

The Three Buckets of Courage

TRY COURAGE



The first bucket of courage is *TRY* Courage. *TRY* Courage is the courage of action. It is the courage of initiative. *TRY* Courage requires you to exert energy in order to overcome inertia. Certainly, it is easier not to do something than to do it, which is one reason why many people prefer to stay in their “comfort zones.” It takes courage to *TRY* something, particularly when you’ve not done it before. This is the kind of courage that’s demonstrated when someone “steps up to the plate,” for example, taking on a project on which others have failed. You experience your *TRY* Courage whenever you have to attempt something for the very first time,

as when you cross over a threshold that other people may have already crossed over.

The courage of try is associated with:

- “Stepping up to the plate,” such as volunteering for a leadership role.
- First attempts, for example, the first time you present an idea to your boss’s boss.
- Pioneering efforts, such as leading an initiative that your organization has never done before.
- Action.

All courage buckets come with a risk, and the risk is what causes people to avoid behaving with courage. The risk associated with *TRY* Courage is that your courageous actions may harm you, and, perhaps more importantly, other people. If you act on the risk and wipe out, not only are you likely to be hurt, but you could also potentially harm those around you. It is the risk of harming yourself or others that most commonly causes people to avoid exercising their *TRY* Courage.

TRUST COURAGE



TRUST Courage involves resisting the temptation to control other people. Unlike *TRY* Courage, *TRUST* Courage is not about action. Instead it often involves *in*action, or “letting go” of the need to control. With *TRUST* Courage, you step back and follow the lead of others. A common example of *TRUST* Courage is delegation. *TRUST* Courage is very hard for people who tend to be controlling and those who have

been burned by trusting people in the past. *TRUST* Courage, though, is a crucial element in building strong bonds between people.

The courage of trust is associated with:

- Releasing control, such as delegating a task without hovering over the person to whom you've delegated.
- Following the lead of others, such as letting a direct report facilitate your meeting.
- Presuming positive intentions, such as giving team members the benefit of the doubt.

TRUST Courage, of course, comes with a risk. The risk associated with *TRUST* Courage isn't that you will harm other people, but that by trusting them, they might harm you. By trusting others, you open yourself up to the possibility of your trust being misused. Thus many people, especially those who have been betrayed in the past, find offering people trust very difficult. For them, entrusting others is an act of courage.

TELL COURAGE



The third bucket of courage is *TELL* Courage, which is the courage of voice. *TELL* Courage is what is needed to tell the truth, regardless of how difficult that truth may be for others to hear. It is the courage to not bite your tongue when you feel strongly about something. Brown-nosing and people-pleasing are symptoms of low *TELL* Courage. *TELL* Courage requires independence of thought. We also use our *TELL* Courage when we take responsibility for a mistake or offer an apology. Whenever we speak up and say what's hard to say, whether it be speaking truth to power, admitting a mistake, or saying "I'm sorry," we are using *TELL* Courage.

The courage of tell is associated with:

- Speaking up and asserting yourself when you feel strongly about an issue.
- Telling the truth, regardless of where the person to whom you are telling the truth resides in the organizational hierarchy.
- Using constructive confrontation, such as providing difficult feedback to a peer, direct report, or boss.
- Admitting mistakes, and saying “I am sorry.”

TELL Courage can be scary and comes with risks too. We avoid using *TELL* Courage because we don't want to offend others and fear being cast out of the group. The need for affiliation with those we work with is very strong, and the risk of *TELL* Courage is that, by speaking up and asserting ourselves, we will be cast out of the group and won't “belong” anymore.

TIPS FOR FILLING YOUR COURAGE BUCKETS

Let's face it, if being courageous were easier to do, more people would be courageous. The fact is that exhibiting courage takes hard work. The tips below will help you be more courageous by applying the *TRY*, *TRUST*, *TELL* framework:

TRY Courage

- Write down the explicit outcomes that you aim to achieve (and the rewards you hope to gain) with your courageous act.
- Take a symbolic risk—do something courageous in another area of your life and capitalize on the confidence you gain.
- Mitigate as many risks as you can, but understand that it won't be an act of courage unless there is still a real risk involved.
- Be clear about the risks of not trying. Often they are more dangerous than the risks of trying. So ask yourself, What's the risk of not taking the risk?

TRUST Courage

- Figure out the criteria that you require before you offer your trust by completing the following sentence: I will trust you when. . . .
- Identify co-workers you implicitly trust (if any). List those things that cause you to trust them. Conversely, identify co-workers you don't trust and list the reasons why.
- Be clear about the consequences of not trusting. Think about times when you weren't trusted and what you personally experienced.

TELL Courage

- Write down exactly what you want to say and why you want to say it.
- Identify the people who will disagree with your message the most.
- Practice delivering the message to someone you trust who will give you constructive feedback.
- Remember: some of the most courageous people in history have been truth-tellers.

Now that we've explored the three buckets of courage, take a few moments to describe your own examples for each courage bucket. Draw upon your own courageous experiences or examples you have observed within your organization. Describe the situation and explain how it fits within the bucket.

TRY Courage: The Courage of Action and Initiative

TRUST Courage: The Courage of Presuming That Others Have Good Intentions

TELL Courage: The Courage of Assertiveness

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