

We can't all be Mandela. But we can live up to his legacy

By [Michael Hathorn](#), issued by [Ginkgo Agency](#)

10 Jul 2019

Honouring Mandela's memory means standing up for the values that he lived for. It means choosing accountability, and playing an active role in serving your community.



Nelson Mandela chose forgiveness over conflict. He [walked out of Victor Verster Prison at 4:14pm on 11 February 1990](#), and made himself accountable for South Africa's future. Over the next four years, he led the negotiations that secured a peaceful transition from apartheid. Mandela's choice was the ultimate example of determination and commitment. He took on the burden of healing a traumatised country. He never let the weight of that responsibility show, and turned his smile into a symbol of hope that soothed South Africa's people.

Remembering Mandela should honour his life – it shouldn't be a passive undertaking. That's the spirit behind South Africa's tradition of giving back for 67 minutes on Mandela Day – to spend one minute working for humanity for each of Mandela's 67 years of public service. It's a meaningful national moment. But truly honouring Mandela means committing to the values he stood for over an extended period of time.

It starts with you

We can't all be Mandela. There's a reason he became a [global icon](#). He was unique in his wisdom, compassion, and grace. But we can learn from him, honour his sacrifices and his achievements. Leadership involves making difficult choices, accepting their consequences, and seeing them through.

Mandela wasn't alone – he was quick to remind us that he [stood on the shoulders of giants](#). And he [became the leader we remember slowly, over many years](#). He spent 27 years on Robben Island preparing for the job of leading South Africa out of apartheid. He learnt from the likes of Walter Sisulu, who taught Mandela that [his true calling was to be a servant of the people](#).

The person you are today is not who you will be tomorrow. If you have the opportunity to make a positive change, take it. We can't all be Mandela, but we can absorb the lessons of his life and work towards the vision he left behind. Contributing doesn't have to take much – the [Global Citizen](#) Mandela 100 campaign raised \$7.2 billion to fight poverty through online engagement at the end of last year – and many small actions can add up to large-scale impact.

More than one day a year

Do your bit this Mandela Day, if you can. But meaningful change takes more than one day of giving. It takes years of consistent, committed work. Mandela gave decades of his life to South Africa. The best way to remember him is to live up to the example he set – over the course of years, not days.

So use this Mandela Day to celebrate who he was, and think about the values that he lived for: commitment, determination, responsibility, education, and accountability. Find a way to help where you can, and stick with it. Change starts with individuals. Mandela was one member of a decades-long struggle. It didn't start with him, and it won't end until South Africa achieves [real equality](#).

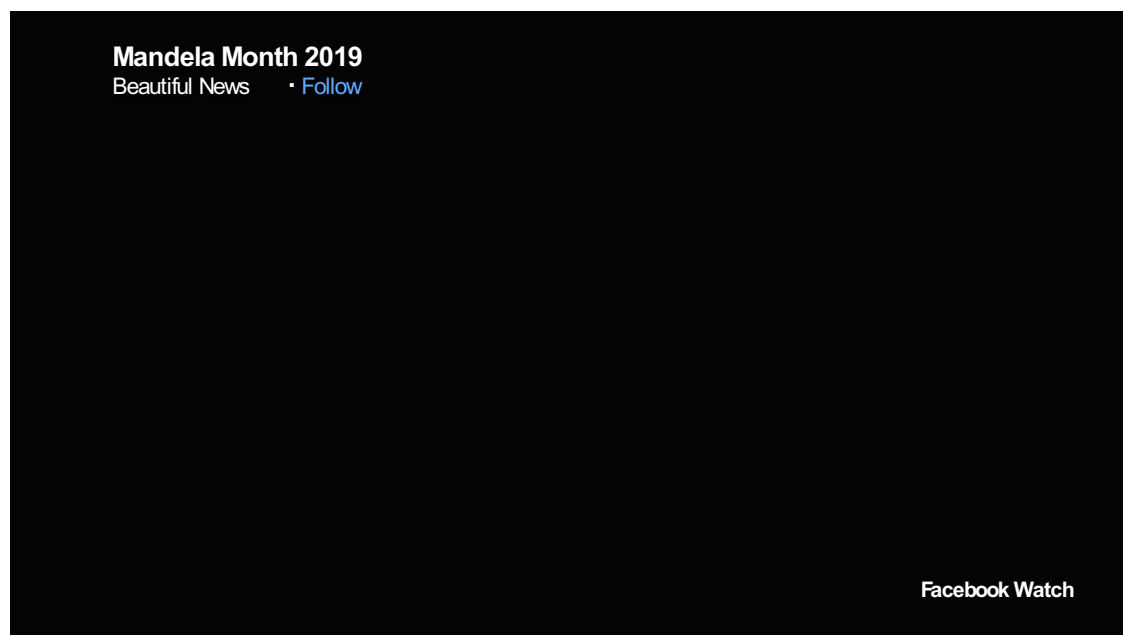
What is your Mandela legacy?

[Beautiful News](#) provides a daily reminder of South Africans who have committed themselves to being active citizens – to living for the principles that Mandela embodied. Take Justin Coomber, who overcame transverse myelitis, a nervous system disorder that paralysed him temporarily. Coomber recovered, but lives with permanent nerve damage. Undeterred, he just finished cycling over 2 500 kilometres through South Africa to raise money for children with disabilities.

Some of the most effective change comes from people leveraging the power of multimedia communication. For example, Jessie Zinn is using her skills as a filmmaker for the benefit of others. Zinn's documentary on the challenges schoolgirls experience while menstruating, *Can I Please Go To The Bathroom?*, was part of a collective effort that led to the recent implementation of a 0% tax on menstrual hygiene products. In a similar vein, Renaldo Schwarp's documentary, *SKEEF*, aims to educate South Africans about the issues queer South Africans face today in spite of progressive legislation.

South Africa has a [long and storied tradition](#) of activism being driven by young people. Yola Mgogwana is continuing this custom by taking action against the climate crisis. Just 11 years old, Mgogwana marched at the front of a 2000-person protest outside Parliament this year, raising her voice against climate inaction – the issue that will define her generation.

These people aren't Mandela, but each story holds a piece of the legacy he left for South Africa – each Beautiful News story is released at 4:14pm to commemorate the moment he walked out of prison. Together they add up to a collection of individuals working to build better lives for themselves and others. That's what it will take to create the type of country Mandela believed in. There's no panacea for the scars that track South Africa's soul. We have to heal together. It's going to take patience, hard work, and accountability. Mandela understood that. It's up to us to live it.



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