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Leadership Traits

Is pride getting in the way of your success as a firm leader? Pride can do a lot of damage to your firm, even if just one partner suffers from this leadership sin. And the onset of pride run amok tends to be subtle, notes Leslie Martin, president of Highlands Consulting Group. In fact, you may confuse pride with authority, Martin explains.

Pride typically becomes a problem when a leader starts to feel that he or she is somehow superior to fellow leaders and employees. Rules of behavior and practical, courteous decision making are seen as being for others, and the owner claims rights without clear authority. This leads to such behaviors as:

- Decisions made without approval of partners or boards.
- Personal discourtesies to colleagues and subordinates.
- Unjustified or unbudgeted spending on equipment, services, travel, or entertainment.
- Unjustified compensation, bonuses, or perks.
- Dominance of meetings and aversion to open discussion.
- Seat-of-the-pants decisions not backed by research or evidence.

- Solo credit claimed for team performance.

This is a slippery slope. Such conduct usually draws antagonism and hostility from partners and resentment from staff. The bad feelings can get your firm a negative reputation and can destroy trust between owners and staff.

The antidote to too much pride is humility, but it shouldn't be confused with weakness, Martin said. The creative tension between "personal humility and a fierce professional will" is the best way to prevent or undo the ravages of pride, says Jim Collins who wrote *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

Adds Martin: "Leaders characterized by humility are determined to harness the influence and authority they have been given to achieve results through hard work and innovation. ... Humble leaders know their strengths and are not afraid to use them." They are, she insists, equally aware of their weaknesses, and welcome feedback to stay on course and enhance their leadership. □

Sources: Leslie Martin, The Highlands Consulting Group, Leesburg, VA (www.hcgroup.org); PR staff

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