

***The Long Walk to Freedom, by Nelson Mandela***  
**Reviewed by Dr. Constance Campbell**

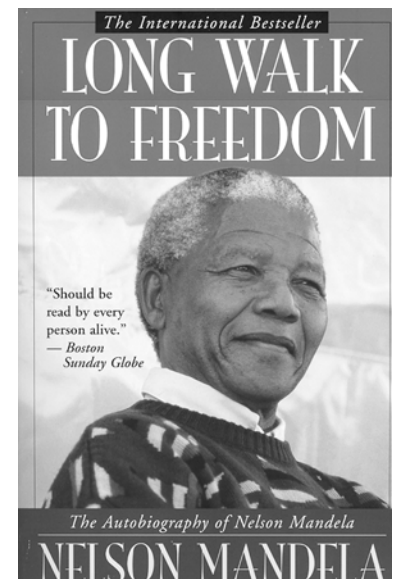
**Biography:** Constance Campbell, PhD, is professor of management in the College of Business Administration at Georgia Southern University. She teaches leadership and organizational behavior in the Department of Management, Marketing, & Logistics and conducts research and training in leadership skills. She can be reached by email at [ccampbell@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ccampbell@georgiasouthern.edu).

“Is there nothing in your life that is worth losing everything for?” This last line in the 1975 movie, *The Wind and the Lion*, could be answered by Nelson Mandela in one word, Freedom. Mandela, a self-described Freedom Fighter, has spent his life on the quest for freedom for Africans in South Africa and has lost almost everything at one time or another in the process. With a Hollywood movie about Mandela’s life entitled *The Human Factor*, starring Morgan Freeman and directed by Clint Eastwood, soon to debut, Mandela’s name will again be in the news, making it a good time to learn more about this remarkable man in his own words, as presented in his autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom*.

For anyone who is interested in leadership, this book is a must-read. From his boyhood days in rural South Africa, to his training as a lawyer in the city of Johannesburg, to his beginnings as a leader in the African National Congress (ANC), through his long imprisonment for political reasons at the notorious Robben Island, to his days as a government leader, Mandela describes the development of his philosophy and leadership skills. In page-turning fashion, Mandela takes the reader on his journey, showing the reader how he developed each of his leadership principles. For example, by observing the manner in which his surrogate father, a regional chieftan, lead meetings with local people, Mandela learned to listen to all sides of a discussion prior to giving his own opinions.

Indeed, the word “developed” is a theme in Mandela’s life, as his autobiography is not just a re-telling of Mandela’s life events, amazing as those are. Rather, Mandela allows us a deeper view of his inner life and his trajectory from hot-headed young revolutionary (“I had the reputation of being a firebrand.” P. 168) to a wiser and, certainly more seasoned, individual (“To make peace with an enemy one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes one’s partner,” p. 612).

One of the many interesting developments in Mandela’s life is the metamorphosis of his view about the use of violence in a freedom movement. In his early days with the ANC, Mandela supports the ANC position of nonviolence, however, as the South African government becomes more repressive toward Africans, Mandela’s view changes. He comes to believe that, if the oppressor uses violence, the oppressed



“have no choice” (p. 537) but to respond in kind. Do you agree with his position?

As you read this book, there will be many other passages that cause you to consider your own beliefs. For example, a recurring theme throughout the book is Mandela’s self-questioning about the negative impact that his freedom fight has upon his family. Mandela notes that, “when your life is the struggle . . . there is little room left for family. That has always been my greatest regret, and the most painful aspect of the choice I made.” (p. 600). Based on his conclusion that the fight for freedom was too valuable to abandon, even in the face of the suffering of his family, we see that, for Mandela, freedom was indeed something in his life worth losing everything for.

Thus, aside from the many valuable basic leadership lessons in Mandela’s book, such as not causing an opponent to lose face, his autobiography also forces us to consider the deeper questions of leadership and of life. Are extraordinary circumstances required to make an extraordinary leader? Does leadership require a personal sacrifice? Is the personal sacrifice worth it? And, finally, we are certainly faced with the question ourselves: Is there nothing in your life worth losing everything for? Reading Nelson Mandela’s autobiography may help you decide.

### The Cover Story

**Title and Author:** *The Long Walk to Freedom*, by Nelson Mandela

**Number of Pages:** 625

**Area of Business:** Management/Leadership

**Readability:** Medium

**Time Needed to Read:** One Month

**Why should I read this book?:** This book has great insights for anyone who aspires to a leadership position of any kind.

**Overall Rating:** 4 bulbs