



The Great Divide – defining moments in adversity

Bởi:

Joe Tye

“One of the things that comes out in myths... is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light.”

Joseph Campbell: *The Power of Myth*

In his studies of the classic myths (e.g. Beowulf), and their modern counterparts (e.g. Star Wars) Joseph Campbell shows that the story almost always follows a predictable trajectory. At one point the hero is severely tested: he falls off his horse, loses his sword, and is lying face down in the mud as the fire-breathing dragon hovers above him. But then, somehow, he miraculously finds a way to slay the dragon, remounts his horse, rescues the damsel in distress, and they ride off into the sunset to live happily ever after.

This is also, to quote the title of a book by my friend and business school professor Michael Ray, “the path of the everyday hero.” That means you and me. Adversity often creates defining moments in our lives, gives us the opportunity to be an everyday hero. The adversity might be one searing moment as in a car crash, or it might drag out over time, as in the failure of a business or a marriage. But as a result, we are forever changed. For the everyday hero (including you and me), that change can be positive and it can be permanent.

Here are some of the ways hitting one of life’s brick walls can serve as a Great Divide that marks a powerful change in our self-identity:

From victim to visionary: Victims are rooted in the past, their frame of reference defined by things that have happened to them or been done to them. Visionaries are rooted in the future, their frame of reference defined by their dreams and the work they can do to achieve them. You can be a victim or you can be a visionary, but you can’t be both.

From entitled to empowered: The entitled mindset expects someone else to do things for you because you deserve them; the empowered mindset knows that you must do the

work yourself. No one can empower you but you, because loaned empowerment is not the real thing.

From complainer to contributor: Complainers whine about bad things that have happened to them, or about good things they think they deserve but that have not happened to them. Contributors focus their emotional energy on solving problems and helping others. The drunk who becomes an AA sponsor has made the transition from complainer to contributor – and been personally transformed in the process.

From greed to gratitude: One of the most remarkable, and paradoxical, ways that having their world turned upside down for some people is that their perspective changes from “what’s in it for me?” to “what can I do to share my blessings with others?” Adding to the paradox, people who make that mind shift are almost always happier.

From Midas to Appleseed: King Midas wanted everything he touched to turn to gold, and his wish was granted. He starved to death because you can’t eat gold. Johnny Appleseed devoted himself to planting trees that he himself would never see grow much less eat apples from. One of the things I’ve observed in my conversations with people who have survived significant adversity, and grown stronger as a result, is that they become more generous with both their time and their money.

From gardener to forester: Gardeners are focused on harvesting and consuming or selling the next crop; foresters are focused on nurturing the woods for future generations. Some of the most significant changes in the world have come about as a result of the work of people whose focus was on passing along a better world to their children and their children’s children.

From wishful to positive: Wishful thinking is hoping for something and waiting for someone else to make it happen for you. Positive thinking is expecting something and then doing the work to make it happen yourself. There’s nothing like getting knocked down by life to teach you the value of being a self-reliant positive thinker.

That which doesn’t kill you will make you stronger, Nietzsche famously said. It’s a paradox of adversity – by knocking you to your knees adversity will, if you survive it, help you stand taller on your feet. There will be life before and life after, and no going back. You cannot change what’s already happened – whether or not what comes next is positive and productive will be determined by you.