

Nelson mandela leadership style



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Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the leader and father of South African population, will turn 92 years on the 18th of July. Born in Transkei, a village in the south-eastern area of South Africa, he was exposed to the African history from his childhood due to his father being the chief of the village. As a result he gained a deeper understanding of the African government and the unfair and inhuman treatment by white people. Once again his father influenced his life path as he was the one who gave the permission for Rolihlahla, to join elementary school where he was given the English name, Nelson. Calling it fate or destiny Mandela in his biography wonders if his teacher gave him that name after the British sea captain Lord Nelson (Mandela N., 1994).

Moving on with his education, Nelson enrolled in the Fort Hare University. At that point, his leadership skills unfolded, “winning” an expulsion from University for leading a student strike. Thus, he completed his degree in law at the University of South Africa (Notable Biographies, 2010). On the other hand, his personal life included three marriages resulting in having six children, twenty-one grandchildren and three great-grandchildren (Mandela N., 1994).

A point of reference is the time, in 1943, that Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) as an activist. Only eight years later, his first major presidential position was in place as the president of the ANC Youth League which he co-founded.

Since its foundation, ANC aims to enhance the human rights and living conditions of black people in South Africa. ANC was the reason for Mandela to be sent in jail for nine months since he participated in protest activities.

However, in 1960, ANC Youth League lost financial and militant support thus being banned. This made Mandela to realise that peaceful behaviour was not the method to change things in Africa. Pride and anger for the unfairness he was forced to face, necessitated him to form a military group that was operating illegally, called “ The Spear of the Nation”. They were fighting the government in silence through sabotage. For instance, they were destroying people’s properties (Notable Biographies, 2010).

Prior to this, in 1952, Mandela launched the first black legal company in South Africa. He was offering his legal advices to black people for free or low cost. However, seven years later, new laws were passed, forcing the creation of separated homelands for black people enhancing the racial segregation (Telegraph. co. uk, 2010). The later, let Mandela to become more active towards protecting the rights of black people. This resulted in Mandela being arrested and imprisoned in Johannesburg Fort, in 1962, for five years, although managing to escape. That did not last for long as he was arrested again and accused for sabotage and treason. As a consequence Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment. The first eighteen years of his imprisonment were in Robben island prison (Telegraph. co. uk, 2010). This as he himself described, was a prison with maximum security, forcing them to work hard, humiliating them and living under inhuman conditions.

In 1968, his mother and his son died but he was not permitted to attend either of the funerals. Contrary to that and to the treatment received by the government, he never stopped supporting his beliefs thus rejecting a liberation offer by the president of South Africa, PW Botha. Moving on in the time of the imprisonment, better and more human conditions were offered to

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him in 1988 as he underwent a prostate surgery. Eventually, after twenty-seven years in prison and as a response to worldwide calls, Nelson Mandela was finally released in 1990 and elected as the president of ANC (Telegraph. co. uk, 2010). However if an evaluation was to be made for his life so far, the suffering he encountered is clearly shown. The government did not allow him any visitors and they considered discussions regarding Mandela as illegal. However, these decisions against Mandela increased people's perception about him, both worldwide and locally. On the top, in people's minds Mandela was synonym to words like fairness, ethnical right and leader. He became an international symbol against racism (Notable Biographies, 2010).

After being released from prison Mandela did not stop fighting for the black people. He started discussions with the existing president of South Africa, F. W. de Klerk, concluding that only a compromise between black and white people will prevent the occurrence of a civil war in their country. Eventually, the establishment of the new democratic government was a fact. This new government was giving the right to vote to all South Africans (Notable Biographies, 2010).

The upcoming years of his life were the rewards for his nonstop race for equality. In 1993 he was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize due to his achievement of the equality in voting rights. A year later, black South Africans and Mandela were allowed to vote for the first time in their life. The result was internationally expected. Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa (Telegraph. co. uk, 2010). During the years of his presidency, he tried hard to minimise the various political differences in South Africa. Moreover, he tried to build up a healthier economy in

combination with establishing a more solid democracy. Additionally, he was one of the supporters of clearing people's criminal record if that was created during the years of racism by the country's government (Notable Biographies, 2010).

Ending a successful century his duration as his country's president ends in 1999. However, his political career doesn't end. He was placed at the position of the statesman where he was acting as the third party in the process for peace (Notable Biographies, 2010). The first decade of the new century found Mandela facing the accursed disease, as he was diagnosed with prostate cancer but he fought and succeeded for once more in his life.

As all things come to an end, at the age of eighty-five he retired from the public life. However, only two years ago at the age of ninety, he showed that his vision of equality and fairness never stopped bothering him. Through a speech he urged and tried to inspire the young generation to continue the "fight for social justice" (Telegraph. co. uk, 2010). Summing up his career, "The United Nations General Assembly declares July 18 'Mandela Day' as a tribute to his contribution to world freedom" (Telegraph. co. uk, 2010).

In general, Nelson Mandela can be characterised as an excellent leader, with good judgement and listening skills, sensitive and open-minded. He was an intelligent leader since it requires good strategic plan and clever manoeuvre in order to defeat your enemies without humiliating them. Once, he stated that "my life was shaped by custom, ritual and taboo and this was the alpha and omega of our existence" (Mandela N., 1994). This excellent knowledge of his origin enabled him to be more confident of what he was fighting for.

Thus his vision of a peaceful South Africa without any racial segregation became a more approachable target. This explains one of his favourite quotes; “ a good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination” (Brainy Quotes, 2010). Moreover, he was exposed to significant leadership education throughout his career. For instance, seeing the world from your enemy’s eyes enables you to identify easier their strengths and weaknesses, planning a more effective strategy (Times Magazine, 2008).

The worldwide discussion of whether you are born or developed as a leader is not a question for Nelson Mandela. It is unanimously believed that Mandela had the charisma to be a leader. This is supported by his acts throughout his life and the recognition he faced worldwide. Scanning Mandela’s life, it can be seen that the way to lead the people was influenced from his childhood. This is because he used to attend the local tribal meetings, where he was observing the speakers, and absorbing every small detail of leadership characteristics. These principles were his significant tools throughout his political life. In his biography, he notes that in the meetings he was just concluding the discussions, most of the times without adding anything new but taking everyone’s talk into consideration (Mandela N., 1994).

Strategically he admits that in the back of his mind he was following a well planned schedule. “ A leader is like a shepherd” he supports, in a way that the flock thinks that it rules, but actually the shepherd directs the movements from start till the end (Mandela N., 1994).

Moving on with the evaluation of Mandela’s characteristics, one can describe Mandela as team manager. This is because he was a supporter and a listener of his followers’ concerns but he always had in mind his primary goal, being

both task and people oriented. He tried to motivate people by making each individual to feel necessary and important thus increasing their willingness to help and achieve their goal.

Making a critical analysis of Mandela's overall attitude, characteristics of a level five leader can be observed, i. e. Mandela represents an executive leader. This is because there is a combination of professional will and personal humility. Being focused on his main goal, he was not afraid of being dishonoured. For instance, his life imprisonment showed that he was not afraid to accept the consequences of his own acts even though humiliation was present. Showing professional will, even when he was in the plane to be taken to Robben Island he did not stop thinking as a leader. He was looking at the area as a strategist where he was trying to find ideal places to launch his army in order to continue fighting for his vision (Mandela N., 1994). This way of thinking also characterise him as a strategic innovative leader.

As a transformational leader he showed his various ways of leadership. He was engaged in individualized consideration and this can be proved by his refusal towards the president P. W. Botha to release him from prison. Furthermore his boxing training enhanced his skills. Attracted by the science of boxing, i. e. the democratic and strategic rules that needed to be followed and not the violence of it, Mandela used the sport to improve his leadership initiative and self confidence. This attitude categorises Mandela as an alchemist and achiever. Renamed voluntarily by his boxing colleagues, "Chief", showed that his leading skills were used even during his daily routine (Mandela N., 1994).

All the aforementioned characteristics show his authenticity as a leader. One can be completely persuaded that he knew how to manage his skills and which personality traits to reveal for each occasion. Two important quotes that he used throughout his life were firstly that “ If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart” (Brainy Quotes, 2010). This shows that he knew the way to cope with people and influence them. Secondly, “ Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Brainy Quotes, 2010). In order to achieve his vision he always had in mind that goodness and forgiveness are two important aspects to fulfil.

To sum up, Mandela’s life and actions made people realize that everyone can have a dream, big or small, good or bad. However, this does not mean that it will be publicly accepted. People will fight one’s vision but looking at Mandela’s story what stays in mind is that, you should never give up.

Developing a well organised plan and creating a well structured strategy are the key components for a successful path to be followed. Although Nelson Mandela spent many years in prison, he never stopped trying to transform his vision into reality. In an article in Guardian newspaper he states that “ if people of courage and good conscience are prepared to stand and fight there is nothing we cannot achieve” (The Guardian, 2010). Thus leading with vision, courage and always being a “ shepherd” is the lesson gained from Nelson Mandela’s leadership.

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