

One of the IB Learner Profile attributes is 'risk taker'. In Spanish, this is translated as 'audaces', which I have always preferred, for it implies calculated risk, as opposed to what might be reckless risk. It is not usual to put Thomas Jefferson and Niccolò Machiavelli together, but the truth is that both were highly intelligent, pragmatic and resourceful men. They both knew that in order to succeed, a person needs to be daring or bold, but I doubt if either would have recommended risk. Jefferson said that *'If you want something you've never had, you must be willing to do something you've never done,'* while Machiavelli wrote that *'Impetuosity and audacity often achieve what ordinary means fail to achieve.'* Both knew that in order to succeed, you have to make things happen, but both also knew that decisions need to be made based on good judgment and having listened to sound advice. In 'The Art of War', Sun Zhu insists that *'Every battle is won before it is even fought'*. He is not talking about destiny or fate, or even fighting only when a victory is all but certain, but he is saying that the best generals are the ones who have considered all the factors before making their decisions.

In the 1950's. Leon Festinger was part of a team studying a cult that in which the leader had predicted the end of the world. The fact that we are sitting here today shows she was wrong. After the designated day came and went, the research team expected people to leave the cult. The predictions were clearly wrong, but many of the followers stayed. How could this be? The ones who had joined more recently tended to leave, but the ones who had been there for a long time defended the leader even more strongly. George Orwell wrote that, *'People can foresee the future only when it coincides with their own wishes, and the most grossly obvious facts can be ignored when they are unwelcome.'* The answer lies in what became known as cognitive dissonance. If a belief, no matter how inaccurate, is held with deep conviction, then a person will not accept any other point of view. Another reason is because a person has invested time in whatever the project, they would rather not admit they were wrong, in what is sometimes known as the 'sunk cost fallacy'. The final consideration is that the person values and needs the support of the others in the group who think the same way, and 'groupthink' has been shown to have very dangerous consequences.

Where I come from we have lots of sayings. Being a Celtic people, we like stories, and sometimes stretch the truth a little, as the phrase, 'never let the truth get in the good way of a good story' implies. However, there is a world of difference between

exaggerating for entertainment, and distorting the truth. Cordell Hull said that, *'A lie will gallop halfway round the world before the truth has time to pull its breeches on'*. It is sometimes easier to believe lies than the truth, especially if a person has a vested interest and the lie supports this interest. In addition, the truth, no matter how honourable, can often be less interesting. Think of films. All actors want the bad guy roles for they are generally more fun to play. Going back to truth and lies, if we tell inaccurate tales they can become rumours, and as we also used to say at home, *'there is no such thing as a constructive rumour'*.

You need to be confident. The great boxer, Muhamad Ali, who certainly did not lack self-belief, once said, *'I'm not the greatest, I'm the double greatest.'* Is this confidence or arrogance? Author Stewart Stafford wrote that, *'Confidence is when you believe in yourself and your abilities, arrogance is when you think you are better than others and act accordingly.'* Getting the balance right is not easy, and who knows how much of Muhammad Ali's comments were theatre, for he definitely enjoyed the show. But not having confidence and self-belief will hold you back. Famous football coach Vince Lombardi highlighted the double-edged nature of confidence. *'Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence.'*

In conclusion. Be daring, but when it is the right time to be daring. Don't believe stories or rumours and don't ignore the facts in front of you. Don't be afraid to change your mind when necessary and if you are part of group, understand that the group might not always be right, so have the courage to ignore it when you believe it to be wrong. Believe in yourself, be confident, but never be arrogant.

It only leaves me to thank all the staff for everything they have done this year. I know your work is appreciated by students, parents and all of the school authorities. Now, it is time for us to take a break, and to enjoy the summer. I wish you all every success for the future.