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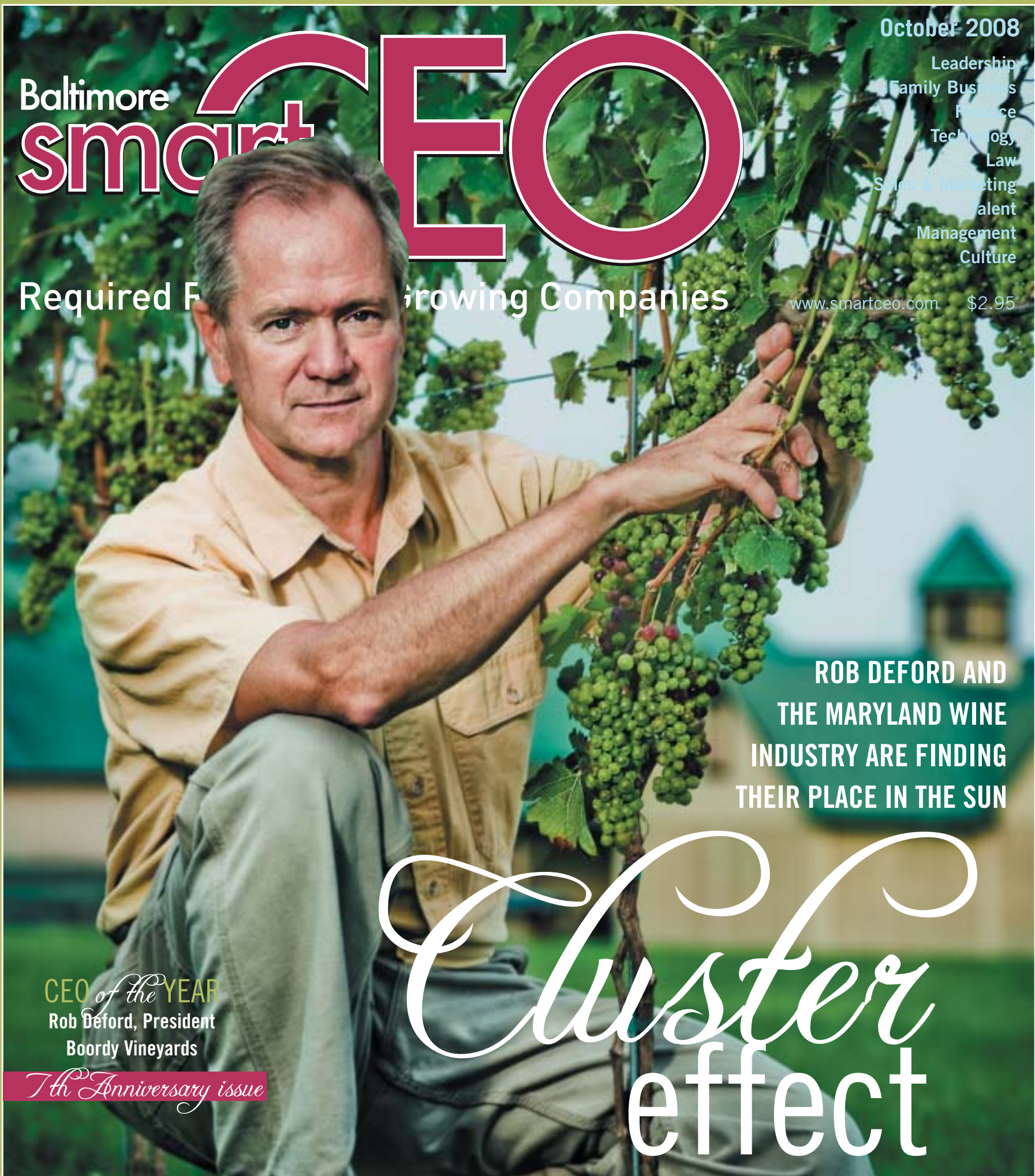
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balance first

SIX WAYS TO AVOID BURNOUT BY MAKING WORK-LIFE BALANCE A REALITY

BY MARK SINCEVICH

When we don't pay attention to our health, our employees and our organizations, once seemingly small inconveniences become big and foreboding. The employee who wanted to take two weeks off on her vacation after your repeated "next times" becomes one of the first out of the door to a competitor. Not taking time for healthy meals eventually becomes a heart attack waiting to happen. When you set the pace for your organization, become the change you want to see, delegate effectively, emotionally vacate when not working, and own the moment, you will be strengthening your organization and improving the connection you have to yourself.

1 SET THE PACE

The importance of executives setting the pace was made clear to me when I worked with Best Buy, Inc., as a speaker for work-life balance at their annual leadership conference. I was told that the store managers set the pace for each store's work-life balance. If an employee or assistant manager needs time off, the store managers I spoke with almost always grant it. As one manager so aptly said, "When an employee's head is screwed on straight with his or her family, then that employee's head is screwed on straight with our customers." Remember that as the head executive, you must emphasize that it is acceptable to take all of one's vacation time when it is earned and even time off without pay.

2 BECOME THE CHANGE

Lee Scott was becoming the change he wanted to see in his organization. When it was announced that the CEO of Wal-Mart was going to take the entire month of May 2006 off, the Wall Street rumor mill already had him resigning or being replaced. However, he had planned a long road trip with his entire family and then some deep-sea fishing with his wife. He was able to detach from his work and came back refreshed and recharged for Wal-Mart's annual shareholder meeting. According to business columnist Carol Hymowitz from the *Wall Street Journal*, "Executives who don't take chunks of time away from the day-to-day deadlines and routines can't create the mental space they need to get a fresh perspective on problems, think up new ideas and be creative." Everything you see around you started as an idea, but how can you come up with new ideas if you aren't practicing your creativity?

3 DELEGATE EFFECTIVELY

Cross training and delegating effectively has helped make REI (Recreational Equipment, Inc.) one of the best places to work, according to *Fortune's* 100 Best Benefits list in 2007. CEO Sally Jewell works out nearly every morning so she can do the work of her billion-dollar company, serve on several boards and attend to her family. Every quarter, a member of Jewell's executive team serves as her backup, with full authority to act in her stead whenever Jewell is on vacation or unavailable. This gives other executives a better understanding of the CEO's job while also exposing them to board members, who can weigh their merits as potential successors. During Jewell's tenure since 2001, the company swung from a \$141 million debt to \$150 million in cash at the end of 2006.

4 EMOTIONALLY VACATE

Another benefit from an extended vacation or sabbatical is that it helps executives emotionally vacate their positions. If you check in with the office, it's as if you never really left. In a study of knowledge workers, Lexmark International found that 92 percent of respondents make or take work-related communications outside of work, including on vacations. Nearly 75 percent stay switched on during the weekends and a fifth of them have been interrupted during a date for work purposes. This "constantly on" approach only leads to burnout.

5 OWN THE MOMENT

One of the best ways to practice an effective work-life balance is to keep being reminded of the power of Stephen Covey's Quadrant #2. This is the most important quadrant and those organizations that win the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award spend at least 70 percent of their time in this "important, but not urgent" area. A great way to spend more time in this area is to set appointments with yourself to check in with e-mail, voice mail and the office. Stephen Crawley, an HR executive, decided to take Covey's advice. He eliminated all voice mail, pulled the plug on his e-mail and stopped using his cell phone as the primary way for people to connect with him. This forced people to find him in person only when it was important. He said, "It worked. The more off of the grid I got, the better our sales and margins, while staff domestic morale improved."

6 PRACTICE MUTUAL RESPECT

In a May 2006 survey by the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), 85 percent of recruiters have seen job candidates reject a job offer because it wouldn't include enough work-life balance, and two-thirds of those companies surveyed are developing programs to help top candidates boost their family time without sacrificing their careers. In addition, 24 percent of those surveyed said they would turn down a promotion that would hurt their work-life balance while 87 percent said work-life balance is critical in their decisions to join or remain with an employer. The more you practice mutual respect by setting clear boundaries around your work-life balance, the less pull your organization will have on you in your off hours.

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