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How to Succeed with Humility

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley also does a blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her musings on life, death, and how to clean your dog's ears.*

Ten years ago, I was teaching about 25 customer service workshops each year at corporations, colleges, hospitals, hotels, and schools across the country. During these sessions, I routinely remarked that the best organizations encouraged high-level executives to work periodically on the front lines. The purpose, I noted, was to put managers face-to-face with their customers. As an example, I often cited Ritz Carlton Hotels. The chain was renowned for having key leaders spend a week or so each year as bellhops, chambermaids, and bartenders.

Usually, when I mentioned this phenomenon, participants in my communications training seminars looked at me in wide-eyed wonder. "Our bosses would never in a million years do that," was the typical response. "They should," I replied.

You can imagine how pleased I was to learn last week that that CBS television was launching a new show called "Undercover Boss." It premiered after the highly rated Super Bowl. The premise of the program is sending normally suited and sequestered CEO's to work side by side with hourly workers. Going incognito, the executives pretend to be just-hired employees who have agreed to be videotaped for a new orientation program. The first episode featured Larry O'Donnell, the CEO of Waste Management, Inc., a \$13-billion trash disposal company

Although some reviewers have criticized the show for providing a public relations vehicle for organizations with questionable ethics, I frankly don't care. I am really thrilled to see a smattering of \$1-million earners showing some humility. That word, frequently but incorrectly confused with humiliation, is defined by many religious scholars as accepting yourself with both your strengths and your weaknesses. I think it means getting off your bombastic throne.

The bottom line: humility is good, both professionally and personally. Whether you are happily embedded in a job with stock options-plus or are nervously thrashing around in the land of the unemployed, you might benefit from giving some thought to this human characteristic. Here are some ideas on practicing humility:

- Treat everyone politely. I once knew a woman who claimed to judge her boyfriends by the way they interacted with service workers such as waitresses and receptionists. If a date acted snotty, she wordlessly dumped him and moved on. You go, girl!
- Own your talents. If you are one of the best sales representatives in your industry, belittling compliments is a minus, not a plus. Have you ever heard the term false modesty?
- Get your hands dirty. I suspect the initial ratings success of "Undercover Boss" came from watching the Waste Management guy get in touch with his inner trash collector. In my view, there's no better way to show humility than getting down in the trenches.
- Live simply. Do you really need to flaunt your new Mercedes Benz in front of friends and family lacking your level of financial success? Be sensitive to others' feelings.
- Share. While watching the news the other night, I happened to see a story about a wealthy family who had cashed in everything and given half of the proceeds to the poor.

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- They decided that selling their mansion and moving into a home half the size would save dozens of people from starvation. Talk about inspiring.
- Be grateful. When you come down to it, luck is responsible for part of everyone's success. Just being born in the United States, for example, dramatically increases the likelihood that you'll achieve your dreams. The child of Irish immigrants, I'm intimately familiar with that fact.
 - Value everyone's ideas. During my lifetime, I've run across numerous individuals who respected only thoughts coming from people with strings of degrees after their names. I pity them. If you're willing to learn only from women and men living and working in an isolated bubble, you miss valuable input from individuals who may know what's really going on.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.