

Of Confidence and Humility

Being a humble leader will get you the results you and your company want. It will allow you to coach your team for success, open lines of communication, and build trust within your team. No one wants to endure an egotistical leader.

Leaders typically are chosen for confidence. The same confidence that helped you become successful as a team member allows you to jump into the unknown and lead others. It undoubtedly takes a certain level of confidence to be a leader; otherwise, no one would follow you. But sometimes confidence can hurt your efforts just as much as it can help. Every leader must walk the thin line between confidence and arrogance because the latter can undermine even the best intentions. Teams want to follow a confident leader, but no one wants to endure an arrogant one. That's why having humility as a leader is just as important as having confidence. Humility allows you to listen, gives you a safe zone to coach and learn in, and builds trust with the team.

Listen, Humble Leader

Leaders often have a very broad responsibility, so it's very important to have a good team that can drive results based on the leader's

vision and direction. Such leadership requires an ability to listen and understand what's going on to determine how to help the team become successful.

The old saw about having two ears and one mouth certainly applies to leaders. You must listen and be adept at doing so, or you'll fail. The difference between a confident leader and an arrogant one becomes very perceptible when it comes to listening. Confident yet humble leaders listen well and do so consistently. You must not let your ego get in the way. You should understand what's communicated to you and consistently seek out such insight from your team, your peers, and your partners.

On the other hand, arrogant leaders have all the answers, fail to acknowledge valid points made by others, and often miss signs that eventually end in failure. While failure is the ultimate humbling event, it could be avoided outright if the leader would just listen. When egos get in the way of leading, it's hard to listen effectively. That's why having humility as a leader is so important.

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, said it best: "Your success as a leader will come not from what you do but from the re-

flected glory of your team." Humility is the key to realizing this success. An arrogant leader will rarely be satisfied with such "reflected glory" and will rarely be graced with success.

Coach and Learn

One of the most important jobs that you have is to coach your team members for success. After all, when the members of your team are successful, you get a share of that success, too. If you're a horrible coach, you'll likely fail as a leader because you can't possibly do everything yourself to make the team successful.

Confidence and humility also play a role in coaching. Just as teams want to follow confident leaders, team members want to be coached with confidence—but not too much. Arrogant leaders who may appear to be superior or all-knowing put others on the defensive and often leave subordinates resistant to any effective coaching.

Coaching requires a delicate balance of confidence and a servant attitude. The objective of coaching is to help you improve individual team members, thus making the team stronger. Your objective as a coach is to serve your team members and help your team reach its



full potential. Team members have to feel like they're in a safe zone where they can learn without reproach, otherwise they'll resist any efforts to be coached. Arrogance disrupts that safe zone and contaminates it with skepticism on the part of team members because no one wants to be coached by an egotistical leader.

At the same time, achieving that safe zone where coaching is vibrant is also a wonderful opportunity for you to build knowledge. There's rarely a case of a coach-team relationship where the coach doesn't learn something as well. These opportunities to learn are an incredible asset for you, not only to develop but also to increase your knowledge of the work your team does. Such knowledge may help you lead your team more effectively or allow you to connect the dots of the broader organization to help the team achieve even greater success. But if you don't establish the safe zone with the team because of your arrogance, the potential is all but lost.

Building Trust

If you've ever worked for arrogant leaders, you know it's hard to trust them. They often believe they have all the answers and that their answers are superior. Even when they appear to be humble and listen, it is fake and not believable. Your defenses are always up rather than having an open mind to a potential learning opportunity. You miss out on a lot of things because the arrogance is a big put-off. A big ego can suck the air out of the room and leave little room for trust.

Yet trust is imperative to every leader. Without it, there's nothing

for you to listen to, there are no coaching opportunities, and there are certainly no viable chances to learn and develop as a leader. Your team members won't be open to discussion or coaching if you don't ensure a high level of trust. Even with positional authority or a leadership mandate, trust must be earned. Arrogance isn't rewarded with trust.

A confident yet humble leader often engenders seemingly automatic trust. Leaders who are adept at walking this balance between humility and confidence regularly find themselves in the enviable position of having highly engaged teams that will do anything to help the team be successful. As a leader, I can say from experience that such teams are ideal.

A Great Humble Leader

Several years ago, I worked for a manager who embodied all of these important traits. She was humble. She had worked her way up in the organization and earned

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her role as a leader the hard way, which gave her a great perspective on the desires and challenges her staff faced. From the moment I went to work for her, I knew she was an excellent listener. She clearly demonstrated empathy and took action when necessary to address problems. She took the time to coach me and help me develop. Her time was valuable, and the fact that she spent so much time listening and helping me built a tremendous amount of trust between us. I was prepared to walk through walls for her because I didn't want to let her down. That's the kind of response a humble leader who listens and coaches well gets from her staff.

A Matter of Degree

While it's important to be confident as a leader, it's also important to have a level of humility that allows you to connect with your team and drive its success. Humility humanizes the leader and helps you get more out of your team because you listen more effectively, are allowed to coach and learn, and build trust with everyone on the team. Being a leader is the ultimate challenge in life because it requires the balance of sometimes opposing ideals or characteristics, but none of the characteristics can be as fatal as the balance of confidence and humility. It can be the difference between unlimited success and outright failure. So be humble and lead. **SF**

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