

NO PLACE FOR GANDHIJI IN MY LIFE

By Meenal Pandya

Meenal Pandya has been writing about India and its culture for more than a decade. She has written several books, hundreds of articles, and poems. Her writings have appeared in many prestigious magazines, newspapers and journals around the world. She lives in the US and is a writer, publisher and a consultant. She has raised two daughters.

Anytime we talk about leaders, we think of politicians, business leaders, and spiritual leaders but we forget that just being an adult is being a leader and a role model – especially if you are a parent. As long as there is someone who looks up to you, depends on your decisions, or follows in your footsteps, you are a leader. And being a leader is a tough job because your every action – or inaction – brings consequences to those in your life. You may change the course of the future generations depending upon how big a leader you are.

Mahatma Gandhi was, without doubt, one of the most respected leaders in recent times. He said “my life is my message” and thus when we look closely at his life, we can derive some fundamental principles of being a good leader.

- **Govern by principles and not policies.** It is natural for a leader to make rules and policies that can be implemented. Many business locations display a sign, usually a retail store or a small business where they proclaim that “Honesty is the best policy”. Although it sounds great and policies are needed to run any business, organization or even a family with a clear perspective, the true leader should govern by principles and not by policies. Honesty is a great principle. Policies can be bent when needed but a principle is something you live by. Gandhiji always perfected his actions according to his principles and made every decision – political or personal – based on his guiding principles of truth and non-violence. Be clear about what you value and which principles dictate your leadership.
- **Integrity is sacred.** When any leader’s integrity is derived from values that are absolute, it becomes sacred and dependable. A great leader is the one whose integrity is never questionable and rests on absolute principles. In Gandhiji’s case, his absolute values were truth and non-violence and even during the toughest of times or against the strongest of enemies, his actions always abide by those two values.
- **Have one single standard for all your actions.** Gandhiji always believed in a single standard of conduct in his public life and his private life. When we see today’s leaders behaving very differently while they are in public versus in their private life, we understand why this is a very important aspect of being a good leader. Having a single standard of conduct creates the kind of persona that others can trust. There is no distinction between who you are at work with who you are at home, there is no distinction between how you treat a superior and how you treat your inferior. When this line is erased because you have a single standard of conduct, then you emerge as a leader who is respected by everyone.
- **Lead by example.** Gandhiji proclaimed that “my life is my message”. Whether your role as a leader comes from being a parent, a small business owner, a supervisor at work or a leader of a community, lead by your example. This is easy to say but hard to follow.

As parents we always know that children learn from our actions and not our lectures. Let people around you see how you conduct yourself and without saying a word, they will understand what the right behavior is.

Of course, Gandhiji taught us many things, including brevity, truthfulness, non-violence, resistance to injustice, and service to humanity; traits that are extremely important in a leader. But these traits can become hollow words if they are not practiced with principled leadership that Gandhiji modeled, the kind that we can all practice.

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