
Puppet Breaks Through “Rarefied Air” That Often Strangles Corporate Environments

For over a decade, Darrel’s Other Brother Darrel (DOBD) embodied the opinions, concerns and values of Kohler Engine’s central distributor organization. The puppet and alter ego of Darrel Husa, Manager of North American Sales, edited a distributor newsletter, supervised special sales programs, sent out Christmas gifts, interviewed Kohler executives, made personal appearances at special distributor events and managed numerous sales and marketing-related competitions.

“Whether on purpose or by accident, the puppet became a valuable tool,” said Husa. “What started out as a one-time sales meeting joke, turned into a popular, entertaining and effective means of communicating candidly with our distributors.

“For some reason, characters like DOBD are not held to the same strict, politically correct standards as the rest of us,” Husa explained. “The puppet could be irreverent without being offensive. He was entertainingly honest with his audience, without being threatening to his employer. He was able to be candid about situations that corporate counterparts may have been reticent to talk about on the record.

“Most importantly, when our central distributors received any type of communication from DOBD, we were confident that the message would be read, listened to or watched,” he added. “And 98% of our audience was appreciative that we made a concerted effort to put some humor and enjoyment in otherwise mundane business activities. To be honest, I never really worried much about the other 2%, because the feedback and response was so overwhelming successful with the rest of our distributor group.”

“Breathing rarefied factory air” was one of DOBD’s favorite explanations for why management sometimes made decisions that may not have delighted everyone in the manufacturer’s distributor organization.

“Let’s be honest,” said Husa. “Corporate environments do not always reflect ‘real-world’ situations. So we created the idea that management’s judgement was sometimes influenced by a bubble of rarefied air that covered the home office. Only a puppet could get away with that in print. And DOBD gained significant credibility and trustworthiness with our distributors by using that phrase for more than 10 years.”

With Darrel Husa’s retirement earlier this year, DOBD found himself out of a job. But, with the help of Brown & Martin, Inc., he did manage to find permanent position at the world’s largest museum dedicated to the art of ventriloquism, Vent Haven Museum, near Cincinnati, OH.

“The look-alike puppet was created for our firm by Verna Finley, who is recognized as one of the finest soft puppet sculptors in the world,” said Dale Brown, president of Brown & Martin, Inc. Brown was the voice behind DOBD and one of a team of B&M staff who col-



Photo Caption: Darrel Husa, (right) and puppet Darrel’s Other Brother Darrel (DOBD) worked as a communications team for over a decade. The puppet and its history will have a permanent home in Vent Haven Museum, the world’s largest museum dedicated to the art of ventriloquism. (Photo by Kate Husa, photosbykatie@yahoo.com)

lectively made up the character’s writing, creative and communication skills. “Now the groundbreaking and effective history of DOBD’s career in corporate America will be on permanent display for the education and entertainment of museum visitors,” Brown said.

DOBD made his final public appearance at a special retirement party hosted by Kohler Engine Central Distributors for Darrel Husa and his family, in Chicago, IL. At the event, Darrel was presented with a new Harley Davidson motorcycle.

“I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of friendship and generosity,” said Husa. “I think this very touching event confirmed that it’s worth the time and effort to consciously put some humor in our jobs. It helps to get messages noticed and understood. It helps to bond people together. And it acts as a reminder that we shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously.”

(Read DOBD’s last column on the back page.)

This was the final column written by Darrel's Other Brother Darrel. It appeared in the Volume 14, No. 2 edition of CHIPShots, produced for KOHLER Engines by Brown & Martin, Inc. DH refers to the "real" Darrel Husa and DOBD, well, you should get that by now!

RAREFIED AIR

by Darrel's
"other brother"
Darrel



Before his retirement, Darrel agreed to take me out for one last round of golf on company time. It was a poignant and enlightening occasion.

DOBD: Fore! (Thwack!!)

DH: Ouch!

DOBD: Sorry Darrel. I'm new at this.

DH: No kidding.

DOBD: Are you sure this is a Kohler-approved way to conduct a golf course equipment survey?

DH: Kohler encourages this type of research. I've been doing it for years. Why do you have a frog glued to your head?

DOBD: When I go into the woods to look for my ball it keeps the bugs off my face. Look! A wide-area-walk-behind with a Kohler Engine. One of our top-notch Centrals has been on the job. (Thwack) Nice shot Darrel. Too bad there was a lake in your way.

DH: Thanks. And that's not a wide-area-walk behind. Take another look.

DOBD: Oops. Sorry lady. So tell me Darrel, do you have any insightful words of wisdom to impart before you retire.

DH: Just one word. "Change." (Thwack)

DOBD: "Change?" Another nice shot. You've hit every sand trap. That must be difficult.

DH: It's not as hard as it looks. Yes, "Change." I've been in this industry a long time and I've never witnessed the amount of change or the need for change that is demanded today at every level... from manufacturing through distribution and sales. Just look at Kohler. We've experienced an excellent influx of new people in key positions. And those people are bringing in new ideas, new ways of doing things and new expectations.

DOBD: Is that why you're retiring? ...That's the fourth really nice-looking putt you've had on this hole.

DH: Thanks again. And no, that's not why I'm retiring. In fact it would be nice to be part of the new direction that Kohler is being taken by our new leadership. It's true that change can sometimes be upsetting. Keeping the status quo isn't demanding and doesn't require a lot of extra work. But in today's competitive environment, change is crucial. I think it will be important for our new leadership to shake things up a bit.

DOBD: You're just saying that because you're not going to be one of those being "shaken up."

DH: I'm saying it because I know it's true. It's not always pleasant, but it's true. In the long run change benefits everyone who embraces it. Those who don't will be left behind.

DOBD: There's one change that I know many of our distributors didn't want to see.

DH: What was that?

DOBD: Your retirement. You did a lot of good. You created the CHIPS philosophy and educational programs to support it. The Captain was your idea and you used him to invigorate morale, educate field personnel and bring some fun to the stressful jobs of increasing brand awareness and market share. This publication was your idea, as was our Expert Dealer program. When there were differing opinions, you stood up for what you believed. You represented Central Distributors' common sense interests within the hazardous boundaries of factory air. You made a difference.

DH: I loaded distributors with a lot of inventory. (Thwack)

DOBD: That too. Hey, I think you hit the beverage cart!

DH: I was aiming at it. I thought you might be thirsty.

DOBD: I'm buying, right?

DH: Not everything has to change.

For more information about how custom puppet characters or mascots can be created for your organization, contact Brown & Martin. Dale Brown also has "standard" characters that can be used for corporate presentations, motivational speeches, at trade show exhibits and much more. Check Dale's web site for more information, www.dale-brown.com.