MADIBA’S 8 LESSONS OF LEADERSHIP

Time magazine recently featured Nelson Mandela on its cover in commemoration of his 90th birthday. Time journalist, Richard Stengel has spent many hours - even days - with Madiba over more than a decade.

Stengel makes the point that Madiba is above all, a politician - and a master tactician. Some of these lessons apply more to politics than business (unless you think both are the same), but they’re worthwhile reading and digesting.

"[Madiba's Rules] are mostly practical. Many of them stem from his personal experience. All of them are calibrated to cause the best kind of trouble: the trouble that forces us to ask how we can make the world a better place."

No 1 - Courage is not the absence of fear - it's inspiring others to move beyond it
Madiba admits to being afraid many times in his life but never showed it and through appearing fearless, inspired others. "Prisoners who were with him (on Robben Island) said watching Mandela walk across the courtyard, upright and proud, was enough to keep them going for days. He knew that he was a model for others and that gave him the strength to triumph over his own fear," writes Stengel.

No 2 - Lead from the front - but don’t leave your base behind
In 1985, Mandela opened negotiations with the Nationalist government against the wishes of many of his compatriots. Prior to this, there was to be no negotiating and he had to persuade the ANC to come along with him. "For Mandela, refusing to negotiate was about tactics, not principles." He just changed tactic, deeming the time to be right, but his principles remained the same.

No 3 - Lead from the back - and let others believe they are in front
"It is wise," he said, "to persuade people to do things and make them think it was their own idea." Leadership is not just telling people what do, but getting them to want to do it.

No 4 - Know your enemy - and learn about his favourite sport
Stengel made that point that Mandela in the 1960s learned Afrikaans in order to better understand Afrikaners and their culture. He also helped his prison warders with their legal problems and, of course, studied up on rugby.

No 5 - Keep your friends close - and your rivals even closer
"Mandela believed that embracing his rivals was a way of controlling them: they were more dangerous on their own than within his circle of influence. He cherished loyalty, but he was never obsessed by it," says Stengel.

No 6 - Appearances matter - and remember when to smile
Mandela was always a smart dresser and has become famous for his smile. Projecting an image is always important for a leader.

No 7 - Nothing is black or white
"Life is never either/or. Decisions are complex and there are always competing factors. To look for simple explanations is the bias of the human brain, but it doesn't correspond to reality. Nothing is as straightforward as it seems. "Mandela's calculus was always, "What is the end that I seek and what is the most practical way to get there?"

No 8 - Quitting is leading too
In 1993, Mandela proposed that the voting age be reduced to 14. This idea was not popular and he gave it up with great humility. "Knowing how to abandon a failed idea, task or relationship is often the most difficult kind of decision a leader has to make." And then he stepped down as leader after just four years - one of a very few African leaders to do so willingly. He knows that leaders lead as much by what they choose not to do as what they do.