



Philosophers from Aristotle to Winston Churchill have recognized courage as the virtue that makes all the others possible. It guarantees them. To the extent you develop your personal courage to face facts, fears and difficulties you will create more positive value and balance in your life. Here's how to have the courage you need, when you need it. (Reading time 180 seconds).

Webster's defines courage as "mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty." Our personal strength and fortitude, or lack of it, in facing the challenges of living, shapes the happiness and fulfillment of our lives.

We tend to salute bravery on the stage of bigger newsworthy actions or events. But most bravery occurs on the smaller stage – with our own loved ones and friends and in the actions of our own lives. The personal day-to-day courage that we display as individuals is a vital virtue that is reflected through our families, our communities and our nations. It is the parent of our recognized heroes that take a more public stage in courageously defending our way of life on the battlefields of bullets and of ideas.

And because the courage that is closest to home makes up more of life than the examples that appear in the media, we should encourage and celebrate it as well. When you act a little braver you should be consciously a little prouder. And when those around you show individual courage in their lives, you should recognize and appreciate them for it.

Developing Courage

There will be critical times in your life when your "strength to persevere and withstand" will determine the direction of your entire future. How do you ensure you will have that courage when you need it?

One answer to that lies in how our soldiers consistently overcome what is a natural and at times nearly overwhelming fear in the face of the most intense of demands. They practice everyday. Soldiers practice courage. It is their job. Their training disciplines them to respond to physical threats in a thoughtful and brave way.

We too should practice. Courage may not be an official part of your job description, but we all need to make it an official part of our life description.

Practice Small Acts of Courage Every Day

Practicing making small courageous choices daily prepares you to face the bigger challenges of life. When the fearful things arrive, as they inevitably do, having practiced, you will be able to convey a quiet and thoughtful control in the face of that distress, disease or turmoil.

So look for and create small opportunities to be a little braver every day.

If you are shy, go out of your way to speak with someone new every day, even if it is just a friendly greeting.

If you are afraid of public speaking seek out ways to speak in public. Volunteer to make a presentation at your company. Speak up at a PTA meeting. Take on a project that requires group presentations. Sign up for a public speaking course.

If there is something about your job that really bothers you, be brave, talk to your boss about it.

By doing these types of things you are establishing courageous decision making and action as routine. When something becomes more routine it does not frighten us as much.

As an example, for a variety of reasons including child bearing, women get in the routine of visiting the doctor regularly starting at puberty. As a result they are much more likely to have seen a doctor in the last year than men (74% versus 57%), possibly leading to the fact that men are hospitalized much more often with preventable illnesses, and they die younger. Because it is less routine for us, we men are more apprehensive about being examined and fear finding out something might be wrong.

When courage in the day to day is not part of our routine, too many of us don't make needed change in our life until the pain becomes so great or something so terrible happens that we can't stand it. We sometimes even accept everyday misery or the prospects of a dreary future for fear changing it could make it worse. Or we think we lack the fortitude to pay the price to change. Practicing small acts of courage daily develops your discipline to face reality while you still have the opportunity to change the outcome in a more positive way.

A relative of my wife struggled to get through high school, married young and had two children. She worked full time into her early 40's and knew that to improve the joy and

Work-Life Balance Lessons

By Kim Neuscheler

Vincent Van Gogh once said, “The best way to know life is to love many things,” which best summarizes my philosophy. I love my job at Turner, but I have many hobbies outside of work that I am equally passionate about – I play several different sports, I enjoy ballroom and Latin dancing, I love to fish, and am learning to golf. I’m completing an internal renovation of my first home and I enjoy cooking and baking for friends and family.

I work long hours, but that’s a personal choice because I enjoy what I do. My typical work day is about 12 hours at the office. After work, I often go directly to an activity – whether to a soccer or volleyball game, dinner with friends, or a concert/Broadway show – so I often don’t get home until 11 p.m. This schedule, although extreme to some, works for me because I would much rather experience life to the fullest than let any opportunities pass me by. (Did I mention that I don’t need a lot of sleep?)

People have indicated they get tired just listening to me describe my schedule. That shows how work-life balance is relative – what’s acceptable for one person might not work for another. I’m happy with mine. I manage to fit in everything I love while I work at a job that’s interesting and satisfying. Here’s how I do that:

Learn to delegate. This is my best recent time-saving discovery. I am a work in progress and still need to get better at it, but I can see what a difference it makes for me and for the people I delegate to. It gives them an opportunity to learn and grow, too.

Don’t reinvent the wheel – utilize your resources. Whatever the task, find someone who’s done it before to show you how to do it. We have a lot of wonderful, bright people here who have plenty of knowledge and tools to share. Why create a spreadsheet to gather what you need when somebody else already has a template? Knowing who to ask is the key.

Don’t overuse technology. We need to communicate face-to-face more often. Some issues just can’t be resolved over multiple e-mails and misperceptions can be cleared up more quickly when people meet to review the issues in person. Keep people focused. Try to limit the number of heads down and fingers moving on BlackBerries when leading a meeting. We need to be in the moment, paying attention to what’s being discussed and the decisions being made.

Multi-task when it makes sense. Wherever possible I try to juggle. I’ll get a large print run going on the copier, then go back to my desk and continue a report rather than stand at the copier. At home, I get something in the oven and do laundry at the same time. On my commute to and from the office I’ll read a book or respond to e-mails on my BlackBerry. I try to maximize every minute of the day.

Don’t be afraid to try new things. Whether professionally or personally, learn to ask more questions and seize new opportunities. It is fulfilling to conquer something new and it’s beneficial to have a little guidance to help lead the way. A satisfied mind is an inquisitive one.

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income from her work she needed more education. Her dream had always been to be a teacher. Without a single hour of college experience and a household budget that required her to work full-time, she knew a degree in teaching would be a demanding task over an extended period of time – with no guarantees. But she started with one small brave step, a phone call to a college. That resulted in her taking an initial 3 hour college credit course. Today, in her early 50’s, she is an elementary school teacher who loves her work, her students and her accomplishments.

It took courage for her to decide to start down that intimidating path and impressive fortitude to continue it over 10 years before her goal was accomplished. The result though was a heroic journey and a life that has delivered for her more meaning, achievement, enjoyment and positive balance.

I would encourage you, too, to find ways to routinely practice small acts of courage or take a brave small step towards a bigger life solution for yourself. Look at the challenges in your life that make you shudder inside as a way to strengthen your courage... and take a step.

Think now about areas where you may have been sticking your head in the sand: a relationship – an unhealthy pattern in your life – a career problem or option – or just a way to make yourself or your life better. Now torque up some fortitude, recognize reality, and do a little something towards changing it for the better.

Be a bit braver today – and every day.

You and the world will be better for it.

Smiles,

Jim Bird, Publisher

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Quotes

“We are made strong by the difficulties we face, not by those we evade.”

“A smooth sea never made a skilled mariner.”

“A ship in the harbor is safe...but that’s not what ships were made for.”

“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.”

Unknown

e-tip

Give yourself a reward each time you are a little braver – when you do something that is out of your comfort zone. Reward yourself not only when your extra bravery succeeds but also when it fails. The reward reinforces that the courage involved in trying is the goal and the victory.