

# The Humility of a Leader

## *Seven attributes an engaged leader should embody*

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The focus on leadership practice is about adopting and adapting your personal leadership style, which is inherently an adaptive behavior specific to the situation you are facing. For example, in some situations, the appropriate leadership style should be to demonstrate engaged humility, which is the practice of engaging those around you by demonstrating genuine humility.

The operative word and behavior, therefore, must be “genuine.” Leaders cannot fake this behavior. We are in an incredibly cynical time, with transparency as the watchword. Any attempt at inauthentic behavior breeds criticism and distrust. The search for and practice of authenticity is absolutely critical to success for all those involved with you: both those who are part of the team you lead and those who are receiving what the team has to offer. These latter groups could be customers, clients and/or co-workers.

Comedian Bob Hope once said, “I feel very humble, but I feel I have the strength of character to fight it.” Not quite the attitude and practice we’re suggesting you consider. We realize that remark is meant to be comedic and totally off-base from reality.

So what is the profile and what practices define the engaged humility of a leader? These are the top seven primary attributes an engaged, humble leader should practice:

He practices the art of listening. Listening to the facts, the information that surrounds the situation, challenge or event. Listen even if you think you know where and what needs to get done. Really listen! Consider this the warm-up to practice.

She practices inquiry. The ability to ask questions...to ask the right questions. This requires leaders to both understand and to be self-aware about what they don’t know. Thus, this leadership style resides in an arrogance-free zone. There is no shame in great leaders not knowing or having every answer to everything. This also demonstrates to the team that you are approachable and care to hear other opinions.

He provides clarity about the decision process. We’ve all had terrific CEOs who would say to their leadership teams: “I need your best thinking now, so please engage,” or “This will be setting the bar for everything we do, we are all in this together and we need everyone’s best foot forward.” The leader’s maxim is: Everyone contributes as a team, and everyone must feel vested in the outcome.

She is decisional: Engaging one’s leadership team for its best thinking helps decide; helps the employees to make the decisive

call. Keep in mind, businesses are not intended to operate in a democratic mode. We are not describing leadership decision-making by “the ayes have it.”

He practices having a bias to act and execute well. “Execution is the chariot of genius.” He finishes well. He follows through. He creates error-free processes, yet doesn’t wait for a perfect solution. Remember this expression paraphrased from the French philosopher Voltaire: “perfect is the enemy of good.”

She is consistently humble and consistently engages those around her in a 360-degree work world. The 360-degree world revolves internally around direct reports, colleagues, superiors and most importantly, the worker bees; as well as externally, around partnerships, collaborations and relationships with stakeholders. There is no room for false humility in a cynical world.

Humble leadership and courageous leadership go hand-in-hand and require continued practice to keep in balance. Courage isn’t the absence of fear. We can be fearful about any business situation we face. However, the behavior expected of leaders is to act despite their personal or professional fears. This does not mean we act without fear, nor would we act recklessly and randomly, but humbly, as in when the leader asks, “If not by me, then who here is going to do this?”

Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi once said, “Success is never final. Failure is never fatal. It’s courage that counts... It does take courage to do anything that’s worthwhile. And it’s also worth remembering that you may be on top one day and in the gutter the next.”

In the end, a leadership style which evokes the genuine practice of humility should help leaders reach their IPS, or what performance psychologist Jim Loehr termed an “Ideal Performance State.” This state is a unique combination of mental toughness, resiliency, clarity of thinking and mental agility.

We can add humility as the ultimate leadership performance enhancer. Practice this and see the difference.

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