

Mission Ready

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Managing in an Age of Terror

[part of an on going series which will reveal Israeli business management principles to the readers of Mission Ready]

The news media can cause more damage to the Israeli economy than all the suicide bombers combined—not because it reports on the acts of terror, but because it reports on nothing else. I should have known better than to believe CNN. But, as the El Al 777 cruised on its 10 hour flight from New York to Tel Aviv, I prepared myself mentally to enter a war zone. I imagined Israeli citizens furtively scurrying across the streets, avoiding buses and coffee shops, and living wary, joyless lives under the constant threat of terror attacks. I expected to see a society paralyzed by fear, and I steeled myself for the grim experience of interviewing business leaders who are trapped in an economy under siege.

When the jet landed, I was greeted by the car from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, which was to drive me about Tel Aviv and Jerusalem for two weeks. My heart sank as I noticed that the rear windows were covered with black curtains—no doubt to protect an important American VIP, like myself, from assassination. As we drove off, I huddled in the shadows of the back seat. The Israeli driver soon saw me peeking through the curtains like the star witness in a Mafia trial, and laughed out loud.

The curtains, he explained, were for the summer heat. “But this is winter, so open za curtains.” I did so, both literally and metaphorically, and what I saw during my visit was a vibrant, resolute society, packing the buses, cramming the coffee shops and nightclubs, living lives of commitment, purpose, and hope.