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Career Path: How Will You Be Remembered?

Skills and Professional Development



First, I will point out an irony. That is, if you are overly worried about your legacy, chances are you will be challenged to leave a positive one. The best people do not always seem to generate the broadest influence, but their impact on those they do influence is deep.

If you want to know how you'll be remembered, it helps to understand how people think. A certain percent of the population will tell you that people are defined by their exceptional moments. It is your best accomplishments in a long line of mundane events that people will remember.

Similarly, no matter how impressive your overall record, these are the same people who will tell you that a person is also defined by their worst moments. An off-color joke, an offensive tweet, a politically incorrect view. Any of these can be taken as evidence of your flawed nature, outweighing an otherwise unblemished life and character.

It is true that many people notice just the headlines, good or bad. Nowadays we can think of these fleeting headlines scrolling across our screens as social media moments. But only shallow people think what they read in the headlines defines a person, or even gives you a semi-realistic idea of what they stand for.

Would you want your life judged by strangers who know nothing about you?

Or worse, that they judge you by what other people are saying about you? I can't imagine many people would rush to sign up to such a standard. And yet it is a standard that people apply routinely without a second's thought.

It really takes only a brief reflection to arrive at a more well-founded conclusion. Deeper thinkers

know people are far more than the sum of their worst (or best) moments. People are complex, yet we're capable of change.

If that weren't so, there would be no need for school, no need for training, no need for a great deal of what humans do. Strangers don't know a fraction of what makes you special and important. Thus, what strangers think of you based on misleading headlines designed to garner attention is far less meaningful than what people closest to you think of you.

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When it comes to the people who do know you, the question becomes what impact did you make on them? Were you kind and patient? Did you listen to them when they were hurting and needed help? Did you help develop them and promote them in their careers? Did you celebrate their successes, and commiserate in the failures? In short, did you act in ways to make their lives better?

If you had a positive impact on people close to you, rest assured your legacy is secured. Perhaps not among the masses, who are easily distracted by superficial things. But people you genuinely care about and help are the ones who count.

I remember coming across a quote years ago from the Athenian statesman Solon, who was commenting on how to evaluate the lives of successful individuals. Solon's observation was this:

Were you kind
and patient?

“Count no man happy, until he is dead [or until the end is known].”

Solon's point was that life is full of reversals of fortune. A person who is riding high now may later have a fall from grace. They may lose their wealth, they may fall ill, they may be caught up in a power struggle with the losing side, and so on.

According to Aristotle, to truly evaluate the success of a person's life and decide whether they achieved their highest good or eudaimonia, you should even extend your evaluation to look at their children's and relatives' lives.

For today, I think we can draw this lesson: You don't know what a person's life means until they have lived it out. You can tell very little from an isolated incident or a snapshot in time. If you would not be

judged by your worst moment, do not be quick to judge others for theirs.

Be well.

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