

A special kind of leadership now needed in South Africa

By Piet Naudé

South Africa needs a special kind of leadership to explore the great potential of our country.

In this regard, self-leadership becomes pertinent since you cannot hope to lead others if you are not able to lead yourself.

It starts with character.

After former President Nelson Mandela's passing the perception was that the country was now suffering from leadership erosion. However, leaders with character, such as Mandela, are not born that way. Those are characteristics that one learns, just as you learn to read and write.

The other important characteristic is trust.

When the level of trust in a leader decreases, it is the beginning of the end for that leader. In such a situation the leader continuously lives with doubt hanging over him or her.

Good values are also a must-have for the kind of leadership that South Africa needs now.

In this regard, too, Mandela set a good example. Since his passing our moral fabric deteriorated. Also, in the business world you can't flourish without trust. An erosion of leadership starts when the voice of civil society is weakened. This leads to people retracting behind high walls.

American civil rights leader Dr Martin Luther King did not focus on what was wrong in society. Instead, he sold a dream. Mandela followed the same approach after years in prison. He did not complain about poor conditions in prison; he spoke about his belief that justice will one day be served.

South Africa has a chance to turn the perception that it is experiencing an erosion of leadership post-Mandela on its head. But this is only possible if leaders with character – those who instil trust in others and who adhere to good values – step forward.

This is a shortened version of a talk recently delivered by Prof Piet Naudé.