

18 July 2013 Mandela Day, University of the Free State – Zelda la Grange, Personal Assistant of Nelson Mandela

Professor and Mrs Jansen, Management team, esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen, and you – the students – the most important guests today.

I am humbled to have been invited to spend Mandela Day, a day for obvious reasons very close to my heart, with you.

Thank you, Prof and Mrs Jansen, the management and trustees of the No Student Hungry Programme for inviting me to share this day with you.

Mandela Day develop naturally following Madiba's 90th birthday in 2008 where he handed the baton to us all when he said, "It is now in your hands."

The Mandela Day campaign message is simple: Mr Mandela gave 67 years of his life fighting for human rights. All we are asking is that everyone gives 67 minutes of their time – whether it's supporting your chosen charity or serving your local community – to improve the lives of others.

Mandela Day is a call to action for individuals – for people everywhere – to take responsibility for changing the world into a better place, one small step at a time, just as Mr Mandela did. It is a day of service! Whether you support the No Student Hungry Programme, read or care for the elderly, help a child to play and have fun on a full stomach for a day, spend time caring for abused or neglected people, clean streets as I did with Bikers for Mandela Day here in Bloem this morning; we can each play a small part to make the world a better place. One small step at a time. Because, as Madiba has taught us, it is a long walk to freedom, and the walk never ends.

People often ask me what it is like working for Madiba, what lessons did you learn? Well, the answer is simple: I am who I am today because of the privilege I have had of being chosen by Madiba to work for him. I am a better person and will forever cherish the lessons I have learnt from Madiba.

I would like to share some of those with you today:

- "If you speak to a person, you speak to his head. If you speak to him in his language, you speak to his heart." (Recite own meeting.)

- “If you don’t have courage around here, you are not going to last for long.”
- “Never allow your enemy to determine the grounds for battle. The way you approach a person will determine how that person treats you.” (Recite Louis Luyt court case.)
- “To question a person’s integrity without valid reason, could well be a reflection of your own integrity. Believe there is and seek for the best in every human being inherently.

Why is it that Nelson Mandela is so revered, that his legacy is celebrated, not just in South Africa, but around the world?

- Principled
- Simplicity. Conversations with myself – leadership falls into two categories: those who are inconsistent and those who are consistent.
- Honesty: admits his mistakes and moves on. Fact that when people elevate him to sainthood, he says, “A saint is a sinner who keeps on trying.” As Madiba once observed in a letter back in 1975, and I quote, “Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others – qualities which are within easy reach of every soul – are the foundation of one’s spiritual life.”
- Integrity. I read, “If you have integrity, nothing else matters. If you don’t have integrity, nothing else matters.”
- Discipline
- Respect, even when you differ in opinion from someone. “On which aspect one concentrates in judging others will depend on the character of the particular judge. As we judge others, so we are judged by others.” Letter to Winnie Mandela in 1959.

These are such simple values and something we can all emulate. For 18 years I’ve seen Madiba every day trying to be the best he can possibly be in service of others. I’ve been a privileged witness and recipient of his forgiveness, his humility and his inherent conviction that there is good in every human being.

I was struck and reminded by a quote President Barack Obama repeated when he recently delivered an address at the University of Cape Town from the *Long Walk to Freedom*.

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Your university has become what we hope for in South Africa. A transformed society whose purpose serves the greater good of humanity. Embrace and nurture what you have here under the leadership of Prof Jansen and his team. And influence society consciously, every day, in the same way as Madiba did for every day of the 67 years of his activism, and beyond.

You are the generation that inspires change. Your passion must ensure that the ideals started by Madiba and others, are kept alive. Emulate the values that Madiba is so well known and loved for: remain principled, be honest, disciplined and respectful. He leaves a wonderful legacy for us to learn from. And as we do good today, dedicating 67 minutes in his honour on Mandela Day, let's remember that he made every day a Mandela day – well, not just because he is Nelson Mandela. The challenge is ours to make every day a Mandela Day, a day in which we care and serve others in our communities. Not as a gesture of charity, but as an act of justice. It is a journey and a call of restoration, of dignity, to those who continue to suffer injustice due to poverty and deprivation. Don't just do good today because it is Mandela Day – it's a start, but consistency brings about change. Decide that you will be a better *you* if you emulate the values of Mandela Day every day.

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made in the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” (Words of Nelson Mandela.)

I thank you.