The Mindful Warrior

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As a police officer for over 20 years I have learned many things – about myself, and about the human condition. I have seen the best and worst of people. People have at times asked about how my police experience connects to my work as a psychologist. There are key principles I believe healthy and ethical police officers demonstrate in their work. I believe these same principles can apply to everyone in their lives and careers. The title for this piece is The Mindful Warrior. I believe everyone has an inner Mindful Warrior that can be called upon as a source of strength, courage, and wisdom in their life.

Carl Jung, one of the great thinkers in psychology, spoke about archetypes that exist in everyone. An archetype is like an inner blue print that can play out in one’s life – the Hero, the Villain, the Victim are all archetypes we can understand and see in the lives of those around us, and perhaps in our own lives. Archetypes can be healthy and positive, just as they can be destructive and damaging. Jung would say archetypes transcend culture and history, and are part of the collective human experience. There are 4 key archetypes I believe help police officers, and everyone, find health, balance, compassion, and wisdom in their lives and careers:

The Warrior

Some people have a negative view of this word. This is understandable given the destruction and abuses of power we see around us, and around the world, many done by people with weapons and agendas for power. I will suggest the Warrior archetype, as with the others, can have healthy expression as well as unhealthy expressions.

The healthy expression of Warrior energy is about Protection and Achievement. Healthy warriors can courageously and skillfully protect and defend themselves and others in the face of threat. Warrior energy is about healthy Assertion, and includes the ability to find one’s voice, to speak the truth to power, and to set goals and accomplish them. Healthy warriors know about courage, and the ability to survive difficult situations. They know about strategy and tactics. They don’t give up, and they can work through pain to accomplish a goal. Healthy warriors know about establishing and defending boundaries, and how to earn the trust and respect of others. Healthy Warriors are deeply safe, and never use excessive force in any way.

Too much Warrior energy and one moves in to the realm of the Bully. Bullies push themselves and others beyond limits. They don’t respect boundaries, and they leave a trail of carnage. Bullies get off on using and lording their strength and power over others. They use their power to hurt and do damage – not to protect or defend. In place of healthy assertion they move to needless aggression and violence. Bullies exist all around us – workplaces, schools, homes. Bullies are damaged and twisted warriors who have lost their way and transmuted healthy energy in to something dark and damaging.

Not enough warrior energy and one enters the realm of the Coward. Not enough warrior energy and people have difficult setting goals and accomplishing them. They have difficulty finding their voice and speaking truth when it matters. They allow themselves to become victims and they don’t protect or defend themselves or those they may be responsible for. Coward is not about valuing peace. It is about not taking action, when we can, to stop violence, aggression, or even people being shamed, attacked or humiliated in a business meeting. It is about not standing up for one’s values, and allowing one’s self or others to be attacked, shamed, hurt or killed.

The Lover

Just as some people may have a reaction to the word Warrior, the same may be true for Lover. This archetype too can get twisted and do damage. Healthy Lover archetype is about the ability to establish and form deep and meaningful relationships. It is about being sensitive, kind, and deeply respectful of others. It includes the ability to form alliances and partnerships, and to work collaboratively even with challenging people. At core Lover energy is about Empathy and Compassion. Daniel Goleman, of Emotional Intelligence fame, states: “Empathy is the prime inhibitor of human cruelty”. Criminals lack this capacity when they commit a crime. Leaders lack this capacity when they push beyond limits, when they shame or embarrass others, or when they attack others. Bullies in all forms show a lack of empathy and compassion or they would not do what they do. Compassion is not just a soft skill. It is rooted in deep respect for one’s self and others, and an insightful understanding of the human condition.

Too much Lover energy and one becomes overly sensitive, and emotionally draining. The ooey – gooey overdose kind of attention no one likes. These people get overly focused on making everyone happy, and lose a sense of healthy boundaries. In relationships this is the realm of affairs, sexual harassment, and interpersonal betrayal.

Not enough Lover energy and people become cold, disconnected, and at extremes - cruel. Warriors who lack compassion and lose a sense of empathy become dangerous to us all. Warriors who remain mindful and keep their hearts are far less likely to ever use any unnecessary force in doing their duty. A lack of Empathy and Compassion causes severe damage around the world every day – not just on the streets or in war zones, but in board rooms, classrooms, and in homes and families. Compassion is a powerful force for preventing cruelty and harm, and I know very few among us who couldn’t benefit from deepening our own sense of profound respect and empathy for others. There would be far less trauma and suffering in the world if there were more heart-felt Compassion.

The Magician

The Magician archetype is about the ability to think clearly, objectively, and strategically. Skilled Magicians work their “magic” through being smart, highly skilled, and logical. They master their trade or technology, and consciously pursue higher levels of education, skill, and mastery. They utilize science and research, and value both strategy and creativity in solving problems and discovering new knowledge and wisdom. Policing is filled with Magicians – from crime scene investigators to undercover operators and master hostage negotiators and interrogators. Magicians can be found in all walks of life. When we come upon a person, even in a humble craft, that is an absolute master at what they do it is often inspiring and we can celebrate and respect their skill and wisdom.

Too much Magician and one becomes a Manipulator. These people use knowledge as a weapon. They can manipulate or deceive, and use their skill for their own gain. They know how to plant pieces of information, or withhold information to mislead, sabotage, and destroy efforts.

Not enough Magician energy and one enters the Dummy archetype. These are people who are willfully blind and avoid learning / knowing too much. These people can’t chart a course even when presented with research and evidence, they avoid decisions, and plead ignorance or blame others when confronted with errors or problems.

The Sovereign

This archetype is about accessing one’s own inner King or Queen. This archetype is about Governance, Vision, and Blessing. The Sovereign takes responsibility first for their own lives, and for leading within their own “kingdom” – workplace, team, family. They accept responsibility for their own finances, health, and time. The Sovereign leads with a firm but kind eye. The Sovereign sees the big picture and is responsible for the good of the entire kingdom. The Sovereign knows when to send in the troops, the diplomatic core, or the intelligence operatives. He or she understands how departments and units fit together, and works collaboratively to bring out the best of everyone under them. They appreciate and understand the complexity of some situations. They create the conditions in an organization for people to thrive. They look for ways to bless and affirm people. They identify people’s strengths and abilities, and find or create ways for them to contribute and shine. How many wise and respected Sovereigns do you know? Fully accessing this archetype is a challenge for each of us and usually comes through sustained and conscious effort, patience, and being mentored over time by an elder and wise Sovereign.

Too much Sovereign and one becomes a Tyrant – exploiting others and using one’s power for personal gain.

Not enough and one abdicates – not leading, avoiding responsibility. People are left confused, hurt, and in chaos.

Learning to mindfully develop ourselves in the archetypes of Warrior, Lover, Magician, and Sovereign can lead us to deeper levels of courage, compassion, wisdom, and balance in our lives. These archetypes are sources of deep inner wisdom to help us in our different roles in life: at home, school, or in the workplace. We all have much to learn…

Note: The book King Warrior Magician Lover by Robert Moore and Doug Gillette provided foundational insight in the development of this paper.