

Humility, Patience, Passion, and Mindset: Attributes of the Effective Manager

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Abstract

Managers need to be able to demonstrate an array of skills in order to maximize their effectiveness and job satisfaction. Humility, patience, passion, and mindset are four skill sets that will significantly aid managers in accomplishing these skills. Humility is the capacity of managers to avoid putting themselves before others, exercise acute self-awareness, accept their imperfections, and not feel driven to be dominant over the staff members that they supervise. Patience means that managers demonstrate tolerance, empathy, confidence, compassion, open-mindedness, and willingness to delegate and trust the skills of those they supervise. Passion represents a strong emotional desire, commitment, drive, interest, enthusiasm, and focus to complete tasks for a limited number of important goals. Mindset represents managers' predispositions toward beliefs that factors such as intelligence and personality are unchangeable (fixed mindset) or that these factors can be nurtured and developed (growth mindset). When managers integrate humility, patience, passion, and mindset into their daily actions, they as well as those they supervise, will perform more effectively.

Keywords: humility, patience, passion, mindset, managers' effectiveness

1.0 Humility

“Humility allows us to strip away our ego, to suppress the need to be visibly right at every turn, and to take the long view” (Davis, 2017, p. 213).

Humility is the capacity of managers to refrain from putting themselves before others, exercise acute self-awareness, accept their imperfections, and not be driven to be dominant over their colleagues and staff members whom they supervise (Stillman, 2014). Humility is an important attribute to managers because: (a) it keeps them from being overconfident which can cause them to limit input from others, (b) it keeps them from blindly pursuing the wrong course of action because they believe they are always right, and (c) it creates an environment in which colleagues and staff members are more motivated to be innovative and produce high quality work. Authentic humility by managers is beneficial to themselves as well as those with whom they interact at work.

Arrogance—the opposite of humility—is a huge “turn-off” to those supervised by managers, as well as to colleagues and superordinates (Silverman, Johnson, McConnell, & Carr, 2004). Warren (2017, p. 199) depicts humility and arrogance as:

Humility

(sincere, honest, faithful,
humble, loyal,
unassuming, modest)



Arrogance

(sly, deceitful, greedy,
pompous, pretentious,
hypocritical, boastful)

No one likes a “know-it-all.” The arrogant, know-it-all manager impedes the performance of those supervised and crushes many innovative and creative ideas that contribute to a more effective work environment.

As Myatt (2010) notes, “I would much rather listen to the self-deprecating humor of a confident person [manager] making fun of themselves than the mean spirit attacks of an arrogant person [manager] waged at someone else’s expense. More importantly, I would much rather work for, or alongside of, the understated than the overstated” (p. 1).

Humility is akin to managers “displaying a quiet confidence” (Myatt, 2010, p. 1). Those supervised by a manager crave positive recognition and appreciation for the work they perform. Humility allows managers to put their egos aside and willingly and authentically give credit to staff members for their work accomplishments. As Myatt (2010) notes, “Simply put, humble leaders [managers] recognize and value the contributions of others in lieu of their self-promotion” (p. 1).

Humility allows managers to foster teamwork and meaningful engagement of staff members in order to gain their insights and ideas, which will optimize job satisfaction and staff retention. A manager is most effective when the work climate epitomizes a “oneness” between the manager and the staff members being supervised. Humility prompts managers to be team players and arouses them to openly acknowledge that they are not the *knowall* of good ideas and do not always have the “correct answers.” Effective application of humility by managers improves their personal performance, as well as the performance of others, resulting in higher quality works.

Prime and Salib (2014) advocate that the best leaders [managers] are humble leaders. They emphasize that humility is a crucial leadership factor for managers in creating situations in which staff members from different demographic backgrounds feel included in the work environment, are more at ease, more confident, and more likely to work harder to accomplish the goals of the work unit.

Staff members’ perceptions of managers’ behaviors for being authentically humble and “selfless” are: (a) demonstrating acts of humility such as learning from criticisms and mistakes, (b) empowering followers to learn and develop, (c) displaying acts of courage such as taking personal risks for the greater good of the work group, and (d) holding staff members responsible for results. When managers displayed these behaviors, staff members are more likely to feel included in teamwork and support the manager in pursuing the work goals (Prime & Salib, 2014, p. 1). Prime and Salib (2014) offer these suggestions for techniques managers can use to embrace a selfless leadership style indicative of humility: (a) share mistakes as teachable moments with staff; (b) engage staff in dialogue, not debate; (c) embrace uncertainty; and (d) reverse roles—model being a follower (p. 2).

Through the effective application of humility, managers create a work environment that is centered on a high priority of helping staff “be their best.” This contrasts with narcissistic and self-centered managers who put themselves first. Managers utilizing humility understand that “Leadership is not about what we can get them to do for us. It’s about what we can give back to the team” (Fridman, 2017, p. 1). This is supported by the philosophy of the Arbinger Institute (2016) when it states:

“Leaders [managers] who succeed are those who are humble enough to be able to see beyond themselves and perceive the true capacities and capabilities of their people. They don’t pretend to have all of the answers. Rather, they create an environment that encourages their people to take on the primary responsibilities for finding answers to the challenges they and their facilities face” (p. 9).

Dalio (2017) coupled humility with the attribute of “mental maps.” He observes that:

“Some people are good at knowing what to do on their own; they have good mental maps. Similarly, some people are more humble and open-minded than others. Humility can be even more valuable than having good mental maps if it leads you [managers] to seek out better answers than you could come up with on your own. Having both open-minded and good mental maps is the most powerful of all” (p. 180).

Humility is a key part of the servant leadership approach. Servant leaders invert the traditional power-distance hierarchy by displaying an attitude of service to their team members. When managers use humility in the context of a servant leader approach they stimulate greater staff empowerment and engagement which results in better group and team productivity (Warren, 2017, p. 199). Blanchard (2010) suggests that sometimes managers need to “reign in” their egos that often represent *false pride*. He indicates that the perfect antidote for the overly egotistical manager is humility (p. 275). Blanchard recommends that managers understand the concept of a servant leader since humility is engrained in such leadership style. Managers that authentically possess humility generally have solid self-esteem and are even willing to see humor in their mistakes.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) caution that managers should not “get infected with the disease of arrogance and pride, becoming bloated with an exaggerated sense of self and pursuing one’s own end” (p. 340). They advocate the antidote for this infectious disease of arrogance and pride is humility. Kouzes and Posner (2012) further note that managers cannot do all the work alone, and through the use of humility, can motivate staffers to identify with the work to be done.

It is also very important for managers to praise staff members for their work accomplishments on a regular basis. Kouzes and Posner (2012) recommend that managers adhering to the effective use of humility utilize “self-efficacy” humor, deep listening to those around them, and give general and sincere credit to others (p. 341). They go on to indicate that managers need to have the confidence and courage to utilize humbleness and admit that they are not always right, cannot anticipate every possible outcome, or solve every problem by themselves. Managers displaying humility also willingly admit when they make mistakes, as well as being honest with themselves about mistakes and constantly focusing on having a realistic understanding of their own shortcomings.

Modesty is an attribute that complements humility. Modesty and humility are a part of *agreeableness*, which is one of the factors in the Five Factor Model of Personality (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Modesty prompts managers to be unpretentious and not regard themselves as special or better than those with whom they work. Modesty causes managers to quickly share successes and accomplishments bestowed upon them with their staff members who have significantly contributed to these accomplishments. In this context, the manager quickly shifts attention from self to team members (Seligman, 2002, p. 153).

Collins (2001) identifies humility as a part of his Level 5 Executive, the highest level of leadership in his hierarchy. Regarding humility, Collins notes “Leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves” (p. 21). Extrapolating from the observations of Collins means that managers need to put the accomplishments of the work unit at the forefront, as well as the contributions of their team members.

Ou’s (2011) identification of humility descriptors applicable to managers is an excellent summary of: (a) accurate self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses, (b) propensity to place self in a realistic perspective to the situation and others, (c) openness, (d) acknowledgement of weaknesses and what one does not know, (e) appreciation of the attributes of others, (f) low self-focus, (g) honest self-reflection, (h) acknowledgement of imperfections, (i) open-mindedness, and (j) eagerness to improve (p. 11).

2.0 Patience

“Patience is too often overlooked as a leadership virtue, and sometimes is even viewed as a weakness in a manager. Anyone who believes this could not be more mistaken” (Eich, 2016, pp 1-2).

Eich (2016, pp. 2-3) explains the virtues of managers having patience through “**P.A.T.I.E.N.C.E.**” This is an acronym for the eight critical elements that compose the effective application of patience by managers: (1) **Purpose:** Patient managers understand that having a purpose—and sticking to it—is essential for meaningful change; (2) **Approachability:** Patient managers are open to change and understand the value of being *accessible*; (3) **Tolerance:** Patient managers know that intolerance stunts growth, while tolerance powers it; (4) **Independence:** Patient managers are independent, straight forward, and even defiant in certain instances; (5) **Empathy:** Patient managers know that empathy is a sign of maturity and confidence that bodes well with those they supervise; (6) **Nurturing Nature:** Patient managers know how to effectively lead staff and nurture (develop) their skills and abilities that result in enhanced human capital for staff members; (7) **Confidence:** Patient managers are cool and self-assured—without being cocky and conceited; and (8) **Endurance:** Patient managers understand that effective accomplishment of meaningful goals takes time, tenacity, and endurance.

Regarding the crucial role patience plays in a manager’s effectiveness, Llopis (2013) notes, “Leaders that are unable to practice patience will also find their careers short-lived. The marketplace demands it, and employees see patience as a sign that their leaders are more compassionate, open-minded and willing and able to manage every circumstance” (p 2). Llopis adheres to the old axiom of “patience is a virtue” in the context of managers performing effectively. She stresses that managers must be extremely cognizant of the mindset of each staff member and how the “demands of today’s new workplace” affect staff’s attitudes, desires, and loyalty. (p. 1). Managers need to understand that meeting work goals is achieved through properly utilizing patience in order to maximize the effectiveness of the work of individual staff members and the team.

Llopis (2013) indicates that in order to effectively apply patience, managers need to look at the world of work through the lens of those they supervise. Because of the fast-paced lifestyles of today, many staff members feel stressed. This is often due to work and personal demands that create feelings of being short of time to meet all such demands. In essence, many staff members are impatient because of the professional and personal demands which they perceive as being put upon them. Managers need to carefully evaluate tension points for staff members—especially those related to job demands—and identify the real causes of these problems. Next, managers must have the patience and skills to work with staff members to relieve these tension points, while at the same time performing their jobs effectively. Patient managers understand the importance of not “jumping to conclusions” regarding staff members’ performance problems and demonstrate an unbiased patience in examining these problems. In all such situations, patient managers also maintain positive attitudes.

3.0 Passion

Passion represents a strong emotional desire and commitment of managers to achieve tasks and goals important to them in the work environment. Drive, interest, enthusiasm, and motivation to see activities through to completion of important tasks and goals are key elements of passion (Bartz, 2017). Passion causes managers to persist in the journey to accomplish these important tasks and goals when times are hard and solutions become elusive (Miller, 2017). Without passion, managers are unable to “screen out the noisy disturbances that undo less committed individuals” (Miller, 2017, p. 96). Pink’s (2009) explanation of intrinsic motivation described in his best-selling book *Drive* is applicable to passion: “we’re intrinsically motivated purpose maximizes” which aligns with managers’ unwavering driven pursuit of goals for which they are passionate (p. 32).

Managers displaying passion send a message to others in the work environment of the need to achieve the tasks related to the most important goals. When managers are driven by passion, it brings renewed enthusiasm each day for them and their staff members to continue the pursuit of the crucial tasks needed to accomplish the most important goals. Passion generates energy in the manager to doggedly pursue the crucial tasks for a goal to fruition through day-in-day-out focused efforts.

There are two basic forms of passion—harmonious and obsessive. Harmonious is the positive type of passion that prompts managers to be happier, wiser, and in control of passion in order to put it in its proper perspective. Harmonious passion prompts managers to look forward to the pursuit of crucial tasks for attaining important goals in a controllable and positive manner. Obsessive passion is marked by intrusive thoughts by the manager and difficulty in controlling the passion in the proper perspective regarding other job requirements. Managers possessing harmonious passion generally add happiness and enjoyment to their job, while managers controlled by obsessive passion are psychologically experiencing a sense of uncomfortableness and difficulty in objectively controlling their actions. In reality, at times managers may find a fine line between being able to demonstrate harmonious passion and being overcome and possessed by obsessive passion. It is crucial for managers to occasionally “call time out” and make sure that the passion (obsessive) is not controlling them and that they are enjoying and controlling passion (harmonious) in pursuit of important goals.

The antithesis of the passionate manager is the “burned-out” manager who has no motivational desire to pursue important goals relevant to job expectations. Such a manager needs to rediscover passion by initially identifying a minimal number of important tasks which can be accomplished for an important goal in a relatively short time period (e.g., a week or month). The manager then needs to focus unwaveringly on accomplishing these tasks and create a psychological mindset that convinces oneself that they are “doable” in this time period.

Duckworth (2016) describes passion as truly caring about a limited number of goals with an unwavering focus on these goals. Endurance—sticking to an unwaveringly pursuit toward goals—is indicative of managers with passion. While enthusiasm is initially important to managers in the context of passion, endurance is the long-term effort that results in passion for achieving goals. The best scenario for managers occurs when a work goal for which they have passion fits well with personal interest. This is likely to result in extraordinarily excellent performance. Duckworth (2016) notes the following regarding a good match between a manager’s work goal driven by both passion and personal interest: (a) people whose jobs match personal interest are, in general, happier with their lives as a whole; (b) people perform better at work which interests them; and (c) staff whose intrinsic personal interests fit well with their occupations do their jobs better, are more helpful to coworkers, and stay at their jobs longer (pp. 97-98).

Focus is concentrated attention—the ability to zero in on a goal and related tasks. It is a crucial component of passion. Focus is represented by managers having a clear understanding of what they want to accomplish through the application of passion. It gives managers *drive* (Dalio, 2017). Linking this drive with passion can propel managers to higher levels of focus and goal actualization (Charan, Willigan, & Giffen, 2017).

Focused managers are not in a reactive mode with every issue that comes their way and, therefore are not sidetracked by less important issues. They resist being distracted from the goals linked to passion that require their attention and concentrated effort for attainment (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2002). Borrowing from the *Conscious Communications* philosophy, when managers intensely focus on a goal at the root of passion, their ability to accurately “hone in” on what needs to be done sharpens (Shores, 2017). The focused manager driven by passion understands that an “interference dilemma” can exist when attempting to multitask while pursuing a goal driven by passion (Gazzaley & Rosen, 2016). Hence, they control or eliminate multitasking.

4.0 Mindset

Mindset is based on the premise that managers can choose to believe that factors such as intelligence and personality are unchangeable (fixed mindset) or believe that these factors can be nurtured and developed (growth mindset) for professional and personal enhancement (Dweck, 2016). This presents to managers the proverbial “nature vs. nurture” debate that has been discussed for centuries. In reality both factors impact managers’ success on the job to some degree, but believing that nurturing can cause them to continually develop (growth mindset) will enhance managers’ expertise (knowledge and skills) and, thus, their job performance (Bartz, 2016).

Managers challenging themselves to nurture and develop their existing attributes, and being willing to put forth the effort to do so, is key to the growth mindset and to managers increasing their productivity and satisfaction at work. The growth mindset also prompts managers to be more positive and optimistic when dealing with staff members, which results in managers taking actions necessary to develop new skills in staff. These new skills of staff translate into improved work unit performance. The Arbinger Institute (2016) indicates that managers should possess a mindset that focuses upon developing the skills of staff members working together collectively to maximize work unit productivity.

Purposefully engaging in professional development is key for managers in maximizing their potential and enhancing achievements. It is important for managers to avoid stereotyping themselves in ways that deter motivation to improve. For example, if a manager believes he/she has never been—or can ever be—good at making presentations, there is likely to be little motivation to get better. Will-power is essential for managers to overcome setbacks on the job and pursue the needed change for improved performance.

In summary, key growth mindset factors for managers to focus on are: (a) having purpose drive work; (b) understanding that deficiencies should not be hidden, but dealt with “head-on;” (c) perceiving setbacks as learning opportunities for future successes; (d) viewing staff members as collaborators and stressing the team approach; (e) nurturing a burning desire to keep learning new knowledge and skills; (f) finding inspiration from the successes of others and learning from them; (g) realizing that everyone can change and grow through passion, effort, application, and experience; (h) understanding even when feeling distressed, a person should be ready to take risks, confront challenges, and keep working to get better; and (i) knowing that when relationships with people in the work environment go wrong, there is a learning opportunity in identifying positive actions for more positive future relationship building (Dweck, 2016; Bartz, 2016).

5.0 Concluding Thoughts

Effective managers are always self-assessing in the context of skill sets possessed in order for them to perform at peak efficiency. Humility, patience, passion, and mindset are four skill sets that will aid managers in maximizing their performance, as well as the performance of those with whom they work. Managers need to be astute regarding when to emphasize each of these four skill sets and when to use combinations of them in order to maximize self-performance as well as the effectiveness of those they supervise. Managers must understand that their effectiveness, in large part, is dependent upon those with whom they work. When properly applied humility, patience, passion, and mindset will bring out the best in a manager’s team members.

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