



LEADERSHIP AND THE STEERING WHEEL

One night a few years ago, as we were driving back to our apartment on a Greek island, my wife noticed that the petrol gauge was showing red. Since this meant we had about a quarter of a tank left I drove cheerfully past the only garage on our way home. Although closed, the garage probably had some facility for credit cards, but I didn't fancy the challenge of deciphering Greek instructions in the dark. And because I'd done most of the driving, I knew the gauge was indicating we had enough petrol to drive up and down the island at least six times. However, two small, tired children in the back were soon echoing my wife's anxieties, joined shortly afterwards by her elderly stepmother.

I was irritated by the wails coming from all around me and drove on, secure in the knowledge that I was right. I ignored their concerns simply because I had the power to do so. While I may have been correct that we had plenty of petrol, this was not leadership of which I could be proud.

Leadership is not about having possession of the steering wheel. It's about being looked to by those around you because they believe in you and trust you to take the right decisions. It means harnessing people's energies and ambitions, taking care of their worries and concerns and influencing them to follow you because they choose to. It shows itself, not just in the grand moments of visionary inspiration, but in small, mundane interactions and behaviours. Everything you say and do is noticed. As a leader you're 'on' all the time.

Daniel Goleman, the author of Emotional Intelligence, argues that the leader of a group is the person who has the biggest influence on their emotions. And this is not about having the badge that says 'leader'. It's about who and what you are.

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