

Mike Myatt
Founder and Chairman



Leadership & Courage

Originally Published On The Executive Hub:

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Courage is a trait possessed by all great leaders. So much so, that leadership absent courage is nothing short of a farce. Let me be very clear – I’m not advocating for bravado, arrogance, or an overabundance of hubris, but the courage necessary to stay the course and to do the right things. Standing behind decisions that everyone supports doesn’t particularly require a lot of chutzpa. On the other hand, standing behind what one believes is the right decision in the face of tremendous controversy is the stuff great leaders are made of. I believe it was Aristotle who referred to courage as the first virtue, because it makes all of the other virtues possible.

It takes courage to break from the norm, challenge the status quo, seek new opportunities, cut your losses, make the tough decision, listen rather than speak, admit your faults, forgive the faults of others, not allow failure to dampen your spirit, stand for those not capable of standing for themselves, and to remain true to your core values. You can do none of these things without courage. Courage is having the strength of conviction to do the right thing when it would just be easier to do things right.

The best thing about courage is that a lack thereof can be overcome. Courage is teachable and therefore it is learnable – proof of this can be found in every instance of overcoming a fear. Courage should not be defined as the absence of fear – that's ignorance. Courage is finding the strength to move ahead in the presence of fear. In short, courage isn't a skill, it is a decision. Here's the thing – we'll all be remembered for the decisions we make or don't make, and the courage we display or we fail to exercise. Leaders who consistently demonstrate courage will stand apart from the masses, and earn the trust and loyalty of those whom they lead. As a general rule, most people can be characterized by their courage or their lack thereof:

- In the corporate world those who demonstrate courage stand apart as innovators and opinion leaders, those who display a lack of courage are viewed as “yes men” who are the politically correct defenders of status quo.
- In the military great courage is often referred to as heroism, while a lack of courage will brand you a coward.
- On the stage of world affairs those who display courage are statesmen, and those who don't are politicians.
- In relationships courage will show you to be a trusted friend, whereas the absence of courage will reveal you as a gossip, adversary, or even enemy.

Each day brings with it a new set of challenges, and the best any of us can hope for is that we will have the courage and character to stand behind our personal beliefs and convictions regardless of public opinion or outcome. Courage will make you faithful, where a lack thereof will cause you to be fearful. Whether you look back on your personal experience or a greater historical reference, you'll find it is always better to stand for courage than regret failing to do so.

Thoughts?