

# Conclusion:

## Answering Frequently Asked Questions

*When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and I could say: 'I used everything you gave me'.*

— Erma Bombeck

### 1. How do you define courage in your books?

In contemporary usage, the word courage generally means bravery. This definition narrows courage to facing and dealing with danger as it relates to physical valor. Courage is much more complex than spontaneous reactions to traumatic events as indicated by the fact that it is one of the cardinal virtues of antiquity. In my books, I return to the original definition of courage based on the Old French *corage*, meaning “heart and spirit” because it empowers people to realize their full potential as courageous human beings.

### 2. Why is courage often considered a male quality?

Pulp fiction, comic books, action-oriented television programs and films have all contributed to the limiting, male-oriented view of courage. The more women recognize the essence of their courage, the more society will break from its stereotypical understanding of courage as physical daring or bravado. When we explode the myth that women rarely demonstrate courage, it encourages women to claim and manifest their courage.

### 3. Why did you write this book?

I have gone through several painful experiences in my own life that made me think about the inner resources I employed to transition through seven distinct careers. I discovered that I’ve always drawn upon a critical but silent source of energy—courage—to guide me through these changes. I wondered if other women were *consciously* using this energy to transcend work barriers, so I set out to find the answer. I wrote this book to help women

- recognize the elements of courage,
- understand why such recognition is vital to their self-fulfillment, and
- recognize how to employ courage-based practices to overcome the obstacles they face at work. .

The journey of this book is to *encourage* every woman to make the choice to display her courage at work. False limitations keep women stuck in conformity (which kills courage).

**4. What research did you conduct for the original book *Courage: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman/Reclaiming the Forgotten Virtue* that applies to this book?**

For the original book I conducted five years of original research, including collecting a survey from over 750 women. The survey was distributed to a random sampling of women between the ages of twenty-one and eighty-seven. The survey asked women to choose nine characteristics out of a list of thirty-six that best completed the sentence: “I perceive myself to be...”

The findings supported my premise that “courageous” is not a common adjective women use to describe themselves. Only eleven percent of 750 respondents perceived and described themselves as courageous. For over two years, I then interviewed these women to find out how they defined and exemplified courage. I found that their stories of courage had certain aspects in common. My research uncovered twelve feminine behaviors of courage. The second book, *STUCK*, extends that research to include the twelve obstacles that hold women back from stepping up the leadership ladder and the twelve matching courage actions to unlock, cultivate and advance a woman’s career (regardless of the job description).

**5. What is the cost to a woman for not being aware of her courage at work?**

The costs can range from a life of mediocrity or conformity to a life of pain and suffering. For the woman who doesn’t speak up and state directly why she is qualified to be the first female CFO of the company, there is a missed opportunity. For the woman who doesn’t stop an injustice or an abuse, there is tremendous regret and pain. For the woman who can’t remember happiness in her heart, there is a slow and painful death of spirit. When you don’t recognize your potential for courage, your spirit erodes.

**6. How can women implement courage in their personal lives so that they can implement it at work?**

My first book, *Courage: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman/Reclaiming the Forgotten Virtue* is the primer to identifying, claiming and applying courage in your personal life. There is an innovative three-step process for discovering and claiming courage.

**Step One—Self-Discovery.** This process requires you to conduct a self-audit in order to identify issues and patterns of behavior that are keeping you from creating the life you desire.

**Step Two—the “Source Wheel.”** (See page 86 or <http://www.sandrawalston.com/book/source-wheel/>). This chart enables you to identify those actions you want to reclaim so that you can consciously commit to changing your life.

**Step Three—Techniques.** This final step is to identify which courageous actions from you will apply in specific circumstances.

### **7. In what ways does language play a role in integrating courage at work?**

Language is a tool that can be used to release us from our “false selves”\* and our inability to live from our essence. I wrote in *COURAGE*, “Expressing one’s thoughts and feelings in language frees the spirit. Simply using the word courage to describe female energy perpetuates the feminine voice and sets a context for positive action. By seeing things differently through the words you choose, you also are able to choose your behavior and to create a desired result. Language has great power to enable or discourage.”<sup>1</sup> Start using the word, *courage*, to identify a new behavior or pinpoint when you stepped outside your comfort level, and then take time to celebrate the step up.

### **8. How would society benefit if more women claimed their courage at work?**

Many of the women I interviewed learned how to be courageous through their own experiences or by watching men maneuver in tough situations. Once they discovered and expressed their courage, they were able to pass this wisdom on to others, particularly their daughters. We have an incredible opportunity to stand in courage and guide the next generation through the universal struggles of growing up.

The ultimate goal in defining and understanding courage as a genderless virtue is to place value on behaviors other than death-defying acts—behaviors that are typically viewed as feminine, such as raising children. The more we accept the idea of courage as a feminine virtue, the greater the possibility of raising sensitive, concerned, caring and open-minded children in a society that seems more and more to have lost its sense of the humane.

### **9. You are recognized for your work as a courage researcher, speaker, learning consultant, and a Courage Coach, but how would you define courage? Is it different for different people?**

Let’s start with a foundation that reveals a few perspectives about what courage is and is not and then move into my research and findings.

**Impoverished Courage.** First of all, the predominant cultural understanding of courage has become limited and impoverished. Nowadays, only facing fear under perilous circumstances tends to receive the courage label. Running into a burning building to save a child, pushing a pedestrian out of the way of a speeding car, throwing oneself on a grenade in battle, or tackling an escaping robber are readily accepted as courageous behavior.

Our understanding of courage makes an enormous difference. One radio announcer said, “It’s 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 stupid 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 courageous! Real courage takes a lot of muscle and split-second thinking.”

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In my opinion, this radio announcer denigrates true courage by confining it to physical bravado. Most ideas about courage lean toward split-second sensationalism that relies on instinct instead of integrity. Perhaps this man believes only larger-than-life people possess the prime personality traits capable of responding in an emergency. Yet, in between, there's all of life for us "everyday people." Besides, plenty of ordinary people like Rosa Parks have made their mark on history along with other "famous" people such as Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa. What I am suggesting is that everyday people like you and me display courage constantly and subtly, and this everyday courage hinges on the personal integrity that empowers us to manifest the truth of our "heart and spirit."

**Etymology of Courage.** Courage originates from the Old French *corage*, meaning "heart and spirit." I apply this original definition to my life. Becoming aware of the behaviors and rewards of courage, I feel more empowered to be discerning and better able to respond to my inherent energy of courage. The word virtue (*virtus*) in Latin means "energy." Hiding my courage drains my energy, but when I recognize and act on my courage my reservoir overflows with the energy of courage. My courage reservoir is full when I turn down a piece of business because it doesn't feel like the right fit. When I constantly ask, "Am I being true to who I am?" I know that I am applying the virtue of courage to my life.

**Courage Research.** My research demonstrates that different people define courage differently. *Your* definition of courage defines who you are! Based on my first five years of courage research, I identified twelve behaviors of courage, including living your convictions, manifesting vision, affirming strength and determination and conquering fear.

**Virtues are Abstract.** Most people say, "Courage is not even a word I had given much thought to." Like all virtues, it is abstract. We grow up learning other virtues, such as honesty, integrity or humor, but courage is the forgotten virtue because people do not recognize their everyday actions as significant. Courage is a state of Being. Sometimes courage is about making sacrifices for a bigger principle. Acts of personal courage rarely roar!

Each day your actions define who you are and reveal your heart. Most people do not perceive themselves as courageous, and only eleven percent of women do. What's required is a shift in cultural tenets that begins with learning about courage at school, home and work; then, you learn that courage is the mother of all the virtues.

To initiate that change in perspective, answer these four questions:

1. When was the last time you used the word "courage?"
2. Are you willing to invite true "heart and spirit" courage into your life?
3. When your time comes to pass on, will you have been true to your heart and spirit, or will you have regrets that you did not go for what interests you?
4. Do one or more obstacles like inertia, denial, invisibility or apathy have you stuck?

There is an untapped reservoir of courage in us all.

**10. Why did you choose courage as your expertise? Was it because you already had enough, or too little? Can it even be assessed in those terms—too much or too little?**

**Why Research Courage?** I chose to research the behaviors of courage when I faced a multifaceted hurdle, or what some would call a dark night of the soul. I always felt my courage was innate but under this duress and during times of uncertainty, I had to summon it and trust that it would propel me through this situation. Would I be able to step up and reinvent myself one more time? This is about trusting my instincts in the moment. My story is not unusual. Most people have a story about something that pushed them to make a change, face the facts or make sacrifices. The problem is that we don't label our responses to these trials as courage, yet the choice and capability is waiting to be awakened. If I can do it, you can do it!

Once I moved past this dark night of the soul, I began a new journey that started with researching the feminine behaviors of courage. I wondered if other women (and men) called upon their courage during times of uncertainty or suffering. Now, after thirteen years of research, my understanding of this virtue continues to deepen. My dear friend Blanche Napoleon demonstrated a keen sense of this energy when she shared, "Courage is both my friend and my teacher. Without courage, I would be an empty shell. With courage, I am complete and full of love and yearning for life and whatever it brings."

**Too Much or Too Little?** I don't think you can ever have too much courage. I did not write the book I needed to read, but I know when my courage runs low or goes into hiding. Most people will change when the pain of staying stuck in an old pattern is greater than the pain of change. But why go through so much suffering? There is always a choice: you can choose to build and draw from a reservoir of courage. Relying on your innate courage supports you in standing up for the self you know to be you. The choice is yours, and it starts with overcoming inertia. Are you stuck in inertia, and will you choose to overcome it by giving yourself permission to claim your courage? Once you give yourself permission, you will become conscious about your spirit's dignity and true essence. You know when you have stayed on a job far too long because it is bleeding your heart instead of feeding your spirit. When you choose to design new choices, you limit the residual of regret.

**11. Your first book, *COURAGE: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman* focuses on women and feminine courage. Is women's courage different from men's? Are women more or less inclined to find courage in the workplace?**

**Male Notions of Courage.** I have not conducted qualitative research on courage gender differences. Gender colors behavior, perception and perspectives. I have researched and discovered that throughout history, women have always acted from their hearts, but male notions of courage as heroic have diminished recognition of feminine courage. Perhaps women have been unconscious of the truth that they have always been

courageous. Discovering courage awakens a feminine energy that every woman should utilize.

**Women and Courage at Work.** In today's business world, courage has a much deeper meaning and a more relevant role for women (e.g., the family-career balancing act, confrontation issues, re-entering the workplace, political finesse, women undermining other women and the way people judge women who stand in their "originality").

When women exhibit courage behavior in the workplace (e.g., by taking a stand on a precarious issue or speaking up in a traditional male industry) they tap into a valuable personal reserve of energy called courage. This energy is very different from the sensational, spur-of-the-moment energy exemplified in instinctual bravery. Courageous women "step up" to the next leadership level. They design their steps rather than letting outside influences dictate who they are or what they should be. As a result of learning to live wholly in the moment and having the courage to stop and reflect, they process choices clearly and quickly, take action more readily and stay centered in their Truth. Courage Centering is a program I conduct to assist people in this process.

**The Label Trap.** Unfortunately, when working women do demonstrate the behaviors of courage, they're often labeled with some unflattering word to "keep them in their place." On a performance review, they may receive comments that reflect what I call the "too syndrome": "too strong," "too driven" or "too outspoken." The irony is that for men, these descriptions are often desirable. However, if used to inspire a woman to action, these stereotypical limitations can actually benefit women, allowing them to overcome obstacles like manipulation and intimidation. Facing habitual stereotypes, we should all acknowledge and honor the personal courageous behaviors in every human spirit so that we move beyond the limitations of typecasting.

**12. Do you think organizations undervalue the effect courage can have to the bottom line? Is it a requirement or a good thing for our leaders and employees to demonstrate?** Most organizations do undervalue the power of everyday courage and its bottom line effect. It's the same with quality control, risk management or diversity. How do you label or pigeonhole an abstract? How do capture the nuances of the human condition? In reality, each person has the capacity to be a courageous leader regardless of his or her company position. Whether you're a graphic designer, administrative assistant, sales executive or CEO, how you confront workday issues and contribute to your own professional advancement speak volumes about your courage quotient and set a leadership example others can follow.

Unfortunately, most people do not identify and demonstrate courage as one of their primary leadership skills at work. They mistakenly believe that courage is only relevant during particularly risky times, such as downsizing. As a result, they don't perceive exploring new ideas, confronting gossip, transitioning to a new career, transcending rejection or taking initiative as courageous leadership moments. If an employee starts to awaken her individual courage, she may confront elements of

corruption and begin to ask: "What can I affect in our culture when corporate corruption seems to be so pervasive? How am I selling my soul?"

Ask yourself: "Am I a profile in courage at work?" Chances are, you don't think of yourself in that light. Courage is the awareness of the heart. If you have lost touch with your heart, your essence, purge the obstacles and change. The change begins with a shift in your perspective and occurs when you come to understand and practice the art of being present. Present to your actions, you regain your courage and step up the leadership ladder.

### **13. Who decides if we have been or are courageous at work? If no one notices our courage, does it matter? Is it just about what it does for the individual or does it have a wider impact?**

**Recognition.** Most organizations have not developed a program that supports courage-based leadership, nor have they distinguished the value of courage in the individual spirit. First, the individual must recognize the twelve obstacles that may have them stuck and then declare a courageous intention to display the twelve courage actions.

Does it matter if this behavior goes unnoticed? No. Your journey is about your dignity and fulfilling your vision. Inserting your spirit at work makes a positive and practical difference. Look around and you will observe a courageous person, like the leader who guides his or her team members to build on their strengths as well as recognize their weaknesses. These people are "courage change agents," and they come in all shapes and sizes because one size of courage does not fit all. Unfortunately, most organizations do not celebrate courage-defining moments demonstrated by their courageous employees.

**Impact.** While courage begins with each individual, it certainly has a wider impact, especially for women in today's business world. Let's consider some very real possibilities for both genders.

- A woman has been passed over for a well-deserved promotion. How can she find the courage to speak up and state her qualifications?
- A man has made an error in a corporate proposal for a customer. How can he find the courage to admit his mistake instead of trying to cover up the truth?
- 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 is a perilous, life-threatening event, they challenge both genders to overcome personal and professional obstacles. Without the virtue of courage, a key part of a human being's spirit is lost. **13. Is courageous leadership a matter of amazing moments, or is it about a shift in lifestyle?**

Courageous leadership is a lifestyle choice. Ask yourself: "Why would I want to exhibit the efficiency that courageous leadership enables?" You will discover that there is a direct correlation between your "courage quotient" and your "success quotient." When you begin to live in the present you can recognize when you are selling your soul. For

example, people 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. To show courage, decide when it's time to face the truth or prompt a change: then, be eager to discover the next opportunity. Facing the facts and taking action are required if you wish to change your life.

The concepts of courage-centered living are deceptively simple. The mind (ego) will want to undermine them. After all, how could something so easy work? In the article "Simple Courage" René Da Costa writes that people demonstrate a tendency to shun simplicity for complexity. "Simplicity takes talent and dedication... It takes courage to advocate simplicity. Simplicity has nowhere to hide and neither do those who advocate it."<sup>2</sup> We become courageous by being courageous. It's that simple! All you have to do is decide whether this forgotten virtue is worth learning. Leadership qualities are defined by courage, such as asking for the tough project or staying focused on the results. What would motivate you to explore where this ancient virtue fits into your work life?

**14. Are the people with whom you work borrowing your courage or finding their own? Is it important to recognize and identify with other courageous people?**

People with whom I work are beginning to be curious about their own courage, and they are starting to redefine their perspectives and viewpoints. I heard one woman say that she was "becoming attracted" to the word. I guide people through the process of uncovering their own personal courage. This three-step process requires time and dedication and is akin to taking an aerial photograph of your courage. Imagine if you were to survey new terrain in a low-flying airplane. On the first pass, the new area looks unfamiliar. The second time around, you spot some points of reference, such as a riverbed or small lake. The third time, the terrain starts to make sense. Finally, you gain familiarity with the new territory through simple exposure. It is the same with learning to recognize courage. The problem is that most people want answers, not self-reflection. They prefer a "courage pill" for quick relief.

Recognizing and identifying with other courageous people are important. Courage is usually identified with fictional drama, soap opera sagas, tabloid headlines, etc. Great and rare leaders who became legends started as simple, ordinary people. Against overwhelming odds, courageous individuals like Martin Luther King Jr. acted from their hearts and applied the behaviors of courage. Their presence lent considerable strength to their causes, and their legacies include the positive ways in which they influenced other people to claim their own courage.

**15. Is courage a matter of process and training or something else? Can it be taught or does it have to be discovered?**

My research demonstrates that courage exists within each of us, and I believe that courage is your birthright! When you allow your courage to surface, you learn to cultivate and nurture it. How you learn to recognize and manifest your courage does not



really matter. What matters is your receptivity. That being said, having a parent or mentor who teaches you about your courage can be a tremendous benefit. Life is rarely anguish-free. It takes personal courage to overcome challenges and become the person you are capable of being. Ask yourself, "Am I willing to live my life with courage in a new way?"

#### **16. What influence would you like your personal discoveries and insights to have on women at work?**

I would like for my work to inspire and empower women to take control of the blueprints that governs their belief systems. For example, a woman's desire for social acceptance can undermine her personal courage. Such limited aspirations paralyze women and cause them to flounder about in society's traditional definitions of women's roles in the workplace. Once women empower themselves with courage, they can overcome the obstacles that perpetuate inequities in the workplace. Additionally, women need to purge from the female psyche the tendency to employ "indirect aggression" to undermine the courageous acts of other women.

To strengthen your courageous will, look for female role models who display unsung day-to-day courage. Role models light the path to positive change. As more women recognize and manifest the behaviors of courage, the notion of feminine courage will no longer seem unusual. Other women will be encouraged to display their courage, and their collective behaviors will ease or even erase the idea that women are not courageous by nature. When women bond together to advance courage in the workplace, they find the strength and determination to hurdle the daily workday challenges that confront them. Eventually, the current denigration of courageous women and their unsung stories will be replaced by acceptance and admiration.

Women who view themselves as courageous have a distinct advantage in the workplace. Not only do they have the power to direct their lives, they are also more willing to accept the success that comes from taking a stand or making a courageous change. Truly courageous women have learned to overcome the business world's stereotypes in an effort to lead more fulfilling professional and personal lives. Katherine Graham, the former CEO of the *Washington Post* provides a great example. Many say she was the greatest CEO of American history. Another courageous woman, Clare Boothe Luce, once said, "Courage is the ladder on which all the other virtues mount." By integrating the virtue of courage into their day-to-day work, women everywhere have the opportunity to call on their courage and take action.

I also suggest that women watch for career-defining moments (e.g., being passed over for a promotion, not receiving a fair raise, being spoken down to, being undermined by another woman or being publicly reprimanded). Recognizing these workplace incidents is the first step to reclaiming your everyday courage. Unfortunately, many women misinterpret these defining moments and respond in self-defeating ways when the better choice would be to demonstrate their courage. They may believe these incidents are "just 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 find it difficult to recognize the defining moments in your own workday, ask yourself what events make you upset, angry, uncomfortable, embarrassed or acquiescent. Those are the times when you will want to display your newfound courage. Recognize which specific events challenge your effectiveness; then, acknowledge the pattern that undermines your progress.

### **17. What are the feminine behaviors of courage?**

The courageous women who I interviewed during my research

- perceived themselves as courageous,
- lived in conscious choice,
- acted decisively,
- confronted the facts,
- conversed in the language of courage,
- understood and emphasized the courageous steps in their lives,
- continued to “step up” regardless of obstacles,
- evaluated the consequences of sacrifice and discipline,
- respected the power of “courageous will,”
- remained focused on the goal at all times, and
- stayed authentic or “true to their hearts” in spite of the circumstances.

Ask yourself: How many of these attributes do you identify with? The more items you identify with, the more apt you are to excel at manifesting your courage and designing your destiny. My goal is for women to animate their individual courage consciousness, celebrate collective courage and pass on this collective intention. “When persons open themselves to each other and focus on a common goal, their individual energies meld in a way that mediates contact with levels of intelligence and creativity that are beyond the reach of these individuals acting alone.”<sup>3</sup>

### **18. Exactly what is courage in the workplace? Is there such a thing as “team” courage, or is it individual?**

Courage in the workplace begins at the personal level, in the “heart and spirit” of each employee, and finds expression in the twelve courage actions (e.g., asking for the tough project, confronting an uncomfortable truth and exiting bad situations quickly). Easily distracted by politics and personalities, we forget to focus on the main issue—getting results through collaboration (not consensus). Results mean a profitable business. Claiming your courage, like achieving organizational goals, is very simple. What are the results you are trying to achieve? How can you contribute? Is your intention aligned with purpose?

### **19. Is there such a thing as “team” courage, or is it individual?**

Courage paradoxes permeate the workplace, making it difficult to distinguish “team” courage (an independent thinker who also contributes to the team, and a team player who does not bend under pressure, for example). When an individual commits to a

courageous leadership environment that includes the twelve courage actions, team courage prevails. Conversely, if each individual portrays courageous leadership, “team courage” still shines. Both examples reflect courage consciousness; it is simply manifested in different ways.

\*False self—the self-image developed to cope with the emotional trauma of early childhood that seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem and power/control and which bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification (Thomas Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart*).

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<sup>1</sup> Walston, Sandra Ford, *COURAGE: The Heart and Spirit of Every Woman*, 2001, 158.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.management-issues.com/2007/5/1/opinion/simple-courage.asp>, (assessed July 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Christopher M. Bache, *Dark Night, Early Dawn: Steps to a Deep Ecology of the Mind*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 209.