

# Leading with humility in a time of crisis

Companies working remotely during the nationwide lockdown will need to place a huge amount of faith in their employees' abilities to deliver on their mandates. While Service-Level Agreements and Key Performance Indicators may contractually bind employees to their targets, it's a particular type of leadership that will supplant the best out of the organisation and its staff, says Arnoux Maré, managing director of Innovative Staffing Solutions.



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“During times of crisis, such as the one we are currently facing, leaders have to be bold and decisive if they want to weather the storm. However, if they wish to keep their employees motivated and on course, they need to embody a kind of leadership that exudes humility. Often leaders who have a high success rate, are those that lead with humility,” explains Maré.

## Humility

He says that humility should not be confused with low self-esteem or meekness. Humility also known as servant leadership, is a mindset that allows you, by choosing to think less about yourself, to change your world perspective, to be more conscious of your hidden biases and to seek what's good for the organisation.

Furthermore, humility, when displayed publicly, has a direct correlation to the feelings of those who experience it.

Research published in the Academy of Management Journal found that humility is also contagious and that humble leaders foster collective humility on their teams. These team members were more motivated to do their best work and to value the contributions of the group.

“Leaders must lead by example and must not take the mantle of leadership lightly. This requires leaders to listen and be teachable, allowing them the fluidity to learn and react towards novel situations a lot quicker,” says Maré.

According to research published in Administrative Science Quarterly, at a managerial level, traits associated with humility, such as soliciting feedback and focusing on employee needs, generated higher levels of engagement and job performance from managers and employees.

“In his book *From Good to Great*, business management researcher, Jim Collins noted the two characteristics separating the best from the rest, are the combination of humility partnered with tenacity to always do what is right for the company,” Maré continues.

### **Leading with humility**

A key component to leading with humility, Maré adds, is possessing emotional and social intelligence. An ability to empathise with your subordinates, seeing them as humans and not simply a means to an end.

This is supported by research published on ResearchGate stating that relational humility is positively associated with/or predictive of a host of prosocial personal/interpersonal behaviours and qualities. These include cooperation, helpfulness and the ability to receive help, generosity, gratitude, forgiveness, ego resilience, the avoidance of interpersonal deception, better relationship quality and relationship outcomes, and social justice commitment. Conversely, relational humility is negatively associated with anti-social behaviour, psychopathic tendencies, sadism, and narcissism.

“Humility allows leaders to shift the load from their shoulders, permitting their employees to grow and improve by taking on more responsibility. And during this unprecedented time, if organisations are to recover from the national lockdown, leaders must have equipped employees with the necessary tools and support systems to allow them to pull their shared weight- this is servant leadership in action,” concludes Maré.

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