



Managerial Courage

by Cub Marion

When one references managerial courage, for some it could invoke images of a loud, aggressive individual, always willing to challenge someone else. Or, it may be the person willing to tell the “Boss” they are way off base in a public forum. Maybe it is the employee willing to send the charged email to a large distribution list touting their opinion, and making it clear their opinion is the correct one. In reality, the above examples are not managerial courage at all. The skill embodied in the two words “managerial courage” is more focused on an individual doing what he or she believes in; taking the tough position. These beliefs of course, need to fall within those thoughts or actions that are morally and ethically acceptable. Exercising these beliefs may be very uncomfortable, and many times will not win in a popularity contest. In fact, it may meet resistance. However, this is the part where courage truly manifests itself, as the individual needs to display the maturity and tact to take action. The form of this action needs to be carefully thought out. Examples of this may be providing feedback to a direct-report whose performance has been slipping, or coaching a peer to be more attentive in meetings, or possibly giving a senior leader input on an alternative solution. A person can take the path of least resistance, and withhold the feedback; thinking it is just too uncomfortable to take action. In many cases, no one will know...but you will. When you have a firm belief, you need to stick with it. If it is important to you, it is important to others. As mentioned earlier, the action needs to be well thought out. Packaging the message is critical, so that it is easily understood, is constructive, and the relevant value is conveyed. The individual or group receiving the feedback may not accept it, but you provided this necessary information so that all can make a more informed decision.

A checklist for managerial courage:

- Thoroughly understand the situation
- Do not have a hidden agenda
- Provide your belief/opinion with clarity, constructively, and with the relevant value
- Take action in person. Avoid exercising your belief/opinion via email if possible
- Lead in all directions (directs, peers, and senior leaders)
- Do not hold a grudge if your belief/opinion is not adopted. Maturity and professionalism will go a long way

Effective leaders are typically exceptionally skilled in managerial courage. It is a skill that needs continuous development. Like any talented leader, there is always room to grow and learn.