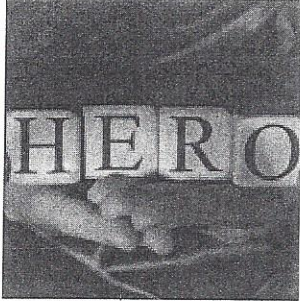


<http://www.raproject.org/blog/entry/what-really-is-a-hero-anyway>

What Really Is a Hero, Anyway?

Mike Dilbeck, Founder



*"True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic.
It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost,
but the urge to serve others at whatever cost."*

— Arthur Ashe

As we all hear the word "hero" used from time to time, have you ever asked yourself the question, "What is a hero, anyway?" I have asked that question many times. As I inquired into this more, and have spoken to many people about this, others also came up for me:

- Is a hero someone we simply admire, respect, look up to?
- Is a hero some kind of "superhero" with "super powers?"
- Does it take a lot of money and fame to be a hero?
- What's involved in being a hero?
- Can we call ourselves a hero?
- Why do we have such a weird relationship to the word "hero?"

You may have asked yourself these same questions. And we will be exploring this subject more in the future days and weeks on this blog. So, let's start now by looking at the concept of "hero" and "heroism."

While there are many interpretations of what a hero is, I have adopted the definition used by the **Heroic Imagination Project**:

Heroes are people who transform compassion (a personal virtue) into heroic action (a civic virtue). In doing so, they put their best selves forward in service to humanity. A hero is an individual or a network of people that take action on behalf of others in need, or in defense of integrity or a moral cause.

Heroic action is:

- **Engaged in voluntarily;**
- **Conducted in service to one or more people or the community as a whole;**

- Involving a risk to physical comfort, social stature, or quality of life; and
- Initiated without the expectation of material gain.

When you consider this interpretation, you can really get that heroism is the other side of the coin — the opposite — of bystander behavior. When you voluntarily engage in an activity that is in service to someone else, or the community as a whole, and you take a risk in doing so AND do it without any expectation of material gain: you are a hero! You are not a bystander.

Heroism is not random acts of kindness, as great as they are. Heroism is very distinct. A hero is not someone you simply admire or respect. A hero is a very distinct person.

Each and every day around us, there are those who need a hero:

- If a child is being bullied at school — or even an adult being bullied at the workplace — they need a hero.
- If someone has had too much to drink and they are about to drive, they — and everyone that their driving may impact — need a hero.
- If someone is being sexually "hit on" and has not given consent, they need a hero.
- If a group of students are being hazed — physically, emotionally or otherwise — they need a hero.
- If an inappropriate or offensive comment is spoken, those impacted need a hero.

Now, truth be told, we all want to be heroes. We all want to make *that* difference in *that* moment of time that will dramatically impact the situation and even foster change. Keep someone safe. Keep others safe. Stand up for what is right and just. As I travel the country and speak to audiences of hundreds of people — and then have the chance to speak one-on-one with many of them — I have yet to meet anyone that doesn't want this. We all simply desire the ability and the power to act freely and without restraint to make this kind of difference.

Yes, I know, we all have a really funky relationship to the word "hero." You may notice that it came up for you the second you read the headline to this post. You may think it's narcissistic. Egotistical. Self-promotional. You may even think that it's something to be bestowed on you rather than self-acclamation.

I also believe that most of us have a very cynical and resigned relationship to heroism. It may come from a time when we tried to be a hero — to take a heroic action — and it didn't go well or have the effect we needed it to. Or, maybe we wanted to be a hero for someone and never took the actions necessary to make *the* difference. In those moments we make a decision that we can't be a hero — we don't have what it takes. It was a good idea at the time; however, "I must not be good enough to be a hero." And these decisions have been validated by subsequent events ever since we made them. Actually, the older we are, the more evidence we have gathered to prove them true.

I get it. I really do. I have just as much evidence as you do that I am not a hero — and can't be. "Why even try, right?"

I am on this journey with you and I invite us all to stay in this conversation and explore it together: **"How can I be a hero?"** Better yet, "how can I prepare and equip myself to be a hero in those moments in life that demand it?"

I am committed that we all create a new and inspiring relationship to being a hero and allowing others to be heroes for us. Let yourself be empowered by the opportunity it is to make this kind of difference. This very commitment is the driving force of this revolution.

Think of a time someone was a hero for you and how you have never forgotten that person for what they did. You have never gotten over their courage and their actions — *for you*.

Think of a time when you were able to make this kind of difference for someone else. What did it feel like? What was that experience like? I promise, if you allow yourself to really experience this, you will be inspired — *by yourself!*

My challenge to all of us: **be a hero vs. be a bystander!**

Be an "everyday" person willing to keep your eyes, ears and heart open "every day" to any opportunity that may demand heroism.

I invite you now to commit to this by taking the pledge in the box on the right side of this page.

I thank you for taking this on. Really! I thank you for being the kind of person even willing to make this kind of commitment and hold yourself accountable for fulfilling it — for others, for organizations, and for issues you care about.

This will allow all of us to live extraordinary lives making *the* difference we all want — and need — to make.
Get involved. Stay engaged.

