

Hello everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute, Digging Deeper.

Who are your heroes and why are they your heroes? And what does that choice of heroes say about you? Americans seem to be smitten by celebrity and success, and we hold these movie stars and sports heroes as our heroes sometimes. And at the same time, we seem to be bothered and jealous by all the money they make and all the stardom they have that maybe it's not warranted. So, it's sort of a strange hero worship that a lot of us have.

I was reading a blog by Guthrie Chamberlain the other day, and it was about guarding your mind. And what he meant by guarding your mind is being careful about the influences that you have in your life, the people that are in your ears telling you how to act or that you're watching and seeing how to act, and I was thinking about that and your choice of heroes. Some of the things Guthrie recommends, of course, are staying well-rounded, staying well-read, so you have a good perspective in life, and maybe you can make good choices about who your influences are. And then he recommends, of course, to choose wisely who you count as your friends and who you count as your heroes.

His point was that if we allow ourselves to be influenced by those who maybe lack a sound moral compass, or don't set a good example as to how to be a better human being, we can be vulnerable to getting caught up in our own wants, our own needs, our own power, our own celebrity, all of those things, and not be our best self.

So, in light of all this, I sort of did a self-review myself trying to say, well, who are my heroes and why are they my heroes? And well, I came up with four of them, you may or may not like them. But the first was Gandhi. And I probably know a lot of what I know about Gandhi from the movie Gandhi. But to me, Gandhi, who is the father of India's independence, the traits that he had, certainly selflessness, he always put others and the whole before him himself, he had an adherence to nonviolent disobedience. In other words, when he didn't disagree with something, his way of going against that was always with non-violence. Never violence, never raising the temperature, trying to lower the temperature. He actually had a willingness to receive blows and by receiving the blows of others, would sort of expose how their power was being mishandled, and that was one of the great tools that he used. And anyway, I found that very admirable and some really good traits.

Next on my list was JFK, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I think he was our 35th president. Now, I was seven when he was inaugurated, but I truly remember his inauguration speech and how moved I was, particularly his ask not what the country can do for you but ask what you can do for your country. And I think JFK had a call to public service from the Job Corps and several other programs that he started that was really admirable. And I think reading back on JFK, he really had a belief in the best of people and the best of mankind and the best of our hopes for the future. And I see where we've been missing in that kind of leadership, I think in recent years.

JFK also of course represented true courage and heroism. His story of PT-109, again, I got that from a movie probably at first, but he was a congressional Medal of Honor winner for saving his crew and helping fight the Japanese after his PT boat got destroyed in the Solomon Islands. The other thing about JFK is he was always a stirring speaker that seemed to bring out the best in all of his people. And thinking about leaders today, again, I think we lack a lot of what JFK held as a leader. So, I think we need more of that.

My number three hero comes from the world of tennis, Arthur Ashe. Many of you may not know that much about Arthur Ashe, and I actually had the honor to meet and work with Arthur some in the past. But not only was he a great tennis competitor and a winner of the US Open and Wimbledon, but he came for very humble disadvantaged beginnings to get there. And of course, as a Black man in those days, wasn't even allowed to play at a lot of the places where he later became a champion. So that was quite great.

But the things people don't know about Arthur. Of course, he also served in the military. He was a very important voice against apartheid and actually went to play in South Africa, sort of at the height of tensions there, and won a tournament

there in a sense to prove that as a Black person that he could win in a white man's sport, so to speak. He was also very much a deep thinker, brought a lot of class to the battle against racial prejudice. That was sort of his style was to be much more quiet and thoughtful. But he was definitely involved in the civil rights program very much. And then later in his life, of course, he became sort of a symbol of the problems of AIDS, and he died of AIDS after a transfusion. But his dignity, humanity, and celebrity really brought the light to AIDS and really helped in the fight against AIDS worldwide as well. So, Arthur Ashe was up there.

And then probably with a lot of you, the last of my heroes is my mother. And perhaps all mothers and even all working mothers maybe is a special subset, which my mother was because she had to be. She was left alone to raise eight children; I was the youngest of the eight. And her traits while getting through this, after having an abusive and difficult marriage, the grace and perseverance that she had in overcoming those situations and the lack of any support to raise the eight of us. We were well below the poverty line even as she was working. But I think of the love and the personal attention that came to us in abundance really made our cups full as we grew up. And probably as a result, she had eight very successful children who became successful parents, successful grandparents and now we have a couple that are successful great-grandparents. And so, my mother's definitely up there.

So, my admonition to all of you today is think about who are your heroes and why are those heroes your heroes? And what do they say about you? And are you guarding your mind to make sure that you're living with the best influences to allow you to be the best you can be?

Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.