

In the footsteps of Mandela – a journey to discover a Leader.

5 o'clock in the morning – Doha new international airport, Janny and I await our 8 intrepid leaders. Our flight is at eight, but we hope that one or two will check in by six..... Several Costas later and we are all checked in – note for file: “ The great leader always trusts the team!” I still have so much to learn.

Qatar airways delivered us to Capetown a little later than we planned and so we had to re-arrange our planned first evening tour of the town. But we had a great dinner in a traditional South African restaurant on the seafront. Day 1 of our Leadership Journey was a tour of Capetown, which was organised as an adventure journey with tasks to perform and different places to discover around the town. We probably underestimated the time it was going to take to do just this! Scheduled were twenty tasks, including buying fish at a local market and selling it to a passerby for a profit. Possibly fortunately we never managed this particular task! But we did climb Table Mountain, and we did gaze out over the South Atlantic and imagined what it takes to be a great leader, and with this in mind dream about our futures.

After a great night's sleep we set off “In the footsteps of Mandela”. I personally don't believe we can teach Leadership anymore in a traditional sense. Certainly exporting a leadership style from America or Europe and imposing that particular style in the Middle East today, is both arrogant and foolish. In our journey we wanted to discover why Mandela was such a great and needed leader for that moment of South African history. What we intend to do is to search not for styles to copy, but techniques which did work in a particular context, and for styles which definitely never will work.

We set sail for Robbin island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, along with several other ANC leaders for over twenty years. We stood in the cell where Mandela was imprisoned; much of his time in solitary confinement, and we imagined whether we would have the courage to emerge from prison and lead a nation to re-conciliation. Nelson Mandela today is admired as one of the most engaging Leaders of the 20th century. Even during his time in prison he was admired and respected by his guards; he preached non-violent opposition, even though he had originally been imprisoned for violent insurrection. He negotiated with the prison authorities, so that everyone was able to study during their time in prison; he had an incredible vision, and he knew that many of the folks he was in prison with would be the government of South Africa one day. No-one else would ever have believed this, but he knew! Great Leaders have incredible vision, and Great Leaders are able to articulate that vision. Many of the people in prison with Mandela would much have preferred a violent resistance; Mandela knew it wasn't the way to bring about a dialogue with a much more powerful white government.

After Robbin island we went to the prison where Nelson Mandela spent the last few months of his captivity before he emerged to begin negotiations. We met the guards who looked after him in the Ndbe house. Their respect for him both as a president of the rainbow nation, but also as a prisoner, was huge. We wanted to meet Mandela, we asked and he had in principle agreed, but on the day we were due to visit, he was not well enough to receive visitors. We walked to freedom along the same road which Nelson Mandela walked some twenty years ago. We passed the gates and we imagined how it must have felt to be free after all those years. We imagined the weight of responsibility he must have felt, the expectations of so many people. But a great Leader doesn't feel these things, As a great leader, Nelson Mandela knew instinctively what had to be done and so he healed a nation.

After our trip to Stellenbosch, where Mandela was in prison, we visited Kaylitsha. Kaylitsha is a township on the outskirts of Capetown where Madam Vicki runs a fabulous bed and breakfast. She explained to us that the people had moved there after the violence in Crossroads became too much. After Mandela came to power there were great expectations that there would be housing, schooling, electricity, running water for all of the South Africans, who had been oppressed so long. But still in 2011 there were townships, with no proper housing, no running water; where it was (relatively) dangerous to walk the streets at night. It was to this township that we came as aspiring leaders. We had heard of a lady in her eighties. Her name was Mama Koulu. She had no house just a shack, with no bathroom, no electricity, with a tin roof which made it boiling in the summer and freezing in the winter. She had children but they had no work, so she was caring not only for her grandchildren, but also several other kids who had no parents. Mama Khoulu was pretty much blind, she couldn't walk but she had enormous determination and more courage than many women half her age.

I explained to our eight leaders – all from Doha's Banking Industry - that we had donated 5,000 \$ to build mama Khoulu a house. There were murmurs of approval, but I then explained, that this was only enough to buy the materials! Imagine trying to build a house for 5,000 \$ in Qatar today!! But, if we physically helped, we could build a house. The instant first thought I think was: "How much do we have to pay to get this job done" But that was not what was needed. Asking who would be prepared to spend four days building Mama Khoulu's a house, I could hear the unspoken thoughts: "But we aren't builders?" But we can learn, just like Mandela did.

Early in the morning we arrived at the site. The concrete slab has already been laid, but that's literally all there is. Two local builders have laid the first row of bricks on the back wall, and there is a huge pile of breeze blocks outside on the road, which need to be transformed into a house. We aren't trusted immediately to lay bricks, that will come later. We form a human chain and shift breeze blocks. Somewhere in the course of that first morning the local kids arrived to help, hundreds of them, smiling faces in the midst of all that poverty, happy and ready to help. It was

ever so easy to fall in love with these wonderful children. We have learned our first lesson.

By lunchtime master builder Mubarak has gained the trust of the headman and soon he is laying bricks alongside the two local builders. The site has become a meeting place for all the locals, keen to understand why this group of young people would want to spend their time in Kaylitsha. We explain what we are doing and soon have hundreds of new friends. A local politician comes down and makes a space, from which it is obvious that she had arranged the whole thing singlehandedly – a vote for me to see more groups of young leaders arrive from Qatar! For many of us it is our first taste of local politics, quite a revelation!

That evening some of us visit the local community centre, where once again there is praise for what our young Qatari leaders are doing in the community. For those of us who went, it was again a new lesson. Almost all of the leadership in African townships is run by the women, which is quite different from Qatar and the rest of the Middle East at least generally speaking.

Day two and three walls are up. We are now waiting for the roof trusses to arrive. Then someone asks where the windows will be? Whoops their enthusiasm our new Qatari master craftsman, forgot to leave a space for the windows..... Never mind this is Africa; knock it down and re-build it again. No sooner said than done. Day three and all the walls are complete. But still no tiles for the roof. Unfortunately they were not to arrive until ten minutes before we left, we could only help unload them but never learnt how to lay roof tiles!

Just before we left Kaylitsha, we handed over the house to Mama Khoulou as we were gathered in the upstairs room of Vicki's guest house. Mama Khoulou sat in a place of honour in a chair, surrounded by her family. The room was packed to the rafters, and our young Qatari leaders had prepared a little video blog of what they had done. One by one Mubarak, Nasser and Ahmad explained to everyone how it felt to have been in Kaylitsha. The predominant factor was what we had learnt – about how other people live, about how lucky we are to live in Qatar. But also about how much we need to cherish our culture and not allow it to become a culture of materialism. The people in Kaylitsha have nothing but they are happy: you will never see so many smiling faces as that morning in Vicki's guesthouse. There were tears too, but they were tears of happiness as the group handed over their last present to mama Khoulou – a wheel chair. We will all remember forever the sight of Fahad pushing mama Khoulou in her wheel chair along a dusty unmade road to her new house in Kaylitsha, and the shrieks of joy when she saw her house. Her granddaughter explained to her she now had a bathroom, with running water. "Do you mean I never have to go outside to the bathroom again?" "No grandma, never again!"

Thank you QFBA for allowing us to embark on this epic journey! It's sad that perhaps it will be the last time this happened; we all believed this was a wonderful experience and the reputation of

Qatar and it's wonderful young people was enhanced. There is much more to tell; perhaps someone else will continue the story, I do hope so. We loved Qatar and its people but now it is time for a new experience somewhere else. Thank you too to all the leaders in Qatar who gave us all this wonderful opportunity.

Next month, editor permitting, we will be telling you about leaving Qatar, but in the meantime "Ramadan kareem" and in time "Eid Mubarak".

By Adam Lomas

URL for this article that was published in Qatar Today to follow soon!