



Sandra Ford Walston

Women Integrating Workday Courage

Sandra Ford Walston, The Courage Expert

Few women regard facing an average workday as a courageous feat. Why? Traditionally, only facing fear under perilous circumstances is labeled courageous. Running into a burning building to save a pet, pushing a pedestrian out of the way of a speeding car, or tackling a robber in flight are readily accepted instances of courageous action.

However, courage actually has a much deeper meaning and a more relevant role in today's business world, especially for women. Let's consider some very real possibilities:

- A woman has been passed over for a promotion and is upset. How can she find the courage to speak up and state her qualifications?
- A woman's boss is sexually harassing her. How can she draw from her reservoir of courage and take action to confront him?
- A woman has made an error in a corporate proposal for a customer. How can she find the courage to be vulnerable and admit her mistake?
- A woman learns she has an illness that might jeopardize her career. How can she face her fear and summon the courage to affirm her determination?

While none of the above examples are perilous, life-threatening events in the typical sense, they are all common occurrences that challenge women and test their courage every day. When women exhibit courage in the workplace, whether it is by taking a stand or taking a professional risk, they tap into a valuable personal reserve.

Courageous women "step up" to the next level. As a result, they process choices more quickly and take action more readily. They design their lives rather than letting outside influences dictate who they are or what they should be.

To fully understand the importance of a woman's courage in the workplace, we must first go back to the word's origin. The word "courage" comes from the French word *corage*, meaning heart and spirit. Throughout history, women have always acted from their heart, but male notions of courage as heroic have diminished recognition of feminine courage. These workplace losses accumulate, obscuring an

equal playing field for women and causing them to doubt their own courage. Without this vital virtue, a key part of a woman's spirit is lost.

Unfortunately, when working women do demonstrate the behaviors of courage, they're commonly labeled with some unflattering word to keep them "in their place." On a performance review, they may receive comments such as "too strong," "too determined," "too driven," or "too aggressive." The irony is that for men, these descriptions are often desirable, but for women, such adjectives are viewed as negative. However, these stereotypical limitations can actually benefit women by inspiring them to increase their courage quotient by acknowledging and honoring their individual courageous behaviors.

How can a woman detect and regain her courage today? In an effort to help women reclaim their courageous spirit, the book *COURAGE: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman/ Reclaiming the Forgotten Virtue* encourages women to rediscover the feminine courage in themselves that has been dormant in many women for so long. When a woman learns to uphold her courageous nature in the workplace, she can gain the equality that has been eluding her.

Being mindful of defining moments

Being passed over for a promotion, not receiving a fair raise, being spoken down to, or having your boss publicly reprimand you are a few examples of career defining moments. Recognizing these workplace incidents is the first step to reclaiming your courage.

Unfortunately, many women misinterpret these moments and respond in defeating ways when the correct choice would be to declare their courage. They may believe these events are "part of the job," or they may feel that in some way they deserved the unfair treatment. They become the martyr in order to keep the peace or maintain the status quo, which ultimately stifles their courage further.

If you have difficulty recognizing the defining moments in your own workday, ask yourself which events make you upset, angry, uncomfortable, embarrassed, or cause you to acquiesce. Chances are those are the times you will want to display your newfound courage. The first step to reclaiming your courage is to realize which specific events challenge your effectiveness, and then acknowledge the pattern that undermines your progress.

Facing the ultimate truth

When you determine a defining moment is occurring, you can “manage up” and take control. By doing so, you’ll be able to face the truth of the situation and do something about it, whether that means confronting a supervisor or rectifying a situation with a customer. If you don’t take the appropriate actions, you’re holding yourself back from achieving your professional best.

One sure way to take control of your future is to begin searching for a new job or career, especially if your current position doesn’t represent or satisfy your principles. All too often, women assume that finding a new job will be difficult, so they remain complacent, mistakenly believing—or simply hoping—that things will change. Yet, in reality, situations seldom change by themselves. They only change when you take the initiative to make the situation better. To show courage, decide when it’s time to face the truth or prompt a change, and then be eager to discover the next opportunity. This is your life to change. Motivation is the key.

Holding yourself accountable

Courageous women are 100 percent responsible for how they design their lives. This includes taking credit for accomplishments when merited. When receiving a promotion or a pay raise, women have a tendency to say, “Oh, thank you for this opportunity.” This is not courage. A truly courageous woman responds to the promotion or pay raise by stating the qualities and strengths they bring to the table and describing how they intend to use those talents to better the company or the project at hand.

Remember, getting a promotion or some other accolade at work isn’t a gift. It’s something you’ve worked hard for and deserve. The action you take or don’t take during such a situation reveals your true courage quotient. When you fail to insist on credit for your accomplishments, your spirit slowly shrinks.

Overcoming limitations by changing your “courageous will”

Finally, women everywhere can foster courage by gaining control over the blueprint that governs their belief system. Being “lady-like” is one societal perception deeply imbedded in the psyche of our culture. The woman is focused on others and is reserved, supportive, considerate, and compliant. Such limited aspirations paralyze women and cause them to flounder about in the traditional deep-rooted definition of courage: being physical, daring, or representing valor. A woman’s desire to be “accepted” can undermine her personal demonstrations of courage.

How can you change your courageous will? Look for female role models that display workday courage. Role models are imprints for change; they light the path. As more women recognize and subscribe to the behaviors of courage, such notions will no longer be deemed unusual. Other women will be encouraged to display their courage, and their collective behaviors will ease or even erase the idea that “by nature, women are not courageous.” When women work together to advance courage in the workplace, they find the strength and determination to hurdle the daily workday challenges that confront them. Eventually, the unsung stories of courage and the current denigrating of courageous women will be replaced by an acceptance and admiration of courage in women just as it is in men.

Working successfully with courage

Women who view themselves as courageous have a distinct advantage in the workplace. Not only do they have the power to direct their lives, but also they are more willing to accept the success that comes from taking a stand or making a change. Truly courageous women have learned to overcome the business world’s stereotypes in an effort to lead more fulfilling professional and personal lives.

By integrating the virtue of courage and instilling it into the workday, women everywhere have the opportunity to take action and call on courage, or “turn up” the quantity they already possess. That’s a good thing if we plan to pass this feminine energy on to our daughters, nieces, or the girl next door.

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

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