

Wise Leaders and Planting Trees

In the June issue of Smart Business "Tips From the Top," Michael Feuer, co-founder of Office Max and a frequent speaker on business, marketing and entrepreneurship writes that wise leaders plant trees under which they likely will never sit.

He makes the point that today's leaders must balance short-term, intermediate-term, and very long-term objectives to satisfy all of their constituents and to improve the odds that there will be a tomorrow.

Consider that it took more than 100 years to build the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and a span of hundreds of years to build the Great Wall of China. Those making the decisions to undertake these massive projects knew that they would never see the fruits of their endeavors. They knew that they were planting trees under which they would never sit.

In today's environment, there are plenty of reasons why a company does not plan far enough into the future. Aside from being selfish because current management will not be the beneficiary of the efforts, Feuer suggests that a bigger reason may be that companies do not have backing from their constituents to do some of the things necessary for the next generation. In many cases, it might require too big a hit to current profitability. Some narrow-minded leadership might say, "What's in it for us and our investors today?"

Being a CEO is like being a tightrope walker who must have nerves of steel and exceptional balance. We all know what happens to tightrope walkers who lose their balance – they fall, and many times they never get up again. It takes a skillful balancing act and courageous leadership for companies to successfully achieve both short and long term objectives.