



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Heroes and Role Models: Nicholas Negroponte”
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There may seem to be only slight differences between what a hero and role model are, but for me there is a big distinction. Role models are people who you personally admire and want to be like in one or more ways. They may not necessarily be famous or looked up to by others. Heroes are people who are admired for their courage and achievements and are usually famous, but you might not like them for who they are as a person.

When I was first considering who would be a good hero or role model for myself, I thought about people like Ben Stiller, a famous actor and comedian; Woody Allen, a great film director; and Steve Ballmer, the CEO of Microsoft. As I researched them, and others, I decided they weren't people I would want to be like. I didn't dislike them, I just didn't really feel a connection with them.

The person I related to as both my hero and role model is Nicholas Negroponte. You may not have heard of him, but by the end of this paper you will know a lot about him. He's my hero because of what he has accomplished, most importantly his creation of One Laptop Per Child, or OLPC. OLPC was founded in 2005. It is a non-profit that brings laptops to children in some of the most remote and poor places on earth. OLPC is in it to provide education, not to make money or to promote technology. Negroponte is also my role model because we share many of the same values.

OLPC's goal is to bring laptops to as many kids as possible. These children wouldn't normally have any kind of connection with the outside world, much less technology like this. These laptops, called XO laptops, are incredibly versatile and cutting-edge. Each laptop is sold to communities, non-profits, and countries in need/that are poor. Depending on the circumstance, they either cost \$100 or are supplied at no charge. Again, the focus here isn't on the technology. It's an education project, not a laptop project. The goal is to provide a way for kids to learn and to better their lives and the lives of their families. Also, it's a way to connect them with each other and the rest of the world. They have been distributed to 1.4 million children in 35 countries, with an additional 500,000 in transit for distribution.

The current model, XO-1.5, will be replaced with a new model in 2011, and with a tablet version in 2012. Negroponte predicts the cost of the tablet version will fall well below \$100. He feels this price decrease will be achieved mainly because there will be only 50 parts, far less than the current 900 parts in the laptop.

As for being a role model, Negroponte has many values that are important to me. For example, one of his values is education, or **cheenuch**. This is pretty obvious considering how OLPC is primarily about educating kids. Also, after attending MIT he became a professor. Just as my family has passed down the value of education from generation to generation, Negroponte credits his father for teaching him the value of education.

We also share the value of family, **meeshpahcha**. OLPC is one the biggest and most important projects he has ever worked on and he shares his enthusiasm for OLPC with his son, Dimitri. One of the pictures always included in his presentations is of Dimitri out in the field with OLPC.

Based on what I learned about Negroponte I see that he and I also share values like charity (**tzedahkah**), bettering the world (**tikkun olahm**), and compassion (**rachameem**).

OLPC shows that Negroponte also values hard work (**avodah kashey**). But that isn't the only example of this quality. He attended MIT as a student and joined the faculty there in 1966. It is one of the best universities, and possibly the best tech university, in the world. You probably know how it is right up in the big leagues with Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. He also has taught at Yale, Michigan, and the University of California, Berkley. He founded MIT's Architecture Machine Group which develops new methods of human-computer interaction. He later co-created the MIT Media Lab, which is like an advanced version of the Architecture Machine Group with labs for new media and high-tech testing for more human-computer interaction.

Negroponte also became involved in *Wired Magazine* as its first investor, and wrote a monthly column in the magazine that had the basic theme of "Move bits, not atoms." He expanded many of the ideas presented in his column into a best-selling book titled *Being Digital*. The book predicted that the interactive world, the entertainment world, and the information world would eventually merge, which they obviously have. It is so popular that it has been published in some twenty languages.

Negroponte has one more value that I want to mention here. It's the strength to follow-through with your beliefs, even when others say you are wrong. It's a combination of Courage (**ometz lev**) and Determination (**hechleteoot**).

Before OLPC was created as a not-for-profit, many experts in business advised him that he had to make it for-profit or it would fail. They were wrong. Being a non-profit has been key to OLPC's success.

Nicholas Negroponte has a career that I might wish to follow. He attended MIT and was successful there as both a student and an educator, he wrote a best-seller, and he created a company that educates and helps impoverished kids through the use of laptops. In addition, he combined two very different interests, art and mathematics, into a degree in Architecture and ultimately into a laptop that is bettering people's lives around the world. Like Negroponte, I hope to someday combine two very different interests -- my love of technology and creativity -- to help people. Nicholas Negroponte is an inspiration to me. His accomplishments and values have made me think about what is possible for me to achieve in my own life through hard work, passion, and commitment to what I believe in.

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