

Mike Holmgren is coming to town. Monday, after nearly a week of meetings and suspense, he accepted the role of Browns team president. If you want a team czar with football chops, a guy who has won everywhere he's gone, a guy who was a leader -- not a support staffer -- on a Super Bowl winner, Holmgren is your man. That's good news. But that's not the best news. The best news is who Holmgren is slated to replace as team president. No, not Mike Keenan. He's the team's main business operations guy, and will transition to the role of chief financial officer. I'm talking about Randy Lerner.



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For way too long now, Lerner has been the Browns' football czar by default. As the team's owner, it has ultimately been up to him to staff the president's, general manager's and head coach's positions. In an organizational setup than began with the hiring of John Collins in 2004 and survived through inertia to this year, the team president was not technically part of the football chain of command, instead leaning more toward the business side of the operation. That removed another layer of authority between the owner and the general manager.

As a result, Lerner's inadequate administrative thumbprint has been all-too-visible on the Browns for the past seven years. From Collins to Phil Savage to Romeo

Crennel to Eric Mangini, Lerner kept hiring decision-makers who were untested in, and ultimately proven to be ill-suited for, their job descriptions.

Every Lerner football hire has been a step-up hire. Savage from scouting director to GM. Crennel from coordinator to coach. Mangini was the coach who would be czar, but he turned out to be a very weak czar, so the job fell back to Lerner.

Holmgren is a step-up hire, too. He's never been a team president. But his history in spotlight positions -- and success in those spotlight positions -- suggests that this hire will be a little different.

As team president, Holmgren's job is going to primarily consist of looking at things from the business-cliche "30,000 foot level." His job will be one of vision, team-building and delegation. At first, he might be more involved in the relative minutiae of deciding who should occupy the 53rd spot on the roster, who makes the final cut in training camp and how to best utilize Josh Cribbs. But over time, he'll have his GM and coach making those judgment calls.

Ultimately, Holmgren is in place to eradicate a firmly-entrenched losing culture by installing a system of leadership based on structure, accountability, discipline, and a cultivating a winning attitude from the GM's chair down to the practice squad.

It's something the Browns haven't had in a long, long time: an umbrella-type leader who rules over the Berea facility with an authoritative air. Someone to build standards and a strategic plan for the future, and make sure everyone is living up to that plan. If someone isn't, there are consequences ready and waiting.

With Lerner splitting his time and attention among Cleveland, Long Island and Birmingham, England, and not really having a dominant personality to begin with, he is ill-suited for the role of organizational godfather. Savage survived a *coup d'etat* of sorts from Collins, leaving him as the organizational go-to guy, but it was evident over the ensuing years that A) his people skills were lacking and B) he was mostly at home in a rental car, jaunting between college towns to scout next year's draft class.

Mangini also has issues with his people skills, and at 38 and with just three previous years as a head coach under his belt, was not experienced enough for the task of singlehandedly running an NFL franchise.

The result was what you'd expect when no one is adequately steering the ship. The often-mentioned "rudderless suck" that has defined the Browns for the past 10 years.

That's the real value of Holmgren. It's not really in his ability to coach X's and O's -- unless he at some point names himself coach, in what would be a pretty blatant mistake on Holmgren's part.

It's not his ability to run a draft-day war room, his roster management, his ability to make trades and free agent signings, or his ability to groom Brady Quinn as an NFL passer.

Holmgren's real value to the Browns, the area in which he needs to succeed above all others, is in finding guys to do all of the above. And then finding guys to replace those guys when they are inevitably hired away by other teams, because you've become one of the league's model franchises and everyone is trying to emulate you.

That's how teams like the Patriots, Colts and Steelers leave the rest of us scratching our heads at their year-in, year-out success, with their ability to take seemingly no-name players and coaches and turn them into hot properties.

It's all in the organizing of the organization. And organization is what the Browns have lacked since returning to the league.

With Holmgren on board, we can now envision a world where Lerner can ping-pong from Long Island to Cleveland to England and back, make sporadic appearances in Berea and at games, hide from the media's microphones, enjoy an afternoon brandy, whatever he wants. And no Browns fan needs to care because Lerner's involvement in the football operations extends only to his writing hand, which he uses to sign the checks.

I don't know about you, but that's a world I can't wait to live in.