

Jack Welch's Journey

by Surinder Deol

Joseph Campbell changed the way we look at mythology as a field of human reflection. He also made us ponder and explore the depths of our being and to find the meaning of our lives from within our deeper selves. Among his many innovations was the idea of the Hero's Journey, about which he wrote in his classic work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and talked about in his famous public TV series with Bill Moyers. For those who are unfamiliar with the original text, Campbell's selected words are reproduced at the end of this article. This is truly an archetypal vision for all humanity in all ages.

Robert Dilts has adapted this unique metaphor for use by NLP practitioners and has given it a modern, businesslike interpretation so that we are able to use the concept, especially in role modeling exemplary figures. Robert asks five questions which appear to be simple but in reality are profound:

1. What is the *demon* (challenge) you face?
2. What is your *threshold*? What is the unknown territory outside your comfort zone into which you must step?

3. What are you being called to do? What is your *calling*?
4. What resources do you have and what else do you need to develop more fully?
5. Who are (will be) your guardians?

In this article, Jack Welch will be our hero. Why Jack Welch? Because during the last two decades he has wielded enormous influence on the evolution of American business thinking. He not only led the charge at GE as its CEO, he championed concepts such as boundarylessness, globalization, six sigma quality, etc. that have impacted global business thinking. He is a business hero who is truly admired internationally. For our purpose, we have his recently published autobiography *Jack: Straight from the Gut*. The answers to the questions are paraphrased from the book, but care has been taken to maintain the integrity of his original meaning.

Jack, what was the demon (challenge) you faced when you took charge of GE?

The main challenge was to give a new direction to the company. My big message in my very first meeting

with the analysts was intended to describe the winners of the future. I told them that winners would be companies that search out and participate in the real growth industries and insist upon being number one or number two in every business they are in—the number one or number two leanest, lowest-cost, world-wide producers of quality goods and service. The managements and companies in the eighties that don't do this, that hang on to losers for whatever reason—tradition, sentiment, their own management weaknesses—won't be around in 1990.

Being No. 1 or No. 2 wasn't merely an objective. It was a requirement. If we met it, we were certain that by the end of the decade, this central idea would give us a set of businesses unique in the world. That was the "hard" message of the day. I also delved into "soft" issues like reality, quality, excellence, and (would you believe?) the "human element." I was very clear in saying that to be a winner, we had to couple the "hard" central idea of being No. 1 or No. 2 in growth markets with intangible "soft" values to get the "feel" that would define our new culture. A good business strategy works only if there are

committed and motivated people to implement it. Also getting the right people in the right job is a lot more important than developing a strategy.

What was your threshold, something outside your comfort zone?

Oh, believe me I was in my “discomfort” zone during the early 1980’s. You didn’t have to be a GE employee to wonder if Jack Welch knew what he was doing or where he was going. The turmoil, angst, and confusion were everywhere. The causes were the goal to be No. 1 or No. 2, the three circles, the outright sale of businesses, and the cutbacks now occurring in many parts of GE.

Within five years, one of every four people would leave the GE payroll, 118,000 people in all, including 37,000 employees in businesses that were sold. Throughout the company, people were struggling to come to grips with the uncertainty.

I was adding fuel to the fire by investing millions of dollars in what some might call “nonproductive” things. I was building a fitness center, guesthouse, and conference center at headquarters and laying plans for a major upgrade of Crotonville, our management development center. My take on this was that all these investments, at a cost of nearly 75 million, were consistent with the “soft” values of excellence I had outlined before. But people weren’t buying it. For them, it was a total disconnect.

It didn’t matter that the money I was investing in treadmills, conference halls, and bedrooms was

pocket change to a company that was spending \$12 billion over the same period on new plants and equipment. That \$12 billion, spread across factories around the world, was invisible and considered routine. But I was certain that time would prove me right. We would win in the end. I didn’t give up.

But Jack what was your calling? Why were you doing what you were doing?

My calling was to change things inside the company to make GE into a big growth engine. But in all of this I was also trying to fulfill my hidden needs. I made big investment in the company’s learning infrastructure. I did this because I love teaching. When all is said and done, teaching is what I try to do for a living. Truth is, I’ve always liked teaching. Whenever I went to Crotonville, our management training center, I never lectured. I loved the wide-open exchanges. The students taught me as much as I taught them. I became a facilitator, helping everyone learn from one another. I had ideas that I brought to every class, and our exchanges enriched them. I wanted everyone to push back and challenge. For the last ten years, they have.

In addition to teaching, I also wanted to express some of my deepest values and beliefs. Personal integrity was most important to me. Establishing it and never wavering from it supported everything I did through good and bad times. People may not have agreed with me on every issue—and I may not have been right all the time—but they always knew they were getting it

straight and honest. It helped build better relationships with customers, suppliers, analysts, competitors and governments. It set the tone in the organization. I never had two agendas. There was only one way—the straight way.

Another personal value for me is humility. I don’t like arrogant people. Arrogance is a killer, and wearing ambition on one’s sleeve can have the same effect. There is a fine line between arrogance and self-confidence. Legitimate self-confidence is a winner. The true test of self-confidence is the courage to be open—to welcome change and new ideas regardless of their success. Self-confident people are not afraid to have their views challenged. They relish the intellectual combat that enriches ideas.

I also believe in giving people challenging but achievable goals. If the bar is too low, it is not motivating. If it is too high, it leads to frustration. A good manager knows how and when to stretch. Stretch is reaching for more than what you thought possible. And I stretched all the time. I not only talked about it I used annual budget meetings to push stretchable goals.

How did you transform your demon into a resource?

I don’t see much of a difference between the two. If you understand your challenge and you are working day and night to transform that challenge into reality, your challenge is your resource. It tells you what to look for, where to go. Where are the best people? Where are the best technologies? Are the people working on their dreams or they are just

making a living? I wanted people to work for their dreams. The best way to support dreams and stretch is to set apart small ideas with big potential, then give people positive role models and the resources to turn small projects into big businesses. This is what I did and this was my biggest resource.

I'm sure you had mentors, guardians, and sponsors too. Who were they?

There is a long list of people who greatly impressed me in my work life. I would consider some of them as my mentors, but you know my greatest mentor was my mother. My relationship with my mother was powerful and unique, warm and reinforcing. She was my confidante, my best friend. I think it was that way partly because I was an only child, born to her late in life (for those days), when she was 36 and my dad was 41. And when she died it really broke my heart.

Both of my parents had a strong influence on me. I was incredibly dependent on my parents. Many times, when my mother left the house to pick up dad, the train would be late. When I was 12 or 13, the delays would drive me crazy. I'd run out of the house and down

Loven Street, my heart racing, if they were around the corner on the way home, out of fear that something had happened to them. I just couldn't lose them. They were my world. It is unfortunate that my parents didn't live long enough to see me as GE chairman. Whenever I was invited to state banquets, met heads of state, kings and queens, I often remembered my parents. They would have been so proud to see me in my new role. They had worked very hard to make this possible for me.

Soulcraft

Would you like to add anything else? Is there any regret?

For the past twenty-four years, I have had a lucky charm—a brown leather briefcase—that has come with me everywhere. My assistant Rosanne, has nicknamed it—“Mr. Lucky.” I won the briefcase in an Atlanta golf tournament in 1977, the year I first came to Fairfield. It has seen better days. It's battered and bruised, or, as Rosanne liked to say, “It's disgusting and looks diseased!”

I've done extremely well with Mr. Lucky. It's been good to me, and I never wanted to give it up. The only time it's been out of my sight is when Rosanne took it home for a night to stitch a torn seam back in place. It's not that I have never been superstitious. I never wanted to push my luck.

My only regret is that I should have done more to develop and promote women to top positions in the company. This is what my critics tell me. And I think they are right. I was too comfortable with men who were like me.

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Hero's Journey

by Joseph Campbell

The heroic life is living the *individual* adventure.

There is no security in following the call to adventure.

Nothing is exciting if you know what the outcome is going to be.

To refuse the call means stagnation.

What you don't experience positively you will experience negatively.

You enter the forest at the darkest point, where there is no path.

Where there is a way or path, it is someone's path.

You are not on your own path.

If you follow someone else's way, you are not going to realize your potential.

The goal of the hero trip down to the jewel point is to find those levels in the psyche that open, open, open, and finally open to the mystery of your Self being Buddha consciousness or the Christ.

That's journey.

It is all about finding that still point in your mind where commitment drops away.

It is by going into the abyss that we recover the treasure of life.

Where you stumble, there lies your treasure.

The very cave you are afraid to enter turns out to be the source of what you are looking for. The damned thing in the cave that was so dreaded has become the center.

You find the jewel and it draws you off.

In loving the spiritual, you cannot despise the earthly.

The purpose of the journey is compassion.

When you have come past the pair of opposites, you have reached compassion.

The goal is to bring the jewel back to the world, to join the two things.

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