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The Number One Leadership Trait: Do You Have It?

It isn't intuition. It isn't persuasiveness. It's not even resourcefulness, according to author and leadership consultant Mike Staver. The decisive quality is *courage*. Without it, none of the others matter.

Courage can be developed, Staver assures us.

Here are six steps for finding it in yourself. "Here's the thing about operating in a harsh business environment: There are serious consequences for making the wrong move," says Staver, "The safety net just isn't there. And because competition is so fierce and [clients] are so savvy, you may have to make some pretty risky choices to differentiate yourself. Otherwise you're a nonentity, and your career, and maybe even your company may fail."

If you commit to leading with courage and consciously work toward that goal in every decision you make, it soon becomes an automatic response.

In his book *Leadership Isn't for Cowards*, Staver says the path to courageous leadership has six components. He sums them up using the acronym ATTACK:

A: Accept your current circumstances. Most leaders either overestimate or underestimate the health of their current culture. Few have a realistic grasp on it. As a leader, you need to look reality in the face and accept it. That does not mean you should "settle." Accepting that you have a less-than-ideal corporate culture is the first step toward changing that culture for the better. Ask yourself: What are you pretending not to know?

T: Take responsibility. A courageous leader is willing to own the results of his or her choices. Don't blame the market, the economy, or the competition for circumstances inside your culture. You are the leader: The market, the economy, and the competition

are *your* responsibility. Not that every problem in the firm is your fault. But if you fail to do anything about them, then it is your fault. Responsibility is not about blame; it is about response. Own what is yours.

T: Take action. You will never have all the data necessary to make the decisions you need to make as a leader. You have to act in spite of it. And if you lack the data, you must be courageous enough not to feel you must cross every "t" before you pull the trigger. Just make sure every action you take is in line with where your heart is, where your values are, and where your culture is now or needs to be in the future. Analyze the pitfalls and act quickly.

A: Acknowledge progress. Many leaders are so goal-oriented they fail to see the individual steps of the process. Determine the desirable results, designate the benchmarks, and be certain those benchmarks are recognized as they are achieved. Celebrate the steps with the same energy and enthusiasm as if the goal were already accomplished.

C: Commit to lifelong learning. If you are leading, you're learning. If you're not learning, you're not leading, regardless of your title. So many principals get into a leadership role and act like they have "arrived." That's the death knell for leadership success. Instead, commit to learning on three levels:

- learn about yourself first;
- learn about your people second; and
- learn about your industry third.

K: Kindle relationships. Courageous leaders are constantly engaging people and caring about their progress. Not that you need to gather your employees, have them embrace each other, and lead them all in singing Kum Ba Yah. Courageous leadership doesn't mean softening your approach with people. It actually means the opposite—toughening your approach. It means confronting people and challenging them, not allowing them to be less than you know they can be.

If you're wondering how courageous you are, visit Staver's Web site (www.thestavergroup.com) and take the Leadership Courage Quotient (LCQ) Assessment.

And in the conclusion to his book, Staver cautions, "If you are trying to live in two separate worlds—being one person in your personal life and a different person in your professional life—you're on the path to destruction."

Source: Michael Staver is CEO of The Staver Group (Fernandina Beach, FL; 904-321-0283 or 904-321-0877). To download a copy of Leadership Isn't for Cowards, visit his Web site, www.thestavergroup.com

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