

MaleCall

Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network
UUMeN, 5307 NW 118th Ave., Coral Springs, FL 33076
Web: www.uumen.org
E-mail: info@uumen.org

Fall 2007



Success is the foundation of the hero myth

By Frank Mundo

Success. How do you deal with it?

Perhaps this is a silly question for you. "Oh, I don't know. I try to hide from it whenever it threatens to surface." ... "I try not to gloat too much." ... "I certainly wouldn't want my children to know about it." ... "The small office is where I really feel comfortable; the less public recognition the better."

Right! Success is a problem for many of us. It is what most of us strive to achieve and what some of us try to keep in balance with the rest of our lives.

Our society, however, does not let men off the "success hook" so easily. *Success, winning, competition, triumph over adversity* — these things find expression in our work, in sports, in military service, in education. Success is the foundation upon which hero myths are built. Consider Rudyard Kipling's poem "If":

"If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you
But make allowance for their doubting too,
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting...
[If you can do all these things,]
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!"

In his sermon, "Fathers and Sons," the Rev. Dr. Edward Frost wrote: "Success...is impressed upon the male...whether they live in the age of Hannibal or Hank, they must, above all, be successful. And they must be successful at everything from running companies, preaching sermons, playing basketball in the driveway, earning a living, staying alive."

The word "success" is so emotionally loaded for men that one is hard pressed to hear them define it in terms other than the humorous. (See quotations in page 4 for samples.)

What Price Success ?

Are men considered to be "success objects" as women have been considered "sex objects"? An interesting question.

During months of studying evolution, I've learned many interesting things. Our animal roots point to some startling facts: that males are focused more on territory than sex; that females have the responsibility of selecting the "right" sexual partner; that males have the role of being "successful" (dominant, aggressive, in short —the "winner") to have the privilege of passing on their genes.

Males have the fancy plumage. They are the ones who lock horns in battle to determine the fittest while females watch for and select those with clear eyes, the fancy feathers, the nice piece of real estate ...

How much does the *competition-success model* translate from animals to man? Perhaps more than you might think.

We live in a time when men and women work together side by side at home and in the workplace. Both sexes often shoulder similar responsibilities. But despite similar roles and responsibilities, men and women handle success and failure, strength and weakness quite differently. In fact, I suggest that these are defining differences between men and women.

When was the last time that you discussed an important career-related failure with another man ? How much do you expose of yourself and your vulnerabilities to

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About UUMeN

The Unitarian Universalist Men's Network is a continental membership organization for UU men (which also welcomes other gender allies). Our purpose is to build and sustain a mature, liberal religious masculinity. Our primary objectives are to: develop a continental resource network; support the personal and spiritual growth of men at the local, district and continental levels; and collaborate with other UU groups who share our interests and commitments. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, may vote at our Annual Meeting held in June at the General Assembly, and are eligible for discounts on materials.

2007-2008 Steering Council

Rev. Todd Strickland (CO),
president, 2010

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Editor: Chip Roush

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Karen Carnabucci

Address Changes: Frank Mundo

President's Letter...

First, I'd like to say thank you to Dave Woods, immediate past president of UUMeN. Dave has been a constant presence and workhorse since I arrived on the Steering Council in 2003. Anyone who has been to General Assembly has seen Dave's commitment to UUMeN. Our booth would not be there if it was not for his diligent guidance.



Speaking of GA, to offer a brief report on it — it was surreal. On the whole, it was fantastic! Portland, Ore., is a beautiful city and judging by the days we were there, it is always 72 degrees and sunny with constant views of the nearby mountains. There were many interesting workshops and lectures as always. I had to leave early so I did not hear about the outcome of the experimental Open Space project, but I have participated in them before so I am optimistic.

The surreal part had to do with UUMeN. We arrived at GA thinking that we had received a choice location at the front of the exhibit hall only to find out that the actual entrance to the hall was on the opposite side — meaning we were facing the back wall. The other surreal part had to do with our changing relationship with the UUA. We are not alone in this but, for part of the journey, it felt like we were. The basic facts are these: UUA is reorganizing on several different levels, including its relationship to "affiliate organizations." For all intents and purposes, it appears that the category of "affiliate organization" is disappearing. However, as the category disappears, the organizations remain. So, as an affiliate organization, we were invited to attend a meeting with other affiliates to learn more about this change. We are being encouraged to form larger umbrella organizations with other organizations with whom we share a similar purpose — in our case, service to a identifiable group within our congregations. What this looks like is still a mystery to be solved, but we will continue to work on that as we continue to serve our larger mission: to build a positive liberal religious masculinity.

During my tenure on the Steering Council, we have had an ongoing conversation about how UUMeN functions to support a positive liberal religious masculinity. We have looked for new ways to succeed in our efforts to support the far-flung members and friends of UU congregations who are either part of thriving men's groups or looking to start one for themselves and their community. The Steering Council has begun to send this newsletter to all congregations electronically. It is our hope that each congregation that receives this newsletter will include it in its literature racks, in new member packets, and anywhere else where men are looking for information and support so that you will know that we are here. We offer our advice, our experience and the resources that we have created and collected along the way. We hope to hear from all of you — new and old, connected and seeking connection, seeking and sharing.

In Support and Brotherhood, Todd M. Strickland

YIKES!

Have you forgotten to renew your contribution to UUMeN?



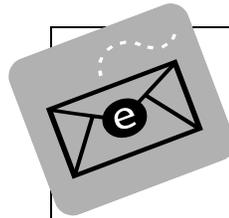
Keep the faith and help the brothers out...**do it TODAY!**

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Just use your credit card through our secure PayPal service. Or, mail in the form on the back of this newsletter. **THANKS, Brother (or Sister) !**

Failure to yield!



MaleCall Mail

By the Rev. Tamara Lebak

I cheated in school only once—and I was caught. I had this marvelous teacher named Mrs. Gouldy, who was my English and French teacher my freshman year of high school. I had both classes on the same day and on this particular day, I had an exam on William Golding's "Lord of the Flies" in her English class and a vocabulary quiz in her French class.

I stayed up most of the night reading all about humankind's base status of savagery and evil, how the innocence of children was a mere myth, and how in the end individualism would replace comradeship and lead to our complete destruction. Humankind may have been deemed a complete wash, but I was ready for that exam.

I was also prepared to argue with Golding, because I didn't believe that people were inherently evil. I believed humanity was inherently good. Although I agreed that rampant individualism might indeed lead to our destruction, I was optimistic that our needs to be in community would prevail.

That morning, French class was first and much to my horror I had forgotten about the vocabulary quiz! So, I started frantically writing the words to help me remember them.

Before the quiz began, I hurriedly stashed the pile of papers I was using on the floor. As I shifted in my extremely uncomfortable seat, not knowing the answers to the first three questions, I realized that my study sheet had slipped ahead of the others and was visible to me from the floor just in front of my desk.

I was usually such a good student, normally such a well-prepared student, even an overly conscientious student. And yet, how could I not look? Likely, no one would believe my good intentions at this point anyway. The paper was way too conveniently placed.

I knew, even then, that the right thing to do would have been to move it out of view. I didn't.

Three or four questions later, I was busted. Mrs. Gouldy said nothing but picked up the papers from the floor, bent over and wrote an F on my quiz paper, and walked back to her desk with my study sheet in hand—all without missing a beat in administering the quiz. I was left to writhe in my own discomfort, devastated and embarrassed as I awaited the Scarlet C, for Cheater, to be emblazoned upon my breast.

I had failed on many fronts: literally, morally, by my teacher's standards, my parents' standards, my own standards. In my 14-year-old mind, I was by all accounts, a failure.

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Send questions, concerns, or responses to previous articles to info@uumen.org, or to UUMeN, 5307 NW 118th Ave., Coral Springs, FL 33076.

Dear MaleCall:

I am a 11-year member of Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura and co-founder of the UUCV men's group with Gary Zinik. We have three men's groups, two closed and one open, totaling 20-plus men out of our 250-member congregation.

Our group was started using the model of UU Men in San Diego. Several times a year we get together in a large circle with all the groups, open to all men, on what we call a fifth Tuesday meeting. The circle starts at 6 p.m. with a potluck followed by a two-hour meeting led by volunteer facilitators.

Our groups are also taking more active roles within the congregation. In the last two years we prepared, cooked and served the annual giving brunch to more than 150 members. Further, we are also doing some specific outreach as men in the community. In May seven to eight men got together bought, cooked, served and had dinner in a women's treatment center with clients and their children on two separate occasions, which was well received.

In struggle, Michael Akseven

Dear MaleCall:

I've just read through the latest issue of MaleCall. I would not hesitate to bring my father or my son to our men's group meetings, but I would think twice before I gave either my father or my son an issue of MaleCall. Why? Because my father set before me a great vision of what it meant to be a man. For that, I thank him. I tried to set the same vision before my son. For all I can tell, he has lived up to it. If I gave either of them a publication on what it means to be a man, I would like it to reflect this vision of goodness, wholeness, virtue, and integrity. I do not see that vision in MaleCall. With exceptions. The letter from Rev. Lisa Presley on Page 3 is a gem. She asks our congregations to feed men's spirits and souls. She seems to get it. – hmhalf

This letter edited for brevity; please see the entire post on the UUMeN Forum at www.uumen.org.

How do you define success?

By Chip Roush

How do you define “success”? Is it earning power? Physical strength? Good health? Knowledge? Sexual prowess? All of the above?



Rev. James (Chip) Roush

This edition of *MaleCall* examines the various definitions of success in our culture, and their ramifications for us as men. Robert E. Taylor’s poem explores whether it is more “masculine” to work with our hands or our heads. Jerry Cross considers physical ability and health. Frank Mundo wonders if men are as much “success objects” as women are said to be “sex objects.” Finally, the Rev. Tamara Lebak offers a way of finding peace with both our successes and our failures.

Success is important; success is good. But how do we find a balance, and not suffer from too much of a good thing?

In Spirit,
Rev. James (Chip) Roush

Chip is the MaleCall editor as well as the UUMeN’s vice president and secretary.

COUNTING BANDAGES IN THE HOME DEPOT PARKING LOT

by Robert E. Taylor

My grandfather with only six fingers remaining from industrial accidents
my mother who nursed the daily traumas in the mill
my uncle from the north woods paper logging trade
with the tuberculosis it brought
would be at home here.

My son, attorney with all thumbs, would not.

Robert E. Taylor is a retired clinical psychologist. He meets weekly with the Men’s Group he co-founded six years ago at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham, Ala.

Questions & Conversation: Starters for Men’s Groups

(This is a regular column—please submit questions and rituals that have deepened your men’s group experiences to share with others in our movement.)

- ◆ How is blue-collar work considered more “masculine” than white-collar work, and vice-versa?
- ◆ If you contracted a serious illness, who are the first five people you’d tell, and why?
- ◆ What did your father teach you about success? How has his teaching affected you?

Quotes, little known or well known, can also be good starters for groups. Here are some quotes that Frank Mundo found that address the topic of success:

“Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.”— *Winston Churchill*

“All you need in life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.” — *Mark Twain*

“Success always occurs in private and failure in full public view.” — *Anonymous*

“If A is a success in life, then A equals x plus y plus z. Work is x; y is play; and z is keeping your mouth shut.” — *Albert Einstein*

“As you climb the ladder of success, check occasionally to make sure it is leaning against the right wall.” — *Anonymous*

“My success has allowed me to strike out with a higher class of women.” — *Woody Allen*

More than 100 ideas for men’s group topics are listed at “Possible Discussion Topics for a UU Men’s Group” on the UUMeN forums: <http://www.uumen.org/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=8>.

Nuts and Bolts!

Tips on creating a men’s group

Q. How often should we meet?

A. For some groups, weekly meetings work best; for others, every other week or monthly is sufficient. Consistency in attendance is more important than frequency.

Failure to yield!

(Continued from page 3)

“Label[ing] individuals [is] shorthand [when] trying to deal with people who are always complex, and [people] always pop out of the boxes we put them into” Sister Helen Prejean writes, *“Like [the way we view] Mother Teresa, we will attribute nothing bad to her. Then, when somebody (else) has done a terrible thing, we say that’s all there is to them. Suppose there was a way that the worst thing you had ever done could be projected on a screen for everybody to see...Then suppose you were told, ‘That is all you are.’ You’d say, ‘But...I’ve been kind to my grandmother. I was honest most of the time.’ We can never transfix into one single, absolute category any human being.”*

My value, as I understood it then, was entirely dependent upon my doing in the world, my performance, my contribution. How on earth would I be able to argue just two class periods later for the inherent goodness of humanity, in front of the same teacher? Maybe, Golding was right. Maybe even in Paradise, even in idyllic circumstances when there is plenty of food and water for everyone, and no real threats, humanity will inevitably find a way to war against itself: project our fears onto the world, fail to live up to even our own moral standards.

We can never transfix into one single, absolute category any human being.

Our value does not rest on a single event, nor merely on our actions.

Barbara Brown Taylor tells a story about buying a gift of small silver pebbles for a friend who was feeling as though her entire life had been a failure. On the counter in the store was a glass jar of smooth silver stones, each with a word engraved on it. She describes sifting through the jar of stones abundant with the words *Tears* and *Loss*, in order to reach the few stones with *Joy*, *Happiness*, and *Love* to offer as the gift. In the end, Barbara bought one of each *Love*, *Happiness*, *Joy*, *Tears*, and *Loss*.

Of delivering this gift, she writes, “I felt almost cruel giving them to my friend, but her sad mouth softened when she saw them. She may not have wanted [to own] them, but she knew they were hers, and seeing them in her hand with all the others told her story better than the edited version I first had in mind.”

We do need to hold all of the pebbles of our being together in order to understand the depth of our human experience: to own our *Tears* and *Losses* and *Failings*, beside our *Smiles* and *Successes*; to hold the pebble of *Free Will* beside the pebble of the *Uncontrollable*; to hold the pebble of *Responsibility* beside the pebble of *Accountability*; to hold *Being* next to *Doing*.

In adult life, not surprisingly, my failures have continued to be about performance, especially not living up to my own expectations or the expectations of those whom I love. Failure today is also about disappointments in relationship: not

being fully present with others or dehumanizing another person in some way.

What I have struggled with the most, however, is a loss of the perspective that even I have inherent value. When I lean too much on my successes and failures as the sole means of identifying my value, I encounter the overwhelming feeling that somehow I am a fraud — that whatever successes that I have had thus far will be negated by a single outcome.

When I grant too much power to an outcome in determining my worth — a grade, my job, an evaluation — I am overcome with a fear of being found out, of believing that the shoe will drop and the judgment will show me on the BAD side of the scale. The remedy for me in this crisis of fraud is regaining perspective. I am responsible for my actions. I must face the consequences, and do what I am able to earn my own salvation. But our value is not based entirely upon our performance. If we are living, if we are taking risks, failure will come, mistakes will come, harm will come, circumstances that you could never even dream of today may come—and you may do something that you swore you would never do.

Good people will continue to fail.

I want to share with you, and remind myself, the good news of our liberal religious faith: as Unitarian Universalists, our value, our salvation comes from claiming our power to act, from owning our responsibility to act.

And we are also saved by grace: saved by the grace of not believing in a God that would banish us to Hell, saved by the grace of celebrating our entire fallible human experience, every pebble, saved by the grace granted to us in our covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, even you, even me, and even in the midst of failure.

Failure ought to cause us to pause and consider the circumstances and the complexities and to yield to that which is beyond our control. After we have paused and owned and yielded, we can recommit to include ourselves in our assertions about the world: remember that we, too, have inherent worth and inherent dignity even in the midst of failure, recommit ourselves to trying to live up to our own standards, to continue moving in the right direction.

I have been saved from my own failures, and will continue to be, not only by my works but also by grace: the grace of a commitment that I have made to be a Unitarian Universalist, to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals, even me. May we continue to own our part, to yield to that which is out of our control, and to welcome the gift of grace. Blessed Be.

The Rev. Tamara Lebak serves the All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Okla., as its Assistant Minister.

(Success and the hero myth Continued from page 1)

associates? Are you inclined to reach out for help in turbulent waters or do your instincts push you to “tough things out”?

No, competition and success are too important for men – and reaching out for support from others usually doesn’t fit the equation. “Success” defines them as men. Success is winning, and there must be winners and losers. Needing or seeking help is often interpreted as a sign of weakness, of being a loser.

Women are strong on relationships and use them in their work; they understand networking and feelings. They are more inclined to share their vulnerabilities. Men typically are loners and often appear not to be in touch with their feelings. *“Men are not encouraged to speak out with their feelings. It is the measured, even response and commentary of ... [Colin Powell, Kofi Annan and John McCain] – not the impassioned presentation of Jesse Jackson – that is the vogue of male expression today.”* (1)

One need only to reflect on the abbreviated political careers of Edmund Muskie, Thomas Eagleton or Howard Dean to understand the cost of emotional expression, of disclosing too much of one’s inner feelings. *“[There are] ... subtle and not-so-subtle directions that lead men not to express their experiences of strong emotions other than the expansive, positive ones associated with winning and triumph. If a man is angry, it is seen as a shameful exposure of his inability to be the victor.”*(2)

Males are socialized from early childhood to be success objects. They are encouraged to suppress feelings, to focus on competition; they are taught that praise and spoils are reserved for the winner. This is subtly and not so subtly drilled into us. That and the “fear of failure.” As boys, young men and adults, the fear of failure follows us like a shadow.

What are the costs of “success”? To what extent does the pursuit of success, and the need to avoid the appearance of weakness, compromise men’s lives? Some likely areas where men may pay a price are in the areas of compassion, emotional accessibility and male community.

The essence of compassion is the ability to put oneself in the shoes of another – to understand the suffering and anguish of another. To do that, one has to “try on” where another person is, to experience that person’s feelings. Try on illness, humiliation, a missed job promotion, a job loss, or divorce, for example. Not a comfortable place, even for a short time.

How often do we take time to extend a hand of caring to another man who is in trouble? If we don’t do this, why don’t we? Do we sometimes withhold our compassion for another man, thereby acknowledging the fear that “there but for the grace of God go I?” Do we subconsciously fear catching failure if we go there even temporarily, or do we feel our own powerlessness to do something about the situation? Are we afraid of another man’s exposure in a time of weakness? Do we want to protect his privacy? Do we, possibly, have no words to share about how to deal with failure or misfortune?

I recall a most precious moment in my life. I was talking with a friend about his recent job loss and his decision to move from Massachusetts to Arizona. His move was necessitated because he could no longer afford his house, and his attempts at locating another job had been unsuccessful. Trying to put a positive spin on things, I chattered about new places, new opportunities, new people to meet and was upbeat about the job market at his destination. All that I could talk to him about was success, and the fact that it was right around the corner.

Suddenly my friend burst into tears and told me that his house was everything to him – it symbolized his life’s work, it was the place where he had raised his child, it was the center of his being in the world, his connection with community and his identity.

I did the only thing I could do. I shut up and put my arms around him. His gift to me was sharing his vulnerability. By allowing myself to be real with the situation I found out new things about communication and could then be of some real help. I discovered a different kind of communication where the price of admission was true compassion and understanding, where my investment was laying down my own vulnerabilities and fears right beside his.

Perhaps “success” should be redefined. Maybe it is better to consider success a group goal or achievement rather than an individual one. With men and women participating in both the workplace and at home, the evolutionary mandates of roles with attendant behaviors may have become obsolete. Maybe we can revise our relationships to other men, to collaboration rather than strict competition.

1. Knights Without Armor, Aaron R. Kiplins. Pg. 3

2. Ibid. Pg. 23

Frank Mundo is an active member of two men’s groups. He serves on the board of First Universalist Church in Rockland, Maine, and is a member of the UUMeN Steering Council.

SUBTERRANEAN URINATION BLUES

By Jerry Cross

I'm standing in the toilet stall
praying that my swollen radiation
riddled prostate will finally let some water
pass out of my aching bladder into the
waiting toilet bowel.

Someone steps into the booth next to me.
Another male I assumed
until I could hear his urine stream
assault the toilet bowl below him
as if it were on fire.
Had I been mistaken and a horse
had walked into the toilet booth
next to me instead of a man?

In the meantime my hundred plus
radiation rods,
euphemistically called "seeds," finally and
grudgingly allow some water to dribble
out into my waiting toilet bowl
as another horse steps into the now
abandoned stall.

As horse number 2 is finishing what he
came for
I am starting to get some relief. Though I
am
now sweating profusely emitting more
moisture
out of my pores than the instrument
mother nature gave me for that purpose.
Still another horse comes and goes.
There must be a herd of them out there.

As the intermission comes to an end my
prostate
lets my bladder know that it is done being
gracious.
So I zip up my pants, and as I leave
my refuge for the past 10 minutes
I say to my already departed comrades,
"Well, I can set off the airport security
Geiger counter
and you can't."

*Jerry Cross is a retired commercial
photographer; a member of the Olympia
Brown Unitarian Universalist Church in
Racine, Wis.; and a survivor of prostate
cancer.*

News and notes

New Steering Council officers for UUMeN

As of our annual meeting in June, the UUMeN Steering Council is composed of the following men:

Bob Hospadaruk, Web Site (2007-2010)
Rev. Keith Kron, At-Large (2007-2010)
Rev. William Chester McCall III, At-Large (2006-2009)
Frank Mundo, Database Guy (2006-2009)
Jack Ripple, At-Large (2005-2008)
Rev. Chip Roush, Vice President and Secretary (2006-2009)
Roy Schwartz, Treasurer (2005-2008)
Rev. Todd Strickland, President (2007-2010)
Rich Wilson, Communications (2006-2008)
Dave Woods, Immediate Past President
The Rev. Tom Owen-Towle will always be President Emeritus.

We welcome the Rev. Keith Kron to our Steering Council. He is the director of the Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns for the UUA and an associate professor for Starr King School for the Ministry, teaching a class on children's literature. He lives in Vancouver, B.C., and is an avid tennis player, loves to watch and play sports (Red Sox, Patriots, Tennessee Volunteers), visit book stores, hang out with friends, and leads trainings in the Enneagram.

Open call at MaleCall

We accept articles, reviews and original poems relating to men's experiences. If you have something to share with your fellow readers of MaleCall, please submit your writing to our editor at jroush@uuma.org. We are particularly interested in works on our upcoming themes: Education for the Winter 2008 issue (due Nov. 1) and Play for the Spring 2008 issue (due Feb. 1). Theme suggestions are also welcome.

Never renew your membership again!

With a UUMeN Life Membership, \$300 means you will never have to worry about renewing your membership again—and you will help us do the important work of supporting UU men and boys!

Make your RE program more boy-friendly

Keep in mind the importance of language. Religious "exploration" can be a more teen-friendly title than religious "education." And "projects" instead of "crafts" will likely be more enticing for teen boys.

Resources for our readers

toolkit.endabuse.org: This Web site is designed to help you work with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence.

MaleCall

Unitarian Universalist Men's Network
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Members receive *MaleCall*, a quarterly newsletter, may vote at the UUMeN Annual Meeting and are eligible for discounts on UUMeN materials and event registrations.

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Make checks payable in U.S. funds to UUMeN. Send this form together with your tax-deductible gift to:

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Coral Springs, FL 33076**