

What Courage Is NOT!

Amazing Heroics—Leaves You Out!

Few people regard facing an average workday as a courageous feat because their notions about courage are too restricted. Traditionally, facing fear under perilous circumstances is our only understanding of “courageous.” Running into a burning building to save a pet, pushing a pedestrian out of the way of a speeding car, jumping in front of a bear to divert its path, throwing yourself on a grenade to save your squad or tackling a fleeing criminal are readily accepted instances. And, these heroic or amazing acts are rarely associated with women.

Most ideas about courage lean toward instinctual reactions to sensational, life-threatening incidents that require split-second decisions. A local radio announcer reiterated this stereotype on his program. He defined courage as “the man who pulls a guy out of the Potomac River when a plane goes down or the guy who runs into a burning building to get some kid out—that’s courageous, not some woman who teaches in a hard-luck school in the ghetto for twenty-five years because ‘they need her’ or some kid who sends in his pitiful allowance to the Red Cross when there’s a flood in Africa, or the guy who tells on a cheating boss. These are nice people, but they’re not really courageous! Real courage takes a lot of muscle and split-second thinking.”

I prefer a more enlightened understanding of this virtue and how it will empower us to take effective steps toward fulfilling lives and careers. For over a decade, I have researched the behaviors and nuances of the misunderstood virtue called courage, and I am convinced that our culture’s limited understanding of courage holds us all back, especially women. From a more enlightened perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of the feminine behaviors of courage and how they will make us more effective in our lives, including in the workplace.

The traditional understanding of courage limits it to physical bravado displayed in extreme situations. Such situations require split-second decisions and immediate reactions, but this book does not discuss these heroic reactions to danger. This “courage in the face of danger” is quite different from and detracts from true courage, which persists far longer than any split-second reaction. It seems as if most of us believe that only larger-than-life personalities are capable of responding with courage. Yet, for the vast majority of the world’s “everyday people,” life provides daily instances of courageous acts.

For me, the common understanding of courage is more accurately labeled as heroism, “ignoring the threat to your own personal safety and putting the lives of your fellow human beings ahead of your own.”¹ True heroism often involves risking your life. During 9-11, “The true heroes were those who saw a purpose bigger than themselves in the heat of the moment, when the natural instinct was for self-preservation.”² Notions of courage as extreme or dramatic heroism diminish the opportunities to substantiate and display true courage—the courage that also underscores *your* life. Author Marilyn Thomsen once said, “While it takes courage to achieve greatness, it takes more courage to find fulfillment in being ordinary. For the joys that last have little relationship to achievement.”³

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 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 Editorial, “Worker at Airport Defines Heroism,” August 19, 2005, Brampton Guardian-Ontario, Canada, <http://www.northpeel.com/br/editorial/editorial/story/2980895p-3455667c.html>

² Daniel R. Castro, “What Heroes See that the Rest of Us Don’t,” *Inside*, September 2005, 18.

³ <http://www.inspirationpeak.com/cgi-bin/search.cgi?search=courage&method=all&page=1>