

Uncommon Leaders Balance Confidence and Humility

Michael Dammann Eisner served as the chairman and CEO of the Walt Disney Company for more than twenty years, from 1984 to 2005. Under his leadership, the Disney brand was reawakened. From animated films like *The Little Mermaid* (1989) to commercial acquisitions like Miramax Films, ABC, and ESPN, Michael Eisner led with confidence.

It was during this time, however, that Disney also accrued a reputation for being tough negotiators and even tougher business partners. Their power was expanding, and they knew it. Eisner gained a reputation for hiring and firing people abruptly, for being unpredictable and for going to court over issues that could have been resolved easily with less ego. Over time, Eisner became increasingly isolated and overbearing, which ultimately led to a shareholder revolt and his own dismissal. His final years, many say, were marked by self-destructive behavior, arrogant attitudes, and unnecessary emotion-driven public battles.

Enter Robert “Bob” .

Bob Iger is a very different sort of leader than Eisner. He was a Disney executive that Michael Eisner swore would never become CEO. Yet Bob, who’d worked under the ABC and Disney brands for thirty years, had been slowly and effectively executing his responsibilities. Although Disney board members looked outside the company for a new CEO, they soon recognized that the right person might just be under their noses.

Bob Iger replaced Eisner and became the Chief Executive Officer in 2005. During the previous three decades, he had had the opportunity to get hands-on experience in every facet of the television industry, from sports, to news, to entertainment. He was exposed to and participated in program acquisition, rights negotiations, and business affairs. And in most of this experience, he felt like a rookie being called up to the big leagues. Iger’s autobiography, *The Ride of a Lifetime*, details how at each stage of his career, he was asked to do something he’d never done before—and always on an increasingly larger platform with more stakeholders watching. For instance, when Capital Cities Communications bought ABC, it blindsided everyone in the company. Almost immediately, Bob was asked to become the president of ABC Entertainment. He writes in his book:

It wasn’t quite leaping without a parachute, but it felt a lot like a free fall at first. I told myself: You have a job. They’re expecting you to turn this business around. Your inexperience can’t be an excuse for failure.¹

Bob Iger differentiated himself from the more experienced Michael Eisner in that he never left his humble, teachable mindset as he forged ahead. He remained authentic. He believed the first rule is to not “fake anything.” He’d say:

You have to be humble, and you can’t pretend to be someone you’re not or to know something you don’t. You’re also

in a position of leadership, though, so you can't let humility prevent you from leading. It's a fine line, and something I preach today. You have to ask the questions you need to ask, admit without apology what you don't understand and do the work to learn what you need to learn as quickly as you can.²

THE PARADOX

Iger embodies a paradox I see uncommon leaders practice that sets them apart from old school leadership, which is too often undermined by hubris and prevents such leaders from seeing certain realities.

Leading today requires combining these two attributes—confidence and humility. Reality changes so quickly, leaders cannot become arrogant, but must remain in a learning posture. At the same time, team members long for their leader to inspire them with confidence. Iger concluded “There’s nothing less confidence inspiring than a person faking a knowledge they don’t possess. True authority and true leadership come from knowing who you are and not pretending to be anything else.”³

When Capital Cities acquired ABC, Bob was called upon to lead the network, which represented the merger of both companies. Bob reminisces:

Back then, the head of any of the (big) three networks was one of the most powerful people in television (a fact that seemed surreal to me), but to everyone in the industry, I was a looming question mark. I had no sense of how things were done in Hollywood, and no experience managing relationships with creative people or working with their representatives. I didn't speak their language. I didn't understand their culture. To them, I was a suit from New

York who suddenly—for reasons that must have seemed baffling—had immense influence over their creative life. So, every day, I met with the managers and agents, writers, directors, and TV stars that Stu and Ted [my executive team] lined up for me. In most of those meetings, I had the distinct sensation of being poked and prodded in an effort to figure out who I was and what the hell I was doing there.⁴

I can only imagine what it must have felt like to be the executive leader but feel like the people under me were constantly questioning my right and ability to give them direction or to make good decisions on their behalf. It's a recipe for egos to flare up; to remind everyone who wore the badge and how the CEO had the right to fire anyone if he wanted to do so. This happens every year between executives and team members.

But Bob Iger refused to let his ego get the best of him.

Rather than trying too hard to impress whoever was across the table, he knew he needed to resist the urge to pretend he knew what he was doing. Instead he asked a lot of questions, expressing his need for what others had to offer. This sort of expression is disarming to most humans. Bob knew when he arrived in Hollywood, he didn't have a big personality or any obvious swagger. He barely knew anyone in town. In light of this, he could either wilt under the power plays of agents and actors and display his insecurity, or he could leverage his “un-Hollywood-ness” to be a kind of mystery that worked to his advantage.

When Bob Iger became the chairman and CEO of the Walt Disney Company, he returned to the approach that had served him well. He didn't pretend to be Michael Eisner (which worked in his favor) or to be Walt Disney. He humbly demonstrated he was himself:

- ▼ He listened more than he spoke.

- ▼ He learned more than he taught.
- ▼ He sought to add value more than gain value.

And he won people over, one person at a time.

Because he led in this fashion, when he made a confident decision, people felt he was believable. His humility balanced his confidence and magnetically convinced others to side with him even when they saw things differently. His confidence was real but came in smaller doses, mixed with humble listening along the way. The fact is, each step along the way, people felt he wasn't qualified for the new job, and often Bob would smile and agree. Then he'd assume a learning posture with those very same people, all of whom agreed they wanted the company to flourish.

Bob built collaborators not combatants. People didn't feel they needed to *compete* with him, but to *complete* him.

This was never clearer than when Bob Iger met with Steve Jobs to discuss how they could resuscitate the relationship between Disney and Pixar. When Michael Eisner led Disney, he and Jobs (original Chairman of Pixar) represented two big egos at the table, both striving for the upper hand in the negotiations. I'm sure it felt like two male peacocks spreading their wings in pride to see who'd win the contest. Such displays usually result in win/lose equations.

When Iger took over, Bob contacted Steve to see if he'd meet with him. The two men didn't really know each other, so neither knew exactly what to expect, but in a relatively short time, Iger won Steve Jobs over. As you'd likely expect by this point, when he met with Jobs, Iger took a completely different approach:

1. Iger acknowledged he was in new territory.
2. He communicated that he wanted to add value to Pixar.
3. He said he felt unqualified to lead such an amazing brand like Disney.

4. He relayed his belief that both teams could be better if they worked together.

This effectively illustrates a helpful lesson for leaders. Leader who are emotionally insecure will sabotage their ability to expand further or to go deeper in relationships. They will naturally put up walls, especially with competitive people. Potential partners are seen with suspicion not expectation. Leaders perceive that strong counterparts represent one of three possibilities to them:

1. **Threat.** The person is a threat to their own power, position, and prestige.
2. **Thorn.** The person is simply viewed as a thorn in their side who must be removed.
3. **Thrive.** The person is seen as an asset who may enable them to improve and flourish.

Too often, Michael Eisner saw Steve Jobs as a threat. In contrast, Bob Iger saw how they could thrive together. Slowly, Iger began to undo the tangled knot created by the dysfunctional Jobs and

How are you naturally perceived by others: as more humble or more confident?

Eisner relationship. Finally, one evening, Bob decided to float a crazy idea by Steve. Bob began by admitting it was a crazy idea. He suggested that maybe Disney could purchase Pixar. After a moment of silence, Jobs responded, “That’s not such a crazy idea.” Then, Steve explained that while he was open to dialogue, he would not make a unilateral decision without involving John Lasseter and Ed Catmull, Jobs’s leaders of the Pixar animation team. Although it wasn’t a crazy idea—it was a big idea. Bob agreed to meet with both men . . . and won them over. The

purchase was made, and Steve Jobs and his Pixar crew joined the Disney Empire.

What I love most about the deal was the way Bob won them all over. He told them if they'd sell Pixar to Disney, they would become the advisors for *all* Disney animation. After all, since Pixar led the way in computer animation, they should direct it all. In other words, the buyers became the learners. It was a picture of confidence and humility.

Over time, Bob Iger and Steve Jobs became friends. When Steve passed away in October 2011, Bob and his wife, Willow, were part of a handful of people who were invited to his memorial. They'd forged a partnership that Michael Eisner was unable to envision and had advised against. Why? The combination of humility and confidence seldom makes sense to those who don't possess it. It's hard to explain.

But allow me to try.

HOW CONFIDENCE AND HUMILITY CREATE MOMENTUM

Herein lies the big idea: Uncommon leaders possess inspiring confidence yet express it with palpable humility.

In today's complex world, people look for anyone with a clear sense of confidence. Teams seldom move forward without seeing it in their leader. At the same time, people demand that a leader's confidence doesn't blind them to their own humanity. Leaders believe in themselves, but they don't believe they can do it alone. Dacher Keltner said, "The seductions of power induce us to lose the very skills that enabled us to gain power in the first place."⁵

Confidence plus humility furnishes the *energy of certainty* and the *flexibility of teachability* to create synergy in partnerships. Bob Iger found this to be true in his interactions with George Lucas (when he purchased LucasFilms), with Ike Perlmutter (when he bought Marvel) and with Steve Jobs (when he bought Pixar). Bob was a learner but brought to the table enough confidence—even

audacity—to make the pitch to these CEOs. Only confidence, even self-confidence, can catapult a leader from average to extraordinary.

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF CONFIDENCE

Because twenty-first century culture is increasingly uncertain and because our global economy is increasingly complicated and unpredictable, team members long for a sense of confidence. I believe one of the leader's tasks is to instill this in their team. This doesn't mean leaders have all the answers up front, nor does it mean they're absolutely certain everything will pan out according to plan. It simply means that as our world experiences uncertainty, the human longing for confidence grows proportionately. Uncommon leaders understand this need and leverage it to increase their influence.

When leaders are confident, their symptoms of confidence become contagious:

- ▼ Their passion and energy become viral.
- ▼ Their clarity tends to motivate people to act.
- ▼ They pass on a sense of security to their team.
- ▼ Their sense of ownership expands to others.
- ▼ Their assurance that something must be done spreads.

Confidence can leak over time. The older we get the more experience we gain, and the more cynical we become. After decades, our worldview changes; we no longer blindly trust others; we become self-protective; we see how selfish and immature even adults can be—and our confidence can wane. This is why a child can be so confident about skateboarding down a hill and his parents feel they must explain why he should be more careful.

Or a young girl can be so confident about her freedom on social media, blind to predators who prey on kids.

Confidence *reigns* in the young. And it tends to *wane* over time.

Consider how many movements in history were led by young, idealistic, energetic, and even naïve people. Along with that idealism comes confidence. And frequently, that confidence paid off. Joan of Arc. William Wilberforce. Martin Luther King, Jr. Abolitionist movements. Women’s rights movements. Voting rights movements. Civil rights and equal rights movements. Thousands of followers in those movements simply needed permission to act. And it was a confident leader (or leaders) who gave them that permission through their confidence.

The fact is people follow confident leaders. Most people lack confidence and admire someone who’s convinced and convicted to move in a certain direction. I believe people follow the leader who is clearest and most confident, not necessarily the one who is right. This is why religious cult leaders can gain a following—they attract unsuspecting people who crave confidence.

Let me focus in on why your people *want you* to be a confident leader. As our lives become more complicated and overwhelming, people feel they don’t have time to research every decision they must make. We’re tired and begin to look for “gatekeepers” who share our values and help us make good decisions. Celebrity endorsements. Wise authors. Social media influencers. Mavens. Political figures. Uncle Charlie. These “gatekeepers” become a sort of leader to us; such people do our homework for us and remove our need to think deeply about everything. We trust their opinion. When they’re confident and can articulate their perspective, we feel comfortable moving in the same direction they’re moving. They’re often the ones who provide clarity in a confusing world, full of gray areas. The clear direction they offer makes us grasp what next step to take—and we like ourselves when we’re clearer. This is why we value confidence in leaders.

For twenty years of my career, I served on John C. Maxwell's leadership team. John is an incredible author and a leader who seldom lacks confidence. He is a good thinker; he is a memorable communicator, and he is sure of his direction. When he makes decisions, he is clear and certain, even when he isn't always accurate. This not only has attracted a large staff, but millions of readers and followers over the decades. People value his confidence. Here are three observations I made as I served under him:

1. **His confidence was attractive.** As I mentioned above, those of us who possessed less confidence could borrow his and feel better about our lives. I recall attending a board of directors meeting when a "gray," even controversial topic surfaced. A decision had to be made. Although several on that board saw the issue differently, John Maxwell listened then shared confidently why we should move in a certain direction. By decision time, everyone was attracted to his confidence and voted accordingly.
2. **His confidence was energizing.** Our team drew upon his energy, deriving from his confidence that our goal could be reached. We absorbed his energy and applied it toward our mutual objective. This was quite common. John Maxwell was once in a fast-food restaurant drive-through lane. When he got to the window, he asked if he could buy a simple cup of ice. No soft drink; just ice. The teenage clerk replied, "Oh, sorry, I can't do that." When John smiled and said, "Yes, you can!" she smiled back and said, "OK!" And John left with his cup of ice.
3. **His confidence invited ideas.** Because Maxwell was confident, we all felt it was worthwhile to apply

our own ideas to the goal. After all, if we were sure to reach it, why not own it and add to it? John's confidence was the result of his emotional security. More than once, he'd share an idea for raising funds for a need around the world, and before we knew it, our entire leadership team was adding to his idea, building off of his belief that we could, indeed, pull it off. Time and again I watched confidence breed creativity.

The truth is confidence makes leadership believable. If people don't have a sense that you are confident—even self-confident—they may not have the confidence to follow you. If you don't believe in yourself, your people will find it difficult to believe in you. If you're tentative about your direction, your people will certainly be. Confidence usually comes first, even before competence (although both are essential).

In any case, leaders need confidence and it's important we understand what our personal level of confidence is. In his book, *Confident Leader!—Become One, Stay One*, my friend Dan Reiland suggests confidence isn't a topic most people think or talk a lot about. Most of us feel confident until we make some big decision like choosing a school for our child, buying a home, or taking on a huge project at work. Then, suddenly, we're different people. We don't want to look foolish by failing or fumbling or falling down. In these big moments, most of us shrink from our normally self-assured manner. I asked Dan what percentage of leaders he interviewed were over-confident and how many were under-confident. He believes about three in ten consistently struggle with over-confidence. Most of us have normal levels of confidence until we hit a wall. Then, about seven in ten struggle with under-confidence. We end up striving to construct a narrative of confidence inside ourselves and our team.⁶

BEWARE OF OVERCONFIDENCE

Unfortunately, over time and when left unchecked, confidence can morph into something unhelpful for leaders. This is what we call ego. It fogs our objectivity. It diminishes our logic. As leaders succeed, they become convinced they'll continue to win; some even blindly believe they can do no wrong.

The more we succeed, the larger our ego can grow. Momentum can cause us to look better than we really are. Over time, confidence can be fed by our egos and our egos by our confidence. There's a fine line between confidence and cockiness. In today's world, many among the emerging generation of young professionals see confident leaders cross that line and become arrogant. These leaders don't want to be questioned; they don't want any roadblocks in their way. They can suspect that if someone interrogates them, that person must not believe in their mission. The line is blurred between the organization's progress and people's submission to the leader. This kind of arrogance is nauseating. And this is the one big reason why humility plays a necessary role.

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF HUMILITY

In Jim Collins' classic book, *Good to Great*, he introduced us to "Level Five Leaders." These are the ones who reached the top; the leaders who took their company from being "good" to being "great." His research team was shocked by what they found in these people. He expected those companies to be led by charismatic leaders, with huge personalities and even bigger egos. Instead, he found the opposite. They were leaders with a surprising sense of humility. They had no illusion they'd accomplished a goal alone. Collins wrote that when something went wrong, they looked in the *mirror* and said: "How can I improve to lead this team

better?” When something went right, they looked out the *window* and said: “Look at this team. Look at what they achieved.”⁷

Both confidence and humility are attractive, and doubly so when combined.

Humility makes your confidence believable.

When team members *only* see confidence, they begin to suspect you’re not being honest; some piece of the puzzle is missing. They know all leaders eventually make mistakes, and followers begin wondering: When can I trust you? Confidence alone feels disingenuous.

When you demonstrate humility, you communicate credibility. Humility signals self-awareness and authenticity. A person who’s always confident and has little humility creates suspicions in team members. Not unlike the person who always uses hyperbole to make their point. People stop trusting this kind of leader. They know their leader is human and begin thinking, “You can’t be so sure all the time.” Eventually, they stop taking the leader seriously.

Jason is a manager who faced this challenge last year. He was placed in charge of a team and immediately turned into the equivalent of a motivational speaker while in front of them. He talked about his big vision, about how great everyone was and about how they could not fail. I spoke to his team members shortly after Jason took over. While every one of them appreciated his positive attitude, his certainty did not bode well. They were too savvy about the difficulties they regularly faced and didn’t “buy” Jason’s superficial confidence. He came across as naïve.

Jason needed a reality check.

I consulted with him and suggested he add humility to his magnificent attitude. If his team saw him acknowledge that their objectives were tough and there may just be some long days ahead—adding a word of confidence would have been just what they needed. He would have been believable.

Humility signals transparency and invites reciprocity.

When you are humble, you display your humanity and acknowledge your imperfections. When team members see this, they're likely to volley it right back. Our brains are hardwired to do this. Belonging works from the outside in. When in groups, our brain lights up differently depending on the social cues we exchange with others. When vulnerability cues are sent, the amygdala switches from *protection mode* to *partner mode* in team members. It moves from "fight or flight" norms to understanding and empathy. Humility signals that you are a human first (before you're a boss) and invites others to connect and help. People want to reciprocate with transparency and trust.⁸

Alison Wood Brooks, from Harvard Business School, conducted an experiment that illustrates this. She described two scenarios to people and asked them how they would respond:

1. You are at a train station; it is raining. A stranger approaches you to ask: "Can I borrow your cell phone?"
2. You are at a train station; it is raining. A stranger approaches you to say: "I'm sorry about the rain. Can I borrow your cell phone"?

Later, Brooke asked her respondents how they believed the overall population might respond to this scenario. The vast majority predicted the scenarios wouldn't matter; either way, most people wouldn't give up their cell phone to a stranger. They were wrong. Brooke and her team found that a full 422 percent more people said "yes" in the second scenario than said "yes" in the first. A simple but clear signal of empathy and shared humanity made all the difference in the world. Suddenly, the person asking the question had become real and transparent.⁹

Humility makes you magnetic.

When humility is present alongside confidence it makes the leader easier to follow. It is attractive to people. Sometimes we don't know why we are drawn to humble leaders, but we are. We feel they are reachable, teachable, and touchable, not some prima donna who resides in an ivory tower. As I mentioned earlier, when humility is present trust deepens among team members. When leaders are humble, they pull people toward them instead of pushing them away. NYU Social Neuroscientist Jay Van Bavel says, "The moment you're part of a group, the amygdala tunes in to who's in that group and starts intensely tracking them. These people were strangers before; now they're important to you. It's such a powerful switch; a total reconfiguration of the entire motivational decision-making system. The whole dynamic changes."

I have a theory I call "The Calcutta Paradox."¹⁰ (It's one of our *Habitudes—Images That Form Leadership Habits and Attitudes*®.) What enabled Mother Teresa of Calcutta to attract so many people? It was the fact that she was humble and didn't like attention—that magnetically drew others to her. It was the fact that she *didn't* pursue fame that made her famous.

I believe people possess a sense of fairness inside them. Whenever a leader exaggerates their importance, others tend to want to downsize the inflated description to be more accurate. Similarly, when a leader brushes off their own importance with humility, downplaying their value, others listening see a void and want to fill it.

Andy is a friend of mine who's an author. Whenever I've heard him talk about one of his books, he tends to be humble and underestimate its value. Can you guess what others say when he does this? They want to rave about it, to right-size peoples' understanding. Why? Because the leader didn't do it. People tend to fill what is lacking in a leader's self-description and empty what is too full.

When we brush fame aside, when we downplay our accomplishments, it is winsome and magnetic to people.

Humility welcomes team members to help you lead.

When you're humble you invite the input and insight of those on your team. Working together is not a *contest* in which to compete; it is a *puzzle* you must complete. Eventually, you have other leaders helping you reach a shared goal, not merely hirelings working on your goal.

Years ago, engineer and designer Peter Skillman and his team decided to study teamwork. They experimented with students at Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, and the University of Tokyo, challenging them to build the tallest structure possible using uncooked spaghetti, masking tape, a yard of string and a marshmallow. Skillman's study had less to do with the *task* and more to do with the *participants*. His team also gathered some kindergarten students to attempt the same goal with the same materials. They were testing how team culture emerged among the participants.

Can you guess who built the tallest structure?

In dozens of experiments, the kindergartners built structures that averaged twenty-six inches tall, while the business school students' structures averaged ten inches tall. Later, Skillman had attorneys and CEOs take on the kindergartners—and they lost as well. How did children defeat adults?

1. Adults engaged in what psychologists call “status management.” They became preoccupied with recognition and aware of how they appeared to others.
2. Kindergarten kids engaged in shoulder-to-shoulder exploration. The children didn't care who had the idea or got credit. They focused on solving the problem.¹²

I believe Skillman's experiments are a picture of what natural humility accomplishes. When leaders drop pretense, they create the opportunity for their team to accomplish more than would otherwise be possible.

BOTH OLD AND YOUNG DESIRE HUMILITY IN THEIR LEADERS

Today, educated team members *desire* and often *demand* humility. I know six friends who've recently left their companies due to ego-driven bosses. Not long ago I met with team members who served as part-time and full-time employees in various industries. I asked them about their supervisors, and their responses were telling:

- ▼ "I think my boss just likes hearing himself talk."
- ▼ "My supervisor's ego is ginormous. I've learned to just smile and agree with him. But we all laugh at him behind his back."
- ▼ "I'm already looking for work somewhere else. She doesn't get me and doesn't care."
- ▼ "Everyone seems so fake where I work. I'd rather take less pay and work someplace where they keep it real and show a little authenticity."

These are comments made by staff from among the Millennial Generation and Generation Z. But these young team members aren't the only ones who recognize the problem of leaders who lack humility. I also took advantage of an opportunity to meet with senior citizens (all eighty years old or older) and asked them to reflect on their careers and bosses. Most of these people described their work experience with something like the following:

Over-confident and ego-driven bosses existed back in my day, too. We didn't like them either—but decades ago, we felt we just had to endure them. We didn't want to lose our jobs.

Today, things are a bit different.

The demise of the over-confident leader has been evident all through history. Consider two Roman Emperors, Julius Caesar (101–40 BC) and Augustus (63 BC–AD 14). Julius Caesar and Rome are synonymous. As a military leader, he conquered more territory than Alexander the Great. And he was genuinely better at stepping back from his conquest and organizing what he won. In the end, however, Julius Caesar came to believe that his success was the result of his divine status. His ego blinded him to the conspiracies going on behind his back. Those plots not only ended his career, but his life.

But it didn't have to be this way.

Caesar Augustus was different. He took reign after Julius Caesar and was arguably Rome's most successful manager of ambition and confidence. He led the biggest and most profitable empire in history for more than forty years, and yet, in spite of his success, he modestly referred to himself as Rome's "*primus inter pares*," or "first among equals." Augustine kept a sensible perspective on himself. "Even though he became the undisputed ruler of millions and the richest man in the ancient world, he listened to others and understood the value of moving cautiously and thoughtfully on everything from building roads to conducting wars. His favorite expression was 'festina lente,' or 'make haste slowly.'"¹³

Augustus stands out because this kind of measured ambition plus genuine humility is rare, indeed, when it comes to leaders.

Today, overconfidence and ego show up just as consistently as in the past. Illustrations include Dennis Kozlowski who served as CEO of Tyco; Hank Greenberg, CEO of AIG; George Zimmer,

CEO of Men’s Warehouse; and Sandy Weill, CEO of Citicorp. Look up their stories. They were ambitious conquerors who were brought down by their egos and hubris. In the end, these leaders focused on what flattered instead of what mattered.

A summary of this paradox

| MY CONFIDENCE | MY HUMILITY |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Makes my leadership believable. | 1. Makes my confidence believable. |
| Communicates energy and certainty. | 2. Communicates trustworthiness. |
| Fosters creativity and participation. | 3. Fosters authenticity and participation. |
| Causes team members to be passionate. | 4. Causes team members to be loyal. |
| Is contagious in others. | 5. Is contagious in others. |

HOW TO BE A CONFIDENT YET HUMBLE LEADER

As I close each of the chapters on these eight paradoxes, I will offer some ideas on how you can begin practicing these paradoxes in your own leadership.

1. When in decision-making meetings, argue as if you believe you’re right, but listen as if you believe you’re wrong.¹⁴
2. When in conflict with team members, be willing to lose a few battles to win the war. Predetermine what “hills you’re willing to die on.”
3. Remain teachable in new contexts, even from those under your care. Don’t let your confidence prevent you from improving your own ideas.

4. Refuse to cross the line between confidence and cockiness. Confidence believes you can do the job. Cockiness believes it will be easy.
5. Don't confuse confidence with certainty. You'll frequently have to take action without certainty as a leader. Even when uncertain, remain clear and transparent.
6. Don't let humility become sheepishness. When we're sheepish, we are self-conscious; preoccupied with our own weaknesses. This keeps us from progress.
7. As you meet with teammates, you must know what you don't know and trust in what you do. Be clear on the difference between the two.
8. If you possess a strong ego on the job, take time to list your shortcomings and mistakes. Remind yourself of your humanity by reviewing these regularly.
9. When tempted to boast about what you achieved, instantly turn your focus to a team member and brag about them. Let someone else do your boasting.

Almost thirty years ago, I spoke at a chapel service before a ball-game between the San Diego Padres and the Chicago Cubs. Ryne Sandberg was an all-star second baseman for the Chicago Cubs at the time. And he got paid very well for his skills. Unfortunately, that year Ryne was in a hitting slump and wasn't playing near his potential. He and I talked after the meeting and he confessed to me it really hurt to be doing so poorly but paid so well. He also told me it angered the fans in Chicago. Fans and reporters criticized him for being this highly paid athlete who didn't perform. And the ball club wasn't happy either. It was a difficult time for everyone.

Several weeks later, however, I remember reading how Ryne decided to handle his situation. In addition to improving his swing, he met with the general manager of the Cubs and offered a large chunk of his salary back to the team. Yes—you read that right. He told them he didn't feel right about taking millions of dollars when he wasn't performing up to his potential. He wanted to give some money back. Wow.

Needless to say, Ryne won the fans over by this act. Those who had booed him—were now praising him . . . even before he got his good swing back. Why? He assumed a humble position (even as he remained confident that he would regain his previous hitting prowess) and won their hearts.

Humility doesn't mean weakness. Next generation leaders are strong and confident—but they're secure enough to see beyond themselves. They're not worried about their image. They know their value, but it isn't about them. They have nothing to prove, nothing to lose and nothing to hide. The mission is bigger than they are.

THINK IT THROUGH, TALK IT OVER

- ▼ Do you know leaders who balance these two qualities well?
- ▼ Who do you know who struggles with either of the two?
- ▼ What do you struggle with in your leadership: humility or confidence?
- ▼ Why do you think keeping a balance between the two is so challenging?