

Create the Courage to Live Your Life on Purpose



eBook

by

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Courage as a Choice

“Often in actual life, and not infrequently in popular tales, you encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn an ear to other self interests. Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom and hard work, the subject loses the power to take significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. ~Joseph Campbell

This quote begins the introduction to my new book, *The Secret of Transitions*. I believe the search for one’s true identity and purpose is the modern day quest. The mythological hero’s journey has always been symbolic of self-discovery and the realization of one’s potential.

Isn’t that why you are here now ...to discover your purpose and courageously contribute to something far greater than your own self-interests? Couldn’t that be the source of the unsettled sense of discontent you feel? You know you have more to give, more to experience and more to fulfill. I believe this is the heroic venture we are all called to experience. And yet, it is a call that many of us resist.

Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychiatrist, came to believe that one’s life journey was “to discover and realize one’s innate potential, much like an acorn’s potential to become a mighty oak.” He believed that it was our very own human spirit that calls us to grow, stretch and test our limits. Perhaps these heroic stories awaken our own need to express the best of who we are.

Modern day psychologist and author Dr. Jonathan Young, who assisted Joseph Campbell for many years and later became the Founding Curator of the Joseph Campbell Archives and Library, has written a number of brilliant essays explaining how and why these great stories touch us with courage and spirit (www.castlebooks.com). Often it’s because we see so clearly how these epics symbolically represent our own life story.

You’re probably familiar with the story line. It begins in everyday life - an ordinary person living an ordinary life. Then there is a disruption of some kind. Sometimes a human weakness is exposed. For example, a foolish mistake or a broken promise begins the adventure. More often, though, the disrupting event occurs as a powerful act of nature or evil, sending our hero into a hostile landscape.

No matter how the adventure begins, you can be sure the hero will be tested more than once. Trials and tribulations follow, but soon allies join the hero. They may take the form of friends, a guide or someone with supernatural powers.

Some of the most memorable fictional characters have been cast as the hero's allies. Remember Hans Solo and Yoda from *Star Wars*? Of course, we all do. What about the Tin Man, Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion from the *Wizard of Oz*? Some say the reason these characters are so compelling is that they represent the power of human energy and spirit that we draw on during difficult times.

After many trials and tribulations, the hero has one last challenge before returning home (home representing coming fully into one's self - being self actualized, beyond the ego needs of security, belonging and esteem). But to get home, the hero must face his or her greatest fear. Think of Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, or Dorothy and Wicked Witch. Just, as in our lives, we must confront our fears in order to truly believe in ourselves.

I find that "home" in these epic tales often represents returning to one's true essence and courageous spirit ...the true and authentic identity we are all born with. Every challenge and every test can be a call to realize your potential.

What Our Own Journeys Teach

What are you are most proud of? What events stand out as peak moments? Aren't they the times when you risked something, took a chance or extended yourself further than you thought you could? And what about the times you regret? Many people identify those moments when something wasn't risked or when they didn't stretch and go full out. They held back and played it safe. That's a call unanswered.

The symbols in mythology are very powerful. Two headed monsters, man eating ogres, and one-eyed giants. What do they have to do with our lives? These can be thought of as the self-limiting beliefs and self-defeating behavior that hold so many of us back. These monsters are our very own fears ...thoughts that destroy creativity, imagination and possibility.

It's when we face and decimate those fears (slay the dragons) that we become vitally alive and powerful. We can only do that if we are willing to be tested and challenged.

We may not know when or how, but we all have or will face events that disrupt our lives. We will be tested, and there will be trials and tribulations. The degree to which we are individually tested seems to vary greatly from person to person, but we are all tested at some point and in some way during our lives.

How we respond to those challenges and how we conduct ourselves in those moments, can affect the quality of our life for years to come. The decisions reached and the choices made are remembered for years to come with pride and sometimes with regret.

That is what the great epic tales teach us as do our own life stories. With the benefit of hindsight, we see clearly that **courage is always a choice.**

Courage is Always a Choice

Experiencing the state of courage is not about being fearless. To the contrary, courage requires the presence of fear. A courageous action can only be achieved by overcoming the paralyzing effects of fear; otherwise it's not a courageous act. The greater the fear, the greater is the courage that must be created. No fear, no courage required.

Here's what I mean. Imagine that a young mother rushes into a burning house to save her child. The media is all over her afterwards, clamoring for interviews. "How did she summons the courage to rush into the flames?" they ask. Other bystanders had been on the scene minutes before her, but were frozen with fear.

She has no answers for them. She realizes that she did not summons courage. Rather she reacted instantly, without thinking. It was a reaction, not a choice. She was fearless. On the other hand, the men and women who serve as firefighters know intimately the horrors of fire. To do their job day after day takes courage.

It was only hours after the young woman came out of the flames with her child safely in her arms that she felt the overwhelming, sickening sense of fear in the pit of her stomach. It came with the memory of that event.

Thoughts can do that to us. The most important concept I have ever learned is that every emotion I experience is the effect of my own thinking, and that for each and every one of my thoughts I have a choice - to believe it or not. Accepting this has been the basis for the most profound changes in my life.

I have learned that nothing makes me happy or sad, angry or peaceful, fearful or courageous, loving or hateful other than what I think. Nothing can have a lasting emotional effect on me unless I choose to let it. Will I react to what you, they or it does? Probably, and that's usually a good thing, but making it a lasting effect is my choice. As my friend, Chris Dorris, a performance psychologist and mental toughness trainer, points out, this is not positive thinking. It is disciplined thinking, and it can make a profound difference in your life as well.

Meet Your Brain: The Incredible Story Telling Machine

Something happens that you see, hear or feel. Call it an event. What do you immediately do, within a split second after the event occurs? You interpret or evaluate the event. That is, you judge it to be good or bad; right or wrong; or the way it should or shouldn't be.

Let's try it out, ok? Here's a wonderful vignette from *The Relationship Handbook* by George Pransky (By the way, I think it's the most useful book on relationship there is). Notice your reaction as you imagine yourself as the person being described below.

The scene is the lobby of a movie theater. You are standing in line to buy tickets. Suddenly a burly man walks in front of you and steps on your toe. He offers no apology. In fact, he acts like you don't exist. Anger builds in you.

Suddenly your anger turns to chagrin. You just noticed his white cane and black glasses. Turning to the man behind you, you relate the mistake. He laughs and says he knows the alleged blind man. "That man is not blind," he reports. "He's just a sadist who pretends to be blind to avoid punishment for his sadistic acts."

Your embarrassment instantly turns to outrage. "How could anyone be that low?" you ask yourself. You consider telling him off or even taking a punch at him despite his size.

An older man pulls you aside. He tells you that the man behind you is the sadist and the burly man actually is blind. Your outrage turns to confusion and then levity when a middle-aged bald man comes over and says, “Smile, you’re on Candid Camera!”

I guess in this day and age, it would be Ashton Kutcher saying, “You’re Punk’d!” We “punk” ourselves all day long. Something happens that we see, hear or feel, and a thought immediately follows. And that thought takes the form of a story - in some form of “that’s right or that’s wrong; or that’s good or that’s bad.”

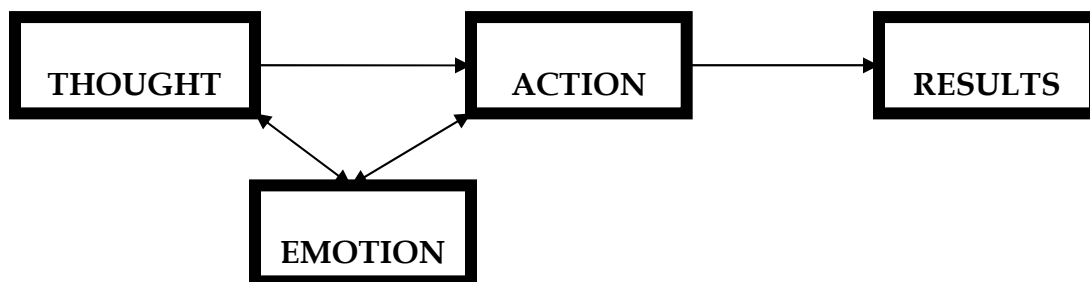
So how do you know what’s right or wrong? And you not only know it, but you feel absolutely confident that that you’ve got it right. Where does that “knowing” come from?

It comes from the past. It’s the sum of your experiences, education, attitudes, values, motives and intent that shapes every present moment. Weird, isn’t it? We experience the present by assessing it with the past.

Don’t get me wrong. It’s a beautiful thing the way our minds work. What an incredible learning machine the brain must be! We wouldn’t live very long without the ability to draw on past lessons, either personally experienced or taught by someone else.

In fact, most of what we “know” has been told to us by someone else. What’s your gender? How many planets are there? What is a cell, a molecule, or an atom? How do you know? If you’re like me, someone told you, and you believed it. And most of the time, that works out beautifully.

So something happens and we tell a story. That story creates an emotion. That emotion creates action, and that action creates a result. Think of results of what we currently have or don’t have in our life.



If you want to create a result in your life that is truly extraordinary, what must change? Yes, only extraordinary thoughts can create extraordinary action. This is especially true if you are limited by resisting a call to experience a greater future.

Let's create another scenario to experience the power our stories have on our negative emotions such as fear. Imagine a solid oak plank lying on the ground that is about 25 feet in length, 12 inches wide and about 2 inches thick. Now see yourself walking the length of the plank, putting one foot in front of the other, step by step. Easy so far, right?

Now let's suspend the plank between two platforms that are about 6 feet high. Go ahead and walk it again. About mid-way, you'll notice that the plank sags from your weight and springs back with each step. Still not too challenging, but you notice that your palms are sweating a little and feel a surge of adrenalin.

Ok, now let's take it all the way up. The plank is now suspended between two twin high-rise buildings, about 250 feet up, resting on the patio bars of the adjacent penthouses. Got the picture? From up here people look like ants and cars are toy sized. A stiff breeze has kicked up and it's pretty gusty, blowing hard one minute and then letting off just before it kicks up again even harder.

Will you walk the plank now? It's just 25 feet to the other side, and even though the plank is a bit springy it won't snap or break. I think I'll pass. How about you? But wait a minute, what's that I see? Is that your baby out there? Somehow your two year old is sitting 20 feet away on the plank, scared out of her wits, crying for you to come get her. There's not much time. You've got to decide. What will you choose?

Most people find that they can indeed create the courage to overcome their fear and save the baby. Love, commitment, duty and sacrifice are all concepts, mere thoughts, but incredibly powerful all the same. We can choose to respond to our fears with powerful thoughts. Intent and purpose can and do trump resistance.

Purpose powers all transitions, just as a lack of purpose can derail them. I've included several chapters from *The Secret of Transitions* to share how purpose helped me cross my own career chasm. Please read on and enjoy.

Chapter One

In which we learn that transitions are powered by purpose. Without purpose, your life becomes a dreary journey without a destination.

Transitioning into Purpose

The year was 2000 and I thought I knew where I was headed. It seemed clear enough. I thought I was living my life as a successful corporate executive, about to interview for an exciting new position back east.

I can see now that this life only looked successful on the outside. On the inside I was lost, refusing to face reality. I didn't understand it at the time, but I had been resisting my own transition for years.

I had just resigned as the president of a company I had helped bring from start-up to major worldwide prominence. I thought my resignation was based on boredom. I thought the job just wasn't exciting to me any more. So I decided to look for something new - something that would excite me more.

I'd had conversations with head hunters and with other companies that were looking for CEO's. At the time I really believed that my next job would be as a CEO. It seemed right. I could take the lessons that I had learned for the last 30 years and share them as a mentor and leader.

At least that was my story as I waited to board the plane to New York. And it was a good story. But it just wasn't true.

At that time, the technology distribution industry was undergoing a massive restructuring. Our company was struggling and so was I. Was I bored? Exhausted? No, the truth was that the thought of failing scared me. But I fought that reality. I denied it. I had my boredom story, a great resume and a burning desire for redemption and another chance.

This trip would be the culmination of many interviews I had done with a number of companies, from very small, venture-funded start-up companies to major European firms (the internet glow was still there—this was the beginning of 2000—venture capital was still flowing). This particular company I was about to do my final interview with was run by a 29-year-old genius inventor who had just received a venture infusion. He was one of these prodigies who had been working since he was 14 years old and had created a number of wireless inventions. He sold his first invention to a local airport when he was 15! He was very dynamic and likeable. He had a great team, and was energized by the possibility of creating a great company. I was feeling the old excitement again. The young owner saw me as a mentor and as someone who had made enough mistakes to steer him clear of them. This trip to New York was for me to meet with his board.

I was flying out of Phoenix and, as sometimes happens when there's bad weather in the east, we were on ground delay. The storms at Kennedy Airport would not let up, so we were stuck there for about five hours. After I had read every magazine that I could get my hands on, called all the people that I knew, and checked all my voice mail I finally couldn't avoid it any longer - I went to my procrastination file. That's where I save torn-out business articles that I know I should read but don't. I just stuff them in a folder and put them in my briefcase.

So I started to tackle that file. And as I was reading through these articles I finally got to the one that was literally the last one in the file. It was dated 1998. It was a little article from *Fast Company* by Richard Leider. He had written a book called *The Power of Purpose*, and he was now talking about the book in an interview in the magazine. A regular contributor to *Fast Company*, Leider had been in the outplacement business working with key executives for 20 years. In writing his book, he had interviewed many of his ex-clients or executives who had retired----all people he knew to be very successful. He asked these people how they were viewing life right now, and what constitutes “the good life.”

Leider noticed that invariably, the “good life” answers came back in the form of these three conditions: 1) You are living in a place where you feel you belong; 2) You're in strong and loving relationships at home, at work and with yourself and 3) You are doing a work that you were truly meant to do in an environment where you fit and are contributing to something you believe in. Finally, they said, you are doing all three of those things with intent and *purpose*.

I can remember reading that article and being struck by that simple truth. I caught a glimpse of my own transition unfolding that day, and my stories started to dissolve.

I sat there suddenly realizing there was *nothing* in my career that I had ever really done with intent and purpose. My career successes had had a lot to do with being lucky---being in the right place at the right time. Events happened, and I took advantage of them. Like a leaf in a stream, I had been swept into a company that was to grow from a fledgling \$5 million company to a \$7 billion Fortune 500 company and the world's sixth largest technology distributor. I was the president of that distribution business. And even though those years of experience were very satisfying and rewarding, it was nothing I had set out to do on purpose.

I realized for the first time in my life that I had no purpose in mind for myself. I never did. I can remember right then sitting in that airport and thinking about where I was about to fly. What was my purpose there? I didn't know a thing about wireless. I didn't want to live in Boston or New York or anywhere else other than Arizona. This trip was much more dictated by *their* needs than by mine. And I had no idea what I really wanted to do. What was I doing in this airport, then?

As far as I could figure it out, what I was doing had something to do with fulfilling an ego need. I didn't define it in those terms back then, but I was pretty aware that what I was chasing didn't have anything to do with what my true life was about. Or *could be* about if I discovered what I was meant to do. So I made a decision on the spot. I called the chairman of this little company and said, "I'm not coming."

After I explained to him why I wasn't coming, he reminded me that I had promised to be there for the interview. He said he had people flying in from all over to meet with me. And he was right. I didn't want to start my new life by breaking promises, so I decided to meet with the board and tell them about my awakening in the airport.

It wasn't easy. As I sat in the conference room facing all of them, I told them about the article I had read and the impact it had on me. They were very gracious and tried to convince me that they could make it work for me. I told them I was sorry, but I would not ignore the message I'd received. And in that moment, I felt freer than I had in 30 years. (Transitioning does that.)

After that meeting I got back on an airplane and flew back to Phoenix. There was a lot of time to reflect about what had happened over the last 24 hours. I had been blind to all the signals that were telling me it was time to move on and begin a new adventure - to make my next life transition. Boredom was the first indicator that I was not being personally accountable for my life. It wasn't the job that was boring me, I was boring myself.

When I returned home, my wife Patsy was waiting for me. I told her what had happened and showed her the article. I didn't know what she would think about all this but then I saw that she had started to cry.

“What’s wrong?” I said.

“I didn’t really want to leave,” she said. “This is where we belong.”

And I realized she was crying for happiness. We talked more about the article, and living a life on purpose and she asked me, “What do you think you were meant to do?”

“I have no idea.”

I took three months off to see if I could find out. I spent most of that time with Patsy, traveling together and just being together. I did a lot of reflection and explored some other opportunities that were in Arizona, and it soon dawned on me that 1) I never wanted to retire, and 2) What I most loved doing was working with and mentoring people. Helping them succeed.

So I started to think about being a business advisor and coach as a full-time occupation. I wasn't totally convinced yet, because I didn't really know how being a consultant would work for me. But the more I talked to the people who knew me best, the more they reassured me that it would be a perfect fit. Some went further and affirmed that being an advisor and mentor was exactly what I was meant to do at this stage of my life.

Even though I knew inside that they were right, it took a while for me to trust it. So many people that I ran into who were former executives were wandering around with business cards that said “consultant and coach” on them. The standard response to that was, “How long are you going to be a consultant? Till you get a job?” My commitment would have to run much deeper than that.

I knew from the time I made the decision at the airport that this transition would be a true test of my commitment. But I was surprised by the emotional intensity that came with this transition. It didn't take long before I realized how attached I had become to my corporate identity. Who would I be without the title, corner office, big salary and stock options? It doesn't take long to discover what you most fear when you're at the precipice of a major life transition.

Beyond my own ego issues, I also had to confront practical matters like making money. Making this transition could mean going a long time without any real source of income. Patsy and I decided to sell the house and the luxury cars. We rented a 900 square foot guest house from a friend. It was in that little house that Patsy and I discovered that we were more committed to our future than to the trappings of the past.

We knew we were on the right path, and we didn't waver. After a great deal of reflection, I created my own coaching practice, one that would not be dependent on long term engagements or interim management projects. I created a practice that would allow me to do the things I most loved...work with people who are fully engaged and not satisfied with the status quo; people who know that they have not reached their pinnacle, who have more to give, more to accomplish, more to express with their life.

It all sounded good, but I had no real idea how to pull it off. The thought of calling a CEO and asking "Do you have more to achieve?" paralyzed me. Besides, that would be a pretty ineffective way to start. So as a means of introducing myself, I decided to do pro-bono speeches for CEO forums, associations and the like.

I met my first client at a business network dinner. He had spent about ten years in the venture capital business helping finance software companies. His dream was to start his own company. When he learned about my background he asked me if I would help him. Soon I had more coaching clients, almost all coming from referrals, and the career I was meant to pursue had begun. For the first time in my life, I was living on purpose. It was a powerful transition up from directionless approval-seeking, and it woke me up to the power that transitions could have for others.

Discovering Purpose: How will you use your life?

Are you living with purpose? Don't look for someone to tell you. You are the ultimate authority. Your first clue is the amount of positive energy and joy you experience each day. Are you excited when you first wake up? How much of the day is used in activities that you like doing? Are you living your life in accordance with your most deeply held values? Are you making a difference and adding value to something that is important to you and others?

If not a wholehearted "Yes!" to those questions, then the first place to look is within yourself. Before beginning a transition, it is vital to know what moves you and what your core values are.

Write a few pages describing your peak experiences and most vivid memories during your pre-school years, grade school, junior high, high school and early adulthood. What beliefs and values emerged from those experiences? Which ones continue to guide and empower you today? Are you expressing those values in your life and work now?

During those peak experiences, what was the source of your motivation - the need for security; the need to love and be loved; for control; for achievement; or to make a difference? What is driving you now and how does that affect the decisions you are making about your life today?

Chapter Two

In which we learn how awareness and acceptance open you up to accelerated personal growth.

Transition Starts with Reflection

To help clients understand the nature of transition coaching I tell a story to get us started. It's a true story that happened about five years ago. At that time I was 20 pounds heavier than I am right now. Like many men I would look in the mirror and I would say to myself, "You know, for a guy your age, you don't look too bad." I would suck it in a little bit and pull up the belt and tell myself, "For a guy in his 50's you are doing OK!"

Then one day I got out of the shower and was shaving in front of the bathroom mirror. I noticed for the first time that I never let my gaze drop below my chin. I got really curious about that and was suddenly struck with the thought that I was actually avoiding looking at my body. I was afraid to look because of what I would see. Well, I can remember, it was almost like "peeking." I took a quick look down, then another, and finally saw what I had done to myself. That was my first jolt of awareness.

So, I was aware that I weighed much more than I wanted to, but nothing was going to happen unless I was willing to *own* it. By owning it, I mean truly caring about it. Letting my health and my overweight body matter enough for me to do something. And because I wanted to symbolically own it, too, I asked my wife Patsy to come into the bathroom and take pictures of me. And she agreed to take the shots - me standing straight forward and looking at her, me standing sidewise and me with the backside showing: Three pictures of me, bare naked, in all my natural glory. (We didn't have a digital camera then, so I'm sure the guys in the photo lab had a good laugh.)

Although Patsy agreed to take the pictures, she was horrified. She thought I was absolutely nuts. And so did I after we got the pictures back. I looked at them, and it was painful, because it was far worse than what I was seeing through the filter of my own denial, even when I thought I was being “brutally aware.” People say a picture is worth a thousand words, but these pictures were worth more than that. Transitioning can’t happen until the truth is welcomed into consciousness.

My next act of ownership was to put those pictures in a prominent place where I could see them. Of course, we would take them down when company came over, but I had them near the refrigerator and other places where I could see my current reality. It wasn’t long before these constant, painful visual reality-checks did their intended job. It helped me get in touch with my core values, and I committed to do something about it. I took action. The 20 pounds came off, and my transition held. I’ve never gained the pounds back and I’ve never looked back.

When I tell my new client this story, it becomes clear that I am here to be that mirror for him. Maybe he is just “peeking” or afraid to look at what’s real in his life. My role is to show him that reality is friendly, and can inspire him and can work with him to get virtually anything he wants. But that transition won’t happen without his looking in a mirror and reflecting on where he is right now.

My being fat wasn’t a “bad” thing once I decided to use it to get what I really wanted. I was beginning to understand something profound: reality always wants to help. And a true transition depends on first accepting reality for what it is.

Get a daily dose of reality

There are two very simple ways to get started, one is an internal inquiry and the other is external. For an external vantage, ask three to five people who know you well these questions about one of your significant responsibilities- manager, member, or mentor, for example:

- What am I doing extremely well that you would recommend that I keep doing?
- What should I start doing that I am not already doing now?
- What should I stop doing that would improve my effectiveness?

When it comes to your personal life, what do you truly care about - your health , personal relationships, financial freedom, home, fun and recreation, spirituality, personal growth and learning, career, or community? Identify what really matters and then assess your level of satisfaction for your current level of performance in each area on a scale from one to ten, with one being the lowest level of satisfaction. Choose one area to improve during the next 90 days by at least one or two points, from a 3 to a 5, for example.

Chapter Five

In which we learn how courage can always be available.

Transitions can Re-define Courage

Accepting feedback as an invitation has changed my life more than once. One day, almost 15 years ago, I was sitting in a restaurant having lunch with a friend and business mentor when he looked at me and said, “Jim, do you know you didn’t smile at that waiter?”

And I said, “Yeah, so?”

My friend said, “You didn’t even look at him.”

“He got my order, didn’t he?”

“Jim, there’s another human being standing in front of you, being nice to you and you didn’t even acknowledge that. What’s the matter with you?”

I was surprised by what he was saying to me. It was one of those “rap” moments where I felt the sting of the master’s stick. I realized right then and there that I was treating that waiter the same way I was treating my business associates and maybe even my family. I was so wrapped up in my own worries that other people might as well have been robots, like the waiter who had taken my order.

My friend and I started talking about my dismissive way with people when he asked me a question no one had ever asked me before. He said, “Jim, have you ever considered therapy?”

“What do you mean?”

“You just seem so angry. You seem like you are not in a particularly good place.”

Then he shared with me some therapeutic work he himself had done and how he had begun reading Joseph Campbell. He said, “I found in Campbell’s study of mythology great messages of hope. They offered me a whole new perspective on life.”

So I signed up for 10 sessions with a therapist and also started reading Joseph Campbell. I found it to be a wonderful, healing experience. The therapy was my first real complete conversation about the things I had never talked to anybody else about—fears, self-esteem, judgments, and my experiences in Viet Nam.

I also started benefiting from reading Joseph Campbell. Campbell was convinced, through his study of ancient mythology, that anyone’s life could become a hero’s journey—a passionate pursuit of something you really care about. Campbell’s famous prescription for finding your path was to “follow your bliss” and not let fear stop you. To return home and find the true self, the hero always had to first face his greatest fear.

I was really taken by Campbell’s accounts of the mythological journeys of the hero. I didn’t know at the time that his writing was calling to that part of me that would later want to partner with people in facilitating their own heroic transitional journeys out of the darkness of self-limitation to full expression of their potential. That is the ultimate transition waiting for all of us.

At that time, more than 20 years ago, it was also connecting with a different yearning inside me—something I didn’t fully understand. All my life it had seemed that there was always something calling me to be more than I am. For example, I had always been attracted to heroes. I’d grown up in the 50’s and 60’s when westerns were prominent in the popular culture. I was spellbound by western myths and heroes: John Wayne... Alan Ladd in the movie *Shane*... Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape* and all those wonderful courageous characters.

In my ten sessions of therapy, I felt part of my journey moving forward. I learned that the things that were limiting me—recklessness, irresponsible behavior or seeking danger—were not genetic. I didn't have to be like my father - a World War II Army Air Corps officer and my earliest hero - who had been sometimes an angry, wayward and daring youth. Once I could recognize my own nonsense and process it, and forgive it, I was better able to understand and accept the personal challenge of others. Transitioning is at first an inside job, a process of looking inward and finding the truth about yourself.

Through reading Joseph Campbell I realized that my yearning was not unique. Many people, from all cultures and from all periods of recorded history experience the same yearning—the same desire to know their strengths and use them fully, and to find their purpose and make a contribution. Or, as George Bernard Shaw said, “This is the true joy in life, to be used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.”

I thought I had been burned out and bored by my external circumstance in corporate America, but I can now see that I was suffering more from an internal lack of vision. As the poet David Whyte has said, the cure for exhaustion is not rest. It is wholeheartedness! As my “successful” life as a business executive was proving, my own exhaustion was caused by living my life through an identity created to fulfill the expectation of others.

This driven but “successful” identity I'd worked feverishly to create was an attempt to win approval by demonstrating courage and strength. A striving to be more than I was. A transition waiting to happen.

I had tested myself like this before. After my sophomore year in college, I was drafted by the U.S. Army. I could have joined another branch of the service like the Navy or the Air Force, but I joined the infantry so I could experience action in Viet Nam. I needed to prove something. I was looking for validation.

This had been a lifelong quest. Early on, even in childhood, I started to listen and look for what was missing - in me and in the world. My fight with reality had started at an early age.

In a bizarre way, this behavior seemed to serve me. I could find what's missing and fulfill it! I could be the one who sees what's wrong and makes it the way things should be. I developed a keen eye for imperfection. I could spot it a mile away. Even better, I could see ways to improve it and then fix it. That particular habit of mind, seeing imperfection, became my source of success...and my greatest limitation.

The love, the rewards and the recognition I received for constantly challenging and improving the status quo were addictive. I was never satisfied. I couldn't get enough of it to ever feel fulfilled. How could I? Nothing could ever be good enough, including me. It was only a thought, but it was powerful enough to create how I experienced the world.

But even up to very recently I was struggling with thoughts of whether something was still missing—some element of courage—or maybe courage itself. When I first met my current coach, Steve Hardison - an extraordinary, challenging charismatic man - I could see that if I agreed to work with him he wouldn't let me off the hook. I knew that I would have to face what I had been avoiding for decades. I told him, "I don't know if I have the courage to work with you."

Immediately he stopped me short and explained that courage is not something anybody has. It's not like brown eyes or blue eyes—it's not a characteristic. It is merely a creation - a thought. It can be created by anyone. Or not. And what would be at play here would not be whether I had the courage to work with him. It would be whether I would create the courage to work on *myself*.

In that unforgettable moment with Steve Hardison I understood courage in a new way. I could suddenly see that courage was an always-available choice for action. And that I could generate any action I wanted if I could understand and change my thoughts.

Your New Story

“Our stories are our destinies. Everything we do, with or without our conscious knowledge, helps to shape our stories. Stories either take us where we want to go or they don’t.” Jim Loehr

How will the next chapter in your life story begin? To create a new story, it is often helpful to first discover your “voice.” After all, it’s your story that *expresses* who you are. Stephen Covey in *The 8th Habit* suggests that your voice is your “unique personal significance.” It can be discovered at the “nexus of talent, passion, need and conscious.”

This nexus is the seedbed of courage. Notice when you are present to your talent, passion, sense of right doing and a true need, that you have access to all the courage you need to overcome any challenge or limitation. You are unstoppable.

Long before Covey had created this powerful concept called voice, I helped my clients create new stories by expressing the very elements of what Covey calls “voice”. These questions might help you discover your own unique significance.

1. Identify what draws you:

- What are the interests, pursuits, or other ideas that attract you?
- What are the things you really care about?
- What causes or issues do you follow?
- What trends or developments capture your attention?
- What do you like to read for relaxation?
- What hobbies or leisure activities do you like?
- What were your favorite classes in college?
- What do you wish you had studied but didn’t?

2. Create an inventory of your skills and talents:

- Which areas of work related skills/functions/tasks do you feel you are talented or do really well? Not skilled?
 - What work related activities/tasks do you enjoy or love doing? Don't like doing?
 - What special knowledge do you possess?
 - List all of your jobs - no matter how small. Note which contributions, achievements or results you are most proud of.
 - Do the same with any aspect of your life since childhood - note peak experiences, things you are really proud of.
 - In each case, think about what the challenge was; the action or steps you took; and the result you produced.
3. **Discover a need you can serve.** Imagine an ideal environment - a place where you truly belong and can make a difference: Create the ideal size, culture, growth stage, resources, market, customers, services, products, etc. The library has great resources for this kind of research.
4. **Finally, begin your journey today.** What action will you generate to create the next chapter in your own story today? What is the one thing you can do now to move forward into your future?

COMMITMENT

“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would otherwise never have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising one’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.” I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe’s couplets:

‘Whatever you can do, or dream you can... begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.’” W. N. Murray The Scottish Himalayan Expedition, 1951

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