



The Power of Humility

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The Power of Humility

Over and over again, we are taught about the necessity of confidence in the workplace, on how it's essential to seem too sure of one's self and one's own abilities. However, while it's true that believing in one's self is an important motivator, there's another, less-emphasized value which matches confidence in importance: Humility.

As we move into the era of the individual, where Facebook and other social media outlets allow everyone to be their own “brand” and, in some cases, become minor celebrities, humility is falling further and further by the wayside.

In reality, this hubris actually limits us, and it is increasingly doing so from a very early age, as this quote from leadership expert Tim Elmore demonstrates:

“Consider how the shift [away from humility] has happened. In 1950, a Gallup Poll asked high school students: Do you think you are an important person? That year, only 12% of students responded “yes.” The same question was asked in 2006 and over 80% of teens replied “yes.” Since 1970, we’ve absolutely bought into the idea that “self love” and high self-esteem are among our highest priorities. In 1962 there were no articles on self-esteem in any educational journals. In 1992, there were more than 2,500 articles in such journals. Fifty years ago, American students were among the best in the world at math. Today, we come in somewhere around 28th worldwide, yet still come in first in our estimation of how great we are in math. More U.S. students believe “I am very good in math” than any other country on the earth.”

The Issue With Arrogance

As the above quote shows, arrogance is an instrument of distortion: While it's vital to believe that we *can* achieve things, when we begin to adhere to the kind of prideful “self-love” that views the mere act of existence as a form of achievement, we become blind to areas within ourselves that require development.

Chronically overestimating one's skills has real-world consequences; when we can't see what we're not good at, the things we're lacking usually eventually become painfully and publicly evident. When this happens, not only are we totally unprepared to deal with it, we also end up undermining the value of our word; after all, we have in essence made false claims about ourselves. For a person in a place of authority, the effect of this is often personally and professionally devastating.

A lack of humility has other consequences too: It makes us less approachable, so that our colleagues are hesitant to share new ideas with us—usually because they fear ridicule. Arrogant people also seek out new knowledge less often, as they more quickly assume they already know all the best courses of action. Due to their inability to properly relate to (and bond with) others, when they do find themselves at a loss, there is seldom anyone rushing to their aid, ensuring that their shortcomings become self-evident.

Humility to the Rescue

Naturally, a person in the above-described predicament is hardly equipped to succeed, but can humility—a quality long associated with vulnerability and “weakness”—really empower people in a professional setting? Emerging research suggests that yes, it absolutely can.

A recent study conducted by the University of Washington Foster School of Business revealed that humble people actually make the *most* effective leaders, and are “more likely to be high performers in both individual and team settings,” according to associate professor Michael Johnson¹.

The researchers also found that employees who felt their managers were humble individuals wound up feeling more engaged in their jobs and more loyal to their companies. They reported feeling more trusting of their leaders, more open to their ideas and overall vision, and more committed to team goals.

“Our study suggests that a ‘quieter’ leadership approach—listening, being transparent, aware of your limitations and appreciating co-worker’s strengths and contributions, is an effective way to engage employees,” Johnson and fellow researchers were quoted as saying in the study.

The research also revealed that humble people are in some ways *less* vulnerable than their over-confident counterparts. How? Due to the fact that humble people focus less on themselves, they are more perceptive and capable of anticipating the future, so have better risk-management skills. They also see more deeply into others, allowing them to pierce surface facades and assess what lies beneath them; as such, they are less gullible and better at improving the dynamics of whole systems.

Humility opens our eyes, in essence, allowing us to see ourselves, other people, and the world around us with far greater clarity; in this regard, it is one of the most powerful tools of insight available to us.

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¹ <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/238328>