Solving Problems: What Would Batman Do?

Batman, Luke Skywalker, Wonder Woman, Katniss Everdeen in The Hunger Games - these are our popular heroes and heroines. But what makes them so special... really?

Sure they might have a Bat Mobile, or a Lasso of Truth, but do you think we would be talking about Luke Skywalker if there never was a... Darth Vader? It’s the villain that makes a superhero. Without them, superheroes would just be circus performers. We get sucked into the superhero’s story only when they face a massive challenge, or mega-villain and in the end overcome.

Like superheroes we all have our challenges and villains, but unlike Superman ours biggest ones are usually found within. Anxiety, stress, anger, low self-esteem try daily to tear us down, and destroy what’s important to us. So why not name them as villains? There’s tremendous power in playing the “Good versus Evil” game with our internal foes because we already know a lot about how heroes win and villains lose. Here’s what we know:

1) superhero knows their enemy. Most importantly, they know their enemy’s strengths and weaknesses. The Wicked Witch of the West from The Wizard of Oz could summon animals to do her evil work, her weakness - a bucket of water. Dorothy and her posse needed to know these things in order to finally defeat her. If your villain is “Low Self Esteem” try thinking about what makes it strong and what makes it weak. Maybe it thrives on self-criticism - “I’m an idiot”,

2) A superhero also needs to know their own strengths and weaknesses. Superman knew he had x-ray vision and could leap tall buildings in a single bound. He also knew that kryptonite could ruin his day. If you battle the “Worry” villain you can be sure that it will try to use your weaknesses against you. Like many of us, are you easy prey at night, lying in bed? If “Worry” knows this it will come on strong right when you’re most vulnerable. Thankfully, you’re smart and you can plan ahead for these risky times. Maybe you’ll have some happy memories you can focus on when you are trying to go to sleep, or maybe you have some relaxation techniques you can use to keep your mind in the present and out of the future (that’s where Worry lives after all).
3) Finally, superheroes keep score and celebrate victories. Luke Skywalker whoops it up every time he shoots down an enemy X-Wing Starfighter because he knows every ball of flames means one less obstacle and a weaker enemy. You can do this too. Take time to celebrate not giving in to the temptation to eat the entire box of Oreos. Ask yourself:

“How big did my villain ‘Overeating’ seem last week or last month? How small did I seem back then in comparison?”

Then you can ask, “How big does Overeating seem now compared to last week or last month - before I was able to resist the Oreos? What about me, how big do I feel now compared to the past?”

If you’ve been using your knowledge of your villain against it chances are you’ll be able to track yourself getting bigger and more powerful, and the villain shrinking and getting weaker. The neat thing is that this success tends to feed on itself. Your confidence grows in relation to your villain and it just doesn’t seem to be as big a threat anymore. Eventually what you realize is that most of our internal villains are no more than little old men shouting into a microphone - remember when the Wizard is exposed at the end of The Wizard of Oz?

Now the next time Worry, Low Self-Esteem, Anger - or whatever your internal villain is called - rears its ugly head you can think to yourself, ‘What would Batman do?’ I’m sure he would school himself about his villain, and he would know himself, his strengths and his weaknesses, and that knowledge would be his edge.

So get out there and fight the good fight, celebrate your victories...to infinity and beyond!

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Where has my money gone?

One key activity I have individuals do is to track all their expenses for at least one month. As small as this appears to be it is one amazing exercise. Individuals who have participated in the exercise find it to be priceless. The value of knowing where your money really goes as opposed to where you think it goes is a foundational cornerstone in the budgeting process.

A number of years ago a man attended a session, his struggle; taking his family on vacation. The income was good, his wife worked, his home was reasonable and the family car paid for, yet he stated he had no money for summer fun. Looking at his gross income of $62,000 a year I could not help but wonder, what was his idea of a vacation. With a little hesitation in my voice I asked, “Where would you like to go on vacation?” His answer surprised me, “Fishing just in a little rustic place up near North Bay or Peterborough”.

The exercise of tracking all money spent was both eye opening for the client and motivating. The first expense that jumped out from the page: the $1,800 spent on coffee over the course of a year. He was making a choice everyday for coffee, while at the same time making a choice not to spend on a fishing vacation. The knowledge of how the money was being spent now gave him the power to make choices that lined up with his expressed goals. Did he give up his coffee time altogether? No, however he was able to make choices that allowed for a vacation along with his coffee.

Will you take the same challenge? Take some time to track your spending whether using one of the many apps out there or a pencil and a little note book you carry. Where does your money go? Take control of your money, knowledge is power.

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