I wanted to share some of my thoughts on an inspiring woman leader who made a difference to many throughout the world, as well as share some leadership insights I gained from researching her life and work.

While few will recognise the name Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, almost everybody will know the name by which she became known: Mother Teresa. Teresa – named after St. Therese of Lisieux – was passionate about helping others from an early age. Later travelling to Ireland to begin her life as a nun, it was from here that she was sent to India, where she first became known as Mother Teresa.

**THE CALLING AND COMMITMENT**

In September 1946, during a train ride from Calcutta to Darjeeling, Mother Teresa was said to have received a calling from God to be of service to those unable to take care of themselves. She expressed that this calling compelled her towards "labouring at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor". In October 1950, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity was finally established, and so began the institution that would become known across the world for its commitment to alleviating the suffering of society's excluded needy and poor.

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love”

Over the next three decades, Mother Teresa's foundations were established in several countries throughout the world. By the time she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, there were 158 Missionaries of Charity foundations. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, Mother Teresa continued to travel the world, bringing her work to those who were in desperate need of love and care. By 1997, her almost 600 foundations in more than 100 countries played host to around 4,000 “sisters”.

**LET YOUR WORKS DO THE TALKING**

What has always struck me about Mother Teresa is how this diminutive lady with a big heart and powerful spirit was able to effect so much positive change. She truly epitomised the saying that "we’re never too small to think big", and it was through her example that I realised there is nothing that cannot be achieved if you have the right focus, passion and determination to make it happen.

One of the other striking qualities about Mother Teresa was that she never talked much about what she was going to do – she simply went ahead and carried out what she felt was necessary. What a powerful quality to have in leadership!

We can talk, debate, discuss, think, plan and speculate – and these are important steps to take in the process of working towards a goal. But how many great ideas have remained ideas precisely because of too much talk and too little action?

Mother Teresa had her critics, but carried with her work. Pic: Mother Teresa Foundation.

"God doesn't require us to succeed, He only requires that you try."

**KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON**

Mother Teresa wasn’t lacking in critics, but carried on anyway to lay the foundations for the work she considered important as a servant leader, for both God and others. Often, we can get so downtrodden when people criticise us and, while we should think about valid criticisms and how we can improve ourselves, we shouldn’t allow our critics to take the reins and steer our motivations in their preferred direction.

One key insight that has served me well is that, from Buddha to Jesus to Prophet Muhammad to Mother Teresa to the Dalai Lama and everyone else, we all have our critics – it is an inseparable part of life.

Keep calm and carry on.

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“It is important to note here that we, as people, are also often critics of others, so we really shouldn’t expect a free ride ourselves.”

With this realisation, I could see there was a choice – we can either yield under the pressure of criticism, or we can rise above it and succeed in spite of it. Mother Teresa chose the latter. Thanks to her choice, she ensured a living legacy that is sure to get out there and just do it.

Mother Teresa died on September 5, 1997 at the age of 87, and her funeral was attended by hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life and religious beliefs. Also in attendance were prime ministers, presidents, royalty and dignitaries from all over the world, paying their last respects to the little nun with the big heart who had done so much to bring the world together. In recognition of her role in alleviating human suffering and humanitarian crises among nations (and many other unsung heroes, of course), the UN specifically picked the anniversary death of Mother Teresa as the International Day of Charity.

**A LIVING LEGACY**

Since then, there has been much written about the life and legacy of Mother Teresa, but I think her example offers up one powerful, yet simple message to anyone who truly seeks to make an impact on the world – you can do it! You can create the change you want to see in the world, and it begins with the decision to go ahead and get it done. You don’t need anyone’s permission to reach inside yourself and bring forth the greatness that’s within you to do amazing things. All that is required is for you to get out there and just do it.

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

At the end of life, we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in.”

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**THE LEGACY OF MOTHER TERESA**

**LIFE LESSONS FROM THE NUN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD**