A Hero’s Journey for the Practitioner

When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness. —Joseph Campbell

When you follow your bliss… doors will open where you would not have thought there would be doors, and where there wouldn’t be a door for anyone else. —Joseph Campbell

Post 1

The Change Practitioner’s Path: A Hero’s Journey

Many consider Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) to be the greatest mythologist of our time. His interpretation and application of ancient myths have had a huge impact on comparative religion, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and art. Among his many accomplishments, Campbell identified an archetypal form that has served as the general story outline for many influential religions, legends, epic novels, and even movies (Star Wars, The Matrix, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and The Wizard of Oz are examples).

In his book, The Hero With a Thousand Faces, Campbell explains how this framework can be used to describe the phases people go through when claiming their true nature:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons (gifts) on his fellow man.

He calls this mythical story structure “The Hero’s Journey.”

Leading dramatic change typically provides clients with numerous chances to uncover strengths and weaknesses they didn’t previously know they had. I’m talking about personal characteristics that can be revealed only when someone is immersed in powerful struggles. As practitioners, we can use the basic elements of The Hero’s Journey as an interpretive lens to enrich our understanding of these struggles and gain a better appreciation of our clients’ actions, aspirations, fears, concerns, etc. It offers a wonderful depiction of the personal metamorphosis
that sometimes unfolds during deep, enterprise-level change. We can then share the framework with clients, if we choose, to help them see their behaviors, emotions, and inclinations in new ways.

What does the story reveal about us as heroes?

Client application of Campbell’s mythical structure is definitely something I recommend if you haven’t done so before. In this series, however, I want to turn The Hero’s Journey lens back on us to expose facets of our maturation as change professionals that possibly haven’t surfaced for us before. Let’s employ Campbell’s framework to learn more about how our own heroic odyssey can make us better practitioners.

The Four Chapters of the Odyssey

Over the years, the titles for Campbell’s main stages of the Journey have morphed into various iterations, but for this writing, I would like to use four terms:

1. DEPARTURE—The hero’s situation is shaken up, either from external pressures or from something rising up from deep within, so he or she must face the beginnings of change. Major change only occurs when the pain of the status quo is significantly greater than the pain of transition. Often, the hero begins the Journey by reaching within to a source of courage; if fortunate, a mentor might appear to offer guidance, inspiration, and wisdom. Feeling the fear of the unknown, the hero might try to turn away from the adventure, but ultimately leaves the ordinary world and enters a different one.

2. INITIATION—The Hero’s Journey is a story of personal transformation. As such, the hero departs the status quo with, at best, less-than-complete clarity as to the end state, and an insufficient understanding of the obstacles that will be encountered along the way. Initially, it is a walk into the wilderness. Moving through Initiation, the hero is tested, often encountering challenges that could never have been imagined. Along the way, however, he or she also gains new insights, uncovers new abilities, and is joined by new coaches and mentors. The hero prepares for the major challenge in the new world.

3. SLAYING THE DRAGON—We each have our own inner struggles and worst nightmares. These are the dragons we cower from when they tell us to stop being who we are. We project them into events, situations, or people in the world around us, but they primarily lie within us. During this stage of the Journey, the hero’s inner dragon is awakened. The hero faces, battles, and overcomes his or her ultimate fear. Out of the intense struggle comes new understanding, and perhaps even a new direction in life.

4. RETURN—The Journey is, by definition, transformational. The hero returns a different person than he or she was at the time of departure. For each who makes the Journey, the changes are profound, and uniquely their own. The hero arrives home bearing some element of the treasure that has the power to transform the world, just as the hero has been transformed. Nonetheless, each faces new challenges at re-entry: “How do I integrate the new me into the old world I once inhabited?” “When, with whom, and how

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1 I’m providing a simplistic sketch of how each of the four stages can have a bearing on change practitioners’ development. Campbell’s work related to The Hero’s Journey is extensive, deeply profound, and filled with powerful insights. In no way can I do justice to the piercing wisdom of his contributions in a blog format. I will be addressing just a small portion of what he has so eloquently elaborated on in his writings, lectures, and the stellar Public Broadcasting Service series of interviews with Bill Moyer. Rather than attempt to summarize the full extent of his contribution, I’m hoping to offer only enough of a glimpse into Campbell’s genius that anyone unfamiliar with his perspectives will be enticed to delve further into his material for themselves.
do I share the wealth (whatever forms it may take) that I have gained along the way?"

The Return severely tests the hero once more; in the process, he or she gains an even higher and more complete level of understanding.

Here is the same outline, as told in the Hobbit\(^2\).

Bilbo Baggins is an average hobbit who lives a comfortable, eventless life in Middle Earth in a tidy little cottage dug into the side of a hill. One day, his friend, Gandalf the wizard, asks Bilbo to accompany him and 13 dwarves on a quest. The dwarves want to reclaim the gold that was stolen from them. It is guarded by a dragon in a cave. Bilbo has no interest in going on an adventure, and doesn’t understand why Gandalf has chosen him. Finally, though, Bilbo gathers the courage to rise to the challenge. He joins the others and embarks on his Journey.

Bilbo, with newfound nerve, goes to spy on a band of trolls, but gets caught. Gandalf, acting as his helper on the Journey, rescues him. The group is later chased by goblins deep inside a mountain and Bilbo becomes separated from the group. He is alone in a dark cave when he finds another helper, The Ring. With it, he is able to escape from the goblins and Gollum (a cave dweller), and find his own way out of the mountain. He is treated with more respect by the dwarves and becomes more confident of his abilities.

Bilbo encounters many other dangerous and risky challenges on his Journey—Wargs, giant spiders, rescuing the dwarves when they are captured, and more. Each test makes him braver and gives him more experience.

All these challenges are nothing compared to the biggest challenge of all, however—slaying the dragon. Here, he has to confront his worst fears and overcome them—alone. He succeeds in taking a beautiful gold cup from the mountain of treasure guarded by Smaug, the dragon. His transformation is complete. He has changed from someone who was pushed reluctantly out of his banal life, to a courageous, wise person who is respected and admired.

Bilbo really comes into his own, however, when he finds, and then relinquishes, a stone of great significance to the leader of the dwarves. He does what is right, which is the final test. Gandalf says, “There is more about Bilbo than anyone expects.” Bilbo receives his share of the treasure, but also maintains his courage and perceptive mind forever.

The adventure is apparently over, and Bilbo returns to his old life. Expecting to contribute in a new way at Hobbiton, he learns instead that his fellow hobbits presumed he had died (he was gone for almost a year). They are reluctant to accept that he is alive and back; even when they do, they think he is strange and peculiar. Bilbo isn’t sorry about any of it, though. Even though he resumes many of his regular habits, he will never see the world in the same way again.

**The Journey to Who We Are**

When applying the story to ourselves as change facilitators, The Hero’s Journey becomes a lens through which we can view our own professional “coming of age.”

In an earlier series, we explored the distinction between *what we do* as change practitioners and *who we are*. The latter refers to how our character and presence influences those we serve. In a subsequent post, I described some of the implications for cultivating character—delving into the

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\(^2\) The Hobbit was written by J.R.R. Tolkien and first published in 1937. It is also a motion picture trilogy directed by Peter Jackson.
core of our true nature to uncover and nurture the essence we bring forward and the resulting value we generate for clients when we do.

The Hero’s Journey offers a framework that can provide context and perspective to the experience of coming to terms with ourselves as the most important asset we have to offer clients. There are three aspects to this kind of introspective undertaking:

- Learning and accepting who we really are after our facades are stripped away
- Authentically and boldly coming forward with our true nature so clients have full access to its value
- Working with clients who recognize and resonate with the Character/Presence Package we represent

Pursuing these kinds of activities entails self-examination at a very personal level that often means exploring unfamiliar, emotionally laden territory. As such, it is virtually impossible to keep an objective orientation about what is happening as it happens. Most people understandably become lost in the experience and can’t maintain a “big picture” sense of what is unfolding.

Having The Hero’s Journey as a compass to regain our bearing when in the midst of, or sometimes following, a significant developmental transition can be very beneficial. The full extent of Campbell’s framework involves much more than the stages I’ve focused on in this series; I’ve treated even these four phases in a cursory manner, but one I hope is also respectful to the depth of his work. Yet, even with only this partial application, much can be learned when using the Journey’s imagery and construct to decipher the process of finding, reclaiming, and leveraging the true core of who we are as change practitioners.

Metaphor Cautions

That said, as with any metaphor, we have to be careful not to let the tail wag the dog. Sometimes, when using symbolism to examine human behavior, the object takes a back seat to the metaphor used to represent it. I found this to be the case after introducing the “burning platform” story in the 1990s. For some people, telling the story became more important than the points about change it was originally meant to portray. The metaphor, not the messages it pointed to, became the center of attention for some people; as a result, the burning platform anecdote took on a life of its own.

In addition, the simplistic, chronological nature of the stories depicted by metaphors can become a double-edged sword. On one hand, they help us see through many of the complexities of the real world. If taken too literally, however, they can also lead to more misrepresentation than enlightenment. For example, the four stages of the Journey I’m focusing on here appear to reflect a logical sequence of events: Departure leads to Initiation, then the protagonist moves on to Slaying the Dragon, and finally engages Return. Viewed from a mythical perspective, one phase of the odyssey is completed before the next is encountered, which makes for great storytelling but a lousy portrayal of reality.

A metaphor is a simple story pointing to complex truth…it’s important not to confuse the straightforwardness of the tale with the convoluted ambiguity of actually living life. Not only do the four phases play themselves out on top of each other, producing an overlapping of their respective implications, but they are recursive in nature rather than being nice, neat narratives with a beginning, middle, and end.

The Hero’s Journey is a wonderful aid to our understanding of who we are, as long as we don’t lose sight of the limitations and cautions. Applying it for what it is—a rudimentary map of the terrain to be navigated—we can use it to help regain our equilibrium and a sense of direction when in the midst of reacquainting ourselves with our true nature.
With the proper precautions applied, metaphors can be an invaluable mechanism for self-discovery. For example, much like Bilbo, we must all transcend certain limitations before we can be released from whatever binds us to our static status quo. If we don't overcome these restraints, our professional journeys of growth will stall. The myth of The Hero’s Journey preserves a timeless truth that points the way to learning these lessons.

In the next post, you’ll be introduced to Sara, a professional change agent who’s waking up to who she really is. Her story parallels the path of The Hero’s Journey. As we follow her, I invite you to examine the degree to which her story reflects some of your own Journey.

Post 2

The Practitioner’s Journey: Departure

In the first post of this series, I offered a high-level overview of Joseph Campbell’s The Hero’s Journey, using The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien as a point of reference. Going forward, I hope to draw out some specific implications of the hero archetype and relate them to the path many seasoned change practitioners (my intended audience) follow as they come to terms with how they work with clients. In addition, I’ll offer some related questions that I hope will be worth pondering.

Here is the basic storyline: The hero pursues a series of adventures that takes her beyond the safety of her ordinary life in order to learn some vital lessons important to her and others. In the process of her odyssey, she leaves her status quo, evolves into a wiser person, and returns to share her insights with those who could benefit.

In this and the next four posts, I’ll frame my comments around four stages Campbell includes in his mythical Journey: Departure, Initiation, Slaying the Dragon, and Return. I have cast Sara, a change practitioner, as the protagonist who first struggles to break out of her perfunctory role, but who eventually earns her standing as a hero as she brings inspiration and enlightenment to other practitioners ready to embark on their own transformational quest.

Leaving the Familiar, Stepping Into the Unknown

Sara had become “comfortably numb” without ever knowing what happened. When she finished her master's degree in organizational change, she was confident she had found her professional niche. The academic challenge had been interesting, but not overly demanding. She had a natural flare for connecting with people interpersonally, so she seemed a perfect fit for the role as an internal change agent.

Her first job was as the junior player in a three-person implementation support team for a small company engaged in numerous IT-related projects. She valued the field experience she received there but never felt that change management was taken seriously by line management. After two years, she left to join a larger enterprise. There, she led one of several transition teams who helped "integrate" companies her parent organization acquired.

This assignment was a bit more interesting. She had a chance to try out many of the diagnostic tools and intervention techniques she had studied in graduate school. Around the third year there, however, she became disenchanted again. Although she was allowed to cherry-pick from an endless menu of implementation approaches and models her company purchased, there was no reliable structure to what she and her colleagues did. She had been exposed to almost
everything but had become highly skilled in almost nothing. Some of her more experienced associates were nearing retirement and yet were still generalists in the change business—they had never gained any deep expertise. This was not something she wanted to repeat.

Thinking the problem was that she hadn’t been properly placed in a large enough enterprise with enough serious change aspirations, she jumped at the chance when a headhunter called about a position as senior change agent, working directly for a CEO and his staff as they embarked on a grand paradigm leap for their organization. “This is as good as it gets,” she thought…and took the position.

Within two years, however, she was back in a new version of the same irrelevant routine. She spent most of her time: 1) trying to talk senior executives into taking their sponsor role seriously, 2) watering down what it would take to really change the culture so leaders wouldn’t become too uncomfortable, and 3) conducting training programs about managing change instead of actually helping execute deep transformational shifts.

There was something different this time, however; she wasn’t frustrated like she had been before. She had “come to terms” with what she reluctantly saw as the truth about being a change professional…and it was very different from the images she had conjured up in graduate school. She had slowly accommodated herself to a much lower standard than she assumed would be the case, back when she was filled with excitement about her chosen profession. The reality was harsh:

- There was no urgency for change…only the rhetoric to suggest it.
- There were no senior leaders willing to do what was necessary to fully realize the changes they had promised customers, employees, and the board…only executives who wanted change results, but lacked the courage or discipline to do what was called for to make it happen.
- There were no true sponsors who were passionate about their transformation aspirations and who reinforced their declarations with meaningful positive and negative consequences.
- There were no disciplined structures to replicate change success…only training programs and processes that looked good but that few people actually applied consistently.

Here she was, a credentialed, experienced change facilitator with numerous certifications and lots of scar tissue, yet she was worse than unfulfilled in her work—she had actually lost hope that her knowledge and skills would ever be used as she had envisioned. She couldn’t say for sure when it happened, but it was clear that, over time, her enthusiasm for making a difference had atrophied and was now flatlined. At some point, the vacancy left by a withered sense of purpose was replaced with cynicism and resignation. She felt like a victim of her career, rather than an active participant in it.

Doing “what she could” instead of “what was needed” had become so routine that the mechanical repetition of her actions first created frustration, then decomposed into compromise, and ultimately full-blown apathy and stagnation. Sara finally reached a point of unconscious negotiation with herself—“comfortably numb” was preferable to ongoing annoyance and disappointment.3

And then came the wakeup call.

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3 Sara’s experience was similar to that of the metaphoric sapling in my series on cultivating character—including smothered and lost by the trunk that had developed to protect it.
What does it take to be roused from a long-standing lethargy? Some people never wake up. Those who do have their own unique requirements. For Sara, it was personal trauma.

Within a six-month period, she lost her last surviving parent and one of her siblings started cancer treatment. She was consumed with the emotions and activities associated with both of these tragedies for a long time. When both challenges finally came to resolution, she collected herself and returned to her professional routine. When she did, however, she found that she couldn’t just pick up where she had left off. She “officially” re-engaged with her work, but found herself exasperated and angry at the futility of it.

The anesthetized state that had allowed her to carry on with her unfulfilling change agent duties was receding. The emotional pain this triggered prompted her to question more than her work: she began second-guessing her marriage, her relationship with her children, her spiritual commitments, and her physical health. In general, she found herself in a sweeping examination of what she had done with her life and what she still needed to accomplish.

She was reluctant to admit to herself that, although she was exploring these things, she was terrified at the prospect of finding answers she didn’t like. However, comfortably numb had been replaced by uncomfortably agitated and there was no turning back. In a way, she felt that she was risking it all to probe beneath the crust of denial that had hidden her discontent, but she also had a sense that it would be even more precarious if she tried to ignore the increasing pain.

Over the next few years, she found different ways to address each of the other issues in her life—her marriage, children, health issues, etc. What we are following here is the discontent she experienced about her role as a professional change facilitator and The Hero’s Journey she embarked on in order to come to terms with it.

In this respect, the professional “departure” Sara pursued wasn’t about one day impulsively turning in her resignation and blindly running toward a new job. Her exodus was more about taking leave from the comatose state she had occupied for so many years. It wasn’t about changing locations, it was about changing her mindset:

- She stopped being tolerant of poor sponsorship and unrealized aspirations.
- She began to believe that her knowledge and skills deserved better clients with more sophisticated initiatives to implement.
- She began to expect more from herself and those she served.

Sara departed from her complacency…a gutsy thing to do, given that her boss and clients were fine with the way she operated and couldn’t really relate to her sense of disappointment.

Slackness and “retiring on the job” were acceptable norms in the organization, creating a political buffer from personal accountability. More to the point, there was even camaraderie with other victims, because everyone blamed something or someone else for the lack of change success.

What is even more important, however, is that when Sara woke up from her uneventful, “going through the motions” existence, it didn’t mean that the indifference and alienation disappeared. It was actually the opposite…when she became acutely aware of how she was wasting her professional energy, her anguish increased.

Life didn’t get better during the Departure phase of the Journey. In fact, it became more uncomfortable. Instead of being insulated by passive indifference, Sara was now extremely aware of the unresponsiveness of her leaders, the detachment of those who were supposed to
be proponents of transformation, her lack of wisdom to deal with these challenges, and the escalating futility at having so little impact.

When Sara left her status quo, she didn’t walk out the door. Instead, she woke up to the hollowness she had unknowingly suppressed for years. She didn’t lay all the responsibility on the organization, nor did she think that if she could just find the “right” place to work, all her problems would disappear. She didn’t begin looking for new clients in a different organization; she started examining how she related to herself and the clients she already had.

By the way, Sara’s departure wasn’t based on any self-assurance. She didn’t begin her search for a better professional path because she was confident of what to do differently and how to make the transition. She escaped from her current status because she couldn’t tolerate it any more. She hoped there was a better alternative but, for all she knew, it might have been just a fantasy to think that she could practice her craft at mastery levels while supporting clients who were as serious about orchestrating real change as she was about facilitating it.

Sara left the familiarity of her present state, not because she knew how to advance or in what direction to proceed. She left because she could no longer be a “zombie practitioner”—hypnotized by complacency, bereft of consciousness and lacking self-awareness, yet able to respond to requests to conduct meaningless activities.

**How about you?** Can you relate to any of Sara’s frustration? Listed below are some questions to consider, whether you are currently well into your Journey or only just beginning to realize you are no longer satisfied with the status quo.

- What does being “comfortably numb” look like in your world?
- Is it possible you (or some of your colleagues) have anesthetized yourself to the point that you no longer feel disappointment regarding what you have accomplished professionally, how much influence you have with sponsors, the quality and integrity associated with the change implementation work you perform, etc.?
- Have you heard a wakeup call but been reluctant to heed the implications?
- To what degree has victimization played a part in any disillusionment you feel (or have felt) about your change work?
- To what degree has sovereignty played a part in avoiding or recovering from being a zombie practitioner?
- If you fell into, but have already rallied from, operating as if “adequate” was all you expected from yourself, what was your wake-up call? What jolted you out of complacency? How did you conclude that demanding more from yourself and your clients was better than remaining in comfortable apathy?
- To what degree did your true nature (Character) and how you conveyed it to clients (Presence) play a role in your “waking up”?

In the next three posts, I’ll explore implications and questions related to the *Initiation, Slaying the Dragon, and Return* phases of the Journey.
The Practitioner’s Journey: Initiation

In this series, we’re exploring the implications of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero’s Journey*[^1], by following the story of a fictitious change practitioner named Sara. In my last post, we looked at the first of the four stages, *Departure*. In this post, I’ll describe the *Initiation* phase of the Journey, where the hero is tested, but then crosses a threshold that causes profound change in her. I’ll also offer some questions to help you explore whether this phase has relevancy for where you are in your quest.

Sara is no longer the change practitioner she used to be, but she hasn’t yet transformed to what she will become. She is a work in progress. When she departed from her uneventful, but familiar, professional status quo, she let go of one trapeze well before being in position to grab another. She isn’t consciously heading toward something specific as much as she is distancing herself from the work and clients she no longer identifies with. She is clear about what she is leaving behind, but has only a vague notion and her intuition to guide her toward her destiny.

Sara used to rely on certain things, events, and feelings to stabilize her during rough periods with clients—particularly challenging assignments—but none of that brings the sense of equilibrium it once did. With no reliable anchors to cling to, she feels disoriented.

She is re-inventing herself in mid-air. More accurately, she is *discovering* herself in mid-air, because what she is finding out about herself has always been there.

Through the Initiation part of the process, Sara felt as though she was walking through a forest blindfolded. There were trees, brush, stumps, and rocks everywhere and the only way she could avoid falling was to first bump into something and then react. Stretching out her arms and taking small steps wasn’t much of a strategy, but it had to do because there were no maps to follow and she had no past reference points to help her anticipate the next encounter.

To say the least, groping around foreign terrain with mostly bruises and scratches to show for her efforts wasn’t fun. Since Sara didn’t really know how to practice her craft any differently than she always had, she decided to read everything she could get her hands on that was in any way connected to change execution at the mastery level. She also began attending meetings/conferences where other change agents congregate, hoping to find some like-minded practitioners who were also seeking alternative answers. These activities were well worth the effort, but she felt she gained the most by simply experimenting...trying new ways of communicating with her clients, testing different approaches to diagnosis and intervention, exploring unique ways to approach measuring change success, etc.

Although searching in the dark for illumination was interesting, she felt she wasn’t making the headway she should. Also, all this experimentation produced more liabilities than assets. Since she was trying to find answers and she wasn’t even sure of the questions, her clients had some negative reactions. They noticed she wasn’t working on the kinds of activities that used to occupy her time, and none of them appreciated the shift they noticed in her demeanor. She was becoming much too forthright and unequivocal for their tastes.

[^1]: Please see the first post of this series for a high-level outline of this archetype, using J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. 
One of her clients told her boss that it was inappropriate for her to be so direct and explicit when reviewing some of the risk in a recent change readiness diagnosis. “She was insubordinate when she suggested that my sponsorship was the biggest problem we faced,” he complained. Sara’s boss was a politically sensitive creature when it came to leaders being uncomfortable, so he came down hard on Sara for “stirring up so much dust.” “This isn’t like you,” he said. “I don’t know what is going on in your life but I hope you get back to your old self soon.”

The combination of unhappy clients, an unsupportive boss, and failure to find the answers she was looking for weighed heavily on Sara. She was risking everything professionally, yet had no safety net—no plan B if the Journey proved too much and she needed to return to the way things were.

As all of this mounted, she felt more lost than ever. She wasn’t certain this quest for a more meaningful career was the right course for her, yet she knew she could never return to the frustration and hollowness she experienced before. She couldn’t go back, but she wasn’t confident about how to move forward.

She had reached her lowest point with all this when, by chance, she met a woman, a master change practitioner, who gave her some extremely useful and encouraging advice. Through a series of exchanges with the woman, Sara found the strength to go on. She renewed her search for alternative ways to relate to herself as a professional change facilitator, and to her clients.

Following her crises in confidence, she was grateful to be back on her trajectory, but her pilgrimage was no easier. Soon, she faced even more problems with less-than-desirable results. She continued to raise eyebrows when she tested out new perspectives and approaches to her work. In addition, clients became more uneasy with her frank, sometimes blunt, way of interacting with them.

As disconcerting as all this was, she found it intriguing that support and assistance appeared when she least expected it. Lucky intercessions continued to occur. Sometimes it was someone she hadn’t previously known who offered prudent council, sometimes it was a close friend with sage advice. Sometimes, a helpful interpretation would come from something she read or through her prayer or meditation. The package it came in varied, but when Sara needed it most, a teacher of some type appeared with the knowledge and/or inspiration she needed to carry on.

Each of these junctures gave her the means and stamina to plow ahead, and bolstered her conviction and self-assurance as well. But the Journey became significantly longer and more challenging than she could ever have imagined and she found herself emotionally exhausted. At the same time, however, her resolve to find deeper meaning in her work and greater skill as a practitioner was more tenacious than ever.

Over time, the hindrances and setbacks she faced intensified to the point that, even with the periodic, unexpected coaching and the bolstered determination, the obstacles seemed insurmountable. She made clear progress toward a new understanding of how to practice her craft, but each time she successfully addressed one predicament, the ante went up and a new, more knotty quandary emerged. Sometimes she felt like she was running up a down escalator.

Despite all this, things began to come into focus for her about why she was in the business of facilitating organizational transition and what she was to accomplish in her role as a change agent. She began to understand that there was more to her professional endeavors than simply providing economically for herself and her family. She began to feel a sense of a larger purpose for the work.
With a greater sense of mission than she ever had before, her role as a practitioner took on a new dimension and significance. This was no longer just a job. For the first time, she found herself registering a deeper level of responsibility about what she could offer others—in particular, the colleagues she left behind when she embarked on this odyssey.

At the same time, it became clear to Sara that the Journey was leading her to operate at new levels of knowledge and skill. She could see that her proficiency with conceptual models, diagnostic tools, and intervention techniques was evolving far beyond her previous capabilities.

In a sense, she knew she was making important gains. From another perspective, however, she realized she was far from where she needed to be. She was still not functioning at the mastery standard she aspired to. Sara wasn’t sure what was missing, but she knew that her wisdom and insight didn’t match that of the veteran practitioners whose work she had read or seen presented over the years.

And then it happened…

Next: Slaying the Dragon

How about you? Consider these questions.

• Have you experienced Departure, only to turn back as the Journey became harder, the path forward more difficult? If so, what would be required for you to set out again?
• If you have begun the Journey, what are some of the things or feelings that you used to rely on as stabilizers for yourself that no longer create a sense of equilibrium?
• What was it like to run blindfolded with harmful obstacles at every turn…exploring yourself and your change work in new, untested ways?
• What was it like to go through a period of having little support, encouragement, positive feedback, etc. from people around you as you experimented with new approaches?
• What price did you pay for this Journey?
• Did you have a safety net…a plan B if the Journey proved too much and you returned to the way things were?
• Who/what showed up as your teachers…providing the guidance/encouragement you needed to continue moving forward?
• Related to your change work, what meaning or purpose has emerged that provides a benefit to others rather than yourself? What is the greater good, the broader impact this is having for others?
• To what extent are you shaping this purpose and to what extent is it shaping you?
The Practitioner’s Journey: Slaying the Dragon

In this series, we’re exploring the implications of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero’s Journey* through the eyes of Sara, a fictitious change practitioner struggling to find who she is and how to redefine how she shows up with clients. In my last post, we looked at the second of four stages we are using from Campbell’s framework, *Initiation*, and left Sara at the brink of discovery.

Sara was making important gains, but still wasn’t operating at the mastery level, and she knew it. She was frustrated that her wisdom and insight didn’t match that of veteran practitioners. That was about to change.

Sara came toe-to-toe with the dragon—the most grueling, onerous challenge she had encountered on the Journey. She had never faced a greater trial. Even her advancing proficiency with concepts and techniques and her emerging passion for the work left her totally unprepared to battle it. Sara was convinced she was no match for what she now faced. This dragon was a familiar foe in her life; each time she had encountered it before, she cowered and pulled away, filled with terror. It was her nemesis.

No teachers showed up to impart enlightened guidance this time...she was completely on her own. It was a terrifying and demoralizing experience. She felt completely out of her league, not only because of what she was up against but also because of the emotional price she would pay if she were defeated.

She had once again become stuck between “I don’t know how to move forward” and “I am unwilling to go back.” She was immobilized for an extended time when it finally became apparent to her what has happening. She had been right in her previous assessment about being unprepared to do battle with such a powerful force, but it was primarily because she had been relying too much on her head and not enough on her heart to reveal the way forward.

In school, Sara had always taken pride in her ability to figure out a logical path through any problem. She excelled at math and science and seldom found an algebraic or calculus challenge she couldn’t conquer. Yet, here she was, in a professional role, facing overpowering opposition. Something other than her left-brain analytical dexterity had to be called into play.

As a change practitioner, Sara knew she had allowed insecurities and anxieties to make her feel like a victim in the past. As a result, she easily slipped into thinking there was no recourse when faced with what looked like unsolvable difficulties. She protected herself and blamed others instead of being a proactive, creative problem solver. However, she couldn’t afford to take such a position this time. She needed to recalibrate how she interacted with others to be more consistent with her true nature. The presence she conveyed needed to better reflect her character. To invoke the sovereignty she needed for fighting the dragon, she would have to stand on her own more than ever before. She had to avoid accommodating others in order to gain their favor, instead of protecting her own integrity.

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5 Please see the first post of this series for a high-level outline of this archetype, using J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit.*
But there was even more to it than that. Sara had to decide how serious she was going to be about pursuing the deeper purpose she had discovered for herself. Beyond making a living, she knew there was a calling she hadn’t fully answered. There were practitioners back home who, like her earlier self, hadn’t yet broken away from the professional orbit in which they were stuck. She wanted to offer encouragement and guidance to any who might be willing and able to make the leap from victimization to sovereignty.

What was she going to do? Was she ready to take herself seriously as a catalyst for other practitioners’ growth? Was she prepared to accept what she would have to do to prime herself for such a role?

After mulling over these questions and diving into some deep soul searching, Sara saw that meaning and mastery were intricately tied together. Pursuit of a mastery path can’t be a terminal objective…mastery for its own sake is a contradiction in terms. Being exceptionally proficient in a craft without a higher purpose produces technicians, not masters. True mastery is possible only when the wisdom being acquired is in service to a greater good.

As she dug deeper into the challenge, she saw that standing for a higher purpose required her to show up differently. She had to come forward with a greater sense of integrity…a more authentic expression of who she was and what she stood for. There was no time for the wasted energy consumed by victimization; only the liberation that comes from sovereignty could be invested in now. It was also becoming clear that the synergy between mastery and meaning was fueled by sovereignty. She had to practice change facilitation at a mastery level because her purpose now required it. Therefore, nothing less than her sovereign best would suffice.

This meant the mastery she sought necessitated a two-pronged approach involving both what she does (her exceptional skills with various change-related concepts and techniques) and who she is (how she shows up…leveraging her full self when interacting with clients). Now she could see that she had been unable to slay the dragon before because she had blocked herself from her own potential. She had overachieved when it came to learning what to do but had not delved deeply enough into who she was. What had been absent was a serious pursuit into her Character and Presence.

To her surprise, she was learning that, despite all her hard work and perseverance thus far in the Journey, she had actually been holding back, and as long as this was the case, the dragon would always prevail. There was still more she had to risk if she was going to succeed against these overwhelming odds. With a lump in her throat and a prayer in her heart, she took the plunge…diving further than ever into exploring her true nature and the various ways she sabotaged her own power.

The introspective plummet into the interior of her heart was hard work and scary at times, but her resolve to prepare herself as best she could to face the dragon was unwavering. After much effort, she felt as ready as she would ever be. She entered the dragon’s cave. The struggle was fierce…she applied all she had from her head and heart and eventually walked out of the cave a triumphant hero.

Sara’s victory over the dragon was stunning…mostly to herself. She fought with all her might to honor her mission of greater good and to stand for her own integrity, but she was as astonished as anyone to actually overcome such a formidable adversary. She entered the dragon’s cave with more moral high ground and determination than capability. When she exited, she had beaten back that which would have stifled who she was becoming and what she was destined to accomplish. She conquered her fears and found a strength and sense of purpose that was previously beyond her grasp.
Sara emerged as a hero because she went where most people won’t go and did what most people can’t bring themselves to do. She faced overwhelming odds to save something precious that would otherwise have been lost. She was a hero for others because the benefits they would receive would save them from a worse fate. She was her own hero in that she saved herself from failing to claim her inner nature.

Such an outcome would have been completely out of the question if the previous Sara had taken on an opponent of this might and prowess. This was a different Sara, however. This Sara was ready to lay everything on the line in order to live up to the responsibility she had taken on for those who could benefit by the dragon’s demise, as well as for the right to claim her own sovereignty. This Sara accepted her true nature and came forward with a bold presence that reflected her character’s essence. The reconstituted Sara was bolstered as never before by her newfound strength, and the energy that comes from furthering a mission of greater good. Not only was she a different person going into the cave, the Sara who emerged on the other side of her crucible was someone fundamentally transformed from the person who first departed her former uneventful, but comfortable, status quo. The vexation and tribulations she suffered when confronting her ultimate challenge gave her a new view of herself as a person and a change professional. A different perspective on what Sara had to offer and who she was in service to had risen out of the ashes. By purging the unneeded and counter-productive aspects of the practitioner she had become, she had allowed a renewed Sara to come to light—a Sara stronger than ever and fully dedicated to her professional mission.

Of course, the ultimate paradox is that all this apparent transience from the old Sara to the new is an illusion. There is no new Sara coming forward. What is happening is the character, presence, and sovereignty that has always been there (but was covered over to the point of appearing nonexistent) is finally becoming known. A new Sara isn’t being born; the true essence of Sara is just waking up. She had gone to sleep and dreamed she was someone other than who she really is. Now she is remembering and embracing her core and applying it to be in service to others.

Next: The Return

How about you? Consider these questions.

- When did it become clear for you that mastery as a change practitioner was a key enabling step toward fulfilling your broader purpose?
- What were the implications for you when you became aware that mastery required not only proficiency in what you do, but also in who you are?
- What was the dragon you had to slay…your worst nightmare…the ultimate test that had to be confronted before you could move forward in your Journey toward meaning and mastery?
- What was it like when you realized that you had to open up your heart as well as expand your mind? Once you came to terms with the fact that you had to go further/deeper inside than ever before to gird yourself to confront the dragon, what did you find?
- Related to being a change practitioner, what are you still holding back on…what have you not yet risked exploring/developing for fear of what it might entail?
The Practitioner’s Journey: Return

In this series, we’re exploring the implications of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero’s Journey* through the eyes of Sara, a fictitious change practitioner, as she comes to terms with who she is and how she relates to her professional role. In this post, I’ll describe the *Return* phase of the Journey, and offer some questions for you to consider.

Sara’s odyssey, and the lessons she learned, liberated her from a victim’s existence and opened her to a new realm of practicing her craft with sovereignty and courage. She gained something more than advanced technical skills—she was able to bring forward and use, as an intervention tool, the full impact of her Character and Presence. She was now in a position to offer her clients the power of both *what she knew how to do* and the essence of *who she was*—a rare combination that makes it possible to impart wisdom in addition to solving problems and exploiting opportunities.

She had not pursued this quest, however, for her gain only. She felt that many other practitioners were still trapped in their victim mindsets and were unlikely to free themselves without access to what she had learned. Knowing how she had suffered under the weight of victimization, she wanted to help as many of her colleagues as possible find their way to sovereignty as quickly as she was able to reach them. Sara felt it was her responsibility.

After recouping from the draining victory over the dragon, Sara reengaged with the practitioners she had left behind at the beginning of her odyssey. She was excited about sharing her wonderful news and couldn’t wait to see them develop the strength and freedom she now enjoyed as a practitioner.

“Not So Fast”

Once she began conveying what had happened and the insights she had learned, she was startled by how people reacted. She expected delight and excitement that the chains of victimization could be broken and replaced by sovereignty. She anticipated gratitude and appreciation for enduring the Journey, bringing down the dragon, and sharing her lessons. What actually happened was just the opposite.

When Sara opened up about what had happened to her, the initial reactions were as she predicted. Being around someone as enthusiastic as she was about what she had learned was an unusual occurrence for those still “comfortably numb,” so, at first, a few people were curious about what she had to say. Once she began to tell her full story, however, most of them drifted back to what they were doing. “Maybe I’m just not doing a good job of conveying the compelling nature of the events,” she thought, so she tried to be more precise about the details and emotions of what she underwent. Still, her associates pulled away rather than engaging in her story. She invited others to join, but it wasn’t enough to keep pace with those pulling away from her conversations.

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6 Please see the first post of this series for a high-level outline of this archetype, using J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit.*
The net effect was that the large interest she expected in her adventures and insights never materialized. The number of people who listened to her shrank instead of expanded. And, most of those who were engrossed seemed taken by what had happened to her but couldn’t make a connection to how any of it might relate to them. They saw her Journey and the lessons she learned as her adventure…nothing they could ever experience for themselves.

Out of frustration, she went to specific individuals she knew more personally and told them all basically the same thing: I uncovered the Holy Grail—the secret sauce. Apply the lessons I’ve learned and you don’t have to be a victim anymore. You’ll have much more impact with clients and be true to your own nature."

The reactions varied by person, but also had many similarities:

“Sounds fine for you, but I’m happy with the way I already relate to my change agent work. Nobody gets upset and I don’t have to worry about getting fired or feeding my kids…and that’s just the way I like it.”

“Sara, I’m having a little trouble keeping up with you. First, I didn’t even know you were pursuing this ‘Journey’ of yours; second, it sounds like a mid-life crisis to me. Why don’t you take a few days of vacation until you feel like your old self again?”

“Look, you have always read more into being a change practitioner than I did. It’s just a job for me. I like it fine, but not enough to put myself out like you do over it.”

“I’m sure the lessons you learned are working for you, and I’m glad you’ve found a path ‘with heart,’ but I can’t see me getting the same results. Besides, I’m not as adventuresome as you, so treading into the unknown to look for myself isn’t my idea of a good time.”

“Who do you think you are, preaching to us this way? I don’t remember anyone selecting you as a leader to guide us out of the wilderness. Take care of yourself and stop pushing your agenda on us.”

“I don’t understand a word you are saying—slaying dragons, practitioner sovereignty, “who we are” versus “what we do”…it all sounds like new-age mumbo-jumbo to me and I don’t have a clue how any of it is relevant to my change work.”

Then there was the most disappointing response: “Sara, it is one thing to jeopardize your own professional future, but to encourage others to follow your path is nothing short of irresponsible. You are a pied piper trying to lure others into your folly just so you’ll have company when your grandiose fantasies fall apart. Pursue whatever risky ventures you want but don’t endanger the careers of others with your talk of independence and autonomy. In the environment where I work, that kind of thinking could cost me my job and you know it.”

Sara couldn’t believe what was happening. She had withstood this incredible experience and, in the process, uncovered what she believed were some extremely useful lessons that others in her profession could apply to their advantage and their clients. Yet, no one was listening. Her hard-won insights fell on deaf ears. She was hurt and somewhat angry that no one appreciated what she had been through or the value she had to offer.

One more thing that caught her off guard: she thought that after routing the dragon and emerging a hero, her grueling Journey was over. It clearly wasn’t. Even after all she had been through, she still had hurdles to overcome and frustrations to deal with….not the “happily ever after” ending to her sojourn that she assumed.
The Most Important Phase of All

Because of the foundation of resilience she had developed during her recent ordeals, Sara’s initial, unproductive response to all this didn’t last long. Even though she had hoped otherwise, it was clear that her odyssey wasn’t over. In fact, the most important part of her transformation was now before her. Absorbing the lessons from her ordeal and gaining the self-confidence that came from triumphing over the obstacles she faced had been a wonderful experience, but ultimately of limited value unless she could deliver on her mission of greater good. She needed to transfer what she had learned to those who could gain the most from it—practitioners still stuck in victimization, who hadn’t claimed their sovereignty, and were clueless about the distinction between “what we do” and “who we are.” This meant she had yet another complication to encounter—finding what it was inside her that was blocking her ability to be the resource she wanted to be for the intended recipients of her insights.

From her previous observations on the Journey, she knew that whatever was inhibiting her from being more effective with others must be within her own space…this was an inside job. She determined that she must rechannel her frustration at not being able to engage her colleagues into a deeper introspective dive. Instead of feeling sorry for herself or mad at the circumstances, she decided it was more constructive to examine, not fight against, the lack of traction she saw among the people she wanted so badly to help.

She intuitively knew this meant more emotional work, not left-brained analysis, so she called on all the heart-centered resources at her disposal—requesting feedback from close friends/family, returning to certain readings that had been inspiring in the past, mediation, prayer, etc. Probably the most important step she took was to seek council from someone who had been a source of personal guidance for her in the past. It was through this relationship that Sara engaged in yet another plunge into herself. This time, the exploration wasn’t to find the strength for another battle as before—it was about how to reenter the world she had left behind. Now the challenge involved her larger mission of greater good—how to crack the code on sharing what she had learned with others.

With the help of her guide, she identified four ways she had been contributing to her own ineffectiveness with colleagues:

- First, she had approached them on the basis of “saving” them from their errant ways when, in fact, most of them were perfectly fine with the way things were. Out of her enthusiasm to share what she had found so helpful for herself, she had forgotten a cardinal change agent rule—*always make a case for the need to change before promoting something dramatically new*. There is no better way to put people off than to say or even imply that you have an answer when they aren’t asking the question. Sara had inadvertently positioned herself as selling a solution when those she hoped to influence didn’t see a problem.

- Second, because she was so convinced that the lessons she had learned would be advantageous to her colleagues, she took on a sense of responsibility to make sure they did what was “right,” even if that meant pushing against their own preferences. “In the long run, they will thank me” had become her unconscious motto. In the process, she had lost sight on another important axiom…*when fostering change, it’s best to help people make an*
informed decision about what they want to incorporate into their lives, not to ensure they do what you have decided is in their best interest.

• Third, while her intention was to convey concern for her colleagues and enthusiasm for the solution she had found, her passion took over and she had come across as pejorative and insistent. She hadn’t realized it but she had been seen as an impatient, even demanding zealot instead of a caring advocate.

• Finally, Sara felt the burden of personally helping every practitioner rid themselves of their yokes and learn how to take advantage of the wisdom she had found. Her intentions were honorable but in her effort to relate to everyone, she diffused her attention and didn’t properly focus on those she actually had a chance of influencing. She forgot what is true for most changes: there are far fewer people who are truly ready for the transition than could theoretically benefit from it.

Sara had to face the fact that she hadn’t been applying some of the fundamentals she always used in her client work. She needed to revisit some well-established tenets of change execution.

• She stopped “selling” people on the value of what she had learned. It didn’t matter if they had any interest or not, the approach was counter-productive. Her heavy-handed tactics had alienated not only the people who lacked any real readiness for her message but also those who might have otherwise expressed some degree of interest. In fact, the more she was driven by a sense of responsibility to “save everyone,” the pushier she became, further estranging herself from the audience she had the greatest likelihood of affecting.

What finally brought her peace of mind and far more effectiveness when interacting with her colleagues? She reframed her role from a demanding parent trying to force a solution on everyone to a coach providing support—but only to people who said they wanted to play. Although she wished all her colleagues could see the light, Sara narrowed her scope of attempted influence to those who showed an interest in, and predisposition for, what she was advocating.

• She dropped the dogmatic, overbearing maneuvers. She shifted gears and started sharing what she had learned as honestly as she could, but without getting into too much detail. Sara only elaborated when someone asked for more specifics or wanted to discuss how it might apply to their role as a professional change facilitator. She stopped suggesting to people that they take on for themselves what she had learned from her Journey. If they expressed some curiosity about how to incorporate into their work some of the lessons she had absorbed, she was more than happy to assist them. If they didn’t, she didn’t take the conversation any further. She only elaborated on her experience if people pursued her for more information.

This style took some getting used to because it meant many practitioners were left unaffected by what Sara had learned. At first, she found it hard to avoid trying to “pull people in” when it was obvious to her how much better their lives would be if they had access to her wisdom. What really helped her to let go was when she realized she wasn’t going to impact them anyway. There were far fewer people actually ready to enroll in Sara’s insights than she had hoped, but by focusing on the ones who were ready to learn, paradoxically, she ultimately had a much greater reach than could have been accomplished by coming on too strong and disaffecting so many people.

Next: The Hero’s Journey: Epilog
How about you? Consider these questions.

• What is it like, after much hard work, to think you have your act together, only to find that what looked like the payoff was just another challenge to be encountered? How many times have you thought you were ready to graduate, but then realized you were still a floundering student with much left to learn?

• Can you relate to feeling unappreciated by clients or colleagues when they don’t recognize how much you have grown personally and professionally or don’t see how much you do for them or how hard you work on their behalf?

• Have you ever felt like a stranger in a strange land…You had something in your heart that was important to share but found there was no audience to value it? You learned something that could benefit others but they showed no interest? Did you pull back or press on? How did you decide which way to go?

• Have you ever fallen into the trap of pushing too hard? In your enthusiasm to help others, did you come across as pejorative or demanding? Maybe in your eagerness to “save” people from their plight, you behaved in other ways that were counterproductive. If so, what were they?

• Have you accepted that some people can’t see that you have matured as a practitioner and are no longer the naïve upstart you once were? Are you finding that, as you deepen your proficiencies, some relationships can’t seem to adjust to the advancing value you are now capable of providing?

• Have you narrowed your aspirations to audiences predisposed to hearing and valuing your messages?

Post 6

The Practitioner’s Journey: Epilog

Joseph Campbell’s The Hero’s Journey is a gift of genius he left to all of humanity as part of his legacy. It depicts the mythical struggle to find and claim our true selves. Throughout time and across the world, this is a story of how our species sheds old identities and moves on to new ones. As such, it certainly has relevance as a metaphor for clients experiencing the challenges associated with organizational and personal transformational change. I think, however, there is even greater value to be harvested if we apply it to ourselves as professional change agents. In this light, I’ve used it in this blog series as context for exploring some of the dynamics in play when we pursue mastery in our field.

Mastery is a pursuit, not a destination, and, throughout its unfolding, is a reoccurring cycle of losing who we think we are in order to make room for who we are becoming. The Hero’s Journey provides a profound narrative we can use as both a diagnostic tool (to determine what phase of the odyssey is currently being engaged) and a navigation system (to anticipate and plan for future phases). The organizing structure of Departure, Initiation, Slaying the Dragon, and Return offers an understanding of the logic to the maturation process and serves as a placeholder for the intangible magic of transcendence.

Although Campbell’s storyline depicts a single movement from naiveté to wisdom, the same stream of events is replicated repeatedly for those on a mastery path. The heroic emergence from one set of challenges is the entry point for a new level of innocence and pursuit of the next
Journey. Mastery calls for taking part in as many of these heroic cycles as is possible, related to a particular domain of knowledge, skill, or beingness. For those of us seeking mastery in the change field, this means repeating the heroic saga as frequently as circumstances and our courage and tenacity will allow.

In closing, I’d like to offer my bias about what is the most important lesson to be learned during these epic periods of professional/personal growth. All the illumination that takes place during these developmental leaps contributes to the wisdom we strive for but, in my view, there is one awareness that stands above all the rest in its creation of value for us and those we serve.

The profound awakening I’m referring to is the same one that unfolded for Sara—at a certain point during the Return phase of her Journey, she could see that all the hard lessons learned during her odyssey weren’t where her hero status proved its real value. Being worthy of the hero’s title isn’t demonstrated through endurance, dedication to a mission, or even slaying dragons, and certainly not by imposing “right solutions” on others. Ultimately, true heroes legitimize themselves, not by anything they do, but by **being who they are**. They come home from their trials and tribulations simply to live a different life. In doing so, they open the possibility of deeply affecting a relatively few people who, in turn, go on their own Hero’s Journey and return to impact a few more who are ready to learn.

As change professionals, the greatest leverage we have for affecting people is just to **be who we are**. Methodologies, concepts, and techniques are what we use when “exposing” large numbers to the technical aspects of how change can be orchestrated, but when deep impact within individuals is the agenda, there is nothing that comes close to the influence of a practitioner’s genuine authenticity on a small number of people. For Sara, this meant that the constituency she came back to serve was actually a relatively small number of her contemporaries who were already predisposed to grow in her direction and who naturally resonated with the full expression of **who she is**.

She was a returning hero, but only to those who could relate to her Journey as the kind of challenges and dragons they had to confront for themselves. For the others who couldn’t see much benefit from her experiences, Sara’s adventures and lessons learned were entertaining at best and, at worst, a boring nuisance. She was best served and best served others when she decided not to waste her heroic accomplishments and wisdom on the many with marginal interest in her insights but instead remain vigilant for the few who felt her Journey pointed the way toward their own odyssey.

Her greatest lesson wasn’t about securing hero status—it was about properly using this position to assist those most likely to pursue a hero’s path themselves. Furthermore, the companion to this insight was the revelation that proper usage of her hero role could only come about when Sara did three things:

- Vetted her Character at its most inner core and tested it against life’s toughest challenges
- Ensured that the Presence she conveyed to others honestly and fully reflected the integrity of her inner nature
- Focused her support on colleagues who were predisposed toward seeing her Journey as a doorway to their own

The ultimate dragon we encounter is to face who we really are and portray ourselves authentically to others. Mastery as a change practitioner is impossible unless we do this. Only then can we match our true Character and Presence with clients who value both **what we do** and **who we are**.
Here are some parting questions to ponder:

• If you have made a commitment to a mastery path, have you found that you have less in common with colleagues who relate to change facilitation more as a job than a calling?

• Do you find that there are plenty of people to talk to about change-related methodology, tools, and techniques (What We Do) but that it’s more difficult to find colleagues who will engage in Who We Are discussions?

• Have you come to terms with the fact that not all clients/colleagues are predisposed to your influence? Have you determined who your true constituency is (your “fan base”)—those who value the hero lessons you have acquired and are eager to learn from you?

• In all likelihood, the audience who will be most responsive to your Character and Presence as a practitioner is relatively small compared to all the potential clients out there. What are your thoughts about focusing on those you will have the greatest impact on versus working with people to whom you might provide a small amount of value?

• What or who provided the turning point when any of the above insights occurred? Did you turn to someone or something to help guide and/or support you as you dove deep within yourself to explore the implications?