

Possibility thinking:

An antidote to fear, a key to high-performance
and a new Courage to Lead workshop

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***“It’s hard
for people
to focus.”***

That’s what we heard from the HR VP during our recent visit. He elaborated. *“With all the news about possible mergers, with a stock price that’s underwater, and conjecture about programs that have to be accelerated or cut, it’s no wonder people are anxious. Almost every family — including mine — has cousins or siblings, parents or children who’ve lost their jobs. Most didn’t see it coming. These are tough times.”*

Astute HR VPs are attuned to the “vibes” within their organisations. They know when the troops are nervous, unsettled, unfocused on the business and preoccupied with the politics or “me” issues.

And astute leaders — in all parts of the organisation — can see the same reluctance, fear, ambiguity and worry in project teams who are hard-pressed to meet aggressive timelines and in account teams who are finding it more challenging to achieve their revenue targets.

What’s the antidote to fear and reluctance?



What makes fear go away?

Over 70 years ago, US President Franklin D Roosevelt warned, *“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”*

Vision is what FDR put forward as the antidote to fear. He extolled American citizens to replace opportunism, looking out for “me” and making a “quick buck” with a stalwart sense of purpose and an unfailing moral compass. *“When there is opportunism but no vision,”* FDR warned, fear wins out and *“the people perish.”*

Now, there’s a wealth of empirical data to validate FDR’s wisdom. Research on effective psychotherapy tells us that fear doesn’t go away by talking about it. That only validates and magnifies fears or finds someone to blame, but it doesn’t help us cope. What works?

- **Calm.** Take a breath. Relax. Get centered.
- **Focus.** Set your sights on something productive. Something you can accomplish. Something to make a difference — for your community, your enterprise and yourself.
- **Take charge.** Act on the things you can control, the levers you can pull, the resources and strengths you already have and the relationships and partnerships you’ve built.
- **Act.** Fight the urge to indulge paralysis, inertia, procrastination, worry, blame. And ennoble others to rise above those indulgences.
- **Energize.** Look at the possibilities. Get yourself jazzed about seizing them, even if they don’t take you on the path your originally envisaged. Laugh. Relish the adventure.
- **Community.** Don’t go it alone. Reach out and strengthen your network. Say, *“We will get through this together”* and provide mechanisms to stay connected.

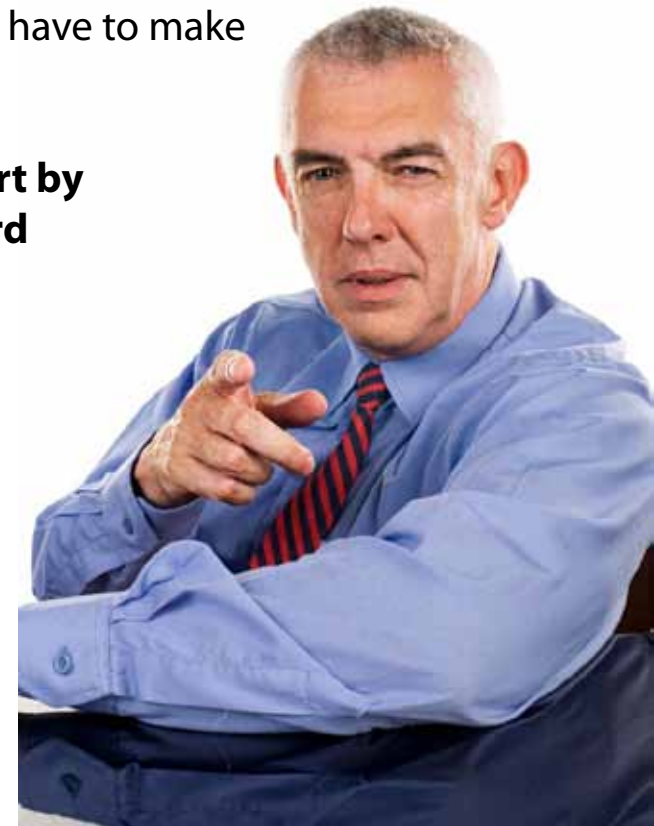
What can training & team mobilization do?

To get through tough times, great companies recognize that they need more, not less, from their go-to players. Great leaders recognize that they, personally, need to step up and encourage those around them to step up.

When cash is tight and performance targets are aggressive, it is tempting to cut the investment in leadership development and teambuilding. Smart companies avoid this temptation. Smart investors seek help when it is most mission-critical, not just when it is easy to afford.

For sure, consultants, business unit heads and corporate talent management co-ordinators have to get creative and do more with less. We have to make sure that there's a quick and tangible ROI.

As people-development professionals, it's up to us to start by imaging new possibilities for the solutions we put forward



So imagine this.

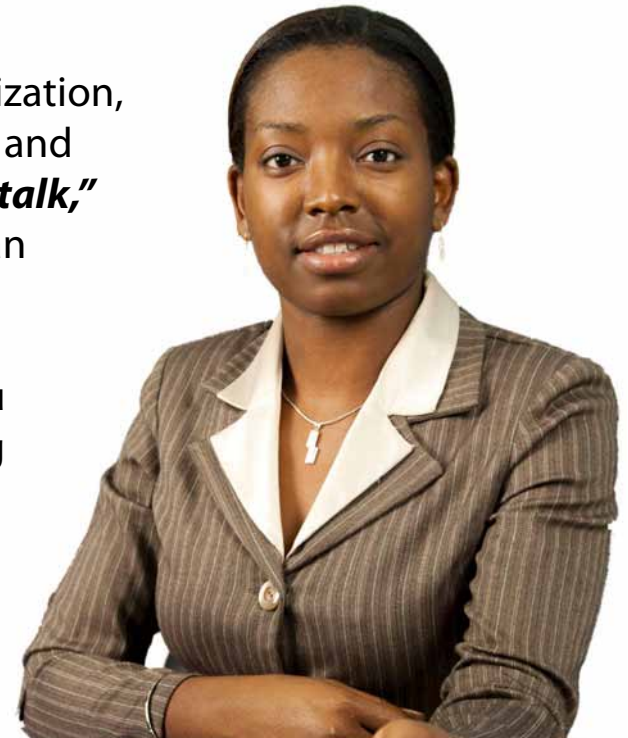
An approach to leadership development that focuses your “go-to” players on real business imperatives, not contrived or hypothetical adventures.

An approach to team effectiveness that mobilises “go-to” players to join forces, pool their know-how, strengthen each other’s resolve and build esprit d’ corps with by solving real problems.

An approach to culture-shaping that fosters possibility thinking, where anxiety about the future stimulates teammates to step up take charge and ask, *“What can we do?”* rather than *“Where can we take cover and hide?”*

A cadre of leaders, from the middle-out in your organization, who remember what’s stated in your company values and core competencies and who look within to ***“walk the talk,”*** rather than looking upward for reassurance — or for an unrealistic level of perfection.

The courage to act, when it’s most needed to take you forward, not just when you have the luxury of offering easy and comforting answers.



Does courage always make a difference?

We'd love to say, "Yes," just like anyone offering a medical remedy would love to be able to say, "Always prescribe this." The ethical answer is, "Not always."

From our research, we know there's little correlation between courage and performance when times are good, when markets are favourable, when doing what's comfortable and easy is sufficient to ensure success.

When times are tough — as they are now — the correlation between courage and performance jumps. The correlation between courage and performance grows even stronger when there is ambiguity or uncertainty about the future. And it is stronger still when there is change to execute, diversity to bridge, departmental walls to break down, novel problems to solve.

From our research we know that courage cannot sustain an unredeemable cause. It will not save your enterprise from the flaws of a product that does not work, from the wrath of unwitting victims exploited by a "get-rich-quick" scheme, from political aspirations that do not enrich the lives of the communities who were supposed to be served. People are too smart to be tricked, even with clever branding, catchy slogans and mighty marketing.

When the purpose is noble — as it is for enterprises who have the potential to make our nations, our communities and our planet better — courage is not a motivational gimmick. As a leader, you don't have to pretend to be someone you're not, in order to rally others to the cause.

You can be effective — in a way that's real and authentic.

How do stand-up leaders build courage?

5 Courage Factors.

As researchers and as advisors, we have studied hundred of teams who have coped with fear, ambiguity, reluctance, scrutiny — and beaten the odds, to make success happen. We have looked deeper than their luck or magic and have asked, “*What gave them the courage to act?*”

Here is what leaders did to spark and rekindle success behavior and to keep teams pointed toward the True North of company values and core competencies, even when the going got tough. **We call these the 5 Courage Factors.**

1. **Purpose.** When times are tough and people get scared, remember FDR’s advice. Provide vision. Keep the team focused. Make success into a “cause” to contribute to the betterment of the enterprise, nation, community, planet. Purpose is different from performance metrics by answering, “Why?” even if you have to interpolate and infer, how will it make a difference?”

2. **Will.** When the tenor of the conversation becomes discouraging and even the small obstacles seems overwhelming, change the energy field. Kindle joy and pride. Affirm strengths and values. Renew resolve. With humour and cajoling, dispel “Poor me” or victim stories, amplify small wins and successes, build confidence and forward momentum.



3. **Rigor.** When people get scared, remind them to stay vigilant. Over-communicate, follow-up and pull things through, so different parts of the team co-ordinate with each other. Convene forums and information exchanges for teammates to invent solutions and work-arounds, encode best practices and teach them to others. Ask penetrating questions. From wherever you sit in the hierarchy, amplify the voices of the teammates with know-how and make expertise the criterion to decide, *“who calls the shots,”* not authority.

4. **Risk.** Build bridges and strengthen a sense of community. Through personal example, kind words and zero tolerance for indulging personal ambitions at the expense of others, cultivate trust and instil a code d’honneur. Empower others to share the spotlight and get ahead and negotiate for mutual benefit rather than protecting parochial interests or pushing to get as much as you can. Appeal to our best angels rather than our base instincts and extol others to do the same.

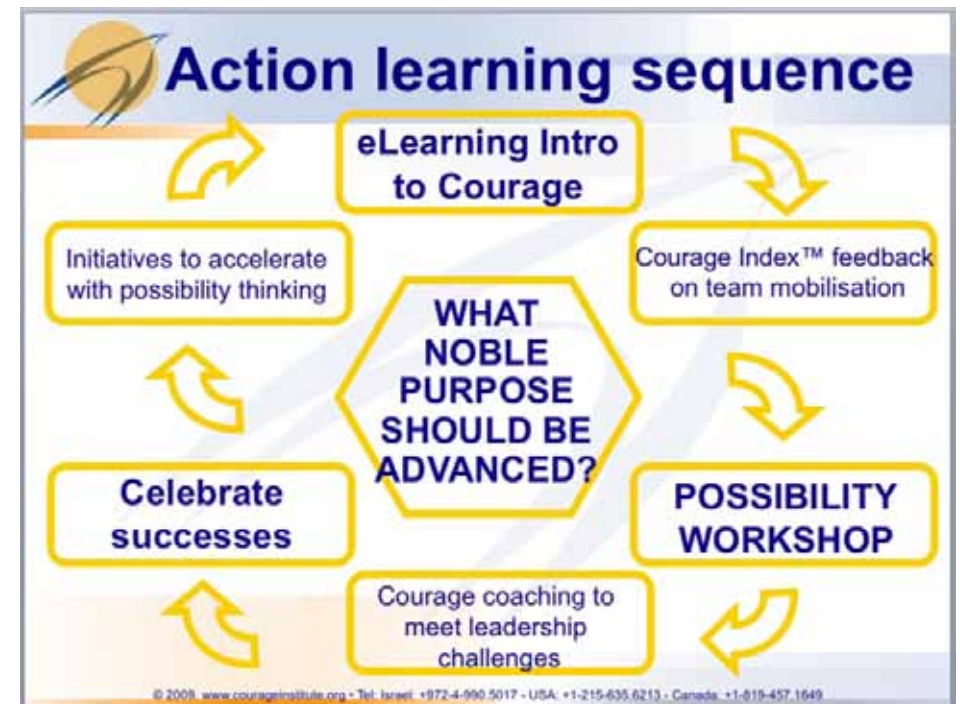
5. **Candor.** When it is tempting to tell those with power the things they want to hear, or to “not rock the boat” by saying nothing at all, say what needs to be said. Ask the right questions and listen attentively, to smoke out real concerns and real issues. Do not stop at, “We have a problem;” in addition, offer solutions — or an action plan to find good solutions. Be selective about the feedback you share to accelerate the Purpose, strengthen Will, advance Rigour and encourage Risk input that creates noise or self-indulgence.

***Possibility
Thinking:
Action
learning,
so 2 1/2 days
mobilize
teams to
expand
possibilities***

Give us 2 1/2 days and we can show your leaders what courage is — and how it can keep a team focused on possibilities and actualising potential, even when times are tough.

Starting in a one-hour eLearning module, leaders will learn to...

- **Spot a “Moment of Truth”** — when doing right, advancing project success and “*walking the talk*” of company values and core competencies requires more than doing what’s easy or convenient; and,
- **Use the 5 Courage Factors** — to diagnose their team’s readiness to step up, overcome fear or reluctance, stretch beyond their comfort zone or entitlements, and do what needs to be done.
- **Ennoble fearful or reluctant teammates**, wherever they sit on the organization hierarchy, to embrace new opportunities, invent and refine new possibilities



Then in an active, interactive, hands-on practice laboratory, your leaders will learn to...

- **Master courage within themselves**, to keep their own fears from clouding their judgement
- **Map the stakeholders** who need to be mobilized into a “can-do,” best-foot-forward virtual team or change-execution community of practice
- **Ennoble courage in others**, using a valid behavioural roadmap to reach out and mobilise others to discover possibilities, not just impediments, and solutions, not just problems
- **Bridge diverse personalities**, cultures and professional disciplines in a way that plays to their strengths, addresses and ameliorates their fears
- **Avoid hierarchy traps**, target blindness, summit fever, analysis-paralysis, lowest-common denominator, impossibility-thinking and parallel-play collaboration — and replace these performance-inhibiting, comfort-zone patters with personal accountability and the courage to act
- **Invent and instil team disciplines** to assess forward progress and benchmark against optimised possibilities rather than compromised or scaled-back aspirations
- **Use web-enabled communication and co-ordination tools**, to keep your best and brightest “go-to” players “on belay, in tune and in a harmonized rhythm

Of course, we customise your workshop to...

- **...advance your Primary Purpose** to mobilize your teams to lift their aspirations and performance beyond fear, reluctance or other distractions;
- **...“walk the talk”** of your organization’s values, core competencies and success behaviors and,
- **...complement other talent management**, leadership & organization development solutions



***Possibility
thinking
applied to
make a quick
impact:
Bridging from
workshop to
workplace***

Sustaining courage requires a bridge from the workshop to the workplace — with real-world, practical application. Using action-learning assignments and practical Courage2Act Coaching, your leaders can apply lessons learned in order to...

- Strengthen real-world performance
- Find new breakthrough solutions
- Garner support from sponsors, partners and external beneficiaries and customers
- Achieve early wins and build on those wins to accelerate optimal performance
- Gain a reputation, even in times of uncertainty and adversity, as “go-to” and high-achieving partners
- Earn a rapid return-on-investment, by accelerating mission-critical business imperatives, discovering possibilities and creating their own “luck” rather than waiting for others to do things for them
- With our without additional consultant support, we suggest ending the Possibility Thinking journey with a eMeeting or live debrief. This encodes learnings, celebrates successes, recognizes the mastery of fear rather than the elimination of fear and prepares other groups to replicate the journey.



What are the elements of most 2 1/2 day Possibility Thinking workshops?

Moments of truth

- The pressure/performance correlation
- The thin line between fear and achievement
- Taking charge of chaos to create alignment

Pirates Cove business simulation

- Proactive vs reactive approaches to adversity
- Use Purpose (rather than Risk) to orient your compass
- Align all 5 Courage Factors behind Purpose
- Benchmark against optimized possibilities, not scaled-back compromises

Sharpen your diagnostic skills

- Read a group's Courage Index from real-time behavior
- Confirm your diagnosis with a team culture profile (with feedback to team leaders during the workshop)
- Maintain your objectivity in the face of fear or blame

Ennoble with uplifting dialogue

- Respond to denial, blame or procrastination
- Encourage initiative, learning & action
- Adapt uplifting dialogue for diverse personalities & cultures
- Start where teammates are without getting trapped there
- Ask the right questions to foster possibility thinking
- Practice, practice, practice with real-life moments of truth

Adding Value problem-solving simulation

- Escape from hierarchy traps
- Achieve best-case scenarios, not lowest-common-denominator compromises

- Challenge easy, obvious but sub-optimal solutions
- Use real work and on-the-fly debriefs for ennobling conversations
- Establish a foundation of trust to support prudent Risk

Stakeholder mapping for team mobilisation

- Empower orchestrators to take charge from the middle-out
- Equip sponsors to set the compass & instil accountability
- Identify advisors with the right know-how & insight
- Ennoble executors to Risk & pull through change
- Keep the eye on beneficiaries for ongoing feedback
- Use web-enabled team mobilization tools to keep stakeholders on delay

Budget-to-Build strategy-execution simulation

- System-wide success vs parochial ambitions
- "Me" issue entitlements vs make-a-difference accountability
- What we need from early adopters who are the first to see system-wide implications
- Chaos, multi-tasking & aligning multiple efforts

Putting it all together

- A code d'honneur for your team to encode high-courage practices
- Fine-tune compression for urgency & resilience
- Diagnose & intervene to ennoble fearful or reluctant stakeholders
- Maintain your balance to provide calm & clear-headedness

Joy, pride, fun, accomplishment, celebration

- Build momentum with small wins and successive approximations
- Enhance resilience to stay confident in uncertainty
- Strengthen community to draw support from each other
- Make it fun — in the workshop and the bridge to the workplace

What can courage do for your team or for your enterprise?

The CEO of a British life sciences enterprise compared high-courage, ennobling leadership to boosting the performance of an internal combustion engine:

“When teammates are content to sit and wait for direction, a leader’s key job is to convert potential energy into kinetic energy, whilst mitigating the losses due to the generation of heat.”

In a European pharmaceutical company, the Chief Medical Officer challenged middle-level leaders in his company to exhibit this courage:

“When teammates are content to put forward the first or the most obvious solution and say, ‘Our job is done,’ leaders need to build courage to challenge each other and produce solutions that are robust enough to fulfil scientific, medical and regulatory requirements.”

Or from the perspective of the Chief Business Officer of an American life sciences firm:

“Leaders build the courage teams need to dream bigger, reach higher, learn faster and be open to ideas and influences that their first instinct tells them to reject. Whether we merge with another firm, buy or get bought, all we can control is whether we put forward the talent they want to retain — to take the enterprise forward.”

Or from the head of Regulatory Affairs:

“We can’t control whether our compounds have the therapeutic benefit we hope they’ll have. Of course that worries us. The best way to counter fear is to reduce it, not legitimize or magnify it. That doesn’t mean pretending it’ll go away. It does mean we should do the best scientific work we can do. If we do that, in the best way we possibly can, the rest will take care of itself.”

Or the head of a commercial organisation:

“The business is changing. We’ve been organised to focus on one group of beneficiaries, who now have less influence than before. The new decision-makers think differently and seek different answers than the ones we’ve always provided. That’s making everyone nervous. I’d like to say, ‘Calm down. It’ll be OK.’ But at times like this we don’t need reassurance. We need the courage to act, to identify new opportunities in the new business environment and to shape new possibilities that will seize those opportunities.”

**If these are benefits you’d like to bring to your teams,
Possibility Thinking and The Courage to Lead can help.**





About the authors:

Dr Merom Klein is Executive Director of The Courage Institute, an international leadership and organization development consortium which specializes in building the inner strength that teams and leaders need to execute new business strategies. Dr Klein earned his PhD at Temple University in Philadelphia, USA.



Dr Louise Klein is Director of The Courage Institute's executive coaching practice, focusing on hands-on action learning assignments to mobilize teams and lift leadership skills with on-the-job application. Louise earned her PsyD at Widener University in Chester PA, USA.



Louise and Merom's research on courage in teams and organizations has resulted in a measure of courage, The Courage Index™, which equips a group to assess its candor, purpose, will, rigor and risk — and equips a leader to assess the courage that s/he ennobles in others.

Louise, Merom and their associates use an action-learning and simulation-and-hands-on practice methodology to equip teams and leaders to raise their level of courage, and apply that courage to meet more aggressive performance standards and to mobilize cross-functional teams, matrix and molecular organizational structures more effectively.

Louise's and Merom's past and current clients include Aetna, CIGNA, ARAMARK, Johnson & Johnson, EPIX, Fonterra, ITI, Sunkyong, Merck, Lucent, Motorola, Intel, ING, Royal and Sunalliance, Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Lockheed-Martin, Fredericks of Hollywood, PowderJect, Orion, KeyCorp, Rafa'el, GE Healthcare; community organizations like The New Israel Fund; and government agencies like the Governor's Office in Pennsylvania, Medical Research Council Technology in the United Kingdom, Canada Health and NASA.

