

Pride - A Leader's Greatest Problem

By Dr. John C. Maxwell – as published in Jan. 2007 Leadership Wired

Pull a 10-dollar bill from your pocket, and you will see the face of Alexander Hamilton on the front. By merit of his accomplishments, Hamilton should be one of our greatest national heroes. Consider his contributions to America:

- Revolutionary War hero
- George Washington's chief of staff by age 22
- America's first Secretary of the Treasury
- Co-author of The Federalist Papers
- Creator of the Coast Guard
- Designer of the nation's banking and finance system
- Architect of a system of tax collection to bring revenue to the U.S. Government
- Builder of the infrastructure for an industrial economy

Yet, despite displaying the greatest blend of legal, political, and financial knowledge of the founding fathers, Hamilton does not rank among the foremost heroes of our country's history. Why? Pride. Hamilton's self-importance and inability to take an insult alienated those around him and sabotaged his career. His ego literally killed him. Far too vain to patch up differences with fellow politician, Aaron Burr, Hamilton was shot and killed by Burr in a duel at the age of 49.

Pride—A Leader's Greatest Problem

Before diving into the body of this lesson, I'd like to credit my friend Dave Anderson, founder of LearntoLead.com. Many of his thoughts resonate throughout this edition of LW.

I agree with Dave when he suggests pride is the leading culprit of managerial ineffectiveness:

"There are many reasons managers fail. For some, the organization outgrows them. Others don't change with the times. Some spread themselves too thin and work long and hard but not smart. Many abandon the priorities and disciplines that once made them great and never get back to them. A few make poor character choices...But all these causes for management failure have their root in one common cause: pride. In the simplest terms, pride is devastating. I'm not talking about the pride one has in their work or their accomplishments. I'm indicting the pride that inflates your sense of self-worth and distorts your perspective of reality." ~ Dave Anderson

There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. "Good pride" represents our dignity and self-respect. "Bad pride" is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance. When you look at the word pride, notice the middle letter is "i". When you are full of pride on the inside, it makes you stiff, stubborn, and creates strife with others.

The Problems of Pride

1. Pride Stops Us from Building a Team.

Prideful leaders readily contract "Superman Syndrome" and devalue the benefits of teamwork. They rely on their own prowess to solve problems and advance the organization. Blinded by their self-centeredness, arrogant leaders are unable to appreciate the strengths in others.

2. Pride Renders Us Unteachable.

Leaders who are assured they know everything don't bother about personal growth. Their ego convinces them that they have arrived, and they quit searching for life's lessons in the people and circumstances around them.

3. Pride Closes Our Mind to Feedback.

Pride deafens us to the advice or warnings of those around us. As Stephen Covey has said, "It takes humility to seek feedback. It takes wisdom to understand it, analyze it, and appropriately act on it." Without humility, we care about only one opinion—our own.

4. Pride Prevents Us from Admitting Mistakes.

The Duke of Wellington once haughtily drew himself up to his full height and thundered to one of his staff officers, "God knows I have many faults, but being wrong is not one of them!" Pride won't allow for failure. The egotistical leader blames mistakes on others, justifies them as inevitable, or refuses to acknowledge them.

5. Pride Keeps Us from Making Changes.

Pride will cause leaders to pledge allegiance to the status quo rather than opening themselves to change; especially if the change alters a system they built. Since leaders have emotional equity in their own work, they will justify living with broken systems rather than changing them.

6. Pride Encourages Poor Character Choices.

Because of arrogance, ignorance, or a little of both, leaders start taking shortcuts that compromise their values. In their conceit, they think they're above the rules or are too smart to get caught.

As flawed human beings, we all fall into prideful traps from time to time. However, failing to recognize the error of pride and change course will doom our leadership. Pride is a fatal character flaw and leaders that leave legacies have their character in tact. Leaders who fail to prune their pride will meet demise. That's not a guess, it's a guarantee. With pride, it's not a matter of "if" we will fall, but "when." There are no exceptions.

7. Pride Hinders Us from Reaching Our Potential.

For leaders to reach full potential, they must be aware of areas in which they can improve. Unfortunately, pride blocks honest self-assessment and prevents leaders from finding the path to better performance.

8. Pride Destroys Relationships.

The opposite of loving others is not hating others but rather obsessing over oneself. When we become self-absorbed, we cut ourselves off from the enjoyment of the relationships in our life. What I call, "The Celebration Principle" says that the true test of relationships is not how loyal we are when friends fail, but how thrilled we are when they succeed. If we can't get excited about the accomplishments of our friends, we had better do some soul-searching.

9. Pride Distorts Your Perspective on Reality.

Constantly viewing life through the lens of selfish ambition colors a leader's outlook. Many problems in business are caused by the ego interfering with judgment. Choices that should be clear to the leader become clouded by an obsession with self advancement.

How to Correct the Pride Problem

1. Recognize Your Pride

"If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a bigish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, you are very conceited indeed."

~ C. S. Lewis

2. Admit Your Pride

"There is perhaps not one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."

~ Benjamin Franklin

3. Express Your Gratitude

"A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves."

~ Henry Ward Beecher

4. Say Your Prayers

"Lord, when I am wrong, make me willing to change, and when I am right, make me easy to live with."

~ Anonymous

5. Practice Serving Others

"The high destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule."

~ Albert Einstein

6. Learn to Laugh at Yourself

"Blessed are they that laugh at themselves, they shall never cease to be entertained."

~ Chinese Be attitude