

The Greatest Love of All

“We seek perfection, but what we are really looking for is acceptance”

Vanessa Williams

“Learning to love yourself, it is the greatest love of all”

Linda Creed

This mental exercise began for me in December 2019 and on 30th December 2020, I stopped long enough to reflect on various experiences and what new awareness and understanding putting it all together might bring.

This is my story so far ...



8th December 2019 – en-route to Chimi Lhakhang, just at the edge of the paddy fields (picture below), is a village where I spotted two artisans at work (above). The elder seemed to be contemplating while the younger looked at him, for approval perhaps.

Thought that the lines from the bamboo scaffold and building juxtaposed with the two individuals made for both a contrasting and complementary composition.

I left it at that.



16th December 2020 – Vanessa, Adrian, Alex and I were having one of our regular chats on zoom when Nessa shared her insight that “We seek perfection, but what we are really looking for is acceptance”.

A revelation for me indeed as I had not, till then, considered this perspective.

With 2020 coming to a close, I wanted to reflect on this piece of wisdom, to explore why this statement struck a chord and what it might help me understand about myself and others better.



The words of Linda Creed in the song The Greatest Love of All (music by Michael Masser and recorded & performed by George Benson in 1977) came to mind.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMsTuykomZ8>



I believe the children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be
Everybody searching for a hero
People need someone to look up to
I never found anyone who fulfil my needs

A lonely place to be
And so I learned to depend on me
I decided long ago
Never to walk in anyone's shadows
If I fail, if I succeed
At least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me
They can't take away my dignity

Because the greatest love of all
Was happening to me
I found the greatest love of all
Inside of me
The greatest love of all
Is easy to achieve
Learning to love yourself
It is the greatest love of all

...

And if, by chance, that special place
That you've been dreaming of
Leads you to a lonely place
Find your strength in love



Does this mean that learning to love oneself and others entails acceptance of who we are in all its entirety; the good, the bad and the ugly?

Where does achievement, striving for the best and the champion's mindset fit in then?

I'd really like to hear what you and others might have to say.

Do pause here and pen down your thoughts and feelings.

Well, acceptance and achievement doesn't have to be mutually exclusive does it?

What if I accept that I am not perfect, can and do fail (quite miserably and frequently) – and that “failure” is ok as long as it is within tolerance* and if I can learn from it so that I can be better and achieve better results moving on?

Won't doing so help me learn to be kinder and more compassionate to myself, and in doing so experience what that feels like so that I can be more aware and understand how others might feel and be kinder and more compassionate to them?

What will you recommend as a perspective that will embrace both acceptance and achievement?

* Note: Amy Edmondson identified three broad categories of failure across a wide spectrum; preventable, complexity-related and intelligent. She advocated that only intelligent failures would be praiseworthy.
<https://hbr.org/2011/04/strategies-for-learning-from-failure>

An area of interest for me is leadership and leader development.

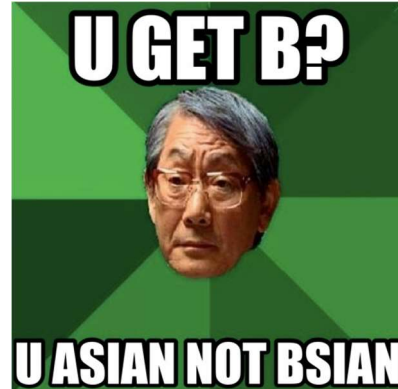
Hence, I'd like to explore if this way of thinking and its subsequent related practice will be useful and pragmatic for leaders.

I'd like to firstly explore how leaders might view acceptance and tolerance for “failure”, especially in a multi-generational workforce.



Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders grew up and were exposed to “failure is not an option” type of mindset. In school getting perfect scores or A grades in general were like wearing a badge of honour.

As the meme goes “You are A-sian, not B-sian”.



Picture credit:

<http://www.funnyism.com/i/memefactory/u-get-b-u-asian-not-bsian>

You may argue that those were different times. That the cycle times then were longer, things and situations then were less complex, and problems we dealt with were much less wicked than what we are dealing with now. And you'd be correct to say that.

The fact remains that we were brought up this way and would most likely perpetuate this thinking and corresponding behaviour until we change it.

Suffice to say that (in generalising) such leaders will not tolerate any type of failure and anyone who had made errors would have failed and labelled accordingly. I have seen leaders make such attributions to someone who had made typographical errors in reports.

Have you had encounters with such leaders?

How did you interact with them and what were the outcomes?

Were you able to influence them to make other choices?

I am curious how they might see their own failures, what they do to protect their self-image and the constructs they put in place to make sense of the world.

Given that millennials and Generation Z see the world and “failure” quite differently, will this possibly explain some of the conflict we find between these groups?



The second area I'd like to explore is the role a leader plays when s/he encounters team members who might have made a mistake.

In my experience working in and with organisations, we are good at managing the tasks. This got many of us to where we are as managers and leaders, we are comfortable with that and under stress fall back to what we are comfortable with.

In such a scenario, we are likely to play the role of "the corrections officer" – i.e. tell the team member what the error was and how s/he can correct it.

You may say "The job gets done, so what is wrong with that?"

Well, that is good if the team member learns what to do subsequently and not good if the team member becomes disengaged and / or a mindless automaton.

If not the role of "corrections officer", then what?

What will you advocate? Which roles have you seen leaders adopt that were effective for their teams, the organisation and themselves?

Let's revisit getting the job done. What is a leader's job?

To keep it simple - ensure that our team and staff members are able to do their jobs well and to have the foresight to anticipate organisational challenges round the bend so that staff members can respond accordingly.

If this is the case, it is more a helper (enabling, teaching, coaching) role rather than that of a hero.

Unfortunately our society rewards (and even glorifies) heroes more than helpers. This is another conversation for another day.

What is your experience like? Is it different? Please share that with us.

This brings me back to Bhutan and the picture of the 2 artisans.





If the younger artisan is seeking acceptance and validation from the other, what does he need to experience in order to learn and grow?

What do you recommend?

Do take a moment here to pen your thoughts down.

Awareness and understanding must lead us to act in a way that brings us closer to our purpose and intentions.

So, what can we do?

For today, I will steer away from the academic, authors etc. and turn back to Linda Creed and her lyrics for The Greatest Love of All. I have taken liberty to alter her words to replace “children” with “people” and other small changes to more reflect our workplace.

“I believe our people are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty (and talent) they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let our people’s laughter remind us how we used to be ...”

“Learning to love yourself, it is the greatest love of all”

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