

Building Higher Trust 60 Practice Humility

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The relationship between trust and humility is a strong one, even though we think of the two concepts as completely different things. In this brief article, I will describe some interesting ideas that demonstrate the synergy between these two ideas.

The concept of humility revolves around the principle of self-worth. The antithesis of humility is another word beginning with the letter “h.” It is hubris. The Free Dictionary defines hubris as “An ancient Greek word meaning pride or arrogance, used particularly to mean the kind of excessive pride or conceit that often brings about someone's downfall.”

Good to Great

In *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins wrote extensively about humility as one of the two universal characteristics of what he called “level five leaders.” The other characteristic is passion. Jim says that the concept of passion creates energy to get amazing things done and humility creates the ability to relate well to people and give them the credit. When you combine those two characteristics in one person, you create a highly effective leader and an atmosphere where trust grows spontaneously.

When people operate as level five leaders, they generate trust because they do not hog the credit for the good work that is driving performance. They are not ego-centric. Collins uses the “window/mirror” analogy to explain the difference.

Window/Mirror Analogy

When things are going well in the organization, level five leaders look out the window and express gratitude for the many people who make it happen daily. When things are not going well, level five leaders see a mirror and recognize themselves as the problem.

People who are not level five leaders do exactly the opposite. When things are going well, they see the mirror and are happy to take the credit. When things are going poorly, they see the window and look out at all the problem people in the organization that are goofing up.

By refusing to let an over-inflated ego take over in the good times, leaders cause satisfaction and empowerment in people. In that condition, trust will grow easily.

Collins wrote *Good to Great* over 20 years ago, and the world is a very different place now. Back then we had no idea the working environment would be radically different for more than 3 years in a row. However, the concept of the window/mirror analogy has stood the test of time and is still valid, even in a hybrid working world.

Why Many Leaders Operate by Command and Control

It is a shame that many people who become leaders did so by being managers first. These managers often learn that to be efficient they need to use a “command and control” mentality. When they move on to become leaders, they take that mindset with them. The command and control philosophy of leading does not foster high trust because people resent all the bluster and lack of empathy.

How to Gain More Humility

If humility is one key that leads to higher trust, how can leaders increase their humility? I believe the best way to change such a basic characteristic is to get a mentor or coach who is a really humble person.

It takes time to wean out the thought processes that lead to excessive pride and ego. You have to reverse years of practice where the person is feeling dominant and smug. The only way to do it is to get a great role model and have that person coach you on what to do differently.

You also will need lots of encouragement when you start showing baby steps in the direction of a more humble existence. It may take years to reverse some of the old bad habits.

Conclusion

In these times of turmoil and difficult choices, the role of humility should not be a “nice-to-have” concept. Having true empathy for what people are going through is a needed concept to help people survive and thrive as individuals and as teams. Supporting each other is the best way to keep people engaged and empowered.

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Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, and Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind

