

## Being Humble Part I

Two recent events have coincided to spark this Monday Note. The first was a trip to visit a client to help fine-tune their company's business plan. The second has to do with the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

While visiting our client we were told of a discussion that took place between the company's sales manager and the operations manager regarding hiring. Although making progress the sales manager appeared to be having trouble filling some open sales positions. At the same time the operations manager always seemed to have a fair amount of success attracting and keeping hard working, dedicated cleaning technicians. When asked about his secret to finding suitable workers the operations manager mentioned he looked for people who were humble. He figured people who were humble were willing to listen to him and learn new things. They didn't act like they already knew it all.

His comment hit me like a load of bricks. Obvious answers always seem to hide in plain sight. Naturally the candidates he considered had to meet the physical, mental, and legal requirements of the job. But he knew that even if they did meet all the other requirements, if they weren't humble chances were pretty good they wouldn't work out for long. He was looking for long term, team players. No arrogance. No swagger. No dancing in the End Zone. Just solid performance day in and day out.

His comment reminded me this is a characteristic we look for in any position in our companies, whether they're technicians, sales people, office people, project managers, or senior managers. Although the top candidates for each of these positions will have the required skill set to perform their jobs, and they will have demonstrated records of success in their specific areas of expertise, it doesn't mean they come with an arrogant attitude about it, or feeling they have nothing new to learn.

Perhaps part of the confusion we have with people who are humble has more to do with the definition of the word itself. Webster's New World Dictionary defines humble in two primary ways. In an unfavorably light it defines it as "low in condition, rank, or position." In a favorable sense humble is defined as "modest, not proud, having a consciousness of one's shortcomings."

Still we too often confuse being humble with being weak or soft. In my opinion this is a huge mistake. All you have to do is try running that one past guys like Joe Torre, Mike Krzyzewski, Warren Buffet, or the late Sam Walton. Being humble has nothing to do with being weak. It has to do with being honest with ourselves about who we are.

People who excel at any endeavor, whether it sports, music, the arts, or even business bring two overriding questions to their game. "What can I contribute?" They know they have been blessed with talents in certain areas of their lives and they're searching for ways to use them. The second question is "What can I learn?" In spite of their significant gifts they know there is still much more to be learned from other people and new experiences. It takes humility to ask the second question.

In Part II of this series I'll explain how the Pro Football Hall of Fame served as the second inspirational source for this article.