

“The James Gang”: Keys to the Success of  
Tobin James Cellars

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### Introduction

An increased focus on direct-to-consumer wine channels has bolstered the popularity of wine clubs within the industry in recent years. This is especially true in the U.S., where the politics of interstate direct shipping drives wineries to seek new channels of distribution (Teaff, Thach, & Olsen, 2005). While the prevalence of wine clubs is limited mainly to the U.S., there has been exponential growth in a short period of time. This can be attributed to wine club profits guarantee wineries a steady income on top of distribution and tasting room sales. Further, the economic contribution from the wine industry alone to the state of California was \$45.4 billion dollars in 2003 – and according to a survey taken that year, wine clubs represented about 24 percent of those direct sales (MKF, 2004). That being said, it makes sense that more and more wineries are exploring direct-to-consumer routes for selling their wines. Last year, direct-to-consumer wine sales accounted for 60 percent of winery revenue nationally (Cornwell, 2017); and a recent survey in *Wine Business Monthly* showed that direct-to-consumer sales only continue to rise: with wine shipments having a 28 percent increase in value between April 2017 and April 2018 (Penn, 2018). In light of the fact that direct-to-consumer wine sales are growing and profiting so immensely, wine clubs are a phenomenon that should be further examined.

Within this quickly evolving industry, the state of California currently has the highest volume of wineries in the country. As of 2016, the number of wineries in California reached 4,653 – equating to almost half of the total wineries in the United States (Wine Institute, 2017). This means that consumers have no shortage of options to choose from when it comes to buying California wines. Thus, in such a heavily saturated industry, the factor of direct-to-consumer wine clubs becomes crucial in a winery’s overall success. Further, a winery’s failure to adhere to this industry trend will force them to be left behind by the numerous competitors. The purpose of

this study is to understand what motivates individuals to join and remain members of the wine club of a popular winery located in Paso Robles, California. Paso Robles is a small central California town that has in recent years seen large growth as a wine region – now containing over 200 wineries – making it the perfect sample to study when looking into what factors entice consumers to join a particular wine club, as well as maintain membership commitment in the long-term. The four flows of organizational communication will be applied to discover what allows direct-to-consumer wine clubs to be – and remain – successful.

### **Background**

Paso Robles winery Tobin James Cellars has been repeatedly celebrated for its fun, casual environment and great wines. In the late eighties, Tobin “Toby” James moved to Paso Robles, California from the Midwest to establish himself as a winemaker. Working several apprenticeships and winemaking positions at other Paso Robles wineries, he produced his first gold-medal-winning “Blue Moon” Zinfandel in 1985 with a batch of “bad grapes” that other winemakers did not want. Then in 1993, Toby took the plunge and established Tobin James Cellars (Tobin James Cellars, 2018). Built on the site of an old stagecoach stop eight miles east of Paso Robles on Highway 46, Tobin James Cellars has an atmosphere similar to the old West saloon that Toby felt at home at, while serving a diverse selection of high-quality wines with unparalleled hospitality. A few years later in 1996, Lance and Claire Silver partnered with Toby to help create what Tobin James Cellars is today.

Recently celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Tobin James Cellars has experienced incredible growth and success. Currently, the winery’s “James Gang” wine club is the largest direct-to-consumer wine club in the country – consisting of over 30,000 wine club members across the United States. Additionally, Tobin James has some of the longest-standing wine club members –

many of which have been members since wine clubs first came to fruition – consistently belonging to the wine club for ten or more years. Bottle prices of Tobin James’ wines range anywhere from \$10 to \$150, offering a selection to accommodate any occasion and price point, appealing to wine novices and connoisseurs alike.

### **Wine Clubs**

Wine clubs reflect a general trend among marketers to develop long-term relationships with customers instead of just one-time transactions (Teaff et al, 2005). In signing up for a wine club membership, consumers are committing to the winery sending them a specified number of bottles at an agreed upon price, occurring a certain number of times per year. Along with receiving wine, wine clubs usually offer various benefits for their members such as VIP status, special events, value-added material, and discounts on future wine purchases. While the number of bottles, frequency, and member benefits vary greatly among wineries, the intended result of wine clubs is to create satisfied customers, a strong brand identity, and increased wine sales (Berglund, 2003).

### **Literature Review**

A multitude of literature examines the relationship between communication and organizations. Putnam and Nicotera (2009) view organizations as “communicatively constituted” social phenomena that are created by interactions, sensemaking, and symbolic processes (pg. 1). The four flows approach argues that we can understand organizations by appreciating the types of communication that happen during the process of organizing: membership negotiation, organizational self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaig, 2009). These communication flows are typically seen as both internal and external matters that need to occur for organizing to take place. In viewing Tobin James Cellars not as a static

entity but as something that exists through interactive, multi-way communication, it is possible to analyze what practices are being utilized by the organization that contribute to its success in the wine industry. The four flows will be applied in this situation to uncover the motivations for people to join and sustain membership with Tobin James Cellars as part of the “James Gang” wine club.

### **Membership Negotiation**

Tobin James Cellars maintains its high volume of wine club members by excelling in customer connection and accessibility to great wine, capitalizing on how it differs from the “typical” winery experience. Membership is more than simply organizational entry – it involves varied and continuous interaction between the organization and individual. Thus, one process vital to membership negotiation is the communication that establishes and maintains its relationship with each of its members. McPhee and Zaig (2009) discuss how one crucial aspect of membership negotiation is crossing various boundaries of knowledge, legitimacy, and connection that can separate organization members from others. This is exemplified in the socialization process that occurs when potential members visit the organization’s tasting room. Tobin James not only satisfies the consumer’s expectations of customer service, but exceeds these expectations through the attentiveness and warmth of the management and tasting room staff. Tobin James maintains an upbeat and friendly atmosphere that encourages employees to have fun in the workplace, which is reflected in the organic management style and close relationships with the owners. Burns and Stalker (1994) define the organic form as ideal for changing conditions which give rise to unforeseen requirements in an organization, making the development of shared beliefs about values and goals the primary concern. By emphasizing the value of customer connection, Tobin James gives each member of the staff the autonomy to

accomplish this with customers in the appropriate way. In turn, this company culture creates an easygoing attitude amongst the tasting room staff making visitors of the winery feel welcome and comfortable. With a focus on establishing connections and sustaining customer satisfaction, the organization provides consistently excellent service that leaves a lasting impression on people in the tasting room. Tobin James’ atmosphere proves to be a major point of difference in comparison to other wineries, influencing member attitudes toward the organization and shaping their level of commitment and involvement.

Further, Tobin James offers a large variety of wines and price points – including both non-reserve and reserve quality options – to maintain a steady recruitment of members. Jablin (1987) postulates that member recruitment and socialization are the best-known examples of member negotiation. With wine club shipments consisting of reserve wines at an incredibly competitive price, the organization appeals to not only wine connoisseurs but to the everyday wine drinker as well. Members of the James Gang wine club are attracted to the membership because of the high-quality wines at low prices, while the organizational atmosphere encourages frequent visitation and involvement. McPhee and Zaug (2000) emphasize members act as limbs of the organization, because the one can only exist when they draw members in and get them to understand the world unique to the organization. Tobin James’ entertaining environment and reasonable price points gives them an advantage in the wine industry by incentivizing James Gang wine club members to bring their friends and family into the tasting room, furthering membership negotiation and participating in the recruitment and socialization of the winery.

### **Self-Structuring**

Tobin James Cellars utilizes a hierarchal – yet organic – management style to foster an informal approach to problem solving and goal setting. McPhee and Zaug (2000) argue that

organizational self-structuring does not directly concern work, but rather the internal relations and norms that shape work processes. Tobin James maintains a vertical structure with specific roles for employees to keep the winery functioning; however, bilateral communication between owners, management, and tasting room staff creates a direct and open dialogue within the organization. While stereotypical examples of organizational self-structuring include official documents, procedure manuals, and directives, Tobin James uses an interpersonal approach when communicating expectations and values amongst the staff. By sharing ideas and addressing issues in a casual, personable manner, it reduces power distance between individuals and gives all employees a sense of agency at the winery. McPhee (2015) argues that communication is social practice that requires “ongoing, coordinated, contingent agency” (pg. 487), emphasizing the worker’s ability to make a difference in the flow of conduct in an organization. Such agency cannot exist without the powers of human understanding, intent, and skill; and it depends on a collective effort to achieve this in the workplace. Tobin James places high value on teamwork and comradery to ensure that employees feel this sense of agency, regardless of their role in the organization. The organization capitalizes on this idea of teamwork while still maintaining a top-down management style to establish order in the workplace. Both cohesiveness and individualization are crucial to self-structuring because communicative exchanges must convey a sense of the organization as a differentiated, yet purposeful whole (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This sense of purposefulness is seen in the gratuitous words and actions that are routinely expressed towards others in the organization: generosity and acknowledgement from the owners; patience and constructive suggestions from the managers; and pleasant demeanors and hardworking sales efforts from tasting room staff. In this way, each employee at Tobin James functions as an

autonomous individual that respects the workplace decisions made by other areas of the staff – both of which are key to the success of the organization.

### **Activity Coordination**

Tobin James Cellars uses strong connections between employees and with the owners in order to effectively combat problems and boost morale in the workplace. Working in close proximity with one another in a high-stress environment, Tobin James employees are expected to help and provide emotional support for fellow coworkers. Parkinson (1996) argues that this emotional support is crucial, contending, “The things that people do and say are typically the things that affect us most, especially if we are involved in some sort of established relationship with them” (pg. 664), such as ongoing work arrangements. Tobin James employees forge these close relationships with one another by spending time together outside of the workplace. At the end of the day when everyone is off the clock, tasting room employees are encouraged to drink wine together and talk about their day, as well as their lives outside of the tasting room. As a family owned and operated winery, employees are expected to not just perform the duties of their job, but to participate in the company culture and dialogue that creates and recreates the social conduct of the organization. This activity coordination allows employees to self-divulge and get to know coworkers on a more personal level, leading to a stronger sense of comradery both within and outside of the constraints of work. Tobin James employees gather outside of the organization, attending industry events, birthday celebrations and other fun activities together. This comradery helps staff members work out solutions to problems, taking part in what Mintzberg (1979) calls mutual adjustment – group members determining amongst themselves how to substitute for one another and help each other out when needed. Hence, when problems

arise in the workplace or an employee needs a shift covered, these strong relationships enable coworkers to help each other without involving management.

A second type of activity coordination occurs at Tobin James through frequent visitations by the owners. Employees are able to stay after hours and interact with the owners, making the end of the work day a fun and casual way for everyone to talk and get to know each other. McPhee and Zaug (2000) argue that through activity coordination, members presume that they are working not just on related tasks but within a common social unit. This social dynamic is fortified through regular post-work tasting opportunities and staff appreciation dinners. These opportunities for bonding help to decrease power distance and increase positive emotions within the organization, attributing to Tobin James’ teamwork-oriented style. Bono and Ilie’s (2006) work suggest that leadership communication infused with positive emotion spreads positive affect to members and generally increases helping behavior; while Emmons and McCullough (2003) suggest that positive phenomena are associated with desired organizational goals. Therefore, when tasting room employees feel valued and important they perform their jobs more efficiently and are motivated to become more involved within the organization.

### **Institutional Positioning**

Tobin James Cellars stands out in the wine industry at the macro level due to its unique presence and strong organizational identity. McPhee and Zaug (2000) define institutional positioning as including both identity establishment and development of a place in the inter-organizational or larger social system. Tobin James differs from other wineries in the Paso Robles area by offering a complementary tasting, which greatly expands its audience of visitors. Not just catering to the “serious” wine tasters, this reifies their casual atmosphere and creates the opportunity to access a whole new consumer base. Identity is inescapably comparative and

relational, therefore being known as one of the only wineries that does not require a tasting fee places Tobin James in the light that it is not pretentious, increasing visitation immensely. While wineries requesting a \$15-\$40 tasting fee may be initially perceived as more upscale with better wines, this is immediately reconciled upon the individual’s realization that Tobin James carries a wide variety of high-quality reserve wines. Sultan and Larsen (2011) argue that economic incentives are the most important factor influencing people to join cooperatives. Thus, offering a complementary tasting for their reserve-quality wines is a huge influencing factor in positioning Tobin James as a worthwhile organization to maintain membership with.

Tobin James further bolsters their organizational identity by not paying their employees in the tasting room based off of their sales. Not operating on commission, tasting room servers are instead paid a steadily high hourly wage, decreasing coworker competition and maximizing employee satisfaction. Recognition is a primary driving factor that maintains Tobin James employee commitment, making them feel valued as individuals outside of their normal organizational duties. In a 2011 study on discourses informing positive assessment, Lutgen-Sandvik, Riforgiate, and Fletcher found that recognition was the most frequent experience in evoking positive emotion in the workplace. By having their financial livelihood not be completely dependent on sales, Tobin James employees feel they are desirable beyond their ability to produce high numbers, recognizing them as unique individuals and reinforcing the idea they are important to the organization. Further, by choosing to not operate on commission employees are able to see coworkers as friends and teammates instead of their competition for sales. Organizational belonging and connection are key to employee satisfaction, with this human connection being identified as a main source of positive work experiences; articulating the importance of social embeddedness through “relationships, social support, and teamwork”

(Lutgen-Sandvik et al., pg. 16). Without the pressure of sales competition in the workplace, Tobin James employees are instead able to focus on coworker relationships and the connections they forge with visitors – ultimately creating the fun, care-free environment in which the winery thrives on.

The following study will examine the four flows of organizational communication within Tobin James Cellars. The purpose of the study is to understand why Tobin James Cellars is such a successful winery in the Paso Robles area.

**RQ:** Using the four flows of organizational communication, why do individuals join and sustain membership with Tobin James Cellars as part of the “James Gang” wine club?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The subjects of this study were Tobin James Cellars tasting room employees and James Gang wine club members. A total of three employees and three wine club members were interviewed over the phone to then be considered in the analysis. All of the participating wine club members have sustained membership with Tobin James for at least fifteen years, classifying them as long-term consumers.

### **Recruitment**

Wine club member participants were recruited based on willingness and availability; meaning they mentioned their wine club membership longevity with Tobin James and expressed interest in doing an interview while visiting the tasting room. Once they had expressed their long-term membership with the winery on their own accord, wine club members were asked if they were interested in participating. After the initial recruitment in the tasting room they then

were contacted to participate in a 15-minute phone interview. Tobin James employees were selected based off availability; meaning 15-minute interviews were conducted over the phone outside of tasting room hours. All participants were required to sign a consent form upon participating in the study, and to ensure confidentiality all participant names were removed when reporting the results.

### **Procedure**

The study began with interviews conducted with three long-term members of the James Gang wine club, which provided insight on member’s opinion of Tobin James Cellars, wine club memberships, and other wineries in the Paso Robles area. The interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions (see Appendix A), as well as follow-up questions when appropriate to extricate further details from the interviewee.

To further understand what motivates people to be involved with Tobin James Cellars, interviews were conducted with three employees that work in the tasting room. The interviews consisted of six open-ended questions with five probes to gather further details from the interviewee. Many questions captured one or more of the four flows in the interviewee’s responses. All interviews were led by the researcher, using a voice recorder (with participant consent) to allow for transcribing. The interviews lasted around 15-20 minutes, depending on how in-depth the responses were (see Appendix B).

### **Results**

Results of the interviews were transcribed from a voice recorder. Shown below are the results of six separate interviews from both wine club members and employees. The analysis used membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination and institutional positioning as a way of gaining a better insight to the organization.

## Members

The interview transcripts showed members of the James Gang wine club are incredibly pleased with Tobin James Cellars due to the genuinely friendly staff, unparalleled deals for amazing wines, and unique experiences in the tasting room. Individuals are happily willing to be part of the wine club due to the organization’s successful approach to membership negotiation. The staff is committed to providing customers with an excellent experience, engaging them from the moment they walk into the tasting room to the time they leave. When discussing the amazing customer service, one wine club member stated they have “never had a bad time there,” explaining that when tasting at Tobin James, “It is the engagement that you get when you’re a wine club member and feeling that the person serving you also wants to know more about you – and you feel like you are part of something really cool” (Consumer Interviewee 3). Another member expressed similar thoughts when she stated, “I just can’t express enough how great the service always is with Tobin James. The atmosphere, the comradery, and just everyone we meet is so warm and welcoming – we truly appreciate that” (Consumer Interviewee 1). This focus on cultivating connection with people is a prime example of membership negotiation, creating an atmosphere that is more about the experience than the transaction and leaving a lasting impression on those who visit the tasting room.

In contrast, one of the main factors that incited wine club members to leave a winery was lack of communication or acknowledgment. Describing a negative experience with a winery, one member stated, “It’s just not the same treatment, it’s different...we’ve stood at one winery and never been recognized or addressed. We just ended up leaving...something about Tobin is that it’s just so much more comfortable and friendly” (Consumer Interviewee 1). This further reifies

that Tobin James’ exceptional customer service is a key ingredient to their success – and without that aspect, member recruitment can suffer.

Tobin James Cellars also ensures member retention through its’ institutional positioning – always sending reserve quality wines at incredibly low costs in the shipments – setting them apart from other wineries in the area. In all three interviews wine club members expressed appreciation for the amazing wines at reasonable prices, and one person stated, “The wines have always been incredible, and reasonable in price. The wine has only gotten better over the years. It’s what keeps us there, too” (Consumer Interviewee 2). Tobin James further exemplifies successful institutional positioning by including a free gift branded with the Tobin James logo in every shipment – something that is beneficial for both organizational marketing and member satisfaction. This proves to be a major point of difference with other wine clubs, as one member stated, “Now everyone I know who is part of the wine club says, ‘Oh what will the next gift be?!’ That has always been a nice surprise” (Consumer Interviewee 2).

### **Employees**

The interview transcripts showed tasting room employees are extremely satisfied with Tobin James due to the positive management style, supportive community, and excellent treatment by the owners. The organization guarantees employees needs – both work and personal – are met through its’ self-structuring and activity coordination. Despite the fact there are defined roles, management knows employees are capable of doing their job, using bi-lateral communication to provide direction while still being approachable and caring. In this way, the results show many examples of successful self-structuring, and when discussing problem resolution in the tasting room, one employee stated, “What I appreciate about our management is that as soon as a problem is brought to light, they gather as much information as they can from

all sides before doing anything. They take the time to dig deep and then act accordingly, but always talk to you in a casual setting and reasonable way” (Employee Interviewee 2).

All employees feel that they have cultivated strong relationships within the staff and feel valued by the organization, and the interview transcripts provide numerous examples of activity coordination bolstering coworker support systems and team morale. One employee expressed these feelings of support when she stated, “Sometimes I wake up in the morning and don’t want to go to work, and then I get there and I’m receiving hugs from my coworkers and I can tell they are genuinely happy that I’m there – and makes it so worthwhile to come to work every day” (Employee Interviewee 1). Considering the longevity of the staff – with many employees working there for upwards of six years – constant acknowledgment and interaction with the owners is a huge contributing factor to employee satisfaction. This recognition creates a strong dedication to their organization, as one employee mentioned, “I think that when Lance, Claire and Toby are around they always try to involve us in conversation and making decisions in the winery – seeing how we feel about things is important to them. It’s just fun and we treat each other like family” (Employee Interviewee 3). Overall, employees of Tobin James are passionate about their team and contributing to the success of the winery.

The results of the interviews can be viewed in full in Appendix B.

Overall, results show that people join and sustain membership with Tobin James Cellars’ wine club over other wineries in the area due to strong word of mouth advertising, consistently great wine accompanied by gifts, and the guarantee of great experiences with familiar faces in the tasting room.

## **Discussion**

### **Membership Negotiation**

After identifying the socialization practices at Tobin James Cellars, many trends arose. One trend was that wine club members immediately felt at home at the winery; and upon tasting the wines, all three joined the James Gang wine club during their first visit to the tasting room. In an industry that can often be perceived as pretentious, Tobin James serves as a needed alternative amongst the multitude of standardized tasting “experiences” tailored to a specific demographic. By focusing on the unique needs of the individual, the organization makes amazing wines accessible to the everyday wine drinker – a huge part of the wine market often ignored by upmarket wineries – through its personable atmosphere. This attentiveness from the staff creates opportunity for connection with the consumer and, in turn, opportunity for the consumer’s own identification with the organization. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) propose organizational identification involves a sense of oneness with, or belongingness to, organizations and concerns the ways in which members define and evaluate themselves in light of the organization. Tobin James employees cater the tasting experience to the individual through genuine interactions and an unwavering warm demeanor, going above and beyond seeing customers as merely a transaction. This practice serves the organization well in respect to membership negotiation because people feel valued, which makes them value the treatment they receive. The socialization practices of Tobin James are crucial to their success in Paso Robles – an area that has over 200 wineries – because after visiting three or more tasting rooms per day, people will not necessarily remember every great wine they tried; however, they will remember where they had fun, how they were treated by the staff, and if they felt they belonged in the environment. Ultimately, Tobin James excels at making people feel special, which in turn creates a customer loyalty that goes much deeper than the wine they produce.

Another common theme that evolved from the study was that word of mouth created the strongest form of organizational awareness and member recruitment for Tobin James. According to Scott and Meyers (2010), membership negotiation must account for the influence of external, indirect sources that affect it both prior to entry in the form of anticipatory socialization and following entry as communication received from family, friends, and other meaningful sources. Results supported this claim by showing current wine club members frequently bring friends and family into the tasting room, knowing that Tobin James is a fun winery that provides consistently above average experiences for its visitors. Morrison (2002) argues the perceptions and related evaluations of individuals in members' social networks can pressure or encourage attachment to the organization. Thus, current wine club members are incentivized to bring others to the winery due to their own positive experiences, indirectly marketing the organization and perpetuating member recruitment amongst their social circles.

### **Self-Structuring**

Many trends became apparent after studying the management style at Tobin James. The interview results showed that Tobin James has a vertical style of management and each member has their role within the organization. Toby, Lance and Claire run the organization and are at the top of the hierarchal structure and below them the general manager, followed by tasting room managers and at the bottom tasting room staff. These defined roles allow the organization to function productively and increase opportunity for success. Despite this vertical structure, bi-lateral communication across all areas of the winery ensures that people feel valued and have agency within their position. This method of communication is beneficial for both owners and employees to gather information and successfully align organizational values. Larson (1992) discusses that self-structuring processes must go beyond mere considerations of economic

advantage to achieve low uncertainty, high mutual knowledge, and high goal alignment. One way that Tobin James accomplishes this is through open dialogue, allowing for management to communicate expectations and employees to reciprocate ideas in a direct, non-threatening way. Results supported this claim by showing tasting room employees feel valued by owners and managers, believing constructive criticism is necessary for the winery to function. Similarly, managers approach their role in the organization as being part of a collective effort, seeing themselves as guides who are only as good as their team.

When internal issues do arise, Tobin James utilizes interpersonal communication to solve problems quickly and effectively. Interview results supported this idea as employees found both managers and owners to be approachable and caring, expressing gratitude for the support they receive from the organization. Under the premise of knowledge sharing, internal issues are framed not as individual wrongs but constructive improvements, leading to effective goal alignment across the organization. Spender (1993) supports the position that collective institutionalized knowledge exists and influences the organization, suggesting that “an organization’s distinctive competencies emerge at a collective level” (p.16); and Grant (1991) further elaborates on the forms of collective knowledge being organizational routines and direction. By focusing on teamwork as opposed to rigidly set rules, power distance is reduced and agency in the workplace increases so employees choose to perform better for the organization. What is communicated through the values of teamwork and comradery are the routines themselves – employees, managers and owners working together to make the winery an enjoyable environment for everyone – thus becoming part of the organizational culture. A strong culture is an internal strategic capability, and the carrier of widely communicated knowledge (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Thus, while employees have defined roles they are encouraged to help

each other, knowing they will also receive support. Polanyi (1967) noted there must be a shared set of experiences within an organization, for it is intimacy with these experiences rather than with abstract concepts that lies at the root of human communication. Wineries can be stressful and fast-paced work environments; however, through the process of interpersonal communication between roles and an overall open dialogue, Tobin James successfully creates a larger understanding of the organization for its' employees. Using knowledge sharing to boost morale and set organizational goals, Tobin James is able to unify the staff and create a collective culture where individuals work as a purposeful whole.

### **Activity Coordination**

After analyzing the strong connections at Tobin James, many trends arose. The interviews showcased that employees interact positively inside and outside of the organization, often choosing to stay at work after hours to hang out with coworkers. Barnard (1938) argues activity coordination is vital to the organization-constituting process, presenting organizations as systems that are dependent on the cooperative stance taken by workers toward executive arrangements. As a family owned and operated winery Toby, Lance and Claire excel at treating staff like an extension of their own family. By allowing after hours socializing and providing staff dinners, tasting room employees, managers and owners are able to spend time together within a common social unit outside of formal structural arrangements. In turn, these activities increase employee satisfaction and commitment in the workplace. Steers (1977) defines commitment as the strength of an employee's involvement and identification with the organization. Tobin James employees use socializing as an agent to create friendships, increasing positive regard for one another through supportive communication and bonding. In dealing with the stresses of work, it is likely that coworkers will be able to provide more support than friends

and family outside of the workplace. As Ray (1987) noted, “the overt and subtle stresses in the workplace are known to members and unclear to nonmembers. As a result, supervisors and coworkers are probably in a better position to provide support than non-organizational members” (p. 174). Results support this claim by showing employees feel supported by owners, managers and coworkers no matter what situation – describing Tobin James as one big family. Thus, the social aspect of working at Tobin James is crucial for employee well-being, using time spent together outside of work hours to bolster coworker relationships and reify commitment to the organization.

### **Institutional Positioning**

After uncovering Tobin James’ unique organizational identity, many trends arose. The winery stands out amongst their competitors in Paso Robles – and California as a whole – due to their unwavering values and strong workplace culture. People who enter the tasting room immediately recognize the ways Tobin James is an anomaly in the wine industry: loud, raucous tasting room; all three bars filled with people; and people tasting wines free of charge. Upon arrival, people witness both customers and employees having fun in a casual, carefree atmosphere that feels different to many other high-end modern tasting rooms. In comparison, Tobin James has a genuine, no-nonsense approach to wine that is happily welcomed by individuals who identify with this environment. Albert and Whetten (1985) refer to organizational identity as the core, distinctive, and enduring features unique to an institution; and Gioia (1998) asserts that “identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion” (p.17). Interviews with wine club members showed that people recognize Tobin James’ organizational identity as distinct, especially compared to other wineries in Paso Robles and areas such as Napa, Sonoma and Temecula. One distinction made was the fun and

friendly disposition of the staff which made them feel at home in the tasting room. Researchers have shown that individuals’ identification with an organization leads to increased support of – and participation in – the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992); and further, this identity is inherently connected to communication that occurs within the organization, as communication is the social glue that ties members and organizations together (Euske & Roberts, 1987). Tobin James is superior at catering to the unique needs of the customer, regardless of perceived experience or status. Therefore, the amazing quality of wine combined with the welcoming tasting environment serves Tobin James well by attracting wine drinkers who do not identify with the expectations of many standardized wineries. Interview results showed that members were immediately attracted to the winery’s atmosphere – many having unique experiences with tasting room staff or the owners – and after tasting the wines all three joined the James Gang wine club upon their first visit. This strong response attests to Tobin James’ successful identity differentiation and positioning amongst its competitors in the wine industry.

Organizational identity would be impossible to disseminate without the help of tasting room staff, and results showed that members were impressed with the staff culture and longevity of Tobin James’ employees. O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) contend that organizational identification leads to decreased employee turnover, and Tobin James accomplishes this longevity through the strong values that the owners uphold in all areas of their business, from employees to customers: making people feel important and treating them well. By paying tasting room staff a consistent, high hourly wage – instead of the typical commission-based approach – employees assess their value to the organization not just as their ability to sell, but their worth as an individual. Employees positively assess certain episodes and events because these experiences resonate with deeply held beliefs about what is good about working (Lutgen-Sandvik, Riforgiate,

& Fletcher, 2011); and Giddens (1991) asserts employees are pleased with better-than-average salaries and benefits because it points to them as valued workers. Thus, by not being paid solely on commission, Tobin James employees feel more valued and autonomously work harder for the organization as opposed to competing with coworkers for ontological security. In turn, this reifies the comradery and strong workplace culture that is crucial to the organization’s success. Ultimately, Tobin James gives employees above-average treatment which motivates them to be successful not just on an individual level, but for the organization as a whole. It is this priority of treating employees well that recreates the social conduct in the tasting room, attracting customers and sustaining the success of the organization indefinitely.

### **Limitations**

Although the study presented insightful findings concerning the success of Tobin James’ “James Gang” wine club compared to other wineries in respect to the four flows of communication, there were some limitations. First, only three employees and three wine club members – a small quantity in comparison to the total number of people in the James Gang wine club – were interviewed. If time allowed, a larger number of interviews should have been conducted with both members and employees to yield more generalized results. Second, all participating wine club members were California residents. In order to gain a broader sense of motivations for remaining members of the wine club, out-of-state participants should have been interviewed. Lastly, all wine club members recruited expressed interest in participating, which may be indicative of support for the winery rather than representing most long-term members. In the future, research in this area should take into account how membership commitment might change with younger generations, as well as how to attract and sustain commitment with these individuals.

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## Appendix A

### Consumer Interview Template:

1. How long have you been a member of the Tobin James wine club?
2. What drew you to this wine club membership as opposed to others in Paso Robles?  
(applies to flow of membership negotiation)
3. Describe your experience with Tobin James Cellars leading up to joining the wine club.  
(applies to narrative paradigm theory)
4. Are you/have you been a wine club member at any other winery in Paso Robles?
5. If applicable, what made you ultimately end that wine club membership? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)
6. How did you first hear about the James Gang wine club?
7. Have you gotten other people to join Tobin James' wine club?

### Employee Interview Template:

1. How long have you been working at Tobin James?
2. What attracted you to this tasting room as opposed to others in the area? (applies to flow of institutional positioning)
3. How long have you been involved in this industry?
4. How often do you work in the tasting room? (applies to flow of organizational self-structuring)
5. Have you worked at other winery tasting rooms in the area?
  - If yes, what was your experiences with that winery?
  - Why did you leave?
6. Do you hang out with other Tobin James employees outside of the tasting room? (applies to flow of activity coordination)
  - If yes, would you say that the workplace is a friendly environment?
  - Would you describe your experience with management to be more vertical or horizontal?
  - How are problems resolved that arise in the workplace from time to time?

## Appendix B

### Consumer Interview Transcript:

#### Interviewee 1

**Interviewer:** How long have you been a member of the Tobin James wine club?

**Interviewee:** Close to 25 years, between 20 and 25. I’m one of the members that gets to pick up their shipment instead of having it shipped to them!

**Interviewer:** What drew you to this wine club membership as opposed to others in Paso Robles? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)

**Interviewee:** Tobin James was the first wine club I ever joined. There weren’t nearly as many wineries in Paso at that time, only a couple – but it was the first one I joined and I fell in love with the wines immediately. We’ve always been drawn to Zinfandels and they made amazing ones, and still do. It was that and the people, the people are always so friendly, I don’t know if you’ve ever met Carla, but she’s been there forever and always will recognize us and says hello when we come in. Also on a weekend you could always find Toby or Lance in the tasting room mingling with the clients, and they would take us back into the barrel room and let us taste from the barrels. They were always just so friendly and open.

**Interviewer:** Describe your experience with Tobin James Cellars leading up to joining the wine club. (applies to narrative paradigm theory)

**Interviewee:** One thing that we always look for in a wine club or a winery when we go in is when we walk in the door, someone says hello/how are you/come over we’ll make some space for you at the bar. We’ve been to a lot of wineries in the San Luis area and it’s just not that same treatment, it’s different. I mean we’ve stood at Bailyana and never been recognized or addressed.

**Interviewer:** Oh really? What did you end up doing, just go up and make yourself seen?

**Interviewee:** We just ended up leaving. No one ever approached us to say, “we’ll make room for you in a second” or “it’s a really busy day” – nothing. Something about TJC is that it’s just so much more comfortable and friendlier than Napa or places down south like Temecula. The tastings were ridiculous – like \$20 – so we ended up just drinking beer by the pool instead.

**Interviewer:** (Laughs) Hey, that makes sense it’s the sense of getting your money’s worth!

**Interviewee:** Yeah well, we’ve seen the area change a lot in recent years as more industrial style wineries have come in, and you can just feel the difference in their interactions and how they operate. Another thing we love too about Toby is that when we go in there, no matter how many guests we have with us they always treat the guests as well as they treat us, and always let them taste the best of the wines. They treat our guests just as if they were part of the family, part of the group.

**Interviewer:** That really is awesome.

**Interviewee:** But you know, it’s the people like you and the people like Carla that’s been there forever that recognizes you and says, “thanks for coming back.” It’s those special touches that we just love.

**Interviewer:** Are you/have you been a wine club member at any other winery in Paso Robles?

**Interviewee:** We belong to six wine clubs, and the main thing that attracts us besides the wine and the people is music. Since Toby doesn’t really do that, it’s definitely the people, wine and overall experience that keeps us coming back – we’ll stay there forever! If we’re part of a wine club and something changes for us then we adjust and join a different one.

**Interviewer:** If applicable, what made you ultimately end that wine club membership? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)

**Interviewee:** Several times it’s been because of things like we weren’t notified of pick-up parties, they didn’t get our emails, just miscommunications across the board. We loved (Shale Oak) but we never received their emails and the only time we knew that we were getting a wine club shipment is because my credit card got charged.

**Interviewer:** That’s unfortunate, so it was ultimately lack of communication that did it for you?

**Interviewee:** Exactly, no communication. Or a couple of places we belonged to, they changed their wine club and the price was doubled. We joined for one club, and then they decided they would change it and the price was doubled for the same number of bottles – at that point, we said we’re out.

**Interviewer:** Wow, yeah that is a crazy price jump for the same number of bottles. I know for TJC’s wine club, the price has gone up from previous years but not nearly that much.

**Interviewee:** When I very first joined it was around \$120 something, then to \$139 and now around \$179, but you know, you still are getting eight bottles and it comes with the gift!

**Interviewer:** The gifts are awesome! Do any of your other wine clubs do gifts?

**Interviewee:** Sometimes small things, but nothing like what we get from Tobin James. I actually do payroll for another winery in Paso Robles, and Toby is just different – just a different, different winery.

**Interviewer:** Could you elaborate on that a bit further?

**Interviewee:** Just the people! The people who have been there for years and years. I think just seeing the longevity of the staff there is just, I mean, it’s amazing. A lot of wineries turn over

employees like, three times a year. You go in and ask, “where’s so-and-so” and they’ve left! So, it really seems like Tobin is doing something good for their employees as well.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I really do believe that a huge aspect of a tasting room is walking in and seeing the people working a job that they love, and really enjoying working with each other.

**Interviewee:** Exactly. I mean, from an HR perspective I’ve seen people come in that hop around from winery to winery every few months or so and I just wonder why can’t people keep these servers? I don’t understand it.

**Interviewer:** How did you first hear about the James Gang wine club?

**Interviewee:** Just going in there and tasting. I went in with one of my girlfriends and we just had so much fun and loved the wines.

**Interviewer:** So, you joined the wine club your very first time there? That’s awesome.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, we had such a good time and just thought, why not??

**Interviewer:** Have you gotten other people to join Tobin James’ wine club?

**Interviewee:** Yes, yes, my sister and quite a few of my friends. I couldn’t tell you how many because there’s been a decent amount, but we love bringing anyone we can there. Whenever we have people visit, we always bring them to Toby.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Interviewee:** I just can’t express enough how great the service always is with Tobin James. The atmosphere, the comradery, and just everyone we meet is so warm and welcoming – we truly appreciate that.

**Interviewer:** And we truly appreciate you! Thanks so much for your time.

## Interviewee 2

**Interviewer:** How long have you been a member of the Tobin James wine club?

**Interviewee:** A long time (laughs). At least 20 years? Let’s go with 20+ years.

**Interviewer:** What drew you to this wine club membership as opposed to others in Paso Robles? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)

**Interviewee:** I would probably say the tasting room, and the servers like yourself.

**Interviewer:** That’s great! Could you elaborate a bit on that?

**Interviewee:** Everybody is so happy! And it seems genuine, you know, not like it’s being put on. People are so willing to help and tell you about the wines, they are all so knowledgeable.

**Interviewer:** Describe your experience with Tobin James Cellars leading up to joining the wine club. (applies to narrative paradigm theory)

**Interviewee:** Oh boy, it was such a long time ago! I remember the tasting room was much smaller, only the one bar. It’s kind of hard to remember because it was such a long time ago – the wines have always been incredible, and reasonable in price. The wine has only gotten better over the years. It’s what keeps us there too.

**Interviewer:** Are you/have you been a wine club member at any other winery in Paso Robles?

**Interviewee:** Yes, we’re members of about six wineries.

**Interviewer:** If applicable, what made you ultimately end that wine club membership? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)

**Interviewee:** There was one that we dropped, because we didn’t agree with the new owner of the winery.

**Interviewer:** What did you not agree with this new owner about, was it more values or business related?

**Interviewee:** Well, it was definitely the values, but also the wines got much more expensive. I would say that the average bottle of wine there has increased quite a bit. The wines that we loved the most went up in price – and I understand that Tobin has some wines that are in a higher price range, but you still have your lower prices which are wonderful. It’s directed towards everyone, not just the ones who have lots of money.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I agree that jumps in prices can be a deal breaker for so many people. When you experienced these changes in price, did you notice any other changes such as in the tasting room?

**Interviewee:** Oh yes, everything changed. Everything is different. They completely renovated the place, and got rid of the area in the back that used to be reserved for just club members. Now I think that area of the winery is just for production purposes – no one is allowed back there anymore.

**Interviewer:** How did you first hear about the James Gang wine club?

**Interviewee:** My wife and I were coming up to visit Paso Robles, and just sort of came across Tobin and joined the same day! There weren’t very many wineries in Paso at the time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah in the 90’s I believe that Paso Robles only had about eighteen wineries! That’s why I think it’s incredible that despite all of the growth that has occurred in the area, Tobin’s wine club members have made the choice to stick with this particular membership.

**Interviewer:** Have you gotten other people to join Tobin James’ wine club?

**Interviewee:** Oh yeah!

**Interviewer:** Do you bring people in or just tell them about it?

**Interviewee:** Both, but the majority of the people are people we have brought in over the years with us to Toby.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Interviewee:** Something that hasn’t always been part of the wine club that has been great is the gifts that Tobin James puts in their shipments. It used to not be something that they did, but now everyone I know who is part of the wine club says, “oh what will the next gift be?!” That has always been a nice surprise. Also, in the beginning we were getting a lot of dessert wines in our shipments, and when we called to ask to stop receiving them they fixed it, no problem. So, they replaced those wines with ones of the same value – actually, of better value than the ones that were replacing! That was so nice of them to do. I know that other wineries probably do something similar, but we’ve never been comfortable asking anyone else.

**Interviewer:** That’s great that you felt comfortable enough to let them know! I’m sure they were more than happy to accommodate you.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, another thing is that sometimes we’re drawn to wine clubs when there is a beautiful view from the tasting room. Tobin James surely does not have that (laughs), but that doesn’t make a whole lot of difference to my wife and I. Personnel keeps us there too, not just wine. I can drink good wine but not have the best experience with the servers. But also, you guys have a great selection of wine and as a wine club member you get to taste everything, and the wines have kept developing over the years.

**Interviewer:** That’s so good to hear! That brings me to the end of my questions, thank you so much for your time.

### **Interviewee 3**

**Interviewer:** How long have you been a member of the Tobin James wine club?

**Interviewee:** Oh, well it’s been so long that I don’t quite remember! At least 15-17 years.

**Interviewer:** What drew you to this wine club membership as opposed to others in Paso Robles? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)

**Interviewee:** I think it was multiple factors. For one, financially it’s a great deal – every bottle’s value is reserve price, and the wine is always good! And we’ve always had a good experience there, it’s always welcoming. If you let your server know that you’re a James Gang member, there’s a pouring of the reserves that makes you feel really cool. They do a very good job on making people feel comfortable and welcome.

**Interviewer:** Describe your experience with Tobin James Cellars leading up to joining the wine club. (applies to narrative paradigm theory)

**Interviewee:** It’s actually a funny story, because I’d been with two of my cousins and my sister, and we’d driven up to go white water river rafting and decided to extend the trip by going to Paso. The last time we had all tasted together had been in a Napa kind of format, where you had to choose the wines you wanted to taste and there was money involved in the tasting – we walked into Tobin and asked the server how it worked, and they simply replied, “well we start with the whites and then move onto the reds!” (Laughs) We were like, oh, okay! So, it was definitely the environment – I think we joined on the spot that day because we had such a good experience. And then throughout the years we’ve had really unique experiences, like when the winery doors get locked and we’re in there with Toby, drinking reserves and chatting!

**Interviewer:** Wow, truly a V.I.P treatment! That’s awesome. I bet that it must be nice to walk into the winery and have the people who work there recognize you.

**Interviewee:** That’s the thing! You know, we really don’t go in that often, but still the courtesy that’s extended is like you’ve known them forever.

**Interviewer:** I really like that sentiment, could you elaborate on that a bit?

**Interviewee:** I’m sure if I walked up to Toby tomorrow, he wouldn’t remember the experience of us drinking wine together twelve years ago and hanging out with four cousins. But we had a great time, and it felt great knowing you met the guy involved in making and caring for the wines! So, we had that intimate experience – but I haven’t seen him since. Conversely, we got engaged at Tobin and ended up having pizza with Claire and Lance, and it’s like, they may remember who we are but probably not, and I wouldn’t fault them! But you still feel like they know who you are.

**Interviewer:** Are you/have you been a wine club member at any other winery in Paso Robles?

**Interviewee:** Oh yeah, I have. A couple of them for different periods over the years.

**Interviewer:** If applicable, what made you ultimately end that wine club membership? (applies to flow of membership negotiation)

**Interviewee:** Well, I was a member with one winery because their wines were affordable, but after a while I just wasn’t in love with the wine anymore. Then I picked up another one which I really liked, but ultimately, I had to drop them because of financial reasons. At one time, I was a

member of about 4-5 wineries up in Paso, and a testament to Tobin is that when times changed and I had to financially cut back on just about everything, I kept Tobin! It was the only winery I kept when I had to get rid of wineries.

**Interviewer:** How did you first hear about the James Gang wine club?

**Interviewee:** I hadn't heard about it until I went into the winery that day and joined.

**Interviewer:** Have you gotten other people to join Tobin James' wine club?

**Interviewee:** (Laughs) Oh yeah. Us four cousins joined on the spot, both of our moms joined, another sister joined. So yeah, we've gotten quite a few people to join off of our membership.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you would like to add that you think is important for me to know regarding the Tobin James wine club?

**Interviewee:** I've never had a bad time there, and it holds a lot of very fond memories because of it. I think for a winery to be able to do that is great. Another thing is that we got engaged there, and when we went to purchase the wine for our wedding we asked if they did discounts on wine above club price. We ended up getting 10-12 cases and they gave us 30% off instead of the regular 20% wine club discount.

**Interviewer:** Definitely, it makes the whole thing much more special. I do want to pick your brain once more, since you mentioned that you've never had a bad time there – I would love if you could elaborate on that more.

**Interviewer:** Well, I mean, sometimes you walk into wineries and it can be overwhelming or disruptive, especially if there are bigger parties like bridal groups and wine tours. But it's never gotten that way for us at Tobin. I actually didn't remember this until just now, but one time we called ahead when we were tasting with some other couples to make a reservation, and the person on the phone said they'd just had a large party come in and weren't sure about accepting another party. Then I mentioned that I'm a James Gang member, and they said, "Oh why didn't you say that earlier! Come on in, we'll make room for you and figure it out." So again, you can get whatever kind of experience you want to get there – if you want to focus on the wine and who you're with, you can do that. But also, if you want to go next to a livelier group, you can do that too.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I would have to agree! I feel the same way about the people that work there. I always say each person has their own persona so when you're tasting at Tobin your experience can be different every time.

**Interviewee:** It's so fun. Even on the day when my husband and I met you, we at first were with another girl who was lovely, but it was her first day on the job. So then after a bit we made our way over to you, and it is that engagement that you get when you're a wine club member and feeling that the person serving you also wants to know more about you – and you feel like you are part of something really cool.

**Interviewer:** I really love that, and I’m happy that I could be part of that experience for you both. That’s exactly why I love doing what I do, meeting people like you guys! Thank you so much for your time.

**Employee Interview Transcript:**

**Interviewee 1**

**Interviewer:** How long have you been working at Tobin James?

**Interviewee:** I’ve been working there for one year and three months.

**Interviewer:** What attracted you to this tasting room as opposed to others in the area? (applies to flow of institutional positioning)

**Interviewee:** Well, I was looking for a part-time job on the weekends and saw that the position was open via Mustang Jobs. I knew that the place had a good reputation in the community for being fun so that’s why I applied!

**Interviewer:** How long have you been involved in this industry?

**Interviewee:** It is my first job in the industry.

**Interviewer:** How often do you work in the tasting room? (applies to flow of organizational self-structuring)

**Interviewee:** That depends, but sometimes it’s four times a week, and other times five times a week.

**Interviewer:** Have you worked at other winery tasting rooms in the area?

**Interviewee:** I haven’t worked at other tasting rooms, but I’ve visited a lot of other wineries to go wine tasting. I feel like at Tobin when you’re working behind the bar it’s very relaxed and low-key, and you don’t have the pressure to behave a certain way in the tasting room or perform to any rules and it really is just more laid back. I try to create an environment where you don’t ask a stupid question ever, and when I wine taste at other wineries I definitely feel I need to look a certain way and look more professional even on the other side of the bar – I feel like it’s much fancier.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever had a very bad experience at a winery?

**Interviewee:** Not really, but there have been times when I’ve gone wine tasting while being in the industry and I wasn’t treated as a priority. There was one time I went to a winery and there

was just myself and an older couple, and the older couple definitely got more attention as opposed to a single, young female. I definitely feel that there is stereotyping in the wine industry: what kind of buyer they are, have they tasted wine before, etc. What I’ve learned from working in the wine industry is that you can’t judge a book by its cover, and you never really know the taster’s experience – you must keep an open mind.

**Interviewer:** Do you hang out with other Tobin James employees outside of the tasting room? (applies to flow of activity coordination)

**Interviewee:** Yes, absolutely. I go wine tasting with fellow employees, I get dinner with fellow employees, I even watch the Bachelorette with fellow employees (laughs).

**Interviewer:** Would you say that the workplace is a friendly environment?

**Interviewee:** It is more than friends, it’s family. I think that if I had not started off with Tobin James as my introduction to the wine industry, I would not have the passion or the drive that I have today.

**Interviewer:** Would you describe your experience with management to be more vertical or horizontal?

**Interviewee:** I would definitely say it is vertical because we all have our own specific jobs, but it doesn’t feel too hierarchal. There are instances where you’re told what to do, but that needs to come from management anyway – sometimes you need direction. I do feel that management is super helpful when it comes to resolving issues, work out schedules, and make sure everyone is happy. Our managers are managers first, friends second – but that doesn’t stop them from trying to be our friend. Management knows that we know how to do our job, but their job is to guide us and make sure we’re treated right and things go well in the tasting room.

**Interviewer:** I agree, and that kind of goes back to the friendliness of the approach – you know that it isn’t something that is solely about you but for the sake of bettering the functioning in the tasting room amongst the employees.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, ultimately, I know that my coworkers and our management has my back no matter what situation I get into – I will always have the support of the winery and support of my coworkers. I think that the owners know how to treat their employees and really take care of us. They want us to stick around, so if there’s an issue they’re going to approach that issue and resolve it. They want us to be happy and they listen to what we have to say, asking for our input even if it isn’t something that directly involves us. The owners try to create a fun and stress-free environment even though there are obviously stressors. Also, we don’t work on commission for sales or wine clubs so it feels much more relaxed, not just in competition with our coworkers – I

feel like that can sometimes lead to more stress to perform better in the tasting room. At Tobin James, we do what we do because we want to. We talk about the wines and we try to broaden people’s horizons and knowledge of the wine industry because we want to, not because we’re pressured to do so by our employer. I don’t think about my coworkers as coworkers, I think about them as my family.

**Interviewer:** How are problems resolved that arise in the workplace from time to time?

**Interviewee:** I would say that voicing my opinion and how I feel, trying to go to management as soon as a problem starts and not letting it resolve on its own and become a bigger issue. But I honestly haven’t had many problems! Sometimes, however, I wake up in the morning and don’t want to go to work, and then I get there and I’m receiving hugs from my coworkers and I can tell they’re genuinely happy that I’m there – that makes it so worthwhile to come to work every day.

**Interviewer:** Wow, I really love hearing about the bond that you have with the other employees because I feel the same way!

**Interviewee:** Yeah, I feel that if Tobin James hires someone and within a couple they don’t start to mesh with everyone, then they’ll never mesh with everyone. You can be great at your job, but if you don’t get along with your coworkers then it’s not beneficial for the winery to employ you, because the rest of their employees aren’t happy. And you definitely want to create an environment where your employees get along with each other as coworkers.

**Interviewer:** Has there ever been a specific instance with a coworker that has forced you to involve management?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, with another coworker I always try to resolve the issue between us first. But in one specific instance, I started hearing the same complaints from other coworkers about that same person. At first it starts off as a way to vent, but ultimately, I ended up going to management to point out that this wasn’t just an issue that I was having. I felt that it wasn’t fair to the rest of us, you know.

**Interviewer:** So, you ended up going to management after you had realized that it wasn’t just an issue for you, but for the staff?

**Interviewee:** Absolutely.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that you would have still felt comfortable approaching management if it had ended up being an issue between just you and this coworker?

**Interviewee:** It was never an issue between us personally, but an issue between us professionally, and that’s why I felt it was appropriate to approach management. I saw that she wasn’t doing her job, and customers were reacting – if I had felt that it was a personal issue, I would not have involved management. But when it starts to influence your work performance and how customers are perceiving you, I would absolutely go to management again.

**Interviewer:** Great, that is so helpful. Thank you for your time!

## Interviewee 2

**Interviewer:** How long have you been working at Tobin James?

**Interviewee:** Since last May, so a year and a half.

**Interviewer:** What attracted you to this tasting room as opposed to others in the area? (applies to flow of institutional positioning)

**Interviewee:** The comradery of the employees combined with the quality of the wines. And the holding of the employees, actually.

**Interviewer:** That’s great! Feel free to elaborate on that as well.

**Interviewee:** Well for one, they pay their employees the best out of the industry. Second, the fact that people have been their employees for so long – the people who work in the tasting room have worked there for such a long time. You don’t see that very often.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I heard the turnover rate for employees in a tasting room can be pretty quick!

**Interviewee:** Definitely, and even for management it’s only around 1-2 years. That means that people are happy – you don’t stay if you’re not happy.

**Interviewer:** How long have you been involved in this industry?

**Interviewee:** So, I come with a different approach on this – I used to own a wine distribution business, and with that I worked closely with multiple wineries in the area, and I was getting their wine out into the marketplace for them. By working so closely with many of these wineries, I was able to see the inner workings of the wineries without working in the winery itself. I’ve seen firsthand for over eighteen years now what goes on in the wine industry.

**Interviewer:** You’ve definitely seen some things I’m assuming! This is the first tasting room you’ve worked in then?

**Interviewee:** Yes, this is the first tasting room that I’ve worked in. And I had my choices of many places to go, and even though I didn’t sell Tobin James out of the marketplace, I knew some of the employees that worked there and knew it was a solid place to go to.

**Interviewer:** I agree completely! This is the only tasting room I’ve worked in as well, and it always makes me wonder what goes on in other tasting rooms.

**Interviewee:** Catty. Very, very catty.

**Interviewer:** Oh, really? What would attribute that to?

**Interviewee:** Well, there’s a few aspects. One of them is being paid commission. Even though that would be wonderful because I know I do well with sales, it creates a very serious competition between all of the people in the tasting room.

**Interviewer:** That makes sense, you’re trying to get more sales as an employee as opposed to simply contributing to the sales of the winery.

**Interviewee:** Yeah exactly. So, you’re really not caring about the other person, you’re just trying to talk to whoever will get you the sales. It’s about the caring aspect that we can feel free to have at Tobin, because we’re not concerned about the competition. And they pay so well because of the fact we don’t get commission – it allows me to know that I can bank on my paycheck, instead of wondering what my sales are going to be for that week. It creates a family atmosphere.

**Interviewer:** That’s a very good point. How often do you work in the tasting room? (applies to flow of organizational self-structuring)

**Interviewee:** 4-5 days week, but mostly 5 days a week.

**Interviewer:** Have you worked at other winery tasting rooms in the area?

**Interviewee:** I didn’t work in another tasting room, I only ran the distribution company that I had to ultimately close. So, I went to the next best thing.

**Interviewer:** Do you hang out with other Tobin James employees outside of the tasting room? (applies to flow of activity coordination)

**Interviewee:** Yes! And that’s something you don’t see very often!

**Interviewer:** (Laughs) I know, that’s why I love this question.

**Interviewee:** I know that you’re newer to the industry, but the one thing I want to say is that there are not many places where you go to work, you clock in, you clock out at the end of the day, and then stay. Most cases, you get out of there. That is something that is very, very unique about Tobin James. There are no tasting rooms that I know of where you can hang out at the end of the day, and not only that, have the owners come hang out with you.

**Interviewer:** It’s such a fun time! I love how it is so intimate and we can all taste together, it really helps to talk about the wine we’re pouring every day.

**Interviewee:** The owners do that frequently! It used to just be once a week when they first started doing that, so that they could connect with some of the people in the tasting room – and then they loved some of the people in the tasting room! They were gathering information, and we were gathering information, and it turned into something that started happened every night of the week.

**Interviewer:** I wasn’t even aware that they happened so often until recently when I started working more during the week! That’s when I realized it was so awesome to interact with the owners and feel like they truly appreciated my presence there.

**Interviewee:** It’s because they want to connect with the customers, and they know you are connecting with their customers. They want the connection with you, and you are connecting with them. And there is a huge piece of that pie, that businesses – regardless of what the business is – do not understand. Customers want to know who the owners are, if they’re not invested in their organization or if they’re awesome. As an employee, you have that relationship and get to say that everyone genuinely has fun together. Who can usually say that?

**Interviewer:** Not a lot, definitely not a lot.

**Interviewer:** Would you say that the workplace is a friendly environment?

**Interviewee:** Yes. The employees love it, which makes the wine club members love it. Plus, the owners are genuine and it does them well.

**Interviewer:** You just made a connection that I hadn’t made before, the link between the owners and the customers!

**Interviewee:** It comes down from the top, it really does filter down from the top. You have amazing, caring owners who hire well and who appreciate the job that they have. Then when people walk into the tasting room and feel comfortable, happy, and they feel it too.

**Interviewer:** Would you describe your experience with management to be more vertical or horizontal?

**Interviewee:** Compared to past working experience, it’s very horizontal. But you have to remember that in businesses that are close, you are going to have almost the same family dynamic that you would in a family. So, you’re going to have somebody who has to make calls, and you must have that respect level even if you don’t necessarily agree with the calls being made. But I feel like our management does a good job at calling situations when they need to be

called, while still being approachable and caring. Management can be scary, and we don't have scary.

**Interviewer:** And communication with management is so crucial to an organization! On that note, how are problems resolved that arise in the workplace from time to time?

**Interviewee:** I've experienced intimidation when bringing up problems in the workplace, because I don't know how they're going to feel about it. But also, I'm comfortable enough to bring it up – is it going to go my way? No, not necessarily! Are they going to make me feel bad because of it? Definitely not.

**Interviewer:** Knowing that you can approach management with issues and count on them to be reasonable is so important. Otherwise, if people are afraid of speaking up, there could be some very real issues that don't get addressed early on.

**Interviewee:** Yes. And what I appreciate about our management is that as soon as a problem is brought to light, they gather as much information as they can from all sides before doing anything. They take the time to dig deep and then act accordingly, but always talk to you in a casual setting and reasonable way.

**Interviewer:** Great, that is so helpful. Thank you for your time!

### Interviewee 3

**Interviewer:** How long have you been working at Tobin James?

**Interviewee:** It will be ten years as of May! It seems like longer but in a good way.

**Interviewer:** What attracted you to this tasting room as opposed to others in the area? (applies to flow of institutional positioning)

**Interviewee:** I had a friend who was working at Tobin James at the time, and the general manager needed people to help out with Wine Fest Weekend, so I showed up and put my game face on and the rest is history!

**Interviewer:** How long have you been involved in this industry?

**Interviewee:** That was when I got involved in the industry, I had never served wine in my life but knew that I loved it. I knew a lot about the area, so fortunately it kind of all went hand in hand.

**Interviewer:** How often do you work in the tasting room? (applies to flow of organizational self-structuring)

**Interviewee:** Depending, around 4-5 times a week.

**Interviewer:** Have you worked at other winery tasting rooms in the area?

**Interviewee:** No, just Tobin James!

**Interviewer:** No problem! That being said, have you had many experiences as a consumer of wine in a different tasting room?

**Interviewee:** Oh, yes, many experiences.

**Interviewer:** Have any of those experiences been negative or less than ideal?

**Interviewee:** Well yeah, of course there have been instances. One occasion at a winery that I remember having a mediocre experience – and I would never name names – there was a lack of acknowledgement towards us from the tasting room staff. I was a younger taster with a group of older people, and I got the impression that the people helping us didn’t think that we knew much about wine. I refrained from mentioning that we were industry right out the gate because I like to see how the tasting room treats the average customer, and unfortunately, I was kind of talked down to.

**Interviewer:** Wow that is unfortunate. As a younger worker in the industry, I definitely feel that sometimes as well. Even more unfortunate is the fact that one negative experience in a tasting room can be the deciding factor on if you return or not!

**Interviewee:** Definitely, especially because we have such high standards at Tobin James. Saying hello and greeting people I think is extremely important, and unfortunately that was not the experience that we received.

**Interviewer:** Do you hang out with other Tobin James employees outside of the tasting room? (applies to flow of activity coordination)

**Interviewee:** Hmm, let me think about that (laughs). Yes, all the time!

**Interviewer:** (Laughs) I knew that was coming. So, you would say that the workplace is a friendly environment?

**Interviewee:** Definitely, I think so. We all look out for each other.

**Interviewer:** I love that answer, could you elaborate a bit further?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, I think that when Lance, Claire and Toby are around they always try to involve us in conversation and making decisions in the winery – seeing how we feel about things is important to them. Having a great staff that is trusting is a huge factor, and I think having fun is our main thing! If people are enjoying the wines and we are all enjoying each other’s company, then that is what’s making the tasting room function I think. It’s just fun and we treat each other like family!

**Interviewer:** Would you describe your experience with management to be more vertical or horizontal?

**Interviewee:** I think that it can go both ways! Yes, we have the vertical structure with the management and the whole nine, but there is definitely still a comradery there. Because first and foremost it is a business, and on a busy day we need to have roles and be on our best game. But I think that behind the scenes and when we’re with the owners it can be horizontal, because they really do want to make sure that we feel comfortable enough that we can express our feelings, decisions, and opinions on things. So, yes, I feel like there can be a mixture of both.

**Interviewer:** It really has been amazing getting to know the owners, management and staff on a personal level as opposed to being just someone who pours wine in the tasting room. It gives another of appreciation and value to the job!

**Interviewee:** It’s pretty incredible the way that we don’t structure things perfectly to a tee – that little bit of chaos that naturally occurs in the tasting room works well to our advantage in that way. It adds to the personal aspect of things between one another.

**Interviewer:** How are problems resolved that arise in the workplace from time to time?

**Interviewee:** Usually it’s just a simple, “Hey, what’s going on? You’re acting this way today, is there a reason for that?” A big aspect that we’re all pretty good at is being able to read each other’s vibe or body language, and realizing things may be going on in each other’s lives outside of the tasting room. And from there, we just squash it! We just deal with it before it escalates into something bigger, we don’t want it to fester.

**Interviewer:** I’ve had friends in other tasting rooms that can’t say the same thing, and I couldn’t be more appreciative for that! That brings me to the end of my questions, but is there anything else you’d like to add that wasn’t necessarily addressed in this interview?

**Interviewee:** Since you’ve been working in the tasting room for a while, I think that you’ve seen how we’re all in this together. Yes, I may be a manager and there are things that need to be done, but really, we’re just a big team – and a big family when it comes down to it. I’m just happy to be there, and I’m happy that you’re there! I’m only as good as my team!

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much, I’m so lucky to work with you and the rest of the staff! And thank you for your time!