

Add a Dose of This Virtue to Your Conversations and Watch Your Leadership Skills Flourish

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“It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.”

There’s so much simplicity in this quote from Steve Jobs. We bring people we trust onto our teams, people we’re excited about – their ideas, their unique passions and their deep desire to propel the company forward.

Why then, do so many leaders struggle to create an employee-guided workplace: one where employees raise the bar of success by contributing to the effectiveness of their leaders?

It all comes down to egos. Now, I’m not accusing leaders of walking around snubbed-nosed, touting their own business excellence. There is, however, the issue of leaders ineffectively communicating their openness to ideas. Ideas that flow outside the mold of their normal views and opinions.

Leaders must focus on intellectual humility in their daily conversations to encourage employees to share their ideas and opinions about the company. Intellectual humility, [by definition](#), is a virtue, a character trait that allows the intellectually-humble person to think and reason well. It’s related to open-mindedness and a healthy recognition of one’s own fallibility.

Even if you feel confident with the current state of your intellectual humility, that doesn't mean employees recognize it at face value. Here's how you can use the virtue at its greatest, business-improving capacity by weaving it into your daily conversations:

Get up, get out, and ask for help

No matter how in-tune you are with employees, it's easy for your [leadership](#) qualities to override critical aspects of intellectual humility. Even if you don't believe it's your duty to know everything, employees may be making that culturally poisonous assumption. So it's important to help employees understand you know your ego and intellect can – and should – be separated.

Whether you're taking care of business from your office or are out problem-solving with your team, the solution for squashing this assumption doesn't lie in your natural leadership skills.

It actually lies with what you don't know. When you're stumped on finding a solution or have a question Google simply can't solve, reach out to your team. Let them view your openness to your own fallibility by asking them for suggestions – regardless of whether they're the technical 'experts' on the subject.

Giving them the opportunity to offer their advice assures them you trust their abilities and knowledge beyond their roles. Even better, you're acknowledging there are things far beyond what you currently know and believe they have the answers.

Thank employees for giving you new insights

A 2017 Sage Journals study, [Cognitive and Interpersonal Features of Intellectual Humility](#), found intellectual humility is associated with variables related to openness, curiosity,

tolerance of ambiguity and low dogmatism. When your daily communications with employees align with these variables, you start creating honest, genuine relationships.

Giving way to these variables also means welcoming uncomfortable discussions with employees. It's when you're pushed outside your comfort zone you begin to grow – and employees will notice.

Whether it's in hallway chatter, during meetings or at an after-hours team event, focus on employees' beliefs and opinions. Consider, for example, their concerns or enthusiasm tied to the current governmental administration or new legislation.

Let them sink in for a day. View the world in full-color through their eyes and experiences. Then, reach out and thank them for altering the way you see the world. Explain how they changed your insights or gave you something serious to consider when it comes to your own personal beliefs.

Share communication materials that don't align with your viewpoints

Your employees have a right to their own opinions. They also deserve company leaders who nurture those opinions, even when they don't align with their own.

Remember, the basis of intellectual humility isn't founded on constantly agreeing with others. It is about having respect for all viewpoints. Base your culture around this cornerstone by offering out-of-your-ordinary communication materials.

Consider an employee, for example, who has asked the company to pay for a new certification. You've researched the certification and don't see a direct correlation between it and their role.

Now is the perfect time to realize that you don't understand

every aspect of the role and that they're the expert in this situation. Invite them to explain the importance of the certification and how it will improve their skill set.

If they've effectively explained the need, but you still don't view it as a necessity, consider paying for it anyway. Prove that you're listening to their needs and, even when you don't view something as important, you trust their opinions.

Don't forget to continue the conversation. Ask what they've learned, how it's improving their day-to-day and if they recommend the course for other employees. While this holds them accountable, it also shows them your continued interest in their viewpoint.



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