

# **Success or Significance: Leaving a Legacy**

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## **Introduction**

If you are a cow you definitely want to be at the head of the herd when it comes to getting a drink of water or eating from a patch of grass. Cows follow the leader without any idea on where the herd is going? When a cow gets an invitation to dinner, that's a concept that could have double meaning.

On the other hand, fish sometimes swim in schools for protection while others must swim upstream with an almost singular focus – even at the risk of life. While there are lots of hurdles – from waterfalls to bears – there is urgency in staying the course.

If you are offended at thinking of yourself as a cow or a fish – then let's look at the word leader. Of the crew on this panel I'm the least likely of all to be called a leader. A leader must by definition have followers. At this point in my career, I run a one-person show. Yet, it isn't just our work lives where we're called on to be leaders. Whether in work, family, faith matters or pro-bono activity – each of us can be a leader.

## **Measures of Leadership**

I want us to think about a very different aspect of leadership. The concept is that wherever you are and whatever your age or influence you can exhibit one of the most lasting of leadership qualities -- that is to "leave a legacy."

Legacy is defined as “money or property bequeathed to another” or “something handed down from an ancestor or predecessor.” Another way to say it would be to “leave every organization you are a part of better than you found it.” That could either be financially, or in terms of effectiveness, conservation outputs, service or attitude. Of course there is another concept for legacy in forestry vernacular – the old and perhaps dying tree.

Bob Buford in his book **Half Time** speaks of near middle age having the desire to move from success to significance. While I agree with his premise, I believe that each of us, regardless of age or position can choose to focus on significance in our lives.

### **Possible Examples of Leaving a Legacy**

I'd like to look at my own 30-year career in natural resources – and mention a few outcomes – not as a way of bragging, but only as an example of the variety of legacies that each of us can leave.

#### Leaving a Sound Financial Foundation

My first example goes back to my very first professional position – Executive Directors of a small environmental non-profit, the Mississippi Wildlife Federation. By title, I was a leader. But, more importantly I would hope history would judge that I used my two short years there to leave a legacy. There were many important conservation battles and initiatives in my time at MWF, but perhaps my most lasting legacy could be seen in the organization's finances. When I arrived MWF was in debt and could not meet its monthly bills. Twenty-four months later, the debt was gone; revenues had doubled and we had instituted a long-term financial plan through a life membership campaign that boasted \$100,000 in cash reserves. Needless to say, while those who followed might not have had an easy time, the foundation upon which they built to leave their own legacy was more sound than that I found upon my arrival.

#### Instilling a Conservation Ethic

Next, a note from my years with Potlatch Corporation and its southern division in Arkansas. As the first wildlife biologist in the company's history, I worked for the state's 4th largest forest products producer and landowner. The late 1970's and early 80's were a time of environmental awakening in a very traditional industry. When I left, the company had a formal and credible plan to identify and manage a very significant population of endangered red cockaded woodpeckers. It was my pleasure to

nominate and secure, even after my departure, recognition for Potlatch as the Arkansas Wildlife Federation's Forest Conservationist of the Year in 1986.

While I can't take credit for the fact that in more recent years Potlatch has executed a formal Habitat Conservation Plan committing long-term management of its woodpecker population, and in Idaho, has announced plans to place conservation easements on over 600,000 acres of company lands, I would like to believe that the small legacy of my tenure at Potlatch helped prepare the soil for further environmental growth and leadership.

#### Lasting Financial Footing & Conservation

Now to my five year stint in Washington DC. There I held multiple positions with the American Forest Institute, American Forest Council and American Forest Foundation. I count among my legacies, the fact that AFF, the owner and manager of Tree Farm and Project Learning Tree, today has a \$4 million endowment created through the generosity of forest products companies that donated forestlands that I then sold to conservation interests and agencies. Among the gains are a 7,000 state wildlife management area in Arkansas that abuts two national wildlife refuges and in Washington State, a bald eagle preserve. Perhaps the conservation gains are legacy enough, but the fact that AFF has a lasting financial foundation to support its work is also a source of pride.

#### Exhibiting Sustainable Development

Next to my decade at Champion International. I ended with an executive leadership position as VP of Forest Policy with Global responsibility. I count as one of my legacies a project in the Brazilian State of Amapa near the mouth of the Amazon. When the company completed a multi-year worldwide study of potential forest plantation areas, we settled on Brazil – a country where we had a ½ century of experience. But none of that experience was in the Amazon. The company ultimately purchased more than 1 million acres – agreeing voluntarily to set aside not only all rainforest segments but also several significant cerrado – or grassland reserves --- (*as an aside, grasslands are far more endangered in Brazil than are rainforests.*) The conservation plan was the product of the largest private Rapid Ecological Assessment even conducted. It was recommended and overseen by an independent International Advisory Council that we put in place. That land today is targeted 2/3<sup>rd</sup> for conservation and 1/3 for plantation – a model of private forest conservation and sustainable development.

### Bringing Business and the Environment Together

Let me end this snapshot look at my career with one additional example. This comes from my consulting practice – The Environmental Edge -- yet is part of my commitment to give ½ of my time to not-for-profit causes. This work was done on behalf of the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), where I serve as Vice Chairman of the Board of Direction.

Weary of simplistic arguments and debates about sprawl and development and resulting loss of open space and wildlife habitats, I set about developing and attempting to market a model that would link conservation with continued growth. With the aid of a fellow board member with ties to the Walton family, we pitched a rather simple idea to Lee Scott, President of Wal-Mart. Let's have Wal-Mart – the world's largest corporation -- become the first company in the world to off-set its entire development footprint – building, parking lots, offices and distribution centers – acre for acre with conserved lands.

We started with an idea that would have the company do this over 10 years for all of its U.S. operations – addressing historic, current and future growth. NFWF committed to match Wal-Mart at least \$1 for \$1 in an effort to use conservation easements to achieve the goal. With Wal-Mart's pledge of \$35 million over ten years, the Foundation launched what will likely be a \$100 million project entitled *Acres for America*.

Our 10-year goal was to offset 138,000 acres of development. In year one, pulling funds forward from the second year, we and our conservation partners badly missed our goal of addressing perhaps 20% of the company's development footprint. In fact, through projects in Maine, Arkansas, Louisiana, Arizona and Oregon, we achieved not 20% but 230% of our original 10-year goal – conserving more than 322,000 acres. I'm pleased to say that Wal-Mart didn't back away from the commitment; they are excited about seeing just how much land we can conserve under their original pledge.

While I am personally proud of each of these legacies I acknowledge that none was not mine alone. Great team support and not a little divine intervention were involved in each.

## Conclusion

My take-away is that we should not view leadership based just upon budgets and numbers of employees or any other traditional measures alone. While each is fine, the real judgment about leadership will be seen in the legacies you leave. It's also something, that unlike legacy trees, you don't have to wait decades to see.

Regardless of age, position or perceived power, let me leave you with five challenges or questions:

- What are you doing to ensure that your organization -- whether a university, company, not-for-profit or agency – will be stronger and more effective because of your service?
- What are you doing to challenge yourself and others to live more sustainably?
- What are you doing to invest in the future of the profession perhaps by sharing time with a student or new graduate as a mentor? (Rick Warren in his book **Better Together** says “Life is too short to learn everything by experience.”)
- What are you doing to tangibly leave the world's nature resources better for your time?
- Finally, what are you doing to move from success to significance?

We speak of legacy trees --- those relics left from a former time. They add value and diversity to the managed forests.

We speak of leaving a legacy to our children in term of an inheritance or values.

Most of us will never be mentioned alongside the likes of Pinchot, Leopold or Muir, **but we each can leave a legacy.**