

How Women Hit the Bull's-Eye with Courage (Every Time)

By Sandra Ford Walston, The Courage Expert

We all know that hitting the bull's-eye means being on target, but have you ever wondered where the term comes from? Seventeenth-century English longbow yeomen in small hamlets often held archery practice immediately after church services, the only time during the week when many of the archers could gather. "A common target was the white skull of a bull, and the greatest skill could be illustrated by getting a 'bull's eye.'"¹ Hitting the target is one thing, but consistently putting arrows in the bull's-eye requires enormous practice.

The same holds true for anything else in life: achieving a high level of competence requires disciplined training to develop a certain set of "real" skills. But before practicing the skills needed to hit the bull's-eye in our professional lives, we need to know that we're aiming at the right target. Unfortunately, far too many women who intuitively recognize the target distrust their own vision and aim in the wrong direction. Aristotle reminds us, "Courage is the first of human virtues because it makes all the other virtues possible," and the failure to aim at the right target represents a failure of courage-centeredness.

To understand the importance of courage in the workplace, we must understand the true meaning of the word, which comes from the French word *courage*, meaning "heart and spirit." So acting with courage is really about acting from the heart, from the center of your innermost being. Ironically, the bull's-eye that we women must learn to hit consistently is the true Self. Even when we do hit the target, women have to learn to recognize that everything outside the bull's-eye represents a different aspect of the false self (also known as the ego or mind) stories such as "I could never be like that"! By accessing the empowering virtue of courage, we not only take aim at the true target of our life's work, we begin to hit the bull's-eye with ease. Being more on target increases happiness and self-fulfillment.

Are You Off Target?

Do you cherish your work? If you could choose to do a job that you would love to do, what would your heart's wish be? I have yet to meet a single person who does not wish to be happy at work, but a recent Gallup poll found that job satisfaction has steadily declined from nearly sixty percent in 1995 to just fifty percent in 2004. Are you disengaged at work? Developing courage and the skills that manifest courage at work will help anyone struggling with a lack of self-contentment.

Dorie McCubbrey knows about getting off target. In high school and college, she excelled in math and science. She entered college as an engineering major at the advice of guidance counselors and family members. She excelled scholastically and earned a doctorate in bioengineering. Despite never feeling any passion for her work, she was reluctant to change career paths, and in this state of unhappiness, she developed a severe eating disorder. She said, "My passion finally emerged while I was being treated for my eating disorder. It became clear that my mission was to help others overcome their eating disorders." Turning down a six-figure salary, Dorie returned to college to earn her counseling degree. It took years for Dorie to find the courage to act from her heart—the place where self-acceptance lives—and

express her true identity thus revealing her authenticity. Said another way, her courage was alive and well in her original Self. The word “authentic” is derived from Greek *authentikos*, which means “original.” Sadly, there’s no magical formula for originality. Anyone can shoot arrows, but few are enthused to get on target.



Getting Back to the Center

Developing courage consciousness is a process. Exploring and understanding the internal terrain of your courage takes time and dedication just like being an archer who consistently hits the bull’s-eye. Each time you miss the target, you learn more about your personal courage and the power of the unconscious. Additionally, with each bull’s-eye you become more keenly conscious of the skills that went into making the shot. For example, if you were to survey new territory in a low-flying airplane, it would look completely unfamiliar on the first pass. The second time around, you would recognize a few points of

reference, and on the third pass, the landscape begins to make sense—it’s more on point and focused. Finally, you gain familiarity through simple exposure. Courage is no different, so begin to examine your personal courage by asking yourself a few simple questions:

- Would you stay in a job you hate or don’t believe in?
- Are you inclined to secure your physical safety despite great inconvenience?
- Would you hide a mistake because you “need” your job?
- Are you prone to selling your soul (and you know it)?

Honestly answering these questions allows you to assess your courage and its correlation to the number of missed shots. By quieting your mind and allowing yourself to focus on the bull’s-eye, you will realize that you know your true Self better than you let on. The problem is that most people want concrete answers and a quick fix, not the ongoing process of meditative self-reflection. They simply don’t want to dwell on the answers to probing questions. No wonder Americans’ prescription drug usage is at an all-time high—our culture of instant gratification prefers a pharmaceutical fix to a true healing process. And when the sickness lies in your “heart and spirit,” it produces suffering. If your job does not honor the convictions of your heart, your courage is on a restrictively short leash. Awakening your personal courage begins with learning to stop and reflect so that you live from the inside—the bull’s-eye of your true being.

What’s an example of “the bull’s-eye of your true being?” Lin Carson is a scholastic baker in Denver. With a Ph.D. in Cereal Science and Chemistry, she knew the corporate road with Nestle or Kraft would eventually not fulfill her unique ideas. A true example of the courageous spirit of the female visionary, Lin wanted to open her own bread café and develop recipes with shorter baking times so customers could purchase them all day long hot

from the oven. As a result, she is reaping intrinsic rewards from her efforts and she's on her way to achieve the results that lead to long-term self-fulfillment.

Deceptively Simple

The simplest actions can have a tremendous impact. The skilled archer pauses breathing before releasing the arrow. The pause, known in the workplace as reflection is a powerful tool. It allows you to have goals yet stay present to shift gears as needed. This is very different from “going with the flow” or living in complacency (a courage killer).

With the emergence of “spiritual courage”* at work the mind will want to undermine your courageous intent such as transitioning into a new industry. The concepts presented here are deceptively simple. After all, how could something so easy, work? In the article “Simple Courage” colleague René Da Costa writes that people at all levels of work shun simplicity for complication. He shared two reasons, “Simplicity takes talent and dedication, and it requires a great deal of courage. It takes courage to advocate simplicity. Simplicity has nowhere to hide and neither do those who advocate it.”² We become courageous by being courageous, and that means learning how to hit the bull's-eye more frequently. It's that simple!

All you have to do is decide whether this forgotten virtue is worth a steady stream of bull's-eyes. How do you start to discover and identify your courage at work? Women with courage develop new business models when the door to an old model closes or the existing model no longer works. When asked if they have courage, they respond with an enthusiastic “yes.” Such was the case with Regina, an entrepreneur from Minneapolis. When asked, “How do you perceive you apply courage with your business?” she said, “I step forward and upward. I never quit. I take risks to continually reinvent myself, which sometimes leads to redesigning the organization.” Then she paused, smiled and said, “Just like Madonna.” Setting challenging goals and taking calculated risks reveal an entrepreneur's heart and spirit. Because of their desire to live their dream and succeed, they foster and draw from an innate reservoir of courage that leads them down the path to entrepreneurial success.

Other examples of leadership qualities defined by courage include asking for the tough project that no one wants and staying focused daily on the results. What would motivate you to explore where this ancient virtue fits into your work life? If you are receptive, you will find that sometimes you're on target and other times you're not even aiming at the target.

In summary, several steps are needed not only to focus on the real target, but to hit the bull's eye every time. How can you increase your accuracy and help other people in your organization nurture this same skill? Here are three bull's-eye strategies:

1. **Determine why you are living off target.** If you are not consistently hitting the bull's-eye, you're probably being thrown off-center by your human condition (also referred to as the mind/ego). Start to notice if you're focusing on negative external factors rather than listening to the affirmation of your heart. Eckhart Tolle admonishes us, “Say ‘yes’ to life—and see how life suddenly starts to work *for* you rather than against you.”³ Are you willing to say “yes” to courage, to become centered in your courage? If you are stirred by this challenge in courage-centering then try to assess, recognize and employ your underutilized strengths so you hit the mark more often. If you desire to remove aspects of mindless conformity from your work experience, then these fundamental courage-

centering techniques are key. Ultimately, courage-centering enables you to create a joyful life free from the habits that drain your energy and restrict your spirit.

To awaken your courage, you will need to let go of some unhealthy habits such as complaining or accepting mediocrity. As you invite an overall healthier perspective about who you are, you diminish the missed shots in your professional life. This takes energy, but developmental courage *is* the source of energy that makes life happen! At this integral level of courage consciousness it is valuable to remember this wise saying: “What is held in the mind tends to manifest.”

2. **Enhance your accuracy with some form of meditation.** Courage-centering begins with learning to stop and reflect so that you live from the inside, from the core of your true being. Finding a meditation practice can help to reveal your unconscious motivations and awaken your courage. Meditation techniques promote focus, centeredness and spiritual awareness. They put you in touch with your “heart and spirit.” Each of us is different, so what works for me may not work for you. Proven meditative techniques such as prayer, yoga, therapy, psychosynthesis, transcendental meditation, chakra balancing, sweat-lodge ceremonies, walking a labyrinth, process painting, Dzogchen, reflective reading, playing a musical instrument, writing and so on, help to remind you of your spirit. Adopting a contemplative discipline begins the practice of targeting the bull’s-eye, the Self, in all aspects of life.
3. **Start to underscore your bull’s-eyes.** Begin to underscore your hits. These are your defined behavioral competencies—the times when you feel you are energized about your work rather than dispirited such as the ways you deal with people becomes less toxic. Soon, you will look around and you will observe other courageous people—the person who confronted a bully on behalf of a peer, the person who volunteered for a challenging project or the person who lifted her voice above the crowd to speak the truth. The real example of centeredness lies in the noble and courageous actions of the everyday person like you and me! While our culture does not celebrate the courage you display in your day-to-day life, recognize how your bull’s-eyes make a difference in society. Your manifestation of courage-centeredness provides an example to the people around you, making courage contagious and, ultimately, transforming the workplace!

Utilizing these simple suggestions will allow you to transcend the mental survival mode of the calculating mind, and you will discover the joy of living in the present and from the heart. This is quite simply being your true Self rather than endless off-target hits that cause ultimately, suffering and pain.

* Spiritual courage. The spiritual journey requires being in the present. It is a trust in faith that propels you to continue growing. You become a “witness” to your attachments to results and learn to self-correct. You surrender your ego to a higher level of courage consciousness, and you begin to exist in a place “where courage meets grace.” As all this happens, humility steps in to replace arrogance and righteousness. The sacred within awakens.

About the Author:

Sandra Ford Walston, The Courage Expert, innovator of STUCKThinking™, is an organizational effectiveness/learning consultant, speaker, corporate trainer and courage coach. Specializing in understanding courage behaviors, individual personalities and leadership styles that focus on the tricks and traps of the human condition, the author/trainer facilitates individuals and groups in discovering their hidden talents. She is the internationally published author of the regional bestseller, *Courage: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman/Reclaiming the Forgotten Virtue* (Greece and Brazil). Her second book is currently agent represented. She is qualified to administer and interpret the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® and is a certified Enneagram teacher. Currently she is a candidate for an Honorary Doctorate Degree.

Sandra provides skill-based programs for public and private businesses, including Caterpillar, Inc., Auburn University, Procter & Gamble, Wyoming Department of Health Public Nurses, Farmers Insurance, Wide Open West and Hitachi Consulting. With over eleven years of experience with finance professionals, she instructs for the University of Denver Graduate Tax Program Continuing Professional Education courses and she formerly taught for the Colorado Society of CPAs. To learn more about how Sandra can help your business cultivate success or to purchase a copy of her first book, visit www.sandrawalston.com or contact her 303.696.1010 or Sandra@SandraWalston.com.

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¹ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bullseye>

² René Da Costa, "Simple Courage," *Management-issues*, October 13, 2005, http://www.management-issues.com/display_page.asp?section=dacosta&id=2660.

³ Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of NOW* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999), 35.