# The Memories That Matter

*In a month, as I write, I'll be 68. No matter how hard one tries to be forward focused, at that age there is a frequent urge to "sum things up." As one does look back, there is a certain class of memories that stand out. I know my own story—and I've talked to many others. When you look back at "what really matters"—it's rarely "the numbers." Make no mistake, as you soldier on, your tiny or huge enterprise must be profitable to survive. Wanna do great things? Well, check out the "cash flow" statement first. True, but still "the summing up statement" is far more about the basics of human behavior and character than about the angle of incline of a market share graph. What follows is then, in a fashion, "the memories that matter"—or will matter. Why point this out? Because to get the tally right on this one at age 68, the sorts of things enumerated here must have been "top of mind" throughout your career—i.e., yesterday and this morning.*

**The "memories that matter"/that *will* matter:**

**The people you developed who went on to stellar accomplishments inside or outside the company. (A reputation as "a peerless people developer.")**

**The (no more than) two or three people you developed who went on to *create* stellar institutions of their own.**

**The long shots (people with "a certain something") you bet on who surprised themselves—and your peers.**

**The people of all stripes who 2/5/10/20 years later say, *"You made a difference in my life," "Your belief in me changed everything."***

**The sort of/character of people you hired in general. (*And* the bad apples you chucked out despite some stellar traits.)**

**A handful of projects (a half dozen at most) you doggedly pursued that still make you smile and which fundamentally changed the way things are done inside or outside the company/industry.**

**The supercharged camaraderie of a handful of Great Teams aiming to "change the world."**

**Belly laughs at some of the stupid-insane things you and your mates tried.**

**Less than a closet full of "I should have …"**

**A frighteningly consistent record of having invariably said,** *"Go for it!"*

**Not intervening in the face of considerable loss—recognizing that to develop top talent means tolerating failures and allowing the person who screwed up to work their own way through and out of their self-created mess.**

**Dealing with one or more crises with particular/memorable aplomb.**

**Demanding … CIVILITY … regardless of circumstances.**

**Turning around one or two or so truly dreadful situations—and watching almost everyone involved rise to the occasion (often to their own surprise) and acquire a renewed sense of purpose in the process.**

**Leaving something behind of demonstrable-lasting worth. (On short as well as long assignments.)**

**Having almost always (99 percent of the time) put "Quality" and "Excellence" ahead of "Quantity." (At times an unpopular approach.)**

**A few "critical" instances where you stopped short and could have "done more"— but to have done so would have compromised your and your team's character and integrity.**

**A sense of time well and honorably spent.**

**The expression of "simple" human kindness and consideration—no matter how harried you may be/may have been.**

**Understanding that your demeanor/expression of character always set the tone— especially in difficult situations.**

**Never (rarely) letting your external expression of enthusiasm/determination flag— the rougher the times, the more your expressed energy and bedrock optimism and sense of humor show.**

**The respect of your peers.**

**A stoic unwillingness to badmouth others—even in private.**

An invariant creed: When something goes amiss, *"The buck stops with me";* when something goes right, it was *their* doing, not yours.

A Mandela-like "naïve" belief that others *will* rise to the occasion if given the opportunity.

A reputation for eschewing the "trappings of power." (Strong self-management of tendencies toward arrogance or dismissiveness.)

Intensity, even having been "driven" … but not to the point of having been careless of others in the process of forging ahead.

Willingness time and again to be surprised by ways of doing things that are inconsistent with your "certain hypotheses."

Humility in the face of others, at every level, who know more than you about "the way things really are."

Having bitten your tongue on a thousand occasions—and *listened*, really really *listened*. (And been constantly delighted when, as a result, you *invariably* learned something new and *invariably* increased your connection with the speaker.)

Unalloyed pleasure in being informed of the fallaciousness of your beliefs by someone 15 years your junior and several rungs below you on the hierarchical ladder.

Selflessness. (A sterling reputation as "a guy always willing to help out with alacrity despite personal cost.")

Having been as thoughtful and respectful, or more so, toward thine "enemies" as toward friends and supporters.

Always and relentlessly having put at the top of your list/any list being first and foremost *"of service"* to your internal and external constituents. (Employees/ Peers/Customers/Vendors/Community.)

Having treated the term "servant leadership" as holy writ. (And "preached" "servant leadership" to others—new "non-managerial" hire or old pro, age 18 or 48.)

Having created the sort of workplaces you'd like your kids to inhabit. (Explicitly conscious of this "Would I want my kids to work here?" litmus test.)

Having been a "certifiable" "nut" about quality and safety and integrity. (More or less regardless of any costs.)

**A notable few circumstances where you resigned rather than compromise your bedrock beliefs.**

**Perfectionism just short of the paralyzing variety.**

**A self- and relentlessly enforced group standard of "EXCELLENCE-in-all-we-do"/"EXCELLENCE in our behavior toward one another."**