

Humility a quality to be cherished

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August 2, 2015 Updated: August 2, 2015 05:10 PM

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The forum's compère had clearly done her research, sharing details of the accomplished leader who was to be the next speaker on stage. Facts flowed about measurable achievements while anecdotes added a unique flavour. Upon its completion and with the audience's curiosity piqued, the leader stepped on to the stage saying how the introduction was so interesting, that for a while she was wondering who was being introduced.

Such humility is evident in many great leaders, when the level of consideration for one's own impact has reduced importance or significance, with judgment never being clouded by position. During that forum, I pondered one question: with all those credits to her name, what made that leader so humble?

Great leaders facilitate change in trusted and trusting environments, and to cultivate trust the show must be about "us", not "me". This can be achieved by:

1. Sharing credit

A humble leader is willing to share results, giving credit where credit is due.

In some cases, that means credit to people. What better way to influence a band of followers and ambassadors than to reward effective behaviour, great ideas and incremental progress of others.

One great example of that would be when the pilot Chesley Sullenberger landed a flailing aircraft on the Hudson River in New York with all passengers surviving unscathed.

All credit was given to the years of training: "One way of looking at this might be that for 42 years, I've been making small, regular deposits in this bank of experience, education and training. And on January 15 the balance was sufficient so that I could make a very large withdrawal," he said.

2. Sharing vulnerability

When we are humble, there's more room for others to share the space. Do leaders ever make mistakes? Absolutely, and with that shared space collaborative lessons can be learnt.

Take the example of Enron's downfall, with poor financial fundamentals and an intolerable competitive clash between two senior stakeholders.

Inappropriate decisions were taken with "entitlement" mindsets, irrespective of the damage that was occurring. Not only was trust destroyed but also any possibility of getting the company back on track.

3. Sharing understanding of human behaviour

Humble leaders are aware that there will be always be opposing views at any time. With an understanding that behaviour and personal circumstances are inextricably linked, a humble leader will recognise the spectrum of responses and ensure options are available.

When Mother Teresa was spat on when asking for funding contributions, she replied: "I'll take that for me, now please contribute for the children".

The UAE is undergoing change with the abolition of petrol subsidies. The normal reaction to change is resistance and we are seeing some deal of that. During this transition phase, are we also witnessing the above-mentioned traits of humble leaders?

- **Sharing credit.**

The situation of decreasing global oil prices, and increasing desire to continue the creation of public infrastructure.

- **Sharing vulnerability.**

The reasons for the removal of the subsidies which have been gleaned from researching the situation.

- **Sharing understanding of human behaviour.**

The indication that public transport systems are mature enough to now be a viable option for those not able to adjust to the new pricing scales.

Great leaders have nothing to prove. People around them feel connected when feet are firmly planted on the ground, and trust is organically growing. It is probably a safe bet our pilot is sleeping well these nights while the two ex-Enron officials are still living in the land of justification.

And for those less evolved in the arena of humility who may be looking for some personal growth, why not ponder upon C S Lewis's quote: "True humility is not thinking less of yourself but rather thinking of yourself less". Humility is indeed not a weakness but rather a strength.

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