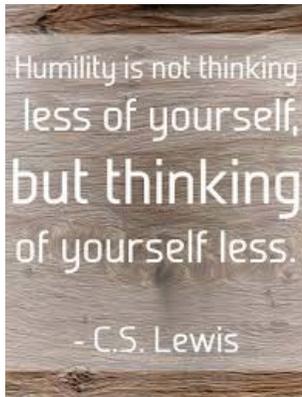


What's More Engaging - Humility or Pride?

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Think of a situation where you want to make a good impression. Maybe interviewing for a job. Meeting a new client prospect. Being introduced to a strategic business partner. Going out on a first date. Or meeting your date's parents. If you had to choose between two approaches would you: 1) choose to be humble and minimize the attention on yourself? Or would you: 2) choose to highlight your accomplishments and abilities in hopes to impress?

If you're like many people, your first reaction might be to impress by talking about yourself. You might think a little name dropping, references to your achievements, anecdotal mention of your capabilities, or use of a sophisticated vocabulary would be the way to go. You wouldn't think self-deprecation and humility would be most appropriate if you were hoping to impress someone.

Humility is often associated with meekness. Not an attribute with which many people want to be associated. After all, when you are *selling* yourself, your products, or your ideas, you need to exude confidence. You need to manifest your capabilities. How can you promote a positive can-do capable image while being humble and directing attention away from yourself? Besides, if you are truly good at what you do and your capabilities, achievements, responsibilities, and network of acquaintances are real, being truthful isn't being boastful. Or is it? Could humility leave an even more positive impression than talking about a factual achievement? Would minimizing accomplishments be better than promoting them?

Think about someone you know who is overly self-centered? Maybe they are a manager who likes to refer to their team as "my staff" or "my employees". Or a colleague who constantly uses the "I" word instead of the "we" word even though they work as part of a team. Or someone who likes to highlight their prestigious neighborhood, brand of car, or exotic travels. Or a prideful parent who brings attention to their kid's accomplishments or acclaimed college. How do these types of people make you feel? If you are like many people, you aren't impressed. You probably think they are way too high on themselves to leave any room in their life for you.

Arrogance, pride, and pretentiousness aren't endearing traits. Worse than causing people to not be impressed, arrogance makes people not want to be around you. It causes people to not want to help you. People don't like to feel inferior. People don't like to feel belittled or put down. Even when the intent is not to demean others, boasting about accomplishments, assets, relationships, or capabilities makes people feel put down.

You may be thinking, surely it's okay to promote yourself a little. People do it all the time. Most do it unconsciously. If you look for it, many people use the "I" word profusely. It's common in emails, texts, presentations, books, and blogs. You could certainly say a bit of self-centeredness is normal. But be careful. Just a little boasting has unintended consequences. In addition to making others feel inferior, it reveals your tendency to be selfish. It exposes the insecurity that accompanies arrogance.

To be clear, there are two types of pride with one being respected and one not. In conceited pride, we consider ourselves better than others. We show off. We put ourselves above others and make them feel inferior. We are self-righteous. In contrast, conscientious pride shows our propensity to care. We manifest a pride of workmanship. It reveals the attention we give the quality of what we do. Because we get satisfaction from doing good, our conscientious pride highlights our capabilities through our behaviors rather than our boasting. Conscientious pride reveals our self-respect without threatening other's self respect.



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When you manifest conscientious pride, people appreciate you. They want to spend time with you. Hiring managers want to hire you. Employees want to work for you. Colleagues want to help you. People want to be friends with you. You set the example others want to follow.

Who would you rather be around? Someone who makes you feel inferior or builds you up? Someone who likes to talk about themselves or asks you questions and wants to get to know you? Someone who wants the credit and attention or makes you feel valued and appreciated? Of course, it's the latter.

How do you know if you are expressing healthy conscientious pride rather than conceited pride? As C.S. Lewis advised, how might you think of yourself less without thinking less of yourself? Here are six principles to assess yourself against and follow:

- Accept yourself as you are. Appreciate your individuality including your imperfections and past mistakes. Appreciate your unique blend of DNA, parenting, education, experiences, abilities, and values. You are uniquely awesome. Keep growing, learning, and improving, but accept who you are right now. Replace any insecurity with self-acceptance.
- Don't try to be someone you are not. Be authentic. Don't feel the need to only reveal your highlights. Your highlight reel isn't real. No one is perfect. Don't hide your struggles or lack of knowledge behind a facade of perfection. Be appropriately transparent for your audience and let people see what you think and feel. People appreciate genuineness and honesty.
- Focus on others rather than yourself. Build up and encourage others. Seek out and enjoy opportunities to make others feel good about themselves. Promote others' capabilities and accomplishments. Show your respect and concern for others by giving and helping them. When working on a team, put the team's interests ahead of your own.
- Relate to others. Be empathetic. Seek to understand how people think and feel. When part of a conversation, be careful not to do most of the talking. Ask questions. Listen. Make others feel heard. Make them feel valued. Get to know people's interests, capabilities, and accomplishments before turning the attention to yourself.
- Express your pride through your behaviors rather than your words. Communicate your capabilities through the quality of your work. Be the person you want to be rather than talk about it. Give each day your best and be the example whom others respect. Promote your resources by sharing them. Promote your achievements by helping others reach theirs.
- Communicate the progress you make along the way to reaching your accomplishments, particularly in the workplace. Keep people informed as you make incremental progress so you don't come across as "look what I did" when you are finished. When communicating progress, do so without pretentiousness. Highlight others' involvement and contributions as well.

Help others unconditionally and don't expect anything in return, but know that when you focus on and promote others, they generally return the favor. When others promote you, it is a much better validation of your capabilities and more meaningful source of pride than when coming from yourself.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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