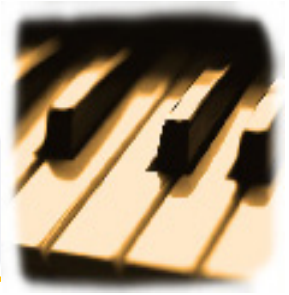


Courage is a special kind of wisdom



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“Courage is a special kind of wisdom. It’s knowing how to fear what ought to be feared and how not to fear what ought not be feared.”

Maybe you know which national leader uttered these words, mobilizing his citizens to face a national crisis. Maybe not. Who said it doesn’t matter. Taking it to heart does.

There’s a lot to fear in this economy. Even in the executive suite. A CEO asked, “What am I supposed to tell my team, when everyone can see that our income won’t cover the expenses?” Another asked, “How do I keep my Board’s confidence, when I’m doing everything possible to raise capital and the investors just aren’t biting?” And a third called to say he’d soon be out of work. “The owners decided to take the enterprise and its assets in a different direction. We didn’t see it coming. We have 30 days to shut things down and transfer the assets back to New York.”

Every responsible business and government leader — and every responsible household — has to ask tougher questions about how what they’re buying, how they’re investing and who’s being deployed to do what jobs. Each one has to make tough decisions. The result is that someone, somewhere will get less business.

In a time of scarcity, the fear is palpable in corporate lunchrooms, locker rooms, labs and meeting rooms. Some of us will lose our jobs. Some of us will see promotions vanish into thin air after going to school and working hard to achieve a higher position. Some of us might have to take a transfer, a new assignment or a demotion — rather than lose our livelihoods or adjust our lifestyles. And, believe it or not, even for those with “C” in their titles who earn seven-figure incomes, it hurts to forfeit a bonus or stock options after so many nights on the road and 100+ hour workweeks.

Courage can’t insulate us against the fears that we ought to fear. But it can make us face those conditions, without sacrificing our values, principles, honor, pride, or compromising the success of the enterprises we’ve helped to build, when the chips are down. Even without the cushion of savings and the prospects of a ready-made next career, courage can equip us to go out with the grace and class of former Phillies third baseman Mike Schmidt — and leave a legacy of success to those who succeed us.

We ran a Courage to Lead workshop for a group of R&D Project Leaders in New Jersey. They looked calm but it didn’t take a PhD in Psychology to see how many were scared. After an uncomfortable silence, one member of the group threw down the gauntlet.

"Our executives are scouting Singapore, Brazil, Hungary and Israel for promising innovations. They seem unimpressed when we present our discoveries. How are we supposed to keep our teams fired up and focused, when there's so much uncertainty?"

Lest you think the fear is limited to the USA, think again. At a CEOs Forum in Nairobi, for East African top executives, a top executive with a prominent multi-national African corporation asked, "How can I get my lieutenants to step up and focus on what's right to sustain this business through a decline rather than worrying about whether they're delivering the news or the recommendations that I wanted to hear?"

Working with the Executive Team of a high-tech company in Singapore, we saw a VP-level executive lower his eyes and tell us he could never take forward an idea that cost too much or a proposal that didn't have every T crossed and every I dotted, no matter how much potential he saw in the breakthrough discovery or embryonic idea. "The big boss wouldn't like it, and he'd tell others he didn't like it," the executive said. Half-rhetorically, he asked, "How am I supposed to deal with that?"

What's the common denominator? It's fear — that the job could be here today and gone tomorrow, in a whim of investor infatuation, a reassessment of priorities or a boss who's offended when you voice your professional recommendations.

If you're a leader in this environment, you can't make the fear go away. You can cultivate the wisdom to deal with fear and not let it get in the way of what needs to be done.

In our research, we've analyzed teams who've overcome fear and who accomplished extraordinary things in the face of adversity. We've advised business and government leaders about uplifting leadership that inspires courage. We've even written a book on *The Courage to Act*, a collaboration between The Courage Institute's founder Merom Klein and Temple University Professor Rodney Napier.

In our consulting experience, we've identified 5 specific things that a leader can do to equip their teammates to face fear effectively, and not be inhibited or preoccupied with fear of things that ought not be feared.

1. **Candor.** Get the issues out on the table. Name the fear. Identify the moments of truth. Just be careful how you do it. The last thing you want is a free-for-all complaint session, that paralyzes a team with excuses not to act or creates a wish-list of expectations you cannot meet. Don't ask a team, "What should management do, to make you more secure in your job?" Ask a question like, "What are the difficulties and worries that we'll need to address and overcome?"

In the first chapter of our *Courage to Act* book, we tell the story of King Sejong the Great, credited with bringing Korea into the modern age as a world power in the 1400s. Lots of leaders had Sejong's vision. He was extraordinary because he broke down the social distance between a monarch and his people, and created forums for Korean citizens to say, "Here's what we need" and "Here's how we can make things better." The result was nothing short of a technology avalanche that mobilized the entire country and transformed Korea from an agrarian to a knowledge-based and industrial power.

2. **Purpose.** Appeal to pride, social responsibility, altruism, health, well-being, making a difference — not just to baser motives like ambition, greed, political manoeuvring or self-indulgence. Be prepared to articulate why the direction is compelling enough to sacrifice comfort, relinquish entitlements or suspend disbelief. Have an elevator speech ready (to articulate the purpose in the time it takes to ride an elevator from the ground floor to the 4th floor), as well as a longer and more data-driven treatise.

You may be fortunate enough to connect “what we’re asking of you, in the here and now” to a formal statement of purpose set forth in the Johnson and Johnson Credo. Or you might have to read between the lines and connect the dots, to explain why you are asking teams to step up and lift their game, achieve more, faster, better, and leaner. You may not be able to reassure someone that their job is secure and their place in the team is forever. You can reassure them that they have the opportunity to contribute to greatness while they are here and to take that legacy with them.

3. **Will.** As Americans, we know how some leaders light up the mood when they enter the room, even when they don’t have good news to deliver. We remember how some teachers, coaches or mentors made us believe we were capable of more than we thought we had. In Kenya, we saw how people strengthened each other’s will in even the smallest of encounters — with Obama-like smiles, laughter, and by shaking hands with a two-hand-clasp and a don’t-let-go extended connection. We saw how people pulled each other in with hushed voices, which required others to listen more intently. We could see the rhythm of getting on with things and making the best of what we’ve got, rather than grousing about things we don’t have.

How you deal with frustration, setbacks, scrutiny — and draw people in, when they’re tempted to give up and back away — is a key factor in the success your teams will achieve. It doesn’t mean you have to relish adversity. Few of us do. Or be inauthentic. It does mean that you’ll have to find a way to show your appreciation for the strengths and character of the people around you, so they feel valued and “held large” in your presence. It means generating a “can-do” attitude with questions like, “How do we fix this? What’s the solution? What have we learned? Who else do we need to consult?” rather than folding our tent and forfeiting.

4. **Rigor.** We ran a Team Mobilization workshop with the executive team of a global pharmaceutical company. The strategy was clear and compelling. They were psyched. The strategy was simple to understand, but getting it executed would require some heavy lifting and new skills. On the third and final day of the workshop, the Directors were scheduled to join the VPs. In this session, the VPs were supposed to unveil the strategy and mobilize the Directors, who would then be asked to orchestrate change. In preparation for this Call to Action, a strong debate occurred amongst the VPs. “Should we script our announcements to the Directors, to be sure that we are all singing from the same hymn-book, or should we permit each VP to speak from the heart about the new strategy and improvise his or her call to action?”

With healthy dialogue, the VPs soon realized a scripted, formal protocol would sound too canned and artificial, and would create fears that ought not be feared. They also saw that “speaking from the heart” didn’t mean that their colleagues should “wing it” and speak to a group of sceptical and frightened Directors without adequate rehearsal or preparation. They knew that the Directors would hang on every word — whether it was uttered by one of the smoother-talkers or by one of the less articulate VPs. The VPs spent the late

afternoon and most of the night rehearsing one another, sharpening one another's sharpening one another's delivery, coaching, providing feedback, rehearsing again. They focused on the non-verbals, the person-to-person impact, the words, the delivery — and not just on the powerpoints. The result was a stunning success, with each VP delivering the message in his or her own words, style and voice. It was enriched, not compromised, by the diversity of the team-at-the-top.

5. **Risk.** A combat soldier told us about the biggest risk she faces. "It isn't when I have to rely on my own physical strength and ability," she said, matter-of-factly, with no hint of boasting or bravado. "It's when I have to rely on someone else who's in a key position to protect my life and who isn't as fast or strong or precise as I am."

In any organization, we rely on others to "have our backs" and protect our careers and likelihoods. When we're at peace, that's no big deal. In this business environment, we have to trust those meeting behind closed doors about jobs to cut, budgets to slash and people to reassign from pet projects to mission-critical but less glamorous projects. We have to give them the benefit of the doubt and trust their good judgment, even when we don't immediately understand (or agree with) their reasoning. If we think there's a mistake, we have to challenge the decision without challenging the integrity of the decision-makers — or, even better, be proactive enough to anticipate mistakes or miscalculations and to step up, take the risk and provide input early, before decisions are taken. We have to be willing to put our own egos, ambitions, turf, budget and resource allocations and bonuses aside — and do what's best for the enterprise. For some of us, it may mean that we have to relinquish a take-charge, high-status role in a project team, and listen to experts from Regulatory Affairs, Quality, Compliance or Strategic Marketing rather than pushing ahead with business-as-usual. For others of us, it may mean that we have to advise a client to forgo this quarter's spending or advise a boss to give a coveted promotion to someone else, who's better equipped to lead the squadron and accomplish the mission without casualties from friendly fire.

Conventional wisdom says that courage is one of those strengths that "you've either got or you don't." Conventional wisdom is wrong. Courage is a strength that leaders — at any level — can cultivate in those around them. It's a choice we all can make about how we perceive and deal with adversity. We can't escape the pressures but we can choose the fear we ought to fear. And we can mobilize ourselves and our colleagues to step up and face those fears constructively.



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