



## **BUILD YOUR COURAGE MUSCLES**

I was talking to the massage therapist the other night about my upcoming workshop on Courageous Choices and what a thrill I get every time I am able to help someone let go of the familiar to try something new. Whether it's a new job with a different company, asserting new boundaries within an important relationship or a significant transition like choosing a new career – each step toward change requires moving beyond a well trod comfort zone and that takes courage.

For most of us, the path from the Land of Wishing to the Land of Having requires us to step through the Gate of Doing. Typically, we step through that gate only when a) the pain of staying where we are is too great to stay put or b) the desire for that for which we have been wishing becomes strong enough to overcome the inertia of resisting. I've seen that pain come from any of a thousand different avenues for the people I work with – getting fired, not being able to raise the next fund, learning your spouse is preparing to leave you, a serious medical issue, death of a loved one, the empty nest or a gnawing restlessness that you just can't put your finger on but you know you can't keep doing what you've been doing any longer.

For nearly everyone, “wanting” something to be different may be the starting point, but as the old saying goes “nothing changes if nothing changes.” Change requires action, plain and simple – no avoiding it. It is often fear that keeps us from taking the action we most need to see the changes we desire. Fear is not the enemy, inertia is. Fear challenges you to build your courage muscles and when you make friends with fear by stepping outside of your comfort zone, your comfort zone expands. Too often we hold ourselves back from taking the steps that will improve our lives and fulfill us, hoping that our fear will go away. The fear that you might not make enough money or that you won't be as successful in a new career or that someone is going to be upset about your decision can keep you stuck where you are, hoping that “some day” you'll wake up and feel the courage to try something new. Believe me, courage is not going to find you, you're going to have to tackle that fear and step into the courage whether you want to get a new job, give a speech or leave a relationship that just clearly isn't working anymore.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the pioneering psychiatrist in the work of grief surrounding the dying found that the most oft-cited fear was the fear of death, even though we all know that it is inevitable and unavoidable. Her research showed that those who felt they understood and acted on their purpose in life or found special meaning in what they had been able to do faced significantly less fear and despair in the final weeks of their lives than those who had not.

Identifying the work we are meant to do and the strength of character to do something that frightens us and then deploying the physical or mental or emotional willingness to do it is empowering and exhilarating. It requires reflection, introspection, a willingness to

look at things in a new way, and the courage to actually step out of one's comfort zone and do something different and unfamiliar and yes, sometimes, frightening.

Often I hear "What will other people think or say if I (fill in the blank)?" A fellow I'm working with has become clear about the specific step that he needs to take to have the life of his dream, one he's been dreaming of for as long as he can remember, admitted that he was worried about what his family and friends would say if he took this step. He wasn't sure he could stand up to their criticism of his decision, even though he knew that if he didn't act soon his dream would really be beyond his reach. I shared with him a favorite quote: ***The opposite of courage is not cowardice, it is conformity. – Rollo May***

Courage is the willingness to act in accordance with one's beliefs, especially in spite of criticism or disapproval of others. Many people stay in jobs they detest and go to events they despise and behave in certain ways that violate their integrity just to please other people, all the while draining their life force into the pit of conformity for the poison pill of approval. To me, it is a sad waste of a life. After all, I often joke that if your friends think less of you for chasing your dream, you need some better friends! And, families often use the tool of guilt to manipulate their loved ones into conformity because of their own fears and wants. While it's easy to confuse courage and bravery, I think courage is not the absence of fear, but the resistance to fear and mastery of that which you have not yet achieved.

Here are some questions I use to regain my courage:

1. What do I really (in my deepest heart) want? (Be precise)
2. What do I need to do to have that? (List every action)
3. What am I afraid of? (List every fear, no matter how silly it looks in writing)
4. What does avoiding this fear cost me?
5. What would I do if I weren't afraid? (List every action)
6. At the end of my life, will I regret not having done this?
7. How will my life benefit from facing this fear?
8. What else might I be able to do if I faced this fear?
9. What specific actions must I take in spite of this fear so I may have what I want?
10. What one action am I willing to take today and who can I ask to support me?

Dear friends, I want for you the life of your dreams. You deserve it, you're worth it and as Christopher Robin said to Pooh, "***Promise me you'll always remember you're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem and smarter than you think.***" If you need me to be your Christopher Robin, I'm here.

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