



DOING THE HARD WORK

The hardest work of leadership is often the work within.

What If You're Not Done Learning?

Growth often begins when we become humble enough to discover that something we "knew" was not the whole story

Experience is valuable. You make decisions, solve problems, survive mistakes, build relationships, and develop judgment. Over time, you become good at things. That is how expertise develops. But expertise creates an interesting danger: **the more you know, the easier it becomes to believe you already know.**

One way to think about life is as a series of **Rubik's Cubes**. We each see the sides our experiences have positioned us to see. Wisdom does not require distrusting our own perspective. It requires enough humility to recognize there are sides of the cube we cannot see from where we are standing. Other people - and sometimes failure, conflict, or unexpected results - help us turn the cube.

1 Expertise should make you more curious, not less

Knowing a lot about something is valuable. Believing there is nothing left to learn about it is dangerous. The experienced farmer may know vastly more about raising a crop than the young agronomist standing in the field - and the agronomist may still see something worth understanding. The founder may know more about the business than anyone in the room - and the new employee may ask a question nobody has asked in fifteen years. **Humility means being secure enough in what you know to remain curious about what you do not.**

ASK YOURSELF: Where has my experience made me more confident - but perhaps less curious?

2 Pay attention to the moment you become defensive

Someone questions your decision and your mind immediately starts building a case: **'They do not understand.'** **'That is not fair.'** **'We already tried that.'** Sometimes you are right. But defensiveness can still be useful information. It may be protecting your competence, authority, reputation, identity, or desire to be right. The hard work is not automatically agreeing with criticism. It is pausing before dismissing it and asking, **'What part of this could be true?'** Even if most of the criticism is wrong, the part that is true may change you.

ASK YOURSELF: When I feel defensive, can I become curious about what I am protecting before I start proving why I am right?

3 Remember: you can only see your side of the cube

Imagine a Rubik's Cube sitting between several people. You can see your side clearly, and what you see is real. Your experiences, education, successes, failures, responsibilities, and values shape what is visible to you. But someone across from you sees another side. The owner sees risk from a change that failed years ago. The younger manager sees an opportunity being lost. The employee sees the production floor. The customer sees what it feels like to buy from you. The spouse sees what the business costs the family. **Nobody necessarily has the whole cube.** You listen not because the other person is automatically right, but because they may see a side you cannot.

ASK YOURSELF: When someone sees a situation differently, am I trying to prove my side is right - or understand what they can see from where they are standing?



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4 Let reality turn the cube

Sometimes another person shows you a different side. Other times, life does. You thought the employee would work out. They did not. You believed customers wanted something. They did not buy it. You thought working harder would solve the problem. It did not. **Reality just turned the cube.** Now something is visible that was not before. Human beings are remarkably good at protecting old beliefs from new evidence by explaining, justifying, blaming circumstances, or finding evidence that supports what we already believed. Humility allows experience to become wisdom instead of simply becoming more experience.

ASK YOURSELF: What is reality repeatedly trying to teach me that I keep explaining away?

5 Make learning part of who you are

Patrick Lencioni describes an ideal team player as **hungry, humble, and smart**. Hunger creates drive. Being smart means developing awareness of people and how our behavior affects them. Humility keeps growth possible. Without it, hunger can become ego-driven ambition, knowledge can become certainty, and success can become evidence that our way is the right way. Put humility together with curiosity and the posture changes: **'I want to get better more than I need to look like I already know.'** Read. Ask questions. Seek feedback. Learn from younger people, older people, failures, and people who see the world differently.

ASK YOURSELF: Am I more interested in demonstrating what I know - or discovering what I still have to learn?

You Don't See the Whole Cube

Humility is not assuming your perspective is wrong. It is **recognizing that your perspective may be incomplete**. Curiosity is how we begin seeing the other sides of the cube.



What I'm seeing is real - but it may not be all there is to see.

When another perspective or an unexpected result turns the cube, we have a choice: **DEFEND** what we already know, or **GET CURIOUS** about what has become visible. Curiosity creates the opportunity to learn, update our understanding, and grow.

THE HUMILITY TEST

NOTICE - What reaction am I having? Am I curious, defensive, embarrassed, dismissive, threatened, or interested?

EGO - What am I protecting? Do I need to be right, competent, respected, in control, or seen as the expert?

CURIOSITY - What might I be missing? Before deciding something is wrong, have I understood the other side of the cube?

REALITY - What does the evidence actually say? Am I updating my beliefs based on what is happening - or explaining away information I do not like?

LEARNING - What can I take from this? Even if the other person is mostly wrong, is there something useful here?

GROWTH - What will I do differently? Learning is not complete simply because I understand something new. What changes because of it?

And perhaps the most important question: **Am I still teachable?**

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You do not have to diminish your experience to remain teachable. The objective is not to know less. It is to hold what you know with enough humility that there is still room for what you have not learned yet.

AgStrat works with founders and leaders who are building both stronger organizations and the personal capacity required to lead them. To begin a confidential conversation, contact AgStrat at virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Humility | Curiosity | Learning | Growth | Leadership