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# » Legacy of Leaders



**I**n the run-up to the Games, communities and organisations across the UK are being encouraged to create projects that celebrate London 2012 in a way that is relevant to them and which will leave a lasting legacy.

Few leaders are remembered for leaving a remarkable legacy behind them but Steve Jobs is one such example. As the face of Apple for so many years, Jobs became part of the very fabric of the company's products. It is not uncommon for a chief executive (CEO) to start thinking about their legacy early on in their role. The following comments are from two different world renowned chief executives during interviews undertaken by Cranfield as part of a global study into the role of Chairmen on boards. Both are outstanding performers and both are reflecting on the issue of legacy.

"I put the organisation and all those involved first, but that for me had its consequences. I upset a prominent, national political figure, but I felt I had no choice. I do not know how I will be remembered but at least I hope others understand the reasons for my actions and the values and beliefs that drove me."

"I worked hard to make the organisation what it is today. It became part of me and that, on reflection, was the problem. I became over concerned with posterity and the image I would leave behind. I interfered with many things even after I left. The place has slowly deteriorated. I should have stepped aside and let the business determine its own direction and way forward."

The unfortunate passing of Steve Jobs has drawn considerable attention to a topic prominent in the discourses of Plato and Aristotle, that of legacy.

Throughout history, outstanding leaders have been distinguished by their strength of character and deep conviction of purpose and mission. Whether dictatorial or collaborative by inclination, their oratory nurtured a charisma that convinced, perhaps even manipulated, others to applaud their cause.

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President Harry Truman's words "a man or woman who can persuade people to do what they ought to do... without being persuaded", ring true. →

**“The challenge is, how to lead in order to realise sustainable legacy without ego taking over?”**

These outstanding men and women are the legacy leaders. They are the ones who have others do what they desire because of their ability to inflame passions that the motivation to do so comes from within.

However, the ancients equally warned us of the downside of legacy leaders. The profound and evident contribution of Steve Jobs is countered by the scandals of Bernie Madoff and Dennis Kozlowski of Tyco. These leaders were originally viewed as people of high integrity but later revealed to have abused their privileged position.

Some are crooked from the start; others unfortunately just lapse. Aristotle, was deeply conscious of the challenge of continuously being virtuous not just because of the erosive effect of personal weaknesses, but also because of the impact of forever balancing competing moral priorities. In this sense, the search for everlasting posterity can become an overarching temptation in its own right.

Even some fifteen hundred years before Socrates, the Chinese extolled the virtues of balance captured in philosophies that have become catchphrases of today, Taoism and Daoism. The Tao, (the way), is a journey of trial and tribulation where man and woman stand bare in front of the world clothed only by their virtue as a cover for their modesty.

Distressingly, the teachings of our Chinese and Greek forefathers seem to have been neglected and substituted by prescriptions on how to be that ‘great leader’. Even recent works such as, *Your leadership legacy* by Robert Galford and Regina Marcia or *How do you measure up as a legacy leader*, by Walter Lippmann, pay insufficient attention to one critical life experience, namely that all leaders

have their weaknesses and most have been tempted by the ultimate mistress of salaciousness, namely, ego. Therefore the challenge is, how to lead in order to realise sustainable legacy without ego taking over?

Research at Cranfield highlights there is no particular secret to leaving a long lasting footprint other than to seriously consider the following questions:

- Are you approachable, particularly when strained? Do you create a culture where others have the confidence to offer comment that can feel like criticism, but is intended to enhance yours and others performance?
- Do you reflect on your actions and motivation, not in the quiet of your own home after a long stretching day, but when you are being stretched and probably at the height of being stretched?
- Do you instil confidence in others to have them offer even half formed views, sometimes for information and sometimes just to make people feel they have made a contribution even when you already know the answer?
- Are you both driver and coach, authoritative and instructive, able to forge direction but in an environment that encourages open dialogue?
- How do others address you - with your title first or just talk to you as a person they deeply respect? Perhaps more important, how do others refer to you when you are not present?
- Are stories of your successes, failures or learning’s more about you, or more about the wisdom and learning you have shared with others?

- When displaying tenacity and courage, is that done quietly, driven by the issues at hand, or more flamboyantly with you holding centre stage?
- When behaving inconsistently (and behave inconsistently you will) does the example you have been striving to set fall apart or have you won sufficient respect to explain yourself? How do you maintain dignity when you show that you are like everyone else – human?
- How do you pursue your vision – with great strides or through sharing the bite size steps that are being taken, therefore allowing others to contribute and feel part of the daily momentum of striving for success?
- Do you stretch and develop those around you, or just frighten them? The gap between development and paralysis is quite small, often captured in the tortured comments of, ‘he or she has set impossible goals’, countered by ‘what I have done is set stretching targets.’
- How do you know when it is time for you to go? You have done all you can and to remain longer will hold the organisation back.

So much depends on the deeply held values of each leader. The balancing of resilience with care, being visionary and

yet humble, and being ruthless but still compassionate, distinguishes a leader that unknowingly lives their legacy as compared to the one who is obsessed with leaving a legacy.

And therein lays the secret to legacy – worry less about yourself and what you leave behind and be more concerned with what

is the right thing to do today. Legacy shaped by clearly thought through values is long lasting. Ironically, legacy shaped by ego and self-concern is also long lasting but creates folklore of distaste and sets an example of what not to be. [LME](#)

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