

Humility at Work at Work

Humility is not about humiliation. Humility is about truth, the truth inherent in the statement, “God is God and I am not.” Well, that is nice and it certainly is true, but what does that have to do with work, particularly in a workplace where there are bosses, supervisors, and subordinates?

Ultimately, it is not about authority but about attitude, the attitude that drives how we interact with our fellow workers. It is not about pecking order. It is about being aware of our individual imperfection and limitations. It is not about abjectly denying our capabilities and worthiness. It is about fully and freely accepting the worth of all others.

It is about recognizing that all in the workplace have gifts of knowledge, talent, and/or capabilities, and they are all different. We acknowledge and value that other people have strengths which we do not have. Being humble is about utilizing our gifts AND the gifts of all co-workers, seeking their contribution to the work at hand and doing so with appreciation and thankfulness.

Humility at work also takes into account the contributions we as individuals and as a workplace can make to the common good of our communities. Profit and/or recognition are not sought directly, at all costs, but are allowed to arise from the provision of quality products and services, of just and caring attention to the needs of employees, customers, and the community.

The CEO of one of the nation’s leading financial companies, one not embroiled in the “too big to fail” disasters of recent times, tells the story of one of the turning point moments in his leadership development. It was the final exam for a course in leadership. It consisted of one question, “Remember the janitorial worker who set up the lecture hall and cleaned up after class. What was her name?”

Seeking out and seeking to learn from all who are engaged in our workplace does two things in my opinion. One, we are likely to learn something about our work that we did not previously know; and two, we help that person understand that they are part of the enterprise that we are about. Honestly listening to and learning from those we work with and for requires setting aside our egos; that is humility.

This can be particularly true in evaluations. When egos are at the fore, defense mechanisms leap to any critical comment. When humility is present, when the ego is set aside, learning and growth can take place. When humble persons give evaluations, they begin with the possibility that there may be information that, if known, could change their judgment. So they present the information underlying their judgment as well as the reasoning that led to their judgment. They actually seek to discuss the information and the reasoning with the person being evaluated. They seek to learn what they do not know.

This same attitude is present in those who receive evaluations with humility. They seek to learn that which they do not know, essentially the information and reasoning that led the evaluator to his/her conclusions. It is not about ego but about development and growth.

Humility should flow from our understanding that God created all of us, our world, and our universe. We humans are brothers and sisters in his creation. We are all his children, none more so than another. In that equality of creation, we are none of us more worthy than another. We owe respect and courtesy to our co-workers, our customers, our communities, and, lastly, to ourselves. When we put ourselves last, being a servant to others, then we act out of humility, out of the truth that we are but one of God’s creatures.

HUMILITY — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of honesty in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of humility in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of humility in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based humility in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?

Some links to additional readings related to humility and the workplace:

- <http://www.majikalwishes.com/humility.htm>
- <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/humility-in-the-workplace.html>
- http://www.ehow.com/how_2067113_increase-humility.html