Editorial

Humility

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Semin Intervent Radiol 2016;33:1–2

Humility is the awareness that there's a lot you don't know and that a lot of what you think you know is distorted or wrong.

–David Brooks

For the holidays last year my wife gave me a book entitled, *The Road to Character* by David Brooks. Why my wife felt that I needed to read this book is something I'd rather not discuss and is beyond the scope of this article. One of the concepts that the author of this book discusses is the personality trait of humility—true humility, not forced or faked. In the book, which I highly recommend by the way, he uses case studies of individuals from American history to outline the personality traits to which we should all strive. Humility seems not to be a stand-alone characteristic for which he uses one case example, but is a thread that runs through the fabric of all of these individuals who define “character.” As he didn't use a specific case example to describe an instance of humility, I thought I would—although from a different perspective.

A few weeks ago, I was included in an email chain started by a fellow IR that was, simply put, a rant against all things IR. The discussion focused largely on this individual's practice and how without appropriate and aggressive leadership in place the field of IR is doomed to oblivion. It struck me as odd that the main target of this individual was the “ivory tower” “nutty professor” (his words, not mine) types who, parenthetically, have spent many of their own hours away from their families to advance the field from which he has prospered (these are my words).

Anyway, this pomposity aside, I started contemplating the idea of humility in our field. When I think back on many of the IRs who have influenced me in my career—John Kaufman, Sadu Shenoy, Jan Durham, among others—I thought about how the personality trait that they all show is humility toward themselves and their own accomplishments. They truly feel, against all evidence, that they haven't really made that much of a difference in our field or toward our patients. The people from whom I've learned the most don't even feel worthy of the accolades—somewhat ironic, really.

Humility in individuals is a noble characteristic and one for which I will continue to strive—but I'm not sure it has a place in our specialty as a whole. We do a horrible—abysmal—job of telling people how truly great IR is, how nobody else has the skillset to do what IRs do (despite their thinking they do), and how much IR adds to the value of medicine. Do you remember the era when we had to be certain that a vascular surgeon was on standby when we did an angioplasty to “bail us out” in case we got in trouble? Well, when was the last time you were bailed out by *anybody*, instead of the other way around? Perhaps it's time that we remind people of the paradigm shift, and remind them loudly and frequently. We needn't, and indeed shouldn't, do it as individuals (“Look at what I can do”), but instead should do it together (“Look at what WE can do”).

In fact, I was thinking that the Bard mentioned above could get us out of this humility craze we suffer as a field and back into the mainstream of me-ism. We all can, after all, learn something from everybody.

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Issue Theme Dialysis
Interventions; Guest Editor,
Gordon McLennan, MD, FSIR

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Publishers, Inc., 333 Seventh Avenue,
New York, NY 10001, USA.
Tel: +1(212) 584-4662.

DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1055/s-0036-1572549>.
ISSN 0739-9529.