



Nancy Proffitt

Proffitt Management
Solutions
326 Maddock St.
West Palm Beach, FL
www.ProffittManagement.com

561-582-6060
info@proffittmanagement.com

THE POWER OF HUMBLE LEADERSHIP

Today's leaders face innumerable challenges that previous generations never confronted: employee disengagement, cloud-based speed of commerce, political correctness, cultural diversity, social sensitivities and a hyper-focus on efficiency, among others. Pressure to succeed is higher than ever. Leaders know they must have an A-game, and they continually encounter methods that experts claim will improve proficiencies.

Humility, however, is an often-overlooked character trait that flies in the face of culturally accepted leadership norms. It may, in fact, be the most powerful attribute a leader can have to engage and inspire people. Leaders dream of motivated teams, yet many try to develop them in all the wrong ways.

FUNDAMENTAL PARADIGMS

For generations, workplace humility was seen as a detriment, not an advantage. For the greater part of the 20th century, leaders believed organizations were best run with power, intimidation, authority and ego. Employees were told what to do and were shown the door when they failed to comply. Decisiveness, toughness and assertiveness were deemed leadership strengths. Facts and figures ruled the day, and leaders seldom prioritized employee needs.

These paradigms are still found in many corners of commerce. Old-school leaders regard softer skills as weaknesses. Unfortunately for them, the primary weakness in this mindset is results.

The word "humility" is plagued with negative connotations. Humble leaders may be erroneously viewed as unsure of themselves, permissive or unable to stand firm. Nothing can be further from the truth, and outdated leadership paradigms are responsible for countless organizational woes.

A message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are you in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization's bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?

In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that "what got you here may not get you there."

At Proffitt Management Solutions we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

Find out how services such as individual or team coaching and development, motivational and skills workshops, seminars may help you better answer those 5 questions and benefit you...

Studies and surveys over recent decades clearly show that organizational prosperity is highly connected to employee satisfaction and engagement. A company runs much better when its people feel good about what they're doing. Recent emphasis on efficiency and growth has led leaders to examine these softer skills and pay closer attention to people's needs.

Thus, the leadership world is trying to learn how it can engage and inspire employees, though humility's role hasn't yet achieved universal buy-in. Many bosses still enjoy being bosses, with the authority and privileges the role affords. Fortunately, positive, people-oriented approaches have made their way into leadership game plans, including onboarding, open communication, telecommuting, progressive office layouts and a host of enticing perks. Humility, nonetheless, must become a more popular leadership practice.

HUMILITY'S ADVANTAGES

Employee mindsets have shifted from previous generations, according to current data. They want much more than a paycheck, seeking interpersonal connections with their leaders. They desire purpose, significance and the fulfillment associated with making a difference in the workplace. Employees want to contribute value and enjoy meaningful work. They need assurances that they'll be given the opportunity to succeed at the tasks they're assigned. They want to be valued, supported and encouraged. They're looking for leaders who will connect with them and meet these needs.

When employees' needs go unmet, the organization also suffers. Morale and attitudes steeply decline, and engagement and work ethic follow suit. Productivity and effectiveness drop, and overall business performance significantly deteriorates.

Humble leaders are more adept at meeting people's needs because they connect with them at the most basic human level, explain organizational leadership consultants Merwyn A. Hayes and Michael D. Comer in *Start with Humility: Lessons from America's Quiet CEOs on How to Build Trust and Inspire Followers* (CreateSpace, 2010). Employees sense sincerity, care and openness in a humble leader. They see someone who puts a higher priority on people's needs than his or her own. They value a leader who will help them succeed and develop into a better worker, which promotes purpose and self-esteem. Employees become inspired and respond with respect and trust.

When encountering humility, employees feel they are listened to and heard, and their best interests are served. They experience humble leaders growing and empowering them, rather than controlling or manipulating them. Humility allows leaders to relate to their people more personally, fairly and reasonably. Humble leaders deemphasize their own importance by emphasizing their people's worth.

A leader's desire to meet people's needs cultivates a loyal following and promotes positive responses. The entire organization benefits when people and practices operate optimally and life at work is enjoyable.

HUMBLE BEHAVIORS

Before determining how best to reflect humility, it's important to grasp what it is and what it looks like. Perhaps pastor, speaker and author Rick Warren expresses it best:

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.

While strong leaders are stereotypically portrayed as egocentric, forceful, bold and self-serving, humility is by no means a lack of confidence or authority. It's a mistake to view considerate and other-focused leaders as ineffective. In reality, self-serving leaders are ruining workplaces everywhere, to the point where most employees do not care for their jobs or employers. Self-serving leaders have yet to recognize the clear outcome of widespread research: Their style doesn't work.

True humility is a response of noble character, based on a choice to regard the needs of others ahead of one's own. At its heart, humility is characterized by a desire to serve and dedication to bettering others. Humble leaders are fulfilled by helping others achieve fulfillment. A leader with a humble approach lifts people's spirits, self-esteem and confidence, which enhances overall organizational life.

Hayes and Comer cite numerous humble behaviors, any of which can be clearly discerned when on display. Some of the more important ones are:

Admitting mistakes: If you can be vulnerable, transparent and fallible in front of your people, your true self is revealed, and people are drawn to you. You convey safety, build trust and strengthen relationships.

Empowering people: If you push authority down to the most effective level, you give up some control to your people. This engages them and demonstrates they're valued and trusted.

Actively listening: This shows people you're interested in and care about them. You've laid the foundation for trust and forging a loyal following.

Crediting others: When your people succeed, give them the credit to build teamwork and inspire higher productivity. People will go above and beyond for a supportive leader who doesn't steal the spotlight.

Expressing Empathy: Being sensitive to people's trials helps you better understand their perspectives. You'll lead them more considerately, and they'll reciprocate with appreciation and allegiance.

Other humble behaviors include honesty, kindness, sincerity and approachability, each of which sets the stage for more favorable employee responses and mutually beneficial relationships. Humble leaders exhibit behaviors that more effectively meet people's needs—and when their needs are met, there's no limit to what they can accomplish.

ASSESS YOUR HUMILITY LEVEL

Once you grasp the basic tenets of humility, you can more accurately gauge how well you exhibit it. Start by assessing your behavior and responses to the following questions. (You can work with a trusted colleague or coach to ensure you see yourself clearly.)

Do you frequently lose your temper? Perhaps you're short with people or pressing your points without regarding theirs. Take stock of how people respond to you. Is there an issue with your approach? If your employees try to avoid you or resist bringing up difficult topics, you may

be overbearing. Focus on being calm and collected, and recognize the harm caused by a lack of kindness or empathy. Put yourself in the shoes of a person confronted with your gruff approach.

Are you a focused listener? Are people frustrated because they can't complete their sentences with you? Do you make sense of their points, or have you missed part of the conversation? Do people's comments indicate that you don't understand their perspective? Practice better listening skills by eliminating distractions and making a deliberate effort to grasp everything someone is saying. Imagine being quizzed on the conversation to see if you've caught every point. Ask questions to verify what you were told. (If this embarrasses you, use it as an incentive to listen better.)

Are you too focused on your own image? Do you build yourself up at others' expense? Do their victories end up on your bragging list to impress your boss? Do you give your people a chance to present how they accomplished their tasks? Any attention your people draw from success reflects directly on you. Great leaders don't need to grab credit. They earn much more respect when their people get the credit. Advance your reputation through your team's exemplary track record.

Do you search for sources of blame when things go wrong? Are your stories getting more creative as you try to avoid judgment? Is throwing people under the bus more the norm than the exception? Try to recognize that blame causes more damage to your reputation than the initial problem. Respect and trust are earned only when you accept responsibility for a situation, learn from it and take steps to avoid a repeat scenario. Admit to your people that you don't know everything and you're open to learning new ways to improve efficacy and productivity. Swallowing your pride is a major step toward achieving humility.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Leaders can certainly change—at least to a degree. Behavioral adjustments and upgrades are possible, but they take work. An entire overhaul of your behavior is generally not workable and may indicate you're not in the correct role.

Hayes and Comer point out that a cognitive decision to improve is only the first step in practicing humility. Change is proportional to the effort you put into it. Lasting results are achieved only after rigorously practicing new behaviors.

Training your brain requires focus, repetition and ongoing feedback from others. Consider hiring a qualified professional coach to help you adopt a humbler approach to leadership. The rewards are well worth the investment.