



You're a Browns fan. You hate owner Jimmy Haslam, the slimy, crooked huckster who is trying to stave off a federal indictment by playing dumb about his company's rebate fraud scandal.

You hate CEO Joe Banner, the squinty-eyed, lock-jawed little Napoleon who got run out of Philly and views the Browns gig as one big ego trip.

You hate GM Mike Lombardi, the sniveling, shadow-lurking weasel who has a vastly overinflated opinion of himself as a talent evaluator.

You hate them all. And if you have any interest in giving the Browns a fighting chance to chip away at one of the most firmly-entrenched losing cultures in professional sports, you'd better hope that you get to hate them for a long, long time.

For 15 years, the Browns have been on a nauseating, ever-spinning carousel of high-level turnover – really, a carousel of insanity – and it has to stop.

Wednesday's trade of Trent Richardson to Indianapolis is symptomatic of everything that has been wrong with the Browns since 1999. You can agree or disagree with the move itself – for what it's worth, I've seen enough of Richardson to agree with Jim Brown's original assessment of "ordinary." Not bad, but certainly not the franchise-caliber game-changer you'd expect to get at the third overall pick. But what makes the trade so troubling is the underlying causes, which stab right at the heart of why the Browns have been so bad for so long.

In 14 seasons since the club's 1999 relaunch, the Browns have been led by six distinct leadership regimes. Six different brain trusts, with six different leadership philosophies, in 14 years. Carmen Policy and Dwight Clark from 1999 to 2001, Butch Davis from 2001 to '05, Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel from '05 to '08, Eric Mangini in '09 (the only year he was in charge of the entire front office), Mike Holmgren and Tom Heckert from 2010 to '12, and Joe Banner and Mike Lombardi for the past year.

The math whizzes can quickly figure out that 14 divided by six is 2.33. That's right. The average tenure for a Browns leadership regime since 1999 is two years and four months. If you don't include the just-launched Banner-Lombardi regime, the average balloons to a rocksteady two years and 10 months.

It's a suicidal level of turnover. In any other industry, the Browns would have gone out of business quite a while ago.

It's because when new leaders come in, they're brought in because the old leaders, at least in the sample size they were given, didn't perform at a high enough level. No brain trust comes into a situation like the Browns present thinking that the old regime did anything resembling a good job. Is it realistic to ask that of them?

New leaders will always arrive with their own ideas and philosophies, which are usually starkly different from what came before. That's why they were hired. They think differently. They're supposed to be a breath of fresh air. They're supposed to strip away what hasn't worked and replace it with a system, and talent, that does work.

Those factors are compounded in the ego-driven world of professional sports. No roster architect worth his seven-figure salary wants to win with the last guy's players. Then, then

previous guy gets all the credit as the “real” brains behind the success. In the world that Banner and Lombardi occupy, that doesn’t compute.

To peek inside their heads, Banner and Lombardi – and every president/GM who has come before them – haven’t come to Cleveland to win games. They’ve come to Cleveland to realize a vision. The wins will come as a byproduct of that vision being realized.

It likely makes you want to put your shoe through the screen to read that, but – welcome to the world of big business.

This is why it is painfully essential that Haslam not follow in the footsteps of former owner Randy Lerner, caving to fan and media pressure for change as the losses mount.

No matter what you think about Haslam, Banner or Lombardi, they need to stay here for the balance of a decade, or longer. They have to be given the space and time to see their vision through to fruition.

The majority of fans and media, and apparently Lerner, seemed to operate under the pretense that it’s better to cut bait with a leadership team that isn’t producing immediate wins than to continue on a treadmill to nowhere for years on end.

But all that does is produce an ongoing stream of executives making short-term moves to save their jobs, with no attention paid to the overarching problems that continually plague the franchise.

As the losing seasons continue to mount and the region-wide frustration with the Browns reaches a boiling point, the pressure to win now grows ever more urgent, leading to a snowball effect. If the latest brain trust can’t reverse the losing in Year One, we want them gone. Because it’s been long enough, and we, as a fan base, are simply fed up to the back teeth.

Again, this is the problem with perpetual reboots. Every few years, the Browns bring in new leaders who want to start from square one. They can only be held accountable for what happens on their watch. But beyond the gates to the Berea complex is an entire region enduring the sum total of 14 years of losing with no end in sight. We end up with the divergent goals of a leadership regime that wants to craft an organization in its own image, from the ground up, and a fan base that is beyond desperate for someone to end the losing as soon as possible.

This is bigger than the latest 4-12 season. This is bigger than an 11-game losing streak to the Ravens or going two-and-a-bazillion against the Steelers over the past decade. Turnover is the fatal, systemic flaw that is leading to all the other problems that are destroying this franchise, eroding the fan base and suffocating what was once one of the great football towns in America.

Do Banner and Lombardi have the answers? Do they comprise the brain trust that can finally turn the Browns around? Only time will tell. But that's exactly it – time. More time than any previous regime since 1999 has received.

You might hate Haslam. You might detest Banner and loathe Lombardi. And maybe they aren't the perfect football brain trust. They do come with a very prominent set of questions attached. But these are the guys who found the seats when the song stopped in this latest game of musical chairs. And we have to move forward with them for a good, long while – even if the wins don't come this year, or next, or the year after.

The phrase “stability for stability's sake” carries a negative connotation when it comes to the Browns and their various leadership regimes. But without stability and consistency, you have what the Browns have become.

The Browns very much need stability – and for stability's sake.