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## The importance of humility in practicing law

**H**umility. We often hear about it, whether we're discussing human interactions in the context of business or world relations.

It is a rather elusive virtue often in short supply, yet it is essential in our ability to take meaningful steps forward in many areas of our lives.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines "humility" as "the quality or state of not thinking that you are better than other people."

Although it seems simple enough, it is exceedingly rare to see true humility in action. Given where we are as a profession and as a society, we simply cannot afford to underestimate the importance of humility in all that we do.

As one of the core emotional intelligence attributes, it is a key component in both transforming our organizations and in bettering ourselves as professionals.

So, what does humility look like? It means we put others before ourselves and strive to get beyond the surface in our communications in an effort to connect with other people in a more thoughtful, meaningful way.

It is appreciating the importance of hearing others' points of view, thereby creating an environment conducive to sharing viewpoints, one where everyone feels like they are truly being heard. Listening plays an essential part in the success of this dynamic, and true collaboration is a byproduct of the process. It is creating a sense of "we," not just "me" and "you."

Humility is also understanding that we don't know everything there is to know, and that others are able to contribute just as much, if not more, as we can to a particular situation. It also means that we are not always prioritizing ourselves, our wants and desires. Instead, our attention is consistently focused on the needs, wisdom and contributions of others and what is best for the collective whole.

With humility, we recognize that we are not perfect, and we make a concerted effort to conduct ourselves in alignment with that knowledge. It means that we have come to terms with that aspect of ourselves, and it is a willingness to acknowledge our shortcomings to others.

There are many lessons to be gleaned through the process of making mistakes, and it is through this imperfection that we experience a sense of vulnerability. By being able to convey this sentiment to others, we have an ability to relate to them and to understand different sides to issues and various points of view.

This, in turn, makes us more effective in our interpersonal communications in the long run, since we project a sense of accessibility, approachability and camaraderie that is essential in successful relationship-building and decision-making.

We can't overestimate the importance of humility in our client relationships, and it's a critical element in effective client service. Our clients look to us as wise and knowledgeable counselors in our respective practice areas and expect us to effortlessly demonstrate that they

### PARADIGM SHIFT



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chose wisely when retaining us as their counsel.

Whether they express it or not, they also expect us to strike that extremely delicate balance between consistently demonstrating our quiet confidence and displaying a healthy dose of humility.

While clients don't set out to hire wimpy lawyers, they most certainly don't want to be subjected to needless arrogance. It's our responsibility to be the very best practitioners we can be, to believe in ourselves and in our ability to do our jobs effectively.

At the same time, we must carefully modulate our behavior and attitude appropriately and

make sure that our priorities lie first and foremost with our clients, rather than ourselves. When interacting with them, we should always ask ourselves if we are listening to what they are saying and reacting accordingly, rather than merely telling them what we want them to hear and what makes us feel good about ourselves.

True humility means a lot less talking and a lot more listening.

Humility is also an extremely important component of effective leadership. The best leaders intuitively understand there are myriad ways to achieve success, and it is often a product of synthesizing the thoughts and ideas of those whom they lead, rather than any independent epiphany the leader may experience.

Projecting humility is a critical part of engendering the type of dialogue and sharing of ideas necessary to arrive at a desired result. Having that likeability factor and being able to instill confidence in others through empathy inspire others to act and are the hallmarks of a truly effective leader.

Ultimately, humility is a truly selfless act, not a weakness by any means. In fact, it takes a great amount of strength and resolve to consistently demonstrate humility, both professionally and personally. And just as it is abundantly clear when we are seeing humility in action, it is likewise patently obvious when it is absent.

As C.S. Lewis so wisely stated, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather thinking about yourself less."