

What is Humanistic Leadership?



Purpose · Connection · Creativity · Trust · Influence · Uniquely Human

Technological developments continue to disrupt the nature, flow, and even the meaning of work. The impacts of these advancements have long been felt in blue collar work; increasingly, they are impacting traditionally white collar occupations in law, accounting, consulting, and healthcare, among others. Such advancements drive occupational displacements, and generate anxiety among those who remain. This begs the question, “What is the role of leadership, what is its value-add, in the face of these disruptions?”

As these developments continue we are confronted with a paradox: technology is becoming more and more adept at replacing the “hard” skills, yet technology is not capable of displacing the “soft” skills and are unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future. The hard skills are rational, logical and linear; susceptible to algorithms that can readily program and execute routine tasks and activities. The soft skills, however, rely on meaning, purpose, intuition, empathy, emotion, connection, creativity, conflict resolution, and influence; in effect, the uniquely human. These so-called soft skills are too hard to program, too hard to replace through AI and machine learning.

The consequence is that there is a demand for new models of leadership, new models for engaging the human element at work, the element that cannot be programmed. In response to this demand, the Marshall School of Business Office of Executive Education (MSBEE) has formulated a new integrative, humanistic model of leadership built around seven core themes that, taken together, address the requisite “soft” skills in the newly emergent world of work. These seven themes can be grouped based upon their focus on (a) understanding oneself, and (b) collaborating and producing with others.

They are:

Understanding Self (Looking inward)

- Meaning and purpose
- Intuition and empathy
- Mindsets and pattern recognition

Collaborating with Others (Looking outward)

- Social sensitivity and teams
- Design and pattern creation
- Humor and play
- Storytelling and narrative

Within each of these themes, we have identified a set of behavioral skills that, when taken together, equip and empower leaders to engage and support the most important asset that remains, their people. Machine learning and AI cannot be counted on to create and innovate, to develop new products and services, and to adapt and respond to an increasingly complex and volatile market environment. The requisite skills for leading the uniquely human, for leading with agility, in this uncertain environment are presented through a series of practical, applied modules embedded within our new leadership curriculum.

For more details on our Humanistic Leadership Series, visit www.marshall.usc.edu/humanistic-series