



Sandra Ford Walston

## The Courageous Spirit of the Female Entrepreneur

By Sandra Ford Walston, The Courage Expert

*Everyone has talent. What is rare is the courage to follow the talent to the dark place where it leads.*

-- Erica Jong, Author

Imaginative...enterprising...visionary... self-assured...opportunistic...passionate... conscientious...resourceful—such are the expressions most people use to describe the courageous spirit of the female entrepreneur. While these descriptions are usually accurate, many people fail to see female entrepreneurs for what they really are: the embodiment of courage! These women know there is a direct correlation between their success quotient and their courage quotient.

Female entrepreneurs represent the true portraits of courageous endeavor. Why? Rather than accept the status quo, they trust their own abilities, define their own career and step up to the challenge of creating the business of their dreams. They give themselves permission to go against the norm and make bold moves into uncharted waters. How does a woman start to discover and identify her 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.

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 not fulfill her unique ideas. A true example of the courageous spirit of the female entrepreneur, 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 success.

Even though women are staking claims to the entrepreneur market (“Nearly half (48%) of all privately-held U.S. firms are 50% or more women-owned. This means that 10.6 million firms are at least half owned by a woman or women.” *Center for Women’s Business Research*), why then do women entrepreneurs lag in some industries such as in the information and technology? Because most women do not claim courage as one of the primary virtues they display in their professional pursuits. True feminine practitioners of everyday courage do not accept the status quo, they trust their own abilities, design their

career choices and create the work of their dreams. Most women do not claim and display courage in their professional pursuits. They mistakenly believe that courage is only relevant during particularly perilous times. As a result, they don't perceive exploring new ideas, creating an innovative business, transcending rejection, or taking initiative as courageous moments.

In reality, each woman has the capacity to be a courageous entrepreneur regardless of her current position. Whether you aspire to branch out in a solo venture or strive to build a multi-million dollar corporation, how you view your abilities and contribute to your advancement speak volumes about your courage quotient and set an example of the entrepreneurial spirit other women can follow.

### **The Heart and Spirit of the Courageous Female Entrepreneur**

The original definition of the word “courage” comes from the French word *corage*, meaning “heart and spirit.” Historically, innovative thinkers have always acted from their hearts, but notions of courage as heroic have diminished this heartfelt value of courage. Without courage, however, a key part of our spirit is lost. Perhaps that's why Aristotle believed that courage is the first of human virtues because it makes all the other virtues possible.

When you come from your heart and spirit and allow your passion to guide you, you are displaying your true authenticity. Many people prefer to settle for conformity or complacency—this is the opposite of courage. They believe that starting their own business is not worth the sacrifice or time. They don't want to sacrifice their annual vacation, attend evening school to obtain a degree or certification, suspend golf games for a few years, or commit to their calling. Such people are not acting courageously.

Women with courage declare their goals and then go backwards from there to seek what's possible. They 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 move forward and upward. I never quit. I take risks to continually reinvent myself, which sometimes leads to redesigning the organization.” Then she paused 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.

### **Step Up with Courage**

Embarking on an entrepreneurial venture and building your courage reservoir is similar to climbing a standard six-foot ladder. The first step is low and wide, with each consecutive step getting higher and narrower. Near the top of the ladder the ascent can get a little shaky as the steps taper.

For a female entrepreneur, verbalizing the business idea to others may be the first seemingly easy (or difficult) step. But each step thereafter, such as leasing office space, purchasing office equipment, and hiring a graphic artist to design marketing materials, may perpetuate anxiety or feelings of uncertainty. Conquering these obstacles and/or revealing vulnerability are two out of twelve behaviors of courage. Both support you to face the

challenge head on. What would happen if you said, “It takes a lot of courage for me to admit that in my first year of business I made the wrong choice when I purchased and installed the new software.”

The women who continually “step up” do not easily give up on their dreams and beliefs, even when doubt creeps in. Their willingness to stay true to themselves when others try to convince them otherwise requires self-efficacy—the capacity for producing a desired result or effect. This behavior is very different from being close-minded and restricted.

In other words, female entrepreneurs believe in themselves and their skills. Even more important, they do not blame others for their shortcomings or failures. They hold themselves 100% accountable and recognize the value of courageous will. They have control over the patterns that govern their beliefs and know their “courageous energy zone.”

As you continue to climb each step of the ladder, your motivation to improve standards of excellence, to commit to your specific goals, and to seize opportunities that allow you to take setbacks and obstacles in stride intensifies. Unfortunately, 20% of people never make it past the first rung. They don’t identify their purpose much less state their courageous intention. In essence, they quit before they start. The other 80% of people set a target for progress. As the challenges increase, the group takes a break to regroup and refuel. Sixty-five percent of the people decide they are content to stay where they are, so they settle in. Only the remaining 15% reset their purpose, commit to their original vision and plan, and continue the climb. During doubtful moments, they ask themselves, “Do I really want this?” Then, after reevaluating their path, they decide whether the sacrifice is worth the objective. If they need to make adjustments to their plan, they do. Applying conscious choice, they constantly refocus and continue the climb. For such courageous female entrepreneurs, giving up is not an option. They reach the top rung of the ladder. This makes their hearts sing!

What rung of the ladder will satisfy your entrepreneurial spirit?

## **5 Tips for Applying Entrepreneurial Courage**

As courageous female entrepreneurs maneuver through business pursuits, they recognize defining moments and apply courage (coming from their hearts and spirits). This conscious action is vital to their success, particularly during times of uncertainty. Based on five years of original research, twelve behaviors of courage emerged that cultivate a reservoir of courage. Below you will find five behaviors the courageous female entrepreneur can utilize to keep stepping up. Developing the following behaviors in yourself, you’ll be better able to call upon your courage when needed.

### *1. Constantly affirm your strength and determination*

The entrepreneurial spirit is a disciplined machine. Realize that no one expects you to be perfect. Take time for daily reflection (at least twenty minutes of silence) so you can evaluate and best apply your resources. When you know how your strengths can benefit your business idea, you’ll be able to do what you believe is right and see any challenge as an opportunity for unlimited growth.

### *2. Hurdle obstacles and take risks*

Every behavior you exhibit and every action you take is a conscious choice. Give yourself permission to choose to be different so you can creatively navigate your way

around, through, or over any obstacles that cross your path. Entrepreneurs know that mediocrity is the kiss of death. When you feel reluctance set in, ask yourself, “What’s the worst thing that can happen if I do this?” Usually the worst never occurs, so take the risk and step up the ladder. Remember this Ancient Chinese Proverb: *He who hesitates before each step spends his life on one leg.*

### 3. *Manifest vision*

There are no shortcuts when it comes to business success. Know where you want to go and develop a crystal clear vision of your goal. Become stubborn about attaining your vision so you can discard any non-productive judgments others put on you. Committing totally means you stay “true to yourself.”

### 4. *Reflect self-esteem*

All your actions reflect who you are and what you stand for. If you’re repeating a certain behavior that you don’t like, don’t editorialize! Look inside and ask, “What do I need to change?” Sharpen your skills and abilities through education, reading and training, and surround yourself with the kind of people you want to become. Remain disciplined and focused on the results.

### 5. *Speak up*

If you feel uncomfortable in a situation, believe your intuition and tell those involved why you believe the situation is not right. Exercise your courageous voice by challenging the status quo and making waves when someone is putting you down or attempting to deter your dreams. A true entrepreneur does not live in consensus. Instead, they think and ask this key question: “What courageous conversation are you not having?”

## **Claim Your Courage Today**

If courage has eluded you in the past, now is the time to step up and make your entrepreneurial vision a profile in courage—the one that reveals *your* heart and spirit. Make decisions based on your beliefs. Be vulnerable to admit a mistake. Reinvent yourself to begin a new business. And most important, manifest a vision and follow it to the end—that’s your courage at work!

When you follow a decisive course of action and do what it takes to live the entrepreneurial dream, you become a catalyst for profound change and a role model other women can follow. With such courageous capabilities, your future success is imminent.

### **Sidebar:**

If you want to enhance your courage quotient, practice the following exercise. You’ll soon be able to “step up” and tap into your courage reservoir. Remember, over time a reservoir evaporates, so the more you reveal your authenticity the larger the courage reserve.

1. Recall a specific moment in your entrepreneurial life when you were proud of yourself. Maybe you finally confronted the difficult client who always berated you. Perhaps you committed to learning a new skill that benefited your business. Whatever the event,

- relive that experience and determine the specific behavior you employed that made the difference. This was your courage at work!
2. Think of a recent time when courage and its energy (virtue in Latin means “energy”) were not called upon—when the portal to your heart was asleep. This was a missed opportunity you can never reclaim. You don’t want this to happen again. What possible outcomes may have been different if you had drawn from your reservoir of courage and stepped up? A courageous entrepreneur is not filled with regret.
  3. State your intent to claim your courage this year. Write down your “Declaration of Courageous Intention” (DCI) and post it prominently! Giving yourself permission is the first step to declaring your courage.
  4. As you form your footprints of courage throughout the year, notice how your actions reveal your authenticity. Then keep asking: “Am I applying the behaviors of courage?”

### **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](http://www.sandrawalston.com) or contact her 303.696.1010 or [Sandra@SandraWalston.com](mailto:Sandra@SandraWalston.com).

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