Inspirng legacy

Mark your hero's contributions

HAVE you ever known a work colleague who was one of those "behind the scenes" volunteers who never sought attention or even a thanks for their contribution? Yet as an observer, you start to recognize the significant attention to mentoring young colleagues played a key role in the successful development of new business leaders.

Or, you may have seen these individuals accomplishing their full day of work and instead of heading to a golf course, they went directly to a volunteer role at a local food bank or they may have served on an advisory board member of a local social service agency.

However, as these individuals move into retirement and perhaps pass on from this world altogether, you may feel a sense of loss because in your mind, there just isn’t enough recognition for their legacy of contributions. You feel a desire to do something special to remember this individual. At the same time, you are probably not aware of the many opportunities available to create a long-term recognition and celebration of this individual’s contributions, whatever they might be.

One means of remembering an individual's contribution is to create a special legacy fund. For instance, friends and colleagues were successful in establishing the G. Clarence Elliott Fellowship at the faculty of graduate studies, University of Manitoba. Their mentor, Clarence Elliott, was a young man who rose from humble “farm boy” beginnings to become chief financial officer and a pioneer institutional real estate investor with Great-West Life Assurance. While Elliott was instrumental in putting Great-West Life at the forefront of the real estate development industry, he also sat on many corporate and community boards, generously donating his time and energy to special projects.

At some time, Elliott never forgot his country roots or abandoned his “down-home” leadership style and never forgot about the young talent who strived so hard within his departmental responsibility. While he used his personal charisma and interpersonals to develop some of the industry’s first successful partnerships and alliances, he always gave time to frontline professionals whom he deemed as having significant potential.

Elliott had a special talent for identifying unique skills among young people and a knack for bringing out the best in individuals. As a result, he gave as much time as possible for individual mentoring and personal development. In fact, the individuals who set up the legacy program recall Elliott as the person who literally directed their destiny. They saw him as a great teacher who coached, cajoled and challenged each individual to continuously excel in their field.

It was Elliott’s dedication to developing young people that drove a group of colleagues—Annie Johnson, former associate treasurer at GWL, Gillian Ewing, who rose to the role of assistant vice-president, BMU Harris Private Banking, and Steve Derrings, who started his own company and is now president of Site Selection Canada—to propose the development of a legacy project in his name. They reached out to many people who Elliott had touched with his gift of mentorship and quickly garnered a substantial financial fund in support of the project.

Then in 1994, the G. Clarence Elliott Fellowship and Trust Fund began the annual award to encourage the "pursuit of excellence" as exemplified by Elliott’s career. This year, up to three students in the departments of agriculture, agricultural economics, city planning, architecture, business administration, economics or statistics will receive scholarships of $1,000—$4,000 for their study efforts.

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The G. Clarence Elliott Fellowship is a good example of a legacy project that can be created by work colleagues and friends to celebrate the personal and professional life of someone special. Rick Frost, chief executive officer of the Winnipeg Foundation suggests his organization or other charity groups, university and college foundations recognize that many work colleagues, friends and families today are seeking unique ways to celebrate the legacy of someone special.

As a result, these charity groups are becoming creative and innovative in assisting interested parties to meet their legacy needs.

For instance, the Winnipeg Foundation, one of the 80-year-old service, will work closely with you to develop all aspects of your legacy project. It will assist you to clearly define the mission, value and goal of your legacy project, develop selection criteria for vetting applications, establish grant processing dates and other administrative procedures and assist you in determining an effective public relations and marketing strategy.

Several benefits arise from working through an established public charity organization or a university/college foundation.

In particular, the charity organization will take on the key task of managing the money to enable your legacy to benefit from their significant investment expertise. Secondly, it will absorb the annual administrative requirements needed to distribute your legacy. Thirdly, it will ensure the legacy survives your own succession and will continue to contribute to society as you have specified.

Unfortunately, people often think legacy recognition projects are for the wealthy, high-profile, rich and famous. This is absolutely not the case, Frost says. In fact, the Winnipeg Foundation has created an innovative donor mechanism called a "giving circle" that invites small donors to join together to create their own legacy project.

If you have known a personal hero at work whose contributions you admire and want to recognize through a special legacy, don’t hesitate. Rally your friends and colleagues and seek the advice of a selected charity. Remember, creating a legacy in memory of this individual is a special and timeless form of recognition that goes on living. Your hero, your employer and the family will be proud to know your legacy will be a gift that inspires bright young men and women to succeed at their highest level.

Sources: Interview with Steve Derrings, president, Site Selection Canada and Rick Frost, chief executive officer, the Winnipeg Foundation, a review of Legacy Documentary Video, and review of Leave a Legacy Canada website, http://www.beauregion.ca/

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