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LEADERSHIP SKILLS: FAITH IN SELF AND FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS AS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Dr. Ahmed Baker¹

Faith and belief

Leadership is contingent on effective inter- and intra-personal relationships that depend to a large degree on our faith in ourselves and humanity as a whole. It is difficult to persuade four petit ladies they are able to lift a man weighing some 94 kg with only their four fingers; any attempt by them to do so will generally result in failure! However, if a particular exercise leads these four petit ladies to have faith in their ability to lift the 94 kg man, they will do so as I shall later demonstrate.

Leadership depends on how much a person has confidence in himself and in his colleagues. The capacity of human abilities is infinite according to humanistic psychology. There are many schools of thoughts in psychology but we are going to talk about the humanistic one (*al-madrasah al-fikrieh al-insanieh*). This school derives its concepts from the experiences of the orient, especially the concepts of the Zen and Buddhist philosophies. It differs from the American psychological perspective, which is empirical-experimental in its approach. The power of comparison would be shown if we select a person randomly out of a group and measure the time he or she could remain under water. Most westerners will be unable to remain submerged for no more than five minutes. A trained Buddhist monk, however, could remain under water for nearly half an hour. Our belief that breathing is involuntary and cannot be consciously controlled is challenged by oriental philosophy. Here we have to believe in the ability of the human being. You as project leaders, if you don't have a belief in the infinite capacity of human beings, then your efforts are doomed to remain limited, if not doomed to failure.

The following incident concerning the painter and philosopher Walter Russell and his wife Lao could serve as an example. Walter wanted one day to take his wife to the opera, but he was penniless. He told his wife, however, we are going to the opera, knowing that he had not a

¹ Dr. Ahmed Baker is Professor of Psychology at Birzeit University, Birzeit, West Bank.

single dollar in his pocket. He maintained a firm belief, however, that they were going to the opera that night. He went to the ticket office that afternoon - again not having the money to pay for the tickets, but was confident that he would secure the money by the time he reached the clerk selling the tickets. As he was standing in the long queue, a stranger approached him. He asked: "I am in a hurry, and I can't wait to buy tickets for the opera. Is it possible that you could buy the tickets for me, and I will add another five dollars for your service." Walter not only told the stranger that he would do that, but that he would also deliver the tickets. That response created another line of strangers to form, all requesting that Walter would do the same for them. When Walter reached the clerk, not only did he have the money to take his wife to the opera, but also to take her out for dinner.

If Walter Russell did not have this infinite belief in himself and other human beings, he would not have been able to go to the opera. However, we have to differentiate between faith and illusion (*halwaseh*). If we lose faith in ourselves and in others, our objectives will not be achieved.



Our world is comprised of an infinite number of internal and external factors and combinations. But each of us has two worlds in which we live: the internal world, and the external one. We have little or no control over the external world, but we can have full control over our internal world. The one who loses control over her/his internal world maintains no control over the external world. You have to be realistic, but always have faith in your ability to control your internal environment.

The first premise is to have **faith in the ability of human beings** no matter who they are. I once saw how a newspaper vendor with obvious physical and mental disabilities directed traffic when vehicles were jammed in all directions and traffic had come to a standstill. This person managed the traffic jam when all others stood idle.

The second premise is to believe in the principle of '**self-fulfilling prophecy**'. If you believe in something your behavior and the behavior of others will move in that direction.

Another example: A group of children were assigned randomly to two groups. The first group was given to a teacher who was told she was getting a group of 'slow' children. The second group was given to a teacher who was told she was getting a group of 'talented' children. At the end of the year, the achievement level of the second group ('talented') was much higher than the achievement level of the first ('slow') group. The following year, the groups were reversed in terms of their introduction to the new teachers: The 'talented' group was called 'slow' and vice versa. The achievement of the groups again was a function of how the new teacher perceived them. This leads us to premise three.

There is nothing in psychology to stereotype behaviors as totally negative or totally positive, even in the worse situation you can always find something positive about a certain behavior. If you look hard, you can always find something positive about any person – even the worst criminal. The **psychology of behavior**, however, will show you that the more you look for positive aspects, not only will you see things in a more positive perspective, but the behavior of the other individual will become increasingly more positive. By the same token, the more you focus on negative behavior, the more you will see them, and the more that person will become negative.

Another example: Teachers were asked to focus on the negative behavior by placing an “X” next to each incorrect answer; correct responses were ignored. As a result, the numbers of incorrect responses increased. They were then told to focus on the correct responses by placing “□” next to each correct response and to ignore errors. As a result, errors decreased.

All of us seek attention, support, and rewards from those who are significant to us.

My students take pleasure in seeing a happy face drawn on their paper, although they are adults and enrolled in a university. I have also learned to grade a response by focusing on the positive rather than the negative. For example, if the student deserves seven on a ten-point question, I place “+7” rather than “-3” on her/his paper. No response receives a “zero” because a “zero” implies (s)he does not exist. By the same token, providing someone with feedback that (s)he has made an error is not as effective as explaining the error and then showing her/him how to correct it. The motto of effective interaction is to focus on the positive.



Perception

Perception is reality, not the other way around. What you perceive is the reality you feel. No two persons will perceive a stimulus in exactly the same manner. For example, if we draw a line A-B and ask a group of people to give us its length, we will get varying answers from them depending on their personality, experience, and visual acuity. For example; children coming from economically deprived backgrounds estimate the size of a coin significantly larger than children coming from affluent backgrounds. Hence, perception is reality.



How do you perceive yourself? And how do others perceive you? The less differences between how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you, the more effective you can be as a leader.

Civil Society Empowerment

Let us do this exercise: I am going to ask you 18 questions about yourself and you are going to answer either “yes”, “no” or “perhaps”. Try to commit yourself as much as possible by refraining from putting “perhaps” as much as you can. Then I am going to ask you to rate the item how you think others see you.

	Questions:	Yes	No	Perhaps
1	I'd rather work alone			
2	I postpone my work			
3	I like to take a leadership responsibility			
4	I feel with others and their suffering			
5	I work hard on the project that I am responsible for			
6	I have professional attitude and standards			
7	I like to be fashionable			
8	I like to do volunteer work			
9	I appreciate friendship more than (benefit) <i>Maslaha</i>			
10	I worry more than I act			
11	I face problem in terms of saying good things to others, giving them compliments			
12	I like to take risks			
13	I consider failure is a negative thing			
14	I try to respect the opinion of others			
15	I like to adhere to laws and principles			
16	I like parachute jumping			
17	I like to take revenge on those who hurt me			
18	I consider opinions which are different from mine			

Now, look how the other person perceived you. Keep your perception about yourselves and compare the results. Examine the differences between how you see yourself and how your colleagues see you. Also, examine how you thought he would perceive you. Are there similarities? If yes, where are they? Concentrate on items 12 and 16.

We have three levels of analysis. An effective leader has minimum differences amongst these three levels of analysis. There will always be differences in perception, but if the differences are great the person has to take a closer look at himself as a potential leader. (S)he should expect problems in interpersonal relationships, especially in the area of communication. (S)he may understand something that you didn't mean or say. This also means that (s)he may not be clear to others or even with to her/himself.

How others see you is the important factor. It matters little if you see yourself as the most understanding leader when others see you as not understanding at all. Perception is reality.

Perception can be analyzed at more than one level. Sometimes one can be described as lazy at work, although he is very active outside the work place. How you are perceived in the work situation, in this case, is the crucial perception. For example, how our spouse perceives us at home is the important factor. It matters little that the husband is perceived as a considerate person in the community if his wife thinks otherwise at home. So how your friends perceive you is not as important as how your colleagues perceive you when you are leading projects.



Inter-personal relationships are quite important in a work situation. If our workers perceive us as dictatorial, not understanding and difficult, they might engage in covert behavior to take 'revenge' on us. For example; you may give a messenger a proposal that has to be delivered at a given date or hour. He

returns and informs you that he could not deliver the proposal because of problems with the car. Such passive-aggressive behavior is similar to seeing a warning light turn on in an expensive machine and ignoring it. Passive-aggressive behavior is minimized if you understand your workers and they understand you – when there is similarity in perceptions. Never underestimate human beings. They have an infinite capacity and creativity that can be directed constructively or destructively. The “insignificant” messenger could cost you the most expensive project.

You have to understand yourselves; you have to understand how you perceive yourselves, and how others perceive you.

Values

We all have values and this affects our behavior. A lot of the time we think that we hold values but they are not really there. We have to be clear about the values that affect and direct our behavior. Are the values we hold and adopt congruent with our behavior? Sometimes, we hold values and yet we do not live according to their principles.

Let us do the following exercise in “value clarification”:

Scenario:

You learn that a nuclear disaster is to take place in a community, and the shelter there can only accommodate six people in terms of food, water, and oxygen. There are ten people present, and only six can enter the shelter. They know if the decision is left to them, they will enter into serious fights that could jeopardize the lives of everyone of them. They agree amongst themselves to abide by the decision you take. Who are the six people you will chose to place in the shelter from the following ten people:

1. *A nuclear scientist; his careless experiment caused the dangerous activity.*
2. *The wife of the nuclear scientist who is four months pregnant.*
3. *A Marxist revolutionary, 3rd year university student.*
4. *A famous sixty year-old psychologist author.*
5. *A noted TV celebrity host.*
6. *Statistician*
7. *A fifty year- old alcoholic priest*
8. *A professional football player, very low IQ.*
9. *A very bright secondary high school student*
10. *A former presidential assistant who is clever but shifty.*

We can argue that how you arrive at your decisions is a way of applying values. It is obvious that these values differ from one group to another. But that is not what I am interested in. What I am interested in is how you interact with each other; i.e., your group interaction. This is the aim. This is an exercise to put you in an interactive atmosphere. How does the group reach its decision? What does it take into consideration when it makes its choice?

1. Who feels, among the group, that his/her opinion was important or not important, or not taken into account, was active or inactive?
2. Who would go behind the group? It is thus destruction if one person in the group feels that his opinion is not important.

3. Who feels that there is someone among the group who wants to impose her/his opinion?
4. Who feels that he had an opinion, but later on he/she changed his/her mind? Were there reasons, persuasions, or points that that person did not think about? Flexibility is what is required and is important in any group discussion. You have to decide: to go with the group or defend your opinion. Sometimes it depends on the importance of the subject.
5. Who feels that you were unjust to one of the group members after you made your decision? How do you feel about the decision?
6. Have you felt that someone is/was a leader? Were you a follower or leader in the discussion? Did you feel comfortable or uncomfortable with your own role? Most people feel more 'comfortable' when they take a leadership role!

Human feelings are very important. It is important how we interact and perceive each other. Every time we interact with someone, there are feelings involved and these feelings are reciprocal, relating to how we feel about ourselves, and how the other person feels about us.

