

Five Minutes to Thrive: 26-30 Mar 18

What Makes A Good Leader: **HUMILITY**

This week we continue our series on the four key pillars of character required of successful leaders (nobility, humility, courage, and compassion), as delineated by Lt Gen Steven Kwast, AETC/CC. In that we are *all* leaders in some form, at some time, and with some people—and because the development of these characteristics is a journey, rather than something with which we're born—this series of 5M2Ts will focus on each of these traits, in turn. Next up: **Humility**.

The paradigm of simultaneously embracing both nobility and humility may, at first glance, seem like a paradox. On the one hand, we are being called to demonstrate our goodness and virtue above all else; on the other hand, we're supposed to transcend the status quo while somehow being humble about it! But don't confuse humility in this sense with the ideas of meekness or diffidence: humility is a guard to prevent our egos from dominating our interactions, to enable us to retain control over our emotions (and hence our decision-making), and to accept—and to move forward in spite of—our own fallibility. It also holds the key to making us stronger and more resilient.



To err is to be human; despite our best efforts, we *will* fail (sometimes spectacularly!), we *will* make mistakes, and we *will* fall short of others' (and our own) expectations. Humility allows us to embrace these imperfections, to acknowledge our blunders before others, to embrace the shame, to accept whatever responsibility may be appropriate, and—most importantly—to *move on*. Because a fear to err will always lead to a failure to innovate. An unrealistic pursuit of perfection not only creates anxiety but stalls progress as well. And a leader who does not, or cannot, admit to their shortcomings loses all sway with those whom they hope to lead.

Don't get me wrong; I know each of you reading this are *awesome* in your own right, and you certainly have traits or accomplishments for which you *should* feel proud. But this actually underscores the importance of taking a periodic, honest, self-assessment of our own humility:

- **Keep your ego in-check.** No one likes a braggart; examine your personal motivations (and methods) for sharing your accomplishments. Are you trying to demonstrate nobility in order to positively influence others? Or are you just looking for a pat on the back? Try to refrain from committing the *faux pas* of being the insufferable self-promoter (you know the kind...).
- **Acknowledge your “challenges” (and then address them).** We all have “opportunities for improvement.” Examine the areas of your work, of your relationships, and of your personal life where you could stand to create some growth. Then gather the courage to ask for help.
- **Humanize yourself.** Nothing endears me more to my leaders than when they freely share their personal struggles—especially when I can relate to their experiences. Judiciously share your past struggles (and subsequent triumphs) to encourage others. Not only do you provide them with a model for resilience, but you distinguish yourself as more approachable as well.

For questions, contact Dr. Jerry Walker, 363^d ISRW/ART, @ jerry.walker.16.ctr@us.af.mil or 757-764-9316