



2-2 Article on The Importance of Heroes

Who's your hero?

You may not have a name spring to mind, and that's a problem. You need a hero. We all do.

The heroes we choose say something about ourselves. Our heroes display certain characteristics or traits we want for ourselves such as courage, determination, kindness, strength, skill, intelligence, and creativity. Heroes show us what it looks like to *act* on our values – for example, to be honorable and loyal, to strive for justice.

Heroes aren't just for young kids. Adults who want to accomplish great things—a successful business, a happy family, a beautiful painting, meaningful work—need heroes as well. As a teenager, you may find it more difficult to choose a hero than you did when you were a child. Younger children tend to wholeheartedly idolize their heroes, but as a teenager you see the complexities of those around you – the good and the bad. So, what to do?

Accept that heroes have flaws

One of the most painful parts of growing up is coming to terms with the fact that there is no perfect hero: our parents are flawed; our favorite athlete or actor might sometimes act like a jerk to others. To grow up is to understand that no one owns a complete set of virtues. For example, those who are brave might also be impatient.

As we grow up, we can choose our heroes actively and thoughtfully. We can identify a hero's positive qualities that we want to develop in ourselves, while also acknowledging their shortcomings. We can admire the free-thinking genius of Thomas Jefferson without accepting, or ignoring, his slave ownership of other human beings.

Your heroes may be more personal to you than famous people — a friend, a parent, a relative, a coach or teacher. They, too, will be flawed. They can still be your heroes.

If we believe that our heroes are flawless, we begin to believe that we, being flawed, are incapable of heroism. In this way, a belief in the perfection of *others* can hold back *our own* growth. Sometimes people poke holes at and tear down heroes as an odd way to comfort themselves. If no one is heroic—the thinking goes—then why should I try? Yet flawed heroes—even fatally flawed heroes—are still heroic. Every Achilles has an Achilles' heel, a weakness.

Bottom line -- your hero is flawed. So are you, as are we all, and it is a commonality we share.

Recognize how heroes help you

We need heroes, because all of us have to do things in life that are hard.

What is difficult, painful, confusing, chaotic and worrisome in our lives can feel—because it is happening to us—as though it is unique to just us. It’s easy to imagine that because you’re a unique person, your struggles are unique too. And it’s easy to become isolated, especially when things are hard. The truth is, someone out there has encountered the same hardships as you. You are not alone, even though it feels like you are.

Most heroes are heroic only because they have struggled mightily. They’ve doubted themselves, made mistakes, made fools of themselves, and failed at different times.¹ It is through these struggles that they have gained wisdom, strength, and the ability to help others. If these flawed individuals can be heroic, so too can we.

A hero can serve as a model. They might teach us how to continue pursuing a goal when we want to give up, to rebound from setbacks, move forward after losing someone close to us, persevere in spite of our fears, lead a team, and more.

Over time, the challenges in front of us change. The model who taught us courage may not be helpful when the challenges we face demand patience. At each stage of our life, we pursue different dreams and pass through different trials. We will, therefore, need different heroes. So be on the lookout for them!

**Your hardships in life are real, but they are not unique. Learn from your heroes.
Emulate the best in them.**

Connect with your heroes

Remember, direct contact with a hero isn’t required. All you need do is study them. Reflect on what they represent for you, what they have done to be successful, and how they have handled difficulties in their lives. You can even ask yourself when faced with a challenge, “*What would my hero do?*”

Look for someone who possesses qualities that you admire. Your hero can provide you with a great subject to explore and learn from. Your heroes can be some of your greatest teachers.

Emulate (verb) to try to be like (someone or something you admire)

Achilles’ heel (noun): a weakness or vulnerable point

In Greek mythology, Achilles was a warrior whose mother protected him from harm by dipping him in the River Styx. However, she held him by the heel while doing it. As a result, this heel did not get wet and thus was not protected. Later, ... Achilles was killed by Paris, a Trojan prince, who shot him in the unprotected heel with an arrow. The term *Achilles’ heel* has since come to refer to any weak spot or point.” (from www.wordcentral.com)

Adapted from an article by E. Greitens, *Want to Accomplish Great Things: Pick Great Heroes, Here’s How*, Time Magazine, March 20, 2015, <http://time.com/3751671/want-to-accomplish-great-things-pick-great-heroes-heres-how/>

1. S. LaBarge, *Heroism: Why Heroes are Important*, Markukula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, January 1, 2000, <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/more/resources/heroism-why-heroes-are-important/>