

10 Traits of a Humble Leader

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Even though I don't consider myself a humble leader—I can be brash and bigheaded (both literally and figuratively)—by God's grace, I've been blessed to serve under many humble leaders. I've watched many more from a distance.

Based on my observations, I've noticed 10 common traits of leaders who demonstrate humility, in contrast to those who demonstrate pride. As we all guard our hearts against the pervasive allures of pride and, for leaders especially, the toxic temptations of power, it's good to reflect on which of these traits mark our own lives.

Humble Leaders vs. Arrogant Leaders

1. Humble leaders tend to share their resources, whether in want or in plenty. Arrogant leaders tend to hoard their resources, unwilling to share unless they get something in return.
2. Humble leaders tend to be bridge-builders, refusing to demonize or neglect the "other." Arrogant leaders tend to work alone, refusing to partner with others—especially those who hold differing views.
3. Humble leaders tend to ignore gossip, being wise enough to know there's always another side to the story. Arrogant leaders tend to spread and entertain gossip, always wanting to hear the worst of others to make themselves feel better.
4. Humble leaders tend to be king makers, without clamoring to be kings themselves. Arrogant leaders tend to be attention-seekers, preferring to burn bridges or arrive with guns blazing if they don't get their way.
5. Humble leaders tend to celebrate others' accomplishments and not their own. Arrogant leaders tend to disregard other people's accomplishments if it doesn't serve their agenda.
6. Humble leaders tend to give the benefit of the doubt, knowing that nobody is always at their best. Arrogant leaders tend to assume the worst, unable to see the logs in their own eyes.
7. Humble leaders tend to appreciate nuance, since they know they've been wrong many times before. Arrogant leaders tend to be exceedingly black and white, unwilling to consider contrary views.

8. Humble leaders tend to be empathetic, often prioritizing people over ideas. Arrogant leaders tend to be rigid, unable to receive constructive criticism.
9. Humble leaders tend to welcome accountability, for they know how much they need it. Arrogant leaders tend to reject accountability, finding it a nuisance or waste of time.
10. Humble leaders tend to own up to their mistakes, since they know they're far from perfect. Arrogant leaders tend to blame others for their shortcomings or failures, unwilling to acknowledge their own sinful tendencies.

Christ the Perfect Leader

Perhaps this list overwhelms you. *How will I ever become a humble leader?* you wonder. But the beauty of the gospel is that, in Jesus, we already have the perfect model of humble leadership. And he's not just a role model to look up to; he's the image we're being conformed to, by the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

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Jesus shows that humble leadership starts at the cross: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26–28). The servant leader who stooped to wash faithless feet (John 13:1–17) flips the world's idea of leadership on its head. He shows us the way up is down (Luke 22:26) and the last will be first (Matt. 20:16). In his kingdom, selfish ambition leads to death, while serving others to the point of death leads to life (Phil. 2:2–9).

It's a testimony to pride's relentless pull in our hearts that, even for Christians who have the ultimate model of humility in Jesus, such leadership is still a struggle. Of course, the world of social-media posturing, platform-building, and celebrity obsession doesn't help. But few things confuse the world, hardening hearts further to the gospel, more than followers of Jesus who hijack his name to promote themselves. Why would we, who bear the name of history's humblest man, be so pompous? It's confusing and sad.

The need for humble leadership—Christians who actually look like Christ in how they live and lead—is urgent. May we check ourselves with sobriety and recommit to his cause in humility, for our witness and his glory.