

The Heroic Journey: A Master Architecture to Foster Transformation

A conversation with Mobius Co-Founder & President, Erica Ariel Fox



ERICA ARIEL FOX is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Winning From Within: A Breakthrough Method for Leading, Living, and Lasting Change*. Erica is a leadership expert who advises executives and other senior leaders on personal and organizational transformation. She is President and Co-Founder of Mobius Executive Leadership. To watch Erica's 2016 NPI Keynote please visit the Reading Room section within the Next Practice Institute section of our website.

Q Tell us about the foundation of your track at this summer's Next Practice Institute.

I've been teaching at Harvard for 20 years and was initially trained in Action Science and a lineage that comes out of the Harvard Negotiation Project including classics such as *Getting to Yes* and *Difficult Conversations*. While these authors have been my friends and mentors, in the years I spent working on my own book, I took a very interdisciplinary approach and immersed myself in everything from philosophy to poetry to neuroscience to anthropology. I was influenced by fairy tales, pop culture – looking at the legends, the lore of different places on earth, from different moments in time and really looking at the history of the way people tell the story of who we are and what our lives mean.

Over the course of my immersive training for practitioners this June, we will deep dive into the power and mysteries of the Hero's Journey or what we might call journeywork. First, we'll explore how to use the gems of myth to liberate ourselves from limiting

patterns. We'll then examine how we can follow a "master architecture" – the hero's journey – to help people who seek transformational development.

Q One of the central pieces of your methodology you refer to as the Big Four, can you tell us more about these archetypes?

My goal in writing *Winning from Within* was to take the best nuggets of timeless wisdom and different kinds of contemplative practice and create a bridge so that business people and busy leaders would have an accessible way into them. There are many thought leaders who have created different frameworks for identifying the core parts of the self – one of them has twelve, Joseph Campbell's had a thousand. My purpose was to bring some of that wisdom to very busy people, so I honed in on four which I call the Big Four, not because they encompass the entire territory of the self,

THE BIG FOUR



DREAMER

Your *Dreamer* cares about creativity and future vision. If you're not being true to your *Dreamer*, you might be listless and bored. You might feel stifled in your routine. Letting yourself muse about your ideal world energizes your *Dreamer* to remember that your future holds great possibilities.



THINKER

Your *Thinker* is invested in reason and analysis. If you haven't been listening to your *Thinker*, you'll find it hard to get clarity on big, complex decisions. Stop waiting to understand the answer all at once, and start breaking it down into parts. Even putting your ideas into a simple spreadsheet can wake up your analytical mind.



LOVER

Your *Lover* is engaged with emotion and relationships. If you're out of alignment with your *Lover*, step back for a minute, and consider if you've withdrawn from the people around you. Maybe you worry people will slow you down, or even take your ideas. Maybe your *Lover* finds it safer to go it alone. If you dig a bit deeper, you'll often find other emotions lurking behind the choice to hide from people.



WARRIOR

Your *Warrior* is determined to achieve results and protect what matters. Your *Warrior* is out of alignment when you're not getting things done. People often get intimidated by the mountain of effort they think success might require, but one step in the right direction can unleash the power of your *Warrior*. A healthy *Warrior* loves momentum, and even more appreciates crossing the finish line.

but because in researching all the ways in which we might capture the essence of who we are, I noticed these four aspects of human nature surfaced again and again.

Q You talk about a master architecture to transformational development. What does this mean?

This is essentially Campbell's hero's journey. It is the path or the blueprint which takes the busy executive participants in our program from self-discovery to self-development to self-realization. There are clear stages in the hero's journey which we use to inform the design of our transformational change programs.

Self-discovery

In the beginning of a program, the aim is to help participants see themselves more clearly. You're not immediately trying to change anything. You're helping them see a pattern clearly, giving it a name and understanding how it works in them. This part of the program I call "arriving."

Self-development

In the middle of our week together – or in the middle of any transformational experience – there's a period of productive disturbance. You're challenged. It's pointed out to you all the things you're missing out on by following the pattern we named at the start of week. You see your habitual response clearly and then we begin to question, and occasionally dismantle aspects of these – or at least experiment with them. Depending on the person and where they're at, this stage involves self-development that can trigger transformation. Not everyone is ready for a transformation. Some people really are. I give participants a lot of choice at this stage. I might say, "We can do this exercise on a scale of 1-10 and I don't have a preference. We can do it at a level 2 or a 6." And then I watch for those moments where I need to check again, "Should we stop or keep going?" The further we go, the more of a potentially life-changing insight we might reach. But it's never the case that we need to reach a 10. We can stop at any point and the

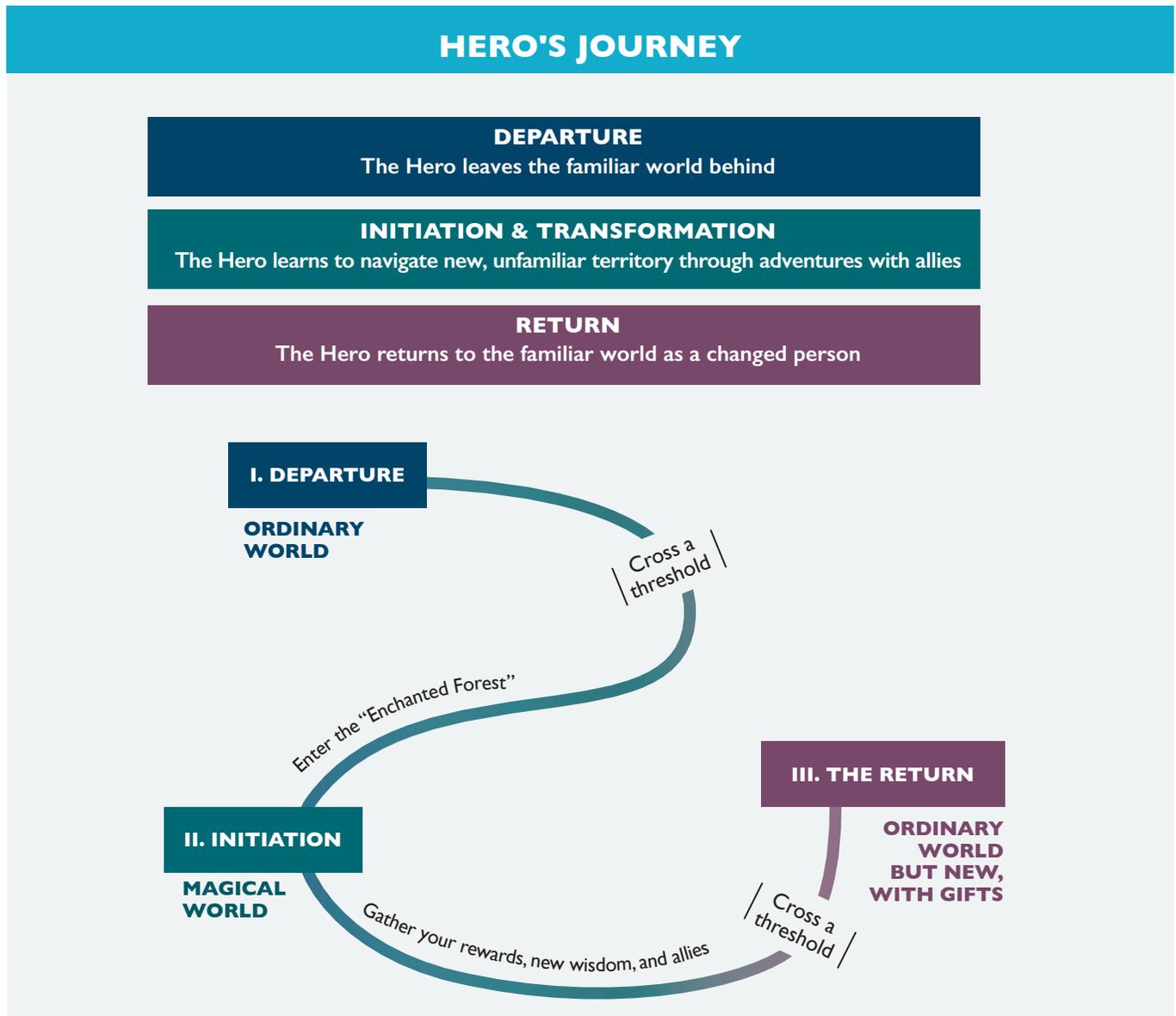
outcome can be exactly what the person needed in that moment. In terms of the journey architecture, there's a lot of real-time modulation and it's important in any given intervention, that as a practitioner you know how to ratchet it up and down.

Self-realization

Then there's a notion of helping people grasp that "Who I am" at an essential level isn't any of these patterns. You're not just the member of the Big Four that you think you are – you're not just the Thinker, for example, or the Warrior, Dreamer, or Lover. You have access to each of these types. After that there's the insight that actually you're

not any of those. We go from you're not one of them, you're all of them to you're not any of them – you are not those things. Instead you are the Voyager who is going through your life learning things, reinventing yourself and changing your operating modes over the course of your life. You shift the identification from Thinker/Dreamer/Warrior/Lover to I'm-an-evolving-human-being, who is growing, stretching, maturing and reconnecting with my heroic nature. This is the self-realization process.

In our work, the role of the practitioner is to help leaders reconnect with their heroic nature so that as people of influence, they can return to society its noble purposes. It's not just a company you lead, it's what's



YOUR TRANSFORMERS



THE LOOKOUT

To call on the appropriate member of the Big Four at the appropriate moment, you need to be centered. This is where the Lookout comes in. It watches the strategies that

your Big Four carry out and sees them for what they are – impulses, suggestions, possibilities that you might or might not follow. The Lookout tracks your internal states and is able to observe “this is your Lover feeling those strong emotions, not you” or “that was your Warrior speaking, not you.” By separating yourself from the Big Four in this way, the Lookout allows you to be at a point of choice in all of your actions.



THE CAPTAIN

Where the Lookout’s role is to help you track the Big Four and separate yourself from them, the role of the Captain is to hear out each of the Big Four and make

an informed choice about your next move. The Captain has the ability to draw on any or all of the Big Four, deploying all of their strengths and using all of their skills. The Captain treats the Big Four like passengers on a ship; rather than letting them steer the ship, the Captain is always at the helm.



THE VOYAGER

Neuroscientists tell us that the brain grows and changes not just in childhood but right through adulthood and that the experiences we have and the

lessons we learn literally rewire our brains. This notion of neuroplasticity opens the door for the inner Voyager, the part that drives your long-term growth. The Voyager takes you in new directions and keeps you moving forward, rising to new occasions and new opportunities, and overcoming the fears that limit your potential.

the core purpose of your life. This is what we do in the self-realization part; we ask not just who you are, but why are you here? A leader may arrive at the program questioning what sort of CEO she or he hopes to become and leave it feeling “I’m a steward in society. I’ve a higher purpose than even leading my organization and I’ve reconnected with that sense of purpose, the one that’s beyond my Big Four patterns.”

Q Given the nature of the quest, can you talk more about the Voyager ...

We all have our personal myths about who we are. In roles of influence, that story becomes your leadership myth as well. In my work with top teams, I’ve called each leader a “Voyager,” because, to paraphrase Deepak Chopra, your life is not *like* a quest, it *is* a quest.

Unless we practice this inner innovation, the Voyager work, human beings see what we expect to see, think what we expect to think, feel what we expect to feel, and do what we always do. Holding tight to expectations, built on the inner structure of our past, we are too fragile. We will break, and fall. In these times of massive change, we need leaders who embrace the complexity and emerging possibility of the world, and meet it with the full power of the complexity and emerging possibility within themselves. That is the disruption and reinvention “from within” that will take us into the future.

Q Can you say more about how the design of your leadership programs follows the hero’s journey?

There’s an arc to the design of a week. We start with discovery: we need to see ourselves more clearly, deeper than just the behavioural level. Not the level which many courses work on, such as “I notice that I assert and I assert and I assert and I never ask questions.” We are not talking about that. We’re talking about a much deeper sense of who we are: our identity and purpose. We go beyond ego-level. We follow Campbell’s path

to pattern disturbance/trials and tests/self-development to returning to the world transformed/more fully self-realized.

From a practitioner level, I must sense what is the limiting energy and what is the liberating energy for each person in the room. Jung talked about how we're born into a mansion that has all these rooms and over the course of our lives we lock this room and then another and another until we find ourselves as adults living in something the size of a small studio! We forget that we are a mansion.

From Jung's perspective, coming back into the fullness of who we are, demands gently going back into some of these rooms to look at what's in there. Jung calls this shadow material. We find the gold in the shadow and then we can reclaim that as part of who we are. A participant arrives to the program in the studio apartment version of themselves. If I'm with them for a week, I'm not going to go into twenty locked rooms. There isn't time and some of those rooms are locked for a good reason. I need the expertise to understand which door is appropriate to open versus those that provide defence mechanisms it's not my business to unlock (all practitioners in transformational work need a mastery of discernment in this regard). What I look for is the key. One of those doorways will release limiting energy and allow in liberating energy.

If we can find that door, or that key, it's like a domino: now that I've changed that one aspect of myself that was closed, everything suddenly looks differently to me – about how I live my life, about all my priorities, all my decisions. There's a huge sense of release and of fresh perspective and energy. This is why participants regard these programs as life-changing, because they felt seen and had an experience that gave them access to a lost part of themselves around which everything in their lives will now pivot.

This is the power of mythology. On one level the practitioner must hone their ability to intuit where the key lies for each person, on another, the process is helped by the magic of mythology. Mythology helps us connect with something bigger than ourselves, what Jung regarded as the collective unconscious. The hero's journey is the story of all our lives and each of our lives. It uplifts a person's sense of who they are, as they start to notice there are universal patterns (like

Lover, Thinker, Warrior, Dreamer) running through human experience. There are timeless dimensions of the human condition which challenge us and call us to adventure / to leave the comfort of what we know. We refuse that call initially – that new job or whatever it is, we find allies and mentors who guide us, we face trials and tribulations, we slay the dragon, we return to our villages forever changed.

Q What about when participants get back to their day jobs and everyday lives – back to the village – after a program? A residential program is an intense experience, but can it really shift things for someone permanently?

Once a door that was locked has been opened, there's a threshold that people cross after which they cannot go back. In a lot of courses you learn frameworks and practice behaviors, you learn to do things, but you don't cross a developmental threshold. You may come up against it, but then you go back to work. You can easily default back to what you used to do. The word transformation means you change form. When you change form and cross over a certain threshold, you just cannot go back. You can't discover that you have a heart that feels and then forget that ever happened. You can't have the deep understanding that you are not your Thinker; you have discovered the core identity you carried around in the world about who you are was false and limited and now have deeply understood that who you are in the world is much more. You can't forget that. You can definitely default back to your pattern, but having been through the experience what I hear from people is that they catch themselves when this happens. Their Lookout has developed.

It is also true that these programs are a peak experience and we cannot walk around the world in a peak state all the time. We can't maintain new ways of being we're still learning, but we practice these and we keep the insights that we gained during these peak experiences. That's another crucial part of the program design: we do integration work to anchor participants in the insights they've won.

“Your life is not *like* a quest, it *is* a quest.”

Q What part practice, what part ‘magic’ is involved in your work?

When you watch or participate in on-the-spot transformation, it can feel like magic. You’re sitting in a workshop, or leading a group, or meeting with your team. Then suddenly – boom! A person changes before your eyes. What just happened? How did it happen? Where did that come from? Even for advanced leadership practitioners, there is a level of mystery when an alchemical impulse arrives and supports a major shift in someone’s life. At the same time, there are methods to the madness. When we “look behind the curtain” to understand some underlying principles and practices that guide this type of experience, we can see that “instant breakthroughs” tend to follow an arc — with a start, a middle, and an end.

To master the Winning from Within methodology there’s essentially two elements — which is a gross simplification, but for the purposes of discussing the nature of the work at a high level, these are: pattern recognition and situational awareness. Some of us are more capable of these than others, but all of us can deepen our mastery of them.

Pattern recognition

This comes only with experience. For example, one of the gifts of Campbell’s monomyth, the hero’s journey, is what it gives the facilitator. You have a map to work with. You listen to one participant’s story about their issue at work and what you hear underneath all that is “Oh here is the myth of the abandoned son.” Even though this may have nothing to do with the participant’s father, the healing is going to come when we tackle a

deep fundamental sense of abandonment like the King who disowns the Prince.

This pattern insight allows the practitioner to recognize deeper dynamics to the surface details of this participant’s story. Once that happens, there’s a better chance you know how to fix that, you know how that story needs to end. You don’t get caught up in the drama of Richard’s or Nancy’s situation and instead you see the bigger pattern through myth. This takes experience and is just one example of pattern recognition.

Another example is noticing that there are certain points during the week when the energy of the group collapses. Inexperience may lead us to worry that the program isn’t going well. Experience suggests that this is a natural, normal and welcome aspect of the work unfolding.

If we’re at the stage of our own development as facilitators where we need more practice to develop this sort of pattern recognition, we need to stay humble and ask more masterful practitioners for guidance or partner with them. Watch and learn from their pattern recognition as you develop your own.

Situational awareness

A heightened quality of situational awareness is another element of the craft. The only way we can heighten our understanding of what is happening inside and outside the room is through being present. Even when you’re working with someone individually, you’re constantly aware of the collective mind of the group because the collective mind is going on a journey together and every individual is going on a journey within the collective. Everything that’s happening to the individuals and the collective is unfolding moment to moment in the room and outside of the room. As



the head facilitator, you have to be tracking all of that, all the time, in a very heightened way. Presence and situational awareness can be learnt. And it's these elements that invite in the magic.

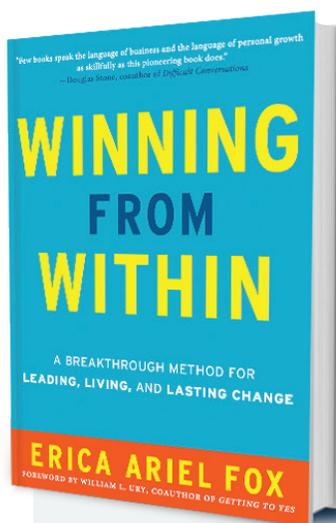
For example, a few years ago one of the participants in a program wrote a poem for the group. In it he had given a line to everyone in the group – all except one. As he shared it with the group, pointing out the strengths of each member of his team, he stopped when he got to his colleague, Martin. Martin had been the life and soul of the group – he was witty and warm and engaging, but when his colleague, Richard, reached Martin he simply said: “I haven't written you into the poem because I don't have a line for you yet.”

This was my cue, a moment of potential magic was presenting itself. I said, “Martin, come sit here with Richard and listen to what he is saying.” Then I asked Richard to repeat what he had just said about not having a line for Martin yet. I then told Martin, “I too don't yet

have a line for you. In fact, it seems that no one in the room, despite the years in which they've worked with you, has a line for you.” This was the truth. How did I know it to be true? Intuition.

I asked Martin whether he wanted a line in the poem. He did. “Let's-get-you-a-line” led to an hour and half process with this shielded, hidden guy who hadn't been revealing any of his authentic self to the group. It wasn't a planned intervention. A person made an unexpected comment and I identified that comment as the doorway. It was the key to unlocking Martin.

Heightened situational awareness helps us listen and watch for the keys for each person in the room so that we can take it and work with it. Afterwards Martin referred to this as a miracle. We'd unlocked the part of him that hadn't even started on the journey. Others in the room wondered had it been planned? It had not. I seized on the key because it was placed before me. That's the magic of journeywork. ■



Take the Big Four Profile Survey online. Visit www.ericarielfox.com for more about the *Winning from Within* approach to self-development and leadership work. A sample chapter of the book is available on the website. There's also a resource section, where a companion bibliography explores each of the leadership archetypes in depth. For example, under “the captain” we provide a list of materials that explore what situational awareness is and how to develop it.

Erica Ariel Fox was interviewed by Nathalie Hourihan. For the last several years Nathalie has served as Mobius Global Knowledge Manager with wide ranging responsibilities for the firm's thought leadership, including serving as the editor for its transformational leadership magazine, the *Mobius Strip*. She is a former global knowledge expert for McKinsey & Co. and has recently set up Wolf Knowledge Ltd (www.wolfknowledge.com) to offer knowledge creation, codification and curation services.