

Achieving Results

A Black Diamond Associates Publication

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The Humble Leader

“Humility”

In his book Good to Great, Jim Collins identifies one of the elements of “Great” companies as being what he calls “Level 5 Leadership”. According to Collins, a Level 5 executive “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”

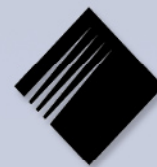
I think much has been written about the professional will of successful leaders. Some are branded “Type-A” or “High D” in reference to their drive and determination. Leadership qualities like resolve and fortitude, courage and confidence are often admired because they lead to results.

But, humility? What is it about humility that makes a “great” leader?

According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of humility is “the state or quality of being humble.” And humble is defined as:

- not proud or haughty: not arrogant or assertive
- reflecting, expressing, or offered in a spirit of deference or submission - a humble apology
- ranking low in a hierarchy or scale : INSIGNIFICANT, UNPRETENTIOUS
- not costly or luxurious <a humble contraption>

If being humble is not haughty, arrogant or assertive, then the antonyms of these – modest and timid – must define what it is. On the surface, these terms are rarely used to describe greatness. However, great leaders achieve success when others follow. It is



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We’ve all heard the joke about the man who drives around aimlessly refusing to ask for directions. Rather than seek help, he prefers to find where he is going himself. Fortunately, the do-it-yourselfer now has access to technology that solves the problem. If you’d like to be more of a Level 5 leader, follow the proven steps that you use every day when you access your GPS.

- Enter the destination – Level 5 leader.
- Acquire current position – Assess who you are now.
- Map out the driving directions – Create a plan to develop who you are into who you want to be.
- Drive to highlighted route – Execute.

An executive coach is the GPS that helps you on your journey. Begin with the humility that recognizes you need help to get where you want to go. Contact Black Diamond Associates. We can help.

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Humility is the only true wisdom by which we prepare our minds for all the possible changes of life.
~ George Arliss

this aspect of leadership that requires the right dose of humility. Humble leaders recognize that they can't accomplish great things alone. Being modest and timid enables the humble leader to let go appropriately and let others take over.

Robert Bulwer-Lytton said "O be very sure that no man will learn anything at all, unless he first will learn humility." What steps can you take to increase your leadership effectiveness by learning humility?

Know thyself first. Appreciating your authentic self is the essence of humility. There are a variety of scientifically-validated assessments available to help you recognize your inherent strengths and limitations. Additionally, 360° surveys provide the perspective of how others perceive your effectiveness. These assessments can provide you a "look in the mirror" to help to gain an accurate view of your strengths and reveal blind spots that otherwise may cause you difficulty. Knowledge and acceptance of your strengths and limitations helps you identify when to rely on yourself and when it is best to complement your leadership with the strengths of others.

Humility leads to the highest distinction, because it leads to self-improvement.

~ Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie

Knowing and accepting yourself is a prerequisite of being authentic and being authentic is a prerequisite of earning the trust and respect of others. It enables a leader to:

- Have an accurate self-assessment and be comfortable surrounding themselves with complementary talent.
- Empower others to be the best they can be.
- Put success of the organization before personal gain or recognition.
- Recognize the contributions of others as the primary reason for the company's success.
- Acknowledge failure as an opportunity for growth.
- Seek accountability partners as a natural component of continuous improvement.

There is enormous relief that comes from leading with humility. You don't have to have all the answers. You are allowed to make mistakes. You don't have to do it all yourself. And, when your ego is out of the way, you can focus on the goal at hand.

This brings me back to the stark contrast of the two qualities of a Level 5 leader. It is extraordinarily challenging to achieve a successful balance of the two and is probably the reason why few leaders attain greatness. When a leader demonstrates too much "professional will" and lacks consideration for others, they are what we term "micro-managers." On the other hand, an overly timid leader who lacks resolve to pursue goals is viewed as "wishy-washy." In either case, the leader loses the respect and trust of others.

Humility, like darkness, reveals the heavenly lights.
~ Henry David Thoreau

Striking the right balance is difficult because each of us has a set talents, skills and style that are God-given and have been developed over our lifetimes. Many people will have a natural tendency to be more task-oriented and others will be more people-oriented. The Level 5 leader is one who has developed the right blend of the two. They strike a balance by understanding and accepting themselves and others, and establishing the vision for the organization and accepting nothing less.

To develop your leadership abilities, and move from good to great, take a step back and assess where you are. Only then can you begin the process of moving forward.

