

SIGMA

Leader Character Series



**Great Leaders
Act with Humanity**



GREAT LEADERS ACT WITH HUMANITY

“ **Compassion is not a virtue, it’s a commitment. It’s not something we have or don’t have, it’s something we choose to practice. — Brené Brown**

Humanity has long been considered an important trait for leaders, and in recent years this character dimension has also become increasingly valued in the workplace. Humanity involves showing genuine concern for others by paying attention to — and appreciating — their values, feelings, and beliefs. To appreciate the benefits of humanity, it can be helpful to consider the impact its absence often has. When there is a lack of understanding and care for others, people may fear bringing up issues and ideas. This results in a stifling of innovation and psychological safety. Humane, compassionate leadership is beneficial for leaders as well as their followers. Leaders who are compassionate are more likely to maintain healthy relationships and be successful in pursuit of their goals.¹ Employees who have compassionate leaders are also more likely to report being satisfied and engaged with their jobs, and are less likely to experience burnout.^{2,3}

Humanity is demonstrated via empathy, generosity, and forgiveness. When leaders demonstrate humanity, people around them feel understood and appreciated. When leaders act with less of these qualities, employees may be afraid to make mistakes, and may feel like their organization isn’t concerned with their development and well-being. Without humanity, businesses can lose insight into stakeholder values and forgo their competitive advantage. They may also see lower employee engagement and performance as well as higher turnover. Therefore, humanity is an important trait for leaders to develop because it will impact people across all levels of an organization.

In assessing your ability to act with humanity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I want the best for the people around me?
- Do I show concern for others when they share difficult information with me?
- Do I think about how decisions will impact others?
- Am I likely to forgive others when they make mistakes?
- Am I patient with people who need extra help, and do I give them help?

Ways to Improve Your Humanity

Make time for connection: Small talk, pleasantries, and checking in with others can seem inefficient when you feel like there isn’t enough time to get things done, but these small

niceties are integral to forming and maintaining positive relationships. Take time to check in with others, follow up, and express concern when people share challenging experiences. If you don't feel a connection with someone, the best way to foster one is by making time for small daily interactions.

Really listen: Demonstrate care for others by actively listening to what they have to say, and make sure to confirm your understanding before you respond. Listening is critical for productive relationships, negotiations, and conflict resolution. When you listen to others and make space for them to share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas, you are also showing generosity by giving others your time and attention.

Fail better: Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. Treat these mistakes as learning opportunities, and practice forgiving yourself and others. Focus on what was learned, what went wrong, and how you can adapt to improve future outcomes. By demonstrating compassion and understanding when things go wrong — for yourself and others — you'll help create a workplace where people feel safe to admit faults and try new things, both of which are key components of psychological safety and can lead to increased creativity.⁵

Consider These Tips to Moderate Your Humanity

Effective leaders are able to balance the 11 leader character dimensions rather than focusing on just a few. As you develop your leader character, look for places where strengths may need to be moderated. If you scored a 4 or higher on humanity, use the tips below to help you balance the expression of this character dimension.

Set boundaries. Without boundaries, it can be easy to get overwhelmed by others' emotions and neglect your own priorities. When someone approaches you for advice or to share their frustrations, be mindful of your capacity and set boundaries as needed. Let the person know if you have limited time or aren't able to listen in that moment. Setting boundaries might feel uncomfortable at first, but it gets easier over time and it is necessary for preserving healthy, mutually supportive relationships.

Be kind and clear. Sometimes you will need to share critical feedback or information that might hurt someone's feelings. These kinds of difficult conversations can be done in a way that is still caring and considerate. Remember that being transparent is also a way to be kind. If someone has a blind spot or bad habit that's holding them back from a promotion, withholding that information does more harm than good. When you stay focused on serving a person's best interests, it becomes easier to see when difficult conversations are necessary, and compassion will help you to deliver the information in a gentle manner.

Respect the boundaries of others. Sometimes being concerned with the well-being of others can lead to intrusiveness or trying to provide help to someone who isn't receptive to it. Although well-intentioned, your attention may not be welcome. Remember to be mindful that people may not necessarily want to answer questions about a sensitive situation, be reminded of an issue, or may want to move past it — particularly in the workplace.

Resources



[Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe](#)



[The Importance of Empathy in the Workplace](#)



Develop your ability to be compassionate by taking advantage of SIGMA's [coaching services](#).

Contact SIGMA for more information about leader character.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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References

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² Lanaj, K., Jennings, R. E., Ashford, S. J., & Krishnan, S. (2022). When leader self-care begets other care: Leader role self-compassion and helping at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 107*(9), 1543-1560.

³ Eldor, L. (2018). Public service sector: The compassionate workplace—The effect of compassion and stress on employee engagement, burnout, and performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 28*(1), 86-103.

⁴ Castro, D. R., Anseel, F., Kluger, A. N., Lloyd, K. J., & Turjeman-Levi, Y. (2018). Mere listening effect on creativity and the mediating role of psychological safety. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, 12*(4), 489–502.

⁵ Hughes, D. J., Lee, A., Tian, A. W., Newman, A., & Legood, A. (2018). Leadership, creativity, and innovation: A critical review and practical recommendations. *The Leadership Quarterly, 29*(5), 549-569.