

Five tips to making a real impact this Mandela Day

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We need a new approach for Mandela Day (18 July), one that reignites a passion for changing the world.



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Mandela Day is when corporate South Africa rolls up their sleeves and heads off to the closest non-profit organisation (NPO), armed with business builders, volunteers, gardening tools, buckets of paint and plenty of good intentions.

For many charities, it is a day when teams from well-meaning businesses arrive in a hurricane of matching T-shirts and boot-loads of supplies, get stuck in and then leave as quickly as they arrived. Aside from having a freshly painted wall, the NPO is no better off than it was before they arrived – and more often than not, there's a bit of a mess to clean up.

Five things to avoid

Here are five things you should not do if you really want to make an impact and leave a legacy, not just for one day a year, but every day:

1. **Don't pick just any NPO**

Find an NPO that could really benefit from what you do - your product or service, or your business counsel.

A catering business could easily set up a soup kitchen at a homeless shelter. An IT company can teach underprivileged children how to access educational information online. One costs money, the other time but both are equally effective.

2. **Don't assume**

Painting walls and planting veggie gardens are popular Mandela Day activities. However, many charities have more pressing, immediate needs – and the simplicity of some might be surprising.



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Schools for example, might choose printer paper over a painted wall. For stationery suppliers, this is a cost-effective, low-effort way to make a difference. Ask your chosen NPO for their wish list and act on it.

3. ***Don't overlook planning***

You need a solid action plan for the day – especially if you only have 67 minutes to spare. If the homeless shelter really needs a veggie garden – but this is not your core business – consult with experts on the right seeds to plant for the time of year, the right tools to use and how to maintain the garden.

Without proper planning, the shelter could be left with a barren patch of sand that does not yield a single carrot. Plan for cleaning up, too. One of the reasons why charities dread Mandela Day is the chaos that is left in the wake. Keep it tidy and do not leave a mess for someone else to clean up.

4. ***Don't neglect your legacy***

The efforts you put into Mandela Day should not be a once-off exercise. Ideally, you should partner with the NPO so that you can make a real difference, all year round, year after year – consider doing monthly food donations from your catering business.

It is also a good way to appeal to millennials. They are a conscientious bunch that wants to make the world a better place – that is the type of passion you need for your legacy.

5. ***Don't forget...***

Mandela Day is not about money, budgets or writing cheques. It is about using our ability and honouring our responsibility to make the world a better place. Not to mention the positive mental health effects that volunteering has on your team members.

Let us think about it more, collaborate more and make it part of our cultures. We owe it to Madiba.

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