

CEO Worldwide Expert File



Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen. --Winston Churchill

Leadership Courage is Contagious

As a young leader, when I first heard the phrase "Leadership Courage", it left me feeling a little scared as to what I would have to do to live up to or even begin to possess such a thing. Today I wonder how I would manage without it and enjoy helping the new generation of leaders to develop their own brand of it.

It's helpful to define Leadership as "any attempt to influence" and Courage as "the ability and willingness to confront fear, pain, danger or uncertainty"

So together Leadership Courage can be described as any attempt to influence a person or situation in the face of controversy where there is an easier option available. Quite often this alternative is a simple "Yes, I agree" rather than put your voice into the ring.

It is this strength of conviction and verbalising those thoughts that are running around in a Courageous Leaders head that differentiates them from the yes people.

During some of our assignments, I have seen amazing examples of Leadership Courage where team members will openly challenge the status quo and debate their corner either for the good of the team they lead, the company or the team they are part of.

The latter team is the most important one they serve. Also, this is where the courage to speak up is the toughest as there is no position power in a room of peers therefore the ability to influence relies heavily on personal power and the courage to be able to overcome any fear to speak out.

The great news is that once you develop the ability to demonstrate Leadership Courage you will positively infect those around you and start an epidemic, it is truly contagious and the results that can be achieved will be way beyond your expectations.

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So What are some of the traits of a courageous leader?

- The ability to face adverse conditions head on is a key trait and allows the leader to see the real and lead the team to a better place
- Holding everyone to the same high standards is sometimes a challenge for the non-courageous leader. Courageous leaders don't wait too long before removing poor performers. Those not acting in this way tend to hear cries of "what took you so long to deal with that issue!" when they eventually get round to dealing with performance issues.
- A courageous leader also gives and receives honest feedback. The leader has the ability to say what has to be said to an individual by focusing on the behaviour that needs to be corrected. In the same way, the leader actively seeks feedback from all around them and acts upon it.
- A courageous leader consults before making important decisions and leads others in moving towards the resulting actions required. This helps in making an informed decision while encouraging others to move forward regardless of the challenges to be faced.
- The ability to change is a pre-requisite for delivering a courageous stance on your leadership, be bold and recognise the only constant is change.

What is the positive impact of courageous leadership in an organization or a team?

Provides security to the team

Courageous leadership promotes a sense of security to the team in the organization. When the leader faces the hard reality, he/she then leads the team members by showing the right way. It therefore makes the team members feel secure to take the risk and work towards higher goals.

Builds more courageous leaders

The leader builds confidence in the team around them by showing how small reversible experiments (risks!) can really be game changers, demonstrating that failure is actually encouraged and how speaking up with conviction can have a 10x positive effect on a difficult situation. This is a skill that can be learnt and one that we have had many a success with installing into executive teams.

The difficult conversations are aired and resolved

I have sat in a lot of board meetings with our clients biting my tongue as the tricky subjects are danced around, very effectively in many cases! A common reason for this I have found is the lack of accountability in the room, therefore no one can by definition be held to account for an issue so it is swept deftly away under the boardroom carpet. The great CXO teams ensure that they leave the room aligned and all the debate has taken place. This takes time to establish but is well worth those sharp intakes of breath you take before you speak up!

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Drives the organization to the next level

A courageous leader drives the organization to the next level through bold decision making, problem solving and risk taking. This is often when the CEOs we work with are ready to step up themselves and become more strategic in their thinking and take bold steps to change the way things are done around the organisation, this takes courage and determination.

A few tips to try out!

Becoming the courageous leader that you aspire to does not happen overnight but with the willingness to try some new things out your confidence will grow fairly rapidly. The following tips have served me well, some were passed down to me from key mentors in my career and some were trial and error on my part. Be bold and try a few out!

- Trust your gut instincts, your intuition. If something feels or looks wrong to you, it probably is worth challenging the status quo.
- Ask yourself: "What's the worst that could happen?" before you raise a subject or issue you can sense is not quite right or has not been debated fully
- "Grasp the nettle" was a term my leadership mentor encouraged me to do from an early age. This drove me not to dance around issues but to get to the root cause efficiently, however difficult or unpleasant.

(Side note: Aaron Hill's Works, circa 1750, contains the first example that I can find that advises that a nettle be grasped: "Tender-handed stroke a nettle, And it stings you, for your pains: Grasp it like a man of mettle, And it soft as silk remains.")

- Be receptive to tough feedback. Easier said than done depending on your behavioural profile!
- Gain self insight into your talents, your drivers and behaviours to ensure that all of your strengths are being deployed to the good of yourself and others. Holding them back or working in an environment that does not allow them to be deployed is unfair on yourself, others and the company. Develop the courage to use them... a lot!
- Surround yourself with people who are better than you. This was a lesson I learned during my time with Starbucks from the founder Howard Shultz. Courageous leaders are ok with not being great at everything.
- Communicate openly. Do this a lot and very often. Don't hide behind the office door in fear of being transparent with your team. This not only builds your own confidence but enhances the trust given to you by others.
- Set stretch goals and delegate well. Ensure accountabilities are clear and everyone knows those key indicators that show they are on the right track and correct when they are not.

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In summary

Nurturing Courage amongst your leadership team should be top of your agenda when looking for ways to make your team more effective. It takes you to demonstrate courage daily if you are to be the one who helps change your team, company or the world!

For more information on how to take stock of where you and your team are in relation to Courageous Leadership, drop an email to Mike@mikehoffconsulting.com

A great leader's courage to fulfil his vision comes from passion, not position.

- John Maxwell

About the author:



Mike Hoff has more than 30 years of senior leadership experience across a wide spectrum of trades and professions. Along with an in-depth understanding of business processes at both strategic and operational levels, Mike's energetic style and passion creates a unique blend, offering companies all-round bespoke development solutions.

<https://youtu.be/iDlzAuxAMQQ>

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