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# The Missing ‘Leadership Principle’ at Amazon

## The online retail giant has maintained a disruptive spirit,

## but it may need to adapt its corporate culture to keep employees happy

[*Brad Stone*](http://www.bloomberg.com/authors/AP2Ww3Sbbuw/brad-stone)*- August 17, 2015 – Bloomberg*

**Inside Amazon's Working Environment and Culture**

Amabots and Amholes; employees sobbing[[1]](#footnote-1) at their desks; colleagues spamming the internal employee-review tool in an attempt to eject their managers from the company; cancer survivors returning to work, only to be put on “performance improvement plans.” These and other rich anecdotes made the New York Times [broadside against Amazon](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/16/technology/inside-amazon-wrestling-big-ideas-in-a-bruising-workplace.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) an entertaining and brutal read.

Amazon.com Chief Executive Officer Jeff Bezos [wrote a memo](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-17/bezos-assails-callous-practices-as-he-refutes-times-article) to his employees last night contesting the Times article and asking anyone who witnesses such displays of corporate callousness[[2]](#footnote-2) to report it to human resources or e-mail the CEO. “I don’t recognize this Amazon, and I very much hope you don’t, either,” Bezos wrote. “I strongly believe that anyone working in a company that really is like the one described in the NYT would be crazy to stay. I know I would leave such a company.”

**How Bruising a Workplace Is Amazon?**

The byways of technology, particularly in Seattle, are now filled with former Amazonians who will eagerly dredge up [[3]](#footnote-3)stories of inhumane treatment. Many seem to be touched by a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. They did witness the kind of working conditions described in the Times story and burned out quickly, leaving within a year or two after they were hired and abandoning their stock options.

It’s important to note, though, that there are also many former employees and executives who will testify on Amazon’s behalf. They consider the company to be an energetic and productive place to work that doesn’t tolerate the kind of mediocrity infecting many other tech giants and that molds employees with a disruptive way of thinking[[4]](#footnote-4). That’s why Silicon Valley startups, such as Uber, try to recruit from Amazon as much as possible—they are familiar with the demanding pace of work[[5]](#footnote-5) that’s required when you are tearing down old institutions and creating new ones in their place.

Experiences largely vary by division. The conditions described in the Times piece likely have little to do with the engineering paradise of the Amazon Web Services division or its growing Amazon Studios arm in Los Angeles. Based on my interviews with current and former employees, the pace of work actually seems to be most intense and unforgiving in the areas where Bezos himself has direct interest, such as the Kindle e-book division or the Lab126 hardware group in Cupertino, Calif.

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Ultimately, though, Amazon’s culture is inseparable from its overall performance. The company is unique among its peers online and in retail for continuing to grow quickly, innovating constantly, and expanding relentlessly into new business areas. Tech companies that were started around the same time, such as AOL, Yahoo!, and EBay, have long ceased to be so dynamic. This mode of operation works for Amazon, and its high performance drives its appeal among top engineers and MBAs, who, as the Timesnotes, line up [[6]](#footnote-6) every Monday to join the company. They are not conscripted[[7]](#footnote-7); they have no illusions about Amazon’s culture; and they can leave at any time.

The more serious allegation against Amazon is the way it treats sick employees and, in particular, women. One possible solution should be clear to Bezos and his top lieutenants: They need to add an entry to the company’s vaunted “[leadership principles](http://www.amazon.jobs/principles),” the 14 written values that guide new employees and mold the thinking[[8]](#footnote-8) of executives. The new 15th principle should go something like this: Have Empathy.

**Answer the questions :**

1. Describe the workplace in Amazon’s ?

2. How would you define its corporate culture ?

3. Explain the underlined sentence

4. Do you think a « disrupting spirit » is necessary to keep competitiveness ?

1. Sobbing : sanglotant [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Callousness : dureté [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. dredge up : dévoilera [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. that molds employees with a disruptive way of thinking : ces employés façonnés à la pensée perturbatrice [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. the demanding pace of work : le rythme de travail exigent [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Line up : font la queue [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Conscripted : enrôlé, forcé [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. mold the thinking : qui modèle la pensée [↑](#footnote-ref-8)