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Kellogg

J. L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management Northwestern University

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July 5, 1987

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Marlys A. Grantwit
Principal Consultant
HR Research
Control Data Corporation
Box 0
Minneapolis, MN 55440

Dear Ms Grantwit:

Please accept my apologies for the long delay in responding to your letter and the interesting material accompanying it on "Humility and Ethical Leadership." Material of this degree of complexity (and subtlety!) takes time to digest, and the past several weeks have been unusually busy ones for me. With all that's going on at Control Data, I'm sure they have been busy weeks for you too.

I think you have hit on the trail of something that to this point has had little attention but ought to be explored further. Your review of the literature indicates that certain kinds of behavior on the part of acknowledged leaders reflects a degree of humility in their attitudes, but I'm sure that a lot more than humility is involved. Many adjectives have been used to describe Bill Norris, but no one ever called him humble. In some important ways, he was humble, but he was also -- and still is -- supremely self-confident. I have never heard the word "humble" in connection with Lee Iacocca, but neither have I ever heard him described as anything other than a leader. Turning to the political field, Napoleon, Churchill, and the Roosevelts (both of them) could not by any stretch of imagination be called "humble." Yet there is something in Norris, Iacocca, Napoleon, Churchill, and the Roosevelts that recognized and took carefully into account values that can only be described as "ethical." The only thing that troubles me about your formulation is your coupling of "humility" with "ethical behavior."

However questioning my reactions to your paper may be, I'd like to talk with you about your line of thinking. Perhaps on my next trip to Minneapolis we can arrange to meet and talk. Meanwhile, please continue the interesting line of speculation in which you are engaged.

Sincerely,

James E. Wright

CC:NR13



James C. Wortny
Professor of Management

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