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Gleanings

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Your Choice: Build Monuments or Train and Equip Sons

On November 10, 2004, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Yasser Arafat, died. Mr. Arafat was the only leader that the PLO has ever had and he left the organization without a clear succession plan. Because of the power vacuum, the Middle East is bracing for conflict as various parties vie for power.

Despite the brutal tactics of Mr. Arafat and the PLO, which are deplorable, there are lessons to be gleaned from this situation. Perhaps one of the most significant lessons is the impact of not having a succession plan.

The day after Mr. Arafat's death, one of the news agencies noted that Mr. Arafat resisted preparing anyone to take his place. Like so many leaders, he was so self-absorbed and paranoid that he failed to subordinate his personal agenda to the good of the whole. This meant that the organization's mission was sacrificed because of Mr. Arafat's unwillingness to prepare his successor.

In working with dozens of organizations through the years, I find a general lackadaisical attitude about succession planning. There is clearly an understanding that such planning is important for the long-term viability of organizations, but it is oftentimes given little focus or priority. Most leaders and business owners have the attitude of King Hezekiah who was pleased when he learned that God's judgment for his sin was not going to come during his lifetime. In other words, King Hezekiah's descendents would pay for his sin. Since he would not be around, King Hezekiah was delighted.



Hezekiah's attitude was self-centered and self-focused. His personal agenda was the driving motivator in his life. The concern about the future of his country and people was secondary to his own comfort and enjoyment.

Absalom was another self-absorbed Jewish leader. Since he had no sons, Absalom decided to build himself a monument.

Monuments are not bad, but they are lifeless. They remind us of great men and events. While they may be inspiring, they cannot impact the future. They cannot bring change. Monuments do not contribute to the advancement of an organization. Only by reproducing ourselves and passing on all that we have learned to the next generation can we build enduring organizations that advance society's rule of the physical world. Investing in the next generation is a selfless loving act.

Every leader has a choice—to build lifeless monuments or to develop followers (sons) who bring change and advance mankind. Sons, both natural and spiritual, are people who are trained and equipped by a leader to carry on his or her work. The question for every leader is: Will the leader build monuments or train and equip sons? Since everyone leads in some way, this question is for you. It is your choice: Will you humble yourself and put the good of the whole ahead of your selfish personal agenda? *Will you build monuments or train and equip sons?*

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