

Staff Development Services

building strong businesses one employee at a time.

Courage -- The eighth in our series discussing the 13 tendencies in our reports.

If you missed or, would like to review, the first four articles of this series that cover Emotional Energy (18), Stress (19), Self-Esteem (20), Optimism (21), Work (22), Detail (23), Change (24).

Courage— Harry Houdini was renowned for doing crazy things, such as hanging upside down 75 feet above the ground by a rope that was on fire while trying to free himself from a straightjacket. Or, being shackled, put into a trunk that was locked, roped, weighted, and then thrown over the side of a boat. Just proves he was crazy, right?

No, Eric Weisz (his real name) was probably not crazy. Instead, although I never saw his character survey, Mr. Houdini probably just had very high courage that was counterbalanced by good attention to detail. (Or, if he didn't have good attention to detail, he was smart enough to surround himself with assistants who did!!) And, this character make-up is what allowed him to be a successful risk-taker. He was able to assess risks to eliminate or, at least, decrease the chances for failure. Unfortunately, while Mr. Houdini never suffered any harm from his risky performances, he died from complications from an unexpected blow to the stomach, for which he was not prepared.

Having confidence is a wonderful thing. Courage is one of the primary characteristics needed to be a good leader. Successful independent business people have the confidence to accept a certain level of risk and they focus on doing something new or different rather than being content with the status quo. The confident person usually has ambition and puts their efforts into activities that further their goals. They are good at analyzing things to minimize their failures but can also learn from what they do wrong. As Edison once said and I paraphrase, *"I have not failed 5,000 times. Instead, I learned 5,000 ways that do not work"*. That is good self-confidence. Most of us would have quit after a few attempts at inventing the light bulb.

You have probably heard the jingle, *"the hip bone is connected to the knee bone and the knee bone is connected to the ankle bone"*. This means that what affects one part of our body affects all the other parts of our body. And, it is no different when considering our character—you cannot isolate one character tendency and then use that one trait to determine how a person is going to behave because that one character trait is affected by all of a person's other character traits.

Unfortunately, some people have very high courage in combination with low detail and very high self-esteem. These people are thrill seekers who attempt to show others 'how good they are' and constantly put themselves in harms way just to feel the excitement. This may work for a while but, over time, they must do increasingly risky things to get the same level of excitement. This person eventually crosses an imaginary line and they start to 'crash and burn'. In Houdini's situation, he offered a challenge that no one could 'land a blow' to his midsection that he could not take. But, unfortunately, someone took the challenge without allowing Houdini to prepare for it and the unexpected blow killed him.

So, what about people who have lower courage? Does that mean they cannot be successful—of course not! Some of the best workers in this country have lower courage. They work hard to help companies rise to the top. But, there are people who have such low courage that they are almost paralyzed by their self-induced fears. They may not do much with their lives because they live in constant fear of doing or saying the wrong thing. Add a pessimistic character trait to the equation and you end up with someone who goes through life 'waiting for the other shoe to drop'.

What happens if an employee with low courage gets promoted into a management position because they have been such a good worker? This can lead to disastrous results because, unfortunately, being a good worker does not necessarily equate to being a good leader. This person may be able to identify problems that they need to address as a leader but, instead, 'bury their head in the sand' for as long as possible because they do not have the character make-up that enables them to handle difficult or uncomfortable situations. They tend to quickly give up on anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or they miss goals because they fear taking the initiative necessary to succeed.



Staff Development Services

building strong businesses one employee at a time.

Having an appropriate level of courage helps us to lead successful lives--if we have too much we may make poor decisions but, if we don't have enough, we may miss many good opportunities.

Consider the character make-up of this person:

A senior partner in a large law firm died and arrived at the Pearly Gates in a really bad mood. He demanded a face-to-face meeting with St. Peter.

"I shouldn't be here!" he shouted repeatedly. "No one in my family has ever died before reaching 80 years of age. I'm only 65. I demand to be sent back!"

St. Peter listened thoughtfully and pulled down a large volume with the lawyer's name from the bookshelf. He slowly reviewed each page and made some notes on a desk pad.

The impatient lawyer finally blurted out, "Well, you can no doubt see that I am right. I insist on going back."

St. Peter nodded and then, with puzzlement, said, "We seem to have a problem. According to your billing records you are 105."

Do you think that this person might have had very high courage, very high self-esteem, and very low tolerance?

P. S. We have created a toolbar you can install on your browser to make it easier to administer our online survey. If you would like to examine our toolbar visit, <http://staffdevelopmentservices.ourtoolbar.com/> and you can download it for Internet Explorer, Firefox, or Safari.

"One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. Which road do I take? she asked. Where do you want to go? was his response. I don't know, Alice answered. Then, said the cat, it doesn't matter." Lewis Carroll.

Health and Happiness

John

Staff Development Services
john@staffdevelopmentservices.com
910-253-6471