



THE PITFALLS OF HUBRIS



Creating a practice culture that wows patients requires putting them first and ensuring that they have an incredible experience at your practice, clinic, or hospital. Understanding the patient lifecycle and the behaviors practices can adopt to attract and

retain patients goes a long way to achieving this “wow” effect. As technology improves and procedures become safer and more effective, it is increasingly difficult to differentiate your practice from others. The patient experience remains what can set your practice apart and lead to more patient inquiries. This means that the patient is the hero (the center of attention) and that the ophthalmologist is the guide who helps the patient understand the information they receive during their visit.

Previously, physicians assessed patient data, pieced them together, and prescribed treatment. In the digital health era, patient data are often generated by wearable technologies, making patients participants in the discussion of their data. In the process, doctors become guides helping patients navigate the data and their treatment options.

Hubris is the antithesis of what is required to wow patients. The term *hubris* comes from the ancient Greeks, and the trait to which it refers has been evident in the news lately. In many classical Greek tragedies, hubris is the fatal shortcoming that brings about the fall of the tragic figure. An overconfident hero attempts to exceed human limitations only to be met with an abrupt and humbling reminder of their mortality from the gods. Overbearing arrogance, excessive self-indulgence, and the belief that one will always succeed are fundamental to hubris.

Politicians, senior business managers, and medical consultants who have enjoyed power for many years may exhibit hubris. This trait should not be confused with genuine self-confidence, where people perform to their full ability and recognize their limitations. Realistic optimism does not qualify as hubris. Hubris is unjustifiably limitless self-confidence, and it often extends to delusional behavior and domineering egotism.

The power paradox is an interesting phenomenon in which seemingly intelligent individuals change when they gain power.¹ Their prior approach of seeking guidance from peers and being empathetic to others led to their acquisition of power but seems to disappear once power is achieved. I am confident that readers can identify hubristic people in current news reports about the political and business worlds. Supporters of these individuals are often swept along by irrational exuberance and fail to recognize the problematic behaviors until it is too late. Hierarchical organizations are complicit in hubris by not encouraging individuals to challenge people in positions of power. Leaders often receive nothing but absolute obedience. Identifying people who are prone to hubristic behavior is the best way to avoid the pitfalls of unchallenged power. A proper buddy system for leaders in which decisions are contested and behavior curtailed could help prevent excessive and catastrophic outcomes.

An undeniable common denominator in hubris is the alpha male. The virile tendency to portray a tough, uncompromising exterior to defeat others underlies the hubristic condition and does not appear to me to be as prevalent and extreme in women. I have no doubt that, for the good of humanity, we need more women in positions of leadership and power—as CEOs and on boards, as founders of companies, and as leaders of nations. May we all do whatever we can to reduce hubris in our world. ■

1. Keltner D. Why leaders must give away power in order to keep influence. *Fortune*. May 18, 2016. Accessed April 6, 2022. <https://fortune.com/2016/05/18/power-paradox-influence>



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