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JFK, Mandela, and You

I watched the movie *Invictus* last weekend, featuring Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon as the captain of the South African rugby team in the mid-1990's. The story warrants an A+, and the movie, about a B. That said, however, I did draw inspiration from the focal point of the movie for two reasons. Let me explain.

We collectively need to work together to leave the world a better place than the one we inherited from our ancestors. The question is how?

Back on May 25, 1961, John F. Kennedy challenged a nation to put man on the moon by the end of the decade - they succeeded. Unfortunately he did not live to see it happen. One simple iconic goal and vision pulled together a nation.

Our challenge today is exceedingly more difficult in scope. Not just from the measurable and visible goal, but from a societal goal. How and when do we collectively admit and celebrate success? It will not be on a certain date or time. And what metrics will be associated with success? A targeted reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050? Fresh and accessible water for all humankind? No more deaths from cancer? The list goes on. It will not be as easy to define a moment of victory, compared to the victory of putting man on the moon.

Up until watching *Invictus* I did not think this challenge, solution, and its measure of success was possible. That changed for me during the movie.

JFK leveraged his position as President of the U.S. to pull together a nation towards a common goal, and Nelson Mandela used his position as newly elected President of South Africa to pull the nation together towards a common goal (a rugby game was Mandela's man on the moon). South Africa was racially and economically divided in the wake of apartheid, and believing he can bring his people together through the universal language of sport, Mandela rallies South Africa's rugby team as they make their historic run to the 1995 Rugby World Cup Championship match.

We are not all Presidents of nations, famous rock stars or athletes, but what we all do share is what William Ernest Henley recognized in 1875, when he wrote the poem 'Invictus':

*I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

We can all, in our own way, drive positive change from the current places we exist. Whether it is as a small business owner, president of a large corporation, a school principal, or as a citizen - we all influence people in one way or another. The more of us that act on our convictions of leaving this world a better place and believe that we can influence change, the better off our children and their children will be. Henley's words should not be taken as selfish but in the context of leveraging our influence for the good of our common planet.

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