



The Happy Hero's Journey

Tipping the Balance towards Serving Others

By Michelle Gielan

As a computer engineering student in college, I didn't get to take many elective classes, which didn't bode well for my social life. After taking required science courses, I had just four courses I could choose that would allow me to mingle with liberal arts students. I decided on a class called The Hero's Journey, thinking I might meet a dreamy man...

Instead, I met literature geeks and learned about the struggles heroes like Odysseus and Gautama Buddha went through to find themselves and return home. It's a journey so many of us have made recently through struggles with finances, health scares, or taking a leap of faith to start a new business. On our hero's journey, we step out of our comfort zone, face real challenges, and then return home anew. And often it promises happiness in the end.

What I've come to see since my collegiate days—and since becoming a happiness researcher—is that the hero's journey cannot end with simply coming home; if we stop there, we risk not finding happiness at all. The key is what we do after the journey. My research points to the conclusion that the true hero's journey has a happy ending *only if* it ends with being of service.

Some of the most influential people in history learned from their journey and came back not only to change the world, but to help the people in their lives become happy and successful. From Nelson Mandela to Tom's Shoes founder Blake Mycoskie to Zappos.com's Tony Hsieh and Jenn Lim, our modern day heroes serve others. In business, servant leaders are more concerned with helping employees achieve their potential than with leading them solely towards higher profits.

In my upcoming book *Broadcasting Happiness*, we look at how to improve business outcomes through authentic positive leadership, of which servant leadership is a big part. Research shows that anyone at any level of an organization can be a driver of success through positive communication. By taking a realistic assessment of challenges and broadcasting an optimistic vision of how to tackle them, each of us has the potential to fuel better business outcomes. The key is realizing your power to influence others.

The best heroes make other heroes. That's the real hero's journey. The largest part of creating a culture of success and happiness is rooted in one of the biggest components of servant leadership—providing social support. When we support others, we fuel our own success. We do this by helping them when they are falling behind, lending a listening ear when they are stressed, and mentoring those new to the organization.

Just like no hero is born without conflict or challenge, no hero is able to sustain happiness without ultimately tipping the balance in favor of others once he returns home. Help others today on their journey to create success and happiness through servant leadership and you'll find the true meaning of being a hero.

MICHELLE GIELAN is founder of the Institute for Applied Positive Research. When not traveling the world, Michelle and her husband Shawn Achor reside in Virginia with their baby son Leo.

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