

# Humility in Leadership

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**Abstract**—A great leader never looks out for a following though he deserves it. When we look at most of these leaders, the idealistic trait they usually possess is humility, which remained a key to their success, letting the multitudes follow them this day.

*Businessmen think that they have learnt so much that success is just a few steps ahead. But if they don't really know the importance of humility, they've actually known nothing about success. It'll remain a roller coaster ride of failure and success if your focus is only on being aggressive and distinguished from others. And this is because most of the business schools don't make it a point to teach about the basic ethics of humility.*

*Humility is one ethic that every businessman should possess to overcome the stumbling blocks that sabotage their success. If you do some blue sky thinking and look at the big picture, you can clearly notice that arrogance and pride are taking the place of humility and confidence in today's mission. Pushing them back could really be a state of art solution. So what do you think this turnkey solution is? You need not literally get engaged in any joined up thinking looking out for an answer. It is as simple as this that the arrogant should try to be a little proactive and let the humility plug in. Then it surely will be a win-win situation for the business organization.*

*The primary objective of this subject is to show how humility and arrogance can play a vital role in any organization.*

**Keywords:** Confidence, Humility, Arrogance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the success of many arrogant executives, it was found that humble employees make better leaders in part because of their foster learning which helps with employee retention and job satisfaction. But when does a leader at work develop humility? It is when he is completely secure and anchored in his work place. One of the guiding principles of the Gates Foundation of Bill Gates is "We must be humble and mindful in our actions and words. We must seek and heed the counsel of outside voices."

There are a few situations where the arrogance of leaders was tolerated. Steve Jobs, who was notoriously described as an arrogant leader could be the best example for such instance. But for Mark Newman, the Founder of HireVue, what matters the most is the value of humility. He said, "Earn trust, titles don't matter. Leaders listen to others, consider other opinions inconsistent with their own and have the courage to change their position when evidence demands." For him, "The best leaders are devoid of arrogance but have an abundance of confidence and humility."

## 2. ARROGANCE

Dictionary defines arrogance as offensive display of superiority or self importance. It can also be defined by overbearing pride. An arrogant leader will try to impose only his personal opinions, despite whether it is beneficial or not, on all the workers and shutting his door against others' ideas. He will seek only to be complemented for his expertise, wanting to be on the top of the heap, which blinds him from performing much beyond what he is capable of. Even if he achieves success, it'll only remain short-term. But in the long-run, arrogance will ultimately result in downfall.

King Solomon wrote that before a fall, there is pride. An arrogant leader works with a selfish motive focusing on getting than on giving. Arrogance blames. It feels bitter for others' success. But a humble leader brings others into success. Arrogance doesn't give place for correction, lingering as a huge mountain block, hindering success.

- Stanley Silverman, and organizational psychologist, found in his research that "The higher the arrogance, the lower the cognitive ability." He said, "Arrogant people tend to also have lower self esteem and therefore cover it up by demeaning others to prove their competence. There is a fine line between confidence and arrogance," according to him.
- According to Russell Johnson, a professor at Michigan State University, one of the reasons arrogance is stimulated is that the world of professional sports abounds with examples of arrogant players who are admired so much.
- Sally Helgensen, an author and leadership development consultant said, "People are profoundly humiliated by bosses who are arrogant." She also says that the culture where they work usually allows arrogance to prevail causing all these problems.
- Tomas Chamorro Premuzic, an expert on personality assessment and vice president of research and innovation at Hogan Assessment Systems, said, "Cultures differ significantly and substantially in their ability to tolerate arrogance." Survey shows that most of the employees who are disengaged from their jobs blame their managers. "There is a clear correlation between engagements and

how employees rate their managers and how the company is actually doing,” he said.

### 2.1. Three Simple Instances Where Arrogance Is Reflected

- A manager who says, “I wouldn’t have this position if I had followed the instructions in the first place,” can’t possibly be humble. Could he? Humility doesn’t brag about itself. It’s arrogance which does.
- A leader who takes credit for everything that his subordinates contribute. This leader who robs others’ credit is no doubt an arrogant personality. Humility never takes someone else’s credit instead it appreciates them.
- A leader who impatiently shakes his head and rejects someone’s ideas is surely not open-minded. But humility doesn’t say that. It liberates the carnal minded to be open to others’ views and perspectives.

### 3. FALSE HUMILITY

An attitude that is worse than arrogance is nothing but false humility. It is defined as the pride masquerading in humble words, often to compensate for unacknowledged feelings of inadequacy. But genuine humility is a reflection of neither weakness nor insecurity. Instead, it implies a respectful appreciation of the strengths of others, a lack of personal pretension and a more relaxed sense of confidence that doesn’t require external recognition. A humble leader does not focus on how to make a big impression on people or how to receive glory and honor. He will associate with any people whom he can help, even if the world does not highly exalt him.

### 4. HUMILITY

The word humility comes from the Latin word “humilis,” which literally means “low.” Oxford dictionary defines humility as humbleness. But what does being humble actually mean? It means showing a low status of importance of one’s self. This is an attitude or quality of mind whereby a person holds low esteem or opinion of his own importance. Although some in business view humility as a weakness, research suggests that it is a strength savvy talent managers look for. Most people feel they know what it means to be humble but as a management expert, Ken Blanchard says, “People with humility do not think less of themselves, they just think of themselves less.” One must understand that humility doesn’t call us to consider ourselves lower in stature. A humble businessman is of modest pretensions. Humility is actually modesty and lacking in pretense but that doesn’t necessarily mean that humble leaders are timid. The primary requisite for humility is self acceptance. If one can accept his own strengths and weaknesses, it is not hard for him to accept others’ strengths and weaknesses. It comes out of a tremendous sense of satisfaction and self respect.

- What does the world need today? It needs geniuses with humility. A person filled with self importance cannot

possibly claim to be humble. Cause humility doesn’t bring out the by-product of self importance. Is it not? Humility is perceiving that no human is perfect and as a result being open to other’s views and perceptions. It allows a leader to be open to correction. But those who hate correction will go astray. The best leaders are the best listeners and know when to turn down the noise and make a move. A humble manager will have a genuine desire to discover what others can offer. He will not be clouded by his own egos and arrogance. Humility, in fact, creates a sort of receptacle of acceptance in us. It makes a man receptive to listen before judging. Maintaining a humble profile always stimulates success to shift into one’s path. Humility, indeed, gets you plugged into the flow of success carrying you towards your dream. Opportunities seek you before you seek an opportunity.

- Humility is an attitude that a leader should always stick to. It is good to eat a humble pie when it comes to handling delicate egos. This simply means, handling critical situations by vowing a humble apology to the egoistic problem stimulator.
- Humility is empathetic on ethical grounds. It is one of the stepping stones of success. A humble manager will recognize his own weaknesses and secure himself resistant to those stumbling blocks. Humble leaders focus on giving than on receiving. They serve the organization’s interests. They are willing to go down the stairs to the bottom if they think it’ll help the organization to succeed. They don’t let other’s success jeopardize their career.
- Humility cushions a manager to be confident of one’s private affairs. A humble leader with confidence develops a bespoke image of his self. He shows respect to all his subordinates and gains respect. He takes responsibility and works willingly with patience. He stays quiet as long as it is for the best. He inspires his subordinates, being a very good role model to them. He sets as an example to all his colleagues and promotes team-work by encouraging and motivating them. Tony Schwartz, a chief executive of the Energy Project, said, “The less we spend protecting our own value, the more we can spend creating value in the world”.
- A humble leader is gifted with the ability to teach. Humbleness doesn’t mean that it shouldn’t show others they are wrong. It is the quality of character that demands that we must speak out against error. There is no conflict between humbleness and correction. However, humility towards others will affect the manner in which we do this. One overtaken in trespass should be restored in a spirit of humanity. That permits a humble leader to help solve their problems, being compassionate and sympathetic. In the business world, Henry Ford, who was quite well known for his humility, simplicity and self confidence, has set a perfect example by listening to the problems of the workers and cordially meeting them. Whether or not people are pleased with our support, we need to examine ourselves to be sure that we weren’t egoistic or self

righteous. Azim Premji, Chairman of Wipro, said, "Mistakes should be forgiven and forgotten as long as the lessons are remembered."

- Some people argue just to keep from admitting they are wrong. They aren't honestly considering the evidence but just looking for any silly answer to avoid conceding. But a humble person will accept correction, admitting his mistakes.

#### 4.1. Confidence and Humility

Humility and confidence go hand in hand. While it takes confidence to push an idea into the marketplace, it's humility that prevents it from turning into arrogance which is known as the idiot cousin of the confident businessperson. But both of these words sound like two opposites. Don't they? Great leaders have them both though. They are self aware, understanding their strengths as well as their weaknesses. They leverage their strengths and put themselves in situations which play to their best abilities. Because they have confidence, not many things, or people, intimidate them. They portray assuredness, decisiveness and action. Confidence is one of the constellation of qualities, including strength, courage and decisiveness, that we tend to admire in our leaders. Unbridled confidence can easily slip into arrogance. Your confidence must be balanced with humility, accepting your strengths and weaknesses. But when you become more and more successful, how do you guard against arrogance? It is humility and gratitude that prevents confidence from turning onto arrogance.

- Jason Mendelson, the founder and managing director of the Foundry group says, "The difference between arrogance and confidence is self awareness. The confident leader is self aware of the customer's needs, their company's culture and the rapid change that occurs in their industry."
- Michael Johnson, a business professor at the University of Washington in Seattle stated that 'humble employees make better leaders in part because they learn from others, knowing their strengths and shortcomings and appreciating the contributions of others.'

#### 4.2. Humility in Authority

True success is when authority meets humility. Authority comes with position. A manager or an executive must understand that there exists both top level management and bottom level management. So a manager, to get the work done by his subordinates, must delegate some authority and responsibility to them. But for an arrogant manager, it would be difficult to delegate authority. And that is when he tries to push all the responsibility on his subordinates and keep all the authority to himself. This kind of management, which is usually an example for micro-management, will pull the organization towards failure. Workers will then try to follow the rule book under such circumstances which closes their

minds from innovation and new ideas. This ultimately results in a very low productivity. A subordinate can do his best only when he is delegated with some authority.

True authority is what comes out of great humility. We need to humble ourselves first in submission to the authorities before we even receive any responsibility. We try to skip little character building steps to get to the long run but those who lead should be the first to serve. A leader should primarily prove that he is able to handle the responsibility, then and only then, will he be given the reins to the company. And that is also when he can handle the authority with great humility.

Even as your authority increases, humility should continue to rule your leadership. As a humble leader continues to up-skill, his humility shouldn't diminish, opening the door for arrogance. In other words, in the long run, humility makes them stronger.

When it comes to authority, managers need to be assertive. But being assertive and humble at the same time is something they don't even think about. Stuart Taylor, in his book 'Assertive Humility,' wrote, "Assertive humility is having more care and compassion for both others and my own self while my behavior, decisions and expressed opinions are consistent with my values and beliefs."

### 5. THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

Leaders humble themselves to be willing to be exalted. Bible says, "One who exalts self will be abased, one who humbles himself will be exalted!" But what does this actually mean? To the degree that we display pride, success moves away from us. So what does a successful leader do? Adopt humility or submit to pride? This is where you close your door for pride and let humility rule, for that is when you'll actually be exalted, tasting success.

- Zaveri Poonawala, a well known Parsee industrialist of Pune, who was very well known to have been down to earth even to his car drivers, commented, "Everyone earns money which is nothing unusual in that, but we should be grateful to those people who contribute to our success. This is the belief, we have been brought up with, which made me do, what I did."
- In his book 'The Mindful Leader,' Michael Carroll describes 'the talent of humility.' He explains that humility is how we express our delight, how we appreciate the simple pleasure and great joys. Humility is how we open to life's inconveniences and devastating tragedies. Humbleness creates equality between all the colleagues removing all the differences. Humility doesn't let a leader consider any experience beneath him. He also says that a humble leader wills to savor both the tasty and the non-tasty parts of his job.
- Laszlo Bock, the senior vice president of people operations at the Silicon Valley Giant, triggered some buzz recently when he was quoted in a New York Times

saying “Humility is one of the leading attributes he looks for in a candidate, while expertise is the least important factor.” When a person is humble, he will be able to learn anything and attain expertise anytime he wants.

Greatness is measured by how much you receive from people or how much authority you possess. But we are really great if we humble ourselves to do what is best for the company instead of doing what is best for us. Just having authority doesn't alone make you great. It is your service that makes you great.

## 6. CONCLUSION

A leader may or may not understand his subordinates but a humble leader always understands them. He leaves an exemplary mark in this world. On the other hand, we know many leaders who are arrogant and yet successful. But in today's dynamic business environment, can we really afford to have a humble leader? Yes, we totally can. Humility is the connection with humanity. And the world is always ready for a refreshing change.

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