

# ON THE EDGE

Timely, thoughtful and always candid

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## Imprinting the Sands of Time: The Impact and Intent of Legacy Creation

Years ago, a dear friend and mentor of mine noted, *"You can't leave footprints in the sands of time while sitting on your butt. And who wants to leave butt prints in the sands of time?!"* Indeed. Usually with a smile on my face, I've thought of his words often since then. At the end of our lives, all that any of us can really be assured is that we will leave some sort of legacy behind. A legacy of accomplishment. A legacy of our impact on the relationships we were a part of. Mother, father, sibling, friend or citizen, a legacy of how well we played the many roles we assumed (or wound up in). A legacy of how often we gave our best effort, even with life's more mundane tasks. A legacy of how often we took the time to help others, even when it was not expected. A legacy of how often we did the right thing, even when we thought no one was watching. Smiling, frowning or looking bored, a legacy of expressions and attitudes. Whether simple or complex, our ultimate legacy will be whether we left the world a better place, however slightly, than when we arrived.

The thing about legacy is that most people don't start thinking seriously about theirs until the latter years of their lives. They wait until after the kids are grown or they're retired (or at least thinking about it). At 76 years of age, billionaire Warren Buffett donated 85% of his multi-billion dollar fortune to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. A CEO friend of mine finally decided to get involved with a local youth organization at the age of 66. In a recent interview with Newsweek magazine, 87-year-old evangelist Billy Graham expressed regret over some of the more judgmental social positions he espoused in his younger years. Now, his message is predominantly one of acceptance and tolerance of others with different beliefs. *"Salvation", he says, "is the work of Almighty God, and only He knows what is in each human heart."* Unfortunately, because their dramas are so inwardly focused, some people never think about their legacy at all.

Why do so many people ignore their legacy until later in their lives? First, there's the "fine wine" phenomenon. As we get older, our perspectives are naturally inclined to expand, mature and mellow. Our values shift and we realize that being human is not just about us. Second, most of us are helplessly enslaved by our current routines and habits. We get so caught up in the daily fire-fighting and "have to" lists, that there's never any time or energy left to get to the "choose to" elements...even if we knew what they would be! But time and legacy wait for no one. Whether you intend it or not, your legacy is being created every single day from the point of adolescence.

So, the challenge is this: How can we start thinking and acting today about the footprints we intend to leave in the sand (versus the ones left by random meandering)?

Let's start with the basic ingredients. While there are undoubtedly other themes you could incorporate, I like to think of legacy as having three inter-connected circles: Self, Family/Friends, and Society. And depending on your spiritual leanings, you could certainly add a fourth circle. Either way, it's important that we draw and color in the details of these circles continuously with the things we make time for. So, try this on for size. Since

we already live in a "to-do list" kind of world, why not incorporate the creation of our legacy into that structure? As you're reviewing your task list for the upcoming day, try to incorporate just one "to-do" item from any of your legacy circles. It doesn't need to be time consuming, just significant enough to make a small impression that's in alignment with your circles. Make a phone call or send a card to a friend or family member. Carve out some time after work to play with your kids or visit with a neighbor. Read an article to better inform yourself on an important social matter. Even the simple task of reflecting for a few minutes on what you actually want your legacy to be is a great start. The point is, do something daily.

All too often, we hear of people who die unexpectedly and/or much younger than they should have. And yet we usually don't think (for more than a few seconds, at least) that it could have been us. But the reality is that none of us really know when "our time" will come. When it does, what could be better than knowing that our imprints were left with thought and care? It's the little things we do, day-to-day, that evolve into a legacy created by choice, not by chance.

- *Paul Meshanko*

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