

# Facet: Humility

## Humble Beginnings

By Suzanne Bates

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**Have you seen this new commercial for Dell? It's a simple slide show—a series of photos of tiny, unremarkable places where great companies were born.**

It begins with a photo of a little room over a pizza parlor, where Trip Advisor got its start; then, you see a modest home where in a first-floor bedroom, Skype was born; a dusty basement where the idea for Under Armour came to be; next the second floor above a strip mall where Whole Foods began; two seats of a bus, once South-bound on I-95, where Dropbox was conceived; and of course, a little dorm room, number 2713, where Michael Dell thought about creating a new kind of computer company. And he did.

**I've now watched this commercial about five times on YouTube, and I get teary every time.** (Apparently a few other people have been touched; it's up to about 900,000 hits.) **Why do I** feel so emotional about it? I guess it could be because I grew up in a small town where **everybody has humble beginnings. Maybe it's because the idea for this business was born in a shabby cubicle in a forgotten corner of a TV newsroom. Or perhaps it's just simply** because it is so true. Most of the successful people I know, and I know a few, had humble



beginnings, and most have gotten farther in life than they probably believe they had a right to imagine.

Humility is a good thing. It makes you feel better about yourself, remembering who you were. **On the other hand, it's a little too easy to forget that. You have success, and you get what my parents used to call "too big for your britches."** I remember scraping pennies off the floor of my Volkswagen Beetle to pay for a simple burger and fries on Thursday nights before my paycheck was delivered.

**So now, in all this leadership research we're doing, we've found one of the qualities most essential to executive presence and influence is – you guessed it - humility.** In the executive presence "model" we now have, it's defined as **"awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, openness to others, and a belief that all people have worth."** This is key **because if you have a brain you know you didn't get anywhere on your own; even if you work your rear off, a lot of people helped you. And even now, you aren't the only one with good ideas.** Other people have brains, too. They can still help if you can be quiet long enough to listen to them.

**In the book First Things First, Steven Covey talks about "Independence" versus "Interdependence."** Independent success is about individual achievement, whereas interdependence is collaborative. Happiness in humans is a direct result of what we do with and for others. If we forget this, we become depleted, stressed, burned out, tired, and sick of **it all, even while we continue to work and look like we're wildly successful. If we get into that depleted place because we've lost our humility, we put in jeopardy all that matters to us,** from marriages and children to friends and colleagues, and eventually, the successful careers that we have worked so hard to build.

How can you keep it real? It could be kind of cool to visit one of your **"humble beginning"** places; take out your cell phone and snap a picture. Post it on your wall or turn it into wallpaper on your computer. A picture is worth a thousand words.

And humility is priceless.

If you want to check out the Dell commercial you can find it here:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vFuKhk\\_T04](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vFuKhk_T04)

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