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Oh Captain, My Captain: The 2 Greatest Lessons I Learned from Robin Williams

Two of the greatest lessons I've learned in life came from Robin Williams.

From his role in *Dead Poet's Society*, I learned how to *use* my fears to take my life to the next level. From his character in the movie, John Keating, I learned how a leader helps others to roar.

Robin Williams will be missed. Today, I share with you the two greatest lessons I learned from his life and his character, John Keating.

Lesson One: A leader helps others to roar

A leader's job is to help others to find their courage.

A leader's job is to help others overcome their fears and find that something inside of them that is dying to come out; that something that will change the world and give them life.

That's what Robin Williams' character, John Keating, does in *Dead Poet's Society*. He helps his student, Todd Anderson, played by Ethan Hawke, find his talent and worth...and his "barbaric YAWP."

Mr. Anderson thinks that everything inside of him is worthless and embarrassing. Isn't that right, Todd? Isn't that your worst fear? Well, I think you're wrong. I think you have something inside of you that is worth a great deal.

That is leadership.

You may think you're worthless, but someone else calls the greatness out of you. Someone else tells you who you are before you even know who you are. That is the essence of leadership. He pulled greatness from worthlessness.

Winston Churchill said:

Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.

That is how important courage is. Without courage, nothing else matters.

Each of us needs someone to help bring out our courage. The people you lead, at work, at home, or wherever, need *you* to bring out their courage.

How to bring out others' courage

To bring out others' courage, you only need to do two things:

1. **Be encouraged.** First, surround yourself with others who encourage you. Without encouragement yourself and without some courage in reserve to share with others, you will never be able to pull others up.
2. **Take a risk.** Be prepared to upset some people. The student might have reacted differently. Williams' character might have lost him forever. Was that worth the chance he took? Absolutely! The worst that could have happened was nothing compared to the risk of doing nothing.

What is your YAWP?

We all want to sound our barbaric YAWP, but a lack of courage prevents us. Until someone helps us to dare to do what we've only imagined.

Most people never do the things they imagine because of fear. The fear of the unknown. The fear of failure.

The greatest failure of all, though, is never trying, never having the courage to dare to do what you've imagined.

What is your YAWP? What is the one thing you've never done that you've always wanted to do? Where will you find the courage?

Lesson Two: How to use fear

When you think about Robin Williams at his finest, you think of *Dead Poet's Society* and *Good Will Hunting*, not *Mork and Mindy*.

Why is that?

Because those roles stretched him. Those roles called him to go beyond what he thought was possible, to dare to step outside of his comfort zone, to face his critics and naysayers and do what he was called to do.

The result was that he made two hit movies and became a star in Hollywood.

When the producers of *Dead Poet's Society* cast Robin Williams, the critics scoffed. Even when he was cast for *Good Will Hunting*, after his wildly successful performance as John Keating, the critics said that *Dead Poet's Society* was a fluke.

The critics represented his own voice of fear. The voices that said, "you're not right for this role," or "you'll never be a serious actor." Those voices could have persuaded Robin Williams to quit, to stick

to what was comfortable. They could have prevented the world from receiving the gift that he offered to it.

Instead, he used the voices. He used fear.

What we have to do

In his bestseller, *War of Art*, Steven Pressfield writes,

...fear is an indicator. Fear tells us what we have to do. The more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we *have* to do it.

The fear told Robin Williams, "you might fail, you can't do this, you will never be a serious actor," but what it was really saying was, "you *must* take these roles." And he made history.

Important work will scare you.

World changing work will invoke fear.

It calls out to fear and says, "hey, something important is about to take place. You'd better come stop it."

Your calling (the thing you have to do) will always face opposition. It will always stretch you.

It will tell you that you are unqualified, that you don't have enough experience, that you are untrained, not smart enough, or incapable of doing the thing you fear.

It will tell you that you will fail.

What fear is really saying

That same fear, that same doubt and that same voice in your head telling you to stay in your comfort zone...*that* is the voice that is secretly telling you:

This is what you have been made for.

This is your life's work, your purpose, your reason for being.

Without this one thing, you will never find contentment or joy.

If you give in, I will always haunt you. I will always remind you that you quit or never even started.

I will own you.

Before *Dead Poet's Society*, fear probably told him, "Robin, you are a comedian. Take the comfortable role. This job is too hard. What if I fail? Can I ever go back to comedy?"

But he shut fear up. He followed his calling. He stretched...and his greatest stretches produced his greatest successes.

Listen to fear. It's telling you what is important. That is why you need it.

Today, even as we mourn the loss of a great actor, remember these two lessons from his life and his greatest character.

Use your own fears today. They are telling you what to do.

And then help someone else find the courage to do the same.

Let me hear your YAWP!

How can you use fear to discover your calling? How can you help someone else to do the same?