

Top Stories of 2010 –Leadership and Courage

Were there any success stories from 2010 that can inspire us in 2011?

For many sports fans, a top story in 2010 was Michael Vick's success on the field for the Philadelphia Eagles after a two year absence from the sport. Mr. Vick seems to have turned the corner in reclaiming his personal life and professional success and his success in 2010 arguably required no small amount of courage and leadership. But for many others throughout the world, the most gripping story of 2010 was the rescue of the 33 Chilean miners trapped underground for two months.

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them”
says Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Certainly this is true of the Chilean miners and their triumph after a horrible ordeal. When the mine first collapsed, the first estimates were that six months were required to free them. The President of Chile, Sebastian Pinera, showed both leadership and courage by immediately calling for help from governments and corporations around the world and by marshaling those resources to rescue the miners after 68 days.

This story had the classic elements of a riveting and inspirational legend: men trapped underground wondering; devoted families waiting; a passionate nation watching; and an ingenious international rescue team working. We were all mesmerized as we followed the frantic work above and the miners' incredible spirit and teamwork underground to beat the odds.

Now this was a story of great courage and leadership on many levels but can we learn anything to help us with our own leadership in the work setting? And is courage a necessary part of any successful leader's makeup?

Many studies report on the leadership traits of successful people. Traits like high emotional intelligence, social awareness, dependability and successful relationship management are necessary for today's leaders. Courage, on the other hand, is hard to define. Winston Churchill wrote “Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” As he defines it, courage is an essential personal trait for business partnerships.

The Courage Institute, a small consulting firm in Jenkintown PA, advise to “speak up, step up, gear up or partner with,” as part of a plan for business success. They also define five characteristics required to build courage in a business setting:

- **Purpose** — to achieve audacious, aggressive goals that mobilize the enterprise to add value and make a real difference
- **Rigor** — to mobilize the right partners with the right know-how to solve the right problems and execute in the right sequence
- **Risk** — to show trust and put the interests of the alliance, enterprise and its beneficiaries ahead of power and personal ambition
- **Will** — to persevere, ignite enthusiasm, maintain optimism and self-confidence, and inspire a sense of urgency when you ask others to step up; and,
- **Candor** — to operate with transparency, seek feedback and keep the lines of communication open

Many believe that today, instead of business leaders who model these qualities, we have risk-averse, consensus-style managers who have become cautious and ultimately restrict innovation and business growth.

In today's rapidly changing environment, we can't wait for greatness and courage to be thrust upon us as in the situation with the Chilean miners. We must seize the initiative. As small business owners we must proactively show leadership and create an atmosphere that stimulates a culture of courage. To accomplish this we may need to:

- Establish stretch goals that add real value and change, not just incremental growth, to generate an ongoing flow of new ideas.
- Take a chance on creative champions in the organization to spark breakthrough efforts and lead the implementation of creative new ideas.
- Show persistence and inspire enthusiasm to clear the inevitable hurdles.
- Reward real growth and risk taking.

"To see what is right, and not to do it, is want of courage." – Confucius

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