# THE EXTRAORDINARY POWER LEADER HUMILITY

Thriving Organizations– Great Results WITH FOREWORD AND GUEST CHAPTER BY

# **ALAN MULALLY**

FORMER CEO OF FORD MOTOR COMPANY AND BOEING COMMERCIAL AIRPLANES

MARILYN GIST, PhD

# To leaders everywhere who care to serve the greater good and support the dignity of all stakeholders

In honor of family, friends, and the Source of all Life

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### **Foreword**

While CEO of Ford Motor Company and Boeing Commercial Airplanes, I had the honor to lead the work of hundreds of thousands of people and coordinate with our many stakeholders. I know firsthand how important it is for leaders to have humility. And it is going to be even more important for leaders of the future—and for our society of the future. That's because, more than ever before, we need to be able to work together worldwide to maintain our quality of life and to resolve big, important global and local issues. Humility, especially leader humility, is the foundation for working together in a healthy and high-performance way.

Yet, in my experience, leader humility is relatively uncommon. I have often seen leaders who have more humility than what they exhibit when actually leading. I think this is part of the leadership model still very alive today where we assume the leader is supposed to know all and use command and control. That is also the leadership model still embraced by many stakeholders: investors, suppliers, government, and so on. I believe this will only change when all the stakeholders move toward a new model for the leader of the future—one of being a facilitator and coach, leading with humility, love, and service. This change in the leadership model will come

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only when we see more examples of it delivering better value for all the stakeholders and the greater good. So, this book will really help because it shows a better way to lead and provides powerful examples that can be widely understood.

Leadership humility enhances and enables inclusion, participation, commitment, innovation, safety, excitement, discipline, caring, adaptability, and continuous improvement—to name just a few of its positive outcomes! It is at the heart of the operating process and Expected Behaviors in my Working Together Management System<sup>TM</sup>, which creates a smart and safe organization and one that increases quality, productivity, and performance, while reducing costs, for the benefit of all stakeholders and the greater good.

For the past five years, Marilyn Gist has been a colleague, friend, and kindred spirit because of *who* she is, *what* she does, and *how* she does it. She has a long and distinguished record of successful service in the formation and development of other leaders. I might add that I did extensive research before deciding whom I believed in and wanted to work with. Marilyn did the same, and we selected each other. We came to understand early on that we are very aligned in our desire to serve and further contribute to developing leaders.

I have gotten to know her through our work, which has involved teaching, writing, and many conversations on the important responsibilities of leadership: compelling visions, comprehensive strategies for achieving them, and relentless implementation. We also agree that who you are is going to have the most important contribution to your leadership success. The main elements

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of this are your authenticity, humility, love, and service. Marilyn's character and competencies are wonderful and inspirational. Our working together has produced some great results for leadership formation and development of students, faculty, and publications on Working Together and leadership.

Marilyn is exceptionally qualified to write this book. In addition to her extensive, most successful career in educating others around leadership, her own personal and leadership humility inform her understanding of the subject. Readers will benefit because, of all the things Marilyn could share and teach us, the power of humility is at the top of the list. And it is humility in general, and the extended power of leadership humility, that enable everything required for us all to work together for the greater good, enjoy each other, and have fun.

I truly like this book! It is focused, comprehensive, and compelling. It's easy to read and most understandable. Our world needs humble leaders more than ever to help us deal with issues that are so big, important, pressing, and personal. Only by working together are we going to not only save our world, but create a world based on respect for human dignity, and inclusion and growth for all of us.

Marilyn's definition of leadership humility is simple and clear: "Leader humility is a tendency to feel and display a deep regard for others' dignity." It is a way to be. It is a way to live. It is right. It is useful. It enables everything. The book does a great job of showing us what humility really is—and what it is not. It is certainly not weakness or meekness. Genuine humility is a sign of confidence and strength. The model advanced in this book is terrific because it is based on the three questions we all have

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about those who lead and shows the six keys to demonstrating humility, so that we support others' dignity. The model is comprehensive and actionable. I believe that when leaders read this, they will be compelled to try the keys described. Then they will see positive results and further develop their leadership humility. This will generate continuous leadership improvement, effectiveness, and happiness—for the leader and all of the stakeholders. We need and want the hearts and minds of everyone to move forward together.

In addition to the model of leader humility, part of what makes this book so valuable are the experiences, observations, and advice offered from the CEOs that Marilyn interviewed. These are great and successful leaders of great organizations. The leaders are diverse and inspirational, and they lead with humility. They are very special leaders who focus on the greater good.

Marilyn has captured a vital enabling element of the leader of the future—humility! This book explains just why this is so important. Equally important, it shows us how to do it. Appreciating and improving leader humility is a great opportunity to enhance our leadership service. It is essential so that we can engage everyone's hearts and minds and work together to move us forward positively in our rapidly changing world.



Alan Mulally

Former president and CEO, Ford Motor Company; former president and CEO, Boeing Commercial Airplanes; former president, Boeing Information, Space and Defense Systems

### **Preface**

Seattle has spawned many organizations with global impact whose success and innovation have changed the way we live and work. The city thrives on energies from Amazon, Boeing, Costco, Microsoft, Starbucks, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to name only a few. It is in this rich climate that I have been fortunate to lead business executive programs at two universities for the past two decades. This gave me the opportunity to work with a number of CEOs who are brilliant leaders. I have been inspired by their commitment to leading well and privileged to see the positive effects they have on followers and organizational outcomes. I have also seen the negative effects caused by many other leaders—and I have made and learned from mistakes of my own.

Over time, it became clear to me that there is one variable at the heart of leadership that is far too often overlooked. That variable is *humility*. It guides a leader's behaviors by placing central importance on the fact that *others' dignity* matters. This book shines a light on this underrecognized subject. It explains why leader humility is so needed—and it shows how leaders can improve performance by knowing and using the six keys to leader humility that others monitor very closely. This is not merely my opinion. There is sound research on the value

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of humility in leadership. And there are great leaders who prove that humility works.

It is timely and urgent that we talk about this topic. Events on our world stage highlight issues of character and behavior among leaders as they grapple with very complex problems. In the United States and abroad, many people are appalled by the arrogance and lack of integrity we see at the highest levels of *government*. Nearly all feel dismayed by our leaders' collective dysfunction as we face global challenges like a viral pandemic, trade, immigration, climate change, and information accuracy. Most people want a better approach to leadership.

The need for better business leadership is equally urgent. Businesses face many complex challenges: volatile economies, technological change, global markets for trade and labor, cybersecurity, impacts of climate change, and a younger generation that is jaded from past corporate misdeeds and adept at using social media to expose missteps. Business executives need to engage well with employees, customers, shareholders, community activists, and regulators who often have strong and conflicting views. In order to succeed, leaders must be able to bring divergent groups together and forge consensus on a path forward. Power plays, personal attacks, and harsh elbows work entirely against this. And without leadership that can align these stakeholders, businesses can't generate profits, sustain growth, support diversity, innovate, or contribute positively to the needs of society.

Fundamentally, leadership requires working together. We need leaders who can do this well to resolve our global and domestic challenges, whether in business, nonprofits, or government. And leader humility—a tendency to

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feel and display deep regard for others' dignity—is essential for working together well with all stakeholders.

It is now so important for us to understand the imperative of leader humility for working together that I was moved to write this book to show its extraordinary power as a way forward. As part of this project, I interviewed a select group of twelve prominent presidents and CEOs of major organizations who embrace a humble approach to leadership. My sample is small, yet compelling: these leaders represent dynamic companies, most of which are global in scope with widely recognized brand names. Collectively, these leaders employ hundreds of thousands of people, manage or generate trillions of dollars of revenue each year, and contribute significantly to domestic and/or global productivity. The richness of the book is that it draws not only on my experience but on the collective wisdom of these highly successful leaders. The book also discusses how leader humility applies to large organizations as well as to smaller ones.

If you want to lead well, this book is designed for you. The material here is appropriate for current leaders of all levels across industry, government, and nonprofit organizations. It is also appropriate for aspiring leaders, as well as for graduate students of business, educational administration, and public affairs. If you work in leadership development, this book holds content that is important for change agents and organizational leaders who select and develop leaders. And if you are another type of stakeholder, such as someone who works for leaders or chooses leaders by voting, this book should help you by sharpening your understanding of effective versus ineffective leader behaviors.

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Chapters 1 through 3 provide an essential foundation for understanding leader humility. They show why it is important for working together by linking it to human dignity. They include a model of leader humility that is derived from three questions people ask or wonder about leaders and the behaviors that people monitor when forming their own answers. Chapters 4 through 6 take the three questions one at a time, explaining specific behaviors (keys) that demonstrate leader humility. These chapters tie behaviors that are under a leader's control to leadership responsibilities—such as attracting and retaining talent, diversity management, and so on—and provide a list of dos and don'ts. Ideas for action are included in most chapters throughout the book.

The third section of the book brings the material together and shows how it is integrated in practice. Chapter 7 is guest-authored by Alan Mulally, who explains his well-regarded Working Together Management System and shows how it is anchored in humility. Chapter 8 illustrates how these ideas scale to smaller organizations and how leader humility generates thriving versus toxic organizations. It also provides examples of organizational policies that support others' dignity. Chapter 9 offers my observations on factors that led to humility formation across the CEOs I interviewed, suggests how it can be developed in adult leaders, and provides reflection, questions, and exercises for developing personal humility. Bios of each of the leaders I interviewed are included here. In chapter 10, the book closes by discussing the relevance of this material for business and beyond.

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In my experience, most leaders—and aspiring leaders—want to be highly effective. This book holds essential information to help you do that, because leader humility is subtle yet very powerful for working together. It is the secret that many leaders need to create thriving organizations and great results.

Marilyn Gist Seattle, Washington

#### CHAPTER ONE

# Leading as Relationship

Leadership is about inspiring people to do what's needed. If you look over your shoulder and no one's following you, you are not a leader.

-Roger Ferguson, president and CEO, TIAA

Leadership requires working together. Being in relationship and working with others is how we make progress. And a leader's biggest challenge is to inspire in others their enthusiastic engagement with a shared goal, whether that is to launch a new product, advance an important cause, improve financial performance, or resolve global challenges.

So how can leaders work most effectively with others? When we think about factors that drive organizational performance, we tend to think about innovation, capital, and strong competitive strategy. When we talk about motivating people, conversation typically turns to rewards and compensation. Largely unnoticed is leader humility—an extraordinarily powerful way of influencing those around you to volunteer their full support to achieving shared goals. Collins (2001) demonstrated that the best results were achieved by organizations whose

leaders combined strong drive with personal humility, but some leaders find the idea of humility to be at odds with strong leadership. They think of humility as meekness or weakness and see it as a deficiency, overlooking its real promise.

What if we consider humility in terms of certain behaviors? Because leadership requires working together, what if we consider humility in terms of how we relate to others? Let me define it in a way that is relevant for everyone who leads:

# Leader humility is a tendency to feel and display a deep regard for others' dignity.

We can still be strong and have high standards. And we can demonstrate respect for others' sense of self-worth.

#### **Leaders Create the Container**

Leader humility—supporting others' dignity—improves working together because it is the essential foundation for healthy relationships. Leaders create the *container* for how work is done. A physical container is an object in which we hold, mix, or store something. In a similar way, leaders create the environments or cultures in which we do our work: the people, processes, and practices for how we interact.

Leader humility is the container for healthy relationships with all stakeholders (such as direct reports, coworkers or bosses, legislators, media, vendors, community leaders, or customers). When leaders display humility, a tendency to regard others' dignity as important, the container created for work emphasizes respect for everyone. Interactions become comfortable, and information

is freely shared. Because working together is enjoyable, people are motivated to collaborate on shared goals.

When leaders lack humility, when they frequently disregard others' dignity, the container for work becomes unhealthy. Simply put, violating others' dignity harms relationships. Those who feel disrespected become cautious around the leader, sometimes withholding important information if they feel the leader is critical of them. As resentment grows, stakeholders are less inclined to lend their full support. Working together suffers as tensions build. Progress slows and political behavior often grows.

Stakeholders have their own important worries—things like fairness, the amount of change they are being asked to embrace, and their own personal goals. When you think about it, people have three prime questions when facing a new leader (see figure 1). Whether they are asked aloud or merely observed, others evaluate leaders on these dimensions when deciding whether they want to follow along and to what extent.

Curiosity about these questions flows from the observers' personal concerns and is tied to their core sense of dignity, or self-worth. When the answers are favorable, people grow inspired and eager to engage with a leader.



FIGURE 1. Three Prime Questions People Have of Leaders.

Favorable answers allow the leader to connect with the whole person—mind, heart, and spirit—so that people want to join in the quest and give it their all. Yet when the answers are *un*favorable, people tend to withdraw or resist.

Has it always been like this? Were these questions always important? Or has something shifted over the past decade or two?

The challenge comes from society's expectations of a traditional leader. The top three words that we think of for leaders would include things like "accomplished," "decisive," "strong." We think of leaders as action-oriented, driven, type A people. These are very different times. Leaders are being put more into glass houses than ever before. We are being scrutinized, called to task more, and held accountable. People can go on Glass Door to rate their leader. —PHYLLIS CAMPBELL, CHAIRWOMAN OF JPMORGAN CHASE, PACIFIC NORTHWEST

I do think it's changing now. There's a lot more focus on transparency in leadership. The presence of the internet is making that happen because people can quickly report what's going on. Because they can tweet or email, we can see inside organizations. So, there's a shift away from being autocratic toward more servant leadership. Still, there are way too many leaders using the older approach. —HOWARD BEHAR, FORMER PRESIDENT OF STARBUCKS COFFEE COMPANY INTERNATIONAL

Is there evidence that most leaders are missing the mark? There is. In a consolidated report, Forbes Councils (Castle 2018) shared results from multiple surveys they had conducted of their communities of prominent executives

and entrepreneurs. The results identified leadership as the number three challenge facing business executives (just behind generating revenue and time). Leadership was found to be the single most significant concern by 57 percent of Forbes Human Resources Council, 50 percent of Forbes Nonprofit Council, and 38 percent of Forbes Technology Council. Leadership dominated the concerns among executives in computer and technology industries (36 percent) and was named as the most important concern among VPs (33 percent) and C-suite executives (30 percent). Finally, leadership was identified as the greatest challenge by 42 percent of executives in companies with fifty-one to five hundred employees—a substantial portion of the US private workforce. So, what the executives in Forbes Councils know is that our collective competence in leadership is far below what we need to manage the business challenges at hand.

You might be wondering if this applies to you and how it relates to leader humility. Let me share just two examples of leadership challenges that affect productivity in most organizations: evidence on low employee engagement and turnover costs:

1. In a random sample of more than thirty thousand employees, Gallup (Harter 2018) reported that US employee engagement had risen to 34 percent—still quite low, but the highest level since it began reporting on this. Thirteen percent of employees reported being actively disengaged (indicating miserable work experiences), and 53 percent were "not engaged." In other words, 66 percent of employees were described

as not being "cognitively and emotionally connected to their work and workplace; they will usually show up to work and do the minimum required but will quickly leave their company for a slightly better offer." This results in a huge loss of potential productivity—not only because of the minimal performance of this 66 percent but also because of the negative effect they often have on others' work and the culture in the workplace. The fact that nearly two-thirds of employees are doing the minimum required on their jobs (and are willing to leave) implies that most leaders are not creating healthy containers for working together. Because leader humility is the container for healthy relationships, this poses a significant opportunity: imagine the productivity gain if we could generate even 20 to 30 percent more employee engagement with our collective goals.

2. Talent matters. And attracting and retaining talent is another important leadership issue. McKinsey & Company (2017) reported that top talent can provide a 400 to 800 percent boost in productivity over that of average employees, with the wider gap pertaining to jobs with high complexity (such as software developers, top medical professionals, and managers dealing with complex information or interactions). Yet the best employees have the greatest opportunity to leave. When leaders understand how to recruit and retain talented employees, there is a significant upside benefit. Unfortunately,

many do not recognize the importance of leader humility for this. For example, in a large-scale study of departures, Work Institute (Sears 2017) found that 75 percent of the reason employees leave (including workplace culture and leader behaviors) could have been prevented by managers. In other words, most turnover is caused when leaders create unhealthy containers. This significantly affects the bottom line: Catalyst (2018) estimated turnover costs at \$536 billion per year in the United States. This reflects the costs of recruiting, onboarding and training, weak engagement while employed, and loss of productivity from the unfilled role.

In addition to these examples, new demands on business leaders are requiring them to expand their leadership competence. Addressing these effectively will require working together. Economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic presents new challenges, as well as new opportunities, as industries reshape themselves. Leaders face dramatically new financial needs and competitive forces, as well as large-scale job displacement and the need for retraining employees. Technologies like artificial intelligence and genetic science also are poised to cause major changes in work and markets in the coming decade. And urgent factors at the interface between business and society are greatly affected by commerce, calling for business leaders who can represent and integrate the interests of all stakeholders. These include the impact of travel on global health, climate change, trade imbalances, wealth disparities (and resulting political instability), globalization of markets and backlash against immigration, and the use (abuse) of communications technology.

Although some challenges affect certain businesses more than others, it will be important for all leaders to guide their organizations in new ways. Some leaders focus so much on analytical factors involved in optimizing profit margins that they neglect the human factors that are actually driving results. And most important is leader humility because it is the container for healthy relationships—for working together effectively. Fortunately, we do see some leaders making progress in this arena:

On the West Coast, I think we tend to see businesses that align our actions with our values. This has emboldened business leaders to be more values-driven as opposed to simply focusing on shorter-term issues. Airlines are people-based businesses. Investors want high asset utilization and high returns and so forth, and I was drawn to the industry because there is fantastic algebra that a person with an analytical orientation can spend a career optimizing.

But then there's the human side of the business, and that raises the question of which is more important—the algebra or the culture? I think that people have to win. If they feel you have their back, and you give them the tools to work challenges, they will give it their all, and they will help the business prosper and succeed. That is the reason that Alaska is still here while so many other airlines both larger and smaller than us have failed. It's our people. —BRAD TILDEN, CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT, AND CEO OF ALASKA AIR GROUP

So why aren't more leaders successful? The most promising path to optimizing organizational performance is to get people to align and put their very best energies behind a shared plan. Securing this type of alignment today responds better to leader influence and inspiration than control. Most leaders have vision and drive for results—as well as power. Ordinarily, power is used in one of two ways: through coercion (command and control) or through transaction (rewards and punishment, carrot or stick). This works up to a point but is often limited because people resent being coerced, and they see the transactional approach as somewhat manipulative. Ordinary power can earn the compliance of stakeholders. However, by supporting others' dignity, leader humility is extraordinarily powerful for engaging others' hearts and spirits, drawing out their best contributions. Many leaders still emphasize control, because too few understand the power of leader humility to inspire others and navigate the interpersonal dynamics and conflicting opinions on pressing issues. Schein and Schein (2018) called for humble leadership to replace the transactional approach with one that is more personal in order to build more open and trusting relationships.

### **Creating Gracious Space**

Shining a light on this begins by putting ourselves in others' shoes. Think back to the three prime questions people have about leaders: Who Are You, Where Are We Going, and Do You See Me? Rather than relying on command and control to gain support, or the use of fear and intimidation as motivators, leaders with humility create a more gracious space for the dignity of others. By

understanding and honoring the needs of others, leaders with humility gain more support because stakeholders become more engaged.

How do humble leaders do this? The answer begins with recognizing that leaders are always being watched by others. What leaders say and do is scrutinized, and their behavior provides the evidence that answers the three prime questions others have. In aggregate, the answers to these questions form the impression in others' minds of a leader's humility. So, although my own opinion of my humility is useful, my stakeholders' judgments are critical because their assessment determines how well we will work together.

Recalling the three prime questions people have about leaders, let's consider a mirror image of three prime answers that are provided by leaders. These answers determine whether others find that leader humility exists. Figure 2 previews this relationship and how it affects others' dignity. It shows that, as a leader, my own behaviors signal "Who I Am" (as a person), so these behaviors provide answers to people wanting to know: "Who Are You?" Similarly, "The Direction I Set" (for others to follow) and "How I Treat You" provide answers to questions about "Where Are We Going?" and "Do You See Me?" As will be developed in later chapters, my interactions with you around those prime questions will either support or weaken your sense of dignity, or self-worth.

To the extent that I create a gracious space for your dignity—a healthy container for working together—you will feel enthusiastic and engaged. And if I damage your dignity, odds are good that you will withdraw your support or resist my leadership. My behavior—and your



**FIGURE 2.** Relationships between Leader Behaviors, Leader Humility, and Others' Dignity.

response to it—will determine how productive we will be together. Therefore, leader humility has a lot to do with how effective a leader can be.

Leader humility, creating a gracious space for others' dignity, is a game changer. It is not the only thing leaders need to do, but it is the critical foundation for working well with others. As a great example of this, consider one of the toughest cases of performance management in business history. The best-selling book American Icon, by Bryce Hoffman (2012), chronicles the rescue and turnaround of the Ford Motor Company from near bankruptcy to strong success following the Great Recession of 2008. The hero in this story is Alan Mulally, former president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, who took over as CEO of Ford in its decline. Mulally applied a management approach he had developed and used at Boeing, which he calls the Working Together Management System. By using this system, Ford became the only major US automobile manufacturer to survive the threat of bankruptcy during that period without federal bailout money.

Like other strong CEOs, Alan helped Ford craft a compelling vision and comprehensive strategy to move toward success. However, vision and strategy do not go far unless leaders rouse people to join them in implementation. Mulally transformed an organization that was failing (losing \$17 billion the year he arrived) into a dynamic one by creating a container for full employee and union engagement with his "One Ford" plan. Along with regular progress reviews, Mulally's specific approach emphasized what he calls "Expected Behaviors." These begin with "People first" and "Everyone is included," and add "Respect, listen, help, and appreciate each other."

Part of the page-turning excitement in Hoffman's book comes from his reports of how Mulally earned the trust of jaded employees because he personally delivered and accepted nothing less than these behaviors from everyone on his team. In a short period of time, Mulally galvanized a company of more than three hundred thousand employees to move Ford from failure to profitability, and he was ranked by *Fortune* as number three among "The World's 50 Greatest Leaders (2014)."

Mulally shares more about the Working Together Management System in chapter 7. He faced *tremendous* challenges as he pursued his leadership goals. Do you relate to any of these issues he experienced that negatively affect performance?

- Weak sales/strained customer relations
- People who do not collaborate when they should
- Lackluster morale among employees
- Leaks to the media about internal problems
- Poor alignment with labor unions and their expectations

- Declining brand reputation
- Challenging government oversight
- Managers who intimidate peers or direct reports
- Unreliable information because people are being self-protective

Mulally's approach of "Everyone is included" showed humility because it acknowledged that others make important contributions and that it takes everyone giving their best to optimize an organization's results. He also showed deep humility by holding himself and the entire leadership team accountable for behaviors that "respect, listen, help, and appreciate others." This created a culture where others' dignity was supported.

Understanding this dynamic is so important that I personally interviewed a select group of twelve current or former presidents and CEOs. My goal is to show that *leader humility is not a minor principle* that works only in rare or unusual places, so I need to show its highly successful use in many organizations you will recognize. Although my sample is small, it is robust.

The CEOs interviewed belong to a somewhat rare set of leaders who are commended by employees, peers, and/or press reports not only for excellence but for leader humility. They represent highly successful companies with global reach and widely recognized brand names. In total, the organizations represented here employ hundreds of thousands of people and manage or generate trillions of dollars of revenue each year. These leaders have significant impact on goods and services we consume,

contribute substantially to our domestic and global economies, and represent a cross section of industries, government, and nonprofit organizations. Their success is strong evidence that leader humility works.

By default, then, most of these are large businesses. I could have selected from many smaller companies, but they would lack the name recognition needed here. Still, leader humility and working together are relevant to organizations of any size, and chapter 8 specifically explains how the principles that work for these large organizations also apply to small and midsized organizations.

The purpose of this book is to illustrate the value of leader humility. Toward that end, I will be conveying much advice and experience from each of these exceptional leaders. All quotes from them have been taken directly from our interviews. I mention their titles and affiliations only when they are first quoted in the text in order to minimize repetition; subsequent quotes are attributed to them by name only. You have already heard thoughts from three of them in this chapter. Let me provide preliminary introductions to all twelve interviewees in table 1. Chapter 9 briefly shares their exceptional bios, along with personal statements on how they developed the humility that guides them as leaders. Additional information about each of them is available on the internet.

We can assume that leaders and aspiring leaders want to be very effective. And because leaders are typically high achievers, many want to be exceptional. This book holds essential information to help them achieve that. Leader humility improves the employee experience tremendously. This generates higher levels of employee engagement and performance, and lower turnover. And leader humility helps resolve conflicts and forge consensus across stakeholders. Humility also supports a healthy culture of innovation and safeguards a glowing brand reputation. Humility is, in fact, the secret of great success that so many leaders need.

This basic process of creating a healthy container for working together—a gracious space that supports others' dignity—is so little understood that the next two chapters provide needed explanation. Chapter 2 further explains how humility is a strength, not a weakness. Then it shows humility's potency and provides a model of leader humility. Importantly, leaders can control their own behaviors and improve organizational performance by displaying favorably who they are (admirable character, such as integrity and balanced ego), setting compelling directions (vision and strategy that is for the greater common good), and treating others well (inclusiveness and developmental focus). Chapter 3 provides a deeper understanding of human dignity and why leader humility is so important for great results.

Let's pause to consider the following "Ideas for Action" (a section found at the end of most chapters) to help you apply this material to your own situation. Then, as we proceed, let's draw on the advice and experience of the CEO interviewees listed in table 1.

#### **IDEAS FOR ACTION**

- 1. What is your most pressing leadership challenge?
- 2. Assess how well you work together with stakeholders:
  - **a.** Make a list of all those affected by your decisions and actions.
  - **b.** Where do you draw the boundary for who is inside and who is outside?
  - c. Are all stakeholders included (inside)? If not, what judgment guides your decision that some are outside?
- 3. Think of two leaders you follow—one you admire and one you don't. In what ways have you wondered about them in ways that relate to the three prime questions (Who Are You? Where Are We Going? Do You See Me?)? How did you respond when the answers seemed favorable? Unfavorable?
- 4. Consider how your stakeholders evaluate those questions about you. Which stakeholders would answer favorably about you? If some would feel unfavorable, what can you do to improve?

**TABLE 1.** CEO Interviewees and Affiliations.

NAME	TITLES	ORGANIZATIONS	LOCATIONS
Orlando Ashford	President	Holland America Line	Seattle
Howard Behar	Former president	Starbucks Cofee Company International	Seattle
Phyllis Campbell	Chair	JPMorgan Chase, Pacific Northwest	Seattle, New York
Roger Ferguson	President and CEO	Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association (TIAA)	Washington, DC
Sally Jewell	<ul><li>(a) Former secretary</li><li>(b) Former CEO</li></ul>	<ul><li>(a) US Department of the Interior</li><li>(b) REI Corporation</li></ul>	<ul><li>(a) Washington, DC</li><li>(b) Seattle</li></ul>
Dick Johnson	President and CEO	Foot Locker	New York
Alan Mulally	(a) Former president and CEO	(a) Ford Motor Company	(a) Detroit (b), (c) Seattle
	(b) Former president and CEO	(b) Boeing Commercial Airplanes	(b), (c) scattle
	(c) Former president	(c) Boeing Infor- mation, Space and Defense Systems	
Jeff Musser	CEO	Expeditors International	Seattle
John Noseworthy, MD	Former president and CEO	Mayo Clinic	Minneapolis
Jim Sinegal	Cofounder and former CEO	Costco Wholesale Corporation	Seattle
Brad Tilden	Chairman, president, and CEO	Alaska Air Group	Seattle
Jim Weber	CEO	Brooks Running	Seattle

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

# The Heart of Humility

A leader's humility allows other people to see that they are important—that they matter.

—Dick Johnson, president and CEO, Foot Locker

After hearing a senior executive's keynote speech, several people commented on how inspiring she was. As they talked about what they had learned from her, I asked if they thought she was a humble leader. One man resisted that idea, saying the speaker *had* to be confident to achieve as much as she had—that women and minorities, especially, can't be too meek but must show strength as leaders to be taken seriously and get ahead. I then asked if he thought the speaker was arrogant. "No. Some of her comments made sure you knew about her accomplishments, but she was light-handed about that. She earned your respect, but she wasn't arrogant." This discussion shows that people can be confused about what leader humility means, so it is important to show how it relates to meekness, confidence, and arrogance.

### What Leader Humility Is Not

To help clear some of the confusion, let's address first what leader humility is not. Dictionaries typically offer two definitions for humility: one entails meekness and the other indicates the absence of arrogance and excessive pride. Neither definition really communicates what leader humility is. Let me assure you that leaders with humility can be strong and confident. And, by avoiding arrogance, they stake out the sweet spot of confidence, as shown in figure 3. Consider this CEO's observation:

I can see where this could be a complicated question. Some people see humility as being aware of your weaknesses but not necessarily aware of your strengths. In that case, it wouldn't be good for a leader. But there's nothing weak about humility in leadership. It's actually a sign of confidence. When you connect humility in dealing with people with a strong sense of purpose and direction, it's a great superpower for leadership.

Arrogance is not the same and should not be confused with confidence. Arrogance overwhelms others and shuts them down. Confidence creates a frame or umbrella of leadership that guides people. Often, arrogance reflects serious insecurities, while confidence can suggest steadfast, informed conviction. Business is a team sport, and teams always do best when people give their all in an environment of trust and support.

—JIM WEBER, CEO, BROOKS RUNNING

In a similar vein, Morris, Brotheridge, and Urbanski (2005, 1331) defined humility as "that crest of human excellence between arrogance and lowliness." Figure 3 depicts this relationship; below, I explain how humility relates to meekness and arrogance.



FIGURE 3. Leader Humility in Context of Common Terms.

### **Leader Humility Is Not Meekness**

The idea of humility as meekness has faith-based origins. Some studies interpret humility as a view of oneself that assumes something greater than oneself exists (Ou et al. 2014). This may imply a belief in God or a specific religious doctrine that suggests humbling oneself before a higher power. But meekness is not always faith based. It can reflect a cultural upbringing that discouraged asserting one's views—or personality factors like general shyness or a lack of confidence.

Regardless of the cause, when people think of humility only as meekness, it's easy to see this as inappropriate for leadership. Leaders with humility need to be confident and strong enough to set direction, take reasonable risks, and bear responsibility. They need to appreciate their skills and accomplishments—and recognize their limitations. Leader humility does not imply meekness.

There is a thin line between confidence and conceit. A person in a large job of leadership has to walk that line. You must have confidence, but you can't cross the line. I know what I know, and I know what I *don't* know—and I'm very comfortable with both. It's impossible to know everything in business today. If I meet a leader like

that, I short that stock! I have to know my limitations. Otherwise, I put the organization at risk by making decisions where I don't know what I'm doing.

—ORLANDO ASHFORD, PRESIDENT, HOLLAND AMERICA LINE

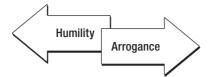
#### **Absence of Arrogance**

The other common definition of humility—the absence of arrogance and excessive pride—is relevant to leader humility (but does not fully define leader humility). Let's first see how it is relevant. Among the CEOs interviewed, this comment sums it up well and is illustrated in figure 4:

Arrogance is like a cancer. It permeates the whole organization. It's a horrible thing. Actions speak for themselves. You don't need braggadocio. Humility is necessary. —JIM SINEGAL, COFOUNDER AND FORMER CEO, COSTCO WHOLESALE CORPORATION

Arrogance is a turnoff for many (perhaps most) people. Excessive pride overshadows the value and accomplishments of others. If a leader's ego is too big, he or she will have trouble gaining commitment and broad support from those who are needed for success (peers, employees, other stakeholders). Arrogant leaders signal their sense of superiority through behaviors like the following:

- Persistent name-dropping
- Cutting people off in conversation
- Excessive displays of status and perk
- Insulting, bullying, or being condescending to others



**FIGURE 4.** Direction of Humility Compared with Arrogance.

- Taking credit for others' work
- Blaming or refusing to accept responsibility for their own mistakes
- Frequently boasting about themselves (or friends, family, successes)

Arrogant leaders tend to rely on power and commands to get the work done. This creates a climate of fear and intimidation. If leaders can exert direct control, this may succeed. Even then, while followers may comply, they will dislike being treated this way because it trivializes their own dignity. Often they will resist the leader's direction by limiting their productivity, leaking negative information to the media, or leaving the organization. So, arrogance should be avoided, and humble leaders are not arrogant. Yet defining humility as the absence of excessive pride or arrogance fails to show its real power in leadership.

### What Leader Humility Is

If leader humility is not meekness or arrogance, then what *is* it? Some authors suggest that humility shows up in our interactions with others, based on our perspective about ourselves and the relationship (Nielsen, Marrone,

and Ferraro 2014). Others observe that humble people seem to lack an excessive focus on themselves (Hess and Ludwig 2017; Nielsen and Marrone 2018). These authors frame humility as being related to how we see ourselves and how we see others. But what *is* that exactly? What is *present* when others see a leader's humility as opposed to what is absent? Can we state what is present in a way that is practical for leaders, while being consistent with existing definitions and writing about humility?

#### Regard for Others' Dignity

I define leader humility as a tendency to *feel* and *display* a deep regard for others' dignity.\* The word *regard* implies respect or admiration; it is derived from the French verb *regarder*, which means to take notice of, look at, observe. While arrogance is self-focused and often insensitive to others, humility is other-focused and emphasizes recognition and support for others' dignity. Thrive Global (Davis 2018) noted that "those who have cultivated humility . . . go from being consumed with themselves (an inner focus) to looking for ways to contribute and help others (an outer focus)."

Humble leaders are aware of their strengths but also realize they can't know everything. With a secure sense of self, humble leaders tend to respect others' dignity, regardless of others' rank and position. This value for the dignity of others governs the leader's speech and actions quite differently than what we see in arrogant

<sup>\*</sup> Although there is growing academic interest in the topic of humility, leader humility as a scholarly construct is not well developed. This book's practitioner focus does not support construct differentiation and validation. However, organizational research would benefit from robust assessment of the proposed definition of leader humility and from empirical exploration of the forthcoming model, especially in field versus lab studies.

leaders. Leaders with humility are not merely neutral—not merely avoiding a negative state (arrogance). They display a positive or affirmative stance toward (that is, genuinely caring about) others' dignity:

Fundamentally, you actually can't think you are better than other people. Your mindset and attitude have to be that we're all human, we all make mistakes, and we come from different backgrounds and perspectives.

-BRAD TILDEN

I added the element of feeling, an emotional state, in defining leader humility for two reasons. First, it is hard to fake this. Feeling affects our nonverbal communication, which has long been considered to comprise 93 percent of communication (Mehrabian 1972). We take cues about what others think of us from tone of voice, body language, eye movement, and facial expression, which are less subject to conscious control than our speech. And when nonverbal cues conflict with verbal speech, we rely on nonverbal cues most heavily to interpret what others really mean. Equally important: a tendency to feel regard for others' dignity generates reasonably consistent behaviors (displaying a deep regard) that affirm the value of others. In practice, it is a humble person's desire to affirm the dignity of others that suppresses arrogance.

### **Extraordinarily Powerful**

Earlier, I mentioned that leaders have power. They vary in how they use it. What might be considered an *ordinary* use of power (that is, still quite common) involves command and control, carrot or stick. Sometimes it stresses dominance over others through fear and intimidation. Those may work to an extent but come at a price. Consider these perspectives:

Leaders can be effective even if they're not humble. But it's different. I met with a well-known oil company executive when I was secretary of the interior. He was very arrogant and clearly had a successful career. I was having a thoughtful discussion with leading oil industry CEOs from around the world when this man walked in the room. His arrogance took over at that point, and the ability to have a respectful dialogue ceased. He showed a total lack of willingness to listen to the group or figure out what was going on. It was clear that the group was intimidated by his presence, and we lost the value of our discussion that may have prevailed through a more respectful approach. —SALLY JEWELL, FORMER SECRETARY, US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, AND FORMER CEO, REI CORPORATION

The interesting thing about arrogant, autocratic leadership is that it only works to a point. It doesn't draw people in. People don't stay in those environments unless they feel they have to—or unless it's for the money. [I]n many cases they leave part of themselves at home and don't fully connect in . . . you will only get what you ask for and no more. . . . You do see the domineering style in politics at times, but elections are episodic. Nothing in great businesses is episodic—you *must* deliver repeat performances—year in, year out. To do that, you must draw people in. —JIM WEBER

The downside of using ordinary power is that it is actually rather limited for motivating people: it draws compliance, not full engagement. Because humility involves

showing deep regard for others' dignity, it goes beyond ordinary power. It is *extraordinarily* powerful because when we support the dignity of others, we inspire them and boost their enthusiasm for us as leaders. Humility engages their hearts, minds, and spirits. And when people are energized and fully engaged, their creative and productive contributions soar. But don't just take my word for it:

I don't think you keep the best people or get the best energy from them if you don't have a culture that's feeding them, reinforcing their superpowers, and challenging them. We're playing a long game, and we know that, over time, you can't compete with a strong culture. We are holding on to talent because they can see a work environment that welcomes them and allows them to make an impact.

Command-and-control leaders don't keep their best people. They also will model and inbreed selfishness over time. If you look at Brooks's results, we have had three major pivot points: 2001, 2009, and 2017. In this recent strategy reset, we've come out of it with rapid growth, up 30 percent+ in the first half of [2018]. I know our success is very much an outcome of our culture, values, and people. Over time, it's our culture and purpose-driven strategy that will be a force multiplier for Brooks. —JIM WEBER

Leader humility, then, is a competitive advantage today. Strategically, it makes good business sense, and it is seen as a strength by many leaders who are also quite confident and successful.

### **Needed: A Model of Leader Humility**

Let me close with some context and a brief review, then pull it all together. The context for humility making a compelling difference in leadership results was shown by Collins (2001), who found that leaders with strong drive (fierce resolve) coupled with personal humility are the ones who lead organizations to greatness. Studies have since shown that humility enhances a number of personal, learning, and organizational outcomes (see, for example, Nielsen and Marrone 2018 for a comprehensive review). Most leaders are selected for their roles because they were outstanding achievers, so we assume that most have strong drive. Yet the need for personal humility is often neglected when selecting leaders, and the absence of it can seriously limit their effectiveness.

Chapter 1 introduced three questions people ask themselves about leaders: Who Are You? Where Are We Going? Do You See Me? It indicated that leader interactions around those three questions would either support or weaken others' dignity, or self-worth. This chapter explained that leader humility is neither meekness nor merely an absence of arrogance. Instead, I defined humility pragmatically for leaders as a tendency to feel and display a deep regard for others' dignity. And a leader's humility has a lot to do with how effective a leader can be: supporting dignity increases the chance that people feel enthusiastic and engaged, and damaging others' dignity causes people to limit their support or resist leadership.

Given the importance of leader humility, we need to identify specific behaviors that support others' dignity. As shown in figure 5, there are six keys to leader humility: balanced ego and robust integrity (related to "Who

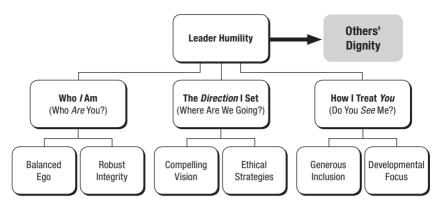


FIGURE 5. Six Keys to Leader Humility.

I Am"), compelling vision and ethical strategies ("The Direction I Set"), and generous inclusion and developmental focus ("How I Treat You"). I call these keys that open a lock. When we use the right key and turn it in the right way, the lock opens. If we don't have the right key, the lock won't budge. In a similar way, we affect others' dignity positively by using these six keys well.

The behaviors related to each of these keys will be explained in chapters 4 through 6. But first, let's consider ideas for action. Then I'll clarify more fully what human dignity is and why it is so important for leaders to honor it—the subject of chapter 3.

### IDEAS FOR ACTION

- 1. On a 5-point scale, with 5 meaning very high and 1 meaning very low, how do you rate your confidence?
- **2.** On a continuum running from meekness at one end to arrogance at the other, where do you place yourself?
- 3. On a 5-point scale, with 5 meaning very high and 1 meaning very low, how do you rate your personal regard for others' dignity?
- **4.** Which of the six keys to leader humility do you think are your strongest? Are any of them weak? If so, pay particular attention to the chapters describing those keys.

### **About the Authors**



Marilyn Gist, PhD

(https://www.marilyngist.com)
With strong leadership experience
and deep academic credentials, Marilyn has long been fascinated by the
quality of relationships that leaders
must form to influence others effec-

tively. As a consultant, she has guided numerous organizations and CEOs to greater success. As a speaker, she has clarified the essential behaviors that generate loyal and high-impact teams. And as an educator, she has inspired students to adopt a growth mindset and become exceptional leaders.

By watching what works—and does not work—Gist became keenly aware that we don't gain followers by stepping on others' dignity. Over time, she has seen major changes in the expectations of leaders that employees, peers, competitors, customers, and diverse stakeholders have. Yet, she has been dismayed that our older models of leadership continue to influence how new and continuing leaders behave. The evidence is strong that arrogant, command-and-control approaches yield limited results. This led her to develop and offer the approach in this book. Based on leader humility, this approach is

simple to understand and learn in order to create thriving organizations and great results.

Leader humility is not meekness or weakness. It is simply a tendency to feel and display a deep regard for others' dignity. Marilyn found, both in her own work as a leader and in her mentoring of others, that leader humility has profound results. To amplify this message, she interviewed the twelve CEOs in this book, and invited the chapter written by Alan Mulally, to add *their* advice and experiences to her own voice. These individuals, currently or in the past, have led organizations as renowned as Alaska Airlines, Brooks Running, Costco, Expeditors International, Foot Locker, Ford Motor Company, Holland America, JPMorgan Chase Northwest, the Mayo Clinic, REI, Starbucks, TIAA, and the US Department of the Interior. Their great success shows how humility can make a difference for leaders everywhere.

Dr. Gist's work in leadership development began through the Center for Creative Leadership and continued in professorships at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Washington. At UW, she held the Boeing Endowed Professorship of Business Management and served as faculty director of executive MBA programs. Most recently, Marilyn led Seattle University's Leadership EMBA degree program (anchored in a model of leader humility) from its inception in 2006 to rank as high as number eleven in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*. She served as executive director of the Center for Leadership Formation, and associate dean and professor of management, at the Albers School of Business and Economics. In 2017, she received the Distinguished Faculty Award from the Alumni Board of

Governors and, in 2019, was named professor emerita by Seattle University's president.

Marilyn earned her BA from Howard University and her MBA and PhD from the University of Maryland, College Park. Her scholarly work has received more than twelve thousand citations in the published work of others, demonstrating exceptional thought leadership and visibility. Dr. Gist is a member of the Academy of Management, the American Psychological Association, and the International Women's Forum.



#### **Alan Mulally**

One of the world's best leaders, Alan has been ranked number three on *Fortune*'s "The World's 50 Greatest Leaders," one of the thirty "World's Best CEOs" by *Barron's*, one of "The World's Most Influential People" by

*Time,* and "Chief Executive of the Year" by *Chief Executive* magazine. These honors flowed from his career contributions, industry leadership, and service.

Mr. Mulally served as president and chief executive officer of the Ford Motor Company and as a member of Ford's board of directors from September 2006 to June 2014. During this time, he led Ford's transformation into one of the world's leading automobile companies and the number one automobile brand in the United States. He guided Ford in working together on a compelling vision, comprehensive strategy, and implementation of the One Ford plan to deliver profitable growth for all of the company's stakeholders. He also was honored with the American Society for Quality's medal for excellence in executive leadership, the Automotive Executive of the Year designation, and the Thomas Edison Achievement Award.

Prior to joining Ford, Mulally had a long and distinguished career in aerospace. He served as executive vice president of the Boeing Company, president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, and president of Boeing Information, Space and Defense Systems.

Equally impressive is that Alan has been deeply committed to helping others grow and succeed in leadership. He speaks and consults widely on the approach he developed: the Working Together Management System. For the first time, Alan has authored a chapter to share this

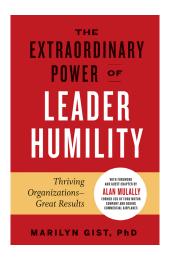
approach. He explains in detail the operational process and Expected Behaviors involved in Working Together that you can follow to success. He shows how WTMS is deeply anchored in leader humility—and explains why humility is essential for making it work. Alan's own life, based on humility, love, and service, has earned him many followers and fans.

In addition to consulting and speaking, Alan is currently very active on boards of directors: Alphabet (parent company of Google), Carbon 3D, and the Mayo Clinic. These reflect areas where he brings his deep experience in engineering and business leadership to the future of design and manufacturing, information technology, sustainability, and health sciences.

Alan's past service includes being president of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and chairman of the Board of Governors of the Aerospace Industries Association. He also served on President Obama's United States Export Council; as cochairman of the Council on Competitiveness in Washington, DC; and on the advisory boards of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the University of Washington, the University of Kansas, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the United States Air Force Scientific Advisory Board. He is a member of the United States National Academy of Engineering and a fellow of England's Royal Academy of Engineering.

Mulally holds bachelor's and master of science degrees in aeronautical and astronautical engineering from the University of Kansas, and a master's in management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as an Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow.

# We hope you enjoyed this excerpt from Marilyn Gist's *The Extraordinary Power of Leader Humility*



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