

LeaderShift: Authenticity

A.C.T. Authentic: The Hero’s Journey to Self

By Joe Hunt

It’s relatively common: you’ve got all your ducks in a row, established some healthy routines, and you’re comfortably progressing on your career path. Then “bam!” you hit a wall. You’re stuck. You wake up knowing something’s missing and you don’t know what it is.

It may be a mid-life thing, but it can happen early on, and it also strikes toward the end of one’s career. In that moment of stuckness, we are faced with three choices: go back, stand still and stagnate, or jump ahead to an uncertain future.

Welcome to the hero’s journey, a story which has been told and retold in many different ways in every culture throughout the world. Joseph Campbell wrote about this phenomenon in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in which he examines mythic figures such as Jonah, Odysseus, and King Arthur.

The hero’s journey begins with a call or a problem that we can’t ignore, but which requires we discard outmoded ways of being. To learn what we need to answer the call, we risk facing unknown challenges.

To refuse the hero’s call is to stagnate and die. To move forward we must change--but we don’t know exactly how. The hero engages in the serious work of self-assessment, reflection, and painful exploration of his insufficiencies and failings.

To undertake the hero’s journey is to question everything, but particularly oneself. How can we accept ourselves in spite of our doubts and insecurities? How do we gain confidence to lead others knowing our weaknesses? The hero faces self-discovery with brutal honesty to become more authentic and real.

The paradox of the hero’s journey is that when you accept and incorporate the parts of yourself that you’d rather not acknowledge or share, you gain tremendous energy. As you integrate your whole self you become more authentically you, your best self.

While we may never become heroes like Mandela, King, Churchill, or the Dalai Lama, everyone can become more authentic and capable of heroic acts. This requires attention and mindfulness as well as connectedness and compassion. The journey doesn’t have a final destination. It meanders, so you need to be vigilant, pay attention, stay connected and focus your intentions in order to transform and create a life full of meaning.



Three Steps to Self

How do you become your best self? How do you learn to act like a hero? According to author Greg Giuliano in *The Hero's Journey: Toward a More Authentic Leadership*, the journey to self is a perpetual three-part process, abbreviated by the letters A.C.T:

1. **Attend to Who You Are:** First, we pay attention to who we are and where we are right now. This involves being mindful and engaging in honest self-reflection.
2. **Connect with Your Best Self:** Second, we connect with ourselves and recognize when we are our truest and best self.
3. **Transform Your Life:** Lastly, we seek to transform, to be intentional and create the life that is the most accurate expression of who, what, and where we want to be.

Attend to Who You Are

Can you make an honest assessment of where you're at in life right now? How do you perceive yourself intellectually, cognitively, emotionally, physically, socially, sexually, and spiritually at this point in your life?

Many people find having such conversations with a coach to be revealing and helpful. Sometimes tools such as the Wheel of Life can help elucidate your different roles and how you experience a sense of meaning and fulfillment.

When you find that some of your answers cause sadness or disappointment, this suggests that you want your answers to be different. Ask yourself, *"What will it take for me to be able to answer differently?"*

Connect with Your Best Self

What will you do with the information you discover when you pay attention to where and who you are? The next step is to connect with your best self by expressing your deeply held values, beliefs, and principles, as well as your skills and strengths.

Each time you use your strengths and express your values, recognize them as gifts. Find meaning and purpose in every moment of life, including those that are less than ideal. Seek out the answer to this question:

"What am I doing here, and what is my life for?" Find out what resources and goals you will need to move forward.

Transform Your Life

When you've taken a brutally honest assessment of yourself and connected to what and where you could or should go, you are ready to take the next step.

Transformation is a bold act of renovation, of stepping into life. It is clearly intentional.

IF YOU'RE YOUR
authentic self,
YOU HAVE NO
COMPETITION.



Transformation is conscious self-definition. But it's no good without a plan, without taking action. It doesn't just happen, and this is where many people falter. Changing attitudes, beliefs, and habits that are a deeply engrained part of our self will require undoing and redoing.

**Authenticity =
Self-Awareness x Courage**

It requires courage, practice, and self-discipline. It takes time and perseverance; however, eventually the meandering path that you are on will become clear and meaningful.

King Arthur had Merlin, Harry Potter had Professor Dumbledore, and Luke Skywalker had Obi Wan Kenobi. You don't have to take on the hero's journey alone. Get a coach, a mentor, or a trusted colleague to help you along the way.

Take the journey and you may be surprised where it leads you.

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