Preface

Egotism is the glue with which you get stuck in yourself.

— Dan Post

Shocked and dismayed, Sophie, the CEO of a community hospital faced a career-defining moment when a whistle-blower informed her that another employee had eliminated crucial steps in the process for sterilizing surgical equipment. The employee had demonstrated a complete lack of integrity that threatened to undermine everything the hospital stood for. "We discovered ninety patients who were potentially exposed to cross-infection from the improperly sterilized equipment," Sophie said. How would you handle this situation as the CEO or the employee who exposed the impropriety?

Fortunately for the public, both women, the CEO and the whistle-blower demonstrated courage. "If we screw up," Sophie said, "we are going to tell you in an appropriate and timely disclosure. Regardless of the devastating PR and lack of confidence the public could have with our facility, we create a workplace culture that supports reporting errors at all levels. We care about the patients and chose not to hide behind risk-management." This courageous woman trusted that her forthrightness would establish trust with their patients in the event that they discovered a positive exposure. The hospital took the most courageous step they could by personally contacting every patient. "No 800 number in a form letter for our patients," Sophie said proudly, "we contacted them all. We treated patients individually, and we gave the institution a face, a name and a resource that they could contact because we used one nurse."

While you are most likely not the CEO of a company, true practitioners of everyday courage, like Sophie, do not allow obstacles to prevent them from establishing high standards of integrity. They trust their own abilities, showcase their talents and create the disciplines that reveal their essence. Without the power of her innate courage, this woman could not have taken the risky steps that allowed her to achieve community and board approval.

During thirteen years of research, I have discovered that, when women face obstacles, our natural tendencies often reinforce these obstacles instead of moving us beyond them. But eleven percent of the women I interviewed have learned to overcome obstacles as a matter of course. These women span the range of job descriptions, yet they all recognize and utilize a crucial source of personal empowerment and motivation—courage. The other eighty-nine percent mistakenly believe that courage is only relevant during particularly perilous times, so they do not perceive the courageous aspects of exploring new ideas, creating innovative businesses, transcending rejection or taking the initiative.

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To understand fully the importance of courage in overcoming workplace obstacles, we must first understand the true meaning of the word. Courage comes from the French word *corage*, meaning "heart and spirit," which tells us that acting with courage is really about acting from your heart and spirit—from the center of *your* being. In other words, living courageously is not so much about what you are *doing* as who you are *being*!

Whether your entrepreneurial spirit is stuck in self-doubt or your commitment to excellence is stuck beneath a glass ceiling, your relationship to your innate courage affects how you view the obstacles you face and your ability to overcome them. Courage lies within each of us, and as you learn to employ the tools of your courage, you will overcome obstacles that once seemed overwhelming. Your courage will enable you to rise above every challenge so that you stand as an example, en*courag*ing your peers to overcome their own obstacles.

Your attitude toward your work reveals much about the obstacles that hold you back. Do you cherish your job? Very few people do, but I have yet to meet a single person who does not wish to be happy at work. A recent Gallup poll found that job satisfaction has steadily declined from nearly sixty percent in 1995 to just fifty percent in 2004. Stop for a moment and reflect. If you could choose, what job would you love to have more than any other? Overcoming obstacles begins with learning to stop and reflect on key questions so that you live from the inside, from the core of your true being—your heart and spirit. Reflection invites stillness. Stillness aligns you with your heart, your passion and your joy. With this book as your guide, you will reconnect with your heart's passions, empowering yourself to overcome the twelve biggest obstacles that hold women back at work:

1. Inertia
2. Intimidation
3. Denial
4. Blame
5. Uncertainty
6. Invisibility
7. Defeat
8. Self-Neglect
9. Self-Doubt
10. Apathy
11. Manipulation
12. Ambiguity

For each of these obstacles, courage provides a specific response—a "courage action" that enables you to transcend the limitations imposed by that obstacle (See "The Courage Wheel" chart in the next chapter). By practicing these courage actions, you will

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tap into the hidden power of your personal courage, enabling you to prevail over obstacles and situations that once seemed impossible.

Levels of Consciousness

The profound consciousness research of Dr. David Hawkins (M.D., Ph.D.) provides crucial insights into the obstacles to personal growth. In over twenty years of research, Hawkins has delineated levels of consciousness on a scale of twenty to a thousand (with seven hundred and above representing enlightenment). Hawkins' research confirms that a critical shift in consciousness occurs at two hundred, the level of *courage* consciousness.

All of the consciousness levels below two hundred ("shame, guilt, apathy, grief, fear, desire, anger, pride"[1]) describe an existence dominated by levels of force and falsehood, violence and deceit. At two hundred, courage not only represents the crucial first step into an empowering, truth-based existence, it also opens the door to higher levels of consciousness and empowerment.

When we respond to obstacles from the lower levels of consciousness, we invariably get stuck. Even if we manage to get "unstuck," we will find ourselves repeating the same patterns and getting stuck at the same obstacles (like a bad version of the movie *Groundhog Day*) until we respond from a higher level of courage consciousness. Simply put, getting unstuck and staying unstuck requires the power of courage. Regardless of your unique circumstances, courage elevates your consciousness into the realm of truth, empowering you to advance your life's work.

The following table, "Five Levels of Courage Consciousness," can help you assess your own level of consciousness. Then, armed with self-knowledge, you can conquer the behaviors that prevent you from surmounting the obstacles to a more rewarding work life. Scroll down the page the next page to see all five levels (5 is the highest in courage conscious).

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The Five Levels of Courage Consciousness
What Step Are You On?

Classic Comments	Steps	Behavioral Manifestations
"I don't stay very long anymore in situations that don't make me happy. Life is too short and denial causes me unnecessary suffering." "Absolutely, I have courage. Every time I follow my heart, I am being true to myself. When I die I don't want to be filled with regrets."	**5** **Aware**	Recognize when you get stuck, draw from your acknowledged reservoir of courage and take ownership. Hold yourself 100% accountable and edit your actions. Dismantle old behaviors (scripts). Invite new possibilities; embrace a simpler life. Find joy in the present (not living in the past). Model courage; en*courag*ing others.
"I failed to speak up at that last staff meeting, but I won't do that again." "I never thought of myself having courage, but I recognize it in other people. Maybe I have been courageous." "I notice when I fall back into my old ways."	**4** **Observant**	Embrace the nuances of courage; dig deeper. Take action to confront oneself and declare a courageous intention. Feel dispirited but saying, "Enough!" Begin to awaken your courage and identify your actions as significant to your destiny. Allow yourself to claim your courage and accept that your life will change.
"I know I've been complaining a long time about this matter, but I'm busy." "I will step up and face this situation as soon as I…." "I tend to get comfortable and have a hard time with change."	**3** **Unavailable**	Rely on a suitcase of reasons to avoid taking action (until forced to by illness, job loss, etc.). Put reality on hold and hide out. Place more importance on your job than your own life. Face your life and sense the times you sold your soul.
"I know I am unhappy, but I am the breadwinner. I do what I have to do." "It's hard to change, but I know I should. I keep trying."	**2** **Excusing**	Stay stuck in pre-scripted dramas. Identify with the attachments to your scripts. Recognize the same repeating stories but stay stuck on the same step. Be unwilling to embrace discipline.
"I never think of myself as courageous, nor would I describe myself as such." "I'm no 'hero'!" "I don't give much thought to the word."	**1** **Unaware**	Live in denial and/or blame (denial is saying "no" to courage). Feel that you've never done anything courageous. Fail to associate with this virtue (it's a BIG word!) Avoid unpleasant truths.

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After reviewing the chart, ponder these questions:

- Do you identify with or use any of the statements on the chart?
- Did it motivate you to reflect on your own courage awareness?
- How do you deal with work challenges?

Once you recognize your level of courage consciousness, begin integrating each level into your life as you step up to higher levels of awareness, a process that engages the complete individual—mind, emotions and spirit.

Business consultant Lee Livermore employed this chart with a group of teachers to help resolve conflict and remove obstacles to communication: "I asked the group to review the sheet and give a self assessment… Then, I asked them to share their thoughts about the chart as a tool. While the feedback was positive, they realized they did not consider themselves in terms of courage… Courage is a character element that needs to be nurtured so it becomes more a part of people's identities and awareness."

Using this chart helps you recognize and take ownership of your unconscious behavior patterns. As you begin to step out of your automatic behaviors, you elevate your consciousness and begin to respond to obstacles from a more courageous level.

Contemplate these questions:

- How do you handle obstacles at work?
- How frequently do you step out of your comfort zone?
- Do you have the backbone for inviting change?
- When was the last time you offered a new idea?
- How engaged are you at work? (One hundred percent? Eighty percent?)

Answering these questions is your first step toward the courage consciousness that empowers you to overcome the obstacles to your advancement!

The Importance of Courage at Work

In today's business world, the importance of courage cannot be over-emphasized, especially for women who must balance the demands of family and career. Consider these very real situations:

- Behind closed doors, a manager bullies and denigrates an employee.
- The best-qualified woman is passed over for a promotion (again).
- A woman realizes that she has made an error in a corporate proposal.
- A happily married woman hits a career roadblock when her employer assumes that motherhood will interfere with her job performance.

These examples characterize significant obstacles faced by working women. Following our natural behavioral tendencies leaves us stuck in these kinds of situations, but responding with courage activates a valuable personal energy source—an energy you will come to recognize and use.

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Throughout history, women have acted from their courageous hearts to overcome huge obstacles and achieve amazing results. Unfortunately, male notions of courage as physical bravado have diminished recognition of the broader spectrum of courage. *STUCK* emphasizes four main themes that deeply connect with the feminine conscience and reveal the obscured intentions of the heart. When applied rigorously, they compound your spirit's courage.

1. Teach yourself to confront obstacles by applying a specific courage action.
2. Flush out a deeper awareness of your heart and spirit by learning to stop and embrace some form of stillness that allows reflection. Be more present to your heart's intentions.
3. Evoke a courage-based shift in your consciousness. As you rise above the self-deception of the lower levels of consciousness, learn to observe the anguish you experience at work and make courageous self-corrections so that you no longer perpetuate suffering.
4. Begin to recognize the obstacles (psychological, social and professional) that women inflict upon other women.

To apply courage to the obstacles you face at work requires self-realization. Self-realization dwells in reflection. This is very different from self-help. You cannot slip sweetly into your true Self by attending a two-day conference. While a conference may be a good start, it will not change the habitual behaviors and attitudes that keep us stuck in dead-end jobs or unfulfilling careers. Getting unstuck requires that you sharpen your intention and allow the power of your innate, heart-and-spirit courage to shape your experiences at work. Empowered by courage, you will not only obliterate the obstacles to your success, but also manifest the wholeness and happiness of a courage-centered life.

May the feminine energy of courage illuminate your mysteries and elevate your possibilities! And remember:

Love is the most difficult and dangerous form of courage.
Courage is the most desperate, admirable, and noble kind of love.[2]

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[1] David Hawkins, M.D., Ph.D., *Power vs. Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior* (Sedona: Veritas Pub, 1995), 68-69.

[2] http://en.thinkexist.com/quotes/delmore_schwartz/, (assessed January 2006).

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