



Controlled Discipline: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Meekness and Its Application Among Entrepreneurial Leaders

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Abstract

Meekness is often misunderstood and confusing when applied in highly challenging, dynamic environments. For entrepreneurial leaders, the construct of a leadership strategy that incorporates virtues is frequently low on the list of priorities for business ventures and intraorganizational initiatives (Ciulla, 2020). However, the lack of an intentional and clear leadership strategy can undermine entrepreneurial endeavors, as much of a startup's success relies on the often-small cadre of professionals who work to achieve a vision amid the unique risks facing new ventures (Badura et al., 2020; Venus et al., 2019). This conceptual study examines meekness as a potential virtue that entrepreneurial leaders can adopt and embody as they strive to inspire and motivate followers to achieve a shared vision of success and realize their full potential. A qualitative analysis of recent literature on meekness in business and entrepreneurial endeavors, as well as biblical profiles in which meekness is contrasted with success and failure, was used to examine the holistic impact on follower outcomes. For biblical references, socio-rhetorical analysis of inter-texture was applied to ensure theological consistency with the biblical definition of meekness and its outcomes for both Moses and David. The study concludes with an examination of the rhetorical value of meekness as a virtue in entrepreneurial leadership strategy. It demonstrates the need for further research on the impact of meekness as a potential moderator of employee motivation and business outcomes in entrepreneurial ventures.

Keywords: meekness, leadership, strategy, entrepreneurial, virtue

The beatitudes include the opening line, "Blessed are..." nine times in a repetitive pattern that the original audience would have been familiar with and one that Jesus likely used to emphasize the singular quality of persons who embody each of the associated attributes; they are blessed (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016). The beatitudes outline the ethical guidelines for a godly life and provide a framework for assessing individuals' behaviors and intentions (Longman et al., 2010). The principles

therein are not limited to those who ascribe to a Judeo-Christian worldview but can be found emulated throughout society on the spectrum of foundational morality, even among secular ethicists (Davies, 2016; Rotaru, 2023). Secular literature is replete with beatific mores taught in both practical and theoretical contexts, and the very definitions of the terms: meekness, humility, peace, and moral righteousness have their roots in theological imagery and in externally applied moral law (Barnat, 2017; Mourão Permoser, 2019; Westermarck, 2022).

Winston (2002) described meekness as an often-abhorred virtue among secular leaders that is misunderstood and misapplied. In Matthew 5:5, Jesus stated, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The term used in the Bible to connote meekness in Hebrew, *anaw* refers to the bearing of a burden or persistence under trial, while the Greek term *praus* refers to disciplined calm or exercising strength under God’s control (Bible Hub, 2022; Caner, 2010; Green, 2005). The qualities of meekness are illuminated by the original languages in which they appeared, such as demonstrating persistence and controlled calm in the face of burdens or challenges. The beatific reference to meekness does not expound on the qualities of the virtue. Still, it does declare that those who are meek will inherit the earth, where “earth” is an allusion to the Kingdom of Heaven and “inheritance” is an operative term for actualizing a promise akin to entering into a promised land (Barker & Kohlenberger, 2004). The parallel between meekness and humbleness in the beatitudes is demonstrated in the characteristics that embody them. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus extols the virtue of a spirit of poverty, in which the individual relies solely on God. Similarly, in Luke 6:20, the allusion to poverty is explicitly in the context of economic poverty, whereas in Matthew 5, the allusion is often translated to mean spiritual poverty or a state of complete reliance regardless of external wealth (Barker & Kohlenberger, 2004; Orr, 2019).

On its face, as a virtue, meekness seems to fit with the operational definitions of multiple leadership theories and styles, not least of which would be servant, transformational, authentic, democratic, and ethical leadership (Bourantas & Agapitou, 2016; Nawaz & Khan, 2016; Newstead et al., 2020). However, there is a lack of research on meekness as a virtue for leadership behavior and efficacy, particularly in private businesses and among entrepreneurs. Given the operating definition of meekness provided herein and its general application as both a virtue and a behavior in the Bible, this study explores the potential of meekness as a virtue in entrepreneurial leadership strategies, laying the foundation for employee engagement, motivation, and corporate performance. For this study, discipline and humility are used as subordinate traits of meekness and are associated with the term as components of the behaviors exhibited by meek leaders. Therefore, discipline is the quality of persistence and diligence in accomplishing a goal regardless of the environment or circumstances (Robertson, 2020). Humility is defined as a leader’s competency in self-awareness of limitations, ownership of failures, willingness to learn and accept advice, and openness with

employees regardless of echelon (Maldonado et al., 2018). These definitions are analyzed against the backdrop of scholarly literature on meekness and leadership virtues, as well as biblical examples of meek leaders, to provide a framework for future research into the impact and value of this virtue in planning and executing leadership strategies for entrepreneurs.

Literature Review

Meekness in Leadership

Much of the scholarly literature on meekness in leadership has focused on the biblical quality outside secular contexts, primarily in church and non-profit leadership studies (Crowther, 2017; Halstead, 2021; Molyneaux, 2003; Smurthwaite, 2011). Literature on meekness as a leadership trait in entrepreneurial ventures is even more scant, with most references to meekness used as a synonym for discipline, constancy, humility, and gentleness as positive leadership traits for comprehensive leadership styles (Bocarnea, 2018; Botha & Morallane, 2019; Kujanpää, 2022; Sanz-Bas, 2023). Traditionally, meekness has been associated with the servant, authentic, transformational, and altruistic leadership styles where the trait is integrated into a formal theoretical construct as a factor in follower development and organizational well-being (Byrd & Thornton, 2019; Mallén et al., 2019; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Where these leadership styles are associated with entrepreneurial contexts, the quality of meekness is often used as a determinant of a leader's competency in each style or as a moderator in leader-person fit to aid organizational culture development (Caesar, 2014; Ferch, 2005; Fernando, 2007; Oc et al., 2020).

Winston (2002) provided a cogent assessment of each beatific virtue in organizational leadership by invoking their imperative nature as constituent elements of a holistic, positive leadership ethos. Regarding meekness, Winston noted the term is often associated with a general perception of weakness or passivity. He stated that modern leadership across organizational types "abhors" the term and sees it as anathema to the concept of toughness touted as necessary for competent leadership (p. 41). However, the dynamic of meekness as a trait of ineffective and feckless leaders is challenged when defined through its biblical conceptual framework. Winston described meekness as "controlled discipline" (p. 46). He noted that meekness equips leaders to make difficult decisions that may require toughness through rational, data-centric, humane processes of understanding and emotional discipline. This early work embodies meekness from a position of moral and personal strength, promoting self-control and enriching interactions, regardless of their tenor or impetus. Winston further described how meekness is a quality that contains the means to most ends, whereby leaders who exhibit controlled discipline can make, communicate, and execute difficult decisions and diffuse organizational challenges by demonstrating an inherent quality of care for

individuals and organizations without indulging emotional and reactionary impulses and, thus, set a model for similar behaviors among subordinates, peers, and superiors.

The concept of meekness as a leadership virtue was expanded by Molyneaux (2003) through a pragmatic study of the virtue, considering an evolving interest in leadership qualities that extend beyond tactile and methodological constructs. The literature review included the socio-rhetorical application of Matthew 5:5 as a contravention to the popular concept that meekness implies a leader's foregoing power, but that it genuinely means controlled power. Molyneaux concluded that meek leaders can respond to challenges rather than react and are equipped with the ability to aggressively address issues ranging from misconduct, shortfalls, and structural impositions with poise and precision. He associated his analysis of Matthew 5:6 with Comte-Sponville and Temerson (2002), who posited a moral philosophy of meekness as a virtue for human interaction, particularly in leadership contexts. While Molyneaux (2003) did not explicitly disassociate the biblical principle of meekness from its secular application, he did pave the way for the concept of meekness as a humane virtue among leaders, irrespective of their worldviews.

Knights and O'Leary (2006) further developed this concept by applying it to historically relevant cases of ethical violations in business. They conducted a semi-structured meta-narrative of the literature on leadership ethics against the backdrop of multiple scandals in the financial and equities trading sectors, with references spanning a multimodal qualitative analysis of case studies, phenomena, and linguistic logic. The study's findings demonstrated a correlation between a lack of leader morality and unethical behaviors that led to highly publicized business failures, scandals, and structural flaws in market regulations. They concluded that ethical frameworks were imperative to organizational success, that leaders are the stewards – if not instigators – of these frameworks, and that meekness via the combination of humility and poise (control or discipline) increased the potential for ethical financial decisions when faced with unethical options.

Pettigrove (2012) contributed to the body of knowledge by presenting a qualitative article grounded in elements of grounded theory, exploring the applicability of meekness as a predominant moral virtue for leaders, and providing an explanatory dematerialization of the term and its connotations. Relying heavily on the classical definitions of meekness from the original Greek word *πραῦς* (*praus*), Pettigrove provided a logical argument for the constituent qualities of meekness among leaders and their pervasiveness as valid means of disciplined decision-making and conflict management. The use of meekness, thus, is rooted in the concept of gentleness and humility but combined with the fortitude of integrity and moral imperative of ethical behavior, which in turn presents a vision of leaders who act ethically with gentleness

but are unwavering in their convictions which can manifest as assertiveness and stability much in the way Jesus is depicted when he cleared the temple in Matthew.

Harris (2013) presented a conceptual framework for a term dubbed *humbition*, in which new leaders embody meekness when taking over preexisting teams while maintaining their ambitions for career advancement. The study highlighted the need to disentangle the negative cultural presumptions that often accompany ambition among leaders, particularly female leaders, from the requirement for humility when assuming a leadership role in an organization with low or nonexistent social capital. Ultimately, this study demonstrated the theoretical value of meekness among ambitious leaders and a potential, albeit not empirically validated, moderator for unbridled personal advancement and inconsistent resolve in early team acclimation phases. The study provided a conceptual foundation for disciplined leader-follower social responsibility within organizations, in which meekness sets a tone of consistency, intentionality, and deliberative decision-making that can be modeled and embodied by the entire workforce.

Crowther (2017) proposed what is possibly the first values-based leadership model, grounded in biblical virtues and the fruits of the Spirit outlined in Galatians 5:22-23, with meekness as a core virtue of the construct. Crowther's model included meekness as a moderator of relationships in leader-to-follower dynamics, imbuing the leader with moral authority through calmness and self-discipline in challenging circumstances. Thus, meekness is used here as a structural element, much like a pillar that works in concert with eight other virtues to embody the definition of a holistic, biblically moral leader. Crowther demonstrated the value of meekness in resolving conflicts, making difficult ethical and responsible decisions, and maintaining harmony in the face of challenges. This study, along with its associations between meekness and a leader's capacity to maintain emotional and mental discipline in any situation, demonstrates the need for empirical data on the quality as a moderator of organizational culture and individual responsibility. Further, Crowther demonstrated the inherent applicability of biblically centered value systems to non-religious contexts and the validity of meekness as a virtue among secular and non-secular leaders.

Gist (2020) argued for a broader empirical analysis of the virtue of leader humility as a moderator and potential indicator of employee dissatisfaction beyond tangible benefits and career opportunities. The concept presented highlights the need for more qualitative and quantitative analysis of how followers perceive leader humility and whether a lack of humility among leaders is correlated with employees' desire to leave corporations and pursue other opportunities. Employee motivation is at the core of the conceptual framework, and Gist provides a strong theoretical argument for how new employees and tenured staff alike are affected by a leader's ability to demonstrate discipline and deference in their decision-making, which maintains employee well-

being as a top concern for company longevity and market relevance. While this study did not address meekness outright, it did provide a factorial framework for the characteristics of meekness in its operating definition of humility to call on researchers to produce validated analysis on whether humility, deference, discipline, compassion, and intellectual honesty play a role in attracting and retaining employees among business startups and established corporations with exploratory analysis in leader humility and meekness as the justification (Gist, 2020; Ren et al., 2020; Subrahmanyam, 2018).

Halstead (2021) took an inverted approach to studying the impact of meekness on leadership efficacy by analyzing the level of cognitive dissonance among followers who identified anger as a negative quality in leaders. The study included a phenomenological review of scenarios contrasting leaders' tendencies toward anger or meekness and the potential impacts each has on employees' cognitive dissonance between their functional jobs and their commitment to the overarching organization. Halstead used biblical baselines from Matthew 5:5, Matthew 11:29, Colossians 3:12, and Titus 3:1–2 for the definition and practical application of meekness as exemplars that framed the model of meekness and provided substantive contrasts to undisciplined expressions of anger among leaders as *de facto* modes of negative motivation. He concluded that there is a substantive connection between the affective and cognitive domains of human emotion that amplify human reactions to leader anger, with equally adverse outcomes for organizations, manifested in employee disengagement or in employee anger that amplifies and propagates a culture of anger and undisciplined reactions among the workforce.

Virtues in Leadership Strategy

There is scant research on meekness in leadership strategies among private enterprises. Research on entrepreneurial leadership strategies that emphasize meekness or humility as virtues is almost nonexistent. However, a body of knowledge does exist that associates meekness and humility with employee motivation, including new employees and new organizations that demonstrate the value of virtues in leadership strategies (Caldwell et al., 2015; Flynn, 2008; Ozkan & Ardic, 2022; Tsoukas, 2018; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). From the literature on leadership virtues and their strategic implications for developing and leading businesses, the characteristics of meekness arise as elemental to ensuring employee engagement, increasing business efficacy, and promoting corporate longevity outside of the structural factors and variables – often in the face of challenges they pose (Arjoon, 2000; Glauner, 2017; Maldonado et al., 2018; Tsoukas, 2018; Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Research on leader discipline and self-control augments this body of knowledge by contrasting leader impact and corporate responsibility and by conducting multiple exploratory studies on the effects of leader discipline on corporate culture and outcomes (McCarter et al., 2022).

Discipline and Humility: Antecedents to Leadership Strategy. Discipline has been studied as a factor in employee performance and organizational efficacy for centuries and is referenced in the early writings of Stoics, political philosophers, and classical theorists (Robertson, 2020; Russell, 2015; Stephenson, 1959). Scholarly literature on the application of discipline in business contexts, particularly business-leader contexts, has focused heavily on the role of performance and execution discipline in organizations, with less emphasis on discipline as a virtue versus a behavioral trait among leaders (Aeni & Kuswanto, 2021). Tumilaar (2015) conducted a quantitative analysis, including classic assumption tests and multiple linear regression, to examine the relationships among employee performance, leader motivation, discipline, and the success of private businesses in Indonesia. They determined that discipline is a behavioral norm that can be cultivated through corporate citizenship programs and that leaders positively impact employee discipline when they model desired behaviors rather than dictate them.

Razak et al. (2018) found that a leader's personal work discipline had a corollary effect on employee modeling of disciplined behaviors, leading to measurable improvements in business performance. They conducted a quantitative analysis of data collected from Indonesian businesses. Correlation, determination, and simultaneous and partial sample testing showed that leader self-discipline could be used as an indicator of organizational performance consistency and as a baseline for employee motivation when tangible benefit variables were accounted for. McCarter et al. (2022) conducted a similar analysis among hospitality employees in Texas and found that leadership style, including traits associated with meekness, positively affected employee discipline. Specifically, they concluded that leader work discipline had the highest impact on employee work discipline as a moderator for performance, and that leader work discipline, conjoined with elements of authentic, transformational, and transactional leadership styles, was the most significant predictor of employee motivation among the sample set. Suhartono et al. (2023) conducted a study among Indonesian steel manufacturing employees and reported similar results. Notably, employee performance was directly correlated with a culture of work discipline, attributed to leader self-discipline and the maintenance of organizational protocols, most notably through the paradigm of transactional leadership.

Vera and Rodriguez-Lopez (2004) advanced a conceptual argument for humility as a fundamental quality of leaders, defining it as a virtue and citing multiple studies correlating humility with success across various environments (Farson & Keys, 2002; Hayward & Hambrick, 1997; Solomon, 1999). They concluded that leader humility is tied to corporate success in both practical business scenarios and organizational longevity, as well as cultural well-being among employees. Their findings demonstrated that humility, defined as accurate self-knowledge, realism, a propensity to learn, and self-discipline among leaders, has a positive impact on organizational learning, employee resilience, a service-oriented culture, firm performance, and

longevity (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004). Owens and Hekman (2016) expanded on this analysis through a quantitative analysis of the impact of leader humility on team interactions, emergence, performance, and outcomes. Their study included samples from 607 employees across multiple industries, using a double-blind design with 84 laboratory and 77 organizational field teams (Owens & Hekman, 2016, p. 1106). The authors concluded that leader humility provides a strategic advantage by preventing employee cultural contagion through demotivated behaviors and destructive attitudes, and by enhancing the quality of both team performance and corporate engagement, with validated correlations to business success.

Recent literature on humility among business leaders emphasizes the value of virtuous leadership strategies and their impact on organizational culture, business performance, and social responsibility. Maldonado et al. (2018) conducted a study that identified six organizational behavior norms, including humility, exemplified by leaders who are almost synonymous with the operating definition of meekness, namely employee development, failure tolerance, organizational transparency, awareness, performance recognition, and corporate openness Kelemen et al. (2023) synthesized a substantial amount of literature on leader humility. They emphasized the value of virtue-oriented leadership strategies, incorporating humility and elements of meekness as pillars that support both internal organizational health and external impact. Their analysis included nomological and theoretical frameworks of leader humility. It demonstrated the operational definition of meekness espoused by Winston (2002), which involves controlled discipline as a precursor to humble and altruistic leadership, with direct correlations to organizational performance (Kelemen et al., 2023). Most literature associating virtues with leadership strategy highlights humility as fundamental. It dematerializes this virtue to constituent behaviors, qualities, and skills that repeatedly demonstrate the qualities of meekness as elemental to humility. Thus, while there is scant literature on meekness as a virtue of leadership in business contexts, a growing body of foundational literature on humility paves the way for future research on meekness specifically, as well as for identifying the differences between the two as independent and interdependent elements of a holistic leadership strategy.

Analysis

Biblical Contrasts of Meekness

Throughout the Bible, there are multiple examples of meekness in leadership, and equally, if not more, examples of leaders who failed to demonstrate it. Two examples of leaders who both failed and succeeded at demonstrating meekness are Moses and David (Halstead, 2021; Molyneaux, 2003). Herein, each will be considered in the context of their ability to apply controlled discipline against scenarios where they failed.

Moses

Moses was raised in the courts of Pharaoh after being miraculously saved by Pharaoh's decree that Hebrew midwives must kill any male child born to Hebrew women (Exodus 1). He was given every opportunity that a princely leader could imagine, as he was groomed in diplomacy, military command, and the execution of power (Exodus 2). The biblical narrative provides an image of uncontrolled discipline and a clear point of growth in maturity for Moses as a young man before he assumes his calling to lead Israel's freedom. In Exodus 2:11-14, Moses enters a scene in which an Egyptian commits an injustice against a fellow Hebrew. To this point, Moses has watched and learned how the Egyptians forced the Hebrews to conduct hard labor with little to no reprieve and oppressed God's people to build Pharaoh's vision of an unrivaled kingdom. His moral anger was likely a motivator for his actions as he responded to the injustice played out before him by murdering the Egyptian slave master (Carpenter, 2012). The Hebrews immediately rebuked Moses's actions, in a likely unexpected turn, and questioned his leadership. The next day when Moses comes upon two Hebrews embroiled in an argument, and in his attempt to understand and settle the conflict, he is rebuked by one of the men who says, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:13-14). In his haste to address a wrongdoing and exact his own form of discipline, Moses undermined his authority among Hebrews and Egyptians and fled the country to avoid Pharaoh's justice (Kaiser, 2017). Then, Moses embarked on a journey that would shape him as a leader and ultimately lead to his return to Egypt as God's deliverer for the Hebrews.

Throughout Exodus, Moses demonstrates the human condition of conflict between faith and doubt, self-control and unrestrained emotion, obedience and defiance. However, a recurring theme of meekness emerges in the process whereby Moses submits himself to God's power and executes his charge to confront the impetuous Pharaoh with the demand to free the Hebrews. Moses's meekness prevails over his self-doubt in Exodus 4, when God provides Aaron as a spokesman for Moses's mission. Again, Moses demonstrates restraint and controlled discipline when proving to the Hebrews that he is God's deliverer of their freedom, as seen in Exodus 4, 5, 12, 14, 15, and 16. It is meekness that is underpinned by faith that Moses employs when executing God's will and the declaration of each plague on Egypt. Moses showed controlled discipline not only in giving Pharaoh God's ultimatum but also by doing exactly as commanded rather than taking matters into his own hands to either negotiate with Pharaoh or exact a more immediate plan of action (Carpenter, 2012).

David

As a leader, David was blessed and anointed by God from an early age. In 1 Samuel 16, God commands the prophet to anoint David, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, and not

the most prominent in terms of stature, outward appearance, or bearing. However, David was declared to be “glowing with health” and of “fine appearance and handsome” (1 Samuel 16:12). He was still the least of Jesse’s sons and, at the time, a shepherd of Jesse’s flocks (. While David was not expected to be the anointed one based on his age and position in the family, God used him, from a presumably lowly state, to be the successor to King Saul and the leader of Israel. From this humble beginning, David would rise and fall and rise again as a leader who embodied and violated the tenets of meekness, among other prominent godly virtues (Benton, 2016).

Early in David’s life, he shows remarkable meekness in the face of overwhelming odds. At his father’s command, David visits his elder brothers, who are encamped at the battlefield against the Philistines, to bring them food (1 Samuel 17:17–18). His actual task, however, was to demonstrate God’s power in the face of an insurmountable challenge by humbly accepting God’s charge to face down the giant Goliath with a sling and stones, leading to Goliath’s death and the Israelite conquest over the Philistine army (Hoffner, 2015; Longman & Garland, 2010). Here, David demonstrated meekness as he employed the controlled discipline of God’s power through faith and obedience, setting the example for God’s omnipotence where human capability and capacity failed. David would go on to experience many trials and victories throughout his life, demonstrating the caprices of human nature, both succeeding and failing in his pursuit of meekness.

In 2 Samuel 11, the Bible portrays David at a particularly low point in his moral character, abandoning his kingly duties and remaining at his palace while his army is off fighting (Longman & Garland, 2010). David demonstrates a lack of self-control and a failure of self-discipline by choosing to rest and remain idle while his men were fighting the enemies of Israel. Instead, he sends his representative, Joab, to oversee the military campaign. Longman and Garland (2010) noted that David’s actions were unusual for a ruler of his time, but they also opened the door for reprehensible, sinful behavior. Thus, although his army enjoyed a decisive victory over the Amorites, David’s lack of meekness in the face of his responsibility led to greater sin. Immediately thereafter, the story of David’s lechery with Bathsheba unfolds and can be concluded as a direct consequence of his abdication of duty (Cloyd, 2019; Hoffner, 2015). While various other virtues are jettisoned in this image of David’s failure, the operating definition of meekness is appropriate as a factor in analyzing his behavior. David demonstrated a lack of discipline, which led to a more significant lack of control and, thus, resulted in selfish behaviors that followed, including adultery, murder, and deceit (Hoffner, 2015).

While David ultimately repents for his sins and endures the consequences they created, he also demonstrates a growth progression in pervasive meekness throughout his life. This is evidenced in a seemingly simple exchange that any leader seeking to learn and apply meekness can easily emulate. As David flees the pursuit of his son Absalom, who

was set on killing the anointed king, he is confronted with one of his many failures by Shimei, a man from Saul's clan, who curses David for the deaths attributed to his actions. Shimei hurled insults at David and his entourage, throwing stones at them as they journeyed to Bahurim. At this juncture, Abishai, one of David's cohorts and the guard of the king, requests that he be allowed to behead Shimei for his insults and impertinence toward the king (Longman & Garland, 2010). David responded with both humility and disciplined control when he said, "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite [Shimei]! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to" (2 Samuel 16:11). David had every right to allow Abishai to kill Shimei and to assert his authority as the anointed king of Israel; however, he showed restraint and spared his life in submission to God's will and ultimate jurisdiction over David's circumstances (Hoffner, 2015). David demonstrated his discipline by leaving the disciplining of Shimei to God and not adding to the offenses his ego had committed in earlier chapters of his life. Thus, David demonstrated meekness in later years amid highly challenging circumstances, even when he had the social and moral authority to do otherwise.

Strategic Discipline and Vision

Successful entrepreneurial endeavors require a clear vision of success to galvanize stakeholder interest and attract and retain talent (Baum et al., 1998; Preller et al., 2020). Moses and David were not necessarily entrepreneurial leaders because they did not start businesses; however, they were both called to lead Israel into unknown territory and inspire their followers' thinking with transformative ideals. Their visions came from God, the highest authority, and the most precise direction anyone could hope for. In turn, they applied disciplined control in executing those visions, and although both failed at various points in their leadership journeys, they achieved the end state God had called them to (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012; Jones, 2018; Soloveichik, 2017).

Entrepreneurs must establish a vision for their new venture, even if that venture is internal to or incubated by a larger organization. Innovative and progressive business concepts require a vision, or they may become disjointed and fail due to indiscriminate qualifications (Behling & Lenzi, 2019). Strategic vision provides an image of a future state that the business aspires to, allowing employees and stakeholders to envision their outcomes within the broader mission and vision framework. Therefore, the vision established by an entrepreneurial leader is a critical element in the organizational discipline and control framework, in the same way that constellations provide mariners with a focal point to steer and maintain their headings (Märk & Situm, 2024). For the Hebrews following Moses, the vision was multifaceted, beginning with freedom and ending with entrance into a promised land (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012; Kaiser, 2017). For David, the vision was a unified Israel that prioritized God's will and actualized its status as a chosen people to be a light in a dark world (Benton, 2016; Soloveichik, 2017).

The leader's vision is the foundation for organizational goals against which meekness can be applied through controlled discipline that pursues organizational success and outcomes, providing the necessary architecture for teams to be efficient and effective (Singh & Singh, 2021).

Meekness as a Motivator

Entrepreneurs, like all leaders, will face resistance to their endeavors and need to employ motivational strategies to ensure their vision is executed and achieved. Those who lack self-discipline may become discouraged when resistance arises and gives in to the temptation to disengage from their followers and the venture (Murnieks et al., 2020). Conversely, resistance may also result in a recalcitrant and defiant entrepreneur-leader who becomes overbearing, micromanaging the foundational activities of their followers (Hoang et al., 2022). Both ends of this behavior spectrum will undermine the business's vision and erode followers' motivations, leading to tangible losses and attrition (Märk & Situm, 2024). Winston and Tucker (2011) described meekness as a virtue that prevents these two extremes, and, when embodied, operates as a moderator between laissez-faire and overbearing leadership styles (p. 19).

David's abdication of leadership on the battlefield led to the materialization of real threats to Israel, himself, and others close to him. Moses abdicated by fleeing his failure to protect individual Hebrews under his authority, resulting in his exile and loss of influence. Both leaders also succumbed to overbearing attitudes, with David responding to his sin by micromanaging the assignment of a trusted officer, which ultimately led to the discovery of his failures and to Uriah's death (Hoffner, 2015). Moses took matters into his own hands when striking the rock with his staff against the command of God and, thus, lost his opportunity to enter the promised land after 40 years of wandering (Carpenter, 2012). In both contexts, these leaders lost social capital with their followers by failing to demonstrate disciplined control and to motivate them toward the ultimate vision. Entrepreneurial leaders should cultivate meekness as a constant virtue that permeates their behavior, fostering consistency, fairness, earnestness, and dedication to their followers. This will motivate followers toward a common goal, even when challenges inevitably arise, which is a common occurrence in new ventures.

Conclusion

Meekness is a virtue that entrepreneurial leaders can embody and apply to drive strategic vision and motivate employees around common goals. The capacity of an entrepreneur to cast a vision, share it, and motivate employees toward its achievement relies heavily on the leader's ability to pursue it with controlled discipline in the face of adversity, unforeseen change, cultural discontinuity, and team development cycles

(Winston & Tucker, 2011). The Bible offers multiple examples of leaders who exemplified and violated the characteristics of meekness, demonstrating the effects of each (Longman & Garland, 2010). Still, God maintained the overall vision and used the failures of those leaders to bring about circumstances that glorified him and sanctified them. Entrepreneurial leaders embark on a process of change, growth, challenge, failure, and success that requires diligence, humility, and controlled discipline. The lack of literature on meekness as a leadership trait, particularly in entrepreneurial ventures, demonstrates the need for operational theories and testable hypotheses to determine the impact of meekness on employee motivation, talent acquisition, corporate identity, business outcomes, and appropriate leadership styles (Bocarnea, 2018; Kujanpää, 2022). This conceptual study is a clarion call for researchers to study meekness as a virtue in the context of business and develop empirical data that can assist in leadership development, strategy, and execution, particularly in new ventures where team development and leader competency develop simultaneously in a dynamic and often opaque environment (Sanz-Bas, 2023). As seen in the literature review and analysis, there is foundational research in leader humility, leadership virtues, and biblical profiles of leadership that can be built on to frame the argument for meekness as an integral beatific leadership virtue. Future research should build on these precepts to apply empirical methods that test the extent to which meekness influences employee motivation, startup member cohesion, and vision execution.

About the Author

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