

ROLLING STONE

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Tom Rounds Quits KFRC

Tom Rounds, KFRC Program Director, has resigned. No immediate date has been set for his departure from the station. Rounds quit to assume the direction of Charlatan Productions, an L.A. based film company experimenting in the contemporary pop film.

Rounds spent seven years as Program Director of KPOL in Hawaii before coming to San Francisco to take the reins.

THE PROOF OF A GOOD IDEA IS IT SURVIVES

Jann Wenner and the leadership of Rolling Stone Magazine

Jann Wenner exemplifies that a good leader doesn't necessarily need to be a good person – but that a successful business needs a good leader at the helm to make it grow.

Sarah Knight

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WHO IS JANN WENNER?

It would be hard to argue that there has been a more influential publication in the Rock and Roll entertainment era than *Rolling Stone*. This powerhouse of influence originated from a modest investment of only \$7500, according to Co-Founder Jann Wenner's own interview in "How I Built this with Guy Raz". From that modest start Wenner developed *Rolling Stone* into a publication that still has over 1 million subscribers and has given Wenner a personal net worth of an estimated 700 Million Dollars. Wenner has recently faced controversy – namely due to a biography released in 2017 that was highly critical of him on a personal level. However despite any personal failings Wenner may have, he has clearly created, guided and developed *Rolling Stone* into a highly successful publication, alongside a number of other entertainment publications he also started and spearheaded. I selected Wenner as I think it is important to realize that not all leaders are perfect people – the flaws in someone on a personal level don't necessarily dictate whether they will be a successful leader or not. Additionally, I can think of no greater influence in modern entertainment as *Rolling Stone* and I wanted to look at how the publication developed and grew. Finally, I wanted to focus on a leader in entertainment that illustrated Maxwell's "Law of Navigation" – that a true leader is constantly learning and steering their ship in the right direction based on the lessons they have learned. When I began contemplating who would exemplify this, the interview with Wenner in "How I Built This" immediately came to mind.

JANN WENNER AND LEADERSHIP

"The ambition was to do something that was new and fresh about the music – rock and roll was no longer dance time, it was starting to have some very serious musical and political content, and social content"
 - Jann Wenner, "How I Built This"

In 1967 Jann Wenner was a mere 21 years old and about to embark on a leadership journey which would take him into the green rooms of the biggest acts in Rock and Roll – and into some of the most heated political discussions of the following decades. Wenner spent his late teens being mentored by Ralph Gleason, a well known Jazz columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, developing an editorial voice and passion for connecting music to modern events. Wenner said of Gleason that "he was one of the few voices around

anywhere in the country, and in San Francisco that was saying ‘hey there’s real merit to these artists, to Dylan and to the Beatles and what they’re doing is important, is musically important and is culturally important’” (How I Built This). Gleason encouraged Wenner to focus on the importance that this new music form was building in their era – both as a mentor and financially as one of his early backers. Armed with only \$7500, a room upstairs at his current employer *Ramparts* magazine, and with a few connections made while working at *Ramparts*, Wenner gathered a few volunteers together and released the first edition of *Rolling Stone* in November of 1967. “It was fly by the seat of our pants, we knew nothing about magazine publishing and distribution” said Wenner in his interview with Guy Raz for “How I Built This”. Wenner clearly knew more about gathering people to him than finances – by his own admission it took some time to realize they needed to hire CPAs and “folks with accounting degrees” to ensure their efforts were profitable – before that time he relied on volunteers and meager advertising revenue to keep paying the bills as they came in. Wenner’s clear leadership advantage was an instinct for good writers, good contributors and connecting with their staff to get the best possible work from his people. He wanted to establish from the first edition of *Rolling Stone* that they were focused on traditional journalism, not just fluff about the current trends in art. Even the selection of the first cover photo, a promotional picture of John Lennon from the Movie *How I Won The War*, according to Wenner “was the last piece of the puzzle for the issue [...] It was a defining cover, because it encompassed music, movies and politics” (Qtd in Wawzenek).

From that first issue the 21 year old established that he knew how to lead his team of counter-culture writers, photographers and editors. Through his interview in “How I Built This” he talks about the importance of finding volunteers who had a spirit and passion for their message. Wenner was able to use Maxwell’s “Law of Respect” in that he was finding these counter-culture authors, like Hunter S. Thompson, and getting them to fall in line and produce for his magazine. By his own admission his greatest strength as a business leader was having an instinct for finding talented people and knowing how to work with them – he used his own passion for reporting and the arts to pull others in the field to him and to get them directed in the same direction as his vision. Maxwell notes that “perhaps the greatest test of respect comes when a

leader creates major change in an organization”, and this was apparent in 1977 when Wenner moved from San Francisco to New York, causing him to expand the *Rolling Stone* offices and take on more leaders at levels below himself – not just writers and editors, but accountants, business managers, publishing professionals and advertising account managers. By making this move and still attracting a following he was able to continue to shape the growth and vision of *Rolling Stone* – the large change helped him rather than hindered him.

Wenner’s interview with “How I Built This” touches on his experience with two other of Maxwell’s Laws – the Law of Navigation and the Law of Intuition. Seemingly these two Laws almost contradict – one is all about how you can research and prepare to lead and know the best direction to go through learning. The other is about having a natural intuition about how to lead and just doing so through that intuition. There is no denying that a 21 year old writer probably had very little leadership education. He was learning on the fly, he “knew nothing about magazine publication and distribution.” Despite that lack of knowledge he took the time to learn, to see where trends were and to guide his ship to the right city at the right time, to the right political topics, to the right authors – all while also displaying a great intuition about what would be best for the business. Members of his leadership team from the 80’s noted that they knew it was a great idea “if it survived Jann” (How I Built This). They knew that if they brought an idea to Wenner and it didn’t receive solid praise, that there was a good chance that idea would flop before arrival. Intuition functions best when it is informed intuition (Maxwell 53). Informed intuition comes from learning your field and researching the best path – a skill which comes from the Law of Navigation.

Through its decades of publication, Wenner has shown that he firmly espouses the Goleman leadership styles of Visionary and Affiliative. Wenner knew from the start what he wanted *Rolling Stone* to be – he wanted to connect readers to Rock and Roll, but also to the deeper meanings behind the music and the artists. He wanted to look at how music and arts culture impacted politics and personal beliefs. Most importantly, he had a view of how his publication could change the landscape of how arts was addressed and create a culture around that vision. All while he managed from an affiliative stance – He knew the

importance of ensuring his staff wasn't just loyal, but happy. He noted in his interview, "What I've learned about managing people is you want them to be happy with what they're doing. You want smart people, you want loyal people - loyalty counts a lot - but people, if they're unhappy in a job, won't do a good job" (How I Built This).

Controversy has followed Wenner in recent years. As mentioned before, in 2017 a biography (*Sticky Fingers* by Joe Hagan) was released painting Wenner as a misogynistic, money hungry, fame hoarding troll of a man. Rich Cohen, a writer for the *Rolling Stone* initially asked to be the author of Wenner's Biography, described the outcome of this biography on the legacy left behind for Wenner:

"[A]s much as I admire Hagan's book, something is missing—the infectious charm of Wenner; his gleeful, here-goes, let's-hope-we-don't-get-shot zeal for adventure. You won't come away with any sense of how much fun he could be in his heyday, how contagious his enthusiasm was, how important his loyalty could be. A writer needs to feel the freedom to look stupid, even to make a fool of himself, in order to do the kind of work he has always imagined but never before quite pulled off. Wenner let us feel that. Personality is what made him a one-of-a-kind leader, and it's not here. Wenner's pen and language weren't what defined him as an editor. It was his vision and energy that attracted the best talent and inspired such memorable work.

A funny thing happens when a part of your life becomes official history. No matter how good that history is, the writer can't help getting a crucial aspect wrong. All the facts might be correct, but the spirit is lost. The effect is like a body without a soul"

Clearly Wenner is a controversial figure. He went from an inexperienced 21 year old author with a clear vision to a multi-millionaire with many intriguing experiences and stories along the way. The release of *Sticky Fingers* however is problematic for Wenner as the history it tells leads us to feel Wenner has violated Maxwell's Law of Solid Ground – we've lost trust in him as a person, so we feel we should lose trust in him as a leader. The best defense that Wenner has to these accusations is to employ another of Maxwell's Laws – the Law of Connection. Shortly after the release of *Sticky Fingers* he gave his interview on How I Built This – and came across as so personable, humble and honest that it helped undermine the image created of him by Hagan.

HOW WENNER INFLUENCES AND COMPARES TO MY OWN LEADERSHIP STYLE

I try to lead from an Affiliative approach (Goleman 63) – I believe in the importance of knowing an employee’s personal strengths, fears, feelings and hopes. If something I am doing can help further a goal for an employee outside of an office setting, then I will ensure the employee is empowered to help themselves in achieving those goals. I think that Wenner’s observation that people who are unhappy don’t work well is exactly how I feel – while loyalty and intelligence are important, happy employees are the ones who will go above and beyond to achieve all they can for their employers. In my non-office hobby, running a large social network group for Pokémon Go Players, our number one rule of the organization is “Are you having fun? If not, figure out how you can and let me help you achieve it.” This rule has enabled us to attract leaders within the community who otherwise wouldn’t interact as a leader because of a fear that they will stop having fun with the game as they start helping with community development. By keeping our approach focused on ensuring every member has fun I help keep them all flowing in the same direction – toward providing entertaining ways to make friends within the community. I would like to believe that I am working a little more closely on developing strong connections with those who work with and for me, as the one weakness Wenner exemplified was that he occasionally left contributors hanging (Hunter S. Thompson most notably) and that is what led to his naming being so easily tarnished by the biography *Sticky Fingers*. By making sure I don’t violate the Law of Solid Ground, I’ll ensure I don’t run the risk of having to show I’m an effective leader despite personal flaws.

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