

Designing a leadership legacy framework

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Abstract

What does it mean to leave a "leadership legacy" in the organizations and communities in which we are involved? This overall mixed-methods approach will explore the stories of successful individuals who have left a leadership legacy. Specifically in this presentation, the preliminary research will share various components of a model to create a leadership legacy (L2). A leadership legacy (L2) is to leave behind the significance of our talents and our passions. The structure represented in this research includes areas such as vision, foundation, intentional focus, meaningful relationships, resiliency, and sustainability. Creating an L2 provides the opportunity for individuals and organizations to leave a meaningful impression in the world.

Keywords: Leadership, Legacy, Vision, Education, Development, Leadership Framework

INTRODUCTION

The long tale of human history includes stories and examples of individuals who broke the proverbial mold. These people saw possibilities that others simply couldn't imagine. Matched with an equally impressive ability to transform vision into reality, these leaders created positive, lasting meaningful change for themselves and others around them. But what happens after such a person departs the organization he/she has transformed? Does the work continue? In some cases, the answer is a resounding yes! What separates these leaders from others, whose work simply fades away when they are no longer the driving force?

Research conducted over the past decade reveals a framework or collection of attributes possessed by individuals who are able to stimulate such a lasting legacy of positive change. These attributes have been collected into a framework called a leadership legacy ("L2"). This framework is currently being studied and applied in various environments (classrooms, board rooms, conferences, retreats, etc.) The next step in the study of this framework is a series of in-depth interviews with individuals identified as possessing these attributes to uncover exactly how they are able to leave such legacy. Ultimately, what will be created will be a user's guide for anyone to apply these same principles and create their own leadership legacy.

A leadership legacy (L2) is to leave behind the significance of our talents and our passions. Kousez and Posner (2006) explain, "We leave a legacy to others. They are our inheritors..." (pg. 91). The L2 that we leave behind is extremely personal and unique. Everyone can have a leadership legacy - it is not defined by our position within an organization or our financial status. It is the component of our lives that carry beyond our individual efforts.

Leaving a leadership legacy does not have a time limit, nor is it intended to be an end of life reflection. Rather, having a distinct legacy early in our lives can help us determine the proper pathways to take on a daily, weekly, and annual basis. According to Burchfield (2012), "Legacies define leaders... good leaders start thinking about the legacy they prefer to leave early in their leadership tenure" (p. 24). A leader's legacy is what is left behind and the impact they have on an organization when they are no longer in a position (Kaye & Jacobson, 2012; Coleman, 1998; Reed, 2009).

Unlike the organizational mission and vision, a legacy is intended specifically to define or brand individual efforts within that organization that comprise what is left behind. Whether it is the CEO, managers, or employees, each individual has the potential to make a lasting influence. As Galford and Maruca (2006) explain, "legacy thinking is grounded in the individual... (and) guides the process by which vision, mission, and strategy are attempted" (p. 8).

Defining the key characteristics of leaders within organizations has many essential components. As Kousez and Posner describe (2006), "It is our collective task to liberate the leader within ourselves and within every one of us" (p. 121). Being provided a model to help with that approach is a valuable guide to duplicate the success of others.

LEADERSHIP LEGACY (L2) FRAMEWORK

It is important to note that the definition of leadership legacy is not for people within organizations only, although that can be one area where leaders will thrive. Rather, leadership legacy (L2) can be defined as the impact we want to leave in areas we are most passionate. The

areas of passion can be considered family, community, organizations, or all of them. The model for the L2 isn't based on money left behind, although that could be a type of legacy; it's about sustainability beyond our output. The L2 created can live on within the organization(s) or the lives of others it has affected. In order to leave behind a leadership legacy (L2), a framework to help guide leaders to achieve their intended outcome is provided:

1. Vision - the direction you are striving for, unwavering
2. Foundation - keeps you grounded and anchored
3. Intentional Focus - selecting purposeful energy and activities
4. Meaningful Relationships - people in our lives as a catalyst or part of the legacy
5. Resiliency - overcome obstacles; change and adapt to continue on the pathway
6. Sustainability - having a long lasting outcome and communicated epilogue

Vision:

A strong vision on what we intend the future to become is the spark and catalyst of a leadership legacy (L2). A vision is an ideal and unique image (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). It is what those leaving behind a legacy strive to achieve. It is the direction that is being strived for, unwavering. There is a famous quote in *Alice and Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." That is what vision adds to a leadership legacy (L2); it drives it. It provides a roadmap in the right direction, and more importantly a guide when we get off track. A vision provides the opportunity for us to look back at our L2 and determine if the course we were on is what was accomplished.

Foundation:

The opposite of having a futuristic vision, equally as important, is having a foundation upon which to stand. This terminology keeps us anchored and grounded to the core values and practice consistently and ultimately creates our legacy. Foundation is the core philosophy that sets roots in leadership. Research by Patnaik and Sahoo (2012) describe the foundation of the organization Xerox, established by the founder Joe Wilson, who had consistency with the focus of developing and promoting from within. His foundation was to groom employees to achieve higher positions and advance the organization further. Upon his retirement, each time that the organization or current CEO went against this philosophy, it ended poorly. It was the structure within the board to maintain this foundational philosophy that ultimately saved the organization during the economic downturn. When in duress, the company revisited this core practice. The eventual savior was selecting leaders from within, who understand the culture and the values of the organization.

Intentional Focus:

The outcome of legacy is determined by the intentional focus a leader brings to the legacy they are creating. This can be done by "finding meaning in their work. It doesn't have to be a giant, earth-shattering kind of meaning. The day-to-day variety - meaningful activities and interactions - are just as good" (Barsh & Cranston, 2011). And it is the every day focus on these meaningful tasks that influence others across the organization they are involved in. The people primarily influenced may be successors, employees, colleagues, or outside stakeholders (Galford & Maruca, 2006). As we are involved in organizations, and draw closer to our purpose within them, we will hopefully define the legacy we will leave behind. The legacy begins with the simple

notion that we are looking to change the world from what it is today (Kousez and Posner, 2006). Intentional focus includes selecting purposeful energy and activities each and every day that lead to the legacy.

Meaningful Relationships:

A leadership legacy (L2) can truly leave a lasting impression based on the meaningful relationships that define the legacy beyond one person. Meaningful relationships are the people in our lives who serve as a catalyst or part of the legacy. The people whom leaders surround themselves with and those they groom makes a lasting impression on a legacy. Luthy (2000) describes that legacy is created with a sense of collaboration and developing others. These characteristics are also mirrored in Nanton (2011) as the features become "responding to a dynamic environment... strategically and proactively focused on leadership development... willing to work in a collaborative relational partnership" (p. 82). The meaningful relationships associated with the leadership legacy are what hold together the legacy and knit it between the past, present, and future.

Resiliency:

Resiliency is an important element to overcome obstacles, change, and adapt to continue on the pathway. The term resilient as described in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is "the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens." That is the legacy that can be born from experiences. Now it is not necessary for something bad to always be in place, but it is important to set up a system where a legacy can "bounce-back." McAllister (2003) describes this essential component as a commitment within a legacy. If we believe it is valuable, then we will endure. With this idea of commitment, it is truly resiliency of person(s) that would ultimately create a legacy. And once that legacy is established, the measurement would be how resilient it is throughout the test of time.

Sustainability:

The ability to last is the final component to leaving behind a leadership legacy (L2). A strong L2 structure that goes beyond one person or action is what creates the lasting imprint. Establishing sustainability and having a long lasting outcome and communicated epilogue of the legacy left behind is important. According to Toor and Ofori (2011) "a common thread among their [the leaders] thoughts about legacy was a long-term impact on others. Some of the leaders mentioned how they wanted to be remembered after they left the company" (p. 34). Based on legacy research by Kousez and Posner (2006), "our teachers continue to teach as we go on to tell their stories" (p. 24). It is through the continuous communication of an epilogue that the legacy remains. It is through this type of continuous lasting communication that the L2 is sustainable and continues to impact a family, community, and organization.

As mentioned earlier, the leadership legacy (L2) framework is currently being studied and applied in various environments (classrooms, board rooms, conferences, retreats, etc.) The first step of the process was to create the specific components of the L2. The next step in the study of this framework is a series of in-depth interviews with individuals identified as possessing these attributes to uncover exactly how they are able to leave such legacy. Ultimately, what will be created will be a user's guide for anyone to apply these same principles and create their own leadership legacy.

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