

What Is Everyday Courage?

The courage of life is often a less dramatic spectacle than the courage of a final moment, but it is no less than a magnificent mixture of triumph and tragedy. People do what they must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.

—John F. Kennedy

THE EVOLUTION OF COURAGE

Early Greek philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, participated in spirited debates about the definition of courage. They were in agreement that courage was one of four virtues. The four virtues are prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. Aristotle is credited with saying that courage is the first of all virtues. It makes all other virtues possible. It was Socrates who asked, “What is courage?” He spent many hours with his students attempting to discover the answer to this question.

Plato’s ideas about courage, found throughout his writings, liken courage to a kind of perseverance. He took into account and considered how courage related to everyday common activities such as facing sickness, poverty, pains, and fears. Aristotle’s definition of courage was focused on physical

courage, the courage of soldiers on the battlefield or the courage of men in defense of their families, and the role they play in keeping the *polis*, or city, safe. Aristotle's conception of courage was that courage as well as the other virtues represented a system of means between extremes. With courage, the two extremes were cowardice and rashness. A coward runs away in the face of danger, as opposed to the extreme of rashness, which is when a person faces danger in a careless or foolish manner. Courage is the mean between the two. After the many debates and discussions however, Socrates and Plato lamented that they never arrived at a definitive answer to the question, "What is courage?"

Throughout the centuries, ancient and modern peoples have attempted to define and understand courage. Philosophers, soldiers, and common citizens alike have struggled to understand what it is about an action that makes it courageous (Brafford, 2003, p. 1). Although the definitions of courage and courageous acts have evolved over thousands of years, some ideals have remained true—people want to be considered courageous, and courage is highly valued by nations. All around the globe, nations recognize and bestow honor upon those who are thought to have performed courageously. In the United States, honors for courage include the Medal of Honor, which is the highest honor given to recognize valor in American armed forces, the Profiles in Courage Award, which recognizes displays of courage described in *Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy, and the Civil Courage Award, which is a human rights award given by the Trustees of The Train Foundation for steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk. In Sweden, the Edelstam Prize is given to persons for exceptional courage in standing up for one's beliefs in the defense of human rights.

In modern America, beloved poet, novelist, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou reiterated the thinking of the early philosophers in many of her poems, stories, speeches, and interviews. She said,

I am convinced that courage is the most important of all the virtues. Because without courage, you cannot practice any other virtue consistently. You can be kind for a while; you can be generous for a while; you can be just for a while, or merciful for a while, even loving for a while. But it is only with courage that you can be persistently and insistently kind and generous and fair. (Beard, 2013)

Upon Angelou's death in 2014, *Washington Post* writer Jena McGregor concluded,

The world lost a great author, poet and civil rights activist Wednesday when Maya Angelou died at her home in Winston-Salem, N.C. It also lost someone who was a great student of leadership and the creative process—who understood what it takes to have the courage to lead, who had close affiliations with some of the most well-known world leaders of her lifetime, and who could articulate the virtues of courage, steadfastness and truth as only a poet can do.

Angelou wanted to be known as a courageous person, and as she passed at the age of 86, she was lauded for her many accomplishments, most notably her courage.

MODERN SCIENCE STUDIES COURAGE

Courage continues to intrigue human beings in the 21st century, over 2,000 years after Plato and Socrates failed to gain consensus on courage and courageous behavior. According to a collection of research studies on courage published by the American Psychological Association, titled *The Psychology of Courage: Modern Research on an Ancient Virtue* (Pury & Lopez, 2010), there is growing interest in courage and the quest to answer the question, “What is courage?” The study of courage is gaining momentum in the fields of psychology and neuroscience with over half of the research to date being done from 2000 to the present. The ultimate goal of the researchers, however, extends far beyond the early philosophers’ question and broadens to the following questions:

Why does courage matter?

Can courage be learned?

Can courage be leveraged to improve organizational performance?

As part of the research chronicled in this text, a synthesis of the many descriptions and definitions of courage proposed in the fields of philosophy, social sciences, literature and lexicons, was provided. (Pury & Lopez, 2010, pp. 52–53)

After extensive consideration of the descriptions and definitions, I am choosing to use the definition offered by Rate, Clark, Lindsay, and Sternberg (as quoted in Pury & Lopez, 2010) to define everyday courage for school leaders. When I speak of everyday courage throughout the book, it will be defined as (a) willful, intentional act; (b) executed after mindful deliberation; (c) involving objective substantial risk to the actor; (d) primarily motivated to bring about a noble good or worthy purpose; (e) despite, perhaps, the presence of the emotion of fear. In essence, courageous actions include risk, fear, purpose, and deliberate action, all of which are relatable and necessary in the day-to-day challenges of school leadership.

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Further, contemporary thinking about courage encompasses all areas of modern life and contains the notion that there are many different kinds of courage, much like Plato's early thinking on the subject. According to Steven Kotler (2011), author, journalist, and writer for *Psychology Today*, there are many types of courage in modern society. In his blog, "Courage: Working Our Way to Bravery: A Modern Examination of the Real Requirements of Fortitude," he describes physical courage, battle courage, moral courage, intellectual courage, empathetic courage, emotional courage, fiscal courage, stamina, and decision making.

EVERYDAY COURAGE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS DEFINED

In relationship to the everyday courage needed for school leaders, I am borrowing from Kotler's moral courage, intellectual courage, and empathetic courage, and adding disciplined courage to provide a description of everyday courage relevant to school leaders. Figure 1.1 provides an illustration of the four domains of everyday courage for school leaders as well as thumbnail definitions of each of the four domains of everyday courage.

FIGURE 1.1 Domains of Everyday Courage



In the following sections, the domains of everyday courage are discussed in greater detail to clarify and explain each one as it relates to the work of school leaders. I have included an illustrative example in each section in the principal profiles. These profiles convey the stories and experiences of principals like you who demonstrate everyday courage.

MORAL COURAGE

Moral courage is the courage to stand up for one's beliefs in the face of overwhelming opposition. It is a synonym for civil courage. Those with moral courage stand up and speak out when injustices occur, human rights are violated, or when persons are treated unfairly. Moral courage is the outward expression of the leader's personal values and core beliefs, and the resulting actions are focused on a greater good. According to the research, what distinguishes moral courage is brave behavior accompanied by anger or indignation, which intends to enforce society or ethical norms without consideration for one's own negative consequences (Greitemeyer, Osswald, Fischer, Kastenmueller, & Frey, 2006). It is best exemplified by the actions of people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, or Rosa Parks.

As it relates to moral courage for school leaders, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008, p. 28) point out that principals can have an impact on pupil learning through a positive influence on staff beliefs, values, motivation, skills, and knowledge, and ensuring good working conditions in the school, and that these factors all contribute to improved staff performance. They further report that in recent studies in the United States and United Kingdom, what stood out among the leaders who undertook the challenge of taking on very difficult-to-serve schools was their “moral purpose,’ a fundamental set of values centered on putting children first and faith in what children can achieve and what teachers can do.” The moral purpose of improving the lives of children is ever-present and directs the leaders’ actions and decisions toward that end. In short, moral courage for school leaders acts in service to all students.

For school leaders, it might involve intervening in and changing school practices that overidentify African-American male students for inclusion in special education, or it could involve maintaining persistence in dismissing a teacher who has been doing educational harm to students and previous leaders have failed to act and failed to spare students a wasted year in their learning. Moral courage compels action that ensures the social, emotional, and academic well-being of all students. Finally, moral courage is inclusive of several other types of courage and as such is an essential component of everyday courage in school leadership.

The Principal Profile that follows provides a rich example of moral courage from Tommy Thompson of Connecticut.

Principal Profile



Moral Courage

Tommy Thompson

New London, Connecticut

When Tommy Thompson became the principal at New London High School in New London, Connecticut, he observed many practices that challenged his moral compass. New London serves 977 students, where

80% are students of color and 70% are economically disadvantaged. There was an entrenched faculty that operated on a “this-too-shall-pass” mentality and an unspoken agreement of “you leave us alone and we will leave you alone.” Students were not graduating prepared for the rigors of college and careers, and they were not being challenged academically in their classes. The school ran as a factory model with all students receiving the same instruction regardless of their needs or entry level knowledge and skills. During our interview, Tommy stated, “Free agency among teachers abounded.” As the father of four sons, he knew this was not something he could accept. He felt, and continues to feel, a moral obligation to the parents of his students, and committed to do all he could to transform the culture of the school to embrace a students-first, equity-based mindset.

Tommy understood that if things were going to change, it meant that he had to be the change agent on behalf of the students, and he also knew that change agents don't last long in the job. He stated to me during our interview, “you have to do a gut check and be able to look yourself in the mirror and say, ‘if this means I will only be here a short time then so be it.’” He could not accept the status quo, knowing that students were at risk of not graduating, not achieving, and not reaching their life's fullest potential.

Tommy went to work putting structures and routines in place that included the use of common formative assessments, weekly PLC meetings, and follow through on expectations for quality instruction every day. He made sure his expectations for teaching and learning were clearly communicated to the staff, and he worked hard to provide support, resources, and guidance to help teachers make the required shifts. He worked cooperatively with the teacher union to assist teachers on assistance plans. High expectations resulted in some teachers choosing to leave the profession, while he recommended nonrenewal of contracts for others who would not or could not improve their teaching practices to satisfactory levels.

As a result, the union representatives were frequent visitors to the school. Tommy learned a lot through these exchanges, and he came to

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know the teacher contact inside and out. He learned to work within the language of the contract to provide teachers due process and assistance. Tommy stated that he disagrees with people who say it is impossible to remove ineffective teachers due to teacher unions. He found that it is quite possible, but you have to be willing to do the work. Teachers should be afforded every opportunity to improve, but in the end, if they are harming students and are unwilling to improve, or the learning curve appears to be too steep for the individual, then the principal must do whatever is needed to remove them. Tommy has demonstrated the wherewithal to see his expectations through to the end on behalf of student learning. Tommy stated to me, “to do anything else would be educational malpractice.”

After 8 years, Tommy’s moral courage is paying off. In 2015, New London High School was named one of U.S. News and World Reports Best High Schools for their work in closing achievement gaps and the performance of the students in various subgroups.

The next domain of everyday courage is intellectual courage.

INTELLECTUAL COURAGE

The second component of everyday courage for school leaders is intellectual courage. Intellectual courage is the courage to challenge old assumptions and understandings and act on new learnings, understandings, and insights gleaned from experience and/or educational research. Paul and Elder, thought leaders at The Foundation for Critical Thinking, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving education worldwide through the cultivation of critical thinking, describe intellectual courage as being conscious of the need to face and fairly address ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints toward that we once opposed or have not given serious consideration (The Critical Thinking Community, n.d.).

Intellectual courage is relevant to school leaders because, inevitably, we will come to see value in some ideas not previously thought to be valid or

important. We need the courage to recognize the limitations of our own thinking in such circumstances (Lombardo, 2011). New research evidence and advancements in the science of learning are reported regularly at conferences and in research journals. This contemporary research is sometimes contradictory to present-day practices and beliefs about what works in schools and classrooms. School leaders must be open to new findings, ideas, conclusions, and recommendations that have the potential to revolutionize their thinking. In the end, we must all be willing to say: “I used to think . . . Now I think . . . because of . . .”

Think of Galileo’s courage to argue that the Earth revolves around the Sun based on scientific evidence, or Columbus’ theory of sailing west to get to the east on a spherical world, or modern environmental scientists arguing that climate change and global warming are the result of man’s toxic gas emissions and destruction of rain forests. This kind of courage likens to John Hattie’s revolutionary research in *Visible Learning* (2009). Many old assumptions about what works *best* in education have been disproven, thus challenging educators, policy makers, and researchers to rethink positions on certain instructional practices, and thereby enlightening all to other instructional practices that new research shows works best for students. Hattie calls on educators to “know thy impact.” For leaders, this means changing from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning. It means having the intellectual courage to look critically at the impact our actions and practices have on student learning and adjusting our actions accordingly to improve our impact on student learning.

Further, Hattie calls for educators at all levels to face and address the most stubborn of barriers to student achievement: the variability in learning from classroom to classroom within a school. Hattie believes appropriate attention to this problem has not come to bear because it requires uncomfortable examination of the quality of teaching and teachers in our schools (Hattie, 2015). Why is it that some teachers have a significant impact on students’ learning and others have no impact at all? How can we learn from those who are positively impacting student achievement? And, how can we leverage that professional capital for the benefit of more students?

Finally, successful school leaders demonstrate intellectual courage when they seek to learn and understand contemporary research and share their

thinking with the school community about current practices that either are or are not working for students. Failure to do so, or failure to act on what we know is best for students, is the opposite of intellectual courage, it is actually intellectual cowardice, and some might argue is morally unacceptable. Intellectual courage is a call to action to close the infamous knowing-doing gap. We know what works best in education, but it takes courage to act on this knowledge to lead change on behalf of all students.

In the following Principal Profile, Emily Paul provides a compelling example of how principals activate and leverage their intellectual courage to impact student learning.

Principal Profile



Intellectual Courage

Emily Paul

New Orleans, Louisiana

Emily Paul, principal of Good Shepherd School of the Nativity, provides us with an excellent example of leadership characterized by intellectual courage. Good Shepherd is a Catholic school located in New Orleans' French Quarter serving a student body that is 100% African-American and 100% economically disadvantaged. The students are in the "scholarship" program administered by the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which enables students from the public school system to attend the Catholic schools on scholarships paid for by the state of Louisiana.

Emily has been a principal for over 20 years at various Catholic schools with the last 7 years as principal at Good Shepherd. With well over 45 years in education, she has seen and learned a lot about what works for students. She has never lost her desire to learn and improve, and she has endeavored to stay current in educational research in order to support her teachers in using practices that research shows work best for students.

I have been witness to Emily's work as her instructional coach and as a professional developer for the Archdiocese for over 2 years. At each opportunity to learn new practices, Emily attended professional learning sessions with her teachers. She and her teachers focused on implementing high-effect-size practices including teacher collaboration in data teams, linking cause and effect data to build collective teacher efficacy, using a formative assessment process to encourage student ownership in learning, and creating lessons that build students' conceptual understanding. Emily consistently reinforced the teachers' efforts and followed through to ensure that they learned, improved, and helped each other refine these practices in all of their classrooms. Emily continues to demonstrate intellectual courage by acting on new research, following through to support her staff who are implementing new practices, and using data to measure the impact new practices are having on student learning.

Emily was equally vigilant about her own learning of the research and high-effect-size practices, and her intellectual courage has made a difference at Good Shepherd. State test results in 2015 ranked Good Shepherd number two among all schools in Louisiana for student performance. In 2016, after the first administration of the PARCC assessment, Good Shepherd ranked seventh among all schools for overall student performance. The school has received many recognitions and accolades from the Archdiocese and the Louisiana Department of Education.

The team at Good Shepherd is evidence driven, and they understand that their actions precede student learning outcomes. They intervene early, they adjust what they are doing, they use research-based strategies, and they learn from their mistakes. The infamous "knowing-doing gap" does not exist at Good Shepherd, and the students are the clear beneficiaries of the intellectual courage and wise leadership from Mrs. Paul.

Disciplined courage is the third domain of everyday courage. It is discussed in detail below.

DISCIPLINED COURAGE

The third component of everyday courage is disciplined courage. Disciplined courage is the courage to be reflective, strategic, and focused in the face of constant distractions and opposition. It is what Aristotle called the mean between the extremes of cowardice and rashness. This kind of courage helps leaders focus on the greater good and is usually morally based. Leaders with this brand of courage have great clarity on their vision and the impact they want to have on those in the school community. They are focused on doing the right things, in a thoughtful and purposeful way. Mike Staver (2012), author of *Leadership Isn't for Cowards*, explains it this way, “Courage is about clarity and mindfulness—clarity about what you believe and mindfulness in the execution of those beliefs in the culture” (p. 14).

Disciplined courage enables leaders to steadfastly address important issues and maintain a focus on the goal or desired outcome. When setbacks and disappointments occur, disciplined courage helps leaders stay the course, connect with their resolve, and persevere through the challenges and keep moving. It also allows them to keep their emotions in check in order to learn from the opposition and compromise along the way in order to achieve the intended outcome with the integrity of the goal intact.

Disciplined courage is in direct opposition to blind courage. Blind courage is uncontrolled courage, and it could get you fired. It is oftentimes spontaneous, emotive, passionate, or rash, as Aristotle described. It is sometimes grounded in good intentions or righteous thinking, and may sometimes lead to positive changes, but can often result in unintended consequences. For example, school leaders who violate teacher contracts, even if it is for a good cause, as opposed to finding a way to the goal within the contract or working to change the contract, might be said to have blind courage. School leaders who exempt certain students from state testing because they believe the test is inappropriate for the students, as opposed to finding a solution within the testing guidelines, may also be said to have blind courage. Their cause may be noble, but their blind courage will not end well for them or their schools.

The Principal Profile that follows provides an example of the real challenges principals face today and a great story to learn from as you strive to activate your disciplined courage.

Principal Profile



Disciplined Courage

Ashton Clemmons

Guilford County, North Carolina

Ashton Clemmons, principal of Brooks Global Magnet School in Guilford County, North Carolina demonstrates the kind of discipline and stick-to-it-ness that exemplifies disciplined courage in schools. Brooks serves students from all around the district who are chosen through a lottery system. Students do not have to meet any entrance criteria in order to go into the lottery draw. Therefore, the school serves a wide cross section of students including low-to-high socioeconomic status, as well as students of color representing various cultural backgrounds including African-American, Asian, and Latino families.

When Ashton arrived as the new principal at Brooks after spending 4 successful years in a very challenging Title I school, she was quite surprised at the practices in her new school. Known for their success, Brooks is one of the highest-performing schools in the district, lauded for their rigorous global studies curriculum. Ashton was expecting strong instructional pedagogies, progressive learning environments, and high expectations for all students. She was surprised to find this was not the case in all classrooms, and she was concerned about stark inconsistencies in the quality of instruction from classroom to classroom, and within classrooms as well. Although Brooks is high performing, significant achievement gaps existed among ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

To provide a quality learning experience for all students, Ashton communicated her core values to the staff in “Clemmons’ Norms,” which she brought with her from her previous school. These norms govern her leadership practices and how she works with students and staff. They are posted on the wall in her office. They include the following:

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- It is our responsibility to spend all of our time focused on student learning.
- If what we are doing is not working for the child, then adults will change their practices.
- We all will continually improve and get better.

As Ashton attempted to lead in accordance with these norms, she experienced a number of challenges along the way. For example, teachers had become accustomed to sitting students in the hallways when they became disruptive or nonresponsive. When they weren't sitting in the halls, they were sent directly to the office. Not only was this practice in violation of the district's discipline process, but it was also contributing to the achievement gaps in performance. Students cannot learn if they are not in class. As Ashton insisted that the teachers follow the district's discipline referral process, a small group of vocal teachers and parents tried to derail the changes. Rather than express their concerns directly with her, they held secret meetings to criticize her leadership, and they created and circulated a petition for her removal, which was sent to her regional superintendent and school board representative. This led to a face-to-face meeting with the regional superintendent where the group expressed their displeasure with the way Ashton was running the school.

All the while, Ashton stayed focused on her core values and the purpose of her work. She stayed steady and calm, and strategically kept plugging away at improving instruction and implementing the district's discipline policy. She exemplified disciplined courage in very difficult circumstances. Her courage was grounded by clarity and mindfulness mentioned earlier in this chapter. Clarity about what she believes and mindfulness in the execution of those beliefs.

Ultimately, Ashton was supported by the school board and her supervisor, which reflects their commitment for equity and excellence in all of Guilford County's schools. Ashton attributes their support to her past work in the district and her success as a principal, as well as her courage to stand by her core beliefs that all students deserve the very best education.

Ashton has demonstrated disciplined courage by remaining true to her core beliefs and taking clear, strategic steps to create a school culture in which adults accept responsibility for the learning of all students, and to her, all means *all*.

The final domain of everyday courage is empathetic courage.

EMPATHETIC COURAGE

The final type of everyday courage is empathetic courage, or the courage to open up and feel deeply for others. Without this, the previous three types of courage become impotent. It takes humility and courage to put aside your own biases and assumptions and let go of control and certainty for the sake of learning something new. But it is only when you are willing to listen to a different perspective, and manage to empathize, that you can be enriched by a new way of thinking.

Daniel Goleman (2006), psychologist, author of 10 books, and two-time Pulitzer Prize nominee for his work on emotional intelligence, tells us that there are three kinds of empathy all leaders need to know and use. These three types of empathy include cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and empathetic concern.

Cognitive empathy is the ability to see the world through another person's eyes. It helps us connect with another person's mind giving us a mental sense for how they think and see things. This is a critical skill in the workplace that enables strong relationships and effective communication to motivate, inform, and support the people we work with.

Emotional empathy allows us to tune into the feelings of another person and read their facial, vocal, and a stream of other nonverbal signs that illustrate how they feel. According to Daniel Siegel, a UCLA psychiatrist, connecting with people on this level creates a "we" chemistry in the brain that builds rapport and understanding that results in productive and meaningful work for both parties.

The third type of empathy is empathic concern, or expressing care and concern about another person. Leaders accomplish this kind of connection when they show people that they will be supported and that they can trust the leader. This encourages people to take risks, try new approaches, and open up to others for collaboration and team learning. Goleman stresses that it is essential for leaders and teachers to have all three kinds of empathy.

Empathetic courage also means acknowledging our biases up front and intentionally moving away from them. You have to effectively parse these thoughts out from yourself. This frees you to start vicariously experiencing the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of others, and muster the courage and conviction to decide to go where they are.

Examples of empathetic courage, which includes Goleman's three types of empathy, might include holding students and staff to high expectations while empathizing with them as they struggle with learning something new and experiencing failures along the way. Or, holding a student accountable for unacceptable conduct while also showing empathy for the student's challenging home life. A leader demonstrating empathetic courage might insist on implementing new reading or math programs, while seeking to understand and experience the challenges teachers are having along the way, in order to help them through the change process.

In the end, the reward is worth the risk. The reward is a genuine understanding of the human condition that helps you earn trust, gain respect, build teams, and engage all stakeholders in work for the greater good.

Following the tragic death of 46-year-old Beau Biden from brain cancer in May, 2015, his father, Vice President Joseph Biden made an appearance on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*. During the interview, he said this about his son, "He had so much courage; he had so much empathy." He was equally proud that his son was both courageous and empathetic. It is a powerful combination of traits. If a person is both courageous and empathetic, it would seem that he is willing to take wise risks, while having strong feelings of concern and even love for others (Lieber, 2015).

The Principal Profile that follows features Dawn Massey from Florida. Her leadership philosophy provides an informative example to learn from when it comes to leading with empathy in your school.

Principal Profile



Empathetic Courage

Dawn Massey

Okaloosa County, Florida

Dawn Massey, principal of Florosa Elementary School in Okaloosa County Schools in Florida, is a leader who demonstrates courage and empathy. She leads through a servant leadership mindset and believes her role as principal as one who sets high expectations, while genuinely caring for the people on her team.

During our interview, Dawn explained that when she began her principalship, she reflected back on a leader from her past who had a significant positive influence on her development as an educator. She thought about the leadership style and specific practices of this leader and asked herself, what did he do that motivated me to achieve challenging goals, trust in his leadership, and give 110% effort each day? She wanted to be a leader who could connect with people at this level and inspire them to achieve great things. She concluded that this leader trusted his staff to make the right decisions for students, and he empowered them with shared decision making to run the school with him.

Dawn inherited a school characterized by low trust, suspicion, hidden agendas, and fear. Florosa is a Title I school serving a large percentage of economically disadvantaged students. Their school rating from the state of Florida was a grade of C when Dawn took the helm. She knew they were capable of much more, but she had to build trust and develop strong relationships with the staff before she could push them to heights they were capable of achieving. Dawn expressed her genuine concern for the teachers at Florosa and her desire to empower them to run the school, just as her previous leader had done. She firmly believed that, by building trust, creating a caring culture, and empowering the staff through shared decision making, student achievement

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would soar. She was right. Florosa went from a C school to an A+ school in just 2 years. Dawn gives full credit for their success to her staff. Her role in the success of the school is as lead collaborator with the team.

Finally, Dawn considers herself a member of the team whose major contribution is recognizing and leveraging the talent of her people to serve the needs of all students. It is important to her that every day teachers have joy while working hard in service to students. She exclaimed, “Joy and rigor is what it is all about!”

Dawn’s courage to see the school through the eyes of the teachers, her ability to tune in to their feelings and fears, and her genuine concern for their well-being makes her an excellent example of a school leader with empathetic courage.

Finally, everyday courage, including moral, intellectual, disciplined, and empathetic courage, requires explicit practice and discipline. It is tempered, thoughtful, planned, and moderated. It is morally based and works in service of all students. It is intellectually grounded, while maintaining a strong connection to the human condition. Everyday courage promotes and facilitates leadership from the whole person—the heart, the head, and the gut. It calls for leaders to be in touch with the courage that lies within them and to use that courage to keep unproductive fear at bay. School leaders need to skillfully leverage all four types of everyday courage to succeed in their complicated roles. In the next section, you will learn about courage and the brain, and how you can control your thoughts to develop a courage mindset.

THE NEUROSCIENCE OF COURAGE AND FEAR

In addition to the growing body of psychological research on courage, neuroscientists are beginning to explore how courage operates in the brain. While much research is available on fear in the brain, research specifically on courage is more limited, even though the two are closely linked. Just as the researchers listed earlier wanted to expand the scope of understanding courage, so too do the brain researchers. Their questions about courage

include the early philosophers' quest to answer, "What is courage?" as well as the psychologists' questions previously discussed, which include:

Why does courage matter?

Can courage be learned?

Can courage be leveraged to improve organizational performance?

Neuroscientists are expanding the scope of the research and seeking answers to the questions below:

Can we train our brain to act courageously?

Can brain stimulation activate courageous behavior?

Can medications modify or enhance courage activity in the brain to treat anxiety and stress disorders?

Uri Nili and colleagues (2010) at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot, Israel, designed a study to measure fear and document courage by monitoring brain activity during a fearful event using MRI scanning. About 60 people volunteered for the study, and they were separated into two groups. One group, the Fear Group, was composed of 40 people who were found to have a serious, debilitating fear of snakes. This group was determined by a questionnaire that graded their fear level toward the live snakes. The other group, the No Fear Group, was composed of 20 people who handled snakes on a regular basis and had absolutely no fear of the animals.

In Part 1 of the study, subjects laid in an MRI machine and saw either a live snake or a teddy bear at the end of a conveyor belt located near their heads. They were asked to choose either "Advance" or "Retreat" options on a button, and when the choice was selected, the snake or teddy bear moved closer or farther away from them. No one in either group was afraid of the teddy bear. But, in the No Fear Group, there was no difference in selection of advance for either choice, live snake or teddy bear. To them, the snake was as safe as the stuffed animal.

In Part 2 of the study, the participants were instructed to bring each object as close as possible to their heads, even if they were experiencing significant fear. Of course, no fear was involved with the teddy bears, and

some subjects were able to bring the live snake closer, but a larger percent of this group chose “Retreat” to move the snake away. After each button selection, the participants were asked to report their fear level on a scale of 0–100. Those in the Fear Group reported, on average, a 62 score of fearing the snake. In addition to the after-selection question, the participants were also monitored with a brain scan and an SCR, or skin conductance response that measures sweating when nervous. The after-selection questions helped to determine how much courage the participants summoned in order to bring the snake a step closer. The Fear Group participants recognized their mounting fears, and some were able to force themselves to overcome their fear and press the button to bring the snake closer.

The researchers discovered that a courage center in the brain lit up when the Fear Group showed courage by moving the live snake closer despite their fear. This part of the brain is the sgACC, or subgenual anterior cingulate cortex, which is responsible for fear, emotion, stress, perception, and a variety of other tasks. The powerful thing about this is that when you show courage and face your fear, the courage center or sgACC is activated, and when you succumb to your fear, it is not.

Interestingly, as the sgACC activity increased, the sweat-related skin conductance response decreased. Also, other MRI monitored regions of the brain were quieted by the courageous act, namely the amygdala. The amygdala is connected to the sgACC and helps to generate the body’s arousal when certain kinds of emotion, such as fear, are triggered. The researchers believe that the sgACC helps the brain to overcome fear and dampens the fear-related arousal response. This research indicates that when the sgACC is activated by a courageous act, it is actually able to cancel out some of the fear response activated by the amygdala. “Fear is fundamental to survival,” says study coauthor Uri Nili. “But the human brain makes us capable of overriding it to a certain point. When there’s a strong motivation, the sgACC sends out orders to inhibit the amygdala’s fear response” (Nili, Goldberg, Weizman, & Dudai, 2010).

The researchers reported their findings in the June 2010 issue of *Neuron* (a research journal for neuroscience). It is the first study to show that activity in this area of the brain is needed for a person to act despite a

natural fear. Mauricio Delgado, a neuroscientist at Rutgers University in New Jersey noted that from the MRI data, the researchers found that the increased activity of only one brain region, the sgACC, correlated with high fear levels, advancing the live snake, suggests that this region was involved in the successful mastery of fear. The conclusion is that courage trumps fear in the brain.

Why should school leaders care about this? Given the perpetually demanding work in schools, and the constant string of crises to solve, the brain may get stuck in fear overdrive. This is what leads to stress and anxiety. Knowing how the brain works up the courage to confront fear could help. With this knowledge, perhaps we can learn to activate courage to trump fear when dealing with difficult situations. In the meantime, the lesson from this research is that to overcome fear and practice everyday courage, we have to purposely engage in acts of courage. These intentional acts will provide the necessary exercise of our brains to build the muscle needed for continued courageous acts.

According to neuroscience, courage trumps fear in the brain.

CONCLUSION

I began this chapter with a brief overview of the evolution of courage in societies. Courage has been considered a virtue for thousands of years, and still today that remains true. Since 2000, however, the scientific community, psychologists and neuroscientists, have become intrigued with the concept of courage that they have launched numerous studies which might explain courageous behavior or pinpoint how it works in the human brain. For school leaders, I provided a working definition of everyday courage that was born from the work in the scientific community and then further explained everyday courage by providing a description of the four types of courage relevant to the daily work of school principals.

In the next chapter, I will further make the case for the focus on everyday courage and provide a rationale for a national conversation on the topic.

Chapter Summary

Key Points

- Courage has been a valued virtue by people for thousands of years.
- Modern researchers define courage as (1) a willing, intentional act; (2) involving substantial danger, difficulty, or risk to the actor; (3) primarily motivated to bring about a noble good or morally worthy purpose.
- Everyday courage for school leaders involves the appropriate use of four domains of courage including
 1. Moral courage
 2. Intellectual courage
 3. Disciplined courage
 4. Empathetic courage
- Neuroscientists have discovered a courage center in the brain that is activated when a person behaves courageously. When this center comes on, fear responses decrease.
- In order for school leaders to develop everyday courage, they must intentionally ignite the courage center in their brains. They do this by facing their fears head on and doing more of what they fear most.
- School leaders must activate all four types of everyday courage to eliminate fear and establish a high-performance culture in their schools.

Chapter 1

Learning Activity: Reflect and Assess

The purpose of this activity is to reconnect you with examples from your past when you were courageous in an effort to learn from these previous acts of courage and replicate them with current difficult

situations. The four domains of everyday courage are listed below. Choose one or more where you have demonstrated courage in the past and respond to the questions that were derived from the modern definition of courage. Record your answers in the spaces provided. Make note of how you might tap into past acts of courage with current challenges knowing that courage is developed by acting courageously over and over.

Moral Courage

Standing up and acting when injustices occur, human rights are violated or when persons are treated unfairly.

What actions did you take?	What difficulties or risks did you face?	What noble good or moral purpose was achieved?

What challenge(s) are you facing now where moral courage is needed?

What will you do, based on your previous success above, to address your current challenge(s)?

Intellectual Courage

Challenging old assumptions and understandings and acting on new learnings, and insights gleaned from experience and/or educational research.

What actions did you take?

What difficulties or risks did you face?

What noble good or moral purpose was achieved?

What challenge(s) are you facing now where intellectual courage is needed?

What will you do, based on your previous success above, to address your current challenge(s)?

Disciplined Courage

Remaining steadfast, strategic, and deliberate in the face of inevitable setbacks and failures for the greater good.

**What actions
did you take?**

**What difficulties or
risks did you face?**

**What noble good
or moral purpose
was achieved?**

What challenge(s) are you facing now where disciplined courage is needed?

What will you do, based on your previous success above, to address your current challenge(s)?

Empathetic Courage

Acknowledging personal biases and intentionally moving away from them in order to vicariously experience the trials and triumphs of others.

**What actions
did you take?**

**What difficulties or
risks did you face?**

**What noble good
or moral purpose
was achieved?**

What challenge(s) are you facing now where empathetic courage is needed?

What will you do, based on your previous success above, to address your current challenge(s)?