



The Courageous Leader

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Good leadership is often something that is easier to recognise than to define. Lots of people talk about the qualities that leaders need to have. Often the C's are used – sometimes standing for character, communication, competence, commitment, caring. I am going to talk about one characteristic of leadership that is very important in the world today, and that is “courage”. As the world gets more complex and the leader’s role gets more demanding, courage is something greatly needed to lead an organisation today.

What are some of the attributes of a courageous leader?

1. A great leader has the **courage to be humble**. This might sound odd, however it takes courage to be humble. To be arrogant is easy. To think that you know everything and should always put your personal views only into practice is easy. The reality is that if this is how you think and act, disastrous decisions are often made. A great leader will acknowledge that they don't know everything. They will recognise there are experts in the broader community and seek their advice and wisdom. A great leader is not a “know it all”. A great leader knows how to access the best information and use it wisely.
2. A great leader has the **courage to set and achieve high standards**. If you are going to lead, you want to lead your organisation and its people to be more and have more. You are not going to do that if you are timid and conservative in your goal setting. Very often people will achieve what they are required to do. Require more of them and they will give you more. A leader needs to be bold and set tough goals and then provide the resources so these can be

achieved. A great leader is someone who has people realising they can achieve so much more than they thought they could.

3. A great leader has the ***courage to innovate***. This is a bit like the above point. Timidity does not get anyone anywhere successfully. The last thing you will hear a great leader say is, “we have always done it that way and that is good enough”. If you don’t innovate you don’t grow. And if you don’t grow you eventually go out of business.
4. A great leader has the ***courage to be honest***. We say a lot about honesty and integrity. Most of us think we display these traits. The truth is, to be honest means to be honest all the time. Not just when it suits us. It means being honest about what we have done that was not great. It means being honest about our weaknesses. It means owning our mistakes rather than trying to cover them up or blame others. Although there is a tendency to think that being honest at times may make us lose face, the truth is, honesty will give you respect. We know the leader is human. We don’t expect him or her to be flawless – no one is – we want to know we can trust them and that they won’t lie to us.
5. A great leader has the ***courage to give credit to others***. No one ever does it all by themselves. A great leader realises this. And a great leader remembers everyone who was involved in achieving tough goals and acknowledges the contribution of others. Great leaders do dish out praise when it’s warranted.
6. The great leader has the ***courage to do the right thing even if it means standing alone***. As social creatures, we human beings are very influenced by the opinions of others around us. More so than we will admit to. A great leader will not let social norms, or popularity, get in the way of their decisions. They will consider all the options and do the right thing. A great leader has the courage to stand alone if needs be.
7. The great leader has the ***courage to surround him or herself with the right people*** for the organisation. It takes courage to reject those who want favours or think they are owed favours. It takes courage to reject people whom the highly political want to push forward. It takes courage to examine each and every appointment, especially at the senior level, and place the right people in the right roles irrespective of whether they like you as the leader or not.
8. A great leader has the ***courage to change course when on the wrong path***. A great leader will, after making decisions, look for evidence as to how right or wrong those decisions were. If it becomes clear that the decision was

not the best one, the courageous leader will change it. A courageous leader knows that continuing down the wrong path, although easy, is wrong.

9. The great leader has the ***courage to know that they will not be the leader for ever.*** Organisations need leadership turnover. Assuming you will remain the leader for 20 to 30+ years is not in the best interests of the organisation. A great leader knows how to prepare others for his or her role and knows when to bow out.

Someone once said to me that everyone wants to be the leader. That, I don't think, is true. What is true is that leadership is not easy. It's not for the faint-hearted. It is for the bold and the compassionate and the wise. This is not a role you want to give someone lacking in courage.