

A Civilized Jungle

The wild musings...

July 27, 2017 (Day 4). *I waited. Patiently. There was no hurry. My mind was hurried enough. The sound of the flying machine broke my thoughts. I observed the tiny plane descend. Then watched in fascination as it abruptly ascended again. There was something tall blocking the runway, refusing to budge. The airport patrol rushed and honked away the intruder. The plane made a successful landing. So did my racing thoughts. I smiled as I gathered my bags. Who would have imagined a stubborn Giraffe blocking an airstrip can wrap up an interesting lesson?*

Bucket list may be a strong word. But all of us have wish lists. The aspiration to see all we want to see in our lifetimes. Depending on our pockets, we may upgrade or downgrade our aspirations. If it's romancing the mountains, then it's Switzerland or Kashmir. If it's the fascination of the sun and sand, then Hawaii and Goa figure in the list. If it's the adrenalin rush of nightlife, then it's NYC, or even Mumbai. Usually, a Kenyan Safari doesn't make the cut. And perhaps that is what makes it such an exotic destination.

Day 1. 6.30 a.m. is very chilly in an open jeep of the [Maasai Mara National Reserve](#). But we had broken out into a cold sweat. Watching National Geographic on TV is no match to witnessing a majestic lion, just a leap away. He sat unfazed, glaring at us. Then he yawned, dismissing our existence.

The next stop was the famous 'river crossing'. It was an excruciatingly long wait. The wildebeest appeared to debate on the choice of their leader. Then, all of a sudden, one took the plunge. The next one followed, and then a few more. In no time, the river was swarming with wildebeests.

These two experiences offered a sharp contrast to each other. On the one hand was the audacious lion, and on the other hand were the timid wildebeest. The **courage** to take danger head-on differentiated the two.

Day 2. Our driver-guide steered towards a vast herd of wildebeest. Then, he slowed down. Ahead was a pride of six lions. Our jeep softly treaded the path. We passed a couple of fresh 'intact' hunts. "The lions are not hungry," the driver explained, adding, "They are just teaching their young ones how to hunt."

The pride spread out, and began their stalk. While most of the wildebeest continued grazing, those at the front held their ground, staring right back at the lions. Stupid, I thought, the frontbenchers are reckless. Fortunately for them, the lions decided to call it a morning.

The contrast stood out again. The lions were more tactful than the wildebeest. The trait of **cleverness** separated the two.

Day 3. The lion cubs made the most endearing sight in the wild. They were playing in the tall

grass. Our jeep tiptoed behind them. The annoyed mother let go a warning roar from a distance. She didn't bother to get up. Scared, we left in a jiffy.

Soon, we were back in familiar territory—scores of wildebeest; except they were scattering in all directions. At the center of the commotion was the cruelest sight on the planet: a lone hyena eating a baby wildebeest, even as it cried out for help. All her family, friends, and relatives just stood at the periphery, watching.

A hyena is smaller than a wildebeest; united, they can surely empower him. Unlike the mother lioness, the wildebeest run low on **confidence**.

*Each day in the wilderness led to a new revelation. While the wildebeest were timid, dumb, and unconfident, the jungle cats possessed the three champion C's: they were **Courageous**, **Clever**, and **Confident**. Perhaps these same traits separate leaders from the masses in the civilized world, I concluded.*



Back to Day 4: We had a few hours to kill before our departure. The only creature left to see was the magnificent leopard. So our guide took us deep into uncharted territory. The leopard stayed elusive. Instead, we saw something more stellar as we stumbled upon a water body. A never-ending ocean of wildebeest, zebras, elephants, giraffes, and warthogs surrounded us. Suddenly, our jeep transformed into a zoo. Outside was the real world. And the real world didn't give a hoot for the zoo. I began to unlearn and relearn. My tutorial culminated with the giraffe's runway episode.

The giraffe was not acting over or under smart—it just didn't care about the approaching plane. The leopards were not playing elusive—they just chose their own timings. Our jeep didn't go unnoticed—it was just that our presence was inconsequential. The jungle belongs to the animals, not us. The rules of civilization break here. We need to reevaluate the definition of leadership from their context.

The law of the jungle: All lions are courageous, clever, and confident. Is that leadership? No. This is merely their genetic 'luck' owing to their position at the top of the food chain. But leadership is not about luck. On the contrary, it is about our ability to kick out the luck factor.

An animal's core mission is survival. Those who stretch their likelihood to survive are the leaders. Some do it by standing behind in the crossing queue, allowing the ones in front to take their chance with the crocodiles. Some do it by monitoring the lion's movements from the front row, so that they get a head start over the ones grazing at the back. Some do it by not disturbing the cruel hyena while the brave ones get caught in the saving act.

Back to civilization: Most successful people are courageous, clever, and confident. Interestingly, these traits haven't made them successful. Instead, it's their exposure to success that has rewarded them with the above qualities. But leadership is not about lucky rewards. It is about earning them. By beating the odds to succeed. Just like it is in the animal kingdom.

An animal is able to calculate its moves. Instinctively. Humans have the gift of logic. We have an edge. It's easier for us to sort out our chances, and then exploit the laws of probability. I believe those with a knack for analytical magic will rise to prominence in tomorrow's world. It applies to individuals. It applies to organizations.