

Your Career Your Life – Sample Chapters

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Week 13

Separation

Extraordinary goals attract resistance

In the fourth century BCE, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle of Stagirus, invented a model that has since been used by many playwrights and storytellers, called ‘The hero’s journey’. This dramatic model can mirror your real life-course when, during the pursuit of your goals, the going gets tough. The first part of this book laid the foundation for attaining your goals. This next section will prepare you for the resistance you will experience as you start to execute your plan.

Resistance accompanies all movement, change or growth in life.

Adriaan Groenewald

The playful approach of seeing yourself as a type of superhero will ensure that you not to take yourself too seriously and remind you that the road leads to success if you persevere. Heroes always reach their goals! The model of the hero’s journey also shows you that the trials you experience come with the territory.

The extraordinariness of your goal rips you out of the status quo world. This is the moment when you begin to move away from your usual experiences. You may be so engrossed in the way forward that the loneliness of the Separation Phase of your journey catches you off-guard. More of that later.

After receiving an opportunity to prove yourself, for instance through a promotion or a new boss, you may experience a change in office dynamics you had no idea would happen. As a result of your new responsibilities, for example, you may have to instruct or correct a former colleague. At that point, you may encounter unexpected resistance. You may also lose your feeling of belonging to a familiar group of people when you sense a sudden lack of trust or pick up a degree of suspicion from your former peers as you start to climb the corporate ladder. At the same time, you may not yet feel connected enough to your new peers on the management team. All of this is painful and can make you feel insecure.

You probably don't understand what is happening: you have not changed, you are still you – why this opposition? Where do you fit in? Everything was fine until you got serious about moving ahead...

It is true that things are different now – the result of your 'Call to Adventure'. This is simply a part of the process you go through as you set out to accomplish something bigger. You could look at these peers as your 'threshold guardian'. In the Hero's Journey, the hero must step over the threshold from status quo world into the world of adventure. As he senses the danger but also the opportunity of change, he encounters this threshold guardian, a type of gatekeeper, that tests the hero's competence before he may proceed. At this point already some people 'refuse the call' - they give up right here and then. This is ok because it is their choice. However, if you answer the call, over time, you will show your former peers that you still care for them. You will regain their trust and acceptance despite, or even because of, your new, more influential role.

***The scars you acquire by exercising courage
will never make you feel inferior.***

D A Battista

The higher you aim, the more obstacles you have to overcome. Ask any leader or person of significant success and they will tell you that a good part of their day is spent dealing with hindrances. Big goals attract resistance. You will not be able to avoid times of conflict or unease. An easy race and a huge prize are mutually exclusive. If the feat were easy to achieve, it would no longer be significant enough to yield a great reward.

Resistance is always an indication of progression. In fact, in the Hero's Journey, the wise hero always recognises that an encounter with a threshold guardian, ie resistance, is a signal that he is progressing. Think of running against the force of a strong wind: the faster you want to advance, the more resistance you will have to overcome. The moment you stand still, the effort required to withstand the wind's force is reduced; yet now you are going nowhere! You can experience the same thing when you go sailing. Without wind, without any resistance to the sails, you just float powerlessly over the water. Resistance allows you to move forward. Moving forward gives you the chance to steer.

If you experience resistance, you are probably on the right track. Harness and direct the power of resistance. Working *with* what comes up against you induces the fastest growth and leads to the farthest progression.

Note that your call to adventure demands *separation*, not isolation. You need to connect with people in order to achieve greatness. The more people are involved in the achievement of a goal, the greater will be the outcome. However, this also applies to your struggle. We rarely have

trouble with ,things‘. If we do, we can fix the problem. Complications flare up as soon as we depend on another person to make something happen. This is not because people want to stop you or to be difficult. The problem, once again, is incongruence, and this time it extends to a person outside of yourself. It is then prudent to bring what you want in line with something that benefits the other person as well.

There is an well-known abbreviation for this situation: WIFM – ,What’s in it for me?‘, which in our case becomes ,What’s in it for the other person (WIFOP)?‘ WIFOP is not restricted to money or material rewards. Even a warm (genuine) smile can provide an incentive to engage another person’s goodwill.

Try the following. Next time you want to change lanes in rush-hour traffic, indicate, make eye contact and smile directly at the driver behind your shoulder. Few people will resist you. As in traffic, so in the rest of your life. Make every interaction an attractive one. Sowing these seeds of attraction will help you to achieve your goals more quickly.

Every hero’s journey involves a guide, who helps the hero through and beyond the separation phase. Your guide is your supporter or mentor. This is not necessarily a physical or a spiritual being; in fact, it could simply be the secret formula, common sense.

You can appoint your own guide(s). Your mentor can be someone you admire, a role-model. Even if these mentors never speak a single word to you personally, they are accessible. You can study their principles; listen to their talks; read their literature; or research articles and books about them. At a recent leadership breakfast in Johannesburg, I learnt that many of our country’s business

leaders rose to the top without a specific, dedicated mentor. However, all spoke about having had something or someone to provide them with guidelines. Nobody actively coached them, or spent time with them. But situations, books, their own conscience and role-models (dead or alive) gave them the support they needed.

Many up-and-coming people in the workplace have heard about the concept of mentorship. They expect someone to hold their hand day by day and are disappointed when others do not pamper them with their time. If you do have someone coaching you on a regular basis, you are blessed. Be thankful for, and to, the person who is grooming you for the future. If you do not have a direct mentor, ask yourself, 'what would my role-model do?' There was a time at my last company when my boss travelled extensively. When I needed advice during those absences, I simply asked myself, 'What would our CEO do?', I always got an answer. I did not always follow that advice at first, because it was hard to execute. Yet, invariably, I would end up going that route, sometimes after painful delays. You can find all the answers and resources you need, when you need them. Your internal helper will point you in their direction.

With your mentor by your side, you will now begin your descent into the world of night, eventually reaching your road of trials.

Week 14

Descent into the world of night

Dealing with unexpected events and disappointment

Opportunity hardly ever arrives without opposition. The greater your chance to shine, the more you will be provoked. Things will not work out as planned. People will let you down in the most unexpected ways. An organisation may not follow through on a commitment or provide a service you have paid for. A board or committee may turn down your proposal. Do not make this personal. Never look at other people as your enemies – instead view mishaps as stepping-stones that will lead you to an even greater achievement.

Our challenges are only stepping-stones to our desired goals.

From the Jamaican movie, Glory to Gloriana

Every rejection you endure will improve your next attempt and perfect its outcome. I once watched a television interview with a taxi driver who had become a novelist. The programme was about the success of her debut novel, *Taxi*. A few years earlier, the author had sent her manuscript to numerous publishers, who had turned it down. The reporter asked her if those publishers had ‘missed it’. She laughed and replied that it was a good thing that the book had been rejected at first, because it had been ‘really bad’. She said that the publishers knew what they were doing when they turned it down. ‘This one’, she said, ‘is much better’. Of course, it is easy to say this in hindsight. In the midst of your struggle, though, it is important to remind yourself that you are on a hero’s journey. If you persevere, there will be a happy ending.

You may even become disappointed in yourself. During your journey, your mind or body may let you down. You may get flu or lose your voice just when you need to make an important speech. An objection stumps you, you cannot recall an important piece of information or your knees go weak and your mouth dries up just when you want to appear particularly strong.

An unexpected but common source of problems is people who are close to us – our own friends and family. We already talked about trouble with peers, but even the ‘good advice’ of well-meaning friends may turn into an unexpected challenge.

You may also experience opposition from nature itself! A sudden downpour could prevent you from arriving on time for an appointment. In his book, *Story*, Robert McKee points out that time, space, and everything in the universe can put up a fight to prevent you from reaching your goals. Any action from which you anticipate a certain outcome may fail to deliver this outcome. You then need to take another action, knowing that this second way requires more effort than the first to get to where you want to go. McKee reminds us that in nature, creatures expend only the minimum effort necessary. Only when hunger sets in does the lioness go out to hunt. This is a wise use of resources. This principle is the same for humans. We all start out with the least effort required and build up from there. In a particular business, you may have thought that XYZ would do the trick; yet as it turned out, this action pushed you even further away from your goal than you were to begin with.

When this happens, take a rectangular piece of paper, turn it sideways to give yourself more room, and draw six

vertical lines across the page. Write down what you thought would happen (under the heading ,Expectation‘) in the first column; and what did happen (under the heading ,Event‘) in the second. Then identify your ,Consequence‘, ,Gap‘ and ,Next Step‘ in the next three columns, as well as realistic preventative measures for the future in the last column (,Prevention‘). This logical approach will clear your mind of any unhelpful emotions and redirect your attention to where it needs to be.

For example, the following three situations could be re-directed as shown in the simple table below.

- Ben is supposed to give you a lift to work. You have an important meeting at 8 a.m. Ben does not arrive.
- Mary offered to type up a report for you. She went home early intending to finish it the next day. The next day, she called in sick.
- Tom assures you that there will be no electricity cut this Friday. You will definitely manage to have the tender in by 4 p.m. At 1 p.m., the power goes out.

Expectation	Event	Consequence	Gap	Next step	Prevention
Attend meeting at 8 a.m. to discuss revised marketing strategy	Ben forgot to fetch me	Can't discuss my ideas and plans with marketing team	Transport	Set up telephonic conference	Call or sms Ben to remind him
Present report to board regarding new branch	Mary sick	Information not ready	Resources	Pull Tina off her other work to finish report	Build in buffer zone
Finish tender and hand in on time	No power	Contract lost	No back-up	Drive to East Rand office	Laptop, extra battery, memory stick

The Event column refers to events that catch people off-guard. Because such events happen regularly, many successful people quote resilience as their most important success factor. They are able to bounce back after receiving this type of ‚surprise‘.

Defining the Consequence ensures that you stay focused on what needs to happen next. For instance, if you see the consequence of scenario one (Ben) as ‚late for meeting‘, this will limit you to choices around getting another lift. This is fine to a point, but the wider your pool of choices, the better. It pays to drill down one or two levels deeper. Why do you want to attend the meeting? US Author John Demartini teaches that our choices are not limited to ‚this or that‘ but instead comprise ‚this, that, both and neither‘. ‚Neither‘ frees you from being locked in and opens up a whole range of opportunities and choices that fall outside the three obvious ones. Option ‚Neither‘ is a real treasure-chest.

Identifying the Gap means working out precisely what caused the problem. What, exactly, was needed that was not readily available? Focus on matter and fact, not on blaming people. In scenario one, the gap is not that Ben let you down. To preserve relationships, you should view people disappointing you as an event, something that happened rather than something that was done to you. The gap is actually one level deeper – in our first example, it is the lack of transport.

The Next Step is the most critical moment in your analysis, but is often the most neglected. This is the point at which you have to keep moving. Inertia at the first obstacle will almost certainly kill the goal. Successful people drive over an obstacle, negotiate their way past it, navigate

through it or bore under it. When there seems to be no way through, they find one. When they cannot find a way, they create one. And should the next step also fail, they switch courses yet again.

We draw our lessons for the future from the Prevention column. As the hero of your life, you cannot allow yourself to fall into the same hole time after time. US singer and actress Portia Nelson, who lived for over eighty years, managed to write her autobiography in five short chapters⁶. She entitled it *There is a Hole in my Sidewalk*, and this is what she had to say on the subject:

I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost. I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk
I see it is there.
I still fall in. It's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault. I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

Following this fruitful detour, we go back to our hero's journey, which is still taking place in the night world. As your actions increase in severity, you are descending deeper into the world of night. At this stage you may well begin to question the validity of what you want to achieve. You are now entering the 'night of the soul'. In this dark place, you must face the truth and examine yourself, your values, motives and capacity. What you believed would happen did not happen, and this has thrown your world upside down. You are facing another step that will be uncomfortable to take; or you really don't know anymore what to do next. This is the moment when action loses its predictability almost entirely and you have to take a risk. A hero, at this time, takes any action rather than none.

A hero cannot remain stuck, or crawl under the duvet. Heroes do not stick their heads in the sand or go into denial when things do not go their way. Heroes do not resign or permit their dreams to end. They press on. If you want to achieve anything significant, change tactics if necessary, but keep on moving.

You will soon be entering the initiation phase of your hero's journey – so prepare yourself.

Difficulties increase the nearer we approach the goal.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Week 15

Initiation

The importance of taking action

The steps you now contemplate may put you seriously at risk. You are face to face with the ,cost of opportunity‘. As McKee puts it, ,You now stand to lose in order to gain‘. At this point, it may feel as if doing nothing is the safer choice; you may also start to believe that it may be a good idea to ,let sleeping dogs lie‘. I have worked with people who do this. I have done it myself!

This is a hard part of the journey. Initiation is the point where, it seems, you have no strength or wisdom left. When you are here, doing nothing seems like an attractive choice. However, doing nothing will give you nothing. Therefore, what you need to do is to take even stronger action, exercise even more control, increase your involvement, display a stronger presence, and take greater risks. This is where the romance of ,whatever it takes‘ shrinks down to plain hard work.

This is no exaggeration. If you want to accomplish anything noteworthy, you will eventually reach this moment. There will be trouble, and risk, which is why big goals are for heroes only. If you do not take risks, you cannot reach your big goals.

Taking risks implies that we may actually get hurt. We cannot be safe or right one hundred per cent of the time when we take a risk, because then it would not be a risk! This is part of living a life that is rich and rewarding. Real life is about risk. It may be a cliché to say that every time you leave your house to accomplish something, you are taking a risk. But there is no better way of stating this fact. Imagine never leaving your house! This would be an even greater danger. You would open yourself up to depression,

to becoming weird, and to ill-health and poverty. Many people avoid risk or action owing to bad experiences, but they do not take into account that doing nothing will not protect them against getting hurt, at least not in the long term. In fact, people who do not take action typically end up getting worse and worse over time. It is fine to acknowledge and mourn past hurts, but grieving can take you only so far. To bring about real healing, you need to change your experiences. Changing your experiences implies action, and action implies risk. This also applies to your career.

The definition of insanity is doing the same things repeatedly and expecting a different result.

Albert Einstein

Of course, like most other people, you want life to be easy; yet what is easy for you may not be the easiest thing for your supplier, your client, your colleague or your boss. A few years ago, when my role at work became more managerial and operational, I experienced a real shock when I started to deal more intensely with some of our company's suppliers and service providers and found out that they did not act in accordance with our company values. I felt quite lost. I asked myself, 'Don't they know the rules?', and was compelled to answer, 'They do. But they have clearly decided to ignore them.' My wishes and goals for the company remained unfulfilled. I became angry, disappointed and sad, and blamed others for my discontent. I experienced relief only when I understood that my expectations had been unreasonable at the start. The results I desired started to come once I accepted reality and started working on 'What's in it for me?' on behalf of others.

Make this approach work for you. Perhaps you work in the data-processing department of a large company and are surrounded by demotivated peers. On some days, it may feel as if you are keeping the entire team aloft through your personal effort alone. Do not become pessimistic or cynical. Recognise the opportunity in this. If you carry more responsibility, handle a greater workload and remain faithful to your company's values even under difficult circumstances, it will only be a matter of time before this gives you exposure. Exposure is crucial for moving up in a company, but you can only obtain it through action. Taking action means exposing yourself to other people's scrutiny and this means becoming vulnerable.

This is precisely why we like to shy away from taking action and taking risks.

Do not tell me how good you are. Show me.
Seen in a biology lab at Bryanston High School

Look at all the difficulties that are around you and in your way constructively, and use what appears to be against you to rise to a higher level. Fill the gaps, close the loops, shift gear, change direction, step up the pace and take action. Caribbean author Myles Munroe cautions us against over-activity, though. He explains that often we may be active, but are not advancing. When we are clear on the next step, which takes us to the next milestone, which takes us to the ultimate goal, we ensure true progress.

Human exertion creates the forward motion that narrows the distance between you and your target.

A plan does not progress by itself. Every goal needs a driver...