



# INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY

**High-ranking defectors provide an unprecedented inside look at the Church of Scientology and its leader, David Miscavige.**

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## About the Story

Scientology leader David Miscavige is the focus of this special report from the *St. Petersburg Times*. Former executives of the Church of Scientology, including two of the former top lieutenants to Miscavige, have come forward to describe a culture of intimidation and violence under Miscavige. These articles were first published by the *Times* on June 21, 22 and 23, 2009.

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This digital newsbook was produced for the *St. Petersburg Times* at the Reynolds Journalism Institute in Columbia, MO. [www.rjonline.org](http://www.rjonline.org)

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High-ranking defectors say Scientology's leader enforces loyalty with beatings and bullying.

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New details about the case of Lisa McPherson — who died in the care of Scientologists — from the executive who directed the church's handling of the case. He admits he ordered the destruction of incriminating evidence.

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The defectors describe bizarre behavior, group punishments and other facets of the church's internal justice system.

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## Online | [tampabay.com/scientology](http://tampabay.com/scientology)

Go online for more on Scientology, including video interviews with two of the defectors and previous coverage of the church.

## About this story

Mark C. "Marty" Rathbun left the Church of Scientology staff in late 2004, ending a 27-year career that saw him rise to be among the organization's top leaders. For the past four years, he has lived a low-profile life in Texas. Some speculated he had died.

In February, Rathbun posted an Internet message announcing he was available to counsel other disaffected Scientologists.

"Having dug myself out of the dark pit where many who leave the church land," he wrote, "I began lending a hand to others similarly situated."

Contacted by the *St. Petersburg Times*, Rathbun agreed to tell the story of his years in Scientology and what led to his leaving. The *Times* interviewed him at his home in Texas, and he came to Clearwater to revisit some of the scenes he described.

Seeking to corroborate Rathbun's story, the newspaper contacted others who were in Scientology during the same period and have left the church: Mike Rinder, one of Rathbun's closest associates for two decades; Tom De Vocht, whom Rathbun named as key to his decision to leave; and later, Amy Scobee.

Rathbun and Rinder were well known to the reporters, who had interviewed them dozens of times, sometimes combatively, through years of controversy in Clearwater. They also hosted the reporters in Los Angeles in 1998, when Miscavige granted the only print media interview he has given.

Two reporters met Rinder in Denver, where he now lives, but he declined to be interviewed. About a month later, two Washington-based lawyers who work for the church showed up unannounced in Denver, informed Rinder that they had heard about the newspaper's visit and asked what he had revealed.

They reminded him that as one of the church's top legal officers, attorney-client privilege did not end when he left the church. They told him he could hurt the church by going public.

Weeks later, after the church provided the newspaper with a 2007 video of Rinder heatedly denying that Miscavige hit him and others, Rinder decided to talk to the *Times*.

De Vocht was interviewed in Winter Haven. Scobee was interviewed in Pinellas County, when she and her husband came to visit relatives.

The reporters interviewed the four defectors multiple times, and met with church spokesmen and lawyers for 25 hours.

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# THE TRUTH RUNDOWN

HIGH-RANKING DEFECTORS SAY SCIENTOLOGY'S LEADER ENFORCES LOYALTY WITH BEATINGS AND BULLYING.



Times (1998)

**After L. Ron Hubbard died, David Miscavige became Scientology's leader. Former church executives say Miscavige beat his staff. Church officials say the defectors are lying.**

## PART ONE OF THREE

BY JOE CHILDS AND THOMAS C. TOBIN  
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

**T**he leader of the Church of Scientology strode into the room with a boom box and an announcement: Time for a game of musical chairs. David Miscavige had kept more than 30 members of his church's

executive staff cooped up for weeks in a small office building outside Los Angeles, not letting them leave except to grab a shower. They slept on the floor, their food carted in.

Their assignment was to develop strategic plans for the church. But the leader trashed their every idea and berated them as incompetents and enemies, of him and the church.

Prove your devotion, Miscavige told them, by winning at musical chairs. Everyone else — losers, all of you — will be banished to Scientology outposts around the world. If families are split up, too bad.

To the music of Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* they played through the night, parading around a conference room in their Navy-style uniforms, grown men and women wrestling over chairs.

The next evening, early in 2004, Miscavige gathered the group and out of nowhere slapped a manager named Tom De Vocht, threw him to the ground and delivered more blows. De Vocht took the beating and the humiliation in silence — the way other executives always took the leader's attacks.

This account comes from executives who for decades were key figures in Scientology's powerful inner circle. Marty Rathbun and Mike Rinder, the highest-ranking executives to leave the church, are speaking out for the first time.

Two other former executives who defected also agreed to interviews with the *St. Petersburg Times*: De Vocht, who for years oversaw the church's spiritual headquarters in Clearwater, and Amy Scobee, who helped create Scientology's celebrity network, which caters to the likes of John Travolta and Tom Cruise.

## WHAT IS THE TRUTH RUNDOWN?

It's a Scientology term for a confession in which a member searches his memory for sins that caused him to believe something bad about the church and its leaders.

### SCIENTOLOGY'S ORIGINS



Scientology, which means "knowing how to know," is based on the works of L. Ron Hubbard. His best-seller, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, was published in 1950. Scientology was established in Los Angeles in 1954.

One by one, the four defectors walked away from the only life they knew. That Rathbun and Rinder are speaking out is a stunning reversal because they were among Miscavige’s closest associates, Haldeman and Ehrlichman to his Nixon.

Now they provide an unprecedented look inside the upper reaches of the tightly controlled organization. They reveal:

- Physical violence permeated Scientology’s international management team. Miscavige set the tone, routinely attacking his lieutenants. Rinder says the leader attacked him some 50 times.

Rathbun, Rinder and De Vocht admit that they, too, attacked their colleagues, to demonstrate loyalty to Miscavige and prove their mettle.

- Staffers are disciplined and controlled by a multilayered system of “ecclesiastical justice.” It includes publicly confessing sins and crimes to a group of peers, being ordered to

jump into a pool fully clothed, facing embarrassing “security checks” or, worse, being isolated as a “suppressive person.”

At the pinnacle of the hierarchy, Miscavige commands such power that managers follow his orders, however bizarre, with lemming-like obedience.

- Church staffers covered up how they botched the care of Lisa McPherson, a Scientologist who died after they held her 17 days in isolation at Clearwater’s Fort Harrison Hotel.

Rathbun, who Miscavige put in charge of dealing with the fallout from the case, admits that he ordered the destruction of incriminating evidence. He and others also reveal that Miscavige made an embarrassing miscalculation on McPherson’s Scientology counseling.

- With Miscavige calling the shots and Rathbun among those at his side, the church muscled the IRS into granting Scientology tax-exempt status. Of-

## TIMELINE » SCIENTOLOGY HISTORY



**May 1950:** L. Ron Hubbard's book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, is published.

**1954:** The first Church of Scientology opens in Los Angeles.

**Late 1975:** The Southern Land Development and Leasing Corp. buys the Fort Harrison Hotel and old Bank of Clearwater in downtown, and leases it to a secretive group called United Churches of Florida.

fering fresh perspective on one of the church's crowning moments, Rathbun details an extraordinary campaign of public pressure backed by thousands of lawsuits.

- To prop up revenues, Miscavige has turned to long-time parishioners, urging them to buy material that the church markets as must-have, improved sacred scripture.

Church officials deny the accusations. Miscavige never hit a single church staffer, not once, they said.

On May 13, the *Times* asked to interview Miscavige, in person or by phone, and renewed the request repeatedly the past five weeks. Church officials said Miscavige's schedule would not permit an interview before July.

At 5:50 p.m. Saturday, Miscavige e-mailed the *Times* to protest the newspaper's decision to publish instead of waiting until he was available. His letter said he would produce information "annihilating the credibility"

of the defectors. Beloved by millions of Scientologists, church spokesmen say, Miscavige has guided the church through a quarter-century of growth.

The defectors are liars, they say, bitter apostates who have dug up tired allegations from the Internet and inflated the importance of the positions they held in Scientology's dedicated work force known as the Sea Org. They say it was the defectors who physically abused staff members, and when Miscavige found out, he put a stop to it and demoted them.

Now they say the defectors are trying to stage a coup, inventing allegations so they can topple Miscavige and seize control of the church.

The defectors deny it. They say they are speaking out because Miscavige must be exposed.

Rathbun says the leader's mistreatment of staff has driven away managers and paralyzed those who stay. "It's becoming chaos because ... there's no



**Jan. 28, 1976:** It's announced that Scientology is the real buyer of the Fort Harrison Hotel.

**1977:** Scientology files the first of many lawsuits contesting its Pinellas County property tax bill. In Washington and Los Angeles, federal agents raid Scientology offices. According to FBI files, Scientologists arrived in Clearwater with plans to control civic leaders and discredit critics. The files also reveal that Scientologists staged a phony hit-and-run accident with Clearwater Mayor Gabe Cazares in an attempt to discredit him.

form of organization. Nobody's respected because he's constantly denigrating and beating on people."

"I don't want people to continue to be hurt and tricked and lied to," Rinder said. "I was unsuccessful in changing anything through my own lack of courage when I was inside the church.

"But I believe these abuses need to end ... This rot being instigated from inside Scientology actually is more destructive to the Scientology movement than anything external to it."

### BEATINGS: RANDOM, WHIMSICAL

At 49, Miscavige is fit and tanned, his chiseled good looks accented by intense blue eyes. His frame is on the short side at 5 feet 5, but solid, with a matching, vise-like handshake.

The voice, resonant and strong, can transfix a crowd of thousands. Many call him "COB," because he is chairman of the board of the entity responsible for safeguarding Scientology,

founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1954.

"He is one of the most capable, intelligent individuals I've ever met," Rathbun said. "But L. Ron Hubbard says the intelligence scale doesn't necessarily line up with the sanity scale. Adolf Hitler was brilliant. Stalin was brilliant. They were geniuses. But they were also on a certain level stark, staring mad."

Rathbun, Rinder, Scobee and De Vocht say they participated in and witnessed madness, from musical chairs to repeated physical abuse.

What triggered Miscavige's outbursts? The victims usually had no clue.

"If it wasn't the answer he wanted to hear, he'd lose it," De Vocht said. "If it was contrary to how he thought, he'd lose it. If he found it to be smart aleck, or it was a better answer than he had, he would lose it."

Rathbun and Rinder list the executives they saw Miscavige attack:

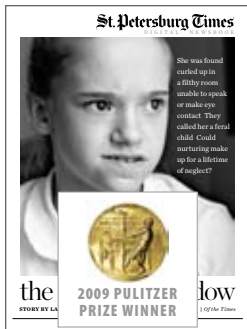


**October 1979:** Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, and 10 other church staffers are convicted of conspiring to steal federal government documents and cover it up.

**December 1979:** An estimated 3,000 gather at Clearwater City Hall to protest the church coming to Clearwater. Across the street, Scientologists stage a counter rally, dressed as clowns and wearing animal costumes.

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