

One's legacy more a matter of good balance

The late Richard Barwick of Lodi was one of those gentlemen you encounter from time to time who was liked by all and made you feel better as a person for spending time with him.

Certainly, that's not what he set out to do but nonetheless that was his impact on family and friends. I counted myself lucky to have known him for the past 15 years.

During Barwick's funeral service the pastor mentioned that for Richard his legacy was family and his simple but powerful love for them. It appeared the pastor got it right. But it also got me thinking about the importance of one's legacy and how we view ourselves.

Spanish poet, novelist and playwright Miguel de Cervantes wrote that "there is a strange charm in the thoughts of a good legacy, or the hopes of an estate, which wondrously alleviates the sorrow that men would otherwise feel for the death of friends."

Since de Cervantes lived 400 years ago, this concept isn't all that new.

For example, take any president of the United States. Immediately after their second term election, pundits begin speaking about what their legacy might be. We would all like to be viewed positively by history, but is this preoccupation healthy?

To be sure, history matters. But

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shouldn't we be more concerned with today and the impact we make on the people affected by our actions rather than what historians interpret years from now?

Business folks seem to be equally concerned. Not all, but enough to notice. This is something that affects someone to the degree of their success in the business world. The more recognized you are as a business leader the more thought seems to have been given to the idea of a durable legacy and promoting that remembrance.

But this can be a smokescreen as well. Too many times, someone viewed as a successful business owner also had a shambles for a personal life. Peel back a couple thin layers and you expose family alcoholism, drug abuse, sui-

cides, divorces and spendthrifts in equal measure to the degree of peer recognition. How does this happen?

Some would say that statistically it really doesn't. We all have these associations and occurrences. It's just that higher profile people are just that ... higher profile. As such they are naturally watched more and personal aspects are more easily observed. They don't have a higher incidence of family problems. It just seems that way.

There's a link that exists, again not for all but for enough. That link is forged by the decisions made during the business person's life. If their only concern is their business and impressive profits, then naturally anything else in their life will suffer. This includes physical health, spiritual development, personal relationships and spousal support.

There's an analogy I formerly used when advising entrepreneurs thinking about going into business for themselves. As a kid the big treat was to attend the Fireman's Carnival and parade when it hit town following the Memorial Day weekend in Palmyra. One time I was fascinated by this guy in a straw hat and red and white striped vest spinning numerous pie plates simultaneously — at least a dozen. It was quite a blur.

Later I understood that the secret was to give equal attention to all the plates even when it didn't seem necessary. Once you get past having one plate up you need to remember that even if you continue to focus exclusively on that plate and it's strongly turning you run the risk of having it collapse by the other unattended plates falling into it.

The pie plates, of course, represent the various institutions in our lives we hold important. Simply focusing on one of those pie plates doesn't mean the other responsibilities are self orbiting. Yet business folks treat them as such and wonder what happened when the whole shebang fails.

Given that the odds of a business making it to the fourth generation are at approximately 1 percent, you have to wonder why business owners are so fixated on this as their legacy. Perhaps the notion of legacy is not overrated, but rather what is seen as their legacy is.

Now it's time for those pie plates. I hear one of them calling.

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