

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF GREAT LEADERSHIP: HUMILITY

"It's hard to be humble," says an old country song, "when you're perfect in every way." Of course, most people don't really think they are perfect, but still it is difficult to be humble in a society that highly values competition and independence. We propose that the way up is down; i.e. humility is an essential quality of great leadership.

Humility is the quality of being humble, modest, courteous, and respectful of others - even politely submissive. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and pride.

Learning to be humble is paramount in most religious and spiritual traditions, but it is also important in our personal relationships. Humility helps us to develop as persons and form richer, more lasting, and mutually rewarding relationships.

We may think we humble ourselves before God, but if humility has become a part of our nature, it will be evidenced in how we respond to and treat others. Rather than putting ourselves first, we give preference to others, being willing to consider their needs and demands. Humility means putting persons ahead of our own selfish interests.

Benjamin Franklin stated, "In reality there is perhaps not one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself...For even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."

People often misunderstand the true meaning of humility. They conjure up images of someone who is weak and ineffectual, frequently putting himself down or becoming a doormat for others. Nothing could be further from the truth. Humility is not thinking less of oneself; it's thinking of oneself less. It does not in any way deny our own self worth. Rather, it affirms the dignity and inherent worth of all persons.

Pretending to be humble is just another form of pride. The focus is still on self and people often do so with the motive of obtaining praise. People are seldom fooled for long.

The truly humble person represents strength and confidence in a quiet sort of way. He or she knows who he or she is. Viewing all they are and possess in light of and in submission to the One who is greater than they, they do not consider themselves better than others. They are able to appreciate and value others, and learn from them.

It's our awareness of imperfection that often drives us to pretend that we are more than we really are. We are far too influenced by what others think; on one hand, we gloat over praise and on the other, we become discouraged by criticism. We constantly attempt to prove that we are valuable and worthy individuals who deserve praise, appreciation, and recognition.

When working with others, each attempting to climb the ladder of success, even if it means climbing over others, we often create conflict. Pride rears its ugly head. It's much easier to point out the faults,

weaknesses, and mistakes of others than our own. As a result, people who should be able to enjoy working as partners to accomplish common goals find themselves bickering and belittling one another. The humble person in contrast is free to praise, encourage, and empower others. He doesn't insist on getting all the credit, or on being rewarded for his/her achievements, even if those achievements are "impressive" in some way. He doesn't need to brag or gloat; neither does he hide his gifts and talents. Secure in the person he knows himself to be, there is no need to prove anything or to tear another down in order to build up himself.

How many relationships have been destroyed by arrogance and pride! Jealousy, envy, anger, strife, resentments, prejudice, gossip, and greed divide and conquer. Arrogance has spurned many a war! Nobody really likes the arrogant, demanding, pushy type of person. Being overbearing and having an attitude of superiority is distasteful. It tends to make others dislike us.

A person is more likeable and tolerable when he generally portrays the characteristics of humility. He admits mistakes and makes changes where needed. He receives correction. Instead of arguing and defending, he takes responsibility and apologizes. Because he feels no jealousy or envy, he recognizes that he doesn't know everything; therefore he can be open-minded enough to seek out new knowledge and benefit from the experience and expertise of others. He is able to see the best in others. He honors and serves them.

Humility is so important to teambuilding. It is needed to live in peace and harmony. We continually tell our students and 4Ekselans volunteers, "We are a team. If one wins, we all win. If we work together and are successful, we will all enjoy the blessings of our success."

As a leader, you do not want to be in competition with those you lead. Wealth, power or status gained at the expense of others causes anxiety for all; therefore, you will want to empower those you lead or influence to grow, develop, learn, and advance. You will want them to be the best they can be. You will rejoice with them. Ultimately, you will benefit as well. Their success is a reflection on you and your leadership.

Humility distinguishes the wise leader from the arrogant power-seeker. Vaunting one's authority, reminding those you lead of your position and title, will not win the trust and respect necessary to have the kind of influence that changes lives and achieves mutually rewarding goals. Trust and credibility are required for open, mutual learning, communication and real creativity.

Leaders who insist on standing behind position and power discover they have followers or employees who do only what is required of them; they do only what they "have" to do. People who are empowered and allowed to make valuable and creative contributions follow because they "want" to. Leaders who invest themselves, seeking first to understand those who follow and giving them opportunities to excel and advance, may also earn love, admiration, and loyalty.

Additionally, if you're operating from a win-win perspective, you'll feel good about your leadership and the decisions you make concerning your team. If you're big-hearted, committed to helping other people

succeed, and willing to share recognition, you'll feel free. You will also increase your circle of influence and the impact you are making on others.

Practicing humility provides benefits much greater than the sacrifice of giving preference to others:

- Contentment with life.
- Incentive to improve.
- Honesty with oneself.
- Greater learning experiences.
- Healthier relationships, since humility dissipates anger and heals old wounds.
- Others are more willing to help you.

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