**PEM 602 Assignment 3**

**Tales of Amazon Warriors**

“This is the greatest place I hate to work.” These are the words John Rossman, a former Amazon executive, uses in attempting to describe how people working at Amazon feel about the culture. This mixed message seems to perfectly capture the positive and negative sentiments that exist side by side among employees at the company. Certainly, one cannot argue with Amazon’s success. In 2015 Amazon surpassed Walmart as the most valuable retailer in the country with a market valuation of over $250 billion. The company’s CEO, Jeff Bezos was ranked by Forbes magazine as the fifth-wealthiest person in the world and he notes, “My main job today? I work hard at helping to maintain the culture.”

There are several aspects of Amazon’s culture that makes it unique. Bezos believes that there are several forces that sap businesses over time after they become successful, including bureaucracy, excessive spending, and lack of discipline. Employees are empowered to be creative and given wide-ranging autonomy to pursue revolutionary ideas, like “package delivering drones.” At the same time, they are held to incredibly high standards of accountability, but these are the very factors that explain why some people absolutely thrive and love working for the company.

Above and beyond the three demons of bureaucracy, spending, and discipline, however, what really makes Amazon most unique is its stance toward conflict. Whereas most organizations try to minimize conflict, Bezos believes that “harmony” is totally overvalued at most work organizations and employees are encouraged to disagree, debate, and tear one another’s ideas to pieces. Instead of polite praise and compromise, the goal is to see whose ideas can survive in Darwinian battle for the one best solution or innovation. The internal phone directory even provides instructions on how to send anonymous feedback to one another’s supervisors. Many employees cannot stand up to this kind of scrutiny, however. Bo Olson, who spent two years in the book marketing branch at Amazon, noted that “You walk out of a conference room and you’ll see a grown man covering his face—nearly every person I worked with I saw cry at their desk.” Still, although many individuals cannot seem to endure the culture for long, Amazon seems to sustain the culture with a never-ending stream of new recruits ready to do battle.

QUESTIONS

If you were working in HR for Amazon, what kinds of individuals would you look for and avoid when it comes to making hiring decisions? Support your arguments.

SOURCES: J. Kantor and D. Streitfeld, “Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace,” The New York Times Online, August 15, 2015; J. Kantor and D. Streitfeld, “Jeff Bezos and Amazon Employees Join Debate Over Its Culture,” The New York Times Online, August 17, 2015; D. Streitfeld and J. Kantor, “Depiction of Amazon Stirs Debate about Work Culture,” The New York Times Online, August 18, 2015.