

Courage Canadian Style: Up Close and Personal!

Relative to many other countries and cultures, Canadians are not often viewed of as being particularly courageous. Too bad, really. Because most Canadians I know act with courage on a regular basis. Perhaps as we approach the 150th anniversary of Canada's inception (which was an act of courage in and of itself) we should pause to think about courage, and how as Canadians we can seize the opportunities to be more courageous more often!

So what is courage?

Everyone has acted with courage at least once and most people do so on a regular basis. In fact, there are lots of opportunities for each of us to act with courage on a much more frequent and conscious basis. Let's examine the notion of courage and identify opportunities to exercise it!

Courage is an inner quality that becomes evident whenever we take action where each of the following three criteria are met: (i) there's an uncertain or unpredictable outcome; (ii) there's an emotion or feeling present that ranges somewhere between mild concern and terror (based on the perceived consequences of failure) and (iii) there's a positive value or belief which consciously or unconsciously compels us to act.

Another way to describe these outcomes is "risky"! We're often labeled as being risk averse and perhaps its time to shatter that perspective, too! We have a sense of what we hope to achieve—but there's no guarantee we'll do so. Consequently, we have an emotional response to the thought of taking the risk. If the consequences of failure seem slim, we may experience mild concern or a touch of anxiety. If failure might result in pain, trauma, or loss, our feeling might be closer to fear or terror. So what drives us to act in spite of the uncertainty and accompanying discomfort? Simply put, "values". When we have a strong belief about the "right" thing to do, we're often compelled to act—possibly without even making a conscious decision to do so. My experience tells me that Canadians have an extremely strong sense of values—we know what the right thing is to do!

Values Directed Courage

For example, we leap into action when we see an opportunity to help another person in distress; observe an individual abusing a young child or animal; witness an accident; feel an intense love or compassion for another human being. Granted, these may be infrequent and extreme examples—so what about the everyday circumstances for acting with courage?!?

We each have a unique set of skills, experiences, desires and values. What requires lots of courage for one person may require little or none for another. Going rock climbing may take plenty of courage the first time. Questions like "Is the equipment reliable? Are my partners competent? What happens if I fall?" may shadow our adventure. Is our value of personal growth sufficient to help us move beyond the initial uncertainty and accompanying fear? If so, as we gain experience, predictability increases (we realize it is much safer and therefore less risky than initially imagined); as a result, our anxiety decreases with each attempt. So the courage required climb the 10th time is less than the first—and by the 100th climb, the notion of courage may not even be relevant.

Depending on our personal experience and values, the following could very well require courage to act:

- Telling the truth when it would be easier to say nothing.
- Speaking in front of a large group.
- Getting married; getting divorced; getting re-married.
- Expressing what you believe will be an unpopular opinion.
- Spending time with someone whom others dislike.
- Telling a close friend how you feel about him or her.
- Moving to a new home; neighborhood; province; country; continent.
- Expressing emotions openly when that is not normally done.
- Taking on an assignment where you (and others) are aware of your shortcomings.
- Having a tough conversation with a loved one.
- Addressing a long standing and unspoken conflict.
- Running for public office.
- Deciding to have a child; or another child.
- Doing something totally new.
- Kissing a spider. Or a frog.
- Listening to a radio station that doesn't play your kind of music.
- Walking through a part of town where people from your own cultural group rarely go.
- Singing out loud (in spite of advice to the contrary)!
- Jumping into a leadership role, even though it is not your job.
- Involving yourself in the community.

Courage—sometimes conscious, sometimes not. We have an endless supply of opportunities to become clear on what we really value; understand our own basis for determining right and wrong; and be willing to take the right action for the right reasons. Acting with courage more consciously and more often is a wonderful source of fulfillment and satisfaction. Succeed or fail, we can't help but gain as individuals while providing inspiration for others to act with courage, too. We can all choose to act with courage more often to continue to make this the best country in the world. The opportunity and choices are ours!