Organizational culture. It's what Mansfield Lucas says that the Browns lack in his latest piece, an excellent diagnosis of the problems he sees plaguing this franchise. Mansfield says that it has been nearly five years now of the Phil/Romeo era, and he still has no clue what type of team this is supposed to be, and calls for some tough and radical change in this opinion piece. A sobering dose of reality for Browns fans. And a superb read.

Most of you may know me as that fan who writes like the late Sam Kinison . You may think I twitch a lot and stand on the edge waiting to jump at the first setback. The very fact that I tend, oh, I don't know, to be
right
so often notwithstanding, today we're going to do something a little bit differently. The airwaves, forums and fan op-eds are now dripping in contempt for the Browns. There is either rage or resignation that the season where we were led to believe the playoffs were likely may very well end with mediocrity being a stretch goal. The reality is that we are staring down the barrel of a four or five win season. Even the most conservative, organization friendly types (we call those "media members") are wondering if the season is over. The mainstream media that tends to look at things through their brown and orange colored glasses with supportive and non-critical eyes are even now predicting that eight wins would be overachieving.

You are all too late. It no longer serves any meaningful purpose to heap criticism upon this team or to hold it up to derision hoping to spur change. There's no reason to be emotionally involved, one way or another. You are just kicking a dawg that won't hunt.

The time for concern was when the Giants' exhibition season game exposed Romeo's Camp Snoopy approach while all you all were Chip from Animal House

yelling, "Remain calm. All is well!"
You missed it. And now, much like LeBron James talking about his view of all things local when he capped it off with, "I have now broken it down for all of you", allow me to do the same. Enough with the self-aggrandizement where I shed false humility, I am now going to give you the basis upon which to evaluate the current regime and why the time is neigh to render final judgment on this bunch as a failure barring anything but a turnaround so stunning that it would give even John McCain hope.

Organizational culture.

There is nothing at all as important to the success or failure of any enterprise as its soul. Organizational culture is that soul. Pop quiz: we are now nearly five years come this January and February from Phil and Romeo taking the reins. Five years. Can someone, anyone, tell me what is this organization's culture? What do they believe in? What are they trying to accomplish? What is the Browns' genomic imprint?

Is it to be strong in the trenches and establish a punishing running game like a Joe Gibbs or Tom Coughlin team? Or like the Jerry Jones' Dallas Cowboys?

Is it to be a high flying aerial attack like the Kurt Warner Rams or the old Dan Fouts' Chargers?

Is it a balanced, "no assignment is too tough, never surrender, play with discipline and heart" bunch like a Marty team or a Bellichick Patriots' team?

Is it to be a loose, fun, team that can focus when it is on the line, like the Kardiac Kids, or the Madden Raiders?

Is it a team that is going to physically punch you in the mouth with a signature defense, like the Ravens and Steelers?

Just what in the world can you discern from what Phil is trying to do from a player personnel standpoint and what Romeo is trying to instill on the field that is distinctive and successful? If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. Right now, the Browns look like Euclid Avenue four years ago.

"Winning" is not an organizational culture. Matt Millen wanted to "win" and even he knew that was important. What is the Browns' organizational culture that creates a coherent strategic plan that establishes that manifests itself in an identity?

Folks, there is none. It doesn't exist. Why; and what does this mean?

Phil and Romeo ain't got what it takes to create one. Additional patience and continuity with these two will get us absolutely nowhere, because both lack vision. This is a prima fascia observation at this point due to this simple but powerful fact: we are into game five of their fourth seasons. If they had the capacity, you'd have seen it by now.

Phil is a scout. He can listen to a head coach or strong GM and excel in breaking down specific pros and cons in players' abilities and make recommendations. He can establish a scouting process and work within an existing group led by a strong leader in an established organizational culture. On occasion, he can make a good acquisition or two. But if you look at his drafts and signings, what is he really trying to do strategically? "Strengthen the offensive line" is not a plan with vision. "Strengthen the offensive line with great pass blockers so we can primarily be a passing team with a deep passing quarterback and talented receivers" is. "Strengthen the offensive line with road graders so we can pound a big back like Jamal Lewis" is. Capice? I defy anyone to tell me that there has been a coherent defensive player personnel strategy if four off

seasons, other than to sign big, fat bodies on the DL. Who is a "Browns' linebacker"? I don't have to ask "who is a Steelers' linebacker?" I know that answer. Who is a Browns cornerback? Is he a bigger cover-two player with limited speed like Gary Baxter, or a more nimble player with press coverage athletic ability like Eric Wright?

I can do the same thing with offensive players at nearly every position. How do finesse linemen like Eric Steinbach and Hank Fraley mesh with plodding bruisers like Rex Hadnot? The Browns are not without talent from players one through fifty-three. Sure, they are thin. But most NFL teams are thin in this day and age of the hard salary cap. The Browns are a disparate hodge-podge of athletes, not a brand of player on either offense or defense that suggests a coherent overall strategy that stems from a defined organizational culture.

And that's the problem. In almost five years and four seasons, no one really knows what type of team the Browns are supposed to be. If no one knows what they are supposed to be, then no one knows what they should be and how to go about creating that, and therefore they can't be.

People harp on how error prone the Browns seem to be, and to a degree they are, even though Pat Mac offers up a unique point of view I am hard pressed to see otherwise. Fans get upset at Romeo's "awe-shucks" players' coach demeanor and his stubborn refusal to make changes that suggest accountability to fans, as well as his penchant for electing goofy field goals. Fans dissect Phil's draft choices in different ways. Some say his day two misses are what holds the team back, while others like to offer up comparisons to the other division teams and point out he's done about the same. There is much discussion about his overall picks and his second and third round misses. I think it all misses the point.

Phil is like this gear-head lost in Pep Boys with an unlimited credit card. In his shopping cart he's stocking up on brakes, wipers, motor oil, a Holly four barrel carb; a catalytic converter here, some bondo there, but in almost five years no one can tell me with any degree of accuracy or certainty what he's building. Does

he want a sports' sedan? An SUV? A dually pick up? A Catholic station wagon? No one knows because no one can tell. Even if they could see what he's trying to accomplish, he's taken one hell of a good pit crew number and given him the responsibility of a driver when it appears he lacks the experience and skill set.

Why does this matter?

Because all this snake oil about five year plans, patience, and continuity is self-serving horse shit put forward by those it protects. The Miami Dolphins went from laughing stock and a threat to eclipse the McKay Era expansion Buccaneers to a competitive football team in one, count ‘em, one off season; and they lost their best player. How did they do that? Culture change. The San Diego Chargers are a mess. Why? Because Marty's imprint has worn off and Norv Turner is and always will be a failure, not because one all star pass rusher is hurt. The Ravens are no longer an undisciplined mess of thugs, but are now hard-hitters winning with a rookie quarterback fresh from small-time FCS football and running backs contributing who have little experience. Why? Because John Harbaugh changed the culture from the undisciplined "anything goes" days of Brian Billick to a rock-solid football team. The examples can go on and on.

The Browns don't need a talent overhaul from one to fifty-three. That's garbage. They aren't a perfect roster, and they've had some bad injury breaks (and they also foolishly rely on oft-injured players), but they don't need an overhaul and some jive-turkey coming in telling us "Woe is me. I've inherited a roster mess and I need to run for the hills for four years because Jehovah Himself couldn't make this bunch a winner." What they really need in the place of the master of managed expectations is what they've lacked for years.

When Paul Brown founded the original Browns' franchise now in Baltimore, he had a strategic vision that was literally second to none in NFL history. His organizational culture is up there on the NFL Mt. Rushmore of such things along with the Lombardi Packers, the Landry Cowboys, and the Walsh 49ers. You knew what he was about and the team had a core organizational culture that

determined its strategy, and that strategy translated to specific tactical decisions including player personnel, offense and defensive schemes, coaching techniques, and game decisions. Blanton Collier maintained this culture in a more player-friendly manner as the generation of world war vets accustomed to Brown's austere style gave way to the 1950's children of prosperity who needed more "freedom". After Collier, Art Modell went outside of the organization and any coherence of who the Browns were was lost until Coach Sam started from scratch with one of the most player-centric philosophies we've seen. Sam's culture resulted in him choosing smart players who excelled in a high-powered finesse offense. Marty Schottenheimer rebuilt organizational culture on the fly into that of pure, unbridled passion for the game, mental toughness, along with some swagger, and that is why we Browns' fans keep Marty's teams so close to our hearts. Bernie Kosar was also instrumental as the player personification of Marty's organizational culture. Bill Belichick was the same genius here he is now, but he failed to fully transform organizational culture. It led to his rocky tenure here. If he did change culture on the team by 1994, it never took root with the fan base.

Since the Browns' moved to Baltimore and this new franchise started via expansion, the organizational culture can be defined in two words: rudderless suck. We don't draft productively because we have no idea what we are drafting for in most cases. It has been either a buckshot approach to fill any of the many holes without a strategy, or it has been a scouting-centric player personnel approach that evaluates primarily "athletes" over selecting football players who thrive in a specific system wrought from a defined organizational culture. In this regard, Phil is Butch and Butch is Phil. This, my fellow abused fans, is why we continue to suck. New boss, old boss, greet ‘em the same way.

Five years and four seasons is enough. Romeo isn't suddenly going to get better in his early 60's. Phil Savage may one day mature and obtain the insight and wisdom to oversee a franchise and create an organizational culture, but he hasn't for almost five years. It seems counter-intuitive to suggest that the light bulb goes off anytime soon in his current gig until he experiences the sort of accountability exercise that leads to reflection. Phil comes off a person who seems to have, ahem, great confidence in his personal abilities to the point of resisting change. The Greeks had a word for this: *hubris*.

When many of you all mocked Carman Policy for what you considered lawyer-speak, political mumbo-jumbo about what his role was supposed to be, this is what he was trying to tell you. Policy used to reiterate that there was nothing more important than the expansion Browns establishing the "right" organizational culture for long-term success. He was right about that even as he failed.

I don't blame Randy Lerner, really. I think the soccer cheap shots and the fact he doesn't want to live in Cleveland are too often used as an excuse that he doesn't care when in fact he is passionate. Two of the three criteria I have for a "good" owner are the ability to write as large of checks as anyone else, and a hands-off approach that isn't meddlesome. The third would be uncompromising expectations of excellence and a refusal to take "no" for an answer. That's where Randy must step up and make the change. Last time around he did try to jump-start organizational culture. I see real signs Randy understands what I'm talking about. He went to New England and tried to engage in a best-practices model along with the guy who was supposed to be running the franchise, John Collins. The problem is that he took "no" for an answer, allegedly, from Ozzie Newsome, and we wound up with two men who are learning on the job and appear unable to be successful in their roles, primarily due to a profound lack of strategic vision and the lack of understanding of the role of organizational culture. This is not the owner's role, but the owner's role is to find the right man, from a football background, to instill an organizational culture that is held accountable to expectations of success in a reasonable time frame.

Times up, Mr. Lerner.

There is a chance that the season will turn around, but looking at the schedule I do not realistically see it. If the season ends with six or fewer wins, Randy needs to hit reboot and start over. This time we need Randy to land the "been-there, done-that, have the T-Shirts" pro from Dover to take over operations and instill a bona fide, coherent, strategically oriented, organizational culture that just doesn't talk about winning, but knows how to win and has proven it. He may or may not be a GM. He may or may not be a coach. These men are out there, but they are scarce. There are only a handful. But the time has come for

Randy to step up to the plate and make the hard decision to have the courage to start over again at the top of the organization. The he needs to write a really, really, big check and return to the background. He'll have the fans' support once he hired the right man.

The time for change has come. Whether change should come is not the issue anymore after the level of play we've seen nearly five years into the Phil and Romeo Era and their stubborn refusal to make changes this season during the bye week, particularly sticking with the starting quarterback guy, as Romeo might say. The issue is why we are again facing change and where we go from here so as to not repeat past mistakes.