**Humility: the antidote for bad leadership**

Early research points to the importance of humility in leaders

**Popular wisdom will have you believe that a leader is someone who exudes confidence and charisma because they appear smart, interesting and engaging. However, more often than not, these types of leaders wreak havoc on the workplace. A growing body of research suggests that** [**humility**](https://trainingindustry.com/articles/leadership/humility-leadership-and-organizational-effectiveness/) **is a far more important quality in a leader than charisma.**

Organizations tend to favor people who “seem” leaderlike. Individuals who are self-promoting, interesting and politically savvy tend to get earmarked for promotion. These leaders know what it takes to get ahead and get noticed, and they strategically cater to audiences who can offer them power, influence, status or access to resources.

Charisma is the elusive quality of being charming, captivating and pleasant to be around. We are naturally drawn to charismatic people because we feel good in their presence. However, charismatic people also tend to have inflated views of themselves and their skills. They also tend to be more self-promoting than others. Too much charisma can make for ineffective leaders as their tendency to be narcissistic can alienate those working under them.

In essence, [charisma is a double-edged sword](https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/psp-pspp0000147.pdf). Too little and it’s difficult to persuade team members to support your vision. Too much and team members feel unsupported and disengaged. The strong overlap between charisma and narcissism means that it’s easy for charm to turn into arrogance and entitlement.

Humility, on the other hand, is vitally important to creating stability and engagement within teams. One of the most [famous studies on the topic](https://www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/good-to-great.html) analyses the success of 11 high-performing companies. The leaders in the highest performing firms had two things in common: they were fiercely competitive, yet personally humble.

Humility is a relatively new subject in the context of leadership and organizational effectiveness, primarily because humble leaders typically don’t stand out from the crowd. Preliminary research on the topic shows that a humble leader inspires collaboration and earns the respect of their team members. They also create working environments with higher degrees of satisfaction and productivity. Although the subject is relatively new, there are valid claims for making it measurable. Initial research shows that these skills indicate humility: modesty, sincerity, open to feedback, recognising others, low levels of arrogance and low levels of narcissism.

Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England [emphasized](https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/speech/2018/mark-carney-speech-at-regents-university-london?sf84680216=1) the importance of humility as an essential attribute of leadership recently. “Good leaders combine personal humility, self-knowledge and the ability to learn,” says Carney. “That means admitting mistakes, seeking and accepting feedback and sharing the lessons you have learned.”

There is good news for those who are not naturally humble: [research](https://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/abs/10.1287/orsc.1120.0795?journalCode=orsc) suggests that just by showing signs of humility, overly charismatic leaders can offset the qualities that make them unlikeable. A dose of humility can make a narcissistic boss seem more approachable, supportive, and open to feedback.

“Humility has the ability to counteract the potentially harmful effects of narcissism, which can lead to positive outcomes for the organisation,” says Dena Rhodes, Research Consultant for Hogan Assessments. “This suggests that individuals can still have a narcissistic identity *and* be effective as a leader, as long as they have a humble reputation.”

The good news is that even the most arrogant of leaders can increase their effectiveness by showing humility, even if it’s not entirely genuine. Here are a few tips for avoiding the pitfalls of charisma:

1. Put the spotlight on others: make a concerted effort to recognise the achievements of team members and subordinates
2. Increase self-awareness: actively try to understand your limitations and show a willingness to acknowledge your mistakes
3. Be open to feedback: a trademark of humility is being coachable, which means opening yourself up to criticism and accepting that your way is not the only way
4. Check your sense of entitlement: work to earn the respect of your colleagues, don’t automatically assume you are entitled to it
5. Monitor your self-promoting behaviors: focus on trying to get along rather than getting ahead

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**About Hogan Assessments**

Founded in 1987 by Drs. Joyce and Robert Hogan, Hogan has been leading the world in personality assessment and leadership development for over 30 years. It produced the first assessments to scientifically measure personality for business use. This, with its several notable innovations, has helped Hogan to become widely acknowledged in the academic and business community alike. Today, with products and services in 56 countries and 47 languages, what began as a small startup has evolved into the industry leader serving more than half of the *Fortune 500*. For more information, visit [www.hoganassessments.com](http://www.hoganassessments.com).

**Opportunity for interviews: Zsolt Fehér, Managing Director, Hogan Assessments Europe**

Zsolt Fehér has been working in the HR consulting industry for 20 years. He has held numerous workshops in corporate leadership, HR development and management, and has published over 100 articles on the topic. He was CEO of Assessment Systems International before being appointed as Managing Director of Hogan Assessments Europe.

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