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Courage: The Bridge Between Fear & Action

Recently, I gave what I considered important and valuable advice to a young friend. I felt I was dispensing common sense wisdom. My advice was comprised of actions I had taken in the past to help myself along my path to self-understanding and emotional maturity. They weren't difficult to implement, they required only determination and a little hard work.

As I congratulated myself internally for these pearls of wisdom, I watched my friend's face for those wonderful signs of epiphany and acceptance that would tell me I could notch another point on my wise Earth-mother belt. Instead, when I looked at her expression, I found pain. Truly confused at her reaction, I stayed quiet for a few moments until I received some feedback I did not expect.

"That's OK for you. These things are probably easy for you. You have the courage to do them. I don't have that kind of courage."

Wow! I didn't see that coming. To me, courage is an attribute necessary on the battlefield or in some other physically threatening situation. I never before equated it with what it takes to push one's emotional comfort zone, or to delve into one's inner stuff. I felt suddenly ignorant, as if I had totally missed a large ingredient in my personal theory of everything.

DO WE NEED COURAGE AT WORK?

Courage is not a subject we often find in the world of business or technology management. We are distracted by our cold, formal terminology of policy, processes, structures, data, methods, etc. If

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I have had the opportunity to hear Diane speak on several occasions. Each time, she has done an outstanding job. She is clear and concise and audience-friendly. She knows how to flex to meet the audience needs and when to engage them in the conversation and dialogue. She is open to questions and has always been gracious to leave us with her contact information for future questions.
- a state manager

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we mention a word like courage, it may lead to other hard to discuss words like fear, pain, confidence, etc. And that's not a place we like to go.

And yet, when we want someone to “step up” to their role as worker, manager, analyst, sponsor, supervisor, or idea generator, we are puzzled when they hang back and don't assertively grab the opportunity. Perhaps, the reason could be connected to courage.

HOW DO WE BRING UP COURAGE?

How does one bring up such a touchy subject? Well, we don't, at least not overtly. Perhaps instead, we could use this insight to be sensitive to a person's hesitancy. This could be a time to suggest a scaled-back step, or a strategy for this person to enlist additional support for the first time they try something new. It may not work to ask a person outright if they are afraid to try something, yet it may be critical to have a conversation around what they feel they need in order to be successful at a new experience.

START WITH A FEW LEADING QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever done X before?
- How long has it been since you've done an X?

- Do you feel X is important to do? Why? Or why not?
- Do you feel prepared to do X?
- What risks do you see in doing X?
- What support do you need to help you be successful at doing X?

Listen closely to the answers. They will lead you to more leading questions. Simply having this conversation may be enough for the person to see that X is not as scary as they first thought. Or, you may find out that specific help is necessary. You may bolster their courage without even knowing it. At the very least, you will have helped them examine their emotions without directly confronting them. This is an important line that is not our place to cross. It is what defines true respect for our staff persons in management situations.

I invite all of you to consider courage as the bridge between fear and action. What a revelation! 🐺

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