



Leaders Leave a **LEGACY**

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John O. Burdett





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*“Those who the Gods want to touch with greatness
bless them with the gift of storytelling.”*

In what amounts to a sad irony, a tree planted to celebrate the life of Beatle, George Harrison, was destroyed by, of all things, *beetles*. George died in 2001. He was only 58. Planted three years after his death, the twelve-foot tree in Griffith Observatory gardens, Los Angeles, had to be torn out. Below the tree was a simple plaque: “In memory of a great humanitarian who touched the world as an artist, a musician and a gardener.” Not a bad tribute for a working-class kid from Liverpool. The beetles, well, they were simply being ... beetles. In stealing their name (sort of), perhaps George owed them one.



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The seeds of greatness are sown not in avoiding mistakes, but in how the leader in question deals with the unexpected, with crisis, with personal disappointment. Many, bruised by failure, dial back on their own personal goals and look for a position away from the heat of the kitchen. Others, stripped of self-confidence, recalibrate their personal value proposition and, as likely as not, look for an “advisory role.” A precious few – those with character, those with tenacity, those drawing from a deep well of resilience – see setback as merely one more brick in the road to success.

Abraham Lincoln was defeated in 1832 when he ran for the Illinois State Legislature. In 1834 his business nose-dived. In 1838 he failed in his bid to become Illinois House Speaker. In 1843 he was defeated in his attempt to be nominated for the U.S. Congress. In 1849 he was rejected for a land officer position. In 1854 he was defeated in a run for the U.S. Senate. In 1856 he was defeated in his attempt to be nominated for Vice President. In 1858 he was again defeated in a run for U.S. Senate. And yet, in 1860 he was elected President.

Few of us are going to literally change the world. On the other hand, not too many of us want to be quickly forgotten. Sadly, the accepted definition of success is somewhat shallow. It tends to focus on the 3Ps: power, position and personal wealth. Ultimately, success isn't about what you have; it's about what you create. It's not about how big your garden is; it's about what you plant there. “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.” – Jackie Robinson. **Legacy leavers care.**

Politics have been referred to as “Hollywood for ugly people.” Maybe so, but even those who spend their days conjuring up the next sound bite are ultimately judged by what they leave behind. Leaders who shaped history – Lincoln, Gandhi, King, Mandela – understood that. Nineteenth Century American author, James Freeman Clarke, perhaps said it best, “A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman, of the next generation.” **Legacy leavers have a natural propensity to act today with tomorrow in mind.**

In the political sphere there was no better example of leading and managing than President Johnson. LBJ knew how to make the machinery of government work. He was able to do so because he switched on his finely honed persuasion gene and kept it switched on. The Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, and Medicaid were but the high-water mark of his legislative agenda. **Legacy leavers are, above all else, tough-minded.**

Not all leaders are cut from the same cloth: start-up, growth, running a mature business and turnaround demand very different skills. At successive stages of personal maturity different motivational agendas also tend to put in an appearance: “to make a career;” “to make money;” “to make my family proud;” “to make a business;” and “to make a difference.” Important and rewarding as the latter is, the very best leaders are compelled to do even more. They are on a quest. They are driven to “make a legacy.” **Legacy leavers believe that they are on a mission.**

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Pressure from the capital markets makes success in the short term an imperative. An executive who fails to make money won't be around long enough to leave a legacy. To succeed is to dance to the tune played by the capital markets. Legacy leavers understand that but they still do more. They rarely follow the accepted path. They find a better way. They ignore the cynics and the naysayers. They turn a deaf ear to the critics, especially those who themselves have not ventured into the arena. They part company with the timid and those of a tepid disposition. They blaze their own trail. Does that mean they do it on their own? Not at all! They draw like-minds to the cause. **Legacy leavers chart their own path.**

Consider the following legacy loadstones.¹

1. Dream a big dream

When a Disney executive charged with revitalising the Disney stores turned to Steve Jobs – Disney's largest shareholder – for advice, Jobs responded, "Dream bigger."²

If you are chasing the ordinary, if your goal is to be better than an organization on the other side of town, if you are a follower – you are not going to leave a legacy. If the organization's way to do things is to figure out what's not working and then fix it – you are not going to leave a legacy. Even if you build on success and regularly introduce best practice – you are not going to leave a legacy.

Those who leave something lasting, dream big dreams. They don't simply want to be the best; they want to be better than the best. They want to excel. They want to soar. They want to be the standard against which everyone else is judged. If you don't reach for the stars you will never sprinkle stardust.

Martin Luther King's "I have a dream speech"³ is a living example of the energy that flows and continues to flow from a leader who knows how to inspire. Richard Branson captures that energy as follows:

"At Virgin, we have never entered an industry just for small wins, but instead to reinvent the game with imaginative and disruptive products and services. We haven't followed numbers, done what's expected, or limited ourselves to what's possible. We have dreamed big dreams to make the impossible, possible."

Legendary leaders can be people most of us have never heard of. Canadians have a reputation for being quiet, somewhat withdrawn and unassuming. And that's an apt description for Arthur Fogel. Arthur Fogel is the CEO of the Global Touring division of Live Nation Entertainment and the chairman of its Global Music group. You might not know who he is, but The Rolling Stones, U2, Madonna, Pink Floyd, Sting, the Police, Neil Young

1 A loadstone is one of the very few minerals on earth that is a natural magnet.

2 Carmine Gallo, *The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs* (2010).

3 Delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.



and Lady Gaga aren't going to misplace his phone number any time soon. He has either revitalised or transformed their careers.

Artists always went on the road, but not even remotely in the way Arthur dreamed was possible. In the world of popular music, he put “performing” back into the term “performance artist.” While others looked for opportunity, he dreamed BIG. To give some idea about how big Arthur Fogel dreams, U2 toured from 2009-2011. Those concerts drew an audience of over seven million people and an actual gross of \$736M. Legendary leaders don't just change the game – they invent a new one. The real money is no longer in selling records; it's about the concert experience. It's easy to see why U2 allowed Apple to gift 500 million copies of their *Songs of Innocence* on iTunes.⁴ Fogel's leadership draws on three simple beliefs: nothing is too good for the artists; the experience for the fans has to be epic; and we are always going to make money. Arthur doesn't do ego!

“The vision thing,” as George Bush Sr. called it, should, however, come with a warning label. The vision, the strategy, the plan – define what's possible, what's needed. Without action, without making it happen, however, the vision is no more than just another, “wanna do.” Intent isn't doing. Talking about it is not acting on it. Planning it isn't pulling it off. Untapped potential is just that – “untapped potential.”

Legendary leaders don't just dream, they bring the vision to life. Always! Walt Disney said, “If we can dream it we can do it.” His legacy is that there is now an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. Isadore Sharp, the founder of Four Seasons, started with a small motel and a big dream. He built his dream. That's his legacy!

2. The culture you create

Products become redundant. Technology is always evolving. Even great ideas have a short lifespan. What's around long after those who started the business have left the scene is the organization's culture. Steve Jobs was justifiably proud of Apple's financial success. What he was even prouder of was the organization he built, the culture he had created.

The founder's and/or CEO's leadership point of view invariably shapes the organization's culture. That's what leaders do. If those who wear the mantle of leadership see “culture” as a “we will get to it when we have time” kind of thing, they may appear to be in charge, but they are not going to leave a legacy.

In companies that sustain, the company doesn't have a culture – it is its culture. Apple was an extension of Jobs as an individual. As times change, as the competitive landscape evolves those that follow will, of necessity, modify, adapt and evolve that culture. If the philosophy of design excellence, user-friendly products and producing products before the

⁴ U2's relationship with Apple was reputed to be over \$100M. *Songs of Innocence* was released in autumn 2014.

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customer knows that he/she needs them is lost, however, it will no longer be Apple. The masthead and the brand that it represents are far less important than the conversation that takes place in the lunchroom. If employees don't believe in the brand, if they don't buy into the brand promise, if the culture doesn't support that promise – then much of what the organization offers as value is a nicely packed, self-deluding myth.

There is no opting out when it comes to culture. John D. Rockefeller, Thomas Edison, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Isadore Sharp, the team at Google, Richard Branson, Alan Mulally, Marissa Mayer, Jack Welch, Nelson Mandela and others built something that lasts because “culture” was part of their psyche. To the list of “culture champions” outlined add Satya Nadella, Jeff Bezos, Jack Ma and Michael Bloomberg.

Culture isn't simply a way to do things; it's a way to be. It's the organization's identity. It's their story. Great organizations have a great story. Always! A great story is a unique, sustaining and enabling competitive edge. It's why the customer buys. It's what attracts talent. It's why exceptional people stay. Legacy feeds on and is nurtured by that story. Leaders who create a strong and agile culture leave an invaluable legacy.

3. The teams you build

If you are really lucky you will work for a handful of outstanding teams during your working life – if you are lucky! It might not be a comfortable one, but to be part of a great team is an unforgettable experience. Decades later people talk of the great team they were part of as if it were yesterday.

When history is written, success is often attributed to the lone hero/heroine battling all the odds. It doesn't happen that way. Michelangelo didn't paint the Sistine Chapel on his own – he had no fewer than 13 helpers. Luciano Pavarotti needed a chorus. Mother Teresa would have been ineffective on her own. And even Pele needed someone to pass him the ball.

Where would the Lone Ranger be without Tonto? Batman without Robin? Twitter was created by a team: Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Noah Glass and Biz Stone. Robert Oppenheimer and General Leslie Groves needed each other. Steve Jobs was incomplete without Steve Wozniak. When one thinks of Google, Sergey Brin and Larry Page come to mind. However, one of their first acts was to bring in Eric Schmidt as CEO. The founders of Intel deliberately created a team-oriented workplace. The first thing Marissa Mayer did as CEO of Intel was to stop people working from home. “People are more collaborative and innovative when they are together.”⁵

Cobotics – man and machine working in tandem – may, at some point in the future, redefine how we think about teamwork but for now “the team” is stamped with the DNA of our hunter-gatherer past. If our ancestors didn't collaborate, they didn't eat. Without

5 Walter Isaacson, *The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution* (2014).



trust, conflict was assured. When altruism and sharing was missing, rejection was inevitable. And without leadership that managed from the outside-in (anticipated and recognised threats) and lead from the outside-in (a source of inspiration) survival was in the balance.

It has been suggested that, “leaders walk softly, but carry a big stick.” If you’re the team leader and members of the team are more informed and more experienced in their sphere of influence than you (as they almost certainly are), the only reason to carry a big stick is to beat yourself around the head with it when you forget that the team doesn’t work for you – you work for them! Three decades ago the late Warren Bennis and his co-author Burt Nanus in *Leaders – Strategies for Taking Charge* put it this way, “Lead others, manage yourself.”⁶

4. Knowing when to step away; knowing when to bet the business

When he stepped aside in August 2013, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer obviously recognised that his time was up. If he were in any doubt he only had to read the financial press: Microsoft’s shares jumped 8% on the news. Since his retirement, shares in the company have moved from \$32 to \$84 (at the time of writing).

In 2006, William Clay Ford, Jr., who was President and CEO of the legendary business with his family’s name on the building, stepped aside in favour of Alan Mulally.⁷ Up to that time, Mulally had been the Executive Vice President of Boeing and CEO of Boeing’s commercial airplane business. From 2006 through 2008 Ford lost \$30.1 billion. In the five years following Mulally’s appointment Ford earned \$42.3 billion.

Courage and tenacity sleep in the same bed. Bill Ford had the courage to step aside. Mulally had the tenacity to challenge virtually everything Ford stood for. He told the firm’s top leaders, “Ford has been going out of business for 40 years.” Mulally brought an end to a turbulent chapter in Ford’s history, in which the automaker narrowly avoided bankruptcy. His first step was a \$23 billion *bet-the-business* loan. Leaders who eschew risk – who aren’t, when it is absolutely necessary, prepared to bet the business – are destined to be blindsided by the Mack Truck called “change.” Xerox, Nokia, Kodak, Blackberry, Blockbuster, the record industry and major TV networks – come to mind.

Timing isn’t important; it’s everything! In an act that epitomised both letting go and betting the business, in 1992, to keep his airline company afloat, Richard Branson sold the Virgin label to EMI for £500 million. He started Virgin Records in 1972 as a mail order company. In the early days he ran it out of a houseboat. It was a business embedded in his very being. He sold it anyway. Just over a decade later EMI, the record company that signed the Beatles, was over two billion dollars in debt. A vibrant Virgin Group is now made up of over 400 companies.

6 Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders – The Strategies for Taking Charge* (1985), p. 19.

7 September 5, 2006. Bill Ford remained as Executive Chairman of the Board.

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To reinforce that legacy, leaders know when to walk away. Effective July 1, 2014, Mulally stepped aside in favour of insider Mark Fields. Considered an industry superstar when Mulally was appointed, at the time Fields was deemed by the Board to be too close to the business to be made CEO.

Fields' appointment endorses that legacy leaders leave a successor. By comparison only 30% of family businesses have a thriving second generation and only 10% make a successful transition to the third. Most founders of family firms don't leave a legacy – they leave a mess!

Letting go is the one area where legacy leaders often falter, especially in the political arena. Churchill should have retired when WWII came to a close. Thatcher hung on beyond her time. Ronald Reagan was a lame-duck president for much of his second term. Mussolini would have been advised to call it a day five minutes after he figured out how to make the trains run on time – even before.

Little beats the Australian Press for bluntness combined with neat turns of phrase. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in 2007, describing the defeat of Prime Minister John Howard, wrote,

“Most voters were not hostile towards Howard on Saturday. After more than a decade his approval rating was more than 50 per cent. But they were tired of him and, as the Liberal Party's Federal Director, Brian Loughnane, finally conceded yesterday, Work Choices torpedoed Coalition support among the Howard battlers. Howard's colleagues knew this, Howard knew it, yet he refused to go, and no one had the guts to blast him out or even try.”⁸

5. Failure is merely one more brick in the road to success

For many executives failure is an option. Statistically, 30% of Fortune 500 CEOs last less than three years. For other top executives, the failure rate is as high as 75% and rarely less than 30%.⁹ Writing in *Harvard Business Review*, Dan Ciampa suggests that two out of every five new CEOs fail in the first 18 months.¹⁰

Success doesn't always come easy for legacy leaders. Vincent Van Gogh only sold one painting – at the end of his life for a give-away price. In developing the light bulb, Thomas Edison tried, literally, thousands of possible materials before he discovered that carbonised bamboo would produce over 1,200 hours of continuous light. R.H. Macy (Macy's in New York) started no fewer than seven businesses that failed before he became successful.

8 Phillip Coorey, November 26, 2007.

9 Ray B. Williams in *Psychology Today*, August 13, 2012.

10 “Almost Ready” in *Harvard Business Review*, January 2005.



After enjoying early military and political success as a young man, in his middle years, Winston Churchill was cast into the political wilderness. Politically ostracised by his party, shunned by the leadership and attacked by the media, he survived (and thrived), because through it all, he had an abiding belief that he “was destined to do great things.” Walt Disney was fired as newspaper editor because he lacked “imagination.” Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison before stepping into the light; before becoming South Africa’s first black President in 1994. When they started out, the Beatles couldn’t find a record company.

Steve Jobs was terminated from his own company. Oprah Winfrey was let go early in her career as a cub TV reporter in Baltimore. When he started out as a performer, Jerry Seinfeld was booed off the stage. Before she wrote the Harry Potter series, J.K. Rowling was a single mother living on welfare. Sir James Dyson devolved over 5,000 prototypes before he landed on a vacuum cleaner that met his exacting standards.

What enabled the cast of characters above to rise above early failure? There are probably as many reasons as there are individual stories. What can be said for certain is that those who leave a legacy, those who sustain, those who take a licking and keep on ticking, they don’t give up, don’t back down and don’t see failure as a setback – merely another brick in the road to success. Optimism works.

6. The people you touch along the way

When Bill Gates and Paul Allen created Microsoft they blazed a trail of innovation. They undeniably changed the world we live in. That said, and taking nothing away from their contribution, if Gates or Allen had chosen a different line of work, the hi-tech revolution would still have happened. The microchip was too pervasive, too dramatic and too compelling to be ignored. Once it started to swing, the technology represented a societal hammer that would inevitably smash its way into our collective consciousness.

And then, just when the world had defined him as a tech titan, at the height of his fame, Mr. Gates did the extraordinary. In acting out a line from a popular movie, “With great power there must also come great responsibility”¹¹ the tech-sector’s own superhero elected to make humanity more important than hubris, giving more important than getting and caring more important than competing. He could be buying sports teams, building the world’s biggest yacht and imposing his will on small countries. What is he doing? The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supports thousands of health, development and education projects around the world. A generation of small children have access to fresh water, millions will avoid the scourge of malaria and a veritable army of kids across the U.S. have computers – all because of the Gates Foundation. Now that’s a legacy!

¹¹ A quote that has many authors: Voltaire, Franklin D. Roosevelt and even Winston Churchill. It is best known as sage advice given to Spiderman by Uncle Ben, in the first Spiderman movie.

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When people think of John D. Rockefeller the image conjured up is one of an industrial baron who, through Standard Oil of Ohio, created immense personal wealth (he was the first American to be worth a billion dollars and in the nineteenth century that was real money). He is also remembered as an old curmudgeon whose predatory business practices brought about antitrust legislation. J.D. was a lot more interesting than that. Being true to his strict Baptist beliefs, in May 1913, in partnership with his son, J.D. Rockefeller Jr., he established the Rockefeller Foundation. It was the rock on which modern scientific research is based.

A hundred years later, the Rockefeller Institute is still one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the world. Among its accomplishments are bringing an end to hookworm, a vaccine to prevent yellow fever and the Harvard School of Public Health. Rockefeller also founded the University of Chicago. It's not an exaggeration to say that Rockefeller defined modern philanthropy.

When Ted Turner founded CNN he created a world where people came to expect access to news 24 hours a day. In 1997 he donated \$1 billion to the UN. The Tata Group is India's best-known global brand. Annual sales are in excess of \$150 billion. More than half of its revenue comes from outside of India. About 66% of Tata's profits go to charity. Warren Buffet is regularly listed as one of the wealthiest people on the planet. He has pledged to *give away 99% of his fortune*, primarily via the Gates Foundation. Legacy leavers make a lasting difference in people's lives.

7. The stories you create and share

Building commitment, gaining buy-in isn't limited to what you think people need to know. It's ultimately about how you make them feel. Knowledge, information and know-how matter, but at the end of the day, they are game stakes. They are the attributes needed to deliver value, but they don't have a lot to do with orchestrating lasting change.

Taking it to the next level, reinventing possibility, going the extra mile means you have to get behind the varnished veneer of employee indifference. Regardless of level, employees are inundated with hundreds, if not thousands, of messages every day. Most are overtures to the wallet. The rest, for the most part, are an unnecessary and unwanted form of pollution. To cut through the clutter you have to get people's attention. To get people on board, you have to touch an emotional chord. Leaders who take people where they would otherwise not go understand that they are in the emotional transportation business. They share a story!

Desmond Morris describes us as "the storytelling ape." Story is what got our kind this far. Long after the presentation has been forgotten what will be remembered are the stories. About to speak to an unwelcoming audience at one of the company's town hall meetings? Open with, "Let me share a story." Want to convey leadership rather than

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boss-ship? Push PowerPoint to one side and build your presentation around a compelling story. Challenged with bringing the strategy to life? Translate it into a story. Need to convey a sense of urgency? Find the right story. If you want people to know something, focus on the facts. If you want to inspire them, immerse them in the story.

Leaders who last in memory are outstanding storytellers. Herb Kelleher, the founder of Southwest Airlines, is one such example. Today, Southwest Airlines is the world's largest low-cost carrier: 45,000 employees support the travel of more domestic passengers than any other U.S. airline. Shortly after their inception they became embroiled in a dispute with Stevens Aviation over a brand slogan. Kelleher chose not to follow the legal route. Instead both CEOs had an arm wrestling match. The loser agreed to pay \$10,000 to charity. The winner would continue to enjoy the benefits of the brand slogan. Decades later that story is still alive and well inside the organization. And it still reinforces the philosophy of: (1) find a simple solution; and (2) make it fun. A master storyteller, during his 30-year tenure Herb Kelleher produced the highest return to shareholders of any company in the S&P 500. Only a founder with the right story as a constant companion could have left a legacy like Herb Kelleher.

When Abraham Lincoln was a lawyer on the Illinois Circuit Court, entertainment wasn't exactly a digital click away. To fill the time, the lawyers who followed the court met up at night in a local inn and competed to determine who could come up with the best story. Lincoln was barred from the competition. Money was on the line. He was much too good a storyteller. Only someone with story in their heart could have written the Gettysburg Address.

People who worked closely with the late Sam Walton are quick to point out that he was a wonderful storyteller. He didn't just visit his stores; he inspired everyone he met. Only a leader with a rare ability to connect with his employees could have built the world's largest retailer.

Those who the Gods want to touch with greatness bless them with the gift of storytelling. Ulysses S. Grant, who led the Union forces in the Civil War and who was elected President twice, although dying of cancer, felt compelled in his final months to set down his legacy. It is considered by many to be the greatest of all military memoirs.

Who could argue that Disney was one of the most compelling storytellers in the English language? Churchill was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. One reviewer writing of Nelson Mandela's, *Long Walk to Freedom*, said, "It burns with the luminosity of faith in the invincible nature of human hope and dignity."

In a connected, speed of light, attention grabbing, web-based world, man's oldest communication vehicle is still our most productive way to push past the pollution. A great story is, itself, a legacy. Now, more than ever!



Conclusion

Creating a great business is not the same as leaving a legacy. Legacy is about being successful *and* sharing the learning. Biographies are common. Branson has a wonderful blog. Others are generous and share their insights in conferences and webinars. Michael Dell comes to mind. It isn't ego. It's the simple act of giving back. And anyone who was close to the late Sergio Marchionne witnessed how his whole persona changed when he moved into teaching mode. He loved to win but, when the time was right, he loved to share even more. His eyes would light up, his smile became broad and a mischievous humour entered the conversation. Sergio, you will be missed.

Not every outstanding leader knows how to package what they have learned. The late Peter Drucker wasn't a CEO and he didn't run anything. His mastery lay in how he collected, interpreted, bundled and shared the legacy of others. Charles Handy is no less a "legacy surrogate." The late Warren Bennis was equally gifted, equally generous. The best legacy surrogates leave a legacy of their own.

Leaders want to win. They do win. And the very best win big. Then again, it depends on how you define "win." If winning is measured by power, position and personal wealth expect the sands of time to quickly erase your achievements.

To be remembered, to be around after you have gone, to make a lasting difference is to leave a legacy. You don't have to change the world but you can leave it a better place; you can leave your footprint on a small part of it.

Key questions:

1. In your current role do you expect to simply fade away or will you leave a legacy? The choice is yours. What would it take to leave a legacy? What do you need to do that you're not doing now? How are you going to pass that legacy on?
2. Are you optimistic? Do you see the glass half full or half empty? Are you resilient? Do you work to avoid failure or are you focused on future success? Have you surrounded yourself with optimists? What one change in attitude and/or behaviour on your part would make a difference?
3. Do you dream big dreams? Would its accomplishment leave a legacy? Do you need to revisit that dream? How and when are you going to do that?

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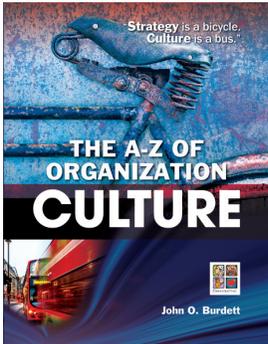


John Burdett has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He has worked on and continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world’s largest corporations.

John’s partnership with the Bedford Consulting Group and TRANSEARCH INTERNATIONAL means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition has supported many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

John holds a doctorate in management development and since 2000 has published ten best-selling books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. He recently completed his highly lauded talent trilogy: *Talent* (2013), *Team* (2015), and *The Empty Suit* (2016). His latest book is *The A-Z of Organization Culture* (2017). John lives in Toronto.

The learning experiences mentioned are expanded on, and a number of others added, in John’s books. Go to Amazon.com, Kobo, Barnes and Noble and eBook. Access using author name John O. Burdett



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