The Leader of the Future: The Humble Hero

"Don't be so humble, you are not that great" (Golda Meir)

The world today has been described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) demanding a different approach to leadership. One of the leadership skills needed in such an environment is the ability to manage complexity and paradox. People attempt to avoid the anxiety created in an ever-changing environment by searching for like-minded views and opinions. Aided by social media and the divisive rhetoric of contemporary politics, we live in a world that has become more binary and conflictual. Our world is fast losing the ability to grapple with nuance, hear opinions that differ from ours and hold moderate and more inclusive views. The echo chambers ruled by likes or bot attacks have removed complexity, leaving forceful voices and crowd behavior to control the discourse. Now, more than ever, we need leaders who are confident to be bold in the VUCA world while also humble enough to hear various voices and opinions. Leaders who are comfortable with the ambiguity of AND rather than the either/or.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Confidence is a wonderful trait. It empowers people to interact socially even amongst strangers and it enables one to express their opinions and be heard. Leaders with confidence are better able to take decisions and convey these to others. Ideas conveyed with confidence energize people with contagious passion and optimism. A confident leader motivates those around them, giving them a sense of security. That said, we all know the overconfident leader or worse yet the arrogant leader. There is little as unpleasant as working for an arrogant leader, which manifests in powerplays, bullying, manipulation and self-serving aggrandizement.

Humility is the trait that serves to balance, or better yet, dance with Confidence. Humility is an endearing trait able to make confident people that much more believable. It fosters curiosity and a desire to learn from others. Humble leaders acknowledge the whole team. The beauty of humility is that it clothes a person in self-awareness, authenticity, and the ability to reflect or just be themselves. In groups it allows for ideas to filter through and more learning to take place. That said, extreme humility carries a negative side, humility that borders on self-effacement causes one to be seen as a walkover and spineless. Such people are reluctant to contribute their ideas and tend to go with the strongest voice.

The uncertainty in the wake of October 7th, much like the COVID pandemic, caught leaders in a situation they could not plan for and unfolding situations full of uncertainty and risk. It is in these situations that humble heroes stepped forward, exuding confidence as was witnessed as we met with school leaders in Ofakim, while working in teams, remaining open to suggestions from colleagues. It is also this type of leadership that will be needed to overcome the divisive conversations of a pre-October 7th Israel or that undermine the changes needed in a mamlachti school system that turns liberal world views and Jewish values into oppositional either/or concepts rather than using the power of AND. It is also this ability that will enrich Israel education and the ability to have deep and brave conversations. In fact most binary issues have underlying tensions that are pregnant with values that need to be understood to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The Jewish world needs confident and humble heroes who will hold complexity in a bold fashion that role models an openness to grapple with difficult issues, seeking to understand the other view as clearly as ones own. Only when I am able to do this, will someone be willing to fully understand my view and then together, follow the wisdom and power of AND, a different perspective to what has contributed to bringing us to our current crossroads.

1. <https://hbr.org/2021/04/6-leadership-paradoxes-for-the-post-pandemic-era>; see also <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/succeeding-in-uncertainty/six-paradoxes-of-leadership.html> as well as Lead with And, The Secret to resilience and Results in a Polarized World, T. Arnold; The Eight Paradoxes of Great Leadership, T. Elmore. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)