



United Nations

TAKING CONTROL OF
YOUR CAREER

COURAGE AT WORK

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ACTIVITY 5: Courage at Work

To go against the dominant thinking of your friends, of most of the people you see every day, is perhaps the most difficult act of heroism you can perform

— Theodore White

Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.

— Erich Fromm

*Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak;
courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.*

— Winston Churchill

Whether you are looking for ways to grow in your current position or looking for a new position, you need to have courage to pursue and effect such changes.

It takes courage to propose new, creative, and perhaps alternative ideas in the workplace in a way which they are accepted and adopted. Similarly, having the wherewithal to respectfully disagree with your manager or teammates, particularly in public, takes confidence and daring. Dealing with confrontational situations is also a challenge which requires boldness.

While building courage at work is an incremental and developmental process, it can reap many benefits in terms of job satisfaction, career opportunities, and leadership potential.

What Does Courage at Work Mean for You?



Instructions: Answer the following questions. You can enter as much text as you want.

1. Describe a situation in which you or a colleague displayed courage at work. Was it effective? Why or why not?

Your response

2. What tips would you give a colleague for presenting a new, creative, “out-of-the-box” idea or alternative proposal to his or her manager?

Your response

How to Discuss a New Idea with a Manager

Here are some suggestions on how to discuss a new idea or proposal with your manager:



- ◆ Pick a private place to have the conversation or set up an online meeting.
- ◆ Keep your argument or proposal short and to the point.
- ◆ Be prepared with concrete reasons, especially the benefits, to support your new idea or proposal.
- ◆ Make a business case with special consideration to costs and operational feasibility. Offer a solution that speaks to your manager's critical needs.
- ◆ Support your case energetically.
- ◆ Be open minded and ready to compromise.
- ◆ Listen. Do not be locked into your own certainties.
- ◆ Acknowledge your manager's point of view.
- ◆ Ask questions to clarify or elaborate your manager's point of view. Confirm your understanding.
- ◆ Put yourself in your manager's shoes as much as possible. What is good about their idea or proposal?
- ◆ Your manager may have information which you don't. Consider the possibility that their way takes into account a long-term perspective.
- ◆ Don't overreact to constructive critical feedback. Keep your tone as reasonable as possible. If your emotions are heightened, cool off before continuing the discussion and schedule a follow up meeting.
- ◆ Be open to reformulating your proposal based on your manager's feedback.
- ◆ Be pleasant when you disagree.

Practicing Courage

Here are a few situations in which you might have to disagree with your manager and present an alternative idea or proposal.



Instructions: Select a case and then answer the questions.

Sample Cases

1. You have been asked to assume additional work when you are already overstretched and you feel others on the team could be doing more.
2. You are asked to continually work overtime when you have child or parental care obligations to meet right after normal working hours.
3. You have been asked to join an emerging team consensus when you think the position or decision represents “group think” and is insufficiently creative.
4. You receive a directive from your manager which you think is ill advised, won't achieve the desired results, will increase costs, demoralize employees, and/or cause client dissatisfaction.

Discussion

3. How would you present your alternative idea or proposal?

Your response

4. Can you think of other cases in which you might need to have courage at work?

Your response

5. What is one action you can take in the near future to build courage at work?

Your response