or not you are intentional about creating it, (culture is) such a strong driver of success of the company," he says.

Rochester is where Brady wants to be, he adds.

"It's an exciting time to be in Rochester," Brady says. "I never understood the negativity that a lot of people have. Part of when I came back to town (I thought), 'How can I be a part of co-creating and co-authoring the future of Rochester?' We've risen from the ashes, so to speak, and it's an exciting time."

Today he is highly involved in Monroe County. He is the youngest member of the Rochester Rotary Club in its 100-year history, the vice president of professional development for the Rochester Young Professionals, and board co-chairman and founding member of the Greater Rochester chapter of Conscious Capitalism, among other pursuits.

Leading today is about learning about the people around you. Every employee has something to add to an organization, Brady says.

"A leader for me is when someone can work with an individual and not only find their unique strengths and talents and sometimes potential that the person does not even recognize, but really find a way to put the person in a position where they're able to use that and be engaged and find fulfillment themselves, which helps the organization," he says.

XLR8 helps firms ignite their own energy, passion and strengths to evolve.

"It goes beyond, 'OK, I'm going to learn a little bit about myself,'" Brady says. "We really focus on helping that leader discover their own inner compass, their own vision, passion and values. The companies that we work with recognize that even though that's not directly work-related, it has huge (implications) for their energy, their motivation and their performance at work; you can treat the whole human being."

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