

A Leader's Legacy

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In April 2006, the APWA Leadership and Management Committee concluded its series of articles on public works leadership entitled "The Baker's Menu." This was the second series of articles (the first being "The Baker's Dozen") that discuss various leadership and management topics of interest to APWA members. The committee's current series—entitled "The Baker's Potluck"—touches on a variety of leadership and management topics, many of which have been suggested by members. Included in this issue is the seventh in the series recommended by the committee. For more information please contact Ann Daniels, APWA Director of Technical Services, at (800) 848-APWA or adaniels@apwa.net.

*"By asking ourselves how we want to be remembered, we plant the seeds for living our lives as if we matter. By living each day as if we matter, we offer up our own unique legacy. By offering up our own unique legacy, we make the world we inhabit a better place than we found it." – Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors, **The Leadership Challenge***

When I facilitated the Franklin/Covey Seven Habits of Highly Effective People training program, one of my favorite habits was Habit 2, "Begin with the End in Mind." Imagine yourself at your 80th birthday party, listening to the people in the room reminiscing about the impact you had on their lives. These people are your spouse, your children, your former employees, coworkers, bosses, customers, and other people from the communities where you have lived and served in various capacities. It would be interesting to peek into the future to see how it will turn out. The question is, if you could see the future, would it cause you to change your actions in the present? We're talking about legacy. Here are two legacies for someone in a leadership position:

Legacy A

- Improved morale
- Set the example
- Brought out the best in people
- Took care of his employees and they took care of the customers
- Improved retention
- Solved problems without placing blame
- Organization took care of the whole person, families are important
- Results achieved through strong relationships with staff and customers
- Loyal staff would go the extra mile for him
- Focused on the positives in people, loyal to those who were absent

Legacy B

- Morale, what morale?
- Held himself to a different standard
- Wrote people off and cut them loose
- Took care of his customers at the expense of the employees
- Long-term employees left leaving a knowledge gap
- Always pointed fingers and found fault in others
- No regard for impact on families
- All that mattered were results, period
- Low trust, everyone looked out for themselves
- Focused on the negatives in people, talked about people behind their backs

If you think this is an exaggeration, you would be wrong. I actually worked with someone who is living Legacy A and Legacy B. The one who is living Legacy A, I consider my mentor. Even after 20 years we stay in touch and I trust his advice and counsel. He made me want to be better, to learn, and to grow. Legacy B is a compilation of the worst traits in people I've come across in 31 years of public service. Needless to say, it was not fun being part of those organizations, particularly when the person with those traits was the boss. In my experience, organizations with Legacy B leaders experienced loss of trust, declining customer service, and loss of employees in the 5-15 year range of service leaving an experience gap. The employees that were left were the new ones just starting out and those hanging on until they could retire. Those organizations were also characterized by a closed system of communication where dissent was not welcome and employees were afraid to speak up. Sound familiar to anyone?

Which legacy do you want to leave, if you want to leave one at all? Also, you don't have to be the boss to have the term "legacy" attached to your life. We all leave a legacy, to our families, our children, our work life, our community, etc. We all make a difference, but the question is what kind of difference will you make?

Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't care if they like me as long as they respect me." As far as I am concerned, that is nuts. The reality is that people will be better workers and more dedicated and loyal employees when they

are treated right by their leaders. Respect, dignity, support, empathy, compassion and confidence are just a few of the terms that apply. If our leaders treat us like that, we will like them. Kouzes and Posner say the following:

"We will work harder and more effectively for people we like. And we will like them in direct proportion to how they make us feel."

"If people don't want to be liked then they probably don't belong in leadership."

It shouldn't take a huge research project to figure this out. However, there is a crowd out there that equates being liked with not holding people accountable or allowing them to do whatever they want without consequences. They may be called easygoing or laid back. That couldn't be farther from the truth. The fact is, if you are that kind of leader, there is a large group of people that don't like you—the high performers. When there is little accountability, the high performers get frustrated and will eventually leave your organization. That is not a legacy you want to leave either.

While on active duty in the Navy Civil Engineer Corps, I had the privilege of serving President Reagan, providing support while he was at his ranch near Santa Barbara. A group of Navy Seabees was assigned to maintain support facilities

during his visits and then we also removed these facilities at the end of his second term. (Seabees is the name given to those in the Naval Construction Force and is taken from the first letters of the words **C**onstruction **B**attalion). I will always remember how he made me and the other Seabees feel when we were in his presence. He made us feel important and that he cared for each and every man and woman in uniform. He would participate in reenlistment ceremonies and tell stories. When he was at the ranch, he was there on vacation, but he always had time for his Seabees. His leadership instilled a sense of pride in us and he made us feel good about ourselves and our contribution to the nation. As a result, we liked him and would work even harder for our organization. That has had a lasting effect on me personally and has challenged me to strive to be that kind of a leader.



Reenlistment ceremony performed by LCDR George Haines and assisted by President Reagan. Haines is left of President Reagan, shaking hands. (Permission by George Haines)

Legacy isn't just about you and what you've accomplished. Peter Drucker said that "There is no success without a successor." What are you doing to cultivate successors? John Maxwell said in a recent *Leadership Wired* newsletter that he resolved to produce leaders rather than attract followers, and it is one of the best decisions he ever made.

Maxwell says there are four aspects of shaping a legitimate leadership legacy:

1. Character – Being and becoming a moral example
2. Choices – Thinking clearly and making wise decisions
3. Conduct – Doing the right things consistently well
4. Consequences – Receiving the results of the seeds that we sow

Your character, choices, and conduct are the seeds you sow. Consequences, #4, are the results and a reflection of the other three. I have seen the positive side of this when you invest yourself in the development of employees. When you give of your time, share your experiences, and lead potential successors down the right road, they will blossom into the kind of person, leader, and successor that will help an organiza-

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tion stay strong when you leave. Maxwell says, “We spend our day either preparing or repairing.”

- Preparing allows us to focus on today, while repairing forces us to clean up yesterday.
- Preparing invests for the future; repairing pays down past debts.
- Preparing increases efficiency, but repairing consumes precious time.
- Preparing increases confidence, while repairing breeds discouragement.

Where is your time spent? Preparing or repairing? If you treat people like a piece of equipment or a car that has a few miles on it, then you will never invest your time or pour your life into the development of that person. You will simply write them off when you are tired of them or when you see a newer, more attractive model that looks good on the outside, but is unproven otherwise. You will be constantly repairing and your legacy will be nothing more than an example of a leader others don’t want to follow. You will leave a “track record” rather than a legacy.

Be a leader who has confidence in your followers. Have the belief and knowledge that they will go on to do even greater

things than you have done as a result of your influence on their lives. People will not remember how well your organization did in the fourth quarter of 1998. They will remember the people you developed so that your organization was able to “adapt, prosper, and grow.” In a relay race, success is determined by successfully passing the baton. In business and public service, successfully passing the baton might just be the greatest gift you can give to yourself and to the next generation.

Finally, if you start questioning what legacy you will leave, remember that on the highway of life, you won’t get anywhere by looking in the rearview mirror. Keep your eye on the road ahead and you can make a brighter future for yourself and others by starting today.

“Leadership is not solely about producing results....Being a leader brings with it a responsibility to do something of significance that makes families, communities, work organizations, nations, the environment, and the world better places than they are today. Not all these things can be quantified.” – Kouzes & Posner, from A Leader’s Legacy

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