

A Leader's Legacy: Planting Seeds

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

While ski jumping was an official event in the first Olympic Winter Games in 1924, women weren't given the right to compete at the Olympics until this month, eighty-seven years later. The IOC's decision to include women's ski jumping in the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, might never have come about without the dedication and determination of four Calgary mothers who fought for their daughters to have an equal place with men in the sport.

This decade-long commitment to change an outdated tradition is a great leadership story about passion, vision, persistence – and love. It's also a story of integrity and opposing an approach that, in the words of the mothers, “just wasn't right.”

The irony of this inspiring story is that all four young women whose mothers' determination changed years of convention have since moved on and will likely not be competing themselves. When I read about these women's victory, it reminded me of an old Chinese proverb that says, in essence, “The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.”

I think this is true of so many leaders who have impacted the world and our lives. Stop and think about the leaders who have made a difference in your life but are not around now to see the fruits of their labor. Grandparents, parents, teachers, mentors, people who have impacted us yet never had a chance to sit under the shade of their influence. I often wish my own parents were here to see the effect their lives had on our children.

I believe there are three lessons attached to this concept:

1. When it comes to leadership, it's not a destination; it's a method of travel. Never stop planting seeds. That's what leaders do. They continue to invest in the lives of others. They continue to serve. They continue to plant. Though so many of those seeds fall on seemingly rocky ground and it appears that the impact goes unnoticed, keep planting. You never know the difference you make. You can't always measure it. When it comes to influence, you can't depend on what you see to know you're successful. As my friend, the late Ray Nelson and founder of Nelson Lumber told me, “It's easy to make a buck; it's harder to make a difference.” It's also harder to *know* that we've made a difference. Sometimes we don't know. We just need to keep planting and trust.

2. There's no quick fix to influence. The real difference you make in the world is long-

term. After an inspiring discussion with an eighty-eight year old founder in one of my leadership programs he asked, “Do you know how you can tell if your children have learned the values that you tried to instill in them? Your grandchildren teach you what you taught your children.”

3. Leadership is a matter of love. If you aren't comfortable with the word ‘love,’ then call it caring. Leadership is about caring about people, not manipulating them. Regardless of your title, make it a point to spend one third of your time with the key stakeholders in your job, the people who depend on you and upon whom you depend. Get out of your office. Make building trust your number one leadership priority. If you aren't making a difference, if you aren't influencing lives beyond the responsibilities of the job, then you haven't gone far enough as a leader.

What seeds are you planting today? What difference are you making? How are you building trust? We all leave a legacy. The question is, “What will be yours?”

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