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LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM GOLDA MEIR – THE IRON LADY



"I must govern the clock, not be governed by it."

Golda Meir

Golda Meir was Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1973. Known for her intellect, she was an activist, risk-taker, tremendous fundraiser, eloquent advocate and in many regards visionary. She was also one of the founders of the Jewish state.

She was born May 3, 1898 in Kiev, Ukraine. At eight she moved with her family to Milwaukee. At fourteen, she graduated from the Fourth Street Elementary School as class valedictorian but had to challenge her parents for the right to go to high school. She wanted to be a teacher; they wanted her to find a husband. "It doesn't pay to be too clever" said her father. "Men don't like smart girls". She defied her parents and ran away to live with her sister and brother-in-law in Denver and attended school before returning to Milwaukee to study teaching after receiving a letter of apology from her parents.

In November 1917 Britain proclaimed the Balfour Declaration supporting "the establishment in Palestine of a National home for the Jewish people." A few weeks later on Christmas Eve, Golda Mabovitch married Morris Myerson on the condition that they would immigrate to Palestine and live on a Kibbutz. She became a model Kibbutznic and an expert on breeding and feeding chickens. Her husband contracted malaria and as a result they moved to Jerusalem where they had two children.

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After settling in Jerusalem and establishing herself, Golda then joined the Women Workers Council and moved to Tel Aviv. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 it was clear that conflict with the border neighbours was inevitable. A large amount of money was needed to supply the defence forces and because she spoke perfect English Golda volunteered to go to the United States. To everyone's surprise she was able to raise \$50m. In 1949 she was elected to the Knesset, Israeli Parliament and appointed by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to be the Minister of Labor in charge of creating roles for the seven hundred thousand immigrants following World War II. She later changed her name to Meir and in 1956 was appointed Foreign Minister, the only female foreign minister in the world.

Unlike others in Government positions, she dropped many formalities, she flew tourist class, entertained foreign dignitaries in her kitchen serving home-made food and refused to support inequality in Africa.

In 1966 she retired from government and a year later was diagnosed with lymphoma which she insisted on remaining secret.

Golda was encouraged to become Secretary General of her party and in February 1969, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol died and she became the fourth Prime Minister.

Her retirement plans were put on hold until June 4, 1974 when she resigned. In 1975 she published her autobiography, *My Life*. She died December 8, 1978, a history-making leader and regarded as one of the most accomplished women of the twentieth century.

Some quotes by Golda Meir include:

"I must govern the clock, not be governed by it."

"One cannot and must not try to erase the past merely because it does not fit the present."

"You'll never find a better sparring partner than adversity."

"Don't be humble...you're not that great."

"Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement."

Gregory Robinson, Managing Partner "For many Golda Meir was an ordinary and extraordinary woman. She was described as the Iron Lady and on one occasion as the only man in the Israeli Cabinet. She is the first and only female Prime Minister of Israel and was the third female Prime Minister in the world. She rose from a humble beginning to a position of significant leadership and met with many world leaders to promote her vision of peace. She also led the country when Israeli athletes were killed at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, authorising the Operation Wrath of God and was also the leader during the twenty day Yom Kippur War in 1973. Golda Meir has been described as exceptionally intelligent, balanced and understanding with an ability to see things precisely as they are with a force of nature personality and determination that was boundless. She was asked to be leader in a community which respected the traditional role of women in a male-dominated environment. As a leader, like all leaders she had her critics, but was noted for ability to balance diplomacy with action, to listen to others, to make decisions and accept the responsibility."

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