

Should a Leader be Humble?



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Jim Collins, the author of "From Good to Great" says, "... the key to successful leadership is a matter of intense professional will and **intense personal humility**. Out of all the leadership traits you can conjure – charisma, communication skills, caring, competent, etc – none is as embodying as the character of personal humility. Humility is not about being a "door mat" or a weak-willed person; on the contrary it takes great **inner strength** to be humble!

Are leaders born or made? There is a certain degree of in-built personality that enhances one's leadership – for example, if you have a winsome disposition or charming charisma, it goes a long way in your leadership efforts but if that's all you have, then your leadership lacks depth and sustainability. Here is where humility comes in. Think about it – **no one is born humble**. Humility is a trait that is developed through the school of hard-knocks and diligent effort. In short, a leader may be blessed with a winsome personality but he can never take the character quality of humility for granted. *It has to be developed.*

How does one develop humility?

1. **Pursue feedback.** A delayed feedback is a complaint but a pursued feedback is a contribution to your leadership. Do not wait until there is smoke before you take action; rouse yourself to step out of your comfort zone and solicit for feedback – you never know just what "gems" you will discover.
2. **Seek counsel.** There is safety in the wisdom of others. Are you willing to listen even when it hurts? Humble leaders listens not for their own sake, rather they are willing to change for the sake of those they serve. In other words, he who is full of himself will hardly seek counsel.
3. **Share the credit.** Humility acknowledges those who provided opportunities, help you to improve, or even corrected you. Don't be quick to take the glory for yourself because every achievement comes with the "signature" of a team effort. Praising others on a regular basis builds a sense of *inter-dependence* rather than independence. Learn to deflect praise and recognize team contribution because sincere praise builds loyalty and a sense of "connectedness" with your team members.
4. **Be quick to admit.** When things go wrong (as it regularly will), everybody's favorite response is an activity called "The Blame Game." When everyone is defensive, *no one learns anything except the need to be right*. Even if your part of the problem is only 10%, admit that portion and you will be surprised how this acts as a catalyst to create an atmosphere of transparency and truthfulness.

Hence, leadership is a combination of charisma and character but if charisma is all you have, then your leadership is very shallow indeed and it will not stand the test of time and loyalty. In fact, a person lacking in charisma has a much better chance of succeeding as an *authentic* leader if there is a healthy dose of good character! General Norman Schwarzkopf has this to say – "*Leadership is the potent combination of character and strategy. But if you must be without one, be without strategy.*"

So, are you going through a rough patch at the moment? Take heart – this is the moment where your character is being shaped. Learn to respond in humility and be aware that there is no such thing as a "self-made" person because we all need the feedback, correction and guidance from others to achieve meaningful success. Success that is gained in any other way brings only temporary satisfaction because it is created from a selfish agenda.

If you want to travel fast, it is better to travel alone but if you want to travel far, learn to travel *together*. *Can one go far in life without practicing humility?* Think about it.

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