

The Heroic Journey of Social Change

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The Heroic Journey is a way of understanding, describing and planning for a process of social change at the personal, organizational or community level. It is an archetypal story of transformation found in cultures around the world – in myths, fairy tales, ancient stories, legends, books and movies. It is a way of understanding the lives of great leaders – such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. It is not a journey for the faint of heart, for it requires courage, commitment, and a willingness to explore, learn and change. A successful journey is a transformative experience, where basic attitudes and assumptions are often challenged, and we are frequently different at the end from when we set out.

The journey has five stages:

- **Home** – Where our ideals, values, beliefs and motivation provide the energy for the journey. It is where we start from – and where we can come back to at any time to tap into our source of power and find renewal. This is where we find our strength and the energy for moving beyond what is familiar and risking the unknown.
Signpost: What is really important to me? What do I deeply care about?
- **Quest** – Where we articulate our vision, or desired end state, and motivate ourselves and others to step forward on the path.
Signpost: What do I want to accomplish? What will it be like when I get there?
- **Test** – Where we meet (rather than avoid or resist) the obstacles or challenges in our path, and discover or learn new skills, tools and resources to transform the obstacles into opportunities and allies.
Signpost: How can I use this difficulty to further my journey? What is the opportunity within the obstacle?
- **Shift** – Where our work in meeting the test results in changes – expected or unexpected – in ourselves and/or in those around us. We see positive results, and also new challenges that arise from changing circumstances.
Signpost: What has changed (attitudes, behaviours, assumptions, norms, structures)? How am I, or how is the situation, different?
- **Gift** – Where we realize and internalize what we have learned or gained. We share these gifts with others, apply them in new situations and integrate them into who we are and how we work, thus redefining our Home place.
Signpost: How can I use what I have gained to benefit others and strengthen myself for the continuing journey?

We do not necessarily move through these five stages in a neat linear fashion. We may go back and forth from one stage to another, find ourselves stuck in one place, or feel that many stages or even overlapping journeys are happening at one time. Home is always there to go back to when we feel lost or confused.