

NEW BEGINNINGS  
Nelson Mandela-His Eight Lessons Of Leadership  
by Jack E. Albright

Richard Stengel, Time, July 21, 2008: “As Mandela celebrates his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, the world’s greatest moral leader reflects on a lifetime of service—and what the rest of us can learn from it.” Stengel calls Mandela the closest thing the world has to a secular saint.

In 1964 he was sent to Robben Island under a life term for sabotage and treason. He went in emotional and headstrong. Twenty-seven years later he came out measured, balanced and disciplined. Mandela said, “I came out mature.”

Stengel names eight lessons of Mandela’s leadership:

*Courage is not the absence of fear.* Acting fearless in prison inspired others. He was a model for others, and that gave him the strength to triumph over his own fear. While riding on a two-engine plane one of the engines quit. Some began to panic until they noticed him casually reading a newspaper. After they landed he told a friend, “Man, I was terrified up there.”

*Lead from the front—but don’t leave your support base behind.* His supporters thought he was betraying them when he began to negotiate with the apartheid government. He slowly convinced them that his way was the correct course and slowly and deliberately brought his supporters along with him.

*Lead from the back—and let others believe they are in front.* He told stories of his childhood herding cattle. “You know you can only lead them from behind.” He told of a tribal king who gathered his court in a circle around him and asked each person to speak his opinions of a problem. Only after the different opinions were aired, did the king speak. He accurately summarized every point of view. Then he methodically unfurled his own thoughts in the direction he wanted them to take. He persuaded others to do things and made them think it was their own idea.

*Know your enemy—and learn about his favorite sport.* He wanted to understand their worldview so he could negotiate with them. He was a lawyer and helped his prison guards with legal matters. He proved that he could negotiate with even the worst and crudest.

*Keep your friends close—and your rivals even closer.* If they were close he knew better what they were thinking and doing. Embracing his rivals was a way of controlling them: they were more dangerous on their own than within the circle of his influence. He knew the way to deal with those he didn’t trust was to neutralize them with charm.

*Appearance matters--and remember to smile.* Mandella dressed appropriate when in the presence of those he led. He wore custom tailored suits with negotiators or proper fatigues and a beard when with the ANC underground leaders. His dazzling smile showed sympathy to white South Africans and that he was a happy warrior who was leading his followers to victory.

*Nothing is black or white.* Life is never either/or. There are always competing factors. There must be nuance, shades of black and white. Nothing is ever as straightforward as it appears. Every problem has many causes. He always looked for the most practical way to reach his goal.

*Quitting is also leading.* He was elected president in 1994 and likely could have pressed to be president for life. He was determined to do the opposite of Mugabe, who held the nation hostage as dictator. His friend Ramaphosa said, “His job was to set the course, not to steer the ship.” He knew that leaders lead as much by what they choose not to do as what they do.

Leadership is demonstrated by attitudes and actions.