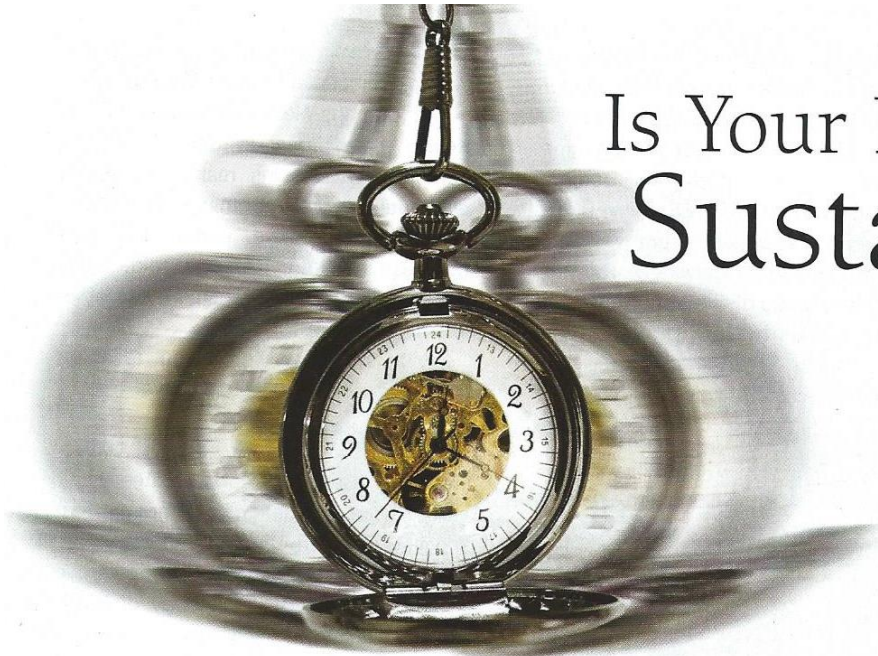


Is Your Legacy Sustainable?



BY KITTIE WATSON, PhD

Social responsibility and sustainability extend beyond recycling bins and carbon footprints. Enterprising women encourage—sometimes *expect*—employees to take on volunteer projects, donating time and talent toward the greater community good. The result is often a deeper, more trusting relationship between a company and the community, and a sense of good will and purpose within the organization.

But what if there were even *more* to gain? What if your company's volunteer activities not only helped key employees *feel* better, but actually helped them *perform* better? Are you ready to take the next step and intentionally build your leadership legacy?

What Does Your Legacy Say About You?

A leader leaves a legacy whether planned or not. Since your legacy is the sum total of the difference you make in people's lives—directly and indirectly, formally and informally—you have a choice in the type of legacy you want to leave: positive or negative. Rather than thinking about a legacy as the last stage of your career, I encourage you to view your legacy as a “story” you write each day of your working life.

Leaders interested in creating a sustainable *positive* legacy need to ask themselves two key questions:

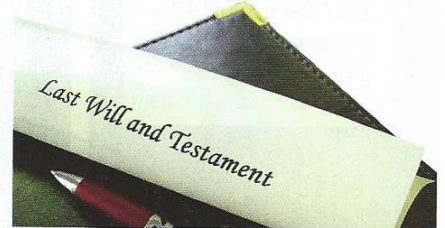
- What story are people telling about me today?
- What story do I want people to tell about me tomorrow?

By answering these questions, many women leaders realize how important it is for them to make a difference and discover that volunteerism is at the heart of their businesses. Rather than see volunteer projects as fleeting, feel-good activities, these leaders recognize the tangible results of how their efforts change lives.



Benefits today and beyond

What is often missed is the benefit companies gain when their leaders and employees volunteer. With the right planning and nonprofit partner, employees and employers can gain as much as they give. New skills and capabilities learned while volunteering can translate into tangible benefits for the company and the communities they serve. For example, Sarah, a young professional, learned how to lead and facilitate meetings when she served as chair of the board at a nonprofit. Kathy, a senior engineer, learned how to negotiate contracts and secure funding by leading a capital-funding campaign for a charitable group.



In a global company, an employee might volunteer to work overseas in a developing country where services are sorely needed. The immersion in a new culture offers new experiences, deepens her knowledge base, exposes her to fresh insights and challenges her to think in different ways. This type of assignment requires the individual to use existing skill sets as a foundation while expanding her capacity and awareness.

A company with high-potential employees might look for skill-building matched with local community needs involving after-school programs, crisis-assistance centers or environmental concerns. The volunteers learn networking, community organizing and planning skills, while leaving a positive legacy for future generations in the community.

Volunteering Builds Teams

Community causes have long provided opportunities for team-building. With pre-planning, employees who work together as volunteers—perhaps cleaning up a local beach or running a fundraising event—can take the lessons they

learn back to their jobs. For example, immediately after working on a Habitat for Humanity women's building project, the supervisor asked the team to discuss the experience. They identified what they learned about teamwork and explained how the event reinforced camaraderie while increasing the return of the time they invested.

“Community involvement is an important cornerstone for many companies, and sustainable leadership practices enhance public image, community relations and good will.”


— *Engaging Employees in Sustainability*

ability is becoming a tool to recruit, retain, inspire and motivate your work force.”

While all volunteerism is valuable, consider the distinction between simply giving away time and building legacies. Rather than just offering assistance to a charity, find ways to use the time to build talent and learning. Socially conscious leaders can collaborate with nonprofits to design talent development strategies that benefit both organizations. While I'm not suggesting that leaders stop serving on their existing boards or close

their wallets to the random charity up the road, there is great potential for exponential impact with more *strategic* partnerships. Businesses and nonprofits can build internal capacity and tap resources that contribute to social progress and business results.

Legacy leaders focus on relationships and model how to care about and serve others. Staff, customers and community all benefit from intentional, developmental engagements. Remember, as a leader, you write a page in your legacy story each day. There is much to gain from viewing volunteerism as an intentional business strategy at the heart of your business.

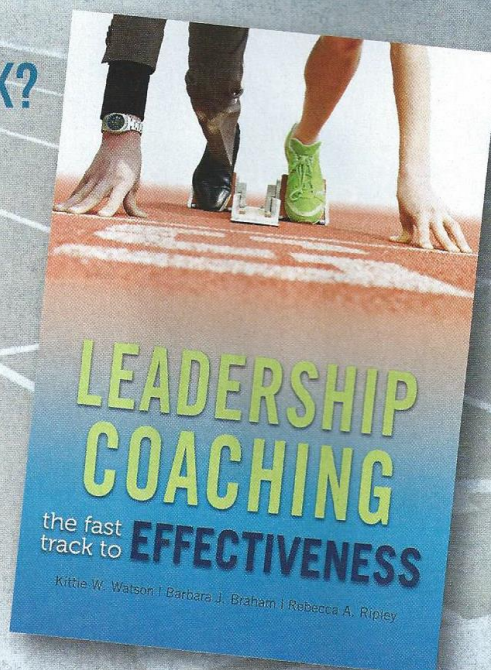
KITTIE WATSON, Ph.D., is the founder of Innolect Inc., a leadership and talent-development consulting firm headquartered in the greater Charlotte, N.C., area. Send Kittie a message through the company website at <http://innolectinc.com>. For a free copy of Innolect's white paper on Sustainable Legacy Leadership, contact AngelaS@innolectinc.com. Kittie is a member of the Enterprising Women Advisory Board. 

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