

Impact Was Never Mine to Own

a Shift in how we think about legacy



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Legacy is often talked about like ownership. Like, the goal is to build something and have your name permanently attached to it, to be credited, remembered, and associated with it for as long as it exists. But I don't think that's actually what makes something meaningful. If anything, the truest form of legacy is when something no longer needs you in order to exist. When it continues, evolves, and reaches people who may never even know where it started. That's a harder thing to sit with, because it requires you to let go of control in exchange for impact.

Legacy is not about being known for something. It's about something working without needing your name attached to it.

I've been thinking a lot about that tradeoff lately. About how much of our desire to build is tied to being seen in what we build. We want the recognition because it affirms the effort. It makes the long nights, the pushing, and the uncertainty feel validated. And there's nothing wrong with that. But recognition and legacy are not the same thing. Recognition is immediate. Legacy is sustained. Recognition says you were there. Legacy proves that what you did still matters after you're gone.

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What complicates this is that when you're in the middle of building something, you don't have the distance to understand what it's becoming. You're thinking about the details, the feeling in the room, whether it's going to come together the way you see it in your head. You're thinking about the next step, not the long-term outcome. And because of that, it's easy to believe that the value is in your presence. That the thing exists because you're actively holding it together.

But that's not the goal.

If something only works because you're constantly managing it, then it hasn't reached its full potential yet. It's still dependent and fragile. Still tied to you in a way that limits how far it can go. Real impact requires a different kind of design. It requires you to build something that other people can step into and continue without needing you to translate it for them every time.

If it only works when you're there, it was never built to last.

That's where legacy actually begins.

Not in the moment something is created, but in the moment it becomes transferable.

I didn't fully understand that when I started building the work that has come to define my time at Bentley. At the time, I wasn't thinking about legacy. I was thinking about a gap. About something that didn't exist in the way it should have. I was thinking about how students were making decisions without having all the information they needed, not in a factual sense, but in a lived one. They could see the campus, hear about

the programs, and understand the opportunities. But they couldn't always see themselves.

That part is easy to overlook, but it's everything.

People don't make decisions off information alone. They make them off. Off whether they can actually picture themselves there, not just visiting, not just touring, but living. And if they can't see that, nothing else really fills the gap.

People don't choose spaces they understand. They choose spaces they can see themselves inside of.

So I built something to address that. Not because I was thinking about the future of it, but because I was focused on getting it right in the moment.

That "something" became Black Admitted Students Day.



A space for prospective Black students to see themselves at Bentley before they ever had to make a decision. Before enrollment, before the pressure that comes with choosing.

A room where they could hear real stories, ask real questions, and feel what their experience might be. The kind of understanding that doesn't come from information but from being in the room with people who've lived it.

Over time, it became one of the biggest decision-making moments for Black students choosing Bentley. Not just in numbers, but in faces I recognized later. Students are coming back and telling me they remember being in that room, that it played a role in why they chose to be here.

And for a while, it required a level of attention I didn't fully realize at the time. I was thinking about everything. The details, the people in the

room, the way it would feel from the moment someone walked in. Not just what the event was, but what people would actually experience while they were there.

That level of involvement can feel like ownership, like it's yours because you've poured so much into it.

But ownership is really just a phase if you're building something the right way. Over time, if it's strong enough, it shouldn't need you in the same way.

That's the part no one really prepares you for. We know how to build. We don't really know how to let go.

| *Building requires control. Legacy requires release.*

And releasing doesn't mean walking away completely. It means accepting that the thing no longer needs to orbit around you to function. That other people can carry it forward, add to it, shape it in ways you might not have anticipated, and still preserve what made it meaningful in the first place.

That's where I've found myself now.

Watching something I built grow, reach people, and shape decisions without requiring the same level of control from me. And that's a strange feeling, because it changes how you measure impact. It's no longer about what I'm actively doing in that moment. It's about what continues to happen because of what was already done.

And that's a different kind of success.

One that doesn't always feel good right away, if I'm being honest. Because it can feel a little slighting. Like something you poured so much into is now being experienced without people realizing what it took to build it.

But at the same time, that's the point. It becomes something people can step into without hesitation. Something that feels familiar, even if it's their first time experiencing it. Students don't need the full story to feel what it's meant to do; they just feel it.

That's when you know it's sustainable.

And having my mom and my nephew in the room this year made everything feel more real. Because they weren't just seeing something I built, they were seeing what it had become.



I had a moment recently where I was able to step back and see that clearly. Not from the perspective of the person organizing or managing, but from the perspective of someone observing. Watching the interactions, the conversations, and the decisions being made and realizing that the thing I once had to push into existence was now operating on its own momentum.

I remember standing in the room and not needing to say anything. Watching students connect, ask questions, and exchange numbers. Hearing someone answer a question I used to take on myself. It all felt natural, like it didn't need me in the same way anymore.

And what struck me most wasn't pride.

It was clarity.

Impact was never mine to own. I could build the experience, shape the environment, create the conditions. But what it meant to people, what it did for them, where it led them... that was never something I could control or claim.

Clarity that the most meaningful work I've done isn't defined by how visible I am within it but by how effective it is without me. That the goal was never to be permanently attached to it, but to make it strong enough to stand on its own.

I never wanted it to depend on me. I wanted it to be strong enough to continue without me.

That shift changes how you think about contribution.

You stop focusing on whether your name is attached to something and start focusing on whether it's built well enough to last. It's not about

being at the center... it's about whether the structure can hold. The real question becomes: will this keep doing what it's supposed to do, even when I'm not here?

Because that's the real test.

Legacy isn't about being remembered.

It's about what still stands because of you.

It's about building in a way that your thinking, your intention, and your standard of care become part of how the thing operates, even when you're no longer directly involved. It's about creating something that reflects you without requiring you to constantly represent it.

And that requires a different kind of discipline.

It requires you to prioritize sustainability over visibility. You have to design for repetition, not just impact. You must think about how something will function in your absence, not just how it performs in your presence.

That's not always intuitive.

We're taught to maximize the moment, to make things as strong as possible while we're in them. But lasting work requires thinking beyond that. It asks you to consider how it will be experienced by people who weren't there at the beginning, who don't know the origin story, and who will encounter it as if it has always existed.

That's when something becomes bigger than you.

And that's the point.

Not to disappear from it entirely, but to remove the dependency on you. It should be able to grow, adapt, and reach people in ways you can't

control, even if you wanted to. At a certain point, you have to trust that what you built is strong enough to carry forward without constant reinforcement.

I think that's why letting go can feel so emotional.

Because it's not just about stepping back, it's about accepting that the thing you poured into is no longer yours in the same way.

And that's not a loss.

That's success.

It means the work did what it was supposed to do.

It moved beyond you, and it lasts.

The best work doesn't belong to you. It outgrows you.

■ *If it still needs you to survive, it hasn't become legacy yet.*

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