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By Rick Boxx

## THE GIFT OF A TEACHABLE SPIRIT

My friend, Larry, was being interviewed for a position to run the operations of a large, privately held, family business. The owners said they also wanted him to mentor the CEO's son, with the intent that the young man would one day preside over the corporation.

During the interview, the executive's son pointedly asked Larry, "Can you train me to eventually lead this organization?" Larry responded honestly, "That is up to you. If you have a teachable spirit, I can train you to run this business." Apparently, the company ownership liked the response, because Larry got the job.

The world of business is littered with the failures of men and women that had great potential – possessing the intelligence and skill sets to perform well in their jobs, yet lacking one important quality: Teachability. When someone is unwilling to learn, assuming they already know everything there is to know, or acting obstinate and refusing to receive much-needed, well-intended instruction, predictably their likelihood of success is very low.

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This applies to mentoring relationships as well. A mentor can only help the person he or she is mentoring if that individual is receptive to the insights and experience the mentor wishes to offer. Someone that is unwilling to learn, even if it means humbling oneself enough to be corrected as well as instructed, is poor leadership material.

The Bible speaks about this often, especially in the book of Proverbs. For instance, Proverbs 9:8 says, *“Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, reprove a wise man and he will love you.”* Many people, for whatever reason, become “stiff-necked” when someone attempts to teach them. Someone that is teachable, however, remains receptive to what they can learn from others, even their peers.

Another passage states, *“He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray”* (Proverbs 10:17). A teachable person appreciates learning about how to improve and overcome weaknesses. Yet another verse points out a desire to learn reflects growing wisdom: *“Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin”* (Proverbs 10:15).

Being teachable is a characteristic of established leaders, as well younger people striving to advance in their careers. One familiar verse describes requirements for leadership: *“Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach”* (1 Timothy 3:2). However, a different translation of the same passage

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expresses it this way: *“Therefore, an elder must be blameless...stable, sensible, respectable, hospitable to strangers, **and teachable.**”*

One more passage offers a similar sentiment: *“Which of you is a wise and well-instructed man? Let him prove it by a right life with conduct guided by a **wisely teachable spirit**”*(James 3:13).

When looking for younger leaders in whom to invest your time, or to cultivate for future leadership, first look for those with a teachable spirit. Your investment of time and energy will prove to be far more fruitful. At the same time, we should never lose sight of the importance of remaining teachable ourselves. We are never too old, or too accomplished, to learn.

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## Reflection/Discussion Question

1. How would you describe someone with a teachable spirit?
2. Give an example of someone you consider to be very teachable? Can you think of any leaders you are associated with who possess that trait? What about yourself – are you a teachable person?
3. In this discussion of teachability, some related traits are mentioned, including wisdom and humility. Why do you think these would be significant for maintaining a teachable spirit?
4. The idea also is presented that someone who is not teachable is a fool. Do you agree, or do you think such a judgment is too harsh? Explain your answer.

## NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

*Proverbs 1:7, 3:13-15, 9:9-10, 14:6,8, 15:31, 16:21, 19:8; Colossians 1:28-29, 3:16*

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