



Your Leadership Legacy

The New Year is upon us and like most smart business people, you are probably taking inventory and making plans for the coming year. Most of these actions focus on external items, like deciding on how many widgets you are going to make and sell, or how many new clients you hope to acquire by the end of the first quarter. While this type of inventory and planning is necessary, it is important as a business leader that you take time to inventory and plan for your own development as a leader, and this involves both reflection and introspection.

A good place to start is simply by asking yourself the question: what do you want people to say about your impact as a leader 10, 20 or 30 years from now? Or what would you like your leadership legacy to be? Even better: write down your responses to both of these questions. What comes out on paper may surprise you.

Cartoonist Johnny Hart once noted that a legacy is "something that one should be able to hand down, without having to trump up." It is not a strategic plan that can be nicely quantified and measured. Rather, it is the sum of all of the outcomes resulting from our behavior that others continue to remember about us. That's the key here - it's what others continue to remember about us, not how we remember ourselves. Put another way, it is the cumulative record of how others think we measure up to the person that we had intended to be or that they expect us to be.

Take a moment to think of some of the current or former public or corporate leaders that have been in the news during the past year: The Apprentice's, Donald Trump; The Oprah Winfrey Show's, Oprah Winfrey; South Dakota's former Senator, Tom Daschle; LA Laker's Guard, Kobe Bryant; Martha Stewart Omnimedia, Martha Stewart; Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice; and U.S. President, George W. Bush. For most of us, it is probably very easy to articulate their leadership legacy - the good, the bad, and the ugly.

So, what can you do as a leader to ensure that your legacy is the one that you want to be remembered for? First, successful leaders have a strong sense of their personal values beyond their business values. They have a personal mission and vision for their life as well as their business. And, as you probably guessed, the most successful leaders are those who have found a way to combine the two proactively.

Second, successful leaders have passion. Find what you are passionate about in life and then find a way to incorporate this into your life in some way every single day. To me, passion can be defined as the current that propels us forward to fulfill a purpose or a goal. It is often the source of the creativity, energy, rejuvenation, and inspiration, that all leaders rely on everyday in order to be effective. For me, that passion revolves around helping others be successful leaders.

And finally, successful leaders take time every day for personal reflection and renewal. Reflection is critical because self-reflection is the greatest source that we have for tapping into our own self-knowledge. And, it is by tapping into our own self-knowledge that we grow both personally and professionally, helping us to become the authentic leaders we hope to be.

If you hope to obtain greater self-knowledge, the only way to do that is to find time for silence. In today's 24/7 media-bombarded world, there are fewer and fewer opportunities that present themselves naturally for reflection. That's why it is critical that you schedule time for reflection as frequently as you can. Daily would be best but weekly and monthly can work too.

You don't always have control about what people will remember as your leadership legacy. However, there are things that you can do to ensure that you are remembered the way you want to be remembered. Identifying what you would like your leadership legacy to be is a good first step. Combine that with a strong sense of your personal values and your passion, and, take time for personal reflection and renewal, and you will be well on your way to achieving a lasting legacy that you can be proud of.

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