

Lose the Cape

In the 2004 animated movie *The Incredibles*, the government bans superheroes and finds them average jobs and lives. Bob Parr, a father of three who once fought crime as Mr. Incredible, sits at a desk in an insurance company. Frustrated with his mundane life, he is quick to accept a chance to secretly use his superpowers. Unfortunately, his costume is the worse for wear, so he seeks out fashion designer Edna Hogenson—former outfitter of superheroes—to repair it. Instead, she creates an entirely new suit for him, but a point on which they disagree is the cape. Mr. Incredible wants one, but Mrs. Hogenson says no. In support of her argument, she shows a series of film clips in which superheroes' capes led to their demise. In one example, the cape and then the hero are sucked into a jet engine.

My reason for siding with Mrs. Hogenson is different. I would argue that people do not need the flash of a cape to be amazing. Secretly incredible people do not need to seek accolades, start an organization, purchase expensive equipment, or develop an organizational mission statement. They focus on doing incredible things, not on who will get the credit for those things.¹

In words generally attributed to Mother Teresa but actually from a collection of sayings,

"People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway. The biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men with the smallest minds. Think big anyway. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build

anyway. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway. Give the world the best you have, and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway."²

My parents taught me that anyone can make a dollar but that few people ultimately make much of a difference in the world. Like so many of my colleagues, I entered medicine because I wanted to positively affect the lives of others. With that in mind, I would suggest that it is worthwhile to pause periodically to evaluate if our focus is on being incredible or on being perceived as such. In other words, let's live like superheroes but lose the cape. ■



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1. Goff B. *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson; 2012.

2. Do good anyway. The paradoxical commandments. Quote Investigator website. <http://quoteinvestigator.com/tag/mother-teresa/>. Posted May 18, 2012. Accessed November 4, 2015.