



By KIMBERLY ALYN, Ph.D.

The Power of Humility

To Be An Effective Leader, Try Swallowing Your Pride

Two battleships were assigned out to sea for maneuvers. There was thick fog with very limited visibility. The captain of the lead battleship stayed on deck to keep an eye on all activities. After a few hours, he heard his first mate yell, "Captain, there's a light bearing on the starboard bow."

So the captain asked, "Is it steady or moving astern?"

"It's steady, Captain," the first mate responded. This indicated to the captain the ship was on a dangerous collision course with the other ship.

The captain took immediate action and ordered, "Signal that ship the following: 'We are on a dangerous collision course - advise you change your course 20 degrees.'"

Back came the light signal: "Advise you change your course 20 degrees."

The captain's face flushed red as he became angry and yelled, "Send this: 'I am a captain! Now change your course 20 degrees!'"

Back came the light signal, "I am a seaman second class, now change your course 20 degrees."

By now, the captain was furious. "Send back this: 'I'm a battleship. Change your course immediately!'"

Back came the signal, "I'm a lighthouse. Your call."

Arrogant leaders often find themselves in situations of humiliation. When

you refuse to willingly show humility, life has a way of humbling you. If you want to be an effective leader, show humility. A variety of areas deal with humility. You may only need to work on one area, or maybe you need to work on all of the areas. Only you and your followers can judge that. If you took my advice from the September issue about using a 360-degree evaluation, you will know what areas to work on. If you ignored my advice, you might have a humility problem.

• **Give away credit.** Real leaders will not only share the credit for successes, they will give away more credit than they need to and accept more blame and responsibility than they have to. Great leaders understand the concept of being able to accomplish more in life when you are less concerned about who gets the credit for it. People are not inspired by leaders who take credit for everything. If you want to inspire people to follow you, share the credit and give it completely away when it belongs to someone else.

• **Admit when you're wrong.** You probably know experienced individuals who do not like to admit when they are wrong. As a result, they come across as arrogant. Some people fear that if they admit they are wrong and show humility, people will think they are weak.

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You can be a confident leader and still be humble. Humility is not the presence of weakness; it's the absence of arrogance. When you refuse to admit you are wrong, you are just being proud and arrogant. When you say things like "I could be wrong" or "I stand corrected, I was wrong," people will find you much easier to be around.

The more you minimize your mistakes or try to cover them up, the more people will want to maximize them. If you take full responsibility and ownership for your screw-ups, people will respect you. Unfortunately, that's not what most leaders do. Instead, they try to minimize their mistakes and hope they just go away. It is very difficult to learn from your mistakes if you spend all of your time trying to cover them up.

• **Let others praise you.** There are people who wrongly believe that if they don't tell people how great they are at certain things, people will never know. If you have to tell people you are a good leader or you are good at your job, then you probably aren't. When you do a fantastic job, people notice and the word gets around fast. Part of humility is not feeling the need to constantly tell people all the great things you have done or how great you are in life. Let other people praise you and let other people discover your great traits on their own.

Humility is a powerful tool for formal and informal leaders to positively influence people. When you admit you're wrong, give away credit and let others praise you, people will gain a higher level of respect for you as a leader. Just remember the quote by the famous "unknown": "Swallow your pride occasionally; it's non-fattening!"

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Kimberly Alyn, Ph.D., will present "Understanding the Firefighter Bill of Rights & Discipline in California" and "Developing Responsible and Accountable Leaders" at Firehouse World 2012.

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