

BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

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Locals give nod to Israel's acting leader



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INSIDE STORIES

When the news broke last week about **Ariel Sharon's** stroke, **Stuart** and **Harriet Levine's** thoughts turned not only to concern about the Israeli prime minister, but to the man who, at least in the short run, will be running the country: the man with whom last summer they broke bread, shared a little wine and exchanged ideas.

And based on that experience, both Levine and Stuart's acting prime minister, **Ehud Olmert**, is well-equipped to lead.

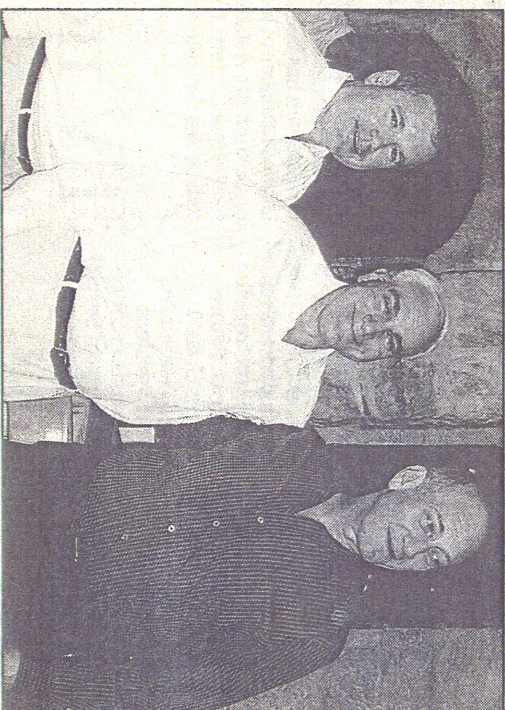
Especially, we should note, if Olmert has read Stuart Levine's book.

"He's got the ability to look you in the eye, smile, and give you the feeling that he cares about you individually, that he's thinking about issues that are your issues," said Stuart

Levine, chairman of the Jericho consulting firm that bears his name (Harriet Levine is the president). "I think that on a global stage, he will surprise people, because he's got that ability to develop relationships and make people feel at ease."

"He was charismatic, he was extremely likable, he appeared to be very strong, competent and confident," Harriet Levine said, "and he was cautiously optimistic, which, in turn, made us feel similarly. . . . I felt confident he had the ability to lead."

The meeting took place in July at a Jerusalem restaurant, when the Levines were part of a delegation of business leaders that included the president of City College of New York, the former chairman of New Jersey-based Automatic Data Processing Inc. and the former president of the American Stock Exchange. As we chronicled last summer, they met with assorted top-level Israeli politicians and ventured into Ramallah to meet with Palestin-



Stuart Levine, with Peter Quick, left, ex-president of the American Stock Exchange, and Ehud Olmert, during a social engagement last summer at a Jerusalem restaurant. Olmert is now Israel's acting prime minister.

ian economic officials in a whirlwind four days. "It was probably for the better part of three hours," Stuart Levine said of the session with Olmert, adding that "over din-

ner and drinking some wine, you really get the measure of the person that's across from you." He said he was especially taken by Olmert's grasp of issues, ability to crystallize the challeng-

es to Mideast peace and his candor. "He impressed me as being very open to questions. He did not evade, and he did not throw a knuckleball back to any question, and we had a really robust discussion that night." The Levines were further impressed by the more-than-pro-forma response they got after sending Olmert a copy of "The Six Fundamentals of Success," Stuart Levine's best-selling business book: a letter in which the then-deputy prime minister noted, "From browsing through it, I can already see that it contains some important and interesting ideas."

Did Olmert ever get around to reading the book? Neither we, nor the Levines, may ever know, especially if Olmert succeeds Sharon permanently. As Harriet Levine said of the dinner, "We probably would never get that meeting again. It was a wonderful opportunity we had to be face-to-face with him, eyeball-to-eyeball, to get a sense of who he was and what his character was like."