

Activity: Humility as a precondition for discourse¹

Goal:

The goal of this activity is to consider the role of humility in public discourse. Social psychologist Daryl Van Tongeren,² for example, argues that humble people are open to what they don't know, learn to tolerate uncertainty, and they are on the lookout for times when they are in the grips of illusory (or mistaken) forms of thinking. Because they care about getting it right (as opposed to "feeling like they are right"), they accept the messy process of asking questions, looking for evidence, and revising in light of new evidence. Likewise, humble people have learned to "right-size" their ego (it is not all about me) in ways that opens them to the experiences of others and differing cultural ways of doing things. Humility, therefore, arguably prepares the ground for productive discourse.

PART ONE: Self-check – how humble are you?

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high). The goal is to think about our own level of comfort in situations where we may be mistaken or moments in which we find ourselves being defensive.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from a loved one about my driving.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from friends and/or family members about my cooking.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from strangers on a social media post.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from close friends about my communication.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from colleagues in my department about my teaching style.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from colleagues about a departmental matter.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from reviewers of my professional work.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from students about how I present material.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from students about my willingness to meet them where they are with regards to their learning.

___ I am good at accepting uncomfortable feedback from someone who questions my most cherished beliefs (about god, human rights, etc.)

PART TWO: FOLLOW-UP (share in small groups)

- What do you notice about your answers?
- Do you find yourself feeling more defensive in some contexts and not others?
- Are you above average at everything?
- How do you think others in the room might rank you?

¹ Created by John Draeger. Made available on www.beingthoughtful.net

² Van Tongeren, D. (2022). *Humble: Free yourself from the traps of a narcissistic world*. The Experiment.