



Sandra Ford Walston

This is a perspective by Sandra Ford Walston.

Perspective is defined as one's mental view of facts, ideas, etc., and their interrelationships: *to have a perspective of a situation*; the ability to see all the relevant data in a meaningful relationship; a mental view or prospect.

**WITH COURAGE,
YOUR PASSION CANNOT BE DOUSED**

Uncertainty is an inevitable condition throughout life. While we would like to get up each day to face this perpetual unknown with courage, all too often, we feel *dis-couraged*. Discouragement saps our energy and resolve. Maybe that's why the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote, "Sometimes even to live is an act of courage."

Accepting the impossibility of knowing the future, of predicting an outcome, requires enormous courage. Yet, rarely do our parents, much less society, prepare us how to confront this elusive predicament by teaching us about the virtue of courage.

While courage is generally defined as facing and dealing with danger or difficulty, for me the essence of courage is a spiritual energy from the heart that in defining moments motivates a person to take action. In other words, it's when a situation requires you to "step up" and display the authentic you, and you do!

My desire to share this energy source guided me to write a book titled *COURAGE: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman/Reclaiming the Forgotten Virtue*. My premise that only ten to twelve percent of women would identify themselves as courageous was validated after collecting over 700 surveys. During the early stages of conducting my research, I looked the word courage up in the dictionary. To my amazement, I discovered the origin, *corage*, was medieval Old French, meaning "heart and spirit." Acting from my heart had always been how I chose to design and confront issues that emerged on my road of uncertainty. I realized then that courage was the guiding light that I used to hurdle obstacles and confront barriers.

My experiences about living in uncertainty are similar to those of others who encounter the normal bumps and bruises of living. The transitions in my life, whether day-to-day common issues such as dealing with the frustration that prices keep going up and up, or feeling agitated with a client's idiosyncrasies, or coping with more serious crises, I learned to approach each challenge with an ally—my courage. I

vowed that nothing was going to douse my passion. Protecting my passion required me to bundle a combination of courageous actions. Micro goal setting, continual learning, and being mindful of defining moments are a few of those components.

Courage was the source of heartiness that served me well. I refuse to be limited by the common, self-imposed limitation: no energy, no heart, no courage. When I decided to write a book on courage, I had already made four drastic career changes in the fields of education, real estate, banking, and speaking/training. Each time I changed from one career to the next, I was required to reinvent myself. Twice I moved to a city where I knew only one or two people. I had to find a suitable place to live, make quality friends, establish rapport with peers, develop business contacts, and of course earn a living. The key ingredient to my approach to all this change was the desire always to strive to step up to the next level of progress and personal growth. Frankly, I was unwilling to let anyone else design my life. Passion soars when courage is reclaimed.

Goals Are Footprints

Designing your life means that you manifest a vision and set goals. Living life with verve placed me on the edge, and living on the edge meant that complacency played no part in my course of action. For many years, while conducting seminars or facilitating Courage Coaching™, I would ask participants: “How many of you have ever had a great idea? A good idea?” They always looked at me with a smile that seemed to say, “Who hasn’t, you silly fool?” I would agree with them that most people have good ideas but, unfortunately, most people do not know how to implement their ideas, much less maintain the tenacity required to produce the ultimate result. Operating at the next level entails recognizing that your potential is limited only by which of two alternatives you choose: self-determination or self-limitation.

Linda, a colleague of mine, challenges herself each year to make new goals happen, holding herself accountable for the experiences in her life. Each September she takes a “self-exploration” vacation to Wyoming. There, surrounded by the beautiful Grand Teton Mountains, she ponders her agenda. One year she decided to explore a series of unlimited questions. “What would I do differently if I had unlimited time, unlimited money, unlimited market share, unlimited knowledge, etc?” Her answers to these questions were less than satisfying, since she realized in most ways she had achieved unlimited time, unlimited money, and unlimited market share.

These were not the things that presented barriers to satisfaction with her life. These were the wrong questions.

Near the last day of her vacation, while walking around Jenny Lake, she came up with a better question. “What if I had unlimited courage?” This turned out to be the right question. As she resumed her regular workaday routine, she immediately began to apply courage in all aspects of her life. Soon she began to feel noticeably greater satisfaction with her work and relationships, and inner peace as she applied her growing courage to daily problems. Later she wondered if her insight had been from cosmic sources; three months later she was diagnosed with breast cancer, which required a full measure of her newly activated courage. Linda now feels that courage is a part of her “success toolbox,” and that consciously and courageously setting goals generates the footprints of a fulfilling life.

Challenging ourselves to raise the bar to the next rung requires us to ask a somewhat daunting question: “How am I holding myself back from accomplishing my goals?”

A participant in one of my seminars came up with this reinforcement, “Write your goals. The paper won’t forget.” Research states that only two-to-three-percent of people write down their goals. A few years ago, while instructing goal-setting classes, I signed-up for a program in which the instructor listed seven major life categories on the white board: financial, spiritual, career, mental, physical, family, and recreation. We were to pick one of the major categories and identify our life goal in that category. I picked career, with “writing a non-fiction bestseller” as my goal in that category. Then we were to list all the specific action steps required to immediately start the ball rolling. After completing the list, we were to put the required steps in order of what needed to be started first, followed by the subsequent actions. I listed eight specific goals involving how I was going to learn to write and design my book. Identifying the goals energized me. I left the seminar determined to carry out those goals.

Several of the actions, such as buying a book about how to write a book proposal and formulating an outline for my manuscript, were accomplished in less than three months, while others took years. I surveyed and interviewed women for more than three years, and five years later, to the month, my goal that began with listing the required action steps produced a finished product, a book on women and courage.

My “courageous will” made this life goal possible. Believe me when I say I had no idea how to write, design or publish a book. I don’t even enjoy writing; I prefer speaking to express my ideas. This is when the ability to use courage to manifest vision comes into play. Carl Jung said, “Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside, awakens.”

I was determined that I would indeed look inside myself and awaken. Self-limitations were not going to sway me from accomplishing my life’s purpose. Little did I know that this fifth career would require me to muster all the courage I possessed. Many times, as the saying goes, the light at the end of the tunnel was an oncoming train. Yet, once I picked myself up and shook myself awake, I remembered what the great mystic Osho from India said:

You cannot be truthful if you are not courageous.

You cannot be loving if you are not courageous.

You cannot be trusting if you are not courageous.

You cannot enter into reality if you are not courageous.

Hence, courage comes first...and everything else follows.

Writing down goals has always been a vital part of my success quotient. No short cuts are allowed on the journey; otherwise, I shortcut the footprints of my life. A colleague shared in a presentation a study found in the book, *Adversity Quotient* by Paul Stoltz. The author wrote that about twenty percent of people don’t want much in life. They quit before they start. Another sixty-five percent of folks set their goals but stop during the climb. They settle before they reach the top of the mountain. The remaining fifteen percent set their goal, and begin the climb, but keep asking, “Do I want this?” Then, after reevaluating the difficulty to finish the climb, they decide if the sacrifice is worth the goal. They refuel and continue out of conscious choice, settling is not an option for these folks.

Wandering about without a vision leads to disappointment. I dislike this emotional zone. Success is earned by learning. Armed with my courage, I prefer to forge ahead straight toward my desired goal. When I am proactive (taking the bull by the horns) versus reactive (waiting for the bull to put his horns in my hands), I am able to say, “I did it my way.” There is a definite correlation between my success quotient and my courage quotient.

Unending Learning

Nothing is more valuable than to deepen the sense of who you are. No matter the goal, choosing to “know thyself” takes conscious choice and effective action to dive into your heart and spirit in order to confront the real you. Since most prefer to live in certainty, uncertainty is unsettling. In trying to change, misgivings about the emotions that surface are inevitable. But these new emotions become the foundation for learning, and the growth that comes with learning is the bedrock for new passion. George Eliot said, “It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

As a perpetual seeker in search of self, I have always been keenly interested in further developing my self-awareness. Old scripts and images that clutter my mind keep my spirit from being authentic. Learning became my main desire—learning about my family, peers, all the people my life touches. Many times my scattered learning felt like I was a spiritual wanderer on a lonely road going nowhere fast. Yet I found that when I resided in my courage—the authentic part of who I am—this force allowed me to press forward. It was as if I were wearing a placard that read, “I defy all the odds; I break the rules.” My mother says this conviction was in me as a little girl. I would get angry and throw temper tantrums if someone tried to make me subscribe to an idea or cultural belief that I could not accept. When I was about six, I wanted to grow up and be a news anchor. The images on TV told me that was a man’s job, but that was an assumption I disputed.

While I didn’t become a news anchor, later in life, I did challenge myself to write. First, I wrote articles, and then my book on courage. My intention was to help women understand what courage really is, why society rarely recognizes women as courageous, and why such recognition is vital to knowing ourselves. I believe wholeheartedly Aristotle’s allegation: “Courage is the first of human virtues because it makes all the other virtues possible.”

Defying accepted practices has been a theme in my life. In the 1970s, my uneven teeth diminished my self-esteem, and my smile remained hidden behind self-consciousness. Dental customs confirmed that I could not be fitted for braces because I was too old, my teeth might loosen and fall out. Fortunately, an orthodontist in my hometown was willing to let me be the first “old” ginny pig. Today my smile is readily available, and age plays little part in orthodontistry—you can be buried with braces. To challenge something erroneously established as fact cracks the belief in it and dispels it forever.

Applying courage to each of life's stepping-stones leaves a unique footprint, an imprint that can be charted and utilized again and again. But this is not an easy task. During the charge forward junctures in my life, I was told I was being "a little too strong." I call this kind of labeling the "too syndrome"—too assertive, too independent, too intense, too courageous, too deep, too smart. Maybe I instinctively took to heart the message I saw on a bumper sticker: "Well-behaved women rarely make history."

Such stereotypical limitations merely inspire me to step up my courage. Researching and writing a book on courage for women offered a new idea that women reclaim this innate virtue. Gender is not part of the component. Courage is about our make-up; our fundamental nature.

William James says in *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work*, "A new idea is first condemned as ridiculous, and then dismissed as trivial until finally it becomes what everybody knows."

Defining Moments

Defining moments are the times in life when one leaps forward to clarify heart and spirit. When we observe our choices in such moments, we define the virtues that make up our character.

One example would be confronting an uncomfortable truth by openly speaking up about it and perhaps halting an injustice. A mother who suspects her husband is molesting their daughter must face the truth and take realistic action. That can be difficult, as the outcome may necessitate her moving on to a new and different life. But if the woman remains silent, her lack of action betrays her daughter, and this suppression of her courage damages all concerned. In the midst of repulsion, her courage contains the capacity to change the situation, to right a wrong, and to rekindle her daughter's courage. Otherwise, the mother accepts an unimaginable blow to her own spirit as well as her daughter's. Which perspective is healthier: "Good mom's care, or Courageous mom's act?"

Defining moments means living in conscious choice. Holding one's self totally responsible for one's life is another key illustration. Throughout my years of conducting Courage Coaching™ for women, I noticed a pattern in the way women communicate their feelings. Women have a cultural tendency to be so appreciative for any opportunity offered them that they appear importune. Recently, a coaching client of mine interviewed for a chief operating officer of a business. She had never

held this title before but was well qualified for the advancement. While on the interview, her failure to speak up and state clearly why she was eligible for the position undermined her chances of being selected. Her passion was doused!

Women have a tendency to say, “Oh, thank you for this opportunity,” instead of stating the qualities and skills they bring to the party. This is a missed opportunity. Women think if they have the courage to speak up they are exhibiting an offensive behavior—the “too syndrome” in operation. In reality, the action taken, or lack of action, reveals their courage quotient. When we don’t recognize our potential for wisdom and courage, our spirit slowly erodes.

Social Change

A new millennium is unfolding. Technology, science, the media, and social changes, including the roles of the sexes, are outpacing humanity’s ability to respond positively. The old rules about how we live our lives are becoming blurred and hard to follow. There are no guaranteed roads to fulfillment and prosperity.

Unchallenged wrongs kill heart and spirit, but courageous active voices can change mind-enslaving ideas and influences. Only the forceful assertion of heart and spirit will assure women a promising future in which unlimited potential comes to fruition. We are free to act through the portal of the heart. Such action is called 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

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