

12 Definite Traits of a Humble Leader

Humble leadership can be difficult to define.

It's subjective, and then there's that pesky old saying that goes something like, "if you think you're humble, you're not."

Well, that might be true, but it's not very helpful if humility is something we should embrace. I'm mean, then how do you know?

Scripture is clear that humility is a good thing and indicates that it's the opposite of pride. (James 4:6) So, the concept of humility isn't a mystery. In fact, Moses was known as the most humble man on the face of the earth (Num. 12:3), and we know a lot about his life.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17) and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death (Phil. 2:8) Again, we do have clear examples of humble leaders in action.

But I rarely hear conversations of someone trying to "achieve" humility. Yes, I'm smiling as I write that.

Should a leader focus on avoiding pride or aspiring to humility?

Part of the difficulty may reside in the fact that leaders need to be confident, strong and decisive—along with other virtues that don't seem like natural partners with humility but actually are.

Humility is based more on the idea that you don't feel *superior* or better than others because of what you have, your status or power; and equally, it's not about feeling *inferior* to others.

Humility is not about your place on the org chart; it reflects the disposition of your heart. You can be the CEO and be humble or full of pride. You can be among those with the least formal status or authority in the organization and also be humble or prideful.

Humble leaders live for others more than they live for themselves. Humble doesn't mean insecure. Don't confuse the two. Humility is an attractive virtue, insecurity is not. Humility is directly connected to strength; insecurity is tied to fear and our weaknesses.

This does not suggest that humble leaders never struggle with insecurities, but recognizes that humility is based in strength, not weakness.

My hope is to make this post on humble leadership very practical by offering a list of traits that are largely intuitive. And because they are somewhat self-explanatory, I'll add just brief but helpful comments after each one.

12 Traits of a Humble Leader

1. Humble leaders are not easily embarrassed.

Humble leaders do not try to protect a reputation or project a certain public image. They aren't worried about trying to look good. This doesn't mean they don't care how they're perceived or what happens, but they just don't take themselves too seriously. Humble leaders possess a healthy balance of self-awareness and self-confidence.

2. Humble leaders are not offended if they don't receive credit.

When a leader isn't looking for credit, they're not offended when they don't receive it. Every leader appreciates acknowledgement, but they don't seek it out or need it in an unhealthy way. Humble leaders serve for the good of others,

not for accolades.

3. Humble leaders are willing to lift others up.

Prideful or narcissistic leaders may try to keep you down or at least in your place, but a humble leader finds ways to lift others up. They will promote young leaders, give others opportunities, invite you to a seat at the table when they can and freely give public recognition.

4. Humble leaders are not prone to gossip.

Gossip finds its root in jealousy, envy and pride. Gossip often puts others down in order to gain allies, gain an advantage or maneuver in position. These things are contrary to a humble heart.

5. Humble leaders have a good self-image but don't need to tell you how good they are.

As I mentioned, humility comes from a place of strength and therefore is nearly always connected to a good self-image. A humble leader knows their strengths and is not hesitant to talk about them if needed or asked, but they don't have a need to constantly tell others of their worth, accomplishments or importance.

6. Humble leaders value kindness and respect toward others.

Humility finds part of its endearing quality in kindness and respect for others. Humble leaders are not afraid of influence, authority and power, but never use it for their personal gain or to take advantage of others. Humble leaders are intentionally kind and communicate respect by showing appreciation and valuing people's time and skill. They demonstrate that they care about who the person is, not just what they can do.

7. Humble leaders inspire trust, authenticity and close teamwork.

Because leaders who exemplify humility rarely have a personal agenda, let alone a hidden one, they are easy to trust. They live more for others and therefore inspire trust in others. Their authenticity encourages authenticity in the people they're around and these two things, trust and authenticity, are part of the foundation for close teamwork.

8. Humble leaders find joy when others succeed.

Have you ever been around someone who doesn't seem happy that you won? They don't seem pleased that you succeeded. That's not a sign of humility. Humble leaders don't need to be the best and love it when others succeed. They certainly want to be good, perhaps even great at what they do, but that's different than "the best." That gets dangerously close to the idea of superior or "better" than others.

9. Humble leaders are grateful for what they have.

Entitlement is a dangerous notion and always wanting more is a sad way to live. Gratitude is at the core of people who are content, happy and live a healthy life. There is always someone who has more than you. There is always someone who has bigger and better stuff. If that's your goal, you can't win. Instead, being grateful for what you have brings great peace and joy and is a hallmark of humility.

10. Humble leaders don't always need to be right.

No one is always right, so any leader who attempts to be or insists they are reveals, at a minimum, pride. Attempting to always be right must be exhausting, and it certainly isn't part of God's plan and design. Leaders make mistakes and are better together. We need each other, and humble leaders know that's true.

11. Humble leaders admit when they are wrong and take responsibility.

Since no leader is always right, that means on occasion, we're wrong. The humble leader quickly and easily admits their faults. They own the mistake or whatever the case may be and take responsibility rather than making excuses or passing the buck.

12. Humble leaders listen to others well, receive input and are willing to change.

You may have experienced a leader who seems to like to hear himself talk. Admittedly, most of us leaders talk a lot, but good leaders also listen well. In fact, the more we listen, the better. That's the only way to receive input and leads to the need to change. Humble leaders are willing to change: change their minds, change their plans and so forth because they are open to other's ideas. {eo}

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This article originally appeared at .