

The Art of Persuasion: How to Optimize Your Customer's Hero Journey

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Introduction to The Hero's Journey

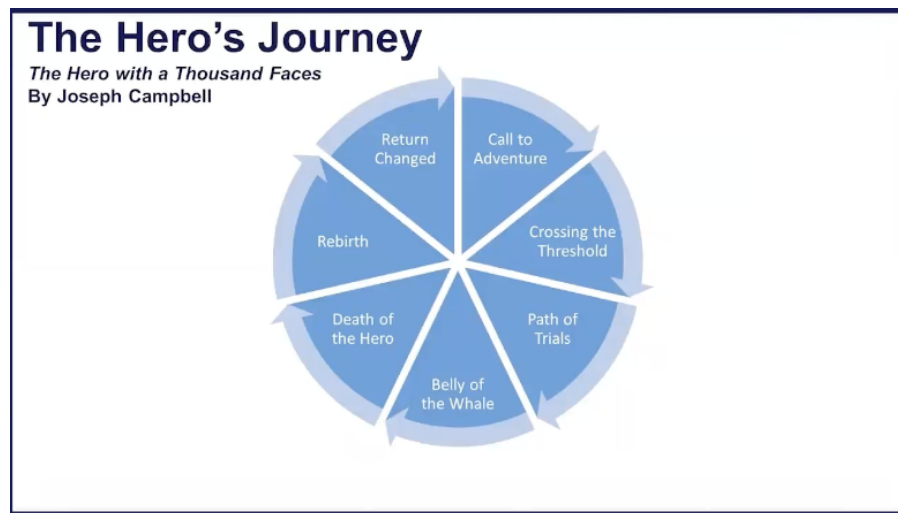
We all love to see our prospects, our customers, and even the visitors to our websites, as Heroes on a journey, a quest to solve the problems that we solve with our products and services. Of course, we want to be helpful in that journey. I'm going to look at the Hero's Journey, I'm going to map to it, the sort of things that we can do to help them along in their journey, *not all of which are helpful and magical*.

So I'm going to start off with a quote from the Bible, *"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them also the other cheek."* This is a complete Hero's Journey: It starts off with a *Call to Adventure* and a push *Across the Threshold* into the adventure. The hero finds himself in a strange world, a world in which people will slap him and has a *Trial*, a moment of decision that he has to make, and making the right or wrong decision will determine if he completes his journey. He has to decide, should he strike back? Certainly, his first instinct is to fight back because it's just not fair. And at that moment, he finds himself in the *Belly of the Whale* that moment of indecision. But when he comes out, he understands the truth, it is a *Rebirth*. And he turns the other cheek, also. He gains inner peace and inner wisdom from this, that he can then carry back to his people.

Every turn cheek requires a slap. ***So who's doing the slapping?***

Who is the Hero and What is a Villain

Joseph Campbell outlined this Hero's Journey. It begins with a *Call to Adventure*, *Crossing the Threshold* into a strange new world, a *Path of Journeys Trials*, into the *Belly of the Whale*, where they're in moments of indecision, the *Death of the Hero*, or they become something else, or *Reborn* and *Return Changed*.

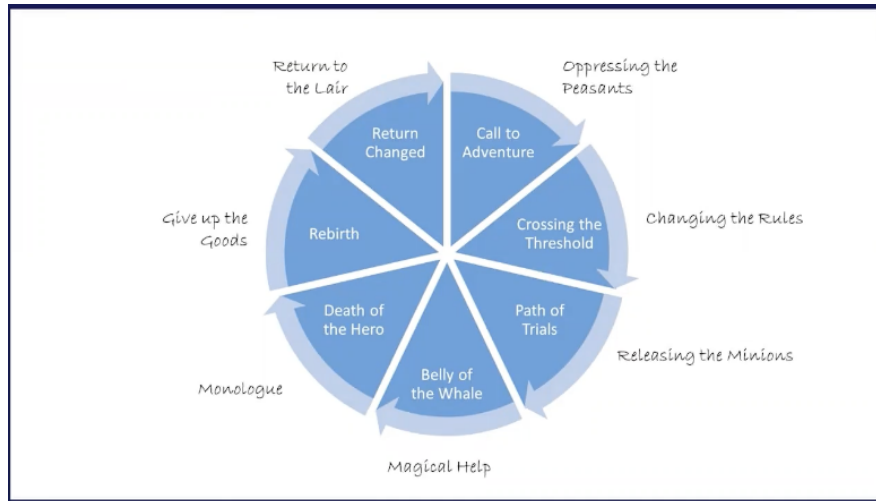


I want to also talk about the Villain's Journey, and map it into this process. So the ***Villain, the Bad Guy, the Heavy, the Antagonist***. This is a person or organization sometimes that believes the world needs to change, and tasks themselves with changing it. We begin to see villains in places we wouldn't otherwise expect to see them.

So if that's the villain, ***Who is the Hero?*** Well, the Hero is a person and sometimes an organization that needs an external force for internal change. The natural external force is often applied by the villain. So my premise is that *shoppers seek internal change*. Sure, they're trying to solve an external problem, but they're ultimately looking for satisfaction. They're looking for the career-changing results of hiring the right firm to solve a problem for their firm. *But ultimately, our shoppers are looking for an internal change. They need a catalyst.*

The Hero's Journey and the Villain's Journey

The *Hero's Journey* maps out like this, map onto it what I call the *Villain's Journey*.



- Starts with a **Call to Adventure**. The job of the villain is to **Oppress the Peasants**.
- This is an interesting one, **Crossing the Threshold** because the hero naturally has a resistance to crossing the threshold. We all have a natural resistance to change, especially inner change. So the villain's job is to **Change the Rules** to create an environment that just requires the hero to step across.
- Next comes the **Path of Trials**, and it is the job of the villain to **Unleash the Minions** and begin to create challenges for the hero. This is how they find their way to the right answer and strip off childhood ways.
- The **Belly of the Whale**, this is that moment of indecision. Here's where the villain offers **Magical Help**.
- Ultimately, the **Hero must Die**, and the visitor must die to become a customer, he's going to become something very different. The villain must deliver in a **Monologue** of sorts, to destroy anything that the hero is hanging on to, that would keep them from crossing into this **Rebirth**, this threshold of becoming something else.
- At this point when the heroes **Reborn**, it's the villain's job to **Give Up the Goods**.
- The **Hero returns Changed**, and the villain lurks **Back to her Lair**.

How The Hero and Villain Journeys Play Out on a Website

I'm going to show you how these *journeys can play out on a website*. And there is a certain pejorative to villain so we get to ask the question, which of these tactics is really fit it within the boundaries of our brand? Is this something we should be doing?

So who is the villain in your brand story? Well, I can show you an extreme example of an advertising campaign that created a very palpable villain.

Back in the day, Listerine was a household disinfectant. And they wanted to get into the mouthwash gig. They wanted to sell their disinfectant, as mouthwash. So they created a disease that was tantamount to bad breath called *halitosis*. Now, how many of you people think halitosis is a real thing? It's Latin, yay. But they made it up. It is a fancy word for bad breath. And we know what the root of bad breath is. But this was just an *advertising ploy*. We can do this too. And we're writing headlines.

So here are two headlines for a debt collection website:

“Debt Relief That Works For You” - that's very aspirational, and really speaks to the needs of our hero.

But **“Free Yourself From the Burden of Debt”**, creates a villain, creates a bad guy, and it is the debt. And if debt is burdening you, then you are an *oppressed peasant*, potential hero rising above.

I love this example, too, for an addiction treatment center.

“A place of New Beginnings”. This is what we call a very conceptual headline. This was tested by Mike Parla against this: **“Addiction Torments Addicts and Their Loved Ones”** Once again, we have a bad guy, tormenting addicts and their loved ones.

This is a *complete story in seven words, got the bad guy, the good guy, the conflict and some resolution promised on the page*. This was 184% increase in conversions over the “Place of New Beginnings” headline. So we can see *how the villain can really play an important role*. These are what we would term negative headlines as opposed to aspirational or positive headlines. And there are good reasons to believe that these work.

Call to Adventure - Oppress the Peasants

Let's start at the beginning, the *Call to Adventure*. Advertising is really where we *Oppress the Peasants*.

Give you an idea following our Listerine commercial. These are the ads that were put forward by Listerine:

“Often a bridesmaid, never a bride.”

“Marriage and halitosis. Don't fool yourself, your marriage is at risk, because of bad breath.”

“Are you unpopular with your own children?” This is oppressive. This is stirring the pot. This is causing people to say, “Oh my gosh, I'm going to go out, and I've got to fix this.”

“He's not going to call.” Love is always a great place to turn the screws on your audience.

So we'll generally see our advertising, our outreach, as stirring the pot, oppressing the peasants. And our goal is for the heroes to arrive and step forth, they must cross the threshold. And their *first step towards that will be clicking on one of our ads and coming to our website*. And at this point, it's the job of the villain to change the world to bring the hero into a new world so that she can be, she can stop relying on the things that she's always relied on and begin to see new possibilities.

Crossing the Threshold - Changing the Rules

This is a great example from the folks over at Copy Hackers. This is an underarm deodorant, it's a, it's a different way of fighting perspiration.

“Control your sweat”. Again, very aspirational, very uplifting.

They tested this one against **“It doesn't even have to be hot out. My armpits are always wet.”** So we've gotten this sweat as the bad guy. But we've changed the rules of perspiration. It's not about being fresh and feeling clean. It's about avoiding embarrassment of people around you. The *Rules have been Changed*. *How can you change the rules in your copy so that you are bringing heroes across that threshold?*

Here's another one: **“The longer your home sits on the market, the less you will make.”** And I love the specificity. We learn what to do that nets \$9,875 more. This is for a realtor who is obviously looking for homes to sell. So the *Rules are Changed* from *“I can sell my house at any time”* might be a good idea to *“Oh, I better get on this.”*

Path of Trials - Releasing the Minions

Our next step is the *Path of Trials*. And it is the job of the villain to *Release the Minions*, to *create obstacles*. And we find these on our website, we introduce them on purpose and on accidents. Some of us are just natural villains.

The first way of creating an obstacle is by too much **Choice**. Whenever somebody says “*Oh, this page seems cluttered, we need to redesign it.*” What they're generally saying is that it's not really clear to the human eye. What's most important on the site, on the page, and what is least important, the eye is not being guided. And even adding long lists of features can often create a choice that overwhelms the brain and becomes an obstacle.

We can use psychological techniques like **Anchoring**, where we artificially lift the price of something only so that we can cross it out and offer what is perceived as a discount. So this creates a psychological issue in the hero's mind. And it also can be very manipulative.

Belly of the Whale - Magical Help

The *Belly of the Whale* is next, and we're going to offer some sort of *Magical Help* to get them out of the belly and on their path down their hero's journey. The belly of the whale is the moment of indecision, it's those times when we have decided that this can help us, but we just want to give it a minute more.

An extreme version of this would be if you've got a leak under your sink that is ruining your wood floors. You want to find an emergency plumber fast. And if you type in “emergency plumber for your city” you will find listings for “*Emergency Plumbers*”, but the click-through is often like this: “There's no mention of emergency here. Should I call this number? Could these people be here right away? What if it's the evening? What if it's the weekend?” So what we've done is we've not provided any magical help in the belly of the whale.

A better approach would be this” *No extra charge for weekend holidays and nights. Austin Plumbers 24 Hour Emergency Plumbing, here's the phone number.*” This is offering magical help to get the visitor out of the belly of the whale and on their path. So the magical things that we can touch on include a lot of what we call **Loss Aversion**. It shows that *humans are far more afraid of losing something than of gaining something*. And we can play this to our advantage.

Loss Aversion on Magical Help

- **Myopic Loss Aversion**, where we focus on short-term losses, even if it's a long-term decision that they're making - *sunk cost fallacy*. Think about how much you've already spent. We see some of this happening when we take a form, a long-form and we convert it to a quiz-style solution. So they answer one or two questions, one or two questions, one or two questions, all the way through. By the time they get to the end of the series, they've already spent so much time answering questions that they really need to power through and get to the end, *sunk cost fallacy*.
- **Regret Aversion**, emphasize how they will feel if they make the wrong decision. Agitating a problem is *tried and true methodology* in copywriting. How far do you want to take that down?
- **Status Quo Bias**, emphasizes that you require less change than a competing solution. Pretty straightforward, right?
- **Satisficing** focus on good enough procrastinators. And people who are what we call spontaneous buyers, are really just looking for an excuse to get the problem solved. And they might bite on what you have to offer to their satisficing needs.
- **Cognitive Dissonance** makes the case that they're being hypocritical. Take something that they believe strongly in and turn it on its head. This gets their attention. This changes the rules, this is very **villainous**. Takes a certain amount of skill and copywriting now.

So an example of *Myopic Loss Aversion* is 33% discount on, limited-time promotion. And in fact, anytime that you add time pressure, you're really focusing on *Myopic Loss Aversion*, the fear of losing out, so they're implying the regret effect. This is one of the beautiful things about Black Friday and Cyber Monday is that there is a time limit, this has to be done now.

So there are a number of ways of going about this. And we see these all over the web. Here's one from a company that I know for a fact *always has this available, but it says limited time only gets 20% off*. Now, limited time only means that they could decide at some point that this isn't working and take it down. But there really was no time limit on this. And I think this is one of those places where you have to decide if you're going to cross the line. Are you offering real discounts to accelerate things? Because it's in your best interest? Or are you just manipulating people?

- And you can also leverage these psychological, these magical things by **Borrowing Trust from other Brands**. So that's what *testimonials* are when you use logos from companies that you've worked with, logos from associations that you're a member of, and the Better Business Bureau logo. All of this works, to

borrow trust, and bring in trust from other brands. This is the magic that helps the visitor get through and continue their journey.

On the extreme end, there is this. So you've all seen trust symbols that tell people they're safe using your site, and you can't be hacked. But I've seen more than one example where the company has simply engineered and designed its own logo, *Ethical SEO 100% Satisfaction Guaranteed*, no one gave them these monitors, but they're using magic to help people feel more secure.

- And then there is the **Threatening of Loss**. I know you've all seen these on travel sites if you're booking a hotel, *"Only 2 like this left on the site."* And one of the more extreme examples I've seen is, *"Oh, you've already missed this one."* Now, if it's not in stock, if there are no rooms available, why would you put it on a page, other than to turn those screws a little bit more? It makes them think *"Oh my gosh, I better act now."* Or *I'm not going to be able to get this room, a room, I might be standing out in the rain."*

So we've really provided some **magical psychological help**. And you can start to see where we can use these crossing lines. These are decisions you're gonna have to make for your brand.

Death of the Hero - Monologue

The *Death of the Hero* is the *Monologue*. This is where the truth comes out. So the villain finally lays out his entire plan and why the world needs to change and how he intends to change the world. It is the truth of his, his vision laid out to the hero and the heroes like, *"Ah, how could I have known?"*

And *Monologues* typically start with **"You fool."** Like when we get to the end of the checkout process, **"You fool! Did you think you could have books for just 59.65?"** This is where we begin to discover things like extra fees, shipping, and tax. And this is where a large percentage of your abandonment comes from. Because everybody knows there's a monologue coming when they're on a website when they're buying something on an E-commerce site. And they go and they want to hear the monologue, before they make a final choice, they want to find out what the bottom line is, going to be long forms. So a nice ad that brings you to a landing page, that takes you to a page that has a giant form **"You fool, now you must tell us everything about yourself."** And this is where the truth comes out. And this can chase away the hero, or it can give him that final thing that he must get through to spend himself and *díe* in the process and to be *reborn* on the other side as a lead or a customer.

Addiction Treatment Centers, again. So this is you know, ostensibly saving someone's life who's suffering from an addiction or a loved one who was trying to save someone in their family: **"You fool, You thought we would just help your addiction."**

Long, long forms. The good thing about long forms like this is they really increased phone calls, which is a far more effective way to speak to an addict or loved one. The problem is that *Monologues* do hurt. And as we start to tell the truth through the process, for instance, at checkout, we find people are shying away, they're not finishing their hero's journey.

Consider writing your *honest monologue* first, if you were really to spell out everything about your value proposition, the good and the bad. That would be a great starting point. Because you would find these points where you, what you are hiding, and what you think are our weaknesses, actually are important parts of the hero's journey and can help them get through that process and be reborn.

My favorite is from this movie called *Crazy People*. This was one of the ads that they proposed to the executives at Volvo. **"Buy Volvos, they're boxy but they're good. Be safe instead of sexy."** Now, If you wrote a few of these, you might find yourself discovering some aspects of your brand, certain honesty that you can carry forward. I'm not saying you should lead with everything that's wrong, where your disadvantages are. But we do go a little bit over the top and sugarcoat everything that we write.

Rebirth - Give Up the Goods

And then finally, of course, *Giving up the Goods*. They've gotten through the checkout process, they've completed the form, and we are going to give them the rewards of their labor to have been reborn, they are now a friend of the company, and they are beginning a conversation with us. And this is the chance for us to really help them solve their problem.

Now this is where something called the **Endowment Effect** comes in. And it's simply this that *we value or overvalue something simply because it's ours*. And this really kicks in immediately after somebody has completed an action on your website. In fact, *Thank You Pages* are the best time to ask for more stuff. One of the things we love to do is to put a question on every thank you page, whether it's an E-commerce site or lead generation site, and ask *"What almost kept you from buying today? What almost kept you from signing up today? What almost kept you from requesting the report today? What almost kept you from signing up for the webinar today?"* Because these people are and drenched in the *Endowment Effect*, they are more willing to answer your questions.

You'll have very high completion rates on this, certainly higher than if you had posted it anywhere else on the website. And you're also asking the question of someone who has been through your entire process and may actually have a bone or two to pick with you. So *Thank You Pages* are great to ask for shares on social media, and they're great to sell an upgrade to the product. They are great for selling anything additional that you could offer, such as training, and things like that, that the buyer would want to have. You would think you want to give him a little breather and not ask him to buy anything more but the *Endowment Effect* will begin to fade.

Return Changed - Return to the Lair

So the visitor *Returns Changed*, changed internally, changed externally. They've become a customer, they become a contact, they become a lead and you *Return to the Lair* waiting for the next hero to show up and begin oppressing those peasants again.

Villainic vs Visionary Analysis

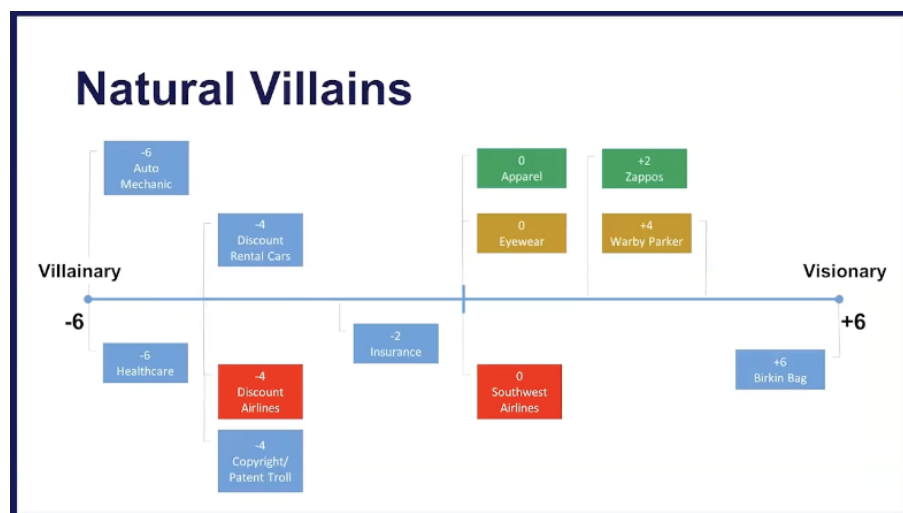
So, *we need our villains*. How to move out of that? Because we really don't want to be in the mode of manipulating, we want to be in the mode of persuading, helping, and serving. But we have to realize that we're dealing with humans, humans that are reluctant to cross the threshold that will ignore the *Call to Adventure*, and might need a little help along the way.

So I believe in *Villainary* and *Visionary* products and services.

Villainic Analysis	
Villainary Subtract 1 Point for each "Yes"	Visionary Add 1 Point for each "Yes"
<input type="checkbox"/> Commodity: Easy to acquire from multiple sources	<input type="checkbox"/> Differentiated: Difficult to find alternatives
<input type="checkbox"/> Cost-based Pricing	<input type="checkbox"/> Value-based Pricing
<input type="checkbox"/> Preventative or Regulatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Enabling or Aspirational
<input type="checkbox"/> Opaque: Seller knows more than buyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Transparent: Buyer knows more than seller
<input type="checkbox"/> Decision time pressure	<input type="checkbox"/> Decision time flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/> High perceived cost of poor decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Low perceived cost of poor decision

- If something is a *Commodity*, that means it's easy to acquire from multiple service sources, you're generally going to find it using more of these tricks. But if you can take even a commodity product and sufficiently *Differentiate* it with your *value proposition*, so that becomes something different, then you do not need to be quite so villainous to get the hero to cross that threshold.
- If you're using *Cost-based pricing*, which is, you know, markup. Generally, you see this with *commodity-type* products, or using *Value-based pricing* where you, you're pricing based on the value of what you're offering. You don't need to be as villainous.
- Is this a *Preventative or Regulatory* like preventing halitosis? Or is it *Enabling, an Aspirational*? Saving time, saving money, more convenience, more happiness, looking beautiful, and enjoying the way you dress. Villainary versus visionary?
- Is it *Opaque*? Does the seller know more than the buyer? Or are you transparent? Can you be very *Transparent* about what you do? Does the buyer know more than the seller?
- Is there *Time pressure* decision on the decision? Like when your faucet is leaking? And it's ruining your floors? Or is there *Time flexibility* in the decision-making?
- Villainary - visionary, *High perceived cost* of a poor decision or *Low perceived cost* of a poor person decision.

For those of you that are in the *B2B world*, you might be surprised to find that you're more on the *villainary side*, because not only is it possible that the company would lose money by choosing the wrong services and products for the business. But it could cost the person who made that decision, their job. So there is a relatively high subconscious cost of someone picking the wrong HR management tool, for instance, or the wrong conversion optimization team.



And if you look at the point where certain industries and certain kinds of businesses fall on:

- *Apparel*. If you *add points for visionary* and *subtract points for villainary*, *apparel* comes in at about a zero, right down there in the middle.
- But if you're *Zappos* and you have this amazing return policy, returning the shoes anytime within a year, it allows people to buy several sizes, find the one that fits, and at any time return the one that didn't fit. So they created less of a *Commodity* product and moved themselves a couple of points over. They also decreased the *Perceived Cost* of a wrong decision.
- *Warby Parker* I think did the same thing, an eyewear.
- *Airlines*. The *discount airlines* scored very low. And I might have been a little hard on them. But a company like *Southwest Airlines* brought themselves up to zero and they're doing things like they don't charge extra for bags, they don't have change fees, things that really have made the difference in me being a Southwest customer.
- *Insurance, healthcare*, way down there at minus six. This is one of the most villainous industries.
- *Auto mechanics*.

So to give you an idea of how businesses fall on the path and you as a marketer, and brand manager, product manager want to move yourself more towards the visionary because of all of the villainous techniques available to you, but if you don't have to use them, then I think your brand has a much longer, more positive lifecycle.

Conclusion

So I'd like to hear your *villainous examples*. Your brand has an opportunity to mark itself on the *villainous scale* and find ways to move more toward the *visionary*. Because while you can use those psychological tricks, it is better to be in a position where you don't have to. This is how we embrace our heroes. We take them on this difficult journey because it is a difficult journey. And we help them get through to reborn for inner change and at the same time, we are changing the world a little bit. One conversion every time.

Transcribed by:

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