CHAPTER 1

Choosing Courage

Stuart Scott will always be remembered as a trailblazer. As the first Black anchor on SportsCenter, ESPN's flagship program, Scott's use of slang, his references to Black music and culture, and his clever catchphrases helped ESPN appeal to younger viewers—especially younger Black Americans.

Scott's style was influential. "African Americans throughout the history of this country have been told that we needed to conform, to assimilate. That we needed to be less street, be less hip-hop, be less hood. Just be *less*," recalled Michael Smith, a sports journalist and former ESPN commentator who grew up watching Scott on television. "We had to be less of ourselves in order to make the majority feel comfortable. For Stuart to come along and be every bit as good and professional, as sharp, as polished as any broadcaster doing it, but yet still be able to be as authentic and connected and representative of the culture as he was—it was just incredible."[1]

Beyond his on-air brilliance, Scott fought a well-documented, multiyear battle against terminal cancer and became an inspiration to many beyond his sports viewers. Upon his death at age forty-nine, he was universally praised by fans, colleagues, athletes, and journalists;

in a written statement, President Barack Obama commended Scott for being a pioneer: "Stuart Scott helped usher in a new way to talk about our favorite teams and the day's best plays."

That's the part of Scott's story many of us know. Keith Olberman, his longtime colleague, shared another part few people knew. "I cannot think of anybody I worked with in sports whose professional courage I have admired more," he said in a heartfelt tribute.[2]

Olberman was referring to Scott's behind-the-scenes struggles at ESPN. Though he is praised today, Scott received strong pushback from some viewers, media critics, and an ESPN executive. He was told to stop using language that most of the audience—meaning "white viewers"—didn't understand or he'd be taken off SportsCenter. "It was awful," recalled his wife, Susan. "People really don't know how awful it was. . . . Stuart was desperately frustrated."

Scott's response to this pressure, said Olberman, "was the single most impressive thing I've ever seen a television sportscaster do."

Faced with two apparent choices—to back down and tone down his style to protect himself and his career or to lash out—Scott decided on a more creative option: he defied the directive from above but did so in a way that made it nearly impossible for the executive to carry out his threat.

Scott went on air and *publicly congratulated* ESPN on its willingness to accept crucial aspects of American culture that had traditionally not been adequately represented on TV. This brilliant, gutsy act neutralized the executive, who now had little choice but to let Scott carry on or be seen as explicitly against tolerance and respect for Black culture.

That, Keith Olberman wants us all to remember, was a brilliant act of workplace courage.

What Is Workplace Courage?

Throughout my career, I've heard hundreds of stories of people like Stuart Scott who've acted courageously at work.

Take Chris, a medical student, who pushed a supervising psychiatrist to order a simple diagnostic test before sending a suicidal patient in the ER to the psych ward. Because of Chris's courage to challenge authority, the medical team discovered that the patient's unremitting pain was caused by a vascular disease, which was resolved with surgery.[3]

Or consider Jackie, who launched a marketing and sales campaign that her organization's president was against. "If you want to do this, your job is on the line," he told her. "If it works, you stay. If it doesn't, you can find something else to do." Jackie, after a few days of intense deliberation, decided to go for it. Though the campaign was a success—she's told it was the most successful one in the company's history—and she kept her job, she was never thanked for her work.

Though these examples may not fit into the traditional view of courage, which, historically, has focused on physical acts, Stuart Scott's, Chris's, and Jackie's feats are surely courageous.[4] Each faced a choice to act or not, and—despite the threat in all three cases, of recrimination from their superiors—each chose to step up when most people wouldn't.

In scholar-speak, I define workplace courage as *work-domain-relevant acts done for a worthy cause despite significant risks perceivable in the moment to the actor.*[5] But put more simply, workplace courage is taking action at work because it feels right and important to stand for a principle, a cause, or a group of others, despite the potential for serious career, social, psychological, and even physical repercussions for doing so.

Workplace courage comes in many forms. It is speaking truth to power—and to peers, subordinates, and other stakeholders whose behavior is causing problems or falling short of what's possible. And it includes acts aimed at personal and organizational growth, such as taking on stretch assignments, owning bold initiatives, and innovating within or beyond one's current organization.

You'll notice that these acts represent "everyday" opportunities for courage—the kinds of things we might hope we'd do routinely. When it comes to courage, we need not go looking for special occasions or

wait for a single big moment. We need only decide to act when the chances come, which they do for all of us.

This runs counter to how many people view courage—as a rare trait that's practiced only by exceptional people. In fact, thinking of it this way is counterproductive and an excuse for our own inaction. As educator and social activist Parker Palmer has written, if examples like Rosa Parks's unwillingness to move to the back of the bus in the 1950's South are going to inspire us to our own action, rather than merely be something we passively admire, "we must see her as the ordinary person she is. That will be difficult to do because we have made her into superwoman—and we have done it to protect ourselves."[6] As Palmer correctly notes, we have to take her, and others, off the pedestals we've placed them on to avoid holding ourselves to the same standard of virtuous action when the opportunities arise.

I've had the privilege of meeting some amazing people as I've studied workplace courage, and I can assure you that they range across gender, ethnicity, nationality, physical appearance, political orientation, religious commitment, education level, and so many other dimensions we use to categorize people. A few are rich or high-status, but the vast majority are not. Unless we normalize acting courageously, seeing it as a possibility and responsibility for everyone, too many of us will keep waiting for others to do it, hiding (uncomfortably) behind assertions like "We can't all be Mandela or Gandhi" or that we're going to do it later when we have more power.

You'll always have something to lose, and there's no credible evidence that says an abundance of courage in others is right around the corner to save us. If you want to make things better at work, for yourself and for others, the only thing you control with certainty is your own willingness to take action.

As I'll detail in this book, courage is about skills that can be learned and developed: there are specific things you can do before, during, and even after a courageous act to increase the odds that the risk you take isn't for naught. And there are plenty of opportunities to practice

everyday courage, building your "courage muscle" a little at a time by starting with relatively safer, more manageable acts from which you can learn.[7] It's these skills, honed through practice, that differentiate those who act—and act competently—from the rest who don't.[8]

Why Courage Is in Short Supply

We know in the abstract that courage is valuable (even if we wish someone else would be the one to act). Winston Churchill said courage was the first of human qualities because it guarantees all the rest.[9] Writer C. S. Lewis likewise claimed courage wasn't merely *a* virtue, but "the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the highest point of reality."[10] The leadership literature is also rife with claims about courage as a virtue, attribute, trait, or behavior pattern needed for effective leadership. My own students certainly believe that courage differentiates those leaders who succeed from those who fail over the long run.[11]

Protecting and inspiring others. Solving problems. Pursuing opportunities. Growing and innovating. Put that way, it seems clear that we should want and be motivated to be more courageous. So, why aren't we?

We're Programmed to Avoid Unnecessary Risks

Because humans have evolved to (subconsciously) prioritize perpetuating their genes, it's quite logical to worry about not doing grave harm to ourselves in all types of social settings. We've also spent most of our time as a species living in small groups or clans, and so making sacrifices for those not very closely related to us—such as risking one's family's well-being to do what is right for a large group of employees or citizens scattered around the globe—probably isn't instinctive for most of us. It's a conscious choice we have to make against these very primal instincts.

Our instincts are often reinforced by vicarious learning. Sadly, we see too many cases of people getting ahead at work—at least in the short run—despite, or even because of, their lack of courage. While it may eventually catch up to you, there are certainly enough examples of "getting ahead by going along" for people to believe that courage might be for naive losers. When I asked a sample of my MBA students to think of someone highly successful in a leadership position over the course of an entire career, and then rate that leader on a set of characteristics, courage scored highest—higher than technical knowledge or skills, intelligence, and work ethic. But when I asked them to think of and rate another leader who has been highly successful in a leadership position for just a short period of time, courage rated last (with work ethic at the top). So, in the eyes of these ambitious young people, courage is clearly a hallmark of those who have had highly admirable careers. They don't, however, think it's as important as other things when one is getting started. The question, of course, is when courage will kick in for those who spend years rationalizing that "it's just not time yet." In my experience, the answer is too often "never."

Our language has also evolved to remind us of the benefits of conformity and risks of challenging the status quo: phrases like "Be a team player," "Be loyal," "Don't rock the boat," "Don't risk your career over this," "We've always done it this way," "Everybody does it," and "Let it go" are abundant, whereas those pointing to the value of speaking up and persisting in change efforts are few in comparison and suggest significant hardship (e.g., "Fight tooth and nail" or "Stick to your guns").[12]

There's also the fact that, whether or not we are willing to admit it, most of us want to be *liked*. And given the intense pain that social rejection can bring, we certainly don't want to be *dis*liked. Hence, it's natural to view life, and leadership in particular, as an extended popularity contest. Consciously or not, we avoid doing things that might anger or alienate the people whose approval we seek so they'll continue to like and endorse us. If you doubt that, check out the behavior of posters on Twitter, Facebook, or any other social media platform.[13]

There Are Real Risks

Beyond the instinctual and culturally reinforced bases for frequent conformity and conflict avoidance, it's undeniably true that courage is in short supply because it is inherently risky. People *do* sometimes see their promotion prospects vanish, some *do* lose their jobs, and some *do* suffer broken relationships and deeply bruised egos as a result of courageous action at work.

In most modern work organizations, there are plenty of risks. Even in places like the United States, where the First Amendment of the Constitution protects free speech, most employees with at-will contracts (and that's the vast majority these days) can't say what they want without potential repercussions. Want to publicly criticize public officials in the United States? Go for it. Want to criticize your organization's leaders? Tread carefully.

Fortunately, many fewer of us face *physical risks* at work today than at any time in history, though firefighters, police officers, oil rig workers, and miners, among others, still routinely put themselves in harm's way. And, to a surprising degree, so do those who deal with angry customers or former employees.[14]

Most of us do, however, face potential *career risks*.[15] Despite all the talk about flatter organizations with more shared leadership, most people still have bosses and are still wage dependent in one way or another.[16] If we push the envelope too far, we could get fired, blackballed, held back, or otherwise negatively impacted financially.[17] As William Deresiewicz noted in his book *Excellent Sheep*, people don't like it when you challenge the consensus because you're forcing them to question it as well.[18] You're trying to surface for clear consideration the doubts that others are working hard to keep below the surface. Numerous former Wells Fargo employees, for example, reported being fired for minor violations like slight tardiness shortly after speaking up internally against the illegal sales tactics that eventually led to hundreds of millions of dollars in penalties and a congressional investigation.[19] Career risks for speaking up loom large even in environments like

the military where physical courage is expected. The most decorated military leaders sometimes still feel "afraid to paint the true picture" to those above them, and some certainly face career consequences for going against their boss's wishes.[20]

Social risks also loom large. For most of humans' time on earth, being ostracized by those around you wasn't just psychologically unpleasant—it was life-threatening. You courted death if you were left alone to face violent predators and harsh environmental conditions. While today you're unlikely to actually die if your coworkers shun you, that doesn't mean we don't have horrible fears of "social death."[21] Indeed, some research suggests that "social rejection is perceived by the brain and other mechanisms as similar to physical injury."[22] Consider the social consequences Edwin Raymond, a New York City police officer, has faced for trying to change routine practices in the police department, such as how arrest statistics are used. He's been called "crybaby," "rat," "zero," and worse on anonymous officer message boards. Even his friends have told him he's nuts for continuously trying to do what's right against such significant pushback.[23]

Often, acts of courage court both social and career risks. Sam Polk, a former hedge fund trader in New York, described how difficult it was to speak out against the "bro talk"—the belittling, sexist banter—that made it hard for women to advance on Wall Street. "It feels really good to be in the in-crowd," he acknowledged, and to protest typical male behavior would have "been embarrassing and emasculating" and "bad for my career." As a result, he "stood silent hundreds of times as men objectified and degraded women."[24] While it's easy to be the armchair critic about rich Wall Streeters, it's more useful to acknowledge that it's hard for any of us to go against the grain of strong norms and, as Polk noted, "even harder when doing so means jeopardizing millions of dollars in future earnings" for challenging a "culture of brutal conformity."

Standing out also poses *psychological risks*. No one wants to feel stupid or impotent. Taking on high-visibility projects or stretch assignments beyond one's current competence courts public embarrassment. When you show vulnerability in facilitating the work or well-being of

others, you risk being seen as weak or incompetent. Implementing a truly innovative product or process you developed could cast you as the champion of a failed experiment. Sure, these behaviors sometimes also expose you to career and social risks. But they expose you to psychological risks every time. You're your own judge and juror, and when you're really pushing boundaries, there's a real chance you'll take at least a temporary hit to how you feel about yourself. "Looking stupid" or "feeling incompetent" or "being a failure" are often self-imposed labels and, hence, represent the psychological risks of workplace courage.

In our studies of thirty-five acts of workplace courage, Evan Bruno and I have consistently found a strongly negative correlation between the level of risk (and courage) attributed to a behavior and the frequency with which the behavior happens when it could. Put simply, when perceived career, social, psychological, and physical risks for doing something go up, the willingness to do that thing goes way down.[25]

And, unfortunately, these risks suppress courage even among the most powerful. I've had countless senior leaders tell me that they don't tell their bosses or boards what's really going on for fear of career repercussions, and just as many tell me they pass up opportunities for courageous action to avoid social or psychological consequences. Others similarly note that too many of today's CEOs "wait for public opinion to tell them what to do."[26] The same is true in politics—too many politicians putting their own interests above principled stands has led to an "unprecedented deficit" of courage in the halls of Congress today, says Eliot Cohen, the dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins.[27]

Why Courage Matters

Given all these risks, you might be ready to put this book down now. If I've validated your fears about workplace courage, why is it worth reading on? Are there really enough upsides to counteract all these risks?

The truth is, we don't have nearly enough strong, systematic evidence about the conditions under which courageous workplace acts produce good and bad outcomes for both the actor and others or the organization itself.

Still, a core premise of this book, and the focus of several subsequent chapters, is that how we engage in workplace courage can make a big difference in whether we bring success or harm to ourselves and others. That is, we can be more or less *competent* in our courageous action. Assuming for now that a courageous act is performed competently, what are some reasons to expect that good things might happen?

Your Courage Matters for Others

Let's start with the chance to directly affect important outcomes. As I argued in the preface, courage at work can protect others, solve problems and avert disasters, and lead to opportunities seized and various forms of innovation and growth. Stuart Scott paved the way for more diversity in sports broadcasting, Chris saved a patient from intense physical and emotional suffering, and Jackie spearheaded the most successful campaign in her company's history. This is undoubtedly why people at the top of organizations, and those charged with overseeing them on behalf of others, claim to value courage so much.[28]

Conversely, the costs when employees fail to demonstrate courage can be immense, in both human and financial terms. Volkswagen shareholders have lost billions of dollars (already) following the revelation that the automaker sold millions of cars worldwide with software used to cheat on emissions tests. According to one commenter who had worked on emissions software for one of the Big Three US automakers, "There was simply no way this didn't involve a concerted effort by many individuals." Surely some of them had the sense to know that this fraud was not just wrong, but eventually going to be detected and to lead to great harm to the company's many key stakeholders.[29]

Courageous acts, or their absence, can also have more indirect effects on performance through their impact on how others feel and behave. A single act of courage, particularly by those in leadership roles, can inspire others to be more committed, to work harder, to do things of benefit to the organization that they can't be made to do (scholars call these "citizenship" or "extra-role" behaviors), and even to perform their own courageous acts. When I asked a group of executive MBA students to describe the impact on them and others of a courageous behavior by a leader, they used words like "great sense of pride," "motivated to work harder and be more creative," and "energized." "It has been a career-defining moment for me, as it taught me and others how to be courageous and accountable," said one. "It reinvigorated our sense of purpose and commitment," said another, adding that it "strengthened our resolve and confidence in each other that we were prepared to face any challenge and be successful."

In contrast, the responses I received from another group of executive students who described the impact of a leader's failure to act with courage in a specific situation show the incredibly negative effects that can result from being seen as having failed the courage test. Respondents said they "felt angry and undercut," "lost confidence in, and respect for, the leader," and "lost faith in the competency and ability of the department manager from that day forth." Another said that he was "disgusted and saddened that I was being overseen by such a cowardly individual with low moral fiber." I doubt any of these individuals were going the extra mile for those bosses anymore. Those with options were probably looking to get out.

In this final commencement speech to US Naval Academy graduates in 2011, former defense secretary Robert Gates summed up nicely just how important courageous action is. Not just physical courage, he clarified, but "the courage to chart a new course, the courage to do what is right and not just what is popular, the courage to stand alone, the courage to act, the courage as a military officer to 'speak truth to power.'" For those who will become leaders, he told the young men and women, "the time will inevitably come when you must stand

alone. When alone you must say, 'This is wrong' or 'I disagree with you and, because I have the responsibility, this is what we will do.'"[30] Being courageous is, in short, how we fulfill our obligations to others under difficult circumstances.

Your Courage Matters for Yourself

I'll also offer you two broader reasons to choose courage: legacy and regret. Our legacy is what endures after we're gone. Beyond tangible things like money or buildings, it's what people say about us, how they remember us, and what they do or don't do because of the impact we had on them. And legacies tend to be about what we *did*—at least if we're talking about a positive legacy. Research shows that regrets, in contrast, tend to be about the things we *didn't do*, but wish we had. This links opportunities for courage inextricably with the shaping of our legacy and our regrets.

Let's look a bit more at regret first. Admonitions to avoid regret are commonplace throughout history, be it President Teddy Roosevelt reminding us that "it is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed," or poet John Greenleaf Whittier's warning that, "for all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'" And, indeed, research does suggest that "regret" is a major theme among those who look back on their life as they age, with that regret stemming more from things not done than from trying things and not succeeding.[31] John Izzo interviewed 235 people between ages 59 and 105, and found "Leave no regrets" to be one of the five secrets to a great life. To do this, he argued, "We must live with courage, moving toward what we want rather than away from what we fear."[32] When we don't, suggests the research of Australian nurse Bronnie Ware on patients in their last twelve weeks of life, we live not just with a psychological burden, but physical illnesses related to bitterness, resentment, and regret.[33]

It doesn't take until the end of life to have regrets haunt us. Sam Polk, the hedge fund trader mentioned above, is middle-aged. He

lives with deep regret about what he didn't do during his eight years on Wall Street, and with sadness and fear for the world his daughter will enter as an adult. He's used those feelings to make major changes in his life: he left the trading environment, owned up to his part in perpetuating a sexist culture, and has started Everytable, an organization whose mission is to bring healthy food to low-income communities at affordable prices.[34]

For all of us who have screwed up an attempt to do something bold, it sure may feel like we're more likely to regret actions taken and gone wrong. Over the longer term, though, research shows it's regret for inaction that tends to linger.[35] The enduring potency of "I should have" regrets probably stems from it being harder to tell ourselves a convincing story about why we didn't do something. That's why courage matters, why it's so important to push beyond your fears, to embrace actions outside your comfort zone before it's too late. Not just because you can do a lot of good for others by daring to stand up and speak out—though I think that's the main and most important reason—but also because when you don't, you live with regret.

As for our legacy—whether we'll be remembered much at all after we've left a job, an organization, or the Earth and, if so, for what—that depends on what we do now. While our preferred legacy is deeply personal, I've learned about a number of common aspirations by surveying people anywhere from thirty-five to eighty-five years old. Interestingly, whether they were just a decade or two into their careers, or well into retirement, what people hoped their legacy would be was pretty similar. They wanted to be remembered as people of high integrity, people who'd served others well, people who'd made a positive difference in the lives of those they'd worked with and on their organizations. Most of all, they wanted to be remembered as good to, and role models for, those closest to them. In explaining these aspirations, they didn't talk about the wealth or titles or awards they'd accumulated. They talked about acts of service, of taking risks on behalf of others. They talked, in short, about times they'd been willing to show courage rather than take the easy or more comfortable path.

Sometimes they suffered personal consequences, but they didn't report regret. They reported hope that these acts would lead to them being remembered as they desired.

. . .

I've collected far too many workplace courage stories done by people like you and me to believe it's impossible to hope for more. There is much we can learn from the collective experience of those I've studied that can help tip the balance in favor of competent courage. We can understand how to set the stage via our ongoing actions so that we'll be more likely to succeed when the time for courage arises; we can improve our clarity about our key values and purpose, and hone our sense of the best timing for a bold move; we can learn all kinds of techniques for managing ourselves and others more skillfully in the heat of the moment; and we can learn what to do after our big moments to keep the ball rolling or contain any damage. Perhaps most importantly, we can choose to see courage as a skill and not a natural endowment. When we do, we can commit to the kind of practice needed to make courageous acts seem less daunting and more likely to go well.

To be clear, there's no magic bullet for eliminating the risks or guaranteeing good outcomes. If there's no risk at all, we're not talking about courage. It's precisely the riskiness of the kind of acts I'll talk about in this book that makes courageous action the truest test of virtue. As the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre reminds us, "If someone says that he cares for some individual, community, or cause, but is unwilling to risk harm or dangers on his, her, or its own behalf, he puts into question the genuineness of his care and concern."[36] I think most of us do genuinely care. We just need a healthy dose of instruction and inspiration to help us take productive steps forward. That's what I hope this book provides you.

What's Next

In the chapters that follow, I'll use findings from years of my own research and insights from many others' work to systematically explore these ideas. My aim isn't just to inspire you to act, but also to provide useful diagnostics, frameworks, and tools that increase your chances of having maximum impact when you do.

In chapter 2, we'll look closely at *truth to power*—the category of behaviors most closely connected to people's conception of workplace courage. Truth to power behaviors include confronting or challenging direct bosses or other higher-ups, acting with more autonomy than you technically have, protecting or promoting others, and owning (rather than hiding or denying) your mistakes.

Chapter 3 is all about *candid conversations and bold actions*, other common types of behavior that require courage at work: difficult conversations and actions involving peers, subordinates, and other important stakeholders like customers or external partners. We'll also look at other bold actions, like taking stretch assignments or personal responsibility for major initiatives, starting a new venture, or making principled stands. While some of these may seem like, and technically are, everyday learning behaviors or part of people's jobs, they're done with surprising and disappointing infrequency due to their perceived riskiness.

Once we're on the same page about what workplace courage looks like, and you've done some initial self-assessment using the Workplace Courage Acts Index as a guide, you'll start your personal journey toward more frequent and competent courage by *building your courage ladder* in chapter 4. Choosing courage is about committing to practice—to taking small and specific action steps that will help you slowly but surely improve how you feel, think, and behave during situations that feel risky but also important. I'll encourage you to choose an action from the bottom of your courage ladder, so your initial steps feel more manageable and likely to lead to some early wins and motivation to keep climbing.

To increase the odds that your courageous acts actually change something for the better, I'll describe in part 2—chapters 5 through 9—what, collectively, differentiates courageous acts that seem to have the largest and most enduring positive effects, and fewest negative effects, from those that fail to have the intended influence or keep the actor from undue harm. Drawing from hundreds of experiences shared with me and a host of related studies I and others have done, I'll share how people from all walks of life enacted multiple aspects of what I call the Competent Courage framework to increase their odds of successful action.

In chapter 5, I'll first talk about *creating the right conditions* for successful courageous action. The focus here isn't on a particular courageous act, but rather on how we behave *over time* to enhance the odds that we succeed when we do step up and to minimize downside risks. We'll delve into the importance of a strong internal reputation, which involves being seen as emotionally intelligent, humble, kind, and generous, and also as a consistent high performer. We'll also look at ways to optimize one's own autonomy to act with less fear of retribution. This includes keeping your job mobility high and taking steps to be less financially dependent on your specific employer.

Chapter 6 focuses on *choosing your battles*—deciding which specific acts to undertake. You'll learn about developing the discipline to both know what matters most to you, and also what things automatically set you off even if they're not that important. While your emotions are an important guide, for sure, competent courage is also about understanding what your ultimate objectives are and being in control of when you act and when you hold back in the service of longer-term success.

Choosing your battles is also about timing. The competently courageous avoid pushing an issue too early, when those they must influence aren't ready or able to pay attention; conversely, they don't wait until it's too late to matter. The saying "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste" also applies here. Challenging the status quo is a lot harder when you're seen as the sole impetus than when you're acting amid some other obvious source of internal or external pressure for change.

No matter how well you set the stage and choose your battles and their timing, you've also got to be skilled at managing the moment itself when it comes. That's the focus of chapters 7 and 8. In chapter 7, we'll focus on *managing the message*, which is fundamentally about understanding the targets of your action—how *they* see the issue, what *they* care about, and what kinds of data and solutions *they* are most likely to find compelling. Knowing this allows you to make many important decisions, including those involving the *framing* of your message. It helps you know, for example, whether to present something as an opportunity with an upside or a necessary response to a threat. It also helps you decide to paint your picture in primarily economic or cultural terms, and to find ways to connect your issue to their priorities.

In chapter 8, we'll turn to the importance of successfully *managing emotions*—both yours and those you seek to influence—during critical moments. Shaking in your boots while talking, going silent, or literally fleeing the situation because you're so scared at the first sign of resistance aren't hallmarks of effective courage acts. And, while being angry might fuel your action, failure to control your anger undermines success. Failed communication happens in part because when you're being overwhelmed by your own emotions, it's darn near impossible to focus on managing others' emotions. Thus, we'll also focus on some strategies for harnessing, rather than being hijacked by, the emotions involved during courage opportunities.

Chapter 9 examines the importance of *taking action after the act*. Though we don't spend as much time thinking about it—perhaps because we're just relieved to have finally done something or are busy licking our wounds—what we do *after* a bold act can also be vitally important. This chapter delves into the importance of following up, whether to clarify your target's position and solidify next steps, or to check in and address lingering negative emotions. We'll learn the importance of thanking those who have helped you and sharing credit for any wins. And we'll look at the importance of persistence—accepting that meaningful change requires multiple, sustained efforts—and the choice to see setbacks as data to learn from rather than reasons to give up.

Having reviewed the principles of competent courage, we turn, in part 3, to putting them into action. Chapter 10 invites you to decide on and commit to your next steps. Then we'll return to the courage ladder you started in chapter 4 and walk through some specific tools for managing the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that can help you start *cultivating courage* one step at a time. I'll share some strategies for turning your goals into routine practice, such as using implementation intentions and public commitments to override our tendency to fail at developing new habits.

In chapter 11, I'll end by encouraging you to get clear about your "must dos." No matter how skilled you become, how much you increase your "can do" based on the ideas and tools in this book—you also need to understand what you want your life to stand for. Why? Because no amount of skill eliminates all risk. So if you want to increase the chances you push past that risk and act anyway, you need to keep front and center what you consider your responsibility to do, either merely so you can look yourself in the mirror without shame, or because you want to avoid long-term regrets while building a legacy you and others will feel good about. *It's up to you.*

One Final Note

Before moving on, let me address one question you may already have: "Do you think everything you're saying here is universally applicable?" My answer, in short: No. I'd be skeptical of any social science book that claimed to be presenting something that applied perfectly in any context, and you should be too.

Given my data sources and my own cultural embeddedness, this book speaks most directly to the situation in the United States. There are many cultures where the behaviors described in this book would be even more risky due to political environments and judicial processes that offer no guarantees against severe punishment for speaking up or acting against the rules. For example, Omeleye Soworo, who runs a website providing online news to Nigerians, has succinctly

described the reality in Nigeria: "It is not so much a problem of freedom of speech, but freedom after speech."[37] There are many other places around the world where speaking up may be legally allowable and not likely to get you jailed or killed, but nonetheless remains very difficult due to cultural norms. In its report on the Fukushima nuclear accident, for example, the Independent Investigation Commission concluded that the accident was a "disaster 'Made in Japan.' Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to 'sticking with the program.'"[38]

This said, many of the phenomena described in this book are really a function of natural *human* tendencies in the face of common opportunities for courage. So while the risks may be different around the world due to varying physical, social, and economic circumstances, I'm pretty sure that in almost any culture, humans—especially those organized in social hierarchies—will find the behaviors examined in this book to at least sometimes reflect courageous action.

In the end, part of being competently courageous involves adopting and tailoring the general principles that can work *in your context*. On that front, your expertise certainly exceeds mine.

Remember

- Workplace courage is about taking action at work on behalf of a principle, a cause, or a group of others, even though one knows there could be serious career, social, psychological, and even physical risks for doing so.

- Courage is risky, but it's also hugely important for ourselves and for others. Choosing courage in key moments helps us build the legacy we want and avoid the regrets we don't want. Acts of courage at work can protect others, help solve problems and avert disasters, and lead to opportunities seized and to various forms of innovation and growth. Courage acts also impact how others feel and behave. They

can inspire commitment, bolster trust, and lead others to act more courageously.

- The lack of courage permeates all levels of organizations, but so do positive examples from people who differ on every conceivable characteristic. Thus, thinking about courage as constituting specific *acts*, not an innate characteristic of a limited number of people, helps us recognize that we all share responsibility for being courageous and that skill comes from preparation and practice.

- We can all improve our competence, and hence the likelihood of positive outcomes when we act courageously, by studying what others do well before, during, and after their acts of courage, and by committing to practice those kinds of behaviors.

NOTES

Preface

1. M. Richtel, "Frightened Doctors Face Off with Hospitals over Rules on Protective Gear," *New York Times*, March 31, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/31/health/hospitals-coronavirus-face-masks.html; N. Kristof, "'I Do Fear for My Staff,' a Doctor Said. He Lost His Job," Opinion, *New York Times*, April 1, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/opinion/coronavirus-doctors-protective -equipment.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage; as told to Eli Saslow, "'No mask, no entry. Is that clear enough? That seems pretty clear, right?'," *Washington Post*, July 18, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/07/18/Covid-pandemic-store-clerk-north-carolina/?arc404=true; R. Gates, "Kansas State Football Team Announces Program of Protest," *247sports.com*, June 27, 2020, https://247sports.com/college/kansas-state/Article/Kansas-State-football -team-announces-protest-of-program-K-State-offensive-tweet-Josh-Youngblood -Chris-Klieman-148609553/.

2. Like Amy Edmondson, author of *The Fearless Organization* (Wiley, 2018), I have been committed to trying to reduce fear in organizations for two decades. This book acknowledges that however important that task is, most people work in organizations where fear is still present and must therefore decide if and how to act in spite of it.

3. R. Lacayo and A. Ripley, "Persons of the Year 2002: The Whistleblowers," *Time*, December 30, 2002, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2019712_2019710_2019677,00.html.

4. M. Egan, "I Called the Wells Fargo Ethics Line and Was Fired," *CNN Business*, September 21, 2016, http://money.cnn.com/2016/09/21/investing/wells-fargo -fired-workers-retaliation-fake-accounts/index.html; Jack Ewing. "Volkswagen Says 11 Million Cars Worldwide Are Affected in Diesel Deception, *New York Times*, September 22, 2017, http://www.nytimes.come/2015/09/23/business/international/volkswagen-diesel-car-scandal.html?emc=eta1&.

5. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/266822/engaged-employees-differently .aspx.

Chapter 1

1. All quotes from https://www.theringer.com/2020/1/15/21066392/stuart-scott -espn-sportscenter-career-death-broadcaster.

2. Keith Olberman tribute to Stuart Scott, ESPN, January 5, 2015, 6:19 p.m., http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=12125173.

3. All stories told in this book are true. However, to protect identities, I often use only a first name in sharing someone's story and change that name and any other nonsubstantive details to preserve anonymity. For example, "Chris's" story

is real, but this is not his actual name. In contrast, when a story is already in the public domain or I have received explicit permission, the person's full name and other details are revealed. For example, Stuart Scott and others named in his story are actual names.

4. Since the earliest recorded tracts of Aristotle, Plato, and the Chinese poet Mengzi—all before the common era (BCE)—courage has been written about in nearly every domain of intra- and interpersonal social life. Most dominantly, though, discussions of courage have centered on the physical bravery needed in battle. Plato, for instance, focused mostly on courage in military settings; likewise, the "good soldier" was the measure of courage for Aristotle. While social scientists and philosophers have focused more attention in recent decades on other types of courage, rigorous attention to the concept of *workplace* courage is still nascent.

5. This definition of workplace courage put forth by Evan Bruno and myself includes the two components widely agreed upon in the broad literature on courage: (1) action taken despite *perceivable risk* and (2) action that is in service of a *worthy cause*. Note that this definition does not require the cause to be "moral" or "morally good." Here is a simple example that illustrates why I believe some workplace acts are worthy enough to be called courageous without having to meet some formal ethical threshold. In one study I ran, each participant read about an employee, "Maya," speaking back to a defensive boss about one of four different issues: (1) a product line not well aligned with market trends, (2) unrealistic sales goals, (3) hiring trends not aligned with the organization's needs, or (4) unethical comments about people's looks, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. While all have potential value to the company, only the last issue involves a clear violation of ethical standards or standard conceptions of morality. Yet all of these behaviors were seen as reflecting significant, and a similar amount of, courage by Maya.

Whereas there's widespread agreement about action taken despite perceivable risk or for a worthy cause as core components of courage, there are other components less consensually argued to be central to the definition of courage that are not included in our definition. For example, philosophers have often consensually agreed that an act is not courageous if it was not carefully deliberated. In this view, no spontaneous acts can be accorded the attribution of courage. If this is true, those of us who think that running into the burning World Trade Center's towers on 9/11 was courageous are wrong. It likewise makes many people in one of my experiments wrong for thinking there is no significant difference in the courage level of a spontaneous challenge to an unfair criticism versus the same challenge voiced after a minute, a few hours, or a few days. The "deliberation required" view also seems inconsistent with neuroscience research showing that people can "automatically" or "unthinkingly" do all sorts of highly worthy, laudable acts.

Similarly, despite arguments by some, it's not clear that a behavior has to (1) be fully volitional or (2) involve recognized fear to be considered courageous. For example, we've run some experiments in which participants evaluated the courage of someone who engaged in a risky, worthy act because they felt coerced by a boss (who threatened to fire them if they failed to act) or by coworkers exerting implicit or explicit social pressure. In both cases, participants didn't rate these "forced" acts as significantly less courageous than when the same acts were described as freely chosen. Likewise, given that fear is increasingly recognized as the cognitive label we place on a set of physiological reactions and actual stimuli (that is, what's happening around us), there is no reason why people have to label their reaction

"fear" or "being afraid" just because they recognize there is potential risk in an action.

6. P. J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 34–35.

7. The notion that courage is like a muscle that grows stronger with use was popularized by Ira Chaleff; see Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

8. As reviewed by Catherine Sanderson, the primary difference between those who were complicit and those who defied authority in the Milgram obedience experiments, and between bystanders and those who intervened in actual dangerous situations, was prior training in the relevant kinds of skills and strategies (*Why We Act: Turning Bystanders into Moral Rebels* [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020], 16 and 72).

9. Winston S. Churchill, "Unlucky Alfonso," *Collier's* magazine, June 27, 1931.

10. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Fontana Books, 1955), 148–149.

11. In surveys I've done, students ranging from their twenties to their sixties, and holding all types and levels of professional and leadership roles, rate a leader's courage even higher than technical expertise, intelligence, and work ethic in importance to long-term leadership success. They also rate courage as more lacking than those other qualities in ratings of leaders whose careers derail. Interestingly, though, it's clear that people have an intuitive sense that courage doesn't always go well in the short run: for differentiating short-term leadership success, my students rated intelligence and work ethic as more important than courage.

12. Some "going along" makes perfect sense, as it's hard to imagine a functional or healthy workplace where people didn't agree to abide by certain rules or be good followers most of the time. Whatever we may feel about hierarchy and rules, we don't like utter chaos or isolation very much either. So it's logical that we've created and largely accept systems (and associated cultural norms and social pressures) that require at least some degree of deference to authority and interpersonal agreeableness. But sometimes this tendency to favor stability and avoid conflict presents a direct challenge to our sense of integrity or authenticity, or to our aspirations to make things better.

13. Our desire to be liked is what makes Michael Bloomberg's conscious willingness to be unpopular so unusual and inspiring. Toward the end of his time in office, Bloomberg told *The Atlantic*, "Leadership is about doing what you think is right and then building a constituency behind it. It is not doing a poll and following from the back. . . . If I finish my term in office . . . and have high approval ratings, then I wasted my last years in office. That high approval rating means you don't upset anybody. High approval rating means you're skiing down the slope and you never fall. Well, you're skiing the baby slope, for goodness' sakes. Go for a steeper slope." From James Bennet, "The Bloomberg Way," *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2012.

14. In my own research, I've been surprised by how many types of jobs present at least periodic opportunities for physical courage. Restaurant employees, for example, sometimes need to step in front of combative or violent guests, as do store managers or bartenders whose fellow employees are being put at risk by irrational or intoxicated customers. Store employees show up despite the risks of being robbed, and keep coming back after it happens. For example, I interviewed a restaurant manager who'd been held at gunpoint early one morning and forced

to empty the contents of the safe into the ski-masked robber's bag. He was then left tied up and gagged until other employees arrived and found him. After calling his wife, he then helped open the store and stayed until mid-afternoon. Why? "Because we had a store to run," he told me. Sometimes it's employees themselves who bring violence—and weapons—into the workplace. When an employee pulls a knife on another or starts to physically assault someone, others on the scene face imminent physical risk.

15. In every organization I've personally studied, I've found people all the way to the top who are aware of the career risks of speaking up. They, too, worry about losing status, future opportunities, income, and more. Like the rest of us, they have their ambitions, mortgages, and kids' futures on their minds when considering pushing the envelope at work.

16. Charles Perrow, "A Society of Organizations," *Theory and Society* 20, no. 6 (1991): 725–762.

17. These career risks are highly visible in the realm of external whistleblowing. Though it's hard to get truly accurate statistics on whistleblower retaliation, and the figures vary quite a lot, we know that the percentage of people who suffer significant negative career consequences for speaking out about illegal, immoral, or illegitimate organizational practices is well above zero. From nurses to financial employees to federal workers, whistleblowers face real risks. Whether it's 5 percent, or 25 percent—or even some higher number—people do get harassed, demoted, reprimanded, denied promotion, physically accosted, or fired and incur other consequences for this extreme form of courageous action. See S. McDonald and K. Ahern, "The Professional Consequences of Whistleblowing by Nurses," *Journal of Professional Nursing* 16, no. 6 (2000): 313–321; M. T. Rehg et al., "Antecedents and Outcomes of Retaliation Against Whistleblowers: Gender Differences and Power Relationships," *Organization Science* 19, no. 2 (2008): 221–240; J. Mont, "The Whistleblower Retaliation Epidemic," *Compliance Week* 9, no. 106 (2012): 36–63; and R. Moberly, "Sarbanes-Oxley's Whistleblower Provisions: Ten Years Later," *South Carolina Law Review* 64, no. 1 (Autumn 2012): 1–54.

18. W. Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

19. M. Egan, "I Called the Wells Fargo Ethics Line and Was Fired," *CNN Business*, September 21, 2016, http://money.cnn.com/2016/09/21/investing/wells-fargo-fired-workers-retaliation-fake-accounts/index.html.

20. L. Wong and S. J. Gerras, *Lying to Ourselves: Dishonesty in the Army Profession* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2015), 28; https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/19/navy-fires-brett-crozier-aircraft-carrier-coronavirus-329716#.

21. K. D. Williams, "Ostracism," *Annual Review of Psychology* 58 (2007): 425–452.

22. For more on the risks of social rejection, see R. F. Baumeister et al., "Social Rejection Can Reduce Pain and Increase Spending: Further Evidence That Money, Pain, and Belongingness Are Interrelated," *Psychological Inquiry* 19, no. 3–4 (2008): 145–147.

In light of these deep-seated fears of isolation, it's not surprising that research on reasons for employee silence include "relational" concerns. People don't want to upset coworkers, create tensions, or hurt others' feelings (see C. T. Brinsfield, "Employee Silence Motives: Investigation of Dimensionality and Development of

Measures," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 34, no. 5 [2013]: 671–697; see also F. J. Milliken, E. W. Morrison, and P. F. Hewlin, "An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues That Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why," *Journal of Management Studies* 40, no. 6 [2003]: 1453–1476). Is this because we're all so nice? That's part of it. But there's also a more self-interested reason: we realize, often subconsciously, that upsetting others also poses a social risk for ourselves. When probing for the reasons that people don't speak up or push for change, I commonly hear sentiments like the following (from a research scientist in a *Fortune* 100 company): "You might look like a show-off, not a team player, and then your peers would isolate you."

23. According to his friends, Raymond is willing to be unpopular and to not be liked as a result of doing what he sees as unquestionably right. But the fact that his case got so much attention suggests that his courage is the exception, not the norm. Indeed, a sergeant above Raymond chose not to submit a promised recommendation letter to higher-ups on Raymond's behalf, citing his need to "protect myself and my job and my family" (S. Knafo, "A Black Police Officer's Fight against the N.Y.P.D.," *New York Times Magazine*, February 21, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/21/magazine/a-black-police-officers-fight-against-the-nypd.html).

24. S. Polk, "How Wall Street Bro Talk Keeps Women Down," opinion, *New York Times*, July 7, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/10/opinion/sunday/how-wall-street-bro-talk-keeps-women-down.html.

25. E. Bruno and J. Detert, "The Workplace Courage Acts Index (WCAI): Observations and Impact," presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, August 13, 2019.

26. S. Lohr and L. Thomas Jr., "The Case Some Executives Made for Sticking with Trump," DealBook, *New York Times*, August 17, 2017, https://nyti.ms/2vl9fMe.

27. E. A. Cohen, "America's Crisis of Courage," *The Atlantic*, November 8, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/11/americas-crisis-of-courage/545063/.

28. For instance, a 2016 Russell Reynolds survey of large public company board of directors from twelve countries consistently rated courageous behavior in directors as most important to creating strong board cultures and high performance. Specially, "possessing the courage to do the right things for the right reasons" was rated the most important director behavior, with "willing to constructively challenge management" and other similar behaviors rounding out the top five (with a significant gap between these five and the next dozen or so). See Russell Reynolds, "Global Board Culture Survey. Understanding the Behaviors That Drive Board Effectiveness," (2016).

29. J. Ewing. "Volkswagen Says 11 Million Cars Worldwide Are Affected in Diesel Deception," *New York Times*, September 22, 2017, http://www.nytimes.come/2015/09/23/business/international/volkswagen-diesel-car-scandal.html?emc=eta1&.

30. See https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4472965/user-clip-robert-gates-leadership.

31. R. Pieters and M. Zeelenberg, "A Theory of Regret Regulation 1.1," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 17, no. 1 (2007): 29–35.

32. J. B. Izzo, *The Five Secrets You Must Discover before You Die* (San Francisco: Berrett-Kohler), 47.

33. S. Steiner, "Top Five Regrets of the Dying," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/feb/01/top-five-regrets-of-the -dying.

34. https://www.everytable.com/mission/.

35. J. F. Bonnefon and J. Zhang, "The Intensity of Recent and Distant Life Re- grets: An Integrated Model and a Large-Scale Survey," *Applied Cognitive Psychol- ogy: The Official Journal of the Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 22, no. 5 (2008): 653–662.

36. A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: Uni- versity of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

37. Brendan Spiegel, "From Safety of New York, Reporting on Distant Home," *New York Times,* November 19, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/ nyregion/from-safety-of-new-york-reporting-on-a-distant-homeland.html? searchResultPosition=1.

38. Yoko Wakatsuki and Jethro Mullen, "Japanese Parliament Report: Fuku- shima Nuclear Crisis Was 'Man-Made,'" cnn.com, July 5, 2012, http://www.cnn .com/2012/07/05/world/asia/japan-fukushima-report/index.html?hpt=hp_t1.