

[00:00:00] **Stephen Calabria:** From the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City, this is Road to Resilience, a podcast about facing adversity. I'm Stephen Calabria, Mount Sinai's Director of Podcasting. On today's episode, and in honor of May being Mental Health Awareness Month, we delve into The Hero's Journey, a storytelling template first developed in the mid 20th century.

[00:00:22] Chances are, if you've ever seen a superhero movie, or really any major Hollywood blockbuster, you've seen The Hero's Journey's story structure in action. The story of the hero, be they Luke Skywalker, Wonder Woman, or virtually any other well known protagonist, often follows a cyclical series of steps.

[00:00:39] The hero often embarks out on their quest reluctantly, and ultimately finds themselves changed as a result of the journey. It turns out, the hero's journey is much more applicable to our lives than we'd think.

[00:00:50] Our guest is Benjamin Rogers, an assistant professor of management and organization in the Carroll School of Management at Boston College.

[00:00:57] Professor Rogers is the co author of a recent study showing how participants who applied the lessons of the hero's journey to their own lives came away with a deeper understanding of themselves, their struggles, and the world as a whole.

[00:01:09] We're honored to welcome Professor Rogers to the show.

[00:01:13] Benjamin Rogers of Boston College. Welcome to Road to Resilience.

[00:01:18] **Ben Rogers:** Thanks. I'm really excited to be here.

[00:01:20] **Stephen Calabria:** Could you give us some of your background?

[00:01:22] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, I am an assistant professor at Boston College in the management and organization department. So I study broadly organizational behavior, which deals with the psychology of work generally.

[00:01:33] And so that's really my focus. But I have a lot of interest in the stories that we tell about our lives and our work.

[00:01:39] And that ends up spanning broader psychological issues, such as the paper that we'll talk about a lot today.

[00:01:45]

[00:01:45] **Stephen Calabria:** A big concept that you cover and that we're here to talk about is the hero's journey. So for our listeners who aren't familiar with it, could you walk us through what is the hero's journey?

[00:01:55] **Ben Rogers:** Yes, definitely. So the hero's journey is called and it's an archetypal narrative or it's a prototypical sort of story arc and really what that means is, it's this story formula or series of plot points or template that was identified by Joseph Campbell.

[00:02:11] He was a mythologist in the 1900s and he was looking at a series of myths and myths and legends from across the globe. And over time, and he started to notice that there was this sort of template that was used over and over again, going back to the BC with the epic of Gilgamesh, all the way to more modern day stories.

[00:02:30] And I'll give a brief summary of what that story is. It's this idea that there's a protagonist or a hero of some sort, who experiences some sort of change in setting. So that could be going off to a magical land or being pushed out of their comfort zone. And as a result of that, they end up on some sort of quest.

[00:02:48] And it really depends on the circumstances, what that quest is. But during that they encounter allies or friends, mentors. And they also face challenges, whether that's difficult circumstances, nemeses, whatever the case may be.

[00:03:01] And as a result of facing those challenges, they end up transforming themselves in some, some sort of profound way. And then they return back to where they came from, to sort of give back and sort of help society in some positive way.

[00:03:14] So that's the story arc that really has shown up in all of these very enduring stories over time and even show up in like modern day superhero movies and fantasy stories.

[00:03:23] **Stephen Calabria:** Right, right. We could apply it to almost any modern day big-time movie. So it starts where the hero gets the call to adventure. Now, what does that typically entail?

[00:03:34] **Ben Rogers:** So there, depending on how you look at it , there's a different number of steps.

[00:03:39] So we ended up boiling it down to seven. But as you mentioned, it starts off with a protagonist of some sort and often in these stories, it's a nobody, someone who is not at least obviously remarkable in some way.

[00:03:52] The example I always think of is Luke Skywalker. You know, he's a, uh, no named farmer on Tatooine, which is sort of a desert planet. Doesn't seem like he's destined for superstardom or anything.

[00:04:02] And what happens to that person is, either someone comes into their life or some shift or change of experience happens and that sets them off on this quest and that's the call to adventure. So with Luke Skywalker, R2D2 showed up and showed him Princess Leia's video saying, like, we need your help.

[00:04:20] In Lord of the Rings, Gandalf shows up and says, Frodo, you need to go off and take the ring, all those types of things.

[00:04:27] And so there's some sort of event or initiating circumstance that takes this person who may not seem heroic and pushes them into a new experience and then they have to figure out what to do.

[00:04:37] **Stephen Calabria:** And they're often a reluctant hero. It's often a call to adventure that they themselves are not initially on board with.

[00:04:44] **Ben Rogers:** Yes, I think that's a common trope or a common part of the hero's journey, and I wouldn't say it's a necessary part of it. You can imagine classic superhero movies, once they're already a superhero, you know, they're not necessarily reluctant.

[00:04:58] But I think the reason that the reluctant hero shows up so often is sort of a maybe unconsciously savvy move by writers of these stories. In that, in the human existence, we're often resisting change.

[00:05:10] We're trying to see if we can really do it, we're not sure if we can overcome these types of things, and so by making the hero initially reluctant, it makes them more relatable, and it allows the reader, the watcher, the experiencer of the story, to better relate to that hero, and sort of go along on the adventure with them.

[00:05:27] **Stephen Calabria:** Right. And not Every hero begins a hero. To your point, like at the beginning of the story, they're just some Joe Schmo and it makes sense that they would be reluctant to embark on this journey that likely promises danger or discomfort of some sort.

[00:05:44] **Ben Rogers:** Right, yeah, I think it better represents the human experience for Gandalf to go to Frodo, Hey, you need to go do this epic adventure.

[00:05:50] If he just went like, Alright, sounds good. It would be like, what is he doing? It's, it's more relatable and logical for them to go like, that's not me. I'm just a Joe Schmo. Who, Who am I to sort of go on this epic adventure?

[00:06:03] **Stephen Calabria:** Now, conversational footnote. Does this apply to anti heroes that we've come to know? Walter White of Breaking Bad was very much a reluctant hero. But how do the anti heroes that we've come to know, Walter White, Tony Soprano, et cetera, do they still fit the same mold or are there differences?

[00:06:22] **Ben Rogers:** That is a really good question. So my gut reaction to that is, sort of what is calling them to adventure will make them more or less reluctant. So in the, you know, in the examples you gave of particularly Walter White, I'm from Albuquerque, New Mexico, so that's near and dear to my heart.

[00:06:39] They're reluctant in the sense of, they're trying to figure out if they want to give in to these impulses. It feels like it's a little less, am I big enough, strong enough to go on this adventure?

[00:06:49] And more like there's this thing I want to do that may be unethical, immoral, whatever, like, am I going to give up and give into it?

[00:06:58] And I would say that that definitely happens in Breaking Bad and a lot of those other stories of, there's those initial, they might take a step towards doing something bad and then, you know, it's justified or come back, but they end up going full deep into the story into their own anti heroes journey in a way.

[00:07:14] So I think it is a similar reluctance, but the way it manifests is a little different of feeling more compelled to do it internally and trying to resist, because society says we shouldn't.

[00:07:25] **Stephen Calabria:** So they've received the call to adventure. Then comes the part in the story where they have crossed the first threshold. There are multiple thresholds, but what does the first threshold look like and signify?

[00:07:39] **Ben Rogers:** So, the way we studied it in ours and the way we boiled it down is, we ended up sort of lumping the challenges that they would face into one sort of big group and just having people reflect on, you know, what are the challenges that you face?

[00:07:52] In the hero's journey, I think it's often like belly of the beast on those types of things. And that's this idea that you're often thrown into an overwhelming first challenge and the hero has to kind of go like, Oh, I have no idea what I'm doing.

[00:08:04] **Stephen Calabria:** What's an example of that?

[00:08:05] **Ben Rogers:** The one that comes to mind, might be Star Wars as, as I mentioned it earlier, and the idea that, you know, Luke Skywalker comes back from, like, he's entertaining the idea of going with Obi Wan Kenobi to Alderaan, if I remember, I'm having to remember these things as I go.

[00:08:23] But he comes back and realizes that his aunt and uncle have been killed, and that I think the Stormtroopers show up pretty soon after that, and he realizes that he's now way in over his head.

[00:08:33] And I think that's really that first moment of realization of, you know, I'm not in Kansas anymore. Kind of Wizard of Oz.

[00:08:39] **Stephen Calabria:** The point of no return.

[00:08:40] **Ben Rogers:** The point of no return. And that's a really profound moment psychologically because you almost no longer have the choice to go back because you, there is no return. And so you have to face these challenges, figure out what allies you can get along with it, and then hopefully, you know, transform as a result of it.

[00:08:57] And so it's this idea that if you can always go back, there's not necessarily a need to transform because you can kind of shelter in place, but having that first overwhelming challenge sort of severs the ties to who they used to be, and that's a really profound part of this story, is moving, like, sort of the death and rebirth of the death of the previous self, and sort of being reborn through facing challenges and sort of ending up stronger at the end of it.

[00:09:22] **Stephen Calabria:** It's around this part in the story, rather early in the story, usually, that the hero typically encounters their allies and mentors. Could you touch upon that a little bit, the utility and importance to the story that these archetypes represent?

[00:09:37] **Ben Rogers:** Yes, so allies I think is a key part of the hero's journey and it's a key part of the studies that we ended up running. I think it differentiates the hero's journey from other sort of more just basic stories of a hero winning or just someone sort of conquering their fears or getting over it.

[00:09:55] Like those are classic stories and the hero's journey is a type of redemptive story. But what's sort of unique about the hero's journey is the allies are an intimate part of it. Often they're the ones who help set them off on the journey.

[00:10:07] So like I mentioned with Gandalf and Lord of the Rings, Frodo would never have gone on that adventure without sort of being pushed out the door by Gandalf. But also beyond being part of the initiating aspect of it, they're the ones who help them actually succeed.

[00:10:21] Rarely in a hero's journey is it one solitary hero conquering everything by themselves. It's having these friends along with them. So continuing with Lord of the Rings, you know, you have the other hobbits along with Frodo, you have obviously Gandalf, you have Gimli and Legolas and all those other types of people there that, you know, Frodo would have never succeeded without the help of these other people.

[00:10:42] And I think that's an important aspect for the story. And I think the reason it's there is it also reflects life. As we'll get into when I start talking about the stories that our participants would share is, without exception, everyone always mentioned friends, families, colleagues.

[00:10:59] Doctors, you know, whatever their story might be, there was always people who they're like, in my darkest moment, I was able to rely on them.

[00:11:06] **Stephen Calabria:** And in prepping for this interview, I was trying to think of famous movies that featured the hero's journey, and I could not come up with one where the hero did it alone. Even Cast Away, Tom Hanks had Wilson the Volleyball. So, no hero is complete without their mentors and their allies helping them along.

[00:11:25] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, absolutely. The story sort of archetype or the other version that I wouldn't say are classic hero journeys are like Wild West movies sometimes, or sometimes martial arts-types movies.

[00:11:36] But those are not having the person grow and change often those stories are you have this stoic hero who is just a principled amazing person from the start and they just withstand other forces.

[00:11:47] **Stephen Calabria:** And it's a little boring. Like, they don't exhibit much vulnerability in those movies. They don't seem to have a three dimensionality.

[00:11:55] It's very one-dimensional heroes without much doubt without much weakness. It's around this time in the story also that the antagonist, our hero's nemesis, perhaps makes themselves known. It could be a Voldemort-like villain, it could be a shark, like Jaws, it could be anything.

[00:12:14] So what do we know about the villains in the hero's journey, at least the archetype, and how heroes ultimately face their fears?

[00:12:22] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, I think facing challenges or facing nemeses or villains is almost, the facing them and transforming as a result of that is sort of the heart of the hero's journey.

[00:12:33] But focusing on the challenges. You laid out a number of sort of external ones, and that also happens in real life of, you have that boss who is very difficult, you have that ex boyfriend or girlfriend who causes you internal struggles, all those types of things.

[00:12:48] But we also broadened it out when, in the way we look at it in people's personal narratives, to look at their internal struggles. Whether that's sort of personified or not, but you know, lack of self esteem, facing depression, anxiety, all of those types of things.

[00:13:02] Like, those are challenges that people push up against and that can prevent them from pursuing their quests or their goals and so we really look at it in our stories of what are the things that challenge or that you had to overcome?

[00:13:15] And that can be a specific person or that can be something internal or something sort of circumstantial. And the reason that's important is because. Stories that don't have challenges or nemeses, they lack stakes.

[00:13:27] They're not that interesting. They can be enjoyable. I have a two year old and lots of the stories that she watches don't really have intense emotional stakes.

[00:13:35] But as an adult, sometimes those are less interesting to watch because we want to feel like there's some danger. And I think that also applies to people's lives is, when things are too easy. People often lose interest or they wonder, you know, why am I even here?

[00:13:48] Why am I doing this? And so the idea of facing challenges and having things to overcome just seems to be an important integral part of the human experience. So, there's two ways that we sort of look at the hero's journey in people's lives.

[00:14:02] One, we created a scale, a questionnaire, a series of questions asking people about the various elements of the hero's journey, the seven that we had boiled down, including the element of challenge. And so we ask them to, you know, agree or disagree with ideas like, I've had to overcome obstacles.

[00:14:20] And so leaving that very broad so that people can self identify what obstacles are relevant in their own lives. But we also guided them in an intervention to tell their own personal story as a hero's journey.

[00:14:33] And so the way we had them do that in terms of challenges. We asked them, you know, what challenges or obstacles such as a nemesis, rival, or a negative event, have stood in the way of your journey?

[00:14:44] So not necessarily assuming that they conquered it, but what have stood in the way of your journey? And so that allows people to say like, Oh, I had this very difficult person in my life who didn't want me to succeed, or I've really struggled with anxiety or depression or self-doubt.

[00:14:59] They were able to sort of figure out authentically from their own experiences, what are the challenges that were relevant in their own lives?

[00:15:06] So we didn't necessarily say, you know, imagine your anxiety as Voldemort, but we said, what are the challenges you face? Like describe them, explain, you know, not relive them, but explain how they fit within the broader context of your life.

[00:15:20] **Stephen Calabria:** So after the hero has crossed the first threshold, they have met their mentor, perhaps, and-or their other allies, they have met their villain.

[00:15:30] They then find themselves, at least historically, according to the classic hero's journey of Joseph Campbell, they find themselves in the abyss, in the belly of the beast, where things look perhaps their bleakest.

[00:15:42] And our hero is perilously close to death or defeat. How does this typically play out in the hero's journey and how did you apply that to the study?

[00:15:55] **Ben Rogers:** So in the hero's journey, this is sort of the, you know, the moment of it's always darkest before the dawn kind of idea where all seems lost, their allies aren't there or they just weren't strong enough, maybe they had some initial success against their nemesis, but now they're really realizing that I'm not the hero I thought I was.

[00:16:15] And that's a really powerful moment always in these stories, because the audience or the reader is going, are they going to make it through this? Like this is the moment of the highest stakes, because it seems like all is lost.

[00:16:26] And often in the Hero's Journey stories that I can think of, two things often happen. One is, in some stories, they're sort of rescued by an ally, at least in the moment. Someone comes in and swoops in.

[00:16:37] I think of there's a, in one of the Lord of the Rings movies, I think Gandalf literally flies in on a giant eagle and saves Frodo, which I, that really stuck with me as a teenager watching those movies.

[00:16:49] But what also often happens in these is that's when the hero finally transforms or finally begins to take up the mantle. They dig in deep, they realize something about themselves, some sort of fundamental strength or insight or power that they didn't know they had.

[00:17:05] And then that finally sets them off on the final part of the hero's journey, where they end up, you know, conquering whatever fear, circumstance that they're doing, but that's really the transformative part.

[00:17:15] And that's how we captured it in our studies is asking, by facing these challenges, how did you transform or in what ways did those challenges help you transform into who you are today? And again, not assuming that

people succeeded, but saying that like, whatever way you face a challenge, you're going to transform somehow.

[00:17:34] And so that's how we applied it. You know, we asked questions like that when we guided people to think of the transform, you know, how did you personally grow from facing these challenges? And so that.

[00:17:44] The moment of the abyss or the lowest part is sort of the final initiating part of the hero's journey, at least the way I sort of read it and remember it, of giving them that last opportunity to transform and then hopefully succeed in the end.

[00:17:57] **Stephen Calabria:** Well, oftentimes, our hero fights the villain and they initially lose. That's a big part of the hero's journey historically and, in contemporary, like a lot of the Batman movies. The third Batman movie, I don't, not spoiling anything here, but Batman loses hard to Bane, hard. And then, to your point, he has to dig himself out and escape on his own.

[00:18:22] There's sort of a deus ex machina oftentimes type-thing about the hero's allies or mentors swooping in and saving the day. You would know better than me, but it doesn't seem like it's doing the hero any favors in the long run to have them kind of swooped from the jaws of death.

[00:18:41] **Ben Rogers:** And I agree, you know, When those happen in movies, you know, I, being interested in stories generally, both in my research and my personal life, I like to read a lot of reviews. And I think about story structure a lot.

[00:18:52] And I often find when things happen like that where out of nowhere the ally comes and helps, people often sort of laugh or ridicule those experiences, because I think it's sort of can be a cheap tactic of saying like, we didn't know how to write ourselves out of this story, versus I always find the ones where the moment of sort of deep abyss, that's the moment in which finally who the hero is crystallizes, and that's always, to me, the more powerful way of doing it, because it really, that's what makes the hero.

[00:19:26] Yes, they've had steps towards it and they've had the allies, but you want, them to have that self-realization, that transformation, versus just kind of getting, you know, carried off by an eagle.

[00:19:36] **Stephen Calabria:** When people in the study shared with you what these experiences were in their own lives, what were the most common things that you heard?

[00:19:44] **Ben Rogers:** In terms of the the transformation aspect of it? So what's interesting, I was thinking about this earlier today is, the idea of religion came up a lot and In both ways this idea of, in some times people, their moment of transformation was, you know, finding Jesus, finding whatever religious figure.

[00:20:06] Then that finally, you know, in their darkest moment, they finally found religion and that led them to succeed.

[00:20:11] But also I wouldn't say it was 50-50, I don't know the exact amount, but there was so many of the flip, where they were in this sort of restricted religious lifestyle and they didn't know what to do and finally they had this transformation of realizing like, Oh, I am, you know, my own hero, to some extent, that I can just be a good person, or my friends and family or what matters.

[00:20:33] It's not, you know, this artificial, to them, perspective of how they needed to be good for some, you know, being up in the clouds. And so that was a, that was one that came up remarkably often in both directions, this idea of transforming either to find religion or transforming out of it in some interesting way.

[00:20:52] The other things that I'll say about transformation relating to the darkest period is, we had a number of participants across all of our studies who would say that the moment in which they were in the throes of addiction, whether that's drug or otherwise, or some people reported being in prison as the moment of transformation.

[00:21:12] So often it was these really dark moments or really difficult moments in which they finally realized or they finally decided that they were going to be something different or change in some way. And so those were the moments of transformation that really stuck out to me from the participant stories that they shared.

[00:21:29] **Stephen Calabria:** So the hero battles their way back from within the abyss and gets back on the road to the promised land. What typically happens at that leg in the journey? It's sort of building up to the climax, is that right? It depends on, I guess, each individual story.

[00:21:45] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, that part depends. And we kind of, we ended up collapsing that in terms of our studies, but you'll often see either they build up to the final climax of facing their villain, but often there's, I forget the name that Joseph Campbell referred to it as, but there's often a confrontation with the villain, they end up succeeding, and then there's a, like, rapid journey back, where they're also still fighting others, and that's something that I think really depends on the story that you're trying to tell, in terms of, you know, is the climax the most important part of the journey or is it them getting home to return?

[00:22:21] It really depends on sort of the hero and the context. We ended up just collapsing that into, did you transform? And then, how did you go back and give back to society, to your family, to your friends? So we glossed over that aspect in our studies.

[00:22:34] **Stephen Calabria:** There is a component towards the end oftentimes where the villain may be defeated, but there is still one perilous moment where they don't know if they're going to get out of it or not. There is a bomb that still needs to be defused. Something that heightens the tension until the very last moment.

[00:22:53] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah. I think the one example for that that pops up in my mind is in The Wizard of Oz. Dorothy, uh, I forget, like, melts the Wicked Witch of the West, either inadvertently or on purpose. And, um, she goes to escape, and I remember all the flying monkeys at least initially start sort of attacking or trying to stop her, because, you know, they think that that's what they're supposed to do.

[00:23:14] So there's one last moment, even though the big villain of the story has sort of been defeated, there's a little bit of excitement there at the end. Maybe a sort of a comedown from the big climax of it.

[00:23:24] I believe it might be called magic flight, if I'm not mixing up my Campbell terms, someone listening to this is probably shaking their fist at me. But yeah, there's a little bit of final danger, final risk at the end.

[00:23:35] **Stephen Calabria:** Finally, the hero finds themselves back in their place of comfort, having changed as a result of the journey. What might that look like?

[00:23:44] **Ben Rogers:** This is another interesting part that I think varies based on the story. I often see two versions of this. One, Star Wars comes to mind

where, particularly in A New Hope, the sort of first of the film series, they blow up the Death Star and everything's great and essentially Luke comes back and they receive medals and everyone's really excited.

[00:24:03] So that's one way of, they come back and sort of celebrate their, their victories. But you also see in a lot of stories, and I don't have a particular one in, in mind, but they come back with their newfound powers and sort of share those with the people that in the society that needed help.

[00:24:19] So particularly with the heroes that came out of difficult circumstances, maybe they were poor. Often they'll come back and sort of share the richness, whether that's literal financial richness or helping them conquer whatever difficult circumstances they're in, and that's the idea of legacy.

[00:24:35] You know, now that you've transformed, become this hero how do you then go back and give back in some profound way? And that's how we studied it in our paper, the idea of, whether it's just your personal growth or whether, you know, you got a job that you had always wanted to, what did you then do with that newfound success or those newfound skills?

[00:24:55] How do you share that with others or even how do you use that to better yourself down the road?

[00:25:00] **Stephen Calabria:** What did your study find to be the most common ways people applied the hero's journey to their own lives?

[00:25:06] **Ben Rogers:** I think because of the big role that work plays in our lives, particularly in the U.S. and in Western cultures, people often were applying that to their workplace experiences.

[00:25:18] Often, college was their sort of moment of shift where they were some person from a random city, they went to a big college, and they didn't know who they were. They had to figure it out. They face challenges.

[00:25:30] Maybe they didn't do so hot in the first couple years of their college, but then they ended up figuring things out and realizing that they had some quest to, you know, become a doctor or become a teacher or any of those types of things.

[00:25:42] So I would say in terms of number of stories that people would share, how it applied to the workplace and finding your ultimate career, even if we didn't specifically tell people apply it to the workplace, that often came up.

[00:25:56] And the other thing that I would say that often came up is people sort of overcoming the difficulties and challenges that they faced as kids, whether that's difficult parents, difficult families, self-doubt stemming from when they were a teenager, a lot of the transformation was becoming someone new, and distancing themselves from who they used to be.

[00:26:18] And, you know, I think that shows up in a lot of psychotherapy-type things of, we're always just dealing with the things that troubled us as a kid. And so people, when asked to tell their stories, they were often telling stories of how they were either still dealing with those issues or, in a lot of cases, how they had overcome and sort of ended up helping people who were in similar circumstances to like, not have to deal with those issues as much.

[00:26:40] **Stephen Calabria:** Well, hero's journey stories often end with the hero still living with the repercussions of the victory, if there even was a victory, because that is one of the criticisms of the hero's journey, is that this by no means encompasses every story structure. It doesn't account for Eastern storytelling.

[00:27:03] A lot of the time, Campbell drew predominantly, if I'm not mistaken, from Western sources, particularly Greek and Roman mythology. Could you talk about that a little bit? Like, what's missing from the hero's journey template?

[00:27:16] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, that's a really good question. So I would say that absolutely I agree, it does not account for every story and I think it is particularly Western-leaning in terms of its source and a lot of its application I would say though that there are lots of examples from across the globe in different cultures, across the millennia of heroes journey. So, it is not something that has only existed in In Western cultures.

[00:27:41] But I definitely agree that they're more common and often more popular in Western cultures. I'd say, to me, it's not necessarily a huge difference in terms of what is included, it's a degree of emphasis.

[00:27:54] So the idea of the hero's journey, by its name, is focused on a hero transforming and changing, and that's not always as valued or as important in other cultures. It might be the collective is really important or it might be staying true to important cultural values are important.

[00:28:11] And so there's lots of stories that deal with those kinds of concepts in terms of stress. But then there are also other stories. I think of tragedies and sort

of the Russian historical thing where that is a very popular not necessarily happy, but popular format and very deeply ingrained in that culture.

[00:28:29] The idea of, a lot of times the mistakes that you make, either self-inflicted or circumstantial, they'll lead things to not work out in the end. And that's sort of the antithesis of the hero's journey. The idea that you did not transform, you actually ended up sort of falling apart because you were unable to transform.

[00:28:47] And so, absolutely. There are aspects that are not covered by the hero's journey, and that's something that I would love to look at and research down the road. The hero's journey is a really great template for the type of work we are doing because of how popular it was, because of how common it is, and because it's a redemptive story.

[00:29:05] But it would be interesting to look at some of the findings if those might play in different cultures differently, or maybe they're sort of similar in terms of their effects, but just from a different angle.

[00:29:16] **Stephen Calabria:** Is there a step or two that you consider to be the most important?

[00:29:21] **Ben Rogers:** Yes. So looking at our research, you know, we're we're often collecting Hundreds of participants hundreds of stories depending on the study design and we were actually able to analyze this in some specific studies looking at you know, we have these seven elements and how important they are to people's lives or how much they show up in their personal stories, what are actually really predictive of the outcomes that we cared about?

[00:29:44] And we looked at a number of, as we've sort of hinted at and have alluded, we're often looking at meaning in life. So, to what extent is having the hero's journey as part of your personal story make you feel like your life feels more meaningful?

[00:29:58] And often what we found across these studies, and in one study in particular where we analyzed all of the different relationships, was that the challenge and the transformation was really the heart of the hero's journey story and its most predictive aspect in terms of the outcomes.

[00:30:13] So the other ones definitely mattered and they each predicted meaning in life and our other outcomes, but challenge and transformation were sort of the most important. The idea that if people had said that they faced

challenges and transformed as a result of them, they often felt like their lives were more meaningful.

[00:30:29] They often felt more resilient to future problems. They felt more satisfied with their lives. So those two elements, the sort of crux of the hero's journey, those were both in our research and sort of logically, if you think about the hero's journey, those ended up being the most important.

[00:30:44] **Stephen Calabria:** If we were to apply the hero's journey to your life, how would you say you are different after having completed this study than you were at the beginning?

[00:30:53] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, it's one of those questions that I think is very important to reflect on as an academic. And the idea being, we try as academics to feel like we're above this all, that we're objective, you know, we're the ones who are just thinking and how do we set up a design.

[00:31:09] But this is one study that is very personal to me. And as I tested all of these studies, every time I was often retelling my own personal story, just logistically to like, make sure all the functionality worked.

[00:31:21] But, you know, sometimes I wanted to see, like, does this feel true? Does it still feel personal? And so I really was able to reflect on how malleable our personal stories are, which can sound like a cynical view that the idea of like, no objective truth of my story.

[00:31:39] And that can feel like a little scary for people, but I think it's actually really important because as we evolve, we've, we keep telling our stories and we keep identifying different things that were important or are important to us now.

[00:31:53] And so as I went through this sharing a little bit of my personal story, what really set me off on becoming an academic and starting to study like the ideas of meaning and meaningful life, was my mom passed away from pancreatic cancer when I was a teenager and you know, that was obviously very destructive at the time.

[00:32:10] That was the first real hardship that I had faced. And I always had thought things would just work out and suddenly something really did not work out. And I can obviously tell it as a hero's journey. That set me off on this period of self discovery in college and figuring out, what do I really care about?

[00:32:27] I was in a business school, but I didn't really seem to care about like, finances and numbers all that much. What I was really drawn to is, life is short. How do we like, make our lives and our work more meaningful? And that was what I was trying to pursue in terms of a career.

[00:32:42] And as I went through, I had some great mentors. Shoutout to professor Ethan Burriss at the university of Texas at Austin, who kind of was like, you seem to have these broader interests in aspects of work and how people relate to it and that was another lightbulb moment.

[00:32:56] Of going like, Oh, it's not that I just want meaning in my own life and meaning in my own career. I want to study how to help people do that, because looking at both in terms of some of my peers at school and then when I was a consultant, people just unhappy with their jobs.

[00:33:11] And, you know, not every job has to be the most meaningful one, but having some sort of positive meaning, I think, is really important. And that led me to go into grad school where I faced various challenges and trials, like trying to get over a dissertation, but I ended up transforming and learning a lot about myself, which then led me to this study.

[00:33:27] So you can see there was all of these sort of elements of the hero's journey that I can tell, which maybe I'm applying this framework, but maybe this is just a really natural way of telling our story that it feels very personal, very authentic to me.

[00:33:42] And so, going through this study, thinking critically about this helped me to realize that our stories are malleable and you can put them in whatever framework that you want, but by doing so, you can actually develop deeper insight about yourself and connect to things that maybe were painful in your past, but really helped to shape who you are today.

[00:34:01] And, you know, that's something I carry forward in my work and in my personal life.

[00:34:05] **Stephen Calabria:** That was it for my questions. Was there anything else you wanted to say?

[00:34:08] **Ben Rogers:** No, um, I think the only thing is, I'd like to shout out that, you know, this research was not just myself. This was a broader team. Is it okay if I share that?

[00:34:15] **Stephen Calabria:** Absolutely, please.

[00:34:16] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah, so it was a relatively large team But you know, no hero acts alone in terms of these things. So Harrison Chikas, John Michael Kelly, Emily Kubin, Michael Christian, Frank Kachanoff, Jonah Berger, Curtis Puryear, Dan McAdams and then Kurt Gray. So a relatively large team, but everyone brought a very important aspect or insight to this work.

[00:34:36] And I never would have been able to do this research or explore it, uh, without them and so I'm really thankful to them.

[00:34:42] **Stephen Calabria:** Ben Rogers of Boston College. Thank you so much for being on Road to Resilience.

[00:34:46] **Ben Rogers:** Yeah. Thank you. It was a pleasure.

[00:34:48] **Stephen Calabria:** Thanks to Professor Benjamin Rogers for his time and expertise. Check out the study he and his team co authored, titled, Seeing Your Life Story as a Hero's Journey Increases Meaning in Your Life, published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

[00:35:03] That's it for this episode of Road to Resilience. If you enjoyed it, please rate, review, and subscribe to our podcast on your favorite podcast platform.

[00:35:11] Road to Resilience is a production of the Mount Sinai Health System. It's produced by me, Stephen Calabria, and our executive producer, Lucia Lee.

[00:35:18] Road to Resilience is a production of the Mount Sinai Health System. It's produced by me, Stephen Calabria, and our executive producer, Lucia Lee.

[00:35:26] From all of us here at Mount Sinai, thanks for listening, and we'll catch you next time.

[00:35:25]