

# WE THE OWNERS

## EMPLOYEES EXPANDING THE AMERICAN DREAM

### *Recommended Reading: Employee Ownership Cases*

The following list includes the three companies' cases that are featured in [We the Owners: Employees Expanding the American Dream](#). All cases are provided by academics experienced in teaching employee ownership. Please click on the case name to open the document in **CLEO – a free online Curriculum Library on Employee Ownership**: <http://smlr.rutgers.edu/content/cleo>

#### [NAMASTÉ SOLAR](#)

**Authors:** Lawrence, Anne T.; Mathews, Anthony

**Source:** Richard Ivey School of Business

**Year:** 2010

**Type:** Case

*“The community, the economy, the environment - everything is interconnected. That’s the approach we bring to our business.”*

**- BLAKE JONES, CO-FOUNDER, NAMASTÉ SOLAR**

The story of Namasté Solar can be summed up in two words: workplace democracy. The driving force of Namasté Solar’s success is its dedicated community of individuals who are passionate about what they do and how they do it, and have flourished in the company’s democratic, high-involvement culture.

Founded in Boulder, CO in 2005, Namasté Solar - a designer and installer of solar electric systems for residential, commercial, non-profit and government customers - is an employee-owned cooperative where even the CEO is just another guy with a vote. Each of its 100 employee-owners strives to create strong, harmonious teams while promoting individual autonomy and responsibility. Namasté Solar promotes leadership at every level throughout the organization, from the way they make decisions to how they contribute to their communities. This means that an installer on the roof and their CEO share in both leadership and accountability.

As co-owners, they believe in personal accountability, sharing in the risk, responsibilities, and rewards of business ownership. As they see it, co-ownership is a willingness to continuously hold a bigger picture vision amidst the everyday details of our individual job roles as part of our continuous improvement process.

## **CASES ARE AVAILABLE WITH A NATIONAL CENTER ON EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP (NCEO)**

### **MEMBERSHIP:**



#### **DPR CONSTRUCTION: USING PHANTOM STOCK FOR BROAD OWNERSHIP**

**Author:** The National Center for Employee Ownership

**Source:** The National Center for Employee Ownership

**Year:** 2002

**Type:** Case

*"If everybody feels that sense of pride and responsibility, we can change the world and do great things."*

**- DOUG WOODS, CO-FOUNDER, DPR CONSTRUCTION**

To understand the story of DPR Construction is to know the people behind the name who had a passion for better serving customers and building complex projects with a strong sense of purpose and value.

In July of 1990, three construction veterans - Doug Woods, Peter Nosler and Ron Davidowski - set out to do something different in an industry traditionally resistant to change. From the outset, the founders strived to create a customer-focused company modeled after Silicon Valley's high-tech innovators, where dedicated employees worked long hours motivated by their sense of belonging and a financial stake in the company's success. To do that, they felt strongly that an informal, egalitarian environment would encourage creativity and enthusiasm that would translate into more efficient planning and procedures as well as a happier, more motivated and productive work force. As a result, DPR has no titles, no private offices, no hierarchy, and plenty of camaraderie.

From a team of 11 professionals at launch, DPR has grown at breakneck speed. They now have 2,729 employees in 10 regional offices established in every major technology center in the U.S. DPR also reached the \$1 billion mark in less than 10 years and continues to rank in the top 50 general contractors in the country over the last decade. DPR's form of shared capitalism is twofold: they have phantom stock for the non-union workers and profit sharing for the union employees.

DPR has achieved this success because of its dedication to building great things with integrity, enjoyment, uniqueness, ever forward - and the right people have been, and always will be, the foundation of DPR. The company has also integrated the union into profit sharing and decision-making. As co-founder Peter Nosler explains, "There are many spectacular stories of individuals, who after coming to work here found out their true capabilities. Several people have gone from pounding nails on a jobsite to becoming integral members of the management team. This represents success, as one underlying concept from the very beginning was to build an entrepreneurial organization, where people can continuously grow."

 **NEW BELGIUM BREWING COMPANY, INC.**

**Author:** The National Center for Employee Ownership

**Source:** The National Center for Employee Ownership

**Year:** 2002

**Type:** Case

*"I don't think there's a reason to feel like you're giving up control so much as you're collaborating with your co-workers to build something that's even more."*

**- KIM JORDAN, CO-FOUNDER, FIRST BOTTLER, SALES REP, DISTRIBUTOR,  
MARKETER AND FINANCIAL PLANNER AND CEO**

As the story goes.... In 1989, a would-be young homebrewer, Jeff Lebesch, rides his mountain bike with "fat tires" through European villages famous for beer. He returned to Fort Collins, CO with a handful of ingredients and an imagination full of recipes. From a homebrewing kit in his basement, Jeff and his wife, Kim Jordan, developed a brown dubbel with earthy undertones named Abbey and a remarkably well-balanced amber named Fat Tire. In 1991, Jeff and Kim took their basement brewery commercial.

As Fat Tire grew in popularity, they knew they'd need help. Enter Brian Callahan, an aspiring brewer and New Belgium Brewing Company's first employee-owner. By giving Brian a vested interest in the company, Jeff and Kim did, "what seemed like the right thing to do." Ownership is now awarded at one year of employment, and all the employee owners today thank Jeff and Kim for doing what came naturally. New Belgium's employee ownership is structured as a leveraged Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP).

New Belgium is regularly approached by other businesses, students, and curious beer drinkers wanting to learn about the company's heart-felt approach to being an environmentally, socially and economically conscious business. While solar panels and recycling programs are exciting, the company realizes that its High Involvement Culture (HIC) is one of the most important and transferrable tools they have used to drive sustainability. The importance of consciously creating culture was recognized early on at New Belgium and has perhaps become its most distinguishing trait.

While HIC is a foundation for the company's sustainability efforts, its purpose is much larger in scope. New Belgium is a living example of research that shows high performing companies push decision-making and accountability throughout the organization. Likewise, they have witnessed first-hand that when you share the risks and rewards of ownership, people have a passion for what they do and love to come to work. A high involvement culture is conducive to a triple bottom line approach to business. Coworkers are actively participating in the reduction of natural resources (Planet), as well as the increase in efficiency (Profit) all while having fun and feeling empowered (People).

Fueled by the undisputed results of its high-involvement culture, New Belgium has earned its reputation as one of the most honored craft breweries in the country, brewing well over a quarter million barrels a year. The company has annually doubled and even triple digit rates and now has 435 employee-owners. It sells its beer in about a third of the Western U.S. – but gets lots of requests to expand outward. It is the 11th largest U.S. brewery and 5th largest craft brewer.

***Curriculum Library on Employee Ownership is housed at Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR), and is sponsored by the Employee Ownership Foundation and the Foundation for Enterprise Development***