

# The Illusion of Exclusion



Why misfits exclude themselves, then complain they're not included



by John Wareham\*

*"Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared paths to freedom and justice."— Desmond Tutu*

**A New York chief executive referred to me a member of his corporate team to coach. "What do you think is the key issue I might help him with," I asked. He pondered a moment: "He's one of these people who exclude themselves" he said, "and then complain they're not included."**

Ah, yes, of course, *the illusion of exclusion*: a coping device for wannabe leaders with an underlying sense of inferiority. They crave and get the boost of status that comes with a role for which they are incompetent. But they cannot admit to that, not even to themselves. So they imagine themselves as—and pretend to be—*special and different*. Typically they hide their inadequacies behind masks of aloofness and bullying. But, neutered by their feelings of inferiority, they never truly attempt to

\* A Kiwi-American, John Wareham splits his time between his New Zealand home and the USA. A coach to international corporate chiefs, John established a complementary career selecting and developing community leaders from the prison population. Widely published, his books include *The President's Therapist*, and the crossover life-changer *How to Break Out of Prison*.

deal with the problematic situation they signed on to fix. And, so—consciously or unconsciously can be difficult to fathom—they set the scene for failure. Then when things go awry, they moan that ‘the team’—from which they have already excluded themselves—has let them down. It makes no sense, but one way or another they manufacture ways to make it seem to work for them.

This unhappy syndrome afflicts cultures as well as individuals. Indeed, it seems currently in play in both Israel and New Zealand. Let me show you what I mean.

### **Israelis and Arabs**

“What are you going to do about the tragic and worsening Israeli-Palestine conflict?” It was an intentionally provocative 1990’s question from a conservative member of the UK parliament to then Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He shone his cheesy smile, cleared his throat, and delivered an answer as adroit as it was concise: “Yes, well, Palestinians need to accept Israel’s right to exist, and Israelis have to give back the Palestinian land in Gaza.” The response was political gold; a warm chorus of ‘hear, hears’ from both sides of the aisle. Then, immediately, both parties moved on to other issues.

And so today, three decades later, it seems obvious, at least to cynical realists, that neither Israel nor Hamas has *ever* truly wanted to set aside their differences and create a viable a ‘two-state’ solution. So both have excluded that possibility:

- Israel by continuing race-based policies that favour Jews, and, crucially, by claiming entitlement to build and occupy settlements on Palestinian territory.
- Hamas by denying Israel’s right to exist, and committing to annihilating Jewish residents.

The moral, of course, is that unless both sides quit their fondness for the syndrome of the illusion of exclusion any two-state solution is impossible.

### **My Criminal Life**

Working with a New Zealand charity to help Kiwi gangs, and having taught since 1994 in maximum security prisons, I'm often asked the difference between Maori and African American denizens of those worlds. By way of answer I share what I learned working in New York's infamous Rikers Island prison:

- *African-Americans resent and blame 'Whitey' for the evil of slavery.* Indeed a bunch of class members angrily told me that I was one of their oppressors. "Not me," I replied, "I'm a born and bred New Zealander." The guys all laughed and that defused the issue. So much so, in fact, that we segued to serious, rational discussions of what in a later decade came to be called *Critical Race Theory*.
- African Americans want what they have always wanted, *acceptance*. They want to be treated, as promised in the United States Constitution, as equals under the law; they want to be *Americans*.
- We agreed that slavery was America's 'original sin'; and that racism is an ongoing evil; we agreed that we are all equal citizens with the same rights and duties; we agreed that it is normal for some unhappy folk to express racist opinions, but that actual discrimination based on those opinions should be illegal.

So—and here's the bottom line—we ultimately agreed to become *Pathfinders* and make good on our words by acting in ways that make America a better place for all.

## Iwi and Kiwi

So let's turn the focus to New Zealand. The core belief of Maori gangs is that 'if I look after my gang, my gang will look after me'. Yes indeed. For several hundred years the original version of that mantra—'if I look after my *tribe*, my *tribe* will look after me'—worked pretty well. But then the British arrived and the zeitgeist gradually changed to *every man for himself*.

Something else happened too.

Gradually, at first, but then rapidly in recent years, *the government assumed the mantle and duties of the tribe*. So, as of today, most Maori who run afoul of the law continue to identify by their race and their tribe. They see themselves first, foremost, and only, as Maori. They look after their gangs, but they expect the government—as their tribe—to redress their rates of incarceration for the crimes that they commit against their imagined oppressors.

Alas, too many of those gangsters have virtually nothing to replace tribal identity. They claim that Maori folklore, as embodied in their 'special' *Te Ao* world view, is superior to science—and virtually all other perspectives—yet they paradoxically also blame 'colonisation' for impairing their innate ability to fend for themselves. They don't want to identify as equal citizens. So, they oppose discussing their issues calmly and rationally. *They exclude themselves and claim they're not included.*



So what might be an effective way to address this syndrome among kiwi gang members who identify as Maori?

## Dispelling the Illusion of choice

Clearly, the first step to dispelling the illusion of exclusion is to see it for what it is:

*an apparently mindless—but in fact perversely subtle—‘coping’ syndrome for sufferers of low self-esteem that delivers them plausible deniability for ‘failure’.*

But changing self-serving core beliefs is never easy. Happily, personal experience has taught me that it can be done. But not, alas, with finger-pointing or even regular logic—because *we only pay attention to the things that we discover for ourselves*

Changing minds requires a *process*. I call it ‘constructive confusion’. First, we have to give up on the certainty that our opinion is the ‘truth’. We have to become confused. Then, and perhaps only then, we can extract clarity from confusion and experience an ‘Aha moment’.

The first step in the process of persuasion is to arrange a discussion of a set of apparently unrelated but opposing concepts. An example of this approach is contained in my recent talk to leaders of the Mongrel Mob, which you can [read right now at this link](#). The point I was setting out to make for this happy band of brothers was that *we are all members of the same tribe*. All of us are *homo sapiens*, all of us are equally special citizens. So I introduced the gang to the legendary meeting and conversation of Alexander the Great with the ragged, near-naked but ever-savvy philosopher Diogenes.



Mongrel Mob welcomes John Wareham  
Gang headquarters, New Zealand, 2022

In our Eagles prison programs we also include readings from Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

And, most crucially, excerpts from Ghanaian born, Cambridge educated, Princeton Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah, whose new-world wisdom is that, like it or not, we are all ‘citizens of the world.’

Professor Appiah recently distilled that concept into a philosophy that has overtaken most free nations, *Cosmopolitanism*. Global Citizenship is the heart and soul of that concept. Our cultural inheritance, often miscalled ‘race’, comes second. And that we are all part of one global tribe is firmly based in recent research showing that humans all share the same genetic makeup.

Happily, as you see in the poem below by Eagles graduate Moses Colon, that message struck a happy chord:-

*I am black, I am white, I am brown,  
and to that rainbow I never frown.*

*I welcome every color in me,  
all that I am,  
and all that God  
has made me to be.*

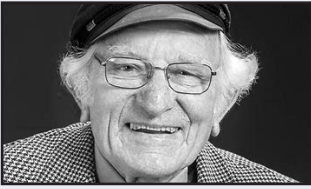
*The conquistador, the soul, and the heart,  
I embrace every aspect and live every part.*

*Yes that’s me—all entwined,  
I can never see black or white*

*for I am color-blind  
when my eyes prevail  
—and color-blinded  
whenever I fail.*

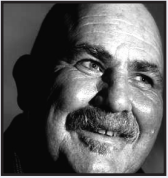
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## Typical Tributes for Eagles Programs



**Professor Tony Taylor,**  
Victoria University of Wellington

**Truly transformational . . .** the content and presentation is outstanding . . . a stunning complex of relevant experiential and solid evidential-based material that should shake many on both sides of the fence to the core.



**Denis O'Reilly**  
Black Power  
Lifetime Member

**Way back in 2005, faced by escalating gang tensions and political conservatism,** I persuaded John Wareham to fly out from New York to create and lead a weekend retreat for two gangs: Black Power, and Mongrel Mob. That weekend was transformational for everyone, so much so, that the *New Zealand Herald* declared John a “miracle worker”. John came back again to facilitate another forum, this time with New Zealand police representatives, 30 Mongrel Mob fathers and sons, and 30 Black Power fathers and sons. Another series of transformations followed, resulting in the creation of the ‘Otatara Accord’—a formal pact between Black Power and Mongrel Mob, which has in turn resulted in the observable reduction of regional gang violence.



**Hassan Gale**  
Eagles New York  
Chapter President

**I've had the misfortune of doing serious time in some of New York's most notorious prisons.** When 20 fellow prisoners signed onto an Eagles program at Wallkill maximum-security prison what happened was truly astonishing. The first session began with a selection of provocative discussion readings—pithy excerpts from contemporary and classic poets, philosophers, psychologists as well as social activists of every ethnicity. Some were liked and some were loathed. But by posing critical questions, John Wareham stoked our insights and opinions, and made every discussion riveting. We realized that our thoughts were vital to our development. And that our ideas truly mattered. Discussions were always respectful and exciting—electric, even—and always wound up with a new set of readings for the next week. And we could hardly wait for the next session. Ultimately, the sum of our encounters transformed our lives. When I was released thirteen years ago, John invited me to become an Eagles instructor. Now I run those programs and train potential facilitators. So, maybe we'll meet up one day. Meantime, you can catch me on our Pulitzer Prize nominated podcast series, *The Breakout Plan*. Peace . . . §

# The Secret to Developing Teams and the mistake that too often thwarts the mission

by **Dr. Jess Maghan**, Wareham advisory board member,  
former director of training, New York City Police Department.

**T**he mistake that thwarts most so-called team-building  
and leadership programs is fixation with organizational  
housekeeping, operational excellence, and quick fixes.

In fact, obsession with technical mastery merely hobbles the most  
promising achievers. They become technocrats not leaders.

Leading harmonious, high-performing, new era teams requires  
a centered heart, not an iron will. It calls for infinitely more insight  
and understanding than information and intelligence. It demands  
a way with words, not a whip. That's why the secret to developing  
leaders is to address the heart, the soul and  
the tongue, not merely the mind.

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*"The Wareham  
development program  
should be a rite of  
passage for every  
leader, and anyone  
who aspires to be one."*

Jack Butler, founder and  
CEO, Municipal Bond  
Investors Association

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And this is exactly what the *Wareham 3 plus 3*  
team-building symposium does. Delegates  
are exposed to the biggest ideas of the world's  
most influential thinkers—the worst as well  
as the best. The program challenges the mind,  
arouses the heart, and creates the exciting  
state of evolutionary change that unleashes  
true potentialities. In my experience, whether  
in the private or public sector, no other  
leadership symposium is so satisfying or enriching.

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## The Wareham Leadership Program

may be customized to fit particular client  
needs, but classic, proven modules include:

- The 3 plus 3 Leadership Symposium ♦
- Leading Inclusive Teams for Profit ♦
- How to Recruit Winning Executives ♦
- Corporate Values and Business Ethics ♦
- Communicating Your Way to the Top ♦

