
Well hello. Welcome to episode twenty-five of the Calm Living Blueprint Podcast. My name is Candice Esposito, the founder of the Calm Living Blueprint and I'll be your host.

Thanks for listening in. I hope this finds you doing well.

So today's episode is going to be a bit different. I actually decided to change the original topic I had planned... this happened when I heard that Nelson Mandela had died.

There are undoubtedly going to be a stream of remembrances, dedications, blog entries, and articles written about this great man in the coming days by people far better equipped to give justice to his story, however I felt compelled to approach it from a bit different perspective.

I often find myself incorporating Mandela's story and how he approached life, his attitude, into the Calm Living Blueprint because I think it offers a wonderful example of taking committed action even in the face of fear, pain and discomfort.

So that's what I want to examine in this episode – five lessons I've learned from Mr. Mandela's example.

I think that is one of Mandela's greatest gifts to all of us... so why not open our hearts to accept it?

As always, a quick reminder that the show notes for every episode are available on the Calm Living Blueprint website. The show notes include the mp3 recording, the transcript of the podcast, any resources mentioned, as well as the homeplay that I recommend in each episode. The show notes for today's episode can be found at CalmLivingBlueprint.com/25. That's the number 25 as in episode number 25.

And if you'd like to join the Calm Living Blueprint members program and work with me personally you can find out more information on CalmLivingBlueprint.com about how you can do just that. I've recently received a lot of applicants – thank you to those that have applied – please know that I will respond back to you, because of the numbers it's just taking a bit longer than usual. But I will respond personally back to you.

Are you stuck in the fear gap?

It's that place we get stuck when fear gets in the way of our dreams and ambitions. You know you're stuck in the fear gap if you believe something like this:

I can't achieve my goals, perform at my peak, do the things I want to do or behave like the person I want to be UNTIL I feel more confident or UNTIL I feel more calm or UNTIL I feel less afraid.

Well, Nelson Mandela was a master of closing the fear gap.

As you probably know, Nelson Mandela risked his life over and over again opposing the brutally oppressive apartheid regime of South Africa, in pursuit of a democratic and free society. He was captured and sentenced to 27 years in jail, the first 18 of which were served in the atrocious prison on Robben Island.

Richard Stengel, the writer who helped Mandela with his autobiography wrote an article: "Mandela: His 8 Lessons of Leadership." In the article Stengel describes how Mandela frequently felt afraid during his many years in prison.

Mandela told him, "Of course I was afraid! I can't pretend that I'm brave and that I can beat the whole world."

But, Mandela knew that if he wanted to be a great leader, to inspire his comrades in prison he had to act courageously. When the other prisoners saw him walking through the grounds, holding himself proud and erect, their spirits soared. And as Stengel wrote, it gave them the hope to keep going.

Now think back to what I said about the fear gap ... the belief that I have to feel confident before I can achieve my goals and do the things I want to do, behave like the person I want to be.

Now just imagine that Mandela had played by this rule during his time in prison. Suppose he had waited until all his fear and uncertainty had disappeared before he took action.

Would that have helped him become an inspirational leader?

Sure, your goal may not be about becoming a leader; however you can apply this to anything you wish to accomplish, any area of your life.

If you wait for the feelings of confidence to show up before you start doing the things that are truly important to you, chances are you're going to be waiting forever. Those feelings aren't going to magically appear out of thin air.

If we want to do anything with confidence – speak, socialize, network – then we have to do the work. We have to practice the necessary skills over and over, until they come naturally.

Each time you practice these skills, it is an action of confidence. And once you have taken action over and over, so that you have the skills to get the results you want – then you'll start to notice the feelings of confidence.

Mandela's approach to life so beautifully illustrates this...

The actions of confidence come first; the feelings of confidence come later.

We'll call that lesson 1. The actions of confidence come first; the feelings of confidence come later.

Just as an aside, I don't buy into this notion that the sole purpose of a person's life is to teach others... when I use the word "lesson" I simply mean something that I took away or learned from Mandela's example. Because I do believe we can learn from each other although that isn't necessarily tied into someone's purpose for being.

Nelson Mandela once said in an interview, "That was one of the things that worried me – to be raised to the position of a semi-god – because then you are no longer a human being. I wanted to be known as Mandela, a man with weaknesses – some of which are fundamental."

What is Mandela referring to here?

Well, contrast what he said to stories we hear about rock stars, movie stars, supermodels and other famous people who take their press too seriously and start to believe they really are better than everyone else, and we see how

much tension and stress they create with their narcissistic, ego-centric behaviour.

This is part of the problem with positive thinking... whether it's positive or negative, getting wrapped up in or getting hooked by any thought is inherently problematic.

When someone holds on tightly to "I'm a winner," for example, in the long run what effect does that have on their relationships? Have you ever tried to build a relationship with someone who had completely fused with the thought, "I am a success," or "I am a winner."

That mindset inherently creates a desperate need to achieve, fuelled by fear of becoming a loser or a failure. And that just leads to more stress and anxiety.

Mandela recognized this. He had accepted himself fully – weaknesses and all. He never bought into the myth of self-esteem because he knew that with high self-esteem comes prejudice and discrimination, egotism, arrogance, and self-deception.

Mandela recognized that self-acceptance rather than self-esteem is much more useful and valuable.

There are going to be times when we make mistakes, when we mess up. Things sometimes go wrong when we least expect it.

This is a fact of life, a part of being human.

The default in our minds is often to kick ourselves, berate ourselves or judge ourselves when this happens. How does that work out for us though? Does that help us get any closer to the person we want to be or the life we want to live?

Compare this to your experience of practicing self-acceptance and ask yourself which works better for you.

Think of it this way...

Is the biography of Nelson Mandela the same thing as Nelson Mandela himself?

Clearly not, right? It is nothing more than a construction of words and pictures. And regardless of how true or false those words are and regardless of the quality of the photographs, they cannot come close to the richness and fullness of the living human being himself.

I mean, would you rather meet your personal hero or read his/her biography?

The same holds true for all your self-judgements. The biography of you is not you. Whether your mind describes you with glowing praise or sums you up with scathing criticism, the words it uses are nothing more than words.

Are these words helpful? If we allow these thoughts to guide our actions, will that work to make our lives richer and fuller?

That's what we care most about when it comes down to it. Not whether the words are true or false.

Self-acceptance. That's lesson 2.

It's a 20 minute march from your cramped, gloomy prison cell to the limestone quarry. Once there, you will slave away with your pick and shovel under the searing sun, your hands blistered and bleeding, your body drenched with sweat and plastered with dust.

How would you feel if you were on that march, knowing what lay in store for you?

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela described this march as a "tonic."

For 13 years of his life in Robben Island prison he did it every single morning. And as he did so, he engaged fully in his experience: he noticed the birds flying gracefully through the sky, the cool caress of the wind blowing in from the sea, and the fresh smell of the eucalyptus blossoms.

He wasn't lost in thoughts about the hard work ahead of him or the miserable days behind him; he was living fully in the present moment.

Fortunately, we don't have to be locked away in prison to appreciate the birds, the wind, the flowers. If we stop rushing around on automatic pilot and use our five senses to connect fully with the world around us, we will find much more fulfillment.

But how often do we actually do it?

Lesson 3: Practice being in the here and now.

Here's a quote from Mandela's closing statement from the infamous Rivonia trial:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

The South African government had high expectations for the trial – they wanted to impose the death sentence on Mandela. However, due to international protests and sanctions against South Africa, they relented and imposed a harsh prison sentence instead.

Mandela's values come shining through in his speech: democracy, freedom, equality, and cooperation. Those values kept him going: through the many years he spent underground, hiding from the police while inciting nonviolent resistance against the government, throughout his 27 years of imprisonment, and during his term as the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

And any time he felt frightened, demoralized or exhausted, those values gave him the strength to persevere.

In prison, Mandela realized that the government could take away his freedom, but they couldn't take away his values.

He believed that good education was essential for democracy and equality and he was determined to make it happen for one and all. So he established an underground "university" – prisoners would secretly meet in the mine shafts to discuss ideas, share knowledge, attend lectures and teach each other everything from politics to Shakespeare.

Mandela's values sustained him throughout a lifetime of fear and heartbreak: without them he would never have achieved what he did.

In his early adulthood, Mandela set himself a seemingly impossible goal: to get rid of apartheid and establish South Africa as a democracy. It took him decades before he finally achieved that goal.

But he was able to find fulfillment along the way through continuously living by his values. With every step he took towards his goal, he knew he was standing for something – that he was doing something meaningful with his life – and that gave him fulfillment and satisfaction.

As Mandela writes in his autobiography, "There are victories whose glory lies in the fact that they are only known to those who win them. This is particularly true of prison, where you must find consolation in being true to your ideals, even if no one else knows of it."

Lesson 4: Clarify your values and use those as your motivation, your guiding compass towards taking committed action.

And, finally, as Mandela said, "After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb."

In other words, it's not over 'til it's over. Keep climbing. There is nothing in this world that can take the place of persistence.

You can start again. And again. And again.

I've mentioned this before... I don't believe there is such a thing as failure. Only in our mind does such a state exist.

That's why you won't hear me tell you, "never give up" or "always do your best."

They sound good, but they aren't based in reality and they only set us up for disappointment.

The thing is there will be times when we quit, give up or get lost. And that's okay. That's part of self-acceptance.

But we can get better at staying on track for longer periods, better at catching ourselves when we go off course and better at starting again from where we are.

Lesson 5: Persist. You can keep taking committed action even after you've so-called quit or given up or gotten lost.

I am sure that Mr. Mandela's ideals will live on long after he is gone. His example of acceptance, compassion and perseverance is such beautiful gift to us.

So in gratitude to Nelson Mandela,

Thank you. Rest in peace.