

Humility as a “What Counts” Factor

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Most people would recognize Procter & Gamble as a respectable, high-quality company. I had the privilege of working in five P&G manufacturing facilities over 23 years. During that time, P&G had ten “what counts” factors used for evaluating applicants and manager performance.

The factors have changed a bit over the almost thirty years I’ve been gone. At the time, they were behaviors such as improving systems, developing others, building networks, and collaborating.

I recently heard Patrick Lencioni describe his latest book *The Ideal Team Player*. It’s based on 22 years that The Table Group, the name of his consulting organization, has sought colleagues who satisfy three simple “what counts” factors: humility, hunger (driven from within to do extensive, high-quality work), and people-smarts (interacts comfortably and well with people at every level). Lencioni claims that of the three, humility is the most important!

I immediately purchased the book, as I’d never been associated with an organization that intentionally searched for humility as a characteristic of their applicants. I wanted to know more!

For example, how can an interviewer determine if an applicant is characteristically humble when the person’s objective is to “sell” his or her capabilities? Lencioni provides several answers!!

My intent with this article is to stimulate you to think about humility in a way that you’ve never considered. Let’s start with how you would answer this question. “Are you a humble person?”

It’s a bit of a paradox, isn’t it? If you **are** humble, you can’t genuinely say, “Yes.” To do so sounds like bragging! If you’re not humble, you’ll likely hesitate, either because you are not sure, the question embarrasses you, or everything in you wants to brazenly shout, “YES, I AM!”

Our society generally doesn’t quite grasp “humility.” Almost every synonym has some negative distortion. Meek. Deferential. Unassuming. Self-effacing. Supplicative. Reticent. Timid. Weak.

In actuality, the word is typically not applied if the person is incompetent. People who are not competent might be called inept, unskilled, inexperienced, or ineffective--but never humble.

Further, the word is typically applied to individuals who use their competency NOT for seeking praise but to quietly serve others. That is, a humble person is usually generous in helping meet another person’s needs if it’s within his or her capability.

The first two-thirds of *The Ideal Team Player* describes how a very practical construction company backed into understanding and adopting Lencioni’s three “what counts” factors. (I confess that my stereotype of burly construction workers does not include the word “humble”!)

Having deeply pondered Lencioni’s perspectives and explored the concepts in practical ways with several clients, I agree with him. Humility is deep competence combined with a genuine desire to quietly serve others from that strength. Who doesn’t want that in a team member?

As a leader, I encourage you to do a little self-assessment. How would your colleagues and team members rate you in the area of humility? And assess your organization. Are you properly recognizing and rewarding your most humble (competent and service-oriented) contributors?

Want more? Look at <https://tablegroup.com/books/ideal-team-player> or purchase the book. Lencioni is extremely generous on this website, delivering almost all that is within the book. (Downloading the pdf file is a great surrogate for the book, something you can easily share with team members.)

I wonder how Lencioni would answer the question, “Are you a humble person?”

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