

5 Nelson Mandela Leadership Style Traits, Skills and Qualities

There are times when you must pursue a personal path which you know is right, even if the majority of people around you believe that it is wrong. For Nelson Mandela, the choices he made during the era of apartheid in South Africa led him to spend more than two decades in prison.

From 1964 to 1982, he was kept in the prison on Robben Island, isolated from non-political prisoners, and placed in a damp cell with nothing but a straw mat. For many years, he broke rocks into gravel, which would eventually affect his eyesight.

In 1955, Mandela had concluded that the only way to end apartheid would be violent action. His decisions would eventually lead him to serve as the President of South Africa, from May 1994 to June 1999.

Why would someone decide to commit violence to create change? The answer to that question lies in the leadership style traits that Nelson Mandela exhibited.

Key Attributes of the Ethical Leadership Style

The ethical leadership style is defined by the moral “correctness” of each decision that is made. Every leader who practices this leadership style must make an ethical decision that is correct for it to be effective, even if they do not realize what they are doing at the time.

That creates an interesting question: how is it possible for leaders to choose an ethical response consistently?

Research from West Virginia University suggests that there are four different observations a leader can make to determine if they are making an ethical choice.

- Would you make the same decision if your children were watching you implement the strategy in question?
- Would you feel okay about your decision if it was plastered on the front page of every newspaper in your community?
- Would you be comfortable receiving the same outcomes from someone else that you're about to place on others?
- Do you feel like the world would be a better place if people acted or behaved in the way that you're about to implement?

The idea behind these four questions is simple. If your answer can be “yes” to each of these questions, then you have decreased the risk of making an unethical decision.

That creates a problem, however, from a leadership standpoint. Ethics becomes a foundation that is built on personal interpretations more than rigid facts. The “correct” decision to make becomes dependent upon the situational context.

What might be right for one person in one situation could be wrong for that person in a different scenario. The opposite could also be true.

That's why it is important to separate ethics from morality, even though the two are often conflated together.

A moral system encompasses more than just behavior. It is the application of universal truths, from a personal perspective, that places the importance of individuality at some level of life. Following a religion is a classic example of a moral system. It is a broad set of beliefs.

For the Nelson Mandela leadership style, the situation is a little different. The scope of the belief system is narrowed. Morality can form the basis of ethical leadership. Ethics, however, does not form the foundation of moral leadership.

Secrets of the Nelson Mandela Leadership Style

Nelson Mandela had a dream that his people would be free one day. He didn't stop pursuing that dream, no matter what obstacles were put in his way. Even 27 years in prison didn't stop him from continuing down the path which he felt was meant for him to walk.

Above anything else, persistence is the key to unlocking the benefits which come with Mandela's leadership style.

Here are some of the additional qualities and traits that Mandela exhibited during his time fighting against apartheid and later when he held political office.

1. Ethics

Although some people may disagree with the idea of violent protest, Mandela embraced the idea when it was needed because he felt like there were things that were morally right and morally wrong from a human standpoint. The minority white leadership in South Africa attempted to stay in power at all costs, often harming the majority population in untold ways in the name of justice. Mandela taught us that there are times it is imperative to stand up and fight to protect your nation, community, and family.

2. Communication

Mandela was arrested several times in the 1950s and 1960s before he was sentenced to life in prison for his role in fighting apartheid. Even though the government attempted to stop his ideas by cutting off his access to the rest of the population, Mandela is proof that a clearly communicated idea can continue to live on, even if the person who shared that idea is not physically present. If you are consistent with your ideology and communicate your ideas to others, it is possible to create the change in the world that you wish to see.

3. Charisma

Mandela had great ideas for his people that would eventually lead them into a new South Africa. Without his charisma and passion, it is entirely possible that his ideas would have been ignored. There was a certain enthusiasm that Mandela provided which created strong emotional connections with people. He was unafraid to do what he felt was necessary to stand up for his beliefs. This inspired many more people to stand up for what they believed as well, which eventually allowed them all to form a new nation.

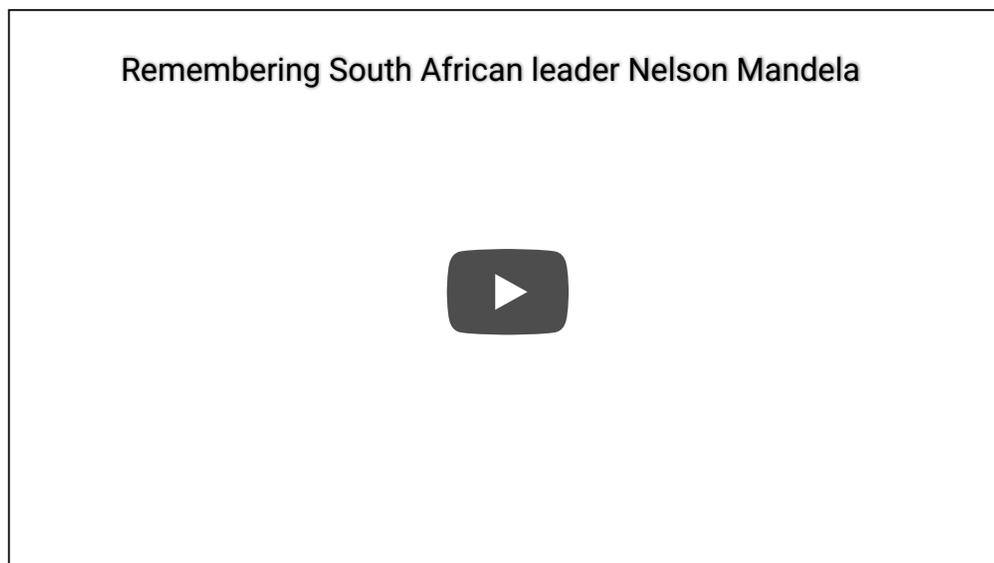
4. Inspiration

To inspire people, Mandela lived by a philosophy of showing people what he meant instead of telling them. By showing people his vision, he encouraged them to develop their own thoughts and understanding of what was important for an equal South Africa. Mandela would often travel throughout the country, delivering speeches and meeting with local leaders, to discuss his ideas and show them results. By encouraging everyone to work together, it became possible to create a democratic nation out of the ashes of apartheid.

5. Transformation

Long before he began to publicly fight apartheid, Nelson Mandela was already transforming expectations within his country. With his partner, Oliver Tambo, he was able to open the first legal practice that was founded by Black South Africans in 1952. His work became part of the struggle to have people become aware of the Freedom Charter that circulated at the time. It was his idea, that he deserved equality, that began to light the fires of freedom in other people too.

Nelson Mandela taught us the importance of standing up for what we think is right. He applied his leadership concepts to his country, eventually inspiring the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new chapter. If it is time to start a new chapter in your life, Mandela's example is an excellent one to follow.



Author Biography

Keith Miller has over 25 years of experience as a CEO and serial entrepreneur. As an