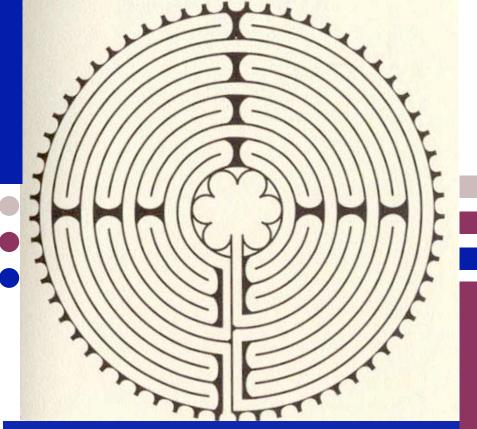
The Hero's Journey:

Legendary Leadership and Employee Engagement



Your Guide Through The Labyrinth



Copyright © 2008 SST Communications, Inc.

The Hero's Journey



 ${
m A}$ re you recruiting mercenaries into your organization,

or heroes? Granted, there is a place for mercenaries and some of them are very good at what they do. But, ask yourself, is it not the hero rather than the mercenary who resonates with your mission, vision and values? Is it not the hero who truly drives the value of your organization?

It is the hero who is willing to shoulder-up with you and execute consistently even when fair weather turns turbulent.

It is the hero who provides strong mentorship to incoming heroes.

It is the hero who gains institutional knowledge and maintains a willingness to share that knowledge with others

It is the hero who derives great satisfaction from what your organization makes, does or delivers.

In contrast, the mercenary comes to work each day leaving one foot out of your door, ready to accept *any* more lucrative offer that may come – and that is an "arms-race" you can never win. There will always be someone out there with a wallet that is just a little thicker than yours.

"The Hero's Journey" is a universal leadership model that assists you to attract heroes to your organization and provides you with a step by step process to retain them over the long-run. "The Hero's Journey" allows every supervisor/manager to lead from any chair, strengthening the bond between them and their direct reports. This methodology reveals what every hero needs in order to thrive and organizes the natural leadership qualities every supervisor/manager possesses to meet those needs.

Jeffrey W. Mangrum, SST Communications, Inc

From Myth to Method

began writing and presenting theatre-based professional development programs when I

founded SST Communications in 1987. These programs typically address HR or Safety issues such as diversity, sexual harassment, customer service, change and transition management, food and occupational safety.

The format I developed combines comedic and dramatic scenes woven together with informative, transitional narration. Early on we were able to measure the effectiveness of this training method by tracking the EAP utilization rates within UAW-GM for our EAP Awareness program; we saw increases up to 120%.



SST cast members, David Thibodeaux (L) and Paul Mapes (R) perform a scene from Mangrum's "Synergy From Others: Inclusion in the Workplace"

These results confirmed my theory that this method of learning would be informative, engaging and effective. It is true "sticky training."

This work has gives me an intimate knowledge of organizational and professional development through my research as I write the scripts. However, the interactions I have with HR, safety and sales professionals, along with the frontline employees we have the opportunity to perform for, consistently refresh my eyes when I think that I have "seen it all." Americans spend most of their waking hours at work; for a writer it is a great laboratory to study what makes us tick.

Mastering Two Unique Disciplines

During this same time-frame, I also continued my work as playwright; having had five full-length plays produced.

So, my career has had a peculiar dual-track; one rail as playwright, the other as a training and development designer using scenario as my key instrument.

My clients had approached me throughout the years encouraging me to write a presentation to address leadership issues, or rather, challenges they were having within their organizations pertaining to leadership.

They would describe these challenges to me in the form of questions similar to these:

"How do we lead consistently from every chair, when we have divergent management styles?"

"Our turnover rate is much higher than the industry standard, how can we keep the best we've got?"

"Why are some of our people highly engaged, while others are not?"

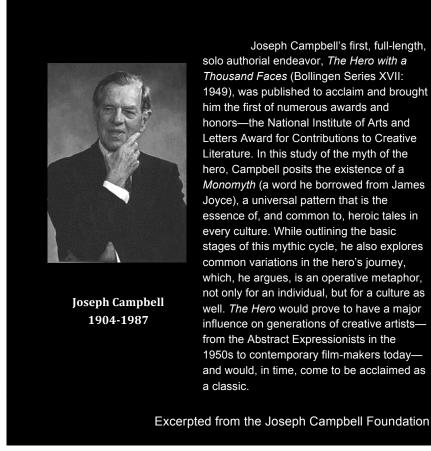
I immediately saw these challenges as being symptomatic of a single larger issue; an erosion at the point of interaction shared between manager/supervisor and direct report.

From Myth to Method

While I could clearly see this larger issue, I was at a loss as to how to address it. I read many of the "Leadership Guru" books on the market (quickly discovering that almost everyone has written a book on leadership or is in the process of writing one). I read research conducted by Gallup, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Society of Human Resource Professionals and many others.

I could see that they were all trying to get to the same place; how to strengthen that bond between supervisor/manager and direct report. But none of them seemed to offer a clear, concise methodology for doing so.

I refrained from designing a "Leadership" presentation because I felt that I didn't have anything new or more effective to offer than what was already being bandied about by Covey, Maxwell, Studer and the like.



Epiphany

And then, in 2002, I had an experience that crossed the two rails of my career in a way I could have never expected. Steppenwolf Theatre Co. in Chicago was producing my play, *Wendall Greene*, and part of the production process is an endless series of re-writes. During that process I revisited a book that I had not read in years...a book by renowned scholar, Joseph Campbell. A book that would not only guide my work for the stage, but also begin to answer the questions regarding leadership in the workplace that had once left me stymied.

Every writer runs across Campbell's , *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* sooner or later. This landmark body of work that he published in 1949 revealed universal elements of the heroic tale

From Myth to Method

shared by all cultures throughout time. He found that a set of basic stages of the heroic journey appeared in all myths, legends, folktales and religious parables, even in isolated cultures like the Australian Aborigines, or the Yanomami of the Brazilian rain forest. Campbell pointed out that if the hero in the story followed this six-step process, he or she was likely to succeed. Likewise, if one of the steps were missing, or taken out of order, something bad happened to the hero; pillar of salt, chained to a rock, or ended up as the bones on the floor of some dragon's cave.

Mind you, I was reading this book now with 17 years of organizational and professional experience in my mind. It was an epiphany for me.

Consider this premise; if you are responsible for sending people in your organization out to achieve a difficult task or goal, aren't you, in a very real sense, sending a hero out on a journey?

If so, doesn't it make real sense then to understand the six-steps of the hero's journey so that we can best support them for success?

Suddenly, I saw Campbell's ideas about the hero through the prism of the workplace and the application was incredibly apparent.

I began to develop a model of the hero's journey designed to strengthen the relationship between supervisor/manager and direct report.

It is a simple yet profound method of attracting, developing and retaining people who resonate with the purpose of your organization.

A method that can prevent and sometimes even repair the erosion that so commonly occurs at the point of interaction between supervisor/manager and direct report.

It is a method that quickly reveals what heroes need from their leaders.

Perhaps even more important and helpful to the leader, this method reveals the actions we sometimes take that may inadvertently undermine our heroes, burn them out, or convert them into mercenaries. I am bringing this model to you, fully operationalized in the context of the workplace for your consideration.

I believe it is *the* thirty-thousand foot view of leadership, because it is what makes sense to the human creature, across all races, creeds, ethnicities for all time.

The Gallup research demonstrates that **people do not leave organizations, they leave you**. They leave because you are failing to provide them with a critical step in their journey, or the order has been twisted. The Hero's Journey is the one critical tool you can master that will help you retain your heroes and avoid relying on mercenaries.

The Imbalance

Campbell tells us that all heroic myths, legends, folktales and religious parables

begin in the same place; "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." There is something wrong, something amiss, something that must be corrected.

If there were no problem, there would be no need for the hero to come forward.

The imbalances we see in myth, legend and folktale are easy to identify:

- The Princess has dropped her golden ball down the well, and she needs help to retrieve it.
- Or, the local dragon is on a binge and purge spree again.
- Or, there is a patch of woods just outside of town that everyone avoids because something *strange* is going on out there.

Imbalances in the workplace are what we call job security.

I have yet to find the organization that hires people simply because they want someone to send a check to twice a month.

You are there because you are needed to correct the imbalances you've been hired to address. Therefore, do not bemoan the challenges you face each day; they are a strong signal to you that you are in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing. If these imbalances were to ever stop...you can go home, your work here is through.

Some imbalances in your world may include:

- Improve Retention
- Improve Customer Service Recovery
- Improve Safety Compliance
- Improve Comp and Benefits
- Improve Policy and Procedure

The list goes on and on and on.



And your success is probably dependant upon sending out throngs of heroes to correct problems that are beyond your reach. That's why *they* are there, because you need *them*!

Your heroic journey is about correcting the imbalances you've been assigned to address. Through the course of the journey, the hero is renewed, and by extension so is the organization.

It is this constant tug of war between imbalance and renewal that keeps us engaged and eager to face each workday. A successful journey fills us with the satisfaction that comes from knowing our work has meaning and purpose. It is the key to Employee Engagement and Retention.

Step One: The Call to Adventure

Once the imbalance has been identified, it is now time for the first step of The

Hero's Journey; The Call to Adventure. Do not be surprised that when you issue the call to adventure you are greeted with a resounding, "No!" from your hero. Most heroes do not want to go on the adventure because it interrupts the smooth flow of our lives.

We see this pattern repeated over and over and over again in myth, legend, folktale and religious parable:



Moses before the Burning Bush

- Prince Siddhartha must be given four signs before he relents and embarks on his journey to become Gautama Buddha.
- Moses refuses to answer the call until he comes across a burning bush that would not be consumed.
- Frodo Baggins agrees to carry the ring, only after it becomes clear that none of the other creatures or men could or would do so.

Accepting the adventure means that the hero must uproot his/her life, take what they have currently been focusing on, throw it on the back-burner and go on high alert once again.

Therefore, the hero is typically reluctant to go on the journey.

Picking Heroes Over Mercenaries

This reluctance is good news for the Hero Leader, because it allows you to sort among the candidates to select heroes for your mission, rather than mercenaries.

When a *hero* receives the Call to Adventure, and before they say, "No," he/she will want to know what must be done and how does it benefit the organization.

When a *mercenary* gets the Call to Adventure, he/she will respond with a, "What's in it for me," form of questioning. Listen closely and you will readily discern the difference between the two.

Be wary of the over-zealous hero, the hero who runs forth to answer the Call to Adventure with raised hand shouting, "Pick me! Pick me!" Either this hero is naïve and has no understanding of the magnitude of what they are about to embark upon, or they may have a hidden agenda and want to be in that place for reasons unbeknownst to you.

I am not suggesting that you automatically pass this hero by; there may be specific jobs for which you need the "ignorant" hero. I'm saying, be wary.

How do you overcome the hero's reluctance? Well, you probably do not have a burning bush at your disposal, but you can keep issuing the call. Do not be discouraged. Understand what is going on in the mind of the hero—give him/her time. And don't forget your trump card; "I need your help, and only your help will fix this."

Step Two: Supernatural Aid

his is where I lose a lot of people. They say, "Sorry, we don't have any Supernatural Aid laying around the place, and have no idea where to get it." No worries. Look closer and you will see that Supernatural Aid is everywhere.



You are Supernatural Aid for the heroes who report to you. Again, turn your thoughts to myth, legend, folktale and religious parable and the pattern becomes obvious. Before the hero departs on the journey, he/she is visited by a fairy godmother, a disembodied voice, or a wise, old man. In other words, a *MENTOR* shows up to bestow *AMULETS* of protection on the hero.



Perseus was given winged sandals to help defeat Medusa

As Hero Leader, you must pull double-duty at this stage of the journey; nobody said this was going to be easy for you. You must provide mentorship to those who report to you, giving them the tools and skills they need in order to be successful. While at the same time, you must seek out your own mentors to gather the amulets you need to endure the trials that lay ahead.

To further complicate your job at this stage, you must be careful to match the right amulet with the right hero for the right journey.

Bestowing your hero with Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) like a Hazmat Suit does little good when his/her journey is to deal with irate customers. On second thought...irate customers can be a bit toxic.

Joan of Arc's voices led her to a sword that would help her defeat the English



Supernatural Aid: Mentors, Skills, Tools

However, this "Customer Service" hero may benefit immensely from a Conflict Management class, or a clear policy of Service Recovery.

The point is this; when your heroes come forward to answer the call, you must guide and "gift" them.

They have been dropped into your world and must count on you to guide them through the labyrinth effectively and ethically.

They rely on you to select the right tools and skills that will make them more essential to the organization. Yes, the hero enters into a sacred pact with you. The question is, will you enter into a sacred pact with them? This is not about coddling. This is about tempering your heroes in such a way that they will be able to endure the trials that lay ahead. Do this, and your hero will stay.

Step Three: Crossing of the First Threshold

 ${f A}$ common mistake Hero Leaders make in working with heroes is to minimize this

amazingly simple yet profound step in the journey.

The Crossing of the First Threshold is, in short, the point of no return. It happens with the hero makes a commitment to the journey, leaves his/her mentor behind and crosses over into the unknown landscape.

We still celebrate this step in our culture (traditionally) when the bridegroom carries his bride across the threshold. They jump in broom in some cultures. To others it may seem a quaint, silly gesture; but within those cultures, you don't dare get married without doing it.

Never discount the power of metaphor and symbolism when it comes to the human creature. I would submit that the world does not turn on money...but on the symbols that drive any given culture.

Ask a soldier if it is the pay or the flag for which he/she places himself/herself in harms way; I think you can accurately predict the answer.

We are constantly crossing first thresholds; we cross a threshold when we are born and again when we die. We literally cross a threshold when we start a new job, we cross another when we leave an old one. When we step onto the field, when we are baptized, when we sign divorce papers, when we begin chemotherapy treatments; these are all clearly defined thresholds.

So, when your hero answers the call, accepts your mentorship and amulets of protection, it is important to acknowledge the moment he/she turns from you to begin that long walk alone.

This is the very essence of drama that we reenact in our workplaces each and every day. This is the moment where you have taken on that difficult assignment and now you are placed in the balance; will you succeed or will you fail? This is the point of no return. No Mulligans here. No do-overs.

As a Hero Leader, it is here you must let your hero go. You cannot shield them from the trials that lay ahead.

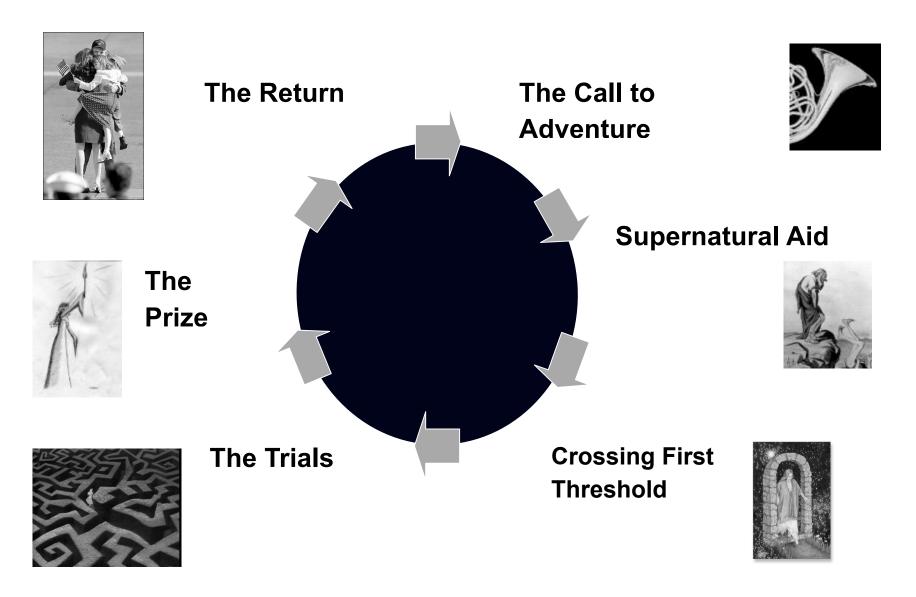
You cannot protect them from what Campbell refers to as "Threshold Guardians." Threshold Guardians are people (sometimes creatures) who greet the hero the moment he/she crosses this first threshold. Many of them truly wish to help, but most will do anything to undermine the hero in hopes of facilitating utter failure.

These are people Gallup refers to as the Actively Disengaged. They hoard supplies and talk down the organization's mission. They whisper disparaging words into the ear of your hero in hopes of hastening their demise.

You must acknowledge this step in the journey, this point of no return, and hope your Supernatural Aid will be enough to pull them through.

IMBALANCE

RENEWAL THE HERO'S JOURNEY



Step Four: The Trials

he Trials are the obstacles that stand between the hero and attainment of the

prize (which is the "thing" that corrects the imbalance).

The word trials conjures up images of battlefronts, the slaying of formidable enemies, or even Ronald Weasley sacrificing himself in a game of Wizard's Chess so that Harry Potter can continue on to retrieve the Sorcerer's Stone.

These are indeed trials and no doubt many people feel that they are under siege in their workplaces as they wade bravely toward the attainment of the prize. War metaphor is widely used in the context of the workplace.

However, I think most people "get" these kinds of physical trials. Rather than go indepth along those lines, there is another type of trial that I believe is more common and certainly more difficult to navigate.

What Campbell tells us, what Carl Jung tells us, and what your therapist has probably been telling you, is that more often than not, the dragons that we must slay do not reside "out there," but live between our ears.

Yes, when we say that we are our own worst enemy, we really mean it.

As a hero, we often encounter journeys that make little sense to us in the workplace. This is usually the case when the prize is not well-defined; the math does not add up.

Internal Dragons must be Slain

How often are you asked to fulfill your duties on your job with "imperfect information?" Once a year? Once a month? Once an hour?

When I think of this type of trial, I often replay the scene from *Saving Private Ryan* in my head when the wise-cracking ranger questions the Army's wisdom of sending nine men behind enemy lines to save one paratrooper. Again, the math doesn't add up.

This is classic "internal dragon" stuff. Obviously you cannot step in and fight your hero's battles, just as you must endure your own. You can, however, take a page out of Capt. Miller's (played by Tom Hanks) playbook and offer vision. He tells the squad why he believes this is a worthy mission as he sees it. In doing so, he skewers the internal dragons of even the most skeptical members of the team.

As heroes endure their trials you can offer support, fresh amulets (because sometimes the current tools or skills no longer work), but you cannot intervene except under the rarest of circumstances. They must succeed or fail on their own accord.

See, I told you this wasn't about coddling.

Step Five: The Prize

 $\mathbf{K}_{ ext{eep your eyes on the prize...}}$ If you had dime, right? This is one time that nothing

but a cliché can truly capture the intended spirit of what I'm writing here. Indeed, keep your eyes on the prize because it can change shape, scope or become something else entirely.

However, you will always know when it is attained because as we said earlier, it is the "thing" that cures the imbalance that started this whole journey.

Do not confuse The Prize with the next step of the journey; The Return. The Prize is not the Return and the Return is not Prize. Keep repeating that over and over...and click your heels as you do.

For example, your academic journey probably culminated with a degree. That's a nice prize.

The prize in running a marathon for some means just getting across the finish line...never mind how long it took!

Often the prize is not attained.

I knew a young lady who desperately needed a kidney and liver donor. Her trials were to stay alive long enough for a suitable donor to be identified. Her prize did not arrive on time and she passed away at age 21. When the hero fails the journey, he/she is no less a hero. Attaining the prize is drama, losing it is tragedy.

Clarity of Prize is Essential

Failing to capture the prize can be a character building experience for heroes, provided they are working in an environment that understands the "failing forward" concept. As Hero Leader, how do you react to the hero who misses the prize?

Defining and clarifying the prize is absolutely critical to giving the hero a chance to achieve it. If you, the Hero Leader, cannot identify the prize, the hero never will.

You cannot issue the Call to Adventure to a hero, have them come forward and say to you, "What needs to be done here?" And you respond with something like:

"We need to benchmark our processes.

To do what?

"Identify core-competencies and shared best practices that are results driven and has a value-add for the game plan."

What do you need me to do?

"I need you to save Private Ryan."

Bam! I'm on it.

I realize the higher up the structure within an organization, the Prizes can become more abstract. But great Hero Leaders work mightily to communicate concisely what the prize is. This is difficult work. It will challenge all your skills.

Step Six: The Return



Heroes typically do not need a ticker-tape parade,
but it's really cool if you can arrange one.

Ah...Here's the rub on The Return; heroes want to know that their work matters, to

you and to the rest of the organization. That may seem counter–intuitive in regard to heroic exploits. You may think that the hero should be humble and happy with the self-knowledge of doing a great job. You needn't concern yourself with all those specifics—each hero is unique in how they process success. We're talking about universals here, and what all heroes need is *the opportunity to be humble*.

Campbell found that there are basically two components of The Return; what's in it for the hero, and how does the community (organization) benefit from the attainment of the prize?

The WIIFM

Hero's want a reward that is just. We all want to live indoors and eat, therefore we want to be justly compensated for the work we do. Remember, the Gallup research demonstrated that people leave organizations rather than people sometimes for less money, so money wasn't the biggest issue. But you can't expect the hero to stay without just compensation.

The hero looks at his/her paycheck and says, "Well, it could be better, but it's fair." The mercenary looks at his/her paycheck and says, "Where can I go to get more, even if it's just a little more."

The reason why the hero is content with *fair* compensation is that they expect other forms of acknowledgement that, as a Hero Leader, you need to deliver.

The Parade

The mercenary is highly focused on the amount of pay and benefits, and will leave you in a heartbeat to go someplace else to get even a few dollars more.

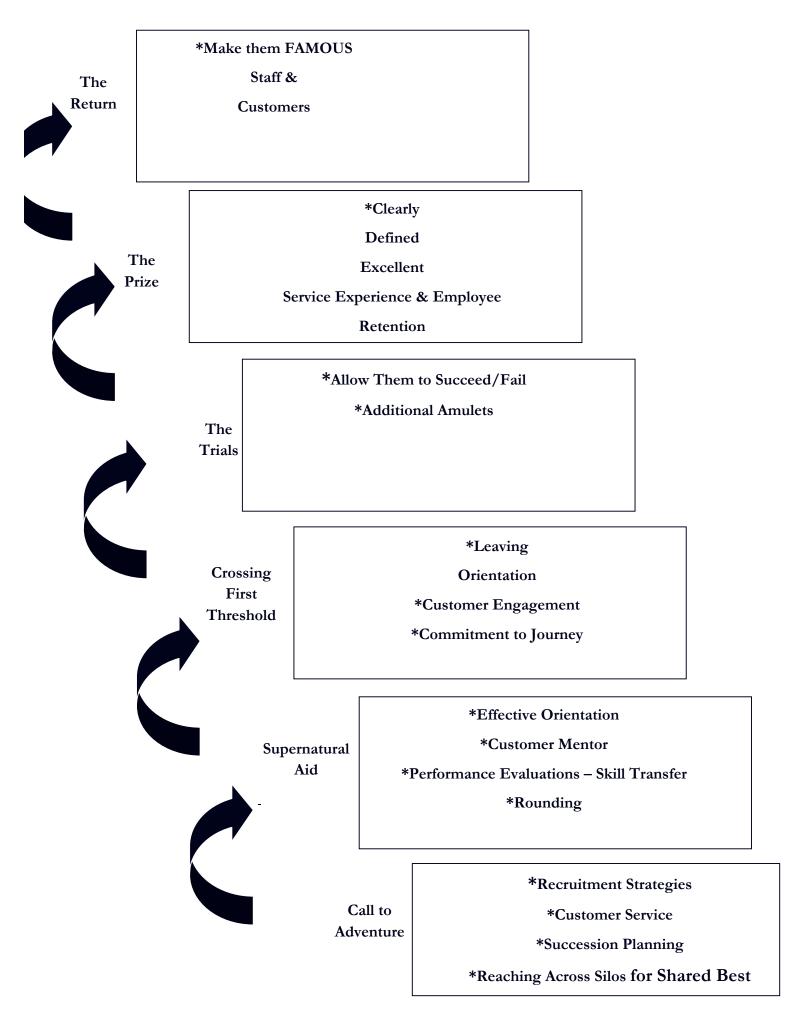
A universal truth for all heroes is that they need to know how their successful quest for the prize benefits the entire organization, not just themselves. Your job, as Hero Leader is to make them famous, if not globally, locally.

This means publicly acknowledging the work they do. Every time.

This seems like a lot of hassle and you're a busy Hero Leader, right? Well, with each missed opportunity to acknowledge the hero's work, you turn them further away from being a hero and toward becoming a mercenary.

If you take acknowledgement out of the equation, what is left? The money. If the money is all the hero has to focus on, you've just transformed them into a mercenary.

The hero needs to share the prize with the entire organization. Help them do so.



Mapping Your Journey

The following section is designed to provide you with some guidance designing

your own journey—or, perhaps the journey of someone who reports to you directly. The journey you map out here could be personal or professional, current or future, simple or complex. My hope is to provide you with an exercise to help you gain mastery over this methodology and by doing so, you will discover just how indispensable it is.

Before you begin mapping out a journey you are currently on, or one that you are anticipating taking, it may be very helpful to look back at a past journey to identify the steps you took.

Think of your proudest or most difficult achievement. Some examples might be earning a degree, getting a promotion or becoming a parent.

Let me walk you through an example of a journey that is commonly brought forward in our workshops; earning a degree.

The first step in mapping a journey is to identify the IMBALANCE—the need. As you will see, identifying the IMBALANCE by definition helps us to define the PRIZE which will correct this IMBALANCE.

The IMBALANCE which drives one to earn a degree is different for every individual. I have a friend who lost a mother to cancer at a very early age. As a result, she decided to do all she could to eradicate this scourge in her lifetime. The IMBALANCE in her journey was the existence of this terrible disease; her prize became earning a degree in oncology so she could work on finding cures.

The IMBALANCE in your journey is unique to you and your situation. Try to identify it as clearly as you can.

Next, write down the various forms the Call to Adventure came in. Again, using the example of earning a degree, that call may have taken many forms. Perhaps it came from your parents who demanded that you go to school. Perhaps it came from a concerned guidance counselor who saw talent in you that you did not. Perhaps it came from your boss who had a vested interest in you earning a degree because she knows it would be valuable to the organization. Or, it could have come from all three! Remember, we tend to be reluctant when it comes to answering that call; we usually need several good pushes before we relent and step forward.

Once you have written down the IMBALANCE and as many forms of the Call to Adventure as you can think of, now turn your thoughts to your Supernatural Aid.

Thoroughly consider what it took to get accepted by the school; SAT's, applications, financial aid. Did you get any help at this stage of the game? Were your parents good mentors, giving you the skills/tools you needed to succeed? If not, who stepped forward to help you?

What is important to understand about Supernatural Aid, is that you could not have successfully navigated your journey without your mentor(s) and the amulets she gave you. Just as the heroes who report to you cannot be successful without the Supernatural Aid you provide for them.

Now that you've written down what form your Supernatural Aid took, it's time to identify the Crossing of the First Threshold, the point of no return.

Some may say that the threshold was crossed when they received the acceptance letter from the college or university, but that is incorrect; you could still back out at that point.

Okay, so maybe the threshold was crossed when you paid the tuition. I don't think so. You could still back out at this point, get a refund with perhaps incurring a nominal cancellation fee.

I think that the true threshold of this journey came at that moment you stepped onto that campus, the moment you walked into your first class, the moment your folks drove away, abandoning you in front of that swank residence hall.

Crossing of the First Threshold is the moment you travel so far along the journey that everyone would agree unequivocally that you had failed should you turn back now. It is the point of no return.

The trials for this journey are easy to identify; there are so many of them. Studying, dealing with personal and social distractions, perhaps you encountered a difficult professor. List as many as you can think of. Take note of how your Supernatural Aid gave you the ability to overcome these trials.

After navigating the trials, you claimed the prize; the degree. Earning the degree corrects the IMBALANCE you identified at the very beginning of this journey.

If earning the degree is the prize, then what is the Return? Remember, there are two categories of the return; what's in it for the hero, and how does it impact the entire community?

Earning a degree does allow you to find a better job than you could had you not traveled this journey. So, there is a financial reward attached to it. Hero's like to live indoors and eat just like everyone else. The hero has to understand that there is something more to it than gaining treasure.

There must be acknowledgement of this accomplishment, and we do this very well when it comes to graduation. We have a CEREMONY. Why do we go through all the hassle of setting up hundreds of chairs on the quad, dress up in gowns and wait for our names to be called before walking up the few steps to take our diploma in hand? The ceremony is important. Even if you are getting the degree online and there is no ceremony, you should create one for yourself. I never went through that ceremony myself, and it is something that I have regretted to this day. Getting your diploma through the USPS just doesn't have the same kind of zing, for some reason.

Journey Mapping Template

THE IMBALANCE

Identify the IMBALANCE: (Note: Keep the imbalance as succinct as possible, remembering that the PRIZE you identify should correct it)



THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

Identify the Call to Adventure, their forms and frequency:



SUPERNATURAL AID

Identify potential mentors for journey and the skills/tools needed:



CROSSING OF THE FIRST THRESHOLD

Identify the moment when the hero will reach the point of no return:



THE TRIALS

List the potential obstacles that stand between the hero and the prize:



THE PRIZE

The Prize corrects the IMBALANCE:



THE RETURN

What does the hero receive, how is the (community) organization benefited:



