

## **Humility: The Overlooked Virtue of Effective Leaders**

The role of CEO has taken a serious beating during the past few years. The media has chronicled the fraud, insider trading, accounting scandals, excessive compensation and many other misdeeds of a few high-profile CEOs. Although it is important to learn how some executives have abused the trust given to them by their employees and shareholders, these headline stories should be put into perspective. While we have been stunned by the excessive greed and egos of these CEOs, many of the most successful and effective leaders have quietly been exhibiting a common trait - humility.

CEOs of FORTUNE 500 companies grab the cover stories, but the vast majority of businesses in America have revenues under \$1 billion. Small company CEOs work hard to satisfy their customers and make a better life for their employees, their communities and their own families. Although their stories do not make national headlines, these CEOs and business owners create most of the new jobs and are the real drivers of our economy.

I work with hundreds of CEOs and business owners and they all recognize the need to

continually improve their leadership skills. In addition to working hard to understand their business, their industry and the latest business strategies and management techniques, they understand that success depends on creating a cohesive management team - even more than a brilliant business strategy.

Competitive environments are changing too quickly for any one person to stay on top of every new trend in their markets and technologies as well, as global economic, demographic and political shifts. Successful CEOs must be able to attract, retain and motivate talented employees to their team who can work together to achieve common goals. Building a cohesive executive team is the first challenge, but maintaining a team that is operating at peak performance is even more difficult. One only needs to read the sports pages to understand how difficult this can be.

So what distinguishes the great leaders from the rest? CEOs are human beings like everyone else and all have their own faults and weaknesses. Patrick Lencioni, best-selling author of The Five Temptations of a CEO, tells us that all leaders suffer from at least one of five temptations. (Some of

us suffer from more than one.) He says that the key to success is for leaders to “embrace the self-examination that reveals the temptations and to keep them in the open where they can be addressed.” Great leaders look first at how they themselves can improve and set an example of honesty, candor and a pursuit of excellence for the rest of their organization.

Jim Collins, author of Good to Great, developed the concept of “Level 5” leadership. Good leaders (“Level 4”) are highly skilled managers who are able to create compelling visions and stimulate higher performance from their teams. However, great leaders (“Level 5”) are able to “channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. Their ambition is first and foremost for the institutions, not themselves.”

Both Patrick Lencioni and Jim Collins site humility as a common characteristic of truly great leaders. Great CEOs know they don't know it all and don't try to do everything themselves. They focus on attracting the very best people to their organizations. They are good listeners who believe that they can learn from anyone, both inside and outside their organizations. They value fresh ideas and people who challenge the status quo.

Great CEOs strive to create a healthy environment where their team is passionately committed to achieving a compelling vision. They are

humbled by the magnitude of the challenge and work hard to ensure that they don't let their team down.

Unlike the high-profile CEOs who are constantly in the news discussing their brilliant strategies, great leaders are typically self-effacing individuals who focus on their organization's success – and not their own. Humility doesn't make for splashy headlines, but business leaders who combine intelligence, integrity and an ample dose of humility, build organizations that are more consistently successful and long-lasting.

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