

CHAPTER 1

**WELL OF
COURAGE**

“*Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities, because it is the quality which guarantees all others.*”

SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL (1874–1965)

Carpe Diem! Stand up and be counted! Put your neck on the block! Take the bull by the horns! Grasp the nettle . . .

When a subject is as rich in metaphors as courage, there must be lots to learn about it. Given the obvious importance of courage to successful leadership, it is amazing to note how little coverage it receives. There are loads of books about risk avoidance and management and very little about the positive nature of courage. It's like going into a bookshop to buy the *Joy of Sex* and being told that there is nothing on this subject, but over 20 different books on reducing impotence. While courage is no guarantee of success, it is obvious that taking action without displaying some sort of bravery is an effective way of preventing success.

The nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer believed that all ideas have to go through three clear stages:

1. They are ridiculed.
2. They are violently opposed.
3. They are accepted as self-evident.

Apply these three stages to Rosa Parks, the Alabama mother who refused to accept that because of the colour of her skin she should be forced to sit at the back of a public bus. She recalled, "I knew someone had to take the first step and I made up my mind not to move." Initially, her decision was ridiculed ("who was *she* to dare to ignore the rules?") before it manifested itself in violent civil rights clashes. Can you imagine now suggesting that there should be a colour bar on buses? Of course not. The courage that Rosa showed when she made her decision is now self-evident.

Courage is vital in taking that first step and so why don't we see more of it? You can find a clue in one long word: *allodoxaphobia*, the fear of being ridiculed by other people. It is one of the most common phobias in the UK and it affects everyone to some degree. This means that the easier option is often to play safe and behave in a way that means we will fit in and be fully accepted by others, so we hold back from doing and saying what we really want. Courage is vital to break through this fear.

Don't believe me? I have regularly tested this concept out with a simple experiment on a number of different groups and audiences, of all ages and ranges of experience, where I take £10 out of my pocket, hold it up and ask if anyone wants the money. You would think that would be a no-brainer, wouldn't you? Who would say no to free money? The outcome is always the same. Silence. Followed by a little more silence, followed by nervous laughter. I even hear people telling their friends to go up and get the money. Eventually someone runs up and grabs the money out of my hand, at which point everyone claps and the lucky winner immediately tries to give the money back – even though it was offered to them with no strings attached! There is one reason I am never trampled by a rush of people coming to grab the money. It is that voice in your head (if you're wondering "Which voice?", it's that one!) which is shouting, "It's an evil trick! If I run up there to collect the money everyone will laugh at me. I don't understand the game. It can't be that simple. I'll make a fool of myself."

That's allodoxaphobia in action.

What is courage? My own favourite definition of the word is the original meaning of it, which is “to speak your own mind with all your heart”.

This means that courage is something that is profoundly personal and intimate to only you. Many of the people who have won the Victoria Cross (which is the highest military award for bravery issued by the British Army and has only ever been given to 1355 people in its 160-year history) have all had very different reasons for displaying courage and many of them claimed, “I only did what I had to.” Courage is often something that others recognize rather than the kind of behaviour that anyone ever deliberately sets out to display.

Stop reading for a moment and consider that last sentence, because it is a crucial point.

Despite what the cowardly lion in *The Wizard of Oz* believed, courage isn't an inbuilt quality, something that you are either born with or you are not. With a bit of practice, anyone can develop the ability to be courageous. If the first step is about speaking with all your heart, it helps to know what's in your heart.

So how can you practise being courageous?

“*What's it all about, Alfie?*”

Let's take an idea from Michael Caine that will guide you through some practical steps to improve your courage. More specifically, let's take some advice from Caine's character Alfie from the 1966 film of the same name. In this film, Alfie's monologues to the camera are inaudible to others in the scene.

Imagine that you are at work and you attend a meeting to discuss plans on how to increase morale among the workforce. You are listening to the debate when your mind suddenly recalls a crazy but intriguing idea you read about in this very book. You feel torn between saying something to the group and concern about what the response will be. It's decision time . . .

Let's now employ the technique from *Alfie* where everyone else stops and you turn to the camera to discuss the pros and cons of the action you might take. In our film there are four practical steps that you can take that will enhance your bravery. Remember, you are the director and star of this film as well, so you can choose whichever option suits you best.

Show your struggle

Let's go back to the freeze frame of the meeting at work. What are you saying to the camera?

“ Sssh. Keep quiet. Don't say a word. They'll think that I'm crazy. It's not my job to come up with ideas. Besides, it'll never work anyway. If I do say something, before this meeting is finished and they stop laughing at me the boss will have heard about it and he'll fire me. I've got a family to support. A mortgage to pay. Keep quiet. ”

While this might be a slight exaggeration of what you're saying, it contains some of the fears you may have, including your fear of failure, of looking stupid, of not

being good enough, smart enough, clever enough or quick-witted enough. All of these fears lead to that one great fear we all dread – rejection. This means rejection from the group, including our colleagues, our friends and our family. These are the fears that play a huge role in preventing us from playing to our true potential; they strangle the new idea before it ever sees the light of day.

The entrepreneur and inventor Charles Brewer once summed up this feeling when he suggested, “A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a yawn; it can be stabbed to death by a joke, or worried to death by a frown on the right person’s brow.” Somehow, a fear that goes unspoken starts to grow in the greenhouse-like atmosphere of your mind.

There is a really simple cure for fear: show that you are struggling.

Go back to that scene at work where you are struggling with what to do with the crazy idea. Instead of keeping quiet, you decide to show your colleagues that you are having some difficulties.

“*I’m not sure how to say this . . . I’m really stuck . . . rather than bottle this up . . . can I share an idea I read recently? Is it okay to throw in an idea that I haven’t really worked out yet?*”

By not being scared of showing the pain of your struggle and indecision, you invite help. Nobody really wants to work with smart-arses who know it all. When faced with someone who is obviously stuck and is prepared to admit that they are stuck, it becomes hard not to want to help.

People who are prepared to acknowledge their own struggles like this have real courage. The possibility of being ridiculed or being on the end of a clever put-down is far outweighed by the connection and goodwill that your difficulties will generate.

The point is, when you ask for help and are not afraid to show your vulnerability, most people are psychologically conditioned to want to help you.

Be a contender

“*You don't understand! I could'a had class. I could'a been a contender. I could'a been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am.*”

Terry Molloy, On the Waterfront.

Let's go back to our film scene, the meeting where you kept quiet. Now let the movie run on and watch as everyone packs up their gear and starts to leave. You gather your belongings together and leave the meeting as well. You said nothing, just like everyone else. “Don't worry,” that voice in your head soothes you, “it was no big deal. It doesn't matter. It wasn't even that important.” But the voice won't go away. It whispers, “You had something to offer. You could have made a real difference.” With regret, you start to admit to yourself that you could have said something.

Do you recognize this scene? What's happening here?

What you are actually doing is rehearsing the scene in your mind. The only problem is that the moment has

passed and it's too late for a rehearsal. Rehearsals only work before the event. Few of us have the habit of rehearsing how we want things to be by running them through in our head and painting a clear picture of how things could be before they happen. Without this clear picture, it's difficult to have a belief or a conviction about what great achievements are possible; instead, fears rush in and fill the vacuum. This is how a mediocre idea is born.

One easy way you can do this is to start all of your future meetings with a couple of minutes dedicated to this mental rehearsal. You could do this privately, or you could dare to make it real and encourage others to start by thinking about the end of the day.

“Good morning everyone. Before the meeting starts, let's take a couple of minutes to imagine that it is 5.30 p.m. and we are walking out of the door. We're slapping each other on the back, feeling incredibly excited by the ideas we've had. There's a real buzz of anticipation about what's possible.”

What's important here is that you are attaching yourself to a vision that is personally motivating. This picture provides you with enough motivation to step out of your comfort zone and through your fears.

You are practising the technique of visualization, which major athletes have been doing for years. It involves focusing not on the pain of speaking up but on the benefits of what you will get from actually doing it. This is the same behaviour that Tiger Woods practises every morning. Before he heads out to the golf course, he disciplines himself to visualize his best chip, his best putt and his best

drive. He understands that the brain reacts to this image every bit as powerfully as if it were happening in real life, and so he prepares his brain to achieve it. If it's good enough for Tiger, why not adopt the same approach and imagine yourself in a situation where you need that extra shot of courage?

Find your friends

Unfortunately, many groups, organizations and cultures don't actively encourage or support the development of courage. Challenging the bosses isn't particularly welcomed; an off-the-wall idea is often greeted by a sarcastic quip; a brave act only offered a grudging recognition; the ideas in the suggestion box remain ignored. In such an environment, being courageous is even more difficult and many people cite this lack of support as a reason not even to bother trying.

But why do you have to embark on such a journey alone? Let's swap stories and look at J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, *The Lord of the Rings*. The little hobbit Frodo didn't set out across Middle Earth to return the ring to its home on his own. He formed a fellowship, a group where bravery could grow and flourish. Too often bravery is typecast as being a solitary activity. Take time to recognize your own Gandalf, someone to advise you when to fight and when to walk on. Who is your Aragorn, your Sam or your Pippin? (You may also find one or two Gollums too). Find people who will stay by your side to share the burden and risk pulling you away from the fires of trouble.

Don't get caught up in the myth of the solitary hero. It's a lot easier to be courageous if you know that there is someone watching out for you.

Celebrate bravery

Finally, if you want people to be brave, then start recognizing them for it. Promote courage as a value of any group of which you are a part and openly start talking about those actions that fit the description. Look for signs of bravery in people who join your team. In short, encourage courage.

Southwest Airlines have a wall of fame in its headquarters that is actually a museum in honour of the company's biggest mistakes. The culture encourages bravery in employees. Herb Kelleher, the founder, argues, "We tell our people to question and challenge everything. It is decades of conventional wisdom which have sometimes led this industry into huge losses. You may make mistakes but the costs of getting burned once in a while are insignificant compared to the benefits that come from feeling free to be brave and to take risks."

Act today to create a culture that is a fertile ground for acts of courage, of bravery, of people putting their heads above the parapet, seizing the day, putting their necks on the block, standing up and being counted, taking the bull by the horns, grasping the nettle . . .

Good luck!

The risk poem

*To laugh is to risk appearing a fool,
To cry is to risk appearing sentimental and soft,
To reach out to another is to risk involvement,
To show your feelings is to risk exposing your inherent self,
To place your ideas, your dreams, your desires before people is
to risk their loss,
To love is to risk not being loved in return,
To show strength is to risk showing weakness,
To do is to risk failure.
The greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing,
The person who risks nothing, gets nothing, has nothing, is
nothing.
He may avoid suffering, pain, sorrow, but he does not live, he
does not love,
He has sold, forfeited freedom, integrity,
He is a slave, chained by safety, locked away by fear.
Because, only a person who is willing to risk not knowing the
result is free.
Anonymous.*

Liquid Leaders

Kim England

I enjoyed a really happy and settled childhood with my mum and dad, Trisha and Richard, and my younger sister Caryn. We moved around the country as my dad's career progressed and after leaving school I moved to Cape Town to complete a three-year in-house training programme with Three Cities Hotels while completing my Psychology and Communication degree through UNISA. Having graduated, I was working as a travel consultant at two hotels while saving the money for my visa to head out to the UK with my friends.

My career up until this point had been pretty eclectic. I had worked as a travel consultant, a chef, a restaurant manager and a legal secretary, and I had experienced every role possible within the hotel industry. What I really enjoyed was the people side of my work and that is why I thrive in my current role as National Sales Training Manager for Unilever Foodsolutions in South Africa.

My life changed forever on Monday 18 January 1999.

I had worked another long day on the travel desk and had enjoyed dinner with my aunt and uncle before driving home at 11 o'clock at night. As I reversed into my parking space, I became aware of a man standing right next to my window, holding a small plastic milk bottle. It gave me a fright when I noticed him, but when I looked

into his eyes, I felt a cold, paralysing fear like never before. There was nothing in his eyes, no emotion and no humanity; there was a void, an evil emptiness that I could feel through the glass. He gestured for me to open my window, which I did by a few centimetres, and he whispered, "I need your car for a robbery", at the same time revealing a large knife as a signal of his intentions.

I was terrified, and thought that there was no way I was going to stay in the car with him. I told him that he could have the car and everything in it, but he had to leave me there and he agreed. I got out of the car, clutching my handbag, which I explained held the keys to my flat and we walked very slowly, with him following only inches behind, brandishing the knife as a chilling reminder not to do anything rash. By the time we had reached the door of my flat, I had separated my car keys from my flat keys and had even given him the gate remote. In this way, I had helped him plan his escape but had also secured my safety. My only thought was that I had to live; the car was irrelevant.

I left the front door of my flat open and hoped that he would just tie me up as he had promised and then leave. Instead, he closed the door and made me lie on the floor while he tied my hands behind my back with my own belt and gagged me with a towel. When I was secured, he began to pace menacingly, asking me questions. Every couple of minutes, he would offer a grim reminder of his power by brandishing the knife and snarling, "I could kill you, you know." He asked me questions about who I lived with and

whether I had a boyfriend. I had to spit out the gag to give him my answers.

During this period, however, the adrenalin heightened my senses to such a degree that I was incredibly aware of the world around me. I could hear the trees moving outside, could feel my heart beating in my ears, could feel his footfalls on the carpet around me and taste the towel in my mouth and feel the thin bead of sweat that ran down my back. After the question about my boyfriend, he asked me whether *he* could be my boyfriend and I chose not to respond. He suddenly knelt down in front of my feet, pointed the knife at me and told me to take my jeans down. Then the dark fear that I had been struggling to keep contained suddenly became real. I was not to escape from this ordeal by only being frightened but possibly raped too. Still, my overriding thought was that I wanted to live. I shook my head and he demanded I remove my jeans.

He put on a condom, pulled down my jeans and raped me.

He got up, took the car keys I had given him, took a last look around, grabbed my portable stereo and walked out, closing the door behind him. I remained on the carpet for a beat or two, listening and visualizing him walking down the stairs to the car park, before I got to my feet, pulled the belt off my wrists, the towel from my mouth, picked up my cell phone and the landline, and simultaneously called my aunt on one and the flying squad on the other. The time was 11.15. I had spent 15 minutes with this man and the only external

physical signs I had were a small nick on my wrist from my belt and a tiny cut on my knee, neither of which remains to this day.

Before this, I had always thought that rape was just sex and that afterwards, you would be able to rationalize it as that, a horrid physical act like badly breaking a limb, before cleaning yourself up and moving on without any real harm done to your mind. So, you can start to understand that my own reactions were not at all what I was expecting. I had no idea what fear and the resulting adrenalin do to your body.

When the police arrived, I started talking and didn't stop until my statement had been taken. Although you are entitled to have access to a female officer, I just wanted to get the whole story out. I don't think they quite knew how to handle me, and if I think back now, it was the last time that I behaved like the old me before the shock kicked in and stripped all of that away. Soon, however, a sense of being numb and lethargic started to wash over me. On the way home I vomited from the horror of my ordeal. I had a bath and just sat there with no urge to scrub. I didn't feel dirty, like I had read you were supposed to. I was just numb and spaced out. I called home but I couldn't find the words to explain to my parents what had happened. I just couldn't get my tongue around it and the ability to use the word 'rape' took nearly six years to come back. It is still uncomfortable to articulate.

When I woke up a few hours later, my whole body ached with a hot heaviness that extended into my bones. I felt like

an elephant was resting on my chest and my nerves were raw, ultra sensitive and exposed. It took me three days to cry and when I did, my parents recall the tears didn't run down my face but poured from my eyes. I also emitted these primal, huge noisy howls which came from the very pit of my stomach. It felt like a trap door to my soul had been opened and I couldn't stop the sounds from coming out. When I think back to this moment, it seems to me that this was the first step in my recovery as I stopped being numb and started to feel again.

Talking about it also proved a huge help. Often when there is a problem, it is easy to believe that by ignoring it, it will go away, but I was determined that there would be no hiding and pretending it had never happened. I knew that I wasn't to blame and I wasn't going to be made to feel like anything other than what I had done had been the right thing at that time.

People asked me, "Why didn't you scream, run away, drive over him, just do something?" I tell them that if they had been there, they would have known that listening to and acting on my intuition was the only thing that got me out alive. I later discovered that my attacker, who had the AIDS virus, had also been previously accused of murder, housebreaking, indecent assault, vehicle theft, the rape of others, including a minor, and operating under a number of aliases. During one escape attempt he had stabbed a policeman, severing both the arteries and veins to and from his heart and

very nearly killing him. My assailant would have had no problem stabbing me if I had resisted, and I knew that when I looked at him through the car window.

Essentially, I took control of my interpretation of the event, which meant I regained a measure of control in my life. I wasn't going to let other people's interpretations affect how I dealt with the situation. If I was to heal I was going to have to seek out the assistance I needed, speak up when I felt overwhelmed and take the lead in healing the hurt that had occurred.

Fifteen minutes was the entire extent of that night's experience. I have calculated that there are nearly one million 15-minute periods in a 70-year-old person's life. There needs to be some perspective on that. Yes, those minutes were significant, but no more so than any other really powerful experience. A wedding, a birth, a swim in the sea, all can have equal weight, can change your life irrevocably, so we have just as much need to focus on those 15-minute periods that help us to grow rather than wither. I have a friend who is a mosaic artist and she describes her work as taking shattered fragments and turning them into something more beautiful than before. That is a metaphor for how I have chosen to live. I knew that I had a choice to take an event that felt like it could leave me broken and scattered, and create a new form from those pieces. Choosing to keep the good and discard the harmful is in itself a healing process.

When I look back over the last eight years of my recovery, there is one quality that I learned about myself and that I believe that everyone possesses: I have

incredible reserves of stamina. I don't mean in any great or dramatic way. At first, I took my days ten seconds at a time, if that was all I could handle. I would tell myself, as I counted them down, that now I had got through those ten seconds, I could do another ten seconds, and some more and another ten seconds, until minutes and hours had gone by. I learned that the human spirit is incredibly resilient in being able to recover from almost anything. For me the reward of being whole again far outweighed the lethargy of merely existing as damaged and this spurred me on to continue looking for the healing. Living in a state of terror was totally unacceptable, unsustainable and frankly exhausting, I wasn't prepared to be that way indefinitely.

There is, however, just one piece of advice that I would like to share with you. Whatever anyone does to you physically, they cannot take away what makes you unique. You are more than your physical body – you are also a fascinating mixture of feelings, emotions, perceptions, thoughts, history and imagination. Victor Frankl wrote of his experience in the Nazi death camps that they could do what they wanted to his body, but he could decide within himself how he would let it affect him. He had the freedom to choose his response, so there was nothing that could transpire that he couldn't deal with. He moved from being a victim to having control over the emotions that occurred within him.

In my context, deciding how I interpreted those 15 minutes had a lot to do with my healing. I wasn't going to be ashamed or embarrassed. I had done what I

did in order to survive, with no regrets, no looking back to say “I should have” or “Why didn’t I?”. I decided that a diminished life was not what I would accept, that I had to take the responsibility to build the new life I wanted, to keep what was useful and positive, and discard the negative damaging thoughts and anger.

It was approximately two-and-a-half years later that Christopher Lubamba was finally sentenced to 65 years’ imprisonment, with an effective 33 years to serve. A number of other victims also came forward to help remove him from society. By taking full responsibility for my responses, I chose not to hate him. If I had, he would have continued to have an influence over my life and I would continually be cast in the role of his victim.

Those 15 minutes in 1999 were significant only in that they were the catalyst to create the person I am, and the life I have now. When I tell people about my experiences they say that I am brave, balanced and strong, they are amazed that I am not bitter, angry or diminished because that is what society expects, allows and even condones. I have certainly been furious, shattered and cynical, I wouldn’t be normal if I hadn’t, but I didn’t want to stay that way, there was no relief in being toxic like that. I have come to realize that I am all I have and I was not willing to have that special uniqueness put out of my sphere of influence and permanently damaged at the whim of someone else. I have never been one to blame others for my circumstance and I mean to continue thinking that way.

Have you made your own choices?

