

Nelson Mandela's Leadership Personal Branding Principles

Recently, I ran across a 2008 interview with Nelson Mandela regarding leadership that I really enjoyed reading. Published in *Time Magazine*, the article outlined eight leadership principles that Mandela used to build his distinguished career – and his very powerful leadership personal brand – as an activist and politician. All eight are interesting, but today, I want to focus on two of Mandela's principles and how they apply to building a leadership personal brand in the business world.

Principle #1:

“Lead from the back – and let others believe they are in front. The trick of leadership is allowing yourself to be led too. The chief's job, Mandela said, was not to tell people what to do but to form a consensus. ‘Don't enter the debate too early,’ he used to say.”

What Mandela is doing here is advocating a democratic, or participative, leadership style. Let's face it: As a business leader, there may be times when you have to use an authoritarian style and make a fast – and sometimes lonely – decision. But, the majority of the time, it makes sense to include direct reports in the decision-making process. Otherwise, why have you hired them in the first place? Great leaders know that they, too, are learning and growing every day in the job – even from those who are in subordinate positions.

So, build your leadership personal brand by (1) allowing others to have a say in decisions, and (2) getting clear on when you need the expertise of others in order to make the most informed choices.

Principle #2:

“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 ever as straightforward as it appears.”

This is an important reminder for all of us in every aspect of life – both personal and business. It's fundamental to success to be able to see the nuances in any business situation, whether it involves launching a new product, dealing with a challenging employee, managing a tough boss, etc. The mind naturally wants to categorize everything in black or white terms, so most of us have to constantly remind ourselves to stop and look at *all* aspects of a situation. Otherwise, it's easy to fall victim to making decisions based on tunnel-vision, and that can lead to costly mistakes. Make sounder, smarter business decisions by pointing out nuances and contradictions to your team, and they will begin to see the situation more multi-dimensionally as well.

How can you apply these leadership principles to strengthen your own leadership personal brand?

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Through her coaching practice, keynote addresses, and corporate learning programs, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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