

## ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF GREAT LEADERSHIP: COURAGE

Great leaders cannot afford to be cowards! Leadership requires courage, that character quality that enables you to do the right thing even when others don't – to stand for your convictions when they are not popular.

Courage may conjure up images of brave men and women who put themselves at physical risk to accomplish a noble purpose. That's physical courage. These acts are often short, instantaneous events. But we are speaking of another kind of courage - the moral courage a leader needs to base his or her leadership on timeless principles and worthwhile values.

When faced with challenges, risks, and the unknown, we may feel fearful or anxious, but courage enables us to do what we must. It gives us the fortitude to attempt difficult things with uncertain outcomes.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is looking fear in the face and determining to act in spite of it. Rather than an instantaneous event, moral courage tends to be a process over time. It develops as we persistently venture forth, withstanding fear, persecution, danger, or difficulty. Eleanor Roosevelt acknowledged, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

The heart of courage is the power of convictions. And convictions are based on values, those elements deep within your belief system that make you "tick." They represent your highest priorities and deeply held driving forces. They are the essence of who you are as a human being.

It's important to know what we believe and why. Being able to clearly articulate our beliefs to ourselves and others prepares us to demonstrate moral, as well as physical, courage when faced with risks and challenges. By developing our belief system, we courageously choose to make right decisions when confronted with a situation for which it would be easier, more convenient or popular to do the wrong thing. By internalizing the values that form our beliefs, we proactively prepare for future experiences and decisions.

"Courage, like all other character qualities, comes from within. It begins as a decision we make and grows as we make the choice to follow through," says writer G.K. Chesterton. Courage like most character qualities are closely intertwined with others – all of them together forming what we call character. If character forms the inner skeleton of strength and values, then courage is the backbone. It requires courage to live with integrity, accept responsibility, tell the truth, take initiative, persevere, etc. The cowardly or fearful person may give lip service to values or convictions, but he or she fails to follow through. There is a vast difference between knowing what one should do and actually doing it.

Leaders make things happen. Courage gives them the power to tackle the tough stuff. The historian Tacitus wrote, "The desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise." Fear and an

unwillingness to take risks limit a leader. Don't surrender yourself to the enemies of character building by taking the path of least resistance, succumbing to laziness, or embracing the status quo of a morally weak society. Instead, lead the way. Face your fears and take risks – without being reckless or foolish. You cannot accomplish great things without taking calculated risks. There are no guarantees in life, but if you don't risk failure, you also miss out on the joy of success. You sabotage your potential by failing to grow. You set low ceilings for those following your lead. And you cheat yourself out of the very experiences from which you can learn and prepare for even bigger risks and challenges.

“Unless you do something beyond what you've already mastered, you will never grow,” says Ronald E. Osborne. If you feel fearful, try to see the potential in the opportunities you will miss. Face your fear; do not allow them to intimidate you. You'll need courage to possess bold but discerning judgment, spirited but calculated risk-taking, and an assertive but reflective disposition, but you can choose to venture forth in deeper waters of experience. Just remember: "In business and personal life, to create true integrity and lasting effectiveness you need to develop the courage to move towards the sound of the gunfire," declares Dr. Martin Groder. You can do it! Those you lead or influence are counting on you.

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