

Recently I experienced a loss in my family. My stepfather Dave Cox passed away. He joined our family when I was about 14 years old. Dave and I shared a birthday, and in fact, his visitation at the funeral home was on that day. He would have been 85.

Dave was a Quaker minister, among other careers in his long life. That technically made me a "Preacher's Kid" or PK as they are known in the biz, which may explain a few things to you about me. He was generally happy, positive guy who wore his heart on his sleeve. Overall, a very likable outgoing person. I will miss him.

His funeral was sparsely attended however, as I suspected it might be, despite his friendly demeanor. Dave outlived many of his friends and family. Mobility issues in the last five years of his life combined with the horrible Alzheimer's disease meant that he rarely got out and saw people. He stopped working some 20 years ago so his job colleagues were gone. He was a traveling salesman toward the end of his working life so he rarely was in the office anyway.

Of course the family was there to say goodbye and to support my Mom who now must carry on without her husband of nearly 40 years. But it wasn't packed at the church. That's often the cost of a long life. You outlive everyone.

It reminded me of another funeral I attended early in my career as an administrator. The former president of a college had died and as a current administrator of the institution it was important that I go to pay my respects, even though this person had left the college years ago and I had never met them.

I was expecting a packed house at the funeral. After all this person was president for many years and knew everyone in town. They led many advancements at the college in question and were considered a local celebrity in many ways. So, I arrived early and found that the parking lot was a bit empty. I went inside and the venue was sparsely populated. As the time approached to start the ceremony, only a few more people came in. I was surprised. Not many came at all.

That got me down a bit. As a young administrator hoping to be a president someday, it really got me thinking. How forgettable is any president? Or any employee for that matter? Did this person have so little impact that, granted, some years later, no one remembered them enough to attend their funeral? Ok, it's been a few years, but really, not very many people took the time to say goodbye.

Later, I attended a session at a conference offered by an ex-president entitled, "From Who's Who to Who's He?" It was on how he dealt with going from someone of importance to someone who was quickly forgotten and disregarded. It was depressing. Currently there is a popular meme on the internet with the message, "If you died at work the posting for your replacement would be in the newspaper before your obituary." Yikes. That hurts.

However, while helping my mom after the funeral, and in the middle of all this negativity, I got a random message from Facebook. It was from a former student of mine when I was a broadcast production instructor in Oklahoma. He said, "I have worked on 34 movies, one with Martin Scorsese. What I learned from you has continued to give me an edge in the industry. Thank you." Wow.

And I had a moment, right there, an epiphany if you'll allow me such a grandiose term, about legacy. The legacy of such a job or of any life, is not found in the number of folks who come to your funeral. It is in the lives that you impact.

All of us have the potential to impact lives around us in a positive manner. Some of the effects of that impact we may see immediately and others we may never see, but it happens. Educators are doubly blessed with the chance to leave an awesome legacy, not in terms of signatures in a funeral guest book, but rather in students who go on to accomplish great things, have a wonderful family of their own, or who, in turn, positively impact other people's lives. It's like throwing a rock in still water, you just never know how far the ripples will go.

Thousands of students have been served by NCCC during my 18+ years here, and while I'll never meet most of them, I know that my work made a difference. And not only at NCCC, but also in the lives all of the students from the other colleges where I have worked over the past 30 years. All of our employees from custodians, to office personnel, to maintenance workers, to fellow administrators, and of course, our excellent faculty, have left a legacy of positive student interaction and success. While they all might not contact us on Facebook, we know we have made a difference.

Our mission at NCCC is to enrich our communities and our students' lives. I believe that my work and the work of everyone at NCCC does just that. We are leaving behind a world a little better than we found it in the form of all of our students. Yes, when this current set of employees are gone, the college will endure. One day I won't be President and one day I won't be with you anymore (I'm hoping those two days are decades apart), but I know that the legacy I and others like me leave behind has made it a life worth living.

Goodbye Dave. You left a lasting legacy in your positive impact on me.

If you have any questions about this article or anything else please contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.