

The Perks of Humility



By Steve Kuhn, Chief Operating Officer, Able Moving & Storage

The quality that has benefitted me in my career the most has without a doubt been humility. When humility is present in any situation, I learn more and become more effective at my job. Humility allows me to listen—and when I listen, I become teachable.



When I was presented with Interstate Tariffs in 1990 as a rising executive at JK Moving, our family's business, I was blown away. The impulse to gloss them over was strong. Mike Steadman at Cavalier Moving & Storage in Merrifield, Virginia, acted as a mentor to me and helped me understand these regulations inside and out. I have never forgotten what I really learned from Mike in those early days, which was that I first had to say "I don't know" in order to learn. Mike went on to give me great advice on commercial moving and how to service international clients.

In the 1990s, I cannot count the number of times Ed Katz at the International Office Moving Institute accused me of not hearing what he was saying. When I was finally able to really listen to what he was offering, his advice became so valuable that we had him teach an annual seminar for ten years, and credited the origins of our office moving success directly to his tutorship.

My brother Chuck has continued to grow JK Moving into a very large and successful independent moving company, and while I now call Able Moving & Storage my home, many things he said have stayed with me. Early on in our careers, Chuck came to me with the advice to "Never let the company outgrow you." Since we were growing at the time, this advice just scared me and kept me awake at night. I thought this meant I had to know more than anybody I hired and had to know what was going on all the time. I now know the opposite is true. It means I need to say when I don't know so that I can learn. Career growth comes from listening to people whose knowledge is greater than mine as much as I possibly can. Honesty about what I don't know and

being willing to learn is what makes me relevant to my company today, and since there is no shortage of that, I no longer stay awake wondering if the company will outgrow me.

Arriving at Able in 2012, I was not used to being transparent with competitors. The idea of sharing best practices with the industry was completely foreign to me. I learned how to do this from Joe Singleton, the CEO of Able. Watching the relationships he had with competitors and the direction he encouraged me to take along these lines opened up a completely new ballgame for me. Very quickly, I realized how profitable collaboration can be. Sharing what we do with the industry helps our peers see us as leaders, and they are more comfortable using us for their own shipments. In 2019 we opened all of our doors to kick off the first AMSA Independent and Small Movers Conference, sharing everything that each of our divisions did with attendees from across the country. We continue to get positive feedback for this as well as business from other movers. None of this would have happened if I had not been willing to listen to Joe Singleton and try a new way of doing business.

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In early 2017 when Office Movers shut their doors, the majority of its leadership and employees decided to come and work for Able. The opportunity to grow the Able Commercial division was huge. These executives and employees were used to working together and doing things in a certain way, and we very much wanted a seamless transition. We wanted to learn from them and encourage this as much as possible while retaining the family culture at Able. Listening to them, we realized very quickly that one of the problems at Office Movers was not what these employees were doing, it was what they were not being allowed to do. We gave them creative licensure, and they have helped to grow the commercial division by 400% in the last few years. All it took was listening to them.

We have an extremely strong leadership team at Able that I was honored to put together at the request of the Singletons. I consider myself lucky to be able to listen to their ideas on a regular basis. This is the team that came up with the "You Squared Movement," a modern-day adaptation of the stale company vision statement, and it's the same leadership team that spawned "Alive and Able," the only company-wide Wellbeing Program I know of in our marketplace. These are amazing feats, but neither would have happened if we had not created a

venue where we really sat down and listened to what our employees were telling us.

Covid-19 arrived earlier this year, is still with us, and has provided us with the biggest opportunity to display humility as a company we have ever seen. Amidst the confusion and chaos that has become the new norm, the internet was suddenly full of suggestions from everywhere about how to proceed. We decided as a company to just listen to what our government was telling us to do and do it. We did not repackage suggestions from the CDC and email them off to clients. We just took the recommended actions (and then some), so that we could focus on what really mattered: the safety and wellbeing of our employees and customers. We have not let go of one employee, and thankfully are emerging from this okay. All we had to do was listen to people who knew better than us and follow directions.

Over the years, I have become much more comfortable not knowing things and getting the opportunity to learn them. I have learned a great deal from others in this business who have been willing to help me. The gratitude that I have for the environment we have at Able that encourages—risk and welcomes failure because of it—is immeasurable. I hope to always encourage humility through example and feel blessed to have the kind of people around me who will let me know if I need more. 🌍



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