

The Hero's Sherpa: Your Guide Through Life's Challenges



5. Live the New Reality

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LIVE THE NEW REALITY

Overview: Live the New Reality

Each change journey comes to an end. If it has been successful, you will be living the new reality that you defined when you created your change story. In *The Art of Pilgrimage*, Phil Cousineau wrote, "The challenge is to learn how to carry over the quality of the journey into your everyday life. The art of pilgrimage is the craft of taking time seriously, elegantly." As this book nears the end, I pass on some of the ways I have learned to carry those lessons over.

"Returning Home"

If this was a big change, you and those who accompanied you have learned a lot. Your thinking has shifted. Most likely you have cut loose some old anchors, redefined your connection to other anchors, and established new ones. You may have developed new skills. Priorities may well have shifted. It's likely that you are acting, thinking, and perhaps even looking, different.

Don't be surprised that life is different now. Even if your physical "home" (whether home or workplace for the journey) is the same, you are not. You are living a new normal.

Reflection

Take time to reflect, and to catalog what those changes are and how they occurred. As different as every change is, the underlying patterns are the same. What can you discern from this journey that may be of use on your next one?

Intention

If this was a big change, and it was successful, there was a clear intent from the start, and there was a concerted effort to remain true to it throughout the journey. Your success required, as quoted above, "taking time seriously, elegantly."

Now that the journey is over, what is your intention? You need to identify it, to declare it, to commit to it if you are to "carry over the quality of the journey into your everyday life."

What You Passed By

"How long the road is. But, for all the time the journey has already taken, how you have needed every second of it in order to learn what the road passes by," (Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings*).

What did you pass by in order to take this journey?

Of all those things, which are best left "passed by?" Which are worthy of now attending to?

Stop, Start, Continue

The end of the change journey is a "stop." It could be that the stop came slowly, as you maneuvered your way along the path and overcame the obstacles that awaited you. Or it could be that it came surprisingly quickly as synchronicity helped move you over the threshold. Either way, don't let the mental, physical, and psychological energy that you were investing in the journey be eaten by all the urgencies that now arise.

Pay attention to what is *now* important; invest there. Now that you have reached a "stop," you have the ability to intentionally make another "start."

Celebrate

This is special. Treat it as such. Find a way to honor yourself, along with all of those who made the journey with you. In the business world, research says that only about 30% of organizational change initiatives deliver on their promise. At the personal level, we may do better. But whatever the statistics are, if you were in it and "win it," celebrate!

At the End of Your Change Journey

"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." T.S. Eliot

There is great power in metaphors, analogies, and stories...ways of communicating that move deeply inside of us, rather than just firing neurons in our brains. One of the greatest teachers of this message was Joseph Campbell.

There are several important things that I have learned about change journeys from Campbell over the years; I want to share a few of those lessons with you.

If you look at the T.S. Eliot quote above, the message is really quite simple... New things come out of the old. Some thing or things have to end for others to begin. Starting a transformational journey, whether at the personal, organizational, or even the societal level, means letting go of something that has served as an anchor in the past. Beginnings can't happen without endings.

Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey provides a powerfully wise road map to what your transformational journey is (and/or will be) like.

First, it is important to know that there are really two journeys needed if you are to achieve your desired outcomes. There is the outer journey: the new career choice, the new relationship, the new home, etc. But, there is also the inner journey: the new way of seeing yourself and your role in relation to others, for example. And, there are new ways of behaving as a result of the new ways of thinking.

The hero cannot make the journey successfully to the end without addressing both the inner and the outer.

The next important lesson that Campbell offers is the answer to the question, *Who is the hero?*

As someone who has been a change practitioner all of his life, the unfortunate truth is that all too often those in this profession (coaches, change agents, mentors, trusted advisers, counselors, therapists, etc.) see ourselves as the heroes. We are not. We are simply the guides. We may do our jobs well, or poorly. We may offer exquisite guidance and profound insights, or we may mislead those who are taking the journey. We may walk alongside them, or serve as Sherpas carrying the weight of guide and counselor, but we are not the heroes. Hopefully, we apply every bit of wisdom we have; we offer the truth even when it is uncomfortable; we support the decisions, even when we disagree; we learn and grow; and we share our deepening wisdom with others so that our professions continue to advance. But, none of that makes us heroes of the change journey.

The heroes are those who make the journey, you, our clients.

This is the next lesson that Joseph Campbell offers. The heroes are those who make the journey.

Perhaps your change is at the end. You—or you and your organization—are at a new beginning.

Now That Your Change Is Done

"This is a great moment, when you see, however, distant, the goal of your wondering. The thing which has been living in your imagination suddenly becomes a part of the tangible world." Freya Stark

Let's assume for a minute that you have successfully completed that really big change. It may have taken months, years, or more. Let out a sigh. Celebrate! Really celebrate!

But what else is important at the end of the change journey? Here are a few things I have learned along the way.

Wake up to your surroundings, and to what you have accomplished.

Remember why you set out on the change. What motivated you; what you were seeking; what you hoped to achieve.

Be in awe. Once this was a dream, a vision, an intention. It was not tangible, not real. You brought it to life. Take time to focus your thoughts, to cherish where you are, and to honor yourself for the journey you have made. Down the road it will most likely become routine...Don't let that begin here, now.

Be present. Open each and all of your senses to it.

Reflect on the differences from "back then" until "now." Reflect also, on the lessons the journey has given you. If you haven't already, record them. Keep them where you can reference them down the line; they may help to better prepare you for your next big change.

Consider the new perspectives and the new insights the journey has given you. Perhaps it has shifted your priorities, or who and what you value, or even more fundamentally how you want to live your life going forward. *Wow! That is one amazing powerful journey!*

Know that you—and the others who made the journey with you—have invested deeply to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

Follow the counsel of Joseph Campbell. In *Myths to Live By* he wrote, "The ultimate aim of the quest, if one is to return, must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others." How will you use this journey—the wisdom and power that it gave to you—to serve others?

Whether you have sown the seed or others have, know that another change journey awaits you. Perhaps it will be a series of minor shifts as you attune the new reality. Perhaps small adjustments as the world outside the new reality continues to change. And, in this turbulent and dynamic world of ours, the time will come to set out again on another major journey. Until then, cherish your time on this plateau. Live your new reality. Live it fully. Live it deeply. Stay awake to it as long as you can.

Every Change Has an Expiration Date

I remember my first personal computer; it was a state-of-the-art dual floppy disk PC manufactured by IBM. In order to run spell-check I had to swap one of the disks out to put in the spell-check disk; my recollection is that there were 10 or more disks for the word processing program. The printer required a special Plexiglas hood that was lined with eggshell crate foam to help manage the noise. At the time many office workers were still on electric typewriters or dedicated word processing machines. That was 1983.

In 1990 I bought my own personal laptop; it was an upgraded model with 20 MB of storage. If I still had it today, that laptop wouldn't even hold one of the photographs I now take with my digital single lens reflex 35mm (DSLR) camera. Part of this book was written on a 120 GB iPad while sitting in a park enjoying the sunshine; it was uploaded to the cloud and then downloaded to a PC when I got home.

In 2004, 90% of American households had landlines; today that number is less than 50%. I am old enough to remember the evolution from 78's, to 33-1/3's and 45's (for my younger readers, all forms of musical records); to eight-track and cassette tapes; to CD's; to the first iPod, which Steve Jobs boasted was "designed to hold 1,000 songs." Even that feels outdated today.

Every change has an expiration date.

Today many children still grow up thinking they have to choose a career that will be theirs the rest of their lives. The reality is, some of the lines of work that this year's high school and college graduates will experience don't even exist yet. Even those who do select—and remain in—a single career for a lifetime, will hold way more than one job.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average worker currently holds ten different jobs before age forty, and this number is projected to grow. Forrester Research predicts that today's youngest workers...will hold twelve to fifteen jobs in their lifetime. ("How Many Jobs Will the Average Person Have in His or Her Lifetime?" Scott Marker, LinkedIn. February 22, 2015.)

It's not just careers or jobs that are changing. Things change "on the job." Think about almost any line of work...it is most likely changing at revolutionary speed. Manufacturing. Teaching. Sales. Law. Healthcare. Technology. Construction. Agriculture. Transportation. Do a little research

over the past 40 years, which is approximately the average length of a working career these days. If you weren't around "back then," it will be difficult for you to even imagine what work in that field was like compared to today.

Changes in our personal lives have expiration dates as well. Child to teen to adult to elder. Single to married to single or widowed. Student to worker to retired. Childless to parent to grandparent, perhaps to great-grandparent. A home full of children to an empty nest. Within each of these changes there are more changes, some minor and some significant; the honeymoon is not like the first year of marriage, or the fifth, or the twenty-fifth.

Yet we tend to approach changes as if they are permanent, as if "This is it." As a result:

- We continue to invest in the old, the outdated, the worn out and expired well after such investments are justified
- Decisions become harder and harder to make, and even more challenging to execute
- We find ourselves "frozen in time," failing to let go of the past, becoming increasingly isolated as we grow more and more distant from both the present and afraid of the future
- Hours, days, weeks, years are spent talking about—and longing for—a past that cannot return
- Victors of an earlier day allow themselves to evolve into victims today
- Once upbeat, vibrant lives grow disengaged, depressed, despondent, desperate

Every change has an expiration date...but not everything in our lives has to change.

Anchors are what provides a sense of stability even in times of turbulent change. I have addressed anchors several times in this book; *Anchors Aweigh* talks about them in depth. For many people, their families, lifetime friends, religious or spiritual practices, core values, and beliefs serve as those anchors. I am not sure whether any of these anchors lasts a lifetime without going through its own changes, at least for most of us. But if we can hold on to them, move with their changes and change our relationship to them when the time is right, they will continue to keep us anchored even as other changes in our lives continue to expire.

Additional learning that supports you as you *Live the New Reality*

- *A Few Reminders: Key Change Principles (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Celebrate! (Plan the Journey)*
- *Every Big Change Needs a Roadmap (Create Your Change Story)*
- *How Often Are You Present With Yourself? (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Important Changes Cannot Be Undone (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *Mistakes and Trust (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *The Future Ain't What It Used to Be (Create Your Change Story)*

Additional Lessons

While *The Hero's Sherpa* provides guidance on the major – often transformational – changes that you face, it also has application to other important changes, and experiences, in our lives. Here I share a few of those applications.

Your New Year's Revolution

Are you ready for your New Year's revolution?

No, that's not a typo. We make resolutions, wanting to achieve revolutions.

We resolve to go to the gym, or to stop smoking, or to walk more, or to eat better...wanting a revolution in our health.

We resolve to work less on nights and weekends, or to spend more time with our families, or to find a new job with better hours, wanting a revolution in our work-life balance.

We resolve to be more selective about who we date, or to stop cheating on our partner, or to be more attentive at home, wanting a revolution in our love life.

62% of Americans make New Year's resolutions.

8% of them are successful in achieving their goals.

We make resolutions, wanting revolutions.

Resolutions are about actions, things we will start doing, stop doing, or do differently. But if those changes in your actions are intended to produce significant shifts in your life, it is likely that you will be among the 92% who do not succeed with your revolution.

If you truly want a New Year's revolution and begin thinking about it as the holidays approach, you probably are already running late; I start working on mine back in the summer. I craft a clear image about the outcomes that I am seeking to achieve. What does it feel like now that I have succeeded with my revolution? Where am I? What am I doing? Who is there with me?

I am engaging all of my senses, working to "embody" my new reality.

Neuroscience tells me that my brain is programmed to keep me where I am. It also tells me the power of story...a well-told story has the same chemical affect on our brain as actually

experiencing the event itself. Perhaps there is more to the saying “fake it until you make it” than most of us ever believed.

My story is written. I set aside time daily to live with it, reflect on it, to “be there in the future.” I am now working on how to achieve it. When I first started working on it, I thought it was improbable at best, and more likely impossible. Now I believe it is real, achievable, “within my grasp.”

I don’t know everything that I will need to do to get there. I don’t know what obstacles I will encounter, or what mistakes I will make along the way. (There will be some, and most likely a few big ones…of that I am sure.)

I do know that I am living into my New Year’s revolution today. And January 1…I will be on my way to becoming among the 8% who succeed. Will you be joining me?

What are You Giving Yourself for the Holidays?

When holidays arrive, what gifts do you give yourself?

No, I am not talking about a new car, the getaway vacation, or that piece of expensive jewelry you have been craving. I am talking about something you so much more deserve, and that is available to you no matter what is in your bank account.

In my work with clients, there are a number of gifts that I encourage them to give themselves. Consider this a gift list from which to choose for yourself.

Passion: Recently I was speaking with someone about my long-term engagement with photography. It will most likely never pay the bills for me. But when I pick up the camera, I am “in the zone.” The images that I produce receive critical acclaim; they are selected for juried exhibitions and museum collections; and they sometimes cause people to see the world around them—and even themselves—differently. I get the same feeling when I am working with people facing, and moving through, difficult change.

What are you passionate about? Where and how are you expressing that passion in your life today? If you don’t know what it is, give yourself the gift of *Exploration*…discover it. If you know it, but aren’t expressing it, give yourself the gift of *Next Steps*. Don’t spend another year regretting that you haven’t done what you could about whatever is really important to you.

Exploration: Discover your passion. What is your “why?” What touches your heart, your soul, your very being. For some people, the answer becomes obvious quickly; for others, it requires reflection. Allow yourself that time and space. Make that a gift to yourself.

Next Steps: If you know your passion, don’t save it for retirement, or “until things slow down.” Even if it is something that requires a considerable investment of time, money, energy, etc., there is something that you can be doing about it now.

I recently spoke with someone whose work options are constrained by the visa that he has. It is work that he is good at, but it is very different than his passion for a more creative writing career. My encouragement was to write, to take courses at the local community college, and/or participate in weekend workshops.

Starting to build that platform now will allow you to launch more fully into the passion when circumstances allow. What is that first, or next, step that you can take to pursue your passion? It is most likely a better investment than the jewelry you were considering buying for yourself.

Patience: Sometimes I hear, “Why start now? It is so long before I can really make this work.” That may be true. But if you wait until that “so long” has passed in order to get started, it will be an even longer time before you are making it work.

If making a new passion a more integral part of your life is a big change, it isn’t going to happen overnight. It is going to require patience. Having a clear picture of what it will be like once you have achieved it, and knowing that you are taking concrete steps to do so, will keep you motivated. Being patient with yourself and with the journey is a great gift to give yourself.

Being Human: We are all human. We all make mistakes. We all hear things wrong. We all see things wrong. We all read things wrong. We all misinterpret things. We all make bad choices. We all take the wrong turn sometimes. Allow yourself to be human. Acknowledge what went wrong; if at all possible figure out why and learn from it. Then move on.

Love and Acceptance: Most of us do the best we know how. Sometimes it is good enough, sometimes it is great, and sometimes no matter how hard we try, we can’t pull it off. Sometimes we make great progress in what seems an impossibly short period of time; sometimes we seem to be going nowhere, sitting in neutral. At the end of the day, give yourself love and acceptance. This is where you are now; this is who you are now. Tomorrow you have the opportunity to pursue your passion, explore, take next steps, be patient, and be human all over again.

Lessons on Change from the Presidential Election

This is a mini-case study, applying some of the lessons from elsewhere in the book; it was written shortly after the 2017 presidential election. It's messages are as applicable today as they were then.

Lesson 1: All Change is Personal

Donald Trump's election is expected to result in societal change across the country, and perhaps around the world. Those who voted for him, those who voted against him, those who voted for another candidate, and those who didn't vote each had an impact on the outcome, and each will feel the impact of some of those changes. Social change, like organizational change, occurs at the personal level.

Lesson 2: People Resist Change

Yes, we are seeing protests and petitions against Mr. Trump's election. But let's look back to those who he appealed to, who voted for him.

There are those who resist equal rights for people of color, and for the LGBTQ community. There are those who resist abortion rights. There are those who resist changes to gun rights. There are those who resist believing in climate change. There are those who resist the evolution of manufacturing. There are those who resist globalization of the economy. There are those who resist immigration. There are those who resist regulation.

While it is unlikely that many of Mr. Trump's supporters fall into all of these categories, most can be found in at least one of them. While some have been visible in their resistance over the years, many have held it inside. "Checking out" of change should not be confused with accepting it, but that is what we as a society too often have assumed. We have let "majority rule" end the needed dialogue, exploration, and inclusion that are needed to create a truly united nation. Too many became complacent when their cause was resolved to their own comfort. Too many pushed resistance underground. And Mr. Trump gave that resistance a voice.

Whether your change is personal, organizational, or you are involved in social change, remember that people resist change. (If you haven't already, the time will come when you resist even your own change. It is going to be more difficult and more uncertain than you imagined.) Give voice to that resistance. See it as a resource to help move the change forward, not as a barrier to be overtaken and driven down.

Lesson 3: Our Beliefs Shape What We See and What We Do

I can't believe it.

Nobody saw this coming.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

These words, and others with the same sentiment, have been said millions upon millions of times in the last seven days. They echo the truth that we see things based on what we believe. The world was flat (ignore the curving of the horizon), until it was proven round. The universe revolved around the world, until it didn't. It was unbelievable that Donald Trump would be elected President of the United States, until he was.

Not everyone sees the world in the same way. Intellectually we know that. But all too often we act as if our view of the world is the reality, the truth. It is our reality; it is our truth. But it is not the only reality, the only truth.

As you look at your own changes, what are the beliefs that shape them? What are the "truths" that limit them? What are the beliefs, the truths that you can reshape to remove the limitations, to open the possibilities? Donald Trump offered a belief that shaped his world, and that is now shaping the world for all of us.

Lesson 4: The Power of Story

Over and over, the media and the opposition decried Donald Trump's lack of policy and position papers. Hillary Clinton was credited with citing statistics and detailed positions in her speeches and during the debates. Meanwhile, even many of Secretary Clinton's supporters spoke of her as a "flawed candidate." While her supporters said the same even more often of Mr. Trump, few of his supporters went there publicly.

Donald Trump used the power of story. He appealed, virtually every time he appeared, to the hearts and the guts of those who felt left out and downtrodden and ignored by the changes going on in our society. He didn't speak in policy terms; in fact, he often didn't even speak in truthful terms. But, in his speaking, he captured people's imaginations, their yearnings; he re-ignited their hopes and dreams.

Hilary Clinton did capture the hearts and guts of some. But for the masses, her appeal was intellectual. "The first female President," or "the better alternative than Trump" just doesn't land with the same power as "build the wall" or "ban all Muslims." Secretary Clinton certainly had

powerful stories to tell, and sometimes she told them. But even her campaign acknowledged that she was better at “connecting with people” in cafes and small gatherings, that she was better in town halls than in debates. Whether that was a limiting belief on her part, I don’t know…But it certainly was a belief that shaped how she showed up.

What drives your change? Is it the facts and figures? Is it the data? Is it the market analysis and the future projections? Is it the unease you are feeling now? If your change is relatively minor, it is likely that these are enough to allow you success. But if it is a really big change, you need the story. You need to know what it will be like, not just in your head, but in your heart and your gut, when you actually achieve the full purpose of your change.

Lesson 5. The Importance of Anchors

When a change like the 2016 Presidential election occurs, it has a significant impact on our personal (as well as societal) anchors. Calls to crisis and suicide hotlines surged. While some are raising their voices in protest, others find themselves in a deep malaise; I have spoken with several people who “just didn’t have the will to get out of bed the next day.” As a gay man in a major urban area, I have become comfortable walking on the streets in recent years; the day after the election that comfort was shattered as the driver of a passing car slowed down next to me to shout, “Trump hates faggots!” I suddenly find myself once again having to be much more aware of my surroundings as I walk, feeling a bit less safe and secure because of who I am.

Those who are celebrating Donald Trump’s win—including President-elect Trump himself—also face significant changes in their anchors. They are no longer the “outsiders” who can freely decry all they see that is wrong. Some have been suddenly elevated to a position of responsibility and accountability. Some have shifted from “outsider” to “insider” status. Anchors are cut loose, or are dramatically changed.

Major changes call for paying careful attention to our anchors, yet most of us fail to do so in any intentional way. There are four sets of questions you should ask yourself as a result of this election, and as you prepare for any major change in your life.

1. *What are the anchors that I have to hold onto, without making any change? Which ones keep me facing into my “true north?” Which ones provide me with the continuing foundation for moving forward with my life?* For some this may be a religious or spiritual practice. It may be a job, a community, family and/or friends. The tendency can be to focus on the disruption; identifying and attending to these anchors can help to restore some of your sense of balance and stability.
2. *What are the anchors I have to continue to hold onto, but that I have to change my relationship with? Are there anchors that I have to hold onto more tightly? Are there others that I have to hold onto more loosely?* For some people, again, it may be that it is

important to deepen a spiritual or religious practice during times of turbulent change. It may be less important to focus on being liked or accepted, and more important to be more publicly authentic about your stand on issues.

3. *What are the anchors that I have to let go of? How and when do I do so?* It may be as basic as letting go of Facebook friends, or stepping off of social media altogether. I know of families that have torn apart as a result of the election results. In any big change, remember, if anchors are what hold you where you are, it is likely that you will have to let go of some of them in order to move to a different place in your life.
4. *What are the anchors that I need to add? How and when do I do so?* It is likely that people on both sides of this election's results are adding a commitment to having a more public voice. Just as we have to let go of some anchors during major change, we need to add others. During your own change, don't forget to attend to identifying, and adding, critical new anchors.