

Beating the odds: A story of pain and success from the land of Sheba

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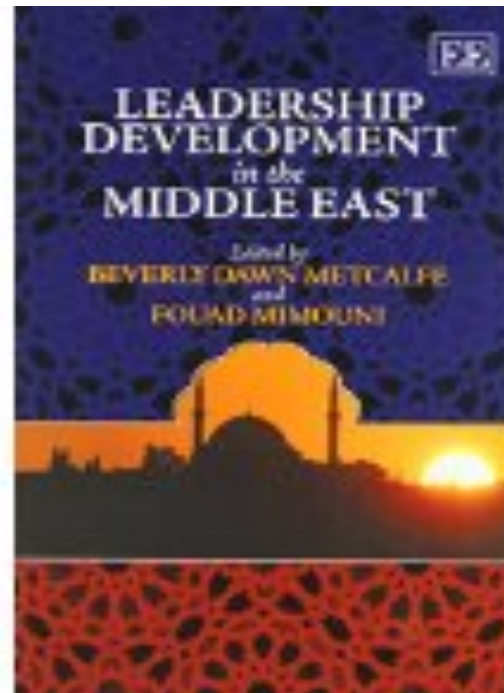
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Purpose

- Reflect on historical and recent examples of people (with a deep sense of servant leadership) from the land of Sheba who:
- Experienced crisis in their lives
- Managed to overcome those crisis
- And prospered...

Book (Chapter)

- **Sultan, N.** (2011), “**Making a Difference in a Troubled Country: The Case of Entrepreneurial and Female Leadership in Yemen**”, in Metcalfe, B. D and Mimouni, F (eds.), *Leadership Development in the Middle East*, pp. 297–327. Edward Elgar.



Where is the land of Sheba?



Once a prosperous country

- Ptolemy once described it as “Eudaimon Arabia” (Fortunate Arabia).
- The Romans later called it “Arabia Felix” (Happy Arabia).
- Trade in incense and spices brought prosperity to this region. It was the predecessor of the Indian Spice Route.
- The ancient Sabeans – the inhabitants of Sheba - (who occupied this land)- established a very sophisticated irrigation system and built a huge dam (Marib Dam).

The Land of Two Paradises

- The Quran also recognised the prosperity of this region:
- “There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place: Two paradises on the right hand and the left: Eat of the provision of your Lord and render thanks to Him. A fair land and a forgiving Lord” (Quran: Saba Surat, verse 15).

Queen of Sheba (Balqis)

About 950 BC

She and her people worshipped the Sun.

King Solomon knew of this kingdom and sent its Queen a letter (by a bird) asking her to stop worshiping the Sun and worship his God or he will destroy her kingdom!

The Queen (wary of the might of King Solomon) assembled her advisors and told them about her **crisis** and the **great threat** of King Solomon.

The advisors told her that they were people of great strength but that they will do whatever she advised them to do.

Queen of Sheba (Balqis)

- Balqis chose peace over war in order to save her country, people and army from destruction at the hands of the mighty King Solomon.
- She swallowed her pride and converted to Solomon's God.
- She was the epitome of an Ancient Arabian Servant Leader.

Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am



Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am



He came from a rural and traditional religious background in North Yemen.

Started work as a young sailor on a commercial ship.

He would travel and buy small items that he would later sell to his colleagues for a small profit.

He landed in Marseille after working for a French commercial ship and worked there as a foreman in factory.

Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am



When World War II broke out he went to Somalia and worked there as agent in animal hides for a French businessman based in Aden.

The **first of his crisis** began with the sinking of a ship carrying his first consignment of hides.

Because of his **honesty** his major break came when the French company (Besse & Co.) agreed to supply him with large quantities of goods on credit.

Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am



He began to expand in Aden.

But **crisis struck again** when a Marxist regime came to power in South Yemen in 1967 following the hurried departure of the British.

The Marxist regime nationalised (without compensation) most private businesses and properties.

Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am



Businessmen fled and many claimed “*force majeure*” as they were unable to pay their international creditors.

But not Hayel! He did however leave Aden for the more economically liberal (albeit backward) North Yemen (his birth place).

He owed US\$ 1.5 million at that time (a large amount of money then). But decided to pay all his creditors.

He paid all his debts in a matter of three months!

This period proved to be a turning point for his business and success.

Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am



Hayel expanded his business empire further when he moved into manufacturing, building Yemen's first food factory.

His business grew to become a global conglomerate with an estimated turnover close to US\$ 2 billion and employing some 22,000 people worldwide, of whom 19,000 people are in Yemen alone.

Mr. Hayel Saeed Ana'am (The Servant Leader)



He helped build schools, mosques and roads and gave monthly stipends to many very poor families.

His responsibility extended to his workforce. He was known to be very close to his subordinates, listened to their concerns, helped resolve their problems and visited them when they fell sick.

His behaviour towards his employees was described as being **more akin to the behaviour of a trade union official** than that of an owner of a business!

Amena Al-Imrani (The Queen of Oranges)





Amena Al-Imrani (The Queen of Oranges)

- An illiterate Yemeni woman in her late fifties when she started her business.
- She had an unemployed husband and seven daughters.
- Her mother and brothers thought she was shaming the family and refused to talk to her.
- Her husband supported her though.



Amena Al-Imrani (The Queen of Oranges)

- She started business selling [coral necklaces](#).
- A woman who owed money promised Amena that when her peaches ripen she would sell them and pay her.
- Amena instead accepted the peaches and sold them herself.
- The profit she made on this transaction started her story in the fruit business

Amena Al-Imrani (The Queen of Oranges)



- She started selling oranges to retail buyers.
- She worked every day from sunrise to late in the evening and never took weekend breaks. Her only day of rest was the first day of Eid.
- She later moved to wholesaling.
- Despite being illiterate she had a strong (and numerate) memory with an intimate understanding of how the fruit market worked.
- This trait enabled her to work out every aspect of her daily income, thus preventing any possibility of her being cheated by her employees.



Amena Al-Imrani (**The Servant Leader**)

- Her hard work, perseverance and honesty paid off and gave her a near **monopoly of the orange market** in Yemen.
- She was also able to export fruit to several Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan.
- She sold almost 200 tons of fruit daily, employed 40 staff and operated a fleet of lorries.



Amena Al-Imrani (**The Servant Leader**)

- She refused to cover her face.
- She stood in the face of many cultural and traditional challenges and succeeded.
- However, what makes Amena a unique case is her ability to make it in the face of **overwhelming odds**: poverty, lack of education, age, a male-dominated society hostile to women, family opposition and a highly competitive market whose clients are men of largely low social status.

Amena Al-Imrani (**The Servant Leader**)



Amena sees hard work as central to her success.

Her advice to other women is summed up in these words:

.tell them you can take the initiative even if you have nothing. Just have the motivation, just have in mind that you can do it, and you will do it.'

She thinks her title '**Queen of Oranges**' is too grand and prefers to be called the '**Fruit Madam**' .

She was able to send her daughters to private schools; something she was very proud of.

A Quote from Robert Greenleaf

- “Servants, by definition, are fully human. Servant-leaders are functionally superior because they are closer to the ground – they hear things, see things and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are dependable and trusted”.

A Quote from Robert Greenleaf

- **Greenleaf** sees servant leaders as builders of communities, **responsible** for the welfare of the people whom they are leading.
- He defines this **responsibility** as being “...a response to one’s environment, whatever it is, so as to make a pertinent force of one’s concern for one’s neighbour – as a member of a family, a work group, a community, a world society” (Greenleaf, 1977).

Summary

- Crisis can be devastating to some people.
- It takes wisdom, courage, foresight, intuition, and resolve to overcome crisis.
- Servant leaders often possess such qualities.
- Most importantly, they have the interests of other people at heart (whether subjects, family members or work subordinates).

Thank you..

References

- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. New Jersey: Paulist Press International.
- Sultan, N. (2011), “Making a Difference in a Troubled Country: The Case of Entrepreneurial and Female Leadership in Yemen”, in Metcalfe, B. D and Mimouni, F (eds.), *Leadership Development in the Middle East*, pp. 297–327. Edward Elgar.

Queen of Sheba (Balqis)



[Return](#)

Hoopoe



[Return](#)

Coral Necklace



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