

Goal, Motivation, and Conflict Workshop

Presenter: Deb Dixon

By Angel and Joseph Smits

Joe: Mom, you've been to a lot of different workshops, conferences, and all sorts of stuff. Why would you go to a workshop on character building instead of something professionally oriented?

Angel: First off, Deb Dixon is a dynamic speaker. Second, every time I hear her speak I learn something new from her or other audience members. I'm curious, Joe. As a new writer, what was your reason for going to this workshop?

Joe: It was mainly the topic, because it helped me look at my characters better. I can now see them as three dimensional people instead of actors on a stage. Instead of just going through a journey, they have reasons for why they do things, why they have conflicts, be they good or bad.

Angel: So you're saying that Deb's talk—which joined the Hero's Journey with her Goal-Motivation-Conflict method—gave you better insight into characters you're already working with?

Joe: Yeah, but it also helped develop characters I hadn't looked at as closely before. I was at an earlier stage in their development, so writing later will likely seem easier.

Angel: You know, I've used GMC for my other stories, but being there at the workshop with you and using it when we brainstormed later really made sense. I suppose we should stop using Deb's grid when we're watching a movie though, huh?

Joe: Dad does seem to get a little bothered when we point those things out in the theater. But once you know it, it's so easy to see. And besides, it's so much fun to apply. And speaking of that, when you said you'd used GMC before, where did you find it most useful when writing different types of stories?

Angel: I've got these people in my head and scenes, but GMC has always been a great tool to use to make sure the characters are fleshed out. For example, if one of my heroines gets angry with the hero for leaving his clothes all over the place (sorry, I write romance—what can I say?), my GMC chart would tell me she doesn't like stuff all over the floor because if she has to get up in the middle of the night to let her cat in, she doesn't want to trip (Goal) because one time she fell and broke her arm and her mother had to come and stay with her for weeks to help out. She was miserable (Motivation), it totally ruined her love life, and she doesn't want to lose this guy. Hey, why are your eyes glazed over, son?

Joe: Uh...sorry. I was distracted by thoughts of GMC for my own characters and their Hero's Journeys. Like if a dragon owned a coffee shop but was allergic to coffee, his main journey might simply be getting through his day. But in that day he might step out

of his Ordinary World of the coffee shop and have his allergies act up for his Call To Adventure. He might deny the flare-up to his wife the gargoyless, an Ally, because the business needs to stay open for when the health inspection gnome—the Antagonist—shows up...

Angel: Oh, I get it. You're saying that his goal is to keep his business open to support his family, since he's been starving before and had to live on the streets, where his allergies were so irritated that he burned down a whole town in one breath. What great motivation to keep him on his journey to find relief for his allergies. Talk about your inmost cave—he does have a cave, right? Does he leave his clothes on the floor? Oh, never mind.

Joe: Yeah, he has a cave. But that just adds to his motivation. Mortgages on caves cost a lot. Um...do you think Bonnie had this in mind when she asked us to analyze this class? Oh, and the dragon's behind on payments, too, to add to the tension and conflict.

Angel: Bonnie had no clue. But I think that's another great lesson we got from the class: GMC is useful for brainstorming. What a great class that was. Think they'll let us in another one after this article?

Joe: I hope so, but they might not let us have coffee if they do.

Angel Smits is the author of paranormalromance books for Imajinn Books and her work has received Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart award. Her son, Joseph, recently graduated from Collins College with a BA in Video Game Design. Together they participate in Writers Improv on a regular basis, where anything is possible.

Originally appeared in The Pikes Peak Writer, Volume VIII, Issue 1, January 2009