

Hero on a Mission

What's in it for me? Set sail on your own heroic journey.

Do you spend a whole lot of time thinking about what to do with your life, but not really taking any action? If that sounds familiar, then these blinks can help. You'll discover how you can live a more heroic existence, and start moving toward your personal goals. From your career to your morning routine, these blinks outline how you can switch up your mindset, and start living with a greater sense of meaning. You'll learn how to cope with challenges and take back control, so that you can reach your fullest potential. In these blinks, you'll learn

the four characters you'll encounter in the course of your life story; what villains and heroes have in common; and how to find a powerful sense of meaning in any situation.

You can choose which character you play in your life story.

It's often said that life is a journey, but the author, entrepreneur Donald Miller, believes that life is actually a story. Our own personal life stories contain a cast of characters, some good and some not so good. It might be an uplifting and inspiring story, or it might be bleak and sad. You get to decide what sort of story you want your life to be, because you are the author. The idea that you have the power to write your own life story can be difficult to wrap your head around. Perhaps you feel like you don't have the power to control anything in your life. Instead, things just happen to you. If this sounds familiar, then you're probably acting out the role of victim in your story. The victim is the character who life knocks around and treats unfairly. Instead of reaching for better things, the victim feels hopeless to change their situation. The best they can hope for is that a hero will come along and rescue them. Donald Miller has a lot of sympathy for life's victims, because, as a young man, he used to be a victim himself. He slept on a crusty old pull-out bed in a tiny rented room. He dreamed of being a writer, but instead of doing anything about it, he spent his days staring at the dingy carpet of his apartment, waiting for inspiration to come along and pull him out of his slump. The best word to describe victimhood is passive. Like Miller, victims passively wait for something, or someone, to save them. Victims don't want to write their own stories; instead, they leave it up to fate. As a young man, Donald Miller wasn't just playing the role of victim in his story; he was playing the villain, too. Villains are characters who make others feel small. This need to hurt people often comes from unresolved pain in the villain's childhood. Just think about how many of the baddies in movies have a scar across their face, or some other notable injury. That's no coincidence; these injuries hint at inner wounds that the villain hasn't resolved. Donald Miller's villainous energy manifested itself through his cruel comments to his housemates. These housemates were nice guys who had their lives together, unlike himself. Because he was jealous of them, and sore about his own failings, he often belittled their hobbies, their jobs, and even the women they loved. Villains often get a lot of attention in the course of a good story, but they're never the main character, and they're always sidelined by the end. So who is the main character of a great story? That honor belongs to the hero. Importantly, heroes actually have a lot in common with victims and villains. Like the villain, the hero

also has a difficult childhood and, like the victim, life throws struggle and hardship their way. But the hero has a different reaction to pain and suffering. Rather than submitting to it, or trying to inflict it on others, the hero takes their pain and uses it to transform themselves. By rising to overcome life challenges, they develop courage and grit, and earn their place as the story's protagonist. Becoming a hero might sound daunting – but every heroic story begins with baby steps. Donald Miller, for instance, simply began writing a little, every day. Through this simple act, he transformed his life, and found a fulfilling career. But as the saying goes, no man is an island. When it comes to your own heroic journey, you'll get there faster if you get some help. This is where another character in your story comes in: the guide. The guide is usually someone a little older and wiser than you are, who has already been on their own heroic transformation. Guides use their experiences to help you on your way. On his journey to become a better writer, Miller looked for guidance from books by literary greats such as Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. Over the course of these blinks, we'll take a look at how you can become a hero, and maybe even a guide, in your own story.

Heroes have an internal locus of control.

There's one crucial thing that separates heroes from victims and villains. That thing is attitude. As we've already discovered, all three of these characters might be presented with the exact same challenges in life, but only the hero has the right attitude to deal with them. What does a heroic attitude entail? Well, it's all about control. Specifically, it's about how much control you believe you have over the things that happen in your life. Heroes have what psychologists call an internal locus of control, meaning that they believe that they have an inner power to control and shape their own destiny. On the other hand, victims have an external locus of control. They believe that outside forces shape what happens to them and where they end up. Let's take a look at this victim mindset in action. Remember how Donald Miller wanted to be an author? Well, when he first started writing, he used to believe that the quality of his writing depended on whether or not he was sitting in his favorite chair in his local coffee shop. That's right. Just because he once wrote a good page sitting in that seat, he began to believe that there was something special about that chair, and that he could only produce great writing if he was sitting in it. What happened if he went to the coffee shop one day and it wasn't free? In that case, he would sit across the street in another place, and watch and wait until that special chair was available again. If it didn't become free, he simply didn't write. This is a prime example of an internal locus of control. Donald Miller believed that outside forces would shape the quality of his writing, instead of believing that he was in control of what he wrote. Now compare that attitude to that of a seriously successful writer, such as Stephen King. Stephen King doesn't wait for inspiration, or a special chair, to help him write his best sellers. Instead, he knows that everything he needs to write a great story can be found within himself, not in his external circumstances. That's why King, like every other top writer, treats his writing like a regular job. He goes to the office, writes his words, and leaves again. That's what an internal locus of control looks like; nothing and no one controls your output except you. Interestingly, having an internal locus of control isn't just heroic; it's also good news for your health, and for your bank balance. Scientists have found that people with an internal locus of control have lower levels of anxiety and depression, and also earn higher wages, than those with an external locus. With this in mind, the first step toward rewriting yourself as a hero is to check your attitude, and start realizing just how much

power you have to make great things happen.

Heroes find meaning in their suffering.

A hero is someone who rises to the challenges of life. But that's not the whole story. A real hero doesn't just sit around and wait for life to throw hardship their way. Instead, a hero rolls up their sleeves and goes looking for a struggle; they seek new missions. One of the key differences between heroes and victims is that heroes are people of action. Instead of waiting around to be rescued, like victims, heroes are always in motion. Donald Miller believes that this heroic motion gives us meaning. It's only when we are actively trying to do something difficult that we experience a true sense of meaning in our lives. One of Miller's most heroic missions came when he set himself the challenge of cycling across the United States, from Los Angeles all the way to Delaware. When he set off, he knew it wouldn't be easy. He was overweight and had never attempted anything like this before. And he was right - it wasn't easy. In fact, at times it was downright painful to sit in the saddle seven days a week, for seven weeks straight. But that's the great thing about heroic missions: they redeem your pain. Cycling across the country with his friends in all weather, battling storms and desert winds, he was able to reframe his suffering into something meaningful and hopeful. The idea that a hero can turn their suffering into something meaningful might sound naive, and maybe even a little offensive. You might think there's a big difference between a grueling cycling holiday and truly terrible pain. But even in the midst of human despair, one can still use their heroic attitude to find meaning. Consider the incredible example of Viktor Frankl, a pioneering psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor. During his time imprisoned in Auschwitz, Frankl embraced an attitude of trying to find meaning in the midst of the horror. When his fellow prisoners questioned him, he replied that their suffering was meaningful, because one day they would be able to tell the world their stories, and prove that evil really existed. Even if they died, Frankl said, their deaths would provide an example of this evil, and encourage the world to fight against it. In this way, Frankl was able to reframe his horrific experience as a heroic mission with a purpose. His remarkable fortitude shows us that, wherever you are in your own life, you always have the ability to transform your attitude, and create a heroic sense of meaning.

Heroes decide on a goal and transform themselves to achieve it.

The hero's story represents a process of transformation. Once you decide to become a hero, you commit yourself to change. For most of us, change feels scary. But when you think about it, remaining exactly the same, and never changing, is even more disturbing. Imagine a situation in which you met an old friend again, someone you hadn't seen for many years. As you talk to them, you realize that they haven't changed at all. They're still grappling with all the same difficulties they used to have, and they reminisce about the same old stories. You'd probably find their company quite unnerving, not to mention boring. Why? Because we all instinctively understand that who you were yesterday should not be the same person you are today. But how can you bring about your own heroic transformation? It's much easier than you think. All you have to do is know what you want, and set about trying to get it. Setting up a goal is how every heroic story starts. Think about Katniss Everdeen in the Hunger Games. Her heroism begins when she steps up to take the place of her younger sister in the deadly

games. Her goal is to protect her family from harm. Katniss is a great example of a hero because she didn't have a lot of choice about her goal. Instead, it was thrust upon her when her younger sister was selected to compete in the games. This is an important point, because most of us spend half our time trying to decide what it is that we actually want. We spend huge amounts of time thinking about what goals or choices will bring us the most happiness or the most fulfillment. But this is all missing the point; heroism is about the journey. Achieving your end goal is not what will turn you into a hero; it's your transformation on the way there that matters. With this in mind, choose something specific that you want to achieve, whether that's building a new career, starting a family of your own, or putting a rock band together, and start your journey toward it. This transformation won't be easy. Along the way, you'll encounter pain and suffering. But the important thing to remember is that this suffering is the fire that will forge your heroism. Without it, there can be no transformation. Donald Miller has had his fair share of painful yet transformative experiences. When he had his first taste of success with his writing, he decided to invest all the money he had just made into a risky financial venture. Within a few days of his investment, he woke up to find that he had lost absolutely everything. At the time, he could never imagine making that much money again. But guess what: he did. He fought through the pain and the loss, wrote more books, and he transformed himself. These days, he makes smart financial decisions, because he has learned from experience how to protect and grow his wealth. What's more, he makes annual charity donations for the same amount that he lost on that painful day.

Writing your own eulogy will help you envision a more heroic life.

So far we've talked about choosing a mission and fighting through challenges to achieve it. But what happens once you've completed your mission? What happens when you've written that book, or finished that bike ride across America? In this blink, you're going to zoom out and take a look at your whole life, from where you are now to where you see yourself in the future. As we've already discovered, heroes are always in motion; once you've accomplished one goal, it's time to swiftly move on to the next one. Your life will be made up of lots of heroic missions. If you combine them, all these missions will add up to a meaningful life, well lived. Of course, the idea of undertaking one heroic mission can sound intimidating enough, let alone several. You might also be thinking that you don't have a clue what life will throw at you in the future, so you can't possibly predict what missions you'll undertake in the years to come. But this way of thinking isn't helpful. In fact, when you refuse to consider the future because of fear or a lack of certainty, you're thinking from an external locus of control. In other words, you're waiting for outside events to come along and give you some clarity or confidence, instead of actively shaping your destiny. So don't wait for heroic missions to come along; make a solid plan for what you want to accomplish during the rest of your time on earth. How can you set about making this life plan? Well, it might sound morbid, but one of the best ways to create it is to write it as a eulogy. Take a deep breath, and imagine that your loved ones are attending your funeral. What would you want them to say about you in your eulogy? Perhaps you'd want them to say that you were a successful business owner, that you were a loving parent who set a great example for their children, or that you were a creative soul who had a deep knowledge of appreciation for art. Maybe you'd like them to say that you had a great relationship with your spouse. By writing down what you would like your eulogy to say, you are creating a

blueprint for a meaningful life, and you're mapping out all the heroic missions you'll need to take to make this life a reality. As you're writing your eulogy, you'll notice that you've embarked upon some of these missions already. But with other missions, you'll realize that you haven't even left the starting blocks yet. This realization might give you a sense of time pressure about how much you still need to accomplish. But this is not a bad thing. Far from it. Remember that your life is a story, and in any good story, there is always time pressure. Consider your typical rom-com movie, for instance. Sure, you might be focused on the boy-meets-girl element of the story, but look a little closer and you'll see that the excitement of the story usually stems from some kind of time pressure. Perhaps the girl is engaged to another man who she's due to marry in six days, and the boy needs to convince her that she belongs with him instead. Without the pressure of time, there is no excitement, no heightened sense of drama, and the story meanders along boringly. Of course, the ultimate time pressure that we face in our own stories is death itself. Each of us only has a certain amount of time to complete our heroic missions, before our eulogies really are being read out at our funeral. This reality can be terrifying to contemplate, but no one ever said that being heroic was easy. Heroes aren't afraid to face their mortality. In fact, they use it to spur them on to move faster, be bolder, and keep everything in perspective. Death is not nice, but the ticking clock is crucial; otherwise everyone would perpetually put off what needed to be done until tomorrow. Our stories would contain very little action – and, as we already know, heroes are made through action. So take up your pen, take a good hard look at your mortality, and write up a plan for your future.

Create different life plans and look at them each morning.

Writing your own eulogy is an intense experience. After you've completed it, you might feel tempted to put it safely away in a desk drawer, and never look at it again. But this would be a waste of its potential. In fact, Donald Miller looks over his eulogy every morning, and he advises you to do the same. Reading over your eulogy every day will help to keep your mind focused on your long-term vision for your life. But make no mistake: simply looking at your road map isn't enough to get you there. You're also going to need some additional directions to help you on your way. With this in mind, Donald Miller has put together some other tools you can use to map out your heroic journey in detail. Specifically, he recommends compiling three separate action plans for your life: a ten year plan, a five year plan, and a one year plan. These plans will help you envision exactly what you want to accomplish during these time frames. As we've already discovered, our lives can be thought of as stories. You can develop your own narrative by thinking about what each of your plans would be called if they were to be made into a movie. David Miller's five year plan, for instance, would be called *Leaving a Legacy*, because that is exactly what he intends to focus on over the next five years. But what should you include? Again, we can look to great novels and movies for inspiration. Consider that every great story has interesting subplots to keep the audience engaged and entertained. Your own story needs some subplots, too. These could include anything from your community, to your family, to your friends, to your career. Write a bullet list of goals for each of these areas of your life, and don't forget to include what action you're going to take to make them a reality. Once you've written a plan for the next 12 months, five years, and ten years, keep these documents together with your eulogy. Make it a part of your morning routine to spend time quietly contemplating these humble sheets of paper. For they contain more than your hopes and dreams; they are also your manual

for living an action-packed, heroic life, all of your own making.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: Heroes don't sit around and wait for things to happen. Instead, they make things happen through taking action. Once you start acting in pursuit of your goals, you'll likely encounter pain and challenges. You can use these hardships to transform yourself into a tougher, wiser person. And here's some more actionable advice: Check out Donald's website! If you'd like to find out more about how you can apply Donald Miller's tips and techniques for heroism to your daily life, then you can visit his website at businessmadesimple.com.