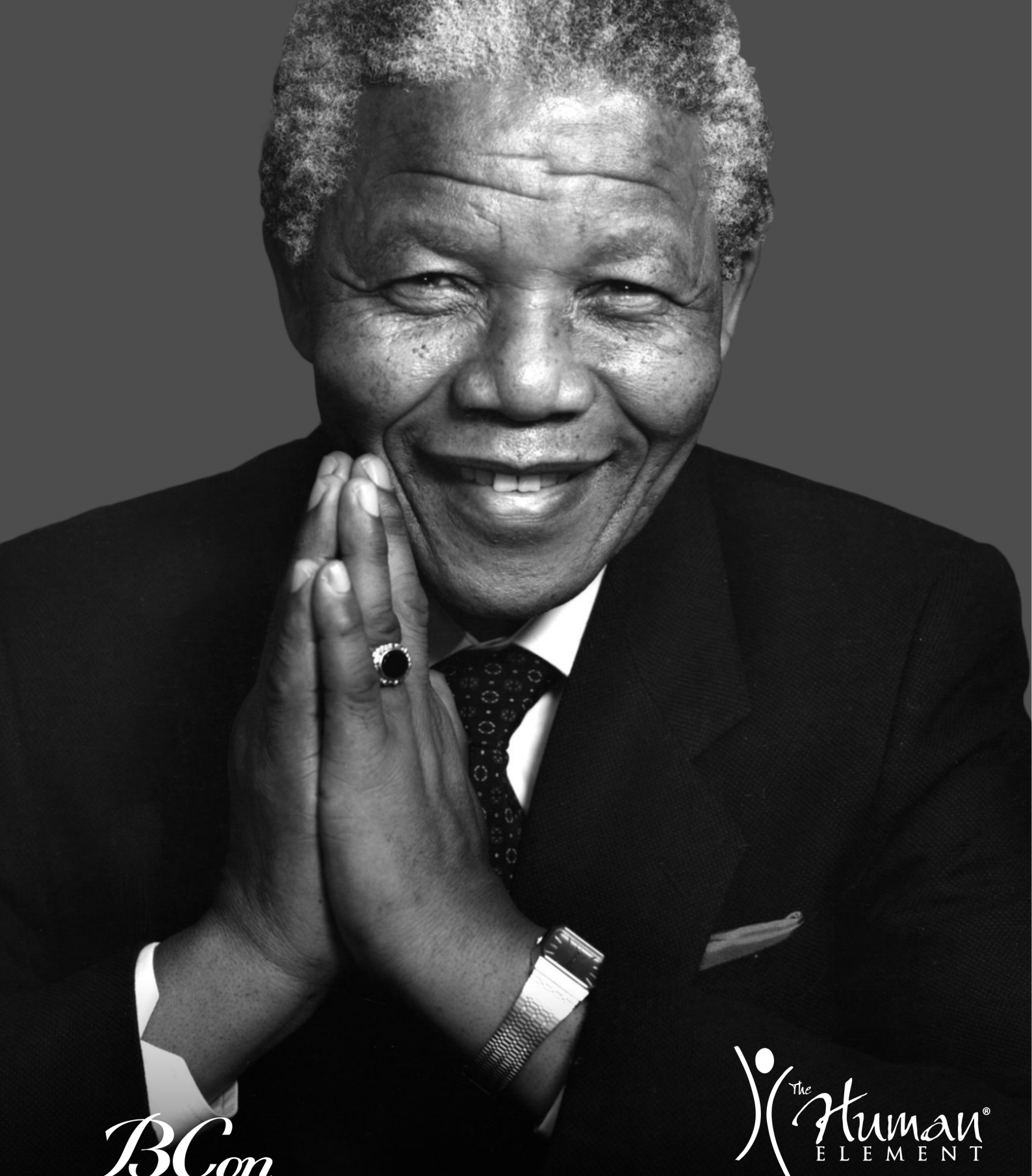


NELSON MANDELA

AND THE ART OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION



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Nelson Mandela and the Art of Conflict Resolution

Through his work as a lawyer defending human rights, conscience prisoner, and the first-ever president elected democratically by true people in the history of free South Africa, Nelson Mandela became one of the most recognized peacemakers of our time. His values and dedication to the service of humanity inspire nations all over the world to the extent that Mandela's name, on itself, became more honorable than the awards and honorary degrees acquired from more than 50 universities worldwide.

His pursuit to change the world for the better was sincere and his ability to achieve that was inspiring. This included supporting and defending human rights; equality, gender equity, children rights, and powerless minorities; the fight against poverty; and standing up for social justice.

Facts about Nelson Mandela

- Nelson Mandela was born as Rolihlahla Dalibhunga Mandela. His school teacher has named him Nelson and sometimes called Madiba.
- Mandela earned a law degree from the University of South Africa in 1942 and is considered the world's most famous political prisoner.
- In 1952, he became the leader of a resistance movement that used civil disobedience to condemn the unjust practices of apartheid in South Africa. He was arrested several times for his activism against the country's unjust system of racial segregation.
- In 1964, Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life in prison. Before his release in 1990, he served 27 years in that term.

- In 1993, Mandela shared the Nobel Peace Prize with his former adversary, president FW de Klerk, South Africa's last apartheid leader. They won the Nobel Peace Prize for eliminating apartheid.
- In 1994, he became the first president of South Africa to be elected by a democratic election in which all South Africans were allowed to vote.
- Once he was finished with his presidency, he has established the Nelson Mandela Foundation in 1999 and focused on three work areas such as Nelson Mandela's life and time, Social Justice Dialogue, and Nelson Mandela's International Day.¹
- In 2007, specifically on his 89th birthday, Nelson Mandela founded a group of independent global leaders and called them "The Elders" a mix of presidents, UN secretary generals, and Nobel Prize laureates, etc. and challenged them to "speak truth to power, raise the voices of the voiceless and offer hope where there is agony." Mandela said about this entity;² Together we will work to support courage where there is a fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair.
- He died at home on December 5, 2013, at the age of 95.

¹ Lisa Toole, December 13, 2013, borgenproject.org., Accessed 11 July , 2021,

<<https://borgenproject.org/tag/nelson-mandela/page/4/>>

² Epic Work Epic Life, 5 Lessons Nelson Mandela Taught the World about Change, Accessed 11 July , 2021,

<<https://epicworkepiclife.com/madiba-leadership/>>

Lesson to Learn from Nelson Mandela ³

Nelson Mandela is a role model for every activist or leader. Throughout his life, he has done what he believed to be his role to manifest the change that he wanted to see in the world. Here are some of Nelson Mandela's wisest words to reflect on them and get some of his life lessons that inspire us to be better leaders and activists in our communities and workplaces.

1. Be Self Motivated and Never Give Up

The more your motivation comes from within; your own values and beliefs, the more consistent and persistent you are. Your intrinsic motivation not only backs you up to achieve your goals but also increases your resilience through this journey and its tough stops. He had not been put off by all the difficulties he met, and when he was asked about that he said; *"It always seems impossible until it's done"*.

2. Utilize Your Strengths

He was a talented "People Person". He valued other people. He was able to identify people's passions and motivate them towards their passions. He had a spirit that fueled those around him to do the seemingly impossible.

3. Improve Your Communication Skills and How to Listen to Others

*"I believe that in the end, it is kindness and generous accommodation that are all the catalysts for real change."*⁴ Mandela understood that communication is so meaningful. People usually think that communication is incredibly easy, but real communication involves more than just words. The key to forming professional relationships is *communication*, which is why Mandela ended up such an [effective leader](#). He managed to get an entire country to work together to move their nation forward from their complicated past, and it was made possible by emphasizing communication.

³ Anita King, 5 Valuable Life Lessons to Learn from Nelson Mandela, Purpose Fairy, Accessed 11 July, 2021 <<https://www.purposefairy.com/67942/5-valuable-life-lessons-to-learn-from-nelson-mandela/>>

⁴ UN, A conversation on "kindness and generous accommodation", OHCHR | Nelson Mandela Centenary, accessed July 11, 2021, <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/NelsonMandelaCentenary.aspx>>

4. Build Better Relationships and Learn How to Forgive

Mandela was not only concerned with his goals and beliefs. Rather, he was keen on building relationships with people so that he could achieve his goal of creating a prosperous and united country in South Africa.

“You must not compromise your principles, but you must not humiliate the opposition. No one is more dangerous than one who is humiliated”

Mandela taught all of us that we can work with someone despite having every reason to feel rage. Being pragmatic and focusing on the goal would be more worthy and beneficial than revenge. He summed it up in his brilliant quote; *“If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner”*

5. Initiate Change from Within

Mandela’s most significant effect came from his ability to pursue the change he wanted starting with his own self. He could see what others could not see and fought for it on his own for a long time paying in advance for his cause.

This shows how important it is for leaders to have confidence and self-discipline for change.

Conflicts and How People React to them

We have always looked at conflict in a certain way. Some of us see it as a negative thing that should be avoided or something that stands in the way of our progress and must be conquered to move forward and “win”. While others are frozen in the face of conflict, not sure what to do or how to deal with it.

Conflict is usually perceived as a struggle between two parties who see their goals as contradictory. Do we have to have winners and losers whenever we have a conflict? Let’s hope not. This fight really seems to be a war. But the place where you work is not a political campaign or a football field. At work, the win/lose mentality is deadly.

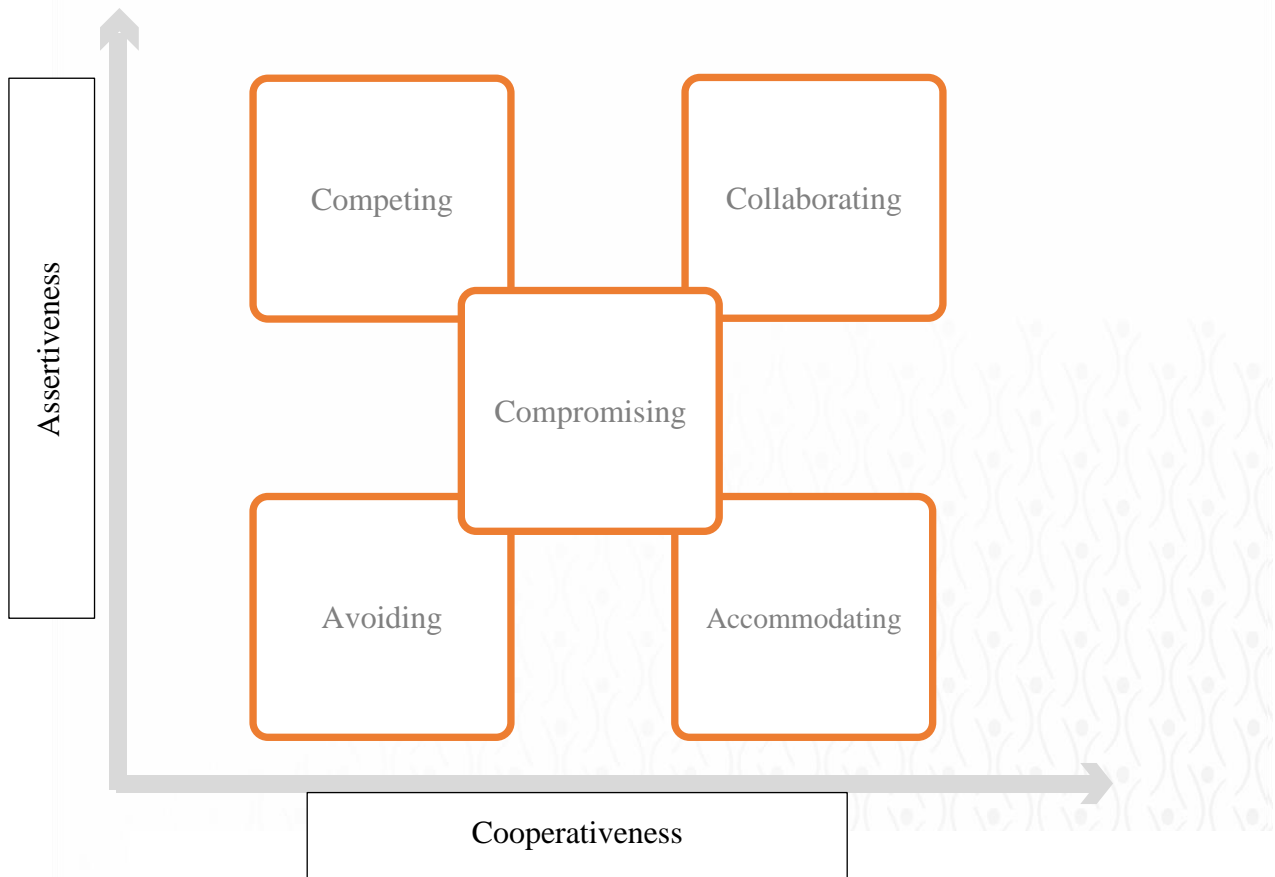
If you strive to see the conflict from a different dimension, it is possible to figure out a way to achieve the goals of both parties at once.

The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument is designed to measure a person’s behavior in conflictual situations. “Conflict situations” are those in which the interests of two people appear to be incompatible.⁵

⁵ Kilmann Diagnostics, Accessed 11 July, 2021,
<<https://kilmanniagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki/>>

In conflict situations, we describe a person's behavior from two dimensions: (1) **Assertiveness**, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy his own concerns, and (2) **Cooperativeness**, the extent to which the person attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns.

These two underlying dimensions of human behavior (assertiveness and cooperativeness) can then be used to define five different modes of responding to a conflict.⁶



1. Competing (assertive and uncooperative)

One person seeks his own interests at the expense of another. This is a power-oriented mode in which you utilize whatever authority that appears to be suitable to win your own position—your capacity to debate, your position, or financial warrant. Competing signifies "supporting your privileges," guarding a position which you believe is right, or essentially attempting to win.

2. Accommodating (unassertive and cooperative)

The absolute opposite of competing. When accommodating, the individual disregards his own interests to fulfill those of the other individual; there is a component of generosity in this mode. Accommodating may appear as unselfish generosity or noble act, complying with someone else's preference which you do not really like, or respecting another's perspective.

3. Avoiding (unassertive and uncooperative)

The individual neither seeks after his own interests nor those of the other person's. Consequently, he does not deal with the issue. Avoiding might appear as a diplomatic escape from a conflict, procrastinating an issue to a more convenient time, or basically retreating from an undermining situation.

4. Collaborating (assertive and cooperative)

The absolute opposite of avoiding. Collaborating includes a trial to work with others to reach some arrangement that completely fulfills their interests. It includes analyzing an issue to identify the basic demands and needs of the two persons. Collaborating between two individuals may appear as diagnosing a conflict to gain from one another's perceptions or attempting to locate an innovative solution to a relational issue.

5. **Compromising** (moderate in assertiveness and cooperativeness)

The objective is to find some catalyst, an arrangement that is mutually acceptable and in part fulfills both parties. It falls middle among competing and accommodating. Compromising more cooperative than competing, however relatively less than accommodating. Moreover, it resolves an issue in a more straightforward way than avoiding, however does not dig as deep as collaborating. In certain situations, compromising might mean resolving the variation between the two parties, trading attributions, or looking for an agile middle-ground arrangement.

Each of us can use all five conflict-handling modes in different situations. The situation itself is what makes us adopt a style or another according to our consideration for the relationship and the stakes we are defending. You cannot identify a person's single style of dealing with conflict. But certain people use some modes better than others and, therefore, tend to rely on such modes more heavily than others—whether because of temperament or practice.

Your conflict behavior in the workplace is therefore a result of both your personal tendencies and the requirements of the situation in which you find yourself. The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument is designed to measure your use of conflict-handling modes across a wide variety of groups and organizational settings. ⁷

⁷ Kilmann Diagnostics, Accessed 11 July, 2021, <<https://kilmanndiagnostics.com/overview-thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument-tki/>>

How did Mandela choose to handle his lifetime conflict?

There were two phases of conflict that prevailed Mandela's life, differentiated by goals, and consequently, the used tactics and strategies were different:

Phase 1:

In the sixties and over three decades, Mandela was bravely opposing the policies of his country's white minority government, and he did not change his mind or quit his struggle despite the long years in prison. He was like the "**Competing**" style in insisting assertively on his goals and not accepting any level of compromise regarding his purpose of getting people's rights, and he persisted till he reached his goal.

This choice was concluded in his saying: "*The struggle is my life. I will continue fighting for freedom until the end of my days*".¹⁸

Phase 2:

In the 1990s, when he finally got out of prison, Mandela made another choice in his battle towards achieving his ambition. He chose the peace and prosperity of his country over the rage and revenge from his enemies. In his society, people were taught to hate, but for Mandela, he chose to forgive. It was more of a "**collaborative**" style in which he considered achieving his and his opponents' goals for the whole country's favor. In order to mend the entire nation's relationships, a lot of effort was required.

⁸ United Nations, The Struggle is My Life, Press Statement Issued on 26 June 1961, Accessed 11 July, 2021.

<<https://www.un.org/en/events/mandeladay/struggle.shtml>>

After becoming President, Mandela created the *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)*⁹, which was a public commission to look at the roots of apartheid and racial injustice. That was the “Truth” part. The “Reconciliation” part was granting people amnesty if they come forward and confess their crimes.¹⁰

Many white policemen and security officials chose to do so. The Commission empowered South Africa and became a mediator to surpass the country’s deep divides. It reaffirmed Mandela’s belief that forgiveness benefits both the forgiven and the forgiver. Indeed, it was powerful to see the relatives of people who were murdered by the old apartheid government forgive their former oppressors. TRC was a way to seek closure to a dreadful aspect of history. As Mandela used to say, *“it is never too late to do the right thing.”*¹¹

He started with Truth, one of the key principles of [The Human Element](#) theory by Will Schutz; truth, choice, and awareness. When applied, truth changes many of our common beliefs about the way people work or act. These assumptions can have a profound effect on our work, our relationships, and our lives¹²

This seems obvious in his saying: *“There are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock, go off in a new direction, confident that he is leading his people in the right way.”*

⁹ *The Official Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC*, Accessed 2 June 2021, < <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>>

¹⁰ Richard Stengel, July 17, 2020, “Let Freedom Ring Wherever the People’s Rights Are Trampled Upon”: What We Can Learn From Nelson Mandela Today (yahoo.com), Accessed 11 July, 2021, < <https://news.yahoo.com/let-freedom-ring-wherever-peoples-214445983.html>>

¹¹ Richard Stengel 2020, *Time*, Accessed 30 May 2021, <<https://time.com/5868365/we-can-learn-nelson-mandela-today/>>

¹² Will Schutz, *Business Consultants Inc., BCon*, October 11, 2017, *Assumptions of the Human Element Approach*, Accessed 11 July, 2021, < <https://bcnglobal.com/resources/the-human-element-assumptions>>

Listening was a key along the way

Mandela was an amazingly open character who listened to everyone, even his oppressors. Although he knew he was defending his people's basic needs that should not be negotiated, he did not hesitate to listen sincerely to his oppressors to cooperate for his nation's best. Mandela says: *"I learned to have the patience to listen when people put forward their views, even if I think those views are wrong. You can't reach such a decision in a dispute unless you listen to both sides."*

Mandela listened to understand and reach a win-win outcome. He was in level-five listening. This level is described in Gary Copland's [article](#) as; when you listen with the intention of truly understanding, that intent will come through.

All this matches Mandela's [Life orientation](#) which is **Supportive Giving**, a style of a principled, loyal person who pursues excellence and a volunteer who works together to achieve goals.

Mandela never took the easy way out. Indeed, he would compromise, anything but his core values which were granting his people the democracy they deserve. Nelson Mandela was commonly a positive, self-assured person, yet he was a true stubborn.



Marking Nelson Mandela Day

November 2009 - commended the contribution of Mandela to peace and freedom, UN General Assembly declares his birth date, July 18, "**Nelson Mandela International Day**". It was inspired by Nelson Mandela's call for the next generation a year earlier - to take on the responsibility of leadership in standing up against the world's social injustices when he said, "*it is in your hands now*".

On this day, everyone is called to signify **Nelson Mandela International Day** through making a difference in their communities. People are asked to spend 67 minutes doing something good for others, which represents the 67 years he spent working toward change.

Everyone has the ability and responsibility to change the world for the better! Mandela Day is an occasion for all to take action and inspire change.

In times of turbulence, Nelson Mandela showed us the power of resisting oppression, of justice over inequality, of dignity over humiliation, of forgiveness over hatred. As the world achieves the 2030 Agenda for [Sustainable Development](#) and strives to deal with new sources of adversity. Let us recall the lessons of Nelson Mandela's life, and the essential humanism that guided him: "*For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others*"¹³.

¹³ UNESCO, Director-General, 2017- (Azoulay, A.), UNESCO, Accessed 2 June 2021, <<https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/mandeladay>>

