Humility And Leadership

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The phrase “humble leadership” is not an oxymoron. While many people immediately conjure up an image of the ever so confident, bombastic extrovert without an ounce of humility as the picture of what constitutes a real leader, nothing could be further from the truth. As my wife has always said, “Those who talk the most usually have the least to say.” While feigned humility is the height of insincerity, authentic humility is the most sincere form of confidence and strength. Leaders need to understand that being authentically humble humanizes them, allows them to build stronger trust bonds, and engenders confidence & loyalty from peers and subordinates alike. In today’s post I’ll share my thoughts on the value of learning to become a humble leader...
It’s been said that life is a long lesson in humility. As a leader, the sooner you come to grips with your humility the better leader you’ll become. Over the years I have come to believe that “having class” is synonymous with demonstrating a penchant for humility over bravado. True leaders possess a quiet confidence that attracts attention like a magnet. It is the genuine nature of their subtle & quiet charisma/presence, and not the decibel level of their rhetoric that draws you in. True self-confidence is reflected in a person’s deeds and actions, and not in their ability to boast. One of the worst things a leader can do is to let their ego write checks their talent can’t cash...

Humility is actually the trait that magnifies all other positive attributes. Without humility all of a leader’s other strengths become diminished if not invisible. It’s been said that greatness lies not in trying to be somebody, but in trying to help somebody. Humility also happens to be the surest sign of authenticity in someone who claims to be a servant leader. Is it possible to be a leader without being humble? Sure it is...but it is much, much more difficult, rarely sustainable, and leaders who lack humility are always called into question with regard to motives and agendas.

When you think of a true leader do you envision someone who displays a quiet confidence or a blatant arrogance? While a reserved attitude of humility can often be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness, if you’ve ever negotiated with a truly confident person who is authentically humble, you’ll find that their resolve is often much greater than the feigned confidence of the arrogant. While hubris can be a needed trait to call upon at times, to rely solely upon it as the foundation of your leadership style just doesn’t work. It was C.S. Lewis who said: “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather thinking about yourself less.” Simply put, humble leaders recognize and value the contributions of others in lieu of self-promotion.

The truth of the matter is that few things have inspired and motivated me over the years like the quiet confidence and humility of great leaders. I would much rather listen to the self-deprecating humor of a confident person making fun of themselves than the mean spirited attacks of an arrogant person waged at someone else’s expense. More importantly, I would much rather work for, or along side of, the understated than the overstated. Those professionals who have self respect, and demonstrate a true respect for others regardless of their station in life, are much more likely to be successful over the long-term than those who use the tactics of disrespect to humiliate and intimidate.
Contrary to popular folklore, it's important to note that nice guys & gals don't finish last. Leaders who display authentic humility have broader spheres of influence, attract better talent, engender more confidence, and earn more loyalty and respect than do those leaders who rely solely upon their chutzpa and their ability to brandish their bravado. If what you’re seeking is lasting relationships, long-term success, and a better quality of life (in and out of the workplace) then you’ll be well served to forgo the pompous acts of the arrogant, and substitute the humility and quiet confidence displayed by true leaders.

If you have any interesting stories about leaders who either possessed great humility, or were sorely lacking in that regard, I’d encourage you to share your experience by leaving a comment below. Thanks in advance for sharing...