



Inspiring Others - Leaving a Legacy of Values

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The best changes often start as single, simple thoughts. Think big, and discover how to make your dreams real. - Anonymous

Fall for many is a time of inspiration as we watch leaves (at least in many parts of the country) change color and transition from one state to another. As they transform from the greens of summer to the vivid reds and yellows of the fall, we are inspired to think about both about how something, even if expected, is still a delight each time it occurs, as well as about our own capacity to change with the times.

What inspires us is a question that dominates a lot of Memoirs' conversations. Sometimes people ask us how we were inspired to do work in the area of legacies. And most flatteringly, we are often told that we serve as an inspiration for people to begin new habits of preserving their legacies, to live their most fulfilling lives and to pass on their values and wisdom through reflection on what matters most.

If you speak any of the Latin languages, you probably

recognize that "inspiration" has the same roots as inspirare, or to breathe. It conveys the idea of motion, direction, or inclination to a place or a thing. In 1308, Dante used the variant ispirazione for the first recorded time, referring to suggestion or prompting; by 1560 it also meant "creative power". Inspiration and Spirit also share the same origins, so when you hear someone say "the spirit moved me", it is another way of expressing a sense of inspiration, from whatever the source.

One of the unspoken truths in our lives is that we don't always know when we serve as an inspiration to someone else. In some cases, it is very clear: when we play an official role of importance, whether defined by family office or business relationships, or when we act as a mentor, a boss, a godparent or have some other responsibility. And we also may inspire inadvertently by demonstrating our passion for something. If you are passionate about what you do, you will likely inspire others, either to do the same thing or whatever they are drawn to. Passion begets inspiration, inspiration begets creativity, creativity begets passion: a wonderful, powerful cycle that allows us to live more fully and leave more lasting legacies.

An easy personal form of inspiration is a simple tool we frequently recommend for getting inspired to pass on our personal legacies of values. It is easy but memorable and will make a huge difference in the life of someone close to you.

Every year on his or her birthday, write a letter to a child or grandchild, and present them all to him or her on a significant milestone - their marriage, the birth of a first child, when they turn age of 21. You should write of any changes, developments or accomplishments you observe about them from year to year but also how you perceive the values and personality of the child emerging - they



will tremendously appreciate this insight by you, someone who loves them, on becoming the person they are. This will form the foundation for their own ethical will ~ Legacy of Values, which they can continue doing for their descendants.

In doing so, perhaps you will be inspired to sit down on your birthday and draft a letter, or audio/video tape yourself about your life reflections, triumphs and challenges overcome that you will one day give to them as a legacy. A note of caution: if you do this on the computer, make sure you make frequent backups on CD-ROM or memory stick (pun intended) or perhaps even print copies on acid-free, lignin-free archival paper so as to have a permanent record.

Nothing fuels inspiration like collaborating with others on a project of some kind. The major challenge when collaborating is to let go of all expectations: it can be very difficult not to want to "lead the process", especially if you are someone used to taking this role, but when it works, it's very rewarding.

As an example in the broader context of our work preserving legacy for family offices, one thirty year-old Family Office we worked with had established a highly organized family governance structure. There were 18 family members over the age of 18 (from close to 90 living family members) who rotated leadership roles on their Family Council. We were privileged to attend one of their bi-monthly meetings and it was a real pleasure to see that all decisions to manage the family members' shared assets and lifestyles were voted upon and usually unanimously passed with little conflict. This exemplified where the shared values, common mission and excellent communication among three branches of families were in harmony. Highly inspirational!

Another inspiring Family Office for whom we preserved the legacy of "those who came before" were primarily stewards of wealth created by previous generations. This family had philanthropy as its working goal and it was determined that any family members under the age of 8-18 were given relatively small amount of funds (from \$200-\$5,000), depending on their age, to be used to give

away. The young people had to research the charity they chose and defend it to the Family Foundation Council to get approval to have the funds disbursed. Again, quite inspiring to all members within that family and other families as well.

Inspiration surrounds us. So, take a deep breath and be inspired...May you all find the inspiration you seek!

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