

## What is Your Leadership Legacy?

TEAM International has on our drawing board a plan for a new program called “Leadership that Lasts”™, focused on issues of legacy, and aimed toward senior leaders who are thinking about retirement in the next years ahead. The questions we ask and the deliverable we seek is a plan that addresses the following: “Who will fill my boots in my company?” and “Where will my boots take me when I leave?” (There’s an intended pun here that’s connected with the bootmaker’s “last” – referring to a basic tool of the bootmaker, and the importance of choosing the correct last for an individual’s feet, i.e. the best legacy for a given person.)

Professor Jann Freed of Central College (Iowa) reminds us that this question of the proper legacy, though frequently asked near the end of one’s career, is better asked during one’s career – and on a day-to-day basis as we go about setting the patterns for future retirement – and life beyond that fateful date. After all, nowadays with increased life expectancy – and health expectancy -- “retirement” is just another word for a change in one’s life that allows growth in a different area of interest and endeavor – perhaps even one that has been postponed for some time while tending to the interests of our employers.

In *Your Leadership Legacy*, Robert Galford and Regina Fazio Maruca advocate that “...thinking about your legacy now makes you a better leader today, no matter how far you are from retirement.” Galford and Maruca believe we should all be engaged in “legacy thinking” – beyond a short-term focus on the past and present and into the future – but with a difference: the difference is that we see our present in terms of the future we want to create.

Here’s a negative example of setting a legacy: I once worked with a CEO who was very focused on cost containment. Although he might not have stated that as his desired legacy, he continually made decisions that pointed in this direction. For example, in order to save a few hundred dollars on airfare for his executives, he would insist that they take inconvenient routes or wait for long times between connecting flights. Upon his retirement “celebration”, he was roasted with the account of a fictitious phone call from American Airlines advising his travel office that they were going to have to start charging overweight for his executives’ baggage, since they were checking themselves into the baggage compartment when they traveled, in order to save on plane fares. I don’t believe this is the kind of legacy he wanted to leave, but it was the one that lived on and was retold by his former executives.

So our daily lives and actions in our workplace determine what we leave behind as a legacy, and Dr. Freed reminds us we must envision our legacy in terms of the “...photo mosaic that comprises our approach to leadership – how we treat others, and what others think of what and how we are leading”. This is an everyday activity, or set of activities, that people can observe and remember .

Medtronic CEO Bill George offers us a positive example of legacy-building, as cited in his book, *Authentic Leadership*. He cites one of the powerful legacies of Medtronic's storied founder, Earl Bakken:

"...Earl started the Company in 1949 in his brother-in-law's garage, where [it] had its headquarters for the next 12 years. Responding to an urgent request in 1957 from Dr. C. Walton Lillihei, the creator of open-heart surgery, Earl invented the world's first wearable pacemaker...[Later], at the urging of his board of directors, to bring focus to the company, Earl wrote the Medtronic mission "*to restore people to fuller lives*".

"Every time Earl talks to employees or customers, he describes the mission and enlists them to his cause. He carries a supply of cards with the mission written on it in his pocket and gives these cards out to everyone he meets. He frequently shares stories of patients whose lives have been restored by Medtronic products. It is hard not to get caught up by his passion..."

Over the years, I have been involved from time to time in the Landmark Education programs, the most famous of which is called Landmark Forum. One of the planning techniques used in these programs is to envision what kind of future we want, say 10 years from now, and project backwards to see what we need to be doing, say in 5 years, 3 years, and next year in order to be where we want to be at that 10 year horizon. This is an effective way to use the future to arrive at the present. This technique leads us to ask, what are we doing *today* to build our legacy? Here we are talking about behaviors that we are carrying out every day and which point toward the legacy we leave behind as our own, in our organizations and for the leaders of tomorrow.

When I was doing a leadership program at a colleague institution in Australia, Mt. Eliza Business School, part of the University of Melbourne, I was given a quote from an unknown author:

" People may not recall what you said,

And they may not remember what you did,

But they will never forget how you made them feel..."

I use this quote after many of our leadership programs and ask our participants to forget what we said, and forgive us for any thing we may not have done right, but to remember how they felt at the end of the experience. Do they feel well treated, accepted, nourished, respected, and, yes, honored and cared for? Do they feel strengthened and validated for who they are? I believe that the sum of these feelings may be the best legacy we can hope to leave behind: Do the people we associate with remember how they felt in our presence, and how they were influenced by us, even when we were not actually there? Will they think that we made a positive difference in their lives, and that we were somehow important in their own development as positive leaders and influencers?

It's never too early to start leaving this kind of legacy, and it's never too late to start...!

**REFERENCES:**

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