

WHAT IS COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP?

by Greg Nichvalodoff, Associate with The Refinery Leadership Partners Inc.

It's been said that courage is not the absence of fear, but our choice to act in the face of it. As a leader, you likely face some measure of fear on a regular basis—when asking tough questions, when making hard decisions, when introducing change. The question is do you have the courage to act?

Over the past fourteen months, I've been working with a multi-billion-dollar, international company and its executives on a leadership development initiative launched by the client's senior executive. Through my role as a Refinery consultant, I've had the opportunity to witness not just great leadership but great courage at the helm. Here are a few key things this experience has taught me about courageous leadership.



A courageous leader's most valuable tool isn't what you think it is.

What is a great leader's most valuable tool? For many of us, words like power, authority, position and status come to mind. It's entrenched thinking that, ironically, can often be a company's biggest leadership drain. No wonder more and more savvy leaders are discovering that vision—one bold enough to inspire and transform—is the true holy grail of leadership. It takes a great deal of energy to acquire and maintain power, energy generally taken involuntarily from others. A bold vision, on the other hand, gives energy to those who embrace it. Power is a limited resource to be divided up or hoarded, whereas the more people who share a vision, the bigger it grows. Great leaders have the courage to let go of the old trophies, break from the status quo, and champion a bold vision for the future of their organization.

The path of least resistance doesn't always lead to greatness.

Every leader quickly discovers that any given day can bring immense opportunity and immense challenge. For many leaders, constantly beleaguered by stress and uncertainty, the path of least resistance becomes increasingly attractive as time goes on. What governs your decision making process? When push comes to shove, will you placate the masses with a middle-of-the-road approach or lead your company into brave new territory?

Courageous leaders transcend the fear of being unpopular and make decisions that are best for the organization. The cost of making the easy decision for the wrong reasons is simply too high.

Courageous leaders use their sixth sense.

I know leaders who almost seem to see the future, innately sensing the implications of today's situations on tomorrow's reality. It's as though they can fast-forward the video the rest of us are watching at normal speed. I call this the sixth sense of leadership, and courageous leaders use it as part of their regular decision-making processes.

Now I'm not talking about the Bruce Willis movie or anything paranormal here, but rather that level of intuition that lies beyond the average person's perceptive reach. I say beyond the average person not because intuition is a rare ability but because most of us don't have the understanding or courage to tap into it. Intuition is simply our innate ability to recognize patterns and interpret cues. Great leaders trust their sixth sense as much as they trust their eyesight or hearing. More importantly, they have the courage to act on what it tells them.

This article, of course, can only begin to skim the surface of what courage means to leadership. As Winston Churchill said, "Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others." Unfortunately, too much leadership is grounded in fear. Is that true for you? Today is a good day to reflect on your own journey and ask yourself what you and your organization could gain from braver, bolder, more courageous leadership. Today is a good day to act.

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