How Would You Like to Be Remembered?

A LEADER’S LEGACY

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Most leaders want to leave a mark in their fields, to create a lasting imprint by their work being appreciated and remembered. A Leader’s Legacy shows readers how a legacy is more than a link to a position or place in an organization. A legacy comes from the idea that everyone, regardless of position, can make a difference. Thinking about legacies requires moving beyond short-term definitions of success. Legacies encompass the past, present and future, and force us to consider where we have been, where we are now and where we’re going. A quest to leave a lasting legacy is a journey from success to significance.

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.

A Leader’s Legacy is a compilation of 21 essays on leadership grouped together into four sections on major parts of the idea of legacy: significance, relationships, aspirations and courage. Each section has a brief introduction that summarizes the highlights of the topic. The essays discuss various leadership-related topics, both in theory and in practice. They represent brand new experiences and stories, as well as new variations on familiar themes. This summary culls the essence of these vignettes and presents the practical, timeworn advice from those in the know, based on the authors’ collective research through the years.

What you will learn in this summary:
✓ Why being an effective leader involves serving others.
✓ Why you can’t take trust for granted.
✓ Why it isn’t good to be a micromanager.
✓ How a forward-looking perspective is integral to a leader’s vision.
✓ How to reflect on moments of courage.
✓ Why it’s OK to fail at your endeavors.
A LEADER’S LEGACY
By James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

Significance

When we move on, people do not remember us for what we do for ourselves. They remember us for what we do for them. One of the great joys and grave responsibilities of leaders is making sure that those in their care live lives not only of success, but also of significance. Leaders who see their role as serving others leave the most lasting legacies.

Teaching is one way of serving. It’s a way of passing along the lessons learned from experience, particularly to those who look immediately to us for leadership. By asking ourselves how we want to be remembered, we plant the seeds for living our lives as if we matter.

Leaders Serve and Sacrifice

Are you on this planet to do something, or are you just here for something to do? If you’re on this planet to do something, what is it? What difference will you make? What will be your legacy? These questions were posed to first-year students in leadership classes at Santa Clara University.

“What will be your legacy?” does not have a single answer or a right answer. But asking the question opens students up to the notion that along life’s journey they’re going to be struggling with determining the difference they want to make.

Asking these questions brings forward another central observation: 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 of these things can be quantified.

Leadership often begins with pain and suffering. And leadership can be as much a service to others. As John Gardner once observed, “A loyal constituency is won when people, consciously or otherwise, judge the leader to be capable of solving their problems and meeting their needs.” John didn’t mean that the leader should personally fix the problems and fulfill the needs. He was suggesting that people willingly follow someone who’s attuned to their aspirations, fears and ideals.

Loyalty is not something a boss can demand, just as a company cannot demand loyalty from customers. Customers decide whether to continue to give us their business, and if we want our customers’ loyalty, then it’s our job to be responsive.

The first objection to this point of view is that customers pay us, but we pay our followers. But what about energy, drive, initiative, spirit, dedication and all the other emotional currencies that people pay us with? Viewing leadership as service is not a new concept. Robert Greenleaf, himself a retired corporate executive, observed that the “great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to [the leader’s] greatness.”

When people talk about leadership, they often use the word passion. But when you look up the word passion in any dictionary that includes origins you’ll see that it comes from the Latin word for suffering. Leadership is hard work. It’s not easy despite what we, or others, may write in our attempts to make leadership more accessible. One guarantee is that what people will say about you will not be about what you achieved for yourself but what you achieved for others. Not how big a campfire you built but how well you kept others warm.

The Best Leaders Are Teachers

The best way to learn something is to teach it to somebody else. As the late Peter Drucker observed early in his career: “My third employer was the youngest of three senior partners of a bank … Once a week or so he
would sit down with me and talk about the way he saw the world … In the end, I think he learned more than I did from our little talks.”

Our teachers continue to teach as we go on to tell their stories. This should make each of us wonder about a few things:

● What lessons am I teaching in each interaction I have?
● What stories will others tell about me in the future?
● What am I learning from others as I teach?

We All Need Loving Critics

We close our ears to constant and predictable complainers. Yet, we never truly believe the sycophants whose flattery is so obviously aimed at gaining favor. No one can be as good as they seem to think we are. To stay honest with ourselves, what leaders need are “loving critics” — people who care deeply enough to give honest feedback. The problem, as shown by research, is that most leaders don’t want honest feedback, don’t ask for it, and don’t get much of it.

Credibility, the foundation of leadership from a behavioral perspective, is about doing what you say you will do. But how can you do what you say if you don’t know how you are doing?

Try this the next time you’re in a meeting. Begin by asking, “How am I doing?” More than likely you’ll be greeted with stunned silence — a sure sign folks are not used to being asked this question by you. But if you wait long enough some brave soul may venture an honest response. When that happens, tell the rest of the group, “That’s what we need more of around here. More loving critics.”

You Are the Most Important Leader in Your Organization

The CEO is not the most important leader in an organization. Despite the fact that CEOs get most of the press, they get far too much credit for success, and far too much blame for failures. The attributions are way out of proportion to their actual influence.

If the CEO is not the most important leader, who is it? If you’re a manager in an organization, to your direct reports, you are the most important leader in your organization. In other words, you are the CEO of your group.

Lots of evidence supports this claim. When we’re young, we’re more likely to view our parents, teachers, coaches or people in the community as role models. When we’re out of school, we’re more likely to select business leaders first. When at work — the person most likely to influence our performance is our most immediate manager. Because we influence those who are closest to us the most, we’re given a great gift, but we may feel weighted down by the responsibility.

No One Likes to Be an Assumption

No one likes being taken for granted. Saying, “Well, I just assumed you knew how much I appreciate what you do” is not going to motivate anyone to higher levels of performance. Not expressing appreciation to others is the same as making them disappear. We need to accept and acknowledge that nothing really significant can ever be achieved unless people feel appreciated. People who are ignored aren’t going to put forth the effort it takes to sustain greatness.

Relationships

Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. No matter how much formal power and authority our positions give us, we’ll only leave a lasting legacy if others want be in a relationship with us. Lasting success depends upon whether we like, as well as trust and respect, our leaders. All leaders should want to be liked. Being motivated to be liked will result in more enabling actions and these actions — actions such as listening, coaching, developing skills, providing choice, making connections — will create higher levels of performance.

Leadership Is Personal

People need to know more about the leader than the fact that the leader is their boss. They need to know something about the leader as a person. It is worth repeating: Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. People want to know:

● Your values, beliefs, aspirations and dreams.
● Who has influenced you the most.
● What prepares you for the job you’re doing.
● What you’re like as a person.
● What drives you.
● Your hobbies and other personal tidbits.

We are more likely to trust people we know, and the more we know about our leaders the more likely we are to trust them as human beings. We lead our lives in the company of others, and that is where we leave our legacy. It is the quality of our relationships that most determines our legacy.

Leaders Should Want to Be Liked

“You don’t love someone because of who they are,”

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said Irwin Federman, addressing a group of MBA students at Santa Clara University. “You love them because of the way they make you feel.” Irwin has it exactly right.

We work harder and more effectively for people we like. We like them in direct proportion to how they make us feel. The leaders people want to follow are the ones for which they have genuine affection. Likeability is a major factor in being successful in just about every endeavor in life. Research shows that people perform significantly more effectively when their leaders treat them with dignity and respect, listen to them, support them, recognize them, make them feel important, build their skills and show confidence in them.

**When You Don’t See Eye to Eye, Seek to Understand**

How can you lead others when you don’t see eye to eye with the leader you’re supposed to follow? It is frustrating when your leader doesn’t share your values, your vision or your passions. This can challenge you and test your dedication. Our gut instincts may tell us to quit in such a situation. But, fleeing is rarely a viable option. Besides, it’s tough to leave a legacy if you leave the relationship.

Experience is a great teacher, and not all experiences are going to be pleasant. Working with people with whom you have difficulty is a terrific laboratory. Consultant and author Roger Harrison once said after a particularly difficult encounter, “Your enemy is your teacher.” When you find yourself in a serious conflict with someone, ask yourself, “What is it that I need to learn?” Self-awareness is a predictor of success in leadership.

We need to take the responsibility to engage proactively, creating a communication channel that works for both parties and letting our manager know how he or she can help us succeed. Understanding our managers’ working styles and being sensitive to their challenges can also go a long way toward creating an effective working partnership. Being able to relate conflict to specific issues and not to take it personally is essential. When we actively engage with others in difficult conversations, we frequently learn that while there are serious differences in styles, we may actually be aligned on our goals and objectives. We can agree on goals even though we disagree on methods.

In a difficult and tense situation, first find out if everyone involved shares the same purpose and goals. Talk about desired outcomes and make every effort to get everyone aligned. Once you’re working towards the same set of goals and operating by the same set of norms, you’ll be less likely to second guess each other’s motives and be more likely to understand each other’s working styles.

However, when everyone agrees all the time, especially just for the sake of getting along, we’re unlikely to achieve the best outcomes. We cannot afford to surround ourselves with “yes” people. We need to have people willing to support us and also willing to voice their disagreements.

**You Can’t Take Trust for Granted**

Trust is the social glue that binds human relationships. Without it we’d be unable to get anything meaningful accomplished.

What does trust look like? Trust is valuing other people such that you respect their opinions and perspectives. Trust means moving outside of your comfort zone and letting go of always doing things the way they were always done.

For leaders, trust is the willingness to be vulnerable and open up to others, even when doing so may risk real harm. If trusting means making yourself vulnerable and you’re the leader, then that means your life and career are on the line, too.

But if you don’t trust, then what? Many things just won’t get done. You’re left with doing more and more work yourself, constantly checking up on other people’s work, getting less than the best from your team. And the less you trust them, the less they trust you. Eventually, you burn out from the workload and stress.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, people don’t do their jobs. The temptation may be to hold on tighter. But when you constantly look over other people’s shoulders they begin not to trust you. Trust cannot be taken for granted, but it is the basis for good working relationships.

**Let Your People Go**

Developing leaders throughout an organization is a
very scary thought, especially for those in hierarchical settings. Freedom, for some, conjures up visions of anarchy. But the opposite is actually the case. The more you control others, the more likely it is that they will rebel. Exemplary leaders have repeatedly stated that they get the greatest commitment precisely when they let their people go.

When Bruce Hillsberg, director of government storage solutions at IBM, was asked how he maintained a high-performing team, he replied, “Hire smart and capable people and then let them do what they do best.”

Bruce didn’t start off with this attitude. In the past, he took a rather tight-leashed approach to his employees and their progress. Eventually, one of his subordinates had enough and approached him about the problems with his management style. This was a turning point for Bruce. He sat back and thought about his constituents and realized they were very good at what they did. It changed his approach from micromanaging to letting his people go and do what they do best.

Personal responsibility can exist only if people have free will and if they exercise it. Personal responsibility cannot exist independent of choice. To make a meaningful difference we have to make our own meaningful choices. If leaders steal from others the opportunities to make such choices, they steal a bit of the legacy those others might have created. ■

Aspirations

People commit to causes, not to plans. If the values about which we care deeply are vividly clear to us, then the whims of fashion and the opinion polls won’t sidetrack us.

Leaders are expected to look into the future and communicate to us what they see. This is not about being prescient or clairvoyant. It’s about being discerning and perceptive. Being forward-looking may differentiate leaders from other credible people, but it’s the skill at which leaders are the most inept. Exemplary leaders also have the confidence to turn themselves into followers, trusting that many others are also eager and competent to make a difference in the world.

Lead From the Inside Out

Authentic leadership comes from the inside out. People want to know about the person behind the mask. What gives leaders the confidence that makes them think they can actually pull off what they attempt? The quest for leadership, therefore, is first an inner quest to discover who you are, and it’s through this process of self-examination that you find the awareness needed to lead. Self-confidence is really awareness of and faith in your own powers. Leadership is developing the self.

When Mike Sullivan started his new position in investor relations at Intel, he knew that he had to find what “grabbed him and wouldn’t let go.” He spent a lot of time thinking deeply about these values, talking them over with his spouse and closest friends. In turn, he realized that the leadership challenges he was facing at work were the result of “preconceived ideas about leadership that were stereotypical, outdated and simply wrong.”

Forward-Looking Is a Leadership Prerequisite

Today’s leaders have to be concerned about tomorrow’s world and those who will inherit it. They are the custodians of the future, and it’s their job to make sure that they leave their organizations in better shape than they found them.

While forward-looking is a highly valued leadership competence, it’s the one leaders are least capable of demonstrating. Those of us who help leaders become better at creating and communicating visions of the future stink at it, too. If there’s reliable evidence and general consensus that it’s so important for leaders to articulate a vision and get others excited about it, why do leaders do so poorly at it?

The most frequent explanation is that people and organizations are hostages to the present, too focused on quarterly profits. The pace of change keeps us from even trying to think more about the future, when it makes it harder and harder to cope with the present. This is not likely to change soon. Even so, people still want leaders to be forward-looking. That won’t change either. Despite the daily pressures that hold our minds hostage, we can be more future-oriented.

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Aspirations

The best place to start creating the future is by being more mindful in the present. Our failure at being forward-looking may be more due to mindlessness in the present than any other factor — not really noticing what’s going on around us, believing that we know everything we need to know, viewing the world through pre-established categories and operating from a single point of view. We have to stop, look and listen. We have to stop doing for some amount of time each day. We have to remind ourselves that most of the disruptive electronic devices have an off switch. Then start noticing more of what’s going on around you right now. And don’t forget to look at the future.

It’s Not Just the Leader’s Vision

At some point during all this talk over the years about the importance of being future-oriented, leaders got the sense that they were the ones who had to be the visionaries. Leaders have assumed that it’s their vision that matters, and if it’s their vision then they have to create it.

To be able to describe a compelling image of the future, you have to be able to grasp what others want and need. And what if people don’t know what they need? This is all the more reason to be a stellar listener. Listening is not just about the words. It’s also about what is unspoken. It’s about reading between the lines. It’s about paying attention.

Liberate the Leader in Everyone

Leaders can arise to meet particular problems. Leadership is an observable set of skills and abilities that are useful whether one is in the executive suite or on the front line, on Wall Street or Main Street. Any skill can be strengthened, honed and enhanced if we have the motivation and desire, and if we practice and get coaching and feedback.

Some people are better at it than others. However, the more we attribute leadership to a set of innate character traits, the more we abdicate our own responsibility to become the best we can be.

Leaders Are Followers, Too!

There is too much focus on the leader leading and not enough on the same leader following.

“A good leader is also a good follower,” said Susanna Wong, vice president of Sherwood partners LLC, a business consulting firm in Palo Alto, Calif. “This may sound like a paradox,” she continued, “but based on my experience I notice that the good leaders are the ones who understand their boundaries and are willing to accept sound advice from their followers.”

The emphasis is on following the process, and not the person. Looking at leadership and followership through this lens, leaders should consider these guidelines:

- Clear values and beliefs consistent with their own.
- A vision of the future that they share.
- Creative ideas that enable the organization to make changes so that the values and vision can be realized.
- Other people whose strengths and talents contribute to the enactment of the values and vision, and teams whose collective capacity is greater than that of their leaders.
- Their hearts and caring for the people who make it possible to get extraordinary things done.

Being a follower is good for the soul. It reminds us that we’re not alone, that any success we enjoy depends on the success of others, and that we’ve got to remain open to learning. Humility comes from grasping these fundamental ideas and realizing that our own legacies are built upon the legacies of those who have come before us and those who labor alongside of us.

Courage

Leaving a legacy is all about making a difference. We can only make a difference when we take stands. Everyone of us is capable of takings stands on things that matter. It takes courage to realize your dreams and to give meaning to your values. If you’re going to leave a legacy of lasting significance, it’ll be the result of acting courageously. You can’t plan to be courageous, but you can chose to act that way. Courage is the virtue that makes all other virtues possible.

We must realize that there is no money-back guarantee for leaders. You can do your best, and it still may simply not be enough. There are forces that are always outside of your control. It is also true that every leader-
ship virtue taken to excess can become a vice, and every strength can become a weakness. We have to remain vigilant in reigning in our own sense of self-importance, and have the humility and grace to admit that we depend on others as much as they depend on us.

There’s Courage in All of Us

Courage is one of those big, bold words. It has this image of being something way out there on the edges of human experience. It’s commonly associated with superhuman feats, life-and-death struggles and overcoming impossible odds. But when you look beyond the headlines you find out that this account of courage is certainly not the whole story.

Courage is poorly understood and not what people typically think it is. The ancient Greeks, who did have a lot to say about courage — Socrates and Aristotle, for example — thought of courage as one of four cardinal virtues that were essential for living a good life and for sustaining a civil society. They spoke of courage as the disposition that gives one the capacity to face danger without being overcome by fear.

While the reading of philosophy gives us a better sense of the historical meaning, it doesn’t bring courage alive. But in asking people to reflect on moments of courage, definition and principles emerge. Everyone can recall an experience that required summoning up courage. Courage is not just for heroes after all.

You Can’t Plan to Be Courageous, But You Can Choose It

People want prescriptions. They want to know how they can apply good ideas to their daily work. But as author and consultant Peter Block points out, “Courage isn’t done for the sake of being practical. It’s chosen for its own sake. As soon as you make courage practical, you’ve stolen its humanity.”

What in your life or work is causing you great hardship and suffering? Beverly Kaye, now a highly accomplished businesswoman, author and speaker, was stating her name and talking about herself without stuttering in a special postgraduate class at MIT.

What are you most afraid of? Consultant and author John Izzo expresses it this way: “Part of courage is to face whatever are the inner blocks or demons or barriers that keep you from becoming the fullest person you can be in the world. A lot of courage is really facing yourself.”

When you think about the adversities that you face, what’s at stake? Jim “Gus” Gustafson, a leadership researcher and wireless company executive, realized that in order to pursue his dream, he needed to quit his job. “I’d been employed since I was tall enough to push a lawnmower,” he said, “and the concept of walking away from a perfectly good job was frightening.” You can’t plan to be courageous. But you can choose it.

It Takes Courage to Make a Life

We may be able to make a secure and comfortable living without exercising courage. Yet most of us want more from life than security and comfort. We want a life that matters, a life that makes some kind of difference to our family and friends, and even to our organizations, our communities and our world. It takes courage to make that kind of life, to make a lasting difference.

Several lessons of courage can be learned. Little acts can have huge impacts. One person can make a difference. Courageous acts flow from beliefs. Small acts can be called Rosa Parks moments, in honor of the black seamstress who refused to move from her seat on a bus so a white person could sit down. Her actions weren’t strategic or grand. They weren’t self-promotional or manipulative. They were simple and mundane.

By her refusal to move from her seat, Rosa Parks demonstrated the power of one person. Furthermore, courageous acts flow from a commitment to deeply held beliefs — you just can’t separate the two. “I didn’t get on that bus to get arrested. I got on that bus to go home,” Parks wrote in her autobiography Quite Strength.

The Courage to Be Human

Leadership is a humbling experience. Leadership is hard work. Anyone who’s ever been in a leadership role quickly learns that you’re squeezed between others’ lofty expectations and your own personal limitations. You realize that while others want you to be of impeccable character, you’re not always without fault. You learn that you can’t see around every corner, and even if you know your

The Achilles’ Heel of Leaders

Kirk Hanson, university professor and executive director of the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, asserts that the Achilles’ heel of leaders can be found when they:

✓ Believe they know it all.
✓ Believe they are in charge.
✓ Believe the rules don’t apply to them.
✓ Believe they will never fail.
✓ Believe they did it all by themselves.
✓ Believe they are better than the “little people.”
✓ Believe they are the organization.
✓ Believe they can focus everything on the job.

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way forward, everyone may not end up at the same destination, let alone be on time. You discover that despite your best efforts to introduce brilliant innovations, most of them don’t succeed. You find that you sometimes get angry and short, and that you don’t always listen carefully to what others have to say. You’re reminded that you don’t always treat everyone with dignity and respect. You realize that you are human.

Failure Is Always an Option

Telling people that failure is not an option is just plain nonsense. Failure is always an option. In fact, if you’re not willing to fail at what you do, you’ll never become great and you’ll never innovate.

It’s really all about your point of view. Imagine that you play professional baseball. The very best hitters each season will have a batting average of a little better than .300. For every 10 times they get up to bat, they get about three hits. The real reality is that despite the probabilities, professionals believe in the possibilities.

Here’s another way to think about it. We only learn and move forward when we experiment and experience doing differently what we already know how to do well. It’s called a learning curve. A learning curve is not a straight line. It always goes down before it goes up.

Life is our laboratory, and we ought to use it to conduct as many experiments as possible. Try, fail, learn. That should be the leader’s mantra. Charles Kettering, the founder of Delco and holder of more than 140 patents, used to say, “It doesn’t matter if you try and try and try again, and fail. It does matter if you try and fail, and fail to try again.”

No Money-Back Guarantee

News Flash: You can do all this leadership stuff perfectly and still get fired. Take the case of a former senior vice president of marketing for a large packaged goods company. When new technology made it possible to introduce a substitute for his company’s product, he took his studies to a board and urged the development of a market entry. The board did not share his point of view.

This senior vice president excelled as a leader. He was someone who was held up as a role model. Even so, he got fired. Sometimes, despite our very best efforts, we don’t succeed.

We know that being forward-looking and communicating a clear and common vision of the future are what set leaders apart from others. Yet a singular focus on one vision of the future can blind a leader.

If perfection is not the leadership ideal, what is? The answer is being more of who we are. David Whyte, author and poet, once said, “The great question of leadership, about taking real steps on the pilgrim’s path, is the great question of any individual life: how to make everything more personal.”

The Legacy You Leave

Sergey Nikiforov, a Russian immigrant to the United States who is co-founder and vice president of product development at Stack3, Inc., wrote this note:

“Where do I start becoming a better leader? This question has been nagging me for some time … Naively I assumed that to become a better leader meant to perform formidable tasks … Then it occurred to me—I was thinking selfishly …”

Sergey has nailed it. Each day provides countless changes to make a difference. The chance might come in a private conversation with a direct report or in a meeting with colleagues. When we choose to lead every day, we choose aspirations of long-term significance over short-term measures of success. It takes courage to lead. It takes courage to make a life. Courage, like leadership, is a choice.

As John Maxwell, author of numerous books on leadership, said, “It’s been said that there are two kinds of people in life: those who make things happen and those who wonder what happened. Leaders have the ability to make things happen. People who don’t know how to make things happen for themselves won’t know how to make things happen for others.” He went on, “What you do with the future means the difference between leaving a track record and leaving a legacy.”

Legacies aren’t just wishful thinking. They’re the result of determined doing. The legacy you leave is the life you lead. You just never know whose life you might touch. What you do know is that you can make a difference. You can leave the world better than you found it.