LIFE LESSONS FROM MULAN

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Exploring lessons from yet another fictional character, today we travel back in time to ancient China to look at one of Disney’s well known and well-loved animated characters: Fa (or Hua) Mulan.

Inspired by a real legendary figure, Hua Mulan, people believe that the origins of this story are from a poem written about her, titled ‘The Ballad of Mulan.’

In this movie, Mulan takes her father’s place in war, as she fears his age and fragile health will be greatly disadvantageous to him.

Accompanied by her trusty horse named Khan, a little dragon named Mushu, and a lucky cricket named Cri Kee, she sets out to war as her male alter ego Ping.

Mulan is someone with a great love for her country, she has filial piety, and a determined spirit – despite her headstrong and stubborn characteristics – and there are many things that we can learn from her.

Here are a few (warning spoilers ahead):

1. **DON'T EVER LET LIMITATIONS STOP YOU**
   - **Mulan:** No one will listen to me.
   - **Mushu:** Hey, you're a girl, again, remember?
   - **Fa Zhou:** I am ready to serve the emperor.
   - **Mulan:** Father! You can't go!
   - **Fa Zhou:** Mulan!

   Mulan is shown cutting her hair and putting on her father’s armour before going to war.

   Despite living in a time when it was generally believed that women should be seen and not heard, Mulan didn’t allow such gender inequalities and social pressures to stop her from doing what she believed to be right – fighting for her family.

   Likewise, there may be many obstacles out there to stop us from doing what we believe in. However, given that they are ethical and moral, we should be like Mulan and first believe in ourselves. Once we do, no external limitations can stop us.

2. **BRAVERY OPENS DOORS OF OPPORTUNITIES**
   - **Mulan:** (to the recruiter) Please, sir. My father has already fought for...

   In the famous scene of her transformation, Mulan is shown cutting her hair and putting on her father’s clothing.

   While some people may depict Mulan as somebody who is eager to go out and fight, this may not be necessarily true at the outset.

   Personally, this part of the movie showed me how a brave young woman took on a great task that could potentially have cost her her life, out of love for her father.

   Mulan’s act of bravery not only leads her to meet the man of her dreams and firm friends, but it plays a crucial role in saving China and bringing honour to the Fa family.

   In life, sometimes all we need is the bravery to step up and act on things that we believe in, and maybe the doors of opportunity that have been closed will even open up to us.

3. **PERSEVERE THROUGH TOUGH TIMES AND NEVER GIVE UP**
   - **Mulan:** (Shang hangs two bronze disks on Yao’s wrist)
   - **Chi Fu:** Silence! (to Fa Zhou) You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man’s presence.
   - **Mushu:** (Mulan uses the last rocket, then points it at the mountain behind Shan Yu)
   - **Shang:** This [pulls one disk up] – represents discipline... and this [pulls another disk up] ...represents strength.

   While everyone rose to the challenge, not everyone had the determination to see it through.

   After a long day of training, all the trainee soldiers gave up and returned to their tents, with Shang telling Mulan to return home.

   However, determined to accomplish the task, she stayed up all night to climb the pole, and eventually reached the top to retrieve the arrow.

   All of us will face challenges in our lives – be it in the workplace, or in our own homes. Nonetheless, it is important to remember: don’t let them get the better of us, don’t give up.

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4. **BE CREATIVE AND THINK OUT OF THE BOX**
   - **Mushu:** (from on top of the rocket as it soars away) You missed! How could you miss? He was three feet from you!
   - **(The rocket hits the mountain and causes an avalanche)**

   In the battle scene at a mountain, the Hun army attacked Mulan and her troop. With only one rocket left as their means of attack, Yao gets prepared to fire it at Shan Yu who is leading his army.

   However, Mulan innovatively handles this crisis by grabbing the rocket and firing it at a nearby mountain instead, causing an avalanche that buried the Hun army.

   Likewise, we shouldn’t allow our limitations to dictate what we can or cannot do. In certain situations, a little optimism and creative thinking can go a long way!

   Mulan is one of Sarah’s favourite Disney heroines. Share your thoughts with her at editor@leaderonomics.com. Read more articles about lessons derived from fiction at www.leaderonomics.com

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