



Leading with *humility*

From 6.00pm on Sunday, November 10th 2019
until 11.15am on Tuesday, November 12th

Background Note and Agenda for our 41st Leadership Conversation

Society of Leadership Fellows, St George's House, Windsor Castle

hu | mil | ity *noun*

1. the quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance.
2. modesty, humbleness, meekness, lack of pride, lack of vanity, diffidence, unassertiveness

"the humility to accept that others' way may be better"

This is me!

Tell us more

Yes I can!



This is our 41st Leadership Conversation

It focuses on a word that we often use in this series and draws many of us to wonder how much our leadership might benefit from more of it!

At this Conversation we will:

- Ask whether a greater degree of humility on our part would enable us to improve our performance as leaders - and if so, in what sorts of ways
- Ask whether there are any downsides to humility that we need to take into account as we each consider how we might best draw on the virtues of humility
- Support each other in sharpening up personal strategies for ensuring that we are better placed to lead with humility in ways that support us in letting go of any unhelpful habits as well as empowering others to step up more as leaders.

How much humility are we demonstrating?

At various stages during this Conversation we will ask how much humility we are demonstrating in the ways in which we engage with each other.

How does it impact on our effectiveness in shaping ideas together?

For example, do we find that greater humility in debate enables us to say "I don't agree" in ways that are easier for others to accept?

Or can it sometimes lead to us backing off too quickly if others disagree?

The counter-cultural attraction of humility

Humility comes from the Latin word *humilis*, which literally means low.

Hence the dictionary definition of humility as "*the quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance*".

Maybe this explains why some of us are so attracted to this term in the context of leadership.

Given the egotistical way in which some leaders behave, there is something refreshingly counter-cultural about it, isn't there.

Some of the synonyms for humility - such as modesty and lack of vanity - immediately suggest how these can be seen as immense qualities that make possible a higher degree of connection between leaders and followers.

"Servant leadership"

Many immediately associate humility with "servant leadership" as well as the term "Level 5 leaders", coined by Jim Collins in 2001 when he identified humility as a key trait of leaders able to elevate company performance from good to great.

In a memorable phrase, Collins talked of Level 5 leaders "*looking out of the window, not in the mirror, to apportion credit for success*".

Key question

Which dimensions to humility would you like to draw on more in your own personal leadership - and which ones would you rather walk on by?

The three stages to our Conversation

At this Conversation we will draw on some of the best ideas that we have gained through the previous 40 Leadership Conversations in this series. We will structure our discussions around three stages:

1 "This is me!"

We put stage one under this heading because early on we want to encourage you to share a story that helps us understand better where you are coming from as a leader.

If we are to achieve strong connections across our group, we each need to be up for sharing something about ourselves in a way that helps others have some sense of the sort of leader that we are.

2 "Tell us more"

Stage two is under this heading because we hope that by now we will all want to mobilise the power of questioning to draw each other out.

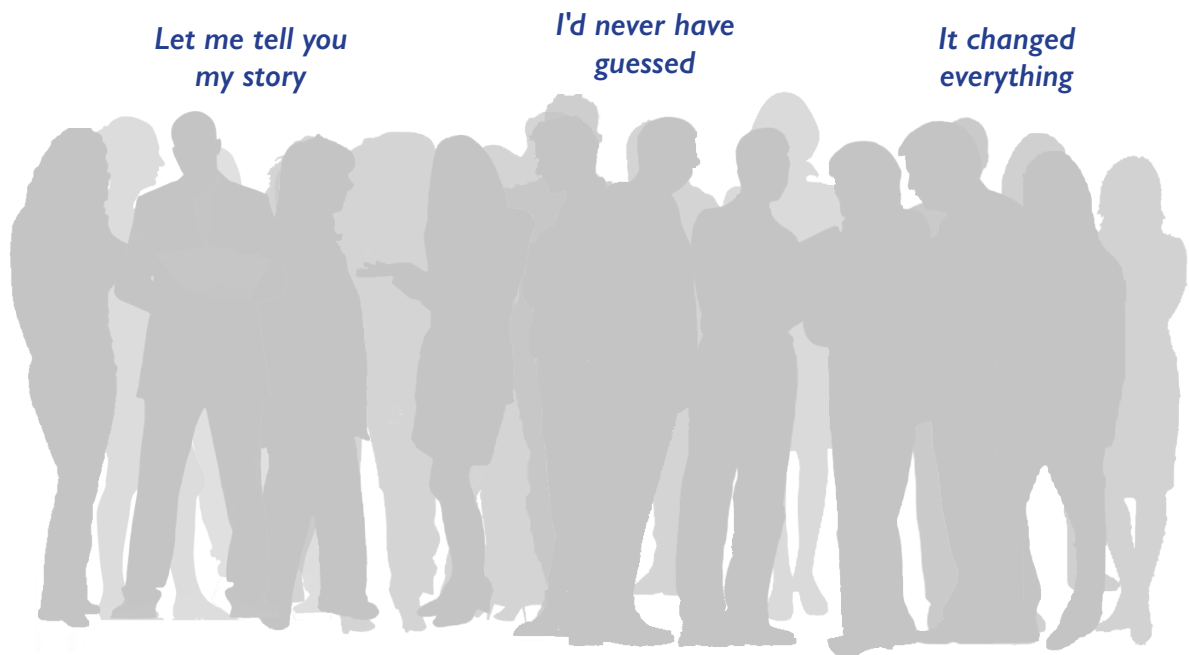
We want to **get behind each other's stories** to try and understand what's holding us back, and what is driving each of us forward as leaders.

3 "Yes I can!"

Our third and final stage is about each of us stepping into a really empowered place where we have a greater sense of all that we can make possible as leaders - for ourselves as well as others.

For every breakthrough in thinking that we achieve during this third stage, we will be able to identify its origins in the stories that we have each shared and the curiosity that others have shown in response.





This is me!

From 6.00pm on Sunday evening to mid-morning on Monday

Once we have welcomed you to this Conversation, we will ask you to sign up to the Guiding Principles that we have developed with Fellows since St George's House established the Society in 2016.

Letting ourselves feel "uncomfortable"

If there is any "magic ingredient" in our Leadership Conversations, it is surely the exceptionally high levels of trust that Fellows invest in the process - and each other.

Whenever we achieve significant breakthroughs in thinking, we know that it is our trust in the goodwill and generosity of spirit of everyone in the circle that has made it possible for so many of us to find ourselves **outside our comfort zone** at times, and okay about being there!

Possibly our greatest point of learning since we started these Leadership Conversations is that these moments of letting ourselves feel "uncomfortable" have been **essential** to the breakthroughs that so many Fellows have achieved.

What IS IT about humility ...?

We will start our discussions by asking **what it is about humility** that has attracted you to this particular Conversation.

If you had to describe the **better version of you** that a larger dose of humility might make possible, what words would you use?

A few days before the Conversation Pete will discuss this on the phone with as many members of our group as possible, and shortly before the Conversation he will circulate a note with a summary of your initial thoughts and ideas and a "killer question" for our first round of small groups.

After agreeing our Guiding Principles for this Conversation, we will explore this question and then bring back our personal conclusions to the wider group.

At this stage, we will encourage you to share your ideas in the form of **stories**. Story-telling can help us learn a lot about each other, and really connect with our different leadership styles.

Listening to others' stories can also trigger all sorts of ideas about our own leadership style that we might never even have thought about.

Looking back, none of my bosses ever were a good role model

I've always associated humility with weakness

I love the word humility, because as a leader I want to keep my ego in check



*So if you say
you should have
shown more
humility, what
got in the way?*

*How would greater
humility on your
part have **changed**
the story you've
just told?*

*I worry that humility
can make us seem
too compliant ... how
can we make sure
we're **resolute** as
well as humble?*



Tell us more

From around 10.00am on Monday through to mid-afternoon

There should come a stage soon after 10.00am on Monday when we have all shared a story about ourselves, and we have in our minds a number of key challenges that have come forward from us as a group.

We will then ask ourselves what are the top two or three challenges that we need to engage with in greater depth, to understand how we might be more effective in leading with humility.

Questioning and active listening

As we address our top concerns in turn, we will be mindful of our guiding principle about gaining insights through questioning and active listening.

We can't overstate its importance to the success of this Conversation.

Focusing on our movement in thinking

This is the stage when we will ask how ambitious you each are for what you want to take away from this Conversation. Whatever your ambitions might be, please ramp them up quite a bit!

Expect more, because if you expect more now you are certain to take more away on Tuesday morning.

We will be focusing on some of the toughest challenges that we all face in drawing on our different senses of humility to improve the quality of the leadership that we can each offer. So we will need to give ourselves time to develop winning strategies.

The key is that as we move forward through lunch and early afternoon on Monday we are aware of how we are shifting in our thinking.

It's so important that we don't let ourselves get trapped into fixed positions. We always learn the most from those who move on in their thinking, and sometimes change their mind.

*You say you're hesitant about showing more humility. Are you sure there isn't an issue here about how you see your **authority** as a leader?*

*Can you explain why you think more humility would lead to others **rolling all over you**? Is there maybe a story behind this!*

*You're right to ask me about **how I lead my team**. I don't think one of them shows much humility and a lot of that must be down to me.*



In future I'll make a point of asking my team how they feel I'm performing. It'll definitely challenge my sense of humility!

I want to start living "connect not convince"

If anyone disagrees with me, I'll always thank them from now on

Yes, we can - with humility!



Yes I can!

From mid-afternoon on Monday through to 11.15am Tuesday

By some stage mid-afternoon on Monday we will know that it is time to do a little less "digging" and move on to the stretch part of our Conversation, when we will encourage a higher level of feedback and coaching across the group.

Safe space

We will all have told our own stories and listened hard to how other Fellows responded to our questions about theirs.

Now we can live the philosophy of **assuming the best of each other**, and offer and receive feedback in the safe space of the Vicars' Hall.

It is remarkable how quickly we can all move on in our thinking, and manage to shift something that has been stuck in our minds for a long time, when we have the benefit of honest feedback from peers who want the best for us.

"Risking up" our thinking

In this final part of our Conversation we hope to deploy all of our creative energies to come up with some stretching ideas about how we might best deploy our sense of humility as a leader.

Just to take one example: *Imagine that you call a member of your team into your office to give them feedback about their recent performance.*

Instead of starting with your feedback about them, you invite them to give you some feedback about you - and encourage them to be constructively critical.

You then thank them for their feedback, especially if it is critical, ask some questions to understand better where they are coming from, take some notes, undertake to reflect on all this - and then, and only then, offer some feedback about them.

A menu of ideas

On this and many other aspects of leadership that we will discuss, we hope to develop a menu of ideas from which you can choose some that are incredibly useful - and impactful - for you.

Well, let's hope they're **fairly useful**. We need to show some humility, after all!

*I think I can ...
and I wasn't in this
empowered space
yesterday!*

*I know I can make
that happen - and
that's exciting!*

*Yes I can -
no point telling others they
can unless I walk the talk!*



Agenda

Sunday, November 10th 2019

2.30pm+	You are welcome to check into your room in St George's House
4.30pm	Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
5.05pm	Evensong (<i>optional</i>)
5.50pm	<i>Vicars' Hall.</i> Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: <i>This is me!</i> We take an agreed question into small groups and then share our answers - and personal stories as leaders - with the wider group
7.40pm	Free time/ drinks in the Sitting Room of St George's House
8.15pm	Working dinner in the House Dining Room
9.30pm	We go through to the Sitting room for tea/coffee with port or brandy
9.45pm	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing from the Sitting Room (<i>optional</i>). After the tour, please join us for a nightcap in the Sitting Room

Monday, November 11th

7.45am	Breakfast is served in the House Dining Room
8.45am	We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall
10.00am	(approx.) We move on to Stage 2: <i>Tell us more</i>
11.00am	Personal reflection time
11.30am	We draw out key messages from our reflection time and take a challenge into another round of small groups
1.00pm	A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups
1.55pm	Team photo on the West steps of the Chapel (<i>weather permitting!</i>) then we are back together as one group. We sharpen up personal insights so far and key priorities for the remainder of the day

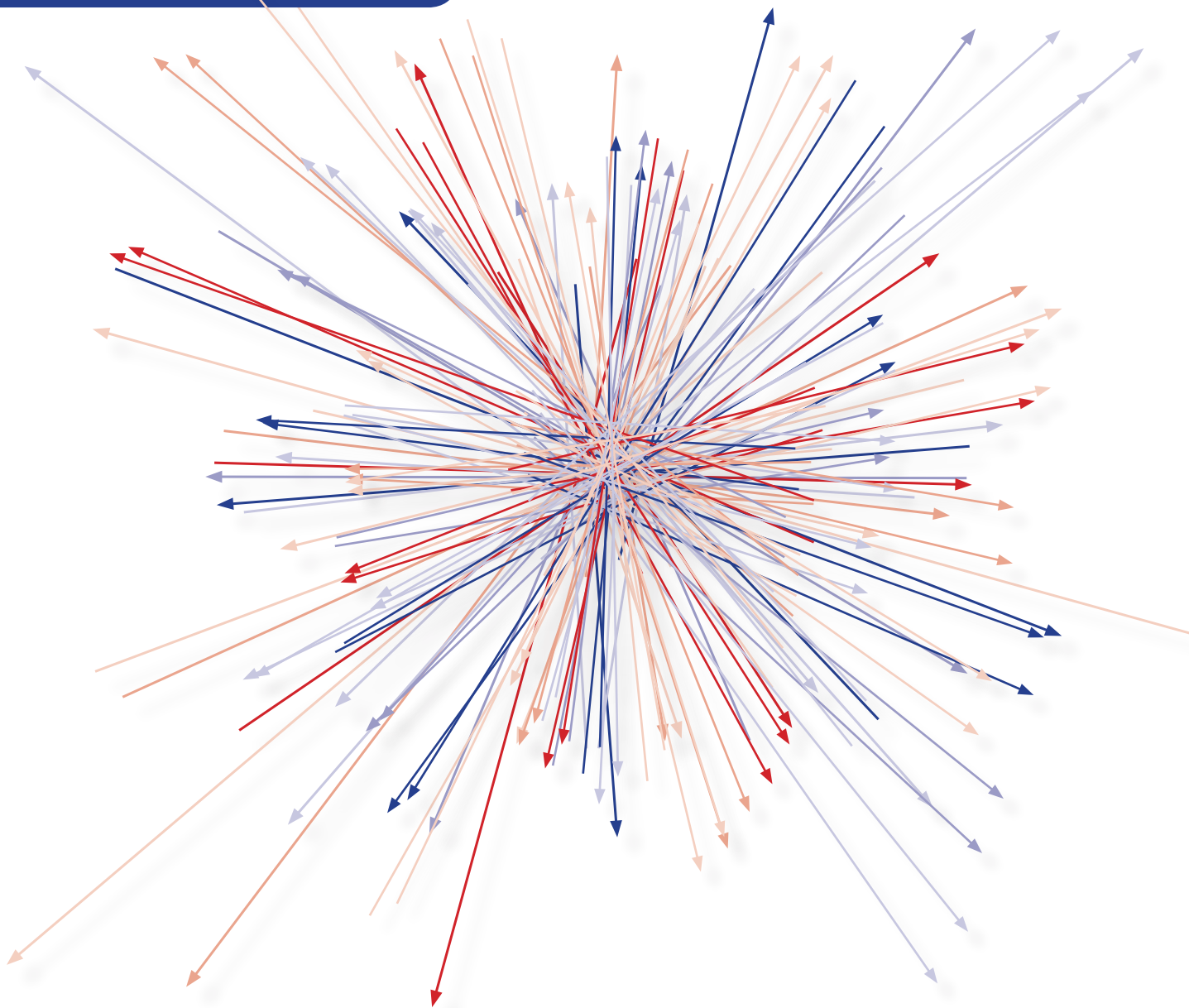
Agenda

Monday, November 11th (contd.)

3.15pm	Personal reflection time until 4.00pm
4.00pm	Tea and refreshments, then we move on to Stage 3: <i>Yes I can!</i> As we go through this stretch stage, we encourage cross-group feedback. We also make a point of focusing our energies on any Fellows who feel stuck in some way and would appreciate additional group support to enable them to move forward in their thinking
5.45pm	Refreshments, then resume the Conversation at 6.00pm
7.15pm	Free time then drinks in the Sitting Room from 7.45
8.15pm	Dinner is served in the Dining Room
9.30pm	We go across to No 25 the Cloisters for tea/coffee and drinks. If anyone has any sort of musical instrument with you, please bring it out!

Tuesday, November 12th

7.30am	Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your luggage from your bedroom, because the domestic staff need to service the rooms. You are welcome to leave it in the Sitting Room or bring it down to the Vicars' Hall where we will be for the remainder of the Conversation
8.30am	<i>Vicars' Hall.</i> We start again promptly, and invite any personal insights that draw on our discussions the previous evening before agreeing our challenge for the final round of small groups. When we return from groups, we make sure that there is time for everyone to share your key insights and draw more from the wisdom of others through "personal leadership walks into the future"
11.15am	Close of the Conversation



Video link-up: February 11th 2020

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will also arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up in February 2020 to swap notes. This will give us all a chance to hear how much progress we have each made in taking forward our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time is for Fellows to share a brief email beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which ones you found the most challenging – and we then take it from there!

Suggested time for Video Link-up:

3.00 to 4.00pm on Tuesday, February 11th 2020