

This Job Is Going To Be Legendary: How Archetypes Keep Showing Up In Work

No normal kid has ever wanted to be a marketer.

I certainly didn't. I grew up reading legends and stories of monarchs, knights, adventurers, and wizards. If you're anything like me and many kids, these were *our* ideal roles. It's why many of us spent time playing them out.

And yet here we are. Instead of becoming heroes in the mold of the heroes of the past, we find ourselves with the modern roles of salespeople, marketers, and customer support agents.

It can be a bit of a letdown to think that we are so far from the legends we wanted to embody when we were younger. But are we really?

The same types of social roles we play out now in our jobs reflect very old and necessary specializations in human work and behavior. Those old specializations have manifested themselves differently throughout history, and yes, sometimes they showed up in the form of monarchs and knights and adventurers and wizards. The psychologist Carl Jung would have labelled the substance behind these changing faces of work to be "archetypal".

I think it's helpful to look at how the "new" jobs of today reflect the same archetypal social roles played out in the legends we love. Humans and human institutions may change in form, but they do not change at heart.

In other words, sorcerers, knights, and the rest are all still alive and well:

- **Sorcerers/Wizards:** Anyone who uses language or images to create new realities plays much the same role as a magician or sorcerer. Think marketers and film producers but also software engineers and psychologists. (I've written before about how writers are sorcerers).
- **Explorers/Adventurers:** Anyone who expands the boundaries of the known is an adventurer of sorts. Think scientists and inventors but also entrepreneurs and even extreme athletes.
- **Monarchs/Rulers:** Anyone who exercises leadership well gets to play out the role of the "good ruler". Think CEOs and managers.
- **Shamans/Priests:** Anyone who represents and stewards culture plays out the priest's role. Think mentors and professors and counsellors.
- **Sages/Scribes:** Anyone who compiles and communicates the knowledge of the present and past acts the part of a scribe or sage. Think historians, journalists,

researchers, language teachers, and the like.

- **Knight/Warrior:** Anyone who guards and protects has to have many of the same duties and virtues of the knights of legend. Think security guards and martial arts trainers but also of defense lawyers and even front-line customer service teams
- **Healers:** Anyone who offers care gets to embody the healers of legend today. Think doctors and nurses but also people in the hospitality industry.

I'm probably missing a few categories, and it may not be easy to see how your job fits within the long stream of human activity. But it does. Celebrate the newness of it, and celebrate the oldness of it, and then go get it done. Because anything so new and so old probably matters for all of us.

Intellectual credit: I owe most of my knowledge of archetypes to people who have derived knowledge from Carl Jung and his intellectual descendants. That includes Jordan Peterson and Richard Rohr, whose book *Adam's Return* talks specifically about the need to recognize the archetypes within you. I sourced a few examples of archetypes and some background on their connotations.