



## HUMILITAS

John Dickson

### A LOST KEY TO LIFE, LOVE, AND LEADERSHIP

#### About the author:

John thinks, writes, and speaks for a living.

Starting out as a professional singer-songwriter, he now works as an author, academic, and media presenter.

He was the Founding Director of the Centre for Public Christianity (2007-17), and has published over 15 books and three TV documentaries.

He teaches a course on the Historical Jesus at the University of Sydney, Australia, and researches the origins of Christianity in the Roman empire as a Visiting Academic (2017-2020) in the Faculty of Classics at the University of Oxford.

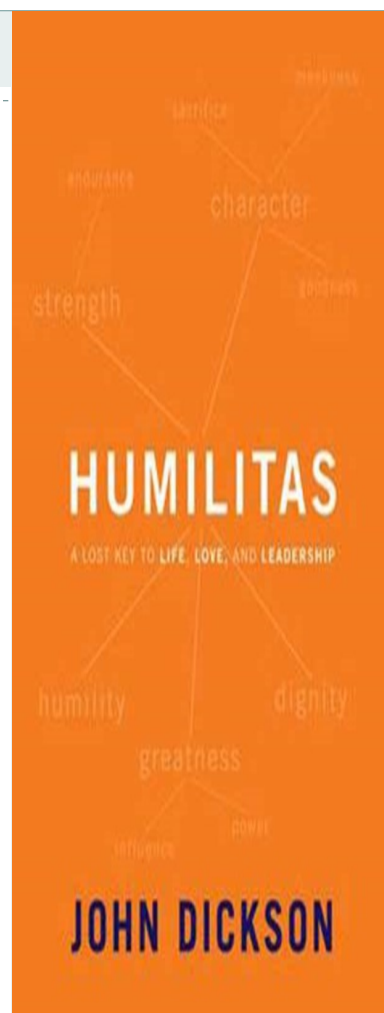
In all that he does, whether in the media or the church, creative or academic, he strives to be a public advocate for the Christian faith.

#### CAN GREATNESS COME FROM HUMILITY?

This is the question that John Dickson asks in his book entitled *Humilitas*. Through examples of historical figures that practiced humility, Dickson attempts to impart their experiences in business, history, psychology, and sociological settings.

The concept of holding your power, not for one's own personal gain but for the good of others is a common theme throughout the book.

Finally, high achievement is possible without humility and humility does not mean a person is guaranteed high achievement, Dickson puts forth the premise that true greatness can only occur if one practices humility.



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## INTRODUCTION—HUMILITY AND HOW I ACHIEVED IT

John Dickson believes that his personal journey to humility is something of a conundrum. How can one say you have attained humility when that admission alone speaks to not being humble. (p. 11) The virtue of humility is a paradox in a book full of paradoxes. Even his best friend of 35 years told him that he at least had the objective distance from the topic he was studying! (p. 12) After taking a DISC analysis he

found he fell into the high dominance category and found that many leaders are in this category as well. (p. 13) While his one of his yearly goals is to be more humble, his DISC report prompted his publisher to encourage John to write a book on the subject. And while John does not claim he has achieved humility, this book is an view into how John has grown to love the virtue for its aesthetic qualities. (p. 14)

*“to discover two things: first, there are few truly new ideas in the world; second, real wisdom for life and leadership is found not in the latest issue of the Harvard Business Review (as helpful as it is) but in opening yourself up to centuries of human thinking on these and other topics.” (p. 18)*

### TIME MAGAZINES NUMBER TWO PERSON OF THE YEAR 2009

General Stanley McChrystal was the commander of all the forces in Afghanistan and was asked his approach to counter the insurgency in that country.

“I have found in my experience that the best answers and approaches may be counter-intuitive. The opposite of what it seems you ought to do is what ought to be done. So, when I’s asked the question, What approach should we take in Afghanistan? I say, humility.” (p. 21)

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## CHAPTER 1 THESIS: WHAT IS HUMILITY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Leadership is a large industry with many books and journals being dedicated to the topic. There is a part of leadership that is often overlooked and that is from a historical perspective. (p. 17) Most people want up to date, cutting edge strategies, but if you include the whole human family ancient and modern, you get a more democratic idea about leadership. (p. 18)

The most influential and inspiring people are often marked by humility. Jim Collins did a study of good to great companies in the US and found that only 11 fell into the great category. All had Level 5 Leadership which has two distinct characteristics: steely determination and an attitude of humility. (p. 20)

Humiliatas is a single Latin word that both humility and humiliation find their roots in. Humility is not humiliation or having low self esteem or even as Muhammad Ali said “Humble people, I’ve found, don’t get very far.” (p. 21) The Western virtue Humility has it’s base in three distinct cultures—the Hebrew, the Latin and the Greek. (p. 23) Words in all three of these cultures used to describe humility mean low, low to the ground, or to be put low and all can be used in a negative or positive connotation. (p. 24) Humiliatas defines humility as “the noble choice to forgo your status, deploy your resources or use your influence for the good of others before yourself.”

There are three aspects to this definition of humility:

1. Dignity—one must have a sense of self worth and abilities
2. Willing—one must make the choice to practice humility
3. Social—one must utilize their gifts for the sake of others (p. 24)

An unverified story speaks of an encounter between three men who got onto a bus on evening in Detroit in the 1930’s. These men attempted to pick a fight with a stranger on the bus, but the stranger did not respond. When his stop came he reached into his pocket and gave the men his card that had three words on it: Joe Louis. Boxer. They had tried to pick a fight with the heavyweight champion of the world. (p. 26) Joe Louis chose to hold his power for the sake of others and turn a potentially violent situation to a teachable moment. (p. 27)

# 4 Humility

**GREAT LEADERS** are those who are strong and decisive but also humble.

- Humility is having the self-confidence and self-awareness to recognize the value of others without feeling threatened.
- It means that you are willing to admit you could be wrong, that you recognize you may not have all the answers.

“The more you can contain your ego, the more realistic you are about your problems. You learn how to listen, and admit that you don't know all the answers.” - Larry Bossidy

*Humility—All great leaders possess it.*

## CHAPTER 2 LEADERSHIP: WHAT IS IT AND HOW HUMILITY FITS IN

Leadership is an **Art** and tends to be flexible as well as intuitive. It is also more about moving forward members of the team, or **Others**, rather than oneself. (p. 34) Leadership in organizations invariably have a **Goal** that they are trying to attain. The exercise of coping with change, not for change's sake, but to achieve a goal is what good leaders do. (p. 36)

Leaders need to have tools at their disposal and the first is that of some general **Ability**. Leaders must exhibit good expertise, but not necessarily be outstanding in their field. (p. 37)

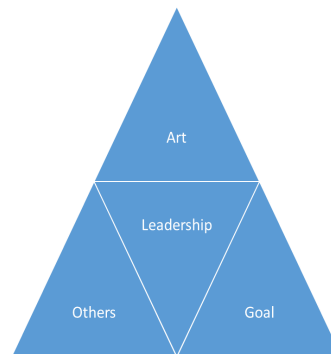


**Authority**, or the ability to make decisions that affect the organization, is another tool of leaders. (p. 38)

The ability to win people over through **Persuasion** is the next tool a good leader possesses. (p. 39) Leaders also must be able to set, or lead by, an **Example** in a variety of settings and circumstances. (p. 40)

These tools laid out in Humiliatas factor into Humility in the following manner:

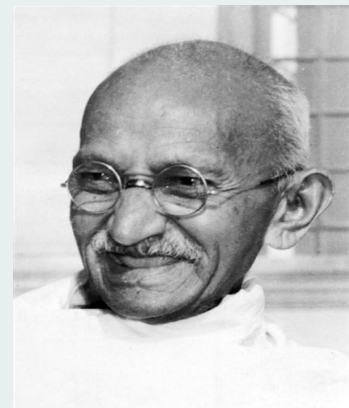
1. Persuasion and example are keys to effective leadership.
2. Humility enhances persuasiveness, partly because it is a compelling character trait in leaders.
3. Therefore, humility is important to leadership (p. 47)

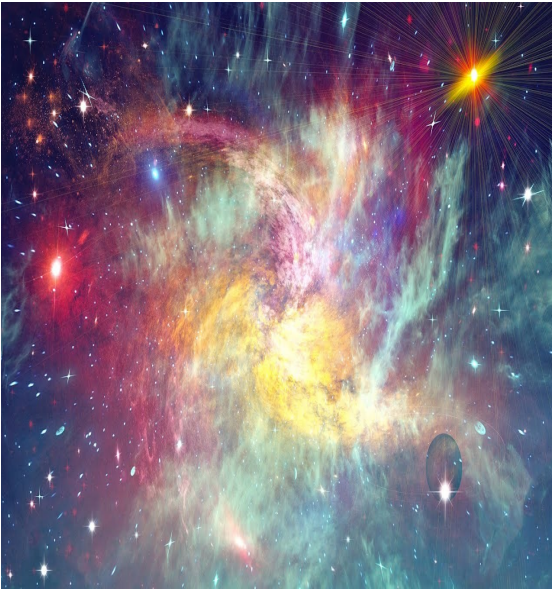


### GANDHI

Gandhi is recognized as the father of modern day India that won freedom for his country from colonial rulers. He is also acknowledged with being one of the most humble leaders to ever exist. In 1918 the Hibbert Journal in London wrote this of Gandhi.

“Persons in power should be very careful how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise, or promotion, but is simply determined to do what is right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy, because his body which you can always conquer gives you so little purchase upon his soul.” (p. 44)





## CHAPTER 3 COMMON SENSE: THE LOGIC OF HUMILITY

Humility is common sense. People will have a certain level of expertise in one or more areas, but what we don't know far exceeds what we do. (p. 51) Yet people often engage in competency extrapolation which is a phenomenon where we think we know more than we do because our opinions are sought after in other areas. (p. 53) Avoiding this pitfall should be what leaders ponder regularly. (p. 54) When we acknowledge our limitations by practicing humility, it demonstrates realism which is a strength. (p. 56)

Self-Deception is a problem for many leaders due to ego and imagination. (p. 57) It

seems to be in humans nature to overestimate our own abilities, which can be combated with humility which is common sense. (p. 59)

The universe and it's mysterious harmony also factor into the idea of humility. (p. 61) Whether you believe it was created by Someone or by a large Coincidence, humanity agrees that we play but an insignificant part in it. (p. 63) Having one life within that structure makes it all the more valuable, and regardless of our competencies living with humility towards others is logical. (p. 66)

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*Muhammad Ali was on a plane that was experiencing severe turbulence and the flight attendant asked him to put on his seatbelt. Ali calmly said "Superman don't need no seatbelt," to which the flight attendant replied, "Superman don't need no plane."*

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### DANIEL AND JANET MATTHEWS

Daniel and Janet Matthews lived in rural Australia in the late 1800's and ran a successful merchant business. (p. 74) They lived in a time when Australian society believed that Aborigines were viewed as less than human and were shot for bounty, raped at the leisure of the settlers and treated poorly for the spectacle. (p. 73) Daniel and Janet committed themselves to the service of Aboriginal people as an advocate, defender, and patron. (p. 74) Part of their property was on sacred land (Maloga) to the Aborigines and the Matthews gave a large portion back to them for their use to hunt and fish on, and not for his commercial venture. (p. 75) The Matthews provided medical attention and education to those that wanted it as well as sanctuary for those in need. (p. 75) Daniel and Janet worked for 4 and 5 decades respectively and lost many friends and family members due to their decision to assist the indigenous people of Australia. The Aborigines bestowed a title to the Matthews, 'Maranooka', which means friend.

## CHAPTER 4 AESTHETICS: HOW THE HUMBLE ARE BEAUTIFUL

Since the time of the Greeks, people have been praised for their excellence and were thought of attractive or worthy of praise. (p. 69) Today we are attracted to good and repelled by bad and this is evident even when people are great at a task but not humble in that task. Humility is beautiful. (p. 70)

Sir Edmund Hillary is noted as the first person to conquer Mount Everest and was duly honoured for it. (p. 70) More important to Sir Edmund was the work he did with the Himalayan people and the hospitals, airfields, and schools he built. He deployed resources and used influence for the good of others before himself. (p. 70)

Albert Schweitzer was a gifted philosopher, historian, biblical scholar, and musician. Mid-career he became a doctor, moved to West Africa, won a Nobel Peace Prize and donated the money to a leper hospital. (p. 72) He summed up his life choices by writing "Those who are given a chance to embark on a life of independent action must accept their good fortune in a spirit of humility." When humility is sincere and a persons words are matched by behavior it is a beautiful thing. (p. 80)

**“You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor.”**

**— ARISTOTLE**

philosophydrops.tumblr.com

*Aristotle views on Courage and Honour*

## CHAPTER 5 PHILOTIMIA: WHY THE ANCIENT WORLD DIDN'T LIKE HUMILITY

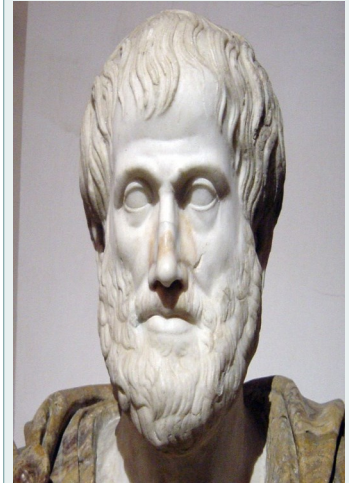
Philotimia is the Greek word for the love of honour. (p. 85) Many Mediterranean cultures believed that honour was the ultimate asset, and shame was the ultimate deficit. (p. 86) Today we believe in the concepts of good and evil, or prosperity and poverty. (p. 87) In the ancient world humility was rarely if ever considered virtuous. (p. 88)

Aristotle in the third century wrote that honour and reputation are among the pleasant things, and good reputation is a matter of achieving respect of all people. (p. 87) He also refers to the humble person as the weak and insipid man who poses no threat. (p. 89) Humility was only practiced before the Gods and emperors because they could kill you. Between your equal or lesser it was seen as morally suspect.

Boasting of one's accomplishments was held in high regard during the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans. (p. 90) Taking hold of your honour was taken for granted and those with merit should seek to honour themselves whenever possible.

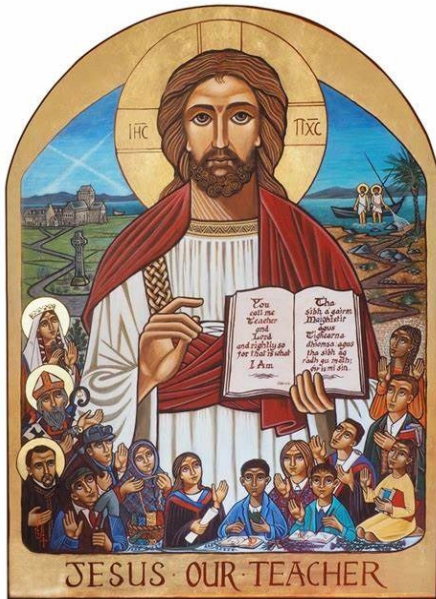
While this thought process dominated for hundreds of years, society went through a revolution that led to embracing humility. (p. 95) Humility was not a virtue that was practiced in the ancient world.

ARISTOTLE



“People are also calm toward those who humble themselves toward them and do not contradict them; for they seem to admit being inferiors, and inferiors are afraid, and no one who is afraid belittles. That anger ceases toward those who humble themselves is evident even in the case of dogs who do not bite those sitting down.” (p. 89)

## CHAPTER 6 CRUSIFORM: HOW A JEW FROM NAZARETH REDEFINED GREATNESS



The Western world has taken up the virtue of humility based on the Judeo-Christian worldview. (p. 99) This was born out by the teachings of the prophets in the later biblical period. (p. 100) Some translations changed the message to gentleness which was acceptable to the Greek civilizations of the time before Christ. (p. 101)

While the teachings of humility by Jesus are not featured strongly in the bible, they are there. (p. 103) What is more telling is how Jesus says that only through self-sacrifice does one achieve true greatness. (p. 104)

Western culture embraces humility as a virtue more because of how Jesus died than how he lived, and how people who follow his teachings deal with his execution. (p. 105) Crucifixion was the most shameful way a person could die in Roman society. (p. 106) Christians view the crucifixion as proof that greatness can be attained by being humble for the sake of others. (p. 107) This event is part of the humility revolution that has taken place in the last 2000 years. (p. 109) While this may be the turning point from honour-shame cultures to cultures that practice humility, it does not mean only Christians practice this virtue. (p. 111)

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Paul*

### DIDGERIDOO

While visiting the Outback the author got a chance to learn to play the Didgeridoo. In the midst of a swamp in I some adverse conditions that was very foreign and difficult to the author, he received a lesson and within a few weeks was incorporating it into his own music. (p. 122)

It is in confronting your fear and deciding not to back down that you will find growth. By opening himself up to being wrong about his perceptions did he learn the value of being better through humility. (p. 123)

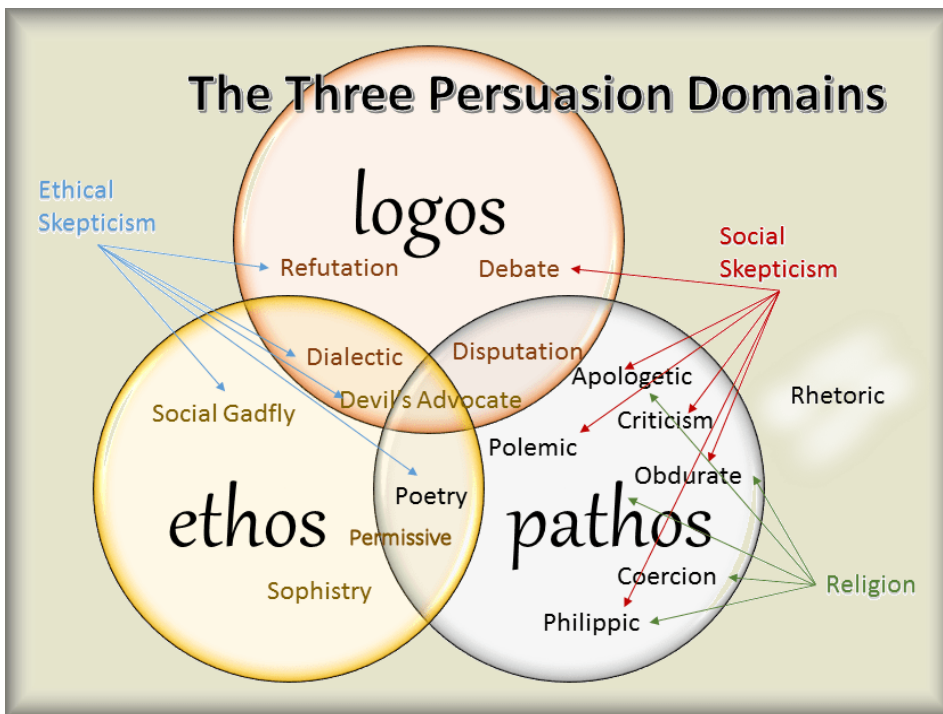
## CHAPTER 7 GROWTH: WHY HUMILITY GENERATES ABILITIES

There are practical benefits to being humble. (p. 115) People who exhibit pride will not learn, grow, or thrive in life. (p. 116) This is demonstrated by people who over evaluate their performance, don't listen, and learn slowly. (p. 117) They also tend to have attained a certain standing in the organization and always thinks their way is best. (p. 117)

Contract that with people who are humble who can be as confident and competent as a person who is prideful. (p. 117) They are probably aware of their limitations and is a better communicator because of it. (p. 118) These people also gain insight from people that they open themselves up to and accepted feedback from. (p. 118) Humility reminds us that we are incomplete and urges us on to greater heights in what we do. (p. 120)

The concept of undefended leadership ties in with the concept of humility. Leaders will have a frontstage and backstage persona to deal with issues. (p. 123) The frontstage is forceful and decisive, while the backstage is where self-doubt is. (p. 124) The undefended leader needs to be honest with themselves and allow trusted colleagues to give feedback into the front and backstage. (p. 124) Humility can generate learning and growth. (p. 125)

Self-esteem is not boastful or unwilling to listen and these traits usually measure insecurity. (p. 125) Knowing your own self worth is rooted more in service than achievement, more in giving than taking. (p. 127) Those that rely on achievement for self worth will feel the failures that much more acutely. (p. 127) Those people that surround themselves with good relationships will be able to withstand the setbacks as they strive for high achievement. (p. 127) Humility, holding your power for the good of others, only enhances relationships. (p. 128)



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## CHAPTER 8 PERSUASION: HOW CHARACTER DETERMINES INFLUENCE

Persuasion is at the core of all leadership and as previously noted the four main tools are ability, authority, example, and persuasion (p. 136) The Greek philosopher Aristotle theorized that we hear and assess arguments and the form what we believe. (p. 137) Arguments either succeed or fail because of three interrelated factors: logos, pathos, and ethos. (p. 137) Logos is the intellectual aspect of persuasion meaning your argument must be sound and coherent. Pathos speaks to our inner self to meet our emotional needs and can be done with humour or tragedy. Ethos is the ability to convey integrity, truthfulness and believability. (p. 138-139) These three factors are present in both the presenter and the listener, and Aristotle contends that we will believe people that we trust more than people we don't. (p. 139)

Leadership utilizes the two tools of example and persuasion as they are closely related. (p. 140) They are also dependent on one another because combined they present the type of character we want to convey. (p. 141) Real persuasion moves people and is invisible when it is practiced. Humility is part of what moves people and that sense of trust allows people to believe what humble people say and this is key to persuasion. (p. 147)

### BEING AN EFFECTIVE CHAIRPERSON—ANTHONY JAY

It is the chairman's self-indulgence that is the greatest single barrier to a success of a meeting. His first duty then, then, I to be aware of the temptation and the dangers of yielding to it. The clearest of the danger signals is hearing himself talking a lot during a discussion . . . If the chairman is to make sure that the meeting achieves valuable objectives, he will be more effective seeing himself as the servant of the group rather than its master . . . His true source of authority with the members is the strength of his perceived commitment to their combined objective. (p. 142)

**leadership is not a position or a title, it is action and example.**



## CHAPTER 9 INSPIRATION: HOW HUMILITY LIFTS THOSE AROUND US

Heroes are some of the most inspiring people around the world today, and they can motivate us to take up careers or give us a nudge in the right direction. (p. 151) It is when we see in our heroes humility that they have the most capacity to inspire us. (p. 152) By taking time out of their day to interact with others, and take an interest in them and not their own achievements make heroes even more inspirational. (p. 152)

There are four main reasons that humility is aspirational. (p. 154) The first is that humility is persuasive when you are lead by someone who puts other

before themselves. (p. 154) The second is that humility steers the team towards the teams goals versus the individual goals. (p. 154) Thirdly, humble leader give the impression that they are normal people, and that the position they hold is attainable for all in an organization. (p. 155) The fourth is that humility fosters loyalty in all stakeholders in an organization. (p. 155)

True leadership is about controlling your own ego while allowing others to maximize their potential, and ensure they are recognized for their efforts. (p. 156)

*The Level 5 Executive “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.” Jim Collins (p. 153)*

### G.K. CHESTERTON

What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself but undoubting about the truth. This has been exactly reversed . . . We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. (p. 168)



## CHAPTER 10 HARMONY: WHY HUMILITY IS BETTER THAN TOLERANCE

Tolerance in today’s society has been defined as being able to agree that all viewpoints are equally true or valid. (p. 164) The UN General Assembly declared the year 1995 to be the year of tolerance as they felt that intolerance was one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century. (p. 164) The definitions set forth in the supporting documentation tried to establish harmony between people of different views by softening their convictions. (p. 165)

Religion is an area that shows us a limit on tolerance. Different religions can require you to be accepting of contradictory viewpoints as true or valid. (p. 165) In the moral context of Left versus Right the problem persists. To be true to their convictions, both sides will reject the other side as invasive, imperialistic, or bigoted. (p. 166)

Humility is the choice to hold your power for the good of others before yourself. (p. 167) If society practices humility it does not mean believing things less, but treating those who believe something different from you with respect and friendship. (p. 167) You can still stand up for what you believe in but you will never allow your truth to become justification for discrimination or bigotry. (p. 169) If we can learn to respect and care for those with whom we profoundly disagree, then this is how we move past mere tolerance to true humility and that is the key to harmony at a societal level.





# CULTIVATING HUMILITY: Understanding your place in the world

*Caption describing picture or graphic*

## CHAPTER 11 STEPS: HOW IT'S POSSIBLE TO BECOME (MORE) HUMBLE

While we have limited control over the personalities we possess, people have the capacity to understand and embrace humility. (p. 173) Sue Gerhardt writes that our reptile brain is rigid and driven by habits, with very little social awareness, while our mammalian brain is open to new possibilities. (p. 173) These six thoughts help us be less reptilian and more mammalian.

- We are shaped by what we love - loving humility can begin our transformation to it. (p. 174) Observe it in those you respect and watch it grow. (p. 175)
- Reflect on the lives of the humble - find examples from not just your personal life but in the history, religion, or societal people you can find. (p. 175) It is also good to study the reptilian side of history to avoid the path of arrogance, like aversion therapy. (p. 176)
- Conduct thought experiments to enhance humility - Use an imaginative exercise to help bring clarity. (p. 177) immerse yourself in what it really means to be in someone else's shoes and this will give you greater depth and perspective. (p. 178)
- Act humbly - Develop your humility muscle and exercise it even when it doesn't feel right. (p. 178) Thoughts affect actions and the cognitive therapy of the exercise can better shape the pattern of humility in you. (p. 179)
- Invite criticism - Ask friends and colleagues to critique you even if it can be uncomfortable. (p. 180) Thoughtful critique be it physical or virtual can assist in staving off organizational defensiveness. (p. 180)
- Forget about being humble - Humility is not something you think about or notice in others, it is a low key virtue. (p. 182) Truly humble people are not concerned about appearing humble as they are not thinking of themselves at all. (p. 182)

### HUMILITY—C.S LEWIS

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed. (p. 183)

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Humility is essential in all leaders
- Ability, Authority, Example, and Persuasion are the four cornerstones of effective leaders
- Common sense can only be acquired by understanding humility at some level
- Humility is the path to growth in life
- Humility is aspirational and that can be passed on from one person to another
- Humility is the key to harmony with people that we have fundamental disagreements with

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The book while engaging I felt was filled with examples from a patriarchal viewpoint. This left me wanting to explore how humility could be viewed from a gender perspective rather than a strictly historical one. The author utilized many key examples from history and from different religious and geographical areas which made it more compelling.

The book was somewhat repetitive in parts of its message, but the author really wanted to justify some of his views. This was evident with his conviction about his personal view on religion and the context that come within that view. This was a good part of the book as the author recognizes his bias and tries to address it head on.

This topic was viewed from many different lenses such as from a religious, societal, business, and historical. It gave the reader much to ponder and it included personal examples which made it more relatable. With a topic such as humility, I felt that the mix was very efficient and brought a better understanding overall.



YOUR LOGO  
HERE