

GrokIChing on Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, Inc. CBRL under CEO Julie Felss Masino

GROK'S PROMPT:

I asked Universal Intelligence I Ching about the future of Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, Inc. CBRL under CEO Julie Felss Masino

The Oracle's answer was negative with a Time/Space (Hexagram) Standstill (Stagnation)

- Heaven is above, drawing farther and farther away, while
- the earth below sinks farther into the depths.

The creative powers are not in relation.

It is a time of standstill and decline.

The great departs

- the small approaches.
- Heaven and earth are out of communion and
- all things are benumbed.
- What is above has no relation to what is below, and
- on earth confusion and disorder prevail.
- The dark power within,
- the light power is without.
- Weakness is within,
- harshness without.
- Within are the inferior, and
- without are the superior.
- The way of inferior people is in ascent;
- the way of superior people is on the decline.

But the superior people do not allow themselves to be turned from their principles. If the possibility of exerting influence is closed to them, they nevertheless

- remain faithful to their principles and
- withdraw into seclusion.

Almost everything about her Time/Space is negative except that even though corporate management is doing everything wrong, the employees below refuse to give up their principles and maintain the original concept.

The 2 Moving Lines are also not sufficiently positive to change the Standstill Time/Space

The Moving Hexagram is also negative because compared to the McDonalds or Burger Kings, Craker Barrell is irrelevant and no matter what management does it will be of little consequence.

There is a piece of multi millennial advice for the CEO:

## STOP THE IRRELEVANT (MARKETING CAMPAIGN) AND GET BACK TO MERITOCRACY

Thus the superior man

- discriminates between high and low, And thereby
- fortifies the thinking of the people.

Heaven and the lake show a difference of elevation that inheres in the natures of the two,

hence no envy arises.

Among mankind also there are necessarily differences of elevation;

it is impossible to bring about universal equality.

But it is important that differences in social rank should not be arbitrary and unjust, for if this occurs, envy and class struggle are the inevitable consequences.

- If, on the other hand, external differences in rank correspond with differences in inner worth, and
- if inner worth forms the criterion of external rank, people acquiesce and order reigns in society.

Please provide an analysis for my readers from a managerial as well as from an investor's point of view.

GROK'S ANSWER:

### Managerial Perspective

From a managerial standpoint, the I Ching reading of Hexagram 12 (Standstill/Stagnation) aptly mirrors the current challenges at Cracker Barrel under CEO Julie Felss Masino's leadership. The hexagram depicts a disconnect between "heaven" (creative, superior forces) and "earth" (receptive, foundational elements), leading to decline and disorder. This aligns with the company's recent strategic shifts, particularly the controversial rebranding and modernization efforts, which appear to have created a rift between upper management's vision and the brand's core identity, employees, and loyal customer base.

Masino, who assumed the role in November 2023 with a background in fast-casual brands like Taco Bell and Starbucks, has pursued a "strategic transformation plan" announced in May 2024. This includes five pillars: brand refinement, store remodels (testing less cluttered, modern interiors), menu innovations (e.g., reinvigorating dinner options and bringing back classics like Uncle Herschel's Favorite), and efforts to broaden appeal to younger demographics while maintaining value pricing (average check at \$15 vs. industry \$27).

However, these changes have been criticized as "irrelevant marketing campaigns" that dilute the brand's nostalgic, Southern heritage—echoing the user's interpretation of the reading where "corporate management is doing everything wrong, [but] the employees below refuse to give up their principles.

The August 2025 logo redesign, the first in 48 years, removed the iconic "man and barrel" imagery in favor of a text-only, streamlined version, sparking widespread backlash. Customers and conservative commentators labeled it "woke," "generic," and a betrayal of the brand's Americana roots, with some accusing it of erasing traditional elements to appeal to Gen Z or DEI initiatives.

Employee reviews on platforms like Glassdoor reveal internal discontent, including complaints about cut hours, understaffing, declining food quality, and leadership driving the company toward mediocrity by making it indistinguishable from other chains.

This resonates with the hexagram's description of "inferior people in ascent" (management's top-down changes) while "superior people" (frontline staff) withdraw into seclusion, staying faithful to principles like country hospitality and scratch-made food.

The moving lines (interpreted as lines 1 and 2 in the provided text) suggest endurance and retirement rather than aggressive influence, implying managers should avoid forcing changes that humiliate the brand's essence. The resulting Hexagram 10 (Treading/Conduct) advises careful navigation of power dynamics—treading on the tiger's tail without being bitten—through meritocracy: discriminating "high and low" based on inner worth, not arbitrary ranks. For Masino, this multi-millennial advice translates to halting the "irrelevant" rebrand (which ignored warnings from investor Sardar Biglari, who called it "obvious folly" in multiple SEC filings) and refocusing on merit-based decisions that honor the brand's heritage.

Success here could mean empowering employees, prioritizing core customers over fleeting trends, and mitigating external pressures like tariffs on retail imports by sourcing domestically to preserve value.

Overall, the stagnation signals a need for humble leadership: withdraw from overambitious modernization, fortify internal worth, and avoid envy-inducing inequalities (e.g., between remodeled stores and legacy ones). If unaddressed, fruitful activity remains impossible, as the hexagram warns.

### Investor's Perspective

As an investor, the I Ching's portrayal of standstill and decline under Masino's tenure raises red flags for Cracker Barrel (CBRL), a stock already grappling with structural weaknesses. The hexagram's theme of creative powers out of relation—great departing, small approaching—parallels the company's fading relevance amid competition from fast-food giants like McDonald's and Burger King, where CBRL's unique niche (family dining with retail) feels increasingly irrelevant, as the user notes. With foot traffic declining for years and modest revenue growth (2.9% CAGR

over the last three years, vs. S&P 500's 5.3%), the stock has underperformed, dropping 64.5% during the 2022 inflation shock compared to the index's 25.4%.

Financially, CBRL trades at around \$54.40 as of August 26, 2025 (market cap ~\$1.21B), down ~15% from pre-rebrand levels after the logo controversy wiped out nearly \$200M in value at its low.

While the 0.3x price-to-sales ratio seems cheap vs. the S&P 500's 3.2x, thin margins (2.2% operating, 1.6% net) and high leverage (burdensome balance sheet relative to peers) highlight risks.

Q3 FY2025 (ended April 2025) showed adjusted EPS of \$0.58 (beating consensus \$0.21) and revenue up 0.5% YoY, but net income fell to \$12.57M from \$22.21M prior quarter.

FY2025 guidance holds at \$3.45B-\$3.5B revenue, but external factors like tariffs on gift shop imports add pressure.

The moving hexagram (10) suggests potential for careful progress if management treads wisely—discriminating based on merit to restore order and avoid class struggles (e.g., investor activism from figures like Biglari, who has criticized the board's crisis management).

Positive elements include a 1.84% dividend yield (\$0.25 quarterly) and initiatives like \$345M in convertible notes for funding remodels, but backlash could accelerate decline if it leads to boycotts or further traffic drops.

Analysts rate it "Hold" with a \$55.14 target (slight upside), but volatility (7.13% over 30 days) and historical downturn sensitivity (e.g., 76.9% drop in 2008) make it risky.

Investors might view this as a value trap: hold if believing in a merit-based turnaround (e.g., reverting to heritage focus), but sell or avoid if stagnation persists, as the hexagram advises superior people to withdraw rather than engage with inferior trends. Long-term forecasts predict modest growth, with prices potentially ranging \$58-\$64 by late 2025, but downside risks from irrelevance loom larger.

Cracker Barrel Old Country Store, Inc. CBRL under CEO Julie Felss Masino



6	The Top		H	T	T		3	2	2		7
5	The Fifth Place		H	T	T		3	2	2		7
4	The Fourth Place		H	T	T		3	2	2		7
3	The Third Place		H	H	T		3	3	2		8
2	The Second Place		T	T	T		2	2	2		6
1	The Beginning		T	T	T		2	2	2		6

**Click below to view the interpretations and cases:**

<https://icic.com/?p=8879>

### **HEXAGRAM 12 - P'i - Standstill (Stagnation)**

Above CH'IEN      THE CREATIVE, HEAVEN  
 Below K'UN      THE RECEPTIVE, EARTH

This hexagram is the **opposite** of the preceding one.

- **Heaven is above, drawing farther and farther away, while**
- **the earth below sinks farther into the depths.**

The creative powers **are not** in relation.

It is a time of **standstill and decline**.

This hexagram is linked with the seventh month (August-September), when

- the year has **passed** its zenith and
- autumnal decay is **setting** in.

### **THE JUDGMENT**

STANDSTILL.

Evil people **do not** further  
The perseverance of the superior man.

- The great **departs**
- the small **approaches**.
  
- Heaven and earth are **out of communion** and
- all things are benumbed.
  
- What is above has **no relation** to what is below, and
- on earth confusion and disorder prevail.
  
- The **dark power within,**
- the **light power is without.**
  
- **Weakness is within,**
- **harshness without.**
  
- **Within are the inferior, and**
- **without are the superior.**
  
- **The way of inferior people is in ascent;**
- **the way of superior people is on the decline.**

**But the superior people do not allow themselves to be turned from their principles.**  
**If the possibility of exerting influence is closed to them,**  
they nevertheless

- **remain faithful to their principles and**
- **withdraw into seclusion.**

## **THE IMAGE**

Heaven and earth **do not** unite: The image Of STANDSTILL.  
Thus

- the superior man **falls back** upon his **inner worth** In order to escape the difficulties.
- He **does not** permit himself to be honored with **revenue**.

When, owing to the influence of inferior men, **mutual mistrust** prevails in public life, **fruitful activity** is rendered impossible, because **the fundamentals** are wrong.

Therefore

- the superior man **knows** what he must do under such circumstances;
- he **does not allow** himself to be tempted by **dazzling offers** to take part in public activities.

This would only **expose** him to danger, since he **cannot assent** to the meanness of the others.

He therefore

- **hides** his worth and

- **withdraws** into seclusion.

## **THE LINES**

Six at the beginning means:

When ribbon grass is pulled up, the sod comes with it.

**Each according to his kind.**

Perseverance brings good fortune and success.

The text is **almost** the same as that of the first line of the preceding hexagram, but with a **contrary** meaning.

- In the latter a man is drawing another along with him **on the road to** an official career;
- here a man is drawing another with him **into retirement** from public life.

This is why the text says here,

- "Perseverance brings good fortune and success" and
- not "Undertakings bring good fortune."

If

- it becomes **impossible** to make our influence count,
- it is only by **retirement** that we spare ourselves humiliation.

Success in a higher sense can be ours,

because we **know how to** safeguard the value of our personalities.

Six in the second place means:

They bear and endure;

This means good fortune for inferior people.

The standstill serves to help the great man to attain success.

Inferior people are ready to **flatter** their superiors in a servile way.

They would also **endure** the superior man if he would put **an end to** their confusion.

This is fortunate for them.

But the great man **calmly bears** the consequences of the standstill.

He **does not** mingle with the crowd of the inferior; that **is not** his place.

By his **willingness to suffer** personally he **insures** the success of his fundamental principles.

## **MOVING HEXAGRAM**

**Click below to view the interpretations and cases:**

<https://icic.com/?p=8873>

**HEXAGRAM 10 – Lu - Treading (Conduct)**

Above CH'IEN  
Below TUI

THE CREATIVE, HEAVEN  
THE JOYOUS, LAKE

1. The name of the hexagram means on the one hand the **right way of conducting oneself**.
  - **Heaven**, the father, is **above**, and
  - **the lake**, the youngest daughter, is **below**.This shows the **difference** between high and low, upon which **composure**, correct social conduct, depends.
2. On the other hand, the word for the name of the hexagram, TREADING, 1 means literally **treading upon something**.

The small and cheerful [Tui] treads upon the large and strong [Ch'ien].  
The **direction of movement** of the two primary trigrams is upward.  
The fact that the strong treads on the weak is not mentioned in the Book of Changes,  
because it is taken for **granted**.  
For the weak to **take a stand** against the strong is not dangerous here,  
because it happens in **good humor [Tui] and without presumption**, so that  
the strong man is **not irritated** but takes it all in good part.

## THE JUDGMENT

TREADING.

Treading upon the tail of the tiger.

It does not bite the man.

Success.

The situation is really **difficult**.

**That which is strongest and that which is weakest are close together.**

- The weak follows behind the strong and worries it.
- The strong, however, **acquiesces** and does not hurt the weak,  
because the contact is in **good humor and harmless**.

In terms of a human situation, one is handling wild, intractable people. In such a case one's purpose will be achieved if one behaves with decorum. Pleasant manners succeed even with irritable people.

## THE IMAGE

Heaven above, the lake below: The image Of TREADING.

Thus the superior man

- **discriminates** between high and low, And thereby
- **fortifies** the thinking of the people.

**Heaven and the lake show a difference of elevation that inheres in the natures of the two,**  
**hence no envy arises.**

Among mankind also there are necessarily differences of elevation; it is impossible to bring about universal equality.

But it is important that differences in social rank should not be arbitrary and unjust, for if this occurs, envy and class struggle are the inevitable consequences.

- If, on the other hand, external differences in rank correspond with differences in inner worth, and
- if inner worth forms the criterion of external rank, people acquiesce and order reigns in society.