



What's courage got

By David Gouthro

Good question. So just what is courage and what does it have to do with anything?

Actually, it has a lot to do with just about everything that is really worthwhile in life. Everyone has acted with courage at least once and most people do so on a regular basis. In fact, there are lots of opportunities for each of us to act with courage on a much more frequent and conscious basis. So, let's examine the notion of courage and identify some opportunities to exercise it!

Courage is an inner quality that becomes evident when you take action where each of the following three criteria are met: (i) there is an uncertain or unpredictable outcome; (ii) there is an emotion or feeling present that ranges somewhere between mild concern and terror (based on the perceived consequences of failure); and (iii) there is a positive value or belief which consciously or unconsciously drives your action.

Another way to describe the outcome is risky! You have a sense of what you hope to achieve—but there's no guarantee you'll do so. Consequently, you have an emotional response to the thought of taking the risk. If the consequences of failure seem slim, you may experience mild concern or a touch

courage got to do with it?



of anxiety. If failure might result in pain, trauma, or loss, your feeling might be closer to fear or terror.

So what drives you to act in spite of the uncertainty and accompanying discomfort? Simply put—values. When you have a strong belief about the right thing to do, you're often compelled to act—possibly without even making a conscious decision to do so. For example, you leap into action when you see an opportunity to help another person in distress, observe an individual abusing a young child or animal, witness an accident, or feel an intense love or compassion for another human being.

accompanying fear? If so, as you gain experience, predictability increases (you realize it is much safer and therefore less risky than initially imagined); as a result, your anxiety decreases with each attempt. So the courage required climb the 10th time is less than the first—and by the 100th climb, the notion of courage may not even be relevant.

Depending on your personal experience and values, the following could very well require courage to act:

- Telling the truth when it would be easier to say nothing
- Speaking in front of a large group

- Kissing a spider, or a frog
- Listening to a radio station that doesn't play your kind of music
- Walking through a part of town where people from your own cultural group rarely stray
- Singing out loud (in spite of advice to the contrary)
- Jumping into a leadership role, even though it is not your job

Courage is sometimes conscious, sometimes not. Become clear on what you really value, understand your own basis for determining right and wrong, and be willing to take the right

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Granted, these may be infrequent and extreme examples, so what about the everyday circumstances for acting with courage?

Each of us has a unique set of skills, experiences, desires, and values. What requires lots of courage for one person may require little or none for another. Going rock climbing may take plenty of courage the first time. Questions like "Is the equipment reliable? Are my partners competent? What happens if I fall?" may shadow your adventure. Is your value of personal growth sufficient to help you move beyond the initial uncertainty and

- Expressing what you believe will be an unpopular opinion
- Spending time with someone whom others dislike
- Telling a close friend how you feel about him or her
- Expressing emotions openly when that is not normally done
- Taking on an assignment where you (and others) are aware of your shortcomings
- Having a tough conversation with a loved one
- Addressing a long standing and unspoken conflict
- Doing something totally new

action for the right reasons. Acting with courage more consciously and more often will be a wonderful source of fulfillment and satisfaction. Succeed or fail, you can't help but gain as an individual while providing inspiration for others to act with courage, too. The opportunity and choice is yours.

David Gouthro is president of the Consulting Edge, based in Vancouver.