



Parked Between Hero and Handicap?
Bruce E. Roselle

This morning, as I drove into the parking lot at the athletic club where I work out, I noticed a small, red sedan parked in ‘that spot’. It was in that highly coveted spot next to the building, very close to the front door. In fact, it’s the one space closest to the door that is *not* marked as requiring special credentials to park there.

It sits right between the one marked handicapped and the one reserved for veterans wounded in combat. Right between hero and handicap.

It’s a space I’ve parked in before. When it’s raining or snowing, or just plain freezing like it was today, I relish parking there—right between hero and handicap. No special requirements, no special license plates—no need to be someone special to park there.

Today, however, when I saw the red sedan there looking kind of lonely with empty spots on either side, I started to think about how this unmarked parking spot reminded me of my life. How many decades had I lived my life parked safely between hero and handicap, somewhere between courageous enough to take a bullet defending a cause I believed in, and being stopped by my own limitations.

I wondered how many others live their lives in that same spot. I wonder if you are, in fact, one of those people, like me, who work and live somewhere between hero and handicap.

Looking up “hero” in the dictionary online, I found that it is a word now considered gender-neutral, referring to a person noted for courageous acts or nobility of character, or who, in the opinion of others, has special achievements, abilities, or personal qualities and is regarded as a role model.

Then, looking up “handicap” online, I found that, in the most generic sense, it refers to any disadvantage that makes success more difficult. So, handicaps can be physical, psychological, economic, geographic, cultural, racial, familial, or any characteristic that makes success more difficult for you than for someone else.

While I have some achievements, abilities, and personal qualities I am proud of at times, I don’t feel like I measure up as someone noted for courageous acts or noble character—someone who is truly a hero. And, while I have certain irrational fears, faulty beliefs, and feelings of being a fraud at times, I do not merit an official designation of handicapped.

Looking back at my life from the perspective of the beginning of a new year, I decided to challenge myself to live this next year dramatically less handicapped by my real and perceived limitations and substantially more heroic in my words and actions.

My New Year challenge to you is to adopt these commitments that I outlined for myself, so that you can get outside of that comfortable rut between hero and handicap:

1. **Recognize who you are at the core.** What are your unique attributes by which others know you? That is, what do those who know you best tell you about your personality, abilities, motivations and ideas? What stands out to them as your signature traits, what words do they use to describe you to people who don't know you already? A key piece of moving away from handicap and toward hero is to know and accept who you are, who, as some say, "God made you to be." Commit to becoming grounded with who you are at the core. (See my 2016 book, **The Fraud Factor**).
2. **Identify the ways you are handicapped.** I often describe to my coaching clients the 'box' they seem to be in, based on the various walls they describe that are hobbling them. Sometimes, these walls are real--gaps in education or experience, physical or psychological limitations, or other factors that create an obstacle to moving forward. Most often, these walls are created unknowingly by the individual. A colleague who wanted my opinion on whether she should complete a PhD complained to me, "I don't want to be 60 years old and just getting my doctorate!" My reply was, "well, either way, you will turn 60--the question is, do you want to have a PhD when you do, or not?" The ways that most people are handicapped are not genuine physical or psychological limitations, but, rather, limitations based on irrational fears and faulty beliefs that keep them from being fully expressed in their work and lives. That is, we most often handicap ourselves through self-limiting talk that is based on unconscious, irrational fear (See my 2006 book, **Fearless Leadership**).
3. **Pinpoint the ways in which you are already heroic.** Ask the same people you identified in step one to recount for you the ways they have seen you exhibit courage, character, or integrity in the past. When they think of you, what stands out to them that is noble or good-- something that has provided a role model for them in certain situations? These are typically the kinds of things that others will not tell you, unless you ask them specifically. Ask work colleagues, family, and friends to answer this; perhaps, you can begin by telling them the ways in which you see them as heroic, and then ask them to give their perspective on you. Commit to continuing and building on these heroic facets.
4. **Paint the picture of your new heroism.** Once you understand who you are at the core, how you have limited yourself in the past, and the ways in which others already see you as heroic, the final step is to commit to becoming more deeply heroic. Where will you speak up more courageously? What will you do to take a stand for others less heroic than you? How will you invest your time and energy breaking down real and artificial barriers that have limited you or others in the past? Remember, from the definition, a hero is someone who has noble character, courage, and the qualities of a role model. What will you do to stretch yourself so that your friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, and--most importantly--you will recognize the heroism?

As for me, I intend to work fully through these four steps as I begin the New Year. My very first step will be to not park in the spot between hero and handicap, but instead to walk past that parking space. Walking past that space will be my metaphor and reminder that I am committed to walking away from my self-imposed limitations and toward the full expression of my heroism.