

LEADERSHIP
ISN'T FOR
COWARDS

How to Lead Courageously
in a Turbulent Age

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Leadership Isn't for Cowards -

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How to Lead Courageously in a Turbulent Age

What comes to mind when you hear the word courage?

A firefighter rushing into a burning building. Winston Churchill addressing London on the radio during the Blitz. Rosa Parks refusing to give up her bus seat. Or any of the ordinary men and women who raise children, stand up for unpopular beliefs, sit by the bedside of dying loved ones, or quietly carry on in the face of hardship or tragedy.

The American Heritage[®] Dictionary defines courage as:

The state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with self-possession, confidence, and resolution; bravery.

Courage for the purposes of this book has to do with the willingness and ability to face what needs to be faced and to do what needs to be done such that you are confident that your values and your heartbeat are being consistently executed and felt in every aspect of the business, the community where you live, and in the lives of those you influence.

With that in mind I want you to consider some of the toughest questions you will ever consider. What do you believe? What are your values? To what extent are you living and leading in alignment with those beliefs and values? Show me what you do and how you act, and I will show you what you value. I have dealt with hundreds of people over the years, one-on-one and thousands in groups. I am continually interested in the gap between what we say we believe and how we lead. I am reminded of the leader of

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a mid-sized company who preached the value of integrity every day but allowed his #1 salesperson to run roughshod over everyone in the organization. Courage is not the enforcement of some rigid set of beliefs arbitrarily

enforced on your followers. Courage is about clarity and mindfulness – clarity as to what you believe and mindfulness in the execution of those beliefs in the culture. I would rather a leader stand up and say that he will adjust his values based on the circumstances and do whatever he feels like doing because he really doesn't care than to have a leader espouse a set of values and then live out of alignment with them. People crave courageous leadership. Rudy Giuliani was admired less for his administrative ability and more for his courage under pressure during one of the worst tragedies in our history.

For instance, it takes courage to make decisions whose outcome will affect the success of the organization. Or to

hold firm to your convictions in the face of pressure and opposition. It takes courage to confront high-performing employees who aren't in alignment with the way you want the culture to operate. It takes courage to be direct and authentic in your communication, clear and without ambivalence in your convictions, and willing to do what needs to be done despite its popularity. It is the courageous leader who can accept reality as it really is and act in alignment with it. It is the courageous leader who can take responsibility for his choices. Finally, it is the courageous leader who, despite the pressure of the balance sheet, market conditions, or personal gain, will make the decisions that keep people focused on the appropriate values and behaviors. It's being certain that the focus is never lost.

The Measure of a Leader

Courage is hard to measure.

It is hard to measure primarily because it is subjective and personal. My family was having a conversation one afternoon about risk. One of my brothers said, "I am not afraid to take risks . . . as long as they are safe!"

I think the point is obvious: there is no courage where there is no risk. I am always amazed to hear people say that they feel no fear or uncertainty. That is usually an indication to me that they are playing it very safe or they are reckless in their leadership behaviors or just so arrogant they really don't feel it.

In my coaching work I measure the courage of a leader in several ways:

1. The level of clarity regarding the heart and soul of the leadership message.

To what extent is your message clear and inspiring?

To what extent is it understood and actionable?

To what extent does it resonate throughout the culture?

To what extent is it relevant to the culture, the customer, and the follower?

2. The degree to which the followers are engaged in the strategy.

To what extent do the followers see how they fit in/contribute to the vision?

To what extent do you ask for input from your followers?

To what extent are you flexible in your strategy as long as the outcome is assured?

3. The degree of action orientation.

To what extent does the leader work diligently to remove obstacles?

To what extent is the leader relentless about quickness in decision making and execution?

To what extent does the leader insist on accountability and results over effort?

There are two sides to leadership: scientific and artistic. The scientific side encompasses everything a leader has to do

every day to execute the fundamental processes or systems of the business: making widgets, getting widgets into stores, writing reports about widgets. Whatever. The artistic side is all about answering questions like: *What are my values and how do I communicate them to the culture? How do I connect what I believe with my company's mission? How do I create the right kind of culture for the people who follow me? What type of experience do I need to be creating for my followers so that they have the greatest chances for success?*

It is important to get one thing straight before we move on: you lead people and people follow you. You do not lead an organization, department, or group, and your people do not follow a strategic plan, fancy goals, or year-end reports. They follow a person, and hopefully if you are their leader, they follow you. Make no mistake; they will follow someone. Your followers care less about the scientific side of business and more about the artistic side of your leadership. Most people leave their jobs because of the artistic side of your leadership.

Many leaders have focused almost exclusively on the scientific side of leadership throughout their careers – and by and large have built some very successful organizations. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with the scientific side of leadership. I am suggesting that there is always a balance in the best leaders. John Chambers (CEO of Cisco Systems) is a great example of that balance. There is no doubt about his commitment to building the company and there is no doubt that people follow him. For some the artistic side makes them uncomfortable. They can get their hands around numbers. They can measure and quantify cash flow, balance sheets, profit and loss statements. But to understand the pieces of the business that

you can't quite get your hands neatly and cleanly around takes courage—to look inward and get clarity on what you believe and to translate that into your culture is a completely different ball game. It requires introspection, emotional intelligence, and a sense of focus that is different from what most of us were taught.

Why Courage Matters

Let's take a moment to think back to the mid- and early 1900s.

Everything about business was different then. The boss said it; you did it. Period. You considered yourself lucky to have a job at all. You stayed with your company for “x” number of years, got your gold watch, and retired. Was it an easier time? Perhaps. Was it a better time? I certainly don't think so—the easy path is rarely the most fulfilling one. We must all make the most of the reality in which we live. There are those who do not live in the current reality, constantly wishing for the good ol' days or looking to the future hoping for better or different times. A rigorous acceptance of the current reality is one of the keys to creating outstanding leadership.

The business of that era required a profoundly different leadership philosophy. Leaders cared only about getting the job done. They weren't as concerned with the human side of business, because, frankly, they didn't have to be. But then a plethora of changes started happening. Women entered the workplace en masse. Technology took off. There

was a backlash by followers and a demand for clarity. Most importantly, people woke up and figured out that the human side of the business was just as important as the numbers side. It is amazing how many leaders to this day still see people as secondary to the P&L.

Focus

Recently I was at an airport and saw a guy walking down the concourse with a cell phone in his right hand and a cell phone in his left hand. He was carrying on two conversations at the same time, alternating between one phone and the other. I looked at his belt and saw a Blackberry®. Wow. How pathetic is that! That is not courageous; that is life without boundaries.

I heard a shocking statistic recently: the average Sunday edition of *The New York Times* has more information in it than the average human being in the 1700s received during his entire life. While I am certain that the minds of most of us have matured and evolved to some degree over the years, I am equally certain that no matter how smart you are your leadership is being tested every day.

If we can't manage the deluge of information that comes at us every day, we'll drown in the chaos. We'll fail to do the things that are most important. We'll fail as leaders.

The speed at which our culture moves – the sheer intensity of the information we must process every day – is beyond overwhelming. If we can't manage the deluge of information that comes at us every day, we'll drown in the chaos. We'll fail to do the things that are most important. We'll fail as leaders.

Here's the thing: leaders are human beings working to influence others. Given the dramatic change in pace and information, you have to be able to stay focused on no more than four core centers of excellence. Those things must be the things that are the most important in terms of driving the organization. That kind of focus takes courage. To whittle down everything that's whizzing and swirling and crashing around you – trying its best to distract you – requires the kind of intensity and energy that comes with a focus on developing your leadership every day. What are your areas of focus? A client of mine identified his areas like this:

1. Making this the best place to work,
2. Creating an exceptional customer experience,
3. Operational excellence,
4. Financial strength.

I was a program manager in a psychiatric hospital years ago and was always amazed by those who came in hearing voices. The amazing thing was just how insightful some of those voices were. As a leader you must be hearing voices of a different type.

1. The voice of your employees/associates:

By and large the associates who carry your organization, working group, team, etc. on their shoulders every day are your best sources of information. They will tell you the truth, if you make it safe and if you ask. It takes courage to ask.

You should be pushing your people all the time to get you good information on the pinch points in their work. You should be asking them about what it's like to work for you and how you can make this a better and more productive place to work. **DO NOT LET IT TURN INTO A WHINE FESTIVAL.** The voice of the employee should always be filtered through solutions. Challenge your people to give you the truth with suggested solutions attached.

2. The voice of your customer:

Until the mid-nineties we lived in a provider-driven economy. Basically, the provider of goods and services was in charge of the transaction. With the Internet came a shift in the economy. We now live in a consumer-driven economy, which means the customer drives the transaction. It is the customer who determines the experience and the expectations. What mechanisms do you have in place to get the voice of the customer loudly in front of you? While surveys are good, it takes courage to actually go out and talk with customers face to face. Do not leave this to your followers alone. Get out there and go face to face. Don't sell them; listen to them.

3. The voice of the balance sheet:

Make certain that you have the courage to look deeply into the financials of your area of influence. How are you spending money? Do the expenditures reflect your values? Well, let me rephrase that. Your expenditures always reflect your real values. Are those expenditures reflective of the kind of culture you want to build? What does the balance sheet say about what you value? What changes do you need to make today? If you don't really have control over your financials, how does your budget reflect your values?

It's Time to ATTACK the Courage Issue Head-on

Okay, okay, I get it! you're thinking. I know I need to become a courageous – or at least a more courageous – leader. But how, exactly, do I do that? What actions are involved?

Courage takes place on the artistic and scientific sides of leadership. The path to courageous leadership has six components. If you want an easy way to remember them, try using the acronym "ATTACK."

Accept Your Current Circumstances.

I have found that most leaders either overestimate or underestimate the health of their current culture. Very few people have a realistic grasp on it. You as a leader need to look reality in the face and accept it. By the way, this does not mean you should "settle." Accepting that you have a less-than-ideal corporate culture is the first step toward changing that culture for the better. Acceptance does not mean approval. Focus your energy on listening to the voices mentioned in the previous section. Make a rigorous commitment to the facts. Listen to neutral sources of information. Ask yourself this question: What are you pretending not to know?

Take Responsibility.

A courageous leader is willing to own the results of his or her choices. In other words, don't blame the market or interest rates or any other outside conditions for circumstances inside your culture. As a leader, they're your responsibility. That doesn't mean every problem your company has is your "fault," of course. But if you fail to do anything about it, that is your fault. Taking responsibility involves understanding what is yours and what is not. It is often as simple as acknowledging you made a mistake or taking ownership of a decision without making any

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rationalization. Responsibility is not about blame; it is about response. Own what is yours.

Take Action.

The action you take, of course, is dependent on your circumstances. One thing's for sure, though: you must be quick and insightful in the decisions you make. You are never going to have all the data necessary to make the kinds of decisions you

need to make as a leader. You have to act in spite of that fact. (Here's where the need for courage really becomes obvious; it's not easy to leap into the unknown.) And even if you do have the data, you must be courageous enough not to feel that you have to have every "t" crossed and every "i" dotted before you pull the trigger. Just make sure every action you take is in line with where your heart is, where your values are, and where your culture is—or more accurately, where

you want your culture to be in the future. Many leaders spend too much time getting ready to be ready to get ready so they can be ready. Analyze the pitfalls and act quickly. Remember, there is a difference in quickness and being in a hurry. Execution is one of the key success indicators of the courageous leader.

Acknowledge Progress.

Many leaders are so goal-oriented that they can't really see the individual steps of the process. Determine the desirable results, determine the benchmarks, and be certain that those benchmarks are acknowledged and celebrated when they are achieved. Celebrate them with the same energy and enthusiasm as you would if the goal were already accomplished. When employees were asked which type of feedback they received most often, "positive, negative, or none," the answer they most often gave was "none." No feedback! Make the acknowledgment specific, behavioral, and immediate.

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Commit to Lifelong Learning.

If you are leading, you're learning. If you're not learning, you're not leading, regardless of your title. So many executives get into a leadership role and have the sense that they have "arrived." That's the death knell for leadership success. You must commit yourself to learning

on three levels: learn about yourself first, your people second, and your industry third. The extent to which you do these things, in that order, is the extent to which you're going to exhibit courage. It's not that courageous to go to a seminar and learn about your business. It is significantly courageous to look in a mirror and say, *I am going to take a serious look at who I am and what I'm about as a leader and do everything in my power to develop myself, my message, and the way I lead!*

Kindle Relationships.

A lot of people think that "kindle" means to start a fire. It can mean that, certainly, but it can also mean "to give new life to." (I looked it up.) To give new life to a culture means that you are constantly developing people, engaging with people, caring about people's progress. Now, this is an idea that causes much confusion. In the past I've had leaders respond as though they think I am suggesting that leaders should gather their employees around in a circle, have them put their arms around each other, and lead them all in singing *Kum Ba Yah*. Nothing could be further from the truth! Courageous leadership doesn't mean softening your approach with people. It actually means toughening your approach: being rigorous in the application of your values and heartbeat throughout the culture. It means

It means confronting people, challenging people, not letting them get away with being less than you know they can be.

confronting people, challenging people, not letting them get away with being less than you know they can be.

The ATTACK method that I just described really is a holistic, “big picture” way to think about courageous leadership. When embarking on any journey, literal or metaphorical, you’ve got to begin with small, manageable steps. Here are three to get you started:

- 1. Identify the areas in your business or life where a gap exists between your current reality and your desired reality.**
- 2. Align yourself with a person or a group of people who can commit to holding you accountable for closing that gap.**
- 3. Make a specific commitment to the outcome(s) you want. Assign dates to them. The brain works well when it has a deadline, an appointment with destiny. It does not respond to vague, general ideas and proclamations.**

I guarantee that if you take these three small steps you will see progress in your journey. That progress will inspire you to take more steps. Then more. Then more. And so it goes. Soon, leading with courage and authenticity becomes second nature. You will find that you are not only more effective at what you do—you are happier and more fulfilled.

Let me leave you with one more thought: you are who

you are, both at work and at home. If you are trying to live in two separate worlds – being one person in your personal life and a different person in your professional life – you’re on the path to destruction.

I help clients integrate what they actually believe with how they behave at work and how their culture behaves. Everything works together to create a life, *your* life.

All it takes is COURAGE:

**Continuing
Onward
Under
Rigorous
And
Grinding
Experiences**

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What Is Courage?

*What Does It Have to Do
with Business Success?*

*And How Can I Learn
to Lead Courageously?*

These are tough questions. But they're questions leaders must ask if they're to succeed in the "take no prisoners" realm that is the 21st century workplace. In this inspiring booklet, Michael Staver addresses the issue of courage head on. He explains what courageous leadership looks like, why it's more critical now than at any point in history, and how it translates into focused, decisive action. Finally, he lays out some steps you can take right now to infuse your own leadership with courage-and begin your journey to a more successful workplace, company, career, and life.

Michael Staver

is the CEO of The Staver Group. Together with his colleagues, he provides keynote presentations, consulting programs, workshops, and executive coaching sessions that help people lead with courage and authenticity.

To learn more about his company, visit www.thestavergroup.com or call (904) 321-0877.