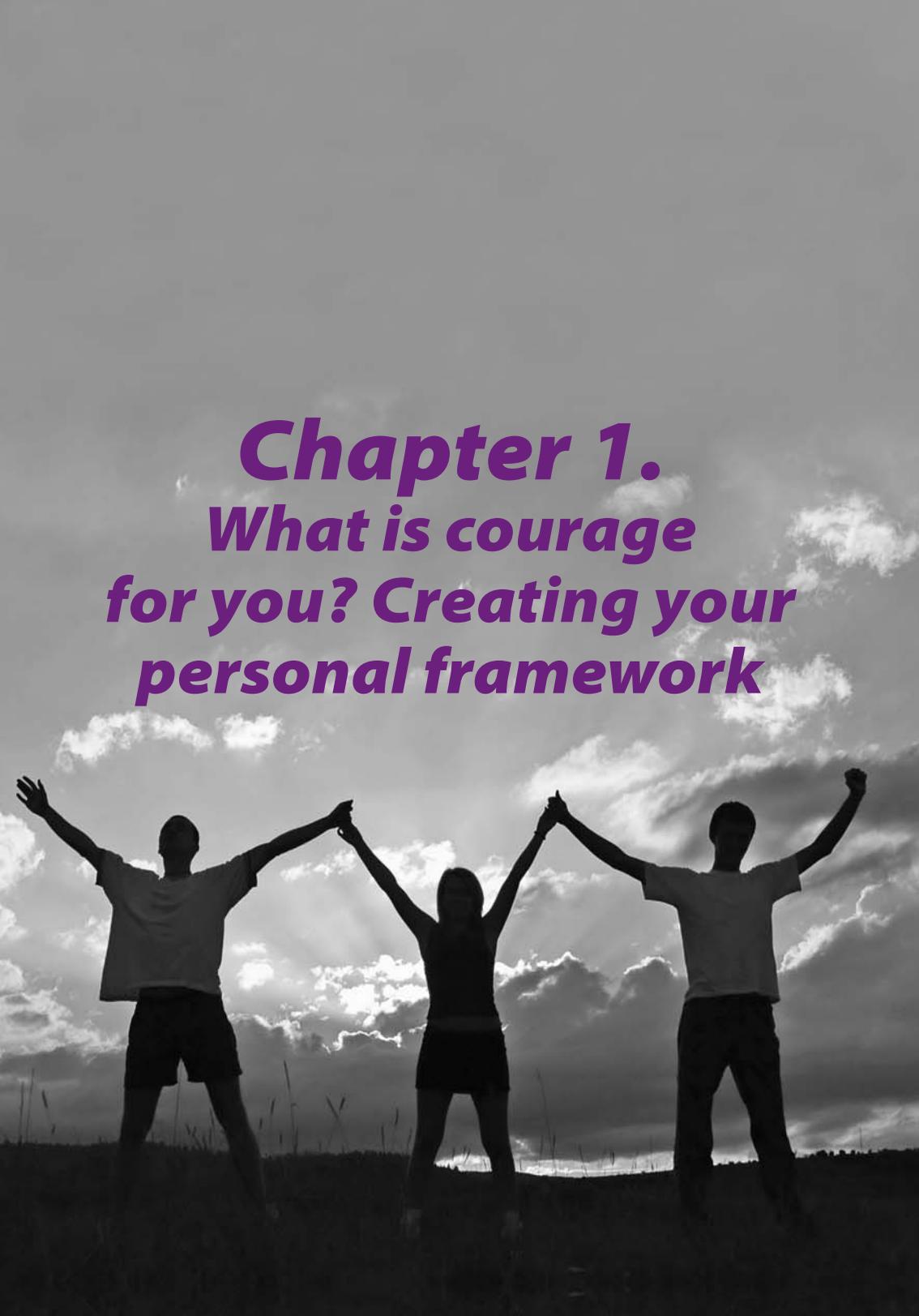


# INSPIRING COURAGEOUS LEADERS



Mandy Holloway



# Chapter 1. What is courage for you? Creating your personal framework

Courage is the quality of the human spirit that allows people to face difficulty, danger, pain, criticism or judgement in spite of the fear they feel. It is a virtue that allows people to make themselves vulnerable so they can face their fear and the real risks confronting them.

## ***Courage connects and unites***

Every organisation has populations of emerging and existing leaders. The Courageous Leaders Model considers the *top* team as existing leaders, based on their decision-making responsibilities and their accountability for organisational results and performance. Existing leaders generally report directly to a diverse group of stakeholders external to the organisation and have a team of *senior* leaders reporting directly to them.

Senior leaders are referred to as the emerging leaders. They manage the performance of others and hold responsibility for completion of specific tasks that create the organisational outcomes for which the existing leaders are held accountable. A similar relationship continues down the chain of command; senior leaders or emerging leaders can be considered existing leaders in their relationship with newly appointed managers in the organisation.

Courage is what connects and unites leaders of an organisation – the existing leaders with the emerging leaders. If emerging leaders ignite action with confidence and conviction in their ability to lead and unleash their courage during conversations with existing leaders, then the existing leaders need to come to these conversations with courage to be challenged and to change.

This results in a united population of leaders who inspire a high performing culture within the business. Culture is all about experiences – the experiences provided by the leaders, the experiences every person is allowed and encouraged to create and the experiences each person chooses to engage in.

Culture is built or destroyed each time people have a conversation, make a decision, choose a behaviour and ignite ideas within others. At its very essence it is the way we treat each other when working with each other to achieve business outcomes.

We absolutely need more people within the existing leadership populations inspired to build a culture where people are working at their best – and this takes courage.

## Courage creates experiences you never imagined



In 2008 I made my return to playing competitive hockey. My team ranged greatly in age – 31 years separated me, the eldest at 48, from the youngest.

I was overwhelmed by fear. What would the others think and feel about having me in the team? How would we relate and how would my level of skill and fitness stack up?

I made a conscious decision not to volunteer for the role of captain because I did not want to feel like or act as their mum, yet I wanted to feel comfortable enough to share my experiences. As a player of top-grade hockey from my mid-teens to my late twenties and a coach of junior hockey for the past eight years, I felt I had a lot to contribute to the team. Yet, my fear of not being accepted as useful by the younger generations was consuming.

To my complete delight it was the most amazing experience. We shared a common goal that included training hard and playing hard, we communicated openly and honestly and treated everyone as equal. Indifferent to age and experience we listened respectfully to all ideas, comments and concerns. Most importantly, we shared a good laugh at every training session.

When I signed up to return to playing competitive hockey I did not anticipate that I would participate in this enriching social experiment. This personal experience reminded me very clearly of how important it is to be courageous in order to create empowering and exciting life experiences.

### Emerging and existing leaders

In most organisations, emerging leaders are not having the conversations they want to have with existing leaders because of fear – a reluctance to jeopardise their future; fear their conversation will elicit a defensive and negative response resulting in them being labelled as a troublemaker; fear their ideas will be put down, refuted, ignored or worse still perceived as idealistic, naive or negative. For some it is a feeling of indifference and this is equally alarming – my conversation will have no impact so why should I invest the time and energy? This fear and indifference is damaging our organisations, restricting growth, squashing creativity and strangling entrepreneurship.

In families, emerging leaders (teenage children) are not having honest conversations with existing leaders (parents) because they are either fearful of the impact on their relationship, or perceive it to be useless as they have no influence on decisions concerning them anyway. It is easier and safer to tell existing leaders what they prefer to hear. It is easier to say 'I'm sleeping over at my friend's house', than ask 'If I can go to a party' and enduring the horrible conversation that follows.

Equally, existing leaders in organisations are not having the conversations they need to have. Most existing leaders recognise the need to retain employees and are driven by a fear of losing quality people. Subsequently they diminish the

overall performance of a business by not engaging in enough conversations about personal performance. They often compound this issue by not approaching the conversations they do choose to engage in with a constructive and encouraging manner. This generally happens because they are too busy defending their past actions and decisions; or trying to control the future direction and outcomes for deliverables. Worse still are the conversations that are delayed because existing leaders are too busy dealing with the urgent, everyday things. This is where they move from one crisis to the next.

Existing family leaders are not having the conversations they need to have with their emerging leaders (teenage children). One thing that is perfectly clear is that in our busy lives it requires discipline and energy to create the time and space to have the kinds of conversations I am referring to. It is often easier to live a façade while avoiding the confrontational emerging leader issues – such as teenage drinking, drug use and going to parties. Increasingly, in my experience, there are more parents who don't want to engage in highly challenging and emotively charged conversations with their emerging leaders – and avoidance seems to be far more preferable.

There is definitely interplay of courage and fear within these populations of leaders. Courage and fear attract and repel and it is this interplay that brings about the wedge of fear driven through these two distinct populations of leaders. We need more leaders to see and recognise this interplay and the impact it is having on the organisational or family culture. They need to realise that to step into their courage they must acknowledge and face their fear. This requires trust – trust that by facing their fear, making themselves vulnerable and creating space and time to engage in a real conversation. Great outcomes and experiences result.



The **wedge of fear** (discontent, blame, defensiveness) that is currently lodged between these two populations of leaders within most organisations needs to be dislodged so emerging and existing leaders unite and connect. Many have referred to this wedge of fear as the corridor of uncertainty – it is the place where leaders walk and don't talk about the things they really want to talk about and don't share the information they know would make a difference to how people think and feel about the future.

The wedge of fear is created by both existing leaders and emerging leaders but its position is propped up most powerfully by existing leaders. If existing leaders decide they want to dislodge the wedge of fear they can – they have the organisational, family and positional power to make it happen. In reality emerging leaders can only chip away at the wedge. To shift the wedge of fear they need the support of existing leaders to make it happen.



When the wedge starts shifting it is replaced with a *ledge of learning*. This ledge precariously connects emerging leaders to existing leaders and everyone on it feels incredibly vulnerable. The ledge represents a transitional stage where people have not completely let go of the old ways of interacting or behaving and are slightly nervous about the new ways they are being encouraged to embrace. They 'teeter' on the ledge and understandably take small tentative steps forward only to be challenged and then succumb to the temptation of stepping back into their comfort zone – their old ways of doing, thinking and feeling.

With patience, persistence and support this ledge eventually becomes a secure place to connect. It becomes a place where existing and emerging leaders gather with the courage to commit to the future in a heartfelt and soulful way. The feelings of vulnerability disappear, replaced with curiosity, interest, zest, intrigue, enthusiasm, transparency and authenticity.

Fundamentally, the Courageous Leaders Model is designed to unite emerging and existing leaders by dislodging the wedge of fear. Exponentially the possibilities are created for developing people, brand, financial and even environmental sustainability in ways not yet thought of or even imagined.

The infinity symbol is used in the Courageous Leaders Model to represent this unlimited growth potential and development possibilities available to existing and emerging leaders when they choose to connect and commit to the future of the organisation, the future of their careers and the future of their collaborative relationships – with courage. They truly unite in their intentions for developing future sustainability for the organisation and for their careers.



## The Courageous Leaders Model

The very essence of the Courageous Leaders Model is to inspire people to be courageous leaders so they can convert these exponential possibilities into reality. There are nine elements to the Courageous Leaders Model and it is designed to start with Emerging Leaders on the left hand side of the infinity symbol and their need to develop confidence, conviction and courage in leadership mastery. This model shows how courage is what connects, commits and unites Emerging and Existing leaders.

So, if we have emerging leaders igniting action with confidence and conviction in their leadership mastery and unleashing their courage during conversations with existing leaders then the existing leaders absolutely need to come to these conversations with courage. They particularly need to have the courage to be challenged – the way they do things, the way they think and feel about things and their natural responses to being questioned. Ultimately existing leaders must be prepared to change for the future sustainability of the business.

### Leadership mastery

If you want to be a courageous leader it all begins with recognising the importance of leadership mastery. Emerging leaders need to develop their leadership mastery so they have the confidence, conviction and courage to become the kind of leader they really want to be and develop the relationship space with existing leaders where they truly connect and commit to the future of the business. Not the kind of leader they think they ought to be to create success or the kind of leader they need to be to fit with the defined expectations of the business. Leadership mastery comprises the leader's personality, character and capabilities – it is about making the best of their natural disposition and melding it with learned capabilities.

### Confidence in your leadership mastery

Once you have clarity on 'ideal self as a leader' then you are ready to develop confidence in your leadership mastery. It is all about creating and defining the space where you will be at your best and so be in a position to bring out the best in others and therefore create the best business outcomes.

### Conviction in your leadership mastery

This is about getting to a personal place where you really believe in your decisions and choices – they reflect well on you, they sit well with you and you are willing and ready to bear the full consequences of your choices. This is the solid belief and grounding for you to emerge into the kind of leader you really want to be.

### Courage in your leadership mastery

Once emerging leaders have conviction they are ready to unleash their courage and engage in the conversations they know they want to have – those conversations you have in your head while taking a shower in the morning.

## Connect and commit

This is where you create the relationship space for leaders to connect and commit to the future of the business and the future of their career. Exponential opportunity is realised here once the existing leaders consistently come to conversations with the courage to be challenged and to change.

## Courage to be challenged and change

Once emerging leaders start coming to conversations differently, the existing leaders need to come to them with a different level of courage. They need to walk into the relationship space with their emerging leaders with the courage to be challenged and to change. This is where the wedge of fear threatens to derail the cornerstone of the model and why it is so important for existing leaders to come with different thinking and different feelings. They need to face up to the eternal tension between power and vulnerability. What this means is they need to leave their positional and personal power out of the conversation and walk into the vulnerable space of not having the solution.

## Challenge

Existing leaders must develop the courage to be challenged and emerging leaders need the courage to voice their challenging thoughts and ideas. Challenging becomes a critical business behaviour between emerging and existing leaders to ensure they are able to connect, commit, collaborate, create change and ultimately able to make decisions that secure the future sustainability of the business.

## Change

This is a lifelong journey where you take responsibility for your choices and your direction, bringing a mindset of constant challenge to create the changes necessary for you to be the kind of leader you want to be, the kind of leader others need you to be to create success for the business and the kind of change needed within the business to build a high performing culture.

## High-performance culture

The final component of the Courageous Leaders Model is the creation of a high-performance culture. The final component of the Courageous Leaders Model is the creation and maintenance of a high-performance culture. Existing leaders have significant influence over the culture of an organisation – they inform the experiences for each person within the organisation. It is therefore imperative that each leader works with their colleagues to create consistency in these experiences as opposed to the confusion and frustration that can arise if there is divergence in the expectations and behaviours of existing leaders within the organisation.

Culture is dependent not only on the behaviours of the leaders and the people; it is also informed by the systems and processes which support people to do a great job and of course the technology which enables people to do the right thing at the right time.

A high-performance culture is the glue that holds together the right people, the right systems, the right organisational structure and the right technology to deliver the right performance for the business. This glue produces people inspired to do the right things, technology delivering the right results, systems enabling people to do the right things at the right time and an organisational structure presenting the right levels of personal accountability so people want to perform. It is truly an amazing and interdependent connection.

## Adopt the mantle and create the courageous space

Sometimes we need others to step into this courageous space with us – to listen, to support, to mentor, particularly, having the courage to let go of the need to have or drive the creation of a solution. To do this you must create courageous space where you can connect and commit to the future – of their career and of the business success.



There was a time in my career where I really needed an existing leader to enter into this courageous space with me and I documented it in a memorandum to the Managing Partner – excerpts of which follow:

*'... I have a real focus on driving change in the culture of organisations like ours. We lose far too many women and recently young men for all the wrong reasons ... and I want to be a role model to make a dent into creating change ... My time here has certainly never been easy or fun and has required an enormous amount of personal tenacity and resilience. I have found the partnership to be a very lonely place ... [yet] I am truly passionate about what I do and just want to have an environment that allows me to prosper while valuing what I do.'*

Sadly, this very personal appeal for support and guidance resulted in a one-hour meeting with the Managing Partner, during which he talked about inconsequential and *safe* stuff that he felt comfortable with. No further action or discussions resulted. We never talked about my loneliness or my drive to create change. Instead, we talked about the firm's performance framework and how things would be better next year if I just put my head down and delivered strong financial results.

To have an existing leader sit in a courageous space with me would have made an enormous difference – many leaders crave the opportunity to sit in such a space with their existing leaders. Instead, they are pushed away as I was. They are not encouraged to talk about what is happening and how they are feeling because there is too much fear and defensiveness.

There has still not been enough change – people continue to experience what I experienced over ten years ago. We need people inspired to be courageous leaders and create the courageous space to engage in a real conversation where vulnerability is often high.



**Your 7-point summary:**

1. courage is the quality of the human spirit that allows people to overcome their fears
2. courage connects and unites emerging and existing leaders so they inspire a high – performance culture
3. find the courage to create empowering and exciting life experiences you never imagined were possible
4. the wedge of fear prevents emerging and existing leaders from having the conversations they really need to have
5. dislodge the wedge of fear and walk onto the ledge of learning. With time stability removes the wedge completely and you have a united population of courageous leaders
6. the Courageous Leaders Model (with its nine elements) shows you how to dislodge this wedge of fear and unite your population of leaders
7. creating the courageous space for conversations that allow you to connect and commit to the future of the business and the future of your career is vital to everyone.



**Rattling your cage**

Here is where I ask you three critical questions to challenge your thinking and rattle your cage of habits:

1. if I had been in a bubble floating over you for the last month how many times would I have seen you being courageous? Describe these moments and assess whether you are happy that this fits with the kind of leader you want to be?

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2. what is the relationship like between your emerging leaders and existing leaders? What would you like to change and what has stopped you from making these changes?

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3. what have you done personally to dislodge or chip away at the wedge of fear between you and other leaders in your population of leaders? Think about a time when you have truly stepped into the courageous space with a fellow leader.

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