



BUILD WHAT LASTS
AgStrat Strategic Solutions

Legacy or Dumpster Fire?

5 questions for leaders deciding what they will actually hand to the next generation

Across farms, churches, businesses, associations, and community organizations, a massive generational transition is underway. Many Baby Boomers have spent decades building, preserving, funding, and leading the institutions around them. Now comes a different leadership challenge: **Can they successfully hand them to someone else?**

A farm can have valuable land and no next-generation leader prepared to operate it. A church can have money in the bank and almost nobody under 50 in the pews. An association can have loyal members while its leadership no longer represents the people it needs to attract. Those organizations may look successful today. But stewardship asks a harder question: **Will what you built still be healthy, relevant, and capable of serving people after you are gone?** That question belongs to both generations.

1 Decide whether you are preserving the institution - or its purpose

Every organization develops traditions. Some are valuable. Others are simply the way things have always been done. A church's purpose is not to preserve the worship style preferred by its oldest members. An agricultural association's purpose is not to maintain meetings or priorities simply because long-serving members enjoy them. A farm does not necessarily have to operate exactly as Grandpa operated it. Sometimes preserving the mission requires changing the organization. **The next generation can honor what came before without being required to reproduce it.**

ASK YOURSELF: Am I committed to preserving the purpose of this organization - or preserving the version of it that makes the most sense to me?

2 Recognize that different generations may organize their lives differently

Many older leaders built their lives around institutions. Church, farm, civic organizations, and industry associations were not simply things they did; they were part of who they were. That sense of duty created enormous social capital. Younger generations may care just as deeply while organizing life differently around children, careers, spouses, farms, aging parents, and limited margin. Older leaders often have one resource younger leaders desperately lack: **time**. When the people with the most available time dominate leadership, the organization can gradually design itself around the people already in the room.

ASK YOURSELF: Have we mistaken willingness to spend time in our current structure for commitment to our mission?

3 Do not ask younger leaders to participate in a system they cannot influence

Organizations often say, **'We need younger people involved.'** Then a younger person attends, offers ideas, questions priorities, and discovers that the real expectation was participation without much influence. Eventually they stop coming, and the organization concludes that young people are not committed. If another generation is expected to carry the organization, eventually it must be allowed to shape it - priorities, methods, schedules, technology, programming, investments, and leadership. **A seat at the table matters only if the person sitting there can help influence what happens around it.**

ASK YOURSELF: When we invite younger people into leadership, are we asking them to help lead - or help us continue doing what we already decided?



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4 Make humility and curiosity the bridge between generations

Generational transitions deteriorate when either side believes it possesses the moral high ground. Older leaders may think, **'We built this. They have not sacrificed the way we did.'** Younger leaders may think, **'They are out of touch and need to get out of the way.'** The older generation brings experience, history, relationships, and hard-earned judgment. The next generation brings proximity to the future - emerging customers, younger families, technology, changing lifestyles, and new expectations. Humility says, **'I may not have the whole answer.'** Curiosity asks, **'What can you see that I cannot?'**

ASK YOURSELF: When another generation disagrees with me, is my first instinct to defend my position - or understand theirs?

5 Measure your leadership by what happens after you leave

There is an uncomfortable test of leadership: **What happens when you are no longer there?** If the farm cannot function without Dad, if the organization collapses when its long-time director retires, or if a church faithfully serves one generation but has no place where another wants to raise its children, something important was never finished. Great leaders do not simply create followers. They develop people capable of carrying responsibility after them. That requires giving away meaningful responsibility, sharing relationships and knowledge, allowing others to make decisions, and eventually surrendering positions that still provide status, identity, purpose, or belonging.

ASK YOURSELF: If I left tomorrow, would the people behind me inherit something they are prepared and excited to lead?

Your Legacy Isn't What You Built

We often talk about legacy as what someone leaves behind: the farm, business, church building, organization, scholarship fund, or endowment. But those are assets. **Legacy is what those assets are capable of doing after you are gone.**

A \$4 million farm divided by conflict isn't necessarily a successful legacy. A beautiful church without another generation of believers isn't necessarily a successful legacy. A financially stable association that represents yesterday's industry isn't necessarily a successful legacy.

**Legacy is not what you leave behind.
It is what what you leave behind is capable of doing without you.**

A steward receives something valuable, cares for it during their season, improves it where possible, and eventually places it into someone else's hands. That changes the question from **'How do I protect what we built?'** to **'How do we prepare what we built to prosper without us?'**

THE GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEST

OLDER GENERATION - Can I release what I built? Am I developing successors, transferring knowledge and relationships, sharing real authority, and becoming curious about a future I will not control?

NEXT GENERATION - Am I prepared to carry it? Am I willing to learn before dismissing, take responsibility instead of simply requesting authority, understand what previous generations sacrificed, and prove I can steward what I want to change?

BOTH GENERATIONS - Can we become curious about each other? Can we discuss differences in lifestyle, expectations, risk, technology, time, money, family, and purpose without turning those differences into character judgments?

Are we trying to prove which generation is right - or build something capable of prospering into the next one?

Take the wisdom worth keeping. Develop the leaders who will carry it. Give them room to adapt it. And have enough humility to recognize that **success may eventually look different from what you built.**

BUILD WHAT LASTS

AgStrat helps farms, family businesses, organizations, and community leaders navigate the leadership and generational transitions that determine whether decades of work become a platform for the future - or a burden the next generation has to unwind.

The goal is not simply to successfully finish your season of leadership. It is to leave the people after you positioned to succeed in theirs.

To begin a confidential conversation about succession, leadership transition, organizational renewal, or preparing the next generation to lead, contact AgStrat at virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Leadership | Culture | Stewardship | Succession | Legacy