

Sue Thompson's

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## Eat Some Humble Pie

Pause for a moment and consider with me the virtue of humility.

The [VIA Institute on Character](#) says humility is: "Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is. True humility involves an accurate self-assessment, recognition of limitations, keeping accomplishments in perspective, and forgetting of the self."

Some think humility means telling yourself you're unworthy, or that you should avoid thinking of yourself in positive ways. "Early in life," said famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, "I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose the former and have seen no reason to change. " Makes sense, doesn't it? After all, if you're brilliant, are you supposed to pretend you don't know you're the smartest person in the room?"

Let's set the record straight: humility is not lying. First and foremost, it is an accurate self-assessment of your talents and abilities. You can't help it if you really are the smartest person in the room. Recognizing you have exceptional talents, knowing you stand out, and personally acknowledging superior abilities does not mean you're not humble. In fact, it's a sign of good self-esteem that you know what makes you special. And good business requires promoting yourself and your services with confidence and boldness. You are what you are, and you can't be what you're not.

Where humility begins is with the acceptance that there will always be someone smarter, more talented, better looking, and more generously endowed with gifts and abilities than you are. William Law wrote, "Humility is nothing else but a right judgment of ourselves."

We often hear the word and instantly think weakness, in spite of knowing intellectually that humility is supposed to be a strength. "Humility" comes from a word that means "to bow low to the ground," and we aren't big on bowing to



others. But when we see humility involves patience or gentleness, we can begin to understand the full nature of this marvelous strength that VIA tells us is quite rare. Humility is the demeanor of a person who is in full control of himself or herself in the face of insults or injuries. It's the ability to bring one's strong will into submission. Submission is a dirty word in our society, because we read its meaning as subservience or slavery. But "submission" does not mean "obedience." It is an attitude. It is a way of conduct. It is a willing restraint of showing our power or exhibiting our will. It takes a very strong person to bring a very strong will into submission to someone else.

I'm not saying there aren't times to stand up for one's principles or act in accordance with one's values, because to do so often requires great strength. But to put humility in simple terms, think about the times you've been unable to bring your own strong will into submission to anything, including yourself! Here are examples of what I mean:

- Can you resist correcting someone if they've introduced you with a minor bit of information that is not accurate but won't be remembered anyway? Let it go.
- Do you insist on making sure everyone knows you're the one who came up with the idea for the new initiative, even if it will cause resentment? Just be quiet. The truth will come out some other time.
- Is it important to say once again from what school you graduated and that you make six figures? Why? If you've already said it, what makes you think it's been forgotten? And if it has, so what?
- Is it imperative that you be recognized when something occurs in which you had a direct hand? Is it impossible to keep it to yourself, even if it's something little?
- Can you allow yourself to quietly receive correction or criticism without defense, or do you have to explain yourself? (This one is especially difficult!)
- What do you feel when you interact with someone who is missing the humility chip? Can you remaining calm and silent in the face of arrogance, or do you have to counteract with your own show of superiority?

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Humility is dying to the need for recognition. It's bringing that strong will under control and allowing someone else to be in charge or have the spotlight. It's acknowledging you're special but able to relinquish attention for it. It's the act of letting another praise you, and not your own mouth.

Develop your humility level: be aware of moments in which you wish to jump to your own defense—and then don't do it. Write about an experience in which you saw someone show great humility. Resist the urge to be the one with all the answers. Exhibit patience with people who are not as smart or as gifted as you. No one knows what's going on inside as you fight your need to be seen—just be willing to be invisible once in a while. Start small, and make your humility a big strength! \*



The fullest and best ears of corn hang lowest toward the ground.

~ Bishop Edward Reynolds

Humility is attentive patience.

~ Simone Weil

Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.

~ Thomas Merton

Life is a long lesson in humility.

~ James Matthew Barrie

Always acknowledge a fault. This will throw those in authority off their guard and give you an opportunity to commit more.

~ Mark Twain

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## About Sue

Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.

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