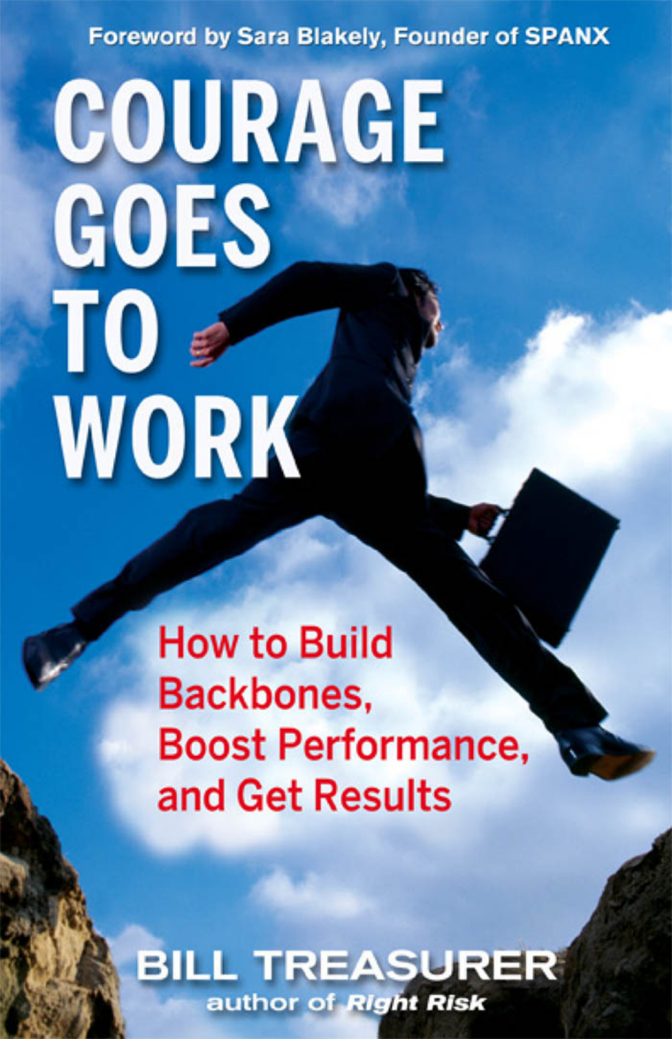

Foreword by Sara Blakely, Founder of SPANX

COURAGE GOES TO WORK

How to Build Backbones, Boost Performance, and Get Results

BILL TREASURER

author of *Right Risk*

an excerpt from

Courage Goes to Work:
How to Build Backbones, Boost Performance, and Get Results

by Bill Treasurer Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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Introduction

Too Much Comfort, Too Much Fear

Courage is the thing. All goes if courage goes.

Joseph Addison

We have not journeyed across the centuries, across the oceans,
across the mountains, across the prairies,
because we are made of sugar candy.

Winston Churchill

"Management sucks. And I'm a manager, so I guess I suck too. Or the people I'm managing suck. Either way, this ain't fun and I want out."

It was discouraging to see that Brian's situation had deteriorated to this point. Only two years earlier, Brian had been fast-tracked into a front-line manager position. His upbeat attitude and make-it-happen work ethic had caught the attention of the company executives, who decided that he'd make a fine addition to their ranks. Yet here he was, ready to jump ship. And he hated himself for it.

"For the first time in my life, I feel like a failure. I couldn't wait to be made a manager. But now I'm convinced that I'm not cut out for it. I think the only reason I haven't quit already is because I'm too ashamed, or too competitive, to admit defeat. I hate being a manager."

I had been coaching Brian for a few months as part of a multiyear leadership program my company had developed for Brian's employer. The program had been developed for the company's high-potential leaders, and Brian had been handpicked by his boss to participate. Brian was highly regarded by the senior executives, so it was a bit surprising for me to hear that things had gotten so bad for him. Somehow this "hi-po" manager had been able to conceal his true feelings about the job from his boss and coworkers.

"It surprises me that you don't think you're cut out to be a manager, Brian. Is it the work? The pressure? What?" I asked.

"The pressure I can deal with. I was a college athlete and I kind of like pressure. It makes things seem more important and urgent, which gets me going. And the tactical part of the work, for the most part, isn't hard. You make a plan; you break it down into a set of goals, milestones, and delivery dates; you keep it all organized on a spreadsheet; and then you work the plan."

"So what's the crux of it, buddy?" I asked. "From what you just told me, you don't find management all that hard. What I didn't hear about was the stuff you hate about managing. What about that?"

Like lava inching its way up through the earth, the frustrations that had gotten Brian to this point began bubbling to the surface. "To me, the hard part about managing, the stuff I *hate*, is all the people stuff. I hate the fact that no one shows the initiative to take on work outside their own scope. I hate the small way people think, and how the only thing they seem to care about is the itty-bitty task right in front of them. I hate having to continuously remind people about impending deadlines and that no one works with the same urgency or intensity as I do. I hate having to force people to accept changes that the company requires us to make and that are mostly in everyone's best interests. I hate all the psychoanalyzing that goes into figuring out how to get people to trust me. I also hate not being able to trust that people won't screw up and make me look bad when I assign important tasks to them. I hate having to confront people about their performance, especially when they think they're performing way better than they really are. I hate having to pry the truth out of people so that I know about problems before it's too late to solve them. And I especially hate all the crybaby excuses, finger-pointing, and shitty attitudes that get in the way of doing actual work."

The little venting moment helped Brian to purge all the surface stuff so that he could get closer to the core of the issue. After a moment his eyes got smaller, as if he'd found a shiny golden nugget while prospecting at the center of hell. He continued, "When it comes right down to it, I hate that people are either too comfortable doing things the way they've always done them or too afraid to do things differently."

Mixing Comfort and Fear

Over the years, I've coached a lot of people like Brian. Talented workers who get promoted because of their strong leadership potential, but who quickly grow frustrated with managing people who are slow to change, slow to trust, and slow getting things done. Brian's golden nugget insight is spot-on: The problem has to do with comfort and fear. Workers who are too comfortable don't exert themselves any more than they have to. They become satisfied meeting a minimum standard of performance, equating "just enough" with good enough. Like a sofa loaded down with overstuffed relatives after a holiday dinner, teams with workers who are too comfortable become lethargic and heavy with the weight of mediocrity. At the same time, workers who are too fearful play it too safe. Fearful workers set *safe* goals, say *safe* things, and make *safe* choices. Because fearful workers spend far too much energy preserving what is instead of pursuing what could be, their preoccupation with safety ultimately becomes dangerous for the business.

Comfort and fear in smaller doses can be good things. Striving to gain comfort with new skills, for example, is a worthwhile goal. At the same time, fear helps workers to focus on preventing and mitigating risks by keeping them vigilant about small issues that could grow into big problems. But in higher doses, and especially when mixed together, comfort and fear become toxic, creating a situation where workers become what I call "com*fear*table."

Com*fear*table workers are those who grow comfortable working in a perpetual state of fear, which only serves to magnify the ill effects of both concepts. Com*fear*table workers develop a high tolerance for misery, often staying in jobs they don't find gratifying or, worse yet, secretly despise. Some com*fear*table workers are like impassive zombies, sleepwalking through their jobs with no sense of urgency or commitment. Others include excuse makers, people who choose apathy over action by cooking up all sorts of reasons why they can't do something instead of just doing it. Com*fear*table workers also include people who dump problems in your lap but offer no solutions for solving them. For these workers, going the extra mile just takes too much effort. Instead, com*fear*table workers give their deepest fidelity to safety and sameness, even if those things come at the expense of progress. When fused together, comfort and fear adhere to the same law: *Stay safe at all costs!* No initiative. No risk taking. No candor. No making waves. No more than what is asked. No innovating or extending or leading. And no support for those who do.

This book is for all the managers like Brian out there. Maybe you're one of them. If you've grown frustrated trying to get workers to stretch beyond their comfort zones, if you're at your wits' end trying to get workers to step up to their potential, or if you're tired of having to treat adults like frightened children, this book is for you.

Activating Com*fear*table Workers

As a manager, you may be tempted to adopt a scorched-earth campaign and just fire all the com*fear*table workers. But a wholesale firing of such workers would do more harm than good. Com*fear*table workers are so prevalent in the workplace that such a strategy would be the managerial equivalent of carpet bombing, potentially eviscerating the organization. A more constructive and practical approach would be to help workers face and overcome their com*fear*table ways. The reality is, managing workers who are overly comfortable or fearful is the essence of management. At the core, management is all about transforming and inspiring com*fear*table workers. All the other stuff—the planning, goal setting,

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Your success as a manager will be determined by how well you manage workers who are too comfortable, too afraid, or too much of both.
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organizing, and delivering—is just the minimum requirement for entry into the management ranks. The hard stuff, the stuff that will determine your success and longevity as a manager, pertains to how you manage the funky behavioral effects of workers who are too comfortable, too afraid, or too much of both. The bottom line is this: Your success and happiness as a manager depend on how you manage com*fear*table workers.

My guess is that your company put you in a management position because it thinks you've got a lot of promise as an executive. It thinks that in some small way you'll help move the company forward by advancing the goals you've been tasked with. To do that, you'll need to find new and better ways to get a greater return on your workers' passion, engagement, and initiative. You'll need to inspire greater commitment to company changes. You'll need to learn how to make people less afraid of stepping up to challenges, more willing to trust you and the company, and more apt to speak up candidly and assertively. The good news is, this book is designed to do all those things by promoting the antidote to com*fear*table behavior: courage.

Courage is, most often, a behavioral response to a challenge. It is something that has to be *activated* within us. Courage is called forth by challenge, opportunity, and hardship. It is also called forth by managers, mentors, and coaches who hold us accountable to our own potential by compelling us to achieve higher standards. As a manager, you have a responsibility, indeed an obligation, to activate the courage of those around you. Courage activation is your job.

Three Buckets of Courage

As mentioned, courage involves behavior. Like all behaviors, courage can be developed, encouraged, and reinforced. While a lot of writers have focused on the realms in which courage is applied (for example, moral courage, military courage, and political courage), I think it is more useful to understand the common ways that people behave when being courageous, regardless of which realm they're operating in. While the realms themselves may have sharp differences, the *ways* people behave when being courageous within those realms are surprisingly similar.

In my work as a courage-building consultant, I have discovered that there are three ways of behaving when your courage is activated. When you become familiar with the three distinct types of courageous behavior, you gain a deeper understanding of how to tap into, and strengthen, your own courage and the courage of those around you. I call these three different forms of courage the Three Buckets of Courage.

> ***TRY* Courage:** When managers talk about wanting workers to "step up to the plate," it is *TRY* Courage that they are referring to. *TRY* Courage is the courage of initiative and action. You often see *TRY* Courage when people make "first attempts"—for example, whenever you see someone attempt new, skill-stretching, or pioneering tasks. Someone who volunteers to lead a tough or risky project is demonstrating *TRY* Courage.
>
> ***TRUST* Courage:** *TRUST* Courage is the courage that it takes to relinquish control and rely on others. When managers talk of wanting employees to embrace

company changes more willingly or to follow directives more enthusiastically, it is more *TRUST* Courage that they want employees to have. When *TRUST* Courage is present, people give each other the benefit of the doubt, instead of questioning the motives and intentions of those around them. *TRUST* Courage isn't about taking charge (as with *TRY* Courage), but about following the charge of others.

***TELL* Courage:** *TELL* Courage is the courage of "voice," and involves speaking with candor and conviction, especially when the opinions expressed run counter to the group's. To preserve their safety, workers often agree too much and speak out too little. When *TELL* Courage is activated, it causes workers to assert themselves more willingly and confidently. You see *TELL* Courage at work when employees tactfully but truthfully provide tough feedback . . . even to you, their manager. You also see it when workers raise their hands and ask for help, or when they tell you about mistakes they've made before you ask.

The main benefit of using the Three Buckets of Courage as a framework for understanding and categorizing courageous behavior is that it helps make courage, as a concept, more graspable. Courage is a large and vague concept. Using the *TRY, TRUST, TELL* framework helps bring it down to size. Parsing courage into three behavioral buckets allows us to discriminate the different ways we have been courageous in the past and are capable of being in the future. Think, for example, of the scariest or most uncomfortable moments in your career thus far. Weren't you *try*ing something new, *trust*ing someone else's lead, and/or *tell*ing the truth about a conviction you were upholding? Now think about the single biggest career goal you have in front of you right now. To achieve your goal, won't it involve exercising more *TRY*, *TRUST*, or *TELL* Courage (or some combination of all three)? Now think about your com*fear*table workers. Wouldn't having more *TRY*, *TRUST*, and *TELL* Courage help them to move past the debilitating effects of comfort and fear?

The Three Buckets of Courage are explained in greater detail in part 2 of the book. For now, it is enough to know that the best way to get workers to try new things, trust you more fully, and tell you what they're really thinking is to build up their courage. Consider, for example, what would happen if all your com*fear*table workers started putting their courage buckets to work. With more *TRY* Courage, wouldn't workers take on more skill-stretching projects? With more *TRUST* Courage, wouldn't they embrace company changes with more enthusiasm and less resistance? If people used more *TELL* Courage, wouldn't they speak up more frequently and truthfully? And by using all three types of courage, wouldn't workers be less risk averse, less self-conscious, and less apathetic? Wouldn't having more courage also result in less brownnosing, ass covering, and shitty attitudes? Most important, with more *TRY*, *TRUST*, and *TELL* Courage, wouldn't workers stop being so comfortably afraid?

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This book is about the actions that you and your workers can take to be more courageous, and what you can do to foster more courageous behavior at work.

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When Courage Goes to Work

The payoff for helping your workers to become more courageous, the ultimate aim of this book, is that it makes your job easier and more rewarding. So what does it look like when courage goes to work? You see courage working when people trust your decisions instead of silently resisting your every move. Courage is working when employees raise the red flag on projects that are going south instead of hiding issues until they fester into full-blown catastrophes. Courage is working when employees come to you with remedies to problems they are facing, instead of dumping problems in your lap. You see courage working when people are candid and engaged during status meetings, instead of politely nodding their heads "yes" every time you talk. You see courage working whenever you see people trying things outside their skill sets, or deliberately seeking out leadership opportunities, or offering ideas for expanding the team's reach. When courage goes to work, you see engagement, and passion, and motivation, and commitment. You also see shaking knees and hear shaky voices. Stepping into one's courage, for most workers, is a scary and uncomfortable thing. Being courageous requires encouragement—from the company, from each other, and from you.

Part of your job is to be a manager. But an equally important part of your job is to be an encourager—to put courage inside people. When you fill up people's buckets with courage—when you encourage them—they place less of a premium on comfort and begin to purposely seek out skill-stretching challenges. With full buckets of courage, they come to value the energy that fear provides as a necessary fuel for doing uncomfortable things. When people are full of courage, they're much more likely to *TRY* new things, *TRUST* you more fully, and *TELL* the truth more candidly. As I explain in chapter 6, the more courage you fill people with, the less com*fear*table workers will be.

The Consequences of Courage

As one of the world's only courage-building consultants, I am an unabashed and vocal advocate for bringing more courage to the workplace. But I readily admit that behaving courageously often comes with unintended consequences. While it is true that people can find their courage when facing challenging and dangerous situations, it is equally true that behaving courageously can bring new challenges and dangers of its own. Workers can get fired for making mistakes, blindly following errant directives, or disagreeing too vocally, regardless of how sincere their intentions for doing so are. But those rare instances shouldn't overshadow the fact that, on balance, people who act courageously at work are more successful than those who don't.

The purpose of this book isn't to cause you to fearlessly swagger into your boss's office, kick your boots up on her desk, and start rattling off all the reasons why she and the company need to change. Courage for courage's sake is at best gratuitous. To be productive and beneficial, courage needs direction and discipline. This book is about providing you with the tips, tools, and techniques that will help you to find the courage that's inside you and apply it in ways that strengthen your career.

The Groundwork

Before diving in, it might help you to know how the book is organized. Part 1, consisting of the first five chapters, reinforces the importance and value of putting courage to work. Chapter 1 introduces a model that will help you to build a foundation that encourages courageous behavior. In chapter 2, you'll learn how Jumping First (that is, being a good role model of courageous behavior) strengthens the courage of those around you. Chapter 3 shows you how to construct safety nets in order to support people as they take on more challenging things. Chapter 4 discusses ways to harness fear as a useful, productive, and even energizing managerial tool. Chapter 5 provides tips for helping workers to modulate between comfort and discomfort.

Part 2 of the book dimensionalizes the Three Buckets of Courage concept. Chapter 6 offers ideas for putting the buckets concept to work. Distinctions are also made between two types of management dispositions: *Fillers* and *Spillers.* Chapters 7, 8, and 9 illustrate, through real-life stories and client examples, the Three Buckets of Courage. Chapter 7 covers *TRY* Courage, chapter 8 reviews *TRUST* Courage, and chapter 9 discusses *TELL* Courage.

Part 3, comprising chapters 10 and 11, starts by providing you with two contrasting views of the same workplace—one directed by fear, the other infused with courage—so that you can make an informed choice about the management approach you will use going forward. The contrasting views, as well as other rationales for putting courage to work, are presented in chapter 10. Finally, chapter 11 looks at courage in broader terms, so that you can take courage home with you after a long day at the office.

All the stories you'll read about in the book involve real people facing real challenges. Some people met their challenges with courage; others did not. In most instances I was at liberty to share both the names of the people in the stories and the names of the companies they work for. In some instances, however, either to preserve client confidences or to prevent people from embarrassment, I have changed their names. As a general rule, when both their first and last names are included in the story, it is their actual name. When only their first name is referred to, the name is fictitious.

The Bottom Line on the Top Virtue

Aristotle called courage the first virtue because it makes all the other virtues possible. If that is true, then courage is also the first virtue of business. Courage, after all, is the lifeblood of leadership, entrepreneurialism, and innovation. In fact, courage is so critical to these things that they can't exist without it.

While courage may be the premier business virtue, in many workplaces it is desperately lacking. Workers are either too comfortable to change or too afraid to try new things. Or, as explained in this introduction, they are both comfortable and fearful at the same time. When workers' actions are directed by comfort and fear, underperformance will always be the result. As a manager, you need to be keenly aware of the dangers that comfort and fear present, and equipped with strategies for mitigating them.

In the coming pages, you will be provided with strategies and tips for influencing workers to be more courageous. Doing so will help them gain the necessary confidence to take on more difficult projects, assume leadership roles more readily, embrace company changes with more enthusiasm, and extend themselves in ways that will benefit their careers and your team. The bottom line is this: Putting courage to work will cause your workers to stop being so com*fear*table, and help you to be a better, more effective, and happier manager.

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The Five Promises of Workforce Courage

There are five premises upon which this book was written. But they are more than premises; they are promises. I call them the five promises of workforce courage, and this book aims to champion and uphold them. They are as follows:

1. **Everyone** has the capacity to be courageous.
2. **Employees perform better** when they are working courageously.
3. **Courage** is a learnable and teachable skill.
4. **The key** to putting courage to work is the regimen of things you regularly do before challenging situations present themselves.
5. **The entire workforce** benefits when everyone is showing up to work with more courage.

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Part I

Setting a Foundation for Courage

People won't start being courageous just because you tell them to. You've got to create an environment that encourages them to extend themselves and take chances. In this section, you'll be introduced to four actions you need to take before expecting people to be more courageous. These four actions, introduced briefly at the end of chapter 1, constitute the Courage Foundation Model, and they follow a specific order.

The first action deals with role modeling, or what I call *Jumping First*. Why on earth would you expect people to be courageous if you yourself are wimpy? Your own courageous actions will have the biggest impact on people's willingness to be courageous.

The second action deals with creating safety. People won't take chances unless they have at least some degree of support from you. Getting people to take big leaps requires putting some safety nets in place to soften their landing.

Action number three deals with putting fear to work. Few things are as potent as fear in causing people to be risk averse. But fear has energy. Properly harnessed, fear's energy can be used to help people accomplish and overcome the very thing that may be inspiring their fear. The third action of the Courage Foundation Model is about harnessing fear.

The final action in the model deals with adjusting the degree of comfort and discomfort that workers experience. The idea is to slowly but persistently stretch workers' capacity to deal with uncomfortable situations by assigning them incrementally greater challenges. Doing so causes them to exert more courage in order to meet the challenging assignments.

Chapter 1

Look Before You Leap

The most dangerous strategy is to jump into a chasm in two leaps.

Benjamin Disraeli

Dustin Webster was scared; that much was clear. It was unusual to see him this way. Dustin is the kind of employee that a supervisor dreams of. A real go-getter, Dustin always got to work on time (often early), undeterred by the Seattle traffic and unfazed by Seattle's soggy mariner weather. With Dustin, such things never prompted grousing or pessimism. He had more important things on his mind, like pitching in, helping out, and getting the job done. So seeing Dustin scared, really *scared*, was way out of pattern.

Looking back on it now, I'm sure Dustin's fear had something to do with the nature of the task. For Dustin, this was a pioneering endeavor. While he had plenty of skills to draw upon, and he had confronted plenty of other work challenges, this assignment went well beyond Dustin's comfort zone and into foreign terrain.

Firsts often provoke fear. I'm sure that Dustin had felt the same fearful feelings on his first day of school, or the first time he drove a car, or the first time he kissed a girl. These feelings were also at work the first time he led one of our team meetings, or the time I tapped him to be in charge when I got called out of town to temporarily lead another project.

Because I was Dustin's manager, my job was to help him temper his fear so that he could focus on the task at hand. I had to keep his potential at the forefront of my thinking. In a real way, I had to believe in Dustin's potential more than he believed in it himself. While his own doubt was inevitable, I would have to keep mine at bay lest we double the doubt, and in so doing, double the chances of Dustin failing. And failure, in this case, could have catastrophic consequences.

Yes, Dustin was scared, and he had a right to be. In a moment, he would attempt a triple twisting back double somersault after leaping backward from a tiny platform more than one hundred feet above the surface of a small pool. He'd be traveling at a velocity of over fifty miles per hour, a breakneck speed that could quite literally break his neck. Dustin and I were members of the U.S. High Diving Team.

Surprisingly, the things Dustin did to prepare for his big leap, and the things I did to coach him through it, were little different from the things workers and managers need to do to help them stop being com*fear*table. The big leap that Dustin was facing was a huge feat, but it wasn't entirely outside the realm of his experience. The dive was just the next logical step in the progression of his skills and capabilities, and the culmination of *lead-ups*—less complex dives from lower heights—that he had taken over time. Plus, we had spent weeks preparing for this moment, building his confidence in a way that, metaphorically, lowered his high dive. Dustin first practiced doing takeoffs from the pool deck. Then we had him adjust the movable high-dive platform (called a *perch*) to ten feet above the water. Once he got comfortable with his takeoff from that height, we had him move it up twenty more feet. The process involved purposely moving from comfort to discomfort and back again. Once he got comfortable with one height, we'd stretch the height to a point of discomfort until the new height became comfortable, too. Each time Dustin got comfortable again, it was time for him to move up . . . we both knew the dangers of his becoming too comfortable!

My job in all of this was to be Dustin's chief encourager—literally, to help put courage in him. That meant I had to keep both of us focused on what Dustin had already done and what he was capable of doing. It would have done no good for me to stand on the pool deck yelling up to him about all the things he *shouldn't* do. Yelling "Don't do this!" and "Don't do that!" would have kept him looking in the wrong direction. Instead, my coaching centered on the things he *should* do to make the dive happen.

Keep in mind that as the captain of the team, I had a vested interest in Dustin's succeeding. This was the U.S. High Diving Team's first year at the Seattle amusement park. If Dustin landed the dive, he would be one of a handful of people in the world to have done so, a distinction that would impress our audiences—and our amusement park client. It would look very good for me if our client would re-sign our multimillion-dollar contract at the end of the season, and Dustin's big dive could go a long way toward making that happen. Dustin's win would be my win, too. Indeed, the team's win.

Despite all the preparation and encouragement, Dustin was still scared. Even though down deep he knew he was ready, doing such a complicated dive from this height wasn't going to come easy. The funny thing is, after I had cheered him on from the sidelines with little success, getting Dustin to launch the dive into the air took only a simple poolside coaxing technique, a method you'll probably remember from the first time you were cajoled off the high diving board at your local pool. Looking up at Dustin, I formed a bullhorn with my hands and yelled, "Okay, Dustin, it's time. Put your arms out to the sides. On the count of three, you're going to get this dive off the platform. All you have to do is get the dive in the air and let it do the work. The dive wants to dive. Ready? One . . . two . . . three . . . JUMP!"

And with that, Dustin leaped into the air, performing a gorgeous triple twisting back double somersault!

Workplace High Dives

Dustin Webster would go on to become a seven-time world cliff diving champion, even beating the Mexicans in Acapulco on their home cliffs. At first glance, his experience learning a triple twisting back double off a hundred-foot high-dive ladder may seem remote from your work environment. The reality, though, is that throughout their careers, workers are asked to perform "high dives" that carry both upside and downside consequences. Asking a worker to move into a new role in a new division is a high dive. Putting a worker in charge of a key customer account is a high dive. Having a worker give a presentation to your boss's management team is a high dive. Putting a worker in charge of your team while you go on maternity leave is a high dive. Informing a worker that she is one of three people being considered as your successor is a high dive. One person's triple twisting back double somersault is another's must-win sale, or do-or-die project, or failure-is-not-an-option strategic initiative. High dives come in many forms, including skill-stretching jobs, big consequential assignments, and sweeping organizational changes. In each case, when employees face such challenges confidently and courageously, a positive outcome is more likely than if they don't. In each case, a positive outcome is mutually beneficial to them, to you, and to the company. And in each case, the best way to get them to do their high dive is to get them to move beyond comfort and fear.

Courageously Fearful

As a former member of the U.S. High Diving Team, I learned firsthand the benefits of moving past my com*fear*table tendencies. Every day for seven years I would climb to the top of a hundred-foot high-dive ladder (the equivalent of a ten-story building) and stand atop a one-foot-by-one-foot perch. Then, after a quick prayer, I would leap into the air like an eagle taking flight. Except eagles soar upward. I never did. I would always go down, careening at speeds of over fifty miles per hour into a pool that was only ten feet deep. Fifteen hundred high dives, all done with no parachute, no bungee, and no safety gear. Just me, a thin coat of sunscreen, and a Speedo.

The fact that I was a high diver doesn't qualify me to write about courage. The fact that I was a high diver who is *afraid of heights* does. Becoming a high diver was a culmination of a series of things I did to engage with, learn from, and ultimately dominate my fear of heights. Many of the lessons I learned from this experience are chronicled in my first book, *Right Risk: 10 Powerful Principles for Taking Giant Leaps with Your Life* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003). The book's front cover has a picture of me diving while on fire. No kidding.

The experience and personal benefits I gained from dominating my fears taught me the supreme value of courage. While I am hardly the patron saint of courageous acts, I cherish courage above all other virtues. I have the Gaelic word for courage, *misneach,* prominently tattooed on my upper back . . . it helps remind me of my feisty Celtic heritage. Also, I am the only person in North Carolina to have a courage license. More specifically, my personalized North Carolina license plate is the word *COURAGE* (wave if you pass me!). Finally, three years ago, I forced a little courage on my family, moving us away from most of my clients in Atlanta, Georgia, and up to the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina. Why? So that we could all live more sanely . . . and pry ourselves loose from Atlanta's traffic lunacy.

I'm so convinced of the importance of courage to business success that in 2002, after working as a change-management consultant for over a decade, I founded Giant Leap Consulting, a courage-building company. Our mission, like the aim of this book, is to help people and organizations to be more courageous so that they can take whatever "giant leaps" they're facing. Through the work Giant Leap has done with thousands of workers and renowned organizations, we've developed a track record of helping people to be more courageous at work. Keep in mind that Giant Leap's clients are not people who have been endowed with some superhuman courage gene. Rather, they are everyday people like you and me, who choose to apply what I call *everyday courage.* That is, a more tempered and measured courage than people typically associate with courageous acts. As someone who once found courage only in adrenaline-pumping and spine-tingling situations, I can now say unequivocally that courage is not limited to extreme feats of bravery. The most important lesson my clients have taught me is this: Courage is accessible to everyone. Not just the daredevils among us.

Fear, as this book will argue, is an invitation to experience your own courage. I am a very fearful guy. But I'm also a guy who hates being controlled—by people, situations, and most of all fear. Courage, to me, beats the alternative: letting other things dictate my actions. So, whenever possible, and when operating out of my better nature, I choose courage. And when I do, I feel good about myself. This is how it is for most workers too. Workers get pumped with pride when they overcome things that are hard, challenging, and scary . . . when they take worthwhile "high dives." As a manager, when you build people's courage, you also stretch their capabilities, boost their performance, and help them to encounter their better selves. Once workers experience the value of being courageous, they begin to respond to work challenges that they formerly found frightening with newfound clarity, confidence, and conviction.

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Fear They Lose . . . and So Do You

Given the benefits to be gained when workers are courageous, it's striking to me that so many managers still resort to stoking people's fears to get things done. Managers who fill people with fear in order to motivate them often do so for reasons of efficiency and immaturity. It simply takes less time, thought, and technique to bark an order than it does to motivate people according to their interests, passion, and capabilities. Some managers justify their behavior with excuses like "I'm too busy to coddle people" and "I'm paid to get results, not to be nice to people." The way they see it, encouragement is a waste of time.

Having seen the wreckage caused by fear-based managers, I am convinced that fear is bad for business. Workers have a way of acting in their own worst interests when managers overload them with fear. Like flailing about at the sight of a bee, thinking that the best way to keep from getting stung is to wave hysterically, the actions of workers who are managed with fear are often dramatic and disproportionate to the fear being faced. Fear makes workers clam up, restricting the flow of feedback that is so necessary for keeping managers from making bonehead decisions. Fear heightens workers' suspicions of one another, undermining the trust that interpersonal relationships need to flourish. Fear causes workers to be unduly preoccupied with safety, strangling their willingness to take risks and extend their skills. Fear lowers morale, damages relationships, erodes trust, and builds resentment. Ultimately, fear lowers confidence, standards, and profits.

Encouragement does, as fear-stoking managers argue, take time. But providing encouragement to workers is an investment of time, not a waste of it. Don't think so? Consider the results I would have gotten if, to expedite the process of motivating Dustin Webster to do his high dive, I had used a fear-based management approach. First, I would have made him spend less time doing all those silly lead-ups. Why bother jumping off the side of the pool deck when the goal is to do a hundred-foot dive, right? I would have made sure that Dustin focused on all the things he was doing wrong so that he would stop doing them. Those were the risks, after all, that needed to be prevented. Then I would have pointed my finger in Dustin's face and told him what was at stake for the team, and me, if he screwed up. Saying this would clarify where the fault would reside if he wiped out. And instead of bothering to help Dustin to see that this dive was the next logical extension of his skills and capabilities, I would have told him that whether or not he wanted to do the dive was irrelevant—doing it was his *job*! All the while, I would have hovered over him, harping about how little time was left to get the job done.

Now, what kind of results do you think I would have gotten if I had tried to motivate Dustin by filling him with fear? Would my approach have made Dustin more confident, courageous, and optimistic? Would it have deepened his commitment to both me and the team? Would it have caused him to want to do bigger dives for me in the future? More to the bottom line, would my approach have enhanced his chances of taking a successful dive? No. In all likelihood, Dustin would have wiped out, or worse.

Your Choice—and Opportunity

As a manager, you may be tempted to resort to stoking people's fear when they aren't getting things done. Maybe this was the approach your bosses used on you. If you aim to build people's courage, however, you won't get there by putting fear inside them. You'll get there by filling workers with enough courage that they can dominate their fears. And the rewards are worth it. Workers who are courage-led are more engaged, committed, optimistic, loyal, and change-embracing. Why wouldn't they be? Imagine working for a boss whose vision was so bold that it actually excited you. Imagine working for a manager who valued mistake making as a natural and necessary part of your professional development. Imagine working for a manager who actually saw ass kissing as a repulsive, manipulative, and dishonest thing. Then go a step further and imagine what the whole company might look like if all the managers led by putting courage into their workers. It would be a workplace where you could implicitly trust the motives and intentions of everyone around you, and where you could speak the unvarnished truth without fear, and where you would make more forward-falling mistakes in order to better serve the company (and clients). This is the kind of company that Giant Leap is dedicated to creating: the courageous company.

An Alternative to Fear-Based Management

As you'll soon learn, there are better ways to use fear than threatening workers. In fact, you can harness fear's energy in ways that cause people to do courageous things. Later in the book, you'll learn why you don't have to resort to using fear just to get people to do challenging things. A far better and more impactful approach is to inspire people by helping them to find their courage. In the chapters that follow, you'll learn about four techniques for influencing people to be more courageous at work. Together, these things constitute what I call the *Courage Foundation Model* (see page 28).

Communities of Courage

My hope is that as you progress through the book, and as you start going to work with more courage, others will want to share the journey with you. There is strength in numbers. It's easier to do courageous things when you know that other people are doing them, too. When I was a high diver, for example, there was a strong feeling that we were all in it together. These days, I get the same feeling of communal support with my whitewater kayaking buddies here in Asheville. When paddling through treacherous whitewater, having the encouragement of your fellow river rats is more important than having a good boat. It makes it much easier to face an intimidating rapid when you know your buddies are there to save you if you get into a hairy situation. Similarly, when courage goes to work with each and every worker, the capacity of the entire organization to take on greater challenges is enlarged. Like ever-expanding concentric circles, every single act of courage at work has the potential to transform the business in unexpected ways. All it takes is someone to start the first ripple. As you'll learn in the next chapter, role modeling is the first and most powerful way of getting others to put their courage to work.

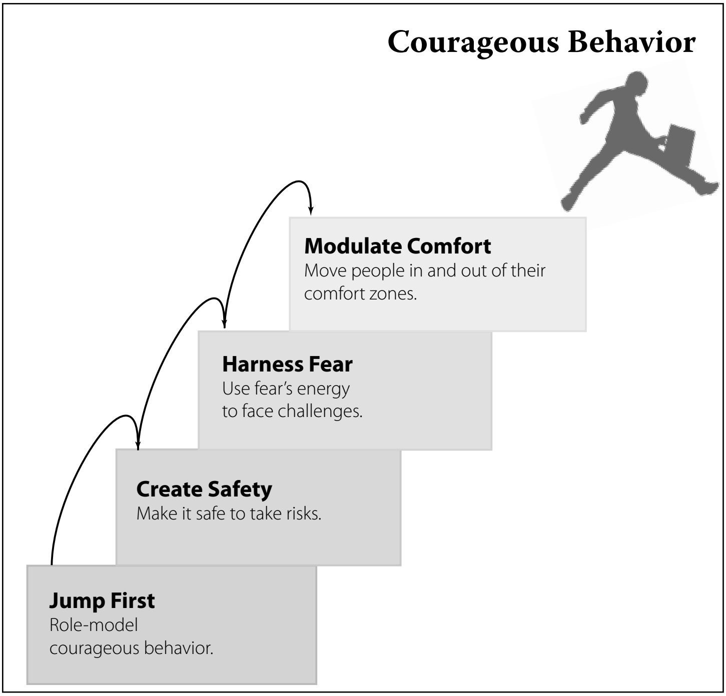
Courageous Behavior
Modulate Comfort
Move people in and out of their comfort zones.
Harness Fear
Use fear's energy to face challenges.
Create Safety
Make it safe to take risks.
Jump First
Role-model courageous behavior.

Figure 1. The Courage Foundation Model

Jump First: Good managers are good role models. Before helping workers to be more courageous, you'll need to be more courageous yourself. Doing so allows you to get firsthand experience with the challenges you're asking workers to face and is the best way to build credibility with your direct reports.

Create Safety: Workers play it safe when it isn't safe to not play it safe. Therefore, to get them to do more courageous things, you'll need to weave safety nets that give them a sense of security as they work. You'll also have to value *forward-falling* mistakes, particularly if the lessons gleaned from those mistakes advance the team's goals.

Harness Fear: Fear in the workplace is inevitable. Your job is to make fear useful by putting it to work for you—not by threatening workers, but by building up their capacity to be courageous. Fear's energy can be used as fuel to help people to do courageous things.

Modulate Comfort: When it comes to career development, too much comfort can be a dangerous thing. As a manager, you'll need to provide comfortable workers with work challenges that make them uncomfortable and keep them motivated. At the same time, if they become too uncomfortable, you'll need to let them settle in long enough to gain confidence with their newfound skills.

Questions for Reflection

How might your team benefit if everyone started showing up to work with more courage?

How might your career benefit if the people you lead were working more courageously?

How would you manage differently if you prized courage above all other business virtues?

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How to Build Backbones, Boost Performance, and Get Results

by Bill Treasurer

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