

Leadership lessons from Madiba



By [Kay Vittee](#)

18 Jul 2013

Annually, we celebrate Mandela Day because we respect Nelson Mandela for his great leadership that brought about South Africa's democracy. However, Madiba has set an example that shouldn't just be admired, but also emulated in our own leadership roles.

The universal everyman

From members of state and celebrities to children and the man of the street, people from all walks of life are drawn to Mandela. Mandela is an everyman. He carries himself with dignity supported by knowledge and experience making him a respected world leader. Yet, he has humble beginnings and knows what it is like to be suppressed and to struggle. He has a broad spectrum of understanding and is able to relate to many different walks of life. It is this understanding that shapes his empathy and allows him to be both tolerant and approachable.

Often, when leaders make it to the top they have done so through hard work and sacrifice and so, feel that they deserve this position. However, this should not lead to a sense of entitlement that causes you to look down on your subordinates. You need to remain approachable, tolerant and able to connect with people on all levels. No one can be a leader without a team and keeping the channels of communications open will allow you to win the respect and the loyalty of those who follow you.

A great listener

A lesson Mandela learnt from the tribal king who mentored him was to listen. Mandela is known for his ability to listen to all sides of the debate and then step in to draw the myriad of opinions to a consensus.

This approach will allow you, as the leader, to be informed by and take into consideration all opinions of your team before stepping in to make the final decision. It also ensures that you are not so busy defending your argument that you are not able to hear the input of the other side of the debate. Moreover, it allows your team to feel heard and know that their opinion makes a valuable contribution which will ensure that you, as the collective, make the best decisions possible.

An agent for empowerment

Whether it was co-founding the ANC Youth League, devising plans for the ANC's underground movement or gaining freedom for all South Africans, Mandela empowered people. Leaders have a responsibility to not only motivate their team, but give them the right tools to empower them. In business, this may require sending them on a skills development course, supplying life coaching or giving them the right gadgets. Motivation without empowerment will remain just motivation. With empowerment, it becomes an action and an achievement.

A daring pioneer

When Mandela opted to negotiate with FW De Klerk, his decision probably wasn't too popular with his comrades. The step was drastic and Mandela had to do it alone. Although good leaders need to take others opinions into consideration, there are times when you have to follow your intuition and make calls that are risky. It may make you unpopular, but as a leader you are required to pioneer uncharted territory because it may yield high returns in the long run.

A course setter

After his long struggle for freedom, Mandela only served one term in office before he resigned as he only wanted to set the course for others to follow. He had achieved and established the democracy he envisioned and then passed the torch on to others to achieve new goals.

As a business leader, handing over the company you have built from the ground up or delegating roles to your team may be difficult because you know you have the better experience and knowledge for the job. However, you need to keep in mind that although you have set the course and established the standard, your successor may be the best one to get the organisation to the destination that you specified. Know when it is time to pass the torch.

The change that Nelson Mandela has brought to our country and the world cannot easily be followed, but what every individual can do is take the lessons the great man has taught us and apply them to our own lives.

ABOUT KAY VITTEE

Kay Vittee is the CEO of Quest Staffing Solutions.

- How to retain staff in tough economic times - 8 Aug 2016
- How to make yourself an indispensable employee - 28 Jul 2016
- Not enough progress being made in gender equality in the workplace - 12 Aug 2015
- Adapting to 21st century employment evolution - 20 Jul 2015
- Spring clean your career - 27 Sep 2013

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>