

## FOLLOWING THE LEGEND

“Legendary” personalities have such dramatic impact upon their organizations that they are too often observed without due concern for the consequences of their uniqueness. Legendary performance distinguishes itself from other levels of accomplishment in ways that need to be better understood by both company and market; otherwise, the loss of such an executive can send warning signals of a diminished corporate inheritance.

Unfortunately, many gifted leaders find their personalities overwhelming their institutions, insidiously promoting an image of business mortality. Consider the impact of such a message upon customer, competitor, employee, stockholder and public. Among entrepreneurs, the potential problem begins where vision, courage and missionary intensity combine in a single personality to launch a product or service with timely market appeal. Such innovative and enthusiastic people readily attract coworkers of superior talent who long for an inspirational climate in which to optimize their capabilities. These personally recruited associates share their leader’s vision and quickly form a cadre for vigorous business development. They applaud the style which, in turn, elevates their own self evaluations. But a mutual admiration syndrome becomes progressively inward in focus, losing touch with changing market realities and competitive forces. When such leaders leave, a legacy of uncertainty is too often inherited. Uncertainty undermines morale and breeds a malaise where politics flourish. *Employee attention turns abruptly from customer concern to corporate personalities; from the future of their product or service to the future of their careers.* This scenario holds for the mid-size family managed company as well as for the large public one.

Therefore, legendary styles of leadership can have most unfortunate consequences when personality focus blurs the original vision and overcomes the original mission. Such “legends” draw so much personal attention that the market loses excitement for the business direction which the leader once represented ... leaving successorship to an expensive limbo of corporate re-examination, often with diminished alternatives. Legends can unwittingly contribute to a climate of frustration and dysfunction if they allow the corporate mission to become subordinate to either personality or expediency.

But there is indeed another kind of business legend where innovation and noble purposes come together in a visionary personality to deliver a sustaining message ... one of *understanding and mutuality in corporate-customer purposes* which gives a product or service enduring appeal.

Truly legendary leadership delivers a corporate legacy in the form of an ingrained image of rare customer sensitivity and community concern. Such an image gives a company its direction, immune to the changing personalities who inherit the mantle.