

Leadership Lessons – from a 7-year-old!

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One of the key descriptors of a 'Leader' is one who can create a vision, and inspire others towards its achievement. Implying a relatively strong orientation towards goals and outcomes. Set the goal, figure out a way to get there, and motivate the troops towards the achievement of the desired outcomes.

And what teams do is walk the plotted course (sometimes, hopefully, with input from themselves), to reach the goal in the quickest, most efficient, least expensive way.

Frankly, I am one of those highly goal-oriented individuals. Which has merit in many cases, but certainly has drawbacks, as I was shown this weekend by my 7-year-old daughter.



We had planned a girls' morning for a little adventure – the city-slickers that we are, this took the form of a trip to Kirstenbosch Gardens, to take a walk on the Tree Canopy bridge (or 'Boomslang'), which we'd not yet experienced. We did not have too much time to spend there so, as soon as we arrived, we (meaning I) made a bee-line towards the Tree Canopy which was a relatively healthy walk away from the entrance. My daughters (six and seven) enjoyed the walk, but kept getting distracted with all the attractions along the way – gardens for cartwheeling, the million-butterfly flower patch, the sticks on the ground that made perfect magic wands. But, with me as the leader, we

kept time as I shuttled them forward to our destination.

Until I was forced to halt in my tracks by my now-able-to-read child, who gasped, “*Mom, the sign says Enchanted Forest! Let’s go!*” And we promptly detoured into the most magnificent spot with the biggest, oldest, most climbable tree the girls have ever seen. Their ongoing yelps of excitement as they explored this quite tiny, but very enchanted-forest-looking space was truly delightful. I felt very gratified with the “*Thanks for bringing us here mom, it’s amazing*”.

And because they were so obviously having a wonderful experience of adventure, I indulged the detour for a while. But soon enough started my practiced hustle to get back onto the path towards the ACTUAL attraction, the place we had planned to get to, and the reason for coming in the first place – the Tree Canopy thing. Which we got to quite shortly, and which was quite lovely too. But nowhere close to the prior levels of intrigue and pleasure.

When we finally returned to the car park, my eldest remarked: “*Good thing we found the Enchanted Forest. The bridge was nice, but the Forest was a proper adventure.*”

As we drove off, my mind was racing with the following realizations: 1. My goal of ‘adventure’ was accomplished (smiley face); 2. My goal was, however, narrowly missed, and ultimately achieved only because I agreed to meander from the planned course; 3. An awareness of the potential detours, and exploration thereof, can turn out to be the main event; 4. The team may know what the ‘main event’ is, and needs the flexibility of the leader to discover and explore this properly.

And lastly, never pass a sign that says ‘Enchanted Forest’ without taking a second look.