To Lead a Meaningful Life, Become Your Own Hero

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What do *Beowulf*, *Batman* and *Barbie* all have in common? Ancient legends, comic book sagas and blockbuster movies alike share a storytelling blueprint called “the hero’s journey.” This timeless narrative structure, first described by mythologist Joseph Campbell in 1949, describes ancient epics, such as the *Odyssey* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and modern favorites, including the *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* series. Many hero’s journey stories have become cultural touchstones that influence how people think about their world and themselves.

Our research reveals that the hero’s journey is not just for legends and superheroes. In a recent study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, we show that people who frame their own life as a hero’s journey find more meaning in it. This insight led us to develop a “restorying” intervention to enrich individuals’ sense of meaning and well-being. When people start to see their own lives as heroic quests, we discovered, they also report less depression and can cope better with life’s challenges.

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