Humility, the Sire of All Virtue
& The Beginning of All Growth
By Mark Faust

There was a product manager at a large consumer products company who was forced to work with a haughty executive who was wont to wear his degrees on his sleeve. With his JD and MBA along with two undergraduate degrees he was quick to say, "I have a degree in..." and he often irritate the sense out of his coworkers. One day in reviewing a problem, he said to the product manager, "You know, I have a degree in this area, and...." The product manager interrupted and said, "Even thermometers have degrees, and you know where people stick thermometers." She was able to say it in a way that even he laughed. She had a gift with communication as well as a level of humility that this well-degreed executive did not.

There is no virtue in leadership as important to accelerated growth and turnaround as that of humility. Not so much because mistakes must be admitted but because the source of the solutions will come from without, not within. Your personal education and experience are probably not the key sources of the solutions that will be needed. The strength of the relationships you have and the process for synergizing those relationships, internal and external to your organization, will be the source of many ideas that will be the steps to your growth and turnaround.

A best practice to show and prove your humility is to have confidential blind-spot sessions. This is the simple but potentially painful practice of inviting your team, one by one, to meet with you to share your greatest blind spots that most hinder you and your company's growth. They are to point out your character missteps with specific examples, and, if they wish, discuss how it might have impacted others. When you as a leader can listen to, understand, acknowledge, and respond to the weaknesses that your subordinates bring to you in this setting, it will do more to bond your relationships and tap the full potential of your people than many a management tactic.

Your people will bring up your character flaws and habits that may seem unrelated to your effectiveness—but they will bring them up for a reason. They will test you with smaller issues to see how you react, and if you take notes, confirm what you've heard, and not make excuses for the examples but acknowledge them and ask for help in keeping you accountable to better character in the future, you will see people transform before your eyes.

Here are a few steps to conducting Blind Spot Sessions effectively:

1. Rule #1, don't respond or make excuses to the issues your team brings up, just take copious notes and thank them for each insight.

Once you start to justify you will cause people to clam up.

2. Invite people to share any character flaw that they see in you, especially what may be hindering your performance.

3. Invite everyone who reports to you directly, and perhaps a few others throughout your organization who have the ability to see you and action both when you are at your best and perhaps worst.

4. You may not need more than 15 minutes with most people but allow for more time if needed. Usually the sessions are short and will be kept so if you don't allow yourself to respond.

This one practice alone has saved bankrupt companies. Turning around a company is first about turning around the people, and the first turnaround is you! Growth both personal and organizational is guaranteed. It works every time, but it may hurt!