Why "leadership – the skipper model"?

Even back in "Bahad 1" – The Israeli Defense Forces' school for officers, where, in fact, the next IDF commanders are qualified – It was clear to me that there are two kinds of people – people who have an innate talent for leadership, which only sharpens by training in "Bahad 1", and people who don't have a natural talent for leadership (but have different skills, otherwise they wouldn't have been in the officer school in the first place). However, the infantry practice in the school improved their leadership skills from week to week. It must be admitted – not each and every one of the graduates who were standing in the orders rink to receive the graduation pin from the platoon commander graduated as outstanding leaders, but their qualification, based on the infantry model, was sufficient to allow them to fulfill their destination as commanders.

In the infantry model, each cadet, regardless of the force that he/she came from and the position to which he/she is destined, is being taught from scratch how to be an infantry fighter, as an individual and as a part of a fireteam and a platoon, until he/she achieves an ability to lead a final military exercise, and by that become a commander.

It is hard to explain how the infantry model manages to develop leadership skills through work that is mostly physical, without using too much "brainwashing" and dull lectures. It is even harder to explain to a young soldier from the air force, who is destined to be an officer in the technical command of the air force, why a soldier destined for a technical/administrative position should go through a fighters' training in order to develop leadership skills.

Back then I realized that the infantry model, however good it may be, is not suitable for a person who wishes to develop leadership skills in a civil environment. I realized that a different model should be designed – one that would suit different kinds of populations.

Throughout my long service in the IDF and DDR&D (The MOD Defense Directorate for Research and Development), in a wide variety of technological management positions, it was clear to me how crucial the leadership skills of the manager are for the success of projects, for developing products in the cutting edge of the world technology and for achieving the organization's goals.

After I retired from the IDF, I started a technological consulting company, and later I founded a startup company in the domain of software. Then, the thought about the importance of leadership for success in any domain – not only for leading soldiers – came back to my mind.

In parallel to running my businesses, I decided to get a speed boat license that would allow me to sail and fish in the open sea. In the world of fishing, it is known that every fisher thinks that the big fish gather where the other fisher stands. If only could we switch places, he thinks, I would easily catch bigger and many more fish!

As a person who used to fish from the shore and from breakwaters, I've always believed that long distance sailings and spin fishing (a fishing method) would dramatically increase me yield. Following this belief, I got myself a license to sail a speed boat.

Getting a speed boat license is an easy and quick process. However, only at the end of it you realize how difficult and almost impossible it is to rent a speed boat in Israel, in order to take it out for fishing.

That's where my wife came into the picture - As a teenager, she used to sail a yacht with her uncle in Greece. She drove us to take a skippers' course together, after which we will be able to rent a yacht. I would enjoy the fishing, and she would enjoy the sailing.

We set a date and arrived to the sailing club. She bargained for the both of us, got an excellent price but somehow ended up signing only me up. Her excuse was that one license is sufficient for both of us.

During the course, the love that I had for sailing (from my childhood at "Zevulun Nathania", with the Caravelle and the swallow boats), came back to me. I took every opportunity that I had to sail, whether as a skipper or a crew member.

Even on a boat with two steering wheels, only one person leads the boat at any given moment

(Photograph: Michal Bar-Or)

Nothing compares to filleting a fish that has been just caught.

(Photograph: Michal Bar-Or)

A year later, I had gotten a "Grade 60 license" (an international license, unlike the grade 30 skippers' license that only allows coastal sailing), and a year after the grade 40 license (a license that allows a Skipper to guide new skippers) arrived.

Throughout the studying and the practical training for the "40 license", I couldn't manage to explain to other people, and not even to myself, why do I need this license – Maybe for my retirement?

And then, in a sudden moment, a few months before the ending of the qualification, all the pieces of the puzzle came together – guiding, leadership and sailing!

As a person who has been always engaged with guiding and managing, while attempting to self-improve his leadership and management skills, this subject fascinated me. As the positions were more and more senior and complex, it became clear that technological leadership is important and interesting just as military leadership, and even relies on the same basic principles.

If we refine these principles, we will find out that, in fact, they are suitable for any kind of leadership.

And then, all of a sudden, I started to realize that all of those principles are put into practice day by day, minute by minute, in the skipper's relationship with the crew on his boat.

Needless to say, without endless amount of sails with many crew members, skippers and guests, this insight wouldn't have come to my mind so naturally.

At this point I reached the conclusion that it is possible, and even necessary, to build a course for teaching leadership, while using the skipper as a "model" and the boat as the "training ground". This model would be a decent substitute to the officer school's infantry model.

The advantages of this alternate model are diverse (obviously, officers who are destined for combat, and even combat support, should be practiced according to the infantry model):

1. This model is suitable for any age.
2. It is possible to integrate men and women in the qualification.

3. It is possible to integrate young people and adults in the same team.

4. It is possible to integrate people with varied professions, hobbies and backgrounds.

5. It is possible to integrate people from different hierarchies in an organization.

6. It is possible to integrate people from different organizations.

7. The training does not require physical strength.

8. It is possible to do short or long sessions, according to the schedule of the trainees.

9. The learning takes place in a fun and interesting environment, anywhere around the world (Who wouldn't like to attend a leadership training in the Bahamas?!).

10. After the basic "Leadership – The Skipper Model" course ends, participants who wish to proceed and study by themselves, or even take skipper license qualification tests, would be able to do this fairly easily, due to the experience and knowledge that they gained as a "side effect" of the leadership course.

11. Of course, if the participant proceeds and gets a skipper qualification, it will allow him to practice, and also sustain and develop the leadership skills that he have already acquired. By the way, those who won't be interested in taking qualification tests, will always be able to rent a sailing boat from any sailing club in Israel(up to 7 meter length). This boat does not require a license, and still allows them to perform a great team practice, while sustaining the acquired leadership skills with lots of fun.

12. The model is a quick and efficient way to develop leadership skills and essential qualities for work, without the trainees' awareness of the process (which diminishes their objections). This fact is crucial: the model allows a natural development – a deep and subconscious development – without competitiveness, which significantly increases the chances of the participants to apply their insights in any position that they will have.

13. The model builds genuine self-confidence, even among people who suffer from lack of self-confidence, from speech anxiety, from fear of standing on their own Vs objection, etc.

14. The cost of the resources required for the training and qualifications is negligible compared to those required in the infantry model.

At this point, when I had the model in mind, I had to plan the first course and its content. It took a lot of thinking and planning, but due to the fact that I came across managers who can benefit greatly from training their leadership skills, I realized that this is a "trump card". From this point, finding an opportunity to make this course happen was very easy.

The purpose of this book is giving the target audience practical tools that will give them the option to conduct courses and workshops that rely on the principles of "Leadership – The Skipper Model".

The book includes more than 20 different exercises that can be combined in any way that the trainer chooses. Of course, it is possible to add additional exercises in case that there's a specific quality required for the trainees in their positions on land.

In addition, the book includes a part about the Ionian islands in Greece, which are, in my opinion, the best location for this kind of training, due to the vast variety of islands and optional anchoring methods and the convenient distance between them that suits any desired sailing duration. Moreover, they have convenient weather that does not allow the formation of very tall waves. It's a heaven for sailing and practicing leadership.

Before we proceed any further and discuss the difference between a manager and a leader from the author's perspective, and why many managers can dramatically improve their leadership skills if they go through a course of this kinds – I would like to encourage the readers to share their experiences with me. By doing this, we will be able to learn and improve the model beyond the insights that are presented in this book following the first course (which was, by the way, very successful!) and the preparations and updates that were made for the second course. By the way, the second and 3rd courses begin in tandem with the publishing of the first edition of this book in Hebrew.

Well, a manager is a person who's in charge of a group of people by virtue of official authority, given to him by the organization in which he works. His aim is to confirm that tasks that were given to his people are done on time, within the budget and the standards defined for them.

Unlike a manager, a leader is not necessarily the manager of the group and does not necessarily have a formal authority (obviously, we aspire to combine these two – a manager with a formal authority and leadership skills). The leader can be any person in the group who has the ability to create a vision, define a destination and make the group follow him toward it, with their understanding that "he knows what he's talking about", and not necessarily by virtue of his authority.

Wise managers know how to recognize natural leaders among their employees and use their skills in order to promote their goals.

Another way of recognizing a true leader inside an organization is finding employees who easily transfer from one management position to another and from one work environment to another, while integrating in their new place quickly and leading the people there.

Now, we will attempt to realize what qualities/skills are required for a leader (some of them are innate and some of them are acquirable). Later, the book will explain how teaching these subjects in practical lessons on the sea affects the participants' development of leadership skills on land. This will come after a short but critical theoretical background about seamanship – After all, we wouldn't like to damage the boat or the trainees on the first training.

An important note: There are infinite kinds of leaders, and there is no absolute and objective way to prefer one leadership method over another. Every leader has a different linear combination of qualities that make him a leader. he uses them for his advantage and builds his unique style of leadership on their basis.

The steering wheel represents the leader.

(Photograph: Michal Bar-

Leadership contain 6 Major elements:

Professionalism

Managing the change

Integrity

Personal example

Vision

Sticky on a mission