

Building Your Leadership Legacy

By Jennifer Anderson

As a leader in your company and in many other roles of your life, you have an opportunity to build a leadership legacy that will not only make a difference in how you will be perceived by your team, your peers, and the community at large today... but also how you want to be perceived in the future. Leadership is defined as the position or function of a leader, a person who guides or directs a group. How you lead today will make a difference for how people will remember you in the future—your leadership legacy.

Legacy is often associated with an endowment or a large sum of money bequeathed to a favorite university that honors the donor with naming a building on the engineering campus. Another way to look at it is that legacy is your personal brand, or your mark on the world. Impressive as it sounds, few people in leadership roles will amass a fortune in their lifetime sufficient to have a building named for them. For those in a leadership role who realize that how they lead impacts the lives of team members, they have a significant way for their leadership legacy to shine... one that might be even more impactful than their name on a building.

If you are not satisfied with how your leadership legacy is being built today, you can improve and make changes to how people perceive you as a leader. Here are three ways to build a leadership legacy of which you can be proud:

Start With the End

When it's the end of your life, for what do you want to be known? What do you want people to say about you at your funeral? You might think that end-of-life questions are too morbid for a career development article but, in answering these profound questions, the author's coaching clients—and the companies they run—are positively affected. If you are not clear about what you want to be known for at the end of your life, no one else will be clear about your personal brand either. That means your leadership legacy is messy and needs to be adjusted to reflect the true and best leader within you. Start with the end in mind.



Perception

If you are trying to get to New York, you need to know where you are now. If you want to be known as a “visionary leader,” start with surveying how people perceive you. This can be done with an extensive 360-degree review, or you can simply ask people to describe you in one word. Compile that list of one-word responses and you will get a snapshot of your current reputation based on how people perceive you. If you like what people have to say, then continue your path to New York. If you do not like what they have to say, then identify where you are and make course corrections to get yourself on the right path to New York. Understand how others perceive you.

You Can Change

In the author's career coaching, clients tell her, “I am not going to change. I am who I am.” You do not need to change yourself to please other people, but, if you have noticed that your work relationships are not as strong as you want, then there is an opportunity to evaluate your part in the relations. As a leader, take note of how people are responding to your leadership style—are they happy working for you, or resistant? You cannot change much about other people, but you

can make changes in yourself if you want to. If you are not keen on how your leadership legacy is developing, then there is a perfect opportunity to start making some incremental changes today, if you want to.

Finally, think about the people who have had a positive influence on your career—your professors, the senior engineers who mentored you when you were a junior engineer, the client who patiently allowed you to make a mistake and then fix it, the architects, other partner engineers, previous firm owners, etc. Likely there have been many people who have made an impression upon you. The author would be willing to assume that you have a good opinion about the leadership legacy of each of those key people. Be certain that other people have an opinion about you too. How you are leading people is building your personal brand—your mark, your legacy. Are you happy with how people perceive you today? Are you content with your leadership legacy?•



Born into a family of engineers but focusing on the people side of engineering, Jen Anderson has over 21 years of helping leaders and their teams build stronger careers.

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