

A WEEK IN *Learning*

LEAD LIKE A HERO

Lane Schonour, Vice President of Learning and Development

Leaders are storytellers. They help us make sense of our world, and where our organization fits into the overall order of things. Whether we need help understanding the very basics of our existence, or seek to explore the most abstract and complex of thoughts, successful leaders of all kinds have been able to weave heroic tales and create majestic myths. At work, we have numerous chances to help others understand where they are, where they are heading, and provide them with the support they'll need to reach their goals.

In 1949, Joseph Campbell published a book titled, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This work was a broad examination of stories, folk tales, and mythology from dozens of world cultures. Campbell's primary finding was something he termed the *Monomyth*. Eventually, the monomyth also became known by another name: The Hero's Journey. Campbell spent the remainder of his career articulating the various elements of the Hero's Journey, linking it to human existence, and among other things, the role of leadership in society. Campbell held that The Hero's Journey is comprised of three primary sections: Separation, Initiation, and Return. A brief exploration of these ideas is worthwhile, and can provide some insight to leaders throughout Goodwill.



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Separation

At the outset of the journey, the hero must separate from routine and begin the pursuit of a goal or objective. Campbell notes that this step in the process involves some sort of call to adventure, a refusal of this call, and the final crossing of a threshold into a different “world” where challenges must be faced.

For leaders, separation can be found in the recognition of an opportunity (and the temptation to ignore it based on perceived difficulties and/or the comfort of the status quo). Great leaders, however, find a way to break free from the inertia of the present and pursue an ideal future.

Initiation

Once the hero commits to the journey, they will encounter tests, allies, and enemies. Additionally, they

must survive some type of ordeal and will, in time, reap a reward. In this stage, Campbell talks about “approaching the innermost cave”.

For leaders, this phase of the journey can be likened to the relationship building, political maneuvering, and perseverance required to achieve a goal. At some point, all leaders must come face to face with the very things they are most worried about – perhaps even facing a significant personal fear. Great leaders find a way to move past these, and grasp the ultimate reward.

Return

Once attained, the reward can be carried back with the hero. The road back, however, is not always the same as the one initially traveled. Further, the group or community the hero returns to will often see a “resurrected” individual. This individual is now strangely encouraging them to “drink an elixir” with the promise of great and powerful changes to the group. In mythology, an elixir was usually some kind of potion able to provide increased strength, heightened wisdom, or longer life.

For leaders, this can be compared to the difficult work of understanding the environment and community in which the organization rests. After leaders make connections with, and commitments to, these stakeholders, they must influence their followers to accept the new initiative and provide the effort necessary to find success.

What Can Goodwill Leaders Do Next?

The power of the hero’s journey for Goodwill leaders is that we can apply it to individuals, to teams, and to entire organizations. We are all leaders in our own way. Can we recognize the elements of separation, initiation, and return in our own lives? Can we help our teams tell of their own heroic travels? In our community, Goodwill has a tale of its own to share of how, for more than a century, we have been able to answer the call to adventure on behalf of those we serve. We need leadership to share the story.

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