

Humble Leadership: What is it?



Humility and leadership are two words that are not often seen together. Humility is often perceived as being weak, lacking confidence or being a pushover. This is incorrect. Humility is not about thinking less about yourself but thinking about yourself less. The humility we refer to is not general humility, such as refraining from buying a new and fancy car or not wearing designer brand clothing, but rather intellectual humility. This refers to understanding the limits of one's own knowledge.

In today's prototypical corporate culture, power can cause leaders to become overly obsessed with outcomes and control, and, therefore, treat their employees as a means to an end. This in turn puts great pressure on employees and creates fear regarding the consequences of poor performance.

People with intellectual humility are more:

- Likely to acknowledge limits to their own knowledge;
- Open to new ideas and criticism;

- Willing to consider new sources of evidence;
- Receptive to learning new things; and
- Equipped to engage in constructive discourse.

Google's SVP of People Operations, Laszlo Bock, says humility is one of the traits he actively looks for in new hires. He goes on to say that humility is about what can we do to solve problems together, and not just humility in creating space for others to contribute. Without humility, you are unable to learn.

The way in which a person perceives the nature of intelligence can either hinder or foster intellectual humility. According to Stanford psychologist, Carol Dweck there are two types of mindsets:

1. Fixed Mindset: Those with this mindset believe that everyone is born with a certain amount of intelligence, and that because of this, there is little point in trying to improve yourself. A person with a fixed mind-set and a high IQ, for example, might take on an arrogant stance, presuming they "already know everything" and therefore inadvertently holding themselves back from learning something new. This is a very binary way of thinking.
2. Growth Mindset: Those with this mindset view intelligence as something more malleable, more like a muscle that can be strengthened. This fosters a love for learning and organisational growth.

Dweck outlines the main attributes that create a Growth Mindset environment:

- Presenting skills as learnable;
- Conveying that the organisation values learning, not just ready-made talent;
- Giving feedback in a way that promotes learning and future success;
- Encouraging respectful and constructive criticism; and
- Presenting managers as resources for learning.

References

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