

## Memory shaped leadership style

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Niel Ellerbrook once recalled a Christmas years ago that helped mold his leadership philosophy.

His father, a Protestant minister, took him along on a trip to deliver gifts to a needy family, he said in the March 2006 EBJ, a niche publication of the Courier & Press.

Ellerbrook, who in 2006 was inducted into Evansville's Business Hall of Fame, recalled giving a boy about his age a present of shoes, underwear and socks and thinking how disappointed he would have been if he, himself, had received that gift for Christmas.

But the boy's reaction was very different.

"I can still remember how delighted he was with these gifts. Compared to that family, we were rich," Ellerbrook said.

The experience made him appreciate who he was and stirred within him an empathy for others, Ellerbrook said.

It was an important lesson.

"To have a quality of empathy is probably the most important ingredient for lifelong success," Ellerbrook said.

Ellerbrook recognized in the EBJ article that business leaders have suffered a decline in reputation in recent years — partly because of corporate scandals.

Leaders of utilities have a further problem, Eller-

brook said, in that they are expected to make enough money to attract investment, but not so much money that they incur the public's wrath.

"I think the business community has to work hard to overcome that (loss of reputation) because business is fundamentally good for the community. That is what free enterprise is all about," Ellerbrook said.

He had mentors through his career.

Larry Greenwalt, a fellow Ball State University graduate, was an accountant who showed Ellerbrook early on how accounting interacted with business and started him on a lifelong participation in the United Way.

Larry Feger, former CEO at Indiana Gas Co., later Indiana Energy, was "a very understated ego. He led through consensus building," Ellerbrook said.

Every leader has to develop a personal leadership style, Ellerbrook said.

"There is no set formula." But a leader needs "a desire to be perceived as someone who is going to do what they say they are going to do. He is principled, ethical and is reasonably transparent."

To lead, "I feel it is always good if you can create a picture or vision of what the outcome should be," Ellerbrook added. You also need luck.

"If you show up for work every day, typically good things will happen somewhere along the way," he said in the EBJ interview.

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