

Multi Nation Program



Lt. Colonel Avi Biran | Tel Aviv, ISRAEL

Head of Technological Research and Development Branch, Israel Defense Forces (IDF)

Lt. Colonel Avi Biran is founding director of the Israel Defense Force's Technological Research and Development Branch, which works toward rapid development and deployment of new technologies in response to operational crises. He is also founder of *Atidim*, an NGO that teaches youth from society's periphery about technology, and of the academic program *B'rakim*, which prepares exceptional engineers for leadership positions in Army R&D units through fellowships with the Technion Institute in Haifa.

Lt. Colonel Biran's fellowship focused on questions of technological innovation, leadership and management, and entrepreneurship, particularly in the technology sector. He began the fellowship with the goal of meeting leaders, primarily from tech firms, to learn how they address three interrelated challenges: how to foster an atmosphere conducive to mobilizing innovation, how to manage change in a rapidly developing high-tech environment, and how to keep one's most productive employees on board in the face of outside competition. After five weeks of traveling and listening to some of the world's top senior managers share their experiences and advice on these questions, Lt. Colonel Biran came away feeling that the fellowship allowed him to gain a comprehensive perspective on becoming a better leader, both in his organization and in society.

During a visit to MBIA, Lt. Colonel Biran learned about the importance of corporate leaders acting as role models for employees to keep them on board, particularly during challenging times. At Boeing, another company that underwent a recent period of change, he heard about the necessity of setting clear goals and a vision for the organization, as well as presenting a realistic timetable for results, and communicating those transparently and articulately to create a commonality of purpose. He also learned about the importance of empowering employees and holding them accountable for their part of the mission, and encouraging them to operate beyond the requirements of their position.

At Google, Lt. Colonel Biran observed an excellent example of how a company has crafted a highly innovative corporate culture largely through the CEO's direct encouragement to all employees to aim high and take multiple shots, while also reassuring them that failure is acceptable. He noted their view that in order to succeed, ultimately you have to fail occasionally, but the most important thing is to learn from the experience. CEO Larry Page further contributed to Google's culture of innovation by allowing employees to spend 20% of their time on any project they choose, a practice which led to the creation of Gmail. Other highlights of Lt. Colonel Biran's fellowship included visits to Cisco, Microsoft and Greffex, a bio-tech startup company.

Lt. Colonel Biran has a number of plans for his return to Israel, including presenting key findings on leadership and on how to motivate innovation and entrepreneurship to high-level commanders in his unit and the Intelligence Corps. He will create a program to allow former Israeli engineering students in the U.S. to come to Israel to serve in the Israel Defense Forces as research and development engineers. He also plans to collaborate with Juan José Güemes (MNP 2011 Fellow from Spain) to start a fellowship program to send officers from the Israel Defense Forces' unit to study at IE Business School's International Center for Entrepreneurial Management, which Güemes directs.

Leaders bettering the world around them.