

Not Enough Cooks in the Kitchen? Building an Entertainer's Team of Advisors

By Daniel J. Scott

Recently, actor-comedian Dane Cook became the latest celebrity to see millions of dollars lost at the hands of a trusted advisor. Dane Cook's half brother and longtime business manager, Darryl McCauley, has reportedly pled guilty to stealing millions of dollars from the star. This unfortunate story highlights the difficulty celebrities and entertainers face in trying to manage their personal and professional lives. Namely, entertainers are rarely involved in the day-to-day activities and administration of their personal and business interests and almost always have to rely on others to watch over their affairs. As a result, entertainers are exceptionally vulnerable to wrongdoing (whether intentional or just negligent) by those in charge.

One way to safeguard against such wrongdoing is to adopt a team approach. Rather than rely on a single person or firm to handle all aspects of their lives, entertainers should assemble a team of advisors to make decisions and oversee day-to-day operations. The team approach provides a system of checks and balances that can help prevent any one advisor from engaging in intentional wrongdoing, and also incorporates the perspectives of multiple independent professionals, which can improve the quality of decisions made and ensure the best possible business and investment decisions.

Who should serve as a member of the team will always vary based on the circumstances and who the entertainer knows and has a trusting relationship with, but some general guidelines definitely apply. An entertainer's team of advisors should consist of individuals who the entertainer trusts, who have the expertise necessary to handle the variety of issues that will arise, who have the ability to be proactive and get the job done, and who are always mindful of the entertainer's wishes and needs. The number of advisors can vary based on the entertainer's preference, but at the very least it makes good sense to include the following: someone who knows money and is financially savvy; someone who knows entertainment and is familiar with the entertainer's particular industry (e.g., film, television, music, etc.) and someone with a legal background. Another good candidate is someone who knows the entertainer personally (this could be a family member, longtime friend or professional advisor), and can speak to the entertainer's personal opinion on matters. In the end, entertainers should be looking for a variety of perspectives and areas of professional expertise, so that the complex range of issues affecting their lives can be adequately represented and addressed.

Once the team of advisors has been assembled, the next step is to adopt a formal decision-making process, or governance system. This can take many forms and is usually based on the ownership structure involved, which can vary for tax and other reasons. In a corporate setting, for example, the central decision-making process will most often involve a board of directors. The function of the team of advisors at this stage is to make high-level business decisions and to then delegate the actual administration and carrying out of those decisions to employees and other staff. The team of advisors also monitors the overall performance



Dane Cook, a cast member in the film "Dan in Real Life," walks the red carpet at the film's premiere in Los Angeles, Oct. 24, 2007.

of day-to-day operations and keeps track of investments and spending, which can help detect any potential improprieties at the employee/staff level. In addition, having a team of advisors serves as its own system of checks and balances at the advisory level, as the advisors monitor each other's performance and participate in group decision-making. Finally, on a less frequent (but still regular) basis, the entertainer then oversees and monitors the entire operation, including decisions made and carried out by the team of advisors, thus providing another layer of protection. In essence, what you end up with is a pyramid-like structure of governance. At the base of the pyramid are the employees and staff that carry out the day-to-day tasks involved in administering the entertainer's life. In the middle of the pyramid is the entertainer's team of advisors, which oversees the day-to-day operations and is charged with making high-level business decisions. Finally, at the top of the pyramid, and in ultimate control of the entire enterprise, is the entertainer.

In order for a governance system to work in a meaningful way, however, careful thought must be given as to how decisions are made by the team of advisors. Determining how many advisors are appointed to the team, how many advisors are needed to act and how many affirmative votes (e.g., majority, supermajority, etc.) are required to take action can be critical to maintaining the right balance of power and ensuring a proper system of checks and balances. Once these procedures are agreed upon and adopted, it is important that the formalities be respected and carefully adhered to.

In addition to carefully planning out how decisions will be made by the team of advisors, consideration must also be given as to how the day-

to-day administrative tasks (such as bill paying) are carried out. Not only must these administrative tasks be done in a cost efficient and effective manner, but they must also protect against wrongdoing or mistakes at the employee/staff level. For example, it is usually a good practice to require more than one signature on checks in excess of a certain amount. This allows for regular amounts to be paid easily and without requiring additional authorization while ensuring that extraordinary amounts are not so easily paid out. Adopting such a check-writing procedure further safeguards against wrongdoing because the bank must now also ensure that checks are properly authorized before being paid.

We've all heard someone at some point sneer that there are "too many cooks in the kitchen," usually to suggest that there are too many people trying to do the same job or make the same decision while ultimately not getting anything done. Well, I have seen enough episodes of *Hell's Kitchen* to know that chef Gordon Ramsay is not cooking alone. Instead, he has an entire team of chefs working together to try and create the perfect dinner service. There are a number of roles to be filled in a properly run kitchen, such as the executive or head chef, sous chef, stations chefs, kitchen assistants, etc. An entertainer's life is not much different. In an entertainer's life, the entertainer is always the executive chef. After all, it is the entertainer's career and legacy at stake and what he or she wants to serve to the public in that regard is what matters most. The team of advisors must work together to come up with the best ways of carrying out the entertainer's vision (this is most like the sous and station chefs in a kitchen). Lastly, the employees and staff, like kitchen assistants, must carry out the administrative day-to-day tasks. So, it is usually not the case of there being too many cooks in the kitchen, but rather too many executive chefs (of which there should only be one). Once it is realized and accepted that the entertainer is the executive chef, then it is a matter of having enough "cooks" to fill the many roles and areas of expertise required to address the particular concerns and issues in that entertainer's life. Each cook, or each member of the team of advisors, should have a unique skill and perspective that, when combined with the rest, creates the perfect dinner service and allows for the entertainer's career and legacy to reach its greatest potential. As we have seen countless times in the past, when entertainers do not take the extra step of putting together a team of advisors and a formal governance system, the chances of getting burned increase dramatically.



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Working Towards a More Tolerant Society

By Stephen Rohde

At the center of the recent overheated controversy that became — misleadingly — known as the "Ground Zero Mosque," was Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf.

Newt Gingrich compared Rauf and other supporters of the Muslim community center and mosque to be built several blocks from the site of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, to "Nazis" who have no "right to put up a sign next to the holocaust museum in Washington." But New York mayor Michael Bloomberg defended Rauf. He quoted Rauf's remarks at an interfaith memorial service for the martyred journalist Daniel Pearl: "If to be a Jew means to say with all one's heart, mind, and soul: Shma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad; Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One, not only today I am a Jew, I have always been one. If to be a Christian is to love the Lord our God with all of my heart, mind and soul, and to love for my fellow human being what I love for myself, then not only am I a Christian, but I have always been one."

Who is Imam Rauf? In 2004, after the 9/11 attacks but before the controversy that exposed him to such public scrutiny, Rauf wrote "What's Right with Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and the West." (Published by Harper One.) Rauf was born in Kuwait in 1948. His father, Egyptian Imam and Sunni scholar Muhammad Abdul Rauf, moved with

the younger Rauf to New York City in the 1960s. The elder Rauf helped establish the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the first building designed as a mosque in New York City, which took 25 years to complete and opened in 1991. It is little known that the younger Rauf has been an imam of Masjid al-Farah, a mosque operating without controversy only 12 blocks from Ground Zero since 1985.

In his book, Rauf confronts the dilemma that "Islam, a religion I love and that comprises my essential identity as a human being, has become broadly perceived in the United States as a national security threat, while America, a land whose values I cherish, has aroused broad antagonism and anguish in much of the Muslim world." Rauf believes the dilemma can be solved through education and understanding. "There are valuable truths in the Muslim experience and worldview that it would behoove America to recognize and consider, and there are valuable truths about America that the Muslim world would do well to recognize, appreciate, and adopt."

Rauf develops at length one of his primary premises that Islam, properly understood and faithfully practiced, is no threat to the security of the United States and the West. "The Quran never allows the killing of innocent people" nor "aggression against others just because of their beliefs." Rauf is eager to publicize the fact that "Islamic jurists ruled clearly that the attacks of September 11 were not allowed under Islamic law. Those acts of terror were not within the norms of a just war. A number of the Islamic world's greatest jurists stated this publicly, but unfortunately, this fact received little attention in American news media."

In fact, Rauf reprints in an appendix, a fatwa (or authoritative legal opinion), issued on Sept. 27, 2001 by five prominent Islamic scholars from Egypt, Qatar and Syria, condemning "all those who terrorize the innocents" and calling for "the true perpetrators of these crimes, as well as those who aid and abet them through incitement, financing or other support" to be apprehended, brought to justice and punished.

Rauf argues persuasively that the true origins of what is known as "Islamic violence" lie "not in religion but in the politics and economics of the Muslim world." Unrelenting poverty, frustration, a lack of political participation and centralized economies, usually owned by the state, "leave most Muslims feeling cut off from the economic wealth" of their countries and "create a fertile breeding ground for extremist philosophies and terrorism."

Driving home this central thesis, Rauf emphasizes that "the popular drawing power of violent Islamism opposition groups derives not from religion, but from their ability to tap into the personal frustrations and feelings of social injustice that are felt daily by millions in the Muslim world. Violent groups have become adept at capitalizing on these frustrations and then addressing them with a religious vocabulary that inspires total commitment in their followers." Rauf adds that this frustration is due in part to the widely shared perception that the United States, instead of focusing on developing Muslim economies by speeding the adoption of democratic-capitalistic reforms, "has done the precise opposite in the past by supporting regimes that in turn siphoned off their own nations' resources rather than distributing them equitably and thus raising their citizens' level of prosperity."

Rauf urges that "the Israeli-Palestinian problem is one that our nation must face head-on in our traditional role as leader of the free world." Rauf offers a powerful plea that "[o]ne hundred years of suicide bombings will not drive Israel into the sea. Nor will one hundred years of targeted assassinations and home demolitions by Israel dry up the reservoir of young Palestinian recruits eager to join organizations such as Hamas."

At home, Rauf assesses the emergence of the Muslim community in American society. The first Muslims in America were brought here from Africa as slaves, composing 10 percent of all slaves. Today, Muslim immigrants represent about 60 percent of America's Muslim population. After tracing the history of Jews and Catholics in America, following

an arc from being subjected to bigotry and discrimination to tolerance, acceptance and prominent roles in all segments of society, Rauf anticipates it will take another generation or two before American Muslims can likewise establish their Muslimness "not apart from or in spite of their Americanness, bit precisely in and through it. This brings Rauf to a discussion of the critical subject of separation of church and state. While Rauf's knowledge of the Quran is comprehensive and sophisticated, his understanding of American constitutional history and First Amendment jurisprudence needs further study. Rauf applauds the U.S. Constitution for guaranteeing separation of church and state as a foundation for religious pluralism.

Thus far Rauf aligns himself with an understanding of the First Amendment, which Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson saw as a "wall of separation." But then Rauf complains that "the church-state relationship as it exists now in America" is "one of too much distance (more like a divorce)." Relying on Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Rauf argues that "the founders intended America to be a religious society and nation, a society whose ethics emanate from our religious beliefs." Rauf arrives at this theory, not by citing majority decisions of the Supreme Court, but instead the writings of Justice Scalia claiming that our government "derives its moral authority from God." Rauf should have been alerted to the problem with Scalia's interpretation since the justice supports his views by citing Christian scripture, apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-5, a sure sign that the church has not been sufficiently separated from the state in his thinking.

It's six years since Rauf wrote his book, and by now he may well have discovered the danger for the believer in a religion that commands a tiny minority of the population, to embrace the notion that we are a "religious nation," or as many in powerful and public places like to say, "a Christian nation." Rauf's ongoing study of American constitutional law will reveal that at the founding through contemporary Supreme Court interpretation, it was understood that the government should indeed be divorced from religion. As Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in *McCreary County, Kentucky v. ACLU of Kentucky* (2005), "[w]hen the government associates one set of religious beliefs with the state and identifies nonadherents as outsiders, it encroaches upon the individual's decision about whether and how to worship."

Rauf co-founded the Cordoba Initiative named for the period between roughly 800 and 1200 CE, when the Cordoba Caliphate ruled much of today's Spain and when "Muslims created what was, in its era, the most enlightened, pluralistic, and tolerant society on earth." Calling for an "ecumenical interfaith movement," Rauf embraces interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding by Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who insists that "in our era, religion is not the cause of conflict, although it is often used as the excuse." For Rauf and Schneier it is essential that "the Cross, the Crescent, and the Star of David become symbols of peace, tolerance, and mutual respect."

Despite vocal opposition, with no legal obstacles preventing Rauf and his partners from moving forward with the new Muslim community center and mosque near Ground Zero, time will tell whether he can achieve the goals of the Cordoba Initiative here in America by reaching out to the wider community in hopes of fostering a more enlightened, pluralistic, and tolerant society.



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