



Trendwatcher: On Leadership Legacies

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Success is not enough. It turns out that many high achievers come to believe that success is hollow unless it ultimately creates significance in their lives and in the lives of others (Stevenson & Nash, 2004). Interviews with leaders indicate that, eventually, many of them make a shift from "success thinking" to "significance thinking." Significance thinking involves asking oneself, "What is the impact of the gift I/we want to leave behind?" This is what can be called legacy (Key & Stearns, 2006).

There are various types of legacy. First, there are *physical legacies*, such as erecting a building like the Trump Tower or endowing a chair at a university. Second, there are *intellectual legacies*, such as writing a book, developing a patent or developing a new business best practice. Third, there are *emotional or social legacies*, such as improving the quality of life for employees through friendly work practices, instituting state-of-the-art environmental processes or raising children who are caring and responsible.

Finally, there are what we can call *spiritual legacies*, such as living your values every day or leaving the world a better place. Think of the legacies left to us by people such as Mother Teresa, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Mahatma Gandhi. They probably never sat down with pen and paper to map out their "legacy," yet their visionary leadership and ability to model their values created what many consider great legacies, perhaps far beyond what they themselves imagined.

Legacies can also be sinister and dark. Few would argue that Hitler, Idi Amin and Saddam Hussein didn't leave a legacy of hatred and separation. On the corporate level, thousands lost their savings and were otherwise betrayed by the personal greed and deceptions of leaders at companies such as Enron, Tyco and WorldCom.

It's fortunate, then, that so many of today's business professionals wish to leave behind something more positive. When i4cp, in conjunction with HR.com, conducted its *Leader Legacy Practitioner Consensus Survey* in September of 2007, it found that - to a high or very high extent - over two thirds (68%) of respondents said their organizations are concerned about leaving a legacy or making things better as a result of the organization's existence. It also found that the large majority - 86% - of the 210 respondents feel that leaving a professional legacy is a high or very high priority.

This interest in positive legacies might seem surprising in a business environment where so much emphasis is placed on bottom-line considerations. But legacy is clearly important to many business leaders, and it often helps serve the needs of the whole organization. When asked what they saw as their legacy, over 60% of CEOs in anecdotal research captured in *CEO Road Rules: Right Focus, Right People, Right Execution* (Key & Stearns, 2006) responded "developing others as leaders." Many commented that knowing that those they mentored went on to do great things was a very fulfilling experience. Several stated that the impact of growing leaders was exponential and that being part of that evolution was exhilarating. "It makes me so proud to see the impact of those I've mentored. They have gone on to be so much better than I see myself as being," commented one of the CEOs interviewed.

i4cp's *Leader Legacy Practitioner Consensus Survey* arrived at a similar finding. When asked, "To what extent does the leadership in your organization make supporting the growth and development of others a priority?" 58% stated that their leaders make this a priority to a high or very high extent.



Survey respondents indicated that, of the four types of legacy, social legacies are the most important, with 71% saying they have a high or very high interest in leaving a social legacy that improves the lives of others. It was followed in importance by intellectual legacies, physical legacies and spiritual legacies.

There are many ways of building a legacy, of course, but for leaders one of the best approaches is by serving as an excellent model for others. The best business leaders model their values every day (Galford & Maruca, 2006). For example, if a leader claims integrity as a core value, then others should be able to see behaviors that display integrity as part of the way s/he leads and conducts business. This includes always telling the truth, listening to others with respect, and doing the right thing, despite the risks.

Instead of just talking about what their values are, higher level leaders act on their values. They don't say, "This is who I am; be like me." They simply model and communicate their values in their day-to-day life at work, home, community, and anywhere else they happen to be. Over time, this becomes a large part of leaders' legacies as the values and behaviors they model influence so many others. This can be stated as a simple formula: *Values + Action = Legacy*.

The notion of legacy can, of course, be incorporated into the leadership development process, helping leaders think about how to forge their legacies. But, ultimately, legacy also informs the strategic decision-making of the whole organization as teams of leaders decide what, aside from bottom-line success, their enterprises will leave behind.

Documents referenced in this TrendWatcher include the following:

Stevenson, Howard and Laura Nash. "Success that Lasts." Harvard Business Review, February 2004.

Key, Mary and Dennis Stearns. CEO Road Rules: Right Focus, Right People, Right Execution, Davies-Black, 2006.

Leader Legacy Practitioner Consensus Survey. Institute for Corporate Productivity, September 2007.

Galford, Robert M. and Regina Fazio Maruca. Your Leadership Legacy, Harvard Business Press, 2006.

