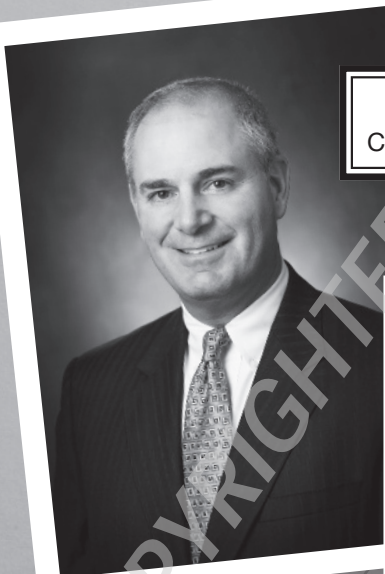


SORTING THROUGH THE GARBAGE

"I don't know if it's because of The Sopranos, but some of the public thinks everyone in our industry is connected to the mob and that our frontline folks are ex-cons. I hoped going undercover would correct those mistaken notions."



Larry O'Donnell
COO, Waste Management



Randy Lawrence
Unemployed Construction Worker



How We Found the Boss

The bosses of large companies are not the kind of people who apply to be in reality TV shows. When we approached Waste Management, there was some trepidation, to say the least. "When Lynn [head of corporate PR] first brought this opportunity to me," said Larry O'Donnell after the show first aired [on BNET.com], "I told her she was absolutely crazy. There is no way I'm doing reality television. But the more we talked about it, well, we'd been working really hard for the last several years on our employee engagement, getting people engaged at every level of the company and opening up communication. We do employee surveys and, as we talked about it, this seemed like a very unique opportunity to drive that engagement."

In the end, Larry O'Donnell wasn't satisfied until we spoke to him personally and explained that unlike any other TV program where bosses of big companies let cameras into their businesses, he would be present in every scene. If he saw something he didn't like, he could then be seen on camera fixing whatever it was.

THE BOSS

Lawrence (Larry) O'Donnell III, president and COO.

HIS COVER

Randy Lawrence, an unemployed construction worker who's the subject of a documentary on entry-level jobs.

HIS COMPANY

Waste Management, Inc., is the leading provider of comprehensive waste and environmental services in North America. The Houston-based firm and its subsidiaries provide collection, transfer, recycling and resource recovery, and disposal services to nearly 20 million municipal, commercial, industrial, and residential customers in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. The company's more than 43,000 employees helped it earn almost \$12 billion in revenue in 2009. Waste Management runs a network of 390 collection operations, 345 transfer stations, 273 active landfill disposal sites, 17 waste-to-energy plants, 132 recycling plants, and 117 beneficial-use landfill gas projects. Combined with its wholly owned subsidiary, WM Recycle America, it is North America's leading recycler. The company's landfills provide more than 24,000 protected acres for wildlife.

HIS STORY

It's hard to be top dog and one of the guys. When you're a leader you can do all the outreach you want; you can regularly break bread with the rank and file, have an open-door policy, and insist that everyone call you by your first name. No matter how hard you try to be one of the guys, though, you'll always be the boss. There will always be things you don't hear from your employees, no matter how hard you try.

Larry O'Donnell prides himself on being part of the team. As president and chief operating officer, he'd tried hard to be accessible ever since he came to Waste Management in 2000. After a career in law, Larry joined the corporate ranks and within four years climbed to reach the COO role.

Despite or perhaps because of his not having started his career in the Waste Management trenches, Larry had gone out of his way to reach out to the company's frontline personnel. "I realized there were a lot of things I just didn't understand, and so I've made it my business to spend time in the field meeting with and talking to our people." Larry's aim in these conversations was to find out what made employees happy and unhappy on the job. "If I don't know about a problem, I can't do anything about it. We're all a team, and I want to be known as a team builder. We have different roles and responsibilities, but we either play hard together and succeed, or we fall short together and figure out what we need to do to win the next time."



Larry became known for carrying around a little pad on which he'd always make notes about the information and feedback he received from employees. "Every time I go to a location, I make it my business to sit with drivers and mechanics rather than managers at lunch. They've never held back, and I've always returned with a page full of notes."

Most of Larry's note taking, research, and spreadsheets serve to drive three major goals: boosting profitability, improving customer service, and maintaining safety. For all his genuine talk of team building, Larry obviously had a financial mandate, looking to make the company as much money as he can. "I'm always sending out performance targets and cost-cutting goals



PRODUCERS' NOTE

What You Didn't See

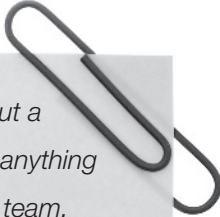
When Larry was growing up, his father owned a construction company and hardware store. Although the store has long since closed down, Larry's fond memories of his dad's business shone through when he took us to visit the site of the original location. Larry showed us around the building, now little more than a dilapidated warehouse, he had not visited in nearly 30 years.

Larry first started working for his dad's company at age 17 after a back injury derailed his promising football career. Rather than let him mope around the house, Larry Sr. took him into the fold of the family business. The very next year, Larry rose to the rank of foreman, overseeing the construction of three houses. It's no wonder that someone who exhibited such impressive leadership skills at just 18 years old would later find himself at the top of a major national corporation.

from my office. Increased efficiency translates into saving jobs.” But efficiency alone isn’t enough to stand out. “Previously we didn’t feel like our service was any better than any of our competitors, so we’ve tried to focus on our customers more.” But the goal that was closest to Larry’s heart was safety. That’s because it’s personal.

With pleasure in his voice, Larry says his son is the joy of his life, and his wife, Dare, is the source of his strength. His daughter, Linley, is clearly his inspiration. “She was born totally normal. During a routine test she threw up and aspirated, causing a lot of brain damage. It was really the result of a doctor not following proper procedure. We brought her home thinking we were bringing her home to die.” Thankfully, Linley is still very much alive. The bubbly 25-year-old lives in a special home care facility at which Larry spends a great deal of time volunteering. It’s easy to see they share a very special father-daughter connection. While his daughter’s accident had a profound effect on him personally, it’s also been a motivating force in his preoccupation with safety. “As a result of what happened to Linley, I never want to work at a company that I’m responsible for where people don’t know how to follow the proper and safe procedures. We don’t even begin our meetings without having a safety briefing.”

It’s more than just a question of the individual employee’s safety: repercussions of unsafe procedures can reach far wider.



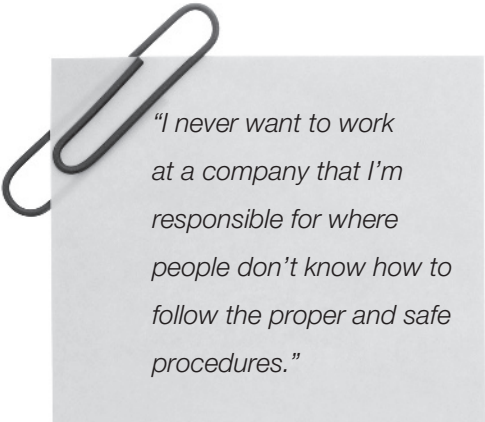
“If I don’t know about a problem, I can’t do anything about it. We’re all a team, and I want to be known as a team builder.”

“If we drive our trucks unsafely and there’s an accident, it’s not just the people directly involved who are injured; families and communities are affected as well.”

Larry was eager to go undercover to see how well his three goals had been absorbed into the culture of the company. But he also wanted the world to see the kind of people who work for his company. “I don’t know if it’s because of *The Sopranos*, but some of the public thinks everyone in our industry is connected to the mob and that our frontline folks are ex-cons,” he explained. “We’ve got an unbelievable workforce, lots of whom take these very tough jobs so they can be home early for their families. I hoped going undercover would correct some of those mistaken notions.”

This undercover adventure wasn’t Larry’s first time walking in his employees’ boots: only one year prior, Larry took the

test for his commercial driver’s license so that he could drive his company’s vehicles and get a sense for what some of his employees go through. On the day of his road test, however, he arrived early at one of the company’s facilities to pick up a truck and found dozens of drivers already



“I never want to work at a company that I’m responsible for where people don’t know how to follow the proper and safe procedures.”

gathered around wishing him luck. Everyone seemed to know what he was doing. When he returned triumphant, the staff greeted him with a celebratory cake. Although the support of

his employees was gratifying, Larry knew they were giving him special treatment. Despite all his well-intentioned efforts and candid conversations, Larry was still very much the boss in his employees' eyes. Going undercover would give him a chance to avoid that extra attention and see things he otherwise wouldn't.

JOB #1

Waste Not, Want Not

Recycling Line Sorter, Material Recovery Facility (MRF), Syracuse NY

Larry chose to start his undercover adventure at an MRF because recycling is such a significant part of the company's business, although in the economic downturn, margins were contracting. Wearing a watch cap to ward off the upstate New York chill, Larry arrived to do a typical assignment for an entry-level or temporary employee—working a sorting line.

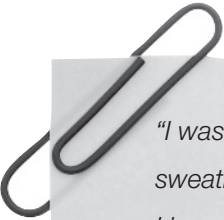
Sandy, a line leader at the MRF, was to be Larry's boss for the day. Although she'd been at Waste Management for only three years, the 50-year-old Sandy brought to her job 20 years of prior experience running a line at a Nestlé USA factory. Despite Larry's already being dressed in his coveralls and wearing a hard hat and gloves, Sandy handed him additional safety gear for his assignment: ear plugs to minimize the noise and a pair of protective sleeves to avoid being stuck with needles or cut by glass. "When do we get paid?" asked Larry, very much in Randy character. "Thursdays," replied an unsuspecting Sandy.

As the mass of waste material rushed down the belt, Sandy patiently explained to Larry the color-coded bins into which

cardboard, plastic, and trash must be separated from recyclables. She then stood behind him to check that he'd grasped what she'd told him. "Cardboard," said Sandy as he missed a big piece. Moment later, "Cardboard!" As the belt sped past, Sandy repeatedly called out to Larry, pointing out the cardboard and trash he missed . . . and missed. "Cardboard!!" Embarrassed, Larry attributed his failures to the speed of the belt. He grew more embarrassed when Sandy explained, "You're working on the slowest of the four belts."

Finally, Larry started demonstrating some proficiency, so Sandy moved him to one of the faster-moving belts. Sandy likes

to think the best of people. She was being over-optimistic. Larry's heart raced as he tried to keep up at the new belt. "I was panicking, trying to keep an eye out for the cardboard and pull it off the belt so it didn't jam the machine. I was sweating



"I was panicking, . . . sweating bullets, because I know how expensive that equipment is."

bullets," he admitted, "because I know how expensive that equipment is." The alarm sounded. Larry's worst fears materialized. The belt ground to a halt. It was jammed with cardboard. Kindly, Sandy chose not to single Larry out. Instead, she sent the crew for their lunch break while the machine was cleared.

Feeling awful about his mistake, Larry tried to confess that he was the machine-jamming culprit, when suddenly Sandy leaped up from their table and ran across the lunch room to the time clock as if her life depended on it. Everyone had to punch right

back in at the 30-minute mark, or else they'd be docked two minutes for every minute they were late, Sandy explained to a puzzled Larry. Stunned, Larry tried to find out more about a policy he'd never heard of or approved. But before he could do anything, it was time to get back to the line. Larry spent the rest of the afternoon trying to ensure that he wasn't responsible for another jam.

"That kind of discovery was a great example of the benefits of being undercover. What Sandy described wasn't our time clock policy," Larry explained afterwards. The amount of pay that employees were meant to be docked for being late was much less. The policy hadn't been communicated properly. "I know Kevin, the manager of the facility. There was no way he would have implemented that kind of policy." It's also unlikely that Sandy or one of her crew would have ever brought up the issue if Larry had been there on an official visit. Larry's other revelation of the day was discovering how draining the noise and pace of the work was, combined with the mind-numbing repetitiveness and the pressure not to cause a jam. "I had no idea this job was going to be so physically demanding and mentally exhausting. My back was hurting like you couldn't believe. I wasn't sure I was going to be able to get to the next location." He did, but it wasn't Larry at his most alert who arrived at his next job.

JOB #2

A Bird in the Hand Is Worth Two in the Bush

Trash Collector, Central Landfill, Pompano Beach FL

Larry arrived at his next job at Waste Management's landfill facility in Pompano Beach, Florida, after only four hours of

sleep. His boss was to make sure he'd stay awake. Walter is a 20-year veteran at Waste Management, having climbed from beautification and landscaping to fulfilling his childhood dream of becoming a heavy equipment driver, something he'd wanted to do since the fifth grade when he saw a bulldozer in action outside his classroom. Because of the respect his skill and expertise command, and his authoritative presence, 55-year-old Walter is a mentor for most of the staff at the facility.

Walter had a seemingly simple job for Larry to do. Walter wanted Larry, armed with a spiked pole and a plastic bag, to pick up litter on the side of a hill. With a sweeping zigzag motion of his arm, Walter showed Larry the pattern he wanted him to follow as he worked his way up the grass-covered, treeless incline. Thinking it would be easy, Larry still felt compelled to ask Walter for advice on technique. "What kind of technique do you want?" Walter answered, looking perplexed. "It's not a big deal. Just sticking and holding paper and picking it up. It isn't rocket science."

It might as well have been for Larry. Thanks to the wind, the litter had a mind of its own, teasing Larry, fleeing from him as soon as he got close enough to spear it. When he did manage to finally catch some litter, the breeze made it hard for Larry to manipulate the plastic bag. Larry thought that if he worked walking up and down the hill, he could use the wind to his advantage, but Walter insisted Larry take the prescribed zigzag course. When Walter checked on him after a while, Larry had to confess that he wasn't meeting his supervisor's performance goals. "The bag does have a hole in the top, doesn't it?" Walter asked, only half in jest. "Randy, you're not cutting the mustard," he said bluntly as they broke for lunch.



PRODUCERS' NOTE

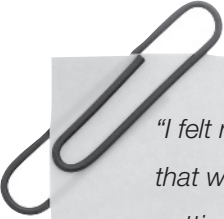
What You Didn't See

It's not easy to become someone else. While working in the landfill, it's important to maintain lines of communication. But what's even more important is to remember who's doing the communicating. We lost count of the times Larry radioed in with "Larry for Walter"—completely forgetting that everyone on-site knew him as Randy!

Because they didn't allow our crew to accompany Larry out in the landfill, all we could do was nervously watch on the monitors as Walter responded, "I'm not Larry! There's no Larry here! My name is Walter!" Luckily Larry corrected himself before Walter caught on, narrowly avoiding blowing his cover.

Keen to get the no-nonsense Walter to warm up to him, Larry asked about what he did outside of work. Walter explained that much of his time was taken up with medical care. "I'm on dialysis, and that takes up three days and three nights," he said, casually adding, "I've lost the functions in my kidneys." When Larry expressed admiration for Walter's ability to remain so physically active, Walter was not one for self-pity. "I let my spirit tell my body what's gonna happen: what I'm gonna do and what I'm not gonna do. Because if I let the body tell me what I'm gonna do, I'm not gonna do very much. When I see a perfectly healthy person dragging around, and I can go out there and work circles around him, that really pisses me off, because I wish I was him."

Larry took the not-so-subtle hint. It inspired him to give his litter collection another go. But out on the hillside, inspiration



"I felt miserable out there in that wind, knowing I wasn't getting the job done. Walter's the only person who's ever fired me."

turned out not to be enough. Despite Larry's best efforts, the wind, plastic bag, and paper maintained their dominance. Because Larry was unable to fill two bags in 10 minutes, a

disappointed Walter called his trainee over and gave him the bad news. He was fired.

Later that evening at his motel, Larry was dejected and deflated. "I felt miserable out there in that wind, knowing I wasn't getting the job done. Walter's the only person who's ever fired me."

JOB #3

Multi-Multitasking

Scale Operator, High Acres Landfill, Fairport NY

Hoping to get his mind off being fired, Larry turned to his next job with a clear purpose: "We try to run our landfills with a small staff. I wanted to see if our cost-cutting measures have taken effect." Unexpectedly, Larry also got to see some of the unintended consequences of those measures.

Briefed beforehand by Jeff, the facility manager, Larry was told that his boss for the day was the glue that held the place together. Talk about an understatement. "You wore boots, buddy," said 29-year-old dynamo Jaclyn as soon as she met Larry. "I hope you can keep up. I'm a sneakers girl myself

because I'm always running around." She wasn't kidding. After leading Larry on a whirlwind tour of the tasks she has to accomplish in the course of the day in her roles as office manager and administrative assistant to the facility manager, Jaclyn led Larry to the scale building, where she also served as a scale operator and scale supervisor. She coached Larry through the process of weighing trucks when they arrived and then again when they departed to determine the proper charge. The line of trucks began to back up, but Jaclyn remained patient. When she did take over from Larry, she began fielding calls simultaneously. "The phone was ringing and she was entering stuff in the computer while chatting with the driver and telling me how to do things," Larry recalled in amazement. "She took multitasking to a whole new level."

Chatting on their way back to the office, Jaclyn said she felt proud that the company knew they could count on her. "I don't do it for the money, since I'm making the same salary as when I was just the administrative assistant. Life is what you make out of it." As they got to know each other over the course of the day, Jaclyn revealed that she had a total hysterectomy at age 21 and had battled and beaten five forms of cancer before she was 25. Not looking for sympathy, she quickly added, "Someday I'm gonna run this place." Learning he didn't have any family or friends nearby, Jaclyn invited Larry to come to her home for dinner that evening.

Over a dinner of spaghetti and meatballs, Larry discovered that Jaclyn, her husband, and their daughter share their home with Jaclyn's father, sister, and brother-in-law. After her busy day working at the landfill, Jaclyn came home to do the accounting, billing, and payroll for her husband's business. But

the most troubling news was that the family's dream home was now up for sale because a recent reassessment had made the tax bills unaffordable on the family's income.

Larry was touched at Jaclyn's generosity toward him, a new employee without a friend in town. He was also troubled at the thought of her family's financial predicament. "I felt so bad for Jaclyn's family that I knew I had to get the ball rolling on solving her problem before I left for my next undercover location." Arranging to meet with Jeff, her manager, in secret in the parking lot before moving on to his next location, Larry learned that Jaclyn was having to do so many jobs because the landfill was shorthanded. Larry made it clear he'd taken a personal interest in Jaclyn's situation. He asked Jeff to put together some ideas for helping her move up in the organization.

JOB #4

The Battlefield of Poop

Port-O-Let Cleaner, Fairgrounds, Houston TX

"The job you're going to be doing is cleaning toilets." As Gilbert, Waste Management's site manager, spoke, Larry's face dropped. "These toilets don't flush. So when somebody goes in there, whatever they leave stays behind." This was a job Larry knew he needed to check out. It just wasn't one he was looking forward to experiencing.

Fred, Larry's boss for the day, was a 63-year-old with the energy of someone half his age. A bear of a man, whose imposing frame is softened by an omnipresent smile and infectious laugh, Fred had turned down chances to return to driving a

residential garbage truck because he liked cleaning Port-O-Lets. He'd been doing it for 10 years.

As soon as they were driving down the road, heading for the first of several Port-O-Let locations at the giant fairgrounds, Fred let Larry in on his unique approach to the job. "We're like hunters. We see our prey. We creep up on 'em." Pulling up to a row of Port-O-Lets, Fred warned Larry, "We don't know what's in there. But we know it's trouble." As he opened the door of a stall to reveal a toilet soiled and covered with used wet tissue, Fred announced, "This is destiny." Even when having to clean a particularly foul-smelling stall, Fred kept his humor. "That is not from a human," he joked. "There's an animal in there."

Just as Fred and Larry were getting into a team rhythm, Gilbert arrived. "You've got about eight minutes to get out of here and get over to the VIP area." Fred told Larry to pick up the pace while he vacuumed the next stall. "Make it dance, Randy! Make it dance!" The hose bounced around as Larry hurried to empty the tank. On their way to the next site, Fred's banter continued. "This ain't just a job; it's an adventure. I call



PRODUCERS' NOTE

What You Didn't See

It's easy to appreciate how Fred's great attitude made a dirty job palatable, even through the distance of a TV screen. But you had to actually be there to fully understand the scope of Fred's high spirits, given the intensely unsavory working conditions. While filming at the Houston Rodeo, three members of our crew lost their respective lunches from being around the smell.

it the Battlefield of Poop. Good soldiers endure. Even if you get a little splatter on you, you're wounded, but you keep going."

Looking back, Larry still couldn't get over what an impact an upbeat attitude and good humor could make: he'd actually enjoyed himself cleaning Port-O-Lets. "Fred takes a job most people consider nasty and he turned it into something fun. I don't think I've laughed so hard for that length of time doing any other job in my life."

JOB #5

Lifting Spirits as Well as Trash Cans

***Garbage Truck Helper, Trash Hauling Company,
Rochester NY***

Larry chose to spend his last day undercover working a trash collection route in New York. It was the job he'd spent the most time studying and analyzing over the years, not the least because residential garbage truck drivers are the public faces of the company.

As dawn broke, Larry was introduced to Janice, his boss for the day. A short, spunky 49-year-old grandmother, Janice is a rarity at Waste Management as a female garbage truck driver. She's been with Waste Management for six years, having previously driven for a competitor. Janice began her working life as a geriatric nurse, but has come to love driving a garbage truck. With an enthusiastic "Let's get out there and pick up some trash," Janice took Larry on a route he was surprised to learn was made up of more than 300 houses.



Not long into the route, Janice received a call on her radio from a supervisor, checking up on her progress. “We’re supposed to do our route the same way every day. I can be out here 12 or 13 hours, and they’re calling me asking, ‘What are you doing out there?’ I’m working, for crying out loud. If some procedure comes up and we don’t agree with it, we’re told that’s the way corporate wants it, so that’s how it’s going to be.” Outwardly commiserating with her, Larry knew he was the one at corporate who has been driving productivity. “I felt terrible that I had created policies that were causing her not to enjoy her job.”

It wasn’t just corporate edicts that Janice revealed frustrated her and the other drivers. She explained that supervisors were often in the field, watching drivers work. She felt spied on. As one of the authors of the policy, Larry knew all about those field observations. “But I didn’t know any of our drivers felt like they were being spied on. That’s not what the policy was supposed to be about.” Larry had previously heard firsthand from drivers who saw the observations as a good method to get a fresh perspective on ways to streamline their jobs.

Continuing along the route, Janice opened up to Larry about one of the other difficulties of her job. “It’s a good company and everything, but I don’t think it’s female friendly.” As they pulled up to their next stop and got out of the cab to load the trash, Janice showed Larry what she meant. Opening one of the side storage bins of the truck, she took out a coffee can with a plastic cover and handed it to Larry. “When you’re a female working on one of these garbage trucks, this is your outhouse.” Larry didn’t understand at first, so Janice spelled it out for him: “I can’t keep breaking off the route all the time to use the restroom. That would add too much time.” Larry was shocked and

embarrassed, not just by what Janice had to go through, but because he'd never thought about how the company's female drivers had to deal with being out on the road when nature called.

As Janice steered the truck onto yet another block, a smile came to her face, and all her frustrations seemed to disappear. She told Larry they were getting to a stretch of the route where he'd be able to meet some of her favorite customers: "These are the people who look forward to seeing me every week." It was obvious the feeling was mutual. At one house, an older woman was waiting by the curb to embrace Janice and give her a bottle of cream soda, her favorite. Further up the street, two other customers came out to say hello. Even the dogs looked happy to see Janice. Finally, at the end of the block, an exuberant middle-aged woman with short curly brown hair bounded out her door as Janice's truck approached. Again there was a warm embrace, and Janice introduced Larry to Karen, who's developmentally disabled. Karen sang Janice's praises, reading a letter she'd written about her favorite trash collector. Listening to Karen recite her letter about Janice, knowing how much trouble she'd gone through to write it and then read it to them, made Larry think of his own daughter. He was moved to tears.

Larry never expected to have an emotional moment on the back of a garbage truck, but neither did he think he'd lay awake at night questioning his approach to a job he thought he knew inside and out. "Our customers don't see me; they see Janice. She wanted to spend time with customers, but she also had to meet productivity targets. I'd created policies that could keep her from providing great customer service. There was something wrong with the way I'd been approaching productivity. I didn't

realize the impact it could have on our drivers. All of that came right out of my office. It came right from me. I needed to fix it.”

HE REVEALS THE TRUTH

Eager to address everything he'd seen and learned during his covert time in the field, Larry met with the company's leadership team on his first day back in Houston. He was pleased at how the message of safety had become part of the company's culture. “At every job, my coworkers were constantly reminding me, as the new guy, what I needed to do to keep from getting hurt.” He was also glad to know how many of the company's initiatives toward boosting profitability were working out. But he was concerned about the issues that he knew needed correcting. Employees shouldn't feel spied on. Waste collection routes needed rest breaks. Staff shouldn't be asked to do too many jobs. “Productivity is important,” he affirmed, “but we need to find a way to balance that with not frustrating good employees who are trying to provide the high level of customer service we're looking for.”

He then revealed his true identity to each of his “bosses” from the previous week . . .

When Fred learned that his assistant on the Battlefield of Poop was the company president, he broke out in an uproarious laugh. With both men grinning ear to ear, Larry told Fred how great it was working with him: “The positive approach and attitude you bring to your job makes such a big difference. All I could think was, *How can we tap into the feeling you have, and help others in our company share that kind of excitement?* I'd like you to come up and speak to our senior leadership team and

help us brainstorm.” Fred was too touched to be able to make a joke. “I’m so honored. It would be a privilege, a real privilege to do that, Larry. I promise you I’ll put everything I have into it.”

Janice, upon learning that the helper with whom she’d shared her frustrations was actually the boss, was worried. After all, she hadn’t pulled many punches when candidly expressing her views on management’s oversight practices. Larry reassured her and described what she taught him. “Janice, there was one thing you said that just hit me right between the eyes. You kept talking about ‘Houston’ and ‘corporate.’ You know who you were talking about? *Me*. I got to experience firsthand the frustrations that some of the decisions I’ve made are causing you and other drivers.” He explained that some field managers were being retrained to use and present their observations as positive coaching sessions, rather than searches for flaws. Larry then addressed the specific difficulties Janice faced as a female driver. “You have my commitment that I’ll get those fixed. We’re going to form a task force to work on ways we can make this an environment that works for you.” Janice appreciated Larry’s recognition of the hurdles she faced in doing her job. “He made a commitment and that’s awesome. I’m going to hold him to it.”

Next Larry met with Walter, who looked momentarily disconcerted but quickly recovered, joking that Randy, “cleaned up real good.” Larry confided that Walter’s personal story touched him deeply. “You’ve been on dialysis for almost 20 years, and yet you have such a positive attitude. I’d like to create a program that will give you paid time off, so you can help other folks going through medical treatment. You’re a very inspirational guy.” Walter, uncomfortable at receiving such praise, could only respond by returning it. “It means a lot to me that you came

down to work with us. Most bosses in high positions don't even take the time to say hello."

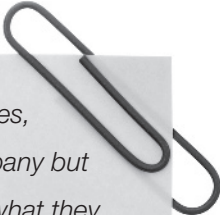
Sandy looked stunned when she realized that the rookie recycling sorter who jammed one of the machines was actually the president of the company. Larry homed in on what, for him, was the vital lesson he came away with. "Do you remember when you and I were having lunch? You got up and bolted out of the lunch room because you thought you had to clock back in exactly on the 30-minute mark. Well, I knew that wasn't our policy, and that really bothered me. So I'm going to talk to Kevin, the facility manager, and we're going to get that fixed."

And true to his word, Larry called Kevin into his office and explained the anxiety Sandy and some other employees were experiencing over the time clock. The misunderstanding about how the docking policy should work for employees who were late was straightened out, and Larry felt gratified that he'd been able to uncover and deal with an employee frustration.

Jaclyn, the overburdened office manager, was speechless when it dawned on her that she had had the COO over for spaghetti and meatballs. "Your personal story really hit me," Larry admitted. "You're doing several people's jobs at once, yet you don't complain. You just get it done." Larry had good news for her. She would become a salaried employee, get a pay increase, and become eligible for bonuses. She would also become a supervisor, whose first job was to hire her own replacement, so that she could take on more responsibility. "I can't describe how good it feels for all my hard work to have been noticed and rewarded," Jaclyn said as she fought to hold back tears.

Finally, Larry shared his undercover experiences with all of the headquarters and local staff. Video highlights showed

some of the moving moments with each employee, as well as his own humbling shortcomings—being unable to keep up with the sorting line and failing as a litter picker. Still relishing the moment, Larry was also able to laugh at himself before he turned serious with the assembled group: “In my role as COO, there are many policies I create that you all have to live with. Now that I’ve actually made a connection with the people who do the hard jobs at this company, I’m going to be a better manager. I have a whole new appreciation of the impact my decisions have on you folks.”



“If you ask employees, not just in our company but in every company, what they want more of, money doesn’t top the list. At the top of the list is always recognition.”

Larry also learned that there is a level of insight into the problems of employees that an executive will never achieve unless he’s able to relate to his team members as a peer rather than a boss. For all of Janice’s spunkiness, it’s unlikely she’d have shown Larry the coffee can she had to use as a urinal if she had known he was the president of the company.

Because it’s not always possible to go undercover, Larry is more convinced than ever that it’s vital to solicit input from employees and put the insights acquired into practice. “The people doing frontline jobs at a company know quite a bit about how to make things better. If you listen to them, and try to implement some of what they suggest, they will be so happy and engaged that it will make them feel even more a part of your team. People want to feel like they have a voice, that they

have skin in the game. If they see they have a way to give insight into how to improve or fix something, you'll end up with a very high performing company.

“If you ask employees, not just in our company but in every company, what they want more of, money doesn't top the list. At the top of the list is always recognition. When you can do that in a way that's heartfelt and genuine, it can be very powerful. I really feel good about what we accomplished.”

SINCE THE SHOW

- ★ People still come up to **Fred** and tell him how much they appreciate his attitude toward work. He left Waste Management to work in a hospital.
- ★ **Janice** held Larry to his promise and worked with his task force to create a more female-friendly work environment. She still has a long day, starting at 2:30 A.M., but is thrilled with the positive changes Larry put in place.
- ★ **Walter** became a health mentor to the entire company, and led several seminars, mentoring other employees about how to handle full-time work while also being on dialysis. Sadly, in August 2010, his health deteriorated, and he passed away.
- ★ After Larry helped **Sandy** and her crew straighten out the time clock policy, morale and production increased to the point where the plant won an award for excellence in recycling.
- ★ **Jaelyn** hired two people to replace her at the landfill and became a customer account manager. She and her family have been able to keep their home. Currently recovering from surgery related to her cancer, she's anxious to return to work.

☆ In June 2010, **Larry** decided to leave Waste Management. He felt that he had achieved a great deal during his years with the company, but now had a desire to take on new challenges, this time as the chief executive of a company.

Larry felt that his *Undercover Boss* experience gave him the opportunity to learn many valuable business lessons. It also gave him an even greater sense of personal gratitude. “My family has had issues we’ve had to deal with, but there are lots of people who are really hurting, and have other issues that, fortunately, I haven’t had to deal with. It was really a wake-up call about how blessed I’ve been in life.”